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Musing on Sandberg's *Lean In*

by Nancy Jane Moore

Workshops on writing opinion pieces for major media presented by the Op Ed Project begin with the following exercise: Each student must say, "Hello, my name is _____ and I am an expert in _____, because (1) _____, (2) _____, and (3) _____."

It should come as no surprise that many women find this exercise very difficult, not because they don't have expertise, but because they find it difficult to toot their own horns even in situations where it is clearly appropriate and expected. Far too many women fall prey to the assumption that if they work hard and develop skills, their work will be recognized without their having to mention it.

"The Op Ed Project's mission is to increase the range of voices and quality of ideas we hear in the world," according to their website. They focus on teaching people whose ideas are rarely heard on the editorial pages—women, people of color, those from the working class—how to make the gatekeepers let them in. The first lesson is for the participants to recognize and own their expertise. Many people have expertise that would be of value in the national debate, but those who were not born and raised in privileged circumstances often find it hard to both recognize their own knowledge and to present it to the world.

This, in large part, is what Sheryl Sandberg is addressing when she tells women to "lean in." Her core advice: Apply for that job you want even if you don't think you meet all the requirements, negotiate your pay package, say "yes" when you're offered the challenging assignment, ask for the support and resources you need, and, above all, don't back away from something difficult out of fear of rejection or because you are thinking about having a child.

Sandberg has been criticized because her book focuses on what high-achieving women can do personally to improve their position in the workplace rather

than on the myriad of problems faced by workers generally and working mothers in particular. It's true that she doesn't address those issues in detail—though she does acknowledge them—but that's because that isn't the book she's writing. Her purpose is to challenge women who are fortunate enough to have the training and credentials to take on responsible and important jobs rather than "leaning back."

There's nothing new about what she says. Linda Hirshman made the same points in *Get to Work*, her 2006 manifesto aimed at highly educated women who dropped out of the workforce to raise kids. Hirshman's four points—delivered much more bluntly than Sandberg's polite exhortation to lean in—are these: pursue an education that will make you employable, take work seriously, demand household equity from your spouse, and don't have more than one child.

What both Hirshman and Sandberg are doing is pointing out that if we want women in leadership positions in this society, women who are in a position to do those jobs have to step up.

And having women in powerful leadership positions is valuable. Take the recent hearings on sexual assault in the military in the U.S. Senate. Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) took a strong lead in questioning the military representatives and while she was not successful in getting them to adopt a policy of independent prosecution of sexual assault cases, she made it clear that the high levels of rape and other assault must be dealt with.

That level of pressure would not have occurred in an earlier Senate with fewer women members. Further, the fact that the public debate has now recognized the high number of sexual assaults in the military is paying off for men as well. *The New York Times* reported on June 23 that more men than women are victims of rape and other assaults in the military, although the percentage of women who

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What both Hirshman and Sandberg are doing is pointing out that if we want women in leadership positions in this society, women who are in a position to do those jobs have to step up.

Cont. on p. 2



Lean In
(cont. from p. 1)

Neither Sandberg nor Hirshman is denying that there are added difficulties for women.

© 2 *I resent the idea that I must pay attention not just to the value of what I offer, but to how I say things and how I look when I say them.*

Sandberg is the Chief Operating Officer for Facebook and a very wealthy and successful businesswoman—certainly not the classic poster child for feminism. But she lays claim to it nonetheless...

are attacked is larger. The “rape culture” problem in the military affects both men and women, and—as might be expected—has more to do with assertion of power or an expression of contempt that it does with actual sex (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/24/us/in-debate-over-military-sexual-assault-men-are-overlooked-victims.html>).

The fact that Gillibrand and the other women senators “leaned in” and reached their positions of authority is changing the debate on the issues faced by women in the military. While I might not agree with everything those senators do, they’re taking women’s issues seriously.

Neither Sandberg nor Hirshman is denying that there are added difficulties for women. Acknowledging that successful women are often seen as too aggressive, Sandberg devotes a chapter to the problems women face when they advocate for themselves and makes several suggestions of things they should do differently from men. For example, a woman negotiating a pay package can bring up the point that women in general are at a disadvantage in such situations, thereby making her action one on behalf of all women, not just herself. Women must also provide “legitimate” explanations for the negotiation. Essentially, women need to be “nicer” than men even when they’re demanding a well-deserved raise. (My impression of Sandberg from reading this book is that she leans over backwards to be nice.)

This section made me uncomfortable. I resent the idea that I must pay attention not just to the value of what I offer, but to how I say things and how I look when I say them. I am often told that I am “too aggressive” even though I have worked hard to develop a calm, rational way of dealing with conflict. I suspect I am seen as “aggressive” because I am a woman presenting a solution to a problem without leaning over backwards to be “nice.”

I don’t think Sandberg was particularly happy with her suggestions, either. She observes, “No wonder women don’t negotiate as much as men. It’s like trying to cross a minefield backward in high

heels,” and adds “I know it is not a perfect answer but a means to a desirable end.” She hopes that “we won’t have to play by these archaic rules forever.”

But niceness combined with competence has worked well for Sandberg. Given that she has managed to get support from men in powerful positions who are not noted for their support of women’s issues, her strategy has been effective, at least for her.

Hirshman harks back to Betty Friedan in advocating that women who have the education and skills for powerful jobs go out and do them. While *The Feminine Mystique* pointed out the many barriers keeping women out of the workplace, it also criticized women for going along with the 1950s suburban dream lifestyle. Feminism has always included a challenge to women to get out and do things in the world along with fighting for changes in laws and institutions.

Hirshman puts particular emphasis on negotiating a fair relationship with spouses, something Sandberg, too, advocates. Hirshman, however, does not encourage women to lean over backward to be nice while taking charge; her style is much more assertive.

What is new and radical about Sandberg’s work is that she lays claim to feminism. Hirshman does, too, of course, but Hirshman has been a noted feminist for many years. Sandberg is the Chief Operating Officer for Facebook and a very wealthy and successful businesswoman—certainly not the classic poster child for feminism.

But she lays claim to it nonetheless and that’s what makes her book important. Her advice is not new, but her willingness as a powerful woman to take a feminist stance is. All too many women in Sandberg’s situation decline to acknowledge feminism, even though they owe their success to feminist efforts to get doors opened for women. While I’m sure most women who run major enterprises today “leaned in” to get to their current positions, all the “leaning in” the world wouldn’t have given them those jobs without the push for legislation, the lawsuits, the expanded repro-



ductive rights, the demonstrations, and the many feminists willing to face the ridicule tossed at “women’s libbers.”

Sandberg’s book is an indication that the discussion has changed. No longer are feminist issues relegated to feature articles for Women’s History Month. Women are getting the educations that give them opportunities, and younger men are more inclined to believe in sharing the household duties. It’s a good time for women with the skills and ambition to lead to “lean in.”

Increased numbers of women in positions of corporate and political authority will make an important difference, as the Senate debate on sexual assault made clear. But that doesn’t mean we don’t need to keep pushing for family-friendly work policies, affordable child-care, meaningful support for eldercare, and other recognition that people are not just their jobs and have many other obligations in this world. Sandberg isn’t dealing with those issues. I hope she is making sure her company expands what they provide for their women employees, but even if she is, those working at Facebook are an elite.

Far too many women workers in the U.S. today are doing low paid retail and service work. The closest thing many of them see to “flexible” working hours is part-time employment where their schedule can shift daily at the whim of their employer. They receive few benefits and risk their jobs when they must take off to care for children or other relatives. There is no way that these women can solve their problems by “leaning in.” They need political solutions. People like Sandberg can do a valuable service by advocating on their behalf.

However, a piece by Stephanie Coontz in *The New York Times* makes an important point about that fight:

So let’s stop arguing about the hard choices women make and help more women and men avoid such hard choices. To do that, we must stop seeing work-family policy as a women’s issue and start seeing it as a human rights issue that affects parents, children, partners, singles and elders. Feminists should cer-

tainly support this campaign. But they don’t need to own it. (Coontz, Stephanie, Why Gender Equality Stalled, *The New York Times*, Feb. 17, 2013, p. SR1, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/17/opinion/sunday/why-gender-equality-stalled.html>).

That is, it’s time to start pressing for work-life balance in a way that doesn’t assume women—and women alone—have to make “choices” when it comes to family obligations and careers.

Both Sandberg and Hirshman made me reflect on my own career choices over the years. I did get the education—I went to law school back when few women did—but I didn’t push to advance in a legal career past a certain point. (My final job as a lawyer was as the executive director of a legal services program, but I did not use that job to move into running a larger organization.) I tend to think this was a personal choice. I was not happy working as a lawyer and found that the more challenging the job, the less time I had to do the writing and Aikido training I considered more important. Though looking at my writing and Aikido careers in light of these books shows me that I’ve held myself back in those areas as well.

The analysis put forward by Anna Fels in her seminal work on women and ambition, *Necessary Dreams*, helps me put that in perspective: What women of my generation didn’t get—and what far too many younger women still don’t get—is recognition. Recognition isn’t just praise. It includes real critiques, acknowledgement that you’re taking your professional development seriously, mentoring, the right word of encouragement at the right time. Understanding that women have rarely received sufficient recognition and support in developing their careers has helped me understand why even the most talented among us falls into the habit of holding herself back. Knowing the problem doesn’t fix it, but it does provide an analytical tool that can help a woman get past rough patches in a career.

Sandberg did get that kind of recognition. She got it from, of all people, Law-

...it’s time to start pressing for work-life balance in a way that doesn’t assume women—and women alone—have to make “choices” when it comes to family obligations and careers.

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Cont. on p. 4



Lean In (cont. from p. 3)

We need women in leadership positions in activist organizations—not just feminist ones, but ones addressing environmental issues, income inequality, and the myriads of other problems we face today.

rence Summers, otherwise noted for his absurd comments on women scientists. I cannot help but find this ironic, but am glad for Sandberg that she got the kind of support she needed.

If more professional women follow Sandberg's advice to lean in—and she is working to develop that by putting in place an organization that encourages women to take action and support each other—I suspect that more women from the upcoming generations will get the kind of recognition Fels addresses.

Sandberg is a success in the corporate world. But while having more powerful women in positions like hers is important to the rest of us, I don't think her advice is limited to women who'd like to run a Fortune 500 company. Her lessons can be taken into other fields. We need women in leadership positions in activist organizations—not just feminist ones, but ones addressing environmental issues, income inequality, and the myriads of other problems we face today. There are too many professions that not only lack women in leadership, but lack a core of women in the hands-on work of their fields—engineering and computer science come to mind.

The Op Ed project began because newspapers and magazines weren't publishing op eds by women. However, when Catherine Orenstein looked into the situation, she found that one of the reasons—though not the only reason—op eds by women weren't being published was that women weren't submitting them in the same numbers as men. She started the project to give women the tools they needed to both have the confidence to submit pieces and the skills to get them accepted.

The Op Ed Project offers seminars across the country that teach unrepresented individuals (especially women) to recognize their knowledge and skills and to write op eds and other opinion pieces that meet the requirements of major media. In addition to offering training, the project has a mentor program that gives its graduates access to editors and writers with significant skills and con-

nections in opinion publishing and also provides detailed information on markets. About forty percent of the students get scholarships to attend.

It has been successful. When it began in 2008, 15 percent of the op ed bylines in major publications were of women; currently, that figure has increased to 21 percent.

The Op Ed Project is not just encouraging women to “lean in” or “get to work” as opinion makers; it's providing them with the tools they need to be successful. This kind of training, which confronts head on the insecurities generated by a sexist society and the lack of recognition discussed by Fels, provides concrete assistance for success.

I have been thinking about how to apply the lessons of the Op Ed Project in the fiction writing world—another place in which work by women is frequently overlooked. Each year VIDA, an organization that “explore[s] critical and cultural perceptions of writing by women,” publishes a chart showing the inequity in reviews of works by women and works by men (<http://www.vidaweb.org/>). Unfortunately, each year the numbers remain very much the same. The same is true in science fiction, as an annual survey by *Strange Horizons* shows. Simply pointing out the problem is not enough (<http://www.strangehorizons.com/2013/20130422/2sfcount-a.shtml>).

I think part of the “leaning in” side of the equation in fiction is for the women writers who are successful to make bigger demands—for advances, for appropriate book covers, for better publicity. Of course, some of them do, but I suspect that are many more writers who can get a better deal for themselves who are worried that they'll rock the boat. Every time a woman presses for a better deal, it changes the rules just a little.

But that doesn't mean that the only thing we can do is point out the problems or demand better deals. The world of publishing is undergoing a sea change right now. It's a good time for women writers and editors to take entrepreneurial leaps and come up with new presses

The world of publishing is undergoing a sea change right now. It's a good time for women writers and editors to take entrepreneurial leaps and come up with new presses and new publications.



and new publications. While many have done so in small presses and independent publishing, it would be good if a few women writers and editors who have large reputations and access to financial resources would try developing a large new publisher. That could provide a boon for good publishing and possibly get women authors taken more seriously.

While I agree with both Sandberg and Hirshman that more women need to become leaders, that is not the only thing needed to give women what they need in the workplace, and exhortations alone are not enough. I hope Sandberg's Lean In project will provide women with more resources in seeking top jobs and top pay in the same way that the Op Ed Project has provided those things for those seeking to make their voices heard. Sandberg's actions in claiming feminism and in pointing out what women need to do to succeed are important, but the next step is providing support.

Works Discussed

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Nancy Jane Moore is the author of *Changeling* from Aqueduct Press. She is a member of the online writer's co-op Book View Café.



It Takes A Village #2



⚙ Re-reading a Touchstone

How to Suppress Women's Writing, by Joanna Russ, University of Texas Press, 1983.

reviewed by Kathleen Alcalá

Russ...claimed that she did not want to write this book, that she, a respected science fiction writer, had better things to do.

In Joanna Russ's great work of literary criticism, *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, the prologue starts with a series of definitions that lead to the adverb "glotologgish" as "a synonym for ridiculous self-deception bolstered by wide-spread and elaborate social fictions leading to the massive distortion of information." Thus, it becomes an intergalactic metaphor for the lengths to which Earth-born critics have gone in order to dismiss literary work by women writers.

Russ, who taught at the University of Washington and with whom I studied in 1984, claimed that she did not want to write this book, that she, a respected science fiction writer, had better things to do. However, the author of works that ranged from her early *The Adventures of Alyx* to the widely acclaimed *The Female Man* and finally, *The Hidden Side of the Moon*, Russ's sensibility was that if critics were spoiling for a fight, she was perfectly happy to give them one. The result is a book I have given away over and over, so often that I try to keep two copies in the house at any given time. It went through at least seven paperback printings from the University of Texas Press and is now available as print on demand: <http://utpress.utexas.edu/index.php/books/rushow>.

How to Suppress is simple in its concept, brilliant in its execution. Russ outlines eleven approaches taken by critics in order to deny, undermine, discredit, or otherwise suppress literature created by women over the centuries. These are Prohibitions, Bad Faith, Denial of Agency, Pollution of Agency, The Double Standard of Content, False Categorizing, Isolation, Anomalousness, Lack of Models, Responses, and Aesthetics. She names specific works, specific studies, and specific critics, then quotes any number of colleagues to back up her scholarship, which ranges across disciplines. The book is footnoted and indexed to within an inch of its slender life, so that there

is little chance of refutation for lack of proof. Russ got her Master's Degree in Drama from Yale, but she would have made a formidable lawyer.

Of Virginia Woolf she says,

Her vocabulary is non-technical and she speaks of the abstract in concrete terms—like the brilliant novelist she is—which may be one of the reasons the men of her circle disliked the book [*Three Guineas*] so much. Although crammed with facts and references, it has the wrong style; it is personal and sounds unscholarly; a charge often leveled at modern feminist writing. That is, the tone is not impersonal, detached, and dry enough—in short not patriarchal enough—to produce belief. (75)

Russ enlists other feminist science fiction writers—Vonda N. McIntyre, Samuel R. Delany, Suzy McKee Charnas, and Ursula K. Le Guin, among others—to her cause, leading to a sort of discussion that implies coffee and rhubarb pie interspersed with Molotov cocktails. I find this is a difficult book to dip into, because within minutes I am possessed to go find an audience and start reading passages out loud.

Why, you ask, has it been necessary to suppress women's writing? According to Carolyn Kizer,

...when...women move out of their restricted place, they threaten men in a very profound sense with the need to reintegrate many of the essentials of human development.... These things have been warded off and become doubly fearful because they look as though they will entrap men in "emotions," weakness, sexuality, vulnerability, helplessness, the need for care, and other unsolved areas. (110)

In other words, the canon has been shaped to reflect the inner lives of only



half of humanity. To include the literature of women is to redefine that canon.

Brit Mandelo reviewed this book for Tor.com in 2010 (<http://www.tor.com/blogs/2010/12/how-to-suppress-womens-writing-by-joanna-russ>), and again in 2011 (<http://www.tor.com/blogs/2011/11/reading-joanna-russ-how-to-suppress-womens-writing-1983>) because, as she says, "*How to Suppress Women's Writing* invites re-reading; on second perusal, I found more than I had the first time. The humor is more obvious, the arguments doubly interesting with repetition, and the culminating effect altogether different: the first time, I was understandably upset though struck with the clarity of the argument; the second time, I was pleased to have read it again, to have closely read Russ's brilliant synthesis of information and to have appreciated her genius."

With her usual grace and dry wit, Russ added (after an Epilogue and an Author's Note) an Afterword that admits to a major omission. "There I was, with the other Glottologi of my hue, slipping and sliding on the ice and frumenting like anything, while at the far-away periphery of our Great, Classical, Normal, Serious, and totally Central circle loomed (but faintly) dim and disquieting shapes" (135). These turned out to be women writers of color. After taking the time to read, research, and read some

more, Russ realized she had left out a significant body of literature that did not conform to the dominant paradigm, or even the feminist discourse in which Russ had engaged for decades, because it had arisen within its own boundaries and definitions.

I think this Afterword was written some years following the first printing of *How to Suppress*, and I hope I helped annoy her in the direction of writing it. I know I annoyed her as a student, mostly because I did not conform in any way to her idea of a feminist. I didn't do this on purpose; I was just less evolved than she was. Which only proved some of the things in her own book, making my presence doubly annoying. Nevertheless, I sold my first two stories during that class, one of them science fiction.

Oh that we could read this book in a strictly historical context. But a recent study by VIDA: Women in Literary Arts shows that conditions for women writers have not improved all that rapidly (<http://www.vidaweb.org/the-count-2012>).

The last years of Russ's life were not as productive as they might have been. She retired to Arizona with her partner, Cynthia, suffering from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. If not for her illness, imagine what sort of an Afterword to that Afterword Russ might have written, or better yet, what other works of science fiction she might have birthed.

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Censorship

by Sonya Taaffe

Cato, thinking of you tastes of salt
I know was never ground in Carthage earth
like tears into slaves' eyes, ash on grieving faces,
the bricks of burnt walls into sun-sprawled backs.
I cannot touch olives, small-flowered as Etruscan jewelry,
without hearing the sword sharpening in the sickle,
the war whetting itself on its appetite.
Your voice repeating across a sea that was never ours
the one word I cannot rub away
as easily as a city's dust from my palms,
my mouth sea-breeze bitter with knowing
none of the names of children we have burned.

Kathleen Alcalá loves a good story. Her five books have received numerous awards. Both a graduate of and instructor at Clarion West, she teaches creative writing at the graduate level.

Sonya Taaffe's short stories and award-winning poems have appeared in numerous venues. She is currently on the editorial staff of *Strange Horizons*.



⚙️ A Hopeful and Eclectic Book About Impending Doom

Scatter, Adapt, and Remember: How Humans Will Survive a Mass Extinction, by Annalee Newitz, Doubleday, May 2013, 320 pp., \$26.95.

reviewed by Victoria Elisabeth Garcia

The book has a breezy and casual tone, but its scope is ambitious.... Newitz shows us that on a geological timescale, widespread ecological collapse is a normal and expected thing; part of terrestrial business as usual.....

Newitz never understates the seriousness of the current global climate situation.

Scatter, Adapt, and Remember is a new popular science book from Annalee Newitz, editor-in-chief of Gawker Media's much-loved science and science fiction blog, io9.com. The book has a breezy and casual tone, but its scope is ambitious. Dancing lightly from paleontology to urban geography to aerospace engineering, Newitz seeks to put both climate change and mass extinction into context on the geological scale, to identify characteristics of entities that have withstood what others could not, and to describe strategies and promising research that could help the human race survive for a million years.

The first section of the book discusses the many dramatic die-offs and mass extinctions that have transpired since life began on planet Earth. Here, Newitz shows us that on a geological timescale, widespread ecological collapse is a normal and expected thing; part of terrestrial business as usual. Terrestrial life consistently finds ways to persevere and flourish despite these harrowing crises, even if it sometimes takes millions of years to rebound. Central to this is the geological carbon cycle: over ages and millennia, the balance of atmospheric and rock-borne carbon shifts back and forth, causing the earth's climate to shift in turn. But even though these fluctuations can happen naturally, Newitz never understates the seriousness of the current global climate situation. She does, however, frame it in optimistic terms:

Earth has always vacillated between a carbon-rich greenhouse and its opposite, the oxygen-rich icehouse where humanity is more comfortable. We're simply the first species on Earth to figure out how this climate cycle works, and to realize that our survival depends on preventing the next environmental shift.

Our ability to reason, in other words, separates us from the fallen trilobites, sauropods, and giant horsetail plants of eons past, and we have reason for hope.

In the second section, "We Almost Didn't Make It," Newitz discusses several specific threats to human survival, both current and historical. Here, too, we see a blending of grimness and optimism. In chapter 8, "Great Plagues," Newitz ably evokes the bleakness of Europe during the Black Death and takes pains to show the scope of its human cost. But she also describes a surprising upside: the epidemic helped to shake up an oppressive and ossified class system. The poor were hit hardest by the disease—but the reduction in the population increased the value of their labor, which empowered the survivors. "With each plague," says Newitz, "there arise social movements that inch us closer to economic equality and clarify what's required to take a scientific approach to public health." Though Newitz's equations are undeniably cold, this is a deeply hopeful idea.

Newitz also discusses the crushing effects of European-derived disease on the indigenous people of the colonial Americas. She does not, however, try to apply the above-described plague-and-progress model here. Instead, Newitz introduces Native American literary scholar Gerald Vizenor's concept of *survivance*: that is, of using creation and sharing of stories as a tool for resisting domination, for keeping culture vital in the face of change, and for soothing the pain of absence. Newitz doesn't just want our bodies to keep going for the next million years; she wants our identities to last as well. The critical importance of stories is a theme that Newitz revisits throughout the book.

In the third section, "Lessons from Survivors," Newitz identifies key traits and behaviors of certain hardy species

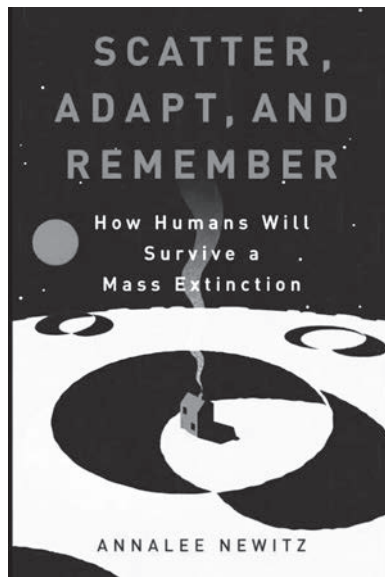


and groups, and attempts to explain how we can learn from their examples. Though not all of the arguments are quite as sharp or persuasive as the ones that came before, the section is just as full of fascinating information.

Chapter 11, "Adapt," is a celebration of cyanobacteria, a robust and ancient phylum of simple, photosynthetic organisms. Species of cyanobacteria have been found in an impressive variety of environments, from steam vents to glacial ice. Newitz gives much of the credit for this versatility to the organisms' ability to harvest energy from sunlight, and it is this aspect of their being that she urges us to take as a model. "Adapt's" second half is devoted to emerging algae-based energy technologies.

It's certainly true that algae research holds a great deal of promise. It's also true that cyanobacteria have adapted extraordinarily well to the task of supporting themselves; that doesn't necessarily mean that they are equally well-adapted to supporting *us*. Algae-based biofuels, like all biofuels, come with their own set of issues, limitations, and challenges, some of which are quite thorny. Newitz never addresses this, however. As a result, the chapter ends up feeling more breathless than instructive, and the word "adapt" comes to sound more like a brand or a buzzword than like a description of a viable strategy.

The penultimate section, "How to Build a Livable City," is among the book's strongest. Largely concerned with emerging solutions to practical problems, this section takes on topics such as mitigating the effects of natural disasters through engineering, promoting food security through urban agricultural projects, and monitoring and controlling the spread of disease. On the whole it's a smart and well-balanced text, deftly explained, and marked (but not dominated) by enthusiasm and hopefulness. "Cities that Hide," a wonderful chapter about the history and problems of building massive complexes underground, and best practices for such work, sounds a slightly more fanciful note.



The final section, "The Million-Year View," is short, punchy, and full of surprises. Here, both Newitz and many of her subjects reach into the realm of the unapologetically speculative. We meet a group of British philosophers who are creating disaster plans in preparation for the Singularity and planning for the eventual digital uploading of human consciousness. We also learn about ongoing preparations for the construction of a space elevator, and about a nonprofit with a 100-year plan for building a starship. Some of the described research is radical enough to be a bit alarming: in chapter 19, "Terraforming the Earth," Newitz discusses the possibility of cooling the planet by doping the upper atmosphere with substantial quantities of particulated sulfur (both Newitz and her interview subject are frank about the risks this would entail). But prospective sulfur-bombs aside, it's a delight to learn that so much audacious, ambitious, and wildly exploratory work is still being done, especially in this era of dwindling scientific funding.


In the second section, "We Almost Didn't Make It," Newitz discusses several specific threats to human survival, both current and historical.... Newitz ably evokes the bleakness of Europe during the Black Death and takes pains to show the scope of its human cost. But she also describes a surprising upside...

Newitz doesn't just want our bodies to keep going for the next million years; she wants our identities to last as well.

For a text packed with such rich and diverse subject matter, it's a surprisingly fast read. But this fleetness has a cost... its concepts are often glossed over too quickly to give the reader a robust understanding of the subject matter.... Despite this glibness, Scatter, Adapt, and Remember is something unique, rare, and worthwhile.

Cont. on p. 10



 *Scatter, Adapt,
and Remember*
(cont. from p. 9)

... something unique, rare,
and worthwhile.

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.

 **Feminist Gaslight Fantasy**

Death by Silver, by Melissa Scott and Amy Griswold, Lethe Press, May 2013, 272 pp., \$18.00.
reviewed by Cynthia Ward

While *Death by Silver* is an alternate history of Victorian England, it would be misleading to label this novel, with its disinterest in steam technology, steampunk; the more accurate term would be gaslight fantasy.

[I]f you read *Death by Silver* expecting the explicit details (or extended angst-wallows) found in slash fanfiction or yaoi manga, you'll be disappointed. What you will find is a believable, three-dimensional relationship between equals.

On balance, the book is undeniably good, though it can also be a bit frustrating. Its sheer breadth and the ease with which Newitz skips from idea to idea and from discipline to discipline are impressive in the extreme. For a text packed with such rich and diverse subject matter, it's a surprisingly fast read. But this fleetness has a cost. While there is absolutely no reason to believe the book is in any way inaccurate, its concepts are often glossed over too quickly to give the reader a robust understanding of the subject matter. Case-in-point: In order to get a solid handle on the process Newitz described in the "Greenhouse Becomes Icehouse (and Vice Versa)" subsection of chapter 1, I wound up reading no less

than five original research papers and squinting my way through pages and pages of chemical equations and a not-inconsiderable amount of math. Having done that, I don't dispute any of Newitz's wording—indeed, I'm even more impressed by its elegance and economy—but I know that if I'd tried to explain the Snowball Earth theory to someone based solely on what I'd retained from a single reading of Newitz's text, I would have gotten it very wrong.

Despite this glibness, *Scatter, Adapt, and Remember* is something unique, rare, and worthwhile. Newitz's ability to respond to the possibility of global doom with curiosity, optimism, thoughtfulness, and clarity is inspiring.

When you're a metaphysician not long out of university, you can't afford to turn down customers. So Ned Mathey accepts a commission to cleanse sinister magic from a silver set belonging to the abrasive father of Victor Nevett, the boarding-school bully who'd tormented Mathey and his closest friend, Julian Lynes. Finding the elder Nevett's silver free of curses, Mathey assures his client there's nothing to worry about. Shortly thereafter Nevett is killed by his silver candlestick under mysterious and possibly magical circumstances. Now Mathey is an object of suspicion in Victorian London and a person of interest to Scotland Yard.

Though their friendship has become problematical due to misunderstandings, Mathey seeks the assistance of Lynes, now a private detective. However, Lynes has just been hired by another old classmate to find the thief of a trade secret involving automata, and because he received especially harsh treatment from their one-time tormentor, Lynes has even less reason than Mathey to assist

the Nevett family. However, though Lynes and Mathey both privately suspect their relationship is over, Lynes agrees to assist Mathey in clearing his reputation and finding the tyrannical paterfamilias's real murderer amid a surfeit of motivated suspects.

If you've read between the lines, you've sleuthed out a resemblance between investigator Lynes and metaphysician Mathey, the twin leads of this new novel, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's dynamic duo, Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson. If you've read reviews of many of Scott's other novels, but haven't read the novels themselves, you might suppose Scott and Griswold have put a slashy spin on the relationship between their S/W analogues. And, if you noted my mention of automata, you may suspect this novel is steampunk. In all of these matters, you would be right, and you would be wrong.

While *Death by Silver* is an alternate history of Victorian England, it would be misleading to label this novel, with its disinterest in steam technology, steam-



punk; the more accurate term would be gaslight fantasy. And, while Lynes and Mathey are clearly inspired by Holmes and Watson, it's in the manner that Leigh Brackett's Eric John Stark was inspired by Tarzan of the Apes: there are resemblances in character and appearance, but you'd never mistake one for the other. Lynes and Mathey are younger than their inspirations, they've known each other since they were twelve years old, they're lovers, Lynes lacks Holmes's abrasive arrogance and scathing sarcasm, and Mathey is no sidekick. As for their physical relationship, it doesn't stay entirely off the page, but if you read *Death by Silver* expecting the explicit details (or extended angst-wallows) found in slash fanfiction or *yaoi* manga, you'll be disappointed. What you will find is a believable, three-dimensional relationship between equals.

You may wonder what a gay pastiche is doing in the review column of a feminist publication. It's here for two reasons. One is that Melissa Scott is an important writer of feminist science fiction. The other reason is that *Death by Silver* is, subtly but unmistakably, feminist.

The unequal status of women is a recurring theme. When Mathey hires a "typewriter girl" instead of the expected male assistant, his colleagues automatically assume he will exploit her; he doesn't, and she proves a smart, skilled employee whose knowledge and insights surprise him. In another example (one simultaneously amusing and appalling), Mathey refuses to pursue a marriage of convenience, sure of both the painful unethicity of such an arrangement and the possibility that, despite certain prominent men's pronouncements, women might actually have some expectations of their husbands in the bedroom. More grimly, a serving woman is killed as she tries to avoid dishonor. Also evident throughout the book is the way in which the situation of gay men in this alt-Victorian society resonates with that of women.

Like Conan Doyle in the Holmes and Watson story "The Yellow Face," Scott and Griswold show a thoughtful under-

standing of and sensitivity to disempowered individuals and groups. They don't share Conan Doyle's ability to construct a fiendishly clever mystery (I suspected the guilty party before the leads, whereas I could never guess in a Holmes story). But Scott and Griswold do share Conan Doyle's ability to rivet your attention till the last page with their twisty plotting, well-realized settings, and nuanced characters.



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Cynthia Ward has published stories in numerous anthologies and magazines. She is completing a novel. She lives in Los Angeles.



Space Opera and Women, Women, Women

The Other Half of the Sky, edited by Athena Andreadis and Kay Holt,
Candlemark & Gleam, April 2013, 445 pp., \$22.95.

reviewed by Tansy Rayner Roberts

[Editor's note:

The anthology covered below contains a story written by CSZ's Reviews Editor, Nisi Shawl; however, the opinions the reviewer expresses about it were unsolicited.]

The most popular future visions that audiences are being sold now in 21st century media can still come with alarming and unrealistic gender imbalances....

Sexist narratives are not a necessary evil that we have to swallow, in exchange for shiny starships, futuristic space captains, and alien cultures.

The Other Half of the Sky very much follows in the Sargent tradition by demonstrating that feminist space opera doesn't have to be an occasional outlier, a rare treat that occurs only sporadically in the genre.

Science fiction has often let women down. As a genre it regularly fails to convey the important fact that women represent at least half of humanity. Having just come away from the latest Star Trek movie, I have to say, this issue isn't just about a bunch of entitled male writers in the 1950s. The most popular future visions that audiences are being sold now in 21st century media can still come with alarming and unrealistic gender imbalances.

There have, however, always been women writers (and indeed, men) trying to include social change and female heroes in their stories. My own idea of what space opera should do was shaped by Pamela Sargent, whose *Women of Wonder* anthology series blew my understanding of the history of science fiction wide open and taught me to expect more of the stories I read. Thanks to Sargent, I discovered a wealth of authors and stories that did exactly what I wanted science fiction to do, despite being outnumbered by books and movies that keep forgetting that the future belongs to all of us.

The Other Half of the Sky very much follows in the Sargent tradition by demonstrating that feminist space opera doesn't have to be an occasional outlier, a rare treat that occurs only sporadically in the genre. There is no limit on how many stories we can have that examine race and alternative sexualities, that allow our heroic (and unheroic) protagonists to be women, women, women, over and over again, without the genre bending or breaking or being in any way Ruined Forever.

Sexist narratives are not a necessary evil that we have to swallow, in exchange for shiny starships, futuristic space captains, and alien cultures.

Andreadis and Holt have assembled a very strong collection of original stories from a diverse range of authors. I was

impressed at how many very different kinds of stories feature in this anthology, allowing exploration of a variety of facets of the space opera genre—from pure space adventures to sophisticated tales of alien linguistics.

I was also impressed by Andreadis's unapologetically fierce introduction, laying out her agenda for the book as well as describing the need for such a book with both wit and snark:

I want women to be nexuses, pivots, movers, shapers, creators and destroyers—loved, feared, admired (or all three, I'm not picky). And I want these women and their worlds to be brought to life by language that's not the Hemingway-wannabe workshop-101 hackery that passes for writing craft in much of SF.

Melissa Scott's "Finders" is about a future where the human race's ability to travel through space relies on devices scavenged from the wreckage of a lost alien race known as "the Ancestors." Our protagonist is a salvage captain with a degenerative disease—and a Gift from the Ancestors might mean a whole new future for her. This opening story of the anthology is light and readable, but also contains a great deal of emotion and depth, setting the tone for the stories to follow.

"Bad Day on Boscobel," by Alexander Jablov, sets up a beautifully complex planetary culture based around a tree-worshipping community, complete with anti-green terrorists, a Martian spy, and a motherhood narrative about what happens when your daughter gets in with the wrong crowd.

Another fascinating culture is at the center of "In Colors Everywhere" by Nisi Shawl: a matriarchal society of Ladies on a very alien planet. This is one of those stories where a whole world is evoked through tiny, clever word choices,



so as not to let the rich world-building get in the way of the plot—in this case about the intrusion of offworlders into the community, and how the elders use that intrusion to their own ends. This is one of very few stories in the anthology addressing the subject of rape, and I did appreciate that the climax was about bodily autonomy and recovery rather than an action-based revenge narrative. So refreshing!

Aliette de Bodard’s “The Waiting Stars” is a powerful and moving story about a generation of stolen alien children whose minds (but not their very noticeable bodies) are wiped and altered for what humans believe to be altruistic reasons, and the awful consequences of what happens when their memories inevitably return. I found this one quite wrenching, but I also think it’s one of the best pieces I have read from de Bodard.

Ken Liu’s “The Shape of Thought” adds substantially to his growing body of work about linguistics in a science fictional context. Sarah, a child of a human colony, becomes part of her mother’s experiment in learning the language of the (Kalahari) people because the flexibility of her young mind allows her to absorb the complexities of the alien culture and language far more easily than the adults around her can. As she grows up, Sarah is intrinsically changed by her understanding of the aliens and how they think, and when war breaks out between the two cultures she is the only one who can see exactly how impossible it is for both sides to understand each other.

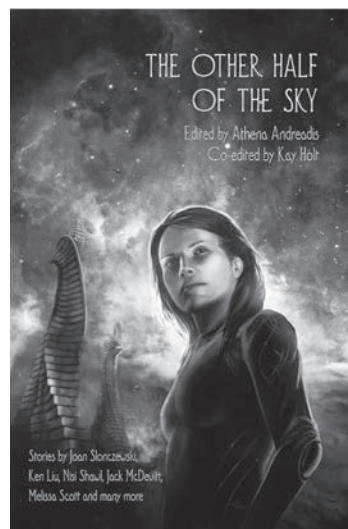
Martha Wells’ “Mimesis” does that incredibly rare and hard-to-get-right thing of conveying a completely alien culture populated with characters with which a human reader can empathize. Though I should note that this is by no means the only story in this anthology that does this—one of the great strengths of the book is how many different cultures, worlds, and societies we are introduced to, despite the works’ short length.

Kelly Jennings’s “Velocity’s Ghost” is the story I would most like to see expanded into a novel. Her galaxy of mining dynasties, slave contracts, harsh politics,

spaceship domesticity, and cynical bounty hunters simply leaps off the page, and her protagonist, the mercenary space captain Velocity, is particularly compelling. A whole universe of space adventures is hinted at in this one, tightly constructed episode, which had me scrambling to see what else this author has written.

Christine Lucas’s “Ouroboros” is an odd, elegant little AI fairytale that manages to be both alien and sympathetic at the same time.

One of the best editing decisions of the book is the placement of the final story, “Cathedral” by Jack McDevitt. After so many wondrous and far out worlds, this one brings us close to home with a bump. Set in a near and certainly believable future where humanity in general (and NASA in particular) is on the verge of giving up on space, the story looks at the realities of media manipulation and funding through the eyes of a space station resident. This is, I think, the only story in the anthology that has a male narrator, but that’s forgivable because “Cathedral” is not Matt’s story at all—instead, he provides an emotionally resonant narration of the story about Laura, an ambitious astronaut who is devoted to humanity’s space-going future—and willing to do anything to save Earth from itself. “Cathedral” is a clever, thoughtful story that addresses an issue highly significant to space opera as a genre—do we really still believe that colonizing the stars is a realistic future? And how do we get there from here?



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Tansy Rayner Roberts has a PhD in Classics. She authors fantasy stories and novels for both adults and children. She lives in Australia.



☸ Metaphysical Science Fictional

Space Is Just a Starry Night, by Tanith Lee, Aqueduct Press, July 2013, 240 pp., \$18.00.

reviewed by Craig Laurance Gidney

The line between science fiction and fantasy in Lee's writing is blurred, as she is more concerned with metaphysical issues than with technological or biological extrapolation.

Though she writes in a variety of genres and modes, Tanith Lee is mostly known for her lush, decadent fantasy. Her science fiction has a much lower profile. Perhaps her most famous sfnal work is the science fiction romance *The Silver Metal Lover*; her stint as a scriptwriter for the British cult series *Blake's 7* is also a touchstone. In fact, this collection of Lee's SF work takes its title from one of those scripts.

The line between science fiction and fantasy in Lee's writing is blurred, as she is more concerned with metaphysical issues than with technological or biological extrapolation. To paraphrase critic John Clute, the plight of the human soul is her primary focus, and the various genre backdrops, while essential to the story, serve as extended metaphors.

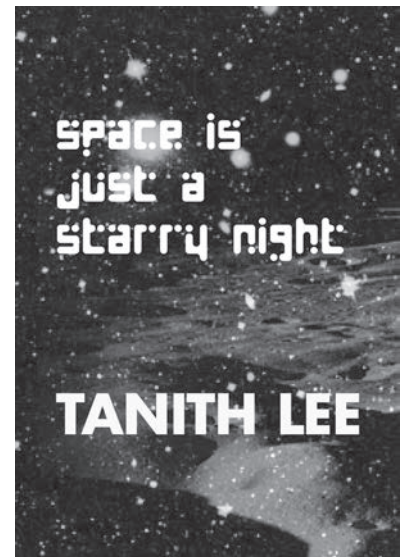
The book's first two tales, "The Beautiful Biting Machine" and "Moon Wolf," are science fictional treatments of traditional fantasy tropes: respectively, the vampire and the werewolf. But rather than being bound by hoary clichés, the two stories subtly critique these myths and add a spiritual element to them. "The Beautiful Biting Machine" is lush, rococo, and full of decadent imagery, but has a clever, clockwork logicity to it that recalls classic "Big Idea" era SF. By contrast, "Moon Wolf" is spare and beautiful, like silver gelatin prints, a science fiction fantasia of werewolves on the moon and a stunning meditation on loneliness that resonates. "The Thaw" and "You Are My Sunshine" display Lee's humorous side. The issue of cryogenics is treated with an almost M. Night Shyamalan-like twist in the first tale, while the second tale recalls the ruthless, gimlet-eyed fiction of James Tiptree, Jr., as it takes on the issue of sexism in a space opera environment.

A triptych of stories are retrofitted Christian creation myths: "With A Flaming Sword" and "Black Fire" both play with biblical tropes and refer to them with cold precision, while the older

"Written in Water" deals with similar issues in a more horrific manner. "Felixity" and "Stalking the Leopard" are futuristic fantasies, both with fable-like qualities and dependent on unsettling deus-ex-machina-like endings.

Two of the strongest SF pieces Tanith Lee has ever written appear in this collection. The vignette "Dead Yellow" first appeared in *Nature Magazine's* flash fiction series; it manages to be both scientific and heartbreaking within a short space. "By Crystal Light Beneath One Star" is, pardon the expression, a piece of Philip K. Dick mindfuck; it deals with a prison system based on time manipulation. The elliptical structure of the story combined with its claustrophobic atmosphere is very effective.

Space Is Just a Starry Night comes from the small Aqueduct Press, which publishes this quarterly and specializes in feminist science fiction. Lee's fiction isn't expressly political, and she peoples her stories with all sorts of characters, including those with abhorrent worldviews. The stories in this collection are balanced between male and female narrators, and other than the creation myths, there is no overarching theme. While not overtly feminist, though, the breadth of Lee's oeuvre subtextually ex-



14 ☸ "Moon Wolf" is spare and beautiful, like silver gelatin prints, a science fiction fantasia of werewolves on the moon and a stunning meditation on loneliness that resonates.

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amines both male and female archetypes in often subversive ways—and some of that comes through here (in particular in “You Are My Sunshine,” “Felixity,” and “Written in Water”). Lee’s other genre work includes female-centered YA (the Tanaquil/Unicorn series) and gay and lesbian fiction (contained in the Lethe Press collections *Disturbed by Her Song* and *Fatal Women: The Esther Garber Novellas*). *Space Is Just a Starry Night* is a wonderful introduction to her poetic imagination.

Lee’s fiction isn’t expressly political, and she peoples her stories with all sorts of characters, including those with abhorrent worldviews... While not overtly feminist, though, the breadth of Lee’s oeuvre subtextually examines both male and female archetypes in often subversive ways

Craig Laurance Gidney has published works in the fantasy/science fiction, gay, and young adult categories. His website is <http://www.craiglaurancegidney.com>.

Muddy Mathematics

Math on Trial: How Numbers Get Used and Abused in the Courtroom, by Leila Schneps and Coralie Colmez, Basic Books, March 2013, 272 pp., \$26.99.

reviewed by Karen Burnham

Math on Trial: How Numbers Get Used and Abused in the Courtroom is a book with two missions: to illustrate how getting math wrong can lead to miscarriages of justice, and to teach people (who may someday serve on juries) what common mathematical manipulations to look for. These are noble goals, but this uneven volume falls slightly short of fulfilling them.

It’s strongest when it tells the stories of specific cases where mathematical errors led to or compounded injustice. The first few cases make this point abundantly clear in very engaging and interesting ways. The authors begin with the story of Sally Clark, whose first two children died of SIDS. Even though she had done everything “right,” including constant monitoring and regular home nurse visits for her second child, she was arrested for the murder of her two children. (Her husband was immediately cleared. Only the mother was charged, of course.) The strongest argument made at court, by a high-profile pediatrician named Roy Meadow, was that the likelihood of two children in the same household dying of SIDS is astronomical: if the chance of it happening once is 1 in 8,543, then the chance of it happening twice is that number squared, or

1 in roughly 73,000,000. Obviously this is unlikely to happen naturally, therefore the mother must have killed the children. QED.

The fact is, you can only square that initial 1 in 8,543 number if the probabilities of occurrence are truly independent; i.e., that there is no common factor such as an inherited genetic cause for the babies’ early deaths. Sally was convicted on the basis of the pediatrician’s flawed, but easily understood and intuitive, mathematical analysis. She was in prison for over three years as the case went through numerous appeals and her husband raised their third child alone. When she was finally released, she was unable to recover from her ordeal and from being publically known as an infamous child killer. She died soon after, of alcohol poisoning.

Similar abuse comes up in a case in 1964 where an interracial couple stole a woman’s handbag; the cops arrested an interracial couple, Malcolm and Janet Collins, who most likely were innocent, and then used made-up statistics to “prove” that the “chances” of there being any other interracial couple in Los Angeles with a yellow car and the woman’s hair in a ponytail were astronomical, so these must be the criminals even though

[This] is a book with two missions: to illustrate how getting math wrong can lead to miscarriages of justice, and to teach people (who may someday serve on juries) what common mathematical manipulations to look for. These are noble goals, but this uneven volume falls slightly short of fulfilling them.

It’s strongest when it tells the stories of specific cases where mathematical errors led to or compounded injustice.

Cont. on p. 16



Math on Trial (cont. from p. 15)

Some of the descriptions are particularly fine, clearly highlighting what was done, what a common intuition would be, and why those things were and are wrong. In other cases, I was left more confused about the math than when I started the book.

This book contains many, many fascinating tidbits.... I want to especially thank the authors for bringing the interesting life of Hetty Green to my attention.... Her chapter was another one in which the mathematics... were muddy and ambiguous, especially compared to this awesome biography.... And that encapsulates the strengths and weaknesses of this book.

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Karen Burnham is vocationally an engineer and avocationally a fiction writer. She works at NASA Johnson Space Center as an electrical engineer. She edits *Locus* magazine's Roundtable blog.

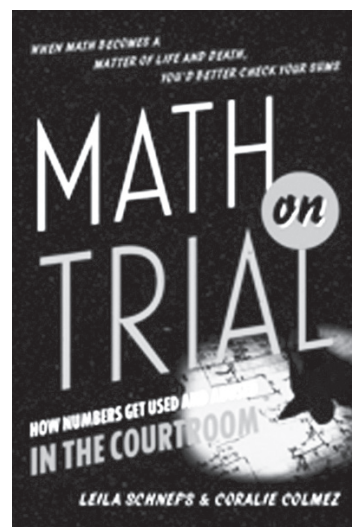
no actual evidence pointed to them. They were both convicted. Then there's the case of a nurse who happened to be present at the deaths of several children at the hospital where she worked. Her supervisors started to get suspicious and toted up the "chances" that one nurse would be present at so many deaths, and arrived at a figure of 1 in 342,000,000. Like the case of Sally Clark, something that seems intuitively correct turns out to be jarringly inaccurate, especially when the authors take a closer look at the shifting ways in which the deaths were selected.

However, the book's mission gets obscured in some of the other cases depicted. One gentleman named Joe Sneed was convicted of killing his parents based on the unlikelihood of his apparent pseudonym occurring by "chance," but his conviction was never overturned and no other suspects were ever found. The math may have been wrong, but it's not clear that he was actually innocent. Likewise, using the Amanda Knox case may have been a poor choice. While the authors' analysis of the mathematics behind a partial DNA match on an incomplete fragment are fascinating, there is so much about this infamous case that is confusing and messed up that the mathematics seems like a sideshow in comparison. And in a chapter about the historical Dreyfuss affair, bad math may have been a component of the case, but the politics of the situation were overwhelmingly more important. In the chapter on the original Ponzi scheme it was evident that there was no need to abuse mathematics at trial; instead, he was rightfully convicted of taking advantage of other people's bad math skills.

Math on Trial's other problem comes in its explanations of the mathematics involved in these cases. Some of the descriptions are particularly fine, clearly highlighting what was done, what a common intuition would be, and why those things were and are wrong. In other cases, I was left more confused about the math than when I started the book. The discussion of the handwriting analysis in the Dreyfuss case completely

lost me. This was also true in a case that mentioned Bayes' theorem in the context of partial matches of DNA in a cold case database. Bayes' theorem is an important statistical technique that I have used several times in my professional life, and I had trouble understanding what the authors were talking about. If they failed to reach a reader who has taken a graduate class in statistics, I'm not sure how well this section will educate the general reader.

This book contains many, many fascinating tidbits. I was shocked at the cases that blatantly targeted women caregivers and others lacking social power (although that could be true of any number of books about miscarriages of justice). I want to especially thank the authors for bringing the interesting life of Hetty Green to my attention; at her death in 1916 she had a fortune of \$100 million and had made personal loans to bail out the city of New York. She was the only female investor on Wall St. in her time. Why had I never heard of her before? Her chapter was another one in which the mathematics (involving a contested will) were muddy and ambiguous, especially compared to this awesome biography I was learning about for the first time. And that encapsulates the strengths and weaknesses of this book. Though it's titled *Math on Trial*, the math too often pales in comparison to (or is obscured by) the drama of the trials.



Russian History à la carte

Wolfhound Century, by Peter Higgins, Orbit, March 2013, 303 pp., \$25.99.

reviewed by Natalya Volkhovets

When I first read the glowing reviews of *Wolfhound Century* praising its imaginative and seamless melding of Russian history and mythology, I was suspicious. So far I haven't seen a believable Russian-based setting done by a Western author. Sadly, this book didn't turn out to be an exception. Moreover, it appears to be a part of a popular trend in world building: take what you want and mix it randomly. The less your readers know about the source of your setting, the better.

The list of books used by Higgins while writing *Wolfhound Century* is available at <http://www.wolfhoundcentury.com/bookshelf/>. I find it impossible to look at this list without embarrassment, but at the same time it's very revealing. Only about 10 percent of the books are written by Russian authors—none of them recent and nothing beyond the level of a very basic school curriculum. The remaining 90 percent, fiction and nonfiction alike, are either retelling our stories for us, or completely unrelated. Very familiar. Higgins used Russian history, but didn't want to engage with any living Russians in the process. We were not even considered as potential readers of this book. Would it be better if we didn't exist at all?

Wolfhound Century tells the story of Vissarion Lom, a provincial police officer, who is summoned to the capital to uncover a major terrorist organization all by himself. As we follow his investigation deep into the conspiracy, you can see a number of glimpses of the real events. There are references to the bank robberies, or as they were called expropriations, done either by the Fighting Organization or Bolsheviks at the turn of the 20th century; to the mass executions of the civilians during the WWII era; to Bloody Sunday in 1905; to the Revolution of 1917; to the arrest practices of the 1930s. There are allusions to real people—from Stalin and Beria to

Akhmatova and Gumilev. There are random names dropped: Stolypin, Savinkov, Durnovo. The story pulls people and events from different time periods depending on the plot's needs. It reminds me of a *Doctor Who* episode where all the history happens at the same time. The Doctor, however, recognizes the situation as abnormal, and for him it's a clear sign of the end of the world. The universe created by Higgins pretends to be functional.

It must be possible to reconcile all these periods and create an alternative world that doesn't contradict itself. After all, using real historical events in world building is common, and the 20th century is one of the favorite playgrounds for many Russian authors working in the genre of alternative history. There are stories that rework the course of the Revolution, or the Civil War, or even WWII, leaving no stone unturned, no option missed. There are stories that investigate the imprint the 20th century has left on us. The quality varies, but they create realities where Russia and Russian people are still recognizable.

I don't see Russia in *Wolfhound Century*. Not even an alternative version of it. I see a random bunch of elements thrown together in a blender, for no other purpose but the shock value. I wasn't able to have any emotional response to this world due to its so obvious fakeness. The approach taken by Higgins was to borrow symbols, but not what they represent; to take words, but not what they mean; to use historical events, but not the reasons behind them.

Higgins believes his world building to be sound. As he stated in his online interview:

...things and words and places have a history, and connections to other things, which you sense, even if you don't pause to explore them. That whole idea of accretions and

[T]his book...appears to be a part of a popular trend in world building: take what you want and mix it randomly. The less your readers know about the source of your setting, the better.

Higgins used Russian history, but didn't want to engage with any living Russians in the process.

The story pulls people and events from different time periods depending on the plot's needs. It reminds me of a Doctor Who episode where all the history happens at the same time.



The further the narration goes, the more it's obvious that the only force that keeps these suicidal characters alive is the power of the author, since none of them are capable of surviving on their own.

connections—typologies, etymologies, genealogies, mythologies, unexpected resemblances, recessive mirroring—is really important. Things remind you of other things. Events echo and repeat. Pattern making.

While there are obviously working patterns in this book, it's the connections that lead nowhere that leave me with no choice but to pause and examine them. For example, why would there be Communist symbols, such as a Red Star with a Hammer and Sickle, on the cover of a book without a single mention of Communism or the Red Army? What pattern is this?

I can't help but feel disappointed by the shallowness of this world. A myriad of superficial details don't create depth.

For instance, pages and pages are spent on terrorism, but no hints are given about what all these revolutionaries are trying to achieve. A hidden agenda might be related to the novel's "angels," that's understandable—but it's not a reason for the absence of a cover story beyond some generic freedom fighting. That gives the impression that revolution and terrorism in this world exist just for the sake of revolution and terrorism. My inner nihilist suspects that it's just a part of Russians' stereotypically "cryptic nature."

The book's depiction of a totalitarian state is equally weak. There's a lot of talk about a bureaucracy called the Vlast, unjustified repressions, and iron fists. The Secret Police collect information about private citizens and constructs Circles of Contact to ensure they know everything about everybody. There are even mass executions thrown in to pump up the grimdark factor and art references to make it seem glamorous.

However, when you look closer, none of the characters bother to modify their behavior to fit this horrific reality. Hero Vissarion Lom doesn't realize that his night visit could endanger his friend Raku Vishnik. Vishnik might be terrified at night, waiting for his inevitable arrest, but that doesn't stop him from

hanging out at the Crimson Marmot Club—a place whose existence would be impossible in any totalitarian state. Lakoba Petrov, an active terrorist, can afford to be frank with a cop. Everybody talks. It's quite amazing that in a world where *dvorniks* (a sort of concierge or apartment building caretaker) report night visitors to the authorities, people keep speaking their minds freely.

The further the narration goes, the more it's obvious that the only force that keeps these suicidal characters alive is the power of the author, since none of them are capable of surviving on their own.

Oh, but *Wolfhound Century's* not set in Russia, it's in *Lezarye*, you might say at this point. It's not meant to be Russia. Why would I be complaining about misrepresentation of Russian history in a fantasy world? After all, imagination trumps everything. But the novel's readers are not in a position to tell where the truth stops and imagination begins. This story—minus *mudjiks*, angels, and all that mysterious Pollador business—will go down as a fairly decent approximation of everyday life in Stalinist Russia. How could it not be trustworthy since so much research went into it?

It may be not easy to tell the difference between an authentic and culturally appropriate narrative, if there aren't many obvious stereotypes or other exoticizing markers present.

Here's the test: When you deal with authentic story, the more context you already know, the more layers and meanings you will be able to see. Your knowledge will help you to find connections that add to the world, not generate more confusion.

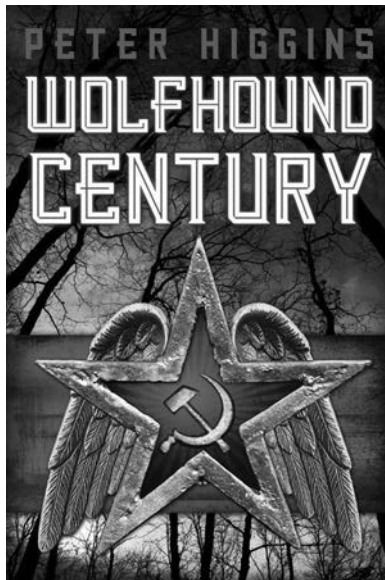
With appropriate story, the picture is just the opposite. Reading *Wolfhound Century*, your knowledge works against you. You'd be better off if you didn't know anything about Russian geography. Then you wouldn't have to laugh at the birch forest landscape unchanged for five days of train travel. You'd be better off if you didn't know anything about the Russian language. Then you wouldn't be surprised when Higgins tried to redefine "paluba" for you, or explained that an "isba" had

When you deal with authentic story, the more context you already know, the more layers and meanings you will be able to see. Your knowledge will help you to find connections that add to the world, not generate more confusion.... Reading Wolfhound Century, your knowledge works against you.



a wool-covered whalebone frame. You'd be better off if you didn't know anything about Russian names. Then you'd be able to read a name like Prince Raku ter-Fallin Mozhno Shirin Vilichov Vishnik without blinking.

And the biggest obstacle would be knowing Russian and Soviet history as someone who lived it, as someone who watched the fall of the Berlin Wall from the other side. I guess I should be thankful that the characters neither eat herring and caviar, nor resurrect Princess Anastasia between banya visits, but in the long run the messages that Higgins is sending about Russian culture and history are still unfortunate.



Natalya Volkhovets was born and raised in the Soviet Union. She currently lives in Atlanta, where she works as a firmware engineer and occasionally reviews speculative fiction.

The Marriage He Saw Beneath the Shade by Sonya Taaffe

Is that the Great God Pan
the next seat over, that raffish old man
in the dirty raincoat of Soho theaters
and the wild white whorls of his hair
like acid-softened marble, city-grit
and an old smell of wetness underneath his nails?
He watches the movie laughing
with popcorn in his mouth,
drums finger-tattoos at the tense parts, mutters fuck
when the girl lays her face beside the statue's,
one lichened eye in the hollow of her temple like the moon
staring so painfully down the warm alley of pines
plumed like ash-clouds of Vesuvius
the terror grips you, blundering down the aisles
with lead-locked shoulders and a racketing heart,
awful as the emptiness of a sunny hill.
Strangers' faces smear past in the sunset,
flaking like fresco off a flash-burnt wall.
The shaggy-pricked son of Hermes
has a she-goat on her back
like the woman she might as well be to him,
all animal to his god:
he ruts behind your eyes,
hands above and hooves below,
presenting two backs whichever way he turns.



Ta-coumba T. Aiken

Ta-coumba Tyrone Aiken is an internationally recognized artist, arts administrator, educator, and community activist who focuses on public art and collaborative projects. He has participated in the creation of over 300 murals and public art sculptures with themes ranging from local history to the artist's own style of rhythmic pattern and spirit writing. He has taught in various schools all over the state of Minnesota as an Artist in Residence. A longtime resident of Lowertown, Saint Paul, Aiken identifies himself as a healer above all: "I create my art to heal the hearts and souls of people and their communities by evoking a positive spirit," he states.

Ta-coumba started painting at age 3 and had his first show at 6. After damaging his color vision in a childhood accident, his mother helped him find a way to continue to work and develop his skills by drawing in black/white and adding color later. She taught him to never give up. Working from black and white outlines, he describes his process of coloration and shape building as "spirit writing," and his usage of repeating imagery as "rhythm patterns." He crafts pieces that come together into a story, like a spirit, something calls you, one little specific things, calls to you, and

then you see more. Much of the work has evolved into the creation of rhythm patterns; sometimes the patterns aren't clear, but they are always there, the beginning, the skeleton. He creates his art to heal the hearts and souls of people by evoking a positive spirit. There is something for everybody that draws you in. He wants his work to connect with what others are doing to help people; he is drawn to collaborations with those working on issues such as housing, sustainability, violence, health. That's the context in which he wants his work to be seen.

In an interview on Twin Cities Public television, Ta-coumba described his painting process as "like life, breathing. I don't try to do anything. The best way to get the best result is to just let go... I hope my work makes people think and have dialogue... I want people to walk way happy to take a breath, to be on this planet contributing... I consider what I do as one grain of sand on a beautiful beach, and I'm proud to create that one grain of sand."

Artist's site: <http://ta-coumbaiken.com/>
Interview on MN Original at Twin Cities Public Television:
<http://www.mnoriginal.org/episode/mn-original-show-220/ta-coumba-aiken/>

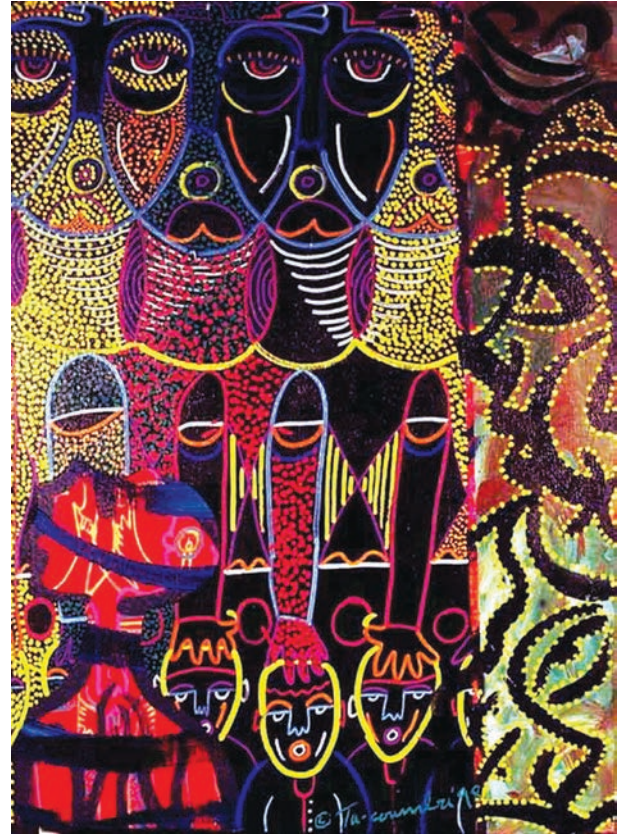


Shaman's Dream #2

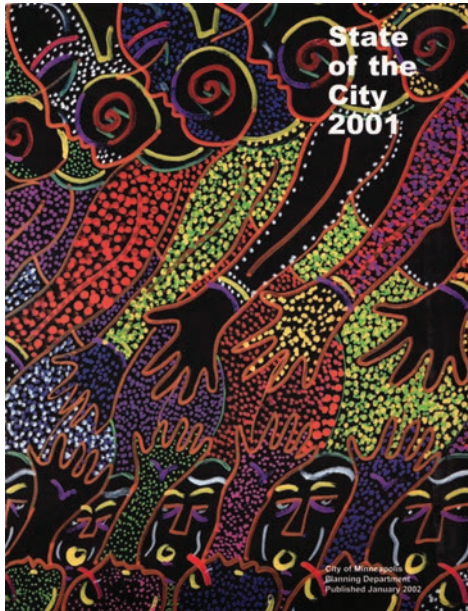




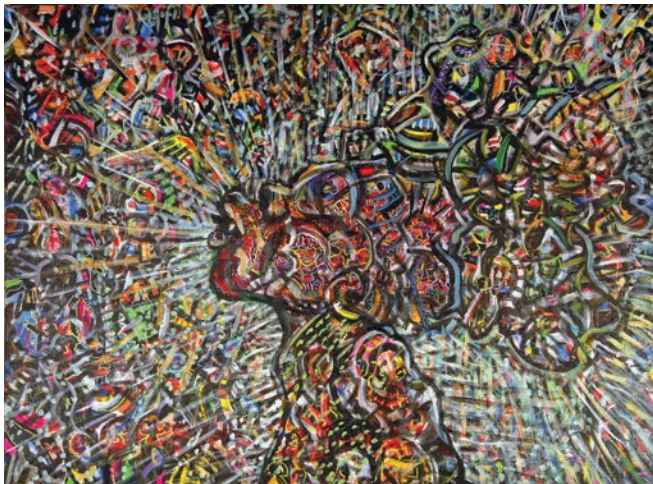
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