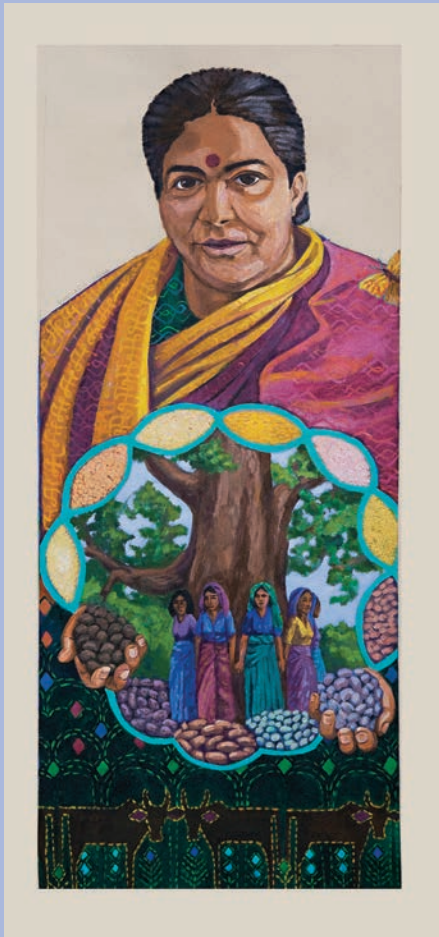


The Cascadia Subduction Zone

A LITERARY
QUARTERLY
2017 ☉ Vol. 7, No. 1

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After the Election: An ever-present emotional weight

by Anya DeNiro

As a transgender woman and a speculative fiction author, I've been striving to figure out what might be coming down the pike from a Trump regime. And from there, how to both (1) nurture and protect the progress we have already made, and (2) craft forward-looking solutions that assesses the chaos that is about to come with a clear head. The "feel" and texture of our current moment is like something from a science fiction novel gone off the rails.

I don't think there's anything new in saying this. But it's a difficult moment no matter how many times it's said. What I've noticed is the ever-present emotional weight of this Trumpian moment—friends and peers reporting anxiety and difficulty sleeping from the events that unfold around us. If speculative fiction is, to an extent, a way to "read through" current events, then how do we read through what's happening to us now?

I certainly don't have any easy or pat answers. All I really have are processes, daily practices, different constellations of mindfulness and activism. One thing that speculative fiction is really good at is telescoping historical moments from the macro to the micro very quickly, and this adeptness is a skill that will be sorely needed as we tend to ourselves, to our most vulnerable populations in our neighborhoods, and for people with whom we can make common cause half-way around the globe. We need to use these critical thinking and *writing* skills to make connections in a variety of ways; and moreover, make sure that these connections are coherent in their own right.

An apocalypse is not just a moment of destruction—it is also a *revealing*, and our global skein of capitalism has certainly had its intentions laid bare with this alliance of white nationalists and the usual cavalcade of plutocrats that has gained traction in 2016. The Republican Congress, for example, isn't particularly hiding the desires to gut the ACA, Medicare, *and* Social Security. Of

course, people who have been battling with these kleptocratic and racist forces for a long time, particularly people of color, have been speaking the truth of the matter for an equally long amount of time. The revelation has always been ongoing, and we need to honor—and read extremely closely—those stories and voices who have reckoned with this brutality already.

More specifically, as a trans woman and author, I'm acutely aware of the lack of published stories out there *for* other trans and non-binary people (not just as spectacle for cis readers, however well-meaning). This means finding room and doing the heavy lifting for trans writers to reach a full, healthy audience—an audience that is desperate for stories that actually resemble the contours of their lives. The urgency for this to happen in the age of Trump is stark. Trans people are an easy target (and as usual, trans people of color are going to bear the brunt of this) for legislative rollbacks of basic rights and fear mongering, all to make transgender and nonbinary populations appear as subhuman. One only has to see how quickly LGBT culture has been brutally suppressed (though it still, amazingly, thrives in the margins and shadows) in Putin's Russia in the last few years to realize that it can happen here as well. These aren't just stories, then—these are potential lifelines for trans and non-binary people in situations that might feel hopeless and fraught with violence against them. So these lifelines need to be written, they need to be distributed, and they need to be actually found by the readers who need them. This all requires an ecosystem of readers, reviewers, publishers, and writers, trans *and* cis, who are committed to making this happen.

One thing that speculative fiction is really good at is telescoping historical moments from the macro to the micro very quickly, and this adeptness is a skill that will be sorely needed....

An apocalypse is not just a moment of destruction—it is also a revealing, and our global skein of capitalism has certainly had its intentions laid bare....

Anya Johanna DeNiro is a writer who lives in Minnesota. Her work has appeared in *Asimov's*, *Strange Horizons*, *One Story*, *One Teen Story*, *Persistent Visions*, and elsewhere. She is currently writing young adult novels with young trans women as protagonists.



Before Helicopter-Heads Arrived

Mark Rich

Before helicopter-heads arrived
we walked dull pavement, shared space
with slowed cars, and then made traffic
be our own, alone. Our feet
claimed avenues and intersections
and their crumpled wrappers, wheel-scraped coins,
and worn-short city grasses, green in cracks.
We spread ourselves as lightly as we could,
with bending knees beneath breasts heavy
with but single heart apiece
from all that beat within
this many-hearted beast
that, salamandrine, had crawled forth this day.
For fire, some say gunfire,
had brought about its birth.

To rhythms set by footfalls
murmurs passed between us,
sharing struggles taking in
the news. Soapboxers called out antidotes
to morning buzzbox toxins
that fat wallets paid
to have sleek whitemasks kiss into our ears.

Long banners rippled soft percussion,
at each breeze-touch. Hand-scrawled
placards flapped. Words stitched us
into this unlikely quilt
that crept with unexpected life.

A patchwork piece, I entered a space
where senses unmoored. A mist rose,
for a heartbeat. Just behind me
I heard doors close—not that any forms
loomed near save walking ones like mine.
Yet in that passage, in that throng,
a girl appeared, as through a doorway,
lone but seemingly unlonely.
How she then acquired a parent
who had never had a child
and never thought to have one, I cannot say.
When this child's eyes and mine met,
a binding strand stretched instantly,
making me gasp as I grasped it
like thing forgotten. Guarding against
frays or holes within this shifting weave
we intertwined our fingers.

Years had passed since I last
pulled out childhood crayons
to draw lines between points
pressing on the space I called my life,
and then to color in

whatever pictures took shape
in among the seeming disconnections.
I had read so many bold-font bold lies
that each newspaper word
reflected on my deadened eye,
not eye on word. Sweet soporifics
wafted around sofa, bed, and desk.
Always, a plastic table-muse
revived old tunes, to drone them dead again.

When friends said, "Walk with us,
and help us fill our city's streets,"
I humored them and their small gathering,
then found myself within a milling,
massing flow—and lost myself in thoughts
that played between those round-about.
I floated like twig caught and turned
by stream-eddies. I woke to how
our undirected shiftings, back and forth
and to and fro, might alter scores
on tally sheets and balances in ledgers,
even when such truths, or otherwise,
behind high-rising steel and glass facades,
had been filed in secrecy,
sealed with bureaucratic earwax,
and, in public, overlooked
in smiling ways by those who oversee.
Our motions, if commencing in
in-common thoughts, may write upon the world,
if only in ink shoe-scuffed onto black roads.
While we learn from indecisive strayings,
when a moment coalesces
our small, separated strengths
combine and concentrate.
And what abides, and can be called abiding?
Only what coheres
when all else falls apart.
These thoughts rose, as my child and I
moved through this unchaotic non-confusion
in which neither one felt cast adrift—
not she, not I.

When eyes lock into outward outlooks,
losing inward focusings,
a frailty may arrive, like leaf on breeze—
in manner unlike blow
from fingers fisted on a matter
that escaped us times before;
in manner, rather, like a whisper
carrying what fist might clench
but tensed not quite with anger.



Some rely on stridency
in times when smaller souls impose on larger.
Others forego such reliance,
if moved by a force
much like the brushing-past
a moment makes upon unrippled thought—
so that this frailty, trembling,
stretches and grows that it might fill
what there is in air,
and is in quiet.

When a child creates a parent,
an old wholeness, cracking,
scatters pieces seeking places.
We are cells within.
Are segments in a sequence.
Are our own belongings
to some greater other.
Are our longings to join with a self
that we might share without possessing.

Other days, along these ways,
pedestrians seemed ill at ease
amidst hard shoulders, frowns, and hurried steps.
Expressions brightened, now, when gazes met,
as though the flow itself breathed out a name
all shared. The cool, enclosing grasp
that moved as we moved, and removed us
from mistakes we made about ourselves,
pronounced us kin.

One moment, pigeons toed between our feet
in cooing calm—and in the next, burst skyward
in pale-gray wing-flurries. Down
like over-eager nightfall
fell the squalling squad
with supramittal rods
unsheathed, aglow, pulsating,
clenched in leathered claws.
They spiraled low into the flowing beast
to press upon its cells
the fact that those who go
unrotored and unhelmeted,
if not complaisant, must comply.
Their lifted wands, tips hissing, spitting,
struck joints, splitting limbs
and snapping tails from spines, collars from necks.
My head, at chattel-prodding, whirled to ground.
Reduced to twitching piles,
our bruise-blued fleshy fragments came to rest
where unresistingly we dropped them,
and where unresistingly we dropped,
like rubbish carelessly forgotten
on our city square.

Some streets may never hear their loud descent.
Yet all have seen their faceless domes
stare down from nighttime skies,
with burning eyes behind glass shields
that men, and, some say, women, too, look through—
without it being theirs to use the glass
to turn their gazes back within.
As though a leaf might float somewhere
never to be disturbed.

Upon those who had coalesced
within the flow, the helicopter-heads
now turned. Through red haze, one ear flat
to tarmac, I watched five surround my daughter,
batting her apart.
Her pieces in their arms,
vanes whined above their bullet brows
to beat anti-silence shockwaves
against outcries from working windpipes
in the few, and scratchings at cement
from all our fingernails.
They lifted off.

Yet binding strands that stretched,
which we had never known before,
which must have waited in us to be found,
which being larger than us held us,
still stretched without weakening.
While one may be a broken body,
two may cohere, in a place
where breaks and separations have no being.
That which lies between
exists there—as did, this day, what I now was,
as created by a child—
as if in air, at even such a moment
as this seemed to be,
with all the air removed.

Mark Rich is the author
of *C.M. Kornbluth: The
Life and Works of a Science
Fiction Visionary*. He lives
in Wisconsin.





The Second Annual James Tiptree Jr. Symposium: Celebrating Ursula K. Le Guin

by L. Timmel Duchamp

Despite its academic setting, the University of Oregon Libraries' second Tiptree Symposium from beginning to end was all about affect and ethos, not high theory or the arcane intricacies of literary criticism. Some of that difference was due to the people present and the schedule of programming, some of it due to the unforeseen timing of the event.

“Lesson from Ursula Le Guin:
Sometimes if you don't fit in the
world, the world has to change.”

—Karen Joy Fowler

“Symposium,” like “conference,” is a dry word liable to conjure an image of philosophers in suits lecturing one another, not Plato's depiction of beautiful young males in short tunics lolling on divans, sipping wine as they argue with Socrates about the meaning of goodness, beauty, and love. These days, it usually denotes a conference with a primary topic and a single track of programming everyone can attend. Despite its academic setting, the University of Oregon Libraries' second Tiptree Symposium from beginning to end was all about affect and ethos, not high theory or the arcane intricacies of literary criticism. Some of that difference was due to the people present and the schedule of programming, some of it due to the unforeseen timing of the event.

When Kath and I set out for Eugene Thursday morning, car loaded with Aqueduct Press books, I—imagining a funeral gathering of friends and associates in pain—harbored a dull wish that we were not committed to attend, while Kath—imagining the comfort and renewal to be had from being with friends and associates facing fear and struggle with fierce determination—declared she was looking forward to a convergence that could, she felt, be only energizing. Shortly after we entered heavy I-5 traffic, we learned that the southbound lanes ahead had been blocked for hours, and would be for hours more. No feasible detour was possible. When we stopped at the rest area just short of the back-up of traffic, we ran into Eileen Gunn, and I realized that many others driving down from Seattle were in the same dismal boat. Clearly, misery doesn't always love company, for it gave me no comfort to discover that I would not be the only one to miss the Sally Miller Gearhart

Lesbian Lecture Alexis Lothian was scheduled to give that afternoon at four. Glum and grumpy, I posted the situation to Facebook, and Alexis generously offered to send me a copy of her paper. This call-and-response was a sign of what was to follow.

Although we missed Alexis's lecture, we arrived in time to have dinner with a score of friends. No one mentioned the election or speculated about life in the near future. As proved to be the case all weekend, some of the hugs I shared were long, silent communications. Perhaps because the table was so long (and a few people had to sit at an overflow table), the conversation couldn't be general and involved a lot of tête-à-têtes. I began the evening benumbed and dull, but extended conversation with Brian Attebery, seated beside me, woke me. I knew, then, that I would be “up” to the symposium, no matter my feeling that a cold, heavy boulder had taken up permanent residence in my belly.

The next morning, as the UO Bookstore set up their tables in Straub Hall, in the lobby outside the auditorium where the symposium would be held, I helped Kath and other Aqueductistas set up Aqueduct's tables and occasionally noted and sometimes greeted arrivals, most of whom made a beeline for the coffee urns arranged nearby. I've no idea what the actual attendance figure was (the auditorium being too large for our gathering), but I think, contrary to my expectations, that it was lower than last year's. Since Aqueduct's sales had plummeted in mid-October, I had no idea whether we'd sell any of the books we'd brought. (We did. Including all the copies of Nisi Shawl's *Everfair* she'd brought for sale.)

The symposium's organizers allowed ample time for attendees to get coffee and circulate. The social atmosphere was much as I'd expected. Anya DeNiro's phrase (in her essay in this issue) characterizes it perfectly, heavy, as it was, with

No one mentioned the election or speculated about life in the near future. As proved to be the case all weekend, some of the hugs I shared were long, silent communications.



“the ever-present emotional weight” in our very exhalations. One old friend could not summon up a smile for me and said, simply, that they’d been strong-armed into coming by their spouse and, disembarking from the plane in Eugene that morning had had the powerful urge to immediately board another plane home. Again, no one explicitly mentioned the election.

Though I will note a few of the things panelists and speakers said, I won’t describe all the panels and talks in extensive detail; the University will likely provide podcasts of them (as they did with the first Tiptree Symposium), and Brian Attebery, who gave the closing keynote address, has already made his paper available online at Tor.com (<http://www.tor.com/author/brian-attebery/>). The symposium kicked off with an introduction by Carol Stabile, who thanked Linda Long for organizing the event. Ursula Le Guin was present in the audience for the first day, but did not participate in the programming.

The first panel, “Ursula K. Le Guin and the Field of Feminist Science Fiction,” moderated by Julie Phillips, featured panelists Karen Joy Fowler, Suzy McKee Charnas, Debbie Notkin, Vonda N. McIntyre, and Molly Gloss. Julie related an anecdote about how, decades ago, when Ursula talked to her college class she asked Ursula why she didn’t write much about women. Ursula, Julie said, replied that she didn’t know how, that she had to “figure out how to do that.” And of course, as we know, Ursula did indeed “figure out how to do that.” “One of the most important things Ursula K. Le Guin has done is think about how to write women,” Julie observed.

Each panelist talked about their first encounters with Ursula and with Ursula’s fiction. Suzy remarked, “*The Left Hand of Darkness* was a bombshell for me. Its mainstream success told me there was an actual readership out there for a different kind of fiction (sf about things that are not mechanical, imperial, or explorational), stories about communities in an sfnal world. ‘Oh, that’s what you can do with this stuff. I can try to do that.’”

Julie noted that in the sixties and seventies sf writers found it difficult to write real women—but that “sf was this place where there was a huge potential for stories about women.” Karen added: “The lack of real women characters in books was a problem in literary fiction as well as sf.” Vonda said that she went through a period of intense fury when she realized what had been done to her. Molly commented that she wrote *The Jump-off Creek* (in the 1980s) because she wanted to write the novel she wanted to read—a western where a woman was the hero; feminism and its rearrangement of her worldview preceded her beginning to write. She had wonderful models of women characters to work from. Suzy: “It was all about getting out of that suit of armor and then realizing I didn’t need it. ‘What have you been doing to *us*. The *us* was incredibly important.” Debbie: “*Millennial Women* (ed. Virginia Kidd, 1978) opens with a poem by Marge Piercy about learning to look at women.” (Actually, the poem is by Marilyn Hacker.) Suzy: “You have to take control of the lens so that you can see what others aren’t seeing.” Julie: “But you can’t do that by yourself.” Molly recalled: “‘The Day before the Revolution’ is probably the first story I read with an elderly woman as the protagonist.” Which prompted Debbie to recall Ursula’s Guest of Honor Speech at WisCon 20, titled “Report from the Planet of Geriatrics.” “Ursula has done a spectacular job focusing on perspectives of aging.” Karen said that she loves how sf is in conversation, and how Ursula’s books are in conversation with one another, her later books reconsidering her earlier books. “The great pleasure of reading her is seeing how she’s rethought things. It gives one freedom, as a writer, to change and reconsider.”

Members of the audience participated in this panel, too. “What is the connection between community and freedom?” one asked. Debbie: “If you have others to support you, it’s easier.” Vonda: “The flip side is the sf novel with a unique hero who single-handedly survives and triumphs.” Karen: “There’s a safety element that allows some of us, who are

“One of the most important things Ursula K. Le Guin has done is think about how to write women,” Julie observed.

“The great pleasure of reading her is seeing how she’s rethought things. It gives one freedom, as a writer, to change and reconsider.”



Harder questions from the audience: "Please talk about how and why so many people were excluded in the '70s and '80s from the feminist sf community; also why were feminist sf spaces so white?" The responses to these were pained and halting.

less brave, to go forward." Suzy: "Susan Wood made the crucial act at WorldCon of saying that women have things to say to one another." Harder questions from the audience: "Please talk about how and why so many people were excluded in the '70s and '80s from the feminist sf community; also why were feminist sf spaces so white?" The responses to these were pained and halting. Another person asked about the distinction between fantasy and sf and their gendering. My final notes for the panel record Molly saying "I've written my last novel—I don't have anything left to say through fiction," and Karen saying that she will keep writing for as long as it's fun.

The symposium broke for lunch, followed by book signings, and resumed at two with a panel of Edmond Chang's students discussing *The Word for World Is Forest*, moderated by Philip Scher. I was particularly interested in their discussion of passages in the novel illuminating the issue of whether the discourse of science has the potential to be used for empathy as well as for objectification.

At 3:30, Pat Murphy introduced Karen Joy Fowler, who delivered "Ursula Le Guin and the Larger Reality," a keynote talk. If one wanted a subtitle for this talk, it might be "Ursula Le Guin's Influence on the Work and Thought of Karen Joy Fowler." Since I find the work and thought of Karen Joy Fowler deeply fascinating, the subject of Ursula's influence on them can only be absorbing and irresistible. "The idea of a larger reality is something I take from Ursula," Karen declared. She amplified: "I love Ursula Le Guin's insistence on the imagination and the need to include it in the larger reality of our lives." Le Guin is inextricably bound up with who Karen is. "I wouldn't be the same person I am if I had not read Ursula's work." In the 1970s Karen was an anti-war activist and a student of political science in area studies; she read political philosophy to find a grand theory to explain the world. Into that mix came second-wave feminism. She noted that she shares with Ursula the privilege of being the daughter of an academic father, such that much was expected of

each. To paraphrase Karen's passionate reflections: Second-wave feminism was profoundly revolutionary, directed at overturning everything, completely incompatible with capitalism and imperialism, which it knew would end. Everything would be different, from the family outward. Reading Ursula was a powerful part of that whole opening of my mind. Ursula's work gave me a sense of a larger reality—making me feel the careful thinking that went into creating a larger reality. I want there to be moments in my fiction in which the world itself is speaking for itself.

Karen went quickly from Ursula's work to that of other women writing sf—Vonda N. McIntyre, Joanna Russ, Kate Wilhelm, Suzy McKee Charnas—inspired by their brilliance. She read Ursula backwards, starting from *Left Hand*. "I could see her coming to the same issue I'd come to in a parallel development. All of that was fundamental to me. I noticed what a useful tool sf was for asking questions." Karen first met Ursula at UC Davis—at Ursula's request. "I don't think I've ever been happier than I was that day." She was completely charmed by Ursula. "We did not talk about sales, publishers, etc. [as other writers she had met did almost exclusively]. I was much reassured that Ursula was a successful writer whose children weren't suffering because of it."

The next part of Karen's talk related "things I think I know about Ursula" and "some of the things in her work that I'm thinking about now." Karen talked about Ursula's enormous courage and great enthusiasms, and her strong opinions. She observed that although she sometimes likes books Ursula doesn't, she knows that if Ursula likes a book, she will too. Ursula is witty and has a lively mind. "A lot of her wit is language-based." Ursula is a very noticing person. Ursula notices where she is. She's very alive to the natural world. She has a thoughtful relationship with animals. She talks to birds; birds talk back to her. She is a great ambassador for fantasy and science fiction. And Karen has learned from Ursula,

Ursula notices where she is. She's very alive to the natural world. She has a thoughtful relationship with animals. She talks to birds; birds talk back to her.



“Sometimes if you don’t fit in the world, the world has to change.”

“Ever since the Iraq war, I’ve been upset about the power of the war narrative,” Karen said. So she’s been thinking about Ursula’s carrier bag of fiction, trying to create a way of telling stories that would be better for us. Ursula compares the male anxiety of influence with feminist writers calling on forgotten ancestors who’ve done interesting work before us. Perhaps, Karen wryly observed, the reason “second-wave” feminists were so respectful of “first-wave” feminists is that all the first-wavers were dead and not irritatingly present.

Karen’s talk concluded with this: “The book of Ursula’s I reread the most is *Changing Planes*.” She plans to read from it at Santa Cruz’s Day of Resistance (Jan. 15, 2017).

Karen’s talk was followed by a tantalizing, inspiring trailer of *Worlds of Ursula K. Le Guin*. The symposium then moved to the Knight Library’s Paulson Reading Room, where a reception was held. There attendees feasted on yummy hors d’oeuvres and the special exhibits displaying Ursula’s drawings, letters, and manuscript pages under glass. Later that evening, the Tiptree Motherboard hosted a party.

“What is right is emergent.
Experimenting is crucial—we don’t
do enough experimenting.”
—adrienne maree brown

The second day of the symposium, Saturday, was something else. If the first day tended to be retrospective, sober, and reflective, the second day was powerful, emotional, and energizing: that is to say, what Kath had been expecting all along. The day opened with a panel moderated by Alexis Lothian, “Speculative Gender and *The Left Hand of Darkness*,” featuring panelists Aren Aizura, micha cárdenas, and Tuesday Smillie, a panel that more than once thrilled me with a sense of that magical intersection between fictional speculation and a reality manifested decades later; more than once that magical intersection moved me to tears.

(Unfortunately, I missed some of what Alexis, Aren, and Tuesday said because they spoke so quickly; micha, I surmise, sacrificed some of her prepared text in favor of emphasis and clarity, to excellent effect.) Alexis began by noting of *Left Hand of Darkness*, “It’s a thought experiment—not a representation of trans society or community of today.”

Tuesday Smillie, a trans woman and artist, who has a book on transgender and transnationality forthcoming, presented first. The entire effect of her talk can’t really be described, since the paper she read was accompanied by evocative slides of collages. Tuesday began by claiming *Left Hand* as a proto-trans feminist text and quoted Le Guin: “I eliminated gender to see what was left, which would be simply human.” She noted some of the problematic aspects of the novel—its use of “he” as gender-neutral, its assumption of a biological (sex) binary rather than a spectrum, its heteronormativity, and its unimaginative, uncreative societal and government institutions. Tuesday noted that that second-wave feminists at the time criticized the first and fourth of these problems, resulting in Le Guin’s concession that she could have been more creative with the structures of government, though she continued to insist that “he” is the gender-neutral pronoun. Later, in “Is Gender Necessary? Redux” (1976), Le Guin addressed some of these problems (most notably the vexed usage of “he”) but never addressed the biological binary. Tuesday expressed deep interest in Le Guin’s trajectory of shifting political positions, showed slides of collages she had made, and concluded: World-building is a collective process. We look to Le Guin as a model for radical progress.

Aren Aizura noted that although he’d been on testosterone for 12 years, he gave birth to a daughter, named Kittatinny (after Joanna Russ’s novel), two years ago. He and his partner, both trans, assumed there would be no gendered division of labor. What they learned, when having a child together, was that regardless of one’s individual attitudes and efforts, societal institutions force parents into a gen-

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Aren Aizura...and his partner, both trans, assumed there would be no gendered division of labor. What they learned, when having a child together, was that regardless of one’s individual attitudes and efforts, societal institutions force parents into a gendered division of labor.



Institutional structures are all gendered, actively devaluing the work of caring. The structural changes, Aren concluded, are up to us.

After the election, she found herself asking: How do we flex the muscle of imagination to get us through this moment? We have to become even more vigilant in asserting our world view. We need to take wisdom from the natural world: how are species surviving and flourishing? "Go roaches!" she cheered.

dered division of labor. Aren reviewed a few of the ways in which the pressure to accommodate the needs of the highest-paying job in the couple resulted, in spite of all their strong, conscious intentions, in creating a gendered division of labor between them. With this in mind, Aren went back to look anew at Gethen, the presumably genderless society found in *Left Hand of Darkness*. He begins by noting that on Gethen, everybody gets time off to have sex, "which is amazing." But having sex itself isn't mentioned much in the novel and is described in a heterosexual way. The work of caring is not devalued by Gethenians, while it is by Genly-Ai. Genly-Ai doesn't understand Estraven's altruism. Genly-Ai sees Estraven as feminine, and Estraven sees Genly-Ai as masculine. In short, Aren argues, despite the lack of designated gender, one can nevertheless see the operations of gender on Gethen. Throughout history particular couples have always figured out ways of relating that aren't gendered (in the sense of division of labor). But what individual couples do is embedded in a structural context that insists on a gendered division of labor. Institutional structures are all gendered, actively devaluing the work of caring. The structural changes, Aren concluded, are up to us.

As micha cárdenas delivered her paper, lines of poetry appeared on the screen above and behind her. (The powerful, moving poetry, of which we were shown a fragment, can be found in her hybrid poetry/bioart project, "Pregnancy: Reproductive Futures in Trans of Color Feminism" in *TSQ* 2016 Vol. 3, 1-2; a pdf of the project can be found at <http://tsq.dukejournals.org/content/3/1-2/48.abstract>). Le Guin imagines a world without rape and without war, micha said, while in our world a serial rapist has just been elected POTUS. The year when gender-queer, as on Gethen, is the norm is still in the future. To imagine people who change gender, Le Guin had to imagine another world. Did Le Guin know that people were already receiving gender treatment at the time she wrote *Left Hand of Dark-*

ness? It's wrong, micha said, to say that transgender people are "new." She noted that instances of sex reassignment surgery occurred in Germany in the 1930s; in Berlin in 1931 Dora Richter became the first known person to undergo vaginoplasty. Other operations followed. Sex hormone treatment in the US dates from 1948. Nevertheless, in 1973, a trans activist speaking at an LGBT event had to force her way onto the stage. Micha cited Emi Koyama's "Transfeminist Manifesto" proposing transfeminism, and she mentioned a couple of the trans women who have long been active in sf, Rachel Pollack and Jessica Amanda Salmonson. Although micha worries that *Left Hand* could contribute to the invisibility of actual transgender people, she praised Le Guin as a visionary in a line of gender theorists. "My own work resonates with Aren's discussion," she said. "Doctors tell trans women that if you want babies, don't take hormones. The medical establishment tell trans women they will be sterile. This is a lie." Trans women, she concluded, need to be scientists. The final image on the screen was of sperm on a slide under the microscope.

A second panel was squeezed in Saturday morning, "Le Guin's Fiction as Inspiration for Activism," moderated by Joan Haran, featuring Grace Dillon and adrienne maree brown. The first speaker, adrienne, who possesses a vibrant energy that ran through the audience like a jolt of glucose mainlining straight into our brains, introduced herself as from Detroit, "a post-apocalyptic city where brown and black peoples have been experimenting in post-capitalist living," and identified herself as a scholar, not an academic, who has worked on Octavia Butler, and a Star Trek fan. She found Octavia Butler's work transformative. Later, she discovered Le Guin. "Le Guin is someone like me," she said. "Someone who wanted to challenge everything about the world, the way I do." As an activist in direct-action, nonviolent disobedience, and in electoral politics, she read sf in the closet because she didn't know how to tell other political activists to read sf. She wanted particularly to tell



them about *The Dispossessed*, which “does a beautiful job presenting a picture of what it takes to achieve complete freedom.” After the election, she found herself asking: How do we flex the muscle of imagination to get us through this moment? We have to become even more vigilant in asserting our world view. We need to take wisdom from the natural world: how are species surviving and flourishing? “Go roaches!” she cheered. Roaches are collaborative collective creatures. “Stop with the rampant individualism!” She characterized herself as a “love and pleasure activist.” “The body learns on *yes*,” she advised us. To create change, we need to switch from shaming to inviting, and make justice work pleasurable. How, she asked, do we transform our concept of pleasure?

Grace Dillon’s presence was both calm and intense, gentle and insistent. She began with the greeting, “I see the light in you,” which in Anishinaabe, her native tongue, means “Hello.” (Throughout her talk, Grace juxtaposed English and Anishinaabe.) Grace described growing up in the woods, *sans* plumbing, with lots of candles and fire. She learned from her father how to build a birch-skin canoe. She had no television or theaters, so no concept of Star Trek. Living in a pacifist, anarchist community, *The Dispossessed* appealed strongly to her. She spoke about the widespread need for water protectors. “Our theory,” she said, “is entangled with practice at all times.” In her tribe, the heart is in the head—the seat of imaginative power and visions. Grace studied 16th-century history in order to learn the history of her tribe’s written language—a form of hieroglyphics originating in the first century of the Common Era.

Joan: “Both panelists independently expressed the joy they found in a powerful text [*The Dispossessed*]. I’m really struck by the importance of love and pleasure in *The Dispossessed*. And by the difference between radical love—recognition and generosity—vs the love that can be turned to hate.

Adrienne: “We don’t know. We don’t know. Right is emergent. Experimenting

is crucial—we don’t do enough experimenting.” We need to start smaller, she said. We need to stop lying. We’re always lying. We don’t need to laugh if someone you’re with is laughing. “We’re slowly dying of reform.” She warned: the paradigm of right vs. wrong is no longer useful. She concluded, “I survived, I adapted.”

The remainder of the symposium was infused with positive energy. I went off to lunch with Julie Phillips (during which we picked up our on-going conversational threads), talking at such length that we missed the first two-thirds of Kelly Sue DeConnick and Ben Saunders’s conversation “New Directions in Feminist Science Fiction.” (Fortunately for me, they ran well over the allotted time.) Kelly characterized her work on *Bitch Planet* as all about rage. She told of how her first approach to race in *Bitch Planet* was “cowardly,” such that she began by making all the prisoners in her planet prison white and the guards black. Then she was confronted by Danielle, who informed her that black women are incarcerated at three times the rate of white women. When she expressed timidity about writing women of color, Danielle told her “I trust you as a *writer*.” That formulation helped carry her through. She noted that at the back of the comic is a 14-page feminist zine, in which women write about issues that have arisen in the comics, a feature with tremendous appeal.

Next, Julie Phillips introduced Brian Attebery, who read his paper, “The James Tiptree Jr. Book Club: A Mitochondrial Theory of Fiction.” (The paper can be found at the link provided above.) Brian proposed a new metaphor for reading sf (which is endlessly allusive, sometimes overwhelmingly, as in Nike Sulway’s “The Karen Joy Fowler Book Club”). Circulation, he argued, is part of the point of intertextuality. Mitochondria are part of us, but also are not. They have their own DNA and RNA; but we’re completely dependent on them for oxygen. And mitochondria come only from mothers, through ova. We’re colonies of commensals. Mitochondria are a sort of living material that communicates con-

Grace Dillon’s presence was both calm and intense, gentle and insistent... Living in a pacifist, anarchist community, The Dispossessed appealed strongly to her. She spoke about the widespread need for water protectors.

Kelly Sue DeConnick... told of how her first approach to race in Bitch Planet was “cowardly,” such that she began by making all the prisoners in her planet prison white and the guards black.

Cont. on p. 10



James Tiptree Jr.
Symposium

(cont. from p. 9)

L. Timmel Duchamp is the author of the Marq'ssan Cycle, *Love's Body*, *Dancing in Time*, and *Never at Home*. Her new novel, *The Waterdancer's World*, was released last fall.

tinually with the organism around it and shares needs and purposes with its host. It remains itself but is part of its host. A single act of reference, Brian declared, is a negotiation, a history, a set of connections. He noted: works of feminist sf thicken one another through such references. To which I can only say: Amen.

The symposium continued for an hour longer with an intense discussion by the audience, moderated by Carol Stabile, about the future of the Tiptree Symposium; a considerable portion of the audience participated in this. The discussion touched on resources (which Carol said were drying up), publicity, organizational structure, and two questions: What didn't get said? And what should we do next year? Since there were numerous people of great experience in the

audience knowledgeable about organizing conferences and conventions, some concrete suggestions for organizational strategies were offered. Among those experienced hands, Jeanne Gomoll said, "You have a community here that would like to get involved; the Tiptree motherboard would love to take over your publicity" (which was frankly subpar this year). And Grace Dillon offered to bring Portland State University resources into the picture.

By the end, I knew that most of those present considered the Tiptree Symposium not supplemental, but of vital significance. Thank you, Linda Long and the University of Oregon Libraries.

Continuity Imperative

by Bogi Takács

Engineer
hands untying neural tubes tentacles
straps
the ship must fly;
the bindings must hold

clasp together
matching ends;
weep fingers shaking
unfold flaps
pick out delicately, from the gore
a kernel that remains

biological material

connect; fuse
pray
bite skin on lips
fuss / cuss
pretend to know
improvise a non-
permanent solution

translucent blood flowing
gathering in puddles
smears on the fabric
of coveralls;

a coughing sound
scraping on the edge of
the human—
unqualified
without certifications
make do;

someone else's
field of expertise

but the ship must—

later they will thank
be grateful
yet it is now
always the now.

because the ship must

Bogi Takács is a Hungarian Jewish agender trans person and a resident alien in the United States. Eir fiction and poetry has appeared in a variety of venues like *Strange Horizons*, *Apex*, *Clarkesworld*, and *Lightspeed*. You can find em on Twitter as @bogiperson, and e also blogs at <http://www.bogireadstheworld.com>.



The Firebird's Revenge

Sonya Taaffe

So you heard the stories, clever boy,
of the orchard of golden apples
and the bird with eyes of fire on its tail
and the king with too many daughters and not enough wives.
Listen to the princess? Bold boy,
no woman turns your ear
into her playbook,
not your mother in her mud-trodden shoes,
not the bone-cracking witch your sisters played at being,
not even your future bride.
To steal a firebird's feather
takes the strength of a man,
a king someday
with sons and soldiers, his hand on the heart of the world.
Far-sighted boy,
I can see my feather burning
through forests and mountains,
stubbled fields and freezing rivers,
the cracks of wind-locked shutters
and the soot of winter-caged smoke.
It fires the air with the pure roar of a furnace,
streams like X-ray through your bones.
Night and day your house burns like a skull
with neither fire nor ashes,
only the endless light
until you sleep no more, dreaming
my gaze on your skin.
Pray God in the faces of peeling icons
to take it from you,
douse it like a candle, put it out like a living eye—
Long-lived boy,
you know it is yours to keep.

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



Testosterone Rex: Myths of Sex, Science, and Society, by Cordelia Fine,
W.W. Norton & Co., January 2017, 272 pp., \$26.95

reviewed by Nancy Jane Moore

[O]nce we realize that testosterone isn't the problem, she concludes, the issue becomes whether we really want sexual equality.

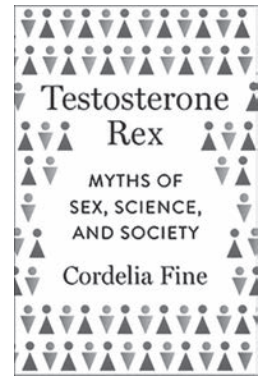
Cordelia Fine could have had a great career as a humor writer or stand-up comic if she had not become a psychologist. In *Testosterone Rex: Myths of Sex, Science, and Society*, she not only dismantles the myth that hormones are destiny, but also provides her readers with witty observations, some of which can be put to good use in puncturing misogynists. For example, she reports that, when she is identified as the author of a book on how the brains of men and women don't differ much (*Delusions of Gender*), people usually look startled and ask her if she'd deny that there are other differences between the sexes.

"I'm always tempted to fix my interrogator in the grip of a steely gaze and pronounce briskly, 'Certainly! Testes are merely a social construction.'"

Her sense of humor coupled with her excellent writing makes it easy for readers to grapple with the serious science she discusses in *Testosterone Rex*, science that thoroughly debunks the myth that the greater presence of testosterone in man explains inequities between the sexes in society. And once we realize that testosterone isn't the problem, she concludes, the issue becomes whether we really want sexual equality. While she says she's never heard anyone say, "we've had sex inequality for thousands of years and I kind of like it," I suspect she knows that is the real reason the testosterone myth has such staying power.

The "men can't help their biological destiny" explanations are rooted in junk science, and Fine systematically points to the research that destroys them. She starts with a fruit fly experiment conducted by Angus Bateman in the 1940s that purported to show promiscuous male flies had more reproductive success. This was considered the gold standard for explaining promiscuous men/monogamous women for a half century.

But a recent re-analysis of Bateman's data found "no serious statistical basis



for his conclusion" that female reproductive success didn't increase with promiscuity. In fact, Fine tells us, if he'd done the same analysis himself, he could have been the first to show reproductive benefits from female promiscuity.

Then there's a point very relevant to the current fight to protect women's reproductive rights in the U.S. Human sex is not just about reproduction. Fine quotes anthropologist Jonathan Marks on that subject:

To confuse human (cultural) sexuality and (natural) reproduction is classically pseudo-scientific. Of course sexuality is for reproduction—if you're a lemur. If you're a human, sexuality is far more than for reproduction; that is what evolution has done for human nature.

According to Fine, Marks goes on to observe, "if you imagine sex to be biological rather than bio-cultural, you're probably not going to have much of it." Not only is Fine funny on her own; she also has a gift for finding humor in other scientists.

In her chapter on sex differences in the brain, Fine points out that even "quite marked" ones seem to have little effect on actual human behavior. She observes that "sexual differentiation of the brain is proving to be messier, more complex, and variable than previously appreciated." Moving on to risk-taking, she discusses how many studies "reflect implicitly gendered assumptions about what risk taking is." In a given culture, some activities could well be much riskier for women than for men. Further, many of the survey questions used in conducting such studies are focused on risky activities more commonly associated with men.



In discussing risk, Fine also brings up a study that looked at race and ethnicity as well as gender and found something very interesting: “Society seemed a significantly safer place to white males than it did to all other groups, including nonwhite men. What on first impression seemed like a sex difference was actually a difference between white males and everyone else.” That study also found that the “white males who were particularly cavalier about risks” were the ones who were rich, well-educated, and politically conservative, Fine notes.

Fine provides a detailed discussion of hormonal activity to raise the point that the interaction of these things is complex. “[T]he amount of testosterone circulating in the bloodstream is just one part of a highly complicated system—the one that happens to be the easiest to measure.” The amount of testosterone measured by most tests “is likely to be an extremely crude guide to testosterone’s effect on the brain.”

Fine notes that in discussions of how to increase sexual equality in the workplace, “castration has never been mentioned as a possible solution. (Not even in the Top Secret Feminist Meetings where we plot our global military coup.)” This isn’t just

for ethical reasons; the truth is, it won’t work. “What would work, the research instead suggests, are major and sustained interventions on status, experience, and what a particular situation *means* to the individuals involved.”

Reading *Testosterone Rex* makes clear that a supposedly feminist joke needs to be retired. We can no longer blame “testosterone poisoning” for bad male behavior. It’s not hormones that make men act badly; it’s culture.

In her concluding chapter, Fine makes the point that the real puzzle in human development is how sex creates the different reproductive systems “while allowing the differences in men’s and women’s behavior to be *non-essential*: overlapping and mosaic, instead of categorically different; conditional on text, not fixed; diverse, rather than uniform.” Most gendered behaviors are social constructions, though the term “construction” implies just how robust they are. “They’re not easily torn apart and reconstructed in new ways,” Fine points out.

But regardless of how societies approach gender inequality, the time is long past when they can use testosterone as an excuse. Or, as Fine puts it, “It’s time to stop blaming Testosterone Rex, because that king is dead.”

Fine notes that in discussions of how to increase sexual equality in the workplace, “castration has never been mentioned as a possible solution. (Not even in the Top Secret Feminist Meetings where we plot our global military coup.)”

Nancy Jane Moore is the author of the science fiction novel *The Weave*, several novellas, and numerous short stories. As someone who never fit comfortably into roles traditionally associated with women, she finds herself reading a lot of books on gender.

🌀 Pouring Poetry

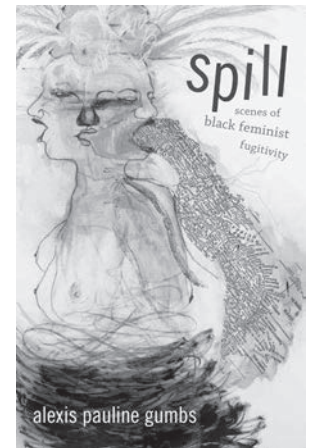
Spill: Scenes of Black Feminist Fugitivity, by Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Duke University Press, 2016, 184 pp., \$22.95

reviewed by Maria Velazquez

Spill establishes itself as a meditation on escape, beginning with its cover. The art is provided by Kenyatta A.C. Hinkle and is part of the artist’s *Tituba* series. Entitled *Now There Are Three Ways to Get This Done: Your Way, Their Way, or My Way*, the painting features a triple-faced female figure, with one mouth screaming, one mouth whose breath gives shape to the third’s face, and one mouth wide open, vomiting forth a colonial map of the western coast of Africa. This southern-oriented map seems to highlight the Gold, Slave, and Ivory Coasts of the colonial era. Rivers are faint, like cracks in dry earth where they meet the

edges of the map and then sprawl into oceans when they encounter the past, present, and future natures of Tituba’s body. This is a collection of poems, a *reflection* of poems, assembled under the watchful guardianship of the Black witch of Salem. It’s a set of poems reflecting on the spiritual, the elemental, the stubborn, bloody-minded survival of a female trickster. It’s a grimoire of #blackgirlmagic, where the magic emerges from blood and glass and gritty sand.

Spill is also a *refraction* of theory. Gumbs describes this collection of poems as an engagement with Hortense Spillers’s book *Black, White, and in Color*.



Cont. on p. 14



Pouring Poetry (cont. from p. 13)

Can you translate theory into poetry, then back again? That question itself presents a binary that Gumbs rejects.

Like any good theory, Gumbs's analysis grants explanatory power to black women's experience of everyday life. Like any good witch, Gumbs's rite (...write?) also bends the rules.

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Spillers's anthology collects almost three decades' worth of her thinking on slavery and race as foundational American myths, stories of rupture and dysfunction told over and over again via American fiction, public policy, and extrajudicial murder. Gumbs introduces Spillers as both a theorist and a goddess-figure in her own right, whose work "made worlds... invited affect...brought to mind nameless women in unknown places who were laughing and looking sideways at each other and a world that couldn't understand them" (xi). Thus, *Spill* begins by invoking Tituba, the Black Witch of Salem, and Hortense Spillers, author of the key text "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," one of the most cited articles in *Africana Studies*. It then twists, bending theory and racial myth into an invocation of the elements. Gumbs writes, "the ground shakes with us"; "the sky sings for us"; "the water waits for us"; and "the fire frees us" (xiv, xv). Then, for the element of spirit: "our work here is not done" (xv). This interrupted stanza is taken up by the title itself. *Spill* functions as a verb, a refrain, and a conceit, simultaneously referring to Spillers's repertoire of work, and the many other meanings of the word. *Spill* could refer to water, the movement of people, kindling, the release of wind from a sail, or the act of engaging with Spillers, here figured as a genealogical foremother of black feminist theorizing. Gumbs's playfulness with language functions as the element of spirit in this invocation, evocative and intuitive and difficult to pin down without losing the magic of the phrase itself.

Can you translate theory into poetry, then back again? That question itself presents a binary that Gumbs rejects. Gumbs uses the page to create an eerie discordance, jamming her lines together and leaving swathes of white space untouched. The deliberate nature of her spacing choices—each section announced by a definition of spill, each word written in small letters yet bracketed by punctuation—challenge the reader to engage with the materiality of the text, to read actively. For example, one poem describes an ultrasound image as,

the tiny unstill life in black and white. blurred glimpses of a dark held world. the technician had looked for phallic signs and failed. so he said *it's a girl*.¹⁰

The footnote here is significant; you could read *Spill* in one go, as I did, like a linear descent through a family tree. You'd encounter the footnotes and bibliography last, like seeing the aunts and uncles waiting for your own arrival as reader to this historical present. You wouldn't find out the poems' titles that way—the poems are simply there, abrupt and untitled on the page, each one a snapshot into another time and place.

Or, you could follow each poem's footnotes, discovering that the poem entitled "new female being" was written as a reflection/refraction/response to Spillers's 1983 essay "A Hateful Passion, A Lost Love." Matching poem to title to theory becomes part of the work of the reader, in the same way as that work means puzzling through the assonance and consonance that define Gumbs's style.

Published a decade after *Black, White, and in Color*, *Spill* is ultimately a genealogical project. Structurally, its fourteen sections layer spiritual and magical references to birth, family, and ancestry. Yemoja, a mother and water deity, is the mother or foster mother of the fourteen major Orishas. The Book of Matthew describes fourteen generations between the Babylonian exile and the birth of the Messiah. Each poetic vignette explores family and reproduction as technologies that produce a particular kind of gendered subjectivity. They also explore the sneakily insurgent reflections of the unnamed narrators. Like any good theory, Gumbs's analysis grants explanatory power to black women's experience of everyday life. Like any good witch, Gumbs's rite (...write?) also bends the rules. This is why I describe *Spill* as both a reflection and a refraction of black feminist theoretical writing. Gumbs's poetry takes up the detritus of the everyday that surrounds theory—the affective social and political worlds in which black feminist theorists write—and bends it, splits it, like a prism breaking a beam of light into a rainbow.

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.



☼ Truth and Beauty, Lost and Found

The Island of Lost Girls by Manjula Padmanabhan, Hachette India,

July 2015, 348 pp., \$17.99, ebook \$11.99

reviewed by Joanne Rixon

Youngest is a man: the first invader from an empire of men, infiltrating the world's last sanctuary for women. Youngest is a woman: body a vehicle for the voice and ambitions of a man, seeking refuge. Seeking freedom.

Youngest is risking everything to win a place for his daughter Meiji in the only safety he knows, the Island. Youngest is struggling to rescue Meiji from the Island before her mind is lost forever.

The Island of Lost Girls, the most recent novel from Indian author and cartoonist Manjula Padmanabhan, is a book of contradictions. Padmanabhan currently lives in both Newport, Rhode Island, and New Delhi, India, where she has spent much of her life. This cultural split is woven into the fabric of the book, from the spices in the food to Padmanabhan's perspectives on gender and power.

Post-cataclysm, the map of the world has been rearranged. Impenetrable Enclaves bar communication between the world's major land masses. In the Zone, four teams perform war for the entertainment and enrichment of the wealthy. Youngest's homeland has been obliterated after the genocide of every woman there—except one, Meiji. The Islands are the only safe place for women; there elders reconstruct the bodies and minds of young women nearly destroyed by the gendered violence of the outside world.

The men of Youngest's homeland have regrouped. An entity known as the General, composed of hundreds of clones in constant contact with each other via radio implants in their jaw bones, is bent on revenge and on the elimination of women from the rest of the globe.

The General is the one who forced Youngest to submit to the gender-altering surgeries that have made him a "transie" with "an anatomically correct woman's body." In this guise, the General sends

Youngest to infiltrate the Islands with his daughter as bait.

The book opens here: Youngest no longer knows himself, his body alien not just physiologically but socially. He must navigate between two major powers, delicately playing them against each other to try to keep his daughter safe.

In addition to delivering a high-stakes story of intrigue, biotech, and violence, Padmanabhan examines the boundaries of gender and the ways in which those boundaries can be transgressed. As an American queer deeply invested in my own gender value system, I appreciate the opportunity to inhabit a point of view that challenges Western queer theory, though I'm not entirely comfortable with all of Padmanabhan's ideas.

For all the movement between genders in this book, there is a distinct lack of options beyond Man and Woman. There is a war between two genders—a literal war, with blood and viscera and death—and while a person like Youngest may have some freedom of choice between one side or another, he must, in the end, pick a side. For many people this is perhaps not an unusual view, but for me an insistence on an oppositional gender binary was alienating.

On the other hand, I found a lot to appreciate when it came to Padmanabhan's exploration of an experience-based method of defining gender. On the Island, the community gets input on a person's self. The Mentors easily accept Aila, a "transie" who identifies as a woman, as one of them. And they handwave away Youngest's persistently male self-identification, because he has a female body and that constrains his existence in meaningful ways.

In both cases, these determinations of gender have much to do with biology and little to do with a person's sense of

In addition to delivering a high-stakes story of intrigue, biotech, and violence, Padmanabhan examines the boundaries of gender and the ways in which those boundaries can be transgressed.



☼
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...determinations of gender have much to do with biology and little to do with a person's sense of self. However, in the world of Island biology is as mutable as it is essential.

Cont. on p. 16



Truth and Beauty (cont. from p. 15)

This isn't the kind of feminist fiction that provides an escape from a world that hates women, but for readers who can stomach it, there is both truth and beauty here.

self. However, in the world of *Island* biology is as mutable as it is essential.

Padmanabhan's writing style supports this. Much of the futuristic tech she's invented is based in bioengineering. Her descriptions are also very visceral, full of multisensory, immersive details. These details, from the flavor of crab-and-seaweed soup to the feel of saltwater drying on skin, really make the book the gem that it is.

On the whole, *Island* is engaging and tightly paced. The ending, while satisfying, feels rushed: the movement from intrigue into violence is only shown from the perspective of a single character, where earlier events are shown from multiple perspectives. And Padmanabhan doesn't give much story space to the aftermath, instead leaving room for a sequel.

Another thing to be aware of is that there are many explicitly described

sexual assaults. I found them to be a thoughtful part of Padmanabhan's engagement with the reality of violence against women, but some readers may find them upsetting.

However, I do recommend this book to anyone who is interested in global gender paradigms or who wants to read a vivid thriller. This isn't the kind of feminist fiction that provides an escape from a world that hates women, but for readers who can stomach it, there is both truth and beauty here.

Joanne Rixon lives in Seattle and has a BA in History from the University of Washington. Her fiction has appeared in *Crossed Genres Magazine*.

⚙️ To Boldly Go Where Women Have Gone Before

Sisters of Tomorrow: The First Women of Science Fiction, edited by Lisa Yaszek and

© Patrick B. Sharp, with a Conclusion by Kathleen Ann Goonan,

16 Wesleyan University Press, June 2016, 432 pp., \$29.95

reviewed by Steven Shaviro



...the project of expanding the range of science fiction beyond the limited circle of white male voices is one that must look backwards as well as forwards.

Sisters of Tomorrow is a pleasure to read; but it is also crucial because it recovers an important portion of science fiction history. As the recent Sad Puppies controversies unfortunately remind us, misogyny and racism are still alive and active in the science fiction community, as they are in America and the world in general. Speculative fiction by women, gays and lesbians, and people of color has exploded since it first became highly visible in the 1970s. Arguably, such fiction is more plentiful, and more easily available, today than ever before—which itself partly explains the Puppies backlash. But the project of expanding the range of science fiction beyond the limited circle of white male voices is one that must look backwards as well as forwards. At the same time that the gates have opened for more varied and diverse forms of expression, there has also been a

quest to find dissident and diverse voices from before the 1970s, when feminist science fiction first emerged into public consciousness. Aqueduct Press has of course contributed to this process, with its publication of books like *The Merrill Theory of Lit'ry Criticism*, a collection of Judith Merrill's important science fiction criticism from the 1950s and 1960s. *Sisters of Tomorrow* pushes back yet further in time, collecting writings by (generally white) women that originally appeared in the science fiction pulps of the 1930s and early 1940s.

Sisters of Tomorrow is both a book of scholarship and an anthology of early science fiction writings. Generous introductions by the editors recount both the overall history of women's involvement in early science fiction, and biographical and critical information on specific writers. The book is divided into five sections,



dealing respectively with fiction authors, poets, journalists, editors, and visual artists. Women took on all these roles in the pulp era; they contributed to early science fiction through their involvement in every genre of imaginative production, as well as by working as shapers of taste and playing a crucial role in fan culture. The book covers all of these areas, stressing both the presence and the sheer variety of women's contributions to the field. Though most of the figures highlighted in *Sisters of Tomorrow* worked for mass market pulp publications, others (such as Lilith Lorraine) edited and wrote for small independent magazines, which shared characteristics with both the "little magazines" of early-20th-century modernism and the fanzines of more recent vintage. And although some of the women discussed in the volume were active almost exclusively in science fiction, others were pioneers in different areas as well (most notably Edith Eyde, who published science fiction poetry under the name Tigrina, but was also a pioneering lesbian journalist and editor from the mid-1940s onward). All in all, the volume gives a well-rounded portrait of women in early science fiction culture; the book's Conclusion, by Kathleen Ann Goonan, wraps things up with a broader overview, relating the stories recounted here to the subsequent history of misogyny and gender issues in science fiction up to the present.

The big lesson of *Sisters of Tomorrow* is that science fiction was never as male-dominated a genre as it has often been reputed to be. Women were involved right from the very beginning, and the field could scarcely have existed and developed without them. Of course, there were limitations. Some big editors (Hugo Gernsback, for instance) welcomed science fiction written by women; but others (John W. Campbell most notoriously) regarded sf as a male-only club. Some of these early sf writers published openly as women; but others—decades before Alice Sheldon/James Tiptree—signed their work with pseudonyms or initials, in order to obscure their gender identity. Also, many of the stories here use male protagonists

and first-person narrators, presumably in order to appeal to an ostensibly male-dominated readership.

Nonetheless, nearly all the texts collected in *Sisters of Tomorrow* raise noteworthy feminist issues, whether overtly or covertly. Many of these stories draw, as the editors note, on nineteenth-century conventions of "women's fiction" (both domestic and Gothic), melding elements from these traditions with sf's concern with new and advanced technologies. A number of them present capable and heroic women characters, in a rebuke to "damsel in distress" stereotypes. Some of them are overtly political, presenting stories of revolution (Leslie F. Stone's "Out of the Void") or visions of future utopian societies based on gender equality (Lilith Lorraine's "Into the 28th Century"). Others inflect conventional genre stereotypes in unusual ways (Dorothy Gertrude Quick's "Strange Orchids," for instance, emphasizes the misogyny at the root of the traditional mad-scientist stereotype). All in all, the writings presented here do indeed both instruct and delight, as they infuse their deeply romantic narratives with the concerns of gender politics.

Race is far less a subject of concern than gender in these writings, although Stone's "Out of the Void" depicts the overthrow of a racial hierarchy and the establishment of equality among the "races" of an alien planet. In the journalists' section of the anthology, there are several articles by the science popularizer L. Taylor Hansen, debunking white supremacy in the early 1940s by means of appeals to scientific evidence (now outmoded) from the anthropology of the day.

I am no expert on the pulp writings of the 1930s and 1940s, but nearly all the texts collected in *Sisters of Tomorrow* were unfamiliar to me, and I was glad to see them rescued from obscurity. The only story here that I had read before was C. L. Moore's "Shambleau," a space-opera reworking of the Medusa myth that brilliantly comments on the mixture of possessive lust and misogynistic disgust at the root of conventional male-heterosexual fantasy. "Shambleau" is probably

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Cont. on p. 18



my favorite work in the volume, but I also particularly enjoyed Stone's "Out of the Void" and Quick's "Strange Orchids" (both of which I have already mentioned), Clare Winger Harris's "The Evolutionary Monstrosity" (which dramatizes issues in biological theory that are still unresolved decades later), and Leslie Perri's "Space Episode" (which straightforwardly contrasts male bluster with its female protagonist's pragmatism and heroism). All in all, *Sisters of Tomorrow* is indispensable both for its contribution to the history of science fiction and for the way it offers us works that combine old-fashioned literary "guilty pleasures" with issues and concerns that are still quite relevant today.

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⚙️ **A Jewish State in Germany? *Judenstaat*, Or Historical Speculation in the VHS Era**
Judenstaat by Simone Zelitch, Tor, June 2016, 320 pp., \$25.99
reviewed by Bogi Takács

Judenstaat by Simone Zelitch falls between various genres, not fitting precisely in any. It is an alternate history novel, but also very much a work of Jewish literature, by Jews and for Jews—yet it was published by a major science fiction publisher that, in turn, did not promote it much in SFF circles.

The chief conceit and point of divergence is that after the Holocaust, a Jewish state was established...in German Saxony and given the German name of *Judenstaat*. Judit Klemmer, a Jewish documentary filmmaker, is working on a piece for the fortieth anniversary celebrations of the founding of *Judenstaat*. Her research makes her question not just the fundamental origin narrative of the state, but also the fate of her husband, a Saxon man and renowned orchestra conductor who was assassinated by a mysterious sniper.

Judenstaat is very much an in-group narrative; it doesn't spend a great deal of time explaining basic Jewish concepts or history. It assumes the reader is familiar with these concepts' cultural and historical details, and that the details evoke the same associations in the reader's mind as in the writer's. Quick check: do you know



about Chabad? Chabad is a big part of the plot, but there is no gentle introduction to Chabad inside the book. If you do not have the cultural familiarity required, you might get utterly lost—and judging from the book's Goodreads reviews, this has indeed happened to many readers.

If you do have the necessary cultural familiarity, *Judenstaat* is an immensely rich experience, tying together everything from the Holocaust to secular Jewish labor movements to VHS-era home video in the Eastern bloc. The plot is mostly secondary, and the author mentions in the acknowledgments that earlier drafts had even less plot. What matters is not what happens, but where, and how—*Judenstaat* provides sweeping historical vistas, where what keeps you reading is not the usual desire to find out what happens next, but the desire to burrow deeper into the fictional world of a Jewish-East-German state. The plot or lack thereof is still a weakness, especially

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as a considerable amount of what transpires hinges on the protagonist simply not watching a particular videotape with the sound on. But real life is often messy like that. I found myself thinking of Hungarian narratives that were not formed by a need to rigidly adhere to Western plot conventions, and the topic here matches the chosen form.

As someone from a former Eastern Bloc country that also had a quasi-privileged position as “the happiest barrack” with a palatable “Goulash Communism,” I found much in *Judenstaat* immediately relatable. It was thoroughly researched, but also had just a little bit of a remove: this book would have been different if written by someone *in* Eastern Europe, but reading it I felt it would still very much find its audience if translated to, for example, Hungarian.

It was particularly fascinating to follow the portrayal of the state security services and how this developed over the course of the book. You are a law-abiding citizen, and they claim to help you.... But can they be trusted? They are Jewish, after all; they are just like you. It is very chilling how the protagonist’s thoughts and feelings gradually change, and, alongside hers, the reader’s. It made me think about real-life history and how many Communists were secular Jews, a difficult topic that the novel takes head-on—and without giving away much, the same is true for the equally painful theme of Jewish revenge after the Holocaust. These concepts are fundamental to present day Jewishness in Eastern Europe, discussed with great unease and in hushed tones by Jews, or brayed loudly by anti-Semites. I was stunned that an American novel would not only go there, but actually do so with understanding and sensitivity, gradually unfolding it step by step. The reader is eased into this stream of thought; many Jewish concepts that can be safely assumed as familiar to an American Jewish reader (like the existence and particulars of Chabad) remain implicit, but this, this is not. It’s laid out in detail and with much care.

Simone Zelitch understands something very fraught about the region’s

situation and has done a good job of conveying it to an English-speaking audience—with all its attendant complexities, like the interactions between Jewish and non-Jewish people, especially non-Jewish Soviet Communists in a Soviet-allied country. As I have often had the experience of a cultural gulf with American Jews, I was very pleasantly surprised by this and was moved to look up the author’s background. She not only lived in Hungary for years, but she also traveled in Germany, Eastern Europe, and Israel as research for this particular novel: “*Judenstaat* led me to study Yiddish in Vilna,” as she mentions on her website. It shows. I can only wish that all novelists would come to my region with this amount of respect.

One part where I felt the novel slightly straining against my suspension of disbelief was the role of Chabad. The religious organization Chabad is not only present in the fictional *Judenstaat*, but its head, the Rebbe himself, has moved there too. In Hungary, the real life local branch of Chabad still bemoans the fact that the Communist regime simply did not allow them inside the country. But the character of Communist Hungary was not explicitly Jewish, unlike *Judenstaat*—and it is conceivable, though a slight stretch to me, that secular Jewish Communists would have allowed Chabad into their *Jewish* country.

Then again, it was very enjoyable for me to see Chabad present in the narrative and engaged in various deals with the government; also with present-day overtones. To me it felt like these aspects did not always cohere, but sometimes that slight discord was all the more interesting. The mental image of Chasidim living in Soviet-style apartment complexes will stay with me for a long time, and I’m a bit sad I did not come up with it myself! Just like the concept of the ultimate restitution, a Jewish state in Germany, it seems both self-evident and radically new. I could grow convinced that on a different timeline, a *Judenstaat* undeniably exists in Saxony, and that is the hallmark of excellent alternate history.

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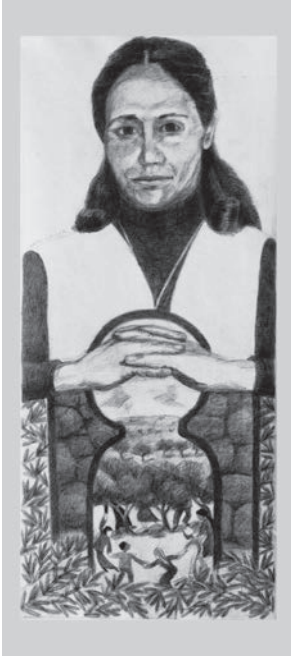
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On Painting the Daughters of Earth Series

Janet Essley



Practice Peace
Amal Nasser,
The Tent of Nations Community

The advice of two wise people hovers as a guiding spirit in my studio. Of the tyranny of the free market and global capitalism, Indian writer and activist Arundhati Roy says we should lay siege to empire, expose it, shame it, mock it—with our art, our joy, our creativity, and with the truth of our own stories rather than those we are brainwashed to believe.

Of the responsibility to lay bare the injustice around us, the Dalai Lama says artists should close themselves in a room until they can get past their anger to a place of compassion.

Living in the center of the Beast, there is no lack of materials for art with themes of social and environmental justice, or of information from which to choose symbols for each work. But to get past anger to compassion is not so easy. My struggle to do this can be seen in the chaos of brushstrokes on the canvas. There are layers and layers of paint below the surface. A final image with harmonious colors, with beauty, is a reflection of my place of compassion found in these women and the truth of their stories.

The journey to the recognizable portraits of this series has taken 30 years. Human figures in earlier paintings were more stylized and the issues generalized in a mythic sort of way. Good guys. Bad guys. Gradually the faces became more realistic and the stories more biographic, until this series of named women. The faces were painted from photographs mostly acquired from public sources. Everything else is part of their story.

The paintings each focus on one of the many positive ways that we must work together to achieve food and water security. Maria Haunanay and the community kitchens in Lima, Peru, was the first story, paint-

ed in 2009. Her sisters and brothers are at Standing Rock today. Food and water security world-wide will become more tenuous during the Trump Era with its promised acceleration of global climate change and warfare, and suppression of civil rights. Even in our relatively secure Pacific Northwest, corporations salivate over profits imagined from mining the watersheds, transporting and storing fossil fuels, creating more CAFOs, and expanding the military-industrial-technological complex. The elephant at Hanford continues to mutate.

At the same time, we have courageous and compassionate individuals of all ages and backgrounds working together to preserve the Earth and the human right to food and water. This series proclaims the importance, the beauty, the rightness of all THEIR stories. The paintings like to travel. They like to do good works in the world inspiring community conversation and action. If you can help with transportation, they can come to your walls. They like to have their pictures taken and stories shared with others.

Of my story? I worked for many years as a treeplanter, herded sheep, sewed mountains of canvas into yurt covers, picked coffee, worked on conveyor belts at fish canneries. Images gathered from all of these experiences have shown up in my work. I learned much about art at public universities, I learned how to teach in a Cambodian refugee camp. I learned how to lead collaborative murals in the graffitied alleys of a small town. I practice graphic arts making signs for rallies, vigils, and demonstrations. My life partner keeps me focused, reminding me:

Don't Mourn—Paint!

Featured Artist

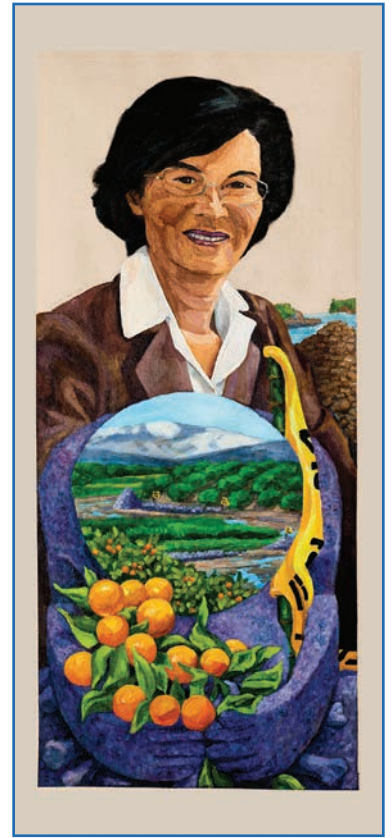




Declare the Rights of Mother Earth
Peregrina Kusse-Visa Bolivia



Community Gardens
Diana Lopez, San Antonio, Texas



Oppose Militarism
Hyun, Ae-Ja, Jeju Island, S. Korea



Weave Community
Centolia Maldonado, Oaxaca, Mexico



Support Family Farms
Eve Bettu Geddev, Ethiopia, Via Campesina



Community Kitchens
Maria Haunanay, Lima, Peru





Protect Forests
Chrissy Swain, Grassy Narrows
First Nation, Canada



Respect Diversity
Helena Norberg-Hodge, European Union



Defend Public Water
Marian Kramer, Detroit, Michigan

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