

The

Cascadia Subduction Zone

A LITERARY
QUARTERLY

July 2012 ☉ Vol. 2, No. 3



IN THIS ISSUE

ESSAYS

In Memoriam: Adrienne Rich
by L. Timmel Duchamp

Back at Day 1, Again
by Abby Koenig

POEMS

adam
by Kiik A.K.

wedding in the uncut hair
of the meadow
by Kiik A.K.

Most Beautiful in Death
by Alex Dally MacFarlane

BOOKS REVIEWED

Grandmother Magma
Nights at the Circus
by Angela Carter

Through the Valley
of the Nest of Spiders
by Samuel R. Delany

Report from Planet Midnight
by Nalo Hopkinson

The Killing Moon
by N.K. Jemisin

Fountain of Age
by Nancy Kress

Beyond Binary:
Genderqueer and Sexually Fluid
Science Fiction
edited by Brit Mandelo

FEATURED ARTIST

Meredith Scheff

☉ Meredith Scheff ☉

untitled

\$4.00

Managing Editor
Lew Gilchrist

Reviews Editor
Nisi Shawl

Features Editor
L. Timmel Duchamp

Arts Editor
Kath Wilham

\$4.00

VOL. 2 No. 3—JULY 2012

ESSAYS

In Memoriam: Adrienne Rich (1929-2012) ☉ 3
by L. Timmel Duchamp

Back at Day 1, Again ☉ 6
by Abby Koenig

POEMS

adam, by Kiik A.K. ☉ 9

wedding in the uncut hair of the meadow, by Kiik A.K. ☉ 19

Most Beautiful in Death, by Alex Dally MacFarlane ☉ 21

REVIEWS

Grandmother Magma
Nights at the Circus, by Angela Carter ☉ 10
reviewed by Graham Joyce

Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders, by Samuel R. Delany ☉ 12
reviewed by Victoria Garcia

Report from Planet Midnight, by Nalo Hopkinson ☉ 13
reviewed by Thomas Foster

The Killing Moon, by N.K. Jemisin ☉ 16
reviewed by Ebony Thomas

Fountain of Age, stories by Nancy Kress ☉ 17
reviewed by Cynthia Ward

Beyond Binary: Genderqueer and Sexually Fluid Science Fiction,
edited by Brit Mandelo ☉ 20
reviewed by Paige Clifton-Steele

FEATURED ARTIST

Meredith Scheff ☉ 22

© The Cascadia Subduction Zone, 2012

Subscriptions and single issues online
at: www.thecsz.com

Print subscription: \$15/yr;

Print single issue: \$4

Electronic Subscription (PDF format):
\$10 per year

Electronic single issue: \$3

Cover banner collagraph of the Cascadia subduction zone by Marilyn Liden Bode

To order by check, payable to:
Aqueduct Press
P.O. Box 95787
Seattle, WA 98145-2787
[Washington State Residents
add 9.5% sales tax.]

IN THIS ISSUE





In Memoriam: Adrienne Rich (1929-2012)

by L. Timmel Duchamp

On March 27, the world lost poet, essayist, and theorist Adrienne Rich. In my personal canon, Rich's work rubs shoulders with Joanna Russ's. For most of my adult life I've gone again and again to her poetry: not to be comforted, but to be slapped awake. True, I've often found my life and myself in her poetry, but that act of finding has always marked the onset of interrogation both painful and life-affirming. I need change, her poetry insists to me—change in the world I live in, change in my life, change in myself. Every time I've located myself within the unfolding, expansive images of her poetry, I've understood that I could never turn back from the path I needed to break for myself without betraying the self I always found in her poetry.

The obituary the next day in *The New York Times*, by Margalit Fox, began: "Adrienne Rich, a poet of towering reputation and towering rage, whose work—distinguished by an unswerving progressive vision and a dazzling, empathic ferocity—brought the oppression of women and lesbians to the forefront of poetic discourse and kept it there for nearly a half-century, died on Tuesday at her home in Santa Cruz, Calif. She was 82." The obituary notes, among other distinctions, Rich's McArthur grant in 1994 and the National Book Award in 1974 for *Diving into the Wreck*. "Widely read, widely anthologized, widely interviewed and widely taught, Ms. Rich was for decades among the most influential writers of the feminist movement and one of the best-known American public intellectuals. She wrote two dozen volumes of poetry and more than a half-dozen of prose; the poetry alone has sold nearly 800,000 copies, according to W. W. Norton & Company, her publisher since the mid-1960s." Poetry selling that well? Extraordinary for any poet, astonishing for a feminist, lesbian poet. But the most interesting line in the obituary, for me, is Fox's quotation from Rich's letter

in 1997, declining the National Medal of Arts, the United States government's highest award bestowed upon artists, written to Jane Alexander, then chairwoman of the National Endowment for the Arts, which administers the award. Rich expressed her dismay, Fox writes, amid the "increasingly brutal impact of racial and economic injustice," that the government had chosen to honor "a few token artists while the people at large are so dishonored. Art," Rich added, "means nothing if it simply decorates the dinner table of power which holds it hostage."

But the obituary also, unfortunately, asserts that Rich "accomplished in verse what Betty Friedan, author of *The Feminine Mystique*, did in prose." I disagree, strenuously. Adrienne Rich's work went so far beyond Betty Friedan's vision that the very idea of reducing her "verse" to Friedan's timid, limited accomplishment appalls me. To explain how wrong this is, I'd like to revisit Rich's *On Lies, Secret, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*, which blew open my thinking in 1981, when I first read it.

Awakening, re-vision, and compulsory heterosexuality are concepts I particularly associate with Rich, just as I do her warnings to feminists against thinking we can "transcend" the history of racism or our anger, or rid our lives of sexism without restructuring every institution of daily and public life. Many of the essays in this book remind me of how exuberant and exciting a task was the project of re-visioning the past and the little bit of literature by women then available to us in 1971—seeing and reading it through the lens of feminism—and discovering the then exhilaratingly strange, rebellious novels, plays, essays, and poems that had been "lost" in the shuffle of male-dominated history. We've had that lens now for forty years and spend much time grumpily adjusting it and complaining about the naiveté and inadequacy of that early re-visioning. But re-

"I've gone again and again to her poetry: not to be comforted, but to be slapped awake."

"Adrienne Rich's work went so far beyond Betty Friedan's vision that the very idea of reducing her 'verse' to Friedan's timid, limited accomplishment appalls me."



In Memoriam
(cont. from p. 3)

"I recollect joy upon succeeding joy at discovering that the past we'd been taught, in which women were passive, perhaps decorative, but largely mute, drudging, and pregnant, was a lie. Even the work we knew of read differently."

reading the essays in this book—looking afresh at the work of Emily Dickinson, Charlotte Bronte, Anne Hutchinson, and others—I recollect joy upon succeeding joy at discovering that the past we'd been taught, in which women were passive, perhaps decorative, but largely mute, drudging, and pregnant, was a lie. Even the work we knew of read differently. Women were and always had been part of those who made the world (for good or ill), and finding their doings would help create a new, different future from that we'd been socialized to take as inevitable. Uncovering that history as well as sharing the excitement of widespread rebellion confirmed what we'd always secretly believed: *we* would not suffer what our mothers had.

In "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision," Rich speaks of her own awakening in the late 1950s. After almost years of resisting, fiercely, identifying herself as a female poet—she had been taught, of course, that poetry should be "universal," meaning, as she says, "non-female"—and being unable to say "I" in her poetry, she began to write, for the first time, about experiencing herself as a woman. One section of "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law" concerns "a woman who thinks she is going mad; she is haunted by voices telling her to resist and rebel, voices which she can hear but not obey." (45) She was still unable to write "I," still feared insanity for feeling and thinking things that did not fit the logic of the world she lived in. This is always the beginning, though, for the lone individual waking to limitations and boundaries and definitions that hurt and confine her.

The flip side of the joy of discovering a past in which women were active and creative is the pain of realizing what has happened when women have accepted those limitations and boundaries and definitions as necessary (though not applying to them). Rich captures this with her poignant thoughts about reading Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition*, written in the 1950s. Arendt was highly respected in the intellectual

establishment, and so Rich turned to her work for help in thinking about the issues of women and work—about "the relationship of women's unpaid labor in the home to the separation between 'private' and 'public' spheres, of the woman's body as commodity." (211) Arendt, Rich notes, "writes as if the work of Olive Schreiner, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Emma Goldman, Jane Addams, to name only a few writers, had never existed. The withholding of women from participation in the *vita activa*, the 'common world,' and the connection of this with reproductivity, is something from which she does not so much turn her eyes as stare straight though unseeing. This 'great work' is thus a kind of failure for which masculine ideology has no name, precisely because in terms of that ideology it is successful, at the expense of truths the ideology considers irrelevant." (212) "To read such a book," Rich writes, "by a woman of large spirit and great erudition, can be painful, because it embodies the tragedy of a female mind nourished on male ideologies." (212)

Back in 1981, when I first read those words, I felt pain because Arendt's disavowal of the realities lived by most of her own sex felt like betrayal. But Rich understood better than I did at the time, the real tragedy: "The loss is ours, because Arendt's desire to grasp deep moral issues is the kind of concern we need to build a common world which will amount to more than 'life-styles.' The power of male ideology to possess such a female mind, to disconnect it as it were from the female body which encloses it and which it encloses, is nowhere more striking than in Arendt's lofty and crippled book." (212)

"Life-styles," in this passage, alludes to a theme running through *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*, that of temptations and dangers of sinking into cultural feminism, which by the mid-1970s was beginning to take shape in a feminism exalting "woman" and a separate sphere for women that not only shut out the ugliness of sexism but also promised to leave behind all oppressions merely by

"The flip side of the joy of discovering a past in which women were active and creative is the pain of realizing what has happened when women have accepted those limitations and boundaries and definitions as necessary..."



separation. The powerful 1978 “Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynophobia” tackles both “a shallow, ‘life-style’ brand of feminism” that “can shrug off the issue of racism” and “more political” white feminists’ intellectualization of racism. This essay walloped me so hard I remember where I was when I first read it. “Love, integrity, and survival all depend, in the face of our history as part of American racism, on the continuing question: *How are black and white women going to name, to found, to create, justice between us?* For even making love together, we can, and often do, perpetuate injustice.” (307) Those were radical words in 1978. They were still radical words in 1988. Rich struggles here and acknowledges that the work to be done is hardly begun. But she insists that that is a huge part of the work of feminism.

“Disloyal to Civilization” helped guide me in a new direction. It led me first to Audre Lorde. It prepared me to read *This Bridge Called My Back*. It helped me think about troubling aspects of the feminist theory I’d been reading, which for a long time I could not articulate but made me uneasy and even alienated.

I’d like to end this memorial with the last words of Rich’s Foreword to *A Human Eye: Essays on Art in Society, 1997–2008*, her last collection of essays:

Karl Marx—humanist philosopher and social psychologist that he was—described how in the

compulsive expansion of capital human senses become starved, reduced to the mere sense of ownership: “an object is only ours when we have it, when it exists for us as capital, or when it is directly eaten, drunk, worn, inhabited...utilized in some way.”

He also observed: “The eye has become a *human* eye only when its object has become a *human*, social object.” When art—as language, music, or, in palpable physically present silence—can induce that kind of seeing, holding, and responding, it can restore us to our senses.

And what apprehension, what responsibility then?

Precisely. Rich’s poetry and essays induce exactly that kind of seeing, holding, and responding; they have the capacity of restoring us to our senses. In doing so, she delivers us to her final question: “what apprehension, what responsibility, then?”

“The powerful 1978 ‘Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism, Racism, Gynophobia’ tackles both ‘a shallow, “life-style” brand of feminism’ that ‘can shrug off the issue of racism’ and ‘more political’ white feminists’ intellectualization of racism.”

“Rich’s poetry and essays induce exactly that kind of seeing, holding, and responding; they have the capacity of restoring us to our senses.”

L. Timmel Duchamp is the author of the Marq’ssan Cycle and two collections of short fiction, *Love’s Body*, *Dancing in Time* and *Never at Home*. She is also the founder and publisher of Aqueduct Press.





Back at Day 1, Again

by Abby Koenig

"Up until a certain point in life, babies are just objects to be placed in ladybug costumes in Anne Geddes portraits. For the most part, children don't seem real."

"The timeframe between the place where you have an intense hatred towards the idea of parenting, ... to a place where, 'Oh, that's a cute baby,' happens overnight."

"You turn older than 30, and the seed of fear that has been planted is beginning to blossom. You are a new car that has just driven off the lot; the Blue Book value of your eggs has lessened by 20%."

You spend the majority of your adult life desperately trying not to get pregnant. You harness the power of latex and spermicidal creams, sponges and films, pulls and prayers. You spin around in Ortho highs and lows, Yaz, Depo-Provera, Rings. You may be the last living woman on earth to still own a diaphragm.

Up until a certain point in life, babies are just objects to be placed in ladybug costumes in Anne Geddes portraits. For the most part, children don't seem real. They are far away in space and time. Children are unnecessary accessories that celebrities spawn for attention. They scream in the aisles of Target over toys that you've never heard of, with names you can't pronounce. They are cute, yes; you have a nephew that you enjoy sending books to that are well beyond his comprehension. But they are also a time-suck and demanding; they smell and they have green gunk coming out of their noses. Your nephew always finds the perfect time to start crying to his mother, exactly when you are about to tell her something extraordinarily important about your job or your hair. You secretly admit to yourself that you really don't even like children, let alone want one of your own.

The timeframe between the place where you have an intense hatred towards the idea of parenting, an "I love my carefree, childless life," an absolute contempt towards people who bring crying babies to brunches and ruin your Bloody Mary buzz, to a place where, "Oh, that's a cute baby," happens overnight. Literally, as you slumber, between being at the young age of 29 and waking up as an old and decrepit 30-year-old. Now babies don't seem all that bad. You find yourself creepily waving to get their attention on supermarket check-out lines and at shopping malls.

You turn older than 30, and the seed of fear that has been planted is beginning to blossom. You are a new car

that has just driven off the lot; the Blue Book value of your eggs has lessened by 20%. Your stock drops a few percentage points every morning that the uterus market opens.

This is the timeframe between the "babies are cute" phase and one of utter desperation. You would never expect to turn into one of "those women;" you have a career and ambition and a drinking habit, but something in you has changed. You begin to feel a hatred toward all those with children, especially young girls who you just know never wanted their babies to begin with and couldn't possibly love them as much as you could. Jealousy's ugly face looks like yours and you ain't looking pretty.

Eventually you decide to take action. Your current doctor, whose name is WebMD, has scared you for long enough with infertility symptoms and tales of potential polycystic ovarian cancer, and so you make an appointment with a real doctor who scares you with tales of polycystic ovarian syndrome (not cancer... yet). She can't be sure, though. You are a "non-standard" case.

You are advised to see a "fertility specialist" who resides in a large, futuristic building labeled with three letters that when placed together in this specific combination have more of a negative connotation than the word "Nazi":

IVF

The office takes up an entire floor and has far too many alcoves and evil looking doors labeled with unwelcoming gold-plated signs reading "In Vitro" and "Family Planning" and "Financial Assistance." Every room has a perfectly positioned box of tissues.

A doctor with impeccably coiffed hair, who is said to be "the best" and whose wall, which is littered with degrees and accolades, backs this up, eyes you up and down. You haven't showered; she must know. She explains your situation, which is to say she has no idea what is wrong with you, but she sounds smart saying it. Regardless of your ailment, she can help. She speaks slowly and delib-



erately and after each stanza asks you if you understand. You nod that yes, yes you do. You leave with a paper in your hand having absolutely no fucking idea what she just said.

The walls of the IVF clinic are blanketed with photos of smiling babies, which gives you both an idealistic sense of hope and simultaneous dread. They are all twins.

You sit and wait, pants off, to be probed. Despite the apparatus's resemblance to a huge dildo, it is far from an erotic experience. "Cold gel, lots of pressure."

You are given a prescription, pills that will stimulate growth, to be taken on Days 5 through 9, which means nothing considering it has already been established that you have no Day 1. "We'll just make today Day 1, then," a bouncy nurse named Jennifer tells you; a scientific approach if you've ever heard one.

The way it is supposed to happen is that you take the pills on the designated days and then you must return for more probing. If all goes well, meaning your follicles are growing, as they should be, on Days 12 through 15 you will have "timed intercourse."

The concept sounds about as romantic as tracking the changing consistencies of your vaginal mucus.

When you go in on Day 12 for your probing—"cold gel, lots of pressure"—those damn follicles aren't ready.

"Well that's surprising!" The nurse tells you, which is surely meant to make you feel good about yourself. You are told that you will have to wait a few more days before you "give yourself the trigger," to which you nod, dumbfounded. Not only do you not know what in the hell the "trigger" is, but you also have an upcoming business trip to Phoenix right when this trigger needs to be...well...triggered.

The "trigger" is a shot that you are very nonchalantly told you will need to inject into your own stomach when prompted. The prompt is the exact day you land in Phoenix for a conference on "Fundraising in a Down Economy," being led by you. Lovely.

Your options are limited: Bag-check the trigger and pay an obscene fee or

find a Walgreens within walking distance of the hotel you are staying at in Phoenix and fill the trigger prescription there. You opt for the cheaper and certainly more risky and awkward option.

Walgreens in Phoenix will have your prescription. They promised, and they texted, but when you get there they prove to be text-liars. They are dreadfully sorry and will fill the prescription for you tomorrow. Tomorrow, being when you are leading various conference sessions with enthralling titles such as "US Postal Rate Hikes and What That Means to You." Really, who cares?

You suck up all of the pride that you have and tell your male supervisor that you will have to make a swift exit during lunch and will return in "no time." "No time" consists of you hopping a cab, getting to Walgreens, running back to your hotel, shoving a needle into your abdomen, then getting back to the conference to talk about how to milk more money out of unsuspecting schlubs.

You find yourself back at your hotel, needle in hand. You have literally five minutes to self-inject. This is a scary thought. You are a needle-virgin. To prepare for the situation you have bought a box of Band-Aids, rubbing alcohol, gauze, anti-bacterial cream and a Peppermint Patty (because you fucking deserve it). Oh, and a bag of chips because you deserve those too.

Thank God someone had the foresight to post a video on EHow.com on "how to self-administer an HCG Trigger Shot." Yes, it is that specific. You slam the needle into your tummy pooch, the only time you've ever been glad to have such a thing, and cold liquid enters your blood stream making you slightly nauseous.

Within minutes you are standing before a conference room full of men and women in suits explaining to them, with a monstrously fake smile, how sending reminder letters to donors is a best practice. At the next break you rush to the bathroom and cry in the stall while shoving the dark chocolate patty down your throat.

While you may think that your untimely egg-issue is leveling out, you are

"Eventually you decide to take action.... You are advised to see a "fertility specialist" who resides in a large, futuristic building labeled with three letters that when placed together in this specific combination have more of a negative connotation than the word 'Nazi': IVF."

"Thank God someone had the foresight to post a video on EHow.com on 'how to self-administer an HCG Trigger Shot.'"

Cont. on p. 8



Back at Day 1, Again (cont. from p. 7)

“Quietly timed intercourse in a friends’ guest room is about as romantic as tracking the changing consistencies of your vaginal mucus and then explaining the process to your husband in full detail.”

©
8 *“Each month that passes becomes more frustrating and lonely. You find it difficult to talk to your friends about the situation, as none of them have children and most of them aren’t even in relationships.”*

Abby Koenig is a playwright, journalist and creative writer. Her writing appears regularly in the *Houston Press* and *Arts + Culture Magazine*. Her plays have been produced in New York and Houston. Additionally, she is a professor at Houston Community College where she teaches Mass Communications and English.

sorely mistaken. Recall that you are now “required” to have sex with your husband who is several thousand miles away, and while he is planning on meeting you in Phoenix, you will be spending the week-end with friends. In their house. That is one floor. And their bedroom is right across the hall.

Quietly timed intercourse in a friends’ guest room is about as romantic as tracking the changing consistencies of your vaginal mucus and then explaining the process to your husband in full detail.

You silently do the deed, but you know in your heart that nothing good will come of this month’s go at it.

And this is your life now. No, not every month is as wildly complicated as the first time, which might have been a good thing in the end. “Well at least we’re not in Phoenix,” your husband says to you monthly on Days 12 through 15, 16, whatever it happens to be. It’s a nice break to the recurring ice of the situation.

Each month that passes becomes more frustrating and lonely. You find it difficult to talk to your friends about the situation, as none of them have children and most of them aren’t even in relationships. You really cannot tell them that you are afraid you are getting too old. The friends that do have children have a confidence that you can’t comprehend. “We went through it too,” they say, but their success is only a smack in the face at your consistent failure. You try to find solace on infertility message boards, but you find them irritatingly optimistic and filled with annoying acronyms such as TTC, which you had to Google.

You make pacts with yourself on every Day 9 to try harder. You cut out coffee and limit your wine intake (but you need it to stay calm!). You are told to stop any strenuous exercise, so you stop your sweat-inducing boot camp class, which doesn’t make you all that upset. You drink kombucha tea and take herbs that are supposed to promote blood flow. You see an acupuncturist and attempt to relax with needles in your head.

You try and harness the power of that book “The Secret,” not having read it or anything, and visualize happy sperm,

voiced by Bruce Willis, swimming with ease up your fallopian tubes. “Go sperms go,” you sing to them. You eat pineapple because that’s what Jennifer the nurse tells you to do. She also tells you there is no scientific evidence behind this.

And each month that you don’t get pregnant you go on a ridiculous drinking bender, which your husband doesn’t comment on because, really? C’mon, say something, guy. I dare you.

You consider if perhaps you are just not meant to have a baby. “Plenty of kids need good homes,” you say to anyone who wants to hear. You mean it, too. They agree, “Of course, of course, there is nothing wrong with adoption.” They don’t believe it themselves, though. An adopted baby won’t have your smile, or your husband’s blue eyes, or your love of pickles. But it also won’t have your autoimmune disease or your mother’s history of depression or your fat ankles, so there’s that too.

You wonder, often, if all of this, money, stress, heartache, is even worth it. Babies aren’t that great. They are actually a real pain in the ass. And breastfeeding seems weird to you and poopy diapers are gross. You don’t need a baby. You have a career and, more than that, dreams of a bigger career. You are incubating aspirations and they are almost ready to hatch. You have autonomy and opportunity and perky boobs.

But then you get a call from your nephew on the phone. “Hi Abby! We are eating cookies.” And nothing sounds more appealing than sitting around with your own kid, eating cookies on a Sunday afternoon. So you call the IVF nurse and tell her, “Well, Jennifer, I am back at Day 1, again.”



wedding in the uncut hair of the meadow

by Kiik A.K.

Eurydice is falling
into the maze of high grass
Death is simpler than binding a knot
No one claims death can be undone
The husband chokes on his silence
like it is stale bread
His lips will gnash against
the poison in the butter calf
Instead of blood—
black pollen will tear from the wound
And black flowers will erupt
from where he spat
Eurydice is falling
into the maze of high grass

Eurydice is dancing
over acorn fruit and kitten's tail
The ants of the meadow are singing
All night—pink and white rice thundered
over their dirt roofs
Now they are hauling the miracle below
The husband will be plucking his whale bones
He will groan like a chorus of lepers
Stamp the dust into frenzy
The number of hooves and feet dancing
could upend the dead
The winds wail through their flutes of pollen
Eurydice is dancing
over acorn fruit and kitten's tail

Eurydice is singing
into the portal of bleached light
The closer she comes to the living air—
her clothes, sandals ignite into sulfur
The stairs become gradually more coarse
The last fifteen steps are covered in broken glass
She will not cry out
She will stay true to the black web
of the husband-image leading her
The dogs lick the red dust
of her footprints like it was butter
They are tensed to recapture her in an instant
They nip at her hair her singed clothes
She is almost nude
Eurydice remains singing
into the portal of bleached light

Eurydice is pouring honey
and milk into a shell
The husband has stripped, gone down,
pulled over the blanket sheepishly
A mist of oil and sweat glints
on his bark-colored skin
There is crackling, a roar
of electricity stretching
as limbs tamp down the straw mattress
Every sheared moth's feather
All the sediment from the floor
rises and flares
There will be fever
There will be joy
Eurydice is pouring honey
and milk into a shell

Eurydice is cooing
The husband has washed ashore
She is patting his back
to jostle the coins fed to him
Though he cannot afford even a wasp
to retrieve his suffering
He has been dashed like flour upon a stone
Eurydice kissed and gathered every particle
It is the joy of lovers to rebuild
Eurydice is cooing
The husband has come ashore

Kiik A.K. is a graduate of the University of California, Berkeley, and Santa Clara University. He earned an MA from UC Davis where his poetics thesis was titled "THE JOY OF HUMAN SACRIFICE." He is a current graduate student of creative writing at UC San Diego. The poems included here were written for the fiction writer Megan Cummins.



⚙️ That Utterly Inspirational Angela Carter

Nights at the Circus by Angela Carter, Penguin, 1986, 304 pages, \$16

Reviewed by Graham Joyce

"One of the most exasperating things about the reception of her writing is how she is still critically received as the woman who wrote 'versions of fairy tales.'"

Here's what Angela Carter does: sets the stage in a conventional proscenium-arch theatre. The house lights dim, and the stage lights come up. Not until the hush has descended on the audience does she emerge, and not from the wings but from the audience itself, middle row, climbing over seats with a noisy and comedic exuberance before finally taking her place on the stage. You feel startled, dislocated. Is this a performer? Or a lunatic? A drunk? A troublemaker?

Anyway, that's how I felt when I read *Nights at the Circus* back in the 1980s, and I instantly fell in love with her writing. She certainly wasn't the first writer to offer the literary equivalent of breaking the fourth wall, but she was the first writer I'd encountered who, having broken that fourth wall, adopted the anarchic trick of reassembling it again. Just so that it might be broken a second or third or fourth time. A lot of literary affectation went on in the name of postmodernism, and she didn't buy into it. The truth is she didn't buy into a lot of things, particularly some intellectual positions where dogma crystallizes to become an enemy of Art.

Nights at the Circus breaks many conventional frames of literature. But—and this is a very important but—it doesn't posture. Carter uses a range of clever techniques to subvert expectations, but this is not in any sense an "experimental" novel. The actor who climbs out of the audience may sound at first like a bag-lady, but she has with her a cunning and well-rehearsed



"She certainly wasn't the first writer to offer the literary equivalent of breaking the fourth wall, but she was the first writer I'd encountered who, having broken that fourth wall, adopted the anarchic trick of reassembling it again. Just so that it might be broken a second or third or fourth time."

script; a deft technique; and a sly sense of timing. This not a *laissez-faire* experiment. This is craft—exuberant, caustic, volatile, iconoclastic, and daring—but craft.

If you don't have that craft you can't step out onto the wire in the way that Angela Carter does in *Nights at the Circus*.

One of the most exasperating things about the reception of her writing is how she is still critically received as the woman who wrote "versions of fairy tales." Yes, she explored the fairy tale and the folk tale and used them as vital energies or sources in her writing, but it misses the mark no less than it would to say that Shakespeare wrote "versions of old Italian stories." But that is of course the part of art that is accessible to intellectuals and academics—the part that can be rationalized, the part that sits outside of the shadows. Whereas it is in the shadowplay, and in the exploration of the protean, shifting, unconscious duplicities of the human heart, that Angela Carter exercises her genius.

This is why folk and fairy tales made sense to her as frames or triggers for her work. These tales have infinite capacity to be one thing and yet another, and possibly yet another, all at the same time. They have this multiple capability, and if you try to analyze them, *pace* Bruno Bettelheim, you end up with a luminous skin in your hands, but you had to kill the animal to get it. Carter rejected naturalism and realism, which she called "the low mimetic." It couldn't work for her. It limited the scope of her trawling and imagination. What's more, her dismissal of realism and naturalism as a "shabby mode of storytelling" was also a rejection of any notion of *reason* underpinning emotional life.

This widely celebrated book does still infuriate and perplex many critics and academics. (I don't know how current this detail is, but about a decade ago Angela Carter was nominated as the subject of more PhD studies in the UK than the entirety of nineteenth century literature.) As a novelist she's a magnificent bundle of contradictions, and while this feature



plagues some of her critics she regarded it as something to be celebrated. She's an intellectual, but she rejects the tyranny of instrumental reason; she is a fierce feminist, but she dismays some feminist critics in that she will keep pointing to the ways in which women deliberately or unconsciously want to collude with their own oppression; she rails against the sexual objectification of women, but she is a sexual voluptuary who likes to turn the tables on men; she swings from High Culture to Low Forms and cherishes all without distinction or value judgment. On and on it goes. Ambiguity and ambivalence are prized by Angela Carter as badges of honesty.

As a way of writing I found it to be—and still find it to be—fearless.

Nights at the Circus is the novel that finally brought Angela Carter some of the recognition she deserved, though that was at the end of her rather short life (a heavy smoker, she was 52 when she died of lung cancer). Even with this astonishing book she never got that recognition from the self-appointed literary aristocracy of the British scene, who were allergic to any contamination of the *Fantastique* as the French define it, preferring always McEwan, Barnes, and Amis. (Not much change there then, in three decades.) It seems to me impossible that this book could not have been even listed for the Booker prize of that year, but there was this...problem...that the judges had with the author's celebration of the Surreal, of the Irrational, of Unconscious desires trumping rationality, and of apparent lack of suitable sobriety.

There is a rampant and promiscuous humor at large in Carter's writing, again a deliberate dislocation of some of her very serious intentions. The protagonist of *Nights at the Circus* is a trapeze artist, and she has wings. Yes her wings are a metaphor. Yes her wings are real. Her nickname is Fevvers (Cockney idiolect of Feathers). She is a six-foot-two curvaceous peroxide blonde. In what for me was a memorable scene confirming that I wanted to write in the *Fantastique* mode, Fevvers opens a Faberge egg in which she finds a tiny train. She gets into the train and comes home. Oh! Whyever wouldn't she?

You could not then and still you can't categorize such a book. At the time it at-

tracted the fig leaf label of Magical Realism, a designation that was also attached to some postcolonial literature as a kind of forgiveness or permission for transgressions against an unwritten British code of tight-arsed high-seriousness. But the label was preposterous, and anyway Angela Carter was nothing if not an Internationalist. She had no respect for borders of any kind.

I can't say that this extraordinary book led me to try to write like Angela Carter. She went for a lyrical, verbose, and ebullient prose style that for me gets out of hand. Maybe I'm too controlling. But the same principle manifests in her composition. Sometimes her tenses change. If in a writing workshop you found these switches in the work of a young or aspiring writer you would excise them at once; but Angela Carter, on examination, introduces these switches as a rhetorical device. It's all under control, after all. But it's a control that permits a gorgeous fluidity, an aquatic consciousness that sometimes approaches the state of dreaming but is never merely random. Maybe that's the secret of the breathtaking fertility of her writing.

You can analyze *Nights at the Circus* all you like. You can try to get it to fit into a PhD or this or that ideology. You may even end up holding a fascinating and beautiful fleece; but you will never, never have the magnificent beast.

Note: If you are not familiar with Angela Carter's work, in addition to *Nights at the Circus* (originally published in 1984) I would also recommend the short stories collected in *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). For a fine and detailed overview, look at Jeff VanderMeer's article at: <http://www.themodernword.com/scriptorium/carter.html>

Graham Joyce is a fantasy author living, writing, and teaching in Britain. He has won the O. Henry Award, the World Fantasy Award, five British Fantasy Awards for novels including *Dark Sister*, *The Tooth Fairy*, and *Memoirs of a Master Forger*, and the Angus Award for a young adult novel, *TWOC*.

"[I]t is in the shadow-play, and in the exploration of the protean, shifting, unconscious duplicities of the human heart, that Angela Carter exercises her genius."

"Even with this astonishing book she never got...recognition from the self-appointed literary aristocracy of the British scene. ...it attracted the fig leaf label of Magical Realism, a designation that was also attached to some postcolonial literature as a kind of forgiveness or permission for transgressions against an unwritten British code of tight-arsed high-seriousness."

"It's all under control.... But it's a control that permits a gorgeous fluidity, an aquatic consciousness that sometimes approaches the state of dreaming but is never merely random."



A Difficult Warmth

Through the Valley of the Nest of Spiders, by Samuel R. Delany,

April 2012, Magnus Books, 816 pages, \$21.95

Reviewed by Victoria Garcia

"The book combines a mainstream literary sensibility with speculative moments and a truckload of uncompromising pornography."

This novel tells the story of two working-class men, one black and one white, who have sex, fall in love, and then spend the rest of their lives together. Over the course of the book, the two share jobs, homes, extraordinary sexual adventures, and a place in the heart of a unique, intentional gay community. The book combines a mainstream literary sensibility with speculative moments and a truckload of uncompromising pornography.

The protagonist, Eric, is sixteen years old at the novel's start and shares a small Atlanta apartment with his father. Eric's life (like the first half of the book) is utterly focused on sex. And though Eric's key turn-ons are well beyond the mainstream—snot-eating, urine-drinking, and smegma-seeking all feature—Eric is completely accepting of himself and of the homeless men from whom he gains both knowledge and physical joy.

Delany demands a similar level of acceptance from his readers.

A move to his mother's home in a town called Diamond Harbor begins Eric's life in earnest. On the way there, Eric takes part in an ecstatically polyvalent hookup in a truck stop men's room. During this interlude, Eric meets a nineteen-year-old boy, whose chosen name is Shit, and an older man named Dynamite, who is both Shit's father and his lifelong lover. The two run the town's garbage pick-up service, and soon Eric begins to work with the pair and becomes part of their family, both emotionally and sexually.

The setting for this is a utopian space—a region within a coastal Georgia town that has been set aside by a shadowy philanthropist as a place where low-income, gay, black men can live for free. This area, which is called "The Dump," is home to a cooperative vegetable farm and a strange yet goodhearted band of locals with a peaceably anarchic sexual code. In The Dump and its environs, erotic life is lived in the open, and from the assembled kinks and quirks of its residents, a complex sexu-

al ecosystem has emerged, with niches for everyone. It's a milieu that Shit has been "raised to": he has been happily having sex with his Dad, and with adult friends and neighbors, for as long as he can remember.

Shit welcomes Eric into his life, and together they use sex to explore their world. It is a way of building community, and way of getting to know themselves and each other. The novel's first 450 pages consist largely of pornographic vignettes. Often, the scenes are between Eric, Shit, and Dynamite; sometimes other colorful Dump residents are involved. People tend to narrate their sexual encounters as they have them—explaining to each other what they're doing; why they're doing it; who taught it to them; and how it makes them feel. (In these voiceovers, one can sense the distilled erotic wisdom of a truly ambitious lifetime, though at times, they do make the book seem more like a series of instructional homilies than a novel.)

The action in these vignettes can be hard to get through. (In addition to the incest, snot, and urolagia, there is, *inter alia*, bestiality, extreme raceplay, and a strangely sentimental coprophagia scene.) But despite this, the lessons that the characters learn from their encounters are surprisingly gentle—perhaps excessively so. Characters occasionally push themselves past previous erotic boundaries, but there's very little conflict beyond that. Shit's sexual relationship with his father is curiously uncomplicated. Integrating Eric into that relationship is similarly uncomplicated. The characters are simply doing what makes them happy and what brings happiness to those around them. In a reading and Q&A for the book (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H3Pdpx7QD78>) Delany describes it as "a fairy tale," and I would agree with that. There's a feeling of indulgence in the narrative here. Given the incest dimension, some readers may find this disingenuous or distasteful; others will find it horribly, horribly triggering.

But for readers who do make it through all of this, there really is a reward.

The death of Shit's father at the book's midpoint is genuinely moving. It's the first time in the story that Eric and Shit experience real distress, and it's the first event to seriously threaten their closeness. In the aftermath, Shit breaks down, and Eric is



forced to confront the enormity of what Shit and his father were to each other. In the sections that follow, the love and warmth between the partners is less puppy-like and becomes something truly powerful.

And as Shit and Eric age, their narrative matures. It is no longer a solid wall of unwashed cocks and piss-drinking. The sex scenes are still frequent and inventive, but they now seem to be more about exploring character and less about delivering instruction, and as a result, they're a lot more fun. We also get more chances to see the evolution of Shit and Eric's community, both for the better and for the worse, and to participate in their experience of the non-erotic parts of their world. Shit and Eric learn to respect, and to work around, each other's quirks. They fight sometimes. Deaths become more frequent, and if the sexual passages sometimes feel duplicative, the bouts of mourning never are. It's in these passages that Delany best honors the uniqueness of each of the relationships

between his characters. On the advice of a friend, Eric starts to read Spinoza.

Though Shit and Eric are rural people, living far from the cultural and technological bleeding edge, changes in the greater world still seep through to them, quietly altering the fabric of their workdays and social lives. Toplessness among women becomes common and acceptable. Nanotechnology makes construction jobs easier and helps Eric keep up with the laundry. A chain of nuclear disasters sends refugees their way. The revival of the space program is celebrated with a barbecue. Small changes agglomerate, and as we follow Shit and Eric through to the ends of their long, loving, and impossibly randy lives, we find ourselves, finally, in a wholly alien world that still feels like home. These last parts, in sum, are the best parts. Beautifully restrained speculation is interleaved with depictions of well-honed perversity and time-tested love. It's shockingly good stuff—but as a reader, you have to work hard to get there.

"[A]s we follow Shit and Eric through to the ends of their long, loving, and impossibly randy lives, we find ourselves, finally, in a wholly alien world that still feels like home."

"It's shockingly good stuff—but as a reader, you have to work hard to get there."

Victoria Elisabeth Garcia's fiction has been published in *Polyphony*, the *Indiana Review*, and elsewhere. She lives in Seattle with her husband, comics creator John Aegard, and a chunky but agile little dog.

Racial Norms and SFF Critiques: Who Does the Work?

Report from Planet Midnight, by Nalo Hopkinson, PM Press, 2012, 112 pages, \$12.00

Reviewed by Thomas Foster

This latest volume in PM Press's Outspoken Authors series, edited by Terry Bisson, is one of the strongest. Though these collections are too short to serve as full introductions to diverse bodies of work, the concept for the series seems to be to combine fiction and nonfiction, essays and interviews, to contextualize what is most "outspoken" or radical about the work. Usually "outspoken" is meant in a political sense, but sometimes it's in a more general sense of what is provocative or transgressive.

The centerpiece of the present volume is "Report from Planet Midnight," the remarkable hybrid talk/performance piece on race and racism in the science fiction and fantasy fields that Hopkinson, as a keynote speaker, presented at the 2009 International Conference of the Fantastic in the Arts, where the topic was "Race in the Literature of the Fantastic." The book therefore might be taken as implying that this intervention is what is most radical about Hopkinson's work. However the fiction selections might equally support

a reading of Hopkinson as "outspoken" in her critique of sexual norms and her investigation of the intersection between race and sexuality. Despite the importance of "Report from Planet Midnight," or rather because of its value, I find myself wanting to caution against reducing the "outspokenness" of Hopkinson's work to that intervention only. The wide-ranging nature of the interview between Hopkinson and Bisson conducted for this collection goes some way to offsetting that potential misreading.

While I will focus here on the talk/performance that gives this volume its title, I want to stress that the interview and also the fiction selections, neither previously included in Hopkinson's story collection *Skin Folk*, make the present book well worth the cost even for longtime readers of Hopkinson. "Message in a Bottle" is a revision of an obscure work originally published as a "faux science fiction novel" for a Whitney Museum exhibit, while "Shift" is reprinted from the

"The centerpiece of the present volume is 'Report from Planet Midnight,' the remarkable hybrid talk/performance piece on race and racism in the science fiction and fantasy fields that Hopkinson, as a keynote speaker, presented at the 2009 International Conference of the Fantastic in the Arts, where the topic was 'Race in the Literature of the Fantastic.'"

Cont. on p. 14



Racial Norms and SFF Critiques (cont. from p. 13)

"The context for Hopkinson's 'Report from Planet Midnight' talk at the ICFA conference was RaceFail '09, the Internet controversy/flame war over race and racism in SFF."

"New Wave Fabulism" special issue of the journal *Conjunctions*. "Message in a Bottle" exemplifies Hopkinson's engagement with contemporary science fiction, as the story offers a vision of the future defined by a posthuman ideology called "speciesism," which regards shellfish as great artists. The origins of this ideology are traced back, however, to "the nascent identity politics as expressed by artists of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries." Rather than regarding differences between humans, like race, as having been superseded and rendered obsolete by species differences or animal rights, this story sees them as continuous. This version of posthumanism is not in any simple way postracial, in direct contradiction to the tendency toward a "backlash against identity politics" that Coco Fusco locates in challenges to "the integrity of the human organism as the basis of identity." This story combines an unremarked treatment of nonwhite characters as the norm with a critique of the heteronormative assumption that children represent futurity, as the Indian narrator learns that the adopted child of a pair of friends is more than she seems.

As a rewriting of the story of Caliban, Ariel, and Sycorax from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, "Shift" exemplifies both Hopkinson's more literary side and also how her fiction draws on Caribbean culture and postcolonial perspectives, given the Latin-American tradition of reading Caliban as a dominant British figuration of the native or the islander by critics like Roberto Fernandez Retamar. Hopkinson's story emphasizes the relation between sexuality and race, with Caliban finding a specular relation with white women, in which he is transformed into the image of their desire, a relation that is ultimately ended by one of these women herself.

The context for Hopkinson's "Report from Planet Midnight" talk at the ICFA conference was RaceFail '09, the Internet controversy/flame war over race and racism in SFF. These sometimes very angry online exchanges dramatized not only the problem of racism within the field but also the problem of even talking about it. They made any attempt to address the place of race in the literature of the fantastic even more fraught than it might otherwise have been. In the original talk Hopkinson

ended by commenting on this event, noting that "what was already loaded became outright trigger-happy." She was explicit in her partisan position, describing white people as having instigated RaceFail '09. In the published version, Hopkinson adds an introduction in which she describes herself as being "so scared and angry that I couldn't write my speech" until she had a "bolt of inspiration" and decided to script a performance instead.

To me, Hopkinson's performative strategy recalls the "reverse ethnographic" techniques of performance artists like Coco Fusco and Guillermo Gomez-Pena. After thanking the organizers for focusing on race and the fantastic and inviting her to speak, Hopkinson immediately interrupts herself, just as she is about to explain "the first thing I want to say." She then acts out the process of being used, or offering herself, as a "horse"—one who acts as a vehicle for a possessing spirit—for an alien observer of human racial norms and rhetorics. This is the first example of what she describes in her introduction as a "culture-jamming of references from fantasy, science fiction, and linguistic and cultural references from the American and Caribbean part of the African diaspora," most obviously Vodoun or Santeria. Marking her difference from herself by looking at her own hands in surprise, and then going on to ironically describe "riding on the head of this horse" as the only way she could find to "communicate directly with you," this alien voice announces that she comes "from another planet," where they have been receiving "broadcasts that seem intended for us;" they have been unable to decide whether these broadcasts are "gestures of friendship, or of aggression."

This alien point of view functions in a complex way. Sometimes, in classic SFnal fashion, it operates as a form of estrangement, an alternative external to contemporary North American forms of race-thinking. This emphasis is most obvious in the long final section of the performative part of the talk, when the alien asks for clarification of phrases drawn from the RaceFail debates (like "I'm not racist") and explains how they translate on her planet. This section of the performance emphasizes alienness in order to imagine a perspective innocent of our racial/racist as-

"In the published version, Hopkinson adds an introduction in which she describes herself as being 'so scared and angry that I couldn't write my speech' until she had a 'bolt of inspiration' and decided to script a performance instead."



sumptions, so we can see them afresh (even though the alien also begins by explaining that they've had "bad experiences with the collision of cultures...even between groups on our own planet"). However, at other points, Hopkinson deliberately collapses the alien perspective and the African diasporic, most obviously by referring to herself as the alien's horse. But the alien also follows up the question of whether "the stories you tell each other about interracial relations," especially within the science fiction field, imply friendship or aggression by noting that "as one of our ethnocultural groups might say, 'Don't start none, there won't be none.'" Similarly, the alien dramatizes the problem of cross-cultural translation by showing a slide of the Italian edition of Hopkinson's first novel, *Midnight Robber*, whose cover depicts a blue-skinned protagonist with "European features and straight hair," and describing her novel as a document the aliens released into our world; in a further irony, the Italian title turns *Midnight Robber* into "The Planet of Midnight," providing the performance with its title. At this point, Hopkinson breaks down the differences between herself and the voice possessing her, rather than emphasizing that estrangement. Sometimes, she is possessed by an alien perspective and sometimes by a version of herself as a representative of Planet Midnight—that is, a representative of racial otherness (at the beginning of the performance Hopkinson removed her shirt to reveal a T-shirt that reads "Speaker to White Folks"). Sometimes, the alien point of view rejects and alienates actual color lines and racial categories, and sometimes it repeats and reiterates them. I believe this doubleness is deliberate and is intended as an implicit commentary on both the value and the limits of science fictional techniques for the representation of race, a commentary on why science-fictional representations need to be articulated with the perspectives of authors of color and a demonstration of how they can be articulated. The performance therefore sets out to show why race still needs to be raised as an issue within science fiction and fantasy in ways that haven't yet been done and also what basis the genre itself offers for doing so.

A similar, simultaneously critical and sympathetic point about SFF is made by the slide show that follows, with examples of the "preponderance of wistful references in your literature to magical people with blue skin," from Smurfs to X-Men. The alien outlines a number of theories proposed on her planet to explain this kind of imagery, all assuming the actual existence of such people and worrying about what we have done to them, that they appear *only* in our literature. She concludes that "whatever the truth of the matter, we're sure you realize why it is of extreme importance to us to learn whether imprisonment, extinction, and mythologizing are your only methods of dealing with interspecies conflict." In another example of applying SFnal techniques to SFF, by reading fantastic imagery literally, the field is read both as saturated with "interspecies conflict" and as limited in its treatment of the topic.

From here the alien moves into a more direct commentary on racial discourse, citing troubling phrases like "I'm not racist," "This story is a universal one," and "Eventually this race stuff won't matter, because we'll all interbreed and become postracial." The translations of what these phrases are taken to mean on the alien's planet and explanations of why they are troubling provide a hilarious, blunt, and demystifying rebuttal to attempts to dismiss talk about race. I was especially fond of the translation of "I'm not racist" into, first, "I can wade through feces without getting any of it on me," and, on a secondary level, "My shit don't stink." Hopkinson here returns to the tendency, within the RaceFail debates, to dismiss systemic or structural analyses of racism.

Hopkinson's performance is also a uniquely SFnal way of addressing what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has described as the dilemma of the postcolonial intellectual within first-world contexts—that is, how to make visible the space of representation she occupies, how she is perceived by and signifies for others. Spivak has compared this dilemma to the problem of being treated as a native informant by an anthropologist, and this returns us to Hopkinson's T-shirt, "Speaker to White Folks," and my suggestion that the performance presents her as possessed by two voices, sometimes an alien's and sometimes

"Hopkinson breaks down the differences between herself and the voice possessing her, rather than emphasizing that estrangement. Sometimes, she is possessed by an alien perspective and sometimes by a version of herself as a representative of Planet Midnight—that is, a representative of racial otherness..."

"The performance...sets out to show why race still needs to be raised as an issue within science fiction and fantasy in ways that haven't yet been done and also what basis the genre itself offers for doing so."

"The alien asks us to function as native informants for her and therefore requires us to auto-ethnographically analyze ourselves and our implication in racist social structures."



Racial Norms and SFF Critiques (cont. from p. 15)

Thomas Foster is a Professor of English at the University of Washington, Seattle, where he teaches courses on science fiction and comics, among other topics. He is the author of *The Souls of Cyberfolk: Posthumanism as Vernacular Theory* and a contributor to *Reload: Women + Technoculture*, *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, and *The Oxford Handbook to Science Fiction*.

the voice she is expected to assume for her talk as a representative of blackness. In contrast, as the alien points out in translating the term “Ethnic” as meaning “Those quaint and somewhat primitive people over there,” on her planet everyone has an ethnicity; there is no unmarked norm. Hopkinson’s performance contests this process of turning marginalized peoples into native informants by reversing the relation of knower and known, subject and object. The alien asks us to function as native informants for her and therefore requires us to auto-ethnographically analyze ourselves and our implication in racist social structures. It is that potential for auto-ethnography that the performance seems to me to present as a resource SFF particularly offers for thinking about race and racism.

When the alien “leaves” and Hopkinson resumes as herself, removing the T-shirt that labels her as a speaker to white folks, she goes on to develop the idea of the centrality of race to science fiction in general by arguing that “one of the things fantasy and science fiction do is to imaginatively address the core problem of who does the work.” Noting that, especially in North America, labor is often racialized or ethnicized, she concludes that “one of the things that fantasy and science fiction do is to use mythmaking to examine and explore socioeconomically configured ethnoracial power imbalances.” Hopkinson demonstrates how this work of “mythmaking” can be a double-edged sword, how it can both challenge and reproduce racial norms, and she therefore points toward an ongoing, anti-racist labor that requires shared effort from everyone invested in the field.

Dream Harvesting in a Superbly Fashioned World

The Killing Moon, by N.K. Jemisin, Orbit, 404 pages, \$14.99 US/\$16.50 Canada

Reviewed by Ebony Thomas

©
16

“The author has created a world of spectacular visual stimulation.”

“Jemisin writes about characters who are truly intriguing; the reader will crave the backstory for each one.... The story follows three main characters, all of whose lives collide in the unfolding of a conspiracy to take control of the city.”

This book is fucking phenomenal! The latest fantasy by the winner of the 2010 Locus Award for Best First Novel is the *The Killing Moon*, and it is utterly addictive. The author has created a world of spectacular visual stimulation. A world much like Ancient Egypt but vastly different. A world where two moons rise every night—the Waking Moon and the Dreaming Moon. Jemisin writes about characters who are truly intriguing; the reader will crave the back story for each one.

In the city state of *Gujaareh*, also known as the City of Dreams, the goddess *Hananja* is worshipped. *Hananja* is one of the divine children of the Dreaming Moon and Sun. She is the goddess of dreams and is also associated with death and the afterlife. The story follows three main characters, all of whose lives collide in the unfolding of a conspiracy to take control of the city.

Gatherers (that’s the title of those in one of the four paths of service to *Hananja*) are responsible for enforcing *Hananja*’s Law—the Law that governs the city and whose principal tenet is peace. *Gatherers* shepherd souls into *Ina-Karekh*, the Land of Dreams. In addition *Gatherers*

are commissioned to collect the souls, or tithes of “dream humors,” from sleeping citizens who have been judged corrupt by members of the goddess’s temple. The living may visit the land as well—but only for a brief period during sleep. The dead, however, dwell there in perpetuity. It is the harvesting of the citizens’ dreams and the use of magic that ensures peace and heals the populace.

Ehiru, a most loyal servant of *Hananja* and seasoned *Gatherer*, comes to question said loyalty while performing his duty of collecting the commission (soul) of a foreigner. Unexpectedly, *Ehiru* is told of a “truth saying” by the foreigner. A truth saying that challenges *Ehiru*’s way of life and pushes him further to the precipice of becoming what he fears most, a tainted *Reaper*.

We first get an up-close-and-personal interaction with the dream world through the muddled collecting of this foreigner’s soul. In *Ina-Karekh*, the soul reveals the inner most desire of its host. It was truly a joy to become a part of a superbly fashioned imaginary world filled with bright colors and intertwined with the perspective of the soul being collected. “And here



the dream of the Bromarte revealed itself. Charleron of Wenkinslan, came the name to Ehiru's consciousness, and he absorbed the name's foreignness....A name of hunger. And hunger was what filled the Bromarte's soul: hunger for wealth, for respect, for things he himself could not name. Reflected in the dreamscapes of Ina-Karekh, these hungers had coalesced into a great yawning pit in the earth, its walls lined with countless disembodied, groping hands." (p. 8)

Nijiri is Ehiru's young Gatherer apprentice, deeply devoted to his master. Their relationship is one of complexities; Nijiri is genuinely and sincerely in love with his master and is willing to do anything to keep him protected. Ehiru is quite aware of Nijiri's feelings for him and yet the love is not shared.

Sunandi, a maiden, is assigned to Gujaareh as the Voice of the *Protectorate*—the council of elders that rules Gujaareh's motherland of Kisua. Upon discovering foul play at work in the guidance of souls, Sunandi nearly becomes a victim herself, as

a falsely and blasphemously commissioned collection effort is aimed at her own soul. A Reaper, a mythical abomination, is responsible for the misguiding of these souls. (The Reaper does not gently guide souls into the afterlife but attacks and absorbs them.) Sunandi's suspicions in this regard are confirmed with the death of her servant girl. Sunandi provides a distinctive outlook. Not one to hold her tongue, she is unafraid to express her hatred for what Ehiru and Nijiri do. Guided by her own belief system, she is a true heroine.

This gripping tale is one of a duology. I have to say that since my recent introduction to the science fiction/fantasy genre, this has been the densest book that I have come across. With no reflection on the author in the least, this reader found it useful to commit to memory the glossary of terms that the author has provided at the back of the book. It helped me to understand the flow of the book. Even if you are fairly new to the genre, as I am, I would highly recommend *The Killing Moon* as well as the forthcoming sister book, *The Shadowed Sun*.

"[T]his has been the densest book that I have come across. With no reflection on the author in the least, this reader found it useful to commit to memory the glossary of terms which the author has provided..."

Ebony Thomas is a graduate of Antioch University in Seattle and the mother of a fine boy. She's active on Facebook and subscribes to Ms. Magazine.

Cutting Edge Science and the Human Heart

Fountain of Age, stories by Nancy Kress, Small Beer Press, April 2012, 300 pages, \$16.00, Ebook, \$9.95

Reviewed by Cynthia Ward

Since her 1976 fiction debut, Nancy Kress has collected the Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award, the John W. Campbell Memorial Award, two Hugo Awards, and four Nebula Awards. She's on her way to becoming one of science fiction's most prolific, most popular, and most critically acclaimed novelists and short story writers. She's also one of our best.

Her ninth and newest collection, *Fountain of Age*, demonstrates her impressive range, assembling fiction (mostly science fiction) published over the course of two years (2007-2009), mostly in *Asimov's SF Magazine*, but also in *Jim Baen's Universe*, *Fantasy Magazine*, and the anthology *Fast Forward 2*.

The collection opens and closes with its strongest works, a pair of award-winning novellas. The opener, Hugo Award-winner "The Erdmann Nexus," reexamines the

well-known sf concept of the group mind or gestalt consciousness through the lens of recent discoveries and hypotheses in neurology, biochemistry, quantum physics, and consciousness theory, as the inhabitants of an assisted-living facility begin to experience strange, transient mental events. Are these the result of strokes or nascent senescence? Are they old memories intruding into awareness? Are they mystical? A brilliant ninety-something physicist, Dr. Henry Erdmann, connects the counterintuitive dots as the characters' thoughts merge and their wishes change reality. While the abuse-victim-as-murder-suspect subplot seems unnecessary, and the human-exceptionalism twist is unsurprising, Kress's sympathetic inversion of the *Childhood's End/More Than Human* trope (youth = overmind) makes the novella powerful and engrossing.

"The collection opens and closes with its strongest works, a pair of award-winning novellas."

Cont. on p. 18



Cutting Edge Science (cont. from p. 17)

“Certain themes and concerns recur... what might, with equal validity, be labeled ‘the biochemical nature of consciousness’ or ‘the varieties of religious experience.’”

Certain themes and concerns recur throughout *Fountain of Age*: aging, of course, and genetic engineering, and the near future; but also a fascination with what might, with equal validity, be labeled “the biochemical nature of consciousness” or “the varieties of religious experience.” In “By Fools Like Me,” an elderly woman remembers the world before catastrophic environmental collapse—but remembers it all too—while the radically revised religion that enables survival also crushes the human spirit. In “First Rites,” rogue geneticists create a possibly autistic child who lacks our innate perception of space and time—yet has the ability to manipulate them. In “End Game,” an Aspergerish genius eliminates the weakness of human distractability, to learn that perfect mental focus may not be an improvement. In “Images of Anna,” a professional photographer finds himself recording, not his middle-aged client, but her memories. In “Safeguard,” an aging geneticist must recover some missing and invariably lethal weapons: four genetically modified children. In the closer, Nebula Award-winning novella “Fountain of Age,” a wealthy, elderly ex-convict is so obsessed with his ageless former lover that he escapes earth itself to undergo an inevitably fatal medical procedure derived from his beloved’s mutant genes.

The nine stories of *Fountain of Age* feature Kress’s characteristic investigation of that oft-bloody place where cutting-edge science encounters the human heart. However, the stories do not engage quite as fully as they might. The numerous view-

point shifts in “The Erdmann Nexus” and “First Rites” inevitably work against fuller exploration of any individual character; while in the single-viewpoint stories, the exploration simply doesn’t go far enough. In some cases this results in characters more off-putting than fascinating, like the ex-con in “Fountain of Age,” or the disintegrating “other woman” in “The Kindness of Strangers,” or the obsessive photographer in “Images of Anna,” or the religious secondary characters distinguished only by their negative traits in “By Fools Like Me.” In other cases, the characterization is affected by limited environmental details, either because the settings are closed, reduced-stimuli environments, as in “The Kindness of Strangers,” “Safeguard,” and “Laws of Survival,” or because the viewpoint characters themselves are mentally or emotionally limited. Though the opening story quotes John Dryden’s observation that “[h]e who would reach for pearls must dive below,” these stories ultimately do not dive deeply enough.

This is not to say that the collection is weak, only that its contents fall short of the piercing insight demonstrated in Kress’s best stories, like “Out of All Them Bright Stars” and “Beggars in Spain.” *Fountain of Age* has numerous strengths, among them sharp prose, an uncommon variety of non-normative characters, a quiet egalitarianism, and the intelligent extrapolation of current scientific thought without kneejerk admixture of libertarian polemic. These strengths put *Fountain of Age* at refreshing odds with much of modern science fiction.

© 18 *“The nine stories of Fountain of Age feature Kress’s characteristic investigation of that oft-bloody place where cutting-edge science encounters the human heart.”*

“[T]hese stories ultimately do not dive deeply enough. This is not to say that the collection is weak, only that its contents fall short of the piercing insight demonstrated in Kress’s best stories”

Cynthia Ward has published stories in *Asimov’s Science Fiction Magazine*, *Triangulation: Last Contact*, and other anthologies and magazines. With Nisi Shawl, she coauthored *Writing the Other: A Practical Approach* (Aqueduct Press) based on their diversity writing workshop, “Writing the Other: Bridging Cultural Differences for Successful Fiction.” Cynthia is completing a novel. She lives in Los Angeles.



adam

by Kiik A.K.

the first man of invention
no champion to hold ourselves to—
eyes they rusted in socket
cheeks they flaks of thorn and scarred gristle
one hand commonly found clamped to head
for fear of losing his remaining hair
teeth they something defeated as maggots
rattled like shell fragment upon the words
chimney and *chosen*
and bound the invented frame
from straw fiber moss fiber
packt in the dunnage of cud and dung and mud
I hid from rain underneath the eaves of hemlock
and passed the photograph of the dying soldier
pinned in the corners where the wings of descending angels
surely faltered
unable to retrieve their open-mouthed babe
I had never seen a face as beautiful as his—
eyes the glass portals, milk-blue, sweet milk
hardening in final orbit
dust misting their final landscape
I had the urge to recover them
rub them vigorously there in the street
on my knees like an indigent searching, searching
until I could return them like two metallic coins shining
how I need to lie down as though to drink
put my lips beside his cheek—that dove breast—
and the pale blossom of his ear
and ask the blood to run back, back
the mouth works a futile magic
his right arm raised as though signaling to be delivered
the rest of the body interrupted by nonsense
from the neck down incomprehensible
a strange cioppino of sea parts and man parts
urchin finger and ring finger
white-knuckled scallop, a scalded barnacle
green-lipped mussel, swim bladder rising
from the belly like a wing of foam
the chest a box of marigold
and the ribs—
twenty-four white spouts
twenty-four flutes of Eve
our first mother was the mender of Eden
her first day she sprang from the riven skull of the heavens
her hair full with the first fires
her breasts two latchkeys hung on their clavicles
her mouth was sewn shut
she removed the string and made of it a net
to cast over the foul dogs of His garden

all day she tended to the scarecrow of her husband
reattaching, restuffing the essentials
attempting to recuperate her lover from His design
her husband's brain was an abandoned conch
unfit for the crabs that fattened and moved on
his heart was a faggot of kindling
pine needle and duff
vulnerable to disappearance at the littlest spark
she kept him from any rocks—when banged—produced light
the first man did not own a nose thankfully
since his shit rose over the garden like mounds of ashen fodder
for flies to gag themselves behind the corridors of paradise
Eve raked the garden clean, took to the dirt
and created for Adam the first latrine
transformed sun and shit and a little water
into startling blue cornflowers
why would we mourn the death of a scarecrow—
half of your face, half your brother's face
have been torn away by fire
well our mother came upon a snake devouring apples
she'd been observing the wisest creature some time
selecting the most enormous rock she could lift
she called out, *Fallen one!*
one of your fruit has rolled beneath this stone!
as the serpent approached she hurled the rock upon its tail
the snake cried out in surprise, *betrayal!*
like a witch lockt in her own oven
like a wolf thrashing in the gears of the sea
our mother took a thick branch of hemlock
and bludgeoned from the creature
its final arm
that night she roasted the snake meat over hot rocks
which wizened, grew black as cast-iron
it writhed like a blood sausage
when they ate the flesh of wisdom a miracle happened
the first man transformed into a prince
all that had been experiment was now perfectly a beefcake
perfectly warm-blooded and courageous
Eve clappt her hands brightly
that Adam was no longer a charity case
the next morning Adam prepared stick and bundle
and announced to his Father he was leaving
the kingdom shook beneath a frenzy of disbelief
a wad of lightning fell from the sky
took Adam's heart in its hands and ate of it
until it was only darkness
a terrifying finger appeared from above
smeared fish scales over every exiled eye
none had owned eyelids before—
permanent daylight being the solution to a world
unprepared to own a single secret



Everybody Lives: Queer Love That Doesn't Hurt

Beyond Binary: Genderqueer and Sexually Fluid Science Fiction, edited by Brit Mandelo;

Lethe Presse, Inc., 2012, 267 pages, \$20

Reviewed by Paige Clifton-Steele

"[T]his latest heir out of Lethe Press is looking to end the long romance of queerness and death. Queer love that doesn't hurt. It's the wave of the future."

"Lately, speculative fiction as a whole seems to be enamored of apocalyptic narratives...."

20 *Here are girls and girlymen and et cetera who skate over disaster on their way to better things"*

"Given the breadth of the stories here, she's clearly construing 'speculative' broadly. If it gives you room to ask a question not presently askable, it's speculative."

If James Tiptree Jr. is the crown prince of speculative fiction (and if Alice Sheldon is the queen mother), then editor Brit Mandelo is drawing a line that starts with total cataclysm and ends, or at least rests, with *Beyond Binary: Genderqueer and Sexually Fluid Science Fiction*. James Tiptree Jr was all gorgeous exogamous couplings whose price was pretty much always death (personal death, if not the death of everything). But this latest heir out of Lethe Press is looking to end the long romance of queerness and death. Queer love that doesn't hurt. It's the wave of the future.

And kudos to Mandelo for that. Lately, speculative fiction *as a whole* seems to be enamored of apocalyptic narratives. But some people have very much been there and done that, and for them, this is the answer: an assortment of worlds with no HIV, no hate crimes, no freaking internet dating. Seventeen sexy speculative scribes can imagine it.

Not that there's no unsafe sex here. It's just that unsafe sex means sex with faeries or angels. Unsafe sex means fucking with your sword on the battlefield, fucking a boy who could become a man who could destroy you. But they don't: you're too lucky to die. Here are girls and girlymen and et cetera who skate over disaster on their way to better things (oh boy, does *It Get Better.*) And what does better look like?

Here's Mandelo in the introduction: "In choosing these stories, I had two major concerns. First, I wanted to put together a tapestry of positive narratives that challenged all-too-common destructive tropes about queer and trans people. There are no tragic "big reveal" stories here; no one is shocked by anyone else, and in the stories that feature physical discoveries, the lovers in question are always pleased and open to the wholeness of their partner's self."

About a third of the stories see a rosy narrative mist closing around some combo of happy lovers. So many lovers! And all kinds of perversion, both sweet and polymorphous. The first story is a piece of sheer

writerly virtuosity (and a risky second person narrative viewpoint) called "Sea of Cortez" from Sandra McDonald. If you're more familiar with her Diana Comet stories, this piece might come as a surprise to you. It's weightier and, to my ear, cadenced like an MFA-finished thing. Her hero is a half-literate grunt with a phantom womb and a thing for Carmen Miranda, and his love life is touched by the same guardian angel of queers that's leasing space on the shoulders of all of these characters. Like in Nalo Hopkinson's "Fisherman" (another nicely polished piece), where a girl's entry into a theater of male sexuality takes a happy turn. Blessed, every one of them. It's not that terrible things don't befall them, but their unsafety is temporary, survivable, even sexy.

I couldn't always figure out what was supposed to be speculative about a particular story—Hopkinson's, for instance. That was the first, though not the last, story that sent me back to the introduction hunting for Mandelo's concept of speculative fiction. "Speculative fiction is the literature of questions," says Mandelo, and yes, that's true, but literature is the literature of questions. Given the breadth of the stories here, she's clearly construing "speculative" broadly. If it gives you room to ask a question not presently askable, it's speculative. Many of the stories work not by science fictional novums or "new things," but by prizing out the Jenga blocks of compulsory heteronormative culture to see what's left. Many of these stories bypass coming-out on their way to coming-of-age. In the absence of that marker, people mark their adulthoods and awakenings in as many different ways as there are stories.

There are other absences, other removals that I'm less sure how to read. There are also not very many protagonists as parents in this book. I'd guess it's not because Mandelo sees no room for parenting in queer lives but because, more simply, it's a collection for people who haven't gotten that far yet. Mandelo noted in an interview



with *Autostraddle* that her ideal reader was a younger version of herself, and indeed there is a lot of overlap between the concerns of this book and YA concerns. It's an excellent book for young people, though not marketed as such.

The other absence is the alien: that favorite figure of the science fiction author who wants to talk about otherness. Maybe it's a stance against the alienating potential of the alien. Maybe it's just an aesthetic preference for not-space-opera.

After all, the book is decidedly intimate in its scope, preferring the kind of people little likely to encounter aliens: high school kids and receptionists and expendable soldiers. Their paranormal encounters are with each other. Their politics are interpersonal. Sometimes I wished for fewer lovers and more prophets: people with big plans for the world, but that's (of course) just me.

The kind of people who appear here may be related to the length of the stories Mandelo has picked. Packing seventeen stories into a page count of 267 means few of them get the chance to sprawl and sunbathe and wander and double back in ways that might nourish their chosen questions. And I feel petulant saying this, but some of their questions don't seem to need the future or the fantastic to work: "Fisherman's" world is our world, and "Spoiling Veena," by Keyan Bowes...well, it articulates an excellent question: "If parents could select their child's sex at great cost, how might that affect their reaction to a child's decision to revoke that choice?" But Bowes doesn't have an appetite for the question. She sidelines it for a climax that seems to me to undermine the work done to ask it in the first place.

The stories that do deal with "politics" tend to pleasantly dishevel those political arrangements we might take for granted. Kelley Eskridge has created in "Eye of the Storm" a country in which bisexual, polyamorous foursomes are not only normal, but installed in the very heart of normality. Perhaps her characters are then queer no longer, or queer for us but not for themselves. Oh, who is anyone queer for, anyways? The question takes on prismatic complexity in worlds where "straight" is up for grabs.

In order to enjoy every story in this collection, you'll have to be prepared to switch

gears a lot. *Beyond Binary* gathers everything: sf-as-usual, funky fantasy hybrids, extended daydreams, surrealism, and at least one story I suspected of being a very long in-joke. My favorite of the collection was the understated "Sex with Ghosts," which I first read with pleasure a few years ago in *Strange Horizons*. It marks, to me, a promising (and funny!) debut from Sarah Kanning, and I'm pleased to see it collected for the first time. And besides fucking and falling in love, what else can happen to a genderqueer body in this stuffed-to-the-gills collection? Briefly: being an elite guard, sailing, buccaneering, evicting people from the Internet, shooting guns, travelling back in time (to fuck oneself), sprouting an unexpected penis, cutting deals with faery queens, and travelling across state lines with sex 'bots made in one's own image.

And Spoiler Alert: everybody lives.



Most Beautiful in Death

by Alex Dally MacFarlane

Do not let me stop you
bold Sir Lancelot
from the ease of your grief:
my lovely face is God's now.
That is enough.
A woman is most beautiful in death.
Do not let me hinder you
from reaching the finest myths
while I rot in this boat.
But I remember you.
Your handsome face,
your thick-jewelled saddle,
your helmet feather
burning in my mirror:
for this I looked outside.
For this.
Better the tears of my solitude
than this river wrapping 'round my bones.
But I was lovely in death; for you
that is enough.
Do not let me stop you
bold Sir Lancelot
from your sleep.
I'm a ghost in your hair,
I'm a mouth at your ear
screaming.

"In order to enjoy every story in this collection, you'll have to be prepared to switch gears a lot. Beyond Binary gathers everything: SF-as-usual, funky fantasy hybrids, extended daydreams, surrealism, and at least one story I suspected of being a very long in-joke."

Paige Clifton-Steele lives in Seattle where she works graveyard shift at a boarding house for schizophrenics, runs a feminist science fiction book club, and writes poems from time to time. She is an alumna of Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio.

Alex Dally MacFarlane (alexallymacfarlane.com) lives in London, where the foxes cross paths with her at night. Her fiction has appeared in *ClarksWorld Magazine*, *Strange Horizons*, *Beneath Ceaseless Skies* and *The Mammoth Book of Steampunk*, and her poetry in *The Moment of Change*, *Stone Telling*, *Goblin Fruit*, and *Here, We Cross*. A handbound limited edition of her story "Two Coins" was published by Papaveria Press in 2010.



Meredith Scheff, the Lady Cartoonist — artist, writer, mechanic, fabricator

I've been creating visual art since I was very small. My father, also an artist, bought me a sketchbook and gave me the direction to "draw what you see." I've worked with every type of media I could since then—metal, wood, clay, textiles. Though most of my paintings are done with watercolor, I also create autobiographical comics and some larger paintings with pen and ink.

Being a cartoonist, I draw a lot of inspiration from the raw, open narrative that many auto-bio cartoonists express. A little motto of mine is "people only hear what you say"; meaning firstly no one else will tell my story, and secondly an inspiration to never hold anything back.

A big source of artistic growth happened for me when I was diagnosed with cancer and during my subsequent treatment. It gave me not only a sense of urgency but one of perspective, one that I'm happy to have.



Eyes Everywhere

<http://ladycartoonist.com/gallery/>





Lady in the Fronds



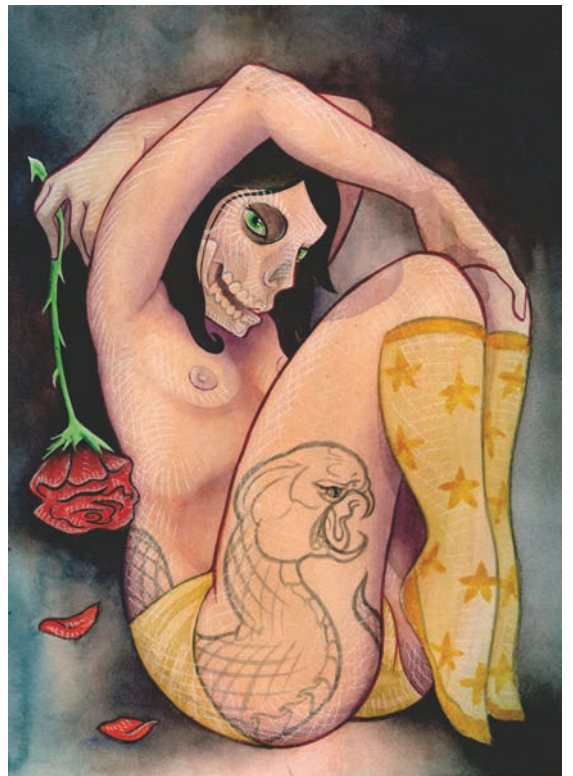
Nightquarry



Chemosavvy



Greenwashing



Charmer





The Cascadia Subduction Zone announces
Special Issue on Joanna Russ
Coming September 2012

Featuring Essays by

Alexis Lothian
Brit Mandelo
Farah Mendlesohn

With an Introduction by

L. Timmel Duchamp

Book Reviews

Candra K. Gill reviews

On Joanna Russ, edited by Farah Mendlesohn

Cynthia Ward reviews

*Heiresses of Russ 2011: The Year's Best Lesbian
Speculative Fiction*, edited by JoSelle Vanderhooft
and Steve Berman



\$4.00

The Cascadia Subduction Zone
PO Box 95787
Seattle, WA 98145-2787