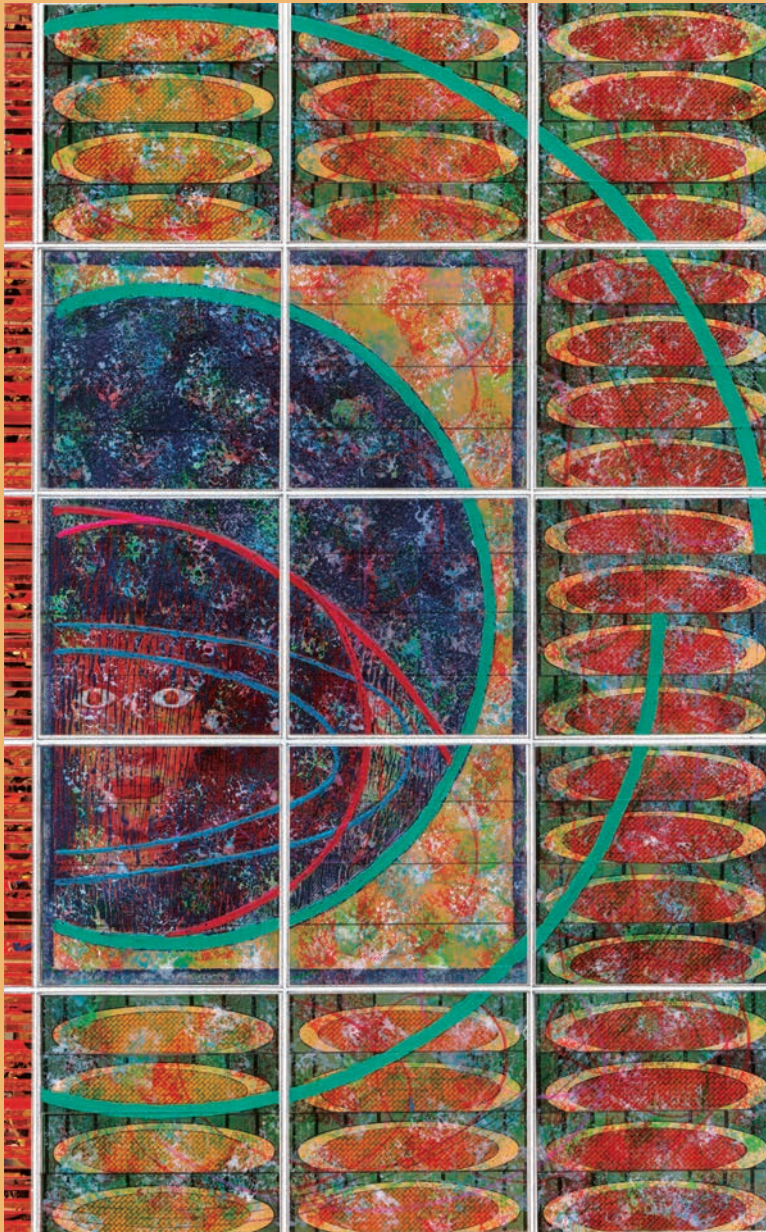


The

# Cascadia Subduction Zone

A LITERARY  
QUARTERLY

July 2015 ☉ Vol. 5, No. 3



Reclaiming an Ancient Self



Sharon E. Sutton

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Sharon E. Sutton

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## The Importance of Dialect: An Interview with Celeste Rita Baker

by Amal El-Mohtar

I first became aware of Celeste Rita Baker’s work through controversy about the place and use of visually marked dialect in fiction. An otherwise positive *Strange Horizons* review of *Long Hidden*—a short fiction anthology subtitled “Speculative Fiction from the Margins of History”—commented disparagingly on the representation of dialect in a story, which prompted a flurry of discussion on the subject, and also prompted the editors of *Abyss & Apex* to publish two versions of Baker’s “Name Calling”: one, the original, in strongly marked Caribbean dialect, and the other hewing closer to Standard English.

I read the stories, loved the original, and wrote a post on the subject in defense of dialect in fiction (<http://amalelmohtar.com/2014/05/17/reading-dialect-in-celeste-rita-bakers-name-calling/>). Subsequently it’s been my pleasure and privilege to read Baker’s mesmerizing *Back, Belly, and Side*, a collection of stories written in several voices, Englishes, and genres—and my further honor to interview Baker about her work.



**AE:** There’s a beautiful variety of Englishes throughout *Back, Belly, and Side*, visually marked to varying degrees. What factors into your decision of what dialect or register of speech to use in a given story? Are they always rooted in character, or are there other considerations?

**CRB:** I hear the characters and try to record the way they think or say things. It does vary quite a bit, I’ve noticed, based on the situation they’re in, who they’re talking to, and even their

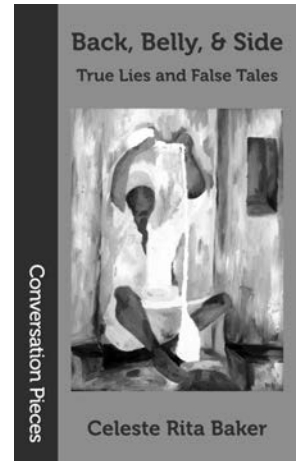
mood. Sometimes I let it stand to help convey tone and tension, and sometimes, I am learning, I have to concede to readability and be more consistent, particularly with spelling.

**AE:** Relatedly, I notice that all the stories narrated in regional dialect are first-person; even in “Cane and Jelly,” which has an observer narrator, the story begins “I gon’ tell you ’bout dis woman from down by me,” setting the story in a first-person frame. Have you ever written a story in dialect where the narrator is omniscient, removed, not a character in and of themselves?

**CRB:** No, not yet. So then I wondered why, and started writing one in my mind and had to come back to this world to answer the question! I guess I’ll try that next. The narrator would be so “loud,” though, that I wonder where that story will take me. Should be a fun trip. It would be interesting, too, if the main characters were Standard English speakers, that would make it much more socially and politically dimensional. Hmmmm...

**AE:** I came to your work through speculative fiction, first reading your haunting story “Name Calling” as it appeared in two versions in *Abyss and Apex* in the spring of 2014. Would you like to share your experience of that and the background that led to them publishing two versions of the same story?

**CRB:** Tonya Liburd, Associate Editor of *Abyss and Apex* read my story “Single Entry” in *Moko Magazine*, an e-zine out of the Virgin Islands, and she asked me if I would submit a story



*AE: There’s a beautiful variety of Englishes throughout Back, Belly, and Side.... What factors into your decision of what dialect or register of speech to use in a given story?...*

*CRB: I hear the characters and try to record the way they think or say things.*



## The Importance of Dialect

(cont. from p. 1)

*So I wrote the whole story in Standard English, and it was like a sea without salt.*

*It was an excellent time to further the discussion on marginalization and inclusion, and I'm happy to have had the chance to add my voice to the clamor*

*...this time I was graced with those whom I think of as "my champions," people who took the time to read both versions of the same story, and then took the time to think about it and then took the time and effort to write publicly about it.*

to *Abbyss and Apex*. This was the first time I had ever been asked for a story, and I was shocked and delighted. Then I was dismayed because even though they, Wendy Delmater, the publisher, and Tonya Liburd, liked the story they wanted me to "tone it down." So I did. Then they said, basically, a little more. So I wrote the whole story in Standard English, and it was like a sea without salt.

**AE:** Which version did you settle on for publication?

**CRB:** We settled on the fourth version, which, yes, I'm happy with because I wrote it. They did not interfere with my words, they asked me to "ice me rum, so I ice it." Somewhere in this process Wendy and Tonya decided to do an editorial (<http://www.abyssexpex-zine.com/2014/05/authentic-voice-or-clarity/>) on what it was like for them to edit something in Dialect, even though this wasn't their first time; years earlier they had published "Douen Mother" by the incredible R. S. A. Garcia, author of the award winning *Lex Talionis*. This was around the same time that there was a lot of discussion about Troy L. Wiggin's use of Dialect in the strengthening story "A Score of Roses" in Rose Fox and Daniel José Older's anthology *Long Hidden*. It was an excellent time to further the discussion on marginalization and inclusion, and I'm happy to have had the chance to add my voice to the clamor.

**AE:** How would you describe the overall experience?

**CRB:** It's been a wonderful experience for me. My work, in dialect, had been published amidst Standard English stories before, but this time I was graced with those whom I think of as "my champions," people who took the time to read both versions of the same story, and then took the time to think about it, and then took the time and

effort to write publicly about it. Tobias Buckell, Sofia Samatar, and you, Amal. People who said "lea she alone, she could write anyhow she want." Strangers who read beyond the "language" and actually understood and appreciated the story itself. Dat stiffen me backbone, mehson!

**AE:** Given my first experience of your work, I was surprised to see how few stories in *Back, Belly, and Side* are fantastical stories; my impression was that the bulk of them were deeply character-oriented slices of life, concerned with work, family, and place. Could you tell me a bit about your relationship with fantasy writing and other genres?

**CRB:** I write what comes out, then I read it and figure out what I was talking about. LOL. Then I try to figure out what box it goes into since you're supposed to do that. I had never considered a short story collection before since the mix I had could not be easily "shelved." When the acceptance of "Name Calling" made me bold I knew it was time to "try de ting." My best, favorite, and most important writing teacher and friend and mentor, the Millennium Midwife of Black Science Fiction, Sheree Renée Thomas had suggested I try Aqueduct Press if I ever finished the novel she had read some of, but it's not finished yet, so I queried them about the short stories instead. My letter to them was specific and explanatory, almost apologetic; "there's some of this and some of that, some in Dialect some in Standard English," complete with a list, a legend, practically a diagram, of which was what. I couldn't believe they wanted to publish it. I feared for their reputation, specializing as they do in Feminist Sci-fi. They published it as one of their Conversation Pieces and everyone slept well. Most of the reality-based stories were written a long time ago.



Now I prefer to try to write (fill in the label here, cause I don't know what to call what I write) because I'm sick of reality—don't get me started.... And there's so much more freedom in the aforementioned unspecified genre.

**AE:** I certainly think this is a feminist collection, focusing as it does on women from multiple backgrounds and walks of life talking to each other and figuring out their own ways! In fact, that's one of the things I loved most about it, how many amazing women I was getting to know and spend time with, regardless of whether the stories themselves were fantasy or more realistic. You mentioned a novel, though?

**CRB:** The novel I'm working on, have been working on for "time longer dan rope" is speculative fiction in that it's set in New York City and is based on the "what if" of "what if this attempted annihilation of Black people escalates?" But it is also—that definition again—because the protagonist is a spirit who is forced into the already occupied body of a Black woman. There is also a mix of languages because the spirit, who is the narrator, speaks in Dialect and the Black woman speaks in Standard English.

And of course I got into the door of science fiction—easily said, huh?—through the Queen of Black Sci-Fi, Octavia Butler. Merle Collins, the Caribbean author of *Angel*, taught me that I didn't have to write in Standard English, and Nalo Hopkinson showed me that doubles, fish and fungi, and ackee and saltfish, were already being served. But it was Sheree Renée Thomas who made me *believe* that everyone, including me, could tell their own damn stories their own damn way.

**AE:** One of the most striking, devastating stories in the collection is "Nobody," which I read as horror—but I consider myself very poorly read in

horror, and don't entirely trust my assertions about it. Could you tell me a bit about that story's genesis, what you wanted to accomplish with it?

**CRB:** Yeah, I have to admit that "Nobody" is pretty horrific. I don't like to read horror stories, the news is scary enough, I never thought of "Nobody" as a horror story though. I was worrying about the homeless people of the planet—and thanking Jah that me and mine, as my sister used to say, "have our own door to slam," because homelessness is my biggest fear. The original ending was edited away, wherein we see her, Francine, living on the street. The story was my examination of one possible life experience that would make recovery impossible. It was a very difficult story to write. But when the suggestion was made to cut the last paragraph I acquiesced because I had done *my* work, and I thought the story could stand on its own without the reader knowing why I had written it.

**AE:** I sometimes think of genres as languages with their own grammar and vocabulary—and dialects. As someone who literally writes in a variety of dialects *and* genres, does this metaphor resonate with you or fall flat?

**CRB:** I think it's a great metaphor because there are some things so ensconced in different genres that we don't feel the need to explain them anymore. So if I write in a Caribbean romance novel (not likely) that "Jacko get horn by he wife and ain' had a woman since" the readers would understand that he was cheated on and might infer a lot more if I don't put an end date on it. Or this one: Skin trouble? Peeling, flaking, disintegrating? Zombies? Or Gold Bond Medicated?

**AE:** I absolutely loved the bit in your author bio where you mention a journal given to you, titled "How Can I

*Now I prefer to try to write (fill in the label here, cause I don't know what to call what I write) because I'm sick of reality—don't get me started.... And there's so much more freedom in the aforementioned unspecified genre.*

*But it was Sheree Renée Thomas who made me believe that everyone, including me, could tell their own damn stories their own damn way.*

*AE: I sometimes think of genres as languages with their own grammar and vocabulary—and dialects. ...does this metaphor resonate with you...?*

*CRB: I think it's a great metaphor because there are some things so ensconced in different genres that we don't feel the need to explain them anymore.*

Cont. on p. 4



## The Importance of Dialect (cont. from p. 3)

*I learn from each story as I write it, so now, having them all together between two covers makes me jump up and down and do the dance of joy....*

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Amal El-Mohtar loves languages, speaks three, and dallies with many others. She is an award-winning writer, editor, and academic who divides her time and heart between Ottawa and Glasgow. Find out more about her work at [amalelmohtar.com](http://amalelmohtar.com), or follow her on Twitter @tithenai.

Know What I Think Until I See What I Say.” What do you see yourself as having said, in this collection, and has it changed anything about your knowledge of what you think?

**CRB:** I’m glad you liked something in the bio. I hate writing bios, but I just realized that I like reading them— Oh, jeez and bread, mehson! Another thing to work on. Anyway, I don’t see myself as having said any one thing in particular; Kath Wilham of Aqueduct

Press asked me to write something for the back of the book to explain what the reader might be getting into, and I stalled for weeks. I finally had to concede that I couldn’t find one unifying factor. But I learn from each story as I write it, so now, having them all together between two covers makes me jump up and down and do the dance of joy, because, to paraphrase Erma of “Name Calling,” “Ah do de hardest part already.”

## The Drowning of the Doves

by Sonya Taaffe

I believe that you will come to see that your sacrifice to the River Thames was neither a worthy nor an honourable one  
—Sydney Cockerell to Thomas Cobden-Sanderson (1917)

His ghost wades again in the toils of the river,  
an old man reflected from Hammersmith Bridge  
hauling up handfuls of water and time.  
Thames knows his bones, his eddy of ashes  
yawned down the slip of the tide  
like so many fag-ends on the flood,  
but his heart snagged deeper,  
tangled at the foot of the Doves.  
Beneath the ripple of streetlights, he sifts  
Viking iron and Roman carnelian,  
Aldgate delft and Whitefriars glass,  
needles, mobiles, tin pennies, cloth seals,  
the skulls of red deer and suicides.  
The cases wrecked on the mud are only box wine.  
The boatman’s shade calls for his fee and skins on.  
Smaller than bullets, or buttons, or coins,  
the lost type washes between his fingers  
as lightly as once he scattered it,  
sowing spite.  
Only Thames with eyes of silt and salt glaze  
can read the curse it spelled him:  
all that falling lead  
mud-inked, current-mounted the length of the river  
telling its story in words he never set.

4 Celeste Rita Baker is a Virgin Islander who currently resides in Harlem, New York City. She has published short stories in various venues. Her collection of short fiction, *Back, Belly, and Side*, was published in 2015 by Aqueduct Press.

---

Sonya Taaffe’s short fiction and award-winning poetry has appeared in multiple venues. Her latest collection is *Ghost Signs*. She is currently a senior poetry editor for *Strange Horizons*.



## Stream

Alicia Cole

“My sexuality is part and parcel of who I am,  
and my poetry comes from the intersection of  
me and my worlds...” — Audre Lorde

The fish on returning finds the running  
grounds damned up, once tender rocks  
bleached and bare. She, mean, nips

the running stream. There is not much  
else a sockeye can molest, the rough  
patch of her breast sheared against rock;

she takes the dry dam in one clean leap  
and when she lands, the water sluicing  
around her, the stream passed breaks

out in laughter. I too take this stream,  
find the rocks hard women moaning  
my name. But I have my biological need.

Lorde, she felt it also—men’s kind,  
strange mouths, progenitor: the stream,  
blood’s running from the arterial source.

---

Alicia Cole is a fox bandit. Well, no, not that kind of fox bandit. More of a love fox bandit. She, a spiritual artistic feminist aesthete, eats, sleeps, and dreams freelance writing. This is her second poem published by *The CSZ*. She is the co-founder/editor of Priestess & Hierophant Press.

## Travel-charm

Bogi Takács

for Shweta Narayan

Certainty rises on bread-buttered wings  
like an elephant taking to the sky,  
its wobbly flight path carrying secrets  
in the erratic values of pitch and yaw.

Flight control sputters, breaks into song  
a paean to well-rounded fluffy creatures  
who dream to dare while filled with stuffing  
and spread cloud-calming cheer wherever they fly.

---

Bogi Takács is a neutrally gendered Hungarian Jewish person. Eir speculative work has been published in venues like *Clarksesworld*, *Lightspeed*, *Apex*, and *Strange Horizons*. Eir website is at <http://www.prezzey.net>; also find em on Twitter at @bogiperson, where e posts story and poem recommendations by diverse authors.





## Samuel R. Delany's Radical Feminism in *Babel-17*

by Tananarive Due

"I thought, a woman grows up in literally an entirely different culture. One of the things I was really interested in doing in my next few novels was to write about women characters. It was a world that was just as strange to me and just as unknown as any moon of Jupiter."

In this era post-Octavia E. Butler, Ursula K. Le Guin, Margaret Atwood, and *Alien's* Ripley, it's often difficult to remember a time when science fiction heroes were solely male and women were relegated to stereotypical or inconsequential roles. The issue is far from solved, but the landscape has shifted since 1966, when Delany's Captain Rydra Wong—a 26-year-old poet/codebreaker/linguist protagonist—appeared in his seventh novel, *Babel-17*.

How different was life for women in 1966 (the year I was born)? For context, 1966 was the year flight attendants filed a U.S. federal discrimination suit because of the policy forcing women to quit their jobs if they got married. (As a GenX-er better versed in the black liberation struggle, I was open-mouthed when a former flight attendant described this rule.) It's also the year the National Organization for Women was born, staked in the era of *Mad Men*.

Rydra Wong's gender was no accident or idle experiment for Delany. Although Delany is well known as a gay man who has written extensively about gay men's lives, for 19 years he did have an open marriage to poet Marilyn Hacker after marrying her in 1961. Through her, Delany has said, he was exposed to a world of women that previously had been unknown to him.

When Hacker began a new job as an editorial assistant, she came home and complained about her workplace challenges as a woman, Delany said during a 2012 interview conducted by the Pratt Institute's Department of Humanities and Media Studies (Pratt LINK: <https://youtu.be/LqeAQ01icK0>).

His growing awareness of gender comparisons fascinated him. Rydra Wong was born, in part, because Delany's wife borrowed a pair of his jeans.

In the Pratt interview, he recalls: "Then she put her hands in the pockets, and a very funny look came over

her face. I said, 'What's the matter?' She said, 'The pockets! They're so big.'" Then she showed him the pockets on her jeans. "You couldn't get a packet of cigarettes in those. In my jeans, you could get a whole paperback library down in those things. She said, 'This is the way women's clothes are made. Things like pockets are not made to be practical.' I wondered, who would I be if I had grown up my whole life without pockets? I would be a completely different person. ...I thought, a woman grows up in literally an entirely different culture. One of the things I was really interested in doing in my next few novels was to write about women characters. It was a world that was just as strange to me and just as unknown as any moon of Jupiter."

Captain Rydra Wong, a poet famous throughout "the worlds of five galaxies" (Isn't that every poet's dream?), is enlisted to break a code to end a desperate war with Invaders because of her linguistic dexterity. The novel follows her adventures through a Delanyscape of body modification, Discorporates (ghosts for hire), space battles, and telepathy, as her deeper understanding of the language known as *Babel-17* literally transforms her.

*Babel-17* does not use allegory to examine women's social and reproductive struggles, as Margaret Atwood aspired to do in her later *A Handmaid's Tale*. Wong's gender is mentioned rarely, and she faces no clear discrimination on the basis of being a woman. Interestingly, early in the novel we learn that it is customary in the seedy transport bar Captain Wong frequents to judge pilots based on wrestling ability. "It's a woman!" her companion cries, shocked, when he sees a woman contestant. Among crews, it is more traditional to hire women as navigators. The woman wrestler fights well, but she is bested by Captain Wong's new male hire, Brass.





The feminist bent of *Babel-17* mostly lies in the creation of Rydra Wong as a kind of Super Woman (not insignificantly, Delany wrote two Wonder Woman books in 1972). She is brilliant, hyper-competent, and relatively fearless.

Much literary discussion of *Babel-17* centers on its exploration of linguistic relativity, determinism, and the (now disproved) Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. The hard theory: thought is determined by our use of language, and as we organize our thoughts into language we're also determining cognitive function—literally, the way we think. *Babel-17* is mostly Delany's exploration of this theory through story: How does communication frame thought and actions? How do we use language in our daily lives? What does our use of language say about us, determine about us? And, most importantly, how can perception of language help end conflict?

Is a "woman's touch" all that's needed?

Not necessarily. Captain Wong's ability to synthesize and grasp the many-layered language of *Babel-17*—one unlike any ever known—is never attributed to her gender. Rather, the novel's inclusion of her poetry (actually written by Hacker) seems to point more readily to Wong's ability as a poet and artist giving her such linguistic skill and insight.

Essay after essay about *Babel-17* will focus entirely on its linguistic theories and achievements without mention of Rydra Wong's gender—or ethnicity, for that matter. (Wong is also Asian in a novel where ethnicity is treated like little more than hair color. When bodies can be modified to include miniature dragons, race and ethnicity have become passé...except when they affect communication, of course.)

Gender is nearly invisible in any broad sense. Traditional "women's" concerns over relationships are all but absent in *Babel-17*. Despite a reference to a brief marriage (which prompted Captain Wong to quit her job in the

military, incidentally), any hint of a love life is all but absent. Men of power who meet her treat her as an equal, even a superior. A Baron greets her by saying, "A woman of your talent and accomplishment would be an honor to my house."

Yet, Captain Rydra is just as radical an element in science fiction literature as she is as a brilliant codebreaker. Captain Rydra Wong's radicalism is her mere existence, a massive pronoun shift in the genre.

As Delany told Rudi Dornemann and Eric Lorberer in a 2000 interview for RainTaxi.com, writing *Babel-17* created a bit of a new language in his own mind that he was eager to spread with others.

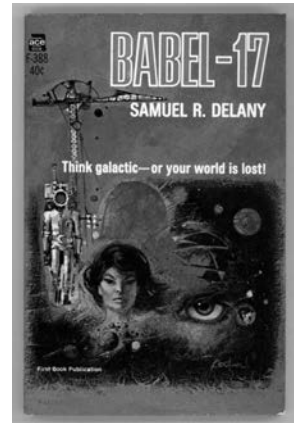
Delany says: "In 1966 and '67, after I finished a novel called *Babel-17*, in the various articles I was writing here and there I began to use 'she' and 'her' as the general exemplary pronoun. In the 'Sixties and 'Seventies, copy editors regularly used to correct me, changing my 'the writer she' back to 'the writer he'—and, if I could, I'd put it back, though I didn't always get a chance. I'd never seen anyone do it before. The decision was purely intellectual. But after having written a whole novel about the trials and tribulations of a woman poet, I just couldn't go on accepting the notion that everything from children to animals to writers to parents were composed of nothing but males. I know a few writers—specifically in the science fiction field—took the idea over from me and began to do it too."

Ironically, in his Pratt interview in 2012, Delany said he did not consider it the purpose of art to "change the world." ("I'm not interested in changing the world," he said. "I'm interested in giving an honest account of some of the things I've seen.")

Yet, *Babel-17* and Rydra Wong did help change the world. Or at least a piece of it.

Whether Delany intended it to or not.

*How does communication frame thought and actions? How do we use language in our daily lives? What does our use of language say about us, determine about us? And, most importantly, how can perception of language help end conflict?*



*I just couldn't go on accepting the notion that everything from children to animals to writers to parents were composed of nothing but males.*

---

Tananarive Due is an author, screenwriter, and educator who has won an American Book Award and an NAACP Image Award. She recently taught Afrofuturism at UCLA. Her blog is at [www.tananarivedue.wordpress.com](http://www.tananarivedue.wordpress.com)



⚙️ **We Have Always Appeared in Science Fiction:  
Creating a Diversity of Disability Experience in SF**

*Accessing the Future*, edited by Djibril al-Ayad and Kathryn Allan,  
Futurefire Publishing, April 2015, 244 pp., \$13.49.

reviewed by Rachel Swirsky

*"We want to see more SF stories that feature people with disabilities as three-dimensional characters...."*

*The strongest recurring theme in the anthology is the desire to disrupt established narratives.*

Kathryn Allan and Djibril al-Ayad lay out their goals for *Accessing the Future* in their introduction: "We want to see more SF stories that feature people with disabilities as three-dimensional characters, as people who have strengths and flaws, who succeed and fail, dream and scheme, as they are and as they want to be." They also want to "move disability into the larger 'We Need Diverse Books' conversation... there are too few mainstream conversations that address disability identity with words and insights from people with disabilities themselves."

The lack is odd, as JoSelle Vanderhooft notes in her preface. "Given the number of pioneering SF authors and creators who were disabled—or who, with today's medical knowledge might well identify as disabled and/or neurodivergent in particular—the ableism in SF is especially baffling and awful."

*Accessing the Future* joins a healthy tradition of science fiction written to explore scientific ideas, in this case ideas derived from social science. Another anthology might look at how our understanding and employment of physics will change in the future; this one ponders how culture and technology will change what it means to be disabled.

Like many anthologies committed to exploring academic concepts, *Accessing the Future* suffers to some extent from emphasizing idea over storytelling. From a purely entertainment point of view, the anthology is about average for a book assembled outside the publishing beltway. However, it marks a striking entry into the disability conversation.

The strongest recurring theme in the anthology is the desire to disrupt established narratives. In his afterword,



Derek Newman-Stiles describes the limited roles traditionally allotted to disabled characters: "We, the disabled, have always appeared in fiction, but always pushed into roles as the wise mentor for the able-bodied hero, the cautionary tale for the youthful character, the self-loathing cripple who becomes a villain because he or she wants to be able-bodied."

Sarah Pinsker's "Pay Attention" takes the boldest approach. Its concept resembles "Flowers for Algernon," but stakes out several important differences. When a high school student with learning disabilities is approached to be part of a medical experiment, she agrees, and becomes one of the first to receive an untested implant designed to improve her executive function. With its help, she becomes an army medic, but after the experiment terminates, she discovers that the company no longer needs her. They have no intention of continuing to let her use their product, and she certainly doesn't have the money to buy it. Despite the obstacles, she resolves to pursue her career without technological aid.

The stakes are very different in "Pay Attention" than in "Flowers for Algernon." Pinsker's protagonist has a more subtle disability than Keyes's, and while technology improves her executive function, it doesn't make her a genius. The rags-to-riches approach to intelligence in "Flowers for Algernon" has appeal as a thought experiment, but Pinsker deals more realistically



with the scale of disability and assistive technology.

The most radical change is the ending. In “Flowers for Algernon,” Charlie fades without technological help. Pinsker’s protagonist resolves to take action. She retains her agency, identity, and determination.

“Pay Attention” is an accomplished story, and one of the best in the anthology. Although a couple of others are more striking or original, Pinsker’s, which appears early in the story order, reads as a sort of statement of purpose, establishing what the anthology is about.

*Accessing the Future* is deeply concerned with the concept of the technological cure. Newman-Stiles writes about it as one of science fiction’s primary limiting tropes. He explains his objection to the uncritical acceptance of cures: “Our technology should be open to imaginative possibilities and questions.” He also lists ways in which disability increases the breadth of human diversity, granting its own tools and perspectives, which cures could erase. “Many of us have spent our lives asking: Why don’t they try signing to that alien—is the whole universe really so dependent on hearing and verbal speech? Maybe someone who is not quite so neurotypical could better get into the mind of that entity?”

Several stories question technological cures by asking questions about who can access them. Are they limited to the rich? The poor? To people who pass some kind of litmus test? Pinsker’s protagonist must consent to medical experimentation; in A. C. Buchanan’s “Puppetry,” the main character volunteers for years of dangerous frontline military service.

Others examine access from the opposite angle, considering the ramifications of socially enforced cures. Kate O’Connor’s “Better to Have Loved” follows a young woman whose society expects people to cure their grief with drugs that cause amnesia. Samantha

Rich’s “Screams” takes place at a school where private emotional states are on public display. Both stories employ modern anxieties (about psychiatric medicine and social media, respectively) in order to create classical cautionary tales.

Rachael K. Jones’s “Courting the Sun” does a more striking, unusual job of complicating the idea of a socially imposed cure. She projects the real-world debate about hearing implants for deaf children into the future. In Jones’s story, deaf people are issued technological aids called dragonflies which help them hear and respond verbally. The main character uses his, but his girlfriend is concerned that they are facilitating the eradication of deaf culture.

The ending of this story contains a fascinating moment. The main character’s girlfriend—about to embark on a dangerous, unsanctioned mission from which she may not return—takes the protagonist’s dragonfly. Though the story appears to portray the action as a romantic way to seal the characters together, from another angle it seems like an assault. Pressuring someone not to use assistive technology—let alone taking it away—seems as much a violation of personal freedom as imposing a cure.

While stories complicating the idea of technological cures are welcome and important, they also run the risk of reversing traditional stigmas, or playing into existing, damaging narratives. Ultimately, this is the problem with “Better to Have Loved.” The story is accomplished, but it can be validly read as contributing to the extant social anxiety that psychiatric medications rob people of human emotions.

Of course, as contemporary technology demonstrates, few cures are without cost. Some impose social costs such as that faced by the competitive robot pilot in Sarah Patterson’s “A Sense All Its Own,” who won’t be able to compete if she has surgery to correct her eyesight.

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*Several stories question technological cures by asking questions about who can access them. Are they limited to the rich? The poor? To people who pass some kind of litmus test?*

*Pressuring someone not to use assistive technology—let alone taking it away—seems as much a violation of personal freedom as imposing a cure.*

*Cont. on p. 12*



## Accessing the Future (cont. from p. 11)

*More than being an endorsement or repudiation of technological cures, "Lyric" is a thoughtful consideration of complexity and imperfection.*

*"Puppetry" goes a step further. When the main character volunteers for dangerous military service...her superiors assume she's doing so in order to access a cure. Instead, she is infiltrating the ranks as a terrorist operative. ...she's able to take advantage of the assumption that life as a disabled person is a fate worse than risking death.*

*"Losing Touch" ...is a post-apocalyptic story in which survivors have been uploaded into robots... The main character doesn't just rely on technology; together, as unique entities, she and her robot host form something new.*

The most interesting exploration of cure and cost is A. F. Sanchez's "Lyric," a disturbing but delicate piece about an autistic woman who uses a program called Lyric to communicate with neurotypical people. The program helps, but can't completely bridge the gulf; she remains different, a mystery to those around her. Alienated, she purchases a "faulty" genetically engineered animal, which was mutilated when it turned dangerous and is scheduled for euthanasia. Although she can't really afford it, she feels compelled toward the animal: like her, it's considered broken. More than being an endorsement or repudiation of technological cures, "Lyric" is a thoughtful consideration of complexity and imperfection.

A. C. Buchanan's "Puppetry" goes a step further. When the main character volunteers for dangerous military service usually only undertaken by death-row inmates looking for reprieve, her superiors assume she's doing so in order to access a cure. Instead, she is infiltrating the ranks as a terrorist operative. The other members of her cell couldn't credibly enlist, but she's able to take advantage of the assumption that life as a disabled person is a fate worse than risking death. Buchanan not only repudiates that idea, but shows how disability empowers her character to help her cause.

*Accessing the Future* subverts a number of other tropes. Disabled people are active characters; they find ways to do what needs doing rather than being incapacitated by their disabilities. They are sometimes able to solve problems with skills that abled people lack.

The two most effective stories in the anthology, however, are not primarily concerned with trope intervention. "Losing Touch" by Louise Hughes is a post-apocalyptic story in which survivors have been uploaded into robots. The robots, which have their own identities, act as hosts to the human riders, able to block them out of control of their shared physical body. In this

universe, human minds divorced from human flesh begin to degrade, losing coherence and memories of their former lives. The most interesting piece of the story is the relationship between the robots and the humans, which is unlike anything that exists today. Over the course of the story, they begin to view each other as collaborators rather than obstacles. The main character doesn't just rely on technology; together, as unique entities, she and her robot host form something new.

Though there are some parallels to dementia, "Losing Touch" presents a disability unique to the future. This makes it unusual in the anthology, even though the future is likely to create radical changes to what constitutes disability. Allan and al-Ayad point out that "Disability, like all assumptions of what is and is not 'normal,' is defined by society's expectations—it is not a person's ability or impairment but the willingness of our culture to include and accommodate all people that draws the line between disadvantage and accessibility."

New disabilities may emerge, as in "Losing Touch," but contemporary disabilities may also have vastly different meanings in the future. Although this concept is not deeply explored in the anthology, Allan and al-Ayad note that it's represented by the art. "One of the reasons we chose the cover image that Robin E. Kaplan so beautifully created for the anthology is because our space woman *isn't* visibly marked as 'disabled'.... We like that the single person (with her expression of calmness and contentment), weightless in space, challenges our conceptions of what disability looks like: in a weightless environment, someone with limited mobility issues, or sight or hearing impairment, would look just as the person depicted on the cover. It's a new environment—literally, space—that has changed what counts, or what appears, as disability."



The strongest story in the anthology is “into the waters i rode down” by Jack Marr, about a deaf woman whose disability has changed her brain structure in a way that makes her the only possible subject for an experimental military technology. Though the tech allows her to hear, that’s only a side effect. Its purpose is to allow her to telepathically bond with and control non-human animals for the purpose of spying on enemy camps. When she connects with an otter-like alien and forces it to scout, the creature is shot. They exchange thoughts and emotions as the alien animal dies.

There are several notable features in the story. One is the main character’s reaction to the technology. Not only is she uninterested in hearing, but she resents being chosen for the experiment. Another story might have made her delighted at being “useful;” in this one, she’s angry that her son only considers her useful now, rather than acknowledging her years of diligent work.

The relationship with the alien animal is even more interesting, and gives the story its distinctiveness and emotional power. Like “Lyric,” the story involves a disabled person bonding with an animal over humans. This theme has the potential to be problematic; poorly done, it could imply an equation between animals and disabled people. However, both stories avoid this. In “into the waters i rode down,” the main character doesn’t view herself as broken or animal-like, but instead recognizes the creature as a fellow mother, and a fellow entity used and discarded by the technological machine.

More than any other story in the anthology, “into the waters i rode down” decenters disability. It’s still an important part of the narrative, shaping the narrator’s character and abilities. However, it’s less important than her emotional relationship with the alien, her reaction to the military, and her alienation from her son. It’s a story

that adds to the body of fiction about disabled people by moving in a fresh direction, rather than interrogating stories of the past.

Overall, *Accessing the Future* could have benefited from more stories that imagine disability in the future as substantively different than disability today. What other new forms of disability, like the one in “Losing Touch,” might emerge? Most pieces in the anthology recapitulate contemporary attitudes. What might futures look like when those dynamics have fundamentally changed?

As a disabled person, these are the questions I most wanted the anthology to answer. I deeply appreciate the existence of stories that examine the systemic oppression of people with disabilities, stories that criticize the veneration of cures, and stories where disabled characters have agency. However, in addition to those, I wanted more stories that consider: How could the future be *unlike* today?

Allan and al-Ayad write that “science fiction is always about today.” That’s true, but imagining substantively different futures can expand the body of today’s thought. It can give us new concepts, new analysis, and new ways to frame goals and activism.

Ultimately, although the anthology could have included a greater variety of futures, it does include a flourishing cast of disabled characters. In Newman-Stiles words, it reveals the “depth and breadth of experience” of disabled lives; it “puts us in the roles of heroes.” Characters have spina bifida, deafness, and visual impairments; they have learning disabilities, mental illnesses, and degrading memories; their disabilities are both visible and invisible. Some are swashbuckling adventurers; others are ordinary people taking emotional journeys of self-discovery. In short, it’s like real life, but with more pirate ships.

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## 🌀 Fractals of Love, Joy, Hope, Survival

*Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction from Social Justice Movements*, edited by adrienne marie brown and Walidah Imarisha, AK Press and the Institute for Anarchist Studies, 2015, 304 pp., \$19.95.

reviewed by Maria Velazquez



© 12 Octavia's Brood reflects a keen awareness of the burning necessity for using stories about the future and present to unveil stories about the past.

...it acknowledges science fiction's roots in colonial fantasies while at the same time paying homage to those authors, stories, and worlds who have continuously written against that trend since the field's inception.

Emergent strategies include intentionality and relationality, and evolve from conversations within marginalized and activist communities.

*Octavia's Brood* is intimately tied to the anti-racist and anti-sexist genealogies of speculative fiction. From its dedication to Octavia Butler and its invocation of Sojourner Truth, throughout its essays, excerpts, and short stories, *Octavia's Brood* reflects a keen awareness of the burning necessity for using stories about the future and present to unveil stories about the past. The preface, written by Sheree Renée Thomas, as well as its inclusion of discussions of the field by Mumia Abu-Jamal and Tananarive Due, make clear that this is not just an anthology for fiction's sake. Instead, this is an anthology curated with an eye towards critique: of the field of speculative fiction as a whole, of that field's editorial and funding politics, and of its vital role in social justice movements.

In her introduction, Walidah Imarisha describes "all organizing [as] science fiction" (15), then offers the delightful phrase "visionary fiction" to differentiate between the mainstream field of science fiction and science fiction devoted to envisioning worlds moving towards justice. I especially appreciate that last point, as it acknowledges science fiction's roots in colonial fantasies while at the same time paying homage to those authors, stories, and worlds who have continuously written *against* that trend since the field's inception. This emphasizes that while *Octavia's Brood* is inspired by Butler's work, the use of science fiction to imagine defiantly has been a key feature of the genre since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Martin Delany's *Blake; or the Huts of America*, and Begum Rokeya's *Sultana's Dream*.

In keeping with its reflections on genealogy and defiance, the anthology's first story features zombies. Bao

Phi's "Revolution Shuffle" envisions an America where zombies have overwhelmed the country. Incorporating the American history of internment camps and the ongoing crisis of the prison industrial complex, Phi's Vietnamese American narrator bitterly reflects that "[t]ragic times do not beg for complexity" (23). In the wake of the zombie apocalypse, the US government forcibly imprisons brown and black people of all ethnicities in work camps, using their forced labor at gigantic pistons to lure the ravenous zombie hordes away from major cities. The imprisoned citizens are bait, guarded by petty men willing to rape, maim, and kill in order to maintain control of their incarcerated charges. "Zombies. Brown people. On any given day, the armed guards were prepared to shoot either" (20).

The ending of "Revolution Shuffle" is no ending. Rather, it hints at new beginnings, new adventures, new world orders. This is actually a feature of all the stories included in this anthology. Initially I found that frustrating: here I am, falling in momentary love with these characters and these worlds, only to find myself suddenly bereft, as both they and I come face-to-face with an unknown and unknowable future. However, after reading adrienne marie brown's "Outro," I realized that the idea of a story with no end is part of *Octavia's Brood's* larger mission. Brown describes visionary fiction as "hard but hopeful" (287), and links its creative process to "emergent strategies."

Emergent strategies include intentionality and relationality, and evolve from conversations within marginalized and activist communities. While that community connection is evocative, and speaks to me as a literacy activist, I



found brown's use of "fractal" in describing emergent strategies profound and revelatory in the context of an anthology whose stories have no ends. I believe brown used "fractal" here to highlight the role of repetition in institutionalizing oppression, and to introduce an intriguing approach to the role of storytelling in time travel, an approach to fractals emergent from trauma studies and the philosophy of physics.

This approach to fractals as a philosophical approach to time and space appears most strongly in Alexis Pauline Gumbs's contribution to *Octavia's Brood*. In "Evidence," Gumbs writes, "Today the evidence we need is legacy" (45). She spirals through the birth of a new black feminist consciousness and the coming of age of Alandrix, a twelve-year-old whose letter to the past has been included in the intergenerational council of possible elders' packet of evidence "that Alandrix consciously exists in an ancestral context" (45). In "Evidence," the endless repetition of fractals as a conceit of time and space is not a damnation. Instead, as Alandrix corresponds to her possible ancestress Alexis, each reminds the other to "live your life as a tribute to our victory" (51). The pattern on repeat is not simply despair; that movement towards victory shapes the pattern of their lives and the evolution of the world as a whole.

brown and Imarisha have assembled a strong anthology. While "Revolution Shuffle" and "Evidence" stood out to me because of their clear engagement with the anthology's political and creative mission, other stories of note include "Small and Bright," Autumn Brown's exploration of a warrior woman's exile from an underground city, and "Hollow," one of the only explorations of disability activism in space that I have read. I also found Dani McClain's examination of family ties in "Homing Instinct" particularly interesting. In an anthology where familial love is often linked to relationships that mimic the

hierarchical dynamics between parent and child, McClain's story on travel restrictions argues that forming and maintaining affective bonds outside the family is radical. Her narrator's wanderlust is presented as selfishness of the best sort. In fact, McClain links the government's push for each citizen to "COMMIT" to a single place (and implicitly to a single family) to the corny "Earth Mama" archetypes at which the narrator rolls her eyes. "Geography was not destiny," she writes, as her narrator "let[s] go of the shore, the nostalgia, the need for certainty" (254).

Though *Octavia's Brood* is an anthology of resistance, there are also zombies, space ships, flightless angels, interdimensional travel, and besieged human colonies on faraway planets. This is speculative fiction at its best, its standard tropes redeployed in deliberately new and innovative ways. The emphasis on social justice movements, community accountability, and collaborative writing reflect *Octavia's Brood's* focus on bringing into being a kinder and more just tomorrow. This approach to marginalized experiences centers the agency of these narrators as they work within and without institutionalized power to bring about long-lasting change. Its emphasis on the fractal nature of time does not treat these struggles as a tragedy or encourage a fixation on martyrdom. Instead, each story reinforces the constant refrain of hope, love, joy, and survival emergent from social justice movements as they work towards better worlds.

*...brown used "fractal" here to highlight the role of repetition in institutionalizing oppression, and to introduce an intriguing approach to the role of storytelling in time travel, an approach to fractals emergent from trauma studies and the philosophy of physics.*

*This is speculative fiction at its best, its standard tropes redeployed in deliberately new and innovative ways.*

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## 🌀 Tiny Gems Worth Listening To: Manickavel's Experimental "Autopsy"

*Things We Found During the Autopsy*, by Kuzhali Manickavel,

Blaft Publications, 2014, Rs 350 (U.S. \$5.50), 200 pp. (E-book: \$7.99)

reviewed by Karen Burnham

*This is a book that experiments widely and wildly with form, tone, genre, POV, and just about everything else.*

14 © Many elements...are repeated throughout the collection: complete indifference of the characters to the suffering of others is common;... vast distances of class, race, gender, and nationality that separate people; post-colonial knowledge of the huge gulf of power separating America from the rest of the world....

*In more concrete elements, though, the stories vary dramatically from one to the next.*

As a reviewer and critic, I fall easily into the habit of picking up a book and very quickly categorizing it. The category provides a mental framework by which the book can then be evaluated as I read it. And for most books, that makes a lot of sense: it's an epic fantasy, so I'll be looking at it in the context of Tolkien and his successors. It's feminist sf, so I need to see how it fits in the field pioneered by Russ and Le Guin and their successors. However, that mental process doesn't always make sense, and sometimes a book needs to be listened to instead of judged. That's the position I found myself in as I was reading Kuzhali Manickavel's *Things We Found During the Autopsy*. This is a book that experiments widely and wildly with form, tone, genre, POV, and just about everything else. It doesn't fall into any neat pigeonhole, and barely gives the reader any hint about how to receive it.

The book's format suits the fiction's wide range quite nicely: this collection of less than 200 pages contains more than 45 stories, few of which are longer than two or three pages, with some much shorter. This gives the author plenty of opportunities to try out different approaches and techniques, while keeping the reader constantly off-balance and on guard. The opening story gives some sense of the whole: in "The Whore Raft" we're presented with two children who are trying to escape an oncoming flood, but "On the way to the railway station someone stole our Flood Relief purse, replaced every single coin with buttons, and put the purse back into Clubfoot's pocket without either of us noticing." Having no way to escape the rising waters, they seem relatively resigned to their fate. They meet the local brothel owner, the "Americanadian" Sully, who



also missed the last train and the last bus. But that's OK, because he's made a raft out of the still-living bodies of the whores who work for him, and he's planning to ride out the flood that way. He invites the kids on board, but doesn't share his food or water with them. Americans drop completely unhelpful supplies on them from helicopters as the flood starts. The story ends with them on the water and one of the whores letting go of the raft and drifting down into the water.

Many elements of that story are repeated throughout the collection: complete indifference of the characters to the suffering of others is common; acceptance of bizarre elements such as the whore raft itself or the coins being replaced by buttons; vast distances of class, race, gender, and nationality that separate people; post-colonial knowledge of the huge gulf of power separating America from the rest of the world, whether it is acting in a land like India, or when immigrants go to live there.

In more concrete elements, though, the stories vary dramatically from one to the next. The second story, "How to Wear an Indian Village," is told in second person, and instructs someone





how to be an awful and embarrassing cultural tourist in just one page. Next, “The Ash Eaters” is only one paragraph, moving from “we” drawing maps to B. Lakshmi sitting up in her own funeral pyre. “A year later her body sat up in her funeral pyre like she had suddenly remembered something. Fat flakes of ash hung in the air while a man beat down her burning chest with a stick.”

The stories are so short that there’s little time for development of character or setting, often appearing more as sketches than stories. Several of these tiny gems pack a lot of punch into a very short space. I have never read a story more tragically created by its framing title than “Three Scenarios Leading to the Rape of a Teenage Girl in the Tropicool Icy-Land Urban Indian Slum,” which would otherwise be merely three half-page character sketches with added touches of Gentoos penguins and albino whales. All of the “Tropicool Icy-Land Urban Indian Slum” stories (five of them) are incisive commentaries on the perception of India and genre conventions, with added touches of sea life including leafy sea dragons and walrus. In a weird way they reminded me of Diana Wynne Jones’s *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland*, although more suffused with anger than with Jones’s amused indulgence.

Anger permeates many of the stories, along with a profound distance/detachment/alienation between characters. There are insults, abuse, cruelty (intentional and unintentional), and a general sense that the POV characters don’t understand that other beings in the stories (whether family members, schoolmates, dragons, angels, or other) are worthy of respect in their own right.

No matter what is happening in these stories, no matter how weird, how detached, how short, or how cruel, they are worth listening to. Some of them are intensely brilliant, and there’s an occasional story which seems to have been thrown in for fun, such as “How Juniper Parsnip Saved Christ-

mas Eve,” a great inversion of the child-saves-Christmas story in which Juniper saves her town from having to celebrate Christmas Eve *every night*. Not all the stories work, or rather they won’t all work for every reader. Certainly with all the alienation, estrangement, and weird elements there’s a risk that the book’s vignettes read more like a series of non-sequiturs than coherent stories or scenes. But given their rapid-fire nature, a misfire is easily forgiven as you move on to the next piece that might speak to you passionately. Manickavel demonstrates a complete mastery of her craft such that I have no problem believing that each and every vignette here, no matter how long or short, conveys exactly the impression that she wants it to. Hers is a voice worth listening to, even when you’re not quite sure how to judge it.

*Several of these tiny gems pack a lot of punch into a very short space.*

*No matter what is happening in these stories, no matter how weird, how detached, how short, or how cruel, they are worth listening to.*

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Karen Burnham is vocationally an engineer and avocationally a fiction writer. Her work has appeared in venues such as *Locus*, *Strange Horizons*, and *SFSignal.com*. Her book on the work of Greg Egan was published by the University of Illinois Press in 2014. She lives and works near Baltimore, Maryland.

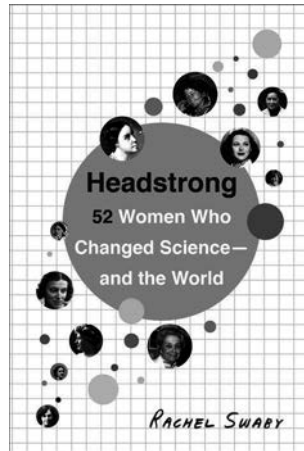


## ⚙️ A Plethora of Paragons

*Headstrong: 52 Women Who Changed Science—and the World*, by Rachel Swaby, April 2015, Broadway Books, \$16.00, 273 pp.

reviewed by Victoria Elisabeth Garcia

Swaby seeks to honor Marie Curie's prescription, which is quoted in her introduction: "Either a woman is a good scientist or she is not...her work should be studied from the scientific, not the sex, point of view."



*Headstrong* is an enjoyable new book from science journalist and former *Wired* research editor Rachel Swaby. Designed to illuminate an unseen part of the history of science and to provide role models for young people interested in technical fields, Swaby's book presents profiles of dozens of women who over the course of the last three centuries have made critical contributions to technology, medicine, engineering, and science, and in so doing have changed the way we live.

In her introduction Swaby explains that her goal is not just to increase the visibility of women in science but to change the way such women are represented and seen: In her view, female researchers have historically been treated either as oddities ("circus performers," in the words of profiled physicist Hertha Ayrton) or else as wives and mothers who just happened to stumble upon a scientific insight or two. Swaby's assertions are well-supported: Examples of press coverage that praises an award-winning rocket scientist for her dutiful mothering and that describes a Nobel Prize-winning chemist as a "British wife" will have many *CSZ* readers muttering curses and grinding their teeth.

In choosing her subjects, Swaby looked not just for productive careers but for an element of unique adventure, drama, or struggle, and indeed, some of Swaby's subjects have lead positively cinematic lives.

As we read about these women, we get the chance to learn the scientific backstories behind many everyday things.

By foregrounding her subjects' careers and work, and including their domestic lives only insofar as they overlap with their professional and intellectual activities, Swaby seeks to honor Marie Curie's prescription, which is quoted in her introduction: "Either a woman is a good scientist or she is not...her work should be studied from the scientific, not the sex, point of view." The resulting book is, on the whole, refreshing, engaging, and useful.

To show the scope of women's contributions to science and technology, Swaby introduces us to an intriguing mélange of researchers and thinkers. Some (such as Ada Lovelace and Rachel Carson) will be familiar to most *CSZ* readers—but the majority are likely to be brand new. In choosing her subjects, Swaby looked not just for productive careers but for an element of unique adventure, drama, or struggle, and indeed, some of Swaby's subjects have lead positively cinematic lives. Émilie du Châtelet, for instance, was born to a functionary in the court of Louis XIV: She began her studies of mathematics and physics at the age of twenty-six and completed the first English translation of Newton's *Principia Mathematica* fifteen years later, just days before the birth of her fourth child, and weeks before her own death. Also all-but-begging to be filmed is the life of Rita Levi-Montalcini, a Jewish neuroembryologist who kept her research alive in World War II Italy, despite shortages, prohibitions, and all-pervasive anti-Semitic terror, by bicycling from neighborhood to neighborhood to beg, door-to-door, for fertilized eggs, and by building a secret lab in her bedroom.

As we read about these women, we get the chance to learn the scientific



backstories behind many everyday things. Anyone who has had more than a passing association with a first-world newborn knows about Apgar scores, the numerical values assigned at birth to describe an infant's level of health based on color, heart rate, responsiveness to stimulus, and such. Learning about Virginia Apgar, the medical powerhouse behind them, is a delight. It is similarly delightful to find out about Elsie Widdowson, and the painstaking and path-breaking work she did to understand and catalog the nutritional content of the food that made up the British national diet: information that so many of us either agonize over or pointedly ignore on a daily basis.

Swaby also spotlights lesser-known dimensions of familiar figures' work. Florence Nightingale, for instance, was not just a brave and selfless combat nurse: She also did rigorous, quantitative analysis of the effects of disease on the war wounded and used her data to campaign for changes in hospital sanitary practices. Through Swaby's portraits we also learn intriguing and unexpected details about Hedy Lamar, Ada Lovelace, Rosalind Franklin, and the Curie family.

Alas, not all of the portraits are equally vivid. As stated above, Swaby's interest, first and foremost, is in each woman's intellectual and professional journey: papers published, hurdles vaulted, and injustices overcome. The subject's personality does come through in many of the pieces (with charismatic Virginia Apgar, for example, or with energetic, chain-smoking Gerty Radnitz Cori). But in some cases the focus on strength upon strength and triumph upon triumph leads to a hollow, almost hagiographic feeling. Swaby's reasons for foregrounding the professional over the personal are, of course, well taken, but sometimes the resulting profiles feel less like descriptions of living, breathing people than they do like summations of particular-

ly excellent CVs. As an adult reader, I found this alienating; for younger readers who are looking for elders to emulate, it could be intimidating as well.

Viewed solely as a piece of science writing, the book has many undeniable positive points, but it is a bit of a mixed bag. At their best, books like this can function as marvelous, intellectual tasting menus, allowing the reader to sample many different fields of inquiry. Swaby, a seasoned science journalist, does this well in many places throughout the book. In the profile of leprosy researcher Alice Ball, Swaby does a bang-up job of explaining how highly viscous chaulmoogra oil was a hard treatment for patients to use, why it was difficult to engineer a thinner and more bioavailable form, and how Ball solved the problem. The passage on developmental biologist Hilde Mangold captures the steadiness of both hand and spirit needed for experimental dissection and resection of living embryos, and leaves the reader with a decent understanding of Mangold's work. The section on pediatric cardiologist Helen Taussig's work is likewise excellent. Unfortunately, in other cases it's not nearly as easy to understand and appreciate the achievements of Swaby's subjects. In the section on mathematician Sophie Kowalevski, for instance, Swaby describes much of her work by quoting from the titles of her published papers rather than breaking down the work and explaining it.

Occasional failings of the sort are, however, to be expected given the book's astonishing breadth: In 224 pages, Swaby is covering 52 lives, over 300 years of history, and dozens of technical disciplines. It's a task that's beyond ambitious, and by and large, Swaby succeeds. This is a book that *CSZ* readers will enjoy reading, referencing, and giving to their favorite young people.

*At their best, books like this can function as marvelous, intellectual tasting menus, allowing the reader to sample many different fields of inquiry. Swaby, a seasoned science journalist, does this well in many places throughout the book.*

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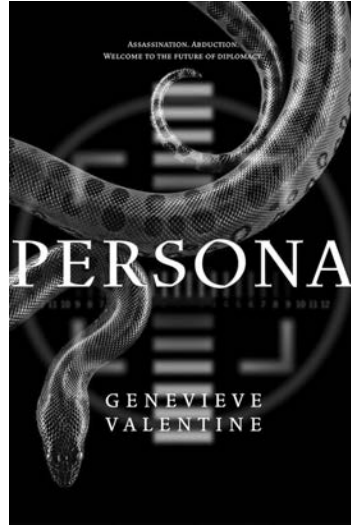
Victoria Elisabeth Garcia's fiction has been published in *Polyphony*, the *Indiana Review*, and elsewhere. She lives in Seattle with her husband, comics creator John Aegard, and a chunky but agile little dog.

⚙️ “Everybody Has To Wear a Façade”: The Face(s) of the Near-future Dystopia

*Persona*, by Genevieve Valentine, Saga Press, 2015, 307 pp., \$24.99.

reviewed by Kristin King

*Surface appearances are deceptive, though. Suyana guards a dangerous secret....*



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In a near-future world chillingly close to our own, the rainforests are almost gone. To save them, the United Amazonian Rainforest Confederation depends on international diplomacy, but that playing field is owned and run by the Big Nine countries. The Confederation's only hope is a celebrity diplomat—a “Face” to charm the public.

That Face is Suyana Sapaki, and she's prepared to do whatever it takes to protect her people. At first glance, that's not much. She doesn't have the right look, for one thing. She's Peruvian, “a little stocky in a world that liked its Faces tall and thin.” And despite the best efforts of her “handler” to dress her properly and invite her to the right parties, she is “a little hard around the eyes in an organization that prized girls who could fawn when the cameras were going.”

Surface appearances are deceptive, though. Suyana guards a dangerous secret, one that threatens not only her

life but also the lives of everyone she cares about.

When we first meet her, she's about to sign a dating contract with the American Face, Ethan Chambers, complete with a physical intimacy clause. But before that she has to get through the vote in the International Assembly. The Big Nine have already decided the vote is “yes,” so it's politically meaningless. Some of the Faces don't even bother to show up. But she does. She takes a fierce pride in smiling for the camera and raising her hand to be counted.

I fell in love with her at that moment. Suyana is glorious. She's in a totalitarian dystopia, and most of the time all her options are bad. But she doesn't let that stop her. She knows the exact measure of her personal and political power, and she seizes every last bit.

Somebody else falls in love with her: Daniel, the cameraman. Like Suyana, he has few options. He's a freelancer in a world where photography is illegal, and his one chance at a real job is to catch a candid photograph of her first meeting with Ethan Chambers.

And that meeting is when everything goes wrong. A shot rings out, and then another. Suyana staggers toward Daniel, bleeding and limping. One more shot and she'll be dead. Against his better judgment, he runs into the line of fire and pulls her out. The next thing he knows, the two of them are on the run for their lives. Why does he stay with her—because he cares, or because he might get a story out of her? Will he betray her for the sake of his career, or because he has dangerous secrets of his own? We don't know, and neither does he.



What follows is a gripping political thriller, a romance, a spy novel, and a mystery rolled into one. You can dip into it for a hell of a fun ride, or you can take your time and mull over the deeper issues.

I chose the slow ride. I got caught up in the excitement of Suyana's desperate fight to stay alive and the fascination of political intrigue, and I enjoyed the interpersonal tensions between Suyana, Daniel, and the rest of the characters. But I was most captivated by the way the dystopia shaped and distorted the human relationships.

We don't see the whole world, just three segments of it: a society of diplomats with scripted personas, a Mafia-type "free press," and a secretive activist/terrorist scene. In each segment, everybody has to wear a façade, and everybody knows that telling the truth can get you killed. That means it's impossible to know whom to trust.

It's also necessary. Suyana is as strong as nails, smart, canny, and resourceful. She's not a superhero, though, and without help she's going to collapse from blood loss and exhaustion. She also needs help figuring out who's trying to kill her and re-entering the diplomatic world after her suspicious absence. At some point, her persona has got to crack. She has to take risks, make mistakes, and be vulnerable.

Within this context, the interplay between Suyana and Daniel is fascinating. They're together out of necessity, but they soon develop a mutual respect and a growing attraction that would, in a better place, lead to something deeper. But they must both maintain their façades and play their roles. The relationship between the camera and the celebrity is intense, exploitative, and always problematic.

The lessons learned from this novel are directly applicable to our own lives. We're not being hunted down, but we are constantly being judged and evaluated on social media. In a way, we're all celebrities, and the cameras are every-

where. Our jobs depend on smiling at the right people at the right times.

This is even truer for teens. What kind of world are we sending them into? This book is exciting and thought-provoking for adults, but a must-read for teens. I'd recommend it alongside two other near-future dystopian novels: *Scored* by Lauren McLaughlin and *Pretties* by Scott Westerfeld. Like those novels, *Persona* reflects the dystopia teens face in the here and now, warns us about the future, and provides, perhaps, a way out.

The book is closed, but I'm not out of it yet. I am still wondering: What will happen to the rainforest? To Suyana, Daniel, the free press, and all the diplomats? Or to any of us, for that matter?

I suppose I'll just have to hope for a sequel.

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Kristin Ann King is the author of the short story collection *Misfits from the Beehive State* (2013). She's also had stories and essays in the Aqueduct Press anthology *Missing Links and Secret Histories* (2013), *Strange Horizons*, the *Pushcart Prize* anthology, and elsewhere. She lives in Seattle and blogs at [kristinking.org](http://kristinking.org).





Orthogonal grids are ubiquitous in the cityscape. Right angles appear in the layout of streets, in the materials of building facades, in the seating of restaurants, in the books of libraries, even in the screens of mobile devices. At times elegant, at times graceless, orthogonal elements are efficient, easily stacked, multiplied, and substituted one for the other. My works on paper are mostly investigations of the elegance of the city grid. They explore the tension between the rational and irrational—the expected and surprising—in the urban environment.

My first works on paper were intaglio etchings, which I learned to make as a student of architecture at Columbia University. In the 1970s and 1980s, I drafted grids onto zinc plates much in the same way that I drafted building designs onto vellum. Beginning in the 1990s when worries about the toxicity of the etching process increased, I began making collages rather than etchings. Similar to the African American make-do traditions of jazz, quilting, soul food cooking, and other creative enterprises, my collages are composed of scraps of discarded items that are glued, drawn, and painted into a unified whole. By themselves, these scraps have no power, but when combined as integrated forms, they take on significance, able to evoke a mood or call forth an association. Frequently made in pairs to explore the effect of color on imagery, the painstaking process of making these works on paper—of transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary through a many-layered and precise craft—is their driving force.

The titles of my pieces deserve explanation. I develop them toward the end of the construction process when the images are almost complete. Testing out different ideas in the margin of the paper I am working on, I look for words that can narrate these abstractions. Some portray journeys through the landscape like “Crossing in Winter’s Storm.” Others like “The Dignity of Resistance” are about my African American ancestors who taught me to make a place for myself in this landscape even though, at the

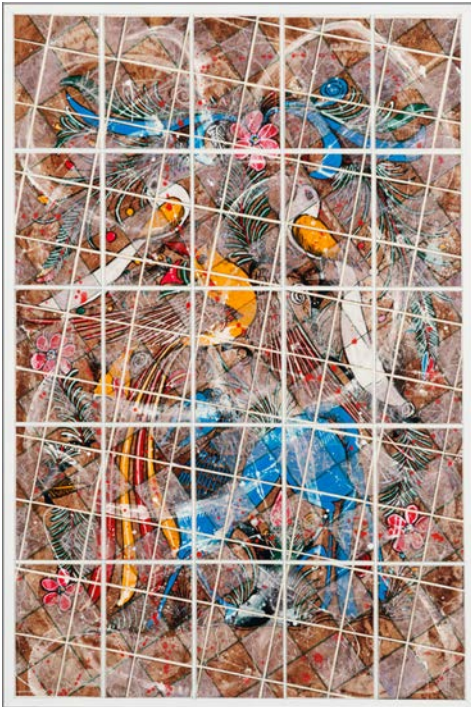
time, I was forbidden to do so by law and by custom.

I am an artist, architect, educator, and former musician. My fine art is in the Library of Congress and has been exhibited in and collected by galleries and museums, business enterprises, and colleges and universities throughout the United States. I previously practiced architecture in New York City and, as a freelance orchestral musician, performed in Radio City Music Hall, for the Bolshoi and other ballet companies, and in such Broadway musical hits as *Man of La Mancha*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. I hold five academic degrees—in music, architecture, philosophy, and psychology—and have studied in art studios internationally (etching in Florence, Italy, and New York City; papermaking in Barcelona, Spain; drawing in Mexico City; collagraph and photolithography in Seattle). However my most life-changing schooling occurred in New York City during the Civil Rights and subsequent Women’s Movements, when I exhibited my works on paper at galleries and museums that were promoting the inclusion of black and women artists in the art scene, while also associating with a handful of black and women architects who were likewise seeking admission to the architecture community. The lessons learned from banding together with these soul mates to scale the walls of exclusion are the ones that inspire the commitment to excellence that underpins my work.

I am a professor of architecture and urban design at the University of Washington and have also been on the faculties of Pratt Institute, Columbia University, the University of Cincinnati, and the University of Michigan where I was the first black woman in the nation to be promoted to full professor of architecture. I am grateful to have received many awards, among them induction into the Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame, the American Institute of Architects Whitney M. Young, Jr. award, and most recently the American Institute of Architects Seattle Chapter Medal of Honor.

Featured Artist

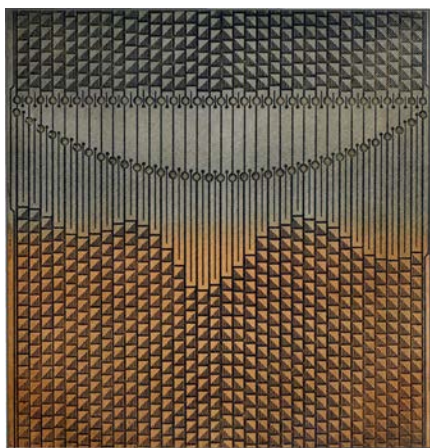




*Disciplina y Delicia (1b), 2014*



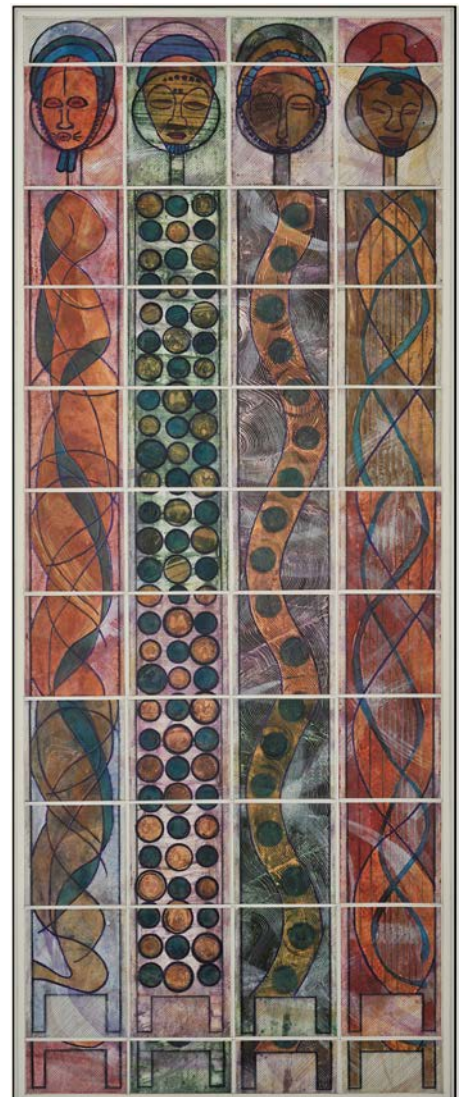
*City Life On and Off the Grid (A), 2014*



*On Entering a Midsummer's Valley, 1978*



*On Passing a Midwinter's Valley, 1978*



*The Dignity of Resistance (IA), 2004*





*Crossing in Winter's Storm (A), 2010*



*Crossing in Winter's Storm (B), 2010*

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