

# The Cascadia Subduction Zone

A LITERARY  
QUARTERLY  
2018 ☉ Vol. 8, No. 1

Slipcase art from *The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August* by Claire North ☉ Chris Roberts



## IN THIS ISSUE

### ESSAY

Genius Communitas  
by Nisi Shawl

### POEMS

Suite of Poems  
by Neile Graham

Singers of the Deep  
a response to Alexander  
Pushkin's "Arion"  
by Maya Chhabra

### GRANDMOTHER MAGMA

Why Science Is  
Practiced So Awkwardly  
*Reflections on Gender and  
Science*, by Evelyn Fox Keller  
by Jennifer Stevenson

### BOOK REVIEWS

The Wayward Children series  
by Seanan McGuire

*Mountain*  
by Ursula Pflug

*The Obama Inheritance*  
edited by Gary Phillips

*Luminescent Threads*  
edited by Alex Pierce and  
Mimi Mondal

*The Emerald Circus*  
by Jane Yolen

### FEATURED ARTIST

Chris Roberts

"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

\$5.00

Managing Editor  
Arrate Hidalgo

Reviews Editor  
Nisi Shawl

Features Editor  
L. Timmel Duchamp

Arts Editor  
Kath Wilham

\$5.00

In This Issue

## VOL. 8 No. 1 — 2018

### ESSAY

Genius Communitas  
by Nisi Shawl ☉ 1

### POEMS

Suite of Poems  
by Neile Graham ☉ 6

Singers of the Deep  
*a response to Alexander Pushkin's "Arion"*  
by Maya Chhabra ☉ 26

### GRANDMOTHER MAGMA

Why Science Is Practiced So Awkwardly  
*Reflections on Gender and Science*, by Evelyn Fox Keller  
by Jennifer Stevenson ☉ 10

### BOOK REVIEWS

The Wayward Children series,  
by Seanan McGuire  
reviewed by Arley Sorg ☉ 14

*Mountain*, by Ursula Pflug  
reviewed by Joanne Rixon ☉ 17

*The Obama Inheritance*, edited by Gary Phillips  
reviewed by Cynthia Ward ☉ 19

*Luminescent Threads*, edited by Alex Pierce and Mimi Mondal  
reviewed by Ayana Jamieson ☉ 21

*The Emerald Circus*, by Jane Yolen  
reviewed by Kristin King ☉ 24

### FEATURED ARTIST

Chris Roberts ☉ 28

Subscriptions and single issues online at:  
[www.thecsz.com](http://www.thecsz.com)

Print subscription: \$16/yr;

Print single issue: \$5

Electronic Subscription (PDF format):  
\$10 per year

Electronic single issue: \$3

To order by check, payable to:

Aqueduct Press

P.O. Box 95787

Seattle, WA 98145-2787

[Washington State Residents  
add 9.5% sales tax.]

Cover banner collagraph of the Cascadia subduction zone by Marilyn Liden Bode

Speech given by Nisi Shawl on Monday, October 16, 2017, at the University of Alabama Huntsville.

First, know that I'm grateful to all of you at this institution, and especially to those of you attending, and to those who invited me here. I'm grateful to my *egun*, my ancestors, and to my mother, who I'm fortunate enough to have with me, to my family and my friends, to all those who've made me who I am. I'm grateful to the humans and nonhumans who live here now and who have lived here in the past—and those who will live here in the future. My thanks to this land in its own entirety, and to everything the web of living connects to this land: all the elements, all my ancestors. All our relations. I'm grateful to all the good spirits who brought me here, to all the orisha, and most particularly to *Eshu*, the owner of words and miracles. It's a miracle I'm here. A miracle of words.

I want to speak about one word in particular: genius. Genius was the topic of my 2011 Guest of Honor speech given at WisCon, and it's compelling enough I want to share some of what I said then with you now, plus what's come to my mind in the six years since.

All words are miracles—that they mean things, that we share those meanings, and that those meanings change, are divine treasures.

Genius means spirit. There is a term less in use these days than previously: "*genius loci*," or "spirit of place." Those we call geniuses may embody the spirit of a place. We speak of the spirit of a time, too, and geniuses often embody this sort of spirit as well. Sometimes, as with Joanna Russ or Octavia E. Butler, they embody the spirit of an age to come, an age which comes *because* that genius ushers it in and ushers us into that time.

Geniuses may also embody another sort of spirit—the spirit of a people, of a community, of a nation. This meaning runs directly counter to the popular notion of a lonely genius. This is the meaning of my talk's title, Genius Communitas.

Geniuses can be thought of as fire-bringers. Or to use a less classically root-

ed term, as extension cords. Extension cords with an infinite number of sockets.

I want to be a genius. I don't want to be a lonely genius. I want to be a beloved genius, the genius of my people, your genius. The genius of your love.

What I want to do is change the world. I can do it with you.

How does one become a genius? I have a couple of examples in mind: Octavia Estelle Butler and Michael Jackson. OEB and MJ.

Octavia was 58 when she died. Michael Jackson was 50. I've outlived them both. I'm 61, and in a very short while I'll be 62.

What hurts about Octavia's death, still, is that she had much more to do. Octavia wanted her work to change the world, to save it from the destructiveness she believed was innate in the human psyche. In her Parable books she predicted, alas, the ascendance of Presidentrump. I like to think she also showed us the path of best resistance: community.

*Fledgling*, Octavia's last book, was perhaps her finest. In it, a deceptively slight black female, childlike in appearance, takes on centuries-old, well-established enemies with the help of a family she constructs using desire and love.

Michael Jackson, believe it or not, also wanted to save the world. In June of 2009 he told the crew and cast of the show he expected to take on the road the very next month, to "bring love back into the world, remind the world that love is important.... Take care of the planet," he said.

MJ brought the fire. He connected people all over the world with the divine: the erotic, the impossible, the dreaming, the beyond. I have a friend who dances professionally, who traveled to perform in Katmandu. People there shouted "Michael Jackson! Michael Jackson!" whenever he made an MJ-style move. In *Katmandu*.

Genius does not consist of being the most proficient person in any particular

*Genius means spirit.... Those we call geniuses may embody the spirit of a place.... Sometimes, as with Joanna Russ or Octavia E. Butler, they embody the spirit of an age to come, an age which comes because that genius ushers it in and ushers us into that time.*

*What hurts about Octavia's death, still, is that she had much more to do.... In her Parable books she predicted, alas, the ascendance of Presidentrump. I like to think she also showed us the path of best resistance: community.*



*A genius experiences, and manifests to others, an essence, a truth, that would not otherwise be made manifest. And nobody needs to be perfect to do that.*

area. Michael Jackson was not a flawless entertainer, and Octavia was not a flawless writer. Sandy Denny was not a flawless singer. A genius experiences, and manifests to others, an essence, a truth, that would not otherwise be made manifest. And nobody needs to be perfect to do that.

I practice a West African tradition known as *Ifá*. *Ifá* embraces many concepts: alignment and balance, the ubiquitous divine, interconnectedness, destiny and choice. *Ifá*'s deities derive from both natural forces and historical figures; in time a person will become a spirit. The spirit reflects the way this person lived, the examples they set, the dreams they followed themselves and found and instilled in others. The fire they brought the world. Their genius.

In his novel *Engine Summer*, John Crowley presents another approach to genius. His protagonist, Rush that Speaks, wants to be a saint. Not a Christian saint, but a saint of the post-Apocalyptic world in which he lives. Saints, an elder informs him, do their best to become transparent. Transparent saints are able to let their fire shine through and through and through.

Often geniuses are said to know in childhood how they want to devote their lives. Michael Jackson's mother reports that as a toddler he danced to the rhythms of the family's washing machine. Octavia, known as Junie back in elementary school, filled notebook after notebook with horse stories. In kindergarten, I got asked what I wanted to be when I grew up. I answered unhesitatingly, "A magician. A real one."

Mirroring is how I learn to be a genius, how I learn to be a magician. Being edited by the great L. Timmel Duchamp teaches me how to edit others. Walking through sand dunes has taught me how to dance. Mirroring. It's how I breathe genius and magic in and out. You make me a genius. I make you magic. I make you a genius. You make me magic.

Peter S. Beagle wrote a book that helped me through my adolescence. It's called *The Last Unicorn*. The protagonist, a unicorn, is magical in a way that makes those around her magical as well.

Her beauty and power don't lessen the beauty and power of her surroundings, they increase them. Those near her aren't made more mundane by contrast. The Last Unicorn imbues everyone in her presence with her magic.

That's sort of what I want to do. With magic, with genius, and love. Yeah.

As I said earlier, words are miracles. They make stories. They make magic. An interviewer once asked me if I thought writing fiction was a good way to change the world, and I replied that I thought it was probably the only way one could change the world, actually.

Here's my reasoning: we are all stories, and stories are our world. Stories are how we make sense of what our senses tell us. Stories are more than what we live by; stories are what we *live*: stories within stories, stories surrounded by stories. If I change the stories I tell, if I change the stories others are able to hear, I change how these others experience the world. I change their worlds. Their worlds change other worlds, more worlds, the worlds of others. Change ripples out, story to story, world to world.

We are all stories. If I change how you tell your own story, I change how others hear who you are. If I change how you tell "the other's" story, I change how you hear those stories and your own, how others hear their story from you, through you, how the story of "the other" can now be heard.

Changing stories changes everything: tale and teller and what is to be told.

Can you tell how passionately I care about doing this? How I really, really, really want to do it? If I am ever able to be a genius, this is how I'll pull it off.

If. Because I have to say, there are forces arrayed against me. Against us. Against our genius. Tremendously harmful forces. Forces that could do us huge harm. Harm like no one has ever seen before. Very, very, very bigly harm.

I bet you know what I'm talking about. Here's an example in case you don't.

Since January 2011 I've co-edited a magazine called *The Cascadia Subduction Zone*. *CSZ*, as we call it for short—because *Cascadia Subduction Zone* is a

*Stories are more than what we live by; stories are what we live: stories within stories, stories surrounded by stories. If I change the stories I tell, if I change the stories others are able to hear, I change how these others experience the world.*



hecka mouthful to be spitting every sentence or so—is a journal featuring poetry, short short stories, art, essays, and reviews of books of interest to readers of feminist science fiction. It’s a literary quarterly, which means that our little magazine comes out four times a year. Or at least it did 2011 through 2016—with an extra issue thrown in for lagniappe in 2012. Six years. Twenty-five issues. But we weren’t able to produce our January 2017 issue. That was still too soon after the U.S. presidential election. We were curled up under blankets shivering. Or I was. Safe to bet the rest of our collective was ensconced in similar safe hiding spots. And I’ve heard of other members of the literary community, editors and writers I admire, whose work I adore, admitting how devastated they were in the wake of Donald Trump’s election to the highest office in this country.

I’m not proud of that time, because behaving like that gets you sneered at on the regular. Because being sensitive is seen as being vulnerable. Where I come from, though, sensitivity is a tool as well as a wound. Sensitivity is vital to the process of writing: I write with all my senses turned up to eleven. Sight, sound, touch, taste, and scent, yes. Also other senses: my sense of balance. Proprioception, which is the sense of knowing where you are and how you’re moving. My sense of belonging.

I told Elizabeth Bear once that I write with my heart. And that’s true enough it bears repeating: I write with my heart. I’m not claiming I’m anyone special because of that, either. I write with my heart. So what? That’s the way we roll around here.

And now our hearts have been damaged. Our balance has been disturbed. Our proprioception has proven untrustworthy. And what about our sense of belonging? That’s in the midst of healing. It is. I’ll talk more about this healing process in a minute.

Here’s another reason I’m not proud: I saw the same distress I’ve experienced since the November 2016 election on the faces of Obama’s opposition’s supporters when he won his second term,

and I felt zero sympathy for them. Zip. Zilch. I watched grown women weeping helplessly over Romney’s loss and thought how silly they were.

Okay, they **were** silly. They were frightened of ridiculous eventualities that the President had vowed would never come to be: the seizure of their firearms, the end of elections, the imposition of Sharia law. Common sense and Obama’s past record should have demonstrated how far from reality these fantasies strayed. These folks mourned in advance for extremely unlikely bereavements.

Whereas I was frightened of the 2016 election’s victor enacting his honest-to-god campaign promises: building physical and legal barriers to freely entering, leaving, and re-entering the United States; and shredding my health insurance coverage, for instance.

But just because I have every rational reason for my own people’s recent emotional collapse, that doesn’t mean I couldn’t have accepted that these silly weepers didn’t view **their** emotional collapses as every bit as valid as those of me and mine.

No, I’m not proud of how I must appear to those people who appeared so ridiculous to me when they were in my place, the place I call “The Loser’s Circle.”

However, it **is** a pretty big circle. Maybe I ought to be just a little bit proud of this: in my devastation, I have lots of good company.

Remember that one sense I talked about as part of my writers’ toolkit: the sense of belonging? That sense got wrenched out of true with the awareness that somebody else’s ideal head of state had been put in charge. Then came the invitations.

Which invitations? Anthology invitations. Which I maybe need to back up a bit to explain the importance of.

I’ve been writing speculative fiction of one sort or another—science fiction, fantasy, horror, magical realism, call it what you will—for decades now. I’m 61. Almost 62. I finished my first story—we’re not counting those I only started—finished my first story at the age of 15. I’ve been an “emerging” author for over

*I write with my heart. So what? That’s the way we roll around here. And now our hearts have been damaged. Our balance has been disturbed. Our proprioception has proven untrustworthy. And what about our sense of belonging? That’s in the midst of healing.*

*Remember that one sense I talked about as part of my writers’ toolkit: the sense of belonging? That sense got wrenched out of true with the awareness that somebody else’s ideal head of state had been put in charge.*

*Cont. on p. 4*



*Immediately after Trump's 2016 election came the invitations to anti-Trump anthologies. At first in a trickle, then in a nice, steady stream.*

40 years, and I've got the event flyers to prove it. Not long ago, I segued from sending magazines and anthologies my unsolicited stories to writing them at editors' requests. These days I write very little "on spec," that is, without having a fairly sure shot at publication because someone asked me for it.

Immediately after Trump's 2016 election came the invitations to anti-Trump anthologies. At first in a trickle, then in a nice, steady stream. Henry Wessel wanted me to contribute to a book of poetry he was putting together—by November 17. That was way too soon. Really, at that point, all I could have written was—edited for obscenity, by the way—"Are you kidding me? Are you freakin kidding me? You have **got** to be kidding me!" I could have filled up a whole page writing like that. And that was just about all I could have done.

But I had other chances. The next was when Ben H. Winters invited me to be part of online magazine *Slate's* special Trump Story Project, along with himself, Saladin Ahmed, Lauren Beukes, and six other cool kids. Our joint assignment was to produce stories about what life would be like under the Trump presidency. By January I'd finished "Slippernet," a tale of street-level antifa action using weaponized empathy with a biotech boost. It was duly published on February 22, part of a series I heartily recommend for those who need heartening.

Two weeks before "Slippernet's" publication, Elizabeth Warren gave a speech on Jeff Sessions' confirmation in defiance of Senate leader Mitch McConnell. Republican McConnell's explanation of his efforts to muzzle Warren—"She was warned. She was given an explanation. Nevertheless, she persisted,"—became a rallying cry for her supporters and inspired more than one anthology. I was invited to Tor.com's version of *Nevertheless, She Persisted*, which also featured flash fiction from Amal El-Mohtar, Catherynne M. Valente, Charlie Jane Anders, Seanan McGuire, and several more women writers. Our work was published March 8. On August 8 an anthology with the same title but con-

taining different, longer stories appeared from Book View Café. That one has Vonda N. McIntyre and Brenda Clough on the Table of Contents and it, too, looks full of fun and defiance.

Yet **another** pro-resistance anthology came out this year, *The Obama Inheritance*, edited by Gary Phillips. This was a chance to play with mad right-wing theories on Number 44 in the company of Walter Mosley and the former Attorney General of Maine. My fictional conspirators could stop time and scratch it like a DJ, make it run fast or slow, but I had to spend whole actual weeks plotting out how Ruth Bader Ginsberg could clone herself and keep the U.S. Supreme Court from kicking over into a conservative majority. I got it done. I got it in on time, and it's out now, with a very favorable review featured on *Fresh Air*.

But I can't participate in every project I'm invited to—not enough oomph in me, even if there were hours in the day, days in the month, months in the year sufficient to encompass all that waits to be done. Nice to know, though, that there is a community of creative writers in action, a loose gang of hand-holding workers-with-words who pride ourselves on our abilities and our imaginations. Our genius.

In each of the projects this community has undertaken, my vision has been deliberately optimistic. It still is. And I had help. Whose help? Your help. Your help. Yes, your help. You make a difference. You make our community wider and fuller of meaning. You make it your own community, the community of booklovers, readers, writers, talkers, thinkers, singers, dancers, actors, artists of all sorts. You create and shelter our genius.

Of course, of course, of course, we'd rather have a world in which the forests were not literally burning to the ground, islands were not literally being pounded to pieces by climate-change-fostered hurricanes, and so on. But to paraphrase the lyrics of James Brown's "Hot Pants," we got to use just what we got, to get just what we want.

*...to paraphrase the lyrics of James Brown's "Hot Pants," we got to use just what we got, to get just what we want. Basically, what we have is us.*



Basically, what we have is us.

Another project I've been recently involved in is a nonfiction anthology called *Luminescent Threads: Connections to Octavia E. Butler*, from Twelfth Planet Press. This book collects essays about and letters written as if to my darling, departed friend and model genius, Octavia. Oh, I loved her. Love her still. There's so much to learn from her, now and always.

One thing I note in my letter is that Octavia used affirmations. A lot. At the Huntington there are pages and pages of them—dreams she told herself to believe in, goals she determined she would somehow be able to meet. In order to follow in her footsteps, then, and to enfold her genius into that of our community, I've created four affirmations for us, for the us of this moment in history. The us of now. Here they are. I hope you'll rise and say them with me:

"We are beautiful, and we have every right to glory in our beauty."

"We belong where we're going. We're getting there."

"We have important stories to tell, and important ways of telling them."

"We live in love."

All of us. Let's live in love. Thank you.



Will you help me?

Yeah? Okay? Okay.

Three ways. Here are three ways to help.

First, ADMIT.

- Admit genius exists. Recognize it when you see it.
- Admit genius is ambient—it's in the air, it's evident in our community, in our selves.
- Admit genius into your self—allow yourself to express your own genius. To breathe it in and breathe it out. This is sometimes difficult. It takes practice. I'm practicing it now. I'm practicing it by asking you to allow yourself to receive and feel and

understand your own genius, your own conduit to the heart of the world.

Genius is not a zero-sum game. The more you get, the more I have.

Second, ADDRESS

- Address the stories we tell. Take them seriously!
- Address all stories' ideas. Make them your own. Listen to mine. Listen to yours. Change them. Shape them. Change and shape the world with what you say and how you say it.

Third, APPLAUD

Name genius when you see it. Call it what it is. Embrace it. Throw money at genius! Dance with genius. Sing with genius. Bring it flowers. Kiss it, kiss it whenever you find it, wherever that is. In me. In you. James Brown, another genius, sang in his hit "Superbad": "Sometimes I wanna kiss myself."

Do it! Do it!

*Genius is not a zero-sum game. The more you get, the more I have.*

---

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





### The Goddess of Grace

Dusk shudders slowly, heavily over the water,  
settling more firmly moment by moment  
with the moon breaking ever starker

through the clouds. This is the scene she sets,  
her boat sliding over the water, wind-like,  
gull-like, not at all the sharp genteel promise

of an early spring. She knows she should be lurching  
her way home, but not today. Today is the moment  
between battles, between storms. The news

has all been winter upon winter, etched  
branches, the north wind cracking down  
trees strong but not strong enough to hide

News of hill-snows too deep to open doors.  
She shudders. This moment should not be so  
tame. She feels mountain lions pace around her,

but even the heavy pad of their paws speaks  
of the quiet between gusts of rain, a pause  
for breath. She's on the water, between land,

between mountains, there and there, between the slate  
clouds and slate waters, gazing with sudden  
hunger at the thin salmon line the moon rides,

the clarity the falling sun describes. Let the ones  
she has loved and has hurt in her loving  
forgive her. This is all that she needs.





## The Midwinter Gods

We can keep ourselves into the next spring. We can hold off  
the long cold. Why else have we been raising  
these clouds of sheep? Just last spring we were certain, safe,  
annoyingly blithe. We were learning, though:

lambing such hard work, hard waiting, tending the ewes, birthing  
new creatures we wanted perfect, fed, alive.

Afterwards, we had time to needle, to argue, as the grasses  
fleshed out, to watch the liling lambs startling

magpies, disappointing ravens. Ha! We could send the scavengers  
elsewhere because we thrived. Only we knew what  
was right and good. But then the sheering. Backs beyond aching,  
more and more sheep to bring in, hold and trim,

our arms afire. Then washing all the dirt, the shit, picking straw  
from fleece. Did we see how our lanolined  
hands set the ewes free to tear the summer-calm grasses?  
To recover their lambs and set out into the fells

to the familiar hollows, the known stones, the clear-tumbling becks?  
Then we had time to rinse, to comb, to spin fibers  
like stories. In the long warm days we missed how gradually  
each night came earlier. But then the leaves

tore away in a bewildering storm. It left us raw, ground shifting  
under our naked feet. Cold, alone, we huddled  
to catch our breath before one by one we began to stand. Began  
to newly gather, weaving and knitting,

composing garments of our pulse and breath, our clever hands.  
It's late but we can still ready homes  
for winter, share out the candles we have forged, the sweaters,  
hats, scarves, and blankets we're so rich with.

And warm with our labours, step outside against the storms,  
linking freshly mittened palms  
loosely bound and bulwarked. Say ha! to the biting winds,  
snapping storms, floods, bitter ice.

Together we defy the battering gales, for we protect each other,  
together building a future spring  
to step toward. From here on out there is no god but us together.  
There is no god but our linked hands.



The Goddess of Broken Things

Her broad hands cup a vessel, a bowl nearly round.  
Rough-glazed,  
absorbent to capture all that broken things leak,  
matte and homely

in the homey way. Inside it, she is nothing shattered into edges,  
jagged chunks  
and a scattering of crumbs that she idly might pick up  
with her fingertip,

examine, then absently lick or flick into the bowl,  
the ragged edges  
all of it leaking. Gather herself up and put her there.  
That is not glue—

there is no gluing—but containment. Let her hold herself.  
Let all her bits lie  
one on the other in the bowl of her arms.  
There is rest in that.

Rest, but no way to vacate herself, no vacation,  
only an intermission  
before those fingers distractedly reach down inside  
and begin shifting

and lifting and stirring her about. Live, she says.  
Step out. Be  
yourself brave. How else to be whole, but to be  
broken again?



## What I Mean When I Talk About Ruins

Read the signs: viewpoint  
ahead. Ancient monument.  
Tower or folly.

Stone my spine:  
my foundation, my spark.  
Fragmented walls speak

my story. Once whole  
and gracious, inhabited,  
inside me folk breathed

and bred. But now not  
shelter. Open to all  
weather. What I am

speaks of what was once  
here. Warning: dangerous ruin.  
Do not trespass.

Do not clamber. Mortar cracks  
to dust. And  
the walls do not exactly

fall. They live  
in wreckage. Imagine lives.  
Imagine me. A monument

to what hands can build,  
overcome by battles,  
by time. By ivy's weight,

the long agonies  
of frost, of rain, all  
that fissures walls. Take me:

awash with weather  
vertebrae and weeds flourish,  
a different glory.

## The Goddess of Naps

Close your too-bright restless eyes,  
let the internal curtain slowly  
sink a veil between you

and the itching  
daily demands you've been  
scratching raw.

See instead the curtain's  
soft red, velvet and dark  
let the silky cat pour herself

onto your lap, let her knead  
her sleep-sands into your thighs  
let her settle, let her curl

her easy spell over you  
till blessed and sacred you  
give yourself away like a prayer

---

Neile Graham's life is full of writing and writers. A graduate of the Clarion West Writers Workshop, she currently serves as their workshop director. Her poetry collections include *Spells for Clear Vision* and *Blood Memory*, and a spoken word CD.





## Why Science Is Practiced So Awkwardly

*Reflections on Gender and Science* by Evelyn Fox Keller, Yale University Press, 1985, 178 pp., \$18.

by Jennifer Stevenson

*Keller holds out hope on two fronts: that theories about how science should work or should be conducted and by whom have never matched all actual practices by all actual scientists, and that science itself has taken a turn away from the models that comforted age-old masculine anxieties....*

“The aim of these essays...is the reclamation, from within science, of science as a human instead of a masculine project, and the renunciation of the division of emotional and intellectual labor that maintains science as a male preserve.” This modest proposal is how Evelyn Fox Keller sums up her powerful book about the history of gender in science. There is far too much excellent scholarship, too much even-handed and nonjudgmental argument in these nine articles to recapitulate thoroughly here. I can only summarize in broad sweeps the arc of Keller’s reading in the history of science and its parents, philosophy and magic, tracing the roots of masculine anxieties about self and maternal power as they have become embedded in our language, especially our language about science.

Briefly, Keller’s nine articles come in three parts: a history of gender in early scientific thought, an analysis of how ideas about masculinity become enmeshed with ideas about science in early childhood development, and the extension of these understandings to a view of how three thousand years of gendered discourse are expressed in very modern masculine anxieties. She shows how this discourse self-selects for the modern stereotype of the ideal scientist, follows the process of how that stereotype excludes women from science, and illustrates that process with a case study of a famous and highly honored woman scientist whose work was at first ignored, then suppressed in favor of more masculine scientific models, then ultimately vindicated.

Keller holds out hope on two fronts: that theories about how science should work or should be conducted and by whom have never matched all actual practices by all actual scientists, and that science itself has taken a turn away from the models that comforted age-old masculine anxieties and toward broader, less gendered because less anxious, more

humble, and better socialized scientists, both male and female.

Plato, considered the father of science at its earliest and most respectable root, was obsessed with hierarchy and with sexuality in his quest for unity with the ideal universe, which was realer and truer than the palpable universe. (Tellingly, the Greek word *sumeimi* translates as unity and also as sexual intercourse.) This unity is accessible only via intellect fueled by the correct kind of sexual love: the love an adult male philosopher feels for a boy. He prescribed the proper boy-love-object’s social class, the desirable degree and order of attaining enlightenment appropriate to each, even the ideal sex positions for this dyad of truth seekers. We still speak of Plato in our schoolrooms, of his fiery hierarchical ideal universe, always above and more perfect than our own. We don’t mention his sex life much.

Some of Plato’s ideas were further pursued in the work of medieval thinkers, who called themselves magicians and scientists interchangeably. Students of the history of science are more familiar with the medieval notion that nature was a vast, unknowable goddess who could confer knowledge and ultimately power upon a magician who performed the right alchemical rituals, visualized the right sexually charged imagery in his primitive laboratory, and purified himself sexually and spiritually with the right prayers, abstinence, and diet. Modern students are less aware that these medieval and early Renaissance thinkers revered nature, humbled themselves before her indomitable power, expressed gratitude for her bounty, viewed themselves as the submissive wooers of divine nature, and conceived at least in theory an eternal equality between male and female.

Francis Bacon is hailed in the history of science as the man who codified a movement in the late sixteenth and early

Grandmother Magma



seventeenth centuries to separate spiritual concerns from scientific ones. It was an especially anxious time. Europe was eternally at war, Protestant against Catholic. On both sides of the war, witches burned and heretics died in their thousands. Bacon's reasoning rescued the practice of science from the bonfire in two ways, one celebrated to this day and the other not mentioned: by reducing nature from all-powerful goddess to a mindless chattel gifted to man by God, and by throwing all things female under a bus.

The latter is of course where a feminist historian, tracing the ideologies and habits of oppressors down through the centuries, takes sharp notice. Middle- and upper-class European women at the beginning of Bacon's era were far from meek, illiterate housewives. They were educated, had money and trades and shops and land and even factory jobs, and they were highly vocal in a world being steadily laid waste by war. In spite of the war, the burgeoning credit economy created and fostered by intercontinental sea trading made cash and manufacturing jobs available to all, and the printing press made education and, more importantly, the dissemination of information, a suddenly universal phenomenon. The world was changing too fast. Masculine anxiety, particularly among those in power, hit new highs. Tremendous reactionary pushback against women (and subject peoples, and enemy religions and nations...sound familiar?) was brought to bear by forces ranging from kings and popes down to lawmakers and the courts. The battle between the sexes polarized every level of society.

Bacon took sides in this battle. He demoted nature: she was mindless, soulless, speechless, weak; she was God's gift to man, a chattel for him lawfully to plow, to possess, to subdue in chaste and lawful marriage. All her properties were identified as feminine and, as such, inferior in every way to masculine properties and to man. Bacon also invented objectivity, taking a polarized position against old-fashioned and politically dangerous magic, arguing that only by staying *outside of* and *above* nature, which was

low, emotional, hot, moist, weak, soft, stupid, dirty, dark, female, tainted, and imperfect, could man hope to obtain full knowledge and power over her. She was the eternal object, he the omnipotent subject: intellectual, cold, pure, hard, powerful, lofty, enlightened, masculine. Her properties were attributed likewise to colonized nations and peoples, thus justifying man's God-granted ownership and domination.

Bacon's political positioning of science on the side of entrenched clerical and temporal power saved science and scientists from burning, but at the cost of Renaissance woman's power, and of all things deemed feminine, for centuries to come. By the end of the seventeenth century, nature was a colony waiting to happen, every aspect of women's rights had been reduced from earlier levels, and (most telling for Keller) men had been removed from the sphere of child-rearing.

I've only covered the first third of the nine essays. We proceed more briskly from here.

The second group of three articles covers the psychological consequences of Baconian thought as it survives in the language of modern science. (One can of course recognize these consequences in many other aspects of our culture.)

The masculine anxieties of Bacon's era are perpetuated today by the practice of isolating child-rearing in the hands of mothers. Male children develop autonomy from their mothers at the expense of connectedness; indeed, they are offered autonomy in exchange for connectedness, and since it is a statistically rare male child who severs himself or is severed completely from his mother, he is always subject to the anxiety that any form of connectedness (softness, trust, emotion, intimacy) is a threat to his autonomy. From the point at which he comes to identify with his father and to reject maternal connectedness and power, the male child going forward seeks validation for his masculinity by embodying in his sense of self the role of subject, objectifying all around him.

*Bacon's reasoning rescued the practice of science from the bonfire in two ways, one celebrated to this day and the other not mentioned: by reducing nature from all-powerful goddess to a mindless chattel gifted to man by God, and by throwing all things female under a bus.*

*By the end of the seventeenth century, nature was a colony waiting to happen, every aspect of women's rights had been reduced from earlier levels, and (most telling for Keller) men had been removed from the sphere of child-rearing.*

*Cont. on p. 12*



Why Science...  
(Cont. from p. 11)

*Keller...points out that masculine anxiety is not the ruling reality for all men—but it embodies an ideal held up to all men,...and especially to scientists.*

On a hopeful note, Keller again points out that masculine anxiety is not the ruling reality for all men—but it embodies an ideal held up to all men, especially to certain kinds of men, and especially to scientists. Similarly she acknowledges that science as practiced by scientists in the real world does not adhere 100% to Bacon's ideal. She explores first the impact of quantum physics and its uncertainties upon other sciences, and points out how Baconian/Newtonian physicists of today have struggled to hold onto their determinism, even while they try to accommodate and incorporate quantum mechanics into it. She discusses the career of Barbara McClintock, biogenetics pioneer and Nobel prizewinner. McClintock and her work stand on the edge of the scientific revolution. She doggedly worked to her own values and goals, scantily funded for decades, survived the Crick and Watson era of "master molecule" genetics theory (which opposed and temporarily silenced her more global, less masculine model), and emerged triumphant on what is still, decades later, a threshold of change.

Keller hopes for a new kind of science and scientific language that is open to all the data, not just data that fits into the experimenter's model, that respects and accepts multiplicity, that seeks to understand all factors of how nature works rather than driving toward domination and control. She suggests that a more dynamic form of autonomy—more tolerant of the inevitably ambiguous boundary between subject and object, wisely more cognizant of and accounting for the observer's unavoidable biases and their influence upon the observed—can save science, and is indeed in the process of doing so. She urges scientists not to fear and deny their emotional responses to the data but to *notice* them, and to interrogate them as deeply as they interrogate the data.

Here are a few of Keller's principles, gleaned from McClintock and other pioneers, for a new approach to science:

Anything you can think of you will find in nature.

Listen to the material.

Develop a feeling for the organism and observe your feeling as well as the organism.

Approach the data humbly.

"In my vision of science," she adds in her own words, "it is not the taming of nature that is sought, but the taming of hegemony." And finally, also in her own words, near the book's end, Keller describes the heart of her approach to scientific philosophy:

"Difference is more than contaminated data; it is a signpost, an invitation to understanding."

There's an enormous amount of meat in Keller's essays. I can't fully describe how valuable this book is without quoting it *in toto*, but my hope is that I've intrigued you enough to buy the book and give it a look.

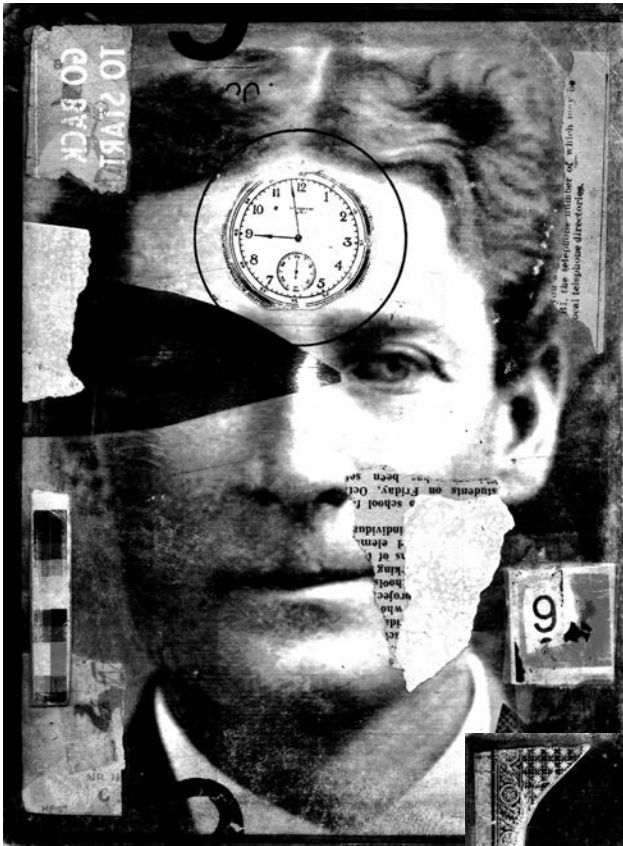
*Reflections on Gender and Science* is widely available in a tenth anniversary paperback edition and in the original edition from used book dealers everywhere.

*She urges scientists not to fear and deny their emotional responses to the data but to notice them, and to interrogate them as deeply as they interrogate the data.*

---

Jennifer Stevenson is the author of 17 published novels and 22 short stories. She's a founding member of Book View Café, the world's oldest, largest, most prestigious author-owned publishing collective. She writes about gender, class, age, race, and religion in fluffy, funny, sugar-coated genre novels. Find her at <http://jenniferstevenson.com>.





Altered Portraits from  
*The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August*  
featured artist, Chris Roberts



 The Road to Where You Belong

The Wayward Children series by Seanan McGuire: *Every Heart a Doorway*, Tor.com, April 2016, 176 pp, \$17.99; *Down among the Sticks and Bones*, Tor.com, June 2017, 192 pp, \$17.99; *Beneath the Sugar Sky*, Tor.com, January 2018, 176 pp., \$17.99.  
reviewed by Arley Sorg

These adventures are marked by wonder and danger.

At a glance, the Wayward Children series is about “portal” stories: tales where individuals, often children, wander through a mysterious doorway (literally or figuratively) to have an adventure in a strange land. These adventures are marked by wonder and danger. Well-known classic examples include Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis, even *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum and J.M. Barrie’s *Peter and Wendy*. Neil Gaiman’s *Coraline* and Tim Burton’s *The Nightmare Before Christmas* carried on the trope, and the tradition continues with the works of authors such as V.E. Schwab (the *Shades of Magic* series), Maria Dahvana Headley (*Magonia* and *Aerie*), and Catherynne M. Valente (the *Fairyland* series).

In classic portal stories, wandering children inevitably come home. Dorothy, while yearning to leave her small town at the outset of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, eventually discovers that “There’s no place like home,” and by the story’s end, all she wants to do is be back amongst the familiar with her family.

Not all children return from adventures with the same sentiment.

The first installment of the Wayward Children series, *Every Heart a Doorway*, explores the lives of children after their portal adventures have ended and their magical worlds have coughed them back into the “real” world, slamming the door shut behind them. In this series, the luckiest of these kids are admitted to Eleanor West’s Home for Wayward Children, a boarding school designed for returnees who yearn to go back to their portal worlds.

Nancy Whitman is an adolescent who returned from such a portal world forever changed. Her parents dismiss the possibility of an actual fantasy adventure

(believing she was kidnapped) and enroll her in the Home as a last resort, hoping it will fix everything. From Nancy’s perspective, she has spent years in an Underworld where quiet and stillness are exalted. Her hair has turned white with black streaks, and she is even more out of place in the “real” world than she had been before she left. The Underworld is the only place she feels at home.

Remember those introductory words, “At a glance”?

While it’s true that Nancy feels out of place in the “real” world, she immediately meets other residents of the Home—children and adolescents—who feel out of place not only in the “real” world, but who, like her, also grew up feeling out of place in society in general. Though each has had a different sort of adventure in a different kind of world, they are brought together by a commonality of strangeness, by the oddness of their lives and the sense of being at odds with people who just don’t get them.

Nancy is assigned to room with Sumi, who is as exuberant as Nancy is reserved; and who—fittingly—went to a nonsensical sort of fairyland, one vastly different from Nancy’s. Nancy makes friends with a few other notable students, and soon after that, students start dying. The plot develops as a murder mystery with light horror tones, and Nancy and her new friends must work together to both survive and solve the mystery.

The heart of *Every Heart* is diverse representation, and feeling like an outcast, and even feeling like an outcast within a community of outcasts. The people in the story and the truths of their social lives are among the greatest strengths of the piece. As a metaphor for life within “misfit” communities (science fiction conventions for example, or gaming groups), the story brilliantly





depicts varying degrees of relief, kinship, and tension in efficient but colorful brush strokes. Characters are specific and memorable, each detailed in their desires, their backgrounds, and their emotions.

Arguably the stars of the first book are the portal worlds from which each child has returned. Glimpses of adventures told mostly in exchanges between students leave the reader fixated on tantalizing imagery, each glimpse a glittering lure, crafted within the span of a few precise lines.

The protagonist of classic portal stories may be carried on the tide of events, rather than making well-defined decisions and facing the consequences of their actions. Nancy functions in a similar way: she is a fairly inactive protagonist who brings the reader into the Home to experience wonder. One might argue that she has been in a land where stillness is a virtue—inactivity within the plot might be consistent with her character's experiences. Nonetheless, significant events unfold out of the hands of the protagonist and major players, and resolutions feel unearned and a bit unsatisfying.

*Down Among the Sticks and Bones* is a prequel detailing the portal-world adventures of two important characters from *Every Heart*, Jacqueline and Jillian. Here one of the glittering morsels glimpsed in *Every Heart* is offered as a meal.

Jacqueline and Jillian are twins, pushed into gender-specific roles by their parents. Jillian is raised as a tomboy by a father who'd wanted a son. She can run and play and jump in the mud, and is told to do so, whether she really wants to or not. Jacqueline is raised as an immaculate princess, taught to fear dirtying herself with playing. She lives the life of a doll on display. The twins' grandmother Louise raises them for a time, as having children is not quite what their parents had expected, and she surreptitiously tells them that they can be however they want to be. The parents find out and send the grandmother away, locking the kids into the roles the parents planned for them.

One day, they find a trunk their grandmother left behind. They open the

trunk and discover, impossibly, wooden stairs winding down into the dark. They take the stairs and enter a portal world: a grim horror-style landscape called the Moor, "the single platonic ideal from which all other moors had been derived."

Jillian, who always wanted to have a frilly dress and be pretty, is adopted as a vampire lord's protégé and offered the chance to become his daughter and heir—to become a princess. Joining the ostensible ruler of the land, she breaks out of the "masculine" standards that her father squeezed her into. Jacqueline becomes Jack and apprentices to the "mad scientist" who opposes the vampire. Jack works with her hands, gets dirty, and learns about science (within the framework of a magical world). Despite their enmity and envies, they feel a deep sense of home in taking on the roles for which they have longed.

In their separation, their lives and relationships develop, their thoughts about each other change, and they grow to miss each other. Until they are cast into bloody conflict with each other, and must make choices about situations imposed upon them by the rules (and ruler) of their new world.

*Sticks and Bones* is a fairy tale gothic, filled with atmosphere, a setting where villagers know monsters are real and death is inevitable. A fairly clear argument is sewn into the plot: some would rather live in a nightmare world where they can be themselves than be in an environment that restricts them.

The book's story relies heavily on a fascination with the landscape, the plot itself falling into a pattern of limited scope: Jack and Jill are bigger actors and decision-makers than Nancy, but key elements of the story are either forced on them or handed to them.

The last third of this story, however, becomes a riveting exercise in consequences, the culmination of decisions and built-up emotions, everything unrolling, and finally laying out the possibilities of all the tensions set in place beforehand.



*Glimpses of adventures told mostly in exchanges between students leave the reader fixated on tantalizing imagery, each glimpse a glittering lure, crafted within the span of a few precise lines.*



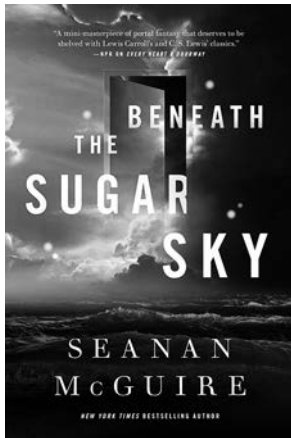
*Sticks and Bones is a fairy tale gothic, filled with atmosphere, a setting where villagers know monsters are real and death is inevitable.*



## The Road to Where You Belong (Cont. from p. 15)

*From the outset, there is a shimmering, playful feminism, exemplified in exchanges such as a scene where Kade offers Rini clothes:*

*“Why?” asked Rini peevishly. “Are you insulted by my vagina, too? Do people in this world not have them?”*



*Clever moments bring welcome levity to what could otherwise be dark and brooding, without filing off the teeth of the narrative's biting social commentary.*

*Beneath the Sugar Sky*, the third in the Wayward Children series, is nothing less than an exciting portal world crossover story. This may not sound logical, but I think of it in terms of Superman vs. The Amazing Spider-Man, JLA/Avengers... Alien vs. Predator!

Imagine if Dorothy and Alice met after their adventures were done. Maybe they become friends, maybe not. But they have to go to Fantasia (from *The NeverEnding Story*) and work together to rescue Peter Pan....

Months after the events of *Every Heart*, a mysterious girl with candy corn eyes falls into a turtle pond at the Home. Her finery, made of sugar, quickly dissolves. She is discovered by a new protagonist, Cora, and Cora's friend Nadya, both enrolled in the Home after water adventures.

The girl is Onishi Rini, a native of the world of Confection, a Nonsense world. Her human mother was killed in *Every Heart* before she could find her way back to Confection, despite a prophecy that she was to return. In Rini's original reality, her mother came back a few years later, decidedly not murdered, had Rini with a candy corn farmer, and lived happily ever after. Due to the mother being murdered, Rini was never born and her existence begins to unravel from the moment she splashes down.

Keep in mind that time does not necessarily operate in portal worlds in the same way that it operates in ours, especially in a Nonsense world.

Cora and Nadya enlist the help of other characters from the first book, such as Kade, who is being groomed to take over the school.

From the outset, there is a shimmering, playful feminism, exemplified in exchanges such as a scene where Kade offers Rini clothes:

*“Why?” asked Rini peevishly. “Are you insulted by my vagina, too? Do people in this world not have them?”*

The group undertakes a quest to bring Rini's dead parent back to life. Their quest takes them first to an Underworld, and then to Confection, where they must challenge the Queen of Cakes and

find the Baker, who uses the First Oven in a demigod-like capacity to keep the world running.

*Beneath* opens with lyrical, poetic language, and is well stocked in ideas and images. Cora's development as a person is moving, and her relatability is marvelous. Relationships shift, talents are tested, and the characters grow.

In a slight twist on the Wizard of Oz theme, Cora longs to return to the oceans of her own adventures, but as far as other worlds are concerned, adventure takes its toll:

Quests were a lot like dogs, Cora thought. They were much more attractive when seen from a distance, and not barking in the middle of the night or pooping all over the house.

As a whole, the series forms a complex plotline. Worlds are fascinating and rich and endless, their foundations built from the familiar to make them easily accessible, their expanses gilded with new ideas. But movements in the books' plots often feel contrived to showcase these settings, and the world shown too long loses its luster.

Each novella is told in a wandering omniscient third person, and their narratives shift casually from semiformal to conversational. Clever moments bring welcome levity to what could otherwise be dark and brooding, without filing off the teeth of the narrative's biting social commentary. Protagonists occasionally slip from primacy, and narratives border on ensemble pieces. A fitting device for fairytales and portal adventures in some ways, it also results in lengthy exposition, and occasionally mutes emotional affect through distanced storytelling (simply telling the reader what's what, rather than letting characters discover, reveal, or feel these same moments).

The Wayward Children series is a fantastic exploration of perspectives and individuals, giving time and importance to people who are often misrepresented, missing, or at the least, misunderstood. But it's not just that, it's not simply putting them on the page, it's going a step



farther: Wayward Children infuses pride into these characters, letting them shine in their own shapes and colors. Fairytale storytelling is balanced by simplistic brutality, this array of sparkling characters, and interpersonal complications that are relatable.

There is a consistent, undeniable deftness throughout the Wayward Children series and a courage in baring difficult emotions to the books' readers. Each novella is laced with heartbreaking truths. Pain pulses through these pages, trapped in the veins of characters, pain and loneliness, and a longing to belong, to find "home," even at the cost of hardship, even at the cost of loss:

Everyone who wound up at Eleanor West's School—everyone who

found a door—understood what it was to spend a lifetime waiting for something that other people wouldn't necessarily understand. Not because they were better than other people and not because they were worse, but because they had a need trapped somewhere in their bones, gnawing constantly, trying to get out.

But these stories also carry a message of hope; in fact, there are several. Among these messages is the notion that if you've lost your portal world, there's a Home for you, a place where you belong. It may not be your portal world, but there are others who are (more or less) like you, who know what it is to long and to not belong.

*There is a consistent, undeniable deftness throughout the Wayward Children series; and a courage in baring difficult emotions to the books' readers. Each novella is laced with heartbreaking truths.*

---

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.



## A Place You Can Come

*Mountain* by Ursula Pflug, Inanna Publications, May 2017, 104 pp., \$18.95.  
reviewed by Joanne Rixon

*I can't write about this book.* I almost emailed my editor, twice, to tell her this. To tell her I couldn't find the words to express what I thought—what I felt—about this book.

Some things are impossible to talk about.

*Mountain*, the sixth book from Canadian writer Ursula Pflug, takes place on an unnamed mountain, in a communal camp where drifters, lost children, old hippies, and silly utopianists gather for the summer. The narrator is a sixteen-year-old girl who is left on the mountain by her mother. She and a crowd of others displaced by the "Cli-Apocalypse" come to the sub-alpine slopes of northern California to get in touch with nature, each other, and their past lives. It's a wet place, heavy with mud and lingering snow and tents that collapse in the rain.

*Mountain* is a utopian book about sexual assault. It begins with a conversation about molestation, and multiple conversations throughout the book begin with the question, "Have you ever

been raped?" Again and again traumas surface like bodies buried in glaciers for eons. Global warming melts the ice and slowly reveals the violence.

I'm having a hard time writing about this.

This year many things that were only whispered about have been set down in print. Weinstein. Halperin. Spacey. Countless powerful men whose names I haven't remembered, whose stories I've clicked to read and then clicked out of seconds later. It's the sameness that gets to me. The way every story is so fucking predictable. The way I know each word before I see it on my screen.

And still it's hard to write about. I know how each word will fall into its row, and still it's hard.

Pflug is a utopianist, is the thing. People come to the Mountain to answer the question: "How do we create something new? If you could create a world, if you had that power, what would it be like?" Or they want to find healing, or at the most basic, to find "a place you can



*Mountain is a utopian book about sexual assault. It begins with a conversation about molestation, and multiple conversations throughout the book begin with the question, "Have you ever been raped?" Again and again traumas surface like bodies buried in glaciers for eons. Global warming melts the ice and slowly reveals the violence.*



A Place You  
Can Come  
(Cont. from p. 17)

*I don't know if this is the book you need to read in 2018. Maybe it isn't. Maybe we're finally moving into an era where we can ask for better than a retreat from the world.*

*The descriptions of life in a transient camp feel authentic; conversely, though, the whiteness of the characters and of the overall aesthetic does not feel authentic at all, and is nearly unbearable.*

come.” But you can’t write about safety without a conversation about why safety is so necessary, and maybe Pflug ran into the same problem I’m having: it’s hard to find the words.

What would it be like to be safe?

Where can a powerless person go to be free of violence?

She can go to a hidden place. But the Mountain isn’t a perfect retreat. As the book slyly admits, though it’s ostensibly an anarchist commune, the organizers have filed “legion and complex” permit paperwork. The absence of power and control is an illusion; at best the Mountain is practice to prepare for a time when the state stops existing, an approximation. A guess.

Maybe safety looks like this: a four-person outhouse without walls between the seats because the anarcho-syndicalists building it ran out of materials, and instead of searching for more planks turned it into therapy, turned it into a place to communally release old injuries.

I don’t know if this is a good book, is what I’m trying to say. I don’t know if this is the book you need to read in 2018. Maybe it isn’t. Maybe we’re finally moving into an era where we can ask for better than a retreat from the world. Maybe we can speak loudly and clearly, and expect to be heard: This is the name of the man who hurt me. This is how he did it, and when.

Pflug would like putting things down on paper to be the answer, I think, but can’t quite make herself believe it. It’s in the structure of the book: *Mountain* is less than a hundred pages long, and the narrator switches between names several times. Information is sometimes dropped into the text as a casual reference, as though it has been mentioned before although in fact it has not. Throughout the main story, surrealist magical narratives are inserted as retellings of stories told by minor characters. People dissociate, speak vaguely, change the subject, and then mention that they’re talking around something without clarifying what it is no one is saying.

There are a few things I could say about *Mountain* if I exercise a little of my own

ironic detachment. The prose is simple and lovely. The descriptions of life in a transient camp feel authentic; conversely, though, the whiteness of the characters and of the overall aesthetic does not feel authentic at all, and is nearly unbearable. *Mountain* is structured as a personal diary, a strategy that only barely works. The “interview” chapters were previously published as short stories, and they read like it. There is a subtle hopefulness woven throughout the book that I did find persuasive and moving.

I could say: the ending ties everything up too neatly. It’s a utopian thought, that the evil men do will come to light and then we will band together and break free. We will speak, and it will have been one guy the whole time: The Villain.

Maybe some people have actually had that experience; for those readers, this book might feel empowering. But in my experience, in real life, it’s not just one guy. In real life, you speak up, and the edifice of power shrugs and moves on. There isn’t just one Villain, there are many, everywhere, hiding in plain sight. Nowhere is safe.

But all of that is not—quite—what I want to say. What I want to say there are no words for. For me, reading *Mountain* flooded me with a feeling like the sweetness of pressing on a bruise. This feeling overflowed my whole chest, my heart and my lungs until I thought I might choke, or drown.

---

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



## Mixed Message: The Obama Inheritance

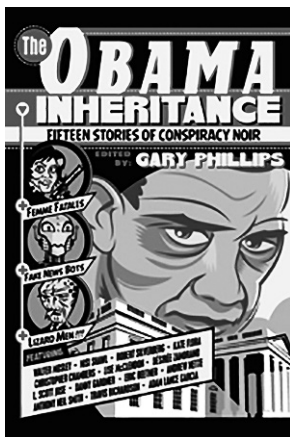
*The Obama Inheritance: Fifteen Stories of Conspiracy Noir*, edited by Gary Phillips, Three Rooms Press, October 2017, 324 pp., \$19.95.

reviewed by Cynthia Ward

The subtitle of the new anthology *The Obama Inheritance: Fifteen Stories of Conspiracy Noir* promises suspense/mystery/crime fiction on a theme of the ludicrous conspiracy “theories” related to former U.S. President Barack Obama. The cover pays homage to legendary EC comics like *Tales From the Crypt* and *Weird Science* with its art, design, and come-ons (“Femme Fatales [sic], Fake News Bots, Lizard Men!!!”), suggesting comics-style science fiction, fantasy, and horror also wait within. The back-cover copy reinforces the promise of comic-bookish fun with its offer of “satirical works” and “an over-the-top, transcendental psychedelic thriller ride of pulpy goodness.” Does this prose anthology of political satire deliver pure pulp pleasure?

Suitably, femmes fatales open the volume. In “Michelle in Hot Water,” veteran suspense writer Kate Flora offers an alternate (or secret?!?) history of Michelle Obama and her covert cadre of undercover operatives. The 44th First Lady as kickass secret agent is a pleasurable, even persuasive idea, and I’ve enjoyed the author’s Maine-set Thea Kozak mystery novels. However, Flora’s contribution gets the book off to a very difficult start with its opening scene: an evil white dude prepares to torture the captive Mrs. Obama, creating strong, disturbing resonances with the abuse and torture of black women throughout American history. If you can get past that, you’ll read a rousing adventure of undercover feminist derring-do interrupted periodically, alas, by infodumps.

The biggest name in the anthology is that of Walter Mosley, legendary creator of the Easy Rawlins and other classic African-American mystery series, and an author of highly regarded Afro-Futurist science fiction. In his contribution, “A Different Frame of Reference,” Mosley tackles the oldest and arguably the most racist of the nonsensical claims



about Barack Obama: that he was born in Kenya and groomed by secret conspirators to be their tool as president of the United States. The protagonist is the not-terribly-bright operative of a white conspiracy (its members genetically verified 99.9% Euro-derived) who learns the truth: Obama is not merely an alien from another nation, but a brother from another planet. However, between the depictions of energy-melding inter-gene souls and an enlightenment-dispensing rock that makes a person crave oneness therewith, the story’s vibe isn’t *Weird Science* but *New Age*; and its ending may seem mystical from some perspectives.

The Born-Elsewhere Obama hypothesis takes a second bow in the contribution from Adam Lance Garcia, a writer probably best known for reviving a classic pulp hero, the Green Lama. In “...The Continuing Mission,” the coolly logical black Vulkh’n Science Officer Bah’rack is sent back in time with the starship’s more emotional white physician, Biden, to save history. The fast-moving plot takes many humorous twists and turns, and the Vulkh’n’s character grows and changes, in ways that will please both pulp and *Star Trek* fans.

While we’re on the subject of the dumber conspiracy “theories,” the über-pulpish lizard-men take more than one turn on the book’s stage. The first is in noir novelist Eric Beetner’s “True Skin.” A right-wing radio host named

*Suitably, femmes fatales open the volume. In “Michelle in Hot Water,” veteran suspense writer Kate Flora offers an alternate (or secret?!?) history of Michelle Obama and her covert cadre of undercover operatives.*

*Mosley tackles the oldest and arguably the most racist of the nonsensical claims about Barack Obama: that he was born in Kenya and groomed by secret conspirators to be their tool as president of the United States.*

*Cont. on p. 20*



*White oppressors merit satire, to be sure. But aiming satire at a poor, undereducated, perhaps mentally ill addict of any race leaves me not amused but saddened. I favor satire that punches up.*

Russ (presumably based on Alex Jones, though the name suggests Rush Limbaugh) spouts nutty nonsense about our secret reptilian overlords until he discovers they're real. Violence ensues. It's true a pulp plot often arrives at a not-wholly-unexpected ending, but its twists and turns should offer surprises along the way. Alas, I was not much surprised.

The contribution of *Crime Factory* magazine editor L. Scott Jose, "Give Me Your Free, Your Brave, Your Proud Masses Yearning to Conquer," tackles the reptilian conspiracy theory with a grimly satirical piece about—not to put too fine a point on it—a moronic white-trash closet-case. Lured by his seducer and right-wing nut-job guru into drug addiction, Custer Kurtz spends years alone in a bunker, decoding secret messages in YouTube videos. Emerging, he finds a truth about reality (or experiences a druggy hallucination?) that, though surprising, will please almost no one across the American political spectrum. White oppressors merit satire, to be sure. But aiming satire at a poor, undereducated, perhaps mentally ill addict of any race leaves me not amused but saddened. I favor satire that punches up.

Well-educated, well-off elites are apparently the reason for the lone reprint, the medium-near-future-set "At the Conglomeroid Cocktail Party" (1982), an excellent work from science fiction giant Robert Silverberg. Or perhaps the reason for its inclusion is the love interest, who may be viewed as a femme fatale. However, firmer connections to pulp fiction, conspiracies, the Obamas, the Trumps, the presidency, or political satire are invisible.

It's female undercover operative vs. fake-news-bot programmers in thriller-author Lise McClendon's "Forked Tongue"—no reptilians, however, despite the title. Albanian "Russians," expatriate Wikileaker Edward Snowden, and even Russian President Vladimir Putin are involved by the rather revolutionary end. I'd be unsurprised to see this fast-paced, humorous, twisty piece of noir pulp in a year's-best anthology or two.

Also effective, if a stone bummer, is "Brother's Keeper" by comedian/screenwriter/novelist Danny Gardner. Generations of Presidents Trump have plunged the United States into an endless dystopian nightmare, but one young man discovers the U.S. had an African-American president and leads his mentally ill brother to the rumored promised land of said POTUS's egalitarian Chicago. This science fiction tale operates in not only the crushing dystopian tradition of George Orwell's *1984* but also the old-school prose-noir tradition of losers losing. Given the main characters are mostly lower-income African-Americans, this may leave a bad taste in some readers' metaphorical mouths, yet it could leave others satisfied that, amid the satirical near-future touches, a reality of contemporary America is faithfully reflected.

The anthology's editor, multi-media suspense author Gary Phillips, closes out the book with "Thus Strikes the Black Pimpernel," in which another Obama-allied secret agent is involved in another ongoing guerrilla resistance. This agent has an alias—the Black Pimpernel—that evokes both Baroness Orczy's French Revolutionary Era operative, the Scarlet Pimpernel, and the South African freedom-fighter and president Nelson Mandela. This is probably the most purely pulp piece in the anthology, with plenty of action and mayhem to please aficionados of the form.

Sometimes, however, the narrative gets in its own way. The opening uses a bunch of media-pundit talking heads to set the scene—an approach that provides effective infodumps in the visual world of comics but confuses readers in the non-visual world of prose. And when the action kicks in, the language can leave the fight scenes difficult to decipher. More generally, the adventure feels like a comics script adapted to prose, and I hope it eventually does receive the comic book treatment it deserves. In fact, I'm hoping for a series of graphic novels starring the Black Pimpernel. Sequential art would be the perfect medium for this kickass African-American hero.

*Albanian "Russians," expatriate Wikileaker Edward Snowden, and even Russian President Vladimir Putin are involved by the rather revolutionary end. I'd be unsurprised to see this fast-paced, humorous, twisty piece of noir pulp in a year's-best anthology or two.*



On the whole, *The Obama Inheritance* offers an uneven experience in terms of both execution and expectation. The variability in quality occurs, I suspect, because political satire has a short shelf life. The publisher must have wanted such a topical anthology released quickly, mandating a mercilessly tight deadline for contributors.

The divergences from pulp fiction are more mystifying, given that's what the cover offers. Few readers opening an anthology of "pulpy goodness" expect or want to encounter a relentlessly dystopic

work like "Brother's Keeper," however excellent. Mosley's satire would make more sense in an anthology of New Age or AfroFuturist fiction. The inclusion of Silverberg's literary and thematically unconnected science fiction reprint is even more mystifying. This lack of focus will leave many pulp fiction fans dissatisfied.

[Note: *The Obama Inheritance* contains a story by CSZ reviews editor Nisi Shawl. Her contribution is not discussed directly or by implication in this review.]

## Formed of Many Suns

*Luminescent Threads: Connections to Octavia E. Butler*, edited by Alexandra Pierce and Mimi Mondal, Twelfth Planet Press, August 2017, 509 pp., \$19.99.

reviewed by Ayana Jamieson

What would you write in a letter to Octavia E. Butler? Alexandra Pierce and Mimi Mondal asked that question, solicited entries from a list of writers, scholars, and readers, then opened the call to more of her fans for inclusion in *Luminescent Threads: Connections to Octavia E. Butler*. I often say that in addition to her writing and influence, Octavia E. Butler gave us one another. Those of us left behind after her passing are able to be in dialog and community with one another because she existed and we feel her absence. *Luminescent Threads*, published the year the beloved Butler would have turned 70, is evidence of how vast and varied that community is and the kinds of conversations that will continue on from now, nearly a dozen years after her passing.

The title of the collection of these fifty-something letters, essays, and reprints comes from a passage in Butler's first published novel, *Patternmaster* (1976):

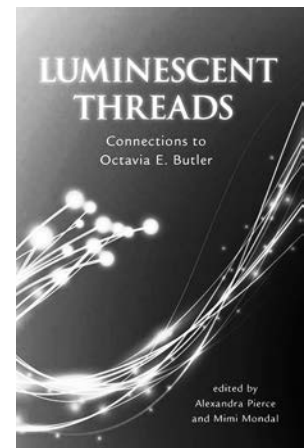
He was suddenly able to see the members of the Pattern not as starlike points of light but as luminescent threads. He could see where the threads wound together into slender cords, into ropes, into great cables. He could see where they joined, where they coiled and twisted together to form a vast

sphere of brilliance, a core of light that was like a sun formed of many suns. (*Seed to Harvest*, p. 748)

For anyone who has read the *Seed to Harvest* compilation of the Patternist series, this description is familiar from the perspective of Mary, the Pattern's first Patternmaster. This passage here with "luminescent threads" is articulated by one of Mary's descendants and an heir to the Pattern in the future, a psionically interdependent network of individuals with special abilities. Throughout Butler's published novels, short stories, and essays, there are echoes, hints, overlaps, and reverberations like this with themes of power, interdependence, survival, difference, passion, persistence, and more. These same themes reoccur in this timely collection. Many of the entries are deeply personal and heartfelt reverences for Butler, overflowing with gratitude. Indeed, many of the entries in *Luminescent Threads* record moments when the authors feel they are heirs to some bequest, discussing a private relationship to Butler and her work in a very public space.

Following introductions by editors Alexandra Pierce and Mimi Mondal, which set the tone for the rest of the text, the book is expertly curated into eight different sections. Each section

Cynthia Ward has sold stories to *Asimov's SF*, *Shattered Prism*, and elsewhere. She edited *Lost Trails: Forgotten Tales of the Weird West*. She coauthored *Writing the Other: A Practical Approach*. Her recent novella is *The Adventure of the Incognita Countess* (Aqueduct Press).



I often say that in addition to her writing and influence, Octavia E. Butler gave us one another.

*Luminescent Threads*, published the year the beloved Butler would have turned 70, is evidence of how vast and varied that community is and the kinds of conversations that will continue on from now, nearly a dozen years after her passing.

Cont. on p. 22



Mixed Message  
(Cont. from p. 21)

*Some of the letters to Octavia the book collects are more self-conscious than others. For example, Rachel Swirsky writes to Butler, "This letter is necessarily a performance. It is written between me and an audience, framed by the echo of you."*

covers a particular theme or represents a particular category of entries and is titled with a memorable phrase from one of the section's letters. For example, the first section, "Your work is a river I come home to," contains letters by individuals inspired by Butler in their lives and work more broadly. The second section's authors focus on current political events (though many other contributors also touch upon this topic), wondering what Butler would think of the current state of things. Another section is made up of Octavia E. Butler Scholars like Mondal, who were awarded the Octavia E. Butler Memorial Scholarship administered in Butler's name by the Carl Brandon Society (the scholarship provides tuition for Clarion and Clarion West Writers Workshops, where Butler herself got her start). There are other entries by Clarion and Clarion West students who had Butler as an instructor. Still other authors appear in other sections comprising love letters to the author and notable essays. A 1996 interview of Butler by Stephen W. Potts concludes the collection.

Some of the letters to Octavia the book collects are more self-conscious than others. For example, Rachel Swirsky writes to Butler, "This letter is necessarily a performance. It is written between me and an audience, framed by the echo of you." Swirsky, who studied at Clarion West with Butler the summer before her death in 2006, notes that Butler was, "the most important science fiction writer of the twentieth century" though she suspected that the famous author didn't care for her writing. Like many others, Butler is part of Swirsky's origin story as a writer. The compilation beautifully traces the intellectual and theoretical lineage from Butler and beyond. As with many of us, for these writers Butler's fiction is the gateway to the speculative fiction of others.

A bit of my own origin story and relationship to her work is also outlined very graciously in *Luminescent Threads* by Moya Bailey and Lisa Bennett Bolekaja, whose paths have overlapped mine because of Octavia E. Butler. Bailey writes, "Building community is our best chance

at shaping a reality that is more in line with the world we want. The process is slow but it is work I love. Through feeding people, through gathering them together and growing our collective skills, we are trying to stave off the individualism and loneliness that consumer capitalism has cultivated." Bailey and Bolekaja each chronicle the collaborations, events, celebrations, and other opportunities to enlarge the Pattern that exists in our world through my work with the Octavia E. Butler Legacy Network.

As Los Angeles-based artist Connie Samaras notes, echoing Bailey, "I doubt I'm the only one writing to you now to say how profound your books remain with every reading. How they never seem dated but rather illuminate the period they're being read in. Vernacular histories outplay official renditions of the past. The present converts into a shared multi-dimensional commons that can never be fully understood. And the future becomes something each of us can try to make." Indeed, since the collection's publication, the announcement has been made that Ava DuVernay, Victoria Mahoney, Allen Bain, and Charles D. King's multimedia company Macro are attached to a television series based on Butler's *Dawn* (1987).

Many readers have had the kind of jarring and life-altering experiences that K. Tempest Bradford relays: "The moment I connected the name Octavia Butler with *That Book That Messed Me Up In Tenth Grade* I knew I wanted to read the other books you'd written." Many people have been messed up by Butler's books to one degree or another, whether this stems from confronting our own desires and needs or accepting the uncertainty and complicated nature of being human. In the essay " 'Let's Dwell a Little': The Trickster Within Octavia E. Butler," feminist science fiction scholar Rebecca Holden writes, "I would suggest that the more time a reader spends with Butler, the more that reader sees the ambiguities, the more unsettling and thought-provoking the stories become." This essay in particular stood out

*Many people have been messed up by Butler's books to one degree or another, whether this stems from confronting our own desires and needs or accepting the uncertainty and complicated nature of being human.*





as a thoughtful entry into the canon of Butler scholarship because it builds on earlier ideas collected in *Strange Matings: Science Fiction, Feminism, African American Voices and Octavia E. Butler*, co-edited by Holden and Nisi Shawl.

The archetypal Octavia rises out of many of the thoughtful and deliberate letters as a fierce instigator and incendiary force of nature who inspired others: "Authors of varied sexuality, genders, race, ethnicity, nationality, background, who are taking their place at the table despite the furious chest-thumping of bigots. They mention your name, often, in interviews. They're winning awards, publishing books, fiercely resisting bigotry" concludes Indra Das, recipient of the Butler Scholarship for Clarion West in 2012. Alongside Lisa Bennett Bolekaja, who applied to Clarion (in San Diego) at Octavia's repeated insistence, and who was also awarded the Octavia E. Butler Memorial Scholarship in 2012, we see in this Butler's continuing impact on students who would not have had the means to attend the workshop without financial support.

The names of many writers that have come after Butler or who will continue to be noteworthy are also contained in these pages. Bolekaja documents just a small part of the lineage of authors that come after Butler the writer, mentor, and teacher. Her recounting is like a recitation of who begat whom in the Jewish Scriptures: "Nisi [Shawl] led me to K. Tempest Bradford, and from there came Sofia Samatar, N. K. Jemisin, Mikki Kendall, Chesya Burke, Andrea Hairston, Jennifer Marie Brissett, Ibi Zoboi, Kiini Ibura Salaam, Nnedi Okorafor, Alaya Dawn Johnson...and the list can go on and on now. Links in the chain of Black women who are writing the future. Our numbers are growing day by day." (Jemisin's award-winning *The Fifth Season* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* are also headed to television.)

The advice and recollections of Butler's students were fascinating to me. Many recalled interactions that could have caused them embarrassment or discomfort. Butler is described as "an invariably gracious,

polite and kind" teacher by Stephanie Burgis, for example; she then goes on to describe a look that Octavia gave her in a private conversation, a look of measured warning, full of unspoken yet restrained urgency. Another student, asked by Butler whether he actually loved the protagonist of a story of his critiqued during the first week of Clarion West, considers whether he does love his character and muses that the character is part of him: "I see literary characters as fragments of the author's psyche."

Most poignant is the advice Asata Radcliffe got from Butler about making space in her very full life for writing. It really resonates with me. The advice was to find time for writing, not by waking up at four in the morning as Butler had for many years, or to write each day, but, instead:

You're the type of writer who needs long blocks of time to write. Some can write every day, but you're not one of them, and that's ok. So, make sure you make the time. Take a whole summer, or a few months. No matter what, do what you have to do to get that block of writing time. It is what you must do.

In the end, a profound absence is filled with more memories and stories than can be contained by any single book. The end is really only the beginning as Butler's literary manuscripts are just being combed through at the Huntington Library, and the world, though weary and uncertain, will have better representation (on screen and in print) thanks to Butler and her artistic descendants. "Sometimes loss makes a bridge" as cultural worker Rasha Abdulhadi notes. This text will be one of those that tide us over until the next unexpected story, or biography, or television program draws readers to explore Butler's work.

While every letter is unique and heartfelt, not every letter will appeal to each reader. Some of the sentiments in the collection do get repetitive as the same Butler texts are mentioned over and over; however, there are enough different voices to keep readers engaged with new

*The archetypal Octavia rises out of many of the thoughtful and deliberate letters as a fierce instigator and incendiary force of nature who inspired others....*

*"Sometimes loss makes a bridge" as cultural worker Rasha Abdulhadi notes. This text will be one of those that tide us over until the next unexpected story, or biography, or television program draws readers to explore Butler's work.*



Mixed Message  
(Cont. from p. 23)

Ayana A. H. Jamieson, PhD, is the founder of the Octavia E. Butler Legacy Network. She teaches at Pasadena City College and SUNY, Empire State College's Center for Distance Learning.

anecdotes, memories, and reflections to make it a library addition to cherish.

[Note: Though *Cascadia Subduction Zone's* Reviews Editor Nisi Shawl and Features Editor L. Timmel Duchamp contributed to *Luminescent Threads*, this article refrains from mentioning their pieces for reasons of professional ethics.]

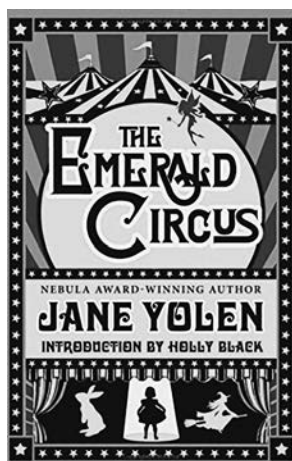
Works Cited

- Butler, Octavia E. *Patternmaster*. New York: Warner, 1976.
- Butler, Octavia E. *Seed to Harvest*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2007.



## The Power to Speak Truth

*The Emerald Circus* by Jane Yolen, Tachyon Publications LLC, 2016, 288 pp., \$15.95.  
reviewed by Kristin King



This collection of fantasy short stories by Jane Yolen spans decades of her career. It talks back to the literary tradition of the British Isles by riffing off everything from a well-known children's story to an obscure historic fact.

Jane Yolen lives most of the year in Massachusetts and four months in Scotland, a place that has clearly captured her artistic imagination. She is the author of more than 350 books, ranging from picture books to adult works, and has won several major literary awards. My first encounter with her was the picture book *How Do Dinosaurs Say Good Night?* That book, deceptively simple, is a mainstay for families because it reflects an understanding of children's primal needs both to be powerful and to contain that power. Her expertise with children's literature has clearly carried over to this collection, because Yolen has a sly grasp of the lies we tell children in our stories, why we tell them, and how to attack them head-on.

The stories in *The Emerald Circus* dig into the truths hidden by traditional Anglo-Saxon tales, especially around power dynamics and self-determination, and reflect a feminist perspective. Most are set in the British Isles, either in medieval or Victorian times. Some are based on well-known fairy tales, some pay homage to famous writers, and a few take on mysterious historical incidents.

Some of Yolen's stories are less successful than others: if the original tale lacks meaning to the reader, then Yolen's fresh take must stand on its own, and some of the magic fades. In comparison to the rest of the stories, the result is disappointing. For instance, "The Quiet Monk" and "The Confession of Brother Blaise" both delve into Arthurian legend, which has never captured my interest. Fans of medieval literature might enjoy these connections, but I found them lacking in relevance.

On the other hand, the best stories steal brilliantly from the power of the original tales in the reader's imagination, refashioning it to work brand new magic.

This review explores three of the most potent stories: "Lost Girls," "Blown Away," and "Our Lady of the Greenwood." These stories lead the reader through the thickets of the original tales (or, sometimes, the contemporary rewrites of the original tales) to discover what's missing. Why did Wendy do all the housework in Peter Pan? What kind of home did Dorothy have to go back to? If Robin Hood was born and named, who birthed him and who named him? From there, she jolts the reader into sudden illumination.

"Lost Girls" takes a new girl, Darla, into Neverland. Darla is a modern young woman with a feminist sensibility and a mother who works as a labor lawyer—on the side of the workers. Peter and Wendy

Her expertise with children's literature has clearly carried over to this collection, because Yolen has a sly grasp of the lies we tell children in our stories, why we tell them, and how to attack them head-on.



seem kind at first, but soon reveal themselves to be ancient, cold, and above all, management. Through persuasion, trickery, and fear, the pair rule a group of lost girls known simply as “Wendys” because Peter can’t be bothered to remember their real names. The Wendys are shut up in the Neverland tree, never get to go outside and fight pirates, and are always cleaning up after the Lost Boys. Fortunately, Darla knows a thing or two about sit-down strikes.

The lie in the original Peter Pan is that a real adventurer (and we won’t worry too hard about who’s allowed that role) can leave behind all the housework and childcare because somebody else naturally wants to do it twenty-four hours a day. The exposure of that lie in “Lost Girls” packs a delightful punch.

Like “Lost Girls,” the story “Blown Away” delves into a well-known tale—The Wizard of Oz this time—to see what’s missing. “Blown Away” is told from the point of view of a field hand, and the main focus isn’t Oz, but the farm that Dorothy left behind.

To a contemporary U.S. audience, Aunt Em’s farm represents a lost Eden, with a roly-poly farm wife cooking delicious food all the time and serving it with a heaping plate of love to the menfolk and kids. But the farm in “Blown Away,” sitting on a lonely gray prairie, affords only meager fare, and while Aunt Em shares what love she can, she’s worked so hard that her heart is “as dried up as an old pea.” Meanwhile, relatives are losing their farms to the banks, and the wife of the hired hand is running herself ragged caring for a dying mother.

It’s a Kansas with few illusions left. In comparison, Oz is—well, actually it’s a traveling circus. When a twister blows the house away, it carries Dorothy to the Emerald Circus, accompanied by a stuffed Toto on wheels (he had been killed in a previous twister), and she spends seven years learning tightrope-walking and sleeping with the Bearded Lady.

It’s a haunting tale, melancholy and moving.

The final story I’ll consider here, “Our Lady of the Greenwood,” is a fun,

spooky tale that delves into the part of the hero story we usually forget. Heroes like Robin Hood spring full-grown into our ken, but they were once born. More specifically, they were birthed. And named. And given a start in life.

In this story, three women carry out these jobs. Lady Margaret makes a deal with the fairies: in exchange for her life, she’ll bear her husband a son, and the fairies will name it. The midwife assists in the birth and then takes the newborn to the forest for an eerie, perilous ritual. And Old Mag provides the name.

Who’s Old Mag? Well, to back up a bit, the midwife had been praying “the old words” to Mary, the Queen of Heaven. That’s an unusual phrase. It turns out that as described in the early Robin Hood ballads, around the early 16th century BCE, Robin Hood was a Marianist (a follower of a form of Christianity that revolves around Mother Mary).

But the midwife is stuck in a struggle between old, pagan gods, and new ones. When she intends to ask the “Queen of Heaven” to save the child, the words instead come out “Oh, my Lady of the Greenwood” and Old Mag appears. After all, she is the one and only queen of the forest. The midwife’s actions and discoveries make for a pleasurable read, punctuated by the surprise of the actual source of Robin Hood’s name.

All the stories in this collection are thoroughly researched, enjoyable reads that shed new light on old tales. Some are good, and others are brilliant.

Wonderland will never be the same.

---

Kristin King is the author of the short story collection *Misfits from the Beehive State* (2013). Her work has appeared in *Strange Horizons*, *Calyx*, *The Pushcart Prize XXII*, and the anthology *Missing Links and Secret Histories* (2013). She blogs at [kristinking.wordpress.com](http://kristinking.wordpress.com).

*...the best stories steal brilliantly from the power of the original tales in the reader’s imagination, refashioning it to work brand new magic.*

*The lie in the original Peter Pan is that a real adventurer...can leave behind all the housework and childcare because somebody else naturally wants to do it twenty-four hours a day. The exposure of that lie in “Lost Girls” packs a delightful punch.*



Singers of the Deep  
*a response to Alexander Pushkin's "Arion"*  
by Maya Chhabra

ARION

But what do you sing, when land gives way to storm-wracked sea and friend to unsure foe  
In one and the same person? To throw away my lyre and bail fruitlessly the shell the sea is gutting  
Were foul betrayal of self. You knew I was never your ally.

THE SAILOR

But what do you do, when frigid water numbs your knuckles and the daft and god-touched singer plays on?  
Let deadweight sink; here we struggle for life. It is no polluted murder that the water claims its own.  
And the gods could save, if only they wanted. They never do.

THE SHIP

Who cast us upon the waters, for augurs to read in our smashed timbers the future we never see?  
Our salt-soaked splintering curves can build nothing other than what we are. Whom we bear  
Concerns us not, only whither.

THE SEA

Humans enjoy twisting the Fates and swift-spun Necessity to the blessing of their endeavors:  
They like to draw forth gods. Let them be reminded that we are sovereign and own no master,  
Least of all our subjects.

THE DOLPHINS

Not singly but as a family we come. Issuing notes of distress and succor, we tear the storm with our leaps.  
Past unsung wreckage, seeking our kin, we find the one who has been discarded because  
He is too much like us.

THE SHORE

Expiring upon my belly a cetacean Grace, unsalvageable. Crushed by itself it craves  
The sea's nearby relief, within the reach of the new Venus. He dries his robe, humming, and sings to the cliff.  
Perhaps you were warned.



## THE TYRANT

It is well from time to time to do good, to exercise the soul. Not a vast demanding good but one  
Small person who may sing you when you are gone. Because he has a face. The many, that abstraction  
Composed of a thousand realities, has none.

## THE TOMB

Two masons chip at my dead face. I can be repurposed—mutability is safety here.  
While they work, they speak hatred to the hard, omnipresent sun. They suspect each other but now and then words  
Awake unbidden, crying like song for release.

## THE CROSS

We are made to bear, not to judge. Good and evil are none of our concern. Amid the moans of our victims,  
We alone do not say, “This was ill-done.” We only wait until their own weight crushes the creatures  
Beached on unfeeling shores.

*Enter ARION, alone.*

---

Maya Chhabra is a poet whose work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Mythic Delirium*, *Through the Gate*, *Star\*Line*, and *Liminality*. Her fairy-tale novelette *Walking on Knives* is available from Less Than Three Press. She lives in New York City.



## Dead Clown Art—Chris Roberts

Chris Roberts is Dead Clown Art. Maker of things that were most certainly not here before. Mixed media. Found stuff. Abandoned scraps. Detritus. Rubble. Nonsense. Shiny objects. Crow wearing clothes.

That's all the third person I have to give.

I created the artwork in this feature for the stellar UK press PS Publishing, for the mind-bending novel *The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August* by the incomparable Claire North. If you haven't read it you really should.

Right now. I'll wait...



I'm a process junkie. I love the *making* of the artwork. I'm fairly rubbish at rough sketches because I'm never really sure how a piece is going to turn out. What I'll need to put into it. Not just the lines and colors but the *stuff*. I'm always surprised by the outcome. The finished product is often a ghost of the image I had in my head. Maybe the other way around. It's difficult to explain. Obviously.

I created a fair amount of artwork for *Harry August*. The bulk of it was a series of 17 altered portraits, some of which are included in this issue. The novel is about time and memory, choice and consequence. Dig deep stuff for sure. I did my best to inject those concepts into the artwork I created for this marvelous book. But there's something else inside these portraits...



Imagine a dog. An everyday walk walked. A recycling dumpster that we pass to enter our apartment complex. I don't always look inside that dumpster, but I do rely on found stuffs for my artwork, and *that* day I looked inside.

Certainly glad I did. Brown bag and box filled with old letters, documents, envelopes, and PHOTOS!

Spoiler Alert: Remember in *Goonies* when they find the pirate ship filled with treasure? Exactly like that!

I was elated. Over the freaking moon. All of it for me and all of it for FREE! I spent the entire next day going through my dumpster spoils. Old photos. Family photos. Holiday cards. Postcards. A letter to Mother dated May 14, 1893. Worn folds barely holding it together. Newspaper clippings about good and bad things. Typewritten communications from the United Spanish War Veterans Official Headquarters.

- A birth certificate.
- A marriage certificate.
- A death certificate.
- A life.

As the hours peeled away, my elation turned to sadness. Somebody received that precious collection of the papers that follows us as we age. Somebody gathered that precious collection into a brown bag and box. Somebody threw it all into the recycling dumpster.

What a horrible eulogy. What a shitty epitaph.

What does this sad story have to do with the 17 altered portraits I created for the *Harry August* novel?

Most of the base portraits I altered for these collages came from some of the carelessly discarded photos in that brown bag and box.

- His name was Homer Dwiggins.
- Photos of Homer as a child.
- Photos of Homer as a young man.
- Photos of Homer as an old man.

I spent a day with Homer. With the papers that followed him throughout his long life. The good stuff. The bad stuff. Beginnings. Middles. Ends.

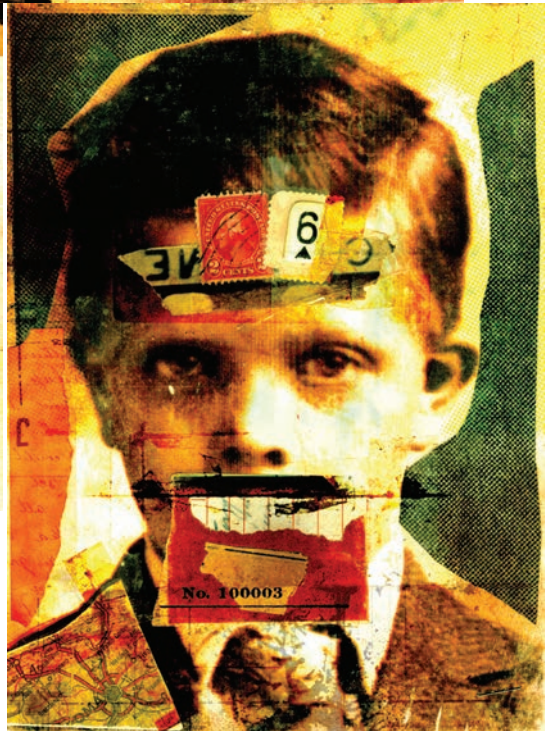
Time. Memory. Choice. Consequence.

Those altered portraits I created, using various photos of Homer Dwiggins, are certainly a more fitting tribute than the bottom of a recycling dumpster.

At the very least, I recycled them.

Please visit [deadclownart dot com](http://deadclownart.com) to see more of my work. And if you're feeling especially silly, follow my antics on Twitter @deadclownart.





Altered Portraits from  
*The First Fifteen Lives of Harry August*





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