

The Cascadia Subduction Zone

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Sticking Together

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FEATURED ARTIST

Milan Djurasovic

“If your takeaway...is that *The Cascadia Subduction Zone* sounds really interesting, you’re not wrong—it’s a wonderful journal filled with thoughtful and insightful criticism.”

© Niall Harrison, *The Guardian*, May 12, 2016

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Managing Editor
Arrate Hidalgo

Reviews Editor
Nisi Shawl

Features Editor
L. Timmel Duchamp

Arts Editor
Kath Wilham

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In This Issue



In Memoriam: Ama Patterson (1960-2017)

Ama Patterson died on May 1 at age 56. An elegant writer who delighted in unexpected metaphors, haunting characters, and startling storylines, Ama's short story "Hussy Strutt" appeared in *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* edited by Sheree Renée Thomas. "Sea Monsters," another short story, appeared in *Scarab*, also edited by Sheree Renée Thomas. Her short fiction is included in *80! Memories and Reflections on Ursula K. Le Guin*, edited by Karen Joy Fowler and Debbie Notkin. Ama also wrote *Finding Your Inner Goddess: A Journal of Self-Empowerment*; *Zen and Haiku* with Chris Paschke; *The Lost Art of I Ching [With 64 Card Set]* with Marian Morton; and *The Essential Guide to Astrology Kit* with Pauline Southard. Her writing has been characterized by *Publishers Weekly* as "gorgeous and tough" and "unbearably poignant."

Ama graduated from Spelman College in 1982 and received a law degree from Emory University School of Law in 1987; she was admitted to the New York State Bar in 1990 and worked as an attorney-editor at West Publishing in Westbury and later at West Group in Eagan, Minnesota, before becoming a contract attorney. She raised two sons on her own.

Both of Ama's parents were poets. She herself studied fiction writing at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis and was a 1999 graduate of Clarion West. After Clarion West, Ama, Andrea Hairston, Pan Morigan, the late Liz Roberts, and Sheree Renée Thomas founded the Beyon' Dusa writing group. The Dusas have supported each other's creative spirits and artistic visions. Ama traveled several times with the Dusas to Hog Hammock, an all-black community on Sapelo (a Georgia Sea Island) to share work, eat good food, visit historical sights, and walk the graveyard, forests, and beaches for inspiration. Ama particularly loved the empty expanse of golden sand, the warm ocean waves, and the Georgia sea breeze.

Ama co-facilitated Azna's Pen, an open writer's workshop in Babylon, New York, and was on the board of the Walt Whitman Birthplace Association in Huntington, New York. Supporting and promoting the work of science fiction and fantasy artists was one of her passions. She was a founding member of The Carl Brandon Society—an organization working to increase racial and ethnic diversity in the production of and audience

for speculative fiction. Along with her geek artistic sensibility, Ama offered the CBS her legal insights. She was a judge for the 2001 Tiptree award, an annual literary prize for science fiction or fantasy that aims to expand and explore our understanding of gender. Ama regularly attended speculative fiction conventions: WisCon—the world's leading feminist science fiction convention, and ReaderCon—a speculative fiction convention focused on the written word, where Ama gave readings from her short fiction and sat on panels, offering critical insight, wit, and joy to writers, editors, and fans.

Ama made a splash in the theatre as well. She performed her poetry with Chrysalis Theatre and Beyon' Dusa at an exhibition of Micala Sidore's tapestries and Beth Beede's felt work at the New Hampshire Institute for the Arts. She also played the character of LOUDSPEAKER (the voice of the regime) in the Chrysalis Theatre production of *Thunderbird at the Next World Theatre* in Northampton, MA, and in New York City as part of *The New York Review of Science Fiction Readings* series.

Ama and Sheree were also published in *Drumvoices Revue's* "Voices of the City" volume, edited by Eugene Redmond (in 2000). About that issue, Maya Angelou said: "The poets in this special issue of *Drumvoices Revue* have earned the readers' appreciation and awe-full admiration. They have dared to dance with dragons and have attempted to translate the meaning of the human heart. Diverse in lyricism and various in intent, they speak with power." Ama was also a featured reader in *The New York Review of Science Fiction* Reading series with Daniel José Older and a guest on WBAI's "Hour of the Wolf," where she was interviewed by Jim Freund and read her work.

In Andrea Hairston's words: "Ama did so much, even helping Sheree sort out how to help a painter in Nigeria recreate the cover art he'd promised her but lost (or sold). She had an eagle eye and had us rolling."





The “Space is the Place” Conference: A Report

by Arrate Hidalgo

The conference was inspired by a piece that cultural critic...Lama Suleiman had written.... Lama drew inspiration from Afrofuturism as a framework applicable to other ethnofuturistic bodies of work....

Last April I was invited by *Tobu*, an arts magazine based in Tel Aviv, to attend their one-day conference “Space is the Place: Afrofuturism, Arabfuturism, and the Search for New Dimensions” (one of the coolest-sounding events I have ever attended). The conference was inspired by a piece that cultural critic and overall excellent person Lama Suleiman had written for *Tobu* on *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness* (Lexington Books, 2015), an anthology of scholarly work edited by Reynaldo Anderson and Charles E. Jones looking at the multidimensional directions the movement has been taking over the last decade. In her review, Lama drew inspiration from Afrofuturism as a framework applicable to other ethnofuturistic bodies of work such as contemporary Palestinian art. She described the book as a “necessary provocation of questions on Pan-Arab culture, which may be read through various Palestinian states of being—whether present, absent, or imagined....”

And that’s what we had all been called to converge for in the contested present of Tel Aviv (which stands partially on the grounds of the old Palestinian city of Jaffa that in 1948 was emptied of 95 percent of its Palestinian population by the Israeli army): to discuss and expand “the relevance of ethno-futuristic thinking to art and culture in the Middle East.” I was asked to bring my knowledge of science fiction and queerness to a conference that would otherwise mostly revolve around theory and art. My acceptance of the invitation came with uncomfortable questions to myself—*Why should I go?*, *What could I possibly add to the conversation?*, and so on—some of which arose again throughout the event. Eventually, I figured (not without external help) that it would be good for artists and philosophers to hear about science fiction authors like Butler and Delany, and I would spend the rest of the day listening, feeling privileged to be there, and taking it all in so as to tell others about it later, which is what I’m doing now.

I was asked to bring my knowledge of science fiction and queerness to a conference that would otherwise mostly revolve around theory and art.

At 4:20 p.m. or so, once enough attendees had shown up, Lama Suleiman and *Tobu* co-editors Leah Abir and Avi Lubin welcomed us all to the outrageously new and tech-y Basis Art School (where some of us early birds, including keynote speaker Dr Reynaldo Anderson, had a fancy cafeteria lunch and relaxed prior to kick-off). Leah Abir explained that English was the chosen language for the conference due to its second-language status for many in the room, recognizing it as “one of the features when dealing with strange and ‘Other’ spaces,” a space such as the one we shared, in which we are not all necessarily comfortably placed. Avi Lubin followed, introducing the keynote lecture by Dr Anderson, associate professor of communication and chair of humanities at Harris-Stowe State University in St Louis, Missouri, co-founder of the Black Speculative Arts Movement, and co-editor of *Afrofuturism 2.0*.

Dr Anderson commenced his lecture, “Dark Speculative Futurity and the Rise of Neo-Nationalism,” with a reference to the Ferguson unrest and the “Ferguson is the Future” conference that it sparked in Princeton (a chronicle of which is available on the Aqueduct blog at <https://aqueductpress.blogspot.com.es/2015/09/black-to-future-notes-from-ferguson-is.html>), attended by many leading figures in African American speculative fiction, including Aqueductistas Nisi Shawl and Andrea Hairston. He brought attention to the under-discussed, tech-mediated collaboration between poor uneducated young Black people and hackers during the Ferguson unrest, as well as to the dramatically different technological bond between Palestine and Ferguson via the fact that the same U.S.-produced tear gas has been used against people in both places. (And Palestinian activists, Dr Anderson reminds us, were quick to show solidarity by advising Ferguson protestors about how to deal with tear gas—by applying milk, not water, to your eyes.)

He moved on to define neo-nationalism, a generation-long development prior to Trump or Brexit that is characterized by high-tech populism and a vision of the



world in networks rather than in nation states. Dr Anderson made a profound, detailed analysis of recent history and concepts such as the post-racial project, multiculturalism, globalization, and postcolonialism, dwelling on the aptness of the term in a neo-colonial world. He dated the long tradition of Black speculative thought well prior to Mark Dery's coining of the term "Afrofuturism," back to W.E.B. Dubois and Martin Delany in the late 19th century, through the division of Black political action in the '60s between liberals and nationalists, and forward into the 1990s' "post-blackness," which, he argues, has left current artists unprepared to deal with the social crises of now. He continued by listing the weaknesses of what he labels Afrofuturism 1.0, too focused on music, fiction, and aesthetics, and among which he lists a lack of knowledge about African and other Black diasporic cultures, and an Eurocentric concept of Black history having been erased—crimes against African American women being vividly documented from a strictly forensic perspective, in the DNA and phenotypes of contemporary Black U.S. women and in the genetic legacy of Henrietta Lacks, for instance.

In contrast, Afrofuturism 2.0 would come from people and technology "co-evolving" in the early 21st century, a time in which, he thinks, African countries themselves will have more to do with futurism because they control their own state and military technology, as opposed to African Americans and other diasporic African populations in relation to the State. Themes dealt with by 2.0 include metaphysics, theoretical and applied sciences, and social sciences. Being such an enormous subject, there was plenty more that Dr Anderson could have discussed (and a lot I haven't mentioned), but time ran short and so he swiftly went through some examples of literary science fiction, including Nnedi Okorafor's, and ended with a quick reference to Islamic sf so as to open the conversation toward Arab futurity, which Mohammad Jabali would deal with in detail next. Dr Anderson drew the difference between the

futurity to be found in the besieged city of Gaza and the neoliberal skyscraper-filled futurity of the Gulf; Larissa Sansour, contemporary Palestinian artist, was, of course, mentioned as well.

Given the realities of globalization, when thinking about Arab futurity, Dr Anderson suggests that rather than thinking about it in terms of the State, we think about it in terms of an ecosystem and observe how it crosses borders, along the lines of either a dystopian reality or a pan-utopia. Though he left plenty about the intersection of Black and Islamic futurity unexplored, he surely left us with enough questions for picking at throughout the event. I enjoyed his final point that "walls never stopped anything from happening," particularly within the Western history of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia; however, he avoided mentioning the Israeli wall around the West Bank by name.

The next lecture, "Aliens: Beyond Western Christendom," was given by Mohammad Jabali, a multidisciplinary artist, writer, poet, illustrator, DJ, online marketer, faculty member of the Photography Department in Bezalel Art Academy, among other things. He opened by pointing out the irony of giving his talk in the main colony of Western Christendom in the Middle East. (In hindsight, the conference lacked more of this head-on tackling of the specific socio-political circumstances of the event, which, Jabali admitted, is a source of contradictory conditions in which we all must work.) Jabali argued that as it currently stands, Arab contemporary art can't really deal with issues in the true interest of the people of the regions it comes from. Quoting from several sources, such as Anidjar Gil's *Secularism* and Edward Said's *Orientalism*, he touched on the non-universality of the Western linear idea of progress. One of the moments of his lecture that I most enjoyed was when he read the desert as the most alien landscape known to humanity and Frank Herbert's *Dune* as a messianic-tinted text with strong echoes of *Lawrence of Arabia*, whose biography is markedly similar to that of the Prophet Muhammad's, except

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“Space is the Place”
(cont. from p. 3)

According to Jabali, Arab sf still lacks a foundational novel, while Arabfuturism these days is mostly produced in English by diaspora artists.

that he wasn't blond and was merely born in the desert, so who cares.

According to Jabali, Arab sf still lacks a foundational novel, while Arabfuturism these days is mostly produced in English by diaspora artists. He introduced us to alternative mapping—one of the earliest Islamic examples of a map, which points up toward the south—as a prelude to arguing for referring to the land we were in as Western Asia, and not the Middle East. Naming matters; points of reference matter. He also displayed some excellent artwork to exemplify a certain tendency toward dystopian art that presents narratives trapped in a passive, “human rights victimhood discourse” state, that of an Arab refugee in an apocalyptic surrounding. He also talked about the Palestinian Space Agency project, a website done by a Swiss artist in Amman and Palestine, and which Jabali describes as “the most Jordanian website ever,” which makes it “very believable.”

Jabali maintained his tongue-in-cheek delivery of stinging truths, such as asking “Why don't we have Western aliens in Arabfuturism?” (A: “We won't get any funding!”), and concluded by praising Kuwaiti artist Fatima Al Qadiri's video work, especially *Vatican Vibes*, as representative of Gulf futurism and the variety and agency of the work it inscribes. Although, he admits, we must not forget issues of modern slavery and neoliberalism and its “weird mixture with religion.” In conclusion, what Jabali expects is for Arab art to deal more with Islamic history, imagine Western aliens, embrace diaspora expressions, and move beyond “self-orientalism,” among other things.

During the Q&A, Dr Anderson mentioned liking the term “Western Asia,” and he asked Jabali how North Africans would feel about it; they consider themselves North Africans, Jabali answered. Another member of the audience mentioned Zionism and ISIS as the most futuristic projects currently at work in the Middle East, neither of which are secular—which, as I gathered, Jabali had identified as an adjective often imposed by the West onto a projected “progressive” Middle East. Jabali concurred:

“There's a religious war; who are we talking about the secular discourse with? These are the politics that will shape the tomorrow.” When asked about whether he considers ISIS a dystopian force, Jabali said that they are certainly apocalyptic, and probably the only revolutionaries around, as well as great visual artists—while what we all want is “little fixes in this Western Christendom.” That was a pretty representative note on which to end a thought-provoking presentation.

My lecture “Speculative Queerness: How Science Fiction Ruined my Relationship with the Gender Binary” followed, after some scattered requests to have the break ahead of schedule. I promised I'd be quick, which I was, although I could have used half the slides, as it turns out. I assured everybody that the graphic aspect of my presentation included no text whatsoever (even where the name of the artist would have been useful—my bad), and that the journey I was about to take us all on was a very personally chronological trip of discovery of genderfluid and non-binary characters in myth and science fiction. I introduced the talk by establishing that I understood the gender binary as a famously patriarchal and colonial concept, and due to where I'm from and to what I've consumed, my understanding of departures from gender would be shaped by its Western codification.

First, I introduced the photographic artwork of Claude Cahun, 20th-century French Jewish Surrealist, writer, DIY activist and nazi saboteur, and pioneer of genderqueerness. I opened with her work in order to discuss the issue of who gets to be human and which markers are used to define one as human or not. Next I looked at popular renditions of ambiguously gendered mythological and biblical characters I encountered as a teen, such as Loki and the archangel Gabriel. I moved on to science fiction by reminiscing about my attraction toward these characters without knowing why, lacking yet the language to discuss gender in complexity, and to which sf came to my aid.

I assured everybody...that the journey I was about to take us all on was a very personally chronological trip of discovery of genderfluid and non-binary characters in myth and science fiction.



Then I had the opportunity to introduce most of the audience to foundational authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin, Marge Piercy, Octavia Butler, and Samuel Delany, and to more recent works such as Ann Leckie's *Ancillary Justice* and Andrea Hairston's *Will Do Magic for Small Change*, and the multidimensional treatment of gender in them. I was then informed that I had somehow run out of time, so I panicked and finished up with a little talk about the wonderful cartoon *Steven Universe* (which WisCon 41 GoH Amal El-Mohtar used in her moving speech last month) and the memes of the Gender-queer Gengar Facebook page.

A break for food and drink ensued, during which I enjoyed interesting light chat with some attendees and was approached by others who told me they had really liked my talk and appreciated the passion I transmitted—I was genuinely relieved, as I had had little to no time to prepare due to personal circumstances. I missed out on the first batch of pizza, so Lama and I waited on the second one while people trickled back into the conference room. By the time we finished wolfing down our slices we were already embarrassingly late to the first talk of the second part: Yael Messer's presentation "Between Nostalgic Utopia and Present Returns."

Yael Messer, independent film curator and director of the 48 mm Film Festival at Zochrot, looked at the future of dissent as imagined by Israeli artists, including several art projects and their treatment of dystopian outcomes to the colonial Israeli project. Michael Blum's *Exodus 2048*, for instance, was an installation reproducing an imagined enclosed space in 2048, when economic support to Israel has ended and a Palestinian population, which has grown in number, has expelled Israelis, who then gain a "refugee" identity. This work allegedly echoes the Nakba (in a possibly "annoying" way, as Messer describes) and reproduces it as a single event while the "disaster" (*al-Nakbah*) is still happening to Palestinians today. Next she read from the book *Architecture after Revolution*, followed by

a look at contemporary films—one about a project to attract Israeli Jews back to Poland and a trilogy by film artist Thalia Hoffman (who would be at a later panel) that focuses on scenes lacking narrative, locked instead in a constant temporality, in a way, Messer argues, that brings the current circumstances of the Palestinians to the forefront.

Before the panel that would have Dr Reynaldo Anderson, Mohammad Jabali, Thalia Hoffman, and Dr Nadeem Karkabi in conversation, two short films were shown: one by Palestinian artist Larissa Sansour, *Nation Estate* (2013), and the other, a documentary featuring the Syrian cosmonaut Muhammed Ahmed Faris titled *Space Refugee* (2016), by Turkish artist Halil Altındere.

The final panel discussion, "Ethno-futurism in the Middle East—Critical Afterthoughts," featuring the above participants, aimed to discuss "the different social contexts that underlie expressions of Afrofuturism, Arabfuturism, the impact of contemporary imperialism and representative democracy on collective history, the utopia/dystopia divide," and more. It was, by all accounts, way too much to tackle in 10 or so minutes per person, as admitted by chair Dr Nadeem Karkabi, Anthropology and Cultural Studies lecturer at The Hebrew University in Jerusalem and member of the *Tobu* editorial board.

Dr Anderson was asked to further link his talk to the current political situation in Israel/Palestine, and he pointed out that in terms of the Black U.S. experience, the apocalypse has already happened, and that dystopia and utopia will always accompany each other. Interestingly, W.E.B. Dubois was a contemporary of the birth of the Zionist project, whereas during the second half of the 20th century, African Americans began to identify more strongly with the Palestinian struggle. Dr Anderson touched on a Biblical type of narrative, that of the utopian leader who will not live to see the changes he preaches, that his preaching proves instrumental in getting people moving, especially in this time of transi-

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“Space is the Place”
(cont. from p. 5)

The idea of being all in the same boat “is certainly an illusion....”

...plenty of conversations sprang up...well into the night. I believe the privacy afforded by smaller groups (and the wine) made us all feel more at liberty to discuss topics barely touched on before and to use terms more bluntly than throughout the conference.

tion in which the West is not so much declining as everybody else is rising.

Hoffman, regarding hopes and fears of displacement, of return, talked about her artwork as relating to the future of our present time, but not futuristic in the sense that it doesn't include technology in the picture. Beyond dystopia or utopia, what she tries to do is “look at the area of where people are trying to get along with each other, with expectations but not with beliefs of what's going to happen.”

Jabali interjected that it's interesting to think of the past as a duration—if we know about things from the past, they're with us here and now. However, how much do we want to fix this place? he asks; and he doesn't think that we're all interested. The idea of being all in the same boat “is certainly an illusion,” and this also applies to the U.S. Dr Karkabi noted the cynicism present in the local context as represented by Jabali, and how that relates to religion and its role in the future. To that, Dr Anderson said that he still believes in God, or “supernatural inspiration,” and has joy, but he asks: Are we willing to take the pain that's on its way, and, as in Octavia Butler, “come out the other side transformed”? He adds that religion in the modern world is used too much in “patriotism.” I found it interesting that nobody mentioned the Israeli state as an example in the conference's context.

Dr Karkabi addressed Jabali and the popular Palestinian discourse of “we've been here since before Israel, and after Israel we will still be here,” as somewhat parallel to other instances in which history is seen as cyclical—such as the Right's study of Asimov's *Foundation* series, according to Dr Anderson. Jabali, for his part, felt that art shouldn't be “a near-future functional thing only,” and that when it comes to creating art, political art should be on the streets, while art fairs should be emptied of political content, for otherwise its power is taken away.

The real lack of heroes in the Arab world was briefly discussed, as well as the fact that you can't educate everybody politically if you intend to achieve change; and that's where the delicate balance be-

tween democracy and authoritarianism comes into play, said Dr Anderson. The floor was then opened to questions, and an attendee expressed interest in the fact that nobody had mentioned the plasticity of time: “time tunnels might be made,” or there could be “loops in time,” as well as transformations in the “visuality” of the body, its skin tone and shape. (Anent this, I recommended Rasheedah Phillips's *Recurrence Plot*.) Lama contributed by pointing out that we seem unable to break other binaries aside from the gender binary, such as the political binary (e.g., democracy/authority, West/East), in looking at the future. When it comes to heroes, Dr Anderson mentioned the Puerto Rican super heroine La Borinqueña, while Hoffman opined that she didn't grow up reading sf, but even the term “hero” should be reconsidered, as it points to “someone who has an answer.” Finally, Jabali argued that Israeli artists' obligation is to deal with the here and now of “the Israeli situation,” and mentioned an artwork that featured a book with empty pages being projected on the wall, at which point the chair noted it was time to close, quite symbolic of the indefinite place at which we were leaving the conversation.

It goes without saying that plenty of conversations sprang up after the conference and during the DJ set by Guy Dubious (Osherov) titled “Space Poetry Volume One,” and well into the night. I believe the privacy afforded by smaller groups (and the wine) made us all feel more at liberty to discuss topics barely touched on before and to use terms more bluntly than throughout the conference. I'm not sure what this says exactly about the transformative power of events such as this, but I do believe that the conference was a step in the right direction.

Arrate Hidalgo is associate editor at Aqueduct Press, and a translator building bridges between queer and feminist speculative fictions in Spanish and English. She lives in Spain.





A Lovely Stroll Through the Violence Museum:

Maggie Nelson's *The Art of Cruelty*

by Victoria Elisabeth Garcia

2011's *The Art of Cruelty*, by MacArthur fellow Maggie Nelson, is a rich and enthralling exploration of the meaning, function, and impact of violence in literature and art. The book, Nelson's eighth, is the immediate predecessor to her 2015 break-out work, *Argonauts*. Unlike *Argonauts*, which is a careful fusion of scholarly writing and memoir, *The Art of Cruelty* is almost exclusively critical. But to be clear: by "critical," I do not mean "dry." Though the book is certainly dense, it has an engaging and convivial tone, and it is consistently delightful to read.

Being both a lifelong horror fan and a believer in safe spaces and nonviolent communication, I will confess that I was a tiny bit anxious about how Nelson would handle this subject, but as it turns out, I needn't have worried. Nelson is neither a reflexive disapprover nor a free speech absolutist, and she appears to relish both complexity and ambiguity. Indeed, though it is smart and compelling, *The Art of Cruelty* is not a book that provides many answers. Instead, it offers an enjoyable opportunity to follow an insightful and curious scholar as she goes on the hunt for good questions.

Though confined largely to the 20th and 21st centuries, the range of works that Nelson discusses in this book is very broad. Even readers knowledgeable about art and literature should expect to encounter the unfamiliar. Nelson's definition of cruelty is similarly broad, and encompasses emotional, physical, political, social, and even spiritual forms of violence. Nelson's inquiry leads her to examine dance performances, philosophy, installation art, film, fiction, and poetry—the specific works she analyzes include Sylvia Plath's poetry; texts on zen swordsmanship; big budget, American slasher films and the marketing campaigns that promote them; artist Kara Walker's Rabelaisian burlesques of Antebellum plantation life; Ivy Compton-Burnett's scathing domestic fiction; Diane Arbus's portraiture;

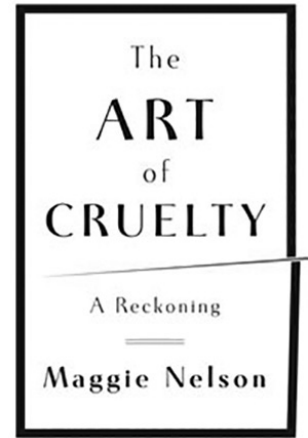
filmmaker John Waters's celebrations of intentional bad taste; and Yayoi Kusama's obliterating blizzards of dots.

Nelson can afford this degree of breadth because she is less concerned with creating durable, universal definitions than she is with learning something about her own preferences and sensibilities. But despite her wide-net approach, she is decidedly particular about the quality of the works she chooses to discuss. Those that strike her as bad, *prima facie*, are dismissed out-of-hand. After declaring that she is "not interested in stupid cruelty, of which the world is overfull," she gives herself leave to skip over a great deal of material. This includes both "cruelties brought about via conformism, especially conformism to misogynistic, homophobic, xenophobic, or racist norms," and "works that strike me as fatally sophomoric or weak-minded, such as the plays of Neil LaBute."

Though the ableism of this language is regrettable, Nelson's decision to choose her subject matter by personal fiat is a strong one. By declining to write a survey, and by expressly disavowing any notions about exhaustive coverage, Nelson spares herself and her readers any obligation, felt or imposed, to methodically sort through the kyriarchy's grimmest creative effluvia or to try to become the Carl Linnaeus of aesthetic dick moves. As a result, the book feels a bit like Nelson's personal *wunderkammer*: an idiosyncratic collection of fascinating tidbits, intimately considered, and deeply treasured.

Because the book is so personal, and so thoroughly given to exploration, it does have a bit of a rambling quality, both on the chapter level and overall. This is not a book to be outlined and argued with so much as it is a book to be chewed on and mused over.

Though it has no formal introduction, the book's first chapter, "Styles of Imprisonment," provides a bit of grounding for Nelson's overall inquiry. Here, Nelson ex-



The Art of Cruelty is not a book that provides many answers. Instead, it offers an enjoyable opportunity to follow an insightful and curious scholar as she goes on the hunt for good questions.

Nelson spares herself and her readers any obligation, felt or imposed, to methodically sort through the kyriarchy's grimmest creative effluvia, or to try to become the Carl Linnaeus of aesthetic dick moves.

Cont. on p. 8



For those of us who use SFF as a vehicle for bringing to light suffering and injustice and driving social change, it's an opportunity to reflect on tactics: Do we become more effective when we are starker, bloodier, and grimmer, or less?

...many of cruelty's more SFnal mechanisms, expressions, and functions are not discussed in this book. For some enterprising scholar, this may actually be great news.

amines the notion, shared by many in the 20th century, that artists with the right sort of vision and sensibility could use violent imagery in their work to deliver viewers a kind of cleansing and curative shock. This shock, properly received and internalized, was thought capable of helping loose its recipients from their own mind-forged manacles and delivering them from mindless conformity, bourgeois morality, dreary religious obligation, and the like. Thus freed, the recipients could then enter a more vital, natural, self-actualized, and self-determined state.

In opposition to this view, Nelson sets the teachings of several Buddhist thinkers. Among them is Thich Nhat Hanh, who holds that the contemplation of aggression serves only to impair compassion and breed more aggression. Nelson declares a qualified belief in the Buddhist position, but admits that she remains drawn to certain aspects of artistic cruelty: among them, the possibility of apprehending intriguing forms of human complexity; the promise, in the words of painter Francis Bacon, of a “violent return to life”; and most of all, the idea, which she credits to Roland Barthes, of being able to “live according to nuance.” The book’s central question, then, is about how to identify those works of artistic cruelty that are likely to deliver on their promises: what distinguishes a piece that is capable of enlivening, enlightening, and complicating, from one that will merely anger, deaden, or bore.

This kind of inquiry has the potential to be particularly useful to many in the SFF world. For those of us who use SFF as a vehicle for bringing to light suffering and injustice and driving social change, it’s an opportunity to reflect on tactics: Do we become more effective when we are starker, bloodier, and grimmer, or less? In what ways do depictions of abjection help, and in what ways do they harm? And for those working in horror or horror-adjacent milieux, it’s useful regardless of whether we have any interest in the philosophy of social change. In addition to offering us a space in which to reflect on the meaning of the art we create and consume, this inquiry gives us

the opportunity to learn about the ways others from across the artistic spectrum approach some of our key themes and motifs, and to look for more interesting new ways to twist the knife.

It should be noted, however, that precious little of the works Nelson discusses in the book is in any way SFnal. The few that are either receive only brief mentions (Octavia E. Butler) or are analyzed in ways that don’t take into account their fantastical qualities (Brian Evenson). A great deal of SFF-adjacent work is also absent. Nelson’s corpus excludes nearly all gothic and decadent work, all magic realism, most psychedelic work (though more than one heroin addiction memoir is included), as well as all midcentury American black humor, very nearly all sequential art, and most of the output of the Beat movement. Surrealism, though mentioned in passing, receives decidedly short shrift.

These choices, of course, are perfectly fair. Nelson’s *wunderkammer*, Nelson’s rules. But it does mean that many of cruelty’s more SFnal mechanisms, expressions, and functions are not discussed in this book. For some enterprising scholar, this may actually be great news. Nelson’s ideas are ripe for expansion in any number of directions, and this is one of them. And in the meantime, casual, SFF-oriented readers who aren’t content to wait for Nelson’s intellectual heirs to come along may need to stretch a bit, but they should still find plenty to chew on.

For me, the chapter that was most susceptible to SFF-world resonance was “Theaters of Cruelty,” the second in the book. In this section, Nelson looks at the role of violence in the pursuit of radical transcendence.

Though in this chapter as in every chapter, Nelson’s sources and examples are myriad, much of Nelson’s understanding of this subject centers on the “theater of cruelty,” which was devised in the early 1930s by Antonin Artaud, a dramatist, a director, and (though Nelson does not mention it) an intermittent but important member of the Paris surrealist group.



Artaud's way of defining the word "cruelty" is particularly important to Nelson's thinking, both in this section and elsewhere in the book. Early on, Nelson approvingly quotes a gloss of the word from a letter Artaud wrote to Jean Paulhan on November 14, 1932: "[T]he appetite for life, a cosmic rigor and implacable necessity, in the gnostic sense of a living whirlwind that devours the darkness, in the sense of that pain apart from whose ineluctable necessity life could not continue."

Though this formulation has instant, evocative appeal, I suspect that for many readers, it will be more than a little opaque. And in this case, the problem is actually worse than it appears: Artaud's relationship with language was fluid and contentious, and (as Nelson also notes) he claimed for himself "the right to break with the usual sense of language, to crack the armature once and for all, to get the iron collar off its neck, in short to return to the etymological origins of speech which, in the midst of abstract concepts, always evoke a concrete element," and he re-glossed the word a number of times. Because of this, and because Artaud's work may be unfamiliar to many CSZ readers, it seems prudent, at this point, to take a moment to explain the theater of cruelty in terms a bit more explicit than Nelson's.

To Artaud, traditional theater was a suffocating and torpid thing that "[I]mits itself to showing us intimate scenes from the lives of a few puppets, transforming the public into Peeping Toms," and Artaud sought to create a more visceral, truthful, and vivid form of theatrical performance: one that "wakes us up: nerves and heart." His intention was to create something visceral, energetic, and absolutely overwhelming, namely: "A mass spectacle...the agitation of tremendous masses, convulsed and hurled against each other, a little of that poetry of festivals and crowds when, all too rarely nowadays, the people pour out into the streets."

Artaud's prescription for achieving this, which he laid out in 1932 and 1933 in a pair of manifestos, was quite specific.

The theater of cruelty was not to concern itself with everyday human relationships, wants, and needs. Instead, it would be driven by spectacle, and the presentation of "famous personages, atrocious crimes, superhuman devotions," so as to evoke "the terrible lyricism of the Myths." Meant to be overpowering and engulfing, the new form required the obliteration of boundaries between performer and audience. Instead of rows of seating facing a raised stage, Artaud imaged "a single site, without partition or barrier of any kind. ... A direct communication... between the spectator and the spectacle, between the actor and the spectator, from the fact that the spectator, placed in the middle of the action, is engulfed...." Old ideas about lighting, costuming, and music would also be thrown out, and even language itself would need to assume new forms. The mode of speech that Artaud envisioned "utilizes the vibrations and qualities of the voice. It wildly tramples rhythms underfoot. It pile-drives sounds. It seeks to exalt, to benumb, to charm.... It ultimately breaks away from the intellectual subjugation of the Language, by conveying the sense of a new and deeper intellectuality which hides itself beneath the gestures and signs, raised to the dignity of particular exorcisms." In the end, this form of theater was intended to leave its viewer with "truthful precipitates of dreams, in which his taste for crime, his erotic obsessions, his savagery, his chimeras, his utopian sense of life and matter, even his cannibalism, pour out, on a level not counterfeit and illusory, but interior."

It is possible, when reading certain parts of Artaud's writing, to come away with an impression of a vision that, while grand, violent, and luminous, is ultimately chaotic. It is important to remember that while Artaud certainly valued rawness and thundering vitality, he also valued rigor, precision, and conscious intention, and considered those things essential to his concept of cruelty. We can see Artaud's concern with this in his letter of September 13, 1932, to Jean Paulhan (also quoted by Nelson) wherein he says that "[o]ne can very well imagine a

Artaud sought to create a more visceral, truthful, and vivid form of theatrical performance: one that "wakes us up: nerves and heart."

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Cont. on p. 10



*I feel a bit of resonance
between Artaud's theater
of cruelty and certain
elements of the SFF world.*

pure cruelty, without bodily laceration.” This is possible, he says, because “cruelty signifies rigor, implacable intention, and decision, irreversible and absolute determination.” In Nelson’s first chapter, she notes that she is particularly drawn to this aspect of Artaud’s thinking. She says: “I am attracted to this precision, this sharpness, this rigor. Why Artaud and so many others have muddled it up with cruelty, I do not know.”

I feel a bit of resonance between Artaud’s theater of cruelty and certain elements of the SFF world. Because while what Artaud hoped to evoke in his audience was certainly extreme, I can remember feeling something that now seems very similar (albeit far milder and cannibalism-free) when I first read the *Dangerous Visions* anthologies. The books came to me via the Science Fiction Book Club when I was thirteen years old. I lived with my parents, then, in a tiny, agricultural town on the dusty edge of nowhere. I was a withdrawn, fidgety kid who stammered helplessly through overlong sentences and tore at her cuticles and hated the sunshine. But after those books came, things changed. I was still a mess, of course, in just about all of the ways that counted. But mess or not, I now felt like I had a connection to something important: gorgeous, riotous, huge, and true. And until I went away to college, that feeling was all but a lifeline. The *Dangerous Visions* anthologies were not the only SFF books I had, nor were they the only SFF books I loved. I read constantly then, and I had genre books by the dozens. But I think that, in Artaud’s prescription, I can see some of the reasons why, for me, the *Dangerous Visions* books were the ones that struck the match: They embodied that combination of “[t]he terrible lyricism of the Myths;” the use of spectacular, overwhelming, and often violent imagery; and, in many of the stories, language that “exalts, benumbs and charms.”

I also can’t help but see implications for SFF when I think about the creative lineage to which Nelson assigns Artaud: A group whose pursuit of sublime ex-

perience and radical freedom required incorporation of some form of violence or pain. Nelson sees De Sade as one of this group’s early ancestors, and she identifies Nietzsche, with his exhortations about reclaiming evil reexamining cruelty, as Artaud’s direct forebear. Among Artaud’s inheritors are the Vienna Actionists, Hermann Nitsch, a creator of Dionysian performances which in the past have involved pale robes, processions, the simulated gutting and crucifixion of actors, feasting, cacophonous orchestras, and the slaughter of live animals.

Granted, the bulk of SFF is not addressed to exercises in will-to-power, or to animal sacrifice, or to extended flights of sadomasochistic pedantry. Many of the SFF world’s citizens do, however, invest substantial effort in the evocation of the uncanny, the negative sublime, and other types of thrilling or menacing otherworldliness, and doing this very often involves the evocation of some sort of physical abjection and pain. And it now seems to me that the range of approaches to abjection that we can see in Artaud’s lineage almost imply an invitation to experiment. How much creepiness and unearthly shimmer can we get from “cruelty without laceration?” How much from something more spectacular, along the lines of: “atrocious crimes, and superhuman devotions?” How much from a full-blown bacchanal?

Nelson does make it clear that not all who carry Artaud’s torch walk in gore. Nelson also sees echoes of Artaud’s desire to break down the walls between performance and life, and between performer and audience, in John Lennon and Yoko Ono’s “Bed-In,” in punk shows, and in Burning Man, among others. (To her list, I would suggest the addition of several examples from the artier parts of the roleplaying game world, such as Nordic LARP, and Jeepform games.) Transcendence, in other words, does not absolutely require violence.

Per Nelson, we can catch glimpses of Artaud’s ghost in some of the current era’s more disappointing and distress-

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ing cultural materials as well. A bog-standard Hollywood action film, for instance, is the product of an Artaud-esque drive for ever-greater spectacles, and the very last thing one of those is likely to do is “wake us up: nerves and heart.” And Nelson also sees echoes of the theater of cruelty in the fall of the Twin Towers on 9/11, and in the events at Abu Ghraib.

This is just one of the many times that Abu Ghraib is evoked throughout the book. The George W. Bush presidency and the Iraq war in general are frequent subjects as well. Abu Ghraib is heavily discussed in “Great to Watch,” the book’s chapter on the weaknesses of photography and documentary filmmaking as drivers of social change. It is discussed again in “Everything is Nice,” the chapter on women as perpetrators of violence, and yet another time in “Captivity, Catharsis,” the chapter on big budget slasher films.

Because of this, even though 2011 was not so long ago, the book already feels like a period piece: A memento from a previous emergency. In some ways, this is reassuring: I can remember when the George W. Bush presidency and all that came with it felt like an inescapable, be-fanged, and slaving maw. But now, that once-ravenous monster has filled up on pudding, spat out its teeth, and gone to sleep. It’s nice to know that’s possible, even though new monsters abound.

At the same time, I never intentionally surrendered my outrage over any of this, and I’m not sure I like the fact that so much of it has, nonetheless, slipped away. This becomes even more thorny when, as in “Great to Watch,” this stuff is brought up during Nelson’s discussion of the public’s ever-increasing ability to excuse, minimize, and ignore.

I also can’t help but wonder how Nelson would incorporate the current swirl of crises into the book if she were writing it now. Which of our new cultural materials would draw her interest? Would she write about Pepe the frog, Kekistan, and meme magic, or would she dismiss those things as being uninteresting products of standard and expected forms of hate, and

examples of mere “Stupid cruelty?” What would she make of nazi-punching remix videos and Trump Tower gilt and ormolu?

There is, of course, a great deal more to *The Art of Cruelty* than century-old French drama theory and the Bush era’s ragged ghosts. In succeeding chapters, Nelson explores topics such as consent, the ethics of provocation, women’s use of violent art as a way of calling out injustice, and more. Readers willing to accompany Nelson for the duration of her journey should be prepared to be challenged and disturbed, but for those who are willing, the book will be impossible to put down. They will spend time with Mary Gaitskill, Susan Sontag, and Henry James. Something wonderful happens with a strap-on burrito. Something soul-killing happens with epoxy spray. Yoko Ono is fearless, and Maria Abramovic, nearly shot, manages to reach a détente with beauty. I could go on, and on, and on. To give anything like a full accounting of the riches of this book, I would need to write an article very nearly the length of this book. It is a glorious treat, intricate and wise, stimulating and stunning, and of course it’s horrible too, but it has to be.

50 Foot

Gwynne Garfinkle

“Middle aged women are such easy prey, like they’re supposed to walk around with eyes averted, hanging their heads in shame at their wreckage.”

—Dodie Bellamy, *the buddhist*

Harry called you crazy, alcoholic,
then took off to nuzzle a floozy. To
be never enough or too much were your
only choices. Now you’re far too much for
him or anyone, as your long legs straddle
the highway. Your footsteps shake the town.
Your voice bellowing your husband’s name could
split eardrums. Harry’s a doll in your hand.
They wanted you invisible or dead.
Daring to take up space makes you monstrous.

Gwynne Garfinkle’s poetry and fiction have appeared in such publications as *Strange Horizons*, *Interfictions*, *Mythic Delirium*, *inkscrawl*, and *The Mammoth Book of Dieselpunk*. She is working on a book of poems inspired by classic films, TV, and pop culture.

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





Lavinia, by Ursula K. Le Guin,

by John Kessel



I would like to say a few words in praise of Ursula K. Le Guin's 2008 novel *Lavinia*, but I am going to come at the book through the side door, and I hope you will bear with me.

I first discovered Le Guin's writing through *The Left Hand of Darkness*, when I bought the Science Fiction Book Club edition in 1969. She has been a large influence on the way that I see the world and science fiction. For coming on fifty years now (!), through the various stages of my evolution, I have read her work with pleasure and admiration.

Lest that sound like a banality, realize that there are great writers who don't pass that test. If you first read a book when you are 25 and it is still a favorite when you read it at 65, that says something about either the book or the reader. Let's assume that my continued affection for Le Guin is a statement about her work rather than about my arrested development. *Lavinia* sums up a great deal about Le Guin's wisdom, her balance, her thoughtfulness, her humanity, her careful craft, her ability to play fair with the characters and the reader, even when writing about things that matter to her a great deal—all this maintaining itself over fifty years.

A good comparison in my case would be Flannery O'Connor, whom I first read at about the same time I first read Le Guin. When I first read "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," "Good Country People," and "Everything That Rises Must Converge" I was absolutely blown out of the water. I wanted desperately to understand how O'Connor did the things she did, and learn to do those things for my own purposes. I studied her stories with rapt attention and stole whatever I could carry off that was not bolted down. She is one of the great short story writers of all time and I owe her a lot.

But over the course of forty years or more I wore out my O'Connor jones in the way that, if you play a song you love repeatedly over decades, it may become less compelling—even annoying. I have

trouble liking these stories with the unqualified admiration I had when I was 25, or 35, or 45. It was not just familiarity that did this. I began to see in O'Connor not simply a demanding judge of human fallibility and an exponent of a particular religious vision. I came to feel that she was too narrow—and if a writer is too narrow, it is possible to exhaust the depth that makes up for that narrowness. O'Connor's stories are unkind in a way that does not speak to me the way they did to the judgmental, morally obsessed young man who first read them.

In the end this probably says more about me than it does about O'Connor, and I would not draw too broad a conclusion from this situation. Had O'Connor lived to be 80, she might have evolved, though she did not express a belief in evolution. But here's the thing: I have taught *The Left Hand of Darkness* and "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" and "The Poacher" and "The Matter of Seggri" many times, and each time I re-read these stories, I am knocked out by Le Guin's craft, her taste, her humanity, and her fusing of boldness with restraint. She humbles me. More important, she surprises me, still.

Which brings me to *Lavinia*, which I just read this month for the first time. I have owned a copy for a number of years, but I had not got to it. I had not paid much attention to reviews because I did not want to know too much about what other people thought of the book before I read it, and I'll confess to never having read Vergil's *Aeneid*, from which it draws its characters and situations.

Lavinia is a minor character from Vergil's epic poem, the daughter of King Latinus and Queen Amata of Latium, destined to marry Aeneas and bear him a son who will be the ancestor of Julius Caesar and thus the Roman Empire. Vergil gives Lavinia only a few lines and no dialogue:

A single daughter, now ripe for a man,
now of full marriageable age, kept the great
household. Many from broad Latium and
all Ausonia came wooing her...

Grandmother Magma



Le Guin makes Lavinia the center of her story, giving her a completely convincing voice and complex humanity. Out of Vergil's few references, tons of research, the experience of a lifetime of writing, and probably a thousand other sources, she creates a remarkable character. But Le Guin also does wonders with Lavinia's father Latinus, her mother Amata, with Turnus her suitor, with Aeneas and Aeneas's son Ascanius, and many other characters she borrows from Vergil.

The story comes from the second half of the *Aeneid*, where Aeneas and the Trojans land in Italy near the future site of Rome, and a war breaks out between the Trojans and the Latins. Lavinia's father Latinus wishes to avoid it, but her mother Amata is determined to see Lavinia marry her nephew Turnus, a great warrior, in defiance of the prophecies that say Lavinia will marry Aeneas, and against Lavinia's own desires. Lavinia is not a passive prize for the winning warrior, but a young woman attempting to find her way in a society that does not offer women, even princesses like her, many opportunities for choice.

There is so much to love about this book. I love its invention, its humor, its scholarship, its observation of male and female behavior, of the behavior of children and adults, of friendship and hate, of household gods, of piety and hypocrisy, of parent-child understanding and conflict, of war and peace and faith, and art vs. reality. Of the mature love between husband and wife.

One of the characters Le Guin adds to the *Aeneid* is the spirit of the poet Vergil, whom Lavinia meets at a sacred spring where she goes to pray. In these passages the novel becomes metafictional. Lavinia discovers she is a character created by the poet, and that all that happens to her is his invention. But she seems to have some independent life of her own—Vergil is surprised by her, and realizes she is immortal, while the poet is limited by his mortality. Behind the Vergil who initially invented Lavinia, and the reason he may be surprised by her, is the author of this book, Ursula Le Guin, who takes the little that Vergil

said about Lavinia and the much greater amount he said about Aeneas and the Trojans and the Latins and Turnus and the war, and from those materials creates her own characters. As Lavinia speaks with Vergil about her fictionality, shadowed forth is the figure of Le Guin, another poet late in her career, creating her own tale, perhaps in some way summing up her vision of life. Vergil is a Roman man in the first century B.C., Le Guin an American woman in the 21st century A.D. The tensions arising from their differences invigorate the story. The tensions between epic poem and history likewise inform Le Guin's novel.

There's much more I could say about the novel. In particular I like the way it creates the everyday life of this pre-Roman Italy, much ruder and homier than we are used to seeing in epics of swords and sandals. In the course of telling her story, Lavinia tells us much about her people and about their politics. At one point her father Latinus pleads with his people not to pursue an unnecessary war against the Trojans. It's hard not to read the people's lust for battle, their fantasy of easy victory, as Le Guin's reflection on Americans' fury for revenge in the wake of 9/11, or in all the other military adventures of the last sixty years, or really, all military adventures everywhere.

And so Latinus' plea was made to them, in the hope that they might remember it later. For now, they were afire, mad with excitement. The chance of a fight, the promise of bursting out in violence, righteous wrath, that was all they saw at the moment, all they wanted. Every farmer hates a foreigner, and here was a troop of fancy fellows from somewhere who thought they could walk in and take over Latium, shoot the deer, marry the princess, push honest men around—well, they'd find out their mistake. The old king wouldn't stand up against them, but the new one would. What did it matter if he was a Rutulian? We're all Latins. We stand shoulder to shoulder, the peoples of the West,

Lavinia sums up a great deal about Le Guin's wisdom, her balance, her thoughtfulness, her humanity, her careful craft, her ability to play fair with the characters and the reader, even when writing about things that matter to her a great deal....

Lavinia is not a passive prize for the winning warrior, but a young woman attempting to find her way in a society that does not offer women, even princesses like her, many opportunities for choice.

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Coffee with Critics

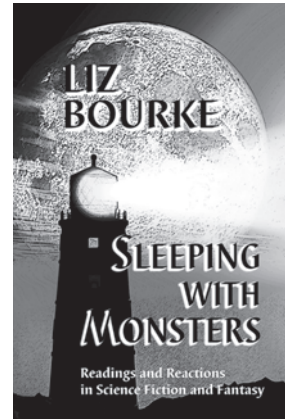
Sleeping with Monsters, by Liz Bourke, Aqueduct Press, July 2017, 264 pp., \$19.00

reviewed by Erin Roberts

Bourke brings a progressive and feminist perspective to each article and review in this collection. She does so deftly, weaving incisive commentary on gender, race, colonialism, and queer representation into her discussion of each book....

Reading Liz Bourke's *Sleeping with Monsters* is not unlike going out for coffee with a good friend. A well-read, opinionated, queer feminist good friend, that is, eager to share her insightful thoughts on the many science fiction and fantasy books she's been reading. Bourke's debut collection of reviews and essays covers over sixty works of speculative fiction, almost all written by women, divided roughly into classic space opera, modern science fiction, fantasy (primarily of the epic and sword & sorcery varieties), and young adult fiction. While the collection also includes a few video game critiques and some compelling essays about the genre as a whole, it is primarily, as Bourke puts it, "one small slice of one single person's engagement with issues surrounding women in science fiction and fantasy genre literature." It is also a must-add to the shelf of anyone who wants to read more widely and think more deeply when it comes to science fiction and fantasy.

As is perhaps to be expected from the author of the long-standing *Sleeps with Monsters* column on Tor.com, which focuses on women and genre, Bourke brings a progressive and feminist perspective to each article and review in this collection. She does so deftly, weaving incisive commentary on gender, race, colonialism, and queer representation into her discussion of each book's plot, characters, and style. She is as likely to challenge a book's lack of female friendships or inability to pass the Bechdel test as she is to point out flat characters or a convoluted plot. Her forays into these broader topics are often short, and I wished at times for longer discussion of Bourke's thoughts on the issues and shorter summaries of the book's plots, but her ideas are no less powerful for their brevity. Her willingness to tackle the pervasiveness of rape culture and the male gaze, the one-dimensional portrayal of older female characters, and the



U.S.-centric perspective of genre fiction, among other issues, is refreshing. What is remarkable, though, is her ability to pair this unflinching look at science fiction and fantasy with an infectious passion for the genre and a casual style that makes readers feel welcome.

Bourke's enthusiasm for science fiction and fantasy is evident throughout *Sleeping with Monsters*. Her personality seems almost as much on display as her perspective, as she uses a conversational tone throughout her reviews and often includes asides about her reading habits or acknowledgments of her personal biases (though one area where I feel this could be clearer is in the section on young adult fiction, which comes off as a bit less generously read than the others). Bourke also makes an effort to highlight positive aspects of each book, even while noting the areas where she felt they fell short, praising a sense of place in a book in which she didn't relate to the characters, for example, or noting the great turns of phrase in a book that felt aimless in its plot. As she notes in one review, "an interesting failure can prove far more entertaining than a novel that's technically successful but has no *heart*."

While the reviews are perhaps the heart of *Sleeping with Monsters*, the essays, grouped at the end of the book in a section titled "In Which I Am Wrong On the Internet: Views and Shorter Pieces," may be its soul. I almost wished to have this collection of thoughts up



front, as they touch on issues tangentially referenced in several reviews and would be good to have for mental reference throughout. Here, for example, is where Bourke muses at greater length about the role of queer women in science fiction and fantasy, takes on those who argue that historical accuracy precludes the inclusion of strong female and queer characters in historical fantasy, and challenges conventional wisdom on the supposed conservatism of epic fantasy and liberalism of urban fantasy. Bourke's background as a reviewer is still quite evident here, and at times I wished for less focus on books and more on ideas, as well as a more definitive stance on some issues, but the essays generally added depth and context to both the book and my understanding of Bourke's perspective. I only wish there had been a few more.

Current fans of Bourke's work, familiar with her talents as a writer and re-

viewer, may wonder what new insights *Sleeping with Monsters* has to offer. The collection mostly contains reprints, but also eight new pieces, including a brilliant essay challenging the insistence of some fans on a literary canon of genre fiction, the aforementioned essay on queer women in science fiction and fantasy, and reviews of works including Elizabeth Bear's *Carnival*, Nicola Griffith's *Slow River*, and Melissa Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends*. As important, *Sleeping with Monsters* is not the kind of book that you read in a day, racing from cover to cover. It is a thought-provoking reference guide to new and challenging literature, a reminder to take a critical look at the works we love and the tropes we have become accustomed to, and a testament to the joy of reading. And like a cup of coffee with a good, knowledgeable, passionate friend, it is an experience well worth savoring.

Erin Roberts is a DC-based writer and communicator-for-hire. Her fiction and nonfiction have appeared in *PodCastle*, *People of Colo(u)r Destroy Fantasy*, and *POC Take Over FSI*, and she is an *Escape Pod* Associate Editor. Find her online at @nirel and writingwonder.com.

 *Lavinia* (Cont. from page 13)

defending our fields, our altars, our women. Once we've driven these strangers into the sea, we can sort out our own affairs.

Latinus had known the enthusiasm of war before and knew better than to try to oppose its first furor, to waste speech on the mindless.

I like it that *Lavinia* does not fit into any of Le Guin's established sequences of stories and novels: it's not an Earthsea book, it's not part of her Hainish cycle of stories and novels, it's not a fairy tale or a science fiction. But it still sums up her career in its skepticism, its craft, its non-doctrinaire feminism, its Taoist embrace of the world and the ordinary, small rituals of everyday life, which in the end mean more than the grand actions of heroes and armies. And it meditates on the power and ineffectuality of authors, people who spend much of their intellectual and emotional lives engrossed in the plights and pleasures of made-up people.

Finally, a personal reaction: One thing about *Lavinia* that is particularly meaningful to me is that, in it, Le Guin en-

ters the world of another writer's story and characters and creates her own story based on it, remaining faithful to the original but also taking it in directions that the original author never intended (and might even object to). This game has fascinated me from early in my career, from "Another Orphan," where I threw my character into Melville's *Moby Dick*, to "Every Angel Is Terrifying," which has the gall to be a sequel to "A Good Man Is Hard to Find." Such fiction runs the risk of being a kind of glorified fanfic, with pretensions. I have just finished a novel that does something similar with the characters and plot of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Whether or not what I have written is worthy of the works I am re-imagining, I find it validating that *Lavinia* shows how this can be done without disrespect to the great work it arises from and comments upon. Yet another lesson I have learned from Ursula Le Guin.

Lavinia was published when Le Guin was 79 years old. And I'm 66, and still as much of a fanboy as I was at 19.

I like it that Lavinia does not fit into any of Le Guin's established sequences of stories and novels.... But it still sums up her career in its skepticism, its craft, its non-doctrinaire feminism, its Taoist embrace of the world and the ordinary, small rituals of everyday life, which in the end mean more than the grand actions of heroes and armies.

Winner of the Nebula, Sturgeon, and Tiptree awards, John Kessel has written stories and books including *Good News from Outer Space*, *Corrupting Dr. Nice*, and *The Baum Plan for Financial Independence*. His novel *The Moon and the Other* was published by Saga in March 2017.





A Visceral Ride

Feral by James DeMonaco and B.K. Evenson, Blumhouse/Anchor, April 2017, 309 pp., \$16.

reviewed by Arley Sorg



For most purposes, the men of *Feral* function in much the same way as zombies in any number of films.... They can't be placated or reasoned with in any way, a head shot is the best way to stop them, and the threat of them is everywhere.

To be blunt, the violence against women in *Feral* is bare and prevalent. This book will trigger anyone sensitive to the topic. It doesn't quite read like an angry male fantasy: it sticks to a basic horror narrative, rather than falling into psychological pornography or sadism.

Feral is a high-tension, classic zombie-style apocalypse with a gender twist.

A fire at a research facility releases an airborne virus that turns men murderous. Called *ferals*, these men are stronger and faster than otherwise possible, practically immune to pain, and often cannibalistic. While some die from the infection, most rampage, slaughtering women in an uncontrollable rage. Society as we know it comes to an abrupt end.

Men everywhere have either become *ferals* or died. What few women remain alive are fighting for survival. Enter Allie, a tough teenager whose primary goal is to protect her little sister, Kim. After the two escape their neighborhood and survive the wilds of apocalyptic America, they join a community of women at a farm converted into a fortress called West Staten.

For most purposes, the men of *Feral* function in much the same way as zombies in any number of films, or more specifically, like the "Rage" infected of *28 Days Later* (arguably also a twist on a zombie trope). They can't be placated or reasoned with in any way, a head shot is the best way to stop them, and the threat of them is everywhere. Because of this, the atmosphere and beats of the book will be comfortable for horror readers.

In fact, for horror fans, the book does its job well: an interesting idea provides groundwork for a visceral ride. The pacing is smooth, and action scenes are quick and dirty. People get hurt, and more often than not, they get hurt bad. Pervasive danger provides a steady sense of tension, and stark brutality, sometimes veering into moments of gore, inspires a darker sense of terror. While the world-building isn't always convincing, and a number of errors in terms of details can be distracting, the plot is sewn together well enough to keep the read moving.

The bulk of the tale takes place a few years after the infection's initial outbreak, when the virus has brought about

a widespread collapse of civilization. The narrative style is visual, with casually shifting points of view, and has a horror-film sensibility paired with the feeling of a hastily sketched story.

A quarter-way in the style side-steps from those well-trodden zombie-apocalypse beats. Literary moments delve into the relationships between the women of the camp and Allie. Changes in perspective humanize characters and refresh the palate, providing a much needed break from violence. A fine balance is struck between this exploration and the action.

Allie as protagonist is countered by Dr Zeman, a pot-smoking researcher and makeshift medical doctor who is searching for the virus's cure. One of the leaders of the encampment, Zeman struggles with the cold need to experiment on *ferals* while trying to see them as human. Power dynamics in the compound are complicated by Jacky, a gun-toting, militaristic leader who is often at odds with Zeman. Meanwhile, Kim is caught between the desire to be a kid and do whatever is left for kids to do, and the urge to be like her sister. A handful of other women are introduced, giving rise to a light foray into the interpersonal complexities of a community without men (not to mention a glimpse at the larger problem: the potential end of the human species).

But the story falls short with most of those same West Staten inhabitants. These characters are archetypal and provide no surprises. There are a few nice minor notes, but the decisions they make, and the environment they create, is entirely expected. The cast and worse, the limited portrayal of gender, generally fit well with '90s genre fiction and media, ignoring a wealth of literature available and missing an opportunity to add something relevant to a very long running discussion.

Gender aside, the plot leans on the twin concepts of characters misunderstanding each other and characters not



communicating with each other, without providing satisfactory setups for their missteps. Happenstance in the plot makes characters' actions seem less important.

Allie's story arc is even more disappointing. Where the narrative initially builds Allie up as a competent badass, promising a character such as Sigourney Weaver's Ripley or Linda Hamilton's Sarah Connor (*à la Terminator 2*), it eventually breaks her back down, undermining any notion of her as hero, or even protagonist. Her agency vanishes. She winds up relegated to roles and actions that are typical of a supporting actress awaiting rescue, even at the cost of contradicting earlier notions about who she is.

To be blunt, the violence against women in *Feral* is bare and prevalent. This book will trigger anyone sensitive to the topic. It doesn't quite read like an angry male fantasy: it sticks to a basic horror narrative, rather than falling into psychological pornography or sadism. For fans of horror who have a fair tolerance for gore, this is a solid (although familiar) read. But ultimately, the casual brutality against women is never justified by the experience of the read, and the overall effect leaves me with the feeling of gender inequality re-lived without examination, without proper exploration, without even a point beyond the fascinations of shock.

Arley Sorg lives in Oakland, California, and writes in local coffee shops. A 2014 Odyssey Writing Workshop graduate, he's an assistant editor at *Locus Magazine*. He's soldering together a novel, has thrown a few short stories into orbit, and hopes to launch more.

Those Dizzy Stargazers, Still Searching

Wicked Wonders, by Ellen Klages, Tachyon May 2017, 288 pp., \$15.95.

reviewed by Joanne Rixon

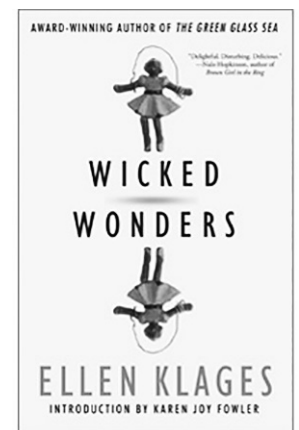
Ellen Klages's *Wicked Wonders* is the kind of book you want to make a mix-tape for. Like a cassette tape that holds songs recorded off the radio, the button pushed at just the right time to capture the first few notes, it achieves what most short story collections only dream of: a book-spanning aesthetic that feels coherent and meaningful in spite of the wide variations between stories. Klages weaves a dream of girlhood, of the agony of growing up, or trying to grow up faster, or refusing to grow up at all. Of riding your bike down the street of a subdivision with the girl you love most in the world riding beside you. Of learning what it is to be a grown woman, constrained and invisible. Of learning your father is mortal. Of leaving home, or wanting to, or never wanting to, and of never looking back, or only looking back when you absolutely must, or looking back all the time and never finding so much as the ghost of the girl you're looking for.

In "Hey, Presto!" Polly Wardlow is fifteen and finding her way as a scholar at boarding school in pre-WWII Britain. When her absent father recalls her to London for the summer to stay with him and work on his stage magician show, she learns the trade both as a stagehand

and as a fill-in for the assistant who has taken off to join the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. Polly, hesitant at first, learns to love the engineering behind the illusions and sets off on her own project: inventing exploding paint to give their tricks an extra spark.

Polly's display of gumption and nerve when pressed to save her father makes for a cheerful, heroic coming-of-age story. Although "Hey, Presto!" is barely speculative fiction—the exploding paint is, spoiler, the only magic or new technology featured in this story—Klages perfectly captures the ethos of scientific discovery, that youthful joy of accomplishment when your first big experiment to go right goes really right. And while the combination of "estranged, distant father" and "dimly-lit theater full of strange devices" could result in a menacing, horrifying story, under Klages's brush it becomes an optimistic story about forging unexpected connections. Listen to "New Constellations" by Ryn Weaver as you read.

A more appropriate song for "Caligo Lane," another story set during World War II, is "Perfect Places," by Lorde. This story is less optimistic, though the writing is perhaps even more beautiful. It is



Klages weaves a dream of girlhood, of the agony of growing up, or trying to grow up faster, or refusing to grow up at all.

Cont. on p. 18



At the best of times, there is a sharpness to her insight, a queering of the real that is hidden inside the expected like a razor in the brim of a plain brown felt hat.

The effervescence of this book simply cannot be emphasized enough.... I recommend pairing it with an orange creamsicle and your very own mixtape.

set in a magical San Francisco where the fog that swirls around the newly completed Golden Gate Bridge and fills the winding streets of the glittering city is made of the stuff that forms the fabric of the world. Like the fog, the descriptions of magic in this story are dense and full of half-hidden, moving shapes.

The protagonist, Franny, is one of the few protagonists in *Wicked Wonders* who is an adult woman. Her adulthood is not incidental; it is her artisan's touch, honed by years of careful practice, that gives her power. She is a map-maker, a wise woman who lives alone in a small house on a street that is not always there, and without the decades of work that have gone into making herself, she would not be able to make the maps she makes, nor save the lives she saves. Polly Wardlow, with all her youthful try-hard energy, could not do the kind of magic Franny does. But they are the same, maker-women, like different songs on the same album.

"Gone to the Library" is another story that leaves the reader with an ending that mixes happiness and unhappiness. Unlike Franny and Polly, the protagonist, Izzy, is only nine years old. And with a nine-year-old's logic, she seeks out and achieves her heart's desire, though the reader knows that this is not the future an adult would want for her. It is her innocence that gives her the power to do a magic no adult could do; she doesn't know how the world works or recognize the limits of reality, and so she supersedes the possible. Her audacity makes "Slip Away" by Perfume Genius the perfect song to pair with her story.

In "Gone to the Library," like in "Caeligo Lane," magic is almost science. In this case, it is almost math—or maybe it just *is* math. Izzy discovers the connection between her father, her father's best friend, and the boy who lives on the other side of the woods: her father's best friend's son. The oath of best-friendship her father and his friend swore over math games, plus a math lesson from a house guest, puts her on track to save her new friend from a bitter adulthood. Izzy uses the game of tic-tac-toe, the math of magic squares, and the imaginary square

root of -1 to cast a spell. Magic math shouldn't work. But it does.

The story also features an ancient giant tortoise, a house that looks like something straight out of a fairy tale but is located just down the street from Einstein's house at Princeton, and a cameo from the (real, and really amazing) mathematician and early computer programmer Grace Hopper. On the other hand, many elements of the story are almost alarmingly prosaic: the game of baseball played by neighbor boys in the sunlit backyard on Izzy's suburban street; the unknown, absent father killed in the war; the tired mother who insists that Izzy fold her clothes and speak politely to guests and help with the vacuuming.

All of Klages's stories reverberate with this kind of unusualness that bends and folds the known world into something that holds a different shape. At the best of times, there is a sharpness to her insight, a queering of the real that is hidden inside the expected like a razor in the brim of a plain brown felt hat. "Queering" is the right word for it, too: although there are male characters of importance here, this is a book about girls and women, and the girls and women they love, even when that love is not romantic. In stories like "Goodnight Moons," the relationship between a mother and her daughter takes center stage, and the mother's husband is literally left behind, his distance across the empty reaches of space narrative as well as physical. This is perhaps unsurprising from an author who spent two decades on the board of the James Tiptree, Jr. Literary Award.

While there is much to love in this collection, there are one or two false notes. I found "Sponda the Suet Girl and the Secret of the French Pearl," Klages's only high fantasy story in this collection, slightly heavy-handed. And "Woodsmoke," a long literary piece without any speculative elements, is set in the kind of summer camp I have only ever seen in fiction and suspect never really existed at all. The heavy weight of nostalgia drags the piece down and gives it a pervasive conservatism that, in spite



of the beautiful prose, made me feel uneasy, and not at home.

Many other readers may find both of those stories just as enchanting as the rest of *Wicked Wonders*. The effervescence of this book simply cannot be emphasized enough. It will leave you with the smell of cut grass in your nose, the sound of sprinklers and an ice cream truck jingle in your ears. You'll taste the sunlight of a summer afternoon in a suburbia

more dream than reality. Small delights like "Mrs. Zeno's Paradox," "The Scary Ham," and "Amicae Aeternum" are enough to make the book worth picking up; the big, chunky stories make it doubly worthwhile. I recommend pairing it with an orange creamsicle and your very own mixtape. Mine includes the above songs, as well as "Good Mourning" by Halsey, "Hotel Song" by Regina Spektor, and "BITE" by Troye Sivan.

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

A Charming Complexity

When the Moon Was Ours by Anna-Marie McLemore, Thomas Dunne, October 2016, 288 pp., \$18.99.

reviewed by Lynette James

As more diverse perspectives in YA and sf literature continue to gain visibility, sometimes controversy, and *always* discussion, the question too often comes down to a false dichotomy of whether a story is important *or* entertaining. This is especially true as they respond to tangled legacies of problematic real-world elements expected with their fantastical ones. "Feel-good" starts to seem like a failure to reach deep enough to find the material's *true* (read *upsetting* or *overwhelming*) significance.

This worry shows when people try to summarize *When the Moon Was Ours* by Anna-Marie McLemore, the most recent James Tiptree, Jr. Award winner. They stumble into two camps: either they gush over a tender portrayal of first love *or* they stress the profundity of including central queer and trans characters.

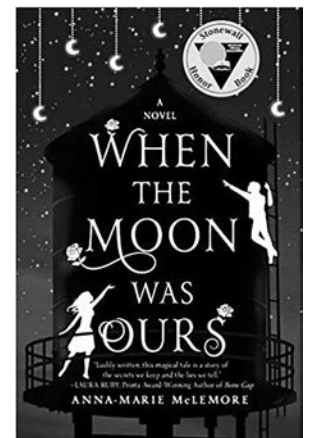
The truth is that *When the Moon Was Ours* is sweet and will appeal to those who love the good heart-squeeze but assumed uplift of a romantic story. The truth is *also* that by existing together, the protagonists explore questions of gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity, and complications of queer identity and the place it is claiming within the standard plotlines of YA. The surprise of this book is how it refuses to back away from this complexity of magic and character backgrounds, and ends up an overall charming read.

Sam and Miel are legend—a modern fable—in their small town, a larger-than-life love story between the Pakistani boy

who hangs painted moons everywhere and the girl who grows roses from her wrist. It follows the typical girl-boy friendship blooming into something more. It plays on many similar themes found in McLemore's debut, *The Weight of Feathers*, with a surer touch for tying together seemingly disparate threads and revealing hidden motivations and twists, without losing the forward momentum of Sam and Miel's attempts to navigate their changed relationship.

McLemore's speculative approach positions the story near titles such as *Summer of the Mariposas* by Guadalupe Garcia McCall or *Shadowshaper* by Daniel José Older. For example, Miel's guardian Aracely exorcizes the remnants of unhappy love, and a group of sisters has the power to ensnare any boy they set their will against. But think Aimee Bender or magical realism rather than classic fairytale. McLemore uses radiant language and commonplace strangeness to draw the reader further into this heightened reality, but doesn't dwell on the mechanics. Like one of Miel's roses, the world unfurls into more complex relationships and shadings. While the sisters' individual stories add empathy, they remain a significant threat, and Aracely's easy acceptance of so much of Miel's mysterious past and sometimes drastic behavior begins to reveal more complicated secrets.

I stumbled across this book even before it won a Tiptree because an independent bookstore had set out a display



McLemore uses radiant language and commonplace strangeness to draw the reader further into this heightened reality, but doesn't dwell on the mechanics.

Cont. on p. 20



Charming Complexity (cont. from p. 19)

Miel and Sam's love story does have significance in terms of portraying queer identities.... But the novel wants to be a sweet love story, something people reach for when they crave the feeling of discovering a person who changes one's life by their very presence

for #weneeddiversebooks. The handwritten description explained how it took on so many important overlapping issues: a queer YA love story with trans characters, a multiracial cast, POC protagonists, a latina and Hispanic heroine, a Pakistani hero, portrayals of multiple important female characters. Basically, that this speculative novel managed to be all things to all progressive people.

Miel and Sam's love story *does* have significance in terms of portraying queer identities, opening the way for more kinds of "marketable" future protagonists beyond cis Euroamerican norms. But the novel *wants* to be a sweet love story, something people reach for when they crave the feeling of discovering a person who changes one's life by their very presence, who re-oriens gravity and the possible. The devastating and transformative significance of this romance remains centered on Samir and Miel themselves. That centering of who they *are* rather than contrasting them with supposedly "standard" characters, normalizing them as people rather than tropes, means McLemore's novel operates the way any other engaging romance does: the "problem" is how and *if* they can make this relationship work.

The internal obstacles keeping the couple apart feel real and like natural progressions of their personalities and circumstances. Their role *as* duo is so central to the very reality of this world that it's a relief they have separate troubles, things that impact their ability to be the partners they want to be to each other. And they do have to work those out for themselves, make choices about how they each connect to their families and the town that are distinct decisions from how they connect to those communities as a pair.

One sign of this is how Sam's struggle unfolds throughout the story. Samir is not confused over who he is; his struggles come from *how* to be that person and love who he loves in a way that doesn't bring him into conflict with everyone's different assumptions of who he *ought* to be. This is true even of the people who love and support him. For

example, he and Aracely do not see their place in the world in the same way. The novel doesn't say either one is right or wrong. Instead it opens up space for discussions while embracing universal ideas that adulthood is owning the choices we make and the lives we intend to live, with the responsibilities and challenges that inevitably come with that. It also resists simplistic notions that deciding to be who you "are" is a once-and-done decision, however significant. As Sam says to Miel: "If I ever don't tell you something, it's not because I don't want to tell you. It's because I don't know."

This book may rightly be embraced as a #weneeddiversebooks or #ownvoices accomplishment, for showing lives and often invisible identities that remain ethnically and culturally complex as well as gendered. But its charm and sincerity also do what supposedly mainstream love stories have always claimed to do: offer accessible windows as well as mirrors. It makes it all right for readers to root for this couple, to be immersed in their love, without ignoring the everyday complications that arise from not matching more visible and accepted identity categories. And sometimes being charmed while being changed is maybe not such a bad thing.

Lynette James has an MFA from USM Stonecoast and presents frequently at ICFA. Her work focuses on representation, particularly in stories for young people and diverse audiences, and has appeared in *Dissections Horror E-zine*, *Extrapolation*, and *The LA Review of Books*.

It...resists simplistic notions that deciding to be who you "are" is a once-and-done decision, however significant.



The Law and Culture of Abortion Rights

About Abortion: Terminating Pregnancy in Twenty-First Century America, by Carol Sanger, Harvard University Press, March 2017, 304 pp., \$29.95.

reviewed by Nancy Jane Moore

Abortion has been legal in the United States since 1973, when *Roe v. Wade* was decided. Almost a third of American women have had an abortion during their reproductive years, and annually the number of abortion recipients is close to a million. Forty percent of pregnancies in the United States are unplanned.

Given those facts, it would seem that abortion should no longer be a controversial issue in this country, particularly when one looks at the many other changes in that period of time. A quick scan of pending legislation, ongoing litigation, and political rhetoric belies the numbers. It may be a legal, common, and safe medical procedure, but the ongoing debates make abortion look like something shameful, even criminal.

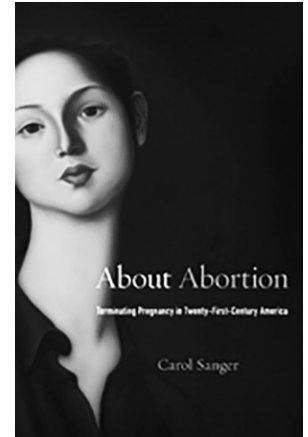
In *About Abortion: Terminating Pregnancy in Twenty-First Century America*, law professor Carol Sanger provides us with a thorough analysis of the legal and cultural issues that underlie our societal attitudes. By explaining not just the existence of laws requiring such things as ultrasounds and parental notification for minors seeking abortion, but the way those regulations impose unnecessary burdens on pregnant women, Sanger gives us a deeper understanding of what is actually going on in the abortion debates—an understanding all too rare in the public arena.

In her preface, Sanger makes clear that her purpose is to write “*about* abortion.” Her book aims “to expose how the law often works to make the lives of women with unwanted pregnancies harder than they have to be.” But while she has deliberately not written a work of advocacy, she has written one that, at its core, gives us the true way this issue plays out in women’s lives. Noting at the end of her first chapter that the current “deluge of regulation” is based on the premise that women don’t understand what they’re doing, she writes:

Women—even young women—understand very well what an abortion is. They understand that abortion ends pregnancy and that if they have an abortion, they will not have a baby: that is its very point... But as with other intimate decisions and commitments—who to marry, whether to pray, how to vote, what to do with one’s life in matters large and small—women themselves are best able to decide what is at stake.

Sanger is an eminent legal scholar who holds an endowed professorship at Columbia Law School, so it is not surprising that she has written a thorough analysis of the legal rulings that form the basis of abortion rights in the U.S. She points out that three U.S. Supreme Court cases form “the pillars of abortion jurisprudence”—*Roe v. Wade* (1973), *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1993), and *Whole Women’s Health v. Hellerstedt* (2016). While *Roe* made abortion legal and set up a “detailed framework” that legislatures could use to regulate the procedure in a constitutional manner, *Casey*, while affirming *Roe*, gave states the right to try to persuade women not to have abortions. Quoting from the *Casey* ruling, Sanger says the court believed “most women considering an abortion would deem the impact on the fetus relevant, if not dispositive, to the decision.” She then observes, “For many women, this is simply untrue.”

But *Whole Women’s Health*, which overturned draconian Texas restrictions requiring abortion clinics to meet unnecessary and expensive standards, “puts state legislatures on notice that there are constitutional limits to abortion regulation after all,” Sanger says. The ruling addresses “the quality of medical care for pregnant women,” and weighs the significant cost of requiring clinics to meet the rules for ambulatory surgical centers against the benefit of such rules for



It may be a legal, common, and safe medical procedure, but the ongoing debates make abortion look like something shameful, even criminal.

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Cont. on p. 22



Abortion Rights (cont. from p. 21)

It is Sanger's ability to combine complex legal analysis with an equally deep look at the cultural and emotional issues that accompany abortion that makes this book rewarding for anyone who wants to understand what is really going on in the U.S. abortion wars....

women—a benefit she characterizes as “none.” She also observes that the ruling “is a grand decision not only for its substantive content, but for its tone. Indeed, the decision is an exercise in the normalization of abortion.” And normalization of abortion is the outcome Sanger seeks.

It is Sanger’s ability to combine complex legal analysis with an equally deep look at the cultural and emotional issues that accompany abortion that makes this book rewarding for anyone who wants to understand what is really going on in the U.S. abortion wars, as well as a particularly useful tool for those who are advocating for appropriate policies and regulations. Her chapter on parental involvement laws—laws that require a girl who is under eighteen to either get the consent of her parents or approval from a judge before having an abortion—is chilling. Thirty-nine states have such laws, and even in those where the judges routinely approve the request, the process is an emotionally difficult one for these young women, who must answer questions about their sex lives and the unwanted pregnancy—excruciating subjects for many women, and even more so for teenagers—while demonstrating that they are mature enough to make such a decision.

Sanger concludes that the process is humiliating and even degrading, even though the hearings are generally held in private, with the cases filed using a pseudonym. Using an administrative procedure instead of a judicial one or allowing teenagers to get approval from other adults—foster parents or grandparents, for example—for their treatment can make the system more responsive to the actual needs of the young women involved. Even better, Sanger points out, the states without parental consent laws rely on doctors, who are quite capable of evaluating whether a patient is giving informed consent. And, once again, she emphasizes respecting the women involved: “But it is not beyond our collective talents to reconcile social concern about the well-being of pregnant young women with respect for their own judgments about what is best for them when unwanted motherhood is on the line.”

A chapter on fetal images in our culture begins with discussion of a press release from an anti-abortion group that saw a fetus in the shape of Hurricane Katrina and took that as a sign of God’s wrath. Sanger writes about many other fetal images, including huge art works and the plastic fetus dolls given out in high schools, where these objects quickly led to “doll-related disruptions” because they were used as projectiles or to stuff up toilets. In Japan, where abortion has been legal since 1948 and is widely accepted as a medical procedure, statues representing aborted and miscarried fetuses are sometimes set up at shrines.

This cultural discussion provides a useful backdrop for the next chapter, which discusses laws requiring women to submit to ultrasound to get images of the fetus and even, in some cases, to listen to a doctor’s description of it. As with many other laws regulating abortion, these are intended to convince women not to have the procedure and are based on the assumption that women don’t know what they’re doing when they decide to end a pregnancy. Because of the prevalence of fetal imagery in our society, including the now-common practice of having ultrasound images as the first picture in a baby book, women know before getting the imaging done what it stands for, Sanger argues. Ultrasound images are not the non-misleading data that the statutes assert; such claims do not take into account “the cultural significance of having an ultrasound in the first place.”

Again, it is this incorporation of the broader cultural implications into legal analysis that makes this book so valuable to its readers. A discussion of the difference between privacy and secrecy also adds to our knowledge. Something is private when it is no one else’s business, but the concept of secrecy includes shame and the fear of being found out. Sanger writes:

Abortion secrecy harms women by distorting their public lives—lives lived in public space—and their private talk as both the burden of keeping a secret and its unbidden disclosure are ongoing sources of

A discussion of the difference between privacy and secrecy also adds to our knowledge. Something is private when it is no one else’s business, but the concept of secrecy includes shame and the fear of being found out.



stress and anxiety. It also distorts the quality of lawmaking by omitting from public consideration whatever information would emerge if abortion were not a discrediting closeted matter.

The closing chapter is titled “Normalizing Abortion,” and it ties together all of the cultural and legal discussion of the book. Sanger writes, “Normalizing abortion—recognizing it as an acceptable option to the predicament of an unwanted pregnancy—is not to trivialize the decision nor to make choosing abortion the new normal. The aim is to pry abortion loose from the confines of a paralyzing secrecy so that the possibilities can be discussed.” And while Sanger points out that culture that links abortion to shame and secrecy “presents a significant challenge to the project of normalization,” she looks at the history of changed social attitudes in the United States and finds it built on open acknowledgement

Where are the Angels of Exiles?

Bruce Lader

Powerless, the dispossessed walk
and caravan through firearms-lightning,
cross desolate plains of the Pakistani,
Syrian, Jordanian, Sudanese borders—

teachers, artists, scientists,
doctors, lawyers, . . . forced
to flee livelihoods,
abandon all belongings

except children, memories,
and fugitive hopes,
bear the burden of uprooted subsistence,
trudge roads of grief,
endure day to day, tent to tent.

What cause does their suffering serve?
They didn't choose to forage
onions and leaves, starve
so much they gnaw their palms.

They were not expelled from Eden.
What sins did they commit
while political leaders amassed
murderous munitions?

Where in the millions of dark nights
of misery can their guardian angels be?

of things once kept secret. When people in our society have friends who are from a group they thought they despised, they change their attitudes—but only when they know their friends are in that group.

I have one small quibble with this book. Sanger occasionally refers to anti-abortion advocates as “pro-life.” The choice of that term by those opposing women's right to control their own bodies was a brilliant political decision, but it is a loaded phrase that should not be used by anyone reporting on the issue and certainly not by anyone who thinks abortion should be legal. The use of it implies acceptance of its premise.

That minor point aside, Sanger has written a book that provides the cultural context as well as the legal analysis necessary to move forward on abortion and other reproductive rights in an effective and constructive way. Everyone concerned with women's reproductive rights—and particularly those engaged in introducing abortion legislation—should read this book.

Nike Apteris

Bruce Lader

unfastens leather laces,
bent knee lifted
with an egret's grace,
slips sandal off virgin foot,
the diaphanous tunic
lighter than pleats
of rippling water.

The messenger-of-moonlight
glides from the Acropolis,
speeds reports of plunderers
loading overseas spoils.
Kings and generals obsessed
with fattening coffers,
drunk on perpetual war,
yearn to possess
her innocence.

Nancy Jane Moore's stories appear in *If We Had Known, Man and Machine*, and Book View Café's forthcoming anthology *Nevertheless, She Persisted*. Her novel *The Weave* is available from Aqueduct. She formerly practiced law and worked as a legal editor.

Bruce Lader is the director of Bridges Tutoring, an organization that educates multicultural students. His books include *Fugitive Hope*, *Embrace*, and *Discovering Mortality*, a finalist for the Brockman-Campbell Book Award. He won the 2010 Left Coast Eisteddfod Poetry Competition and was a 2015 Pushcart Prize nominee.



While Both are Great, Content Outweighs Aesthetics

Milan Djurasovic



Ludmila

Over the years I have forced myself to resist the urge to bash unadulterated beauty and what I consider to be an egotistical pursuit of pure aestheticism. I continue to be unimpressed and uninspired by the idea of “art of art’s sake,” but I try my best to bite my tongue whenever I meet a soul who genuinely believes in the concept.

A dose of individualism and “freedom” of self-expression is one of the key ingredients of any relationship, but adamant requests that art ought to be divorced from any moral or utilitarian functions makes my palms soggy and cheeks hot. The privileged minority permits itself to wallow in such thinking, to preach about aestheticism and to roll their eyes at the majority who cannot access their creations. To puncture the sturdy walls that the former cluster has built and to pave the entrance for the latter bunch has been one of the aims of my artistic pursuits.

The birth of my aversion toward the obliviousness of the privileged few took place after the Bosnian civil war, when the schism between the “haves” and “have nots” became so extreme. My side of the street wore the same purple jackets and boots we were handed by the American Red Cross during all four seasons, while across the street, local big shots and war profiteers bought their children shoes and equipment for whatever whims and frills they could concoct. I distinctly remember how angry and envious I was at my neighbor’s abundant art supplies and my futile attempts to cajole my relatives into buying me a set of watercolors.

During this time I started cutting paper in tiny circles and storing it in plastic bags. After receiving a good thrashing from my grandmother for leaving a mess in the bedroom we all shared, I started gluing the bits of paper on any background I could get my hands on. My first collages were portraits of family members and landscapes of the small Herzegovinian town I grew up in. Only much later, after reading the literature that

helped me articulate what I had instinctively felt all along, did my artistic aims become activist.

Magnifying and attacking material injustice and inequality became the primary objective of my literary and visual art work. The idea behind most of my collages, drawings, and writing is rather simple: expose the injustice, its consequences, those who are to blame, and, if possible, what can be done about it.

“The Global Overturning” is a collage I made for an article about the impending doom of climate change. The article states that “If nothing is promptly done about the human caused global warming, before long we will be inhabitants of a truly catastrophic, ‘overturned’ and tragic world (or a comedic one if we go by the logic that everything will be inverted) in which chickens and pigs will gorge themselves on bacon and eggs.”

The “Photo that Fooled the World” was inspired by the deviousness of the international propaganda employed to vilify one side during the Bosnian civil war in an effort to instigate and support the dissolution of a country. The collages of senior citizens are parts of the series titled “Forgotten Generation”: the generation that helped build one of the more stable states in Europe after the Second World War (although I have a mostly positive opinion, I do not view the former Yugoslavia through rose-colored glasses). These are the former factory workers, miners, and people who fought off fascism. They are now considered riff-raff of the society, a neglected burden whose pensions are regularly slashed and who are doomed to sell their labor until the day they meet their maker.

In its pursuit to explore and comment on the human condition, art inevitably and frequently crosses paths with social and political events of the period during which it is created. When an art piece is created with a sincere wish for an urgent social or political improvement, especially if it provides commentary on the abuse of human rights, the seriousness of the intention crushes the idea of art being a mere intellectual pastime.





Forgotten 2



Jasenovac



Photo that Fooled the World



Dancing with Death





Global Overturning



Agent Orange

\$5.00 The Cascadia Subduction Zone
PO Box 95787
Seattle, WA 98145-2787