

Conference on Imaginative Literature, Eighth Edition

READERCON 8

PROGRESS REPORT 1

Guests of Honor:

William Gibson
Larry McCaffery

Memorial Guest of Honor:

Alfred Bester

July 12-14, 1996

Marriott Westborough

5400 Computer Drive

Westborough, Massachusetts 01581

508-366-5511

Rooms: \$70 single/double

Notes from the Chair

We've said from the beginning that Readercon was envisioned as something different, a *serious* conference on imaginative literature. This is as true today as it was for the first Readercon. And we have all of you to thank for our success. We are very pleased to have William Gibson and Larry McCaffery as our Guests of Honor this year and are looking forward to July.

For those of you who have never been to a Readercon, we bring together readers for a weekend with those who write, edit, publish, illustrate, critique, and market imaginative literature. We include authors whose works are not marketed as conventional science fiction or fantasy. Our Guests of Honor and pros pursue a highly personal vision of the possibilities of imaginative literature. But remember, serious does not mean stuffy; we embrace the subversive notion that thinking is fun. So, if munching on an endless supply of chocolate-chocolate chip cookies, biscotti, and cheesecake while listening to or participating in one of our panels sounds like your idea of a great time, I'll see you in July.

To all those people who have taken the time to let us know that they missed us last year, we send our thanks. I wish we could say that we were back tanned, rested, and caught up on our reading; but I'll just say that at least we had more time to read during 1995.

— B. Diane Martin

Guests of Honor

Like many wannabe SF writers in the summer of 1977 I was there at the very beginning, which was the third issue of a magazine called *Unearth*. *Unearth* only printed stories by previously unpublished writers, so we were the core audience and possibly the only audience. The cover story of issue three was "Fragments of a Hologram Rose" by William Gibson.

Re-reading it now, it's much more of a William Gibson story

than it was then, a small and elliptical slice of his now-familiar world, just as the byline itself is now instantly recognizable instead of almost instantly forgettable, but even as an anonymous and self-contained work it stood out from the rest of the issue. Exquisitely crafted but dense to the point of difficulty, substituting the unfolding of static memory for beginning-middle-end, a dystopia only made more vivid by the exhilarating clarity and science-fictional niftiness, it was aggressively literary, and seemed stuck in *Unearth* not because it was unskilled but because it was uncommercial, too "academic" and "downbeat" for the aggressively anti-literary publishing climate of the time. I'd like to claim that I knew better, but if you had asked me at the time I would have come up with the same verdict Gibson did, that he would be a commercially marginal cult author at best.

Instead, he beat the beginning-middle-end crowd at their own game. His instant rise is so much a part of the lore of the field that I feel as if I was there for that too, but in reality the next time I read anything by Gibson was in September 1985, far along the rapid pop-star trajectory of his career, when the Hugo and Nebula had finally bumped *Neuromancer* to the top of my reading pile.

It would be the last time I'd put off reading anything with his name on it. Reading Gibson was a hedonistic experience. Many authors obey a puritanical ethos: reading them is the work you perform in order to earn the reward of aesthetic pleasure when the story is done and the full design is revealed. Gibson's fiction offers that kind of reward, but—and I suspect this is what makes most of his critics uneasy—the text is intensely pleasurable in itself. Mentally engaging his electric language and imagery and thought is a high.

Like many readers in the fall of 1985 who had caught on late, after *Neuromancer* I scrambled to find his short stories, not yet collected in *Burning Chrome*, and learn anything I could about the

author. That kind of curiosity is the objective precondition of media stardom. Since Gibson isn't the first SF writer to fulfill it, the full why and how remain a subject of debate. It's never bothered me, though, if only because it seems natural that a writer whose greatest fascination is the pop culture apparatus should fascinate the pop culture apparatus in return.

Meanwhile, Gibson has written three more novels, *Count Zero*, *Mona Lisa Overdrive*, and *Virtual Light*, and a collaboration with Bruce Sterling, *The Difference Engine*. I suggested that "Fragments of a Hologram Rose" was less of a William Gibson story when it was published than now, and that seems to happen eventually to all his work. That is, my understanding of it keeps changing. In 1986 I could write of *Neuromancer*: "But the most interesting thing about Gibson is his unusual attitude to his high-tech SF innovations. Almost all his characters are cyborgs, constructs, or clones, but none of them have identity problems. Gibson is pro-technology and pro-change. His characters have all adapted to his future, and most are excited by the new possibilities it opens." Writing in 1991, my view had completely reversed: "The technology, simstim and cyberspace, is memory concretized. The characters are haunted by memory. Some live in memory-worlds. Some are memory-things....The stylistic feel of his work, that elegant, bluesy emotion that lies underneath the cool of the writing like water under ice, is suddenly clarified; it is based on the emotions associated with memory: nostalgia and regret." Now, after *Virtual Light*, with its great symbol of the bridge, it has been changed again. The retroactive deepening continues.

This process makes William Gibson a particularly exciting Guest of Honor. I expect to walk away from Readercon 8 with a body of work that is more complex still. Besides—who knows?—I may get to steal one of the sheets from his bed.

—Barnaby Rapoport

Larry McCaffery has spent the last twenty years of his professional career digging into the zeitgeistial strata underlying contemporary literature. He's been looking deep into the connections and meanings of cultural debris such as popular music, art, TV commercials, film (both sacred and profane), pornography, polemics, fashion—you can add to this list yourself. For a literature professor, he's amazingly open-minded, willing to accept whatever he runs across at face value and (more importantly) teasing out the cross-cultural web of influence—nothing is ever written in a vacuum.

For our purposes here, one major field of his study has been genre fiction, science fiction in particular, and specifically that contentious offshoot of SF, cyberpunk. He was one of the first academics to grasp the true significance of the work of our guest of honor; the distorted metaphoric lens he wields and the cultural recombinations that delight him.

McCaffery has published quite a bit of material, but two of his books are important to you and I, right now, right in this exact moment. His 1991 anthology of fictions and essay, *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Fiction* (Duke University Press) remains, perhaps, the only truly necessary such collection amid an academic spew. He has just published another anthology, *After Yesterday's Crash: The Avant-Pop Anthology*, (Penguin, 1995) which raises the ante, stakes out new territory. It is perhaps the only true "post-cyberpunk" collection so far.

If you don't believe me, if you don't understand (and I'm not sure I do, entirely), if you're wondering what all the fuss is about ... well, I'm out of space here. Get these two books and read Larry's extensive introductions. You won't find any other academic essays filled with as much authentic passion, wit, intelligence and clarity. Then show up at Readercon and argue with him.

—Stephen P. Brown

The Program

The Program is not just the heart and soul of Readercon, it's most of the internal organs, several appendages, and perhaps a tat-

too. We try to think of panels and events no one has ever done and put fresh new twists on the ones they have. From what folks tell us, we succeed. While most cons leave you (and all too often the panelists) guessing what the panels are about, we provide full descriptions not only in the *Program Guide* but in *PR2*.

Our regular programming consists of four of five simultaneous tracks running from 6 to 9 PM on Friday, 10 AM to 5 PM on Saturday, and 10 AM to 5 PM on Sunday. There are panel discussions in two large rooms, each with a stage with easy chairs and coffee tables, and area microphones to pick up all the panelists' dialogue. Two smaller rooms feature author readings and a writer's mini-track of panels and how-I-wrote-my-book presentations. A third small room hosts occasional discussion groups, often on off-the-wall topics (if you'd like to lead one, let us know).

Our Special Events start Friday evening with our Meet the Pros(e) Party, where you get to meet the writers and their writing, and commit Art (How? See *PR2*). After our last Saturday panel there's nothing but special events. There will be an interview with (and by) our Guests of Honor, and a special Best of the Kirk Poland Memorial Bad Prose Competitions, a brief history of our most popular event.

Banquet

We will have a banquet. Probably. But we haven't quite decided how to make it a uniquely Readercon banquet. So look for more information in *Progress Report 2*.

Writers' Workshop

Once again we'll be hosting a three-hour closed writers' workshop for a few amateurs or new pros, led by David Alexander Smith. It will probably happen on Sunday morning at 8:30 AM. Submit up to 7,500 words of fiction (self-contained short story, chapters from a novel, or an outline) by **June 30** directly to David at:

112 Avon Hill Street, Cambridge, MA 02140

For more information, write to David or call him at 617-661-3323.

The Bookshop

The Bookshop is our dealers' room. Expect a varied selection of new and used books and magazines from small and large publishers. If you'd like to have a table here, send us the following information by **March 31**: Your name, address and phone number(s), your assistant's name(s), the number of tables you want (up to 3), whether you're willing to be put on a waiting list, and any special requests, such as electricity. The majority of what you sell must be literary in nature. You must also send us a payment of \$45 per table, which will be returned if you're not selected.

Publications

We've already mentioned our *Program Guide*, which runs 30 or 40 pages. In it you'll find the full conference schedule with panel précis and an index of each participant's appearances, plus a wide variety of useful information. In the back there are complete mini-bibliographies of every participant—that's right, all of their book titles with dates and publishers, and then some. For those who prefer to travel light, we provide a simple pocket schedule in table form.

Last time our *Souvenir Book* had a non-ad page count that matched the Worldcon's. Our book will have original material by and about our Guests, more installments of our regular "Books to Cherish" feature, original artwork, and much more. If you want to place an ad in the *Souvenir Book*, contact us for a rate card. Ads must be submitted in camera-ready form by **May 15**.

The *Readercon Rag* is our at-con newsletter, which appears four times during the conference. It includes program changes, news, trivia, and the all-important Saturday evening party list.

The Tiptree Award Bake Sale

Readercon joins other conventions across the country in raising funds for the award the old-fashioned way: with a bake sale. We'll be soliciting baked goodies and volunteers to help sell them in the next *Progress Report*.

The Fifth Tiptree Award will be presented at WisCon 20, featuring Guest of Honor Ursula K. Le Guin, to be held on May 24-27, 1996. You can write to them at:

Box 1624, Madison, WI 53701

or email wiscon.concom@cs.wisc.edu

or visit their web site at <http://www.cs.wisc.edu/wiscon/>

Our Hotel

The Marriott Westborough is a new location for us, but with familiar staff—many of the people we knew at the Worcester Marriott are working there, and they're happy to have us. We recommend that you make your reservations early—many people arrived at Readercon 7 without having done so at all and were surprised to find the hotel full, and we don't want that to happen again.

Getting There

Westborough is less than an hour west of Boston by car. The Marriott is located at the intersection of Routes 9 and 495, and is served by a limousine service that runs from various points in Boston, including Logan Airport. Call the Marriott for current information about the limousine service. *Progress Report 2* will have detailed directions for driving there.

Membership

You're getting this *Progress Report* either because you've already bought a membership in Readercon 8 or because you're on our mailing list. If your mailing label says "Pre-paid member" on it, you've already bought a membership. Otherwise, you can buy one in advance by filling out the form below and sending us a check. At-the-door memberships will cost \$50.

The Con Suite

The Con Suite is Readercon's own party, where you'll find munchies both nutritious and politically incorrect, and people to talk to (there is a causal relationship here). We try to keep it open during all convention hours (with a little help from volunteers).

Volunteering

Readercon is run entirely by volunteers. We can always use more help, in every area. If you're new to conventions, volunteering is a great and time-tested way to meet people. Let us know you're interested on the form below, and we'll contact you about scheduling you in the areas you'd like to work—or you can just volunteer at the con (although the most interesting jobs may be taken by then). Work enough hours and you'll earn some cool thing or other.

Progress Report 2

PR2 will have an updated guest list, a more detailed description of the program, and more information on getting to the con. It will be sent to *members* in mid-May. If you won't know by then whether you can attend but would like to receive a copy, check the box on the reply form.

(Some) Policies

- No smoking in programming areas or the Bookshop.
- Only guide animals in convention areas.
- No weapons in convention areas.
- Young children who are always with an adult are admitted for free; others need a membership. Readercon does not have children's programming or babysitting (but see the next section).

Babysitting

Every year we seem to acquire more young fans. We don't have the resources to care for them ourselves, but if any parents out there want to organize a babysitting cooperative, we'll help you get in touch with each other. Just let us know who you are.

Finding Us

Write to: Readercon
P.O. Box 381246
Cambridge, MA 02238
Phone: 617-625-6507
Email: readercon@aol.com
Web: <http://web.mit.edu/terra/www/rcon.html>

(Our web page will always have the latest information, including downloadable versions of the *Progress Reports* and the program schedule. Check it out and tell us what you think!)

Mail this to:
Readercon 8
P.O. Box 381246
Cambridge, MA 02238

Enclosed is \$ _____ for the following:

/R8 PR1

- _____ Attending membership(s) (\$40 until July 1, 1996)
_____ Supporting membership(s) (\$10, includes all publications)

- I'm not ready to join yet, but send me *Progress Report 2*.
 I would like to organize a discussion group or workshop.
 I am interested in joining a baby-sitting cooperative.
 Please send _____ Volunteer info _____ Bookshop info _____ Advertising info.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Make your check or money order out to READERCON. Please don't send cash through the mail.

Who's coming to Readercon 8?

GOH's William Gibson and Larry McCaffery

Ellen Asher • Lisa A. Barnett • Terry Bisson • Bernadette Bosky •
Stephen P. Brown • Jeffrey Carver • Suzy McKee Charnas • Bryan Cholfin •
Hal Clement • Kathryn Cramer • Don D'Amassa • Samuel Delany •
Daniel Dern • Paul DiFilippo • Tom Easton • Scott Edelman • Moshe Feder
• Jeri Freedman • Greer Ilene Gilman • Glenn Grant • Geary Gravel •
Elizabeth Hand • Nancy Hanger • David G. Hartwell •
Patrick Nielsen Hayden • Teresa Nielsen Hayden • Jeff Hecht •
Arthur D. Hlavaty • Alexander Jablokov • Michael Kandel • Rob Killheffer •
Angela Gale Kessler • Rosemary Kirstein • Nancy Kress • Ellen Kushner •
Lissanne Lake • Warren Lapine • Shariann Lewitt • Barry Malzberg •
Peter McNamara • Th. Metzger • James Morrow • Yves Meynard •
Rebecca Ore • Rachel Pollack • Kit Reed • Katya Reimann • Paul T. Riddell •
J .F. Rivkin • Charles C. Ryan • Darrell Schweitzer • Melissa Scott •
Delia Sherman • Cortney Skinner • David Alexander Smith • Sarah Smith •
Susanna Sturgis • Takayuki Tatsumi • Jean-Louis Trudel •
Gordon Van Gelder • Joey Zone
...and more to come!

Readercon 8

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