

Stone Martyrs



268038365 | © Wirestock | Dreamstime.com

Conversation Pieces



A Small Paperback Series from Aqueduct Press
Subscriptions available: www.aqueductpress.com

1. The Grand Conversation
Essays by L. Timmel Duchamp
2. With Her Body
Short Fiction by Nicola Griffith
3. Changeling
A Novella by Nancy Jane Moore
4. Counting on Wildflowers
An Entanglement by Kim Antieau
5. The Traveling Tide
Short Fiction by Rosaleen Love
6. The Adventures of the Faithful Counselor
A Narrative Poem by Anne Sheldon
7. Ordinary People
A Collection by Eleanor Arnason
8. Writing the Other
A Practical Approach
by Nisi Shawl & Cynthia Ward
9. Alien Bootlegger
A Novella by Rebecca Ore
10. The Red Rose Rages (Bleeding)
A Short Novel by L. Timmel Duchamp
11. Talking Back: Epistolary Fantasies
edited by L. Timmel Duchamp
12. Absolute Uncertainty
Short Fiction by Lucy Sussex

13. Candle in a Bottle
A Novella by Carolyn Ives Gilman
14. Knots
Short Fiction by Wendy Walker
15. Naomi Mitchison: A Profile of Her Life and Work
A Monograph by Lesley A. Hall
16. We, Robots
A Novella by Sue Lange
17. Making Love in Madrid
A Novella by Kimberly Todd Wade
18. Of Love and Other Monsters
A Novella by Vandana Singh
19. Aliens of the Heart
Short Fiction by Carolyn Ives Gilman
20. Voices From Fairyland:
The Fantastical Poems of Mary Coleridge, Charlotte
Mew, and Sylvia Townsend Warner
Edited and With Poems by Theodora Goss
21. My Death
A Novella by Lisa Tuttle
22. De Secretis Mulierum
A Novella by L. Timmel Duchamp
23. Distances
A Novella by Vandana Singh
24. Three Observations and a Dialogue:
Round and About SF
Essays by Sylvia Kelso and a correspondence
with Lois McMaster Bujold
25. The Buonarotti Quartet
Short Fiction by Gwyneth Jones
26. Slightly Behind and to the Left
Four Stories & Three Drabbles by Claire Light
27. Through the Drowsy Dark
Short Fiction and Poetry by Rachel Swirsky

28. Shotgun Lullabies
Stories and Poems by Sheree Renée Thomas
29. A Brood of Foxes
A Novella by Kristin Livdahl
30. The Bone Spindle
Poems and Short Fiction by Anne Sheldon
31. The Last Letter
A Novella by Fiona Lehn
32. We Wuz Pushed
On Joanna Russ and Radical Truth-Telling
by Lee Mandelo
33. The Receptionist and Other Tales
Poems by Lesley Wheeler
34. Birds and Birthdays
Stories by Christopher Barzak
35. The Queen, the Cambion, and Seven Others
Stories by Richard Bowes
36. Spring in Geneva
A Novella by Sylvia Kelso
37. The XY Conspiracy
A Novella by Lori Selke
38. Numa
An Epic Poem by Katrinka Moore
39. Myths, Metaphors, and Science Fiction:
Ancient Roots of the Literature of the Future
Essays by Sheila Finch
40. NoFood
Short Fiction by Sarah Tolmie
41. The Haunted Girl
Poems and Short Stories by Lisa M. Bradley
42. Three Songs for Roxy
A Novella by Caren Gussoff
43. Ghost Signs
Poems and a Short Story by Sonya Taaffe

44. The Prince of the Aquamarines & The Invisible Prince: Two Fairy Tales
by Louise Cavelier Levesque
45. Back, Belly, and Side: True Lies and False Tales
Short Fiction by Celeste Rita Baker
46. A Day in Deep Freeze
A Novella by Lisa Shapter
47. A Field Guide to the Spirits
Poems by Jean LeBlanc
48. Marginalia to Stone Bird
Poems by R.B. Lemberg
49. Unpronounceable
A Novella by Susan diRende
50. Sleeping Under the Tree of Life
Poetry and Short Fiction by Sheree Renée Thomas
51. Other Places
Short Fiction by Karen Heuler
52. Monteverde: Memoirs of an Interstellar Linguist
A Novella by Lola Robles,
translated by Lawrence Schimel
53. The Adventure of the Incognita Countess
A Novella by Cynthia Ward
54. Boundaries, Border Crossings,
and Reinventing the Future
Essays and Short Fiction by Beth Plutchak
55. Liberating the Astronauts
Poems by Christina Rau
56. In Search of Lost Time
A Novella by Karen Heuler
57. Cosmovore
Poems by Kristi Carter
58. Helen's Story
A Novella by Rosanne Rabinowitz
59. Liminal Spaces
Short Fiction by Beth Plutchak

60. Feed Me the Bones of Our Saints
Short Fiction by Alex Dally MacFarlane
61. If Not Skin: Collected Transformations
Poems and Short Fiction by Toby MacNutt
62. The Adventure of the Dux Bellorum
A Novella by Cynthia Ward
63. People Change
Short Fiction and Poems by Gwynne Garfinkle
64. Invocabulary
Poems by Gemma Files
65. The Green and Growing
A Novella by Erin K. Wagner
66. Everything is Made of Letters
Short Fiction by Sofia Rhei
67. Midnight at the Organporium
Short Fiction by Tara Campbell
68. Algorithmic Shapeshifting
Poems by Bogi Takács
69. The Rampant
A Novella by Julie C. Day
70. Mary Shelley Makes a Monster
Poems by Octavia Cade
71. Articulation
Short Plays to Nourish the Mind & Soul
by Cesi Davidson
72. City of a Thousand Feelings
A Novella by Anya Johanna DeNiro
73. Ancient Songs of Us
Poems by Jean LeBlanc
74. The Adventure of the Naked Guide
A Novella by Cynthia Ward
75. Sacred Summer
Poems by Cassandra Clarke
76. Disease
Short Fiction by Sarah Tolmie

77. Goddess Bandit of the Thousand Arms
Poems by Hal Y. Zhang
78. Resistance and Transformation: On Fairy Tales
Essays by Mari Ness
79. The Silences of Ararat
A Novella by L. Timmel Duchamp
80. Cabinet of Wrath: A Doll Collection
Short Fiction by Tara Campbell
81. The Adventure of the Golden Woman
A Novella by Cynthia Ward
82. Fricatives
Short Plays to Nourish the Mind & Soul
by Cesi Davidson
83. We've Been Here Before
Poems by Anne Carly Abad
84. Bilabials
Short Plays to Nourish the Mind & Soul
by Cesi Davidson
85. When Home, No Need to Cry
Short Fiction by Erin K. Wagner
86. Apollo Weeps
A Novella by Xian Mao
87. To the Woman in the Pink Hat
A Novella by LaToya Jordan
88. From Voyages Unreturning
Poems by Deborah L. Davitt
89. Numinous Stones
Poems by Holly Lyn Walrath
90. Tales from Mnemosyne
A Novella by Dennis Danvers
91. Feraltales
Short Fiction by Couri Johnson
92. Cul de Sac Stories
Short Fiction by Tamara Kaye Sellman

93. Sinking, Singing
Short Fiction by Gwynne Garfinkle
94. Stop Plosive
Short Plays to Nourish the Mind & Soul
by Cesi Davidson
95. Stone Martyrs
A Novella by Erik Hofstatter

About the Aqueduct Press
Conversation Pieces Series

The feminist engaged with sf is passionately interested in challenging the way things are, passionately determined to understand how everything works. It is my constant sense of our feminist-sf present as a grand conversation that enables me to trace its existence into the past and from there see its trajectory extending into our future. A genealogy for feminist sf would not constitute a chart depicting direct lineages but would offer us an ever-shifting, fluid mosaic, the individual tiles of which we will probably only ever partially access. What could be more in the spirit of feminist sf than to conceptualize a genealogy that explicitly manifests our own communities across not only space but also time?

Aqueduct's small paperback series, Conversation Pieces, aims to both document and facilitate the "grand conversation." The Conversation Pieces series presents a wide variety of texts, including short fiction (which may not always be sf and may not necessarily even be feminist), essays, speeches, manifestoes, poetry, interviews, correspondence, and group discussions. Many of the texts are reprinted material, but some are new. The grand conversation reaches at least as far back as Mary Shelley and extends, in our speculations and visions, into the continually created future. In Jonathan Goldberg's words, "To look forward to the history that will be, one must look at and retell the history that has been told." And that is what Conversation Pieces is all about.

L. Timmel Duchamp

Jonathan Goldberg, "The History That Will Be" in Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero, eds., *Premodern Sexualities* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996)

Conversation Pieces

Volume 95

Stone Martyrs

by
Erik Hofstadter





Published by Aqueduct Press
PO Box 95787
Seattle, WA 98145-2787
www.aqueductpress.com

Copyright © 2025 by Erik Hofstatter
All rights reserved. First Edition, February 2025

Content warning: trauma, witchcraft/persecution,
sexual violence, explicit language.

No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any
form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior
permission in writing from the author.

ISBN: 978-1-61976-272-5

]

Cover illustration by Amy Walpole

Original Block Print of Mary Shelley by Justin
Kempton:
www.writersmugs.com

Printed in the USA by Applied Digital Imaging



268038135 © Wirestock | Dreamstime.com

No one shall live
who counts the stones three times
and finds the number the same

~ Ena,

Stop. Don't throw me on the fire again. These words will not burn. The red ink in my heart is still labeled "Mother's Love." You can scratch at it if you want, with your silence, but it won't peel. I only want to tell you about the cave. Where the baby argued with thunder. They heard you.

~ Ulla



~ Tyne,

You felt unattainable, always. But now I know why. I remember candles, wondering moments. Alone, in my chamber, I watched them melt and cry their white tears. Like they knew. Like they were sad for me. Maybe I'll tell you. Someday. What it felt like being your experiment.

~ Morven

~ Burne,

The irony. Burning for you. Being burned—by you.
All the wrong embers shone in your name. Right in
front of me. I should've paid attention

to the light

to the order

of letters

spelling out my doom

But letters mean nothing when they're sealed inside
a flesh envelope.

I can't open you.

Not yet.

~ Ena

~ Ena,

Do you think it strange? Newborns cry when they come out. Like they already hate it here. Guess not. Being pulled into the world, against your will—I would cry too. If I knew how. In that cave, you did not cry. You cackled. You shut the storm up. Imagine that. Even lightning was afraid of you. A force of nature they said. But no. You were far more destructive.

~ Ulla

~ Siddel,

We endure. Chipped hearts, unjust fates. We endure. We are the Stone brothers now. I will carve that on your gray chest. At midnight. When you can feel again.

~ Tyne



~ Tyne,

What Ena did to you. You had it coming. All of you.
My vagina is not a torture device.

~ Morven

~ Morven,

The candle language you speak well. Hate is a slow burn, but tears extinguish also. I am guilty of being the architect of your confusion. But it is merely an echo of my own. Inside you—my soul cries the loudest. You torture with guillotine eyes. You sever rationality until I can no longer think.

~ Tyne

PS: I was only a pawn in a king's game.

~ Tyne,

We live together. In the ground. Part of us, anyway.
Can you comprehend how happy that makes me?
Above—you were always busy. Somewhere else,
with someone else. This chipped stone, my heart,
you carried inside your pocket. I was with you.
Everywhere. Spying infidelity.

And now you cannot move.

Away

from me

~ Siddel

~ Siddel & Tyne,

You stood there on the battlefield of her stupid love,
Whispering Knights equipped with stubborn loyalty.
You defended your king. Your insults slashed at her.
Valiantly. Can eternity be undone? When the bell
chimes midnight, I will seek answers in the sky.

~ Burne



~ Ena,

At night bats sung to you. Did you know that? Some upside-down melody only you could hear. You liked dancing to their fear. You hid your energy in dark places for some idiot heart to find. And then you destroyed them. You were only two years old.

~ Ulla

~ Burne,

I watched you. Proud of the complex some minor
God put in your eyes. You were every fanatic's dream
weapon. It wasn't just your blade that sliced open
her belly. It was your ideology. Your anti-venom
for the world. You cut against her swollen skin—
the only shield between you and the early life you
stabbed and ended. You couldn't see me from behind
your tall euphoria. But that's when I knew.
That was the moment*

*I fell in love with you.

~ Ena



265024548 © Wirestock | Dreamstime.com

Afterword

This story was born in a cave—not unlike Mother Shipton herself. She was a 16th Century English soothsayer and prophetess, but often labeled as a witch. Her legend is associated with the origin of the Rollright Stones in Oxfordshire, England, where she reportedly transformed a king and his men to stone, after they failed her test. That became my blueprint. I wanted to create something that was bastardised, a hybrid alliance of poetry and lyricism. Abstract, but vulgar, something unholy told through a series of “found” letters that were never sent, simply because the inner mechanics lubricated by words that trigger trauma are best left unaddressed. My objective was to splash dark-colored emotions on a canvas seen by no one.

The book circulates thoughts between “the witch” and her mother, their sometime lover, but also examines the dynamics of a love triangle between two Whispering Knights and their chamber maid. The book is a collision of premeditated provocation and psychological manipulation that binds in a kind of Stockholm Syndrome, a constant rumination of obsessive thoughts intending to cannibalize them.

Erik Hofstatter

I was liberal with my interpretation of this enduring English legend—targeting key events but offering my own blood to give it life (figuratively speaking!). I hope you'll enjoy the transfusion.

~ Erik Hofstatter

April 2024

PS: The Mother Shipton's Cave and the petrifying well nearby is the oldest tourist attraction to charge a fee in England.

About the Author

Erik Hofstatter is a dark fiction writer born in the wild lands of the Czech Republic. He roamed Europe before subsequently settling on English shores, studying creative writing at the London School of Journalism. He now dwells in Kent, where he can be encountered consuming copious amounts of mead and tyrannizing local peasantry. His work has appeared in various magazines and podcasts around the world such as *Morpheus Tales*, *The Literary Hatchet*, *Wicked Library*, *Manor House Show*, and *The Black Room Manuscripts* Volume IV. Other works include *The Hurricane Caged Inside of Her*.