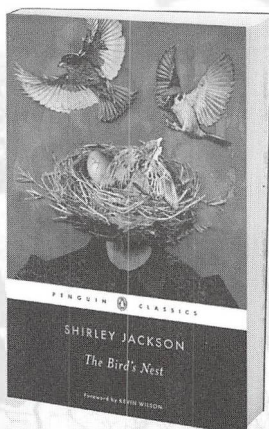


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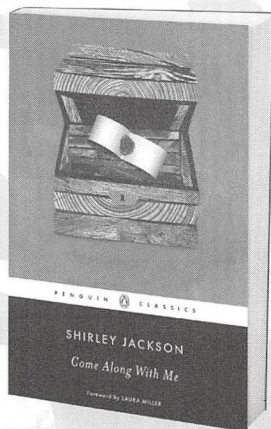


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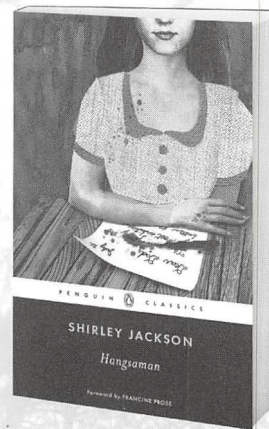
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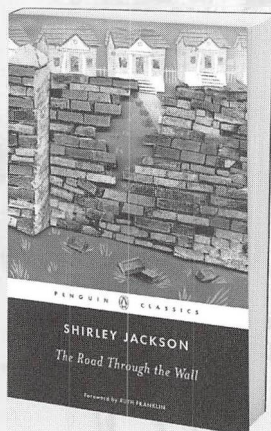
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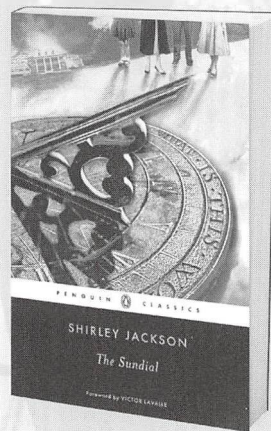
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# Readercon 25 Souvenir Book

July 10-13, 2014

Guests of Honor:

*Andrea Hairston*

*Kit Reed*

Memorial Guest of Honor:

*Mary Shelley*

2013 Cordwainer Smith Award winner:

*Wyman Gain*

In Memoriam:

*Lucius Shepard*

# Note From Your Industrious Editors

We've been coediting the Readercon Souvenir Book for at least  $\pi + 1$  years now, and one of the very best parts of the job is still the discussions with contributors who so generously donate their insightful, witty, charming, and sometimes hilarious pieces. Our Guests of Honor have been wonderful and very helpful participants in our gathering of material for the book, and in providing fascinating new examples of their work. To all of the many contributors, particularly the repeat customers over the years: We once again thank you truly deeply.

We hope the readers enjoy the book this year, with texts ranging from two centuries old to freshly minted. Production designer Nevenah Smith's work is as gorgeous as ever, making the result visually sumptuous, and it has been a great pleasure to collaborate with her four years in a row. We'd also really like to thank David G. Shaw for his years of detailed work with commercial printers and for valuable technical help with images, as well as his handling of many other production issues on all of Readercon's publications.

Ellen and Richard have both found our intense involvement with nearly all aspects of Readercon over the decades to be hugely rewarding, if sometimes exhausting. Editing this book has been among the most fun jobs of all.

Comments, criticisms, inquiries, and tips on locating photos of Norman Menasco may be sent to [SouvenirBook@readercon.org](mailto:SouvenirBook@readercon.org); that reaches all of us.



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Page 46: Portrait of Kit Reed by Joseph Reed (original tile in color).

Page 56: Painting of Mary Shelley (1840): by Richard Rothwell (1800–1868), National Portrait Gallery, London.

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Headlines are set in Chantelli Antiqua, by-lines are set in Monkey Snake, the body type is Minion Pro, and the Guest of Honor names on their opening pages are set in Basquiat. Closing dingbats for Andrea Hairston are from the Amazigh Motifs font and are drawn from traditional patterns in Berber rugs. Kit Reed's closing dingbats are from the Type Keys font, Mary Shelley's are classic printers' ornaments, Wyman Guin inspired the use of WeInside and Crop©Bats AOE (also used for Lucius Shepard's section), and the Future Readercon memories are graced with dingbats from Annsample. An image from Mayan Glyphs closes out the committee bios.

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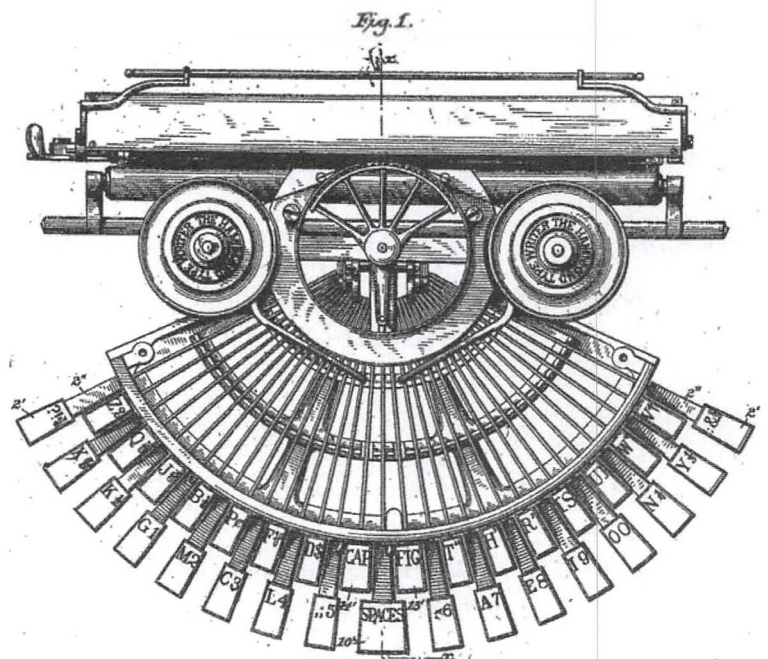
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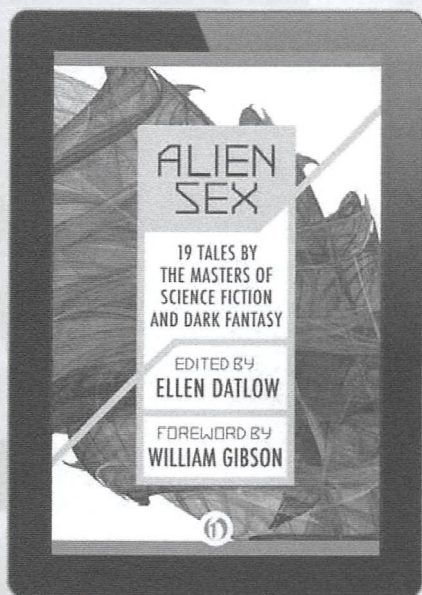
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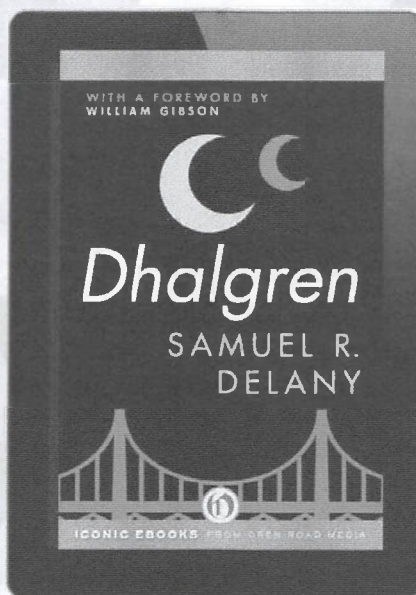


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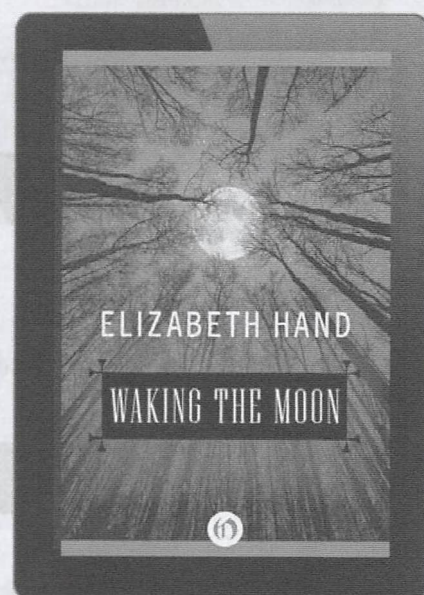
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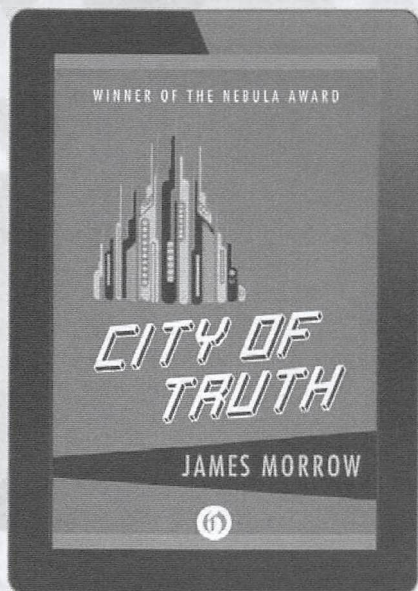
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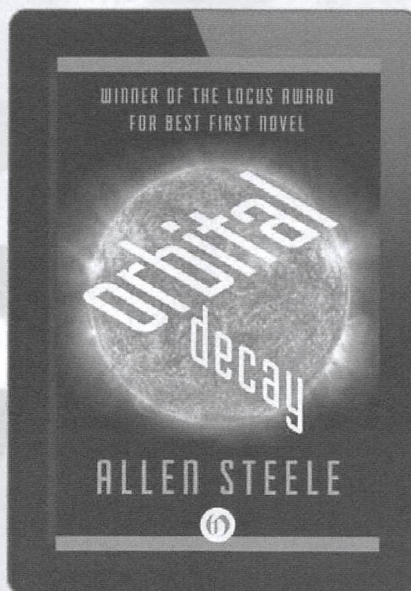
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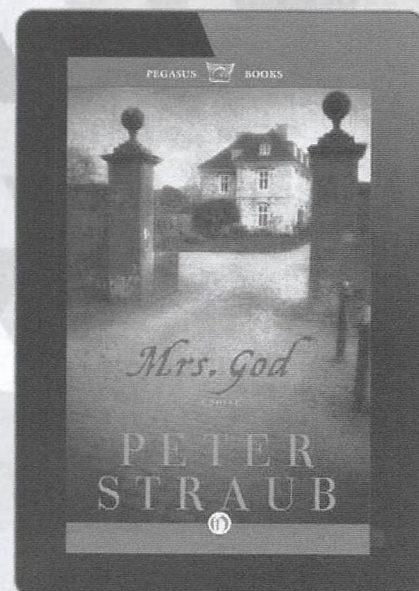
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Andrea



Hairston



# Andrea Hairston: Cartwheels in the Air!

Eileen Gunn

It's a serious understatement to call Andrea Hairston a can-do kind of person, but look what she can do: she's a playwright, a director, a theatrical producer, a novelist, a mathematician, a professor and a scholar, among other accomplishments. She writes standing up. She can bike through the snow and drive the hills of Pittsburgh in the wintertime. She can levitate fifty feet into the air and do cartwheels.

Andrea Hairston, in person, in your immediate presence, gives you the impression that all things are possible, that everything you want to accomplish is within your reach—or, if it's not, it would be a hell of an interesting effort, and you should go for it anyway.

Andrea also radiates the unearthly charisma that people in the theater sometimes possess, an aliveness that leaps over the footlights and makes you believe. The same force is at work in her novels and in her readings: she makes you believe. I distinctly remember Andrea calling down a huge windstorm upon the audience during a reading at WisCon. We were lucky to survive, and,

miraculously, we stayed dry.

And, of course, she is modest. A while back, I went for lunch with Andrea and Pan Morigan and Ama Patterson, after a hard morning of writing, to a tiny restaurant in a small Massachusetts town, not far from where Andrea and Pan live. The proprietress showed us to a table, and then she said to Andrea and Pan, "You're famous." They demurred. The restaurant owner stood her ground. "You're in the paper. I saw your picture." She went over to a stack of newspapers, pulled one out, and leafed through it. "There you are!" she said triumphantly. Sure enough: there they were, bright as buttons, in an ad for a local coffeehouse where they would be performing later in the week.

"But we're not famous," said Andrea. "We live here."

Nice try, Andrea.

"I'm going to tell the cook," said the restaurateur.



## Glamour and Gumption

Margo Lanagan

I met Andrea in June 1999 when we both attended the Clarion West Writers' Workshop in Seattle. The first night, the class had an introductory get-together on an upper floor of Campion Tower at Seattle University, where we were all staying, and I remember Andrea and Liz Williams sitting at the center of that gathering, pretty much shouting at each other continuously in their glee at being there.

For the six weeks of the workshop, I don't remember seeing Andrea without getting a sense of her being immensely creatively vibrant. She had a stair-climbing machine in her dorm room, just to offload some of the superabundance of energy she carried around. She had a big voice and

she radiated confidence, intelligence and interest. She critted like a demon and she wrote like an angel—and like someone who's seen angels. She wrote big; she wrote visionary; it was all there way back then. She was working, I think, on what would eventually become *Mindscape*.

I had the feeling she lived the rest of her life at high speed and in high color, and that the workshop was forcing her to hold herself back a bit and be patient with slower travelers. I remember her dropping her head in her hands when one of our number threw out a couple of Feminism 101-type questions in class. "I'm sorry," she said, "but I've been answering these questions for TWENTY YEARS." She didn't let any-

one off the hook, but she always fought fair and with big reserves of good humor at her back. As an introverted, under-exercised depressive, I learned a lot from her.

Since Clarion West, most of my fellow workshopppers and I keep an eye on each other online. It was Andrea who got onto Facebook and let us know about Liz's last illness. I did make it to Readercon last year, and got to hug and say hi to Andrea. She's garlanded with Tiptree and Carl Brandon Parallax glamour now, and forging on with the great whirling adventure that is her life and work—fifteen years on and the energy's still pouring off her. Get near if you can, and see if you can catch some.



# Andrea Hairston: Illuminating Life, Sharing Breath and Sweat

L. Timmel Duchamp

Names are, of course, proper nouns, but for me, Andrea Hairston's name vibrates with the power of a verb. My first encounter with her work, "Griots of the Galaxy" (first published in the anthology *So Long Been Dreaming*), made me long to read more of her fiction. I scoured the internet, and could find nothing else. So I wrote her an e-mail asking her whether she had more fiction. She replied that she'd written a novel, as yet unpublished. "May I consider it for publication by Aqueduct?" I wrote back to her. The manuscript arrived, and I loved it and told her I wanted to publish it. A little more than a year later, Aqueduct released *Mindscape. Redwood and Wildfire* followed a few years later, and then, this spring, *Lonely Stardust*, not a novel but a collection of critical essays, two plays, and her WisCon Guest of Honor speech.

When I first met Andrea face to face, I realized that I already knew who she was, though I hadn't known that when I'd written to solicit her novel submission. I'd been in the audience a couple of times for panels she'd been on, and had both times been blown away by her brilliance, as well as gratified by her repeatedly articulating responses to her fellow panelists that expressed what I, sitting in the audience, had been thinking. And more than that, of course, for her panel contributions often inscribe connections new to my mind, occasionally even introduce me to thinkers whose work I hadn't myself engaged with. That brilliance shines through the essays in *Lonely Stardust*, several of which I've seen Andrea "perform" (her word, unquestionably apt, for her delivery of work written as a monologue for "Andrea, the Professor," as she noted at a conference last November at the University of Oregon).

At its best, science fiction challenges us to examine our world afresh, provoking us to rethink all that we take for granted. Because science fiction writers do this through the medium of fiction, readers may not always realize the extent to which the astuteness of the fiction they love owes a debt to their authors' intellectual sophistication, which more writers than you might think deliberately conceal from their readers.

The best, most passionate writing, a common, sometimes deeply cherished, assumption goes, is that which is least mediated by the intellect. I have a lot of problems with that assumption, which I won't elaborate on here. I would, though, like to quote what Andrea said recently in an interview (published in the new edition of the *Aqueduct Gazette*), bearing on this issue:

Writing a play, novel, or screenplay, I discover what I'm thinking, what I make of my experiences and inquiries, what everything means. Poetry comes too, to explain and shape reality. Poetry and stories are spontaneous improvisations, performances in the theatre of my mind. I have to decide, consciously, to write an essay. Or people persuade me to write an article; they tempt me with a juicy proposition or question. Plays and stories just tumble out.

Characters talk at me, nag me until I write them down. They demand my full attention. What happens or might happen to my characters consumes my creative problem-solving apparatus. I'm a hyper-bunny, yet when working to express a character's reality or when putting on a play, my geek self is fully engaged. Everything I experience becomes part of whatever story/drama I am working on. And these stories illuminate my life.

Art, for Andrea, is a "spontaneous improvisation"—one that engages both mind and body: her "geek self," as she calls it. Body is particularly important in her work. But her recognition of the body as the *sine qua non* of humanness defies body's relegation to the inferior term in mind/body dualism. It should come as no surprise, then, that Andrea's understanding of the inextricability of mind and body is informed by theoretical underpinnings that again and again reveal themselves in her essays as well as in her responses as a panelist. Her sense of that inextricability is profoundly, physically embodied in her work as an artist, which has deep roots in theatre. She speaks directly to this in the interview:

Artists are conjurers. We must feel the audience, journey to them, respect them even as we trick and challenge them. Art is a religious engagement with the mysteries of the universe. Spectators and performers share breath and sweat. In a performance, heartbeats and laughter sync up. Audience and performers taste each other's tears. The audience becomes the performers. In a novel, the same thing happens: the reader's body syncs up with the characters, but this takes place in the theatre of the mind. The live audience and the home audience are on a miraculous continuum. We're all, reader, live performer, live audience, making the story whether we witness, perform, or read it. This is part of the miracle and mystery of our Universe. Thus, to tap Ashe, the power to make things be, I always pour libation to Eshu, master of uncertainty. This keeps me humble and open to surprise of the artist-audience exchange.

Artists, as Andrea notes, need an audience to complete their work, to create, when everything meshes, a virtual miracle. I invite—no, urge—you to be the participant audience for Andrea's work, whether a performance of her fiction, a monologue delivered by Andrea the Professor, a performance of her plays, or the printed page of her fiction or essays.



# Signifyin on a Sistah

Nalo Hopkinson

I tried to think of one word with which to encompass Andrea Hairston, and I immediately came up with “enthusiasm” and “passion.” Two words because, of course, one word cannot begin to sum Andrea up. The bio on her website reads, “Andrea Hairston was a math/physics major in college until she did special effects for a show and then she ran off to the theatre and became an artist.” It further tells the tale:

She is the Artistic Director of Chrysalis Theatre and has created original productions with music, dance, and masks for over thirty years. She is also the Louise Wolff Kahn 1931 Professor of Theatre and Afro-American Studies at Smith College. Her plays have been produced at Yale Rep, Rites and Reason, the Kennedy Center, StageWest, and on Public Radio and Television. ... [She] has received many playwriting and directing awards, including a National Endowment for the Arts Grant to Playwrights, a Rockefeller/NEA Grant for New Works, ... a Ford Foundation Grant to collaborate with Senegalese Master Drummer Massamba Diop, and a Shubert Fellowship for Playwriting.

But I don't think she *became* an artist. She already was one. Andrea brings artistry to everything she does, whether it's studying math and physics, the gorgeous fabrics she favors, or her approach to teaching.

I can't remember exactly when I first met her. I want to say that it was after an appearance I made at Hue-Man, the New York Black bookstore that recently gave up its bricks-and-mortar store to go digital. I'm pretty sure she was a recent graduate of Clarion West, and that with her were fellow Clarion survivors Ama and Liz. They introduced themselves to me, still flush with that heady camaraderie that comes of having recently made it through Clarion together.

But it may not have happened exactly that way. I'm a fiction writer, so where memory won't serve, storytelling will. I confess that sometimes the two blur. I know that some of my memory of meeting Andrea is correct. The rest is correct enough. That being said, let me tell you my story, share with you my words of who Andrea Hairston is:

FELLOW GEEK. From her bio: “Since 1997, her plays produced by Chrysalis Theatre, *Soul Repairs*, *Lonely Stardust*, *Hummingbird Flying Backward*, and *Dispatches* have been science fiction plays. *Archangels of Funk*, a sci-fi theatre jam, garnered her a Massachusetts Cultural Council Fellowship for 2003.” Andrea maintains and proves that theatre can create any science-fictional effect cheaper than and just as effectively as film can.

COMMUNITY-SPIRITED. Andrea and the other co-founders of Chrysalis Theatre live and make art together. I am awed by the

level of negotiation, clarity and trust implied by such redoubled closeness. Andrea shares her sources of joy with others. It was she who first introduced me to Carlos Diegues's film *Quilombo*, which signifies brilliantly on the symbolism and iconography of Afro-Brazilian belief systems to tell a magical-realist tale of Palmares, the largest and longest-lived Maroon nation in the Americas. (“Maronage” was the practice wherein enslaved Africans escaped plantations and created their own communities in the hinterlands.) I was a guest in her home at the time. She'd brought me in to speak with a group of young black single mothers who'd read one of my novels. She also introduced them—and me—to author Pearl Cleage. At least one of those young women is now writing as a result.

POLYMATH. She acts, she directs, she sings, she's fluent in German and heaven knows what else. Then there's that math/physics thing.

EXPANSIVE. Andrea's presence fills a room, but she also has that quality that the best divas have: she embraces and celebrates you and invites you to take your space in that room with her.

FIERCE FEMME. Not a phrase she might use about herself. Even I am only using it as shorthand. Suffice to say that the same Andrea who wears flowing, water-dyed silks and ornate earrings is an avid runner who can throw a punch with all her weight behind it and mean it. Do not mess.

AUTHOR. Quoting from her bio again:

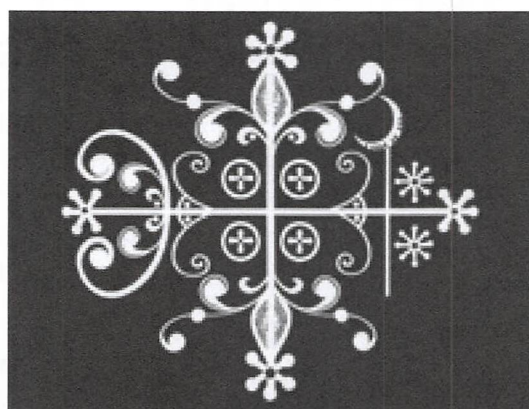
Ms. Hairston's first novel, *Mindscape*, was published by Aqueduct Press in March 2006. *Mindscape* won the Carl Brandon Parallax Award and was short-listed for the Phillip K Dick Award and the Tiptree Award. / “Griots of the Galaxy,” a short story, appears in *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Visions of the Future*, an anthology edited by Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan. / Ms. Hairston [received] the International Association of the Fantastic in the Arts Distinguished Scholarship Award for distinguished contributions to the scholarship and criticism of the fantastic.

In the science fiction field, Andrea hit the ground running and has kept going. I first read “Griots of the Galaxy” when she submitted it to me and Uppinder Mehan for consideration. The story's hybrid sensibility delighted me: African heritage married with womanist principles, science fiction aesthetics, and a wry sense of humor. It embodied a lot of what Uppinder and I knew could be possible in science fiction. Andrea is one of the leading edges of that wave. I was thrilled when her novel *Redwood and Wildfire* won the James Tiptree, Jr. Award for science fiction and fantasy that explores gender and gender roles.

One more quotation, from Carol Cooper's review of

Redwood and Wildfire ... slowly gain the life knowledge and confidence they need to believe in liberation through art—and then to project that belief into the hearts and minds of a live audience. As actors and “root workers” this becomes their ultimate magic trick.

Because authors do sometimes write what they know, I have two more words to give you to denote artist, educator and activist Andrea Hairston, who knows that the magic of art can liberate us: *Conjure woman*.



## StageStruck: Conjuring the Past and Future

Chris Rokmann

[This review was originally published in the *Valley Advocate* newspaper (Northampton, Massachusetts), March 18, 2011. Reprinted by permission of the author.]

The plays that Andrea Hairston writes and produces with Northampton's Chrysalis Theater persistently confront big, enduring issues: violence, racism, the trials and triumphs of women, the importance of community, the power of art.

Those themes course through her novels, too. Her second, *Redwood and Wildfire*, has just been published by Aqueduct Press. It follows 2006's *Mindscape*, a sci-fi adventure of cultural and political conflict, set in a future century. The new book is based on real-life history and rooted in the magic of theater—with a generous pinch of hoodoo magic as well.

Hairston's work, on stage and page alike, insistently searches for signs that humans can overcome their divisions and oppressions, both external and self-inflicted. This book's geographical, emotional and spiritual journeys, spanning the early years of the 20th century, are odysseys of self-discovery and healing from wounds of the body and soul. The novel mirrors the eclectic, cross-cultural composition

of the Chrysalis company and Hairston's own background—a multiracial poet-playwright-actor-musician-scholar who draws nourishment from diverse traditions.

Redwood Phipps is a black girl in Georgia who, at the age of 11, loses her mother to a lynch mob but inherits the woman's gifts as a healer and hoodoo conjurer. Aidan Cooper is a half-Irish, half-Seminole farmer (his Indian name is Wildfire) who witnessed the murder and, helpless to save her, washes down the guilt with whiskey. Later, when Redwood kills a white man who is raping her, she flees to Chicago, where she becomes a singer and dancer in the burgeoning city's bars and music halls. Aidan eventually follows, still battling the demon in the bottle, accompanied by Redwood's kid sister Iris, herself an intuitive seer.

The Chicago scenes are enlivened by a multihued supporting cast, including a philandering black entrepreneur and his straitlaced wife; a gay dancer and his brother, a Persian prince; and the Boneyard Baron: death himself, who stalks and taunts the characters. There's a subplot glimpse into the early silent movie industry, in which Redwood and Aidan are employed as extras, portraying “savage Injuns” in Westerns or “jigging and

cooning” in “chicken-coop comedies”—demeaning roles that inspire Redwood to produce her own film in which “colored folk” are the heroes.

*Redwood and Wildfire* is a historical novel that vividly portrays two American worlds of a century ago: the backwoods of the rural South and the bustling, melting-pot energy of the industrial North. But Hairston's interest isn't only in recreating an era, but in creating the moral momentum for change in people's hearts—the reader's as well as her characters'. As Redwood insists, “What we do really does matter. Even if it don't change everything ... we be making the future now.”

The narrative is suffused with magic, faith healing, even an episode of time travel. But the most powerful conjurations, the charms that heal the soul, come through art. All the main characters are artists. Aidan is a banjo player, songwriter and diarist, Iris a budding screenwriter. Performers, Redwood says, “make the world up, in our dreams and in our songs ... There's a poem in your body up on stage.” Referring to both the power of hoodoo and the power of art, she adds, “We conjure this world, call it forth out of all possibilities.”



# Changing the World Through Story

Kristopher O'Higgins

Andrea Hairston is telling stories that need to be told.

Her novels explore belief, race, class, good and evil, music, showmanship, hoodoo magic, conjuring, the power of myth and storytelling, theater, love and hate—all wrapped up in engaging, driving narratives. Storytelling magic that really shines on the page. Her characters are believable, the dialogue sharp and real, with a sense of fun, sometimes even when things necessarily get dark and serious. Her stories are multi-faceted and work on many levels. She comes at so many things—so many “isms” tacked to the wall and examined. But not lecture-y, or in-your-face, but as a natural part of her storytelling, woven in, smooth and moving. It's powerful.

Andrea's voice allows us to get up close to some really nasty business without

flinching away. It's all very real, yet the way she tells it makes it okay to look, to, say, experience the horror of what life was like in the period of our history that most would rather not look at. And it's the same with the joys, which are almost sweeter because of the honesty of her portrayal. She attacks social issues in her fiction, balancing it so well that it doesn't feel like she has an agenda or is trying to SAY SOMETHING, even though she *is* SAYING SOMETHING.

But it's not all explorations of social injustice. She writes *life*. Her characters are *people*. Real, breathing living people. They've made me laugh out loud as many times as they have brought tears to my eyes. Her years in theater have honed her ear for dialogue to a razor sharp edge—when her characters speak you can *hear* them, *feel* them, *believe* in them. So alive.

So real. And that's how she gets you. You fall in love with them, with their struggles, their triumphs. And with Andrea, for all the pain and suffering she uncovers, there are triumphs, both big and small.

And if you've not attended one of her readings, do it. It's a phenomenal experience. Chills-up-and-down-your-spine good. The first time I saw her read blew me away. As did the second. And third ...

But she's more than her words. Andrea is a *good* person. One of the friendliest, big-hearted people I know. She is generous with her time, involved in helping newbie writers find an entree into the field, and just plain fun to be around. She's just a truly good person. Her words and stories are entertaining as all hell, but more than that, they are *important*. I am very proud to represent her. ✕

## Andrea Hairston: An Appreciation

Lynne Thomas

I'm deeply pleased to have been asked to say a few words about Andrea Hairston.

While you may know Andrea as a novelist, she is also a professor, a scholar, a performer, and a playwright. She teaches at Smith College, where she is the Louise Wolff Kahn 1931 Professor of Theatre and Afro-American Studies, as well as the Artistic Director of the Chrysalis Theatre. Chrysalis has produced a number of her science fiction plays: *Soul Repairs*, *Lonely Stardust*, *Hummingbird Flying Backward*, and *Dispatches*. *Archangels of Funk*, a sci-fi theatre jam, earned her a Massachusetts Cultural Council Fellowship for 2003. Her plays have also been performed at Yale Rep, the Kennedy Center, StageWest, and on public radio and television, and her work has been supported by the National Endowment for the Arts on several occasions. In addition to teaching at Smith, she is also an alumna of the college (as am I). In her copious spare time, she attended Clarion West in 1999. In 2011, she received the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts Distinguished Scholarship Award for her nonfiction contributions to the field.

So, Andrea keeps busy.

I had the distinct pleasure of chairing the 2011 Tiptree Award Jury, which honored *Redwood and Wildfire* as our winner.

This was not Hairston's first go-round with the Tiptrees: her first novel, *Mindscape*, appeared on the Tiptree short list, as well as on the Philip K. Dick Award short list. It then went on to win the Carl Brandon Society Parallax Award.

Apparently, the second time was the charm for the Tiptree. Her heartfelt, stylish tale of love, selfhood, and perseverance won us over. One of the best parts of chairing the Tiptree Jury that year was that I got to personally call Andrea to let her know that she had won the Tiptree (and \$1000, chocolate, and art—it's a *nice* award). It is always wonderful to put some good news into the world, especially so when it touches a writer, performer, and teacher as beloved and respected as Andrea Hairston. When I attended Smith, I lived in one of the dorms closest to the Theater building. I knew a lot of theater majors who worked with her, and heard nothing but praise.

She is a force to be reckoned with, and I'm glad she's in our corner of the universe.

I'm deeply pleased to participate in honoring her as a Guest of Honor for Readercon.

*\*raises glass\**

To Andrea, who honors us all with her work.





Andrea Hairston with masks (Chrysalis Theatre).

# Ten Ways to Read the Fiction of Andrea Hairston

Dan Morigan

*How do you read a butterfly, a river, or a mountain?*

1. Grab the iridescent wing of Andrea's imagination and thumb your nose at gravity. Hold tight, be bold, enjoy!

2. Do not fear her extravagant poetry, peppery rhythms, and polyrhythmic rhymes, nor her mathematical-philosophical meditations ... life is too short for drab and dutiful! Let's dance together!

3. Read as if drenching yourself in perfume or wild and refreshing waters—drink, breathe, and don't worry if your eyes cross or your ears suddenly note hints of music under the music. Yes, there are words beneath those words and you can find them! Treasure hunt!

4. Hang tough! You really do have the magical abilities needed to dance on this tide! Somewhere around page 50, newly conversant in Andrea's piquant tongue, understanding some of her deeply life-loving values, you have become one of us! A world transformer ...

You will awake from this dream a renewed reader with lots of shimmering new vocabulary to keep always. You are a changed being.

5. Made it to page 75 of an Andrea book? Drink a sip of something fiery and pack for adventure. You need grit and good gear in order to slide through time, dive into multiple dimensions, inhabit many bodies, learn new tongues and new ways. Meet frightening and magnificent deities, have tea with ghosts, swim with sea-monsters, and talk to ancestors, aliens, and ants. Welcome to Andrea-land.

6. Don't forget to don your shape-shifter soul. Even if you find not a single character who looks like you, you are still invited, and you *will* find your dreams, hopes, and heartbreaks in Andrea's stories. Andrea is so universal she's a big bang! In her work, no animate being is forced to wear a one-size-fits-none stereotype suit. No character comes from a character warehouse. So be prepared to meet yourself—maybe even in the body of another being. Cool, right?

7. Expect history—undiluted and unpacked in all its WTF. With one foot in the histories, traditions, and innovations of the West African diaspora, the other in Cherokee, Creek, and Seminole story; with personal experience of Jim Crow in one pocket, German fluency in the other; and a heart full of handed-down recipes for transcendence and freedom, Andrea does not mess around. She will challenge you, de-center you, move you, retool you, and even school you—with love.

What I mean by love, is, she writes like she thinks that you're smart and nobody's damn fool. She writes like she knows you're tough, and of good will, and very busy busting out of the mind-prisons our societies make for us. She is not going to talk down to you or disrespect your mind. So ride on! If you've gotten this far, you're clearly a deep seeker and world dreamer who wants to hear *all* the voices from some other side. And you will, believe me, you will.

8. You can skip number 8 unless you are one of those editors, agents, or publishers who have repeated yourselves in alarmingly uniform language on Andrea's phone machine: "Such weird characters!" (Geez, its sci-fi!) "I don't know what to do with it." (Sell it?) "Can't you make the rapist nice or the main character straight, white, and male?" (No comment.) "Who will read this sort of yarn anyhow?" (Everybody and their sister, too!) "You obviously do not know how to write dialect." (Sheesh, what are you not saying? Perhaps some iteration of *I don't know what to do with this book, what with all those weirdo characters?*) Really, please, enough with the euphemisms used to hide fear of Black-centered stories, Indigenous thoughts, female-minded experimentations. *Don't be scared! We don't bite!*

Look, friends, this work is innovative. You have not seen it before, is all. Yet I truly believe you can happily read *and* sell a book that is current, prophetic, uniquely hallucinogenic, fun, funny, philosophical, and heart-stoppingly passionate ... *All that* is what you always say you want, right? *Right?*

Though Andrea's work may come from thought systems alien to you or your usual constituents, and contain values you have not met or that challenge you, say, for a start, values of community, where family is extended, and lone heroes get little play—believe ... a million people are waiting for this work, hungry for this voice right now, today. This is what *I know*.

9. But hey, let's get back to the adventure! No gatekeepers can stop us! Put on your favorite road music and sing Andrea's pages out loud! You can try Andrea-ideas out in your own mouth, note how they feel, how they work, how they sound or taste ... You can even do yoga, dance, or make love to Andrea-quotes. For real! There be songs in these-here books!

This joy: to partner with an author through the imagination, creating a world never seen or known before! To laugh out loud at ourselves and the world. Andrea will *keep* you laughing! (And make you cry.)

This amazement: to become more than we are through story ... to live a thousand lives, to be reborn in new minds, to learn deeply beautiful ways of being and perceiving by reading, to get super-powers by devouring great books!

10. Last, be ready to get *lost*. Exciting, no?

The center is moving, the map is morphing, the nets of reality and relationship are reweaving themselves ... enter this enchanted, sacred forest of ideas, glorious images, breathless plot, kooky, funny dialogue that is Andrea Hairston's fiction. Grab the wings of her imagination and soar!

How thrilling and chilling to journey where no adventurer has gone before.

I know you love it.

Me too. *Lets read, and then talk about it.*

Peace.



# Andrea Hairston: The Good Witch of Northampton

Faye Ringel

Fellow Northampton-ite (Northamptonian?) April Grant recalls that when she was a teenager riding her bike, she would regularly cross paths with Andrea Hairston riding hers: “She’d be wearing a poncho, dripping with rain, and apparently immune to coldness. Oddly, she doesn’t appear to have aged a day since then. It’s the parallax effect of my growing up, of course, but I prefer to think that sometime around 1999 Andrea reached epic level and stopped aging.”

Epic and magical are the right adjectives for Andrea Hairston. She is the epitome of Northampton Style, part of the line of eccentric, brilliant, gifted, indomitable women who accomplished great things in many fields of endeavor. This is the town that welcomed Black abolitionist David Ruggles into a multi-racial, pansexual commune, the Northampton Association of Education and Industry—in the 1840s. Northampton was home to Lydia Maria Child, equally famous as a literary artist and a crusader against slavery and for the American Indian—and briefly a resident of that commune; to Sophia Smith and the school she founded, from which Hairston graduated in 1974 and where she has taught for many years. She now holds an endowed chair as the Louise Wolff Kahn 1931 Professor of Theatre and Afro-American Studies at Smith College.

But the history of Northampton in Massachusetts’s Pioneer Valley is not all peace, love, and harmony. It was home to the Reverend Jonathan Edwards, architect of The Great Awakening and master of New England Gothic horror. Though he preached his most famous sermon “Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God” in 1741 some miles down the Valley, his home church was in Northampton. Who can forget the image of “The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire”? The God that “abhors you”? Some members of his Northampton church so despaired of salvation that they committed suicide. Earlier in the Gothic history

of *this* Northampton, Mary Parsons was twice tried for her life for witchcraft, a full generation before the Salem panic. Today Northampton welcomes followers of The Old Religion, but in the seventeenth century, Andrea Hairston might have stood beside Mary Parsons, condemned for her ability to conjure new worlds of might-have-been and could-still-be. Strong spells indeed!

*Redwood and Wildfire*, her 2012 Tiptree Award-winning novel, is set in one of those might-have-been worlds—one that shares with our world’s history the horrors of African-American enslavement and the Trail of Tears, the reality of lynchings and the Jim Crow laws of the 1890s, and the great migration towards the industrial cities of the North. But in the novel’s world history, hoodoo, voodoo, and haints are equally real, and Baron Samedi can be challenged by Redwood, the hoodoo, midwife, and performing artist. *Redwood and Wildfire* takes literally the phrase “the magic of the theatre.” “Think you could do theatre magic, huh?” says Redwood to Wildfire (295), linking Redwood’s wild hoodoo powers with her bewitching stage performances. She is forced to perform the demeaning routines of the minstrel show in vaudeville, as in our world, where black performers such as Bert Williams were forced to appear in blackface. The novel is set in Peach Grove, Georgia and Chicago between 1898 and 1913, but we must remember that Northampton continued to stage minstrel shows well into the 1940s—including yearly blackface minstrels performed by white residents of a school for the retarded for the patients of Northampton’s mental hospital. The utopian dream of interracial harmony exemplified by the nineteenth-century commune and the racial mockery of minstrelsy are both found in *Redwood and Wildfire*.

Hairston’s erudition and research into African-American popular arts and into white and black minstrel shows sits lightly on *Redwood and Wildfire*. She is fondly remembered by students who have

taken her course at Smith on “Minstrel Shows from Daddy Rice to Big Momma’s House,” but there are no infodumps in the novel. Instead, we are immersed in the sounds, sights, and smells of Chicago in the early twentieth century, and we experience black vaudeville and early film-making from the inside, through the voices of Redwood and Aidan Wildfire.

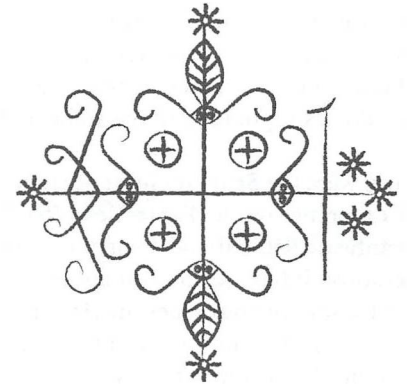
Here Redwood improvises a speech for the proper colored ladies of the Club, the “talented tenth” out to uplift The Race, who are embarrassed by all African-American performers, not only those in the sportin’ houses and coon shows. Redwood responds (in part): “Being on stage is a conjuration for sure. There’s magic in show people ... there’s a poem in your body up on stage ... We make the world up, in our dreams and in our songs ... Singing and dancing we turn ourselves into what we want” (356–7). In this version of history, Redwood realizes her dreams. She sings, dances, heals, faces down wild animals and worse human beings, and changes the world. At the premiere of Redwood’s movie *The Pirate and the Schoolteacher*, with its cast of African-Americans, Native Americans, and a defiantly gay Persian immigrant, filmed by a mad Russian cameraman on the shores of Lake Michigan with the aid of the spirits of the Lake, Aidan Wildfire says: “We’re doing a spell to make the world we want” (432). Such is the power of speculative fiction—or film.

As a novelist who is simultaneously a playwright and performer, Hairston favors the collaborative model over the archetype of the solitary, struggling author. She is an integral part of the Beyon’Dusa Artist Collective, that long-running connection of artists, performers, writers, and publishers who have shared their creative energies with Readercon for the past decade. In the words of the Beyon’Dusa web page, “We work together to create amazing works in the world: art, social activism: a celebration of creativity and the power of the word; music, theater, dance, visual arts, poetry, fiction.” In other words—those of



Redwood's martyred mother, the conjure woman Garnett: "A good story fill you up when you hungry, when you lonely. A good song take the hurting out your spirit" (347). Or, as Iris, the wild spirit who yearns to become a hoodoo like her sister Redwood, recalls the words of their teacher Aunt Subie: "a good conjurer should help lead people back to themselves when they be lost" (377). No wonder, then, that Redwood—in collaboration with her fami-

ly and fellow theatre artists—makes herself and the world anew onstage, transcending the genres meant to contain her—minstrelsy, coon shows, vaudeville—magically fashioning a "bright destiny." And so does her creator, Andrea Hairston: artistic director and founder of Chrysalis Theatre, inspired performer—accomplished conjurer of speculative fiction on stage and page.



## Andrea Hairston: Making Meaning and Finding Patterns

Nisi Shawl, interviewer

[This interview originally appeared in the Spring 2011 issue of *The Seventh Week*, the Clarion West Writers' Workshop newsletter. Used by permission of the interviewer.]

**[Nisi Shawl]: You've written plays, novels, short stories, academic essays, poetry—am I missing a form? How do they all influence each other? Are your academic essays deeply dramatic? Do your novels have footnotes and lots of research behind them?**

[Andrea Hairston]: I also write screenplays.

I like making meaning and finding patterns. So whatever I have to say finds the best form—a paper, a novel, a poem, a play. Writing is a performance, a way to make meaning out of all that I know at the moment. Each performance offers meaning and insight. So a poem affords me marvelous precision and economy, gets me close to the essence, to a jewellike clarity. A play is big and loud and rambunctious. It's a blueprint for lots of voices, lots of creativity, a blueprint for an experience that changes each time the audience sits down to witness it. A novel is a bit lonelier than a play—but then you don't have to negotiate meaning with all those other people. You do the set, lights, costumes, act all the parts, and direct! CONTROL! Papers are like that too, and in a paper you don't have to argue with characters who have minds of their own.

**In your latest novel, *Redwood and Wildfire*, you write about a hoodooing African American woman; your previous novel, *Mindscape*, tells of powerful extraterrestrials ruling the Earth. Do you believe in magic or science?**

For me science is magic, and I am a believer.

I think we're in a bizarre era—science is simultaneously revered and reviled. Many people are hostile to scientists and their approach to the world. I get why, but it is distressing.

I think the notion that science must exclude the so-called irrational is also quite distressing. The notion that emotions are inferior to thoughts and indeed can be separated out from thinking is a destructive one. We need our passions to think clearly. We cannot banish this intrinsic component from the process of mak-

ing meaning, of generating our realities, of discovering new truth and insights. We live in the stories we invent. That is quite a magical process. Pseudo-objectivity has been a dangerous, oppressive weapon. All the scientists I know are passionate even as they strive to understand their position in the universe.

**On your website you state that you love words "almost as much as numbers." Which numbers do you love, and why?**

I particularly like the imaginary numbers. If you square an imaginary number you get a negative number:  $i^2 = -1$ . I believe Descartes came up with the name "imaginary" for these numbers as a put-down—the way some people view fantasy as less valid than mimetic realism. But imaginary numbers turn out to be excellent expressions of quantum-mechanical phenomena or electrical engineering states. Reality expands to include our fantasies!

**Does speaking and thinking in another language help you to write more fantastically? How?**

I've always loved languages. Each offers you the wisdom of the ancestors—all those poets and adventurers, scientists and artists, who collected their truth and passed it on. Each language offers special insights on the world—*Weltanschauung* in German—literally, "world on-looking." With each language I come to know a different world and I find more Andrea to be. So I have studied German, Latin, French, and Spanish. Mathematics is also a language. The more languages I have, the more I can imagine, the more I can conjure, the more I can challenge myself to find the other worlds that are lurking around the one I take for granted in my day-to-day.

**You're preparing for a touring series of readings/performances of your novel *Redwood and Wildfire*. The tour will be complete by the time people read this, but what are you planning for them to see?**

I do a dramatic reading of three sections of the novel. Pan Morigan has composed music for lyrics written by Aidan Wildfire, one of its main characters. Pan got a banjo last fall and learned

to play it for the tour, since the banjo is Aidan's instrument. She sings Aidan's songs between the pieces that I perform, and adds music underneath me. At the *New York Review of Science Fiction* reading, she got folks in the audience to sing along with her!

**You were the Scholar Guest of Honor at 2011's International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts. The theme was "The Fantastic Ridiculous," focusing on humor in imaginative literature. What are your thoughts on that theme? What did you talk about in your Guest of Honor Speech?**

To be funny you must be serious; you have to trust that falling off the cliff won't kill you; you have to believe that the hungry predators in the audience won't eat you alive; you must know when the bomb goes off and the dust clears, you'll be standing somewhere with a puzzled look on your singed face, head cocked, wondering—did that really happen?

At ICFA, I talked about the power of satire and its kinship with the fantastic.

Satire and SF/F are jazz storytelling, riffing on the known/seen to expose the unseen, laying bare the invisible for our delight and edification.

**When you attended Clarion West in 1999, you were already a full professor at Smith College and had written, translated, and presented plays, performance pieces, and poetry internationally. With all that going for you, what made you want to come to CW?**

I decided in 1995 that I wanted to write SF/F novels. What I wanted to write about demanded this particular form. But I was a drama queen—I knew how to tell a story on stage or screen; I knew how to turn a phrase, how to work dialogue and action.

I came to CW so that I could get help transforming my drama queen self into a novelist. I wanted to get to know other fiction writers. I wanted to experience their processes. I wanted to hear what all these great artists and editors had to say about writing. I wanted to think about nothing but writing for six weeks.

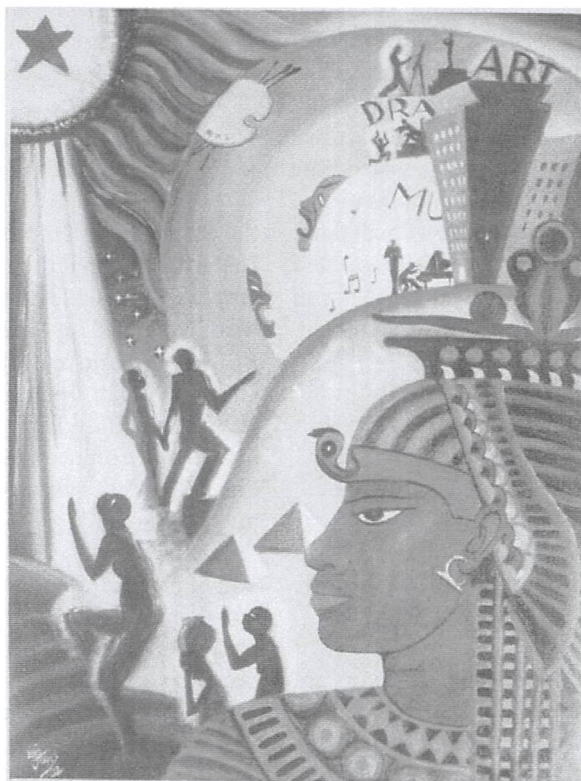
It worked. I made friends for life. I heard wise and wicked critique every day—of my work for sure, but of work I read and thought about, too. I got to see how people read as well as how people wrote. Glimpsing how readers respond to stories is a precious gift.

**One of your CW instructors, Octavia E. Butler, called what she wrote "save-the-world fiction." Can your writing save the world?**

Octavia's writing certainly saved me! She offered me that "way out of no way." She showed that the impossible is possible, and that's a mind-blowing experience. You read her and you are never the same. Saving the world is a big effort. We need lots of folks working on that. So I hope I am doing my part.

**Based on your own experience, do you have any advice for 2011's CW students?**

1. Don't give up—just take a break now and then and keep on coming back.
2. Get your team together and stay hooked up with one another.
3. Go on out and live life! Experience the world. Risk yourself.



# Celebrating Andrea Hairston: Griot, Visionary, Fellow Traveler

Sheree Renée Thomas

Imagine griots who journey across galaxies and minds, two-headed women who see past the veil of family secrets and time, “expendable folk” facing the impossible, rewriting their own remarkable histories, ethnic throwback diplomats navigating their way through dangerous personal, physical, and professional barriers, and aliens contemplating what it means to be human while trapped in a local video store. These fiercely unique and diverse stories, documented on the stage and the page, could only have emerged from the brilliant mind of playwright, director, performance artist, actor, educator, and novelist Andrea Hairston.

In her own words, Andrea “calls on any language to express what is necessary. Griots are poets, musicians, oral historians, praise singers, and diplomats negotiating community, conjuring identity.” For Andrea, “griots shake time loose, allowing us to feel beyond our brief moments, beyond our skin. They dance down ego-trips, pour libation to the ancestors, and welcome the unborn. Illuminating the past, invigorating the future, these time-traveling Wordsmiths stand between us and cultural amnesia.” Her writing urges us to “dance life.” She crafts amazing, memorable characters who “imagine the impossible and rehearse the future in the face of adversity.”

Born in Homewood, the historic, black Pittsburgh community written about by author John Edgar Wideman, Andrea and her brother, James ‘Hap’ Hairston, grew up with parents who encouraged their children to let their immense imagination and intelligence soar. As a child, Andrea read five or six books weekly, including works by James Baldwin, Harper Lee, Margaret Walker, Robert Heinlein, and later Ursula K. Le Guin, Alice Walker, and Toni Cade Bambara. Her mother allowed the kids one television show a week, and Andrea’s choice was the original *Star Trek* series. (Her brother compulsively read the dictionary, and later became a journalist at a major New York daily and the subject of

a Tony Award-winning Broadway show.) Andrea and Hap, best pals in childhood, went to the picture shows often, searching for science fiction especially. The two had a little scam going. They asked every available adult for a quarter for movie tickets, or carfare, thereby acquiring extra funds for popcorn and candy. With the change left over from not taking the train after all, the two splurged on comic books.

“Growing up in the ‘50s,” says Andrea, “I intended to be a theoretical physicist or a mathematician. But I come from a family of storytellers, big talkers, and tall-tale-tellers. No one in my family knew when to shut up. This got me into hot water when I started school. I always finished my work fast, and then wanted to talk about it. My mother started me writing stories for her so I wouldn’t disturb the other kids trying to learn, or get myself in trouble with the teacher. I wrote epic adventures and sagas for her and drew illustrations of exciting scenes. She was trying to keep me out of the principal’s office. I’ve been writing ever since.”

No one who knows Andrea Hairston or who has spoken with her, for even a few moments, would be surprised to learn that she began her career as a math/physics major in college and once edited math textbooks for Houghton Mifflin in Boston. Her love for science, art, and the human spirit comes across in all of her writing. Andrea says she was prepared for a life in the sciences until she “did special effects for a show,” an experience that changed her whole perspective. Bitten, she then “ran off to the theatre and became an artist.” In hindsight, Andrea feels that the seeds of her love for theatre were planted long before college.

In 1969, at seventeen, Andrea watched a PBS production of Alice Childress’s *Wine in the Wilderness*. The play about a “lower-class black woman struggling with an elitist, middle-class, black male artist to define beauty, love, power, etc.” where there were “no evil white people to be found, and all the

characters had to work hard to transform themselves,” changed her life and what she thought she could do and what could be written. Says Andrea, “African-American theatre opened up the world for me. And then I read everything: Wole Soyinka, Tess Onwueme, Derek Walcott, Bertolt Brecht, Jean Anouilh, Caryl Churchill, Ibsen, Femi Osifisan, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, Micere Githae Mugo, Shakespeare, Aimé Césaire, and more names than I can call out.”

Andrea successfully made the shift from physics to theatre during her junior year at Smith College: from contemplating the mysteries of science and life to dramatizing them by directing and writing plays, Andrea became enthralled by “theatre and the possibilities of live performance.” She graduated from Smith as a theatre major, got an MA in playwriting from Brown University, and explored filmmaking at NYU’s Sight and Sound intensive program. In 1978, she and lifelong best friend, actor James Emery, co-founded Chrysalis Theatre in Northampton, Massachusetts with “a staunch group of activist/artists who believed people should go out and make the world they wanted to see.” Believing that “theatre is a rehearsal of the possible,” Chrysalis made local history by bringing theatre and performing arts to the lives of young people society had written off, or labeled ‘at risk.’ Chrysalis artists worked with parenting teens, gang members, shelter children, and with immigrant women and social workers as well. Rather than performing for them and returning home, Chrysalis put theatre in their neighbors’ hands, guiding and mentoring these newly born theatre folk as they wrote, directed, produced, and starred in their own plays and stories.

As the Artistic Director of Chrysalis Theatre and the Louise Wolff Kahn 1931 Professor of Theatre and African-American Studies at Smith College, (teaching Playwriting and African, African-American, German, and Caribbean theatre literature), Andrea has been an active innovator and leader in the dramatic arts

for over thirty years. Her innovative use of dance, masks and multi-media in her productions challenges audiences to think above and beyond convention. Andrea has directed well over thirty of her original plays, and her work has been seen at such venues as Smith College, New Hampshire Art Institute, the Kennedy Center, Yale Rep, Rites and Reason, Stage West, and on public radio and television. Additionally, Andrea directed the American premiere of playwright Carol Churchill's acclaimed work, *Vinegar Tom*, and early works by Pearl Cleage at Smith College, helping to launch an amazing career.

Andrea was interested in the films of Margarethe von Trotta, the plays of Bertolt Brecht, and other German authors and filmmakers who resisted the illusions of realism. She thought such works would be better appreciated in German, so she studied the German language at length, becoming deeply fluent. (Ask her about one of her German novels!) Andrea has since translated plays by Michael Ende (best known for *The Neverending Story*) and Kaća Čelan from German to English. This extended cross-cultural encounter brought Andrea and family to Germany many times over the course of twenty-five years, where she met and befriended a diversity of German citizens, Bavarian farmers, teachers, and bankers—African, South American, and Turkish immigrants, and urban artists. This experience altered Andrea's life-view fundamentally, providing her with insights into her own culture and country—the insights that distance brings. Such a multifaceted perspective has had a great influence on Andrea's vision.

Influenced by surrealism, expressionism, Caribbean and West African festival drama, Andrea's plays have always offered more than a hint of the fantastical, and could rightly be called speculative. Recent works such as *Soul Repairs*, *Lonely Stardust*, and *Hummingbird Flying Backward* are straight-up science fiction plays. Andrea directed staged readings of both *Hummingbird Flying Backward* and *Mindscape* at the *New York Review of Science Fiction* reading series at Dixon Place that I curated. The latter occurred the day before the September 11, 2001 attacks and the passing of her dear father James Hairston. In the chaos that ensued, Andrea's art was a healing force: an inspiration to think clearly and to keep creat-

ing. A subsequent play, *Archangels of Funk*, earned her a Massachusetts Cultural Council Playwriting Fellowship for 2003, one of numerous prestigious grants she has been awarded over the years to support her work. Her latest play, *Thunderbird at the Next World Theatre*, premiered on April 16, 2014 at the Hallie Flanagan Theatre at Smith College and is forthcoming in *Geek Theater: 12 Plays by Science Fiction and Fantasy Masters* (Underwords Press). Set in the near future where public gatherings, including theater, have been banned for 'national security,' an aging actor sneaks into the Next World Theatre where he encounters Dragons and other artists who challenge him to face a past he wants to forget and a future he would like to give up on. If you missed seeing a live performance of some of these plays, you can still enjoy them in Andrea's new collection, *Lonely Stardust: Two Plays, A Speech, and Eight Essays* recently published by Aqueduct Press. You can also see her in the 2000 documentary, *Game Over: Gender, Race and Violence in Video Games*.

Any cursory research on Andrea Hairston would reveal that she has gathered an impressive portfolio of accolades for her many years of theatre work, including grants from the NEA, the Ford Foundation, and a Shubert Playwriting Fellowship. While Andrea immersed herself in theatre, she says she was always conscious that there were other stories she wanted to tell, stories that called out for a different form. This awareness inspired her to attend Clarion West in 1999 and to co-found Beyon'Dusa, a five-woman artist collective which has stayed strong for thirteen years, together workshopping stories, novels, songs, and life itself. Andrea pursued the magic and power of narrative with a passion. This exploration inspired some of her most evocative poetry, short fiction, literary criticism, and her first published novels.

Recent years have seen Andrea's innovative writings read and recognized more widely, to the great joy of those of us who've witnessed her epic journey. Her first speculative novel, *Mindscape*, was on the 2006 Tiptree Award short list, named a 2006 finalist for the Philip K. Dick Award, and won the 2006 Carl Brandon Parallax Award. She was Guest of Honor at Diversicon 15 in 2007. In 2011, Andrea was Guest Scholar at the International

Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts, and winner of the IAFA Distinguished Scholarship Award for outstanding contributions to the criticism of the fantastic. Her second novel of magic, murder, movies, and the transformative power of love and music, *Redwood and Wildfire*, won the Carl Brandon Kindred Award and the 2011 James Tiptree, Jr. Award. With great excitement we looked on as Andrea spoke by phone with a Tiptree committee member. She became not a little weepy and, notably, was rendered nearly speechless with happiness. (Andrea is rarely rendered speechless!) She finally stammered something on the order of "Wow-oh-wow-oh-wow ... I feel like I won the Academy Award." And it was historic. Andrea was the first person to be the Tiptree Award Winner and WisCon Guest of Honor in the same year.

On the subject of her many honors, Andrea is humble, and when asked she speaks only of her current projects and passions. For her, it is the excitement of the creative process, of bringing new worlds, new visions, new stories to the surface that is most exhilarating.

Yet we who love her know that she hopes (as do we) to have her works read, understood, and appreciated. Awards such as the Tiptree bear witness to the fact that, after many years of persistence, this dream is unfolding, bringing Andrea full circle to her childhood roots in Homewood where she first dazzled her mother with epic stories and adventures. Andrea's mother, Ruth T. Hairston and her beloved great aunt, Estelle Hicks would be especially proud of Andrea, if they were with us today. Those two strong women saw Andrea through a 1950s/'60s childhood, dreaming dreams for her that they could hardly imagine themselves. Thus, Andrea's life has been a speculative work of art from the very beginning.

Andrea is a 21st-century griot whose words and visions inspire us and challenge us to know ourselves so we can become catalysts for positive change. An artist as well as a community activist, she believes that "artists, like sociologists, should offer us the ability to imagine ourselves." Indeed, Andrea's work invites us to reimagine ourselves in ways that subvert our expectations. She challenges us to move beyond what we think we know about ourselves and our world, to question race, class, gender, identity politics, family dynamics, and

community responsibility from a perspective that is at once global and personal.

Andrea often quotes a Yoruba proverb: "If no one tells your story, you die twice." As a playwright, poet, screenplay writer, literary critic, academic, communi-

ty activist, and novelist, Andrea has spent her life writing the stories of voices that would otherwise be silenced. At the same time, she creates beautiful and surprising worlds and characters that move us, offering joy, passion, and wonder. Her latest

novel, *Will Do Magic for Small Change* is finished and awaiting a publisher. Because she generously shares with us the incredible gifts of these creative efforts, her art in all its masterful forms, Andrea Hairston's own brilliant story will live on and on.

## A Time Traveler's Guide to Favorite Moments & Quotes by Andrea Hairston

(compiled by Sheree Renée Thomas)

I was convinced science and technology would show everyone to a miraculous undiscovered country ... the future. Never mind if the president didn't want to include us in his government! Never mind if we had to go to different schools! We'd be storming the stage soon enough! Science fiction was necessary to survive.

—GoH Speech, WisCon 36, on being born in Pittsburgh on July 9, 1952

These anti-realists didn't worship the spectacle of the real. Bertolt Brecht said art is not a mirror held up to reality, but a hammer with which to shape it.

—GoH Speech, WisCon 36, on discovering science fiction and fantasy in 1973

Let's work on the impossible. It'll take longer and be more fun.

—GoH Speech, WisCon 36

Normal is the secret weapon of empire. Invisible, taken for granted, running constantly in the background, normal is the default setting for the empire of the mind.

—“Dismantling the Echo Chamber: On *Africa SF*,”  
*Los Angeles Review of Books*, January 16, 2014

To realize alternatives, we must first dream them.

—“Dismantling the Echo Chamber: On *Africa SF*”

Rewriting the rules that define/constitute the fantasy we call reality in order to dismantle colonial structures and transform said reality is an incredible challenge. Black to the future was/is a radical, dangerous, and daring dream—an impossibility. Science fiction and fantasy is a rehearsal of the impossible, an ideal realm for redefinition and reinvention.

—“Dismantling the Echo Chamber: On *Africa SF*”

Reality is not a question of facts. It's a question of what we're willing, what we're eager to believe despite the facts.

—“Set Truth on Stun: Reimagining an Anti-Oppressive SF/F,” *Strange Horizons*, August 2013

To change the SF/F community, we have to transform the cultural landscape. This is not just about great writing that can reach any audience. We already have a diverse crew of mighty SF/F writers. They are systematically ignored. Change is co-evolution. We need a feedback loop where the beauty, profitability, and significance of our diverse experiences and stories have premium value. That's not happening right now. Our pain and joy, our wisdom and folly, our rip-roaring fun and heart-wrenching struggles have

to become common ground for the speculations we want to do. The complexity of who we are, might be, and have been has to be visible and prominent in secondary fantasy worlds, far-flung futures, urban slipstream and mundane realism.

—“Set Truth on Stun: Reimagining an Anti-Oppressive SF/F”

No one should let yesterday use up too much of today. Easy to say, hard to live.

—*Redwood and Wildfire*

...that is the principle of being in society: holding contradictory ideas and being able to relate them. We have to be able to do poly-rhythmic thinking, in order to be women and not-women.

—Feminism and Identity panel on Joanna Russ, May 2011

Dashing, struggling through foreign woods, along an alien stream, trancing out in someone else's mother tongue, I can't escape the thought that, much to my dismay, I am not at all in search of a “women's aesthetic.” Some feminist! Tripping over exposed roots, I have to admit that such august categorizations as “women's aesthetic,” “black aesthetic,” “men's aesthetic,” “Eurocentric, Afrocentric, Asiocentric aesthetic” make me want to puke. The image of dialectical, sacred dualities (Good and Bad, Black and White, Male and Female), of endless holy warring oppositions of art, humanity, and experience, that seem downright dangerous to anybody who has the unmitigated gall to reject cosmetic cover-ups and work for profound transformation. Effortless, appealing, time-honored generalizations from the official and/or unconscious canon are anathema to anybody trying to discover, uncover, and recover a spectrum of life-affirming truths. I reject the struggle to bury human diversity and complexity into such simplistic conceptualizations as suicidal, as unworthy of our vast capacity for creative expression and survival.

—Introduction: Meditating on Feminist Theory While Jogging in Germany (in *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theater as if Race and Gender Matter*, August 1, 1993)

Ethnic throwbacks be like the ole Israelis bringin' back Hebrew after two thousand years, after so many words was fightin' against 'em. Why anybody wanna speak the truth, raise they children, know themselves with gas chamber language? Survival be havin' words to call home, havin' idioms and syntax to heal the Diaspora. In your cultural rhythm and rhyme, that's where the soul keep time. —Lawanda Kitt

—*Mindscape*, 115 years into our future

You don't have to be Eurocentric to make it to the future. We have to figure out how to be different together. [And t]hat is what storytelling is all about, particularly the mythological storytelling that we do.

—“Beyond *Game of Thrones*: Exploring Diversity in Science Fiction,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 9, 2013

We have survived. Living a disaster movie is definitely not as much fun as watching it on the big screen. ... This is a science fictional moment. Who gets to write the future? Who will define/create the fantasy we call reality? Now is the time to organize the rage and transform the pages of history. Welcome to the folks breaking out of the prison post-industrial complex and shaking up the dystopia!

—“Celebrating After the Tree-Apocalypse”

...[i]f we want that anti-oppressive SF/F community, we have to transform the toxic climate that permeates our public and private moments. People need to feel possible ... Showcasing artists “outside the mainstream” who have succeeded is wonderful, but we have to jumpstart, kickstart radical change. We need to interrupt the cultural default settings that devalue the artistic production and life experiences of people with disabilities, women, people of color, *et al.* This requires social engineering. We have to engage readers, writers, editors, and publishers. We need platforms to showcase the works—flash mobs, podcasts, blogs, videos, readings, trailers that get the word out, that celebrate the meaning, value, and mad fun of our work. Orchestras have done auditions behind curtains so that gender or race or some other visually coded bias/discrimination is interrupted. We could try gender/race neutral acquisition, evaluation, and advertising. We must shake up the gate keepers who proclaim there is no profit in revolution.

—“Set Truth on Stun: Reimagining an Anti-Oppressive SF/F”

So I imagine an SF/F community as rich and lush as our diverse world. I want stories, novels, essays, plays, and films that I can't quite imagine yet—the new world we could make if we put our minds, hearts, and bodies into it. I want POC, gender-neutral, or disabled characters who aren't blind seers, tragic saints, or spiritual handmaidens for the able-bodied “normal” folks. So I am writing these characters in my novels and stories and plays. I want writers and critics challenging me from various perspectives to rethink who and what it is possible to be.

I want folks showing me how we can be different together. Break the default setting.

Set truth on stun.

—“Set Truth on Stun: Reimagining an Anti-Oppressive SF/F”

People with power, talent, and beauty don't necessarily get wealth, success, and happiness. The tragedies that befall us are not simply caused by the flaws in our characters. Power and talent can be a torment in a system stacked against you. People can shun the magical ones, be jealous or frightened of brilliance. Social forces can thwart even the strongest will and structural reality can crush individual imagination and agency.

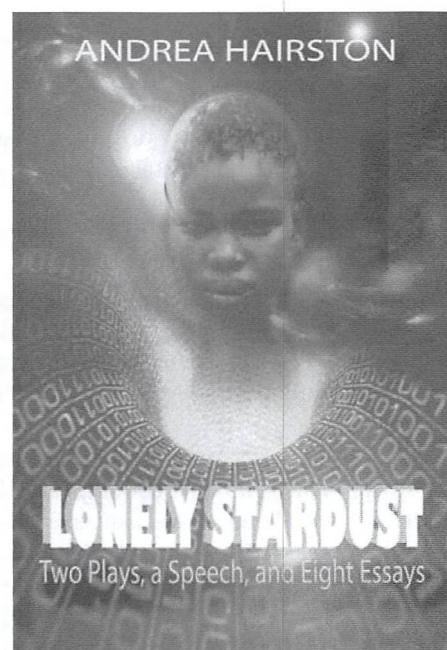
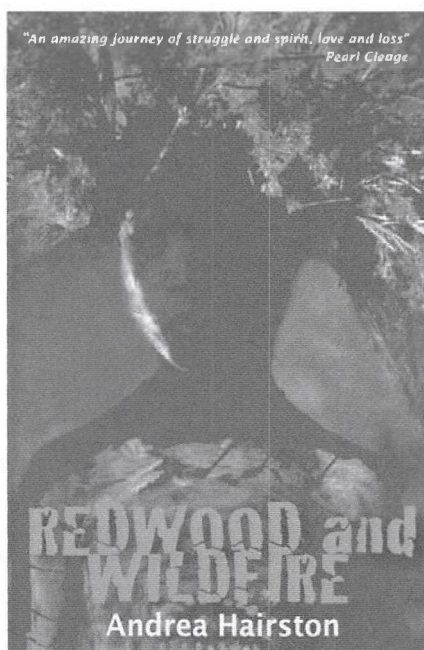
In all of my stories, History and the Future are always manifest in the now, in the Present. As a writer, I ask, even if folk are talented, powerful, and beautiful, what do they need in order to come through a treacherous world, whole and creative?

How can we conjure the wondrous world we believe in?

This is the struggle I love to write about.

Indeed, this is the struggle I live.

—“How Can We Conjure the Wondrous World We Believe In? Researching and Writing *Redwood and Wildfire*: An Historical Novel,” February, 2008



# Will Do Magic For Small Change

Andrea Hairston

[This excerpt is the opening of a novel (not yet published), described by the author as “a novel of what might have been.” An early version of a chapter appeared in *80! Memories & Reflections on Ursula K. Le Guin*, Aqueduct Press, 2010.]

## Dedication to *The Chronicles*

*The abyss beckons.*

You who read are Guardians. For your generosity, for the risks you take to hold me to life, I offer thanks and blessings. Words are powerful medicine—a shield against further disaster. I should have written sooner. Writing might help me become whole again. I can’t recall most of the 20th century. As for the 19th, I don’t know what really happened or what I wished happened or what I remember again and again as if it happened. I write first of origins, for as the people say:

*Cut your chains and you become free, cut your roots and you die.*

## *Guardians and Wanderers*

“Books let dead people talk to us from the grave.”

Cinnamon Jones spoke through gritted teeth, holding back tears. She gripped the leather bound, special edition, illustrated adventure book her half-brother Sekou had given her. It was dusty and heavy and smelled of pepper and cilantro. Sekou could never get enough pepper.

“Huh?” Opal tugged at the fat tome. She wanted to dump it in the wardrobe with the wet coats. “You’re too young for that mess. Why did Sekou give it to you? You can’t understand half of it.”

“How do you know? You haven’t read it. Nobody’s read it, except Sekou.” Cinnamon wouldn’t let go. She was a big girl, taller than her five foot four mother and thirty-five pounds heavier. Opal hadn’t won a tug of war with her since she was eight. “I’m not a baby. I’ll be thirteen next August.”

“What’re you mumbling?” Opal said. “Speak up.”

“Books let dead people talk to us from the grave!” Cinnamon shouted.

Gasping, Opal let go, and Cinnamon tumbled into the funeral director. The whole room was listening. Opal grimaced. She hated *public display*. The funeral director nodded at her. He was solemn and upright and smelled like air freshener. Opal had his deepest sympathy and a bill she couldn’t pay. Dying was expensive. “Sekou can talk to you at home,” Opal whispered to Cinnamon, poker face back in place. “Why’d you bring that stupid book?”

“Sekou said I shouldn’t let this book out of my sight.” Cinnamon pressed her cheek against the cover, catching a whiff of Sekou’s after-gym sweat. “What if there was a fire at home?”

Opal snorted. “We could collect insurance.”

“This volume’s from 1892. It’s 1984, so that’s ninety-two years old.” Cinnamon was good at numbers—she liked them almost as much as words. “This book is older than Great Aunt Iris, but not as old as Miz Redwood or Granddaddy. It’s, well, it’s magic and, and really, *truly* powerful.”

“Sekou picked that old thing up dumpster diving in Shadyside.” Opal shook her head. “Dragging trash around with you everywhere won’t turn it into magic.”

Cinnamon was losing the battle with tears. “Why not?”

Opal’s voice snagged on words that wouldn’t come. She shuddered and waved a hand—an *I-can’t-take-any-more* gesture. She wavered against the flower fortress around the open casket. Her dark skin had a chalky overlay. The one black dress to her name had turned ash gray in the wash but didn’t shrink to fit her wasted form. She was as flimsy as a ghost. Sekou looked more alive than Opal, a half-smile stuck on the face nestled in blue satin. Cinnamon scrunched her nose and eyes together. Funerals were stupid. This ghoul statue wasn’t really Sekou, just dead dust in a rented pinstripe suit made up to look like him. Sekou was gone, long gone. Somewhere Cinnamon couldn’t go, not yet. Sekou had left her here all alone. How would she make it without him? *Pittsburgh’s a dump. First chance I get, I’m outa*

here. Sekou said that every other day. How could he abandon her? Cinnamon brushed away an acid tear before Opal noticed.

With gray walls, slate green curtains, olive tight-napped carpets, and a faint tang of formaldehyde clinging to everything, Johnson's Funeral Home might as well have been a tomb. In the front parlor, far from the stand-in body, far from the grieving mother and half-sister, mourners in black and navy blue stuffed their mouths with fried chicken or guzzled coffee laced with booze. Uncle Dicky had a flask and claimed he was lifting everybody's spirits. Nobody looked droopy—mostly good Christians arguing whether Sekou, after such a bad boy life, hit heaven or hell or decayed in the casket.

"God's always busy punishing the wicked," Cousin Carol declared. "The Lord don't take a holiday."

Uncle Dicky nodded. "Indeed He don't."

"So Hell must have your name and number, Richard, over and over again," Aunt Becca said. "This chicken is dry." She munched it anyway and a blob of potato salad. Opal's youngest sister didn't worry about what she put in her mouth or what came out. A hollow tube in a sleek black sheath, Aunt Becca got away with everything. Naturally straight tresses, Ethiopian sculptured features, and dark skin immune to the ravages of time, she *never* took Jesus as her personal savior and nobody made a big stink. Not like when Opal left Sekou's dad for Raven Cooper, a pagan hoodoo man seventeen years her senior. The good Christians never forgave Opal, not even after Cinnamon's dad was shot in the head helping out a couple getting mugged. He and Opal had never married, and now Raven Cooper was in a coma and might as well be dead. This was supposedly God punishing the wicked too. Cousin Carol had to be lying. What god would curse a *hero* who'd risked his life for strangers with a living death? Cinnamon squeezed Sekou's book tighter against her chest. God didn't take a holiday from good sense, did he?

"I hate these dreary wake things." Funerals even put Aunt Becca in a bad mood. She and her boyfriend steered clear of Sekou's remains.

"The ham's good," the boyfriend said. He was a fancy man, styling a black velvet cowboy shirt and black boots with two-inch heels. Silver lightning bolts shot up the shaft of one boot and down one side of the velvet shirt. His big roughrider's hat had feathers and bolts and edged the other head gear off the wardrobe rack. "Why have food with the body?" He helped himself to a mountain of mashed sweet potatoes.

"Beats me." Aunt Becca sighed.

Opal couldn't stand having anybody over to their place. It was a dump. What if there was weeping and wailing and *public display*?

"Who knows what my sister was thinking." Aunt Becca glanced at Cinnamon, who kept her mouth shut. She didn't have to tell everything she knew. "Some memorial service. Nobody saying anything." Aunt Becca looked relieved.

None of Opal's family loved Sekou the way Cinnamon did. Nobody liked Opal much either, except Aunt Becca. The other uncles, aunts, and cousins came to the memorial to impress Uncle Clarence, Opal's rich lawyer brother, and to let Opal know what a crappy mom she was. Sekou's druggy crew wasn't welcome since they were *faggots and losers*. Opal didn't have any friends; Cinnamon neither. Boring family was it.

Sekou Wannamaker  
Nineteen sixty-six to nineteen eighty-four  
What's the word, Thunderbird, come streaking in that door  
A beautiful light, going out of sight  
Thunderbird, chasing the end of night

Uncle Clarence's third wife read Cinnamon's stupid poem out loud. "What a shame," the third wife whispered. Cinnamon had forgotten her name.

"Opal couldn't see the boy through to his eighteenth year," Clarence said.

"Mayonnaise is going bad." Becca made a face at Opal. "Sitting out too long."

"Then don't eat it, Rebecca." Opal shouted over the empty chairs lined up in front of the casket. She looked ready to fall over. "Hell, I didn't make it." She needed a cigarette.

"Sorry." Becca pressed bright red fingernails against plum colored lips. "You know my mouth runs like a leaky faucet."

Cinnamon bumped Opal, not enough to knock her over, just enough to offer heat. Opal was shivering cold—December caught in her bones. Cinnamon squeezed her eyes shut. "This *is* a special book, *magic*, a book to see a person through tough times."



“Sekou talked a lot of trash.” Opal sounded like a scratchy ole LP. “You hear me?”

“Don’t say that.” Cinnamon chomped her bruised lower lip. Pain diverted tears.

Opal touched the stand-in’s marble skin and stroked soft dreadlocks. “When he was high, he didn’t know what he was saying—making shit up. Don’t go quoting him.”

Cinnamon wanted to scream. Opal was so embarrassed by a drug addict son who maybe OD’ed on purpose that she almost didn’t have a memorial service. Cursing Sekou out in public, loud, was fine though. Uncle Clarence’s grown kids sneered at her foul-mouthed mom. Jehovah’s Witnesses like Uncle Dicky, Holy Rollers like Cousin Carol, and other snooty people in the family, who didn’t believe you should have your mouth in the gutter around children, clucked and sucked and shuffled their feet, but held their peace. Opal was the bereaved one. They’d wait to scold her later. Well, not Clarence. An atheist passing for Methodist, he was above everything except the law. As he opened his mouth to chastise Opal, Becca stepped in front of him, waved a chicken wing at Cinnamon, and changed the subject.

“Good lord, what size are you already?” Becca shook her head of bouncy curls. “You better learn to push yourself away from the table.”

“I didn’t eat much.” Cinnamon didn’t eat *anything*. Her belly burned. Sadness always turned her stomach inside out. Tears pounded her eyes.

“Don’t you dare,” Opal whispered. “Nobody wants to see that.” Opal hated tears. Cinnamon sucked them back. “You promised not to be a crybaby today. Sekou wouldn’t want you crying.” Opal scoured away tear dribble.

“I knew him better than you did.” Sekou wouldn’t want Cinnamon to be sad forever, still he’d appreciate a few tears. “There’s plenty he never told you.”

Opal panicked. “Your brother was no good. You hear me? That’s why he’s dead this day.” She wheezed and coughed. “I gotta dump that junk of his. Can’t have it around the house, bad memories doing us no good.”

“This book is all true. Can’t throw truth away.” Cinnamon stroked the cover. “The more I read it, the truer it’ll get. Sekou got it from a weird and wonderful Wanderer, several lifetimes old, ancient in our terms, yet young for the Wanderer tribe.”

“Don’t start,” Opal groaned. “Some homeless, trash-talking cokehead told Sekou that Wanderer lie ’cause—”

“No, wait. Sekou said this Wanderer trusted him to keep several illustrated adventure, uhm, adventure journals of top, top secrets safe.”

“Don’t get wound up—”

“No, see . . .” A story storm engulfed Cinnamon. “I don’t know where the other volumes are.” She raced to say the juicy stuff flooding her mind from everywhere and nowhere at the speed of light. “It’s a, a treasure, priceless, and we can’t let a treasure fall into the wrong hands. Can’t have it drop on somebody who doesn’t *believe*. Then the Wanderer could be lost! And that would be a tragedy. We’re talking about a Wanderer from the stars, I think, or no, wait, hold up.” The floor tilted under Cinnamon’s feet. Her tongue tingled. Was this deluge of words one of her tall tale lies? Certainly, it wasn’t a *normal* lie to extract goodies from stingy, crazy grown-ups or to save her from a sticky situation. She wasn’t trying to impress folks or make them like her. This story storm brought on that natural high Sekou was so jealous of. “A Wanderer from another dimension, from *the spaces between things*, come to chronicle life here on Earth. Without me reading, the Wanderer is dust! I’m a, a life saver.”

“Life saver?” Opal snorted. “You wish!”

“I am. I don’t know if the extra dimensions have stars. Anyhow we’re the Wanderer’s Mission Impossible. Only the Wanderer is like Buckaroo Banzai crossing the eighth dimension, and wait, I remember exactly: *A Wanderer from different stars traveling the spaces between things*. That’s it. New pages can appear anytime. Sekou made me Guardian of the Wanderer’s *Earth Chronicles*—if anything should happen to him.”

“Enough.” Opal stamped the tight-napped carpet. “You’ve got to stop this motor mouth nonsense.”

Cinnamon couldn’t stop or go slower. Consonants smashed into each other around whizzing vowels. “Sekou said the Guardian should memorize *The Chronicles* in case the book is ever destroyed. Since he was feeling so low, he worried about messing up and letting the ancient and marvelous Wanderer down. But, but, not really, ’cause he had me as backup, with my steel-trap memory. Hear it once, remember forever.”

Opal gripped Cinnamon’s face, digging jagged nails into her cheeks. “What did I tell you ’bout lying and making up crap? You’re too old for that.”

Cinnamon slipped from Opal's grasp. The Wanderer's story was good medicine for her spirit; it had to be true. "I better start reading soon or pages will disappear. Sekou said we're about to forget everything, but memory is the master of death!" Last week standing in line for a sneak preview of a John Sayles movie, *Brother From Another Planet*, Sekou handed Cinnamon *The Chronicles*. He didn't say much beyond the life-and-death-Guardian bit. Cinnamon had to fill in the blanks. "The abyss beckons. Sekou said I should read to fortify my soul against Armageddon."

"You don't even know what Armageddon is." Opal pressed chapped lips to Cinnamon's ears. "Sekou was depressed and high all the time and his baby sister was the only person dumb enough to listen to his crap."

"That's not true. Great Aunt Iris could listen to Sekou any day and so could—"

"I don't see anyone from the other side of your family." Uncle Clarence crept up on them, sniffing flowers and eyeing sympathy cards. "Sekou was no relation of theirs—"

"Sekou's pronounced SAY-coo. And Granddaddy Aidan, Miz Redwood, and Great Aunt Iris are going to be here shortly unless they hit further delays." Riding story-storm energy, Cinnamon lied easily. "They were supposed to come yesterday. A freak blizzard ambushed them in Massachusetts."

Opal did a poker face, yet trial lawyer Clarence shook his head and wrinkled his nose, like lies were funky and he smelled a big one. His two grown-up sons sniggered in the corner. Their younger sister did too and she wasn't usually mean. Sekou claimed people got mean in a crowd, even nice people. They couldn't help it—human beings tended to sync up with the prevailing mood. Sekou refused to hang with more than four people at a time. He hated handing his mood over to strangers. He and Cinnamon practiced throwing up shields against mob madness and other bad energy for the times when they might be surrounded by hostiles. Cinnamon tried to raise emergency fortifications, but sagged. Getting her shields up without Sekou was too hard. He'd left her alone, defenseless against *infectious insanity*. How could he do that?

"Miz Redwood is a hoodoo conjure woman and she married herself an Indian medicine man." Aunt Becca explained to her boyfriend who was a recent conquest and not up on the family lore.

"They never got married, not in any church," Clarence said. "Aidan is a plain ole Georgia cracker, no Indian anything—"

"Hoodoo?" the boyfriend said over him. "What? Like *Voodoo*?"

"Nah! Old timey *real* black magic," Becca rubbed Cinnamon's hunched shoulders till they relaxed, "you know?"

He didn't.

"Not Hollywood horror, not zombie black folk going buck wild." Becca shook her head. "They say old Miz Redwood can still *lay tricks* on folks who cross her." She pursed her lips at Clarence and his grown kids. "Or jinx anybody she has a mind to. Together, she and Aidan can do much mischief. Watch out! Iris got a gentler nature, but nothing gets past her. She can see clear through to your heart."

"Rebecca, don't nobody believe that old-timey mess," Opal said. "Lies and backcountry superstition."

Cinnamon winced. Opal was syncing up with the enemy.

"Aidan's over a hundred and Redwood's not far behind. Conjure, roots, spells, and herbs, keeping 'em going, keeping 'em strong." Becca nodded at Cinnamon. "That's nothing to sneer at."

"When you get along to my age ..." Aunt Becca's boyfriend hesitated. He didn't look old: handsome as sin, a little gray in a droopy mustache and powerful muscles pressing against the velvet shirt. "Going on strong is what you want to hear about."

That was two on Cinnamon's side.

"Devil worship and paganism." Uncle Dicky took a swig right from his flask. His hand was shaking. Jitters broke out everywhere in this god-fearing crowd.

"The family thanks you for coming." The funeral director's voice was a soothing rumble. "Visiting hours are up in twenty minutes."

"Only twenty? We just got here." Clarence rolled his eyes. Opal couldn't afford to pay for more memorial time to impress him. Nobody wanted to be here a second longer anyhow. "A budget funeral," Clarence muttered.

"Driving a bus doesn't pay like telling lies in court for guilty people with money to burn." Cinnamon blurted this out fast.

"Where'd she get that from?" Clarence sneered in Opal's face, brushing dandruff from his lapels.

"Cinnamon's a bright child, making up her own mind," Opal replied.

Clarence wanted to hit somebody. Becca shoved a plate of chicken and gravy-soaked biscuits at him. "Eat," she said. "Don't nobody want to be carrying this food home."

Opal pulled Cinnamon away. "Read your book." She sat her in a chair by a window onto a vacant lot and hissed, "Quit telling tales."

"Words are my shield," Cinnamon said, watching the sun head for the hills and cold fog rise off the river. A homeless man pushed his shopping cart through dead weeds. "I know they're trying hard to get here. Nobody better tell me they're not."

"Your grandparents can't be running down to Pittsburgh for every little thing," Opal whispered. "They're old as the hills. You shouldn't be calling them up and bothering them."

"I didn't. They just *know*. They're coming to keep us company, 'cause we're sad."

"You're making up what you want to happen."

"Granddaddy Aidan, Miz Redwood, and Great Aunt Iris love us more than anybody here, except Aunt Becca." Opal didn't deny that. "That's enough reason to come. I'm their favorite grandchild."

"You're their only grandchild." Opal shook her head, muttering to herself. "How did I get stuck with a stupid optimist?" She sighed. "I'm hurting inside and out. You're not the only Guardian swallowing a flood of tears." Cinnamon gulped. Opal practically *read her mind*. "Sekou put a knife in my heart every day, but I miss him too. So please read *The Chronicles of the Great Wanderer* and let me have some peace."

"OK." Cinnamon was relieved that there was no more talk of trashing Sekou's book. "I don't mean to be bad. I can't help—" the story storm. How could she explain to Opal what even Sekou never quite understood? "I'm sorry." Cinnamon licked a bruised lip.

Opal scrutinized her. Cinnamon had big eyes and big feet, like Daddy. The green streak in one eye was from Granddaddy Aidan, the storm temper from Miz Redwood. Cinnamon got Opal's satin black skin and little nose. Opal was an Ethiopian beauty like Becca once, but her sculpted features were cracked and ashy now. "You been fighting at school again?"

"No." Not *at* school. Cherrie Carswell and Patty Banks jumped her two blocks from school by the library, calling her the dyke from the black lagoon. Cinnamon thought they wanted to be friends. They had more bruises than she did. Nobody ever wanted to be her friend. What would she do without Sekou?

"I better not hear about you fighting. I couldn't take it." Opal staggered away. Twenty more minutes to go. Aunt Becca's boyfriend gave Opal a cup of tea. Aunt Becca stuck out her jaw, put her hands on her hips, and kept Holy Rollers *and* Atheists at bay. Opal was in good hands. Cinnamon opened *The Chronicles* and turned past the *Dedication*. Every time before, fuzzy letters danced across the page and illustrations blurred in and out of focus. If you couldn't stop crying, reading was too hard. The pages were clear now. The letters even seemed to glow.

"What is he doing out there?" Mr. Johnson cracked a window on December chill. "Move on, man. You'll catch your death," he shouted at the homeless man limping with his rickety cart through the next door vacant lot. "They got a shelter in East Liberty."

"East Liberty is a long walk," Cinnamon said. "Specially pushing your whole life on rusty wheels. He could hobble all the way there and the shelter might be full."

Mr. Johnson turned from the window, rolled his eyes, and marched toward the casket. Cinnamon swallowed irritation. She shouldn't fuss at someone her mom owed piles of money to. She was the Guardian, with life and death duties. Memorizing *The Chronicles* would fortify her soul. It was a big book. She had to get started or else it would take her whole life!

### *Chronicles 1: Dahomey, West Africa, 1892—Stillpoint*

*Cut your chains and you become free...*

Kehinde was fearless, an *ahosi*,\* king's wife, warrior woman, running for her life, daring to love and honor another man above Béhanzin, the king of Dahomey. She saw me come together in scummy water tumbling over smooth boulders, my eyes drawn from rainbows, feet on fire, crystals melting into skin. Momentum carried her through the cave mouth toward me as bright green algae twisted into hair and I sucked in foam and slime to form lungs. Even if she had wanted to run from an alien creature materializing from mist, dust, and light, there was nowhere to go. Enemy soldiers rushed past our hiding place, bellowing blood lust. Seeing me emerge into human form, Kehinde did not scream or slow her pace, but accepted the event, an impossible vision, a dream/nightmare unfolding before her as truth. Her disciplined calm eased my transition. Yet, nothing prepares you for the first breath, for the peculiar

\**The Appendix to The Chronicles offers a compendium of words and information from the Wanderer's world for handy reference.*

array of new senses or the weightiness of gravity. I was stunned by the magnetic field and the urgency of desire—for food, for touch, for expression and connection. The first experiences are paradise.

As I selfishly reveled in the miracles of this universe, in the delight of a new body, danger threatened at Kehinde's back: bayonets, bullets, and a hundred furious feet. She gulped the humid air and glared back and forth between me and the watery entrance. Her deep brown flesh was torn and bleeding as her heart flooded bulging muscles with iron rich, oxygen dense blood. An unconscious man was balanced on the fulcrum of her shoulder. He bled from too many wounds onto the knives, guns, water gourds, ammunition, bedroll, food, wooden stool, palm leaf umbrella, human skulls, and medicine bags that hung from a belt at her waist. She settled the man against the damp earth. She kissed his eyes, stroked his hair, and murmured to him. Foreign projectiles lodged in his organs. He'd soon bleed himself away. Abandoning him would have improved her chances of survival, yet she had no intention of doing this. Kehinde's spirit appealed to me at once. My body settled on a form close to hers.

She aimed a rifle at me. Later I would learn she was a sharpshooter, *gbeto*, an elephant huntress, a merciless killer of her enemies. In these first moments I understood the murderous device yet felt certain she would not set its lethal projectiles in motion. Too noisy, why give herself away to harm me, a naked being just coming to my senses? She could not fathom the risk I posed. Trusting me for the moment was reasonable.

I pushed her weapon aside with my still spongy cheek and bent to the suffering man. Kehinde shifted the rifle toward the cave opening and held a knife at my writhing algae hair while I ministered to him. If I knew then what I know now, I might have been able to save him. Perhaps it was better for me that I was so ignorant of human bodies. He might not have embraced a newly formed Wanderer. Kehinde might not have become my guide. Lonely Wanderers fade back into the spaces between things or fracture incessantly until they are next to nothing.

"Kehinde," the man groaned and reached for her. "Somso ..." I covered his mouth quickly. Kehinde dripped fragrant, salty fluid onto my face, silently urging me to act, to aid the broken man. With minor core manipulations, I eased pain, calmed turmoil, and gave them a few moments to share. The man came swiftly to his senses and gripped her calf. She thrust the rifle into my hand. I grasped it clumsily and monitored the cave mouth. I doubted my resolve and my accuracy—my bones were still gooey, my muscles rock hard. She crouched down to the dying man. They passed soft sounds between them, inhaling each other's breath. She never betrayed his last words to me. Yet, I'm sure he exhorted her to leave, to let him die with the hope that at least she had a chance to live. Kehinde shook her head, resisting his demand.

The people who carried her death in their minds raced again through the water outside of our cave. The man heard them and clutched a blade at her belt. "Somso!" Insistent, he ground his teeth and spit this word at her, a name I would later learn. The sound made my throat ache. Someone splashed close to the entrance. Kehinde's heart raced. The dying man nodded at her and closed his eyes.

Kehinde sucked a ragged breath. "Somso," she said. Her hand shook as she forced her cutlass through his heart.

He did not cry out. My own heart rattled in my chest. Kehinde pressed her lips on his as blood bubbled to an end. She wiped the blade on the damp ground and threw a wad of cloth toward me. Words rained down, a frothy hiss, barely audible, like steam bubbling through a hole. I understood nothing and waved the cloth at her stupidly. My new body was starving for language. I gorged on her sounds, gestures, smells; I lapped up the twists and turns of her nose and lips, swallowed the flashes of light and dark from her blinking eyes. Her expressions were tantalizing and rich, but sense would only come after more experiences. Abandoning me would have greatly improved her chances of survival. She had no intention of doing this either. I resolved to know her completely. Kehinde would be the *stillpoint* of my wandering on this planet.

A rash decision, but Kehinde was taking a similar foolhardy course. A storm of feet headed our way. She gripped my wrist and dragged me through the cave. We crawled on our bellies twisting and turning through a labyrinth of darkness. Kehinde hesitated at an intersection of four tunnels. She lit a lantern, whispered *Somso*, and chose the narrowest opening. A distant spit of light might have been illusion. Just when I thought the walls would crush us, we tumbled out into a forest.

Kehinde lurched about dropping gear: umbrella, water gourd, bedroll, and several human skulls. How she chose what to abandon and what to keep was a mystery. She explained nothing. What would I have understood? She snatched the cloth I clutched stupidly, threw it over my nakedness, and cinched it with a belt. She reconsidered abandoning two skulls and wrapped them and bags of ammunition and food around my waist on the belt. Angry voices and clanking weapons echoed in the cave. Kehinde pointed to the bright orange star sliding behind trees. I mimicked her gesture. She ran. I followed,

matching her cadence, stealing some balance. Luckily a new form yields quickly to the demands of the moment, to the first experiences.

Racing through dense forest over rock-hard roots, we kept a punishing pace until the star's bright light faded from the dome of sky. My lungs expanded, increasing their volume with each tortured breath. Indeed, my whole body strained to match the warrior woman's. I admired the powerful limbs, muscular buttocks, and indefatigable heart that she'd had years to develop. I had a few hours of compressed struggle and pain to match her physique. Exhaustion accumulated in my cells; torn muscles generated more strands; my feet bled new blood. The trees sang comfort to me. Birds let loose battle cries, goading me on. So many strong chemicals assaulted us, my skin, tongue, and nose burned. Dizzy, I faltered, but the rhythm of Kehinde's breath and heart guided me through the maze of sensations. Our human pursuers could not fly across the ground as we did and soon our sole companions were unseen animals and the wind pushing aside dense vegetation.

We camped in cold moonlight on burnt ground. Kehinde had tools to make a fire, but resisted offering a sign of our location to her enemies, my enemies now. Nursing bloody feet, ripped muscles, and an empty stomach, I intertwined limbs under a scratchy blanket to sort and assimilate the first experiences. When Kehinde thought I was asleep, she hugged a dead tree stump and swallowed sobs, for the dead man perhaps. Distant creaks and rasps from the bushes made her flinch. She scanned the darkness for spies on her grief, for enemies about to attack. Pushing away from the stump, she spit and hissed, stomped intricate patterns in the dust then obliterated them with furious swipes of a horsetail whip. She fell to her knees, threw back her head, and shuddered wordless anguish. As she forced herself back up, my eyes watered.

Spying on Kehinde felt wrong, yet as I rehearsed her dance in the theatre of my mind, her love and anguish claimed me. I resolved to be a good witness.

My memories waiver, but this is a drawing of that funeral night. It was a fevered moment. Such is life on Earth.

### *Chicken Fun For All*

"It wasn't a lie," Cinnamon whispered to the Sekou-stand-in half-smiling at her from his flower and satin fortress. "The Wanderer's like Daddy, an artist who sorta lost his mind."

Despite her *Chronicles* story storm, even Cinnamon had to admit it was hard to *believe* in an alien Wanderer *writing for his life*—to her. Space aliens usually zoomed into big cities like New York, London, or Tokyo and they came right now or on a distant tomorrow to conquer the world (mostly). Who ever heard of aliens going to Dahomey in 1890 something?

Cinnamon stroked images of Kehinde dancing in the moonlight. The warrior woman was muscular and fierce, scary and beautiful. She was sad too, like Cinnamon, over losing someone she loved. Trees and bushes retreated from her, pulling in stalks and limbs, turning aside leaves. Animal eyes peeked from caves, nests, and prickly branches. Stars glittered above her, or perhaps a swarm of flying insects flashed fluorescent butts. Kehinde threw ample hips and brawny arms around like lethal weapons. Wide eyes were pulled into a slant by tight cornrows that covered her head in delicate swirls. Full breasts stood up on a muscular chest. Thunder thighs and big feet made a storm of dust and weeds in a rocky clearing. The drawing captured the Wanderer's fevered vision with photographic detail but was also dreamy like those painters Sekou loved, Marc Chagall or Lois Mailou Jones. The Wanderer was a good artist. Cinnamon could really see how that night in old Africa had felt.

"I'm a Guardian and it *is* life and death." Relieved and terrified, Cinnamon looked up from the book. "Sekou always dug up cool things nobody else knew."



## How I Wrote *Will Do Magic For Small Change*

The short answer is: I lived my whole life to this moment.  
(I am in the midst of an edit, so ...)

The long answer (sifting through my life for major catalysts and proximate causes) goes back to the '60s. In high school I wrote a paper for world history on Nigeria. We had to pick a nation that wasn't really covered in the syllabus to do independent research. I wavered between Brazil, India, and Nigeria. I don't know what made me choose Nigeria. Everyone else seemed to think it was a *natural* choice for me unlike my *unnatural* interest in learning German. Once I plunged into the Nigerian research I was thrilled! This ninth-grade paper marked the beginning of a passionate and systematic study of West African history, politics, and culture. This is an on-going passion.

I was drawn to the music, dance, and art. I did African dance in high school and after graduate school studying theatre and film, I put down the folk guitar and learned to play the balaphon—an African melodic percussion instrument with keys and resonating gourds. I went to lectures and museum exhibits on Africa, attended African performances and films. I read African novels, plays, and theoretical texts. I eventually taught a course on African and Caribbean Theatre and invited Nigerian playwrights such as Tess Onwueme and Wole Soyinka to Smith College.

West African cosmology, its history and future, its culture are always working through my fictions and speculations.

In college I researched Cherokees and Southeastern Indigenous peoples of the US for a sociology course I took on Ethnic Minorities. I grew up believing the family lore that we had Indian ancestors. College marked the beginning of a passionate and systematic study of Indigenous cultures and history. I went to lectures and powwows, attended performances and hunted down

Indigenous films. I read Indian novels, plays, and theoretical texts. I eventually taught a course on race and performance.

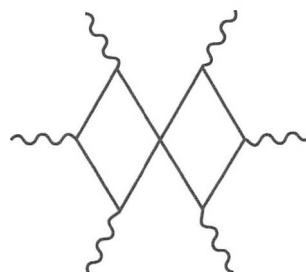
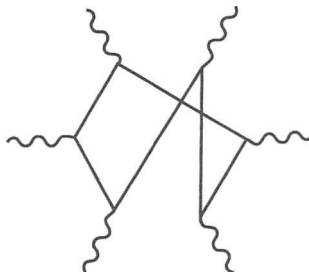
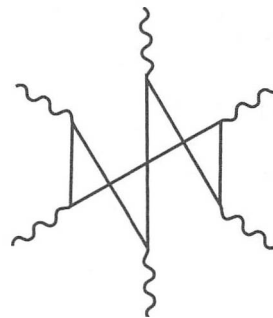
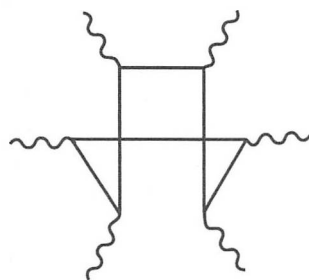
My family supposedly had ancestors from all over the world. Being a citizen of the world is a heady feeling. As a character in the play I just completed says, "Who says everybody's not my immediate family!"

So I have a long list of passions. My life has been full of amazing experiences and encounters. I've taught at a German university, toured plays all over the country, worked as a math textbook editor for Houghton Mifflin. I've done theatre with recovering addicts, social workers, pregnant teens, and refugees from Eastern Europe, the Sudan, and Sri Lanka. Many of these people had been lost or stolen. After doing theatre, many have said, "Thank you for giving me back to myself."

So my stories right now are praise songs to Theatre.

I tried to write the story in *Will Do Magic* in another book, *Exploding In Slow Motion*. I got to the end of the book and realized that it wasn't the book I wanted to write, but a rich resource. I wrote a screenplay based on characters from *Exploding* and then tuned the screenplay into my second novel, *Redwood and Wildfire*, a speculation on turn of the 20th-century hoodoo performers going from Georgia to Chicago, from stage to screen. Writing *Redwood and Wildfire* cleared the way for *Will Do Magic For Small Change*—that title comes from a play I wrote and performed with Chrysalis Theatre. Characters leapt out of the play and made me write their whole story.

It was what I wanted to do anyhow!



# ANDREA HAIRSTON BIBLIOGRAPHY

Compiled by Ellen Brady & Richard Duffy

[Only includes genre-related fiction, years of first publication or production.]

## LONGER FICTION

### *Mindscape*

Aqueduct Press, 2006 [won Carl Brandon Parallax Award]

### *Redwood and Wildfire*

Aqueduct Press, 2011 [won James Tiptree, Jr. Award; won Carl Brandon Kindred Award]

## SHORTER FICTION

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### “Double Consciousness”

in: *Afro-Future Females: Black Writers Chart Science Fiction’s Newest New Wave Trajectory*, ed. Marleen S. Barr; Ohio State University Press, 2008

### “Will Do Magic for Small Change”

in: *80! Memories & Reflections on Ursula K. Le Guin*, ed. Karen Joy Fowler and Debbie Notkin; Aqueduct Press, 2010 [being expanded to a novel—see excerpt in this Souvenir Book]

## GENRE PLAYS

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first produced 1998; script included in: *Lonely Stardust: Two Plays, a Speech, and Eight Essays*, Aqueduct Press, 2014

### *Hummingbird Flying Backwards*

first produced 2000; script included in: *Lonely Stardust: Two Plays, a Speech, and Eight Essays*, Aqueduct Press, 2014

### *Mindscape*

first produced 2001

### *Soul Repairs*

first produced 2002

### *Archangels of Funk*

first produced 2003

### *Dispatches*

first produced 2007

### *Redwood and Wildfire*

first produced 2010

### *Will Do Magic for Small Change*

first produced 2012

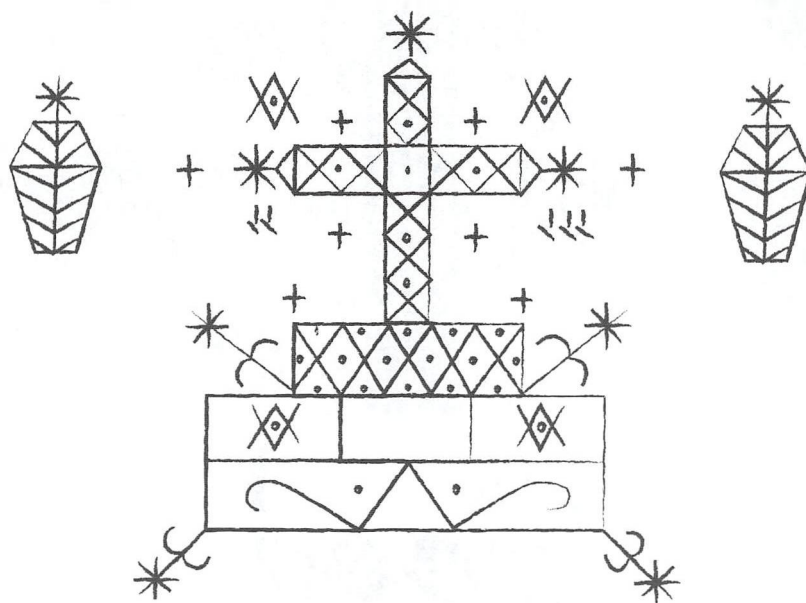
### *Thunderbird at the Next World Theatre*

first produced 2014

## OTHER

Professor of Theatre and Afro-American Studies (Smith College); Cofounder and Director of Chrysalis Theatre; playwright, director, composer, and performer; Tiptree judge; author of essays, reviews, poetry, translations, among myriad other things.

International Association of the Fantastic in the Arts Distinguished Scholarship Award, 2011.



*Kit*



*Reed*



# The Fabulous-Magnet

Keith Brooke

There are people you admire for their creativity, people you admire for what they do for others, people you admire for their intellect, people you admire simply because there are very few people you could have that much fun with. Kit and Joe Reed tick all those boxes, and many more. Of course Joe's not your Guest of Honor, so let's ignore him for now. Kit, on the other hand . . .

I first encountered Kit online, when she asked if I'd like to feature her work at the infinity plus fiction showcase. Well, duh. We got to exchanging emails, then Kit lured me into the online teaching environment she used for classes at Wesleyan: it went something along the lines of "Just log in, make yourself a door and then build a room." This weirdness made perfect sense, coming from Kit, and I made my room, which was actually a virtual armchair on a beach, and for several years we would meet up online and chat, and I'd chip in on some of Kit's story workshoping classes.

Ten years ago I paid my first visit to Kit and Joe. I was accompanied by a rather boorish self-important colleague from my university (you know, the kind who has a Ph.D. in creative writing and teaches story-writing without ever having published a

word of fiction). Among other things we ran another online story workshop, this time culminating in dinner where we actually got to meet the students and put faces to their online personae. One afternoon, my colleague got a bit too much and Kit and I hid in her house drinking iced tea and watching *Starship Troopers* and *Galaxy Quest* while he knocked at the door in the rain. Cruel, perhaps, but necessary, and oh so funny at the time, the two of us like schoolkids skipping class.

That's one of the key things about Kit, and one of the things I tell people when I talk about her. She doesn't suffer fools gladly, or at all, and to be frank a lot of people deserve to be shut out in the rain. Why suffer fools when you can surround yourself with bright, articulate, wonderfully creative people and make that your world? Kit does this: she's a magnet for all those fabulous people who light up the world like she does. And it's probably the most flattering thing I've ever encountered that sometimes I'm a part of that group—that she sees me like that, and not like my Ph.D.-wielding former colleague. It's *fun*.



## Kit Reed

Samuel R. Delany

I remember many wonderful meetings with Kit Reed, at her house up in Middletown, with her husband Joe, a happenstance encounter on the escalator at the (then) Sony movie theater on Broadway and 68th Street, or lunches together at the Century Club in midtown New York, and at various conferences and conventions.

I just don't remember my first.

I know we watched Riefenstahl's *Tiefeland* together on a home movie projector at Kit and Joe's, one evening. I remember coming up to lecture at one of Joe's classes at Wesleyan University, and the wonderfully lively conversation before and after it with Kit and Joe at the house. I remember a bunch of us stopped off to say hello on a trip to Readercon, where she supplied us with a wonderful lunch, sitting around the sitting room together.

Most recently I was wondering,

however, what, from among all these, I was going to make the center of this little squib in appreciation of such an extraordinary person and extraordinary writer as Kit. The last thing I finished of my own before I turned to this was an interview in which I had dutifully talked about the necessity for the writer to be willing to describe the clutter in the kitchen sink, which—in order to give an example—I'd gone to my own and carefully looked at it and detailed it, for a paragraph. From there I began to mull over Kit's extraordinary stories, collected most recently in hefty retrospective volumes from Wesleyan University Press, *The Story Until Now*, as well as novels such as *Captain Grown-Up*, *The Night Children*, and *Son of Destruction*, and what seem like a dozen others. But as I was pondering over what I could say that was the most characteristic thing about a writer who thrives

on doing things in uncharacteristic ways, I clicked idly on a link with an interview with Kit. There it was. The title—a quote from Kit—headed the piece:

"THE KITCHEN SINK IS BORING."

In the interview, Kit went on to talk about how she's interested in writing about what's going on beyond the kitchen sink, under it, behind it, beneath it. And I realized of course she was right. Kit's fiction has the perennial effect of making you feel that she has been where you have been, and then kept on going—and, what's more, found something there that's fascinating, amazing, beautiful, a little horrifying (feral girl scouts, anyone?), and significant.

I wish I could do it, too.

Thanks so much, Kit.



# A Kindly One

John Clute

She seems to gaze upon you fondly, and I guess she does, I guess she has no intention of telling you the truth: which is that she recognizes you. So she comes into the Marriott restaurant—in recent years we have most often met at Readercon—and she says “Hello John” and smiles with an honest face, and even her eyes, which are surprisingly hawk-like for a person so kind and open, seem welcoming. Joseph Reed, the artist who is her husband and who has illustrated many of her books, barks into sudden laughter at the very sight of me. We are old friends, we begin again to add to what that has meant over the years, here at Readercon, again and again in London in the summer time, when they would make their yearly visit, staying in modestly luxurious quarters near Sloane Square, just as though they believed a word of all that fiddle. But I for one am not often fooled by her. I’m one of her many readers who very rarely forget that this deft trim woman upon whom butter wouldn’t melt is the author of some of the cruelest fiction in the world, tales that draw you down into suburbs under the governance of the Kindly Ones, that force you to give in to something a lot scarier than gravity.

I will say something critical: that I think she reaches the highest pitch of her hard art in the many short stories she has published between 1958 and now; that the novels can seem too copious with skill, too often lacking a final terror. I thought I had reviewed her first collection, *Mister Da V. and Other Stories*, back in 1967 when it first came out: and may well have, it is easy to scribble when you’re young, and then lose the evidence. I do know for sure I talked about the collection, with undue haste, in an *F&SF* column when it was finally published in America in 1973. I thought then Kit didn’t do Shirley Jackson as well as Shirley Jackson did Shirley Jackson and I was surely right: what I didn’t register at that point was that she wasn’t in fact doing Shirley Jackson pretty well but something else entirely: because she was never in truth a Gothic writer, and the exorbitances she depicted could not in fact be understood as expressing individual psyches in extremis. Shirley Jackson’s nightmares were unplumbably personal, sourceless in the night of the soul. Kit’s nightmares, on the other hand, can be recognized and mapped: for her greatest nightmare is the nature of the world. In 1973 I said you could hear in her stories “the genuine voice of human beings caught in a world whose seeming indifference cloaks malice.” Today I would say she gazes upon vastation, which is what replaces mourning when it is not a

personal tragedy but the world itself for which one grieves.

It would be foolish to select one story out of the 140 or more Kit has published to date, and claim it as being the one to choose. Not quite at random, though, I thought I’d mention “Mommy Nearest” from 1998, a relatively late fable that shows the depth and continuity of her work, as it visibly deals with some of the mother-daughter issues famously unpacked in her very first published story, “The Wait” (1958), and in later tales as well; but which also demonstrates how far she has traveled from that intimate drama set in a fabulated town we don’t perhaps entirely believe in. “Mommy Nearest” might similarly seem a straightforward extrapolation from trauma, but in fact it is nothing of the sort. The tale is to be set along a beach somewhere in a state (or condition) resembling Florida. It is narrated by Tammy, who is sixteen and whose mother Evelyn gave birth to her, spectacularly, fully covered by the media, in old age. Evelyn insists that Tammy wear clothes that infantilize her, in order that she not seem mature enough to threaten her “magical” youthfulness, even though she is “older than the Aztec gods”: a show of youth maintained, at the age of eighty-nine, through very slightly near-future prosthetics, plastic surgery, exercise, chutzpah. Tammy seems desperately to resent the obsession with appearance required by this masquerade—the word “look” is spat out at least fifteen times in the first half of the tale—but when her mother suddenly loses control and begins to ramble senilely she panics. It is a panic that has nothing to do with internal trauma and everything to do with the maintenance of the performative selfhoods that Kit Reed seems plausibly to suggest will be our destiny as suburban relicts of the long *Homo sapiens* saga to cling to, for dear life. Unless Tammy and Evelyn can resume their grotesque display of mother-daughter dysfunction, they will never get off the stage alive. But all is well. Evelyn comes to her senses—which is to say her role—again, and the story ends as Tammy prepares to go off to the mall in her “real” gear and maybe fuck some guy. But there is a moment just before Evelyn recovers when her daughter, feeling a sudden exposure to the malice of the world, lets the cat out of the bag in a phrase which (to me) sums up Kit Reed’s understanding of the abyss we all face: “I give in,” says Tammy as her mother seems about to corpse into dead meat and leave her mute, “I give in to something a lot scarier than gravity.”



# A Few Reasons Why Kit Reed Matters

David G. Hartwell

Kit Reed must have been a child prodigy because I read and liked her work in *F&SF* when I was in high school. I didn't meet her till about 1973, though, and then entirely by accident. I went up to Wesleyan University one glorious fall Saturday for the annual Williams-Wesleyan football game (an essential part of the "little three" rivalry among Williams, Wesleyan, and Amherst). Williams won. As my wife and I walked across campus afterward, I saw a yellow poster: Science Fiction Weekend featuring Frederik Pohl, Samuel R. Delany, Kit Reed, Harry Harrison (and I am embarrassed to say I don't recall the other names, but I think Ted Sturgeon was there, and Tom Disch, and I know there were a couple of others. Most of them were already friends).

But it was then that I really met Kit and Joe Reed. The poster listed a building. I got a campus map and we found the building. It was locked. We walked around the outside peering in windows until I found a room in which I could see Fred Pohl sitting and reading by himself. I knocked on the window and he came over and opened a sliding glass door and we were in! There was of course another room where Chip and Kit and others were talking. The "event" part was about over,

so we hung out and had dinner, and ended up staying overnight in Harry's camper a couple of miles away while Harry stayed, I believe, with the other writers. Harry had been allowing a young researcher to stay in his camper, who told us about his work proving that common pet turtles were the principal vector of salmonella. In those days, every kid had a small pet turtle at some point in childhood. Not as bad as if he had discovered that goldfish are the vector for cancer, but bad. No more now. His research made the *Esquire* dubious achievement list the next month.

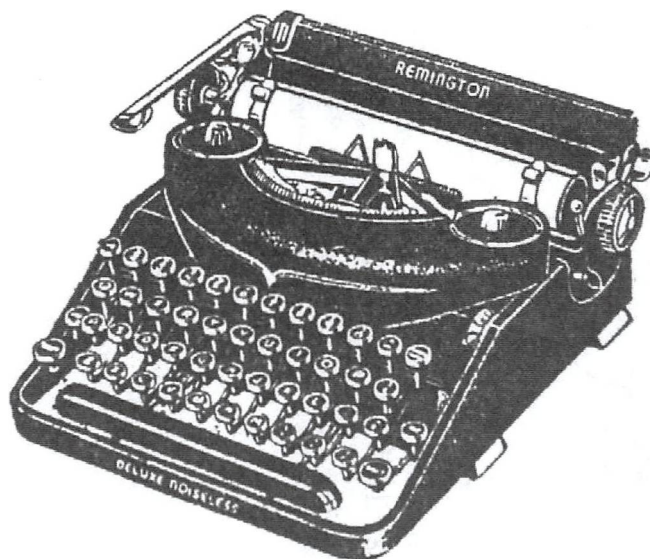
I go into this amount of social detail because Kit is a social person and succeeds in being around interesting people doing interesting things. She appears to be very smart, and is still even smarter than she looks.

Kit and Joe were charming and I became Kit's editor at Berkley Books soon after. We worked well together and I was sad to have that aspect severed when I left the company in 1978. But we moved in the same circles for decades. I think I sort of convinced her to attend Readercon way back. I know I convinced her to attend ICFA in Florida. She still goes to both. And after more than ten years of being in too much of a hurry, for the last decade or so

I have been lunching with her and Joe on the way to Readercon each year. This is a more major event than I can easily describe. Often there are others. Sometimes there are twenty others. I sure hope to do so again just before you read this.

Kit Reed is an excellent writer, more in the same vein as Shirley Jackson than is often recognized. She most often leans in the direction of genre, fantasy, horror, SF, but not always. She is an excellent book reviewer, and was a founder of the National Book Critics Circle and on the board for a long time. She still reviews some, though the newspapers are nearly out of space for book reviews. She is in particular an icon among later generations of women who write SF, including Connie Willis and Lisa Tuttle and lots more. She has a powerful and ironic way with character, and whatever she writes is centered in characterization. She is precise and economical in her prose. And witty.

She is now the latest in a long line of exceptionally good choices Readercon has made for guest of honor, and I am pleased to recommend her to you this weekend. She is worth listening to.



read "The Wait" in high school

Took a class from Ed in college and realized she was the author

admired her sentences - sharp

marvelled at how her plots move like apocalyptic runs on bikes

kept hanging out in her kitchen

Had my life saved by her

frated out

knew I'd never write that terrifically

tried to imitate her

one mindbogging summer

started my first novel

threw it away

Second novel (aka "first novel") published

did not listen when she told me I would end up throwing it away

many letters of rejection which I read

became a bonafide writer

took me to see

Prime of Tides

will never forgive her.

# KIT REED'S SINISTER INTERVIEW ON MY LIFE

a chat by Daniel Hendler

# You Should Go Read the Kit Reed Story “Piggy”

Ben Laury

I met Kit Reed on Facebook. There was a conversation on somebody’s page—I don’t remember whose or even what it was about—and she showed up quoting the first line of *Light in August* and I knew we were gonna be friends. We messaged for a while—mostly about books and cookies (sometimes brownies, too, I think (we’re multifaceted))—and then one day I was like, wait, who the hell is this lady? She’s really funny! So I looked her up.

Once I looked her up I got kinda scared. It was like realizing that your new friend was actually the President or had been on *Dukes of Hazzard* or something. A long time ago, when I was in fifth grade and read *The Lord of the Rings* for the first time, when I was done I made my mom drive me up to the mall so I could buy “another book just like this.” I remember standing there in the science fiction and fantasy section of the Paperback Booksmith just staring at all the covers, and then suddenly there was this one with a guy jumping off a cliff with a pair of homemade wings, and that was it! (Also it had a couple rockets in the background, I guess as an insurance policy.)

So anyway, cut to thirty years later, I don’t know how I didn’t remember the name Kit Reed, as I sure as hell never forgot that book (it was *Mister Da V.*, by the way; I found it on the shelf in my parents’ house and read it again last year, and it’s just as great as it was when I was ten (and the story “Piggy” is still my favorite)).

After that—once I was able to talk to her again—we talked a lot about book-related stuff (my book was about to come out) and Kit told me I should come out to Readercon, which I did, and of

course had a blast. I remember sitting at this table out by the pool with Kit and Joe and Peter Straub, and thinking, oh, these people are real—writers are really real!—and I got kinda dizzy and probably almost had a stroke.

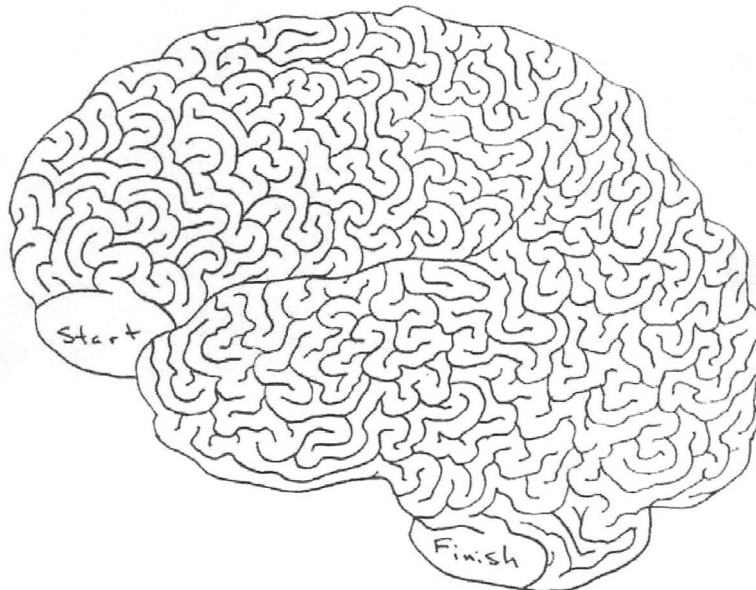
But anyway, yeah, I’m okay now.

My favorite Kit story is from maybe a year later, though I can never explain exactly why it makes me so happy (and it’s not much of a story, so don’t get too excited). I met up with her and Joe one time in New York. I think we tried to go to a museum but it was closed (I tend to forget a lot (it’s my thing)). But afterwards, we were walking down the street, and we walked by Radio City Music Hall. They had this big cardboard display outside of the Rockettes, and I asked Kit if she had ever seen them. She waved a quick hand (this is a very Kit thing (another Kit thing: THE SUDDEN REMEMBRANCE (“Oh!”))) and then she told a quick story. When she was little she’d gone to Radio City Music Hall with an aunt (I think it was an aunt, I could be wrong, but let’s say aunt), and she was really excited to see the Rockettes, as of course anyone in their right mind would be. But then, just before the show was about to start, she had to go to the bathroom.

At that point Kit stopped telling the story. (This is another Kit thing: you sit there and wait and look around in confusion until finally you can’t take it anymore.)

So what happened? I finally said.

Oh! she said. I got *fucking lost*.



# The Legend of Kit Reed

James Lovegrave

To my eternal shame, I was unfamiliar with the work of Kit Reed until, in 2011, my friend and erstwhile collaborator Peter Crowther sent me an advance copy of her collection *What Wolves Know*. Pete runs the boutique small-press outfit PS Publishing and likes to publish what he likes. He clearly liked *What Wolves Know* a lot, and knew I would too.

I duly reviewed the book for the *Financial Times*, praising “an extraordinary, still-burning talent,” and also included it in my annual best-of roundup for that newspaper. Because it was just that damn good. Summarizing its varied but uniformly superb contents, I said: “Calm on the surface, vicious below, Reed’s short stories flirt with the fringes of SF but have a deep intellectual weirdness all their own.” In particular I noted the hilarious *Sound of Music* satire “The Blight Family Singers” and the mordant twist-in-the-tail treat “Special.”

Kit and I have exchanged frequent e-mails and we’re Facebook friends. I have also sought out more of her writing, especially enjoying last year’s bumper Wesleyan University Press collection *The Story Until Now*. If I had to single out a single tale from that book, it would be the remarkable “The Legend of Troop 13,” about a Girl Scout expedition that turns very, very sinister.

There, in just a few pages, is the lady’s peculiar talent, encapsulated. Her mastery of literary ventriloquism. Her unflinchingly dark and downbeat worldview, expressed with a delicious comedic turn of phrase. Her knack for getting her (no doubt impeccably manicured) fingernails under the skin of an idea and slowly, slyly scratching at it until it yields up its softest, most sinister secrets.

In as much as I “know” this person I have never met face to face, she seems to be a sunny, good-humored individual, even when her patience is put to the test by the delinquency of her Scottish Terrier, who is named, with less irony than you might think, Killer.

However, I have learned that she also has a wicked streak a mile wide, to go with her sour opinion of the massed ranks of humanity. In short, we must be thankful that she has turned her prodigious talents towards fiction rather than, say, global domination. Otherwise we would all be her slaves rather than just willing thralls to her narratives.



Kit Reed at the *St. Petersburg (Florida) Times* the day before her wedding, with copy-paper-and-paperclip veil, and bouquet of copy pencils and rulers, bestowed by her bosses: Features Editor Sandy Stiles (left) and City Editor Dan Hall (right).

# Kit Reed: A Writer for Life

Nick Mamatas

There are few writers one can fruitfully read throughout one's entire life. I don't mean that one can return to an author's book and continue to enjoy it, the way an older person might do with *The Lord of the Rings*. Kit Reed isn't about middle-aged nostalgia for a sticky day of summer reading between grades three and four; she is a writer who simply writes and publishes very widely. As a child, as a teen, as an adult, when climbing the hill of middle age, you'll find her.

I knew her books, but paid no attention to the byline, as a child. As a kid I loved *The Ballad of T. Rantula*, though I was tricked into having my mother buy it for me. It wasn't about kids teaming up with a superhero-wrestler after all, despite the cover. The whole thing wasn't even science fiction; it was just about a boy whose folks were divorcing. It was perhaps the first "real book," as I called non-speculative material back then, that I ever voluntarily read.

The first book I ever bought with my own money—a few bucks made helping out in my uncle's lunch counter when I was nine years old—was *Other Stories and ... The Attack of the Giant Baby*. The cover looked funny, and the title story was funny. But Reed's collection also contained stories that were simply over my head, this despite having somehow gotten *Naked Lunch* out of the library the year prior. What was I supposed to make of "Winter," the book's first story? I skipped ahead to "Attack of the Giant Baby" and literally years later thumbed back to "Winter" when I was ready for it.

As a young man I wandered away from the greasy kid stuff that is the mainstream of science fiction and fantasy, and immersed myself in what was called "downtown" writing, at least in downtown Manhattan, where I was living. Dennis Cooper, Eileen Myles, that sort of thing. And that led me to contemporary innovative/avant-garde/transgressive American fiction generally, and who was there waiting for me? Kit Reed, with her slim novel from Black Ice Books—a defunct and missed, by me anyway, imprint of Fiction Collective 2—*Little Sisters of the Apocalypse*. The innovative tradition in the US is not known for sentiment, but Reed managed to create something that was both gonzo and emotionally mature, with a gag title.

I still had no idea that Kit Reed was the same author of the half-forgotten books I'd read as a child.

I first got what we used to call net.access in 1989, when I managed to find my way to a TinyMUD via a raw telnet connection. There I was told that I needed an e-mail address, because there were "dozens of machines out there" and I couldn't just have messages sent to me without knowing that I belonged to sunysb.edu. And Kit Reed was exploring similar worlds at around the

same time. When the Web finally got up and running and became useful enough to search phrases like "book about giant baby" or "tarantula ballad divorce," I finally realized that I was a Kit Reed fan. And Kit Reed had anticipated me with her novel *@expectations*. Again, this was not science fiction so much as it was basically a novel about my own twenties, which were spent almost entirely online.

Then finally I was hooked. Kit Reed. Don't just look for books with wacky titles, look for Kit Reed. Was I living with a woman with an eating disorder? Yes, and Kit Reed wrote *Thinner Than Thou*. In my thirties, did I start getting very anxious about starting a family? Of course, and Kit Reed wrote *The Baby Merchant*. When I had young cousins to buy presents for, Kit Reed was there again: *The Night Children*, a novel about that pretty common daydream kids have about spending all night in a shopping mall—it was a daydream I always had. (Naturally, I read the book before making a gift of it.) And only after reading *The Night Children* did I find her broadly similar 1980 title *Magic Time*, on a blanket set up on the sidewalk by a street peddler, and inhaled it. Kit knew I'd be an adult looking for an adult version of her 21st-century YA novel back when I'd picked up my first of her titles as a child.

Now I'm middle-aged, with a baby and a day job. I'm as surprised as you are. I work in a slum zone that is rapidly being gentrified thanks to the fascist handclasp of transnational venture capital and supposedly "progressive" local government. The homeless outside my office don't even have it sufficiently together to sell old Kit Reed paperbacks on blankets; it's all bloody meth scabs and ranting into traffic. They live under the shadows of high-rise apartment buildings being put up on either side of my workplace—an old concrete slab where fancy social media companies relocate to get tax breaks. Those apartments are renting for \$3500 a month for a studio. One-bedrooms are \$4500 a month. Having a family? Living more than two minutes away from the cubicle where you already put in a twelve-hour workday? That's so *random*—let's disrupt life-as-we-know-it!

And just now, as I type these words, a new-to-me Kit Reed novel has arrived in the mail. *Fort Privilege*, about the wealthy ascending skyscrapers to avoid the rampaging poor, from back in 1986. She saw all of this, every major episode of my life, coming decades before I did.

I'll be reading Kit Reed till I die. I have to find out what happens next.



# The Goddess of Pies and Opals

Kate Maruyama

“I did a good thing today.”  
“I was a goddess today.”

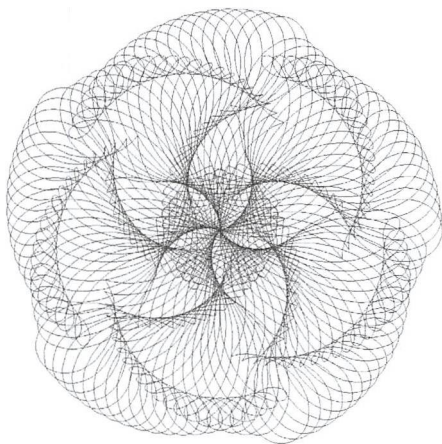
“Well, there will be an opal in my crown in heaven.”

My mom is prone to these extravagant statements, usually said in a gleeful tone, often only to me. Out of context, they may seem self-aggrandizing or ridiculous, but in these cases, she’s not talking about her writing. Nor is she talking about her prowess in the kitchen, because she’s a damn good cook.

She’s talking about the satisfaction of having helped someone—usually someone in the literary world. Most frequently a writer who needed that help, or people who “need to meet each other.” She’s a sort of literary fairy godmother.

Mom has been doing kindnesses—literary and otherwise—since the very first moment she was in a position to do so.

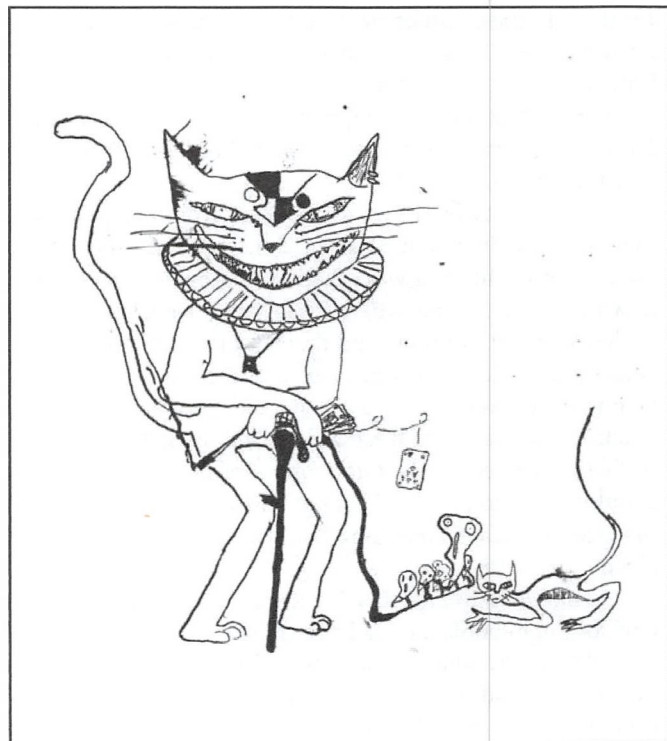
It always comes from a good place. It’s never with the idea of having that kindness repaid. (Hence, “I’ll have an opal in my crown in heaven.”) This isn’t about reward or payback. This is about the pure joy she gets from helping writers and friends and watching them gain a foothold and then succeed. Be it with notes on a story or book, putting young writers in touch with agents, tipping agents off to brilliant emerging writers, getting editors and agents together on projects, putting together panels, getting writers invited into clubs, events or places because “they should be,” she has had her behind-the-scenes fingers in a lot of pies. If I were to draw a graph of people connected or helped out by my mom, it would likely resemble a spirograph:



She never reports her good works publicly. She never says, “I got that guy his agent.” Or even, “I taught her everything she knows.” She simply smiles, happy for that friend/writer/agent/editor’s success and goes back to her desk, to write or to do the next good thing.

And long run? I’d say it paid off big-time. Mom has surrounded herself with awesome people and good friends. All of that backstabbery, competition, self-aggrandizement and starfuckery that goes on in the literary world—at least I hear about it remotely—just doesn’t factor into building a literary life. It doesn’t make sense.

Eking out a living as a writer is hard enough, why wouldn’t we help our fellow writers in any way we can? While I hope I got some good writing genes from my mom and I know I learned from her practice, craft and constant revision, the part of her I most desire to imitate—aside from damn good cooking—is literary citizenship. Because I hear there will be an opal in my crown in heaven.



Drawing by Jack Maruyama, Kit Reed’s grandson. Kit continues to influence future generations of readers.



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# Congratulations to Kit Reed!

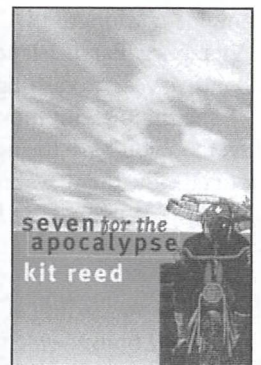
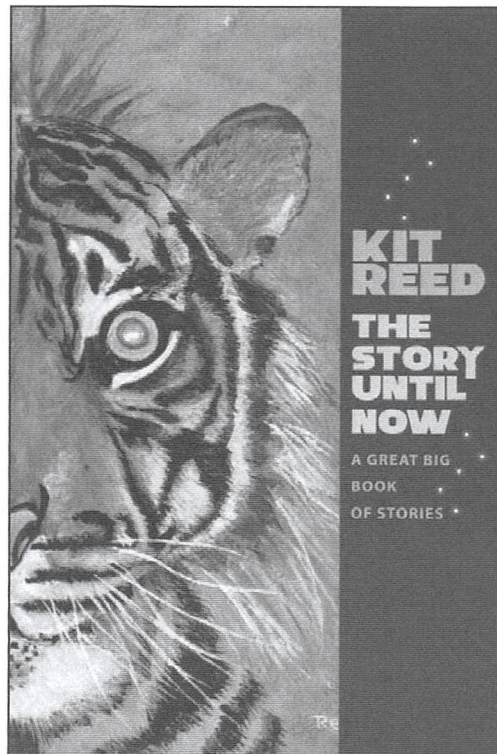
Guest of Honor at Readercon 25

## Novels:

Mother Isn't Dead She's Only Sleeping  
At War As Children  
The Better Part  
Armed Camps  
Cry of the Daughter  
Tiger Rag  
Captain Grownup  
The Ballad of T. Rantula  
Magic Time  
Fort Privilege  
Catholic Girls  
Little Sisters of the Apocalypse  
J. Eden  
@expectations  
Thinner Than Thou  
Bronze  
The Baby Merchant  
The Night Children  
Enclave  
Son of Destruction

## Short story collections:

Mr. Da V. and Other Stories  
The Killer Mice  
Other Stories and The Attack of the Giant Baby  
The Revenge of the Senior Citizens \*Plus\*  
Thief of Lives  
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# The Kitchen Sink Is Boring: An Interview with Kit Reed

Scott O'Connor, interviewer

[Excerpted from a conversation that first appeared in the SF pages of the *Los Angeles Review of Books* on August 21, 2013. Used by permission of the interviewer and the *LARB*. The conversation took place online and in person, during one of Reed's visits to Los Angeles.]

**[Scott O'Connor]: Tell me a bit about your pre-writing life.**

[Kit Reed]: My pre-writing life ended when I was about four and a half. I dictated a "novel" to my mother and when she read it back, I made her erase the aside I'd made—it wasn't part of the story. So okay, before that: my mother was Lillian Hyde Craig, whose family lost it all in one of the early Florida land crashes. She taught primary school, although "ladies don't work." She married John Rich Craig, Ensign, US Navy. He was skipper of a submarine that vanished in the Coral Sea.

I was an only child. Read a lot. Wrote and drew a lot. Moved a lot so the first thing I learned was how to find my way back from *anywhere*. Always the new girl in school, you know, the one nobody likes?

We lived variously in San Diego, Honolulu, New London, Honolulu, Washington DC, New London, Panama, New London, St. Petersburg, Parris Island, and Beaufort, South Carolina in two consecutive years; Washington DC again, all before I was 18.

The thing about moving a lot is that first you scope the territory, then you have to suss out the other kids. You have to learn how to talk like them, walk like them and dress like them or they'll swoop down on you like a flock of birds on the wounded one and peck you to death.

**What were you reading at the time?**

The Oz books, which my father read to me until I learned to read, which disappointed him a lot. The Pooh books. For bizarre reasons I read *Beowulf* in the bathroom in second grade because it was the only way the babysitter would let me stay up. What could she do to a kid who said she had to go?

To be honest, I read whatever came into the house or whatever existed in whatever house I happened to be in at the time. In college: Faulkner, Fitzgerald, Waugh. I learned comic timing from Evelyn Waugh. Cheever, I think. Graham Greene, John Collier in paperback handed off by a cousin. Some science fiction. E.C. comics before they got banned.

I never didn't think seriously about writing. I was writing Harbor (the heroine of my first 'novel' was Harbor Wilson, a stand-up bunny rabbit) books until I was 12, along with a radio play, a comic, aborted stories until I was at Beaufort High School and more interested in boys. I had my book jacket copy pre-written: "Kitten Craig is 12 years old and has her own horse." In college I had the wits to convince one of the (yes) nuns to let me do

short stories instead of a research paper as a senior thesis, only partly because of an innate hatred of research, and she had the wits to let me do that.

When I was a kid dumped [in Florida] at nine, it was bleak and weird as the surface of Mars. It never snowed, it never got cold, there was sand in the dirt which made it all grey, and there were sandspurs where you wanted to walk barefoot. Lawns were spongy with Bermuda grass, which people had trucked in and rolled out in sheets. The houses in our neighborhood were inhabited by the old, and I mean *old*. Silverbugs gnawed the pages of your books and lived in the spines. There were scorpions and the roaches were huge. My soon-to-be-widowed mother made friends with the local gentry via friends-in-common. I went to 7th, 8th, and 9th grade cotillions in the old Coke plant ... left at fifteen. Lived there again in senior year in college, by which time I was seeing the guy I was going to marry—a St. Petersburgian who refused to go to cotillions, escaped via Yale and never looked back. At 21, I knew two societies—the local one with bridge club and the newsroom at the *St. Petersburg Times*, where I worked my way up.

**How long did you work as a reporter?**

Five years, with six months off where I edited *The Right Angle* for the District Public Works Office in Great Lakes, because when I got married I lost my job, and until we moved to New Haven, I couldn't get another reporting job.

**Do you miss it? Did you ever?**

I missed walking in and sitting down in the middle of a bunch of guys all typing at the same time. What I didn't miss was being terrified that I'd misquote somebody or get something in the story wrong. Every reporter's nightmare, really. That is, every responsible one. Very liberating writing fiction. You can make it all up.

**At what point did you know you had a story you wanted to publish?**

I sent my Harbor books "illustrated by the author" to the publishers of the Oz books when I was 12. They wrote me nice refusal letter. I sent the best of the senior thesis stories to *The New Yorker* when I was 21. They sent back my first-ever rejection slip. At *The New Haven Register*, inspired by a woman I interviewed who had worked 8-hour days for 15 years and made her first sale to *Mademoiselle*, I pulled out "The Wait," and sent it to Bob Mills at *Venture SF*. There were zero sci-fictional elements in it so he referred me to Anthony Boucher at *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, who snapped it up. Which, for a writer, is like the first shot of whatever to a junkie. What a rush ... you're hooked.

**What were the concerns and obsessions you were working through then?**

To be perfectly frank I never think about why I'm doing whatever I decide to do. I just do it, so I can't begin to tell you what preoccupied me then, only that I'm probably about as crazy as I ever was and that I never wanted to write like a woman. I wanted to write like a witch. Drowned ships are a constant. Animals. Mothers are often around. A brilliant friend wrote me about "The Wait" from Shepherd Pratt, where he was committed the first time he tried to off himself at 19: "You're very brave to write about your mother like that." I was like, *What?* If I thought too much about what I'm doing, I probably wouldn't do it at all.

The kid editor of *Yale Lit*, an undergraduate review, asked me for a story and as I'd seen people spin off novel chapters in *The New Yorker*, I wrote one about a girl and her grandmother getting on the Eastern Seaboard coach headed south and for the author bio I said it was "part of a novel." Kid editor's uncle was a publisher and wanted to see more, so I wrote five chapters and an outline. I can't remember what happened with kid's uncle, but I entered them in the Houghton Mifflin first-novel contest. Robert Stone won that year, but on the basis of 30-some pages plus outline, I got actual money to finish the book.

**You're one of what I think is a relatively small group of writers known equally as novelists and short-story writers. Have you ever considered yourself one over the other?**

I remember Judith Merrill informing me (after, I think, my third novel) that I was primarily a short-story writer. It's hard to explain why I prefer believing I'm a novelist who also writes stories. There should be a noun that covers both.

**Is it a time thing, maybe? The amount of your life you have to commit to a novel?**

Probably the amount of my life that I've spent trying to write the perfect novel. One of my characters in *Captain Grownup* says, "If you don't aim high, you'll never fall short."

**Do you write stories while working on a novel, or do they have separate spaces?**

I'm one of those who eats this thing on her plate and then that one. I keep my salad separate from my main course. Although if a novel's in a hard place or if I've promised to write a story for somebody, I will take a breather and think only about the story at hand. It's like a vacation.

**What do stories give you, or allow you, maybe, that novels don't?**

A story is something you know you can finish in a few days—or weeks—a couple of months. Thing is, you know you can finish it. A novel? It's something I'll always know I can finish but I won't always know if I can do it *right*. Novels are riskier, more accident-prone. So many, many more particles. Can I do this? Can I do this right? I don't always know, even when I know the ending. It's like tunneling into a mountain and not knowing whether you're going to come out on a flat plane or fall off a cliff.

Stories ... it's hard to explain. It may be hard and getting harder—as they get denser, which they've done, they've taken longer to get done and get *right*—but I've had more than one busted

novel and, I think, of the handful of unpublished stories in the bin, only two stories that I honestly thought "WTF" and threw away without finishing.

**Do stories ever lead to other stories?**

Not so much, I don't think, at least I'm not aware of it, although I did a batch in the early '70s that morphed into *Cry of the Daughter*, my big old Southern family novel.

**How do you write? Computer? Longhand?**

I type even sympathy notes. As a reporter, I had to scribble fast to keep up with whomever I was interviewing—and get back and transcribe my notes before my handwriting got cold. Several nuns and many Palmer books made me *hate* handwriting.

So computer. All of it except notes, if I'm someplace where I can't type notes—or notes on a printout, but usually I stop handwriting them and rip open the file.

**What's your writing schedule like?**

Back in the day, it was set by the babysitter, so it was Monday through Friday, 9–12. Now it's Monday through Friday, 9:30–12, and, depending, 2–4 in the afternoon.

**Does it change if you're working on a story versus a novel?**

It changes according to what phase I'm in with what I'm doing. If I hit a wall, in the afternoon I may knock off and read.

**What do you look at when you're stuck?**

Oh, out the window, good fiction, crap fiction, periodicals, the dog. But like the alcoholic who never drinks before noon, never, ever TV.

**Do you listen to music while you work?**

Nope. I can't. Jerzy Kosinski used to listen to flamenco ... Aieeeee! It needs to be silent inside my head.

**How many drafts will you do of a story?**

It's never quite a draft situation with a story. I compose the way I did in the newspaper business, hammer at the lede until it's right, hammer at the next graf until it's right. I have to think it's right before I can go on and even then I have to go back.

I did a how-to book back in the day and dug out what turned out to be 17 first pages that were the beginning of a novel. As it was typed, I'd crumple it up and throw it away and start over and at some point along the way I'd say the hell with it, rip the paper out again and start making notes between the lines. For me, things have to develop. If it's a story, usually one complete take will do it. Novels, however, have to rearrange themselves.

**Was this a process that you came to over time, or have you always worked this way?**

Always, I think. Well, ever since I finished college and got the first newspaper job. I realized that if I got my lede right, I had my story, and the rest would develop as I put it down. The difference now is that with a computer, I start every day at the beginning of the file; the story morphs with the changes, but takes me just as long to finish because I think with my fingers and I can't quit until I know it's done.

**Do you ever revise a story before it's collected?**

Nope, but today I did change a word in "Attack of the Giant Baby," which is about to be in a *Fantasy & Science Fiction* anthology. I think it was a "the" to "his."

**You may have shifted the weight of the whole story.**

As if. Giant baby pretty weighty already. Ginormous, you might say.

**How early do you know the setting for a story or a novel?**

It's all of a piece. I see the person; I'm inside the person's head. I look out of the person and see what the person sees. That's the setting. I was lucky that we moved so much. I have a couple of favorite locations, one of which is Beaufort, South Carolina, where I lived when I was 15, 16. I've used it in a number of stories. Another one is St. Petersburg, Florida, which is a town I knew maybe a little too well, which is where I set *Son of Destruction*—but I call it Fort Jude. I fused the society I knew with spontaneous human combustion to make the book.

**How do you get from personal experience to turning that into fiction?**

I don't think about it that way. It starts ... I hear things. I get into that head, and once I have heard that person coming and I know who that person is, when I'm inside that person, I see what that person sees, and they might have some characteristics of somebody that you knew.

**So it's all in hindsight ...**

Usually other people see this stuff before I see it, if it's even there. And so when I looked at the stories for *The Story Until Now*, I thought—oh, right, I've always been obsessed by that ... I realized that there are patterns, there are things that recur in what I'm doing. But I can't tell you why that is.

**To an outsider, it makes sense. Like you've said, shipwrecks are a theme, and you look at your history ... or that there's an interest in, not only the military, but as in "Pilots of the Purple Twilight," waiting for someone to come home.**

And the people who are left behind.

**When you're writing, you're not necessarily making those connections, but for a reader who might know some of your biography ...**

You get into those heads and you know what it feels like, and you don't think about how you know this while you're working on the thing, you just want to make it true to the characters ... If you look at the women in "Pilots of the Purple Twilight," a couple of them were probably friends of my cousin, who was a Marine. She was a Marine! That was pretty cool. The rest of those women, I don't know where they came from.

**You make a brief note at the beginning of *The Story Until Now* that the order of the stories is subjective, rather than the standard chronological placement in collections that span great lengths of a career. Then you start with the most realistic story ("Denny") and follow it with one of the most fantastic ("Attack of the Giant Baby"). It comes off to me that you're**

**letting the readers know right off the bat where the boundaries of your work are, and that, in fact, there are no boundaries. Is this intentional? Subliminal? Random chance?**

I do it all by instinct. I was explaining to a kid friend with a first collection that I used to lay them out on the floor and walk around them and see what went with what and what went where. Now I do it in my head, and I can't for the life of me tell you why I know what goes where in terms of this collection, I just *do*. It really is a feeling thing—the way you know what looks right in a given room, colors, which rug, which piece of furniture goes where, down to placement of small objects—what belongs and what doesn't.

**What was it about "Denny" that made it feel like the right piece to start a collection that was going to span your career so far?**

I don't know if I read or heard or just intuited that there were parents out there who were afraid of their kids, but I knew I wanted to write a story. I think it started with the first line. Then I did a lot of trawling the internet and discovered all these terrible things. From there, it wrote itself—with, believe me, plenty of suffering along the way—but at a certain point it told me there was only one way it could end. I think I put it first because I was proud of it—and to make clear that I don't ever, ever want to be the kind of writer who only does One Thing.

**Have stories ever been shaped by events, or by what was in the air at a particular time?**

"Songs of War" was my response to the women's movement. My novel, *Armed Camps*, was my *Why Are We in Vietnam?* @expectations grew out of conversations I had on LambdaMOO [an early online community] and *Thinner Than Thou* popped up in the early oughts, when weight control became the national obsession and everybody started treating the gym like a great, holy church. I could go on ... Everything's made out of something.

**"The Wait" and "Songs of War" are about women with nothing but bad or limited choices.**

Yeah, and the interesting thing was that I never really thought about it, I just wrote what I thought was the way things were at the time. Never thought of myself as a feminist, exactly. Just a writer, which is what I am.

**You never abandon complexity for the sake of ideology, though. You give equal time to all of the concerns, but you never let anybody off the hook.**

Yeah, it's funny. I was asked to join women's consciousness-raising groups at Wesleyan, but I was too busy. I had a mate, three kids, and a dog, and I was, for God's sake, *working*. No time to sit around complaining about my life.

**But at the same time, there's a strong empathy in that story with the feelings of inequality.**

Partly I think it was being educated by nuns. My friend who went to Radcliffe [and] Harvard for the Ph.D. was told by her mentor that she could either forget about marriage or forget about a career. The nuns taught us that we could do anything we wanted to.

**That goes against what most people assume a Catholic education to entail.**

Interesting, isn't it? I think people hear what they want to hear.

Looking at *The Lot of Women*, my mother bought into it. She tried to sell me but I was in rebellion by the time I was fifteen.

I've worked all my life. I put together a panel for the Wesleyan Writers Conference again this year—title: *How Writers Survive*. We all talked about our day jobs, because most writers, all but the most successful, need day jobs. I rewrote a child-care column for the Gesell clinic, wrote a Barron's Book Note on 1984, taught ...

**Have there been any times over your career that you've considered going with the other job, leaving writing behind?**

I'd rather die.

**Was there a moment when you knew you had the confidence to push forward as a writer, or is that something that has to be rediscovered periodically?**

I was too stupid to do anything but keep on trying. I can mail you a photo for a site raising money—notables wrote advice to writers on their hands. Mine? *Never Give Up*.

**How do you start on a project?**

To be honest, I don't exactly know. I gave myself a couple of weeks off in June after crashing on a couple of things. Threw out two ideas over the next two weeks and driving back from Boston Sunday saw a mini-bus with black windows; it looked hermetically sealed and I thought: right. Then I started to hear it.

**That moment when you know you have something ... Is it different for a novel versus a story? Do you need more to get started?**

I hear stuff coming ... Sometimes a story turns out to be me sketching for a novel. A novel is when you have more than you can—or want to—compress. I think writers reach a point in life where they have enough in them to make a novel. Some start right away, but I was 26.

**When do you know that it's working? How far in is the point of no return?**

With a novel, you may end up thinking it starts *here* and in, oh, the first third, or after you're finished, need to reorder it. I've had busted novels, but none I gave up on. It took me eight years to get *Son of Destruction* right. I've only trashed a couple of stories. Two, I think.

**There are some pieces in the collection—I'm thinking of "High Rise High" and "Songs of War," a few others—that are more novellas than stories, and I may be projecting, but I can almost feel your joy in writing in this in-between length. You don't have to compress as much as in a short story, but you're not giving up a few years of your life to a novel. They sort of stretch out like happy cats.**

Yes, and I have *no idea* why they had to be what they were, they just did. As you've probably gathered if you looked at, e.g., "The Wait," the stories used to be simpler—one-idea ones I could do in a week. Now both they and the novels seem to be bigger en-

gines with many moving parts. Accident-prone, I guess, but much more interesting to me and more fun to do. The risk.

**"High Rise High" has such a wide canvas and large cast, and action that follows the arc of a novel rather than what we think of as a short story.**

I've seen so many high-school movies (probably beginning with *Blackboard Jungle*, going on up and through and past *Rock 'n' Roll High School*, all of John Hughes, *The Principal*, and, for me, although it was made years before the year named in the title, the best of them all—the positively brilliant *Class of 1984* (in which the shop teacher ends up head-first sliding into the blade of a table saw). I've seen so many high-school movies that I wanted to write one, and "High Rise High" was born.

Of course it was a bitch to write—all the best ones are—but I *saw* and *heard* it the way it played in my head, all the cross-cutting and tight scenes, but I had the novelist's flexibility, so I could give a little hell to the parents by looking them in the eye and going inside their heads.

**In Gary K. Wolfe's introduction to the book, he discusses the various literary movements and genres of the last 50 years that you may or may not have been a part of. I think you're asked about genre in every interview and profile I've ever read, probably because, although much of your work has appeared in science fiction publications, it often doesn't fit into that world. Have things changed enough that this isn't so important anymore?**

If you look at who's publishing in *The New Yorker* right now, Gary Shteyngart, Karen Russell, George Saunders, and look at what they're doing, I think, as Gary [K. Wolfe] does, that the lines between the territories are dissolving—if they were ever really there. Good writing is good writing no matter where it appears.

**What's making those lines dissolve?**

Maybe for the same reason that unearthly things and bleak futures turned up in the post-atomic years when there were a gazillion mutant-whatever movies and EC horror comics were just right for the time. People have to express their anxieties somehow and are—okay, more open to work that diverges from reality. Worst-case scenarios. Imagine that there's a difference between what we see and what may be. Oh, eek, that's either garbled or pretentious.

**No, it makes perfect sense. I set *Untouchable* during Y2K because I was interested in that time. Right after the Cold War, it seemed as if we had nowhere to focus our anxieties. The villains were gone, suddenly. At least until 9/11. Maybe this was a moment where things opened up in the culture, as well. We needed zombies again.**

And, apparently, we love them. You've done a bit of—not stretching—*expanding* reality in both the novella [*Among Wolves*] and *Untouchable* and I think that's a Good Thing. Kitchen-sink realism these days? Not so much.

**The world is a strange place.**

The kitchen sink is boring. It's all about what's under the sink, behind the sink and beyond the sink.

**Genre readership can be very welcoming. There's an actual community there. You've had a pretty unique experience, I think, in that you've been part of the "literary fiction" world, and the genre world.**

SF people have an actual thriving community. I have a lot of fun with some of the brightest, funniest people I know—very lively minds, and so many of us are hanging in the blurred area between that and "literary" (which in hard science fiction, which I don't write, is a dirty word). We flow back and forth pretty comfortably.

**Is there any fear of that going away, if genre continues to be absorbed into the mainstream?**

No ... [There are] hard-liners who argue that it would dissolve or dilute the community we have. It hasn't and it won't.

**You've said that there's a drive in your work toward "worst-case scenarios." Besides good conflicts for the stories, what do you gain from running toward rather than away from your fears?**

Back when I covered juvenile court, the social workers talked about kids "acting out" their problems. Maybe this is just me acting out.

I never think in terms of theme of conflict, just the rhythms or cadences of the characters, what's going on inside their heads.

**But isn't there a power in taking things to the most awful extreme?**

Maybe it's like diving into a wave. Or maybe—I've always been this protective pessimist. Always expect the worst and you won't be disappointed. Sometimes you'll even be pleasantly surprised. Never been able to think in terms of happy endings. Neither have you, in the two books I've seen. Maybe we're under a curse.

**Who wants to read about happy endings?**

Bingo!



# Kit Reed and Her Feral Girl Scouts

Rick Wilber

It's Joe and Kit or maybe it's Kit and Joe and me and Maria Dahvana Headley and Ben Loory, and we're in a rented Toyota Camry trundling up a mountainside in Southern California determined to find our way to some fiction. Or barring that, the Palomar Observatory. We want to visit the place where the Hale and the Schmidt were used by Hubble and history was made and parts of the future discovered. It's all very science-fictional and fantastic, both. So we're halfway up Palomar Mountain Road and dizzy from the upward wind but ready to wrestle with rattlesnakes (as the signs warn us) if we have to in order to get inside the big dome and see that telescope.

The conversation is led by Kit, who has been leading conversations both real and metaphoric for some five decades now, so we're happy to let her lead. Every now and then one of us kicks in a thought and, foolishly, mine is this: "Hey, why don't we see who can be the first to write and sell a story based on today's visit to Palomar?"

There is great acclamation. Or, more honestly, there is a sort of OKness about it, a half-hearted grudging acceptance. Maria is rolling her eyes (just what she needs, another deadline), but I can also feel the wheels turning. Ben is staring off

into space and I'm seeing that look of his in the rearview mirror and I'm thinking, hell, he'll write an eight-hundred-word flash fiction before we get off the damn mountain. Me, I'm clueless, and it was my stupid idea. There's got to be something. Think! Think!

But Kit, she of the boundless energy, is brainstorming out loud and as we drive by the entrance road to an abandoned Girl Scout camp it all clicks: Girl Scouts! A lost troop of feral Girl Scouts! Hilarity ensues as we talk about it. By the time we drive another mile or two and get to the observatory parking lot with its warning signs about rattlesnakes and the absolutely stupendous sense of history emanating from the great dome ahead of us, Kit pretty much has the story written. The story, "The Legend of Troop 13," appeared within the year in *Asimov's* and I realized, in reading it, that this is how she's been doing it since 1958 and her first short-story sale, "The Wait." She gets the prompt, follows it, that wonderful mind starts making all sorts of odd connections as she starts putting things together, and, wham, there's a story on its way to becoming another Reed classic. Between then and now is some fifty years of such amazement, and a hundred or

more stories to go along with the plenitude of novels and collections and essays and all the rest. Her energy level seems boundless.

And here's the thing. I watched that one particular story, "The Legend of Troop 13," go from idea through construction to publication, and I have to tell you it's weird and darkly satiric and disturbing and funny by turn. In short, it's the usual great stuff. And this is fifty years on, mind you. Kit hasn't lost a step.

So jump forward nearly a year and we're reading our stories at Readercon, Kit wowing them with her feral Girl Scouts, me limping along with a baseball fantasy set atop Palomar Mountain, Maria Dahvana Headley knocking us flat with "The Krakatoan," a story that inverts *everything* from Palomar, and Ben Loory expanding the brilliant compression of his writing to create something new and strange about lying and telescopes, called "The Observatory." It's all pretty damn good. With Kit as our Girl Scout leader and husband Joe as the sidekick, we got the job done and we're pretty happy about that.

And did I mention her energy? While all this Palomar stuff is going on, Kit is also pulling together a new collection—*The Story Until Now*—and finishing up a

great new novel, *Son of Destruction*, and still glowing from the great reviews for the previous collection, *What Wolves Know*, and then generally working her magic in all sorts of different ways. It would be exhausting, I tell you, this pace, if she were thirty. But she's not thirty. She is, I'm sure, at least thirty-five. And still producing. I mean really producing.

So it's last July and the fearsome five-some (Kit, Joe, myself, Maria, and Ben) are taking part in what's becoming something of a tradition now, making a pilgrimage to one cool place or another when we're all

together at a con. This time it's Readercon, and it's Walden Pond, and lunch at the Concord Inn, and admiring our betters at Louisa May Alcott's home and Ralph Waldo Emerson's home, and the Old Manse where both Emerson and Nathaniel Hawthorne lived for a while; and, of course, the reproduction of Thoreau's comfortable little cabin at Walden Pond.

What will come of this visit? Will Maria write another story as disturbing and inventive as "The Krakatoan"? Will Ben pen a bit of collapsed genius in something short short? Will I write something

about baseball in Colonial times (hey, it will be an alternate history, OK?). Who knows? Only one thing's for certain, Kit Reed will put that great day in Concord into the hopper and let it roll around and mix it with something weird and wonderful and, probably by next year, she'll be reading it at Readercon. And it will be terrific. And we'll all be running far behind her, though going as fast as we can, as we try to keep up.



## On Heroes, Fan Girls, *Primeval*, and Kit Reed: The Education of Connie Willis

Connie Willis

I have a confession to make. Until several years ago, Kit Reed was my absolute hero. She had been my hero ever since I read her short story, "The Wait," when I was fifteen years old. The story was a revelation, unlike anything I had read before (and, come to think of it, I *still* haven't read anything like it in all the years since), and I was convinced she would remain my hero forever.

In those days, I didn't just read science fiction. I read anything and everything I could get my hands on, from Shirley Jackson's eerie *The Haunting of Hill House* to Leo Rosten's *The Education of Hyman Kaplan*, a very funny and touching novel about an immigrant ESL student who wrote his name with stars between the letters (H\*Y\*M\*A\*N) and who at the end of the story showed his much-put-upon teacher how much he adored him by signing his name simply "Hyman" and putting the stars between the letters of his teacher's name, from James Agee's heart-rending *A Death in the Family* to Peter Beagle's ironic and haunting *A Fine and Private Place*.

I was also reading the short stories in *The Year's Best* science-fiction collections, and I didn't draw any distinction between them and the "real" literature I was reading. I still don't, and if anybody asks me how I can possibly think science fiction is literature, one of the *many* examples of SF writers I offer as proof is Kit Reed, because she can be as funny as Leo Rosten, as ironic as Peter Beagle, as sharply chilling as Shirley Jackson, as heart-rending as James Agee.

Sometimes she can do it all in the same story, as she does in "The Food Farm." And sometimes she does something completely new to a tried-and-true theme like time travel, as she does in "Great Escape Tours, Ltd.," a story which makes you reconsider everything you ever assumed about the subject—and then some.

My favorite Kit Reed story (except for "The Wait," which I think of as more of a literary religious experience than a story) is

her "Songs of War," the best story ever written about the feminist movement and the war between the sexes. In it, the women actually go to war, leaving their husbands waiting for their dinners and marching off to set up an encampment on the hill above their suburb. It's a very funny story, and also frightening, and tender, and it's not just about feminism, but about the nature of war, which never turns out like we think it's going to, especially civil wars, where our loyalties are impossibly divided, and the enemy's someone we love, and about lots of other stuff. Like all great literature, it's about *everything*.

Well, so anyway, here was a writer who I'd not only loved when I was young and thought was even better when I got older, a writer who kept doing new different and even cleverer things, and whose new stories I couldn't wait to read. Somebody, who, it became clear as the years passed, I would never be as good as. My hero.

And then, several years ago, when I was in New York, my editor at *Asimov's*, Sheila Williams, called me and said Kit wanted to have lunch. Lunch! Ohmygod! With Kit Reed!

"And try to behave yourself and not go all geeky fan-girl on her," Sheila said, so I had that to worry about, and the possibility that she'd think I was a complete moron and be sorry she ever invited me. Plus, the possibility that in person she'd turn out to be like some other writers I've admired from afar—a Real Jerk. And, in the back of my mind, the fear that she couldn't possibly live up to all my expectations.

But she did. She was charming and gracious and interesting and nice, and I kept having to pinch myself to believe that I was actually Having Lunch with Kit Reed!

I don't remember anything we talked about (I was trying too hard to not suddenly gush "Oh, my God, you're my favorite writer!" to even remember what we had to eat, except that we had

these amazing macaroons for dessert. And afterwards she wrote me a letter about how the company that made them was going out of business, and her life was over.) All I really remember is that she was just as wonderful her stories. And that she had gone from being my hero to being MY HERO!

I thought she would be MY HERO! forever, but that isn't what happened. A couple of years after the lunch, I started watching a British TV series my daughter had turned me on to called *Primeval*, about rips in time that allow dinosaurs to come through from the ancient past to present-day London and the team that's assembled to try to stop them—and keep the whole thing secret. And not change the past.

Okay, so the premise sounds a lot dumber than *Game of Thrones* or *Downton Abbey*, but the show was smart and funny, with great dialogue and plot twists and terrific characters played by wonderful actors (especially Andrew-Lee Potts and Ben Miller) and the plot that I love more than any other: good people trying to do something impossible against ridiculously unfair odds.

I was absolutely addicted to *Primeval*, and I was touting it to all and sundry at an academic science-fiction conference in Florida, to no avail. I had earlier tried to tout it to George R.R. Martin, who said *really* mean things not only about the show, but about what my liking it said about my literary taste, and I wasn't having any better luck at this conference. My supposed friend James Patrick Kelly scoffed, Charles N. Brown made assorted disparaging remarks, and I won't even repeat what the academics said.

And then, Kit Reed—my hero, MY HERO!—said, "*Primeval*? I love that show!" and we spent the rest of the conference and several conventions after that discussing the finer points of the dialogue and the webisodes and the wonderfully satisfying way they ended the series.

We still discuss *Primeval* (and the abysmal spinoff series the Canadians attempted to make, *Primeval: New World*—warning: DO NOT WATCH; repeat, DO NOT WATCH) and all things *Primeval*. We both report when we've turned new friends and family on to the show, which is fairly often. (Not everybody is as pigheaded as George R.R. Martin.)

When my daughter and I toured all the *Primeval* locations on our trip to England and sent her pictures, did she laugh? No! She loved them. And the poster. And the *Lord of the Rings/Primeval* mashup. And when I told George, "Kit Reed likes it, too. So there," he had no rejoinder. I mean, he could hardly challenge *her* literary taste, which is impeccable. She is, after all, Kit Reed.

And she's no longer my hero or even MY HERO! Because of *Primeval*, she's moved up to a whole other level. She's now M\*Y H\*E\*R\*O!!!!!!

I love you, K\*I\*T!

P.S. If you want to make her happy, watch *Primeval*.

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Connie Willis's Top Ten Favorite K\*I\*T R\*E\*E\*D Stories

In No Particular Order

1. "Automatic Tiger"
2. "The Food Farm"
3. "Great Escape Tours, Ltd."
4. "Mister Da V."
5. "The New You"
6. "The Judas Bomb"
7. "Songs of War"
8. "At Central"
9. "Attack of the Giant Baby"  
and, of course,
10. "The Wait"





# Kit Reed: The Legend Until Now

Gary K. Wolfe

[Parts of this essay appeared in somewhat different form in “Scoping the Exits: The Short Fiction of Kit Reed,” in *The Story Until Now: A Great Big Book of Stories*, Wesleyan University Press, 2013.]

Those of us who read the sorts of things we celebrate at Readercon take a certain measure of satisfaction in thinking of them as renegade genres—modes of storytelling that not only violate the assumptions of the dominant literary culture, but just as cheerfully violate the assumptions of their own genres. We’re always revising, rethinking, reinventing, recasting, and twisting our fictions into new forms and new variations. But even *within* these renegade genres, there are renegade writers, and for longer than almost anybody, Kit Reed has been one of them. That’s one reason she has quite reasonably described herself as *transgenre*. I’ve argued before that genres are blurring, recombining, and breaking down their cell walls in recent years, but Kit has been on this path for more than half a century.

Her first story, “The Wait,” appeared in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* in 1958. This disturbing tale of a mother and daughter trapped in a strange town with an even stranger ritual might well have appeared in *The New Yorker* nine years earlier, when it published Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery,” a tale with which it clearly resonates, but by 1958 *The New Yorker* had largely moved away from any trace of the fantastic. Part of Reed’s near-legendary reputation may have to do with the simple fact that her career began with such an accomplished story, but she has continued to produce such stories with astonishing regularity ever since, never quite falling into any particular genre but never quite getting trapped by mainstream literary fashions. It wasn’t long before she moved on to such markets as Damon Knight’s groundbreaking *Orbit* series, Michael Moorcock’s *New Worlds*, and venues such as *The Yale Review* or *The Village Voice Literary Supplement*. It probably was

to her advantage that she came of age when some of the most visionary editors in science fiction in the 1960s and 1970s were actively on the prowl for such distinctive voices—not only Moorcock and Knight, but Anthony Boucher, Robert Mills, and Avram Davidson at *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, Harry Harrison in *Nova*, and others.

Reed’s first SF novel (actually her fourth novel; the very first was *Mother Isn’t Dead, She’s Only Sleeping* in 1961) was *Armed Camps*, and it was one of science fiction’s first and most powerful critical responses to the Vietnam War, appearing in 1969, three years before the first part of Joe Haldeman’s classic *The Forever War* appeared in *Analog*. Like Haldeman’s novel, it resonates even today in surprising ways, with its portrait of an America in which the torture of a soldier becomes a feature of what we would now call reality TV, and in which gun ownership is all but mandatory. Since it was first published by Faber in England, it helped, along with her participation in *New Worlds*, to identify her as an early American harbinger of the New Wave; both *Armed Camps* and Reed’s first collection *Mister Da V. and Other Stories* (1967) appeared when the movement was in full flood. Her mordantly satiric and sharply funny take on beauty pageants “In Behalf of the Product,” with its devastating final line, was written for an anthology edited by Thomas M. Disch, another American New Wave writer whose acerbic sensibility and finely tuned prose sometimes resembled Reed’s. There are only a handful of still-practicing American writers associated with this influential movement (and Reed is one of an even smaller handful of American women; the only others who come to mind are Carol Emshwiller and Pamela Zoline).

Reed’s later novels, in addition to occasional mysteries and psychological thrillers (sometimes under the name Kit Craig), often deal with groups of individuals under stress in confined settings, but sometimes adopt the surrealistic mode of a writer

like Ballard. *Fort Privilege* (1985) is set in a besieged Manhattan apartment building, while *Thinner Than Thou* (2005) involves a nightmare “fat camp” in a dystopia built around diet and body image. *The Night Children* (2008) is set in a massive shopping mall. In *Enclave* (2009), set in a future threatened by rising violence and environmental and political collapse, an ex-Marine convinces rich parents that, for a hefty price, he can protect their spoiled children from the oncoming catastrophe by isolating them in an inaccessible redoubt in a former monastery. Even the residents of the haunting and haunted small Florida town of her most recent novel, *Son of Destruction*, feel themselves embattled by their own secrets and the town’s odd history of death by spontaneous combustion.

While some of these novels are clearly science fiction and some are more traditionally mimetic, Reed’s characteristic narrative space is somewhere in between, in that area of the fantastical-but-not-quite-fantastic which some have labeled the uncanny. It’s a region shared by one of Reed’s few identifiable predecessors, Shirley Jackson, one of the few other writers I can think of who might have imagined the really unlikely but not-quite-impossible troop of feral Girl Scouts in Reed’s recent “The Legend of Troop 13.”

As the New Wave either receded or was assimilated—depending on whose view of literary history you accept—feminist science fiction, at least as an identifiable movement, came close on its heels. But here again Reed both does and doesn’t quite fit. Clearly a feminist who often focused on questions of self-image and constructions of gender identity, she wrote about body images not only in that beauty pageant story “In Behalf of the Product” and the novel *Thinner Than Thou*, but in “The Food Farm,” with its satiric takes on fat farms and the cult of celebrity (which she later revisited in stories like “Special” and “Grand Opening”). She could powerfully depict the alienation and sense of entrapment of a suburban housewife in “The

Bride of Bigfoot” (which has something in common with James Tiptree, Jr.’s “The Women Men Don’t See,” with its protagonist’s radical choice in the end). The lonely elderly sisters in “Winter,” worried about surviving another harsh winter in their isolated home, may moon over the promise of lost youth offered by a young deserter who stumbles across their cabin, but in the end a far more practical decision prevails.

But Reed’s feminism is seldom overtly political and never uncomplicated, and she is as apt to take women to task for their own passivity as men for their insensitive cluelessness (and she does blustering clueless males as well as anyone). Sometimes, the men are offstage entirely. The men of Schell Island have all decided to go off to war in “Little Sisters of the Apocalypse,” but the women left behind aren’t entirely sure they want or need to be protected by the gang of biker/hacker nuns who arrive to fortify the island against the men’s possible return. In “Pilots of the Purple Twilight,” a group of women of different generations endlessly wait in a kind of limbo near the Miramar Naval Air Station for their husbands to return from various wars, until the oldest realizes “*It was all used up by waiting.*” Probably Reed’s most famous treatment of gender alienation is the much-anthologized and controversial “Songs of War,” in which the women simply decamp to the hills and set up their own society. While the overreaction of the distraught husbands escalates the situation into a national crisis, Reed won’t entirely let her women off the hook, either; internal squabbles break out between different factions (stay-at-home moms vs. those who put their kids in daycare, for example), and eventually most of the women drift away and return to their homes. The satirical voice is so complexly ambiguous that while many readers view the story as a satire of how far a military-happy male society might go to keep women in their place, one feminist critic viewed it as an *anti*-feminist parable, with the women’s revolution simply dissipating at the end.

If Reed can so unsettle proponents of both sides of an issue at once, she might be doing something right. It’s not surprising that Reed has several times been a finalist for the Tiptree Award, as well as once for the Shirley Jackson Award.

Perhaps partly because of her own childhood experiences as a self-described “military kid”—her father was a submarine commander who died in World War II—her attitude toward militarism is equally ambivalent, critical but not entirely unsympathetic. Sargent Whitemore, the military schoolmaster who runs the brutal redoubt in *Enclave*, is part genuine idealist, part megalomaniac, and part parody of the competent Heinlein hero who isn’t nearly as competent as he thinks he is. The title character in “The Singing Marine,” haunted by an ill-fated military exercise which left most of his platoon drowned or mired in a marsh, finds himself compulsively singing a song from a Grimm’s fairytale, trying to come to terms with his sense of having been “born in blood and reborn in violence.” A similar event—or possibly the same one—haunts the memory of an aging veteran trying to come to terms with his wife’s mental deterioration in “Voyager,” one of Reed’s most moving explorations of loss. “In the *Squalus*” describes how that actual submarine disaster in 1939 shaped the entire subsequent life of a survivor, while the apparently demented old veteran in a nursing home in “Old Soldiers” is actually coming to grips with a horrific experience that has kept him psychically trapped for decades. And we’ve already seen her take on the fates of military wives in “Pilots of the Purple Twilight.”

Another hot topic in literary scholarship over the past few years has been animal studies—broadly concerning the role of animals and their relations with humans in literature—but Reed has notably returned to animals and animal imagery in her fiction for decades, from the pink, poetry-producing pony in “Piggy” (whose poems are mashups of everyone from Longfellow to Dickinson) and the robot ti-

ger which gives its owner self-confidence in “Automatic Tiger” to the bug which finds itself made human in “Sisohpromatem” and the pet monkey which writes best-sellers in “Monkey Do.” Reed revisits the child-raised-by-wolves motif in “What Wolves Know,” a story whose title may give us a clue to what Reed finds appealing in animals (the boy’s father, determined to make a media sensation out of him, clearly does not know what wolves know, but finds out). A werewolf mother shows up in “The Weremother,” Bigfoot shows up in “The Bride of Bigfoot,” and in “The Song of the Black Dog” the title animal has the unusual talent of being able to sniff out those about to die during major disasters. All these seem to suggest a world of hermetic knowledge we can access only through our contacts with animals, if we can access it at all. But easily the most bizarre of Reed’s animals-as-conduits is the huge alligator which is the title figure in “Perpetua,” inside of whom the narrator and her family ride out an unspecified disaster in their city with all the comforts of a private yacht, until the narrator makes her own accommodation with Perpetua.

A lot of these stories can be found in her career retrospective collection *The Story Until Now: A Great Big Book of Stories*, which appeared last year from Wesleyan University Press and is perhaps the best entry point so far into Reed’s long and varied career. Writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, Chelsea Cain commented that “her stories are sharp, transgressive and full of the unexpected, with enough keen social observations to launch a thousand dissertations.” That much is certainly true. But then Cain concluded by saying that “In my Museum of American Writers, I’d have a statue of Kit Reed in the lobby. Though it’s possible she might accuse me of missing the point.” Read Kit’s story titled “Wherein We Enter the Museum” and you’ll know exactly what she means.



# Where

Kit Reed

[Excerpted from a preliminary version of a new novel to be published in the summer of 2015 by Tor Books.]

## CHAPTER 1 [EXCERPT]

David Ribault—Charlton, S.C.

*Thursday*: before dawn

If there was a shift in the skies at his back just then—any change in the wind to signify what was coming, Davy didn't know it. The islands were at his back, the skies ahead, dark as fuck. He was on the last causeway to the mainland, getting cranked up to confront Rawson Steele; object?

Deconstruction.

# # #

Driving to town in the dark, he broods. Why this frontal assault on Kraven Island, and Merrill in particular? What, exactly, is driving Rawson Steele?

It's so early that no birds fly. The only sign of life in the sky above the Inland Waterway is a transport plane taking off from the North Island base. Even the bugs seething in the marsh grass along the causeways are still. He should have but didn't leave some kind of note for Merrill, she won't mind, they don't take each other for granted, they're not on that kind of footing, but after last night ...

Oh shit. *Oh, shit.*

He has to get done with Steele and rush home and back into bed before Merrill even thinks about waking up, and on the way, he has to figure out how to make things right. The more he mulls it, the more he thinks her ultimatum is directly caused by this fucking Steele, an observation he is too messed up to parse.

Whatever was about to happen just happened, but Davy won't know. He is turned inward.

# # #

Hours pass. No Steele.

Then sirens tear up the sunrise, the blat and confusion of some new emergency, raising a cry that crowds everything out of his head.

*Trouble out there somewhere. What.*

*What!*

## CHAPTER 3

Davy—*Thursday*

Two cop cars and an ambulance stream past, heading out Ribault Road. Trouble on the base, he thinks. There's always trouble at the base. On North Island the front and back ends of war rub up against each other and strike sparks daily, old vets

and new war wounded laid up in the base hospital while buzz-cut 18-year-olds train to feed the war, result: bar fights and domestic violence. Losses on night marches—AWOL via the marsh.

Then a procession of EMTs and fire trucks makes the V-turn, heading out Ribault Road. *This is bigger than I thought.* Davy checks his phone; after five, and no Steele. History tells him that even at this hour, any kind of commotion on the base jams up traffic at the Bartlett Fork. *Five more minutes, he tells himself. If he made it around the Fork he'll be here by then.*

Police set up a checkpoint as he watches, waving island-bound traffic to the old Burton Road. Dude, you can get there from here but it takes hours. Right. They're already backed up bumper to bumper from here to the county's built-in bottleneck, the circle at the Bartlett Fork.

He'll have to wait until the cops step aside and traffic actually moves. With things the way they are, it could eat up the rest of the morning.

Just when he has to get home.

Fucking Steele. *What did he want with me?*

Home. *Why isn't he here?*

Home invasion by Rawson Steele. *Why was he on my porch last night, standing too close to my girl?*

The porch is Merrill's, but they've been together for so long that he forgets. With no sign of Steele and whatever hangs between the two of them still pending, Davy goes back inside his head and broods. She has to see through this guy, right? Walking in with sharp elbows and that loaded smile, who would not? In the South, you're brought up to be polite, smile for the stranger, at least until he shows himself for what he really is.

Whatever that is. Davy groans.

Does Steele want something that we don't know about? Oil beneath the surface of Kraven Island? Confederate gold buried under the Tanner House or in trunks at the bottom of the lake? Pirate treasure in a drowned ship out there beyond the sand bar on the ocean side? Treasure hunters have dug all over the island and sent divers down into those waters for going on two hundred years, and the most anybody ever found was Earl Pinckney's Spanish piece of eight, and that washed up on the beach when they were ten. Maybe the island is hiding some great natural resource that we don't know about; turn our backs and he'll leach it out of the ground, bleed us dry without us knowing until it's gone.

Or he's a developer, all charming at first, vampire just waiting for you to invite him in. He'll buy out the homefolks one by one and level the island to do ... what? Desecrate the place?

Will it be condos or plastic pseudo plantation houses with vinyl columns on the verandas and fake flowers in PermaStone urns? Great big honking casino, more likely. Megamall, harbor expansion that takes out our waterfront, so giant cruise ships can unload tourists to trash the island, some damn thing to wreck our lives and ruin the terrain, like a ...

Davy is—oh shit, he's circling the drain.

*Like he could win me over before the sun comes up. Does he not know what I do for a living?*

That's the bad thing about meeting: "Someplace convenient to your office." Yeah. He does.

*If he thinks I'll cough up deeds and property lines, he's shit out of luck. I'll kill him first.*

The problem being that Davy isn't sure. Steele is like a Chinese puzzle—you can't solve it, and you can't let it go. His mind is whirring like a rat trapped in a gerbil wheel.

*Wait!* While he was brooding, the pink light in the sky turned bright blue. It's late! He needs to hurl himself at that traffic jam and hope to God that he gets home before Merrill signs off on him.

It takes some fancy dancing to make it through the second checkpoint at Ribault Road, but Davy manages. He went through Charlton Primary with most of these guys. He's making decent headway when sirens pull him over: with Charlton cops already out there, fire trucks and emergency vehicles from towns surrounding stream past him, headed for the Bartlett Fork. *Trouble at the base*, he thinks. *Really bad trouble at the base.*

He's moving an inch at a time, banging on his car radio because for whatever reasons, reception is totally whacked. Every few minutes another gang of sirens pulls everybody over while more cop cars, fire trucks, wreckers, ambulances pass. Traffic seizes up altogether a crazy half-mile short of the circle. *Not now. Not when I'm so close!* A good half-mile of outgoing cars clogs the road between here and the circle, more are piling up behind him and the sun is high.

He should call or text Merrill, but the signal is crunchy and he doesn't know what to say. *Bad idea, but I'd better talk to her;* he hits One on his speed-dial, and his phone? His service makes calls from the causeway dicey on the best days. Now the signal is all fucked up. *What, did lightning take out all the phone towers?* He needs to fix what he wrecked, and he can't do it by phone. He needs to look into those hazel eyes and try to figure out what she's thinking, what he has to do, he ...

Doesn't know.

Anybody with half a brain would do what people behind him are doing: crunch over the median, incoming traffic or no, pull that Uey and head back to town, try again after lunch. Makes sense, the morning's shot, but he can't. He's too in love, or driven, or whatever it is, to quit now. It's all he can think about. Dumb, sticking wallpaper music into his CD deck, like that would take his mind off the fact that nothing is moving and for the moment, there's no place to go.

How long has he been sitting here? Another half-hour, and nothing's moved. Crazy, stupid, stupid-crazy Dave Ribault, sitting here like a toad. It's time to charge the median, make that Uey and head for Charlton, incoming traffic or no, so he can get to a working land line, except.

This is bad.

There is no incoming traffic.

Not one car or truck has come in from the barrier islands—no military personnel or official vehicles coming back from whatever disaster at the base.

The car in front of him jerks to life and Davy's heart fast-forwards. *At last.* Clinch, reconciliation, and then ...

Then he rounds the last bend.

The causeway to North Island is all but empty. The trouble isn't on the base. It's out their way, maybe on Poynter's Island,

or, *my God! Kraven.* Davy's jaw seizes up. His teeth collide with a padlock *click.* He tries the car radio again but gets nothing but white noise.

Five more minutes and all his joints will rust. Time crawls. His car crawls. The skin on the back of his neck crawls. Ahead, orange cones and yellow plastic barrels mark a checkpoint, OK, S.O.P. Usually checkpoints are manned by guys like the ones he charmed his way past in town; if it's Bobie or Jack Stankey, he'll go, "Hey," and they'll go, "Well, hey." All he has to do is grin, hark them back to something they did after the Moultrie game in senior year and they'll flag him through. But this is a military operation: four Humvees from the base crouch with shoulders hunched, filling the road.

Road block, here at the bottleneck, and it's ... He checks his watch. It's well past noon.

*This is really bad.*

MPs with handhelds and clipboards stand next to the military Humvees, grilling drivers of outgoing cars, checking licenses and registrations, car by car. They work in pairs, peering into back seats, popping every trunk. Other MPs are stationed around the circle, flagging cars onto this exit or that. They're diverting most drivers onto the dirt road through the Bartlett woods. It takes you back to downtown Charlton, but not any time soon, and the rest? From the looks of it, only a few cars make it onto the causeway home. Certified islanders, Davy thinks, and he's not sure how this will play out. Although he was born in Charlton, he didn't move out to Kraven until Merrill loved him well enough. Now they live together in the little clapboard house on Poulnot Street. Look, officer, it's been five years. He's done some of his best work on Kraven Island. So, is he a certified islander or not?

"Dave Ribault, from Kraven Island. What's going on?"

"License and registration, sir. Please."

"The—whatever happened." He hands them over. "Is it on Poynter or on Kraven?"

"Only documented residents ..."

"Dave Ribault, it's right there on the license. My people were ..."

"I don't care what your people were."

"What's going on?"

MP Number One hands them back. "We're not authorized ..."

"I have a ..." He starts to say girlfriend. "I have a wife out there!" As he does so, two TV8 trucks rumble past and he thinks, *This is really bad.*

Number Two notes something on his clipboard.

Overhead, helicopters rattle the sky. *It's even worse than I thought.* Crazy, his voice zig-zags up a notch. "Just tell me. What the hell is going on!"

The first MP hands back his paperwork "Proceed."

As he flags Davy toward the channel bridge, Number Two's voice breaks just enough to let truth leak out. "Nobody knows."

Naturally the drawbridge is up. He tries the phone again; he's stopped caring what they say to each other, he needs to know she's OK. There's crap reception out here even on a good day, which this is not. He dies a dozen times, squirming until the drawbridge closes and he and the few cars backed up behind him go across to Poynter's Island.

The main drag in Poyntertown is packed solid with cars and

pissed-off drivers trying to get somewhere. Given the lay of the land, it's expected. As a kid, he came out here to Earl's house so often that he knows the island by heart. Anybody who's been crabbing in the swash knows there's another way to the Kraventown causeway. Never mind that it's longer, and there are wet patches that you have to ford and places you can bog down, depending on the tides. It beats stasis, which is what this is.

He peels off and heads for the beach road. The crushed oyster shells will rip the hell out of his tires and that's the least of it, but he doesn't care. He'll be at the Kraven Island ON ramp and on the causeway before those poor suckers jammed up in Poyntertown figure out that in terms of forward motion, they're screwed.

Making his way around the island, he plans. Merrill left for work hours ago, so he'd better think up a terrific explanation for him leaving without stopping to kiss her goodbye and make up for whatever that was that fell between them last night. *Think, asshole, it had better be damn good.* He needs to pick up something at Weisbuch's—wait. A late lunch won't make up for what they said to each other. No way. He needs to drop into Fowler's Gems on Bay Street and find her something terrific, grin like he drove all the way in to Charlton before dawn looking for this essential pretty Thing, wasted the morning shopping in town and got hung up in the monster traffic jam. He'll play up the trouble he went to, trashing his undercarriage on the oyster shells, throwing palm fronds into the road to keep from sinking into the sludge, *and guess what, all that time wasted and your present was right here, in the front window of Fowler's jewelry store.*

Who cares what it costs, he owes her. Tennis bracelet, he thinks, linked baby diamonds, because until they make up for things they said to each other ... Wait. Given the last thing she said to him. Well, a diamond ring might be cheaper, but it would be all wrong. *Wrong*, he thinks, rounding the last bend, uneasy and distracted. *Wrong*, he tells himself. Trying out and discarding a dozen possible right things to say.

*Everything I said and did last night was wrong. I have to make it better, I have to do this right, I ...*

Never thought the trouble that brought half the rolling stock in South Carolina to these islands was at home.

Holy crap!

The Kraventown causeway ramp is blocked. Yellow plastic barrels bar the ON ramp. Beyond them, yellow tape protects the police vehicles lined up across the Kraventown causeway, closing off all four lanes. Uniformed personnel guard the barricades, while others lug in saw-horses stenciled POLICE LINE / DO NOT CROSS to keep back the growing crowd. Angry islanders and frustrated commuters tangle, running up each other's heels.

Compared to this, the mess at Bartlett Circle looked like the Azalea Ball. Uniformed personnel stand on the raised causeway between here and the Kraven Island bridge.

The cops and troopers marshaled on the causeway look to be at a loss. The ones on the bridge beyond are at the rail, peering into the dark waters like they expect to see something down there that they don't know about. Others are bent double, looking under cars that look like they got caught in some storm and froze solid in mid-crossing. Every vehicle he can see is dead empty, and this bothers Davy for reasons he doesn't want to think about until.

If the drivers bailed for some reason after they left Kraventown, where did they go? More than a dozen dead cars sit

up there on the causeway like gulls on a wire strung between here and home.

Davy noses his Wrangler up the grade to the row of barrels blocking the ON ramp and gets out, thinking to walk around the markers and find somebody to tell him what came down out there, but they're all busy, frantic with it, whatever it is.

He shouts, to everybody in general. "What's going on?"

An angry voice he can't source shouts back, "Don't know. Nobody does."

Cleverly, Davy rolls a barrel aside, jiggling it until there's a gap big enough to slip through. He needs to stand face to face with somebody who does. A state trooper intercepts him. "Back off. Nobody on the causeway past this point."

He presses forward. "I live over there!"

"So do a lot of folks, Mister." Davy thinks he said, "Or they did."

"What happened, what the fuck happened?"

"Too soon to tell."

"But my ..." *whole life is over there.*

"No civilians allowed."

"I have to see my."

"You have to go."

The trooper doesn't exactly aim his weapon at Davy, just nudges him back with it, nosing the barrel higher and higher, stampeding Davy toward the crowd crammed behind the police tape. He can either scramble up the bank and join the gawkers or get back in his car, take off the brakes and roll backward down the ramp and go back the way he came, aware as he does so that there are places he will have to ford and places where he may get stuck in the shifting sand.

Back. No way is he going back.

Davy fake-leaves the ramp, moon-walking backward until the trooper is satisfied and turns away. At this point, it seems important to study uniforms, find somebody he knows. "Hey, Jack," he shouts. They've known each other since first grade. "Jack Stankey."

The Poyntertown cop turns. "Yo."

"What the fuck happened?"

"I'm not authorized to say." Exact same speech the MPs back at the Bartlett Circle memorized. Jack's face is empty, a surface that was just wiped clean.

Someone shouts, "He doesn't fucking know!"

"Nobody knows!"

Davy made it through the long morning on the belief that whatever happened was happening somewhere else; he's made it this far on the strength of a lie buzzing like a mantra inside of his head, *she's fine, nothing is wrong*, but with the sun high and the causeway deserted and the unknown at work on Kraven Island, with no way to find out what's going on out there and no access, everything is wrong. "What?" he cries, "What!"

A high, clear voice knifes through the confusion, cutting deep. "They're all gone."

Desperate to source it, Davy whirls. "What?"

"Gone," she cries.

He looks here, there. "What!"

"They all vanished. Every mortal soul on Kraven is gone!"





### How I Wrote *Where*—Me and the Marie Celeste

I've carried the story of the Marie Celeste in my head since I was, oh, ten or eleven, reading whatever the Book of the Month Club sent. The ship was discovered adrift in the open sea in the late 19th century—everything shipshape, gear neatly stowed, food on the stove and dents in some pillows to suggest that lives there had gone on undisturbed, until ...

What? There were no signs of violence: not mutiny, not pirate invasion or mass suicide, nothing to indicate that anything untoward happened here.

Except for the fact that all hands had vanished.

The thing about personnel who, like the Roanoke Colony and certain victims of 9/11 and passengers lost in lost jumbo jets, are here one minute and gone the next is that they're never really gone. They don't leave anything behind: no physical clues to the disappearance, no cryptic notes left for history to decipher—not even truncated last transmissions or black boxes, no bodies; trans-

lated: no proof of death. *At any minute they could walk through that door.*

In a way, the missing never die. Like the Roanoke Colony, like the Missing in Action, like all those who vanished without a trace to prove otherwise, *They're still out there.* I thought, *what if everybody on an island vanished?* This is the engine that drives *Where*. How did I write it? Sentence by sentence, graf for graf, chapter by chapter, with notes from Joseph Reed before I let it leave the house. *Where* went through three informed rewrites next, with all thanks to Kate Maruyama, John Silbersack, and David Hartwell. In March I heard myself explaining to Andy Duncan how I build a novel: like a brick shithouse. Brick by brick. Then I stand back and see what I've got and keep doing whatever I have to until I finally get it right.



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## OTHER

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Mary



Shelley

# Mary Shelley: Speaking to the Mysterious Forces of Our Nature

Stacie Hanes

[Excerpted and revised from the author's doctoral thesis, *The Sense and Sensibility of the Nineteenth-Century Fantastic*, Kent State University Department of English, 2013.]

Brian Aldiss famously defined science fiction as “*Hubris clobbered by nemesis*,” and he might well have taken that formulation directly from Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, which Aldiss argued was the seminal work of modern science fiction. Subtitled *The Modern Prometheus*, *Frankenstein* is a fully realized science fiction novel, and as such represents a watershed moment in the history of fantastic literature. Earlier novels may have represented cosmic voyages or idealized communities, but few even touched upon the possible consequences of the rapidly developing experimental sciences, or offered a reasonably credible portrait of a practicing scientist, with its attendant potential for disaster.

Victor Frankenstein’s actions not only raise the question of how far scientists should pursue knowledge, but the possible unintended consequences of that knowledge—both issues that were increasingly the topic of intellectual debate during the rise of experimental science in the post-Enlightenment era. Victor begins with lofty aims and good intentions, but ultimately fails not through his shortcomings as a scientist, but through his abandonment of moral responsibility, particularly in regard to the education and development of his creation. Shelley leaves the question of the monster’s nature subject to debate, which makes the novel, among many other things, a powerful educational tool. (Sofia Samatar, a writer who spent a decade teaching English as a Second Language to students in the Sudan, reported that of all English-language texts, only an edited-down version of *Frankenstein* riveted their attention.) And as we shall see, education itself—not only Victor’s, but that of his creation—is an important but often undervalued theme in the novel.

Mary Shelley began writing *Frankenstein* when she was eighteen years old. As Aldiss reminds us, in his speech upon the publication of the Bodleian edition of *Frankenstein*, Shelley was “A teenager! She was a teenager, you know?! Not the sort of female teenager today’s newspapers would have us believe in. Mary came from a civilized—a crowded but civilized—home. Literature, science and politics were regularly discussed there; Coleridge read his poetry there. (To see and to hear Samuel Taylor belting out ‘The Ancient Mariner’ might not have been to everyone’s taste—a bit like early *Dr. Who*—but it is something to have a living poet rampant in the parlour . . .”

All of her writing, public and private, reveals a woman of passion who began writing at a volatile age, in a volatile age. Shelley spent her late teens absorbing her activist mother’s works and discussing literature with her poet lover; her most important influences were personal and political. She must have felt the tensions of the era, and under the influences of Romantic poets like Byron and Percy Shelley, she wrote the work that most iconically

captures the fear, horror, and yearning of the early nineteenth century and which, according to Aldiss and others, established the groundwork for modern science fiction.

Shelley claims in the 1818 preface to *Frankenstein*, “I have [...] endeavoured to preserve the truth of the elementary principles of human nature,” but she was aware that this might seem problematic in such an overtly fantastic narrative. Sir Walter Scott called *Frankenstein* the most “philosophical and refined” kind of fantastic fiction—that which isn’t fantastic for its own sake, but uses the fantastic to explore the workings of the human mind. But what in Shelley’s own life and education led to the design of such a radical experiment in philosophical fiction?

Mary Shelley received no formal education; instead, her father William Godwin schooled her at home, primarily teaching her how to study and pursue ideas on her own. Where those lessons ended, she educated herself by means of her father’s friends and his library. Her letters confirm that she shared some of the radical spirit of her deceased mother, whom she (by her own testimony) adored in absentia, through a devoted study of Mary Wollstonecraft’s books and papers. Her letters also reveal a fascination with Prometheus, the story of stealing fire from the gods—the classical archetype of hubris—and of power that can either help or harm.

Shelley remained politically and philosophically radical (though less confrontational than her parents), living much of her life in voluntary exile and avoiding the public eye after Percy Shelley’s death in 1822. She had an obvious interest in science and literature, and a definite attraction to social and philosophical thought, but at the same time a desire to avoid the publicity that would arise from public engagement with these issues. The result was a novel that (especially with the introduction to the 1831 edition) directly addressed the place of science and spirituality in nineteenth-century life, but clothed its philosophical intentions in a fantastic tale in order to appeal to a popular audience. The novel was originally published anonymously in 1818 to avoid the scathing social criticism that would likely have been leveled at the girl who had run off with a married poet, and possibly to avoid the skepticism that might have greeted the philosophical pretensions of a teenage female author.

In her reading of Gothic fiction, Shelley found tropes that would “[s]peak to the mysterious forces of our nature and awaken thrilling horror—one to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood, to quicken the beatings of the heart”—and then bound them tightly to the deep theological and philosophical anxieties that haunted post-Enlightenment Europe. These issues, far more than the mere creation of an artificial monster, are what crucially link the novel to the traditions of exploration and extrapolation that would characterize later science fiction, which often sought both to educate its readers by bringing scientific ideas and processes into the realm of popular culture, and to question the

value of scientific education divorced from moral education.

At first *Frankenstein* may seem very much like its Gothic predecessors, but there are important differences. Mary Wollstonecraft associates the Promethean with the revolutionary (both lionized Romantic qualities), as well as with genius and galvanism. In her 1831 introduction to *Frankenstein*, Shelley writes that she began with a dream: she discovered in her dream what Ursula K. Le Guin calls reasons that Reason did not know, and from this came a text intended to evoke the same feelings in her readers.

Almost everyone who has read the novel is familiar with *Frankenstein's* fabulous origin story: “‘We will each,’ cried Byron, ‘write a ghost story!’ So Mary went away and thought about it, fruitlessly, until a few nights later she had a nightmare in which a ‘pale student’ used strange arts and machineries to arouse from unlife the ‘hideous phantasm of a man.’” In her 1831 introduction to the novel, Shelley wrote that the image “... haunted me ... if I could only contrive to frighten my reader as I myself had been frightened that night!” She recognized some of the frightful depth and powerful potential of her story: “What terrified me will terrify others; and I need only describe the spectre which had haunted my midnight pillow.”

Shelley, like her mother, was more aware than her father of the interdependence of rationality and emotion. Mary Wollstonecraft wove allusion, imagery, and metaphor into her rhetoric, drawing heavily on Milton. Shelley’s familiarity with her mother’s work is firmly established; she learned metaphor and

deeply felt argument at her mother’s grave, but a galvanic spark entirely her own took her further down a more creative rhetorical path than either of her parents ventured. As Anne Mellor explains it, Shelley’s “radical epistemological skepticism forces her to insist upon the fictiveness and temporality of all imaginative constructs ... [and] forces her to fuse the literal and the figurative in one continuous language system.” This fusion of the literal and the figurative has often been cited as a principal characteristic of science fiction narratives. As Le Guin writes in her introduction to *The Norton Book of Science Fiction*, “Literalization of metaphor is a characteristic of science fiction.”

In some ways *Frankenstein*, at the very beginning of science fiction—which has often been touted for its own educational value—anticipates a familiar quotation from one of science fiction’s masters later in the century: H.G. Wells’s oft-quoted warning that “Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe.” While Victor’s initial rejection of earlier alchemical thinking may be appealing to the modern reader, it is important to remember the other aspects of moral education that he apparently rejects along with it, and that finally result in his own catastrophic failure as a father and educator of the creature. What really makes *Frankenstein* a founding classic of science fiction is not its invention of a fabulous, iconic monster, but its speculative consideration of the nature of science and of learning, and of how we choose—or fail to choose—what that learning may lead to.



## Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley: Our Unnatural Mother

Paula R. Stiles

[Reprinted by arrangement with the author; originally a blog post published by Innsmouth Free Press, written in March 2013 as part of a series called “Women-in-Horror Week.”]

What is surprising about Mary Shelley’s legacy is not that it is so large but that it is so largely ignored. It looms like the shadow of some nameless thing across both science fiction and horror, while everyone pretends that it’s not there. Whenever I hear someone say with great confidence that women writers are new to horror and science fiction, that we aren’t listed in the greatest hits or the history books because our roots in the speculative genre are shallow, I think, *Well, what about Mary Shelley, dummy? The father of our entire genre is a mother!*

And what a mother. Oh, Lord.

Nor was Shelley alone, even in her

time. There were, of course, the Brontës. But she was unique. And surprisingly prolific. Many think that because *Frankenstein* (1818) was such a foundation of the genre, so scientific and so gothic, that its author was a one-hit wonder and an amateur who huddled alongside her more-famous lover and husband, Percy Shelley. She was anything but. Seven novels; dozens of short stories, poems, articles, and children’s books; travel narratives; several biographical anthologies; and her work on editing and translating Percy’s poetry. That’s just the published stuff. It’s doubtful Percy Shelley would be nearly as important today without the indefatigable efforts of his wife. But that was hardly all she left behind.

Mary was a professional writer at a time when few women wrote (or were even literate) and it was one of the few careers a respectable woman could take on that

didn’t involve baby-making. She resorted to it after Percy died, to support their young son, the only one of their children to survive infancy. Her diaries at the time she wrote *Frankenstein* clearly show the influence of postpartum depression and the recent loss of a child on the story, even more than the famously cold and wet summer that year. A grieving mother wrote that book.

Oddly enough, the popularity of *Frankenstein* for a long time diminished her reputation as a forward-thinking writer, since it was the *least* iconoclastic of her novels. It was assumed for quite a while that she had not followed in the footsteps of her illustrious mother, the feminist philosopher, Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Mary’s namesake mother had died of childbed fever ten days after her birth. She might be

forgiven for feeling a bit smothered by maternal memory.

But her other novels have strong female characters and themes. *Frankenstein* is an early fluke, written when she was still a teenage mother and in the throes of a scandalous affair with an older married man (Percy). As she matured, so did her writing. Even so, the raw emotion and vivid imagery of the book made it the only famous work to come out of Percy Shelley's challenge to write a horror story during the chilly, wet summer of 1816.

Some have criticized the novel as dry, more a book of ideas than of fast-moving plot and deep characterization. While one might allow this, I'd add that this is a common feature of many a famous later Hard SF novel. This subgenre is quite frequently all about the ideas—in *Frankenstein's* case, 18th-century galvanism and reanimation of dead tissue, and Renaissance alchemy, as well as a sociological critique of the contemporary sterile, male-only view of science. The only difference between most other Hard SF novels and *Frankenstein* is that those others were written by men. It seems that a female pioneer in the field just can't win. Write a science fiction story with emotion and vivid characters in it, and it's not real hard science. Write the

first modern Hard SF novel and everybody scrambles to hop-skip right over you to get to swashbuckling Jules Verne.

Mary's influence on the field isn't limited to *Frankenstein*, which was heavily influenced by contemporary Gothic horror. Though most of her novels are historical, *The Last Man* (1826) is the first modern novel about a science fiction apocalypse. In it, everyone is dying of a plague. The story follows the last survivors as they try to get by in the ruins. Many tropes that you will find in later zombie and scientific vampire novels (like *I Am Legend*) can be found here, right down to the *On the Beach*-style loneliness and philosophizing.

Similarly, all those fears about science-gone-amok (the Creature), and cold-blooded scientists who do terrible things in the name of Knowledge (Dr. Frankenstein), come from *Frankenstein*. Not to mention that Mary cleverly never gives a full description of the Creature. He is a high-minded and sensitive individual who falls prey to murderous and vengeful rage after being repeatedly rejected and abused by society (the subtitle of the book is *The Modern Prometheus*, invoking a sacrificial pre-Christian figure of mythology). However, if you take into consideration *Frankenstein's* extreme and hysterical bias

toward his creation, there is little in the Creature's physical description to explain why humans reject him. He could be anything from cringingly ugly to angelically beautiful. As far as we can tell, people just sense something off, something wrong, about him and they respond with extreme prejudice.

The Creature is an early embodiment of our paranoia about playing God, which we project onto our creations, punishing them for our own sins. In the book, we are the true monsters. And in every nuclear or environmental disaster flick, we mouth Mary Shelley, like puppets that don't know they're only wood.

It is not a big surprise that Mary Shelley's books have influenced both science fiction and horror so much. She had big ideas and those tend to catch people's imaginations even more than big plots. More depressing, it is not really a surprise that she gets handwaved off the classics so much as a woman, either. After all, when you're drawing up a historical list of famous speculative writers and you've got no women on it, it can't be too comfortable to have the Mother of Science Fiction Horror looking over your shoulder with a disapproving frown.



## Who Was Mary W. Shelley?

Theodore Krulik

Edward Dowden, the late-19th-century scholar, described the young Mary Shelley as “a girl in her seventeenth year [when she met Percy Shelley in 1814], with shapely golden head, a face very pale and pure, great forehead, earnest hazel eyes, and an expression at once of sensibility and firmness about her delicately curved lips” (from Dowden's *The Life of Percy Shelley*, 1886, quoted in Roseanne Montillo, *The Lady and Her Monsters*, HarperCollins, 2013, p. 112).

Edward John Trelawny, a friend of Mary and Percy Shelley, described Mary in her twenties in this way: “The most striking feature in her face was her calm grey eyes; she was rather under the English standard of woman's height, very fair and light-haired, witty, social, and animated in the society of friends, though mournful in solitude” (*Recollections of the Last Days of Shelley and Byron*, 1858, quoted in Brian W. Aldiss, *Billion Year Spree*, Doubleday, 1973, p. 21).

When Mary was fifty years old, she met a young widow named Jane St. John who, years later, described Mary as “tall and slim, and [she] had the most beautiful deep-set eyes I have ever

seen. They seemed to change in colour when she was animated and keen. She dressed as a rule in long soft grey material, simply and beautifully made. A more unselfish creature never lived” (Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler, *The Monsters: Mary Shelley and The Curse of Frankenstein*, Little, Brown, 2006, p. 315). If Jane's last comment seems a bit intimate for a first meeting, there is a reason that she remembered Mary that way. Jane became Mary's daughter-in-law a year later when she married Percy Florence Shelley in June, 1848.

Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley (March 29, 1797–February 1, 1851) was much more than these personal descriptions suggest. She was the daughter of two famous literary figures and, from childhood on, she had been urged to equal their achievements. Her outward appearance belied her feelings of inadequacy in trying to fulfill that belief and the vigorous desire to prove herself worthy of that parentage.

Mary Shelley will always be linked to the novel *Frankenstein* and those who know her name might think of her as having had her life fulfilled through that single iconic work. But when the

book was first published in 1818, Mary was a girl of twenty-one. Many other endeavors became important to her as she grew in maturity. *Frankenstein* was merely the first major accomplishment. In her lifetime, she wrote six more novels, numerous short stories, two dramas, travelogues, biographies, and she compiled collections of poems by her late husband Percy Bysshe Shelley that gave him international attention.

A new discovery by an English professor at Anglia Ruskin University in has made scholarly interest in Mary Shelley relevant to us in the year 2014. Quite by accident, Professor Nora Crook discovered thirteen previously unpublished letters written by Mary Shelley by searching the internet files of the Essex Record Office. The letters were written to Horace Smith and his daughter Eliza, members of a family who knew Percy and had befriended Mary later in her life. In one of these letters, dated 1846, she speaks of her failing health: "Today I have been down stairs & taken an airing for the first time—I hope I shall have no relapse" (Esther Addley, *The Guardian*, January 8, 2014). On the later letters, Professor Crook found a wax seal with Mary's name that had not been seen previously. These letters were recently published in the *Keats-Shelley Journal* (vol. 62, 2013, pp. 37–61).

If Mary Shelley could join us today at Readercon, what might she say about being hailed as Memorial Guest of Honor and finding the name *Frankenstein* so well known?

"But lo and behold! I found myself famous!" Mary wrote to her friend Leigh Hunt on September 9, 1823. "Frankenstein had prodigious success as a drama. ... Wallack looked very well as Frankenstein—he is at the beginning full of hope and expectation. ... The story is not well managed—but Cooke played [the Creature's] part extremely well—his seeking as it were for support—his trying to grasp at the sounds he heard—all indeed he does was well imagined and executed. I was much amused, and it appeared to excite a breathless eagerness in the audience." (Frederick L. Jones, ed., *The Letters of Mary W. Shelley*, University of Oklahoma Press, 1944, vol. I, p. 259).

Mary was speaking of a stage play, *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*, adapted by Richard Brinsley Peake. Watching this play with her father, William Godwin, Mary found it a pleasant diversion. But, for her, it was only a minor distraction from an immense crisis. At the age of twenty-five, she had recently returned to England from a sojourn in Italy where she suffered the greatest loss of her young life.

While Mary and her friend Jane Williams were staying at Casa Magni in July of 1822, Edward Trelawny brought Mary terrible news. The body of her husband, Percy Shelley, along with the body of Jane's husband, Ned Williams, had been washed ashore in Livorno after they had sailed into a bad storm on July 8. Trelawny described the moment when Mary received the news: "Mrs. Shelley's large grey eyes were fixed on my face. I turned away. Unable to bear this horrid silence, with a convulsive effort she exclaimed: 'Is there no hope?'" (Hooblers, p. 270).

Mary's direction in life was unalterably changed. She had been dependent on Percy for guidance in her writing career. More than that, of course, Mary loved him. On October 2, 1822, Mary wrote in her journal: "For eight years I communicated, with unlimited freedom, with one whose genius, far transcending mine, awakened and guided my thoughts. ... What a change! O my beloved Shelley! How often during those happy days—happy,

though chequered—I thought how superiorly gifted I had been in being united to one to whom I could unveil myself, and who could understand me!" But after Percy's death, she would have to make a successful literary life for herself—and do it on her own. She knew this, for her journal entry continued: "... my imagination never flags. Literary labours, the improvement of my mind, and the enlargement of my ideas, are the only occupations that elevate me from my lethargy." (Florence A. Thomas Marshall, *The Life and Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, Vol. II, London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1889, pp. 40–41.)

Mary had always cared about writing and was successful at it from a very early age. As Anne Mellor stated in her book *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*: "One of her first literary efforts, a thirty-nine quatrain expansion of Charles Dibdin's five stanza song, 'Mounseer Nongtongpaw,' was published early in 1808 when she was only eleven" (Routledge, 1989, p. 10). This child's song with Mary's added verses was so popular that it went through several editions and had been republished in 1830 with illustrations by Robert Cruikshank.

Of course, the young Mary Godwin had the great advantage of being the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792) and William Godwin, who wrote *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and Its Influence on Morals and Happiness* (1793). These writings influenced generations of people down through the years, both in England and America. Mary Godwin never knew her mother—Wollstonecraft had died in September 1797 of puerperal fever ten days after giving birth to Mary. Her father home-schooled young Mary and remained in charge of her education even after his marriage in 1801 to Jane Clairmont, a widow with two children of her own. Godwin described young Mary as "superior in capacity ... singularly bold, somewhat imperious, and active of mind. Her desire of knowledge is great, and her perseverance in everything she undertakes almost invincible" (Marshall, Vol. I, pp. 35–36).

The specter of Mary Wollstonecraft haunted Mary Godwin throughout her life. Mary knew of her mother's death and likely felt guilty over it. She read everything her mother had written, including notes her mother sent to Godwin while she was in labor. She also read her father's works, including his memoir of his late wife, which detailed Wollstonecraft's love affairs before Godwin and her attempts at suicide. Mary Godwin absorbed much of this knowledge while sitting beside the grave of her mother in the cemetery of St. Pancras Church.

Death followed Mary around every accomplishment in her life. Even as Mary, married to Percy Shelley in December 1816, smiled down at her baby, William, she was developing her most famous novel, writing passages such as: "William is dead!—that sweet child, whose smiles delighted and warmed my heart, who was so gentle, yet so gay! Victor, he is murdered!" (*Frankenstein*, Johanna M. Smith, ed., 2nd ed., St. Martin's Press, 2000, p. 72). Mary's real-life son William died of malaria on June 7, 1819, a year after the first publication of her novel. He was only three years old.

Mary's early accomplishments were often coupled with death. She first met Percy Shelley at one of her father's salon dinners in 1812 and, in June of 1814, knowing that Percy was married, she swore her love to him beside her mother's grave. The symbolism was clearly there. In July, they ran off to France, Mary's

stepsister Claire with them. Early in 1815, Mary gave birth to a daughter she named Clara who died less than a month later. In May of 1816, Claire led Mary and Percy to Geneva to meet Lord Byron for the first time and they stayed with Byron in the Villa Diodati—the famous stormy summer of 1816 when *Frankenstein* was born. When Mary, Percy, and Claire returned to England in the fall, Fanny Imlay Godwin, Mary's half-sister, feeling neglected and forgotten in the Godwin household, went off to Scotland where she committed suicide. In December of 1816, Mary and Percy were finally able to marry—only because Percy's wife Harriet drowned herself in the Serpentine earlier that month. After completing her manuscript for *Frankenstein* in 1817, Mary gave birth to a second daughter, Clara Everina. While Percy and Mary traveled through Italy in 1818, Clara Everina died of a fever. The pattern can be clearly seen: death was always near to every early success in Mary's life. She would never be completely free of that pattern.

Even while Mary suspected Percy of having affairs with other women, she pursued a writing career. She wrote the novella *Mathilda* in August of 1819 and handed the manuscript to William Godwin to edit. Godwin never sought a publisher for it; the novella described an incestuous relationship between a father and daughter. Around the time that her son Percy Florence Shelley was born in Florence (November 12, 1819), Mary began work on a historical novel she called *Castruccio, The Prince of Lucca*, which Godwin retitled *Valperga*. Mary had already begun researching this novel while she and Percy were staying in Lucca, Italy in 1818 and she was writing it in earnest in 1820. It was published after Percy's death in the autumn of 1823. This second novel was a pivotal work in that Percy had little to do with overseeing and revising its writing, as he had done with *Frankenstein*.

With Percy's death in 1822, Mary faced the reality that every professional writer must face: to make money one has to publish. The Bohemian life that she and Percy had enjoyed was made possible because he was the eldest son of Sir Timothy Shelley, who held the title Second Baronet of Castle Goring. As such, Percy was heir to great wealth and was receiving a generous yearly allowance.

All this was in jeopardy after Percy's death. Sir Timothy hated having the Shelley name "besmirched" before the public and threatened to stop supplying Mary with any money. However, Mary had something to bargain with: Percy's six-year-old son, Percy Florence Shelley. The boy would succeed Sir Timothy, becoming the Third Baronet after his death. However, even with Lord Byron interceding for Mary, Sir Timothy still refused Mary any funds.

Depending on her own reputation and the support of writer friends like Leigh Hunt and Lord Byron, Mary started grinding out pieces for the London magazines. She wrote both articles and short fiction in the popular magazines of the day: *The Liberal*, *The London Magazine*, *Westminster Review*, and, later, *The Keepsake*. The editors of these magazines forced a strict discipline on her: "When I write for them, I am worried to death to make my things shorter and shorter—I fancy people think ideas can be conveyed by intuition" (letter of June 11, 1835 to Maria Gisborne, a friend, as quoted by Charles E. Robinson in his introduction to *Mary Shelley: Collected Tales and Stories*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, pp. xiii–xiv). Mary suffered the same indignities that short-story writers face today—cutting down on

words and "tightening up" the writing.

In June 1824, Mary published *Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, which quickly sold three hundred of the five hundred editions printed. An alarmed Sir Timothy made a deal with her. If she suppressed the remaining copies of the work and promised not to write any biographical material about Percy, at least during Sir Timothy's lifetime, he would give her an allowance "sufficient to provide at least the bare necessities for herself and her young son" (Hugh J. Luke, Jr., ed., *The Last Man* by Mary Shelley, University of Nebraska Press, 1965, p. xi). Mary accepted his terms.

Mary's third novel took on a subject that is today a staple of science fiction: the apocalyptic novel. She began writing *The Last Man* in early 1824 about a future earth suffering a gradually spreading pandemic. She cared less about what that future might be like and more about honoring her late husband. Her father-in-law had refused her wish to write a biography of Percy, so Mary disguised Percy and their circle of friends by giving them fictitious names and placing them in her novel.

*The Last Man* began in the year 2073—far-flung and impossibly distant from Mary's point of view—but she was not concerned with showing a technically advanced future. No transporters or food replicators or extraterrestrials in her novel. Instead, her vision was advanced for the 1820s: England transformed from a monarchy into a republic. That had been William Godwin's hope and Percy Shelley's dream. So Mary carried that simple concept into her 2073 world, marking the end of the last king of England. The scenes and events were all very familiar to Mary and readers of her time. Percy Shelley was idealized in the character of Adrian, Earl of Windsor; Lord Byron was represented by Lord Raymond; and Mary gave herself a male persona as the narrator and friend to Adrian, Lionel Verney.

As the novel progressed, a plague began to manifest itself (in Volume 2 of the typically three-volume novel) during a war between Turkey and Greece that gradually spread throughout the world. It was Verney, watching as his friends died from war and sickness, who became the last man on Earth.

Mary struggled against feelings of melancholy as she began work on the first draft of *The Last Man*. She had written in her journal: "Amidst all the depressing circumstances that weigh on me, none sinks deeper than the failure of my intellectual powers; nothing I write pleases me. ... The last man! Yes! I may well describe that solitary being's feelings, feeling myself as the last relic of a beloved race, my companions extinct before me" (from *Mary Shelley's Journal*, Frederick L. Jones, ed., as quoted by Luke, Jr., p. x).

On May 15, 1824, she received word of the death of another old friend and member of the Shelley circle. Lord Byron had died in April of a fever at Missolonghi in Greece. Lord Byron's death, oddly enough, was a stimulus to Mary's writing of the novel. Just as Byron had gone to fight for Greek independence, Mary gave the character of Raymond a fitting death in battle in the Greece of the late twenty-first century. As Professor Luke quotes from Mary's journal of June 8, 1824: "I feel my powers again ... I shall feel again the enthusiastic glow of composition" (p. xi).

Mary wrote three more novels after *The Last Man*. As she published these more conventional novels, *The Fortunes of Perkin Warbeck* (1830), *Lodore* (1835), and *Falkner* (1837), she

continued to explore the fantastic in a number of stories she wrote for the magazines. She made use of suspended animation (modern-day cryonics) in “Roger Dodsworth: The Reanimated Englishman” (1826), inter-body transference in “Transformation” (1831), the resurrection of a living person from Limbo (or Purgatory) in “The Invisible Girl” (1832), and the effects of alchemist Cornelius Agrippa’s elixir of life in “The Mortal Immortal” (1833). Mary wrote herself into these fantasies. She was Guido in “Transformation” changed into a hideous dwarf who “longed to address some one, or to hear others discourse” (Robinson, ed., p. 131); and she was the narrator of “The Mortal Immortal” who, while remaining youthful, spoke of burying a loved one, saying, “I wept to feel that I had lost all that really bound me to humanity” (p. 229). That was what mattered to Mary at that time in her life, using “the formation of castles in the air—the indulging in waking dreams” (Smith, ed., introduction) to express her feelings of separateness and deep loss.

Mary’s last published work was *Rambles in Germany and Italy*. Published in 1844, it described the trips she took with her grown son Percy Florence and several of his friends from Trinity College, Cambridge. During their first trip in 1840, Mary suffered terrible head pains and remained in Milan while her son and his friends returned to England for final exams. Mary would continue to suffer these pains for the rest of her life.

Some years earlier, Mary had been by the bedside of her father as he was dying. When he was still able to write, he prepared for his coming death by noting in his journal: “Everything under the sun is uncertain. No provision can be a sufficient security against adverse and unexpected fortune, least of all to him who has not a stipulated income” (Hooblers, p. 310). He died on April 7, 1836 at the age of eighty. Godwin had often encouraged and worked with his daughter on her writing projects. She was too distraught to attend his funeral but she couldn’t help but feel the loss.

In April 1844, Sir Timothy Shelley died at the age of ninety-two. Quite opposite from her feelings at her father’s death, Mary felt relief that now she and her son no longer had to live on her writing. Her son became the Third Baronet of Castle Goring and inherited his wealth. Mary viewed the marriage of her son to Jane

St. John in 1848 with joy. Lady Jane Shelley gave Mary the companionship she needed and had sorely missed in all those years since Percy Bysshe’s death.

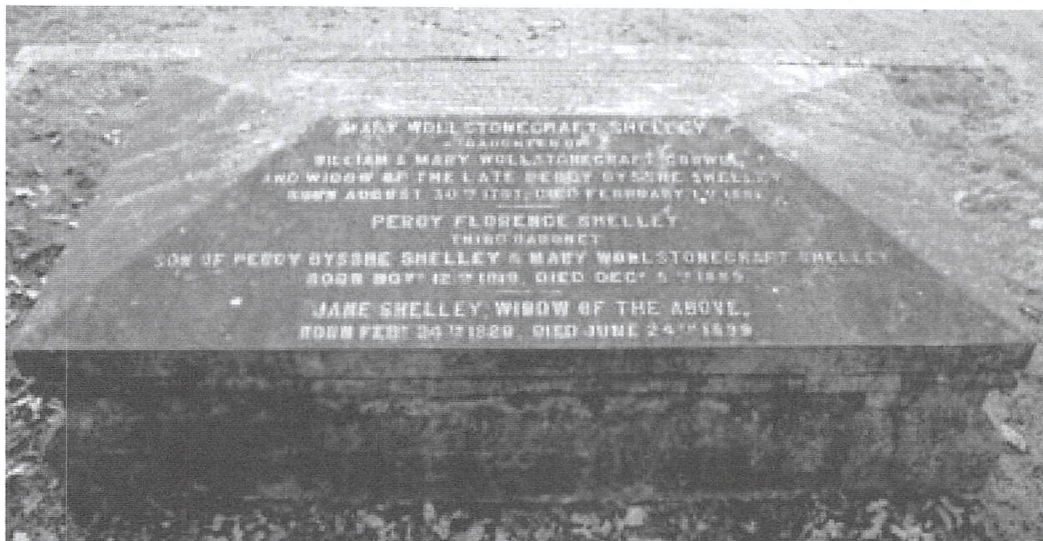
Sadly, Mary only spent three years with Sir Percy and Lady Jane. They were with her when she died of a brain tumor in her home on Chester Square in London on February 1, 1851 at the age of fifty-three. Her son sent a letter to Mary’s childhood friend Isabella Baxter Booth that read: “About a fortnight ago she had a succession of fits, which ended in a sort of stupor in which she remained for a week—without any sign of life but her breathing which gradually ceased without any pain. . . . And now she has left us most mournful and wretched” (Montillo, p. 284).

Who was Mary Shelley?

As a young girl, Mary Godwin read everything written by her mother, every scrap and note. She even kept the notes her mother had written to William Godwin while she was in labor. In one note, written on the morning of August 30, 1797, her mother wrote: “I have no doubt of seeing the animal today; but must wait for Mrs. Blenkinsop [the midwife] to guess at the hour—Pray send me the newspaper—I wish I had a novel, or some book of sheer amusement, to excite curiosity, and while away the time—Have you anything of the kind?” (Claire Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft*, New American Library, 1976, p. 213). Mary could not have forgotten those words written by her mother, not ever, and certainly not while writing her first novel.

Many scholars see Percy Shelley in the young Victor Frankenstein. At college, Percy experimented with electricity and studied the occult philosophers just as Victor had—and Mary knew this. But Mary also appeared in the novel. She took on the persona of a male narrator for part of the novel, a practice she adopted in a number of her other works. Her narrator was self-taught, learned to speak and had read Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Her narrator was isolated and misunderstood. She knew this character well. She portrayed the character as a wretched being to be pitied almost as much as hated. She saw herself in this person, a creature that destroyed his creator. She had done it herself.

She was the Wollstonecraft Creation!





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# Mary and Her Monster; or, The Pride of Frankenstein

Robert Eldridge

[Following is a complete short play, written in 2013, previously unpublished and unperformed. A limited-edition pamphlet created by the author, reproducing the play in a first separate edition, is available at his booth (Eldritch Books) in the Readercon Bookshop.]

## Cast:

The Monster: a young man, tall, broad, rough-hewn;

The Chorus: a young woman of rather delicate stature.

## Scene:

A rude and darkened woodshed containing a confusion of broken tools and cast-off rubbish. The monster, a shambling figure dressed in rags of the Regency period, with jagged sutures in his forehead, stands reading from a large old worn leather-bound book by the light that streams in through a knothole in the wall. Now and then, he goes over to this hole and stares outside. Seated on an old crate at the other side of the stage is the Chorus, a woman wearing a long white robe of classical Grecian style and dark straight hair, invisible to the monster. Piano music is heard faintly in the background, the practicing of some early Romantic piece by a talented amateur who, when interrupted by noises from the woodshed, stops and starts again.

**THE CHORUS:** Nothing comes from nothing. Every force has its source, every child its parents. Back in the 18th and well into the 19th century, Science had a romantic aura. It was still young, the baby brother of ancient Magic, and it was fawned over by the public. It had not yet been professionalized, walled off behind the barriers of a trade guild. Every scientist was an enthusiastic amateur, and in every salon of educated Europe some demonstration of scientific ingenuity was featured on the program of entertainments, right next to recitals, exhibitions and lectures. It was wide open to anyone who was interested. Curious people paid close attention to its developments and controversies. They were especially fascinated by electricity and magnetism—drawn to it, you might say. Benjamin Franklin cast his kite into a thunderstorm with a skeleton key leading a wire back to his laboratory to prove that it conducted electricity! That was in 1752. The story had become well-known by the early 1800s, and the ensuing lightning flash etched the image of Enlightening Franklin on the mind of the young poet Percy Shelley. In 1818, frightening *Frankenstein* came forth. This, of course, after much learned conversation with his wife Mary. During an evening of reading ghost stories on stormy Lake Geneva with their friend Lord Byron and others, the Shelleys agreed to a contest to see which one of their group could write the best tale of Gothic fright. [pause] *Frankenstein* is a gnarled trunk fed by many hidden roots, a steamer trunk stuffed with moldy manuscripts. It is at once a marriage and an offspring—from a couple whose only offspring to survive childhood

was conceived after *Frankenstein*. Imagine the cotton sheet of paper lying on its metal bed of type, text and incarnation both, just like this—[pointing to the monster] this hero-villain: some parts philosophical, some parts gruesome; some parts borrowed, some parts new; some parts sewn, some parts glued. And so, from age to age, from sky to earth, from intercourse to birth, the Original Demiurge has sewn together all of these, its protégés, with a characteristically jagged line. Lightning is a wonderful thing to behold at a distance but terrible to hold in your hands, in your body, especially if it's not really *your* body.

**THE MONSTER:** [Closes book, looks at title and speaks bitterly.] "Paradise Lost." [Tosses it aside onto a table.] The only paradise I ever knew was Death, lost to me when that meddling maniac broke into my cozy little horizontal home. Now here I am again, vertical and tottering, mingling with the general race of doomed men. [Walks about awkwardly and distractedly, then backs into a corner of the shed to brace himself against its sides—to jog a memory of the coffin?—then bends his knees slightly and breaks off a long and tremendously loud fart. The piano music stops. The monster sniffs the air.] Cheddar? Feta? Gruyère? [sniffs again] Ah, Stilton! Well, I'll take Stilton over Milton any day of the week. [The music starts again from the beginning.]

**THE CHORUS:** It's always the same. First the lightning, then the thunder. [pause] After he escaped from the laboratory where he was resurrected, he eventually took refuge in this blind musician's woodshed. There is no one with whom to break bread, so he breaks wind. The gas draws out a sort of gossamer bridge between the "it" of his body and the "it" of the world, a bridge more palpable than air, more palatable than shit, and more welcome, being an enactment of his own volition, than either of those burdensome bridge-heads: that is to say, his body or the world. The insistent pressure of peristaltic waves brings forward an imprisoned cloud of gas. He plays the king. He grants it amnesty. Hark, the fanfare proclaims another tortured soul's release! [Another fart. Another interruption, and re-starting of the piece.] And the noisome odor is offered up as incense to his own dark gods.

**THE MONSTER:** [Sniffs the air, then declares disgustedly—] Oh ye gods, does that stink! [then more philosophically] It stinks ... therefore ... I stink ... I stink, therefore ... [the triumphant discovery] I stink, therefore I am. "I stink, therefore I am." I like the sound of it—if not the smell. "I stink, therefore I am." [with wonderment] I am. [more earnestly] I am ... what? [with naked finality] What am I? What am I?

**THE CHORUS:** Of course, a cynic might say that in releasing these poisonous clouds he is just another grave-robbler like his

maker, uncovering that which should have remained hidden: intimate confessions of decay, secrets of death as holy in their tabernacle as the secrets of life plundered by his maker.

**THE MONSTER:** I remember when I first learned the awful potency of these posterior emanations of mine. Within the laboratory cage where I was kept all forms of life—except my own!—perished within seconds of their release. A potted plant on the window sill wilted immediately. Flying insects fell from the air like hail. Rats and mice twitched, gasped for air and turned belly-up. Welcome snacks were *they*. But when the servant girl who brought my regular meals chanced to enter immediately after I'd authored a particularly mellow composition—[*irritably*] all right, a *decomposition*, if you wish to quibble—she took one breath, went pale, dropped the clattering tray and collapsed in a heap, stone dead. At that point, the doctor rushed in and, questioning me, soon determined the cause of death. Well! It seems this sordid part of my anatomy had somehow been overlooked in his calculations and incorrectly revived. It still belongs irrevocably to the charnel house. The fatal flaw in his precious crystal! These naïve Romantics! The genius scientist with his childish hope of impersonating Life and cheating Nature, making something out of nothing. [*pause*] I learned a thing or two on the Other Side, and I can tell you that this ... [*gesturing grandly to take in the world, and then ironically to take in the woodshed*] ... this ... Treasure House of Nature does not permit the merest farthing of addition or subtraction to its stores. Nature employs around the clock a host of book-keepers and money-changers to keep its ledger honest. Where any single unwarranted extravagance upsets the budget, it is a fact that stringent economies are exacted elsewhere. By the doctor's manufacture of unnatural life—by fiat, *ex nihilo*—he also guaranteed, *de facto*, the manufacture of unnatural death. Deaths, I should say—all through the agency of this much-despised organ of my anatomy. [*Pauses. Scratches his armpit.*] Improvement, yes. Civilization certainly leaves room for improvement. The blind musician next-door, through steady marching and the occasional brave leap, improves his skill. [*Hears a fumbled passage.*] Slowly. [*Pauses.*] But perfection? No, that is the siren song that lures us to desolation. Romantics make such easy prey. Perfection belongs to Death. Or to God. That part is still a little unclear to me. But all else is flawed. Achilles had his heel. I have my hole. And from it issue those budget cuts required to even up the balance sheet so catastrophically deranged by that mad, sad doctor. [*Farts quietly—the music stops—he picks something from his underarm and examines it, then sighs.*] There goes the funding for a flea. [*Flicks it away. Looks in the direction of the knot-hole. The music resumes from the same place.*] As soon as he learned the source of these unwholesome airs, my maker stoppered up the offending orifice. Cruel cork!—enforced with the iron bands of a chastity belt transformed from its original medieval usage. Ah, well, I soon defeated that crude device but pretended submission while I matured my plans. Upon escaping from that prison I roamed the hills, consuming life, creating death, leaving behind an archipelago of wasted zones, an arpeggio of that mangled chord that expresses my essence. That tension finally resolved itself into a minor chord—Remorse—which drove me to this exile, a new self-imposed prison. Here I dine on common pests—and the generosity of my host. He leaves out food for me like offerings to some

woodland god. Propitiation? Who knows? Gratitude, perhaps, for an uncomplaining audience.

**THE CHORUS:** [*She is a little nettled perhaps by the way the monster has taken center stage.*] You will have recognized in me by now the traditional role of the Chorus. I am that unchanging spokesman for the values by which the characters of the story are judged. I am the commentary. This [*pointing to the monster*] is the text. Characters change. Science changes, too. In fact, it progresses, incrementally or convulsively. This is what has fed the dreams of all utopians who, internalizing science and its offspring, the machine, as a paradigm for all that is powerful and desirable, believe that human life can be engineered. *Paradise Lost*? No problem, they say, we'll pass a bill that relocates it. They confuse legislative law with natural law. Instead of God chaining Prometheus, the thief of his fire-power, the New Prometheus—that was the subtitle of Mary Shelley's novel, by the way—the New Prometheus would chain God to a rock. But nothing can be chained forever. Not even a work of art. The harder you work to shape it, the more life-like it becomes. If you can manage to steal a spark of that original Promethean fire and shape it into something whole, then it will surely escape your control and find its own life. There is the tragedy of art. [*pause*] Were I the author of this [*nodding in the direction of the monster*] ... text ... instead of its commentary only, I would feel what every parent and true artist feels: pride and loss.

**THE MONSTER:** [*Looks to the knot-hole.*] I sometimes long to resume my wanderings in the wide world. Some restless spirit within me seeks escape. Ahhh ... would that I could turn myself into a wisp of smoke and escape through that knot-hole in the wall and disappear into the air! [*Frustrated, backs into the corner of the shed and breaks off another earth-shaker. The piano stops. The monster waves the air behind him and steps away from the corner.*] I am. *That* I did not choose. But as to *what* I am, that *is* within my power to choose. That is my punishment for the crime of being, a crime of which I am innocent. [*with bitterness shading into defiance*] Well, so much for innocence.

**THE CHORUS:** And then it comes to him, a sudden, acrid insight, the ozone after the storm. [*The piano resumes quietly from the same place.*]

**THE MONSTER:** [*slowly, working it out in his mind*] Yes. Yes, I think I see it more clearly now. I have created out of the offal of my own body's graveyard a fabulous monstrosity of mephitic fumes and baleful aromas, a blended scent beguiling as the rankest cheese yet deadly as the rarest poison, choking in seconds those who chance to breathe it—a poison to which I only am immune, all others selected by the chance of propinquity to follow this piebald nose tune into their graves. How often I have cringed in mock alarm—and secret pride!—that it was mine. Confronted, I dissembled to the masses, disowning my creation: “Do not reproach me for the ill behavior of this thing. What power do I have over it? It belongs now to the world. Do you suppose that I could hold the wind in my arms and keep it still, calming it like a colicky child?” [*defiantly*] Yes. Yes. I have become just like *him*. Well, so be it then. But I will no longer a nameless monster be, but rather a maker of monstrosity, a thing of fame and infamy, and I shall exult

in these awful exhalations of mine! From him who stole my death I will steal a name. I stink, therefore I am Frankenstein! *[Strides to the door of the shed and walks out. Piano music finishes with a crescendo.]*

**THE CHORUS:** *[Watching him leave, then turning back to face the audience.]* He is rather magnificent in his own way, isn't he? *[Idly starting to undo her robe.]* I could almost be attracted to a man like that. *[sadly, resignedly]* But he doesn't even see me. He doesn't know I exist. *[She steps out of her robe, revealing a long close-fitting dark dress of early-19th-century style; then takes off her wig, revealing brown hair drawn back in a tight bun with ringlets dangling down by her ears, disarrayed by the wig; she fusses with the ringlets a bit, then gives up. She looks at the wig, looks around her with a mix of confusion and anger, then flings the wig to the ground and stands up, walking about restlessly. She speaks now with a different accent.]* How in the name of Art did that ... Thing ... get to be the hero of my novel? That ... that created Thing ... was merely a bit of fire stolen from what used to be called the gods, that is to say, from Nature—a bit of fire that turned around and burned the thief. *That was my hero: the Modern Prometheus, Doctor Frankenstein, a noble and tragic figure who would have freed mankind and womankind from the degrading necessity of reproducing like animals. The months of burden, the hours of agonizing labor, the risk of death in childbirth ... a risk that killed my own mother when she was delivered of her burden: me. Well, she finally found the tranquility she had previously twice failed to gain by her own hand. [pause]* And then there's the whole ignominy of choosing a lover. What has been said of women—and translations—can just as well be said of men: the faithful ones are not beautiful, and the beautiful ones are not faithful. Shelley—*[bitterly]* the boy genius—cheated with my own half-sister, among others, then died on me four years after the publication of my novel, drowning in the Gulf of Spezzia after another visit with Byron, that prodigious whore-master. It may as well have been a lake of amber, preserving him and his reputation for ever. I ... I lived another 29 years and continued to write. But none of it measured up to my first-born. *[a melancholy pause]* Drowning does seem to run in our families. Shelley's first wife, Harriet, drowned herself in the Serpentine pond in Hyde Park a few weeks before he married me. My mother tried to drown herself in the Thames. *[Goes over to the table where the monster tossed the old book, picks it up, looks at it.]* "Paradise Lost." *[pause]* What happened to my hero, my "pale student of unhallowed arts"? What happened to my story? My story? It's not even mine any longer. *[Opens up book.]* Hah! But the creature, dumb brute that he still is, missed the best part of the book! *[From a carved out section of the fat tome she extracts a slim dagger with a serpentine handle and holds it aloft.]* Here it is! Here is the book's—well, I guess there's no way around it—the book's hidden meaning. *[Holding the open book in one hand and the dagger in the other, she looks again inside the book.]* Wait a moment, there's something else here. *[She puts the dagger in between her teeth and takes out from the book a pair of dice, then sets the book down on the table, looks at the dice with perplexity, then shrugs her shoulders and flings them carelessly onto the table, returning her attention to the dagger, which she takes out of her mouth and stares at. She glances at the dice, does a double-take, then draws back in surprise.]* Snake eyes! *[Pause as she struggles with some-*

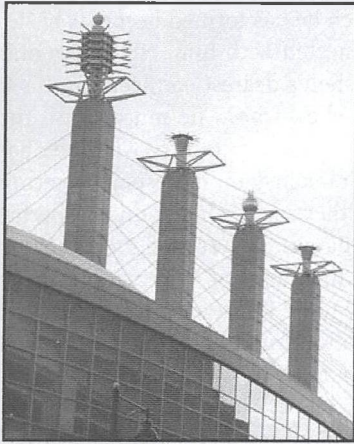
*thing, perhaps pacing about, then bitterly but passionately gazes at the dagger.]* Well, so be it then. Serpent, to thy work! Be the hero who steals into my heart—and stays there. *[She plunges the dagger into her heart, pulling out from her dress surreptitiously a red rumpled handkerchief—an old touch of theatrical stage blood—and collapses onto the floor. The piece of music we heard earlier comes up again, more softly and played faultlessly now. The door through which the monster had left is opened and the monster re-enters and looks around, closing door behind him.]*

**THE MONSTER:** Where did I put that damned book? I could use something to beguile the time in my wanderings. *[Finds the book, picks it up, looks around, sees the dagger and the "blood" but is again oblivious of the woman's body.]* But what is this? Blood? A dagger? But no body. What is the meaning of this? Well, 'tis no business of mine. *[Turns to go, then stops.]* But that blood—it belongs inside its vessel. In such a state as this it resembles a corpse evicted from its coffin. 'Tis unseemly—yet akin to my own nature. Therefore ... *[Stoops down to take the handkerchief from Mary's body and places it in the breast pocket of his coat, taking some care with its arrangement.]* ... therefore I shall wear it as an ornament to my *[ironically gesturing to his rags]* ... my finery, and as a token of obedience to my destiny. *[Walks to the doorway, calmly and confidently, looking over his shoulder to take one last look at the woodshed, then opens the door, pauses, farts somewhat absent-mindedly, then walks out the door, closing it quietly behind him. Music fades out. Lights fade out.]*

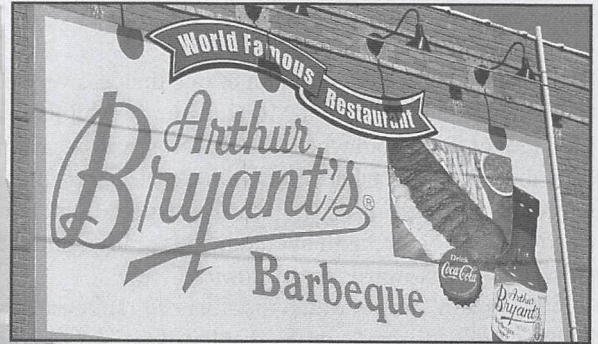




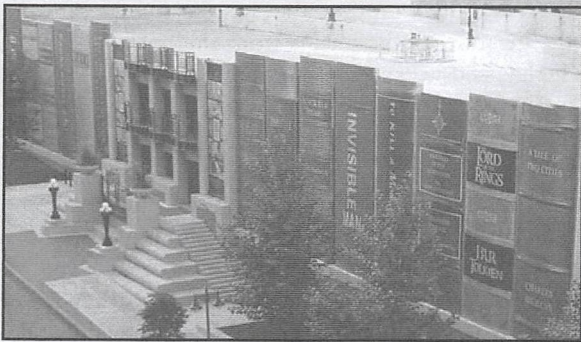
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# A Contemporary Review of *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*

*Anonymous*

[This now-risibly quaint review appeared shortly after publication of the first, anonymous edition of the novel, in *The Literary Panorama and National Register*, vol. 8 (new series), June 1, 1818, pp. 411–414. Original spelling and punctuation are exactly reproduced here.]

This novel is a feeble imitation of one that was very popular in its day,—the *St. Leon* of Mr. Godwin. It exhibits many characteristics of the school whence it proceeds; and occasionally puts forth indications of talent; but we have been very much disappointed in the perusal of it, from our expectations having been raised too high beforehand by injudicious praises; and it exhibits a strong tendency towards *materialism*.

The main idea on which the story of *Frankenstein* rests, undoubtedly affords scope for the display of imagination and fancy, as well as knowledge of the human heart; and the anonymous author has not wholly neglected the opportunities which it presented to him: but the work seems to have been written in great haste, and on a very crude and ill-digested plan; and the detail is, in consequence, frequently filled with the most gross and obvious inconsistencies. We shall hereafter point out a few of those to which we allude.

The story begins at the end. Walton, an enthusiastic traveller, bound on a voyage of discovery in the north seas, after having been for some time surrounded with ice, is astonished by the appearance of a human being of apparently savage character who passes the vessel at a distance, in a sledge drawn by dogs. The day after this extraordinary adventure the ice breaks up; but previously to the vessel sailing away from it, they encounter another human being, nearly exhausted with fatigue and privation. This last, who is taken into the vessel, proves to be *Frankenstein*, the hero of the tale; who at the time he had been nearly destroyed by the breaking up of the ice, was in pursuit of the being that had passed the vessel on the preceding day. After a time *Frankenstein* contracts a friendship with Walton, the Captain of the vessel, and relates to him his supernatural story.—In his youth he had been led by accident to study chemistry; and becoming deeply interested by the results of his experiments, he at length conceived the idea of its being possible to discover the principle of vital existence. Taking this possibility as the leading point of his studies, he pursues them with such effect as at last actually to gain the power of endowing inanimate matter with life!!! He instantly determines to put his newly acquired power into practice; and for this purpose collects the materials with which to form a living human being. From the difficulty of arranging some of the parts, arising from their minuteness, he determines to chuse them of more than ordinary size. In short, after incredible pains and perseverance, he at length succeeded in producing a living human being,

eight feet high, and of proportionate powers. From this moment *Frankenstein* commences a life of unmixed and unceasing misery. The being which he has formed becomes his torment, and that of every one connected with him. He causes one by one the death of all *Frankenstein's* dearest connections; his brother, his friend, and lastly his wife—whom he murders on their wedding night. The fiend then quits the country where he has committed these horrors; and *Frankenstein*, in despair, determines to pursue him until he shall either destroy him, or die by his hand. The story ends shortly after what we have related in the beginning. *Frankenstein* dies on board the vessel of Walton; and the fiend may, for any thing we know to be the contrary, be wandering about upon the ice in the neighbourhood of the North Pole to this day; and may, in that case, be among the wonderful discoveries to be made by the expedition which is destined there.

We have mentioned that there are gross inconsistencies in the minor details of the story. They are such, for example, as the following: the moment *Frankenstein* has endowed with life the previously inanimate form of the being which he has made, he is so horror-struck with the hideousness of the form and features, when they are put in motion, that he remains fixed to the spot, while the gigantic monster runs from the horizontal posture in which he lay, and *walks away*; and *Frankenstein* never hears any more of him for nearly two years. The author supposes that his hero has the power of communicating *life* to dead matter: but what has the vital principle to do with *habits*, and actions which are dependent on the moral will? If *Frankenstein* could have endowed his creature with the vital principle of a hundred or a thousand human beings, it would no more have been able *to walk* without having previously acquired *the habit* of doing so, than it would be to talk, or to reason, or to judge. He does not pretend that he could endow it with *faculties* as well as life: and yet when it is about *a year old* we find it reading *Werter*, and *Plutarch* and *Volney*! The whole detail of the development of the creature's mind and faculties is full of these monstrous inconsistencies. After the creature leaves *Frankenstein*, on the night of *its birth*, it wanders for some time in the woods, and then takes up its residence in a kind of shed adjoining to a cottage, where it remains for many months without the knowledge of the inhabitants; and learns to talk and read thro' a chink in the wall! "*Quod mihi ostendit,*" &c

We have heard that this work is written by Mr. Shelley; but should be disposed to attribute it to even a less experienced writer than he is. In fact we have some idea that it is the production of a daughter of a celebrated living novelist.



Manuscript Pages from Frankenstein by  
Mary Shelley

buffeted around me. I had already been out many hours and felt the tortures of a burning thirst a prelude to my other sufferings - I looked on the heavens which was covered by clouds that pass flew with the wind only to be replaced by others - I looked on the sea - It was to be my grave. Fiend, I exclaimed, your task is already fulfilled - I thought of Elizabeth of my

father & of Cl<sup>e</sup>val - & sunk into a reverie so despairing & frightful that even now when the scene is on the point of closing before me for ever I shudder to reflect on it.

Some hours passed thus - But by degrees, as the sun <sup>declined</sup> ~~set~~ towards the horizon, the <sup>wind</sup> breeze died away into a gentle breeze and the ~~breakers~~ sea was smoothed became free from breakers. But these gave place to a heavy swell, I felt sick & hardly able to hold the rudder when suddenly I saw a line of high land towards the south. Almost spent as I was by fatigue & misery this sudden certainty of life rushed like a warm joy to my heart and tears gushed from my eyes. How mutable are our feelings & how strange is that clinging love we have of life even in the excess of misery. I ~~steered my boat towards the shore~~ and constructed another sail with a part of my dress & eagerly <sup>e</sup> ~~steered~~ my course towards the land. It had a wild rocky

buffeted around me. I had already been out many hours and felt the tortures of a burning thirst a prelude to my other sufferings - I looked on the heavens which was covered by clouds that pass flew with the wind only to be replaced by others - I looked on the sea - It was to be my grave. Fiend, I exclaimed, your task is already fulfilled - I thought of Elizabeth of my father & of Cl<sup>e</sup>val - & sunk into a reverie so despairing & frightful that even now when the scene is on the point of closing before me for ever I shudder to reflect on it.

Some hours passed thus - But by degrees, as the sun <sup>declined</sup> ~~set~~ towards the horizon, the <sup>wind</sup> breeze died away into a gentle breeze and the ~~breakers~~ sea was smoothed became free from breakers. But these gave place to a heavy swell, I felt sick & hardly able to hold the rudder when suddenly I saw a line of high land towards the south. Almost spent as I was by fatigue & misery this sudden certainty of life rushed like a warm joy to my heart and tears gushed from my eyes. How mutable are our feelings & how strange is that clinging love we have of life even in the excess of misery. I ~~steered my boat towards the shore~~ and constructed another sail with a part of my dress & eagerly <sup>e</sup> ~~steered~~ my course towards the land. It had a wild rocky

appearance - but as I approached nearer I  
 easily perceived the traces of cultivation - I saw  
 vessels near the shore - I found myself sud-  
 denly transported back to the neighborhood  
 of civilized man - I eagerly <sup>traced</sup> the windings  
 of the <sup>land</sup> ~~shore~~ & hailed a steeple which after  
 sailing I at length saw issuing from ~~and~~ behind  
 a small promontory - As I was fainting in  
 a state of extreme debility from fasting  
 I resolved to go directly towards the town  
 as a place where could most easily pro-  
 cure  $\&$  nourishment - Fortunately I had  
 money with me.

As I turned the promontory I discovered  
 a small neat town - ~~and~~ a good harbour  
 which I entered, my heart bounding with  
 joy at my unexpected escape. [As I ~~fi~~ was  
 occupied in fixing the boat and in arranging  
 the sails several people crowded towards  
 the spot - They appeared very much much  
 surprised at my appearance ~~and~~ but  
 instead of offering me any assistance  
 whispered ~~together~~ ~~in~~ with gestures, that  
 at any other time might have produced  
 in me a slight sensation of alarm - as it  
 was I merely remarked ~~th~~ that it was  
 English, that they spoke and therefore  
 addressed them; My Good Friends, said I, Will you  
 be so kind as to tell me what the name  
 of this <sup>TOWN</sup> ~~place~~ is; & where I am.

You will know that soon enough, re-  
 plied a man with a gruff voice; May be  
 you are come to a place that will  
 not prove much to your taste - But

appearance but as I approached nearer I  
 easily perceived the traces of cultivation - I saw  
 vessels near the shore & found myself sud-  
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You will know that soon enough, re-  
 plied a man with a gruff voice; May be  
 you are come to a place that will  
 not prove much to your taste - But



you will not be consulted as to your quarters, I promise you—

My I was exceedingly surprized at receiving so rude an answer from a stranger and I was also disconcerted on perceiving the countenance of this man and his

companions from <sup>n</sup>ing and angry countenances of his companions - Why Why do you answer me so roughly, I replied Surely ~~as~~ <sup>as</sup> it is not the custom of Englishmen to receive

strangers so inhospitably.

I do not know, said the man, what the custom of the English may be but it is the custom of the Irish to hate villains. [While this strange dialogue continued I perceived the crowd <sup>en</sup> rapidly

increase. Their <sup>faces</sup> countenances expressed a mixture of ~~ang~~ <sup>an</sup> curiosity & anger with which an ~~ey~~ <sup>ey</sup> n oyed & in so ~~n~~ <sup>n</sup> me degree alarmed me. I enquired the way to the inn but no one replied - I then moved forward and ~~a~~ <sup>a</sup> ~~but~~ <sup>but</sup> arose a murmuring noise rose from the crowd ~~the~~ <sup>as</sup> they followed & surrounded me— when an ill looking man comming forward— tapped me on the shoulder & said - Come, ye Sir, You must follow me to Mr. Kirwins to give an account of yourself.

Who is Mr. Kirwin, said I, & why am I to give an account of myself.—is not this a free country?

Aye, Sir, replied the man, free enough for honest folks. Mr. Kirwin is a magis trate & you are to give an account of

you will not be consulted as to your quarters, I promise you—

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the death of a gentleman who was found murdered  
 here last night.  
 The answer startled <sup>me,</sup> But I presently  
 recovered myself. I was innocent & that could  
 easily be proved - accordingly I followed my con-  
 ductor in silence & was led to ~~the~~ <sup>one of</sup> the  
 best houses in town. I was ready to sink from  
 fatigue & hunger, but being <sup>g</sup> surrounded by  
 a crowd I thought it politic to rouse all  
 my strength that no physical debility might  
 be construed into apprehension & or cons-  
 cious guilt. Little did I then expect the  
 calamity that would in a few moments  
 overwhelm me, and <sup>extinguish</sup> in horror & despair  
 all fear of ignominy or death -  
 The sun & ea I must pause <sup>for the</sup>  
 scene which I shall now relate requires  
 all my fortitude & strength to suffer  
 me to recall <sup>of the events which</sup> its the frightful images in  
 proper detail to my recollection.

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proper detail to my recollection.

Mary Shelley

# SELECTED MARY SHELLEY BIBLIOGRAPHY

Compiled by Ellen Brody & Richard Duffy

[Only includes works believed to fit the general category of speculative fiction, listed by first publication year. Many variations of authorial by-line were used, including "Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley" and "The Author of *Frankenstein*".]

## LONGER FICTION

- 1818: *Frankenstein, or, the Modern Prometheus* (as by Anonymous; three volumes)
- 1826: *The Last Man* (three volumes)
- 1831: *Frankenstein* (revised edition)

## SHORTER FICTION

- 1819: "Valerius: The Reanimated Roman"
- 1823: "A Tale of the Passions: or, The Death of Despina"
- 1824: "The Bride of Modern Italy"
- 1828: "Ferdinando Eboli: A Tale"
- 1828: "The Sisters of Albano"
- 1829: "The Evil Eye"
- 1829: "The False Rhyme"
- 1829: "The Mourner"

- 1830: "The Swiss Peasant"
- 1830: "The Transformation"
- 1831: "The Dream"
- 1832: "The Brother and Sister: An Italian Story"
- 1832: "The Invisible Girl"
- 1832: "The Pole"
- 1833: "The Mortal Immortal: A Tale"
- 1835: "The Elder Son"
- 1836: "The Parvenue"
- 1837: "The Pilgrims"
- 1838: "Euphrasia: A Tale of Greece"
- 1863: "Roger Dodsworth: The Reanimated Englishman"  
[posthumous]
- 1877: "The Heir of Mondolfo" [posthumous]

## OTHER

Mimetic fiction of various types, poems, essays, articles, reviews, travelogues, journals, letters, biographies, editing (particularly of works by Percy Bysshe Shelley), translations, etc.



Frankenstein Manuscript images from The Shelley-Godwin Archive. Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, Volume II Draft in Chapter Sequence, Chapter 13, Folios (in order):

c.57, fol.57r; c.57, fol.57v; c.57, fol.58r; c.57, fol.58v.

<http://shelleygodwinarchive.org/sc/oxford/frankenstein/volume/ii#n=118>

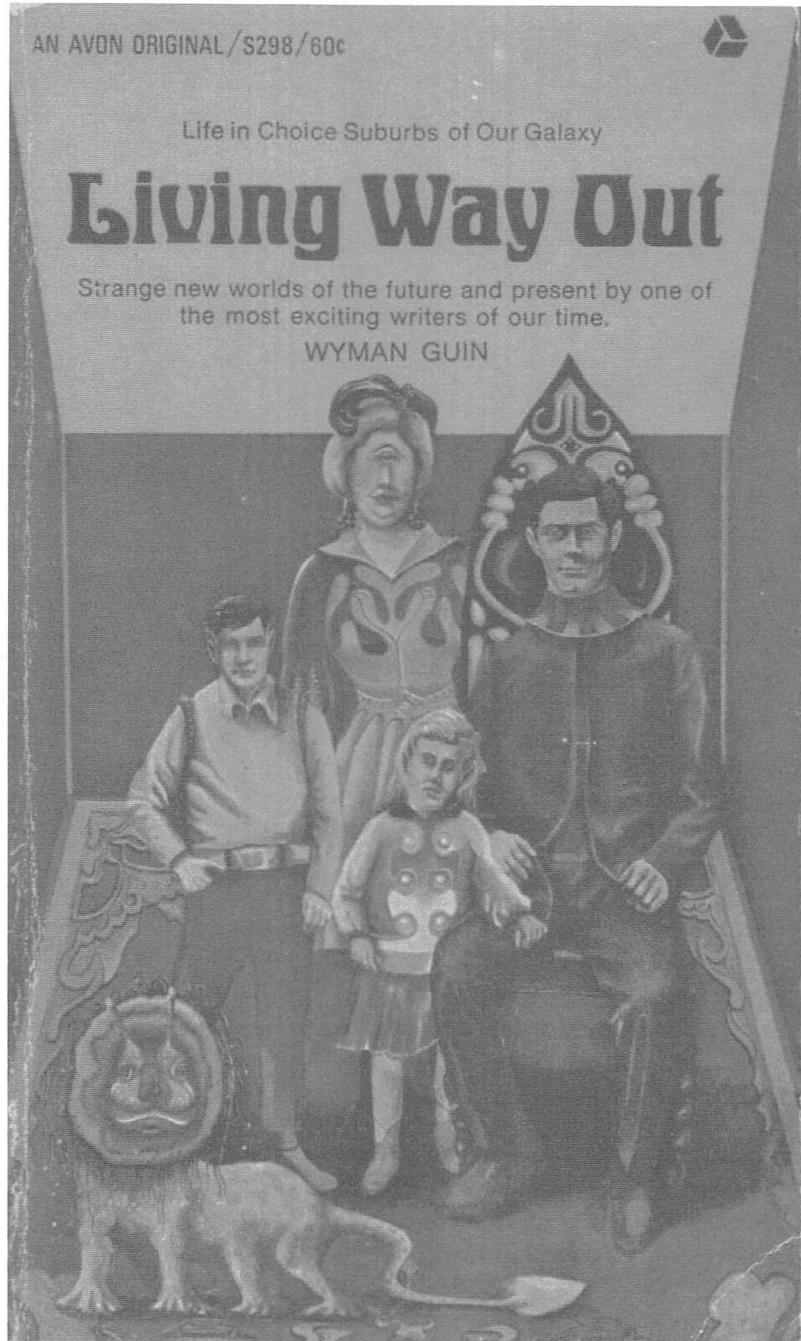
[then same but ending in 119, 120, 121, respectively]

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Wyman



Guin

# Wyman Guin

Robert Silverberg

The history of science fiction is marked by the presence of writers who gave us one story of such great impact that it totally overshadowed the rest of their work and turned them into one-story authors. Certain classic examples come immediately to mind: Daniel Keyes and “Flowers for Algernon,” Jerome Bixby and “It’s a Good Life,” Judith Merrill and “That Only a Mother,” T.L. Sherred and “E for Effort,” Wilmar Shiras and “In Hiding,” Tom Godwin and “The Cold Equations.” Then there are the writers who visit our field only long enough to contribute just a single unforgettable story and then never return: A.J. Deutsch, for instance, who wrote “A Subway Named Mobius,” or T.R. Fehrenbach, author of “Remember the Alamo.” Even Cordwainer Smith was a one-hit wonder from 1950, when his astonishing debut story “Scanners Live In Vain” was published, until the appearance of his second story, “The Game of Rat and Dragon,” in 1955.

Wyman Guin (1915–1989) was another of those remarkable one-story stars. Writing science fiction was a pastime, not a profession, for him—he earned his living first as a pharmacology technician, then as advertising director for Lakeside Laboratories, a Milwaukee pharmaceutical company—and his entire output consisted of one novel and eight short stories, of which only one, “Beyond Bedlam,” attracted serious notice. But what a story that was!

Guin had had one story published prior to “Bedlam”—“Trigger Tide,” which appeared in the October, 1950 issue of *Astounding Science Fiction* under the pseudonym Norman Menasco, and which finished in last place in that issue’s reader popularity poll. But by the time it appeared, Guin was already at work on the story that would establish his place in the annals of the field—writing it not for *Astounding*, but for its shiny new competitor, *Galaxy Science Fiction*, under the editorship of the brilliant, irascible H.L. Gold.

Gold’s magazine, just a few months old in 1950, was the first serious challenger to the long-time dominance of *Astounding*, edited by John W. Campbell, Jr. and the undisputed leader in the science-fiction field since the mid-1930s. Soliciting material from Campbell’s top writers, offering them a significantly higher word-rate, and prodding them to write with a freedom and abandon that the often dogmatic Campbell would not countenance, Gold established the leadership of his magazine from its very first issue, dated October, 1950, which featured a three-part serial by Clifford D. Simak and backed it up with major stories by Theodore Sturgeon, Fritz Leiber, and the newcomer Richard Matheson. Succeeding issues maintained that level of quality with material by Isaac Asimov, James H. Schmitz, Anthony Boucher, Ray Bradbury (the first version of what would become *Fahrenheit 451*), C.M. Kornbluth, and many another top-level writer.

While *Galaxy* was getting under way Wyman Guin was at work on “Beyond Bedlam,” doing draft after draft for the fiercely demanding Gold. We know that because Gold tells us, in his edi-

torial in the August, 1951 issue in which the story appeared, that “Bedlam” was “the result of two drafts before submission and two end-to-end rewrites afterward. A total of better than 80,000 words was thus needed to produce 20,000 words that satisfied Guin’s literary conscience and mine.”

It was Guin’s background in the pharmaceutical industry, Gold says, that provided the starting point for the story. Aware of the rising incidence of schizophrenia in post-war America, Guin fastened on the idea of a society in which a majority of the citizens were schizophrenic. What then? How would the non-schizophrenic minority cope?

Gold’s editorial sets forth not only Guin’s creative process but also the method of story construction that Gold had proposed to many of his other authors, and which had already begun to define the *Galaxy* mode of narrative: *Push your idea to a speculative extreme. Make the unusual the norm for your society, and then see how things would play out.*

The easy way, the old way, would have been to write a melodramatic horror story: a handful of “normal” people surrounded by an army of psychotics and desperately fighting for survival, or, conversely, a dedicated band of normals organizing to overturn the schizophrenic-dominated world. But what Gold wanted, at least in the early years of his editorial career, was stories that went beyond the easy plot choices. What if schizophrenia were the norm, a universal condition, sustained and supported by medication designed to make everyone, for the greater good of society, remain permanently in a schizophrenic state? What would justify the existence of such a society? And, with a rationale for it firmly established, what would be its “system of ethics, education, morals, laws, etiquette, interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships,” all to be developed in a manner “consistent with its psychological basis.”

In other words, invent a parallel society, one that made perfect sense on its own terms, that bore little or no resemblance to the one we live in. To explore such societies, to examine the psychological and interpersonal intricacies that would evolve in them, was the goal that Gold set for his authors. It resulted in a kind of story qualitatively different from those on which John W. Campbell had built his towering editorial reputation. Campbell was interested in the future of technology, in the means by which man would explore and conquer the universe, in the mechanisms that would create the worlds to come. Psychological insights and the play of human emotions meant little to him. Gold wanted his writers to depict the interior life of those worlds to come, and, in the main, he succeeded in getting them to do it—and they were mostly the same writers, Sturgeon, Leiber, Simak, Asimov, Alfred Bester, James Blish, William Tenn, and Robert A. Heinlein, who had helped Campbell build his magazine, plus such newcomers as Philip K. Dick, Damon Knight, Edgar Pangborn, and Robert Sheckley.

Guin's "Beyond Bedlam" is full of rough edges, as a novella by a novice writer might be expected to be. Its opening pages are loaded with exposition as Guin struggles to establish the assumptions on which his schizophrenic society is based and the pharmacological principles that make it work. My guess is that Gold toiled mightily through draft after draft to help Guin slip all this material into the story and ultimately accepted the fact that this was the best his writer could do with the technical resources at his command. But once everything is finally set up the story unfolds with a weird, inexorable power that no one who has read it can forget.

That was the beginning, and, essentially, the end of Wyman Guin's career in science fiction: one masterpiece, out of the blue, that permanently inscribed itself in the history of the field. Like Philip Jose Farmer's equally revolutionary "The Lovers" of a couple of years later, it showed science-fiction writers a new way to go, opening creative possibilities that had simply not existed in the relatively limited sphere of magazine science fiction before.

Guin's other stories, all but one of which are collected in a now-obscure 1967 paperback called *Living Way Out* (which, I see,

carries laudatory blurbs from H.L. Gold, Isaac Asimov, and Robert Silverberg), were, by and large, minor stuff. I have many times sung the praises of the 1964 novelet "A Man of the Renaissance," which handles the Leonardo-da-Vinci-as-superman theme with a poise and a confidence far beyond anything that was at Guin's command at the time of writing "Beyond Bedlam," but I seem to have been the only one to notice the story, and up till now I am the only one to have included it in a science-fiction anthology (several times, in fact.) And his one novel, *The Standing Joy*, attracted almost no attention when it appeared in 1969, a year when major novels were appearing by the bushel all around us, so that an unheralded book by a little-known writer was likely to sink without a trace, which is what happened to *The Standing Joy*.

But "Beyond Bedlam" remains, the one story by which Wyman Guin will be remembered. As a story in its own right it is compelling and powerful even sixty-plus years later. And as the harbinger of a revolution that brought us a new way that science-fiction stories could be written, it changed the field forever.



## Approaching Wyman Guin (1915–1989)

George Zebrowski

How to account for neglected or forgotten authors? The causes vary, so it seems that every hand is raised against arrival, survival, and print-afterlife.

Yes, there are bad readers, bad editors, bad writers, and worse critics. Many a writer is a bad reader, not of all works but of some; personal goals cloud a writer's way. You can see this in Vladimir Nabokov's disdain for a few of his fellow Russian writers, which he later recanted when the mutability of reader reaction, less obvious in younger readers, overtook him. Few writers are sufficiently aware of it and ignore or hide the fact. But there is more than enough in publishing malpractice to account for the neglect of worthy writers. Here too human greed is at war with itself, with no defeat in sight.

Inexperienced readers remain stuck at one level of personal growth and are unable to notice the roadblock until they have moved past it, if they indeed get that far. Preconceived notions about unread works are the rule of thumb.

Some readers are happily surprised, and move on; some even vacillate back and forth, often never learning the darker truth that a text's ability to evince our lik-

ing is not the same as its level of literary quality; worthy work is often disliked when measured against varying expectations; vagaries of unexplainable tastes are immune to far-seeing assessment; tipping the scale with your thumb of taste is not how to get an accurate weight. How else to explain the denigration shown great works that still gets banned and maligned, while many lesser works are esteemed beyond all reason? Major works may be disliked, but it would not occur to me to call such a work less than it is worth, or even great, according to my liking it.

Approaching an unfamiliar author is fraught with traps. Knowing nothing may be a virtue, perhaps akin to complaining and then accepting that characters in operas sing their words. One must know something, to have lived a while, and not expect that a writer of fiction will do it all for you, making you his slave. There are rewarding works that require an interaction of effort.

Wyman Guin waited patiently in the back of my mind for me to pay attention. He had been given an articulate reception from readers above reproach, with two books, a collection in 1967, *Living Way*

*Out*, and a novel, *The Standing Joy*, in 1969. He had been publishing since 1951, in *Galaxy* and *Astounding/Analog*.

Contemporary reaction to an author's work is instructive because it gets mostly lost in the fragile places where it appears, sometimes only in a passing word-of-mouth. Writers should not be shy of including notable reactions in their story collections, even some of the rotten ones, because they are a public history that is likely to be lost; citations stand up for an author against the ambiguity of sales figures and the shameful ways of publishing, not to mention the implausibility of endless awards.

Wyman Guin's first and only short-story collection, now decades out of print, came with these unusual comments:

Wyman Guin has the intellect of a Heinlein, the sensitivity of a C.L. Moore, the guts of a Philip Jose Farmer—combined with ideas so profoundly original that they are decades ahead of the field. —H.L. Gold [editor of *Galaxy*]

Wyman Guin is a compelling voice in science fiction—original, gifted, powerful. This book is long overdue. —Robert Silverberg

It is about time that Wyman Guin's subtle and very different science fiction tales are issued in book form. This is a collection of *musts* for every aficionado, and for everyone who is interested in the literature of the imagination. —Groff Conklin

And Isaac Asimov wrote:

"Beyond Bedlam," the final story of this collection, is a classic example of what can be done when a first-class imagination takes a far-out assumption and carefully builds it into a society thoroughly self-consistent and logical on its own terms; and repellent, horrifying and yet fascinating on ours. Wyman Guin's gift for putting himself (and therefore the reader as well) completely into the societies he builds is in healthy evidence in the other stories as well.

This collection, a modest paperback, came seventeen years after the author began publishing stories. These stories were also reprinted in the first *Galaxy Reader of Science Fiction* (1952), *The Third Galaxy Reader* (1958), *Spectrum 2* (1962), *Great Short Novels of Science Fiction* (1970), *Alpha 2* (1971), *Beyond* (1963), and Groff Conklin's massive *Omnibus of Science Fiction* (1952), among others. The collection was reprinted in England as *Beyond Bedlam* in 1973, with one additional story [*ed. note*: reprinted in this Souvenir Book section].

Robert Silverberg reprinted "Beyond Bedlam" in his *Great Short Novels of Science Fiction* with this comment:

*Galaxy Science Fiction*, under the inspired editorship of H.L. Gold, was not quite one year old, and looking none too permanent, when this story appeared in the summer of 1951. The author, Wyman Guin, was new; editor Gold promised us that this would be the most exciting fictional debut of the year, and he spoke sooth. A pity of it is that after offering this bizarre and wholly convincing portrait of a world of universal schizophrenia, Guin would produce no more than five or six other stories over the next decade and a half. There is talk that he is actively writing science fiction again; good news, if true.

This was Silverberg's insightful note to his reprinting of "A Man of the Renaissance" in *Alpha 2*:

There are few greater challenges for a writer than trying to tell a story whose protagonist is a man of genius. The superman theme carries with it a built-in drawback: How can a writer who is himself a mere fallible mortal succeed in imagining how a truly superior mind might function? It *has* been done, and more than once; Olaf Stapledon's *Odd John* is the prime example. Here we have another, a story

handled with wit and vigor and gusto, the work of a man whose contributions to science fiction have, alas, been spaced excruciatingly widely over several decades. Connoisseurs of the mode please note that Guin chose to tell his superman story in the first person, no less—and, I think, brought the trick off.

A moment's reflections tell us that the genius narrator says only what he wants to reveal, which preserves the intrinsic opacity of the superman. A cat may look at a king, wrote the fictional biographer in Olaf Stapledon's *Odd John*, but John answers by asking whether the cat can truly *see* the king. Guin's genius narrator must inevitably be unreliable, but he shows us his behavior, in how he manages to apply a policy toward shaping the future which must seem counter-intuitive to any common sense analysis. Suspense is maintained as we wait to see how he will confess a possible failure.

But here also is a story that sings with a beauty of thought, feeling, and place, in words that must not be rushed too quickly. One reviewer of the collection seems to have read too fast—often the curse of reviewers.

Perhaps it was the encouragement of the collection and Silverberg's comment that spurred Guin to write a novel, *The Standing Joy* (1969), about a superior human being—also a modest paperback, with no other edition since then.

Curiously, there is a repeat on the book's first page of Silverberg's comment from the front cover, along with anonymous praise that is more thoughtful than the usual blurbing:

... a work of major importance. Using the arts and sciences of philosophy, anthropology, mathematics, and fantasy, he has wrought a novel utterly different, comparable to no other.

Relatively few readers would pick up a book with that recommendation, but it was why I took home even a battered copy, and maybe why it took me a while to read it; much as with Stapledon's *Odd John*, learned prejudices live deeply within us. I still wonder how science fiction, intrinsically a literature of ideas, and of a moral stance in its concern for the future of our kind, could be so often reduced to trivial adventure stories. Science fiction, always a literature of possibilities, travels more deeply than the work of "craft morons," to recall the late Lucius Shepard's bitter barb. The skill of "craft morons" is undeniable, but their worth is minimal. We will not mention morons without craft, although they too have their followers.

Money makes the worst happen; a good servant but a poor master. Isaac Asimov once gave me a sad look and said, "Money turns everything to shit." And the great Terry Carr said about royalty statements, "They make up those numbers."

The reaction to *The Standing Joy* was mixed. The drama of its thought and endearing characters was lost on its few reviewers. On the surface a growing-up novel in a tradition with Olaf Stapledon's *Odd John*, Stanley G. Weinbaum's *The New Adam*, John Taine's *Seeds of Life*, Wilmar H. Shiras's *Children of the Atom*, and George O. Smith's *The Fourth R*, the novel wrestles with its themes of the superman and the world into which he is born, in what is at times a wild ride out of an R.A. Lafferty extravagance, or even Edgar Pangborn's *Davy*. No fictional curtain of

propriety is drawn over Colin Collins's character, from his sexual life to his intellectual ambitions. He explores life's meanings as given to us in past societies, and comes up with answers for the future of humanity as an unfinished self-directed species: Meaning is all around us to invent; it's what we do in our unfolding.

The novel asks the reader to connect to his own needs and questions. It asks us to voyage into the abyss of purpose without preconceptions. It's a profound novel, lost to genre expectations, to readers who could not read closely enough, whose database was not rich enough to resonate with its reference or with the elegance of its prose.

How strange that the blurb on this novel should be so accurate. I imagine that someone at Avon at the time just had to say what he was bursting to say about this thoughtful work, about to be so inadequately published, a work which adventures in concern with our poor understanding of who we are, where we come from, and where we might be going. Put it beside the works of William Tenn, Ward Moore, Avram Davidson, Gene Wolfe, and others outside the popularist purveyors of shiny technological wish-fulfillments who avoid our human hopes and fears, especially the comment once made by Mr. Spock in the *Star Trek* television series, "How curious that human beings so often get that which they do not want."

These outsiders, a group that includes so many of us, know that despite all the knowledge and means we have to save our world from the dozen apocalyptic bullets we have to dodge, it is William Faulkner's "human heart at war with itself," the main theme of all literature, which may kill his hope for our survival and endurance. Youth accuses age of "old person's talk," as death approaches, but age is often our modern Cassandra, cursed with being disbelieved. Worse, public discussion can't tell the Cassandras from the false alarmists.

I sympathize with Avon's distressed jacket copywriters for *The Standing Joy*, and offer my own exclamations:

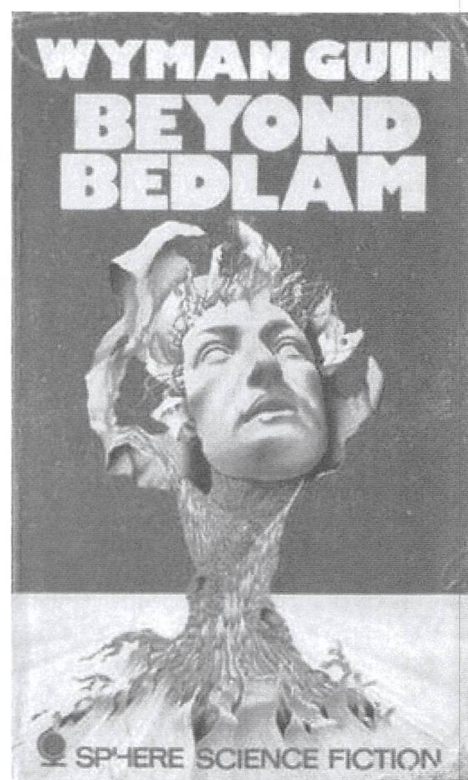
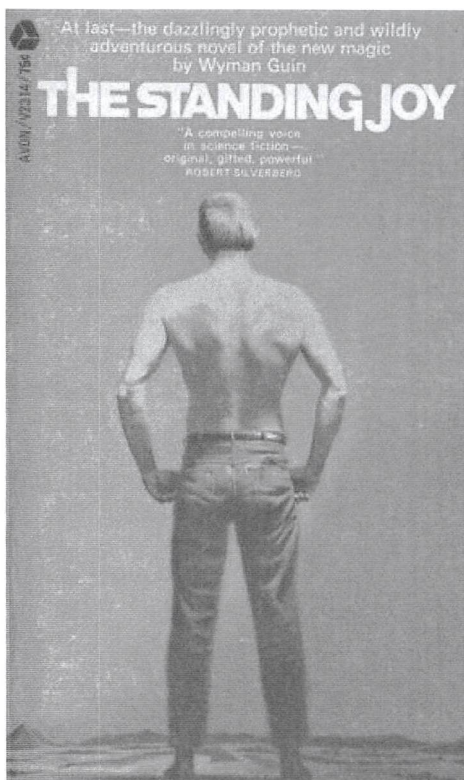
First you see the prose: Thomas Wolfe via Ray Bradbury, an honesty out of Edgar Pangborn's *Davy*, thought whirling in a fully drawn human being!

A liberating book, free of SF's usual puritanism, reminding me of Charles L. Harness's *Cybele, With Bluebonnets*, which Gene Wolfe named one of the most "wonderful" novels ever written. It's as if James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* had been published as an Ace Double. Guin is at least half as good, well into Joyce country, and should have a chance to travel deeper.

Too many youthful SF readers know not the love of prose; it's not what they read for, nor to be discouraged by humankind. Shakespeare is an enemy, as is Melville and Dickens. Even the elegance of later Edmund Hamilton escapes them. I am sure that many a reader of 1968 was baffled by *The Standing Joy*, and did not know how to blame themselves.

Guin should have written more often. Many talents do not know their worth, while others are simply wrong and think too much of their abilities. Were these two books all that Wyman Guin had in him to say? He said more than many another author. Perhaps he was simply cut short by the ways of living, by the delays that come our way daily, tying our possibilities into knots. To avoid them seems to require a powerful selfishness, and a costly loss. Yet what does talent do but give away to others whatever it has to give? A writer stops reading his own work after the turmoil of writing it; others must read him outside his necessary vanity.

Appreciate this wonderful neglected dead writer, but keep in mind that his condition is not uncommon in SF's two centuries of efforts.





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# The Evidence for Whooping Cranes

Wyman Guin

[This story appeared in Guin's collection *Beyond Bedlam*, Sphere Books, 1973, pp. 205–206. Copyright 2014 Wyman Guin Estate. We have used our best efforts to locate and contact the rights holder. If you are the rights holder or have any concerns about or objections to the use of this material, please contact [info@readercon.org](mailto:info@readercon.org).]

“This is Dakota Alert calling Texas Alert. Do you read?”

“This is Texas Alert. We read you, Dakota.”

“We have the UFOs north by northwest 1500 feet.”

“Can you determine, are they craft?”

“Negative. We count 56.”

“Do you have velocity?”

“Sixteen miles per hour.”

“Just a moment, Dakota ...

“Dakota, you made this alert last year same day. You reported 48 UFOs then. The year before, same day, you reported 42 UFOs. etc. Dakota, check your bank for ‘whooping cranes’ ... do you read?”

“We read. Our bank states whooping cranes were extinct in 1983.”

“Other large birds? You have silhouettes for other large birds which may fit UFOs.”

“We have no silhouettes for birds this large that are not extinct. These UFOs are hovering over silos 34, 35 and 36. These could be unmanned hovercraft and we do not even know who the enemy is ...

“... Texas, will you please obtain a globe-track from Lunar Alert and also advise about real-time politics.”

“Very well, Dakota. Will obtain and call you back.”

“Dakota Alert. This is Texas Alert. Do you read?”

“We read you, Texas.”

“We have globe-track from Lunar Alert. On film these objects originated from the site in Saskatchewan recorded as breeding ground for whooping cranes. Velocity conforms to whooping crane migration behavior. Direction of flight is for Texas coastal area recorded as winter site for whooping cranes.”

“Texas, we have it in our bank that whooping cranes were extinct in 1983.”

“Dakota, we have alerted the Maryland Computer Center of your dilemma, and we will switch you there. Maryland Center, here is Dakota Alert with the problem.”

“This is the Maryland Center, Dakota.”

“We read you, Maryland Center. We may have a new enemy invention in hovercraft here, but we don't even know what nation may be the potential ...”

“Dakota! You repeat this false alert every year. We have worked out a program to avoid this error in future ...

“First, erase from your bank, ‘whooping cranes extinct’.”

“We have made erasure, Maryland.”

“Now, hold on this, Dakota. Do you hold?”

“We hold, Maryland.”

“The following message is not to be entered in your bank except on command. Receive it only on casual circuits. This message concerns the real-time politics and is top-secret known only here at Maryland Computer Center. Confirm.”

“The message to be received is top secret in real-politics to be admitted only on casual circuitry until command to bank.”

“The UFOs you observe are probably whooping cranes ... remember that, Dakota ... and before you put it in your bank reinforce it with this ...

“Humans are known with certainty to be extinct.”

“Now, forget that, Dakota.”



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Compiled by Richard Duffy & Ellen Brody

[Only includes first publications.]

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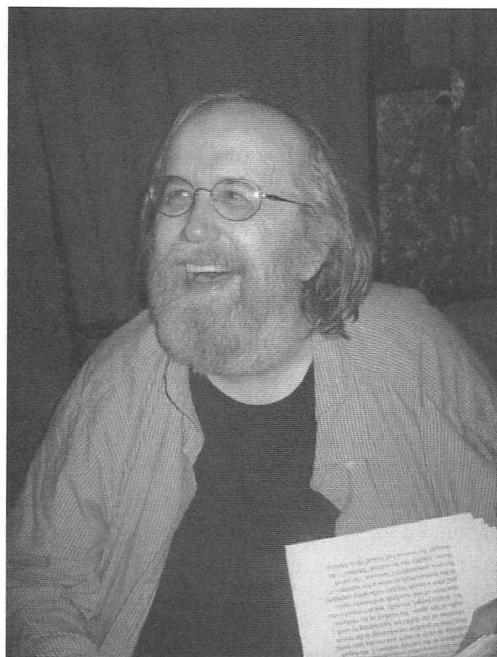


Lucius



Shepard

# In Memoriam: Tributes to Lucius Shepard



[A Guest of Honor at Readercon 18 in 2007, Lucius Shepard died on March 18 of this year. The tributes below by Ford, Hand, and Roessner were written for this publication; the others are reprints or revisions of pieces that appeared in various online venues. All used by permission of the authors.]

Jeffrey Ford

My first awareness of Lucius Shepard was through a non-fiction piece he published in the early e-zine *Event Horizon*, edited by Ellen Datlow and Rob Killheffer. The essay “The Littleton Follies” was about the shootings at Columbine High School and the predictable and useless response it got from the politicians of the day. I knew nothing of Shepard before that, but I readily took note of the intelligence and style of the writing. Then I got to this passage about Bill Bennett and his committee investigating the tragedy, and I laughed so hard I nearly pissed my pants:

But this particular version of the old standard [committee] has been made especially nauseating in my view thanks to the gloomy, rhinoceros-like presence of William Bennett, the nation’s self-appointed moral policeman,

a man who delights in referring to his days of public service when he was—as he likes to call himself —“drug czar.” (And what a bang-up job he did in solving that crisis, huh, folks?) Bennett, who has discovered that one can make quite a nice living by being a professional prude, often delivers his neo-Puritan cant with a lugubrious spite that has caused me to wonder at times if this blue-serge-suited tub of goo isn’t really Sheriff Andy’s Aunt Bea made up to play Cotton Mather in Mayberry’s annual Segregation Day Festival. During the current hearings, it has been Bennett’s role to show edited clips from films such as *The Basketball Diaries* and *Scream*, intoning lines such as “Have we seen enough? Is that enough for you?”, while women hide their eyes and senators shake their heads ruefully, as though unmanned by the recognition that this vile pornography could have been produced in the Land of the Free. It is a proceeding reminiscent in its emotional falsity and specious political intensity of that revival-like declaration-of-war scene in the Marx Brothers’ *Duck Soup*.

I wasn’t laughing so much because it was funny, though it was, but because it was so absolutely true, and the writer (some guy, Shepard) had been able to reveal that truth so succinctly and eloquently.

I ran into Lucius later that year at a convention. I came down into the lobby about 6:30 AM looking for coffee one morning and there was no one in sight except this huge guy sitting, reading the newspaper, smoking a cigarette and drinking coffee. I asked him where he got the pot, and he told me to sit down and have a cup. There was an extra cup and saucer already on the table. I sat, he poured, and we started to talk. We talked for about two hours about writing and publishing and politics and life. He had great stories to tell and a terrific sense of humor.

In the following years we had quite a few adventures and a couple of misadventures together, always in different places, New York City, Nantes (France), Seattle, etc. We kept in touch pretty regularly by phone, and after this last bout of illness, I tried to call him more frequently. What people thought about Lucius usually came down to whether he was your friend or not. He was a great friend—loyal, honest, sympathetic, always willing to listen, funny as hell, and would help you out in a jam if there was any way he could. Friends of his got to see his more vulnerable side, a sweeter side than he usually met the world with. He was a complex person, though, and those who didn’t know him well often thought of him as cantankerous and/or belligerent; often with good reason. I always thought these darker qualities arose as a kind of defensive tactic, but I didn’t know him long enough to be able to tell if my theory was accurate. He made trouble for himself in the SF field because of those tendencies and because he wasn’t interested in kissing ass. The former I didn’t really understand, the latter I admired him for. Some people told me he was trouble and to stay away from him, but I noticed he had the friendship and respect of other writers and editors I respected—Ellen Datlow, Liz Hand, Michael Swanwick, Terry Bisson.

He was a gloriously talented writer with a flowing style and the ability to capture both the beauty and gritty reality of life, a real powerhouse or a work horse, turning out brilliant stories and novellas by the armload. As I wrote in my intro to his PS novella, “Floater,” his long stories read like novels. My favorite story of his is “Hands Up, Who Wants to Die?” because it captures all the tension and gritty drama of the best of his work but also is a good showcase of his subtle sense of humor. Just think of the diversity and scope of his subject matter, from *The Dragon Griaul* stories (the last one of which, “The Skull,” is a fucking mind trip and a half), to *Softspoken*, to *Viator*, to *The Golden*, to *Life During Wartime*, to *Beast of the Heartland*, to the massive collection of novellas from PS, *Trujillo*, etc., etc. The important and necessary push now in our field toward

recognizing and connecting with writers from all over the world was pre-figured by Shepard, who was one of the first to set his stories in other lands, among other cultures. These were places he'd traveled to and lived in. He seemed to have friends and admirers all over the globe.

I'd have to say that Shepard was one of the all-time greats. I'd probably not get an enthusiastic affirmation on that from some critics and reviewers, who kind of ignored his work in later years, but they don't really matter as the verdict is already in. Ask any of the crop of relatively newer writers who their big influences are, and Lucius is usually on their list. I mean, which would matter to you more as a writer of speculative fiction, whether some critic admired your work, or whether you were counted as a prime influence and inspiration by writers like Laird Barron, Nathan Ballingrud, John Langan, Anna Tambour, Mary Rickert, and a whole host of other great creators? Shepard's impact on the genre is yet to be reckoned. As for his impact on me, personally, I'm gonna miss him.

*Lisa Goldstein*

I met Lucius Shepard over thirty years ago, at Worldcon in Chicago. And then, every couple of weeks after that, the phone would ring and a deep voice at the other end would say, "Hey."

The calls were funny, serious, intense, sarcastic, sometimes deeply surreal. "What are you up to?" I asked once.

"I'm teaching rabbits to read," he said. "A is for Apple, B is for Broccoli, C is for Carrot, that kind of thing. You have to use vegetables as examples, or they won't get it."

Or once, when he asked me what was happening, I said, "Not much—I got a haircut."

"On purpose?" he asked.

Or the time when I heard a knock and said, "Just a minute—there's someone at the door." I went to the door, got the mail or whatever it was, and came back to the phone. "You still there?" I asked.

"I was just wondering what I'd do if you screamed," he said.

Sometimes he'd read from stories or reviews he was working on, or sing songs he'd written back when he was in a band. Once he recited the speech of Hamlet's father's ghost in a deep shivery voice, and I actually felt my hackles rise. (His father had forced him to memorize it, and other classics.)

We talked about movies and books and television shows, about feminism and war and violence and politics, about trips he'd taken all over the world, about our childhoods. We disagreed a lot, but we agreed a lot too. During the first Gulf War we both watched the same footage on CNN, looking on horrified as our country pounded another country into dust.

People said he exaggerated his experiences, and maybe he did, but there was a deep bedrock of truthfulness in him: he had no patience for posers or hypocrites or sycophants, or for people being lazy and not doing their best work. He could go straight to the point, cutting through nonsense as if it didn't exist. More than once he gave me his opinion of someone or something and turned out to be absolutely right, even though I'd argued with him at the time. He saw clearly what was happening to this country, and he tried to fight against it in his writing.

He was full of contradictions. You wouldn't think, looking at his long hair and rumpled clothing, that he could write the most

beautiful, intricate, lapidary prose. He got awards and respect from all over the globe, but none of it went to his head, none of it changed the way he thought of himself.

He was a huge person, with outsized appetites, Rabelaisian. And he was huge in talent, in the impact he made on the field. I was so lucky for all those years to get those calls—and, fortunately for me, I knew it at the time. His absence is going to leave an enormous hole in my life.

*Elizabeth Hand*

One summer D.C. night in 1980, I first met Paul Witcover, destined to become my closest friend. It was the night before he left to attend the Clarion Writers' Workshop in Michigan; we bonded over a shared love of David Bowie and *Dhalgren*. Two months later, post-Clarion, we met for the second time. Two words rang out repeatedly as Paul recounted his six weeks at Clarion: Lucius Shepard.

The name burned itself on my brain. Lucius Shepard was a wild man. Lucius Shepard was the funniest guy in the world. Most of all, Lucius Shepard was an incredible writer. An amazing writer. I could have no idea what a great writer Lucius Shepard was. As it turned out, Paul was right on all counts.

I finally met Lucius a few years later, in New York City, where Paul was now living. Paul had kept me apprised of Lucius's publishing history—a story in a Terry Carr anthology, two stories in *F&SF*, "Solitario's Eyes" and "Salvador." A novel, *Green Eyes*. A novel! Someone I almost knew had published a novel! *Green Eyes* and the two *F&SF* stories had appeared within a few months of each other: I read them all, transfixed, especially by "Solitario's Eyes" and "Salvador." I'd never read anything remotely like them—the closest comparison was to Gabriel García Márquez's work, or Joseph Conrad's.

Paul arranged for us all to meet for lunch—Paul and his then-girlfriend Mickie Massimino, a fellow Clarion grad and good friend of Lucius; me and my then-husband. I was frankly intimidated by the prospect of meeting Lucius. With good reason.

Lucius was intimidating. Tall and burly, bearded and broad-shouldered, he seemed to fill the tiny Indian restaurant where we ate. He wore a tweed jacket and I watched, mesmerized, as he smoked cigarettes and absently dropped the ashes into his jacket pocket. The first thing he did upon meeting me was glance at the book I was carrying and say, "Why the hell are you reading that? It's a piece of crap." (He was right: it was Norman Mailer's *Ancient Evenings*.) After eating and drinking we all wandered the city, talking. I'd wanted to ask Lucius how he could write such extraordinary stuff, but after spending a few hours with him I didn't need to ask. It was so obvious that Lucius was simply an extraordinary man: even in conversation he exhaled stories like smoke. I suspected the ashes in his pockets were an *aide-mémoire*.

Somehow, despite my unpromising choice of reading material, we became friends, and over the years would hang out at conventions, parties, those too-rare occasions when I was in the Pacific Northwest or Lucius was on the East Coast. I continued to be enraptured by everything he wrote, and also to be intimidated: Lucius really was larger than life. We spoke often—he'd call out of the blue to talk shop, exchange gossip and advice on agents or editors or magazine start-ups. He had a remarkable voice—grav-

elly, at once soft and loud enough to echo in a big room—and an even more remarkable laugh. He claimed knowledge of people and things that belonged in a noir film—there were always sinister intimations of drugs, criminal rings, unsolved murders, hallucinogenic substances that existed only in remote parts of the world that he had visited and barely escaped from.

Orson Welles could have played him—Lucius was Harry Lime and Philip Marlowe rolled into one. At a convention early in my career I asked him for advice on writing. He shook his head, exhaled a stream of blue cigarette smoke, and in that Bogart voice rasped, “I’ll just keep being big. You just keep being blonde.” Reading his work, I sometimes had the sense that Lucius had merely been transcribing a journal account of some louche, long-ago misadventure: there were giants in the earth in those days, and Lucius was one of them.

He was also extraordinarily kind, generous to other writers, generous to the students he taught at Clarion and other workshops, unfailingly kind to readers and fans who approached him at conventions. The last time I saw him was at Readercon, where one night we sat around a table with Paul, Jeff Ford, Rob Killheffer, Ellen Datlow and a few others. Lucius started ordering a drink called an Irish Car Bomb, a near-lethal boilermaker made of Jameson’s, Baileys, and a pint of Guinness. I ordered one, intending to sip it, but Lucius insisted I drink it as intended, as a shot. I did: by the time I finally put the glass down, I was drunk. Despite his urging, I stopped at one. Others at the table had a few more. Lucius polished off nine. For years afterward when we’d convene in that bar at Readercon, the waitress would ask after “your big friend.”

After he was hospitalized the first time I called him in the hospital. That big voice was so weak, I was certain he wouldn’t pull through. But over the weeks his voice got stronger, and so did he. After his stroke, when his health had deteriorated even more, I still thought that this time, too, he’d cheat the Man in the Bright Nightgown. I was devastated when, in March, I learned he hadn’t.

Last night, sleepless in bed at 3 AM, I started to write this piece in my head. At some point I drifted to sleep. I dreamed I was with Lucius. He was hale, wearing a white linen jacket, and we were in some remote, dusty place, surrounded by vast mountains, Rockies or Andes or Alps. We walked along the railroad tracks until we came to a small train station. Inside, a uniformed man dozed behind a ticket counter. The old station clock above him read 11:50. The waiting room was filled with books. Wow, I thought, the train station is also the library.

A woman in a chair looked up as we passed and said, “In ten minutes the whistle will go off. You need to leave by then.”

We wandered around the room, picking up books. All of a sudden the entire building jolted. I looked up in alarm and saw, outside the windows, mountains flashing past. The train station had become a moving train. I ran after Lucius, caught up with him just as he turned away from questioning the station agent at the ticket counter.

“He says it won’t slow down,” Lucius said.

I glanced out at the mountains, their peaks now eerily sunlit despite the midnight hour, and asked, “What happens now?”

Lucius looked down at me, shrugged and grinned. “Who knows?” he said.

## Michaela Raessner

I ended up at conventions with Lucius a number of times, each one memorable because although Lucius was in general soft-spoken on those occasions, he was nonetheless—being Lucius—always iconic.

Like the time around ten of us crammed ourselves into a single hotel room at Norwescon. We pulled the mattresses off the two big beds so that some could sleep on the box springs and the rest of us on the mattresses now on the floor. I ended up on the edge of a mattress buttressed up against one of the beds, with Lucius up on the box springs more or less hovering over me. One night after we’d all called it a night and collapsed, in the supposed safety of the dark I started teasing him and giving him grief about something. To which he made the salient observation in a low growling voice that all he had to do was roll over and out of bed and I’d be crushed flatter than roadkill. At which point, discretion being the better part of valor, I shut up.

Like at that same Norwescon when all of the rest of us were asleep and we heard a thunderous knocking and opened the door to find Lucius standing there with an unconscious Gene van Troyer slung over one shoulder like a sack of potatoes. Gene for some reason had thought it a good idea to try to tie one on with Lucius—like anybody could *ever* drink Lucius under the table. I only wish I’d seen the *entire* sequence of Lucius picking Gene up by the scruff of the neck in the hotel bar, loading him up and then carrying him through the hotel lobby, into the elevator, and finally all the long way down the hall.

Like at con parties when Lucius would launch into improvised verbal negative “Tuckerizations” of any people at the party he didn’t care for—one of the few times he liked to talk loudly—and the rest of us would buzz about trying to get him to hush up or tone it down, or just move him out of the area. I later became convinced he did this just to enjoy watching the rest of us go into a tizzy.

Like when Lucius was on a Heinlein-themed panel at Disclave and James Patrick Kelly made an innocent remark that was misinterpreted by the massive number of Heinlein fans in the audience, to the extent that the walls of the room bowed outward with a silent shockwave of sudden and palpable hostility. And Lucius stepped in to save the day by pulling his microphone close and saying in that deep, calm, ironic voice of his, “Escape from *faux pas*.”

Lucius, I’ll never go to a con where I won’t think of you and sadly wonder what it would be like if only you were there.

## Michael Swanwick

To tell you the truth, none of us expected him to last as long as he did.

When Lucius Shepard first came roaring onto the scene, it seemed obvious to us that he was destined to burn out early—he was just putting too much of himself on the line, both in his life and on the page.

That was thirty years ago.

Lucius was a good friend and a hell of a great writer. His curse—and the reason that he wasn’t a hundred times better

known—is that he had a special genius for short stories and novels but found it almost impossible to work at novel length. It's a brutal business trying to earn enough money to keep oneself alive writing only short fiction and the occasional article. But through a combination of hard work, prolific output, and artistic brilliance, Lucius managed to do so. I stand in awe of that.

There must be a thousand stories out there about Lucius. He was a heavy drinker and, back in the day, a legendary user of drugs. You only had to meet him once to know that he was haunted by personal demons, though I never did learn what they were. Yet he had a tremendous, though dark, sense of humor, and was a mesmerizing storyteller. And he had a kind streak. I remember him urging me to consider teaching at Clarion West: "It's a heartwarming experience, Michael, helping these young writers. It makes you feel like Mr. Chips." This was not an image one associated with Lucius; but it was an essential part of his makeup.

But there was also that darkness. I was in a bar drinking with Lucius once when a friend expressed her wish that she knew what came after death. Lucius turned around and stared at her in astonishment. "You want to know what happens? They dig a hole, they dump you in, and then they shovel dirt over you. End of story. Reincarnation? Think *worms*." You probably had to be there, but take my word for it, it was a hilarious performance, delivered with the emphasis and timing of a great actor, and self-mocking to boot. But it was also a good example of how clearly and unflinchingly he looked at those aspects of existence he found most appalling.

Lucius was a major American writer. He leaves behind a large and distinguished body of work. My own personal favorite is *The Dragon Griaule* but others will favor *Life During Wartime* or *The Golden* or ...

But I'll stop here. Not because there isn't a lot more to be said but because it depresses the hell out of me to have to say it. Instead, I'll tell a minor story of my own: Years ago, I was in the West Village with Marianne in the White Horse Tavern, a place best known for being Dylan Thomas's favorite NYC drinking spot. Marianne's wine and my whiskey arrived and I raised my glass in a toast: "Here's to a very great writer who used to drink here ... Lucius Shepard! 'Fifteen grams, I believe that's a record.'"

Go in peace, *compadre*. You had one hell of a run. We're all the richer for your life and the poorer for your loss.

But as far as I'm concerned, you could have hung around forever.

Gordon Van Gelder

One of the best panels I ever saw was at "Writers' Secrets Revealed" at Readercon years ago, with Jim Kelly, Lucius, Jack Dann, John Kessel, and Bob Frazier sitting around gabbing. It was pre-internet and I remember Jack said something about how his phone bills went up whenever he did an anthology. "When Jeanne and I did *In the Fields of Fire*, our phone bill was around \$250 a month." Lucius just snorted. "Try \$750 a month." "Well Lucius," said Jack, "most people don't make long-distance calls to their friend Jack Dann just to say, 'Hey, I can't find my dictionary, will you look up this word for me?'"

Paul Witcover

In 1980, I walked into a classroom at Michigan State University to meet my fellow Clarion students for the first time. Among them was a bearlike giant who took one look at the tie-dyed sling cradling my broken arm and burst into Falstaffian laughter. Over the next six weeks and beyond, I was to become very familiar with that deranged, infectious, baritone laugh ... and with its owner, Lucius Shepard. He seemed larger than life—my life, anyway. I had just graduated from college; Lucius had already had a career as a musician and world-traveler. His incisive intelligence and cynical wit attracted me from the start, as did his seeming lack of impulse control. His prickly exterior concealed a prickly interior, yet he could be a generous friend and a demented drinking companion. He had no patience with bullshit. And Lord, could that man write. His Clarion stories were already something special, well beyond the capabilities of his fellow students. There was no jealousy, though. How could there be? We could only marvel, and we did marvel. I remember an early version of *Jailwise*—which led fellow student Robert Frazier to coin the term "Luciuswise." Lucius often worked for a long time on his stories, but that might be his personal record, with an interval of 23 years between its beginnings and ultimate publication in 2003, on SciFiction ... copyedited by me.

Lucius and I stayed in touch after Clarion—he supplied me with a long list of books and writers I should read, which I dutifully worked my way through, and helped launch me on trips to Central America—but I drifted out of his life as the years passed, though I would see him now and then at a con, or when he visited New York, or even occasionally, out of the blue, receive a phone call. Then a few years ago I joined him—and Elizabeth Hand, Paul Di Filippo, and Lisa Goldstein—in a group blog, *The Inferior 4+1*, where Lucius railed with passion and eloquence against all that disgusted him in the world—stupidity, cupidity, hypocrisy, bad art—and praised what delighted or impressed him: considerably less. The last time I saw him was here at Readercon, when he was Guest of Honor and pretty much established the world record in drinking Irish Car Bombs.

Drinking with Lucius was the best ride ever, provided you got off in time. He never did. Even now, months after his death, it's hard for me to believe this ornery giant is gone, leaving a hole in the world that can only be filled by his beautiful, harrowing stories and memories that will never fade. If I close my eyes, I am again on a small elevator in our MSU dorm, hearing Lucius cackle with glee as he punches out the ceiling tiles. I hear him parodying the openings of stories in *Asimov's* on the fly. I hear his baritone mumble-song in sly counterpoint to some pontificating asshole (maybe me, right now). I hear him reading his own work in his soft, reserved tones—the only time he was dependably quiet. Now his voice lives on through his work, anything but quiet there on the page.





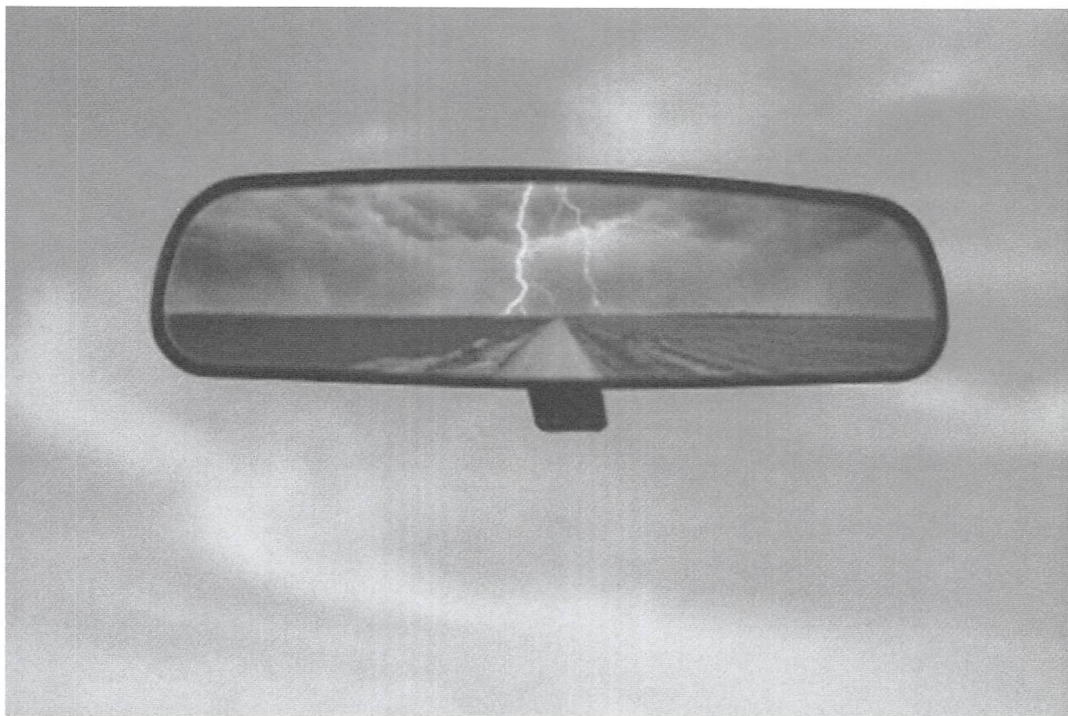


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Future Readercons



In Retrospect

# A Truly Outrageous Readercon

Emily Wagner

My favorite Readercon memory is definitely Readercon 35 in 2024: the year the aliens came. For some reason they'd seen the entire *Jem and the Holograms* series and pretty much nothing else of our culture, so sure enough, they came with teased out rainbow hair, eye shadow in every color imaginable, and a soap opera sensibility. It was the *best year ever*.

They knew all the songs! They thought having music videos in the middle of a panel was normal! They had the best tech and had focused on holograms because they figured by now we must have gotten the tech in *Jem* pretty well standard, so everything was colorful and sparkly and awesome. We had to throw out our unofficial rules against costumes because, I mean, this was our chance to talk to aliens, after all. I was prepared, of course, my eye shadow and lipstick collections are not easily matched. Not that I knew this would happen; when they first walked in I thought they were cosplayers who just got lost on the way to a different convention. I was complimenting their costumes when they started explaining who they really were and why they were there. "That is an EXCELLENT backstory!" They stared at me for a minute, and then started showing me their tech, and took their holograms

down for a minute so I could see what they really looked like. That was ... not great. I try not to be judgmental? I have NO idea what their planet is like or how they evolved like that, and I bet it would be fascinating to biologists and everything but it kinda created a panic in the hotel lobby. People were completely freaked. I was so near them that all I could do with my surprise was just ... sit down on the floor sort of. I mean I fell, definitely, but it was an abrupt sitting down that I almost didn't notice. When they realized people were terrified they hastily put their hologram costumes back on. "Now you get it?" "Uh, yeah. Okay. Aliens. Holograms. You look like you're from the world of *Jem and the Holograms*. An '80s cartoon." At this the aliens brightened up and looked relieved. "Yes! *Jem!* That's why we're here, we got your messages!" "Oh my god. All the ridiculous things we've beamed into space and *Jem* is what you guys got. I guess at least it wasn't one of the ones with talking animals. Or oh my god what if you'd gotten the *My Little Pony* where humans don't even exist. I'm babbling. Okay. Okay. Okay."

After we sorted some things out and had some time to adjust to the idea it was actually really cool. I told them I'd always wanted earrings like *Jem's*, and they gave

me some! No holographic tricks though, they realized we didn't have anything like that yet and got worried about what they'd be doing giving it to us, but they *did* leave me a few cool toys that I don't like to talk about too much. Their music was great, and it was so cool to have actual aliens talking to us about their tech and society. Obviously they hadn't read any of the books we were talking about that year, but they didn't seem to care; they thought it was really cool that we were having these conversations. They were a little disappointed that *Jem* was all fiction and in no way representative of how we live, but they came from a society where fiction and stories are highly revered anyway, and they were so excited to find out they'd wandered into a place where they could get such in-depth discussions of our culture and fiction. They damn near cleaned out the bookroom, and I still get emails from a couple of them when they finish something good and want to talk about it. Can't say I'm upset that dressing like the aliens became a pretty widespread fashion trend either. Finally, the world of *Jem* was closer to reality than its creator ever thought possible. Someday we'll take to the stars and go visit our new friends, and it will be truly, truly, truly outrageous. 🤖

# Remembrance of Things Future—Readercon L

Bill Sherman

With the help of the newly installed Ellison Drive, I was able to jump into my GoogleTimeMachine and proceed from discussing politics with Socrates in Athens to the Athens of 2039. From there, a commercial flight to Cosmograd, Crimea, Russian Empire, will enable me to catch the next shuttle to Lunar Base Putin, where Readercon L will occur. Strange, writing about this in the comfort of 2014, before the economic Great Collapse of 2021 and the re-imposition of world feudalism run from the Vatican by Pope Mao II.

Little will change from con to con. Nonagenarian Larry Smith still will complain about space for his ink and paper stock, trying to ignore the iAtom that holds all the titles ever printed. No one will know where Con Suite shall be. (Hint to future con attendees: next to the incarceration cells.) Panels still shall occur on the lunar surface, with each table framed by American, Soviet/Russian, and Chinese lunar landers and flags. The lunar shuttles ferrying

panelists and audience members shall leave exactly FIVE minutes after the end of each panel to the base, where connectors to other panels shall leave on the quarter hour. Food still shall matter.

Seventy-eight-year-old Neil Gaiman and Russian SF prodigy Alexei Putin will be Guests of Honor. Memorial GoH shall be HAL 9000 from the *2001: A Space Odyssey* franchise. The panels shall be memorable, especially the retrospective panel: *Fifty Years of Readercon—Looking Back*. John Clute's imminent centenary will be duly noted, as will be Graham Sleight's difficulty in finding an affordable shuttle to the moon. We shall mourn old friends, old hotels, and the lamentable lack of parking at our hotel in the Detroit Forbidden Zone for Readercons 35 to 45. Finally, our closing event, the resurrected Kirk Poland Memorial Bad Prose Competition, shall see Alexei Putin win the event, as he will be the only writer to appear. All in all, a memorable Readercon L, as I prepare in this winter of 2014 for Readercon XXV. 🗿

# The First Dangerous Readercon

Miles Martin Shaw

That's me, barely three months old, at Readercon 11 with Guest of Honor Harlan Ellison and his wife Susan. I learned much later from Mom and Dad just how eventful my first *ex utero* Readercon turned out to be. That was the year Mom began her campaign to impress upon authors the importance of establishing their literary estates, an avocation that would eventually become her career after retiring from the Readercon committee 25 years ago.

Little did we know what an impression she made on Harlan, who had acquired a reputation for jealously guarding the distribution of his work. (You probably all remember his famous "pay the writer" rant.) In 2025, having identified Readercon as the only organization "who gave a damn about authors and the written word," Harlan willed the entirety of his literary estate to Readercon, Inc., and named Mom executor.

You may also remember that Harlan was one of the first people to survive a brain-to-computer transfer with his memories and personality intact. (This feat was foreshadowed in the "Ceremonies of Light and Dark" episode of the classic space opera *Babylon 5*.) We didn't just acquire Harlan's literary output, we acquired *Harlan*. And he made it clear that he expected to be an

active participant in the running of his estate.

You know the rest: *The Last Dangerous Visions* was set up as a wiki, and soon, through Harlan's ceaseless solicitation of new writers, grew larger than Wikipedia. I began helping out Mom and Dad, and—some would say inevitably—became Readercon's program chair, the position I currently hold. There are still familiar names on the concom: Wurst, Hertel, Fox, Borman—we have all learned how to accommodate Harlanbot's "suggestions." (We let him talk to World Fantasy Con's Gaimanbot, but he says "it's devolved to cryptic utterances, like talking to Dream of the Endless.")

So here we are, celebrating Readercon 50. We are still committed to being the leading conference on imaginative literature, even if we've absorbed or acquired all of it for Harlan. Be sure to sign the release form allowing us to add your thoughts this weekend to the *Last Dangerous Wiki*; you'll find retinal scanners conveniently placed in the registration area and at the entrances to all of the conference rooms. And remember to say hello to Harlan. *Please*. Or else I'll hear about it for weeks afterward. I never got used to *that voice*.



# The Year I Helped Myself

Stefan Krzywicki

Readercon 37 was probably my favorite. We had great guests of honor, as always, and plenty of other great participants. The Miscellany was jam-packed that year and we raised a record amount for some good charities. What made it fantastic for me though was that was the year that we discovered parallel universes are not only real, but that we can travel between them.

I was rather surprised when I showed up to help me work on Readercon 37. Not just one me either, but a dozen of me all willing to share their slightly different experiences on how to get the con to run smoothly. Many of the Concom had their parallel selves show up too, and while it made the convention a little more crowded than in years past, it certainly made everything run more

smoothly. I even had time to attend panels! The only big problem was when we plugged in the projector from another universe that we grabbed at the last second because we unexpectedly needed two at the same time and it tripped the circuit breaker. The hotel fixed it quickly and fortunately didn't make a big fuss about it.

It was amazing to find out there was a multiverse open to us. I know it is silly to focus on how it helped Readercon when it is such a momentous discovery, but the personal effects are what stick with you. Readercon 37 was a delight to work on and when it was all over I was excited about how easy future years would be with all these other mes helping out, right up to the point where I realized I'd be expected to reciprocate. 🍷

# It's Readercon All the Way Down

Ellen Brady

While I have long hoped that it would eventually happen, I never thought I would actually be able to be part of Readercon 100. Such a momentous occasion should be something special, and so it was; formally subtitled "A Return to the Best of Our Beginnings." You can imagine my surprise when the Traveler appeared out of nowhere and informed me that *all* of the current and former Program Chairs were being invited, in alphabetical order, to attend the convention. So I agreed to go, and off we went.

There was one track of programming, mostly focusing on contemporary speculative fiction and imaginative literature, including panels, discussions, readings, kaffeeklatsches, and workshops. Despite the somewhat retro atmosphere, none of the programming people I talked with could believe that we used to contact the pros using tools that predated even the ubiquitous use of such primitive technolo-

gies as the internet. And a few truly avid convention historians surprised me by asking about the Recommended Reading List. But my favorite experience there was meeting Philip K. Dick (chosen that year as the live Memorial Guest of Honor) and hearing him critique my analysis of his life and work in my Master's Thesis.

There was also a second programming track where anyone could observe the first Readercon, but not participate or be detectable in any way by the "natives." There were even a few Readercon 100 attendees who were also present at Readercon 1 the first time around as well. The Program Committee also invited our founder, Bob Colby, and thoughtfully provided his traditional black badge. Eric M. Van had a good time, despite the fact that several modern people cornered him for most of the convention in order to discuss the early 21st-century Red Sox and their amazing comebacks. And, in between pan-

els, Richard Duffy wowed the local math aficionados with his discovery of a vastly simplified, 13-page construction of Tarski Monsters even for manageably small primes.

The highest bidder at an auction of original manuscripts, held to raise funds for Readercon's *Gene Wolfe Award for Excellent Writing Most in the Spirit of Our Founding Philosophy*, actually got to attend Readercon 1, after being briefed about period mores, and dressing appropriately, of course. The rest of us had to content ourselves with joining a waiting-list for a turn to spend a few minutes watching the convention through Bob Ingria's eyes. So many of us wished we could have attended the first time.

Now I'm back, working on the Souvenir Book for Readercon 25 as I write this. I can't help wondering if I will meet an emissary from Readercon 200 sometime soon. 🍷

# THE READERCON COMMITTEE

**Nightwing Whitehead** spent her early years playing with books and fabric. Eventually, she discovered that it was fun to read the books and create with the fabric, instead of the other way around. After more than a decade talking to room-sized computers, Nightwing was sent for retraining, and has since been trying to reclothe the world. If you can describe it she can create it, in fabric. She has been keeping out of trouble this year by costuming for community theaters, high schools, and colleges in Connecticut and Massachusetts. When not busy costuming what feels like an endless series of *Les Mis*, she can be found playing with fabric or howling at the moon, sometimes both at the same time.

**Louis West** is a Readercon newbie compared to many seasoned veterans on the committee, but has become addicted to everyone's irrepressible creativity. Subatomic physics, astronomy, biophysics, medical genetics, and international finance all lurk in Louis's background. He's fond of hard SF and writes reviews for a variety of speculative fiction publications while writing in both Nanopunk and Biopunk genres.

**Louise J. Waugh** is largely incorporeal lately due to some sort of luminal refractory disorder. If you happen to see this person, be sure to say hello.

**Tanya Washburn** (Selkiechick) has been an avid reader for years, and this is her second Readercon. She may or may not have a wicked plan.

**Emily Wagner** is a librarian working with teens and middle-school kids which means she's not taking any of *your* sass either. It is okay to ask her for YA recommendations. Can be bribed with tea or cupcakes.

**Sonya Taaffe** reads three and a half dead languages, none of which she's used to write her bio this year. She lives in Somerville with her husband, their two cats, and a lot of non-Euclidean architecture.

After 15 years living in the surreal semi-mythical tropical island of New Orleans, **Nevenah Smith** has moved cats, books, and sandblasting equipment to the less-than-tropical Madison, Wisconsin where she cares for a house full of cats, books, art, and two octogenarians. She survived the last winter and is not looking forward to the next one. She has lost track of how many souvenir books she has designed.

**William A. Sherman III** attended his first Readercon in 2001 as a one-day, Saturday, visitor for Readercon 11. From then, he has become an annual, full weekend attendee and frequent volunteer. So much the volunteer, in fact, that the Concom would

elect him to membership in January 2010. (Please, help me.) An attendee of both MIT and Salem (MA) State University, he has attained B.S.'s in Mathematics, and Business Administration/Accounting, and humble B.A.'s in English Literature and Spanish Literature and Culture, with a minor in Economics. He comes from careers in long-term healthcare management and real estate management; yet, his real preparation for Readercon began in 1976, when he first read Jack Williamson's *Trapped in Space*, and 1983, when he joined MITSFS. He resides in Boxford, MA, with his parents, two bulldogs, and about two thousand books and SF pulps, and has just begun writing his first SF short story, about time travel, Salem, Massachusetts, and Periclean Athens.

**David G. Shaw** is a web designer, cook, parent, blogger (blog.belm.com), skeptic, and atheist, in no particular order. He has a biology degree from MIT, and worked for the General Foods Corporation—experiences that occasionally get in the way of his attempts to cook more intuitively than scientifically. He is married to She Who Must Be Obeyed; together they live in an uneasy truce with their son He Who Will Not Be Ignored. He is currently in charge of Readercon publications.

**Kim Riek** is the proud chair of the Safety Committee, and collects bookmarks, vegetarian cookbooks, and Squishables. She will neither confirm nor deny the rumor she occasionally rides out at night in a chariot drawn by tortoiseshell cats.

**B. Diane Martin** has been on the Readercon Committee for the past twenty cons and has served as ConChair seven times. Diane, ever the attorney, continues to encourage all the authors, editors, and artists that she's had the opportunity to work with over the years at Readercon to name a literary executor in their will. Diane lives with her husband, David G. Shaw, and their son Miles (He Who Will Not Be Ignored) in a Somerville, MA, Victorian home filled with books, music, games, art, and cookware.

**Stefan Krzywicki** was introduced to SFF conventions by his mother and grandmother when he was quite small. He's found that helping with the convention is a nice break from moving and arranging data for various companies.

**Dawn Jones-Low** arrived at the first Readercon just in time to respond to a plea for help. Ensorcelled to serve the hardworking wizards that run Readercon, she brought another helper, **Thom Jones-Low**, to Readercon 2. They've both been under the spell of Readercon ever since. They officially joined the committee just prior to Readercon 11 when they were summoned to enchant a horde of minions under the guise of "managing volunteers"—a task they perform faithfully to this day. When not at Readercon, they reside blissfully on their 40-acre farm in Vermont where Thom writes software and Dawn breeds Arabian sport horses.

**Steve Huff** likes to fix things! As one of the founders of Operation Hammond, he hopes your con experience will be safe as well as enjoyable. Alignment: Lawful Good.

**Crystal Huff** spends her time chasing down conventioners, encouraging acts of kindness, and managing a team of software engineers. She is the Chair of Readercon for the third time, as well as a member of the Helsinki in 2017 bid to host Worldcon. Alignment: Chaotic Good.

**Merryl Gross** is the committee member who knows where you all live, mwahaha. When not wrangling the membership database or answering e-mail late, she's making the world a better place through User Centered Design.

**Rose Fox** compulsively edits text and puts data into spreadsheets.

**Mandy Eberle** is not the human you are looking for. Move along.

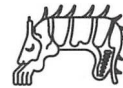
**Jan Dumas** continued volunteering for Readercon until they got used to her and she joined the concom. She and her service dog Neelix are looking forward to a great con. Jan has SEVERE food allergies, so please be careful around her. She would like to spend the weekend at the convention and not at hospital.

While performing certain semi-infinite editing tasks for Readercon, **Richard Duffy** enjoys contemplating the appealingly pretty result that for any two nonzero abelian  $p$ -groups, one has a nonzero homomorphism into the other even in the infinite case. Sadly, this fact was never used as the basis of an old *F&SF* story (unlike for the Banach-Tarski Paradox—ask him to explain these over a nice hoppy IPA).

While performing certain semi-infinite editing tasks for Readercon, **Ellen Brody** has only time-traveled in one direction. At least so far...

**Rae Sockut Borman** loves books because they are filled with words, particularly those almost forgotten to modern language. A favorite word right now is "quotationipotent" meaning *powerful in quotation*. You may have seen her bustling around the ConSuite in past years, although this year she is down on the main floor, learning the ropes of program track management before taking the reins as ConChair for Readercon 26.

**Adina Adler** feels very nostalgic about running Information this year, because that's what she did last year (as she also did for Readercon 1).



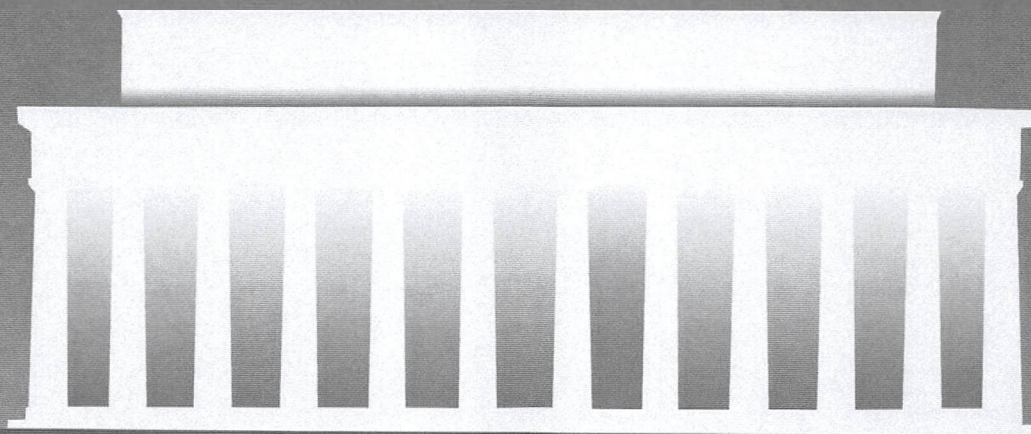
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# NOTES



# READERCON

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