

# *WisCon*<sub>21</sub> ♀

May 23-26, 1997

Souvenir Book



## Karen Axness • 1950-1996

We dedicate WisCon 21  
to the memory of our friend  
Karen Axness  
who has been an inspiration to all  
feminist science fiction lovers  
We will miss her

As a memorial to Karen and her love of feminist science fiction and fantasy, her colleagues and friends thought that the most appropriate way to remember her would be to set up a fund to support the authors she admired. Therefore, donations are being collected by SF<sup>3</sup> and WisCon, and are being turned over to the James Tiptree, Jr. Award. This fund will be used as part of the Tiptree Award that will be presented the next time the Award Ceremony is held in Madison.



# WisCon 21

Madison Wisconsin • May 23-26, 1997  
Welcome!

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A note about publications. All programming information, descriptions of panels, the daily schedule, and other important at-the-con info like rules and maps are contained in one handy publication. Meg Hamel and Jeanne Gomoll have once again produced the Unsurpassed Perfectly Organized Mother-of-All-Pocket-Programs Pocket Program, for WisCon 21. Articles about the guest of honor, the special guest, bibliographies, WisCon 20 retrospective, and the James Tiptree, Jr. Award section are in this book, the Souvenir Book. Tracy Benton will be editing the daily con newsletter, "Vintage Times", available around the Concourse hotel. That will contain all the current news and program changes, as well as lots of wackiness, so be sure to pick one up every day.

WisCon 21 Souvenir Book • May 23-26, 1997 • The Concourse Hotel and Governor's Club • Madison, Wisconsin

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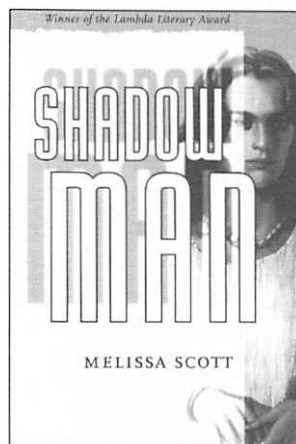
# TOR Congratulates

## MELISSA SCOTT

GUEST OF HONOR

### WisCon 21

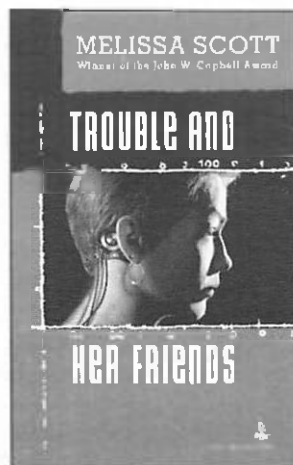
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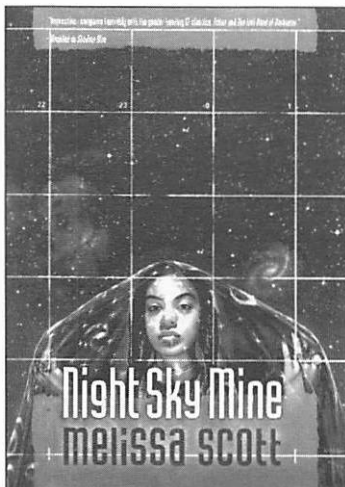
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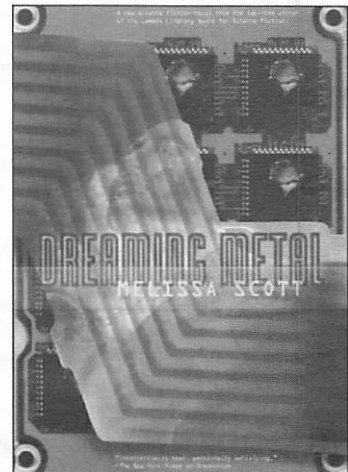
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## WisCon 21 Guest of Honor • Melissa Scott

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### Why I Write Science Fiction

Melissa Scott

I was drawn to science fiction largely because of the radical (in a non-political sense) nature of the genre: here is a form of writing that starts from the premise that change is inevitable. Good or bad, change happens, and the writer's job is to imagine plausible change and depict its possible consequences for people and their worlds. I've been lucky in being able to blend my own various interests into stories that catch reader's imaginations -- because, of course, science fiction, like any other fiction, is ultimately about the story, about the communication between writer and reader, the moment in which the reader is, fully, deeply, and willingly, part of the writer's world. Without the story, characters, plot, and setting, a writer has no right to ask for that participation; with it, a writer can take readers into worlds they would never otherwise have considered.

I have always been most interested in the intersection of technology and society -- of the hard and soft sciences -- and I think that is reflected in my science fiction. I'm fascinated by technology and its developments -- and I enjoy the challenge of playing by the rules of the genre, getting the science as "right" as possible -- but I'm more interested in the effects of that technology on characters and

imagined societies than in the development of some new machine or program. In other words, I tend to set my novels fifty years after a great breakthrough, and consider its aftereffects, rather than write the story of the discovery itself. My academic training (as an historian specializing in early modern Europe) meant that I was exposed to the work of the new group of social and cultural historians, from Michel Foucault to Natalie Zemon-Davis, and Simon Schama, and the tools I learned for analyzing past cultures have proven invaluable for creating future ones. (In fact, my dissertation ended up being oddly similar to my science fiction, in that it was concerned with the effects of a technological change -- the development of gunpowder weapons -- and the unintended consequences of the model borrowed to make use of it.)

Of course, since I'm a novelist rather than a futurist, all of this has to be expressed through plot and character. It's very hard to talk about the creative process without making it sound either stilted ("this developed from my interest in....") or mystical ("this character/place appeared...."), especially when both statements are always at least partially true. I tend to spend a great deal of time on the settings of my

novels, cultural and social as well as physical, and to let both the plot and the characters grow organically from that process. I find that as I work out the details, particularly the ways that technology influences or upsets social norms (and vice versa), the inevitable contradictions that emerge are the most fruitful sources for the characters and their stories. I enjoy the complexity and messiness of the real world, and believe that one of the real challenges of any fiction is to model that complexity without losing sight of the structure that makes a good novel.

It's also fairly obvious that I'm one of the few lesbians writing about queer characters whose science fiction is published by the so-called mainstream SF houses. I began writing about queer women first out of the usual impulse: I wanted to read about people who were "like me", and almost no one else was doing it. As I've gotten older, however, I've begun

to realize that behind that superficially naive statement is something actually quite useful. Even in science fiction, there is a limited budget for novelty, both for the writer and for the reader; if one is creating something new in one part of the novel, other parts must of necessity be drawn from that which is familiar. In most of my novels, the technological and social changes are the new things, and, as a result, I draw on the people and culture in which I live to make up the balance. It's that culture, my own culture, people like me, that provides the emotional background of my novels. Certainly my fascination with mask, identity, and roles comes from living in a culture that is deeply concerned, seriously and in play, with just these issues. Or, to boil things down to the basics, science fiction is one of the few genres that lets a writer consider very abstract ideas in human, messy, and concrete terms. And that very complexity is both an artistic delight and an intellectual necessity.

## Bibliography • Melissa Scott

Compiled by Melissa Scott

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### Novels

*The Shapes of their Hearts*

Tor, summer, 1998

*Dreaming Metal*

Tor, July 1997

*Night Sky Mine*

Tor, 1996

*Shadow Man*

Tor, 1995; Lambda Literary Award winner 1996

*Trouble and Her Friends*

Tor, 1994 (Science Fiction Book Club edition 1994); Lambda Literary Award winner 1995; Tiptree short-list title 1995

*Burning Bright*

Tor, 1993 (Science Fiction Book Club edition 1993); Lambda Literary Award finalist 1994

*Dreamships*

Tor, 1992 (Science Fiction Book Club edition 1992); Lambda Literary Award finalist, 1993

*Mighty Good Road*

Baen Books, 1990 (Science Fiction Book Club edition 1990); Lambda Literary Award finalist, 1991

*The Armor of Light* (with Lisa A. Barnett)

Baen Books, 1988  
reissued NESFA Press, fall 1997

*The Kindly Ones*

Baen Books, 1987 (Science Fiction Book Club edition, 1987)

*The Empress of Earth*

Baen Books, 1987

*Silence in Solitude*

Baen Books, 1986

*Five-Twelfths of Heaven*

Baen Books 1985

(Science Fiction Book Club edition of *Five-Twelfths of Heaven*, *Silence in Solitude*, and *The Empress of Earth* published as *The Roads of Heaven*, 1988)

*A Choice of Destinies*

Baen Books, 1986

*The Game Beyond*

Baen Books, 1984

### Nonfiction

*Conceiving the Heavens: Creating the Science Fiction Novel*

Heinemann, September 1997

### Short Fiction

"The Carmen Miranda Gambit" (with Lisa A. Barnett)

*Carmen Miranda's Ghost is Haunting Space Station Three*, ed. Don Sakers, Baen Books, 1990

"The Merchant"

*Arabesques 2*, ed. Susan Shwartz, Avon Books, 1989

"The King Who Was Summoned to Damascus"

*Arabesques*, ed. Susan Shwartz, Avon Books, 1988

### Series Fiction

*Star Trek: Voyager: The Garden*

Pocket Books, 1997

*Star Trek: Deep Space Nine: Proud Helios*

Pocket Books, 1995

## About Melissa Scott

Lisa Barnett

---

*"You can know everything about me from my writing, and nothing about me from my writing."*

When I was asked to write this blo, I asked Beth what kind of bio people would like -- more of the hard facts, or something else. Beth replied that she wanted something more anecdotal, something that "gives people, who feel they know Melissa a bit through reading her books, a sense of some of the things that click between who she is and what she cares to write about."

*"Don't even mention 'Gentlemen Prefer Blondes.'"*

You know she's an Arkansas native. Being from the South is a major influence on her and on her writing. Her mother is from Oxford, Mississippi, home of William Faulkner, and if you know your Faulkner stories, you know the lawyer character, Gavin Stevens. Melissa's grandmother was secretary to the lawyer Stevens was based on. And if you have read our joint short (hah!) story, "The Carmen Miranda Gambit," you'll see the Faulker influence at work there. (The original draft, which I wrote, was more Chandlerian. See a clash coming? More on that later.)

Melissa attended Little Rock Central High School, class of 1977, and that was a terrific influence on her. Remember that 1957 saw the desegregation crisis, and the first integration of Central High School. Needless to say, in 1977, the networks descended on Little Rock, and Central High School, astounded to see such things as integrated lunch groups, peacefully picnicking on the lawn. Central remains a fully integrated and diverse student body.

*"Harvard -- now, is that in north Arkansas?"*  
question asked of Melissa by a classmate's parent

Melissa went north in 1977 to Harvard College where she majored in history, with a concentration in early modern Europe (which, believe me, has made research for both *The Armor of Light*, and *Point of Hopes* one heck of a lot easier and far, far better than it would have been had I done it alone!). It was there that I met her. I didn't go to Harvard, but my good friend Charles did, and he introduced us. He would tell me about his new friend Melissa and how much she and I had in common, and how well we would get along. To be frank, I didn't think I'd like her. No. To be frank, I expected to hate her on sight: she went to Harvard, Charles, who was MY

best friend, was raving about her, she was on the fencing team..... Grrrr.

She introduced me to a game called Melee (I beat her, and she still liked me!), and I introduced her to Dr. Who and to NESFA and Boskone.

*"I got a scholarship because I was a religious minority."*

That's true, actually -- when Melissa was accepted into the PhD program in comparative history at Brandeis, she got a scholarship because she was an Episcopalian. While she had been writing all through junior high and high school, it was while she was at Brandeis that the possibility of writing as a career first emerged.

*"This is the last chapter of a novel I'm never going to write."*

Back in the early eighties, we were living in Somerville, near Porter Square. At that time, the Red Line of the MBTA only went as far as Harvard Square, so Melissa would sometimes meet me down there, and we'd walk home together (I hear those "Awws!"). One time, she presented me with some pages and said, "This is the last chapter of a novel I'm never going to write." I read them, and said, "No, this is a first chapter, and yes you are going to write it." She did. She sat down and completed a manuscript, the first person I had met who had done that. As it happened, I knew someone who knew an agent looking for clients. Melissa sent him the material, and Ashley Grayson sold *The Game Beyond* and a then untitled *Five-Twelfths of Heaven* to Baen Books. Many people have asked Melissa if she'll be writing more in the Five-Twelfths universe. The Eagles notwithstanding, the phrase "hell freezes over" has been heard.

*If you're having a "discussion" about a project you're collaborating on, go out to dinner. You have to be polite in front of the waiter.*

Scott's Words of Wisdom

I am an editor. I know where commas go. The nice thing about working on *The Armor of Light* was that there was room for two writers and their egos to maneuver. The worst clash we had was about a comma -- don't ask me to find it, I can't remember. (Melissa says she remembers.) But whenever things got a little -- tense -- the answer was to go out to dinner. Didn't have to be any place fancy, but there

had to be a wait staff we had to be polite in front of. That way, the discussion was less likely to degenerate into who didn't clean the cat's box last.

Eeriest thing about *The Armor of Light* -- Melissa is a scrupulous researcher, but one does, occasionally, take liberties. Or thinks one does. For instance, we decided we wanted/needed a small orchard at Penshurst which didn't appear on any of the plans or in any of the writings. Tough, we need it, we'll put it in. When we finally got to visit Penshurst, lo and behold, there was an orchard there, of the right age and in the right location.

*Ok, I'll Write the Scenes with the Nice Guy,  
You Write the Ones with the Sociopathic Playwright*

Sure, we'll cover this in the panel on collaboration, but that's going to cover the broader issues of the art and craft (and occasional craftiness) of collaborating. We do not write "together." We tried, when we were first starting out, but whoever wasn't at the keyboard got frustrated, and sometimes angry and then it was time to go out to dinner. You'll notice that in our two joint novels, there are two main point of view characters. We tend to split the work along those lines, but clearly that's not hard and fast, since the characters do tend to appear in a lot of the same scenes. Nevertheless, it is the basic ground rule for working together. The other is that we both get to revise the other's work.

Melissa is one of the best world builders/society builders I know of. I cannot create a vision of a world in a few lines the way she does. To me, the opening to *Night Sky Mine*, and the society it pictures, is one of the most concise, gorgeously evocative pieces of writing there is. I can, on the other hand, create characters, and write dialogue. Working together, we've found that we're forced to live up to the other's talents in the areas we feel we're weaker at. And anything that makes you grow, makes you stretch, is a valuable thing.

*You Don't Understand My Character!*  
deadliest words in the English language

Truly. Almost killed this relationship. There were two points of disagreement when we were writing "The Carmen Miranda Gambit". Little things, really: style, and character. Actually, while the second was more traumatic, it was the first that gave us fits. I did the first draft in a terse, Chandler-influenced style. When Melissa did the second draft (not the way we usually work), she used a more elaborate, Faulknerian style -- and worse, she completely rewrote the main character! I struggled with what was wrong, what I didn't like, trying to pin it to the

style (nothing wrong with Chandler, grumble mutter, one sentence is TWELVE LINES LONG now?!?), but I ultimately realized that it was what she had done with the character. I conceded on style, she conceded on character, and the story, and our relationship, survived.

*What do we have to do, rent a billboard???*

You do know she's gay, right? No, really, I have to ask, because there still seem to be a staggering number of people out there who don't know.

At a signing at the Purple Moon Bookstore in Fredericksburg, Virginia (a great store, by the way), a young woman was thrilled to meet Melissa because she'd not known she was gay. Yet Melissa has never made a secret of her sexuality (once we both finally figured it out about ourselves -- duh! As Susanna Sturgis kindly pointed out, that was 18 years ago this month.) In her work or in her life. And issues of sexuality are clearly important in her work. There are gay and/or lesbian characters in every one of her novels (except for *The Garden*), and in her short stories. At first, her desire was to present gay and lesbian characters in a matter of fact, sexuality doesn't matter kind of way -- but she discovered that it was too easy for most readers then to ignore or miss the lesbian characters. (Quick, name the lesbian couple in *The Kindly Ones*.) Since then, yes, you have probably noticed her work has become more political, and her influences extend beyond the field of sf and fantasy to the worlds of music and performance art.

*That Bureau in Schenectady*

So, who are some of these influences and inspirations? The ability to tell a story that touches you, makes you think, makes you ponder, makes you wonder, is key to her. She's a great believer in the responsibility of the writer to deliver the goods in terms of plot, character, and place. So who are her writing influences? James Tiptree, Jr., Ursula K. Le Guin, Arthur C. Clarke, Samuel R. Delany, Terry Dowling, Fritz Leiber, Walter Mosley, Gwendoline Butler, and Rudyard Kipling. Musically? She loves the blues -- you can take the girl out of the Delta, but you can't take the Delta out of the girl! She's a great fan of Memphis Minnie, as well as John Lee Hooker, Bonnie Raitt, Aerosmith, Led Zeppelin, Widespread Panic, The Church, Big Mama Thornton, Stevie Ray Vaughan, and fellow Arkansan Sleepy LaBeef. NOT Eric Clapton.

Where else does she take inspiration from? Road trips -- long or short, be it to Camden, Maine, or



Memphis, Tennessee. Or, Madison! Being different places, meeting different people. And then, there are those people who are influences on her by virtue of being who they are, as well as what they do: Susanna Sturgis (you do not know how psyched Melissa was when she learned Susanna was the other special guest here this year), Stan Leventhal, and Michael Kearns.

*Real Musicians Have Day Jobs*

seen on a bumper sticker

And so has Melissa. She has little patience with the carefully, lovingly, almost jealously nurtured image of writers as solitary geniuses (tortured optional). In order to make her sf as real as possible, she makes sure that she gets out of the house and into the world. She's worked as a bank teller, as a teaching assistant, as an office assistant to a Tab-drinking, M&M-popping economics professor, an usher (union, no less) at the old Boston Music Hall, as a stitcher in a theatrical costume shop in Boston, as office manager for a (straight) computer dating service (be afraid -- be very afraid), and she currently works part-time as a secretary to a one man law firm. She has never, ever waited tables, and has enormous respect for people who do.

*"Will Web Master for Guitar Lessons"*

So, what else does Melissa do, when she's not writing? She cooks, sews, knits, studies guitar and creates web pages, of course. A few years ago - I think it was the year Led Zeppelin was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, and Joe Perry of Aerosmith (who had been touring for something like two years straight) wiped the floor with the testosterone driven Jimmy Page and Neil Young during the big jam session. It was gorgeous to see. And the bass players standing there like, Yeah, well, all lead guitarists are jerks anyway. Great theatre. Anyway, Melissa mentioned something about wishing she played guitar and I said, sounding horribly parental, "Well, ok, If I get you one for your birthday, do you think you'd play?" She said yes, and, well, since then she's studied with Russ Harland of Genderfits (a wall of noise punk band) and Jon Nolan of Say ZuZu (insurgent country/roots rock). She also created the Say ZuZu web site, and is currently working with actor/writer/director Michael Kearns on his web page. All of which is indicative of a trait of hers I particularly admire, her desire to keep learning, and her ability to check the ego and tackle something new.

*"If I Could Describe it in a Few Hundred Words, I Wouldn't Write Novels."*

That's why you've read only three short stories by Melissa.

*"I'll Dig, You Make the Pesto."*

What a sweet deal this is. She'll do all the heavy digging I need done in the garden as long as I keep us supplied with pesto as long as possible. This year we made it through March.

*"If I Hear 'Your Little Hand's Freezing' One More Time..."*

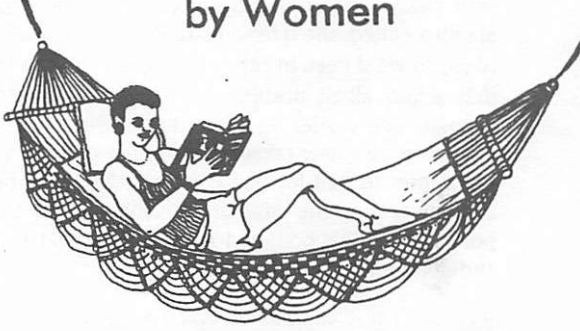
Pet peeves/dislikes? Latecomers to the theatre; know-it-alls (one reviewer of Trouble and Her Friends maintained that Seahaven is Portsmouth. In trying to show off his knowledge, he betrayed his ignorance. If he actually knew Seacoast NH at all, he would recognize Seahaven as the Salisbury Beach/Seabrook/Hampton Beach area); guitar collectors (as opposed to people who actually play them); comedies of manners (because they're usually mean-spirited, but it still means I have to watch my Mapp & Lucia tapes on the small television set upstairs); and no, she's not wild about opera.

*"Our Relationship is Old Enough To Vote!"*

(said in tones of moderate horror)

And WisCon, at 21, is old enough to drink. What a profligious conjunction!

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## WisCon 21 Special Guest • Susanna J. Sturgis

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**I have always known Susanna J. Sturgis, this much I am sure of, and since neither of us can pin down the *first time* we met, she can't prove me wrong...**

Carol Seajay

---

I do recall that she emerged out of that incredible group of women gathered at the Second National Women In Print conference in 1981. She was the new book-buyer at Lammas, the Washington DC feminist bookstore. She'd never been a book-buyer for a bookstore before -- or even worked in a bookstore -- but as one of Lammas' best customers, it was obvious that she had a talent for *buying* books and that she, therefore, was highly qualified for the job. The bookstore got a great book-buyer but lost one of it's best customers in the process and the store's finances were never the same again.

I'd been reading the *Lammas Little Review*, Lammas' very classy newsletter and book review journal that Susanna edited, she'd been reading *Feminist Bookstore News*, so we'd been in conversation for some time at that point, albeit possibly in that kind of internal dialogue one carries on with editors who bring you new ideas and new takes on old situations and who put names to half-formed concepts that have been nibbling around the edge of your mind. So at some point, during that conference, we put names to faces and continued the conversation.

I do distinctly remember Susanna sitting me down at some meeting or conference a couple of years later and explaining to me (very tactfully, I must add, but very successfully), that there were some things that other people could do better than I could, and covering science fiction titles for *FBN* was one of them. Susanna could swear that this conversation didn't happen quite like this and she can prove that we weren't in any of the same rooms for two or three years on either side of it. That detail notwithstanding it was a conversation that changed my whole approach to doing *FBN*, not to mention my



Susanna J. Sturgis with Rhodry; (who now weighs almost 80 pounds). January 1995

life. Susanna, needless to say, was the woman for the job. She started with a core list of *f/sf* titles that every feminist store should be stocking and did "updates" (and soon was doing full-fledged columns) in every issue for the next 12 years. She was *FBN*'s first-ever columnist. She always knew who was publishing what with whom, when it would be out, where and how to get it (no mean feat, given the number of small and independent and self-published works she covered), as well as why feminist bookstores (and all other intelligently run bookstores) should stock it.

Over the course of those columns she convinced booksellers, with no interest at all in *f/sf*, to stock feminist science fiction sections, and she made it easy for them to do it well. For many booksellers, Susanna was their guide in an unfamiliar land. For their *f/sf*-devoted customers she was godsend, an invisible presence who aided the books in that difficult journey from publishers warehouse to the hands of the readers. Readers all across the country owe access to a decade of the best of feminist science fiction to Susanna; but, very few of them know her name or how deeply she has influenced their reading, since *FBN* circulates primarily among booksellers and publishers with a feminist and/or lesbian bent. More of these readers have met her in

the pages of her anthologies, *Memories and Visions* and *The Women Who Walk Through Fire*. Only a handful have seen her play(s) or read her chapbooks. Susanna is one of those women in the world who keep a low-profile and get tremendous amounts of work done.

At times I think of Susanna as a translator; one who translates ideas of one culture into concepts that members of another culture can understand; concepts then adaptable to their own situations. Bringing f/sf (cons, Tiptrees, and all) to the women-in-print community is the aspect of this work that I've seen most frequently; though, I've often been entertained by Susanna's stories, which illustrate that translating in the other direction (feminism to f/sf communities) is no less challenging. She's always explaining something to someone. More frequently, she's illustrating, through her life, what global politics has to do with living in an isolated island community, what fat politics has to do with

photography. She brings big-city dyke politics to a mostly-straight (and sometimes narrow) semi-rural community. Sometimes it takes these various cultures a long time to notice how grateful they are for these gifts. Susanna does it anyway. This is the side of her that I cherish most.

A year ago, concluding that time after all, was finite, Susanna traded her *FBN* writing time for novel writing time. I miss her regular presence in my editorial life. I miss the conversations (by letter and e-mail) that arrived with and between her columns. But, I look forward to that novel and to the ones that will have to follow. It took Susanna over a dozen years to write her way through everyone else's novels. It will take at least a dozen novels to write her way through all of the ideas that she's been translating from one culture to another. We need them on printed pages where a much larger audience will be able to find them.

## Susanna J. Sturgis • Autobiography

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I was born in Boston, all Massachusetts on one side of the family, Virginia/Maryland/Massachusetts on the other. My two grandmothers between them belonged to the Mayflower Descendants, the Colonial Dames, the Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Daughters of the American Revolution (twice). Both my grandfathers went to Harvard, as did my father. When it came time for me to pick a college I knew I had to get out of New England.

The rattling weight of tradition notwithstanding, my parents provided little guidance. They didn't warn me against sex, drugs, rock & roll, or staying out late, so I didn't feel compelled to do any of those things. My mother was pleasant, almost nondescript, when sober but a shrieking banshee when drunk. Like any smart kid in similar circumstances, I developed acute powers of observation and learned to hear what was being said between the words. Over the years I've picked up an odd collection of clues, portents, and other lessons that seem self-evident to me but startling if not outright baffling to others.

My fourth-grade teacher wore thick-framed black glasses, belonged to the National Rifle Association, and won \$600 on the game show *Password*. In her geography class I did a project on Saudi Arabia that spawned one of the two great passions of my youth: the Middle East. The other was horses. My paternal grandmother, Rosamond, was an avid horsewoman who was also active in the international-student community of Boston and Cambridge. Students from Egypt, Kenya, Iran, Korea, and elsewhere regularly

joined our family for dinner on Sundays and holidays.

At ten I pulled the first U.S. edition of T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* off a shelf in my grandmother's den and understood maybe half of it. The release of *Lawrence of Arabia* the following year didn't hurt; it also had a profound effect on my fantasy life, which up to that time had been heavily based on TV Westerns. (Slash fiction fans, you know what I'm talking about!)

At twelve or thirteen, I asked my mother why I, alone of my siblings, didn't have a middle name. She told me I would only drop it when I got married. Immediately I knew (a) that I wasn't getting married, and (b) that I needed a middle name.

A year or so later, I noticed that my classmates and friends -- all girls, since I went to a girls school -- underwent complete personality changes when boys were around. They giggled, they acted like jerks. I was mystified.

A year or so later still, I started eating compulsively and gained forty pounds during one school year. I didn't notice. Neither did anyone in my family.

What did I know and when did I know it? Neither Carol Gilligan nor the women's liberation movement was around to explain, so my subconscious (so I figured, almost twenty years later) found me a way out of danger.

After several years of experimenting, I gave myself a middle name: "Jordan," after the country.

Fat was my main ticket out of the worst of adolescence (meaning boy-girl relationships). Two of the worlds I hung out in were overwhelmingly female: school and horses. My third world, Middle Eastern studies, took maleness for granted, but I still didn't realize how being female shaped my options in the world. In 1969 I started Georgetown University as an Arabic major, vaguely considering a career with an international relief agency.

The anti-Vietnam War movement, then reaching its crest, quickly blew me way off course. Georgetown, run by Jesuits, also provided an intense introduction in what was beginning to be called sexism. My first feminist tracts, both published in the college newspaper, were a review of the preview issue of *Ms. Magazine* and a manifesto for the fledgling (and short-lived) Georgetown Women's Liberation. Discovering feminism was like getting good eyeglasses after years of blurry vision and bumping into walls. It clarified -- though it didn't improve -- my relationship with my mother, and it forced me to start rethinking my relationship with my father, with whom I still strongly identified.

When I transferred to the University of Pennsylvania as a junior, I was on probation, disciplinary (for helping occupy the Georgetown president's office in the wake of the Mayday demonstrations of 1971, during which I, along with about 13,400 others, had been arrested) and academic, despite a 3.5 average (a French professor wouldn't let me take the final with bare feet, so I flunked the course). Almost immediately I broke my vow to stay out of politics, but I still graduated on schedule, magna cum laude. Senior year I went to my first women's dance. I didn't realize that most of the women there were lesbians.

Shortly after Nixon resigned, I went to England to pursue a master's degree at Sussex University. For a smart, articulate, liberal arts graduate (female), the obvious career choices were law school or academia. My subconscious demonstrated once again its penchant for getting me out of long-term harm's way: academia encouraged, rather than countered, my penchant for clobbering people on the head with everything I knew. I dropped the master's program, spent three months hitchhiking around Britain and Ireland, returned to the States -- and crashed. My grandmother died suddenly soon after; I moved into her house, about a mile from where I'd grown up. No plans, no prospects, no money. My father's then-girlfriend was the only person who realized what

bad shape I was in; after I rejected her suggestion that I see a shrink, she enlisted my help in a research project about England in 1776. It began to dawn on me that there were actually some things I could do well.

I taught myself to bake bread.

Slowly I crawled out of the black hole: volunteered for the campaign to ratify a state Equal Rights Amendment (it passed that November), got a part-time job proofreading for a local newspaper, and took an eight-week secretarial course for unemployable (female) liberal-arts graduates. In early May 1977 I moved back to Washington, D.C. A week later a blizzard hit Massachusetts.

Once I found a job, as secretary at the national headquarters of the American Red Cross, and lodging, at a boarding house near Dupont Circle, I went looking for feminism. My gateway turned out to be the Washington Area Women's Center. Once through, I dwelled in a "women's community" superimposed on D.C.'s familiar streets and landmarks. "Living in the chinks of your world-machine," as Tiptree/Sheldon (whom I hadn't read yet) so ably put it.

At the Women's Center, I gravitated promptly to the newsletter staff and became adept with presstype, X-acto knife, hand waxer, and laying out straight columns without a light table. The first time I said I was a lesbian in public, I was leading a rap group, whose topic that week was "The Sexually Uncommitted." I think I became a lesbian at that moment. Shortly afterward, I "fell in love." My girlfriend and I eventually moved in together and broke up not long after. The journal I kept at the time revealed an astonishing juxtaposition of astute insight and appalling self-delusion. I thought I was in love; I knew I wasn't. I wanted to belong but dared not let anyone know how much.

I had been writing for a long time. In the late 1970s I started to consider myself, and become, a writer. My first big assignment was reviewing Mary Daly's *Gyn/Ecology for off our backs*. Maybe a year later, also for *oob*, I interviewed Sally Gearhart, whose *The Wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women* had recently been published. I loved the book and probably had a crush on Sally (to our interview she wore the most wonderful cape). It was my first opportunity to talk about women's f/sf, which I was just discovering. By the end of the interview, I had a Reading List that included Joanna Russ, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Vonda McIntyre, and Elizabeth A. Lynn.



After two years as a Red Cross clerical, I got promoted to editor. I didn't know exactly what editors did, but any good secretary gets plenty of experience untangling convoluted prose, and besides the pay was better.

Sylvia Abrams, a crack editor in the publications office, took me under her wing and taught me the trade. We never did see eye to eye on nonsexist language, but we were simpatica on most everything else. She introduced me to Theodore Bernstein and *Words into Type*. Thanks to her, I still can't bring myself to use "target" as a verb or let "convince... to" stand in anyone's manuscript.

The publications office was in Alexandria, Virginia; I lived in D.C. Most days I rode my bike to work, about ten miles each way. Hot weather made biking in rolled-up jeans unendurable. I went looking for women's plus-size cotton gym shorts. No luck. Finally, in an ordinary sports shop, I bought a pair of purple and gold men's extra-large shorts, muttering to the clerk (who almost certainly didn't care) that they were "for a friend," and took them home to try on in secret. To my joy, they fit. I bought two more pair, one white and blue, one green and white.

Around that time, Joan Biren (JEB), a well-known lesbian photographer, self-published *Eye to Eye: Portraits of Lesbians*. I, along with many other reviewers and countless readers, praised it for its eloquent, beautiful testimony to the visibility and diversity of lesbians. Privately I asked myself, "But why are they all thin?" and answered: "Because fat lesbians are a public relations liability -- people will think we're lesbians because we can't get a man."

Not long afterward, Beth Karbe, a photographer then living in the D.C. area, asked for volunteers for a show she wanted to do at the Women's Center, combining images of and words by local lesbians. How could I complain, even in my own mind, about the absence of fat lesbians if I wasn't willing to be photographed? I volunteered.

Between that moment and our photo session, and between the photo session and the opening of the show, I dreamed, daydreamed, and fantasized being hit by a truck, murdered, or struck down by an instantaneously incapacitating disease. I wrote about how writing and being a lesbian were inextricably linked for me -- nothing about being fat.

I still have the framed photograph; the glass is cracked from one of my many moves.

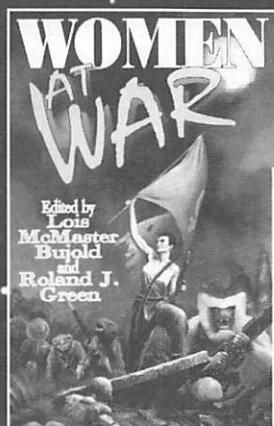
I loved editing, and my co-workers were a great bunch. The editorial and graphics chief, on the other hand, was possibly the laziest, most incompetent individual I'd ever met. Watching the bureaucracy refuse to deal with him was my most disillusioning experience since the Watergate hearings. Morale suffered; we all kvetched incessantly among ourselves, and some of us took to drinking too much at over-long lunches. Finally, responsibly, with five months' advance notice, I quit. I planned to live for a while on the money I'd saved and work on my novel, about two women named Jamie and Cella.

Maybe a month later, at my thirtieth birthday party, Mary Farmer, owner of Lammas Bookstore, asked me to become the store's book buyer. Me? I had no book selling experience, had never even worked retail. Lammas was the heart of the lesbian/feminist community; I was out on the peripheries somewhere. I took the job. That fall the second national Women in Print conference was held nearby, a gathering of the women who ran feminist bookstores, publishers, magazines, and newspapers. (At one plenary session I sat next to Adrienne Rich, then the co-editor and publisher of *Sinister Wisdom*.) "Women in Print" -- the feminist current embodied in that conference, and in the women who continue that work today -- still seems to me the feminist movement at its practical and visionary best.

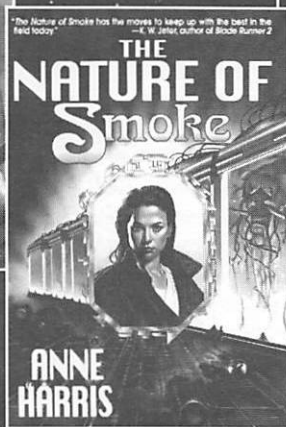
Once at Lammas, I immediately started building a fantasy and science fiction section. Shortly thereafter I discovered the truth that has bugged me ever since: that many otherwise intelligent, discerning, curious feminist readers won't read f or sf. In 1984, in a characteristic attempt to rectify this situation, I started writing a f/sf column for *Feminist Bookstore News* (the nervous system, if you will, of the Women in Print movement). I wrote it for almost twelve years -- the longest I've ever done anything.

I also wrote essays and reviews, and started to write poems. Once in a while I remembered my novel. In '84 I attended the Feminist Women's Writing Workshop, near Ithaca, New York; for the next three years I was an assistant director. Writing moved ever closer to the center of my life. Jamie,

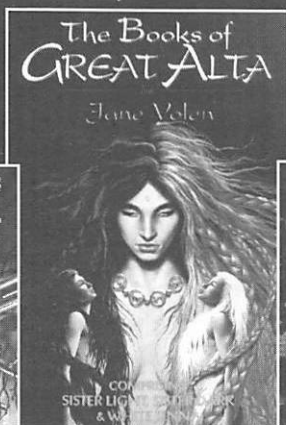
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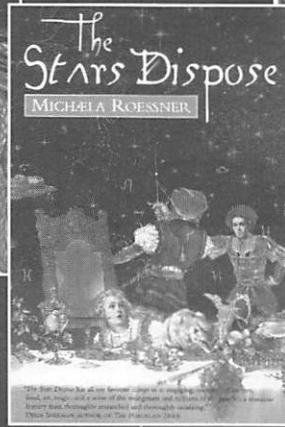
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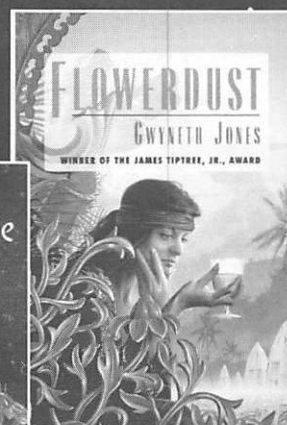
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 —*Analog*  
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 —Marion Zimmer Bradley  
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**THE STARS DISPOSE**  
 Michaela Roessner  
 A novel of culinary magic set in Catherine de Medici's Florence.  
 "Thoughtfully conceived, convincingly and elegantly developed, with solid female leads and a splendid conclusion. Deeply satisfying."  
 —Kirkus Reviews (starred) on *Vanishing Point*  
 0-312-85754-3 • \$23.95



**FLOWERDUST**  
 Gwyneth Jones  
 "The far-future world she imagines, extrapolated from a contemporary culture unfamiliar to most readers, is full of provocative surprises."  
 —*The New York Times Book Review*  
 "Exciting action adventure involving drug-running and political turmoil in an exotic, far-future Malaysia, it is also shot through with miracles, giving it a vivid, scary, metaphysical power."  
 —Kim Stanley Robinson  
 0-312-86229-X • \$14.95



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one of my novel's two protagonists, announced that she was moving to Martha's Vineyard to manage a small horse farm. This passed me off: Who did she think she was, moving to Martha's Vineyard?

While I was spending my annual two late-summer weeks on the Vineyard in 1984, a friend sent me a multi-colored amulet bag. Walking along the south shore, I picked up a lozenge-shaped bit of wampum, slipped it into the bag, and wore it day and night. Before the year was out, I knew I would move to Martha's Vineyard. I hadn't spent the savings I'd left the Red Cross with. I would take time off and work on my novel.

Fourth of July weekend, 1985, I headed north in a rental truck. When I crossed from Connecticut into Massachusetts, I burst into tears and had to pull over to the shoulder of the interstate.

In my D.C. days I once read an article about Cape Cod, about how many residents had to move twice a year because they couldn't find affordable year-round housing. I was horrified. My first three years on the Vineyard, I moved twice a year and learned to dread the coming of summer. I counted myself lucky because I had a house-owning friend to move in with when my winter lease was up.

I bought my first computer (that 10MB hard drive seemed so huge!), got drafted into the local theater scene, reorganized my life, and, for almost two years, wrote mostly poetry and reviews. Few of the lesbians were feminists, and most of the feminists were straight, and I promptly fell into unrequited love with the only exception.

In 1988, Crossing Press asked me to edit a women's f/sf series. *Memories and Visions*, my first anthology, appeared the following year and *The Women Who Walk Through Fire* in 1990. Promoting the first book and soliciting stories for the second introduced me to the f/sf scene, from *Locus* to the Small Press Writers and Artists Organization. I attended my first WisCon (#14) in 1990. Where had these people been all my life? I was hooked.

The east coast half of J. F. Rivkin, author of the Silverglass series, invited me to a group book signing at Glad Day, Boston's gay bookstore. Turned out

J. F. had been reading my *FBN* column for several years. At that 1990 signing, I met, in addition to J. F. herself (now known also as half of Ellen Foxxe), Melissa Scott, Lisa Barnett, Della Sherman, Ellen Kushner, and (I think) Sarah Smith, though that might have been later. Thanks to them, I discovered cons and lots of people to discuss f/sf with. This was good, because in Martha's Vineyard's two bookstores, the f/sf sections are stocked by mundane chimps, and to most Islanders I know, science fiction means *Star Trek*.

To many off-Islanders, Martha's Vineyard means Dyke Bridge and celebrities. I've been to Chappaquiddick maybe four times in twelve years; most celebrities I don't recognize on sight because I don't have a TV. (Salman Rushdie, pre-FATWA, did stay at the Lambert's Cove Inn when I was a chambermaid there.) The Island economy is seasonal, the job options limited. If you don't work for the schools, the hospital, or one of the six towns, there's construction, landscaping, and the "hospitality industry." For writer-editor types, there are two weekly newspapers. Through the usual circuitous route, I wound up at the *Martha's Vineyard Times*, first as temporary typesetter, then as part-time proofreader, and finally as features editor.

For the third time in my life I fell into a perfect job: challenging, satisfying, and significant. For the third time, when it suited me, I left. To work on my novel, the antiwar Martha's Vineyard feminist recovery horse novel. Is there a pattern here? Or a rut?

I won't know till I finish the damn thing. Meanwhile I live on the Tisbury-West Tisbury line with my dog, Rhodry Malamutt; my computer, Morgana II; and an aging Toyota pickup named Tesah. I'm back at the *Martha's Vineyard Times* part-time as copyeditor/proofreader and make the rest of my living copyediting and proofreading for publishers whose names you'd probably recognize. Over the years, my breads have won lots of ribbons at the annual agricultural fair. I sing alto in the Island Community Chorus, do theater when I can, and secretly hope to be in a musical some day. Rhodry and I spend a lot of time rambling the woods and beaches. It's an off-track life, but most of the time I like it.

# Susanna J. Sturgis • Selected Publications

Compiled by Susanna J. Sturgis

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## Anthologies Edited

*Tales Of Magic Realism By Women (Dreams in a Minor Key)*

Crossing Press, spring 1991

*The Women Who Walk Through Fire: Women's Fantasy and Science Fiction, vol. 2*

Crossing Press, fall 1990

*Memories and Visions: Women's Fantasy and Science Fiction*

Crossing Press, fall 1989

## One-Act Plays

"A Midsummer Night's Alternative", 1996

"Prayers for the Dead", 1995

"Persephone's Mother"

winner Nantucket Short-Play Competition, 1993

produced as part of the 1994 Spring Short-Play

Festival at the Vineyard Playhouse

## Stories, Etc.

"Ever After", 1996, "Vengeance of Epona" 1996, and

"The Blizzard's Daughter" 1995, unpublished

"Sustenance"

*Night Bites*, ed. Victoria Brownworth, Seal Press, 1996

"Deer Out of Season"

*Lavender Mansions: Forty Contemporary Lesbian and Gay Short Stories*, ed. Irene Zahava, Westview Press, 1994

"Mimi's Revenge"

*Trivia 16/17*, fall 1990

"Lilith and Her Children"

*Calyx 12:2*, June 1989

## Poetry

*Leaving the Island* (poetry chapbook)

self-published, 1989

"Sunday Dinner"

*Writing our Way Out of the Dark: an anthology by Child Abuse Survivors*, Queen of Swords Press, 1995

"The Assistant Stage Manager Addresses Her Broom after a Performance of 'Macbeth'"

*Pandora #29*, 1993

"The Bullfight Sonnets"

*Sinister Wisdom 35*, summer/fall, 1988

"The Home Planet Vanishes"

*Star\*Line*, January/February 1987

"She Invokes the Four Directions"

*Earth's Daughters 22/23*, fall 1985

## Essays and Other Nonfiction

"Science Fiction: Exploring the Social Impact of Technology" (an essay discussing James Tiptree Jr.'s "The Girl Who Was Plugged In", Nancy Kress's *Beggars in Spain*, Sybil Claiborne's *In the Garden of Dead Cars*, Nicola Griffith's *Slow River*, and Melissa Scott's *Dreamships*)

*Sojourner*, January 1997

"Blood Lines & Bertie Reid: An Interview with Tanya Huff,"

*Lambda Book Report 3:7*, November/December 1992

"The James Tiptree Award: Gender Bending the Genre"

*Science Fiction Book selling*, summer 1992

*American Bookseller*, September 1992

"Behind the Voice"

an interview with Ellen Kushner, *The Martha's Vineyard Times*, March 5, 1992

"Imagining New Gay Worlds: Gaylaxicon '91"

*Lambda Book Report 3:1*, November/December 1991

"The Drive to Protect: Some Thoughts on Censorship"

*Lesbian Contradiction*, spring 1991

"What's a P.C. Feminist Like You Doing in a Fantasy Like This?"

*Lesbian Contradiction*, spring 1986

"Breaking Silence, Breaking Faith: The Promotion of Lesbian Nuns"

*Lesbian Ethics 1:3*, fall 1985

"Is this the new thing we're going to have to be politically correct about?"

*Sinister Wisdom 28*, summer 1985

"One Reviewer's Reflections on Her Work"

*Lesbian Contradiction 11*, summer 1985

"When the Truth Doesn't Fit: On Fat, Choice, and Silence"

*Lesbian Contradiction 5*, winter 1983-84

"Class/Act: Beginning a Translation From Privilege"

*Women: A Journal of Liberation 8:3*, 1983

(reprinted in *Out the Other Side*, ed. Christian McEwen, Virago Press, 1988, U.S. edition, Crossing Press, 1989)

"Discovering the Wanderground: An Interview with Sally Gearhart"

*off our backs*, January 1980



## Reviews

*The New Worlds of Women*, ed. Celia Tan

*Lambda Book Report* 5:3, September 1996

*Four Ways to Forgiveness*, Ursula K. Le Guin

*Sojourner*, February 1996

*Slow River*, Nicola Griffith,

*Lambda Book Report* 4:12, September/October 1995

"Crackers and Netwalkers" a review of *Trouble and Her Friends*, Melissa Scott, "Same WaveLengths"

(sidebar interview), *Lambda Book Report* 4:5, July/August 1994

*LARQUE ON THE WING*, Nancy Springer

*Lambda Book Report* 4:4, May/June 1994

*VIRTUAL GIRL*, Amy Thomson, and *The Rising of the Moon*, Flynn Connolly

*Sojourner*, April 1994

"What the Maid Saw" a review of *The Porcelain Dove*, Delia Sherman

*Lambda Book Report* 4:3, March/April 1994

*Ring of Swords*, Eleanor Arnason

*Lambda Book Report* 3:12, September/October 1993

*Glass Houses*, Laura J. Mixon

*Lambda Book Report* 3:6, September/October 1992

"Reflecting Human Nature" a review of *Dreamships*, Melissa Scott

*Lambda Book Report* 3:5, July/August 1992

"Critiquing Feminist Science Fiction" a review of *Feminism and Science Fiction*, Sarah LeFanu

*Sojourner*, October 1990

"Fantasy Tale Rings True, Deep" a review of *Thomas the Rhymer*, Ellen Kushner

*The Martha's Vineyard Times*, May 17, 1990

*Dancing at the Edge of the World*, Ursula K. Le Guin

*Sojourner*, October 1989

"When Women Seize Power" a review of *The Gate to Women's Country*, Sheri S. Tepper, and *The Shore of Women*, Pamela Sargent

*Sojourner*, August 1989

"Visionary Women Writers" a review of *Women of Vision: Essays by Women Writing Science Fiction*, Denise Du Pont

*Sojourner*, June 1989

*The Female Man*, Joanna Russ

*Sojourner*, March 1987

*Swastika Night*, Katharine Burdekin

*Belles Lettres*, July/August 1986

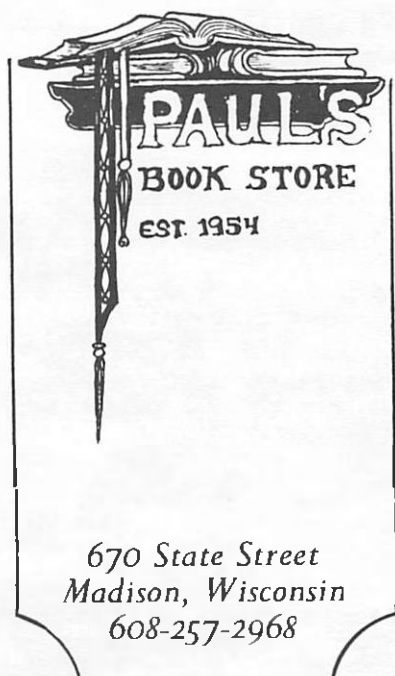
A Review of five feminist-press fantasy/science fiction works

*Women's Review of Books*, June 1986

*Always Coming Home*, Ursula K. Le Guin

*Women's Review of Books*, February 1986

See also: F/SF review column, *Feminist Bookstore News*, 1984-1996; back issues of *Wavelengths*; and *The Lammas Little Review*, 1981-1985



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# WisCon 20

## A Look Back

### Favorite Panels:

#### GoH Speeches

"felt truly in awe of the power collected there"

"the highlight"

"chance to see them was in itself a privilege;  
their thoughts were a bonus!"

#### Women SF Writers You Probably Haven't Heard Of

"hope you'll go back to printing annotated lists"

#### The Rhetoric of F/SF

"watching Elgin completely breaking up Le Guin"

"good writers talking -- being real --laughter"

#### Spirituality and Writing

"personal experiences"

#### Reading by Theodore Roszak

"thoughtful and thought provoking"

"a phenomenally erudite speaker"

#### Designing Feminist Games

"heard from girls, too"

#### Writers Watch Readers

"hearing authors talk about how they write"

"fun mix of actual reading and criticism"

#### Tiptree Auction

"Ellen"

#### Is Gender Real or Fetish

"Hilarious"

#### Always Coming Home

"lovely performance"

"please, keep including performances"

"it was cool seeing Le Guin's work dramatized by  
con participants"

#### Doing the Dishes in Virtual Reality

"Inspiring"

#### Author Signings

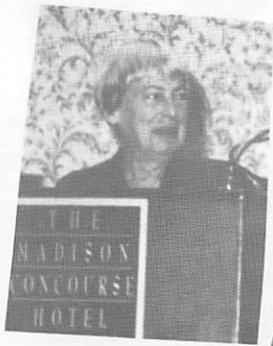
"What an opportunity"

#### Influence of Landscape on Culture/Plot/Character

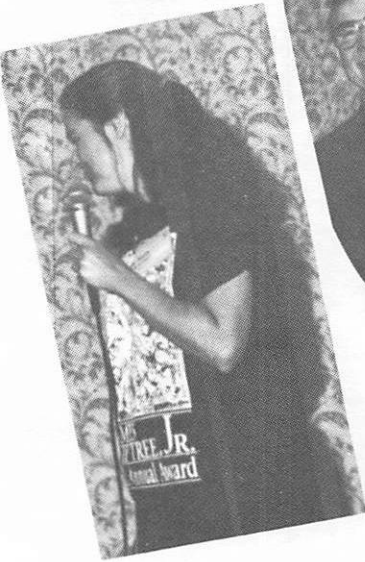
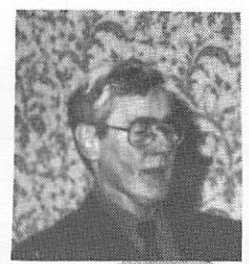
"This panel had four pros and their professionalism  
showed"

comments compiled from WisCon 20 questionnaire









CONCOURSE  
HOTEL  
and Governor's Club





## The Alien Among Us • a note from the editor

Beth Plutchak

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After attending my first WisCon last year, discovering for the first time the huge interactive society of fans and writers, I began to wonder where exactly I fit in this community which has touched my life for much of the past thirty-five years. Why exactly do I choose to read SF? Why in my secret heart of hearts would I like to write it someday? What exactly draws me in? What is SF?

Well, at my age, I'm not as foolish as I used to be, so I didn't try to define SF (even for myself). I did, however, try to categorize the fiction I've chosen to read. Were they considered part of the SF lexicon? If not, why not? Where to begin?

One of the panels I attended at WisCon 20 was a panel hosted by David Hartwell on "the great myths/tropes of speculative fiction". This suggested a recognizable commonality, a community represented through language. Issues were raised surrounding the role of the hero in SF, dystopic vs triumphant fiction, does or can SF rely on other literary genres for theme? The panel discussion articulated my questions, but left them all unanswered. I wondered if Hartwell had given the topic any other thought.

What was I reading when I was twelve? My brother read SF (over my mother's objections). The classics, the stories reprinted in Hartwell's *Age of Wonder* and countless others anthologizing the early years of SF, were the books on my little brother's shelves, and so by definition uninteresting (could there be anything more alien to a twelve year old girl than a ten year old brother?).

I remember clearly the first SF book that I ever read. It was Madeline L'Engle's *A Wrinkle in Time*. I remember exactly why I loved that book, it wasn't the science, it wasn't the triumph (to tell you the truth I don't remember exactly how it ended), it was the fact that that little girl did whatever she darned well pleased! The world was open to her. I had such a hard time reconciling myself between the things I wanted and the things I felt I should want.

The *Age of Wonder* really began for me during the late 70s, when I began reading Ursula Le Guin, Vonda McIntyre, Joanna Russ, Zena Henderson, and Pamela Sargent. After being involved in anti-Vietnam War activity, I realized that I was probably not going to save the world and I turned my attentions to saving just one tortured alcoholic. This was not a wise plan.

It was the writers mentioned above who sustained me through a very dark period, who helped me believe that it was the little, daily battles that were worth fighting and worth winning. My brother (the one I mentioned before) sent me Pamela Sargent's *Women of Wonder* and on the flyleaf he wrote "because you are one". I believed this enough to get myself and my children out of an increasingly desperate situation.

My heroes have never been the little boys in the spaceships who conquered the alien through their bravado and mastery of the wonders of science. My heroes are the people who continue to struggle through the day-to-day.

I gathered up my children and we left their alcoholic father. The intensity of my need to keep my children safe, the events of the life we had been through together, were things not talked about in polite circles. Not at school (I had returned to college) and not, later, at work. But, there was Nancy Kress and her wonderful story "Margin of Error". The image of the mother holding a conversation with her sister, while her mind was occupied with watching the color of her daughter's lips in the wading pool (blue is bad) was precious to me. And the ending (which I will not give away) took me by surprise and made me laugh.

When my son's learning disability was diagnosed, and later my nephew's autism, there was Octavia Butler with "Speech Sounds". This was so much more than "speculation" on what could happen if something caused people to lose the ability to communicate. I KNEW she understood what it was like to love people who cannot understand language in the same way most people can.

Melissa Scott's characters are approachable irregardless of the reader's sexual orientation, as well as irregardless of the reader's wish to deal with the subject. They are just there and their stories are compelling. Scott neither minimizes the discrimination her gay characters face nor makes their political struggles specific only to the gay community.

Susanna Sturgis has made a life's work of bringing the gay community to SF and vice versa. It was Susanna Sturgis who gave me Joanna Russ.

I remember sitting in a college level literature class in the mid-eighties, when the Professor posed the

question "Can women write as well as men?" The boys in the class immediately tried to answer this question seriously!?! The girls, properly trained by the school systems of the Midwest, though clearly agitated did not respond. The only answer I could think of was "Well, of course, women can write as well as men, it's just that men tend to write about such boring stuff." I hadn't read fiction by men for years.


This, by the way, was the professor who introduced me to Virginia Woolf; who taught me to read, in Woolf's fiction, her struggle between the need for respectability and the need to validate her experience through her voice. (If I'd never read Woolf would Tiptree's "The Women Men Don't See" have held the same meaning for me?) Why isn't *Orlando* commonly classified as one of the great classics of SF?

I went back to Hartwell's essays and Le Guin's essays about the field. Hartwell spent a great deal of effort on classifying the trends in SF. I was still confused. As Hartwell chronicled the dissension that shook the field in the seventies, as he talked about how big the field has become and how that was probably a good


thing (even if one still missed the good old days, when you could read it all every year), I became less concerned with trying to fit the works that moved me into some sort of pattern. Because, the pattern, of course, is personal. I started to read men again.

Some of them get it, some of them don't. Who would have thought a man would one day write a book, with a theme of gender discrimination (David Brin's "Barrier Reef") and have the theme be taken matter-of-factly. Not as some over-emotional feminist tripe, but as an acceptable convention for getting a story across.

And that's the point, after all, getting the story across. And as we read the stories we discover that the alien among us is us. SF provides a place where one's gender identity, for instance, or exposure to family violence, becomes something neither shocking, nor central to how we view each other, but a part of a very human whole. In SF's exploration of the extremes I've found a safe home, where my experiences need not be minimized for the comfort of others. Where ways of being outside of my experience become something to delight in and treasure, because I've been enriched.



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## James Tiptree, Jr. • Sixth Annual Award

compiled by Jeanne Gomoll with contributions from the Tiptree jury

### The Award

The James Tiptree, Jr. Award is given to the work of science fiction or fantasy published in one year which best explores or expands gender roles.

### The Founding Mothers

Karen Joy Fowler and Pat Murphy

### The Process

Each year Founding Mothers, Pat Murphy and Karen Joy Fowler, appoint a panel of five judges to read and discuss among themselves the merits of gender-bending fiction published in the previous year. Anyone and everyone is invited to forward recommendations for novels and short fiction to Karen Joy Fowler (457 Russell Blvd., Davis, CA 95616), who will request copies for the judges from publishers. Publishers are encouraged to alert Karen about soon-to-be-published gender-bending fiction.

At the end of the year of reading and deliberation, the judges choose a winner who is invited to the Tiptree Award ceremony to accept their award and prize money.

-- Pat Murphy



Mary Doria Russell photograph © Dina Rossi/Villard, 1996

## Winners

Mary Doria Russell

*The Sparrow*

Random House, 1996

Loved this novel—great old-fashioned science fiction in some indefinable way, but with a modern sensibility. A very smart and passionate book. I was initially concerned that the sexual content was slight, but my enthusiasm finally swept these doubts away. Although never quite defined as such, the transformation of the protagonist takes place largely through sexual experience, from his initial celibacy, to the middle of the book with his longings, to his final climactic and terrifying journey offworld. [KJF]

A fine first contact novel and a subtle exploration of the choices people make in their lives, especially those concerning self-definition, which always includes sexuality and gender roles. [RK]

This novel haunted me for months; I kept thinking about it and mulling it over, and the more I did, the

more I found to think about. The story centers on the spiritual crisis of Emilio Sandoz, a Jesuit priest who has had his view of God (and, not incidentally, his masculinity and his sexuality) challenged by his experiences on the planet Rakhat. The story of this crisis is counterbalanced by the stories of other priests, each with his own accommodation to sexuality and celibacy. On a different level, in her portrayal of the inhabitants of Rakhat, Russell makes fascinating connections among the binary oppositions of male/female, person/animal, ruling class/laboring class, pushing these connections in new directions. To say more about this would be to give away spoilers—and this book is so suspenseful that it wouldn't be fair to do that. Suffice it to say that *The Sparrow* is rich and complex and provides a lot of food for thought about power, gender, sexuality, and the connection between body and spirit. [JML]

*The Sparrow* is one of most haunting evocations of first contact I have read in recent years—on this occasion the contact is between a Jesuit-led team of scientists and some of the inhabitants of the planet Rakhat. How does the novel explore and expand gender? Central to *The Sparrow* is the examination of

the importance of sexuality to gender identity, specifically masculinity. Can you be celibate and still be a man? At the same time the understandings of human masculinity and femininity that dominate the thinking of the Jesuit landing party make little sense in the face of the entirely different gender models of the two alien races. I read this not unduly small book in one sitting. I could not put the book down even though this Australian judge was somewhat put out by an entirely unconvincing (though mercifully brief) attempt at characterizing a 'typical' Aussie bloke (pp. 122-123). [JL]

Profoundly moving and upsetting and very much about cultural constructions and difficult questions, including those of gender. Russell's subjects are faith, religion, the structure and purpose of the Catholic Church (or maybe just the Society of Jesus), and saintliness. There's a gay Father Superior and a woman who (although beautiful and petite) reads more male than many of the male characters. There is an alien race whose genders are ambiguous to humans, mostly because the females are larger than the males and the males raise the children. The center of the book is the hero's struggle to reconcile the fact that the aliens he had moved heaven and earth to study have abused him terribly, with God's Plan, cellbacy, and his own macho upbringing. [DS]

### Ursula K. Le Guin "Mountain Ways"

*Asimov's Science Fiction*,  
August 1996

This is a fuller and, for Tiptree purposes alone, more satisfying exploration of the marital customs on the planet O, set up in earlier Le Guin work. In some ways, the story suggests that every society's sexual norms and taboos are arbitrary and this is an interesting idea to bring back to our own world. In other ways, the marriages on O seem, as opposed to arbitrary, more rational and reasonable than our own simple twosomes. In the end, even on the world of O, it is the twosomes who finally dominate the story, and that, too, is interesting to think about. Le Guin never falls an inch short of brilliance. [K]F]

A lovely story and yet another of Le Guin's thorough and heartfelt explorations of new configurations of desire and belonging, both on a personal and a cultural level. [RK]

On rereading this story I was struck by its second paragraph, which says that mountain people "pride themselves on doing things the way they've always been done, but in fact they are a willful, stubborn lot who change the rules to suit themselves...." This story is partly about the gap between ideals and practice, and about the way that people make new traditions for themselves or change the old ones to fit their needs. The story takes place on the planet

### Judges for the 1997 Tiptree Award were:

Karen Joy Fowler, Richard Kadrey, Janet Lafler (coordinator), Justine Larbalestier, and Delia Sherman

O (a place Le Guin has visited before), which has a system of marriage based on norms of bisexuality and polyfidelity. Le Guin portrays this culture with depth and subtlety, so that the story's events and the characters' development have a naturalness and inevitability. She's also managed to create a story in which an act of cross-dressing has a whole different set of meanings than it would in our society. As usual, Le Guin's sense of place is impeccable. [JML]

A gentle, spare and beautiful story. Le Guin first introduced us to the marriage customs of O in "Another Story, or A Fisherman of the Inland Sea." In that story the system of marriage was another detail of an alien world in a story centered around a time paradox. In "Mountain Ways" the implications and potential tragedies of these four-person marriages are explicated in exquisite detail. Like all fine science fiction and fantasy, particularly that of Le Guin, there is a double process at work; the alien is rendered knowable and familiar, and the taboos and normalities of our own worlds start to seem as "unnatural" as those within the story. Raising questions like why is marriage between two, and not three, four or five? Why is heterosexual union privileged over homosexual? Why formalize sexual relations at all? The story grew with each new reading so that many months after my initial reading I still find myself thinking about it and wondering about the deliberately ambiguous ending. One of my biggest pleasures in reading Le Guin's work is its cumulative power and the way she takes up and reshapes elements of her vast invented universe so that you are forced to look at them in an entirely different way. [JL]

The emotional effect of "Mountain Ways" is strengthened by its being about characters and relationships as well as about sexuality and morality. I like the way complexity of desire overwhelms the relative simplicity of the characters and the fact that no matter how flexible a social system seems, human beings can find new ways of making themselves feel guilty and sinful. As always with Le Guin, the writing is crystalline and the background much more lively and present than the number of words used to convey it would seem to warrant. [DS]



## Short List

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### Fred Chappell "The Silent Woman"

from his novel,  
*Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You*,  
St. Martin's, 1996

A wonderful exploration of "womanliness" which transforms the supposed passive virtue of silence into an almost magic strength. [JL]

At the end of the millennium, noise is king. Flying in the face of that, this is a story that dares to explore the power and beauty of silence. And it does so beautifully, creating an exquisite object, like a literary Faubourg egg. [RK]

### Suzu McKee Charnas "Beauty and the Opera, or The Phantom Beast"

*Asimov's Science Fiction*,  
March 1996

In this gorgeous re-imagining of "The Phantom of the Opera," Christine strikes a bargain with the Phantom and lives with him for five years. Much of the story has to do with the precarious balance of power between the two. Christine has a moral hold over the Phantom, but she doesn't take it upon herself to absolve him, to reform him in any absolute sense, or to sacrifice herself to him. He remains a monster, and not always a sympathetic one. Their passion is based on this tension, and of course it's one that can't endure indefinitely, as Christine knows. The moral and psychological complexity of this story can't be easily summarized. Think of it as an antidote to the fable of the evil man redeemed by the love of a good woman, but don't stop there; it's many other things as well. [JML]

A fascinating exploration of domesticity and power and literary roles. Even though she's the heroine of a Romance, Christine is no fainting, yielding, pliable victim. She is a hard-headed business woman who knows how to negotiate with managers and directors and monsters, too. Erik, on the other hand, is governed completely by his passions. In most Romances, the heroine must teach the hero to feel and to express his feelings. In "Beauty," it's the other way around. [DS]

### L. Timmel Duchamp "Welcome, Kid, to the Real World"

*Tales of the Unanticipated*,  
Spring/Summer/Fall 1996

Thematically perfect for the Tiptree. I admired its brains and awareness of its subject matter immensely. It's a wonderfully imagined externalization of all the

little decisions we make every day that add up to who we will be as adults. Only in Duchamp's world, the decisions are entirely self-conscious and deliberate and revolve around the gender role you will carry, like a big digitally-crafted, chrome albatross around your neck for the rest of your life. [RK]

In this story, an apparent gender freedom (the ability to choose one's gender at a certain age) is embedded within a rigid gender system. A pointed commentary on the problem of "choice" when none of the options is worth choosing. [JML]

### Alasdair Gray *A History Maker*

Canongate Press 1994;  
revised edition Harcourt Brace 1996

The flip side of Tepper's *Gate to Women's Country*. War is a rugby match to the death, and the world is run by wise old women. A very funny, pointed, extraordinary look at maleness. A marvelous book. [KJF]

In this "post-historical utopia," which one of the characters describes as a "mild matriarchy," women live in communal households and raise children, while most men live separately and pursue "manly" activities such as warfare. Sound familiar? That's just the beginning. This is a funny, loony, and irreverent book, but it also has flashes of horror, despair, and lyricism, not to mention the best portrayal of warfare-as-sport that I've ever read. [JML]

### Jonathan Lethem "Five Fucks"

in his collection  
*The Wall of the Sky, The Wall of the Eye*;  
Harcourt Brace 1996

A story of heterosexual love as a sick compulsion. In this sharp, funny, clever story the disease undoes the very fabric of time and space. Straight men and women are aliens locked into combat until the end of time. Literally. [JL]

The *reductio ad absurdum* of "can't live with 'em, can't live without 'em." [DS]

### Pat Murphy *Nadya*

Tor, 1996

This is a book primarily about questions. As the protagonist comes of age at the opening of the western US, she begins to question everything in her world, including her identity and the settled life that she is expected to grow into. When she makes one crucial break with her past (avenging the killing of

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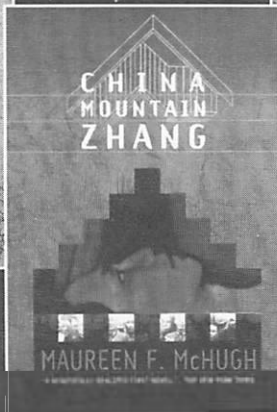
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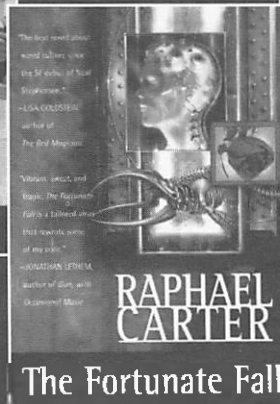
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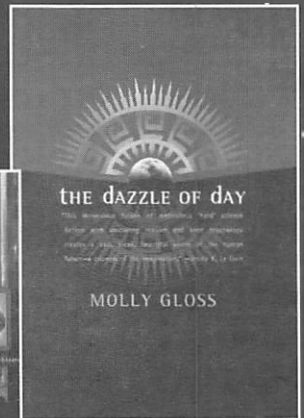
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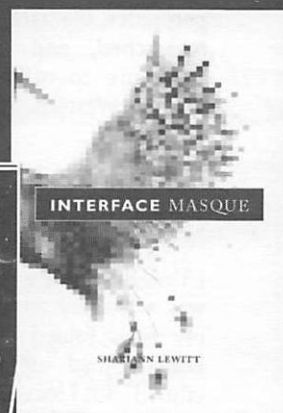
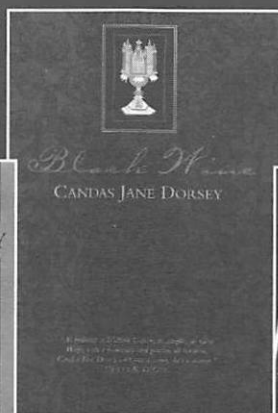
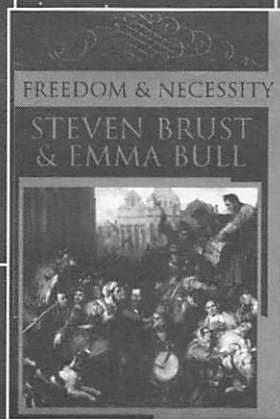
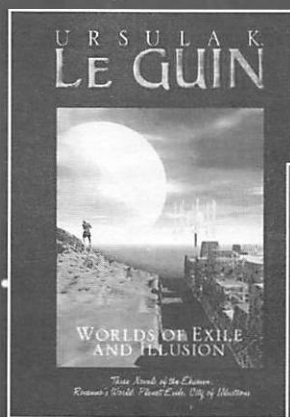
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her parents), the questions deepen, encompassing everything, including her sexuality. What makes the book work is that the questions aren't obvious and political in the soapbox sense, but grow out of the increasing natural awareness of a young woman moving into and finally rejecting the "civilized" world. [RK]

An exploration of (among other things) the borders between male and female, masculine and feminine. Nadya herself slides from man to woman as she slides from woman to wolf, redefining gender in the face of a society whose gender definitions are as unrelenting as they are arbitrary. The characters are persuasive, the background is colorful and beautifully researched, and there's enough suspense and adventure to make it a convincing Western. A feminist Western. Well, that's gender-bending, too. [DS]

### Rachel Pollack

*Godmother Night*

St. Martin's, 1996

I thought the use of fairy-tale elements, while fun, was a bit easy and undisciplined. (Picture me with my arms folded and a stern look on my face. Undisciplined use of fairy-tale elements! Capital crime.) But I loved the identification of the fairy tale godmother with death. If death seemed to be a little more the topic than sex, there was plenty of sexual stuff going on. It was a great read, with many beautiful moments. A top contender. [KJF]

Pollack is interested in playing with types of fairy tale and contemporary society. In Pollack's universe, the only real sin seems to be too strict adherence to one traditional gender. What I liked (and found Tiptoesque) about this book was the androgyny of many of the characters (especially the dead and inhuman ones). If the *Le Guin* is an exploration of Things as They Might Be, *Godmother Night* is an exploration of Things as They're Getting to Be, with "gendered" behaviors like nurturing, passing judgment, avoiding intimacy, and wearing dresses seen more as a function of individual personality than of biological programming or social expectation. [DS]

### Lisa Tuttle

*The Pillow Friend*

White Wolf, 1996

Not all horror novels have monsters and not all monsters have scales and wings. This is a novel about the horror of daily existence, of desire for an impossible "perfect" union. Where longing makes the whole world gray and seemingly constructed of chalk. [RK]

I had a visceral reaction to this novel—I loved it and simultaneously found it extremely disturbing. It captures perfectly one of the main reasons that people (particularly women) stay in bad relationships, ignore warning signs, and pretend to enjoy bad sex—because they're stuck in their hopes and dreams from the beginning of the relationship, when they thought it was going to be the answer to all their desires. Thus, *The Pillow Friend* can be read as a story about the ways that both women and men are imprisoned by fantasies of romantic fulfillment; about the frustrated desire for perfect connection with another; and about the destructiveness of that desire. [JML]

### Tess Williams

"And She Was the Word"

*Eidolon*, Winter 1996

This story derives its impact from its position among other feminist texts to do with naming and un-naming (including the Biblical one). A young woman isolated on a remote planet creates her own words. A lovely variation on a favorite theme. [KJF]

This story is rich with echoes of earlier science fiction by women. Like Suzette Haden Elgin's fascinating *Native Tongue* trilogy, language is used to remake the world. However, this time it is one woman and her child who reinscribe the world in which they find themselves. The scenario of a young woman bringing up her child alone on a planet reminds me of Marion Zimmer Bradley's 1959 story "The Wind People" though in Williams' story the woman and her child reinvent their world rather than letting it invent them. [JL]

### Sue Woolfe

*Leaning Towards Infinity*

Vintage, 1996

This was one of my personal favorites among the books we read this year. Although it alludes to some fantastical mathematics, the fantasy content is minimal. It involves a family in which mathematical genius runs, unacknowledged and primarily untrained, through the female line. It deals with issues of women in (and out of) academia, of the appropriation of women's work, and offers a quick education in the female mathematical tradition, sparse, but there. But the heart is a three-generational mother and daughter story. Beautifully written, absolutely original. Sensational! [KJF]

I really loved this book. It's about a famous mathematician, Frances Montrose, and is her history from the 1950s when she was a child until the discovery of her genius in the late 1990s. The novel



centers around two first person narratives. The first is that of Frances' daughter, Hypatia Montrose, who is trying to come to terms with her extremely difficult relationship with her mother. The second is Frances' I. However, the stories of this I are told as imagined by Hypatia. It is one of the most dazzlingly beautiful negotiations of the lives and relations of mothers and daughters that I have ever read. [JL]

## Long List

---

### Kathy Acker

*Pussy, King of the Pirates*

Grove Press, 1996

This retelling of Treasure Island as "a girl's story," (the author's words) is like Switchblade Sisters on the High Seas. A combination of high-theory on women's bodies, possession and language and drive-in movie biker violence. There's no one else who writes like Acker. [RK]

### Gill Alderman

*The Memory Palace*

HarperCollins, 1996

A wonderfully decadent and intricate look at traditional gender archetypes, ringing changes on celibacy, impotency, fecundity, purity, decadence, magic, story-telling, words, nature and unnature. Really well (if a touch over-) done. [DS]

### Kim Antieau

*Jigsaw Woman*

Roc, 1996

The central character is engaging, the characters she's made up of (you'll understand that if you read it) are interesting, the book has a sense of humor about its subject (which takes some doing), and a sense of compassion about the things that living in an unrelentingly patriarchal culture do to men. [DS]

### Donald Antrim

"Y Chromosome"

*The New Yorker*,  
November 18, 1996

Doug and his ninety-nine brothers have gathered in the family library for some male-bonding before dinner. A mighty funny look at the dance of dominance, told by a shoe-fetishist who ends up on the floor. [KJF]

### Margaret Atwood

*Alias Grace*

Doubleday, 1996

Whether or not this book is fantasy depends on your interpretation of a crucial scene towards the end of

the book, though it certainly has minor fantastic elements (fortune-telling and premonitory dreams). So be warned: this book is only tenuously eligible for Tiptree consideration, but, in my opinion, too fine to be overlooked on a technicality. *Alias Grace* is a novel about the famous 19<sup>th</sup> century "murderess," Grace Marks, a servant who was convicted, along with her fellow servant James McDermott, of the murder of their employer and his housekeeper (and mistress). The way in which the historical Grace was involved in the murders is not clear, and Atwood is careful not to give a definitive answer. Instead, through the imagined Grace's experience, she explores work, sexual and class exploitation, fame, and the public fascination with murder, especially murder of or by a good-looking woman. Also innocence, responsibility, and memory. [JML]

### Iain M. Banks

*Excession*

Little, Brown, 1996

Gender-exploring in a vein similar to that of Banks' other Culture novels—the people of the Culture routinely change sex and many of the characters are genderless machine intelligences. In addition, one of the main characters in *Excession* is a woman who has arrested her pregnancy for forty years. Entertaining, but not Banks' best work. [JML]

### Francesca Lia Block

"Blue"

in her collection *Girl Goddess* #9;  
HarperCollins, 1996

Block is a truly wonderful writer. Her power is rooted in a deceptively simple prose style which is compounded of young adult novels and children's fairy tales. Block takes these simple elements and weaves magical little stories with them. "Blue" is the story of the breakdown (and resurrection) of a family after the mother's suicide. The title character is a tiny transsexual dwarf who appears at a moment of crisis to a young girl in the story (and the only fantasy element). Is Blue an externalization of her own superego or simply a sign that she shares her mother's madness? Will she survive to know? Unfortunately, there isn't quite enough gender exploration in the story for it to be a Tiptree winner, but it's as emotionally strong and true and well-crafted as anything the judges read this year. [RK]

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Francesca Lia Block  
"Girl Goddess #9"

in her collection *Girl Goddess #9*;  
HarperCollins, 1996

A creepy encounter between two teenage girls and Graves' White Goddess, with an ambiguous end which may be interpreted as a critique of the patriarchal vision of the female muse. Or not. [JML]

Richard Calder

*Dead Things*

St. Martin's, 1996

*Dead Things* is the resolution to a complex trilogy chronicling the coming of a new sort of being into the world: predatory and hyper-sexualized females, the Lillim. Imagine a kind of perfect, frictionless Barbie doll with fangs. *Dead Things* is all about gender, but its challenge is inverted. It doesn't show new possibilities, but parodies accepted gender roles by pushing them to Wagnerian heights, making them all-defining, all-consuming and grotesque. It's a brutal kind of parody—fascinating, but an acquired taste. And that's part of the problem. *Dead Things*, the last book of the trilogy, does not stand alone. In fact, as the most stylized of the three books, it's almost incomprehensible without the background and language provided by the other two books. Taken together, the trilogy—*Dead Girls*, *Dead Boys*, *Dead Things*—is a literary head kick, pushing gender and bio-tech buttons as hard as something like *Neuromancer* pushed the romance of digital criminality. My recommendation is to read the whole set of books. And maybe try to convince a publisher to reprint them in a single volume, or better yet, to publish something like this in a single year so that a future committee can consider the work as a single thing, rather than being served a wing and a leg and trying to vote on the whole chicken. [RK]

Sherry Coldsmith

"The Lucifer of Blue"

in *Off Limits*, Ellen Datlow ed.;  
St. Martin's, 1996

A haunting story of the Spanish Civil War. Coldsmith sets the piece in a brothel and gives us the amalgam of war and sex, without glamorizing or simplifying. [KJF]

Samuel R. Delany

*The Splendor and the Misery of Bodies,  
of Cities*

excerpt pub. in  
*The Review of Contemporary Fiction*,  
Fall, 1996

An intriguing fragment in which the sexual identifiers change from paragraph to paragraph; woman appears to be the large category and man the subset,

or the other. The setting is off world, there are aliens and the added layer of alien sexual identifiers. I am eager to see this play out in a longer work. [KJF]

Bradley Denton

*Lunatics*

St. Martin's, 1996

An exploration of the current status of the war between the sexes, *The Big Chill* with wings and talons. [DS]

Greg Egan

*Distress*

Orion, 1995

"Gender migration" as the ultimate critique of identity politics. Egan makes a credible case for the virtues of asexuality and androgyny, one that made me wonder just why I find the idea so disturbing. In contrast to Tepper, who comes off (to me at least) as anti-sex, Egan is clearly pro-freedom. [JML]

Firecat

"Tiresias"

in *Genderflex*, Cecilia Tam, ed.;  
Circlet Press, 1996

A very sexy story which, incidentally, illustrates the distinction between gender change and sex change. [JML]

Kathy Goonan

*The Bones of Time*

Tor, 1996

Great read. Reminded me of *Distress* a bit—a perilous, shoot-em-up mystery plot with a lot of physics theory filling in the cracks. Early on, the narrator, a Hawaiian woman of Japanese ancestry, mentions that the old gender-biased educational system has been completely eradicated. We then rocket through an international chase, which allows no time to pause and see what the results of this have been. But what we're left with is a story in which no one's sex seems to matter at all. Which has its own kind of refreshment for the weary reader. [KJF]

Laurell Hamilton

*The Lunatic Cafe*

Ace, 1996

The adventures of Anita Blake, vampire assassin and zombie hunter. She's a Christian and doesn't believe in premarital sex. I find this more unusual and intriguing than the fact that she packs a piece and doesn't hesitate to use it. Things have come to such a pass! For our purposes, there are interesting dominance issues throughout, made more interesting by the fact that half the characters are werewolves and pack animals. Lots of the book is same old/same

old sexually, but enjoyed for the same old reasons, which means enjoyable. Great fun in fact. [K]F]

### Jean Heglund

*Into the Forest*

Calyx, 1996

A very poetic book about two young sisters living in rural isolation after the collapse of civilization. None of the gender issues are very pointed, but the relationship of women and wilderness is a particular fascination of mine, and I found this an entirely engaging addition to the tradition. The writing is especially lush. [K]F]

### Tanya Huff

*No Quarter*

DAW, 1996

Tanya Huff has to be one of the most dependable writers of cracking good fantasies around. This book is no exception. Compulsively readable and great fun. The Tiptree elements concerns a man existing (as a separate being) within the body of a woman. However, for Tiptree purposes, there is really not enough exploration of this intriguing scenario. [JL]

### Gwyneth Jones

"Red Sonja and Lessingham in Dreamland"

in *Off Limits*, Ellen Datlow ed.;  
St. Martin's, 1996

A nasty twist on virtuality's mutual dreaming and the insidious clichéd archetypes that have such a tenacious grip on our imaginations. [JL]

### Jeanne Larsen

*Manchu Palaces*

Henry Holt, 1996

No one has ever managed to analyze the power of concubines in any new and interesting way. But in the last thirty pages of this wonderful book, Larsen does throw out our previous sexual assumptions and go somewhere unexpected. This is an intricate and beautiful book made up of stories about stories which contain stories, and I loved it. [K]F]

### Tanith Lee

"The Reason for Not Going to the Ball"

*Fantasy & Science Fiction*,  
October/November, 1996

A new version of an old nemesis. Lee's fairy tale shows that there is always and infinitely another side to things. A good addition to the growing body of Cinderella rewrites. [K]F]

### Jonathan Lethem

"Sleepy People"

in his collection  
*The Wall of the Sky, the Wall of the Eye*;  
Harcourt Brace, 1996

A woman finds a man asleep on her doorstep and brings him into the house, where he remains asleep through various events. I read it as, in part, a comment on the lumpish husband who sits in front of the TV and is herded around by his wife: male protector/provider reduced to the role of passive icon. [JML]

### Elizabeth Moon

*Remnant Population*

Baen, 1996

A consciousness-raising novel about an old, working class woman named Ofella who has spent most of her life bowing to the will of her husband, her employers, and her children. The book is mostly about Ofella "finding" herself, developing a new strength, and, at the same time, becoming a pivotal person in the formation of the relationship between humans and another intelligent species. Elderly female protagonists are rare (I'm tempted to say unknown) in science fiction, and it's refreshing to see one portrayed with complexity and honor. Unfortunately, Ofella's opponents and detractors are all straw men (and women); they are so completely one-dimensional and unsympathetic that Ofella's ultimate triumph seems cheapened. In retrospect, the most interesting aspect of the book, to me, was the aliens' combination of youth (as a species) and intelligence. In science fiction, humans are often pitted against primitives or against older and more "advanced" (but stuffy and conservative) alien civilizations. It's rare to see a situation in which humans are coping with a new, young alien race that's smarter than we are. Of course, this has nothing to do with gender. At least, I don't think so. [JML]

### Charles Oberndorf

*Foragers*

Bantam, 1996

The set-up, with some agreeable twists and additions, is the human anthropologist among an alien race—known in this case as the slazans. Humanity is at war with one set of these aliens, when another, an isolated group of hunter/gatherers, is found. The human anthropologist finds among them that the primary value is for solitude. This is an ambitious book with an obvious sexual component and a complex web of plots and subplots. [K]F]

David Prill  
*Serial Killer Days*

St. Martin's, 1996

While not terribly pointed in terms of gender content, this novel does contain a marvelous send-up of beauty pageants and the American entertainment industry's appetite for young murdered women. The protagonist is competing for the crown of Scream Queen and fighting her own unfortunate and unmarketable fearlessness. Very funny and absolutely original. [K]F]

Kim Stanley Robinson  
*Blue Mars*

Bantam, 1996

The final and best book of one of my favorite science fiction trilogies of all time. On finishing it my first impulse was to go back and re-read the whole thing in one go. Robinson's Mars is one of the most fully-realized, fascinating future histories ever written. However, from a Tiptree point of view, the book's speculation about gender is disappointing. On page 43 we are told that sexual violence against women has disappeared and on page 345 that patriarchy has been brought to an end. We are not shown this reinscription of the roles of men and women, however, as, in much loving and convincing detail, Robinson delineates many of the other changes on Mars as its human society is created and grows. [J]L]

Lori Selke  
"A Boy's Night Out"

in *Genderflex*, Cecilia Tam, ed.;  
Cirlet Press, 1996

A light-hearted story about the irrelevance of sex to gender, and vice versa. [J]ML]

Martha Soukup  
"Fetish"

in *Off Limits*, Ellen Datlow, ed.;  
St. Martin's, 1996

I sometimes think that in the West gender difference is all about hair, not genitals—this story is a witty, sharp exploration of just that. [J]L]

Nancy Springer  
*Fair Peril*

Avon, 1996

What Springer does with the structures and assumptions of fairy-tale, the way she weaves Story and psychology, the way she makes us hate a character like Prentis and then shows us enough of his vulnerability to make him more than a simple MCP stereotype—not to mention

the fact that I kept laughing out loud—are delightful. [DS]

Bruce Sterling  
"Bicycle Repairman"

in *Intersections: The Sycamore Hill Anthology*,  
John Kessel, Mark L. Van Name,  
and Richard Butner, ed.;  
Tor, 1996

The protagonist is on anti-libidinal as a member of the Sexual Deliberation Movement, and argues briefly that true freedom is freedom from the urge to reproduce. There's also a fabulous social worker in the story. All a bit peripheral, but fine stuff, nevertheless. [K]F]

Bruce Sterling  
*Holy Fire*

Bantam, 1996

It begins with a crone. In a period of extended lifespans, sex and family and connections of any kind are something she long ago put behind her. She is a well-behaved, rich, and powerful old person who says she has become something other than a woman. She takes a new rejuvenation treatment and becomes a young, beautiful, badly behaved girl and, for a time, a model. I don't think Sterling understands the world of high fashion any better than I do, which is to say, not at all. The sexual aspects of his character's identity are more interesting in the crone part of the book, which is relatively short, than they are in the vamp part of the book. And the sexual aspects are drowned under the less familiar and more fascinating generational aspects. What would it be like to be the last generation of humans who die? This is a wonderful novel and maybe Sterling's best to date. [K]F]

Sean Stewart  
*Cloud's End*

Ace, 1996

A magical blending of fairy tale, myth and fantasy. Although the book is packed with as much fairy tale adventure as any Tolkien clone the book's heart is in the realms of the domestic. The book offers a traditional hero named Seven and then makes his story a minor melody. Marriage, children and home are central. However, this is not the saccharine family values imagined by the political right. Home and hearth are as disturbing and



uncertain as any of the more traditional sites of adventure *Cloud's End* has to offer. [JL]

Caitlin Sullivan and Kate Bornstein

*Nearly Roadkill*

High Risk Books, 1996

I wanted to like this book better than I did. It takes place in the near future, and it takes the form of a series of transcriptions of Internet communications with various backgrounds filled in through connecting narratives. It's the story of two people's erotic adventures on-line in a variety of different guises and genders, and of their battle against the world that doesn't want to accept them. Perhaps inevitably, given its structure, it suffers from a certain "talkiness," and I found the tone irritatingly self-congratulatory. [JML]

Lucy Sussex

*The Scarlet Rider*

Tom Dougherty, 1996

A scholarly mystery, all about history and research and women in Australia, told in Sussex's best wry prose. Among its subjects are women's roles on a frontier, communities of women, how men and women deal with women who act like men, and how men and women can be friends. [DS]

Michael Swanwick

"The Dead"

in *Startight*, Patrick Neilsen Hayden, ed.;  
Tor, 1996

An intense disturbing story written in Swanwick's usual elegant ice. You'll never sleep with another dead person! [KJF]

Bryan Talbot

*The Tale of One Bad Rat*

Dark Horse, 1996

Well drawn and well meant. The protagonist is a young girl, a homeless runaway, struggling to come to grips with her father's sexual abuse. Three things eventually save her. They are 1) self-help books, 2) a move to the country—the countryside, itself, really—wilderness—and 3) her identification with Beatrix Potter. [KJF]

Melanie Tem

*Desmodus*

Headline Feature, 1995

Tem's writing always disturbs me and *Desmodus* is no exception. She strips the vampire myth of any black nail polished romanticism. Her matriarchal vampires are wholly unlike any others, with lives which are on the whole nasty, brutish and sometimes even short. [JL]

Sherri Tepper

*Gibbon's Decline and Fall*

Bantam, 1996

I love the characters, taken each by each, and I think that she's remarkably fair-handed about having good men and honorable lesbians among them, but I wish, oh how I wish, that she wouldn't insist upon Sex being What's Wrong With the World. Even when I don't agree with Tepper's conclusions, she makes me think. And I'm never, ever bored. [DS]

Edmund White

"The Hermaphrodite"

*The Review of Contemporary Fiction*,  
Fall, 1996

This story, written in 1960 but only just published, has some interesting threads—the notion that grief and despair are less intimate than sex, a sort of conflation of upper class with female and lower class with male. This story argues that sexuality is not just a mental construct, but that there are always physical facts to be dealt with. A deceptively simple story with a sad and inevitable conclusion. [KJF]

Diane Williams

"The Stupefaction"

in her collection *The Stupefaction*;  
Knopf, 1996

Not to be confused with the collection of the same name by the same author in which this novella appears, this is a poetic narrative, very apt to our purposes, with some provocative bits. Because of its impressionistic approach, the images and moments last longer than the whole. [KJF]

Tess Williams

*Map of Power*

Random House, 1996

Williams' novel explores, in part, what happens when three very different people from societies with radically different ideas about gender interact. The author has the courage to

confound romantic expectations by depicting this interaction as one of continuing conflict, confusion, and miscommunication, rather than resorting to a climactic, happily-ever-after resolution. [JML]

Laurel Winter

"Natural Permanent Boy"

*Fantasy & Science Fiction*,  
February 1996

A suggestive story about identical boy-girl twins and the business of growing up. [JML]

N. Lee Wood

*Looking for the Madhi*

Bantam, 1996

This book looked very promising. It's about an "ugly as a mud fence" female journalist who, for various reasons (e.g. to make it easier for her to report from the Middle East), dresses as a man and takes on a male persona. There's lots of potential for gender exploration here, but it all gets frittered away. We never get much sense of how the protagonist feels about her disguise, and we never find out how her Arab buddies from her days as a war-correspondent react when they find out she's a woman. The disguise just becomes a plot device. On the other hand,

this book has the virtue of being about the only one I can think of in which a woman-disguised-as-a-man is truly ugly, not just slender and "boyish." [JML]

Patricia Wrede

"Utensile Strength"

in her collection *Book of Enchantments*;  
Harcourt Brace, 1996

Who says gender exploration can't be fun? Wrede neatly deflates half a dozen gender-bound fairy tale conventions and provides an excellent chocolate cake recipe to boot. I laughed out loud. [JL]

Mary Kay Zuravleff

*The Frequency of Souls*

Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996

The story of a man trying to define himself within his relationships and without reference to or seeming awareness of the template of masculinity. The book looks at male sexuality, but is written by a woman. So is its charmingly passive male well done and refreshingly novel, or is it just a female fantasy of what men might be? I think the former, but what do I know? [KJF]

