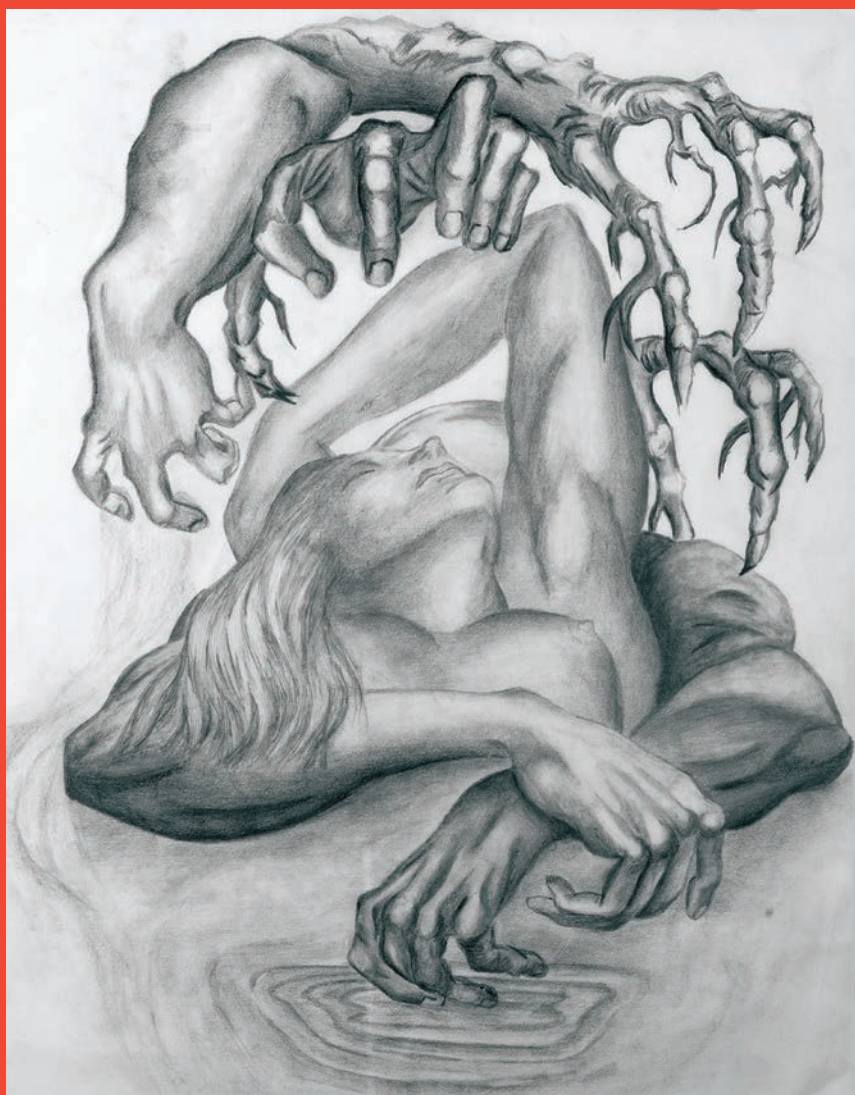


The

# Cascadia Subduction Zone

A LITERARY  
QUARTERLY

January 2016 ☉ Vol. 6, No. 1



Wasteland



Erin Harrop

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Erin Harrop

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In This Issue

## 🌀 The Tiptree Symposium (Eugene, OR, Dec 4-5, 2015): A Few Reflections

by L. Timmel Duchamp

The University of Oregon Libraries hosted a symposium on December 4-5 in honor of Alice Sheldon's centennial. The event remembered and celebrated not only the life and work of Alli Sheldon/James Tiptree Jr., but also her participation in the creation of what Suzy McKee Charnas at one point called "the world of feminist sf." I've written elsewhere about how frequently women relate to feminist sf as a collectively constructed, organic world-in-process that they feel themselves to be part of, even before they discover feminist sf fandom. Of the many thrilling moments of the symposium, I want to especially note those that revealed, through the discussion of and reading of letters by Tiptree, Le Guin, and Russ, that Russ and Tiptree spoke of that world, too. I doubt I've ever felt as intimately connected with these writers as when in her keynote talk Julie Phillips, quoting from their correspondence, revealed their sense of sharing that world and being sustained by it. And Julie's mention of Tiptree's post-disclosure fear that she might no longer be welcome in that world made me desolate. What they knew in the 1970s (and all of us should know now) was that being a woman writing science fiction was nothing new. What was new for them in the 1970s was their sense of and need for an explicitly *feminist* community of writers determined to explore what had been previously dismissed as trivial; yet, as each of them knew, this exploration was in every way risky and dangerous. It was exciting and scary, but possible to do because they were conscious of themselves as a community, conscious that that community had their backs.

The panel of authors who had corresponded with Tiptree was particularly rich in observations linking the experience of 1970s feminist sf with that of today's feminist sf. After asking the panelists to talk about what they had been publishing and reading in the 1970s, giving the audience a sense of those times, moderator Karen Joy Fowler opened with the statement that "It is genuinely true that I imagined science fiction as a place dominated by women" when she first started reading science fiction in the late 1970s, which by then boasted a wealth of feminist fiction by Joanna Russ, Suzy McKee Charnas, Ursula K. Le Guin, Vonda N. McIntyre, Octavia E. Butler, James Tiptree Jr, and others. Ursula then said that communities of writers "were practically nonexistent" in mainstream fiction, while science fiction provided a rich such community. Suzy Charnas recalled her first sf convention, a WorldCon held in Kansas City—yes, that historic event at which attending women, led by Susan Wood, rebelled, demanding a space of their own in which to talk about the sf that the men disdained and would not discuss. Suzy mentions that after her exposure to the Manhattan literary scene, where writers talked to one another only at cocktail parties or at academic meetings, she was "incredibly excited" to find at that con a community of women writers and readers, coalescing and beginning to create "the world of feminist sf"—a world inside a world. It was unlike anything she had known.

This "world inside a world" may sound utopian to many of us today in comparison with our constant, often painful need to re-think how we negotiate our differences, but the symposium of-

*It was exciting and scary, but possible to do because they were conscious of themselves as a community...*

*...a WorldCon held in Kansas City—yes, that historic event at which attending women, led by Susan Wood, rebelled, demanding a space of their own...*

Tom Foster served as The Cascadia Subduction Zone's guest features editor for our most recent issue: Volume 5, Number 4 (October 2015). This was one of our themed issues, with a special focus on comics and graphic novels. We regret that we neglected to credit him in our print edition.

## Tiptree Symposium

(cont. from p. 1)

...after the disclosure, Alli could "no longer hear" Tiptree's voice.

The feminist sf community in general, and her correspondence with Ursula and Joanna in particular, was a lifeline for Alli, though in the end it wasn't, of course, enough.

Forty years later, the "world within a world" is still going strong.

ferred abundant reminders that painful lessons and negotiations have always been with us. Alli Sheldon, like many women of her generation, was ambivalent about feminism and saw its gains as subject to arbitrary male permission, as Tiptree exulted in being part of that community (one of its only "male feminists") and despaired that she wouldn't be welcome there when her non-writing identity was revealed. During that same panel discussion, Ursula said that when she began writing, she had seen literature as written by men about men for men and hadn't thought about it. And so she wrote "as a man, until I started to feel it wasn't right. Vonda kept pinging me gently on the head." She had to *learn* to write "as a woman." And that was "hard work," Ursula said with emphasis. She also said that many 1970s feminists disapproved of stay-at-home mothers, which made her feel at odds with some feminists. "I *like* doing housework," she said, conjuring up the ghost of her former defensiveness.

The feminist sf community in general, and her correspondence with Ursula and Joanna in particular, was a lifeline for Alli, though in the end it wasn't, of course, enough. Julie characterized Alli's last ten years, the decade following the disclosure, as a desperate search for a new sense of identity. Alli often felt that she had no sense of self at all, caught up in "an animated puppet show." During the Q&A panel during which the students in Carol Stabile's graduate-level feminist sf class asked Jeff Smith, Alli's close friend and literary executor, questions about Tiptree, he said that after the disclosure, Alli could "no longer hear" Tiptree's voice. Someone from the audience then asked, "So being outed, he died?" And Jeff replied, "Yeah. She tried to burn her notebooks." Jeff was invited to speculate on a number of fronts and mostly declined to do so. "It was complicated," he said at one point. (Which is why, of course, historical speculation about very particular situations tells us less about the possibilities of a specific situation than it does about our assumptions.) One particularly poignant question was whether, had the conditions

for trans today been the same back then, would Alli have chosen to transition. That question, for me, serves as an index of just how different our world is from that of the 1970s. Yes, a few people did have "sex-change operations" back then. But in a world of locked essentialist sex and gender categories and rigid conceptual limitations, the possible forms that being trans now takes and how they are understood was unimaginable. It is particularly poignant to think of how that began to change in, say, the last ten years of Alli's life.

I've written an account of the symposium for Aqueduct's blog, which you can find at <http://aqueductpress.blogspot.com/2015/12/report-on-tiptree-symposium.html>. We will be publishing Julie Phillips' keynote talk in the next issue of the CSZ. And finally, I want to share the announcement Carol Stabile made at the end of the symposium: the University of Oregon will be hosting a feminist sf symposium focused on Joanna Russ next year and another focused on Suzy McKee Charnas the following year.

Forty years later, the "world within a world" is still going strong.

---

L. Timmel Duchamp is the author of the Marq'ssan Cycle as well as *Love's Body*, *Dancing in Time*, and *Never at Home*. She is the founder and publisher of Aqueduct Press.

# A Troubling Reflection

by Wilma Bernard

While Francesca waited on the line, a woman's voice cut in faintly. "Well, I see your point. But still," said the voice, and cut out again in a thin burst of static.

"David," Francesca said, when he picked up. "While I was waiting, someone else started to talk. Did someone in your office pick up at another phone, do you think? Accidentally?"

She could hear the shrug in his voice. "Doubt it. The lines must have got crossed, or whatever they do now. What're you calling about, babe?"

"I just wondered what time you'd be home for dinner." She kept her head down, feeling red prick in her cheeks, while she searched for a pencil and pad, and wrote down his answer. "Thank you."

"Yup. That it?"

"Yes, thanks. Bye."

She looked up into the mirror, casually, as if to give herself a quick looking-over and proceed. Her eyes betrayed her. Scarcely taking in her stiff pink face and half-done hair, they fled up to that corner by the bed where the black figure stooped. *Ridiculous*, she told them. *You're always playing tricks. You scoundrels.* She forced a little mental laugh. *Anyway, ghosts are supposed to disappear in mirrors. So there.*

She put the phone slowly down and finished styling her hair, watching the figure. She tore her eyes away to help her apply her makeup, although they kept sneaking back toward the visitor. She thought it nodded, the slightest shift of acknowledgment.

At last she stood and turned to face it.

She let her breath out in a long, shaking, laughing sigh. There it was, the terrifying apparition: her son's long leather coat, which she had agreed to mend and subsequently forgotten. She gathered it up to leave her bedside chair pale, ordinary, inanimate once again, and felt her throat tighten against the possibility of tears. She folded the coat, left it on the edge of the bed, and went out.

∞

Driving past the row of shops downtown she saw a woman wearing her mother's favorite jacket in one window, her mother's profile speaking to the cashier in the next. *I don't believe it for a moment*, she told herself, craning her neck around to keep these glimpses in sight.

By the time she found the car turning in at the cemetery, she realized she'd forgotten where she meant to go in the first place.

The heels of her shoes sank a little into the damp grass as she went to the grave, and she leaned for-

ward on her toes when she came to a standstill. No sense ruining good shoes in a late-onset bout of mourning.

She stared at the trim gray tombstone. "Well?" She glanced around anxiously at the sound of her own voice, but no one appeared nearby to observe her unorthodox behavior. The time for talking to the dead was surely when grave-dirt was fresh and loose, the tone surely one of reverence and loss. But here she stood, too late, too peevish, tired of the whole thing. "You're gone," she snapped. "So be gone, then. I release you, I forgive you, whatever you need. Just *go away*."

She thought, but did not say, *You're driving me insane*. Instead she shut her lips firmly, shut her teeth firmly behind them. *I will bring flowers tomorrow*, she thought. *And that will make an end of it.*

∞

She bought a pot of purple hyacinth on the way home. She went to the post office and the grocery store. The checkout girl sounded nothing like her mother, she noted with triumph. The man who sold her the hyacinth used none of her mother's favorite phrases. The neighbor who waved to her as she went into the house bore her mother no resemblance.

She unloaded the groceries, left the hyacinth and the mail on the counter, and went upstairs to mend the offending leather coat.

As she picked it up she caught a glimpse in the mirror of her mother's face above her own starched crimson collar. *Ah, no*.

She put the coat down again, and went to sit in front of the mirror. Looking at her own face, her mother's nose, the eyebrows carefully tamed, the too-familiar eyes, she sat for a long time. She heard her son come in downstairs, call a greeting, open the refrigerator.

"Well," she murmured. "I see your point, I suppose, as well."

## Poems by Anne Sheldon

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### Poem for Kivrin

Time-traveling graduate student in  
*The Doomsday Book* by Connie Willis

You learned too much in 1348.  
You poured wine in their wounds,  
lanced their ghastly tumors,  
taught them to boil willow branches  
for something like aspirin,  
and still they died:  
the quiet constant ugly priest,  
the slender twelve-year old  
mourning her betrothal  
to a middle-aged jerk,  
the demanding little preschooler,  
the heart-broken wife kept alive  
for a week or two in the waters of Duh Nile.

You saved them for a time  
with work and love  
and the gifts of the future,  
but it would never be enough.  
Brought back to your own present,  
how will you survive?  
How many months, years,  
before the “now” feels normal?  
Who do you know in the future present  
that can fill the void?  
And who knew this was the price  
of a degree in history?

---

Anne Sheldon lives in Silver Spring, MD, with her black cat. Her work has appeared in *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*, *The Dark Horse*, *Talebones*, and other small magazines. Her latest book, *The Bone Spindle* (Aqueduct Press), celebrates the mythic heroes and villains of the fiber arts.

---

### Star Babe Takes No Prisoners

Why do so many aliens speak English?  
puzzles Star Babe, lacing up her Teflon  
bustier. And the fair-haired Captain,  
quick to quote the Prime Directive, quick  
to break it boldly: where will his hubris end?

Her fingers fly across the gleaming wafers  
of the shuttle dash, the scarlet nails  
cut neatly square but not too short. He lurks—  
but where? —second red dwarf to the right? —  
within the crook of this galactic arm.

And from between the vast and sleek nacelles,  
her shuttlecraft slides loose. Arrays expand.  
Star Babe scans surrounding space and finds  
the signature: his vapor trail of pride.  
And then sets course. The nearest world, Class M,  
is threatened now with fast food, bloodsport, cable,  
global warming, and “democracy.” *As if.*

*You may be clever, Captain, may be quick  
in a crisis and shimmer in and out of trouble  
at light speed; may even be a natural blond;  
but you're no match for Star Babe.*

She strokes the emerald key—*ENGAGE WARP*—  
and fires the dark with outrage and with joy.

---

### For Peg 1921 – 2010

We come to free  
the houses of the dead  
after they are buried.  
No collections of Trollope,  
no antique doll chairs,  
no old English blue and white  
go into the modest coffin,  
or the more modest urn.  
If this, our aging friend,  
were an ancient Egyptian  
we would be choosing what to leave  
in her last bedroom—  
not the mansion promised by Jesus  
but much more spacious than a pine box—  
and we would walk away with less  
but like ourselves a little more.

Think, if she stood there by the hearth,  
wide-eyed, furious, but unable to speak—  
*my handsome porcelain platter?  
my crystal sherry glasses?  
that lovely old lamp? It was a wedding present!  
What's the meaning of this?*  
But then, we hope, she'd remember—  
*Ah, that gorgeous landscape—  
how strange I felt when  
I hauled it out  
of my mother's empty apartment  
forty years ago.*

---

## Maidservant From Away

The fire's low. Her fingers are so cold.  
The keeper naps. She's served him tea and more.  
This is how it is, since she was sold.  
His waistcoat swells with every tenor snore

as if *he* were the velvet wine-red chair  
squatting on four thickened shiny paws.  
Beside his hand, a bowl of winter pears  
is not for her. These are the winter laws

of this barbaric winter land.  
She knows another land and law, where skies  
are bottle-blue, the air is sweet, the sand  
is smooth and hard and warm. She shuts her eyes

and browses summer memories of home  
and murmurs soft instinctive chants from where  
her watchful gods of earth are more than stone.  
They rear and speak and work their will. *Bear*

*witness: how at night she is reborn  
for just the necessary time, within  
a cave alive with portraits of Before.  
Coiled and finely-marked, she's shed the skin*

*of shame and slides across an underground  
as sleek as marble. Seeking warmth of prey,  
her tongue's a narrow scarlet ribbon....no sound  
when she succeeds....* The street lamps wait for day,

but for the keeper, dawn will never come.  
A woman bites into a pear and parts  
dead fingers from a wound on a pale thumb.  
She feeds the fire, and curls upon the hearth.

---

Josh Lukin teaches at Temple University and belongs to that institution's Interdisciplinary Faculty Committee on Disability. He is the editor of *It Walks in Beauty: Selected Prose of Chandler Davis*, and has published articles on disability studies, noir fiction, and other exciting fields.

## Sighting of an Aqueductista

by Josh Lukin

Of all the powerful writing that fills Twelfth Planet Press's new volume, *Letters to Tiptree*, some of the most moving is in the section comprising correspondence between Tiptree—or rather, Alli Sheldon after she'd been unmasked—and Joanna Russ. Sheldon talks frankly about her depression and her fear that she will lose all of “Tip”'s talents and friends; Russ offers support and criticism and detailed accounts of her own developing radical feminist consciousness. And then suddenly there's this: “Do you remember seeing anywhere a Mack Reynolds story (I think it was) in which women were divided into two kinds: the ‘sexless’ office workers who dressed in gray and were considered by men to be genuinely physically sexless, and the ‘others’ who had breasts and desire, and in general looked like Dolly Parton, wig and all—they had sort of night clubs where they belly-danced (one to each woman) and men came to watch them.... I don't know if it's ever been published. Somebody showed it to me in manuscript (I don't remember how that happened or why) some years ago, say five or six, and it was quite good. I think it was Mack Reynolds and I think he'd never had it published, fearing to, I suppose.” Russ, of course, had got the wrong Marxist—the story described was Chan Davis's “It Walks in Beauty,” a corrupted version of which was published by Frederik Pohl in 1958, and a restored version of which appears in *It Walks in Beauty: Selected Prose of Chandler Davis*, published by Aqueduct in 2010. Possibly Judith Merrill had shown Russ a copy of the uncorrupted ms. I wonder whether Russ knew Chan Davis's work and activism; that of his wife, the historian Natalie Zemon Davis, is legendary in the feminist canon.



## Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Monster

### Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein: A Modern Prometheus*

by Eleanor Arnason

*It's a heck of an achievement for a young woman—or anyone.*

There's a famous Wallace Stevens poem titled "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird." It's wonderful, and you can find it online by Googling. This essay is not about that poem. I mention it because there have to be at least thirteen ways of looking at Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein: A Modern Prometheus*.

Shelley began the novel when she was 18, as part of a writing contest. The other contestants were Shelley's lover, and later husband, the great poet Percy Bysshe Shelley; their friend Lord Byron, who was another great poet; and Byron's personal physician Dr. Polidori. The novel was published in 1818, when Shelley was 20. It's a heck of an achievement for a young woman—or anyone.

*Frankenstein* is convoluted, with a number of subsidiary tales. (One could say it wanders.) Most are sentimental stories of love, familial love, and friendship. They contrast strongly with the core tale: a young scientist named Victor Frankenstein creates a human being out of the parts of dead humans and manages to animate the body. The creature is large—eight feet tall—and unfortunately very ugly. When it—he—comes to life, Victor is horrified and flees, leaving the creature—an eight-foot-tall baby—to find his own way in the world.

The Monster manages to educate himself. He is timid and affectionate, desiring only the best for humanity, wanting—above all—to be loved. But he learns that he has no place among humanity. His size and ugliness always produce a reaction of horror and violent rejection. When he finally meets Victor high in the Swiss mountains, he says:

"I learned that the possessions most esteemed by your fellow-creatures were high and unsullied descent united with riches. A man might be respected with only one of these advantages; but, without either, he was considered, except in very rare instances, as a vagabond

and a slave, doomed to waste his powers for the profits of the chosen few! And what was I? Of my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant; but I knew that I possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides, endued with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome. I was not even of the same nature as man. I was more agile than they, and could subsist upon a coarser diet; I bore the extremes of heat and cold with less injury to my frame; my stature far exceeded theirs. Was I then a monster, a blot upon the earth, from which all men fled, and whom all men disowned?"

Frustrated by his attempts to live among humans and angry at Victor for abandoning him, the Monster begins to haunt Victor and Victor's family. His first crime is to murder Victor's young, innocent brother, because the boy has what he cannot have: human affection. Now, in their meeting on the glacier, he demands that Victor make him a mate, so he will not be entirely alone, and he promises to go with this new creature to the Americas and live apart from humanity.

Victor begins to create the new creature in Scotland. (Mary Shelley had lived in Switzerland and Scotland, and she set the novel in countries she knew, which have spectacular landscapes. There is a lot of nature in *Frankenstein*.) But Victor decides that it's dangerous to make a breeding pair of monsters and destroys the not-yet-living woman.

The rest of the novel is the Monster's revenge. He kills Victor's friend and Victor's bride. Bit by bit, he destroys Victor's entire life. Finally, with nothing left to lose, Victor turns and pursues the Monster, determined to destroy him. The novel ends on the Arctic ice sheet, where Victor meets up with an expedition, tells





his story and dies. The Monster makes one final appearance, saying:

“Once I falsely hoped to meet beings who, pardoning my outward form, would love me for the excellent qualities which I was capable of unfolding. I was nourished with high thoughts of honour and devotion. But now crime has degraded me beneath the meanest animals. When I run over the frightful catalogue of my sins, I cannot believe that I am the same creature whose thoughts were once filled with sublime and transcendent visions of beauty and the majesty of goodness... While I destroyed his hopes, I did not satisfy my own desires. They were for ever ardent and craving; still I desired love and friendship, and I was still spurned. Was there no injustice in this? Am I to be thought the only criminal when all human kind sinned against me?”

The Monster then promises to die alone on the ice. The ending words of the novel are:

He sprung from the cabin window, as he said this, upon the ice-craft which lay close to the vessel. He was soon borne away by the waves and lost in darkness and distance.

It’s one heck of a story, and yet flawed in many ways. As mentioned before, Mary Shelley was 18 when she began it; she was 20 when it was published. It seems to pour out of her, full of anger

and angst and a strong sense of justice. Nothing could be more different from Jane Austen’s carefully polished books.

Why do I say there are thirteen ways of seeing it?

One can talk about Mary Shelley’s famous parents: the early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, and the radical philosopher William Godwin, author of (among other things) the novel *Caleb Williams*. Frankenstein is dedicated to “William Godwin, Author of ‘Political Justice,’ ‘Caleb Williams,’ etc.”

According to Wikipedia, *Caleb Williams* describes a decent, hardworking, able man from a poor background, who strives to overcome his background and is destroyed by an unjust society. The Monster can be seen as a similar being.

One can talk about Mary Shelley’s difficult personal life. Her mother died as a result of Mary’s birth, and Mary was raised by her father and a stepmother she did not like. She lost her own first child and had a dream about bringing the baby back to life. (Did this dream lead to the novel?) Her father was usually in financial trouble, as was her husband Percy. Mary experienced poverty, personal tragedy, and relationships with men who were brilliant, inspiring, and not especially good at ordinary responsibility. She adored both her father and Percy, but did she sometimes long for another life—quieter and safer?

One can talk about gothic novels, often written by women and hugely popular in

*It seems to pour out of her, full of anger and angst and a strong sense of justice. Nothing could be more different from Jane Austen’s carefully polished books.*

*In a sense we all still live in the shadow of Romanticism: its transgressiveness, energy, anger, and hope.*

## Looking at a Monster

(cont. from p. 7)

*In a sense we all still  
live in the shadow  
of Romanticism: its  
transgressiveness, energy,  
anger, and hope.*

England at the end of the 18th century. (In fairness to men, the first gothic novel was written by a man—Horace Walpole—and the novel that put the genre over the top and shocked everyone—*The Monk*—was also by a man, Matthew “Monk” Lewis.) They combine mystery, danger, horror, and strange, possibly supernatural events. In some cases, the supernatural events are explained away when the mystery is solved. In the case of *Frankenstein*, the explanation is given beforehand: the Monster is a product of modern science.

One can talk about the Romantic Movement in Europe and England. Mary ran off (at the age of 16!) with the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley and married him after his first wife committed suicide. (The personal lives of radicals and Romantics in the late 18th and early 19th centuries make my generation of the 1960s look conventional.) Her relationship with Percy put her at the center of the English Romantic Movement. In a sense we all still live in the shadow of Romanticism: its transgressiveness, energy, anger, and hope. Its products were spectacular. Think of Shelley’s “Prometheus Unbound,” Byron’s “Don Juan,” and “Liberty Leading the People to the Barricades” by Delacroix. Romanticism continues to shape us, I think, emerging again and again in art and in revolution, actual or dreamed of.

I think it can be argued that science fiction and fantasy especially are heirs to gothic and Romantic literature. Like the earlier movements, SFF is fantastic, grotesque, transgressive, and often radical. We can trace the gothic and Romantic strains through 19th century European and American literature and art. As bourgeois realism rose to prominence, Romantic and gothic fiction took refuge in genre and ended finally by becoming SF, fantasy, horror, and mystery.

One can talk of *Frankenstein* in relation to the rise of modern science. Educated people of the time were strongly interested in science. Mary knew about the galvanic experiments, which made dead animals move and apparently live. In his critical treatise *The Trillion Year*

*Spree* Brian Aldiss points out that Victor Frankenstein learns to reject “ancient wisdom”—the medieval and Renaissance alchemists—at the University of Ingolstadt and devotes himself thereafter to modern science, the microscope, and the crucible. Aldiss argues that this focus on contemporary science makes *Frankenstein* the first SF novel. The Monster is not animated by magic, but by science.

What else stands out about the novel? The miserable, wet summer that the Shelleys spent in Switzerland next door to Lord Byron and Dr. Polidori. After reading gothic fiction, the foursome decided on the aforementioned story-writing contest. Mary Shelley is the only one who finished, and her story became *Frankenstein*.

My own feeling is there are at least two other influences on the novel: the rise of industrialism and the progression of the French Revolution, which began with hope, then moved through the Terror to Napoleon. “Bliss was it in that time to be alive, but to be young was very heaven,” the English poet William Wordsworth wrote about the Revolution at its beginning. *Frankenstein* was written later, after the Terror and Napoleon’s wars, when darkness had crept in. The Revolution sought to create a new society and new people. Its result was ambiguous, though the French did manage to transform their society. It took three more revolutions and most of the 19th century.

I see the Monster as a French *sans culottes* or an English proletarian, created by—and deformed by—science and technology. He is a hulking, ugly, dangerous being, deprived of a decent life and full of anger. That’s how workers can be seen by “refined” people.

At this point, I am up to eight ways of seeing the novel. What else is there? The history of the Monster in popular culture. The book has never been out of print. Mary Shelley came back from Italy to discover her novel was on the stage. There were many more stage productions, the most recent (that I know of) being in 2011 at the Royal National Theater. Benedict Cumberbatch and

*SFF is fantastic, grotesque,  
transgressive, and often  
radical.*

Jonny Lee Miller played the two leads, swapping back and forth. Wikipedia lists 75 movies based (in one way or another) on the novel. At least three are famous: *Frankenstein* (1931), *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), and *Young Frankenstein* (1974). Like Dracula, the Monster is always with us.

Rather than hunting around for four or five more ways to see the novel, I am going to talk now about my personal reaction to it.

I dislike Victor Frankenstein. I find all his brooding and self-doubt and excuses and guilt almost impossible to bear. He created a living human being and abandoned it. Talk about a bad parent.

In spite of all his sentimentality about family and friends, Victor is self-obsessed, talking endlessly about his feelings, his suffering. His only strong emotional connection—the only one that convinces me—is with the Monster. The two of them chase and torment and destroy each other.

The Monster is wonderful: imposing, frightening, intelligent, eloquent. He races down glaciers with the rapidity of an eagle in flight, springs out windows, kills with ease. Like a Byronic hero, he broods dangerously. I find his version of the struggle with Victor convincing. He was created, abandoned, cast out from humanity. He realizes he has become a moral monster, though—like Victor—he does not ever accept full responsibility for his actions.

Is the novel feminist? I'm not sure, though as a feminist I find its narrative riveting. The women characters are all secondary and sentimentalized, so on the score of creating strong female protagonists it fails. However, the novel can be seen as a critique of the individualism and egotism of the Romantic Movement. On one side we have the compelling figures of Victor and the Monster, both of them male and obsessed. On the other side, in the novel's minor narratives, we have people who care for other people and manage, in some cases, to be happy. Is that a woman's view of Romanticism?

I also wonder if the Monster is—in some way—female. I certainly identify with him: the being with no place in the world of men. I've always thought of myself as too large, too smart, too eloquent, and not the least bit pretty. Like the Monster, I disturb people. They want me to go away.

One of science fiction's great themes is the Other: aliens, robots, women, humans from different cultures, humans who are physically or mentally different. Who is more Other than the Monster: huge, with a yellow skin and dull, watery eyes?

The novel works so well because it has so many layers, so many aspects. I think Brian Aldiss is right. It combines the main themes of science fiction: how we are shaped by science and society, how we struggle to be human in an inhuman world; and it may well have another message. The people we create through technology and capitalism—factory workers, child laborers, the inhabitants of the world's giant slums—do not go away, though we try to escape them. Like the monster, they will haunt us, and our dreams of middle-class happiness will fail.

My count says I have made it to twelve or thirteen ways of looking at the Monster. I'm satisfied with that ambiguity (or complexity), and I hope you are, too.

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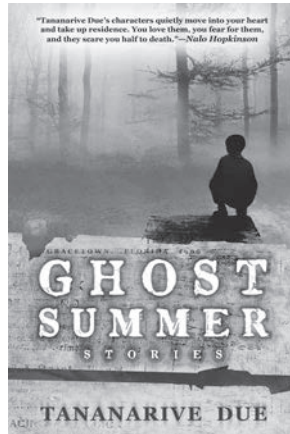
Eleanor Arnason was born in Manhattan and lives in Minnesota. Her novel *A Woman of the Iron People* won the James Tiptree, Jr. Award for gender-bending science fiction. In spite of all setbacks and adversity, she remains a lifelong fan of ordinary human decency and the international working class.

## ⚙️ How Are the Ghosts of Gracetown Doing?

*Ghost Summer Stories*, by Tananarive Due, Prime Books, September 2015, 256 pp., \$15.95.

reviewed by Tanya DePass

*The ways in which each story is linked to another made me feel as if I was diving deeper and deeper into the history of Gracetown...*



This book is terrifying, amazing, creepy, and riveting. From the introduction by Nalo Hopkinson to the last page, it gripped me by the throat and didn't let go. It was a hard read, mostly because the characters charmed their way into my mind as I read through the stories; each one got me comfortable and relaxed as I read through their trials and tribulations then—then, friend, they snatched at my heart and took it.

The opening story, “The Lake,” sets the stage, and slyly introduces you to Gracetown, where things are just not quite right for the young teacher who's moved there to start her career. Tananarive Due's writing is so smooth and easy to fall into that you are lulled into thinking the story is going one way, but then it takes an unexpected turn for the odd.

As you read you continue to learn more about Gracetown, especially the longstanding feud between the McCormacks and Timmonses that is a recurring thread tying the stories together. It's rare for me to get so into a collection of short stories, because they are usually too short on their own to make me invested as I am in what else happened in Gracetown and to each character we meet. The ways in which each story is linked to another made me feel as if I was diving deeper and deeper into the history of Gracetown, learning its ins-and-outs, living there alongside its denizens who stay there, or go back for

various reasons, or in some cases flee as far as they can.

I won't get into each one, or this review would stretch out as long as one of the delicious stories in this collection. Each story could be its own book, or perhaps an episode of a beloved television series about this weird place....

The stories not tied to Gracetown are just as compelling to read. “Other Mother” seemed to be on a straightforward path, yet the end wasn't what I expected at all, once again proving the author knows how to present readers with alternatives they never anticipated. This was one of many stories that got me to make a sad, disappointed sound at it when it ended. I want to know how things turned out afterwards, but maybe...maybe I actually don't? After all, some things once known can't be unknown.

Over and over, within just a few pages I was pulled into their stories by these characters—no, by these *people* whose lives I got to peek in on for a while. It felt almost like I was walking in on a family dinner, or a family argument in some cases. Then the blinds would get pulled down and the door locked, with me on the other side of it. I want to know what happened to the protagonist in “Patient Zero.” Oddly enough, that one rekindled my desire to go back and play the Resident Evil series. That's the power in this collection for me, you see: To light that fire of wanting more, not just in the snatches of each person's story we get here but to remind me of something else I've enjoyed before in my own life, to relink that for me.

I feel like writing the folks in these stories letters and asking how they're doing, as if they could answer: Is everything all right? Did you make it out OK? Did you survive the virus, or the pain you were enduring when we last met? Did Necy grow up or go back home? What happened in the J? So many questions I want answered, because I'm greedy for

more of these folks' lives. This collection made me fall for each person I got the privilege of meeting, and I wanted more.

How many different ways can I say that I loved this collection? Many, and I have probably repeated them for you a few times. They're all true, though. It was a complete joy to read these stories. Some made me cringe and even recoil from the page for a moment, but I always went back. Do yourself a favor: get a drink, your favorite snack, and stop by Gracetown for a bit. But don't swim, be careful of the water, and never, ever go in summer.

## A Prismatic Display

*Dark Orbit*, by Carolyn Ives Gilman, Tor, July 2015, 303 pp., \$25.99 hardcover, \$15.99 paperback.  
reviewed by Nisi Shawl

“Tend-and-befriend” is the catchphrase used to summarize one kind of reaction to the unfamiliar, an alternative to our notorious “fight-or-flight” programming. This new hard science fiction novel set in Gilman’s Twenty Planets universe looks at which of these attitudes prevails in the confrontation of two interstellar cultures.

Saraswati Callicot, a freelance knowledge-hunter for corporate educational institutions, accepts an assignment to secretly watch over a member of her culture’s elite who has recently recovered from the sudden onset of mental illness. An exploratory team including Callicot and the recuperating elite, Thora Lassiter, gets sent via encoded light beams to a planet years away from civilization’s center, supposedly to gather details on an uninhabited planet. The planet is called Iris for the beautiful crystal-like growths covering its surface. But this star system’s local geometry is rife with anomalies, and while hiking on Iris Lassiter disappears inside one. She finds herself in total darkness—but not alone. Ostensibly uninhabited Iris has a hitherto undetected population.

This book delights me. Starting with its opening paragraphs, in which a newly reconstituted Callicot moves through the manufactured banality of lightspeed

*I feel like writing the folks in these stories letters and asking how they're doing, as if they could answer...*

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Tanya DePass is a longtime gamer, a fangirl, the spawn point of the #INeedDiverseGames hashtag on Twitter, and Programming Co-Chair for WisCon 40. She’s also GOH Liaison for Nalo Hopkinson, returning GOH for WC40.

travel as practiced by profit-driven organizations—sipping a restorative drink that tastes “vaguely” of mango, accepting a welcome she interprets correctly as an invitation to get out of the way of the next inbound passenger—Gilman deftly provides all the right clues to her strange yet totally believable milieu. A malachite door and a subliminal artificial breeze signal the luxuriousness to which the corporations’ upper ranks accustom themselves; as a child bride walks along a window-pierced passage, sunlight and shadow first gild, then tarnish her.

When the wind speaks, goes a proverb of the sightless Torobes into whose black realm Lassiter tumbles, its language is the world. Gilman’s language makes this world real.

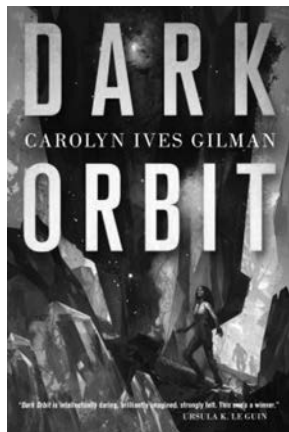
Perhaps the most vividly rendered aspect of *Dark Orbit*’s gestalt is the thuggishness of academic politics, which at one point leads to a murder investigation. Pairing the pursuit of knowledge—one of few commodities it would be economically feasible to trade across the vastnesses of interstellar space—with the rapacity of corporatism isn’t all that farfetched an extrapolation from the actuality of today’s research-focused, grant-hungry universities. Given her position as a museum curator and her career as a historian, Gilman is likely familiar with

*...Gilman deftly provides all the right clues to her strange yet totally believable milieu.*

*...Gilman is likely familiar with the atmosphere of professional jealousy and desperate reputation-building that can exist in academia.*

## Dark Orbit

(cont. from p. 11)



The potential for non-Western traditions to counter fundamentalist phobias also makes a welcome appearance in *Dark Orbit*.

Her approach avoids romanticizing blindness and mental illness while at the same time pointing to the possibility of accommodating oneself to them or reframing their contexts.

the atmosphere of professional jealousy and desperate reputation-building that can exist in academia.



The potential for non-Western traditions to counter fundamentalist phobias also makes a welcome appearance in *Dark Orbit*. Gilman revisits Lassiter's sojourn on a world reminiscent of today's conflict-filled Middle East, then through her account of the fictional populist cult of "the Shameless One" shows how an indigenous society could challenge its own misogyny when unrestrained by ignorant and arrogant outsiders. Related to this perspective is the sweetly illuminating moment when Callicot's unconscious ethnic prejudice falls away to unveil a friend where she'd imagined an enemy—and vice versa. It's especially impressive that the author was able to pull off such a great paradigm switch using a viewpoint character's fallibility. Perhaps her success is due to the objectivity required of good historians, who must frequently gaze through the eyes of other periods and cultures.

Both physical disability—the blindness of the Torobe—and mental disability—the atypical neurology of Thora Lassiter—play important roles in *Dark Orbit*. But in neither case does the author seem to have fallen into the easiest of stereotypic traps associated with their depiction. Her approach avoids romanticizing blindness and mental illness while at the same time pointing to the possibility of accommodating oneself to them or reframing their contexts. When Callicot remarks on the auditory acuity of the Torobe girl visiting their spaceship, a colleague cautions that skill rather than ability could be the cause of what she notices, opining that the Torobes may have more opportunities to focus on listening because they're undistracted by sight. Ability is innate and magical; skill, in contrast, is learned, earned. Similarly, after Lassiter has described how she traversed the area's interdimensional folds led by a Torobe man, she challenges the ship medic's diagnosis of her experience as a hallucination induced by epilepsy. When the medic states as proof of

his diagnosis that he could electrically stimulate her brain to reproduce what she went through, she responds that she could electrically stimulate *his* brain to create the sensation of sight. "Yet you think that's real, and the other sensation is not. That is simply illogical," she concludes. Because it's a phenomenon rarely perceived within its daily domains, Lassiter's society dismisses the validity of "wending," as the Torobes call journeying outside our universe. She, however, stubbornly refuses to accept the assessment of her brain's receptiveness to wending as a disease.

This scientific attitude towards (dis)ability colors Gilman's portrayal of the Torobe girl Moth's training in filtering and interpreting visual data. Aboard Callicot's ship there's much discussion of the difference between receiving signals and interpreting them: looking is a skill, like listening. Later, perception and expectation are revealed to be key to outcomes as an audience of skeptics interferes with Moth's attempts to return to her home and save the other Torobes from a stormlike outbreak of randomly destructive anomalies.

Through exposure to wending in strange and familiar settings respectively, Lassiter and Callicot come to accept its reality. They also voice respect for the Torobes' knowledge traditions built around its practice. But though Callicot worries that her employers will deem the technique too valuable to remain in the control of "pre-industrial natives," Lassiter worries that commercialized and without cultural context it will pose a danger to those using it.

Part of what concerns Lassiter is her growing realization that wending involves the participation, not just of those traveling, but of those traveled to. In order to wend somewhere it helps to know that there's someone at that new location who can "bemind" you. Age, attractiveness, habits, desires, and more can be warped or reified by the faithful or faulty remembrance of the one to whom you journey. When Torobes initially meet one another they introduce themselves with lengthy recitations of

their lives—not neat, stylized narratives, but blow-by-blow accounts of everything they’ve done, detailed repetitions of their dreams and vows and relationships and choices and plans. Will the corporations and governments of the Twenty Planets see how necessary proper beminding is for accurate wending, how beminding, like befriending, is an eminently practical technique? Or will they discount the interdependence it mandates as born of superstition, a useless emotional appendage on what could become a speedier and more inexpensive method of travel than outmoded light beams?

In the end Callicot and Lassiter respond to the tend-and-befriend proclivity of the Torobes with determined echoes of it: Lassiter arranges shelter for the refugees of the approaching “fold storm” on a relative’s estate. Callicot returns to her employers wondering if the secret of wending will be disclosed—but knowing that disclosure won’t come from her. While asking and at least partly answering the question of how its characters’ responses to new situations play out, *Dark Orbit* sheds light on a myriad of other issues. It’s a prismatic display I urge you not to miss.

*Will the corporations and governments...see how necessary proper beminding is for accurate wending, how beminding, like befriending, is an eminently practical technique?*

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Nisi Shawl’s story collection *Filter House* co-won the James Tiptree, Jr. Award in 2009. She is coauthor of *Writing the Other: A Practical Approach*. Her Belgian Congo steampunk novel *Everfair* is due out from Tor in September 2016.

## O(r)bit

by Mary Alexandra Agner

Call me Claudia,  
Lover of laminar flow and plate tectonics,  
African-American  
Undaunted, plasma physicist, planetary scientist.  
*Discover what takes us to the next level,*  
I challenge everyone,  
As student, colleague, statistical outlier.

And when her comet comes round again,  
Lander Philae perhaps still chatty, still  
Explaining comets are not Earth’s watering cans,  
X will mark a plot, headstone, series of dates,  
And the remains of a Rosetta project scientist.  
Not her bright mind, not her bright eyes.  
Do more between disciplines, different cultures, bold  
Explorers and ambassadors. Do as she did:  
Risk everything to “not follow the fold.”

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Mary Alexandra Agner writes of dead women, telescopes, and secrets in poetry, prose, and Ada. Her latest book of poetry is *The Scientific Method* (Parallel Press); her latest nonfiction appears in *TED Ideas*. Each month her patrons receive science news in verse at <https://www.patreon.com/sciencenewsinverse>.

## Power Couple: Combustion

by Mary Alexandra Agner

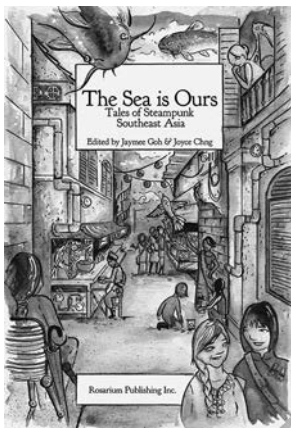
The curve of calf, eye-catching,  
long line of black hose that beckons,  
fan service for Lavoisier’s long list  
of lovers, his look entreating,  
face upturned to view his wife,  
her eyes evaluating those of us who stare  
back at the double portrait, postponing  
what she might dictate and her husband scribe.  
Real world revelations of barometers,  
bell jars, round-bottomed flasks,  
the very oxygen we breathe.  
Investigations done by candlelight.  
Why does fire burn?  
What chokes its throat when it lacks air?  
Real world revelation: Marie-Anne,  
scientific illustrator and collaborator.  
Obtuse angle of white dress, cerulean ribbon,  
the dark line of man and blood-red cloth  
what separates her from science’s paraphernalia.  
An inaccurate representation.  
Staged and posed, what truths  
does Jacques-Louis David leave us with?  
Love, of a certainty.  
That the Lavoisiers gifted the world  
with the ideas of hydrogen and oxygen.  
That even trapped beneath a glass  
we glow—for a little while.

## ⚙ Southeast Asian Retrofuturism

*The SEA Is Ours: Tales from Steampunk Southeast Asia*, edited by Jaymee Goh and Joyce Chng, Rosarium Press, November 2015, 270 pp., \$21.95 hardcover, \$15.95 paperback.

reviewed by S. Qiouyi Lu

*Goh and Chng reject the assumptions that steampunk must center on Victorian England and use colonial powers as its foundation.*



“How do you make something steampunk? Just stick a gear on it.” You may have heard a quip like this, but of the twelve stories in *The SEA Is Ours*, only some make use of gears, and just a couple of those use the classic image of brass gears. Yet each story rings with the spirit of steampunk, which editors Goh and Chng define in their introduction as “an aesthetic that combines retrofuturism, alternate history, and technofantasy...”

The fact that this definition does not mention a specific locale is a strategic choice. Goh and Chng reject the assumptions that steampunk must center on Victorian England and use colonial powers as its foundation. The title also asserts this stance in its double meaning: it is not only a declaration of ownership over the ocean routes that have been so vital to the various maritime cultures of Southeast Asia, but also a declaration of ownership over the narratives of the peoples of Southeast Asia, or SEA. Through retrofutures and alternate histories, Southeast Asian narratives, particularly those written by Southeast Asians themselves, can push back against colonial and imperial powers.

It is not surprising, then, that many of the stories in *The SEA Is Ours* find creative ways to play around with established history and portrayals of the past. Marilang Angway’s “Chasing Volcanoes” presents readers with a vision of the Philippines where two governments centered in New Manila and Cebu City are in conflict. Subtle details, such as Caliso’s nation being named Pina instead of the Philippines, suggest a timeline that did not involve colonization. A broader history and a personal narrative create each other in Timothy Dimacali’s “On the Consequence of Sound,” where extracts from academic texts punctuate a story of a young girl working with her father to become a Navigator. The academic snippets fill in the details of the

worldbuilding and root “On the Consequence of Sound” in a larger conversation, one that understands the hybrid nature of colonial and postcolonial subjects. Kate Osias’s “The Unmaking of the Cuadro Amoroso” positions itself during the Spanish colonial period of the Philippines via its language use. One character becomes “a deviant in the eyes of the *colonia*” (emphasis added); other key terms and locations also use Spanish. Its setting in the Spanish colonial period allows Osias to create an anti-imperial narrative of rebellion.

Although each of the stories in *The SEA Is Ours* stands alone, some images and themes recur. Notable is the disruption of the strict dichotomy between nature and machine, organic and inorganic, which often features in Western interpretations of steampunk. In “Between Severed Souls” by Paolo Chikiamco, Nur and the carver Domingo use not metal, but wood to create a mechanical body for an anito, or guardian, that emerges from a strange log. The world of Alessa Hinlo’s “The Last Aswang” pits magic-fueled wooden snakes and floral automata against the steam-powered Spanish Empire. In “The Chamber of Souls” by z.m. quynh, the guardian Ngoc provides another image of nature and machine working together: “Underneath its skin...were several layers of rotating gears that intertwined with leafy vines and moss that made up the substance of its body.” Meanwhile, Robert Liow’s “Spider Here” focuses on a character who engineers casings for spider fights with unusual organic materials.

With nine of twelve stories focused on women, *The SEA Is Ours* is delightfully woman-centric. These are not stories of the lone woman in a group of men, either. Instead, *The SEA Is Ours* focuses on relationships between women. Nghi Vo’s “Life Under Glass” tells not only the story of two sisters discovering

*Notable is the disruption of the strict dichotomy between nature and machine, organic and inorganic, which often features in Western interpretations of steampunk.*



a startling creature, but also the story of Thi learning to put herself first after her breakup with her girlfriend An. “Working Woman” by Olivia Ho introduces us to three women who start off in conflict, but quickly come to support each other in their pursuits of personal agency. Pear Nuallak packs a vast story into the small space of “The Insects and Women Sing Together,” one that explores intergenerational experiences between mother and daughter, as well as Amphon’s apprenticeship to two other women. Whether romantic, platonic, antagonistic, diplomatic, or something else entirely, the relationships between women in *The SEA Is Ours* are vast and many.

The wonderful illustrations for *The SEA Is Ours* do a fantastic job of complementing their respective stories. They span a range of styles: Kim Miranda’s loose brushwork contrasts with Shelley Low’s carefully rendered pencils; Trungles’ and Stephani Soejono’s character-driven inks are stark and stylized next to Borg Sinaban’s moody, atmospheric pieces. Pear Nuallak’s pencils feature clean, tight lines that bring the fantastic worlds of three stories to life. Their work for “Ordained” by L.L. Hill is particularly evocative and captures so much of the story in just one image. “Ordained” is not as character- or event-focused as the other stories in *The SEA Is Ours*; instead, its strength is its lush imagery filled with clockwork insects, which Nuallak brings to life. Wina Oktavia’s stunning illustration for Ivanna Mendels’s “Petrified” is epic in scope, capturing the grandness of Mendels’s retelling of the Malin Kundang folktale. Although some readers may find the writing in “Petrified” somewhat unpolished, the tale itself is fascinating.

With so many excellent stories, *The SEA Is Ours* is a necessary addition to any speculative fiction collection. More importantly, *The SEA Is Ours* is a reminder to those of us in the margins that steampunk is for everyone: at its best, steampunk offers a space to create new narratives and reclaim old ones.

Finally, the fact that this anthology is a transnational one is no coincidence ei-

ther. Whether we are in the lands of our heritage or in the diaspora, steampunk allows us to collaborate and to engage with our collective pasts and futures. Stripped of its colonial tethers, steampunk becomes boundless: it is theirs, yours, and, most of all—ours.

... at its best, steampunk offers a space to create new narratives and reclaim old ones.

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S. Qiouyi Lu lives in Columbus, Ohio with a tiny black cat named Thin Mint. Their poetry has appeared in *inkscrawl*. You can visit their website at [s.qiouyi.lu](http://s.qiouyi.lu) or follow them on Twitter at @sqiouyilu

## Rachel Carson’s Prix Fixe

by Mary Alexandra Agner

Honeysuckle. Heart of palm. Pali. Sand sucked from under your feet as the surf goes out. Street light, sodium lamp. Constellations. Stories that turn overhead. Dying suns still sparkling. Atmospheric interference, particle scattering. Particle collider. Corridor of grass, green ring a human racetrack. Dirt, amended: soil. Aerated, worm-wended, microbe monitored. Seeds sprout cotyledons, roots, ions across permeable membranes. Axons, nerves, electrical impulse, point and click, liquid crystals, photonic crystals, colors of weevils created by the way light refracts, wavelengths, arm lengths, tibia, fibula, calcium. Cancer. Not a sky story. Develops our taste for destruction. Our mouths so full, with watercress and physics, free-flowing lava on Venus, holes in the bottom of the ocean that encourage extremophiles, the wonder is we’ve any wonder left to spare for the fraying interface of man vs. nature. Look. Tide pools. Dolphins. Stellar clusters. The flavor of those photons aged like rare vintages. Why do we reach for the deep-fried green-house gases, the sugar-free individually wrapped 100-calorie industrial pollution, the cotton candy spun up clockwise into the Pacific Ocean’s gyre of anthropocene plastic?

“The more clearly we can focus our attention on the wonders and the realities of the universe, the less taste we shall have for destruction.”

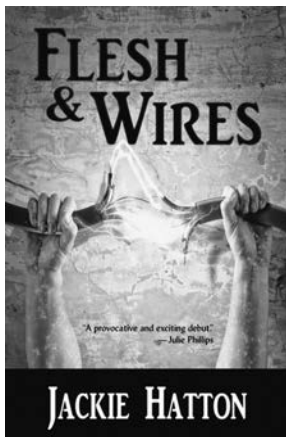
—Rachel Carson

## ⚙️ A Dystopia for Adults

*Flesh & Wires*, by Jackie Hatton. Aqueduct Press, November 2015, 328 pages, \$19.00 paperback.

reviewed by Stevie Watson

*What gives this story weight and keeps the reader hooked is the way Hatton subverts most of the tropes of dystopian novels.*



*One of the book's central themes is that we don't get the leaders we want, or even the leaders we need; we get the leaders who are best equipped to take and keep command.*

What would today's popular dystopian fiction look like if it were written for adults instead of children?

We live in an age where fantasy worlds—bad fantasy worlds, where bad things happen—hold people's interest widely. It is as if our reality is so bleak that we need made-up stories about worlds that are even bleaker. *The Hunger Games*, *Maze Runner*, *Divergent*, and others are prime examples. Children are made to kill each other. Children are forced to be part of a sadistic experiment without their consent. Children, who can feel emotions adults have forgotten how to feel, are tasked with saving the world.

When not defending their lives or plotting to overthrow their repressive governments, these children do what characters in the young adult genre have always done. They fall in love. Usually, the fate of the world hinges on how well these young couples can survive and get along.

Young Adult novels can be entertaining, but they have one major flaw that sets them apart from novels aimed at adults: once the world is saved, the book or series ends. With *Flesh & Wires*, Jackie Hatton has given us a book that picks up decades after the climactic battle. What gives this story weight and keeps the reader hooked is the way Hatton subverts most of the tropes of dystopian novels. This is a book for adults, and Hatton trusts her readers to keep up.

Often in dystopian YA all the adults are absent. One big difference between *Flesh & Wires* and contemporary YA is that the absence is weighted by gender rather than age. Most of the Earth's men die in the apocalyptic arrival of the Ruurdans, an alien race. This takes place 30 years before the events in the novel. These aliens believe women are the ideal slaves. To force their obedience, the Ruurdans violate the women with wires and other electronic parts (this is what gives the book its title).

After the aliens are gone—explaining where they go would put this review in spoiler territory—their legacy remains: technologically modified women who can move objects with their minds but seem emotionally stunted and are unable to age like normal women. These women are physically strong, stronger than most men, but they lack emotional lives. They use their collective strength to form communities, where they protect the aging, unmodified men and the tragically altered children; the Ruurdans have modified, enslaved, and abandoned these children, just as they did the women. The children become vital to the storyline, but they are not the focus, in keeping with Hatton's adult portrayal of her world.

Lo, the leader of the community that is the book's main focus, is a character who bends standard rules. She is tough and uncompromising, tending to shoot first and punish anyone who asks questions later. She defends her community from the Orbiters—unwelcome settlers from another planet. Many of the Orbiters are criminals and exiles, but they also represent oppressed and marginalized people in our own reality. Lo's typically brutal initial response to them raises ethical issues, while also showing she does not have a "heart of gold." Lo is a survivor, not a benevolent ruler. This further sets her apart from standard science fiction protagonists.

As it turns out, the biggest threat to Lo and her group's survival is not a stranger or alien intruder. Her own brother, seemingly returned from the dead, shows up one day for what he thinks will be a short visit. Readers can tell Lo's brother is not what he says he is, but does he really deserve all the pain Lo inflicts on him throughout the novel? The reunion is not a joyous one.

All Lo cares about is keeping her people safe, even if that means hurting or turning her back on someone she has

known all her life. Lo does not trust easily, does not do relationships well, and is barely a mother to her teenage child. In order to go on living, she takes on some of the qualities of her oppressors.

The one quality that makes Lo likable is her loyalty. She is on the side of the modified women, even if being on their side means not giving in to their desires. One of the book's central themes is that we don't get the leaders we want, or even the leaders we need; we get the leaders who are best equipped to take and keep command.

Bad things happen in *Flesh & Wires*, and its outlook is often bleak. The children in this book play an important role, but Lo and her core group of women warriors are at the heart of the story. They carry the scars and memories of a brutal colonization. They are not con-

cerned with saving the world as much as holding on to what is left of it. Love and partnerships, in Lo's world, are never to be taken at face value, and while the alien colonizers were clear-cut villains, they left behind weapon and aviation technologies that the women put to use. Weapons are appropriate, and violence is acceptable, as long as we use them to protect the people we love and value. Aren't they?

Hatton wisely leaves this and other moral questions unanswered, for the most part. She leaves things up to the reader to decide. Again, this is a book for adults, and an adult is someone who thinks for herself. Hatton's work is a welcome departure from authors who seem intent on spoon feeding their readers. Let's hope there are many more stories where *Flesh & Wires* came from.

*Hatton's work is a welcome departure from authors who seem intent on spoon feeding their readers.*

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Stevie Watson is a parent, teacher, and freelance writer living in Atlanta, GA. She might or might not be transgender; she is definitely on the queer spectrum, and loves every minute of it. To contact Stevie and read more of her reviews, visit her website, <http://www.steviescontentservices.net/>.

## The Lost Aphrodite

by Sonya Taaffe

*for Rose Lemberg*

Out of the lamplit galleries of Paros  
they cleaved me,  
in the sunlit dust of the sculptor's workshop  
carved me  
rounded breasts and thighs and hair still dripping  
as gold with paint as pollen of the Pythia's bees.  
Praxiteles, after you I was a goddess,  
but before your sand and chisels  
I was a mountain's heart.  
My fingers flush with cinnabar, my eyes  
stare past the harbor, blue into further blue.  
Headless, weather-eaten, unrecognizable,  
I will outlast the bright breath of you.

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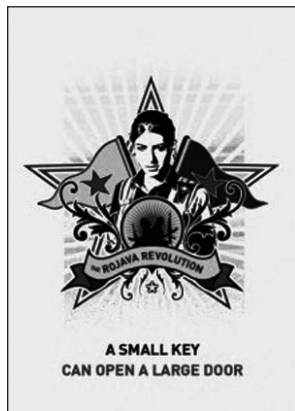
Sonya Taaffe's short fiction and award-winning poetry has appeared in multiple venues. Her latest collection is *Ghost Signs*. She is currently a senior poetry editor for *Strange Horizons*.

## ⚙️ This Small Book Must Travel Far and Fast: A Kurdish Struggle for Autonomy

*A Small Key Can Open a Large Door: The Rojava Revolution*, edited by Strangers in a Tangled Wilderness, Strangers in a Tangled Wilderness, 2015, 184 pp., \$15.00.

reviewed by Maria Velazquez

This book begins by mimicking the format of a U.S. Government document as it introduces the existence of a revolutionary movement that rejects nationalism and statehood.



...a book that makes the Kurdish struggle for autonomy its central focus, in contrast to other histories of the region that focus on the Kurds' oppression.

This is a deceptively tiny book. Only slightly bigger than one's spread palm, *A Small Key Can Open a Large Door* proves its own name right. From its first pages, *A Small Key* positions itself as the product of collective action. Beginning with "A Note from One of Many Editors," *A Small Key* centers its "stitch[ed]" together nature, highlighting that this anthology is a work of love and "fragments" representing the work of Kurdish revolutionaries and their allies across the world. Some of these fragments are truly ephemeral—snippets from listservs and lines of poetry and prose smuggled across rapidly shifting political borders. Even the regional map included in *A Small Key* reflects both the timeliness of this anthology and its ephemerality: its caption notes that the map was current as of November 2014.

*A Small Key* is conceived as both a manifesto and an archival project. In order to realize their lofty goals, the anarchist publishing collective of Strangers in a Tangled Wilderness begins with targets at the level of the everyday. The first few sections provide a brief overview of Rojava as a region, in a format reminiscent of the CIA World Factbook. This is both a useful introduction for the reader and a succinct way of making it clear that the neutrality of data included in those encyclopedic entries must be interrogated. In one entry the editors write, "Population: At the start of the Syrian civil war, Rojava was home to nearly 3.5 million people. Now it is home to a little over 2.5 million.... Nearly a million people have fled, many to refugee camps in Turkey and Iraq." This book begins by mimicking the format of a U.S. Government document as it introduces the existence of a revolutionary movement that rejects nationalism and statehood.

Immediately after this, the editors present a collectively written history of

the Kurdish people, highlighting the role ill-conceived military interventions over the past century have had in leading to the ongoing oppression of Kurdish people and all women in the region. This is both deeply unusual and reflective of the kind of radical decentering of historical narrative undergirding *A Small Key*, unlike the overall slant of the 2007 movie and 2003 book *Charlie Wilson's War: The Extraordinary Story of the Largest Covert Operation in History*, widely praised for its humanizing the mujahedeen supported by Reagan. In contrast to this narrative of benevolent American intervention, *A Small Key* states that the "Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) exists not because the United States protected the Kurds, but because they took U.S. and coalition aid and resources to prepare their own defense." This is important to emphasize for two reasons. First, this is a book that makes the Kurdish struggle for autonomy its central focus, in contrast to other histories of the region that focus on the Kurds' oppression. Second, placing emphasis on the emergence of the KRG (sometimes called Western Kurdistan or Syrian Kurdistan) presents a dramatically different characterization of the region's political landscape.

For example, both the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* have noted that one of the problems facing U.S. coalition-building in Syria has been the defection of U.S. trained locals. In one recent article in *The New Yorker*, trainees are described as feckless and unreliable cowards fleeing from ISIL. Arguing that Kurds are instead making use of that training to realize their own political goals is not only a bold move but seems to be a more accurate description of current events. In a November 11 press briefing, U.S. State Department Deputy Spokesperson Mark Toner expressed concern about the emergence

of Rojava as a semi-autonomous political entity. “I think we’re always—again, we’ve been very clear about our support for the YPD. They’ve been effective. But we also have talked about some of the caveats—that we don’t want them developing some kind of semi-autonomous zone. We remain committed to the unity and integrity of Syria, territorial integrity. We’re focused on advancing a genuine negotiated political transition in Syria.” Despite Rojava growing into “a pocket of stability” according to *Reuters*, the United States remains unwilling to support one of the few local successes against ISIL. Basically, Rojava is not rejecting the Syrian government so much as it is introducing a democratic confederation of local councils whose primary goals are to maintain regional stability, protect women’s rights, and empower a civilian populace for whom the Syrian civil war is but a new iteration of a centuries’ old conflict.

Ultimately, *A Small Key* is not a plea for aid. It is instead a call to arms made by equals and comrades. The political structure and integration of ecofeminist, socialist, and anarchist beliefs into the movement can offer inspiration to U.S.-based activists looking for an alternate mode of interacting with an oppressive state. This revolution is part of a global struggle, with connections to Zapatismo, the Spanish Revolution, and the Argentine Neighborhood Movement. It is also a heavily idealistic movement, one placing feminist principals regarding bodily autonomy and women’s political empowerment at its center.

I’m not sure it is a viable movement. In my work on U.S. military interventions in the Middle East and their connection to American social justice projects, I have consistently seen that projects like Rojava are deliberately undermined because of their perceived connection to a Communist threat. These Cold War concerns are simple costuming, a pretty mask to justify the ongoing imperialist and capitalist aim of exploiting a vulnerable region’s natural resources.

Rojava as a whole produces something like 60% of Syria’s grain, and Kobane

and Jazire, two of Rojava’s three subregions, have vast oil reserves. For the first time, Kurds have begun refining oil and negotiating its sale on the global market, making use of the technology left behind when multinational corporations abandoned the region. The idealist in me wants to cheer for an ethnic minority controlling the means of production. The realist in me is deeply concerned over the fate of a small confederacy of cantons with multiple state and financial interests invested in its failure. If this movement is to succeed, this small book must travel far and fast in its journey to find supporters.

**Further Reading:**

<http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/our-high-priced-mercenaries-in-syria>

<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2015/11/249394.htm#SYRIA>

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/01/22/us-syria-kurdistan-specialreport-idUSBREA0L17320140122#yWMIPo5bwF7ZutKb.97>

<http://news.yahoo.com/syrian-kurds-refine-oil-themselves-first-time-072900132.html>

<http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21656692-turkey-and-jordan-are-considering-setting-up-buffer-zones-war-scorched>

*The political structure and integration of ecofeminist, socialist, and anarchist beliefs into the movement can offer inspiration to U.S.-based activists looking for an alternate mode of interacting with an oppressive state.*

*If this movement is to succeed, this small book must travel far and fast in its journey to find supporters.*

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Maria Velazquez received her doctorate in American Studies from University of Maryland, College Park. Her dissertation focuses on belly dance and its use as an embodied political rhetoric post-9/11. When not thinking big thoughts connecting global politics to American wellness movements, she is an avid reader, writer, and fangirl for all things sci-fi and fantasy.

In 10<sup>th</sup> grade, my high school required me to take an art class, and I now owe a great debt to their graduation requirements. While I had previously considered myself a writer, I had not dreamed of calling myself an artist. “Drawing and Painting 1” taught me a different language and gave me a new way to communicate. Since then, visual art has enabled me to explore areas of my life that I struggle to convey with language. How do you define beauty when it is so varied, tender, and personal? How do you capture what it is to be powerless, yet feel in control? How does one experience a body that is weak and dying? How do you talk about wounds that were perpetrated before you could speak?

These are some of the questions that I explore in both my artwork and my scholarship. As a social welfare graduate student, I am deeply curious about theories of embodiment, gender and power, body-based discrimination, and mental health recovery. I use my art to

further my engagement with these topics; it deepens my own understanding, and I hope that it also communicates to others. I also use art to cope in times of struggle. It helps me to persevere, muddle through, and process grief.

The pieces in this series each deal with illness and embodiment in different forms and stages. When engaging with the body, I play with ideas of power/powerlessness, celebration/grief, and beauty/death. These pieces explore what it is to be female and feminine. My art questions the portrayal of some women’s bodies as hypersexual and others as asexual. Some of the pieces glorify illness. Some of the pieces speak of abuse. All of these pieces are influenced by socially constructed ideas of beauty, both implicitly and explicitly. Ultimately, I hope that my art can be a co-creation. I have brought some ideas to the canvas. You will bring your own perspectives and views, and hopefully we will both learn a little more.



*Girl Writing*



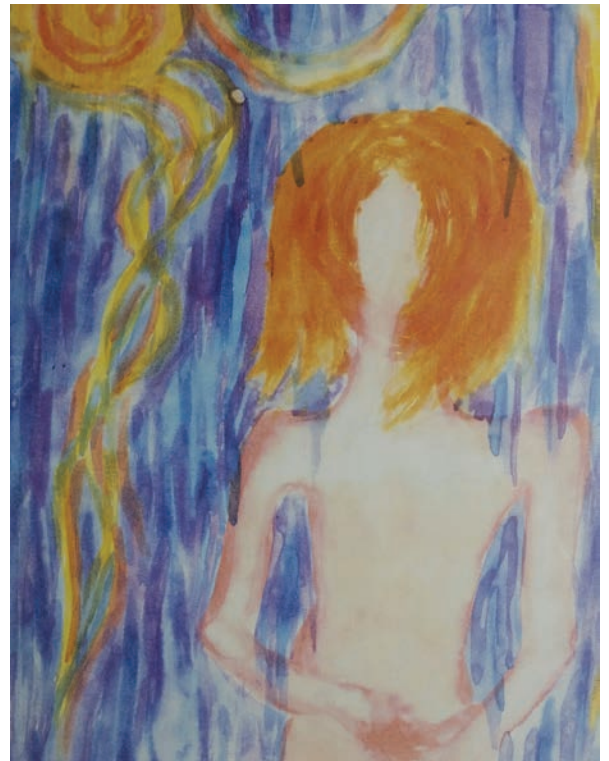
*You'll Understand When You're Older*



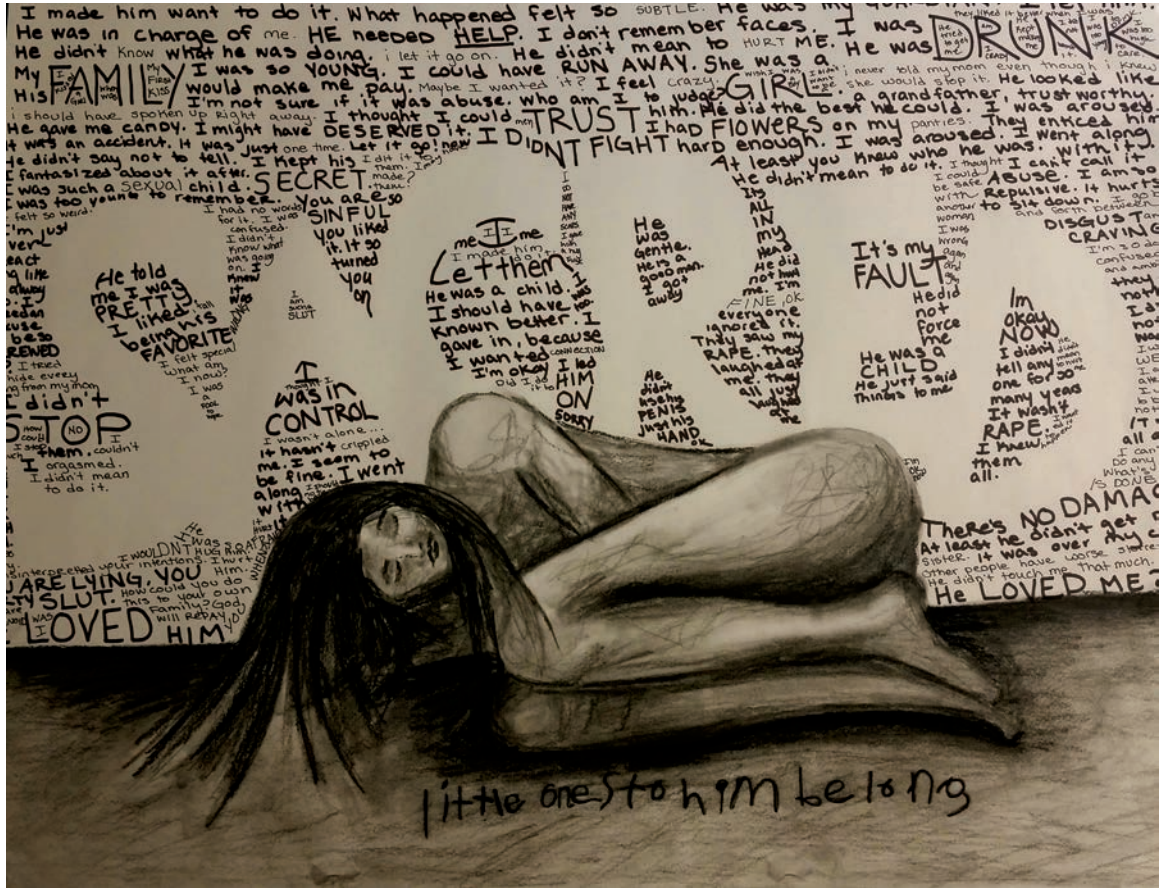
*Image Reflected*



*Iris*



*Maintenance*



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