

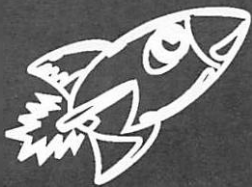
WisCon²⁷ +



China Miéville

Carol Emshwiller

The Carl Brandon Society



The Carl Brandon Society is dedicated to addressing the representation of people of color in the fantastical genres such as science fiction, fantasy and horror. We aim to foster dialogue about issues of race, ethnicity and culture, raise awareness both inside and outside the fantastical fiction communities, promote inclusivity in publication/production, and celebrate the accomplishments of people of color in science fiction, fantasy and horror.

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WisCon

The Gathering **+** of the Feminist SF Community

Madison Wisconsin • May 23-26, 2003

Welcome!

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WisCon 27 Souvenir Book
Editor Beth Plutchak

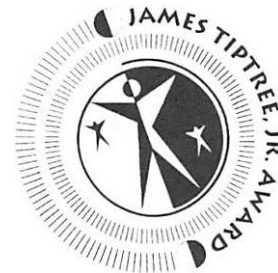
WisCon

May 23-26, 2003
The Concourse Hotel and Governor's Club
Madison, WI

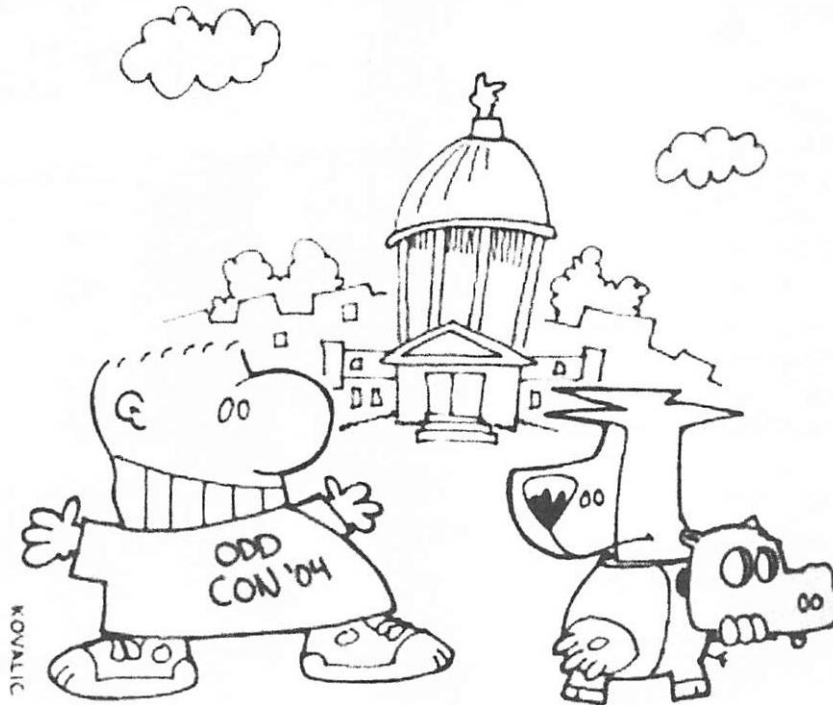
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**Nebula
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Winner**
"Creature"

Report to the Men's Club and Other Stories

"This creature looks more scared than I am. Come knocking . . . pawing . . . scratching at my door. Come, maybe in search of me (I'm easy prey for the weak and scared and hungry), or maybe in search of help and shelter. . . (I'm peering out my window, hoping it won't see me.) It's been snowing—seems like three or four days now. The first really bad weather of the year so far.

It looks so draggled and cold. . . I open the door. I welcome it. I say, "Hello new and dangerous friend." My door's a normal size, but too small for it. It pushes and groans and squeezes itself in."



\$16 1-931520-03-8

**Philp K.
Dick
Award
Winner**

The Mount

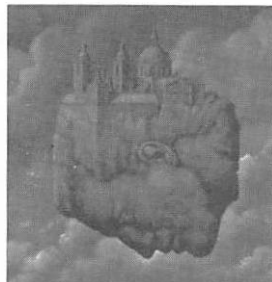
"We're not against you, we're for. In fact we're built for you and you for us—we, so our weak little legs will dangle on your chest and our tail down the back. Exactly as you so often transport your own young when they are weak and small. It's a joy. Just like a mother-walk.

You'll be free. You'll have a pillow. You'll have a water faucet and a bookcase. We'll pat you if you do things fast enough and don't play hard to catch. We'll rub your legs and soak your feet. Sams and Sues, and you Sams had better behave yourselves."

KALPA IMPERIAL the greatest empire that never was

"The story-teller said: Now that the good winds are blowing, now that we're done with days of anxiety and nights of terror, now that there are no more denunciations, persecutions, secret executions, and whim and madness have departed from the heart of the Empire . . ."

ANGELICA GORODISCHER
Translated by Ursula K. Le Guin



KALPA IMPERIAL
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ANGELICA GORODISCHER
translated by Ursula K. Le Guin

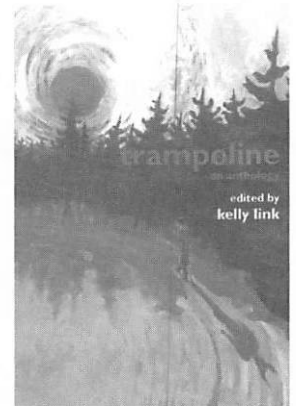
Emperors, empresses, storytellers, thieves . . .
and the Natural History of Ferrets

1931520054 \$16 July 15, 2003

Trampoline: an anthology edited by Kelly Link

An original anthology edited by Kelly Link, author of *Stranger Things Happen*, and co-editor of the zine *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*.

Trampoline: twenty astounding and surprising stories by Christopher Barzak, Richard Butler, Alan DeNiro, Carol Emshwiller, Jeffrey Ford, Karen Joy Fowler, Greer Gilman, John Gonzalez, Glen Hirshberg, Samantha Hunt, Alex Irvine, Shelley Jackson, Beth Adele Long, Maureen McHugh, Susan Mosser, Ed Park, Christopher Rowe, Dave Shaw, Vandana Singh, and Rosalind Palermo Stevenson.



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Mark Rich's jaunty, offbeat stories have appeared in everything from small humor and literary zines to the slick pages of science fiction monthlies. Now, nine of his stories are collected in **Foreigners, and Other Familiar Faces** (\$5, June 2003), with illustrations by Mark himself!

www.smallbeerpress.com

WisCon 27 • Guests of Honor

Carol Emshwiller

An Appreciation

by L. Timmell Duchamp

Souvenir Book appreciations are typically written by friends and long-time associates of a con's Guests of Honor and usually focus on the GoH's personal and professional biography. Since I have had the pleasure of meeting Carol Emshwiller personally only once, I will focus instead on my many years' relationship with a single aspect of the person who is Carol Emshwiller, viz., that mysterious presence readers sense lurking within or perhaps behind the texts of her stories and novels, a presence generally known as "the author." This relationship between a single reader and the particular presence of an author, although seemingly abstract and impersonal, is in practice a deeply intimate one. It is also an extremely privileged relationship, since only a relatively few authors' texts create a sense of that mysterious, very particular presence with which readers so delight in engaging. I recognized and engaged with that presence the first time I read a Carol Emshwiller story, a presence that so intrigued and teased and dialogued with me that the author went at once onto what I call my "magic" list of

must-buy authors whose work I'm always on the lookout for.

What is this presence that I find so alluring and distinctive, lurking behind/within the texts bearing Carol Emshwiller's signature? Critics who speak of the "grain" of the voice typically locate such particularity in the habitual use of certain syntactical forms, vocabulary, and character and place names as well as tone and attitude. I recall seeing studies based on computer analyses of these variables, as well as gleeful promises of a future in which computer programs rather than human beings would effortlessly generate fiction in every style and genre the "consumer" could possibly desire. So now imagine a Carol Emshwiller fiction-writing program. Certain kinds of settings and characters would be input (domestic interiors, mountain villages and valleys, high Oregon desert, seaside beaches...), a variety



of flying creatures, wounded men, insufferable husbands, and willful, sly, needy, nosy, and sexually inquisitive women, a consistently dog-eat-dog reality only the persistent can survive, a lot of first-person, present-tense narrative, and a maddeningly high incidence of ambiguity and irony. I can imagine a program doing *that* much or even virtually representing Carol Emshwiller a la Max

Two Aspects of Carol Emshwiller Chosen at Random
by Eileen Gunn

Aspect #1: Scarier than your average East Village bondage neophyte.

An evening in the East Village. The KGB bar: dark, smoky, crowded. Lenin salutes us from every corner. Carol is on the bill with a skanky-looking 30-something guy.

He reads first, about a visit to a bondage club. Scary people abound (in the text) but the narrator keeps a safe, ironic distance and his S&M cherry as well. The reader's claue applauds enthusiastically.

Then Carol gets up to read. A delicate-looking woman with the cheekbones of a sci-fi heroine machine-gunning a nest of Martian invaders, she reads "Acceptance Speech," a story about the literary apprenticeship of a human being to an alien poet.

Her story is genuinely peculiar, even cruel; the protagonist is forced to compose poetry in a language he doesn't speak, and is humiliated by his teacher when he fails: he submits, he learns, he dominates. Everybody involved loses every cherry they ever had.

It's no contest. Carol wipes the floor with the skanky 30-something. Carol's claue applauds enthusiastically.

Aspect #2: Secret muse of cyberpunk

Excerpt from an email to me from William Gibson, quoted with permission: "Carol Emshwiller's stories, and David Bunch's, were a sort of bridge for me, whereby I could walk back and forth from sci-fi to Wm. Burroughs and the other Beat/avant-garde stuff I discovered around thirteen years of age. Over in Burroughs et al, I could never figure out what the territory was for, whereas I knew that genre sf was for the repeated induction of a certain containable frisson. Her stories spanned the divide for me before the New Worlds crew started building pleasure barges."

William Gibson cut his teeth on Carol Emshwiller. I can't think of a flintier substance.

Headroom, thus to grace every WisCon 27 panel with the author's (simulated) televisual presence. But can one really imagine a computer writing a story like "Modillion"? In "Modillion" a sign – a symbol in a manuscript yet to be deciphered – launches us into an imaginary formation that could only have come from the organic, physical brain of Carol Emshwiller. This sign, that the narrator arbitrarily names a "modillion," is "like a slip of the tongue that makes a word that seems vaguely understandable." This sign carries us away to a palace by the sea (white against white cliffs), to the prow of a trireme, to a wide and powerful woman.

Gateways such as the "modillion" beckon to readers throughout Carol Emshwiller's oeuvre. Sometimes the gateway is to be found within the eye(s) of the sometimes dangerous, sometimes wounded male loner to whom so many of her women are irresistibly drawn, whether it be within the vision of the sightless blue eye of the Prince of Mules, or in the "little pinpoint eyes" of suspected vampire Alculard Snow, whose "pupils show so black in all that lightness,

Carol Emshwiller

by Gavin Grant

Carol Emshwiller, who has been publishing superb, stirring, challenging fiction for over 50 years, is a perfect Guest of Honor for WisCon, the only Feminist Science Fiction convention.

If someone were to compile one of those futile

she thinks he must live in a house made of nice thick slices of snow with clear ice windows. Even inside you'd see your breath and even if everything weren't white, it would look white because of the light." And sometimes it is to be found in the pique and curiosity of a woman investigating the stories she's been told all her life about people, places, and customs that are merely "common knowledge," unverified doxa shaping communal values.

Yes, I know the grain of that voice, I know well the playful games it plays and its teasing refusal to be pinned down. I've always answered its call as inevitably it draws me into the worlds it weaves, by now as familiar to me as they are, themselves, dangerous and strange. I "know" and love this author called Carol Emshwiller in one of the most private relationships possible, the relationship that unfolds between the words on the page on the one side and the beating of a heart and the firing of neurons in the brain on the other. Granted, this is only an "imaginary" relationship. But since without imagination there'd be no homo sapiens, there's really no "only" about it.

lists of the top hundred writers in the world right *Now!* I'd have to hack into the results and replace the name of one of the politely-angry young men in the top ten with Carol Emshwiller's. I wouldn't put her in the top five, but only to avert the

pollsters suspicions. Number six then, or number seven.

I imagine that when they discovered I'd spoofed their poll, said pollsters might be ticked off. But if they attempted to track me down, I expect there would be a *Spartacus* moment (perhaps without all the cleft chins) as writers from all around the world would stepped themselves forward to say, "I put Carol Emshwiller in the top ten," or, "It was I who fixed your silly poll," and so on.

Carol Emshwiller's writing, and she herself, inspires that kind of action.

But why would someone need (or want) to put Carol's name forward that way? Surely the cream will rise to the top? Well, some will, but for the most part, it takes work to get there (as well as some odd mechanical processes which aren't an appropriate extension of this metaphor). As sharper critics than I have pointed out, Carol's writing manages to both demand the reader pay

attention and at the same time depends on the willingness of the reader to invest their imagination in the story to be fully appreciated. This is why I would fix that poll. This is why others would defend me. This is why Carol's readers are very happy people and are always putting her books into other people's hands.

Carol's writing can rarely be satisfyingly pigeon-holed. Her latest novel which we were extremely happy and proud to publish, *The Mount* (2002), is science fiction; but it can also be described (or defended or attacked) as allegory, a coming-of-age story, or fantasy. Or even romance. *Ledoyt* (1995) is a biographical historical Western coming-of-age story. *Carmen Dog* (1990), a novel that I hope every WisCon attendee will read, is transformative in many senses of the word. As for Carol's short stories: they are many, they are awesome, and each one is worth an

essay to itself. Carol, of course, is well aware – and not at all bothered – that her fiction is not easily categorized.

Among the many resonances and influences in Carol's writing are the mountains and landscape of the American West, personal relationships, the odd moments of war, and the actions and effects of people who may or may not be more damaged than the rest of us.

Recently, Carol has written a series of war stories including "Boys" (*Scifiction*), "The General" (*McSweeney's* No. 10), and "Repository" (*F&SF*), which explore war from typically Emshwilleresque viewpoints. Soldiers are unsure of who they are, who they are fighting, or why. War is the question, not the subject.

I look forward to reading many more of Carol's questions.

Carol Emshwiller

by John Kessel

I don't know how important Carol Emshwiller is to Literature with the big "L." I think she is pretty damned important. She's like Kafka, but saner—of course, Kafka was never more sane than in his fiction. Carol is sane in real life.

I suspect that you know her fiction already. It is always original, funny, ruthless and humane.

Animals turn into women, while women turn into animals. Our heroine is

a dog named Pooch who wishes to sing *Carmen*.

Two spinsters discover an alien crash landed in the orchard behind their house. One of them chains him in their basement and trains him to be a man, then marries him. (It doesn't work out.)

A woman and her overbearing husband on a vacation in a foreign land get lost in the mountains. They come upon a village where the people treat her as a god.

A troupe of scientists dressed like marines sets out to find the abominable snow-woman.

Carol continues to write, better than ever, at an age when most writers are ossified in their prejudices and habits. But I'd like to step past the fiction for a moment to identify a quality of Carol's person that informs every line of her work but that you might not know if you haven't spent much time with her: her extraordinary bravery.

At one Sycamore Hill Writer's Conference in the late 1980s, on the first day of the weeklong workshop, we critiqued Carol's submission. One of the writers, a very prominent and popular one, did a tap dance on the manuscript, delineating in painful detail, at great length, and with great eloquence and emotional intensity everything that was obscure, quirky, unconventional, left-handed, and fundamentally *wrong* with the story. One of the workshop rules is that when a participant is giving a critique, no one may interrupt, and so we all had to sit there and listen to this litany. It was difficult. At the conclusion of this critique the writer summed up by saying (I think out of what he considered a legitimate frustration) that if Carol continued to write this way she was throwing away her chance to reach a large audience and would never be read outside a coterie.

After a critique the author gets to respond, and once again no one else is allowed to interrupt. We waited to hear what Carol would say. We were all champing at the bit to leap to her defense. Carol said, as I remember it, quite simply: "Thank you. I appreciate you raising that issue. I've sold some stories to large circulation magazines, like *Omni*, but not many. Sometimes I wonder about whether I should or could find a larger audience, and you make me realize that I have to write what I am going to write." That simple, that graceful, that complete.

I could not do what she did. I am not that strong.

Carol Emshwiller is one of the strongest people—perhaps the strongest person—I have ever known. She doesn't dominate a room or win arguments with verbal gymnastics. But under all the deforming pressures that society and friends and the writing community and family can muster, Carol remains her own self. That she does it without being obstreperous or pushy is a miracle. She writes about things that reduce the rest of us to helpless rage, without losing mystery and human complexity. She tells the truth in slant, and with grace and sly humor.

She is also generous to those who haven't earned her generosity, yet makes you feel that you deserve it. One of the most shocking moments I had in reading *Carmen Dog* for the first time was running across a character imprisoned in the Academy of Motherhood with the female animals: "a man—a strange, sad-looking, very thin and very tall man, introduced to her as John, a clown . . . considered by those at the Academy to be rapidly on his way to becoming a vulture, and therefore female. He is accepted without question, though of course John has always looked like a vulture; even as a child he had a long thin nose and glittering black eyes. He does not try to disillusion the Academy of Motherhood people, but deliberately walks with a jerky, avian motion. Also he has painted a vapid smile on his clown face, knowing that if they feel superior to him they will be inclined to make snap judgments and not give him a second thought."

I count this paragraph one of the great undeserved honors I have ever received in my life.

Verse 19 of Ursula Le Guin's translation of the Tao Te Ching goes like this:

Stop being holy, forget being prudent,

It'll be a hundred times better for everyone.

Stop being altruistic, forget being righteous,

People will remember what family feeling is.

Stop planning, forget making a profit,

There won't be any thieves and robbers.

But even these three rules

Needn't be followed;
what works reliably

Is to know the raw silk,

Hold the uncut wood.

Need little,

Want less.

Forget the rules.

Be untroubled.

If it didn't mislead you as to how extraordinarily beautiful she is, I would describe Carol Emshwiller as raw silk or uncut wood. She is always and everywhere herself. Brave. Quiet. Open. Honest. Original. Passionate. Alive. She is a clear spirit. I suspect that at times it has been a hard struggle for her to grow to be that clear; I know she has had plenty of troubles in her life. How does she do it?

I spend far too much of my life obsessing about prudence and altruism, trying to be holy, claiming righteousness. Just knowing Carol Emshwiller has made me a better person. If I could be like anyone I know, I would be like her.

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Awards and Honors

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Philip K. Dick award nomination for *Report to the Men's Club*.

Philip K. Dick award nomination for *The Mount*.

National Endowment for the Arts grant, 1979.

N.Y. State Creative Artists Public Service grant, 1975.

N.Y. State Foundation for the Arts grant, 1988.

MacDowell Colony Fellow.

Pushcart Prize Vol. #12, 1987 for "Yukon", which was also included in *The Best of the Pushcart Prize*.

World Fantasy Award, best short story collection, 1991, for *The Start of the End of It All*.

"Venus Rising", short-listed for the James Tiptree Jr. Award.

Carmen Dog, short-listed for the James Tiptree, Jr., Retrospective Award.

ACCENT/ASCENT fiction prize 1989, for "Secrets of the Native Tongue".

Gallun Award, 1999

Icon award, 1999

Teaching

Clarion West, 1998 and 2000.

Clarion, 1978, 1979.

Sarah Lawrence College, 1983

New York University continuing education, 1980-present.

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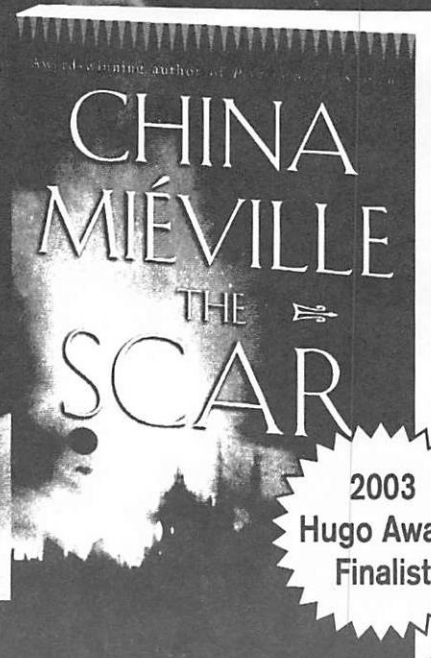
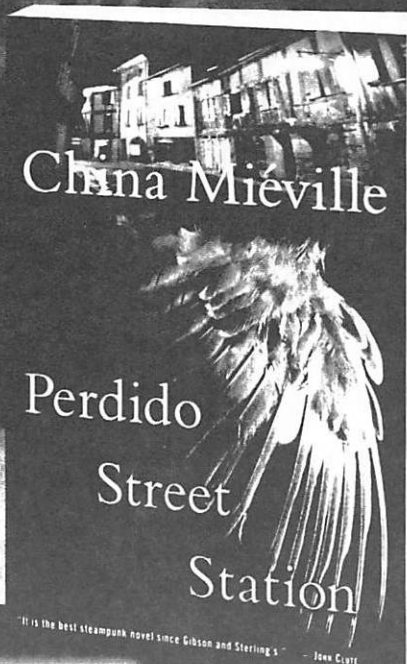
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China Miéville

Four or Five Things about China Miéville

by Mark Bould

Saturday September 28th 2002 was a bright and clear day in London. Which was just as well, because China and Emma were late. A group of us had arranged to meet at the National Film Theatre's Film Café on the South Bank of the Thames at 12.30. From there, we would cross the river to the Embankment to join the protest march against war on Iraq and for a free Palestine.

In a way, though, the delay didn't matter. Despite early police claims that there were only 40,000 protestors, it was clear that there were ten times that number. It's not like anyone would have noticed if we were late.

But coffee had been drunk and impatience was setting in and the crowd on the opposite bank was swelling and China wasn't answering his mobile phone.

Suddenly, in the distance, a sighting.

Arms were waved. Watches were pointed at extravagantly. Tutting noises were made.

China and Emma arrived. China was breathless, not from rushing but from excitement. 'Sorry we're late, but you won't believe what we've just seen.

We had to stop and watch. We were walking through the park, and there was this pelican. Fucking huge, and it just swooped down and ate a pigeon. It was gross. You could see the pigeon struggling in its gullet.'

this: 'So that's about it folks ... Somehow—nobody knows how—we've been planted somewhere in Germany almost four hundred years ago. With no way to get back.'

It seems like this

passage might soon occupy that special place in China's heart once reserved for a line from the underrated *Prince of Darkness*: 'Nothing, anywhere ever, should be able to do what it is

China was right. Nobody believed him.

Not that the story is completely implausible. It's just that impish Mike Harrison had already started the rumour that en route they had popped into John Lewis—an irredeemably bourgeois department store—to buy some things for their new flat.

To this day, nobody believes China's story about the pelican and the pigeon. But for some reason everybody seems to take a special delight in preferring to believe Mike's version of events.

One of China's favourite passages of pure sf explanation is to be found in Eric Flint's 1632. It goes like

doing'.

China's taste in movies is a bit hit-and-miss.

He's right about *Prince of Darkness*—it is underrated. He's right about *Being John Malkovich*—the more you think about it the worse it becomes. He's right about *Donnie Darko*—it is a little too knowing for its own good. And he's right about *Daredevil*—even if it was identical in every other respect, it would have been massively improved by casting Eric Stoltz instead of Ben Affleck

But he will insist on the genius of the first five minutes of *X-Men*.

And that *Fight Club* is a great movie.



One of China's favourite comic book panels is to be found in an old *Trigan Empire* strip from *Look and Learn*. It is night-time. On a roof in the city an old man and a young lad are star-gazing. Suddenly there is a noise. They both look alarmed.

'What was that?' says the old man.

The boy replies: 'It sounded like a large party of men rushing stealthily down the alley!'

Last Autumn, I was diagnosed with Hodgkins lymphoma. We got home from my first session of chemotherapy at about 3.30pm on Friday 15th November. Around 4.00pm, the doorbell rang. China and Emma had sent me a huge bouquet of flowers with a hope-it-went-okay kind of message. Later that evening I phoned to thank them, and the first thing China did was apologise in case receiving flowers from a male friend made me feel awkward.

It was a rugged, ironic, manly thing; but, in truth, I'd never received flowers from a male friend before and I'd no idea feeling awkward about it was even an option.

Ever since, I have felt that these events would provide a future biographer with an incident around which to drape some insight into China's character.

But I will leave it to you to decide what it all might mean.

China in Booktown

by Joan Gordon

I went to a Science Fiction Research Association conference a few years ago (2001) in Schenectady, New York. It seemed like everyone there was raving over a new book by one China Miéville called *Perdido Street Station* (2000). I'd been avoiding that book because it was so long (710 pages)—I believe the ideal length for a novel is 220 pages, this despite my favorite books being *Moby Dick* and *Gravity's Rainbow*. So I read *Perdido Street Station*—and again my theory about the ideal novel was found wanting. Maybe you've read *Perdido Street Station*, too, but if not, let me assure you that it has the major traits of a major novel: 1) what John Irving calls the "and then, and then" factor, 2) fully developed and fascinating characters, 3) joyously inventive language, 4) stuff to think about, and 5) a great heart.

But, who is China Miéville of the improbably glamorous name and jacket photo? Like I know. But I

have met him several times, have written a couple of scholarly papers about *Perdido Street Station*, and have been conducting an email interview with him, so I'll tell you some of what I've learned.

He was born September 6, 1972, in Norwich, England, but grew up in London with his mother and sister. He's traveled around a bit, most exotically in Egypt, Zimbabwe, and Harvard University. He's gotten any number of college degrees—in social anthropology, international relations, and, at last, a Ph.D. in Philosophy of International Law from the London School of Economics in 2001, just as he was finishing *The Scar* (2002), which is even better than *Perdido Street Station* (and almost as long—636 pages).

Not only does his first name come from his hippie parents leafing through the dictionary for a "beautiful word," but also from their knowing that, in Cockney slang, it stands for "mate,"

as in friend, pal, comrade: china plate—mate. The perfect name for a kid who grew up to be a committed Marxist and member of the Socialist Alliance, and who writes books that explore, among many other things, personal and group bonding. That's true of his first book as well, the less massive but still impressive drum and bass fable, *King Rat* (1998).

As idiosyncratically particular as Miéville's writing is, it does arise out of cultural influences that illustrate his coming of age in 1980s England—not only the economic and political climate, but also TV programs such as *Dr. Who* and *Blake's Seven*; drum and bass or jungle music; and, most intriguingly, role-playing games. He cites two things about RPGs that inspired his own fictional world building. One is their "mania for cataloguing the fantastic.... one of the main spurs to write a secondary-world fantasy was to invent a bunch of monsters." The

other is “the weird fetish for systematisation.... There’s something superheroically banalifying about that approach to the fantastic.... it’s a kind of exaggeratedly precise approach to secondary world creation” (interview with the author).

There’s plenty more to tell—how he despises the “consolatory” nature of certain kinds of nostalgic fantasy, such as *The Lord of the Rings*; how he identifies his work as weird fiction; how he edits the journal *Historical Materialism: Research into Critical Marxist*

Theory, including the terrific recent special issue (10.4, 2002) on “Marxism and Fantasy;” and so on. But now it’s time to address the other issue that I’ve left dangling. I alluded to that glamorous cover photo. Yes, he does look like that—it isn’t just his partner Emma Bircham’s flattering shot. She has suggested to me that he didn’t always look that way: once there was long hair and a less fit body. This suggests to me that Miéville, like many of his characters in *Perdido Street Station* and *The Scar*, is

something of a remade himself. But the important difference is that he chose to remake his image into one that reflected and contributed to what I imagine was a growing confidence in his own power and ability to use that power for his ideals, rather than being remade into something less than human by and because of a repressive society. When you meet him, you will find a gentle, sincere, humorous man balancing the responsibilities of fame, talent, conscience, and being human.

Towards a Taxonomy of Fantasy

"Portal and Quest Fantasies," work in progress.

Farah Mendlesohn

The narration of fantasyland, when done poorly, is often didactic, but even the most creative writers find it difficult in this form to avoid impressing upon the reader an authoritative interpretation of their world. An interesting test case, because it is so otherwise divorced from the usual quest fiction, is the work of China Miéville. *The Scar* (2002) in which the protagonist is running away from her own society, while as elegantly written as *Perdido Street Station* (2000) (both an immersive and intrusive fantasy) requires that much more be explained. Bellis Coldwine, the protagonist, acts as our guide to the world, whereas there is no such role in *Perdido Street Station*, and the descriptions are of what is seen, rather than what is; the result in *The Scar* is less

baroque, because the baroque functions best in the taken for granted, the immersive: if over described in the quest fantasy its function is to create landscape rather than tone. And in *The Scar*, these intense moments of description are almost always employed when either Bellis Coldwine, or Tanner Sack, the two principle protagonists, see something new. They are moments of alienation, rather than impressions of familiarity. But they are marked for us. “Later, when she thought back to that miserable time, Bellis was shaken by the detail of her memories.” (10) Reverie here is a device which deliberately impresses memory onto the traumatised; Tanner, who at moments of stress, is told in the first person: “All black on black but still I can see hills

and water and I can see clouds. I can see the prisons on all sides bobbing a little like fishermen's floats. Jabber take us all I can see clouds.” (20) This is not the smooth, narrated reverie we have seen elsewhere. Miéville uses these moments to demonstrate the fragmented nature of observation. To demonstrate that what we see is not a painting, but abstracted, a personal construct. Alienation is one of the keys to what Miéville achieves. In most quest and portal fantasies the process of the novel requires the protagonist to become ever more comfortable with the fantasyland which they have entered. Yet Bellis Coldwine never does. Her alienation is expressed explicitly, her culture shock (94) is profound. This enables Miéville to give to Bellis the role of describing the world

which she can never take for granted because she cannot engage with it. Thus we never see Armada through the eyes of Shekel, who has adapted, become immersed, but predominantly through the eyes of Bellis who learns much of what she knows through books; pre-digested, reported, alienated description, and secondarily through the eyes of Tanner, whose own understanding is distorted by gratitude. It means Miéville can mostly avoid the conversations which explain the landscape or the politics of Armada—although he does have two, one with Carianne, and another with Uther Doul—and instead present it in negatives, the things that Bellis encounters and is repelled by or does not understand. It is noticeable that it is those scenes in which neither Tanner Sack nor Bellis Coldwine appear, that are most written most like the classic quest fantasy. For example, Below the waist, the crays' armoured hindquarters were those of colossal rock lobsters: huge carapaces of gnarled shell and overlapping somites. Their human abdomens jutted out from above where the eyes and antennae would have been. (50). Here Miéville has no choice but to simply describe, to pause the action while the characters are outlined. He has no one in place to mediate for him. In contrast when Bellis observes the inhabitants of Armada the Cray are simply "sluggish on their armoured legs" (94). We see what she notices, and only what she notices. Yet Miéville manipulates this rhetoric. Much later, he uses a moment of removal, a

moment where there is no observer with whom we are identified, to deliver vital information. As Captain Sengka hefts a box containing a message, we are told of "the worthless little necklace that justifies the jewellery box; and beneath that box's velvet padding...a heavy disk the size of a large watch..." the compass that will guide New Crobuzon to Armada. For a moment Miéville breaks the illusion that we hear this tale from Bellis. We know more than she, it is a classic moment of recognition, but one that is denied to the "hero". For at the centre of *The Scar* might be, but is not, our protagonist, Bellis Coldwine. Miéville has effectively created a protagonist who is almost entirely marginalized from what is actually happening. Much of this is achieved by the careful construction of one of the most solipsistic "heroes" since Thomas Covenant. The construction of the lengthy missive-recipient unknown—that punctuates this tale, is a focus of this solipsism. Sent to a reader in New Crobuzon, it would have maintained the internal integrity of the Club story, but presented to Carianne, to another witness, in the end it is one of many challenges to impermeable narrative of the quest fantasy. But before Bellis can reach that point she must rethink her own place in the narrative. As Covenant believed that his own fevered brain generated a world around him, Bellis seems incapable of believing that it is not her story being told. Her anger at Johannes Tearfully when she realizes that her ship was hijacked in order to collect him, is a

result in part of her sense of displacement from the centre of the narrative. (116)

But whether New Crobuzon is invaded, whether the Armada turns around, all are rephrased in her mind in terms of saving her city. How far she will be taken away from home. She is incapable of abandoning a map of the universe that places New Crobuzon at the centre (115) even as she is capable of admitting its flaws and self delusions (141) in a moment that reminds us that at least an element of this world is known to Bellis. We cannot understand "The accounts of the Money Circle and the Week of Dust", because Bellis does not explain it or receive an explanation. For a moment we are estranged twice, once from the world of Armada and second and more conclusively from the fantasy in which Bellis is immersed, her personal framework of New Crobuzon." Only reluctantly does Bellis ever admit the concerns of others, and she never admits that hers is one of a myriad political interests. Miéville is not the first to attempt constructing a quest fantasy from the point of view of a minor character: Robin Hobb, for example, tries this in the *Farseer* trilogy where her protagonist is precluded by birth from ascending the throne. But somehow Fitz contrives to be at the centre of the action. The quest is his even if he does not reap the reward. Bellis's solipsism allows Miéville to undermine the other cardinal rule of the quest fantasy, that what one is told, is. As Bellis herself acknowledges at various points within the novel, but without notable affect, her understanding of the world

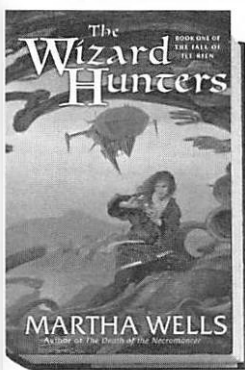
causes her to misplace herself within conversations. She is repeatedly manipulated by those who tell her stories. It is not a coincidence that the longest delivered speeches in the book are those of Silas Fennec, the spy. (151-153 and 199-202), nor that he is one of the few people to actually use the word "trust", to imply that he is grateful that Bellis should trust him. (203) And Bellis knows that he is lying, the "maggot of doubt" that Droul plants in her mind wriggles because it is meaningful. But Bellis's understanding of the world makes this of little relevance. She has chosen to believe, "caught up in it" as Doul points out (564) and we, instinctively, believed with her, because the pattern of quest fantasies has taught us to do just that. We too are caught up in the passion and belief of the moment and our insistence that there must be a quest, a goal, and that those with whom we travel are part of that cosy conspiracy of companionship that is so effectively denied in this novel. As an (ignored) reminder of that such structures are deceptive, what Bellis learns from Shekel is delivered in the past tense, as reported speech; "Shekel told Bellis about Hedrigall the cactae aeronaut. He told her about the cactus-man's notorious past as a pirate merchant for Dreer Samher and described to her the journeys Hedrigall had made to the monstrous islands south of Gnurr Kett, to trade with the mosquito-men. (120-1). In defiance of the conventions of the quest fantasy, diegesis is both more accurate and more important than anything we are told directly by the candidates for

narrative authority, Uther Doul or Silas Fennec, as is the reported tale of the anophelli which Bellis tells to us. (337-338) Alongside this is the challenge presented to the epistemology of the quest fantasy: as much in any other quest, knowledge is fixed and sealed either in the mouths of the narrative authority or between the covers of books. The sacredness of book knowledge is a given and here it is duly revered. The Lovers steal books, make of them communal property. The errors in their filing are lovingly described (122). Books are searched for because knowledge can only be recreated from what is written (161) so that Bellis's destruction of the book (252) is all the more shocking because the convention is that what has been destroyed cannot be recreated, it can only be rediscovered. This convention is reinforced by what the book itself says and how it says it. Krüach Aum does not claim invention or originality. Like Gandalf he narrates a history of what was done and discovered in the mists of legend: "I have ... found a story to tell, of what had not been done since the Ghosthead Empire and was achieved once more, a thousand years ago." (228). At the most, he is a theoretician, who has worked out the equations but never tested them. (231) The dynamic of the novel demands not a reworking of the equations, not a pursuit of the physics that made it possible, but a pursuit of the physicist, or at the least of his books, a dynamic reinforced when Krüach Aum is described as the one who "fishes for old books in

ruins." (341) For all we know, the book at the centre of this section is itself a copy of a copy of a copy, made valuable only by a belief that knowledge does not mutate but sits, waiting to be found. *The Scar* has been grouped with quest and portal novels, and I have already identified the moment of portal transition, but the quest is harder to pinpoint in this novel. Miéville, like the other writers in this section, is actively denying us the conventional quest narrative, but this time in a much more direct fashion. *The Scar* is an anti-quest novel. We are set up, time and time again to expect that something will be found, a hero identified, a mission launched, and each time we are denied. Shekel does not turn out to be the predestined orphan; the magus fin is precisely that, a maguffin, even though it is perhaps the one moment of undisputed magic (as opposed to alternate science) in the book (300); and the Scar in the ocean is never reached nor is its power ever quite defined. *The Scar* may not even exist—we never have a direct view of the chasm. Yet it is even possible that the she-Lover's conspiracy theory is correct.

For many involved it remains opaque, a quest without the power to inspire. As Miéville has argued, the She-Lover is the only character unreservedly inspired by quest-narrative logic, and she is a sociopath, the solipsism of the quest hero taken to the extreme. If there is a true quest narrative in *The Scar*, one which drives a group of characters in a way in which we recognise as the classic quest fantasy, complete with encounters with various

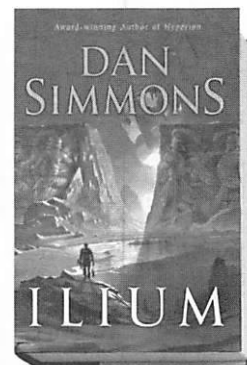
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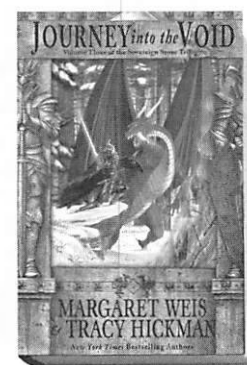


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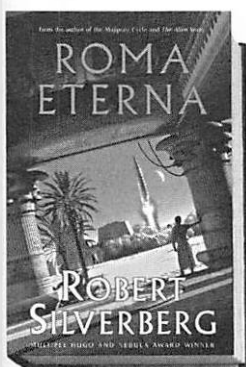
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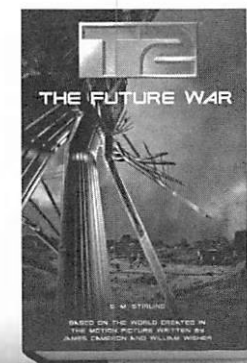


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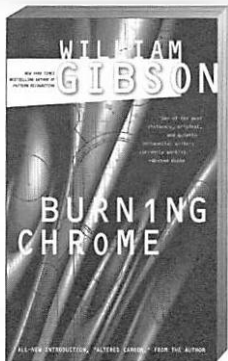
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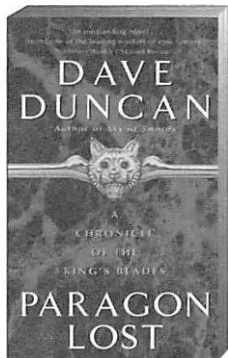
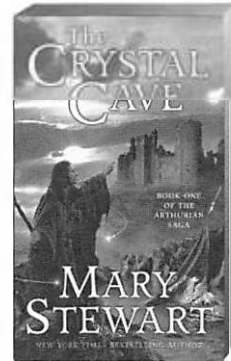
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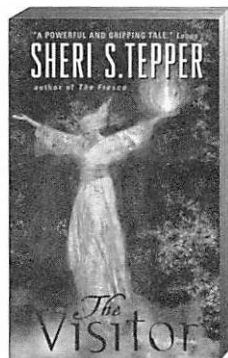
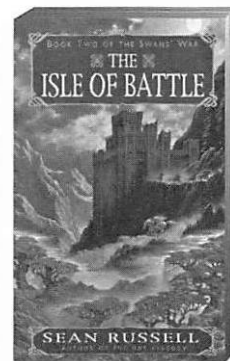
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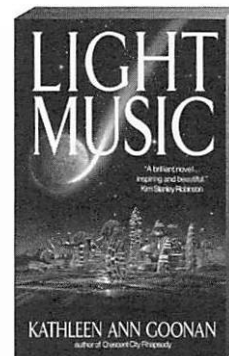
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peoples, mini-adventures, the search for information, and a clear sense of moral justice, which results in success and which allows the protagonists to return home as heroes it is one we see only intermittently. This is the Grindylow's quest

narrative. In the final analysis Miéville has pulled off a very neat trick of writing an entire quest fantasy from the point of view of those-ignorantly-on the wrong side.

Pullman manages to pull off the reverse. In the Northern Lights we are

continually told that Lyra is central, but in this and its sequels we are rarely shown that she is, and in *The Amber Spyglass* (2000) she becomes obscure.

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Light

M. John Harrison, Gollancz,
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Light is a stunning work that's part space opera and part *something else*. Some of us found the protagonists (a physicist and serial killer; a mass-murdering pirate; a VR addict) to be unlikable; others found them brutal, cruel, self-deluded, but completely real, people about whom we cared deeply. All the characters are shaped in ways that very specifically have to do with the structuring and exploration of gender. The male characters are in love with ostentatious masculinity as a thing that's sometimes joyful and sometimes horrifying; the female characters are often consumed with fierce denial of their bodies and their own femaleness. Hanging over all of this is the enigmatic figure of the Shrandar, whose gender identity, like so much else, is ambiguous and complicated. *Light* is rich, horrible, sad, and absurd, and says a lot about how the body and sex inform one's humanity. It will reward rereading.

"Stories for Men"

John Kessel, *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, Oct/Nov 2002

"Stories for Men" is a story about masculinity, about how individuals define themselves in the context of kinship and community, and about how we construct gender roles by telling ourselves stories. The story begins with a female-centered society that mirrors some of our assumptions about social power relations between men and women, and then explicitly refers to our own society's assumptions (in the main character's encounter with a twentieth-century fiction anthology) in a way that makes those assumptions seem new and strange. It reexamines those tales of outcasts and lone heroes and manly individualism within the context of a story of community. It raises questions about the links between connectedness and exclusion, consensus and stifling conformity, patriarchal protectiveness and sociopathy. "Stories for Men" is a short work, one that's more subtle than it first appears.

Song for Harrison:

H - A - Double R - I - S -
O - N
Spells Harrison. Harrison
wrote a book whose
theme is gender bending,
won the Tiptree for its
plot and ending.
H - A - Double R - I - S -
O - N, you see!
It's his name
and now fame
ever will be connected
with
Harrison, that's he!

**Song for Kessel: You'll have
to wait and see**

Awarded

at Eastercon (Seacon 3),
Hinckley England
<http://www.seacon03.org.uk/main.htm>

Prize

fabric cakes by Zhenne Wood

Judges

Matt Austern (chair)
Jae Leslie Adams
Molly Gloss
Farah Mendlesohn
Mary Anne Mohanraj

2002 Short List

Note: This is not the list from which the judges picked the winners. Rather, it is a list of books that the judges found interesting, relevant to the award, and worthy of note.

"Knapsack Poems"

Eleanor Arnason, *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, May 2002

A story that explores the boundaries of personal identity, and the relationship between personal identity and gender, in the context of a culture where the basic unit of identity is a "team" rather than a single biological individual.

"Liking What You See: A Documentary"

Ted Chiang, *Stories of Your Life and Others*, Tor Books, 2002

This story presents what's literally a different way of thinking. It makes the familiar (perception of beauty) seem strange, and makes what we normally consider necessary seem contingent. It doesn't deal directly with gender, but rather works by implication: it raises questions about how many of our ideas about gender are tied in to contingent habits of thought.

Appleseed

John Clute, Tor Books, 2002

An homage to science fiction, with barely a trope untouched. Sexuality and sexual imagery are central to the book, which shuffles through the implications of dimorphism and dualism as components of human thought and experience.

"What I Didn't See"

Karen Joy Fowler, *scifi.com*

http://www.scifi.com/scifiction/originals/originals_archive/fowler/

In dialogue with the Tarzan stories and with Tiptree's "The Women Men Don't See," this story examines gender and heterosexual attraction within the frame of an emerging feminist and ethical consciousness. Not eligible for the Tiptree Award, because the author is one of the founding mothers.

"Madonna of the Maquiladora"

Gregory Frost, *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, May 2002

http://members.dca.net/gregory_frost/Pages/madonna.html

This coolly told story is in large part about the way women (and men) are treated in the maquiladoras of Juarez. It explores several kinds of power relationships: dispossession, complicity in institutional oppression, the blindness of well-meaning individual help, the self-image of masculinity as a mark of colonial identity.

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The Melancholy of Anatomy

Shelley Jackson, Anchor Books, 2002

A collection of thematically linked short stories that, taken together, form a unified whole: surrealist play on sexuality, gender, and the body.

Salt Fish Girl

Larissa Lai, Thomas Allen & Son, Ltd., 2002

A beautifully written novel about class and female identity. *Salt Fish Girl* draws on Chinese mythology, and is simultaneously fantasy and science fiction.



On Tiptree

by Maureen Kincaid Speller

Somewhere in my brain is a macro that fires off every time I'm asked to write or say something about the Tiptree Award: *it's not like any other award*. Actually, no two awards are exactly alike, but the Tiptree has a certain extra *je ne sais quoi*. This is, after all, the award that funds itself with bake sales, that crowns its winner with a tiara, the award that

Conjunctions 39: The New Wave Fabulists

Peter Straub (ed.), see conjunctions.com

<http://www.conjunctions.com/joidx.htm>

Many of the stories in this anthology deal with gender issues in one way or another. Some of the most interesting stories are the ones by John Crowley, Elizabeth Hand, Nalo Hopkinson, Kelly Link, James Morrow, and Paul Park.

2002 Long List

"The Potter of Bones", Eleanor Arnason, *Asimov's*, September 2002

"The Fool's Tale", L. Timmel Duchamp, *Leviathan Three*, Ministry of Whimsy Press, 2002

Schild's Ladder, Greg Egan, Eos, 2002

"Grandma", Carol Emshwiller, *F&SF*, March 2002

"Princess Aria", R. Garcia y Robertson, *F&SF*, July 2002

Effendi, Jon Courtenay Grimwood, Eathlight/Simon and Schuster, 2002

Pashazade, Jon Courtenay Grimwood, Eathlight/Simon and Schuster, 2001

Sisters of the Raven, Barbara Hambly, Aspect, 2002

Amy Unbounded: Belondweg Blossoming, Rachel Hartman, Pug House Press, 2002

"Freedom, Spiced and Drunk", M.C.A. Hogarth, *Strange Horizons*, May 27 2002

Whipstock, Barb Howard, NeWest Press, 2002

The Fall of the Kings, Ellen Kushner and Delia Sherman, Bantam Doubleday Dell Pub, 2002

"Wild Girls", Ursula K. Le Guin, *Asimov's*, March 2002

"Seasons of the Ansarac", Ursula K. Le Guin, *Infinite Matrix*, June 3 2002

"Breathmoss", Ian MacLeod, *Asimov's*, May 2002

Fire Logic, Laurie Marks, Tor, 2002

The Scar, China Mieville, Del Rey, 2002

"Princes and Priscilla", Ruth Nestvold, *Strange Horizons*, April 8 2002

Years of Rice and Salt, Kim Stanley Robinson, Bantam Doubleday Dell Pub, 2002

Hominids, Robert J. Sawyer, Tor, 2003

Empire of Bones, Liz Williams, Bantam Books, 2002

"The Waif", Gene Wolfe, *F&SF*, January 2002

comes with an edible trophy. This is a literary award that really doesn't take itself too seriously ... but it's an award that also takes itself extremely seriously indeed, and it's that side of the Tiptree Award I want to address in this article.

First, some history. We all know who James Tiptree, Jr. was, right? A lot of people thought they knew exactly

who James Tiptree, Jr. was. Short story writer, worked for the US government, including a period with the CIA: the assumption was that this was a man's career and that the writer, therefore was male. This is what Robert Silverberg said in an introduction to a collection of Tiptree's short stories:

"Inflamed by Tiptree's obstinate insistence on personal obscurity, science-fictionists have indulged themselves in the wildest sort of speculation about him It has been suggested that Tiptree is female, a theory that I find absurd, for there is to me something ineluctably masculine about Tiptree's writing. I don't believe the novels of Jane Austen could have been written by a man nor the stories of Ernest Hemingway by a woman, and in the same way I believe the author of the James Tiptree stories is male."

Others were not so sure. What the *Science Fiction Encyclopedia* refers to as 'the deeply felt rapport [Tiptree] displayed for women in stories like 'The Women Men Don't See' had caught the attention of readers like Debbie Notkin. In the introduction to *Flying Cups and Saucers*, 'Why Have a Tiptree Award?' she describes how, after reading 'The Women Men Don't See', she started telling people that Tiptree was a woman. 'No man, I said, could have written that story.' Notkin goes on:

"Chelsea Quinn Yarbro told me I was wrong. She was in regular correspondence with 'Tip' [...]. She pulled out correspondence about being a spook for the CIA, about traveling alone in Yucatan, about other very male adventures. She convinced me.

"And once I thought about it, I was delighted. If a man could write 'The Women Men Don't See,' the world was a little more complex,

and held a little more hope for a meeting of the sexes, than I had previously imagined."

And here's Tiptree himself, before his true identity was revealed, writing in the now legendary 'Women in Science Fiction: A Symposium' edited by Jeffery Smith and published in *Khatru* 3 & 4. I'm using the quotation slightly out of context, I admit, but I think the sentiment holds good, no matter what was going on in the background.

"What we think and feel about 'women in SF' is only a by-product of what we think and feel about women and men in the whole bitter chuckle of life. I think we can take it for granted that women are Human beings who have been drastically oppressed, deprived and warped out of shape by our male-dominated and largely lunatic culture. So are men, to a lesser and less personally destructive degree."

Looking back at all this, with the hindsight of 30 years, I'm fascinated by the way in which a whole thread of argument about how women function in the modern world can be encapsulated in three short quotations. But there it all is ... the assumption that men and women write differently and in recognisable ways, a 'recognition' that relies on cues that don't always have much to do with the actual texts, and lying alongside it the realisation that the issue was less about whether men or women wrote *like* one another, more to do with *how* they wrote about one

another, and that the issue is, at heart, about women and men, men and women. For many people Tiptree embodied that hope for the future ...

It's difficult now to imagine what it was like when James Tiptree, Jr. was revealed to be Alice Sheldon. So many people had invested so much in their own versions of the Tiptree story. As Notkin puts it, 'none of us knew how to react'. And yet, the biography was still accurate ... Tiptree/Sheldon had done all those things, masculine, feminine, whatever; people had made assumptions, that was all. Tiptree herself wrote an essay, 'Only The Signature Was a Lie', which pointed out that everyone had seen what they wanted to see. Robert Silverberg apologised.

Let's fast-forward through twenty-plus years of literary sf history, during which time more women began publishing, women's sf got onto the programmes at conventions, and more women, including myself, started to attend conventions in their own right rather than just accompanying boyfriends and husbands.

It's 1991 and Pat Murphy has had a brilliant idea. At Wiscon 15, she and Karen Joy Fowler have invented a new sf award, 'an award for works of science fiction that explore and expand gender roles. We're naming it after James Tiptree'. The printed version of Murphy's speech at that Wiscon, included in *The Bakery Men Don't See Cookbook*, includes an example of what many writers, male and female, saw themselves as being up against. Here, a male writer has just criticised *The Falling*

Woman because 'there are no strong male characters anywhere in it.' Murphy goes on:

"Now I find it interesting that he perceived it as a problem. I've never heard anyone criticize *Moby Dick* on the grounds that it has no strong female characters – no females at all, except for a couple of whales with bit parts.

"[...] the writer was interpreting my work according to an underlying set of expectations and assumptions, according to his knowledge of the way the world worked. [...] Obviously, not everyone agreed with that assessment, but it startled me that anyone – especially an intelligent writer – would be thinking in that way.

"[...] What can we do about these hidden assumptions? How can we change them – and I say 'we' because I think we all have to work at this, not just a few men, and not just a few women. What can we do?"

It was, though, Karen Joy Fowler who noted that there were *sf* no awards named after women, and suggested this award after James Tiptree, Jr. Murphy calls this 'such a perfect idea', and even thirteen years down the line, I'd find it hard to argue with that.

And so, in the spirit of 'what can we do', the Tiptree Award endeavours to draw attention to and honour those writers who, in the words of Karen Joy Fowler, 'try to help us unlearn what television and the movies and books and comics and advertisements for automobiles and cigarettes

have taught us' about how to be women, and for that matter, how to be men too.

The award itself is run a little differently to most others in that the judges, handpicked by Fowler and Murphy, the Founding Mothers, do not release a list of nominees prior to the announcement of the award's winner, the desire being to avoid creating a list of 'losers' but they do release a shortlist of books they'd like to draw readers' attention to, after the winner has been announced (and these lists are all available at www.tiptree.org). And this award, uniquely in my experience, gives equal weight and value to the novel and the short form, alongside one another. It's not an award for women writers: the gender spectrum is fully represented in the shortlist. Nor is it an award for US writers: shortlists have featured Storm Constantine, Alasdair Gray, M. John Harrison, Gwyneth Jones, Ian McDonald, Salman Rushdie, just to name a few writers a British audience might be more immediately familiar with.

And even that short list of names offers another clue to the breadth of writing being covered. This award is not operating within a definition of science fiction that is focused solely on the genre heartland. Which is not to say that the genre heartland isn't a part of its remit, but alongside that the award looks at a startling range of small press work that doesn't necessarily receive massive amounts of publicity, looks at the short story magazines and, magpie-like, snaps up mainstream publications that fit the bill – Maggie

Gee's *Ice People* is one such example.

So how do the judges get hold of all these books and stories? Obviously, they are all fantastically knowledgeable and well-read, but so are the rest of us, and this is another key element in the Tiptree Award's mission to make the award a collaborative effort. The judges are always actively soliciting suggestions from anywhere and everywhere. If you go to their website, you can suggest books and stories the judges should take a look at. In fact, I earnestly encourage you to. As I said, this award is not just for US writers. The jury always includes an overseas judge, and the judges are always excited by the prospect of spreading the net even wider. And you can make your contribution.

All of this means there's a good chance that in any given year, you might not have heard of the winner before. Hiromi Goto's *The Kappa Child*, last year's winner, was published by a Canadian small press and not very easy to get hold of, even in the US. (Reassuringly, amazon.co.uk now lists it and Goto's other books, but why not ask your bookseller to order it.) No one exactly came to blows over the final copy in the Wiscon dealers' room; let's just say that as the word went round that it was available, the piles melted faster than snow on a hot day, such was the word-of-mouth enthusiasm for the book. And the book itself is remarkable – here's what one of the judges had to say about it:

It is a beautifully, gracefully told story. The

prose glides from the narrator's real-time (shopping cart collections, poor self-image, cucumber binges, halting, if not downright painful interactions with family and friends), to her childhood recollections (presented in hilarious, heartbreaking contrast to Little House on the Prairie), to her recent encounters with the Stranger/Kappa, to brief meditations about water, birth, growth, identity (as told by the Kappa? the magically conceived fetus? the narrator's nascent self? all of the above?) There's so much vivid imagery here: lots of water, lots of green; and many oppositional references to American television and Japanese mythology.

The previous year's winner, Molly Gloss's *Wild Life* has not, I think, been published in the UK, which is a great pity. Its heroine, Charlotte Bridger Drummond, would, I think strike a chord – described as 'a free-thinking feminist who makes her living as a Jules-Vernesque fantasy writer' and 'a staunch advocate for women's rights, with a sense of strength and humour that informs everything in her daily life', she had not a little flavour of several Edwardian women writers about her, though I admit that we are a little short on logging camps and sasquatch, both key components in a story that looks at Charlotte's changing perceptions of her life. I was

personally bowled over by this book when I read it, and it's still a great favourite of mine.

These novel in turn contrast sharply with the 1999 winner, *The Conqueror's Child* by Suzy McKee Charnas, the conclusion to her Holdfast Chronicles, a series which has worked its way from a post-holocaust misogynistic dystopia through a matriarchal alternative, the society of the Riding Women, to a society that has become more balanced in its outlook. L. Timmel Duchamp, one of the judges, said:

In Charnas's post-liberation Holdfast, we see that for society to become politically inclusive, not only do men have to cease to be masters, but also their conception of what a socially normative man is must change. This is science fiction as political laboratory at its finest.

I could keep on looking back over many more fine stories, but it's time to look forward. By the time you read this, we'll know which title the judges have selected to receive the 2002 Tiptree Award, and the shortlist will have been released. There will be more titles to seek out, more stories to challenge our preconceptions about science fiction and about gender roles, more to talk about. And we do still need to challenge those preconceptions, in our fiction and in our daily lives. Here's just one small example for

you. Why exactly is the latest piece of reality-tv called *Wifewrap*? Why wasn't it *Husbandswap*? Or, even better, something gender-neutral?

Back in 1991, Pat Murphy said: 'if you ask me why we need this award, then you haven't been listening.' I think that still holds true, twelve years on. We make progress, little by little, but it's still important to celebrate fiction that pushes the envelope and extends our appreciation of just what women and men, men and women can do with their lives. Indeed, at a point in time when many believe that we just don't have to worry about this kind of inequality any more because it doesn't exist, it's even more important that we do this.

**The 2003
James Tiptree, Jr. Award**

Awarded

at WisCon 28, Madison, WI

Judges

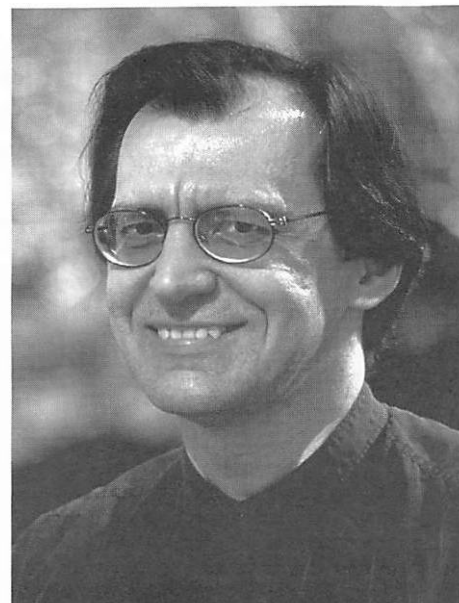
Maureen Kincaid Speller, chair
Michael Marc Levy
Vicki Rosenzweig
Lori Selke
Nisi Shawl

“Stories for Men”, John Kessel, Asimov’s Science Fiction Magazine, Oct/Nov 2002

John Kessel is a professor of American literature and director of the Creative Writing program at North Carolina State University. He holds a B.A. in English and physics from the University of Rochester, and an M.A. and PhD in English from the University of Kansas. His novella “Another Orphan” received the 1982 Nebula Award from the Science Fiction Writers of America, and his short story “Buffalo” won the 1991 Theodore Sturgeon Award and the Locus Poll. His novels include *Freedom Beach*, written in collaboration with James Patrick Kelly, and *Good News from Outer Space*, a finalist for the 1989 Nebula. His story collection, *Meeting in Infinity*, was named a notable book of 1992 by the

New York Times Book Review. His play *Faustfeathers* won the 1994 Paul Green Playwrights’ Competition and, with sf writer Bruce Sterling, he plays a small role in the independent film *The Delicate Art of the Rifle*. Writer Kim Stanley Robinson has called Kessel’s most recent novel, *Corrupting Dr. Nice*, “the best time travel novel ever written” and *Sci-Fi Weekly* has called him “quite possibly the best short story writer working in science fiction today.”

His criticism has appeared in *The Los Angeles Times Book Review*, *Science Fiction Age*, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, and other publications. With Mark L. Van Name and Richard Butner, he has run the Sycamore Hill Writers’



Conference, which recently produced the anthology *Intersections*. He lives with his wife and daughter in Raleigh, North Carolina.

John Kessel

by Molly Gloss

“Stories For Men” is written in clear, descriptive prose about people who are, in just about every way, unchanged from the people we are now. In a year in which everyone seems to be writing in abstruse and ambiguous ways about throw-away bodies and human beings living in the interstices of quantum space, this makes Kessel’s story a rather odd duck, and perhaps even a bit old-fashioned. But the style in which Kessel writes is integral to the question his novella explores.

What Kessel is interested in, it seems to me, is the *meaning* of story, its power and place in our lives; and also the importance and life of communities; and the place where these things intersect.

Our writers, most of them, from Thoreau to Mailer, and certainly including the several writers represented in *Stories for Men* (the very real anthology from 1936 which is a pivotal artifact in Kessel’s novella) are focused on the individual – on isolation and loneliness and solitary heroism and dying alone in a seedy hotel

room or shot down in the dusty streets of a Western town. Our writers have given their sympathies and their interest to the one who’s misunderstood or mistreated by the community, as in *The Scarlet Letter*, or to the outcast, the gadfly, the mountain man lone hero, as in Hemingway and his many successors.

What interests Kessel, I think, as it does few writers, and especially few science fiction writers, is the individual within the context of his kinships. He is interested in the way communities carry the

weight and memory of the past inside them, and the way that past lies like a pattern on the landscape of the community, and on its people.

He is particularly interested in how the stories we tell ourselves are an important part of the process by which we determine who we are, as individuals and as a people. Erno is struggling to find his place in his world, his community, and *Stories for Men* seems to him to be a text to help him understand himself, a way of making his life sensible. "Stories for Men," on the other hand, reimagines and reexamines those stories of outcasts and

lone heroes and manly contests, within the context of a community richly and unsentimentally brought to life in Kessel's clear, vivid prose.

Questions are often more important than answers, and Kessel offers no easy answers. He asks how we can find a proper balance between individual needs and obligations, and the needs and expectations of the community. He asks about the paradox of the small community – how it can be a place of suffocating proprieties and gossip and self-righteousness, and also a place of fundamental decency and connectedness.

He raises the difficulty of defining community without saying who is excluded. And he looks at the dark edges of communities, where they grow from consensus toward authoritarianism. And because he has chosen a female-centered community as the context for exploring these questions, and because his central question seems to be the way in which the (very male) "cowboy" myth explains and defines and acts upon the American experience, this is a story particularly relevant to the Tiptree, and particularly apt in these times.

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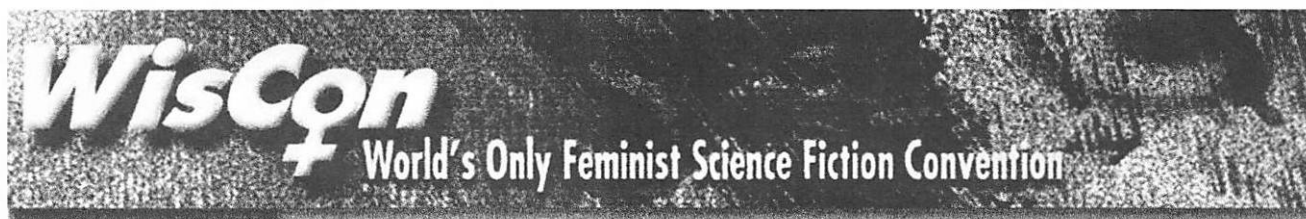
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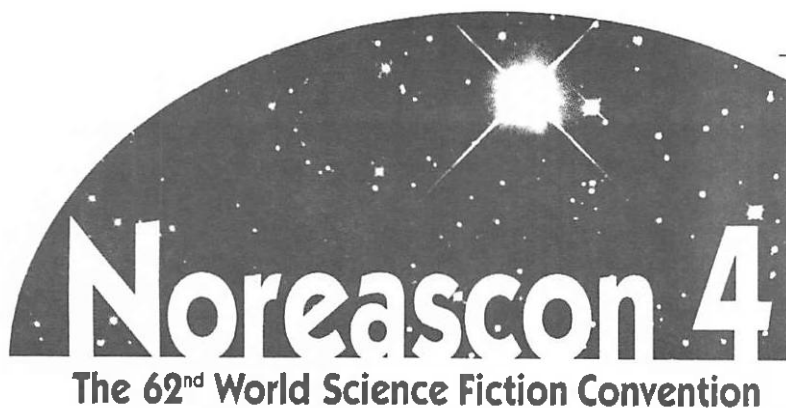
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Light, M. John Harrison, Gollancz, 2002

A Review

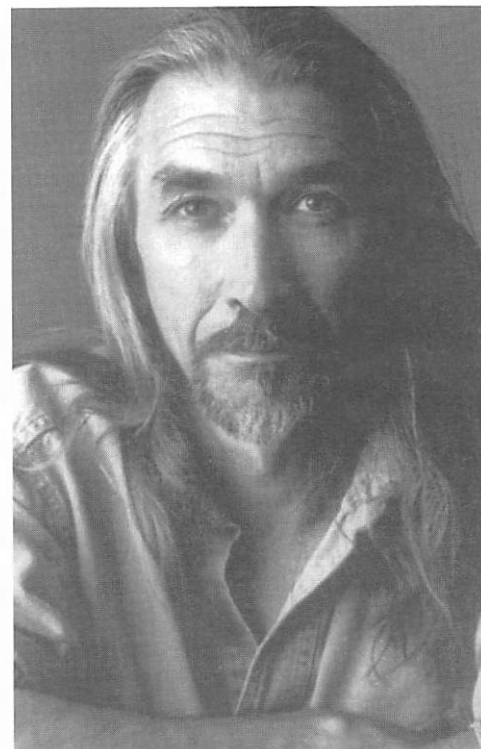
by Farah Mendlesohn

Light is a space opera. It works on three tracks. Four hundred years in the future, Ed Chianese, a 'twink' who has spent a lot of time in a VR tank but keeps telling everyone he meets that once he had a life, once he was a space pilot; Seria Mau, a cyborg, embodied in the K-Ship the White Cat; and in the year 2000 Kearney, mathematician, occultist and serial killer (mainly of women). Just to make it worse, Kearney is the man who will discover the route to the future. And the route to the future is as much through identity and the struggle for self-definition as it is through mathematics. Kearney and his colleague Tate search for an abstruse mathematical formulae that will open up new avenues of physics but Kearney is falling apart and Tate is on the edge of a breakdown. Seria Mau looks for ways not to be herself and to explore the Ketahuchi Tract opened up by the Kearney-Tate equations. Ed Chianese simply seeks to escape his past and the threat of the Cray Sisters, secretary-blouse wearing gangsters, tusked cultivars and kiddie gangs, groups of gun-toting eight year olds. Through all of this wanders the figure of the Shrande, horse-skull head, elderly woman's body. Years before Kearney stole her dice, and since then he has been killing to keep it at bay. What the Shrande is, and what it wants, shapes the book.

None of the protagonists are likeable and they are often unlikeable in ways that

are precisely to do with the structuring and exploration of gender. Seria Mau and Anna Kearney consumed with fierce denial of their bodies and their own femaleness. As with a lot of Harrison's work, his male characters are in love with ostentatious masculinity. It is Kearney's obsession with a particular ideal of masculinity, enamoured of a particular idea of what it is to be a man and the way in which women interact with his own personal fears that lead to his killing. All his choices are structured by his belief that killing women can somehow keep at bay his private fears. He is so blinded by a gendered interpretation of the world that he cannot see beyond it, can only look for more mathematical ways to 'justify' what he is doing--a term I use hesitantly because he is also sickened by it. But each wrong choice carves his road deeper and it is at all points made clear that this is his choice. The only thing driving him to these killings is himself and his own refusal to ask for directions.

But Harrison believes that the energy of masculinity can be wonderful. To be in love with the myths of masculinity can be both tragic and poetic. Four shadow boys have a fight and kill one of their number. They cradle his head tenderly, knowing that 'you can do it all again. Tomorrow night you can do it all over again' in yet one more of the 'one shot cultivars' or modified bodies



I've just finished re-reading M. John Harrison's new novel, *Light*. I wanted to wait until it was out in proofs and so in some sense public.

I know that it is only August, but this is far and away the most impressive book I have read this year, and quite possibly one of the best sf books ever written. However, while I want to go around being terribly evangelical, this is not a book that one could recommend to anyone and without qualms. It is probably going to be controversial and it would certainly be a controversial selection for a Tiptree list. But it is the first book I have read that I really thought of as a Tiptree winner, rather than as a short list book. I think it stunning —

Dr. Farah Mendlesohn (e-mail to the panel of judges)

that can be created for pleasure or business. The cultivars offer new avenues of exploration. Of the several books this year which introduce the idea of disposable bodies, this is the only one which hasn't settled for a simple murder mystery. Cultivars allow people to be who and what they want. New bodies can be 'carved' or cultivated, short or long term body swaps changes, so that Annie, a huge rickshaw woman with the muscle fibres of a horse (literally) and enhanced with cafe electrique, swaps her hyped muscles and fibres for the body of a 'Mona', a creature designed as a male sex fantasy but which she adopts not for the protagonist, Ed Chianese, but for herself, because *she* wants to know what it feels like to have a lover bigger than her. 'This isn't for you, it's for me.' she says in the face of his loss and bemusement. But the other side of this is that cultivars and clones can be exploited. The tool is not intrinsically evil, but there is a crucial difference between Annie in the body of a Mona, and the cloned Mona we meet on Seria Mau's ship. One is her own person, the other a live doll taught that any attention, no matter how awful, represents love. But the marginalisation of a person within their world is not the same as the marginalisation of characters within the text. One of the things I like about this books is that Harrison's anger at exploitation and damage is reflected in the way he treats

minor characters. There are no red jerseys here. Minor characters are protagonists in their own stories which leak off the edge of the page. Even the Mona clone is given a sense of herself so that her death, when it comes, is meaningful.

Bodies are crucial to the book. Kearney's ex-wife Anna is anorexic, a common theme in Harrison's work as is illness generally, but this time Anna works through and becomes something more, stops punishing herself before even Kearney realises that his behaviour too is about punishment – what he does sickens him. It's a profound study of perversion and the dialectic of power and impotence – Kearney has to let go of his fantasy, and of his power over the female body, before he can have either intercourse or understanding. If Anna starves her body, Seria Mau has gone a stage further, rejecting her body to become part of a K-Ship. There is no question that Seria Mau, the White Cat, is a comment on the utter sentimentality of *The Ship Who Sang*. Where Helva revels in her ship-body, Seria Mau is coming to realise that she has sacrificed too much and that her decision to become a K-Ship was as much a desire to punish herself as it was to realise the desire of flight. Seria Mau is brutal, ruthless, her ship brutally ugly (a battle Harrison appears to have lost with regard to the cover) and her behaviour laughs in the face of Helva's altruism. She spaces her passengers,

rescues someone for a whim and kills them when they bore her. Light is a mourning for all illusions of gender, that men must be in control or that women must be gentle are demonstrated as damaging myths with a rare tenderness whether in the grief of the shadow boys for their fallen comrade (even if they did kill him themselves) or the tenderness of Kearney for Anna which cuts across his self actuated fear and psychosis.

Choices are the key to Harrison's agenda. There are no miracles. All solutions originate with oneself. Kearney's understanding of the Shranders turns out to be profoundly wrong. Seria Mau and Ed Chianese, in uncovering their pasts, find new futures. Light rests continually on that liminal moment, the choice not made, the door which the protagonist never enters. Ideas and manifestations of identity are the centre of the plot. I don't know whether Light expands gender roles, but it is a profound and ruthless exploration and expansion of understandings of gender. There is a real sense of process here: characters finish in a very different space from where they begin and crucial to the shift is their changing understanding of the weight of gender identity. The physics is as rigorous as the psychology, in that the causality violations of FTL are precisely mapped on the revisiting and reworking of the past which is central to healing.

M John Harrison • Biography

<http://www.mjohnharrison.com>

M John Harrison was born in the UK in 1945, in Rugby, Warwickshire.

At school he studied aeronautics and technical drawing but preferred to read W H Davies. He left school, without much in the way of qualification in 1963, and worked briefly as a groom, a teacher and a clerk before his first short story was published in 1966.

Shortly afterwards he moved to London, where, in 1968, he joined Michael Moorcock's magazine *New Worlds*, as books editor. There, he published articles in which he argued that the the fantasy and science fiction of the day were ill-written, politically naïve and aimed at people who refused to grow up. He continued to be involved with *New Worlds* and the New Wave for the next ten years, during which time he wrote and published *The Committed Men*, *The Pastel City*, *The Centauri Device*, and a collection of short stories, *The Machine in Shaft Ten*. Increasingly dissatisfied with writing, he took up rock climbing.

In 1976 he left London for the north, where he

became briefly involved with the Manchester-based Savoy Books, wrote for the *New Manchester Review*, and pursued his obsession with rock.. His contribution to the new routes spearheaded by Brian & Paul Cropper and the legendary Loz Francombe was minimal but determined. (Harrison fell off Lethal Dose in Cheedale seven times and spent the rest of the afternoon sitting in a tree.) In 1982 his third Viriconium novel, *In Viriconium*, was nominated for the Guardian Fiction Prize. He began his autobiographical novel *Climbers*, and published two collections of short stories, *The Ice Monkey* and *Viriconium Nights*.

By 1987, he was back in London, where he ghost-wrote the autobiography of Ron Fawcett, a leading British climber. In 1989, *Climbers* was published, to considerable notice, and won the Boardman Tasker Memorial Award, which was given only for nonfiction mountaineering works. Harrison collaborated with the artist Ian Miller on a graphic novel version of his story "The Luck in the

Head", and began to research a soon-to-be-abandoned nonfiction follow-up to *Climbers*, called *The Drop*, set in the roped-access engineering industry. *The Course of the Heart*, perhaps his most accomplished novel, was published in 1992.

Since then, Harrison has published a further novel, *Signs of Life*; and a collection of short stories, *Travel Arrangements*. He has reviewed fiction and nonfiction for the *Spectator* and the *Times Literary Supplement*; and taught creative writing—with a focus on landscape and the autobiographical novel—with Adam Lively and the biographer Jim Perrin. He was involved with Beaulah Land, a mixed media performance piece devised by Claire McDonald and Lucy Bailey, put on at the ICA in 1994; and collaborated with the director Simon Pummel on a short animated film for C4 called *Ray Gun Fun*. He has written short fiction with Simon Ings.

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The Committed Men is still in print, I think—in a Gollancz paperback edition. *The Centauri Device* and *Viriconium* (a volume containing "The Pastel City," "A Storm of Wings," "In Viriconium" and "Viriconium Nights") are available as Gollancz SF and Fantasy Masterworks respectively. *Signs of Life* is available as a Flamingo paperback. *Travel Arrangements* is available in hardback & trade paperback from Gollancz, and will be available from Flamingo in B-format paperback in November 2001.

The Ice Monkey, Climbers, and *The Course of the Heart* are out of print but available from Andy Richards at Cold Tonnage Books. Many of the other out of print titles may be available second hand through other dealers which can be searched on Add All.



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