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Beauty and Beast ๑ Erika Steiskal

"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."

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

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

She's Gone

by Nisi Shawl

"Obituaries don't write themselves." I have no idea whether Ursula ever said that, but I hear it in her voice. She had a lot of voices, but this sentence in particular I hear in the gruff, gravelly, voice of her matter-of-factness, that tone she used when speaking of unpleasant necessities like editorial revisions or vaccines.

Obituaries don't write themselves, and yet they must be written in order for us to read them. We read them in appreciation of the ephemeral excellence of their subjects. I'm responsible for writing this one. Get thee behind me, sadness.

First, the factual portion of the exercise. On January 22, 2018, Ursula Kroeber Le Guin died. She was 88 years old at the time of her death, having been born on October 22, 1929. That was another century. Another millennium. She is survived by her husband Charles Le Guin, their daughters Elizabeth and Caroline, their son Theodore, and thousands of bereft admirers of her life and work.

During her career as a professional writer, Ursula K. Le Guin (her name's preferred abbreviation and spacing) brought forth unto the Earth twenty-three novels, ten story collections, six books of nonfiction, seven books of poetry, an opera, a screenplay, assorted works of children's literature, several humorous and serious chapbooks, anthologies of others' stories and essays, and texts she translated from languages she didn't even speak. You'll notice I gave up counting entries midway down that list. I'm about out of patience with factuality. Ursula didn't just write facts. She wrote truth.

But all right. Two final facts: She was born in Berkeley, California. She died in Portland, Oregon.

You want more? Visit Ursula's official website at http://www.ursulakleguin.com/UKL_info.html. Or her Wikipedia page. Get all the facts you want. Eventually you'll have enough.

Facts are good, but they fill you with satisfaction rather than longing. Not like truth. Truth is harder to capture and convey. Like a bird of ice in July. Like the future, where Ursula lived. At least she lived in mine.

I say that Ursula lived in my future because for me, in a very personal sense, she did. She entered the realm of published authors before me, and the land of age, and now she has set off ahead for that country "from whose bourn no traveller returns," death.

In others' eyes, too, Ursula was a pioneer, a dweller-in-times-yet-to-come. She broke new ground with her feminist science fiction and her stories centering the lives of people of color. Sharing her keen perception of the anarchic harmonies of cooperation, she infected readers with the certainty that they, too, could stand up for their principles when needed—or sit down, or dance, or behave in whatever way was appropriate, because if Ursula could do it they could too.

There's an Akan image called Sankofa. It looks like a bird. It's drawn with its feet facing forward and its head turned back to look over its folded wings, and it signifies remembering the past while moving on from it. Although what she describes is actually its exact opposite, Sankofa is an image I associate with the Qechua concept Ursula cited in her 1985 remarks on a "Science Fiction and the Future" panel. That indigenous nation of the Andes, she said, "figure that because the past is what you know, you can see it—it's in front of you," while, in contrast, "the future lies behind—behind your back, over your shoulder." That's the direction in which my reverse-Sankofa looks. The future is where we're going—but not, in this formulation, the way our toes point. "The future is what you can't see, unless you turn around and kind of snatch a glimpse," Ursula said.

And that's what she did. She ran backwards into the unknown, stealing occasional glances at it over her folded wings. Then she shared with us what she saw, singing or squawking or croaking like a crow about it as the occasion demanded.

She did that for a nice long time. For more than fifty years. We're very fortunate her run lasted as long as it did.

Cont. on p. 2

She's Gone
(cont. from p. 1)

We grieve nonetheless. She gave us the truth, and we want more.

There will be others, but there've already been a couple of memorial services honoring Ursula. A small, private one for family members was held in Portland. A small public one was held in Seattle, at which I and other Northwest SF writers read selections from Ursula's work and spoke about her effect on us. Eileen Gunn read the first two sections of her 1974 story "The Author of the Acacia Seeds," and Cat Rambo read the third. This was not planned. Nancy Kress read an excerpt of "Nine Lives," first published in Playboy in 1968. I read from "Solitude," my favorite of her stories, from 1994. Greg Bear read part of her scathingly funny essay "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie," and Astrid Bear read part of her children's book *Catwings*. Audience members chimed in with passages from "The Matter of Seggri" and *The Left Hand of Darkness*.

What did we say in our own words about hers? Me, I chickened out and took refuge in reading an essay I'd written about "Solitude" for *80!*, Aqueduct Press's Ursula festschrift. Brave Amy Thomson talked about how she started out by stalking Ursula, how she initially wanted to *be* Ursula when she grew up, and gradually came to understand that this was impossible. That there was always going to be only the one.

And yet there were many Ursulas, because she changed and grew throughout her life. Even in the few years I knew her she was busy learning: learning from others, and from her mistakes, and from experience. She was always becoming someone new. Revisiting her greatest successes, the Earthsea books and *The Left Hand of Darkness*, she found room for improvement in them. When an opportunity to make such an improvement presented itself—a television script or a sequel, say—she took it. She ran with it. She never stopped. She never got stuck in her own past. She kept going blindly into the future, sneaking an occasional peek at it, writing down what she saw. She left plenty of reports. Reading them—again or anew—is the best way to honor what she has given us. We'll never get any more.

Lew Gilchrist—A Class Act

by Kath Wilham

"Love doesn't just sit there, like a stone; it has to be made, like bread, remade all the time, made new."
Ursula K. Le Guin

"When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe."
John Muir

Just a couple of days after the world lost Ursula K. Le Guin, we lost another incredible woman, a fabric artist, sf fan, and star in the firmament of prevention research, Lew Gilchrist. Most *Cascadia Subduction Zone* readers will only maybe remember Lew as a name on our masthead, the first Managing Editor of the *CSZ*, one of those behind the scenes critical actors in any endeavor. I want to share my friend Lew with you now.

I met Lew in 1996 when I began working at the University of Washington School of Social Work. Soon after, she started serving as the Doctoral Program Director (my staff job was managing the PhD Program), and we bonded over our mutual love of science fiction and weaving; thus began a friendship that eventually brought Lew, after her retirement from the UW, to help out in the planning stages and first five years of the *CSZ*.

During one of our lunch outings in 2010, Lew wondered if there was a way she could volunteer at Aqueduct Press, if we had any use for her skills. Did we ever! Timmi had been talking about starting a little quarterly that would focus on book reviews, primarily of feminist work, along with essays, etc. Lew was the perfect fit for taking on the managing editor role. Here we had a longtime academic researcher, editor, administrator offering to help out. With Lew joining in, the *CSZ* would be in great hands for getting procedures set up. Thus for the next five years we worked together again and continued to laugh and cry a lot at the vagaries of our world.

Here's the Lew Gilchrist I want you know about, a star both in her academic field and to her students, friends, and family.

Lew was a multifaceted woman, excelling in whatever she undertook both professionally and personally. She wove her varied roles together to create the tapestry of her legacy. She was a widely respected researcher, mentor, and leader across her distinguished years on the

UWSSW faculty, e.g., through formal roles as the first Associate Dean for Research, Director of the Doctoral Program, and Director of the NIMH Prevention Research Center.

The breadth and depth of her scholarship as an internationally respected prevention researcher is remarkable. Lew's enthusiasm for research was contagious; she was always inquisitive about new research questions, theories, and methodologies, and legendary for her big-picture thinking. Her scholarly career began in the late 1970s, and in 1980s, her collaborations with colleagues led to one of the longest longitudinal studies of parenting and pregnant teens ever conducted. In the 1990s, her research expanded to encompass the prevention of HIV/AIDS. This woman took on big challenges.

Interconnected with Lew the scholar is Lew the mentor, who worked with more doctoral students than any other faculty member in the School's history. Our graduates refer to her as a role model in so many dimensions—kind, wise, generous, generative, and always accessible.

Lew did not just run research projects, write grants, administer programs, mentor students, publish widely—she created marvelous textile art. I wish you could see the art pieces her family brought to share with us at the memorial. Some are gorgeous, others absolutely hilarious, shouting out Lew's wild wit. Her family also shared her most recent sketch book, full of fascinating images and quotes from authors whose work inspired her art. (The quotes at the beginning of this remembrance are from that book.)

All of us who knew her will miss Lew's quick, oftentimes dry wit and hearty laugh; her absolute integrity and sense of fairness; her keen intellect, curiosity, and lifelong pursuit of knowledge; her commitment to highly vulnerable populations, particularly mothers and children; her love of travel, the arts, and learning about different cultures; and her joy in her two sons and five grandchildren.

The world is a little less bright without Lew in it. She was truly a class act—but a down to earth and grounded one!

[Note: Much of the text herein came from the words my friend Nancy Hooyman shared during the UW memorial celebration of Lew's life on March 4.]

Saint Roc Cemetery

by Alicia Cole

The first step is the hardest—
reaching up to grasp barbed iron,
hoisting your body over the gate.

After arriving, there will be crypts,
places to lie silently. There will be
long stretches of graves, and you

in a green dress so short, your
panty line will be almost visible.
There will be handfuls of cement,

and your body slowly climbing up,
straight up, up top of Saint Roc.
It's as difficult as it looks—dying?

I never have. Climbing a stand
of crypts to speak to the Dead?
Yes, it's as difficult as it looks.

My advice: speak peacefully,
as the Dead do not always
like howling. Don't burn flowers.

Though they say they didn't notice.
I hang my head in shame, while
the Dead say they may have blown

out the game, may have laughed,
may not have, may have advised
more caution, may not have,

may have drunk the Southern
Comfort with me, or with my own
throat. It's a long descent,

talking to the Dead and explaining;
a long descent, the night washing
like a breathing stone

over New Orleans. We all leave
before the sun, and during full
daylight also; always as one

of the lucky ones, the unlucky
ones, the howlers, the midnight
prowlers, the grave stalkers,

the makers, and the takers. And
the last climb out—Oh, God,
some tell me—is so much harder,

though some say all the sweeter,
than the scrabbling trajectory in.

Alicia Cole is a writer and artist in Huntsville, AL. She's the editor of Priestess & Hierophant Press and works for *Black Fox Literary Magazine*, *Femspec Journal*, and *256 Magazine*. Her work is forthcoming in *Split Lip Magazine* and *Witches & Pagans*. She loves coffee, plants, animals, and art.

Willow: A Forgotten Feminist Fantasy

by Morgen Tell

It requires care and discernment to be a female-identifying person and find a movie that won't insult you to your face, even in 2018.

Like all right-minded people, I love fantasy. No, that's not quite true; I *want* to love fantasy. I want to love fantasy, but I need it to love me back—just a little. I am always on the lookout for works in the fantasy genre that satisfy my tastes for adventure and magic without making me feel either left out or attacked, as a woman. They do exist, and they're slowly becoming more prevalent, but what if I told you that one of my favorites was from 1988?

Like all right-minded people, I love movies. No, sorry, I can't say that with a straight face. I want to love movies, I wish I could love movies—who doesn't love the smell of cheap popcorn and fake butter, the hush that falls over a crowded theater when the lights go down and the studio fanfare blares, the rush of vicariously fought battles watched from the comfort of a padded recliner? But who can stand the huge disparity between the numbers of male and female characters (according to a BBC report, women made up 26% of movie casts in 1913 and 28% in 2017, #progress #sarcasm), the degrading over-sexualization of those women who do appear, and, of course, the constant scenes of sexual assault, played for maximum titilization? The movies don't love us back, and in a hundred years they haven't really gotten any better about it. I wouldn't blame you a bit if you have decided to terminate the relationship and go no-contact with Hollywood. But if you haven't quite managed to do that, if you still hold onto a spark of hope that our love of movies isn't totally unrequited, if you're still in a semi-toxic on-again-off-again relationship with Tinseltown, you're not the only one.

It requires care and discernment to be a female-identifying person and find a movie that won't insult you to your face, even in 2018. So what is this fantasy movie that got it right in 1988, you ask? Maybe you've heard of it but never seen it, maybe you've never heard of it, or maybe, like me, you've seen it ten thousand times and can't believe no one knows what you're talking about. *Willow*! How this movie isn't a huge cult classic, I'll never know. Directed by Ron Howard, produced and co-written by George Lucas, you'd think this movie would be on everyone's radar. But oh well. Let me tell you why it should be on yours if you're a fantasy-loving feminist who occasionally wants to watch a movie.

The plot is pure High Fantasy; the only thing it doesn't have is dragons (unless you count a certain two-headed wingless monstrosity in the second half of the film), but it ticks every other box: halflings (here called "Nelwyns")—check; fairies—check; a quest into the mouth of evil, of course, magic galore, a prophecy—check; sorceresses—check; swordfights—check; evil armies with skull-faced helmets—check; castles—check; folk music—check; it's all here. This movie even has a halfling wizard (here called "the High Aldrin"), with eyebrows to rival Gandalf's or Dumbledore's. And if you liked the scenery in Peter Jackson's Tolkien sextet, *Willow* was also filmed in that real-world fairyland, New Zealand (as well as Wales, England, and California).

"It was a time of dread" the opening title-card informs us. This beautiful, magical world has been overrun by Queen Bavmorda, a powerful and fearsome sorceress (played so charismatically by Jean Marsh that "Bavmorda" is number 7 on my list of Someday Baby Names). But a prophecy has now warned Queen Bavmorda that the one who will destroy her is about to be born. Bavmorda rounds up all the pregnant women in her empire and brings them to give birth in her dungeons so that she can check each baby for the mark that will identify her future killer.

In a dank and muddy cell, by flickering torchlight, a child has just been born. "Is the child a girl?" asks Sorsha, Bavmorda's daughter and most trusted general ("Sorsha," by the way, is number 8). "It is" replies a guard. Sorsha rushes off with a clank of armor to tell her mother. (Note: the prophecy, as far as

we know, didn't specify that the Special Baby would be a girl. Evidently Queen Bavmorda has simply assumed that only a woman could rival her. It appears to be that kind of world.)

"She bears the mark," whispers the dirty, sweaty, realistically-not-at-all-sexy new mother to the dirty, middle-aged, completely heroic midwife Ethna, "Please, you must save her." The midwife springs into action. She hides the baby in her basket of bloody rags and walks with her head down right past the guards and Queen Bavmorda's arriving entourage and the evil Queen herself. She hurries unobtrusively out of the castle, while Queen Bavmorda confronts the new mother in her cell. The mother is fiercely holding onto a baby-shaped bundle of rags. "No," she shrieks, as Bavmorda and the guards wrestle the bundle from her arms, and then she laughs at the queen's bafflement as it falls apart in her hands. "You'll never get her! She will live and you will die!" the red and disheveled mother crows at Bavmorda. "Kill her" rasps Bavmorda to her guards.

Now a gorgeous montage of New Zealand landscapes shows us the brave midwife running away with the Foretold Baby, hiking through forests and across rugged mountainsides for what appears to be months, judging by the amount of curly red hair the baby has in her next close up. But Bavmorda didn't get to be Evil Queen by being bad at the job. The midwife suddenly looks up from washing diapers in a mountain stream. She hears the blood-curdling howls of Bavmorda's rat-boar-hounds, and she knows she has served her heroic purpose and the end is upon her. Quickly bundling the baby onto a reedy tussock, she pushes it and its precious cargo into the stream (George Lucas's love of Campbellian archetypes is showing) and turns to face the hounds. She picks up her staff and prepares to sell her life dear, but she's down within seconds.

All of this happens before the opening credits are over. This movie moves with a clarity and economy that present-day Hollywood would do well to revisit.

You'll notice a few things from these opening scenes. First of all, everyone of any importance in them, the Queen, the Baby, the Midwife, the Mother, the Queen's Daughter (I can't quite bring myself to call Sorsha a princess) is female. I'm pretty sure one of the male guards says something, but all of the dialogue that furthers the plot is spoken by women. This in an industry where women usually get less than a third of all lines, and most of those go to Nubile Young Things and are spoken to a man. Yes, this movie has passed the Bechdel Test, and we haven't even been told its title yet. Interesting. Apparently passing the Bechdel Test is not prohibitively difficult. Interesting.

Yes, this movie has passed the Bechdel Test, and we haven't even been told its title yet. Interesting. Apparently passing the Bechdel Test is not prohibitively difficult.

Second, you might have noticed, or at least a heterosexual man might have noticed, that none of these women were presented as sexually attractive or available. Sorsha later turns out to be very "pretty" but you would scarcely notice it under all that armor and the helmet. Her armor, wonder of wonders, covers more flesh than it reveals, doesn't cling to her like a wet tee shirt, and looks like it could actually save her life and probably already has. She also seems comfortable in it and manages to deliver her lines in spite of a helmet that genuinely protects her cranium. Bavmorda is quite beautiful if you're into Maleficent-types, but she too is clad in an outfit that doesn't display the figure underneath, and tends to focus attention on her face. Ethna looks like an extra in a guillotine scene from a documentary about the French Revolution, the kind of unkempt, old-before-her-time, peasant woman who dips her handkerchief in the blood of the king.

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As for the mother, it is not at all unheard of for Hollywood to show us a woman who has supposedly just given birth but whose hair and make-up are picture perfect, or to adorn her beautifully painted face with just a spritz of dew and a languid expression of exhaustion, as if to suggest, well, what they love to suggest. At perhaps the least sexually available moment of her life, it'd be nice for the mostly male audience, reasons Hollywood, if she could look sexually available. (The mostly male audience, by the way, is a myth. As Hollywood is occasionally reminded, to its chagrin, women are the slight majority of movie-goers. Directors might do well to

Cont. on p. 6

represent our experiences to us in a way resembling how we experience them.) This new mother, though, is not at all glamorized and is the polar opposite of languid. Frankly, she looks like she smells bad, and I love it.

Let's take a moment for numbers and context. By my count, there are twenty-two memorable characters in this movie. Some of them are unnamed, like the baby's mother, and some of them can't really be said to further the plot, but perhaps I could say they all nourish it. Of these twenty-two characters, ten are female (and they are played by eleven actresses, since the baby is played by twins, Ruth and Kate Greenfield. Shout-out to the Greenfield sisters who somehow managed to make a lineless role one of the most compelling and convincing in the film. I'm not kidding either. You have to see it to believe how expressive and intelligent this character comes off). That means this movie beats the average female-to-male ratio in movies by 17%, statistically significant certainly. No, females aren't the majority of memorable characters, only 45%, and no, they are not the majority onscreen, with most of the extras being male warriors. But it's a well-known phenomenon that most people perceive women as outnumbering men when we make up only a third of a group, so you can watch this as a movie that *feels* like it has a female majority, as practice for the day when we have a High Fantasy movie that actually has a female majority. Otherwise that experience, when it comes, might overwhelm you.

Shout-out to the Greenfield sisters who somehow managed to make a lineless role one of the most compelling and convincing in the film. I'm not kidding either.

Another thing you might have noticed about these opening scenes is that two female characters have already been killed off. True enough, but I'm just glad they got to die while spitting in the face of evil, fearlessly and against overwhelming odds. Male characters get to do that every day of the week, but how many actresses have had the opportunity to play that kind of supreme moment? I honestly don't know, as the gender statistics for heroic death scenes haven't been studied yet, but my gut feeling is that it's nigh on unique.

The reedy tussock eventually comes to shore in Nelwyn country and is found by Mims and Ranon, the daughter and son of our protagonist, Willow. Willow and his wife Kaiya are farmers in danger of being driven out of their home by their greedy landlord, Burglekutt. They are industrious, generous people, good parents in a loving and supportive marriage. Willow seems to be the worrier of the two, while Kaiya keeps her head on her shoulders.

They immediately recognize that the baby is "not like us," by which they mean that she is a Daikini, or "giant." It's always refreshing to flirt with the othering of the default group, so it's nice to get a glimpse of tall people through the eyes of a society of little people. The movie doesn't delve into it at all, but it does make perfectly clear that the Nelwyns don't admire the Daikinis for their height or feel any undue fear of them. Daikinis are just another kind of people, who happen to be grotesquely tall, and probably have nasty barbaric ways. Kaiya and the children instantly adopt the baby, in spite of Willow's shrill protests, which they cheerfully ignore.

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Trouble comes in the form of one of Bavmorda's rat-boar-hounds, which attacks during a Nelwyn festival and tears up a cradle before the Nelwyn warrior squad manages to spear it to death. The Nelwyns conclude that the beast was looking for a baby, and Willow and Kaiya realize that they will have to tell the town council about their find.

It is decided by the council and the High Aldrin that the baby will have to be taken back to the Daikinis, for the good of the village. A group is chosen to undertake this potentially dangerous journey: Willow, his best friend Meegosh, the odious and reluctant Burglekutt, as well as Vohnkar, the head warrior and a few of his men. Their goal is to reach the Daikini crossroads and then give the baby to the first Daikini they meet. Willow by this time has grown attached to the baby and serves as her nursemaid in a way that makes it clear he has played an active role in the care of his own children. He knows when she needs to be burped, he knows how she sounds when she needs her "rag" changed. His knowledge of babies even earns him a modicum of authority within the group, who have

been disposed to look down on him and Meegosh. That's a weird way for a man to gain recognition in an action-adventure movie, wouldn't you say? I like it.

Anyway, I don't want to say too much more about the plot. The Nelwyns do find a Daikini at the crossroads. He seems in every way unsuitable to rear a baby, so Willow refuses to hand her over. The other Nelwyns, except for the loyal Meegosh, all defect and abandon Willow, who is determined to wait where he is until an appropriate Daikini comes along. After that, the movie takes turn after turn, and Willow of course has to face his worst fears and summon his deepest strengths, and all that good stuff.

Throughout the movie, he runs into powerful female characters. What I mean to say is that, in this world, all of the most powerful people are female. We know that men can wield magic, because we've met the High Aldrin, and we know that Willow aspires to become the High Aldrin's apprentice, but to be perfectly honest men's magic in this movie is presented as slightly…incompetent. And it certainly never approaches the kinds of powers that Bavmorda demonstrates. Bavmorda's banished rival, another great sorceress named Fin Raziel, seems to approximately equal her in power, and a fairy named Cherlindria exercises great authority during her brief appearance.

We learn from Cherlindria that the baby's name is Elora Danan, and that the baby herself chose Willow to be her helper. Willow is not allowed to decline this honor, which makes me wonder how much authority the baby has. She outranks the male protagonist, evidently, so that's another powerful female character, I guess. She is, of course, physically helpless, but events do seem to conspire in her favor in a way that could suggest some sort of arcane steering of destiny on her part. Certainly Bavmorda fears her so much that she is not content to simply kill Elora, but must perform a complicated ritual which will banish her soul beyond all possibility of reincarnation.

And then there's Sorsha, a highly competent warrior and leader of warriors. She more than once gets the best of Willow's Daikini sidekick, Madmartigan, who bills himself as "the greatest swordsman who ever lived." She does wind up playing someone's love-interest, but the circumstances are unusual enough that I didn't find it trite. She quickly proves that she is not just a kissee, but a kisser, grabbing the guy she likes in the middle of a battle and smooching him good and fierce.

Besides telling us the baby's name and interpreting her will, Cherlindria also gives Willow her own wand, which seems to be a famous object in this world, and directs him to take it to the banished Fin Raziel. Fin Raziel, besides being trapped on a tiny island in a huge mountain lake, is also suffering under an enchantment and can't use any magic until Willow helps her return to her original form. In order to do this, Willow, whose entire stock of "magic" seems to be two or three sleight-of-hand tricks, has to be walked laboriously through the spell multiple times, messing it up completely on his first two tries.

When she is finally made human again, Fin Raziel discovers that her original body has been aging during the decades of her banishment. She was, according to her own words, "a young and beautiful woman" when Bavmorda defeated her, and she is now—well, it's hard to tell a sorceress's age, but the actress who plays her (Patricia Hayes) was 79 at the time. "I'm sorry," says Willow, but Fin Raziel has no time for that. She rolls up her sleeves and prepares for battle without another word said on the topic.

What follows is surely one of the most unusual fight scenes ever filmed. It is exactly like any other magical fight scene (in fact, when I first saw Gandalf and Saruman's duel in Peter Jackson's *The Fellowship of the Ring*, my first thought was "that is some pretty shameless ripping-off of *Willow*, there") except that it is fought by two old women. The actress who plays Bavmorda (Jean Marsh) was actually only 54 at the time, but the character has been rapidly aging throughout the movie, no doubt due to the stress of her impending doom, and she is more or less mummified by the time she fights the climactic fight. And it is the climactic fight. There have been plenty of battles before it, but there are none after it. It is the fight upon which the fate of all the other characters hangs.

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Willow
(cont. from p. 7)

And it is fought in deadly earnest, with no hint at all that we should view it as a semi-comical "cat-fight," or that the director thinks we should be turned on by it. It is simply two highly magical people trying to kill each other, and the fact that they happen to be two women from a demographic that Hollywood can hardly bring itself to acknowledge is a non-issue. And they don't just fling spells, either. Any time they get within arm's reach, they're happy to throw punches.

I can present my own judgment on how feminist the movie is, but I have no way of judging how feminist it was intended to be.

Willow, who is after all the protagonist, plays a decisive role in this fight, but not by fighting. He is not a warrior, nor is he really a sorcerer, so he has to help out by using the very limited tools in his arsenal, which hearkens back to a certain embarrassing failure of his earlier in the movie, but that's all I'll say.

This is a movie that I imprinted on as a kid, before I could really judge it. I liked the magic, the swordfights, the exciting musical score, the humor, the monsters, etc., and it never occurred to me that this movie might be saying better things about girls and women than another of my favorites, *The Princess Bride*, or other fantasy movies from the time. This, for me, is one of those rare childhood favorites that gets better the more I critique it. *The Princess Bride* falls apart completely when you look at it through a feminist lens, and others from the same period, like *Krull* or *Legend*, are even worse. Which brings me to a puzzling question: were *Willow*'s makers trying to make a feminist movie?

Rumor has it that George Lucas had been hoping for years to be able to make an adaptation of *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings*, but hadn't been able to secure the rights, and finally gave up and wrote his own story about a brave halfling carrying a McGuffin on a long quest. I don't know if that's true, but it certainly sounds plausible. If you feel that Tolkien wrote some wonderful stories but shamefully ignored the female half of the population, *Willow* might be just what you're looking for. Instead of an evil ring, there's a charismatic little red-headed baby girl, and instead of wizards there are sorceresses. Instead of elven kings, there's a fairy queen (in fact, there are no kings at all in this movie, only queens and democracies), and instead of Tolkien's 4.5 to 1 male to female ratio (across all races and all published books, according to the LOTRProject), we have Lucas's 1.2 to 1 male to female ratio. (One downside of the movie being so Tolkienesque is that the ethnic diversity among the cast is also, shall we say, Tolkienesque.)

If you feel that Tolkien wrote some wonderful stories but shamefully ignored the female half of the population, Willow *might be just what you're looking for.*

I can present my own judgment on how feminist the movie is, but I have no way of judging how feminist it was intended to be. However, we can glean some relevant data points from Wikipedia. For example, at the time of *Willow*'s release, George Lucas was the father of a seven-year-old girl. During what must have been post-production on the movie, he adopted a second daughter. Is it possible that he was thinking about what kinds of movies his own daughters would grow up watching and what those movies might do to their self-worth? What about the director, Ron Howard? At the time of *Willow*'s release, he also had a seven-year-old daughter, as well as twin three-year-old girls. It makes sense that being the fathers of young girls would play a role in these men deciding to make a movie that is stuffed with admirable and powerful women. On the other hand, plenty of male screenwriters have daughters and still blithely follow the old tropes and stereotypes. All I know is that this is a movie I wouldn't hesitate to share with my own daughters, if I ever have any, and the movies that I can say that about number in the single digits.

Morgen Tell lives in the San Francisco Bay Area and works as a tutor with non-profit organizations. Movies and movie history are subjects that rouse her enthusiasm.

The Somatic Market

by Toby MacNutt

I wake up silent and empty—the bees had swarmed off in the night. No more would their honey drip down upon my tongue; there is no echoing buzz, now, in my hollow places. I cut the orphaned comb and scrape wax carefully from my unglazed terra-cotta, leather joints creaking. I pour one measure of white sand and two of saltwater into each foot, and go to market.

✳

The air is thick with craft, by ear and nose, but I want no mandrake bread, no pomegranate, no dream-salt, and I am keeping good time. I pass up shadowy mice, riddles, pocket seas, and green brittle sunlight. The sweets seller by the miniature herbalist offers me a sympathetic smile and a wax-paper bag, into which I scoop ginseng puppies, white lightning caramels, and basil-amethyst drops for the children. She recommends a bubblestone—blackberry—for my condition, on the house. I accept. I break its shell, and suck; it fizzes in my mouth.

Today I ignore the metallic chorus of dragonflies, though I am tempted as ever by the glass beetles drawing circles in their little tray of coal-dust. I wish for my beeswax to return, as I push through the musician's quarter— it is only noise to me. With my fingers in my ears, the violet-tasting gases from the bubblestone waft higher, condensing against the cool of my pate, still faintly wax-smeared (its curves were hard to reach).

✳

The beekeeper is not here, and I don't know what I need. I wedge myself into a quiet corner, just a gap between stalls. I try to think. I cannot remember. It is hard without my bees, their patterns, their hum, their honey on my tongue.

A vendor. *Lost your mind?*

I have. The words taste purple, though the bubblestone is gone, dissolved.

But you are growing a new one? No, I shake my head. *Looks like a sky, to me. Here, breathe,* and I oblige, exhaling into the glass mask. She draws it away: it is full of tiny drifting clouds, in shifting shades of lavender.

The windmonger is at the corner of Green Alley and Parchment. In her hand are a score of seed-sized, sky-blue pearls, iridescent as the summer, and as warm. In thanks, I cross her palm with silver and a kiss.

✳

I chase the wind home.

✳

The children gather moss and twigs, build a nest in my occipital bulge; in a fortnight's time I feel the egg-pearls hatch. It is dawn. There is a murmuration in my mind and lilac on my tongue. I hum a morning song and lick clean a spoon of honey from the jar.

Toby MacNutt is a queer, nonbinary trans, disabled author, artist, and teacher who lives in Burlington, VT. "Somatic Market" is from Toby's debut collection, *If Not Skin,* forthcoming from Aqueduct Press.

Science Fiction as Patriarchal Dissidence in Argentina: The Unorthodox Feminism in Angélica Gorodischer's *Trafalgar*

by Cristina Jurado

Inverting traditional societal roles, Gorodischer questions gender stereotypes while attacking the absurdity of bureaucracy….

I have one regret from my time growing up; not knowing about Angélica Gorodischer, the celebrated Argentinian feminist speculative fiction author. In my country, Spain, it was mandatory to study the works of prominent writers as part of the literature program, most of them male Spaniards and only a handful of Latin Americans. Female authors were, more then than now, hidden from most syllabuses. So I learnt about Borges, Cortázar, and other Latin Americans, such as Rubén Darío or Bioy Casares, but I was never able to recognize myself in their oeuvres, even if I admired their craft.

When four years ago I was commissioned to edit *Alucinadas* (*Spanish Women of Wonder,* Palabaristas, 2016), the first anthology of short science fiction by women in Spanish, I came across Gorodischer's delicious stories. I was hooked. I'm not ashamed to declare my addiction ever since, and I take pride in having developed a budding friendship with her, despite time (four decades separate us) and space (we live literally on opposite sides of the world: she is in Rosario, Argentina, and my docking station is in Dubai, UAE). Would you believe me if I told you that she is as tireless and witty in her messages as in her stories? Trust me on this one.

Unfortunately, only three of her books have been translated into English: *Trafalgar*, by Amelia Gladhart (Small Beer Press, 2013), *Prodigies*, by Sue Burke (Small Beer Press, 2015), and *Kalpa Imperial*, by none other than Ursula K. Le Guin (Small Beer Press, 2003). From the three, *Trafalgar* is the earliest in Gorodischer's career, including fiction that represents some of her best sci-fi short stories. I intentionally turned to Gorodischer while looking for a solid name to support *Alucinadas*: when Angélica graciously granted us permission to use one of the stories in *Trafalgar*, I pounced on the opportunity. I chose "By the Light of the Electronic Moon," the story that opens the book, a tale of the main character Trafalgar Medrano's adventures. Medrano, an interstellar merchant who loves black coffee and storytelling as much as women, never turns away from a good adventure. What fascinates me about this story is how brilliantly it sets the mood of the collection through the misfortunes of the protagonist on Veroboar, a planet ruled by an aristo matriarchy. Inverting traditional societal roles, Gorodischer questions gender stereotypes while attacking the absurdity of bureaucracy, in a tale that mixes Jean-Claude Forest's *Barbarella* comics and Edgar Rice Burroughs' Barsoom stories with the everyday vicissitudes of the Argentinian bourgeoisie. This is an excellent example of how female characters in Gorodischer stories are central, presenting themselves from what they desire and not from what society legitimizes.

One important aspect of *Trafalgar* is its style: the book is reminiscent of the "club tale" literature found in Asimov (*The Union Club Mysteries*, Doubleday, 1983; and *Tales of the Black Widowers*, Doubleday, 1974) and Arthur C. Clarke (*Tales from the White Hart*, Ballantine Books, 1957), the sort of narrations one patron tells others at a cozy establishment. Elements of the early "tall tale" tradition can be found in this collection, in which extraordinary events are told as if they were ordinary, by good-natured protagonists, and in the form of fabulous adventures or mysteries. The main character not only provides the title for the book but also sets the atmosphere with a casual "storytelling" style packed with blatant humor, a perfect device to transform the reader into a willing accomplice.

Echoes of Borges' "The Immortal" (*Labyrinths*, New Directions, 1962) can

be found in "The Sense of the Circle," the second story of the collection. Even though it maintains the light tone of the ensemble, it dives into a deep philosophical question: immortality as the uber-development of humankind. Borges was more in sync with Nietzsche's idea of humanism, transhumanism for some, but Gorodischer pushes it even further, identifying the immortals with deities. In order to accomplish this without losing the humorous tint, Gorodischer describes the encounter of a group of scientists with the native inhabitants of planet Ananda-ha A, apparently in an almost impassive state. With the inevitable clash of cultures, the author urges us to meditate about the consequences of human enlightenment.

The next story, "Of Navigators," is a particular rewrite of Columbus's first journey, an iconic moment in the colonization of the Americas. Transporting the readers to a "symmetrical" Earth, five hundred years back, Trafalgar navigates Spain's 15th-century royal intrigues and not only redirects history but also portrays the conqueror as a lousy leader.

Time is recurrent in Gorodischer's stories. She constantly addresses it, often through the well-explored concept of time travel, like in the aforementioned story or in the following one, "The Best Day of the Year." In the latter, experiencing a different historical event every morning drives the merchant into a state of confusion climaxed by the realization that time is, in fact, a syncretic dimension. "Trafalgar, the Witness" becomes "Trafalgar, the Target" of extraordinary events, rending Gorodischer as a worthy disciple of Dick or Vonnegut narratives.

The premise in "The González Family's Fight for a Better World" may bring us to think that we are facing a horror story, but the author approaches the topic of the dead among the living in a lighthearted and intelligent way, relying on science—an anti-comet shield—to solve the existential conundrum of the inhabitants of Gonzwaledworkamenjkaleidos (Gonzalez, for short). A wonderful satire on oppressive family ties, it works also as a subtle reminder of the stagnation of Argentinian politics in the 1970s, thus exhibiting Gorodischer's understanding of science fiction as a place for social and political criticism.

Connecting with the idea of women as a thriving force in her universe, it is no wonder that Gorodischer dedicates "Trafalgar and Josephine" to her aunties. The narrator is Josefina, a fictional relative who retells one of Trafalgar's commercial escapades to her niece, who seems to have much in common with Gorodischer herself. Here, the Argentinian woman writer enters the narrative in order to express certain lenience towards Trafalgar, reminding her aunty, and us, about the flaws in the merchant's nature. He is a womanizer, a reckless explorer, a carefree spirit, and a profiteer who, despite all, goes down well with everybody. Even after failing at saving the day in a planet divided by caste, his final act shows the significance of symbolic gestures in times of trouble.

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At the beginning of the book Gorodischer explicitly asks the reader to follow the sequence of stories, almost as if orderliness was an incantation, which brings me to the sixth text, "Mr. Chaos." In the planet Aleiçarga, the interstellar merchant experiences an overly organized society in which there is no room for creativity, inspiration, or art because life is methodical, programmed, and predictable. The only man who displays an incoherent behavior forces Trafalgar to question the true meaning of complete order, as well as its epistemological and cosmological consequences for humankind.

"Constance" describes the encounter of the protagonist with a powerful and mysterious woman, the sole inhabitant of the barren world of Donteä-Doreä. By the aspects of her life that he reveals and, especially, by the ones that are never fully disclosed, Trafalgar depicts Constance as a dangerous creature capable of everything in order to acquire power. Again, female characters in Gorodischer's fiction are depicted as accomplished, independent, forceful people, far from the traditional clichés.

…female characters in Gorodischer's fiction are depicted as accomplished, independent, forceful people, far from the traditional clichés.

In the last adventure, "Strelitzias, Lagerstroemias, and Gypsophila," we are confronted with a part of Trafalgar's personal history in the form of his strange daughter and their no less bizarre relationship.

Cont. on p. 13

Short Fiction Reviews

by Karen Burnham

"Dead Man Walking," by Jeremy Szal, *Abyss & Apex* (#65), 1st Quarter 2018, edited by Wendy S. Delmater.
"Caretaker," by Eden Royce, *Abyss & Apex* (#65), 1st Quarter 2018, edited by Wendy S. Delmater.
"What Makes the Desert Beautiful," by John P. Carr, *Abyss & Apex* (#65), 1st Quarter 2018, edited by Wendy S. Delmater.
"Lines of Growth, Lines of Passage" by Marissa Lingen, *Uncanny Magazine* (#20), Jan/Feb 2018, edited by Lynne M. Thomas and Michael Damian Thomas.

These stories all share a theme of integration, but span a wide spectrum in how that topic is approached.

I'd like to open with a note of thanks to *CSZ*'s editors for giving me space to write about short fiction that catches my eye. It's liberating to be able to consider a few short stories without feeling compelled to touch upon every story in a magazine or an anthology. As much as possible I'll be talking about fiction that is easy to access—mostly because I'm *not* going to avoid spoilers. So if you hate knowing the twist, read the stories first. There be spoilers ahead!

In this inaugural outing I'd like to talk about a group of stories from *Abyss & Apex* and *Uncanny Magazine*. These stories all share a theme of integration, but span a wide spectrum in how that topic is approached.

On one side of that continuum is Jeremy Szal's "Dead Man Walking." A group of soldiers is going about the business of suppressing a handful of occasionally rebellious settlements, making sure that they accept colonial rule without question. The soldiers are sustained in their hostile environment by self-healing power armor. At a certain point our viewpoint character attempts to make a humane choice, but his armor locks him out and issues an order, in his voice, that his squad fire on an entire village. When he gets back to confront his commander it turns out that in a prior engagement his injuries were so severe that he was turned into a cyborg without his knowledge. He is physically dead and his commanders can override his suit at their will. He is understandably horrified—this happened without his knowledge or consent, and he will be trapped in that suit forever.

In the same issue, "Caretaker" by Eden Royce describes an astrobiologist who has suddenly become almost catatonic. As she is cared for by a psychiatrist, her story is revealed: she found a crashed alien spaceship. A pregnant alien mother was dying, and the astrobiologist agreed to incubate her children until they could return to the spaceship. At first the integration was very rough, causing the catatonia, but as the children mature they learn to exist in her more gently. Soon they're able to return to their spaceship. In this case the merger is voluntary, although the risks were not fully known. The POV character is the psychiatrist, and I would have liked it if the story had carried on a little further, to give me a better sense of the aftermath's effect on both women.

In "What Makes the Desert Beautiful" by John P. Carr, a brash young man, Yaran, has crash-landed in an alien desert far from help. The alien creature he was intending to meet, Pak, finds him in the wreckage. This energy alien flows through the sand and manifests in patterns, and it is very friendly and curious. Eventually they figure out that Pak can flow into Yaran and brace him with its energy, allowing him to move to safety. In this case the consequences to the protagonist are clearer—this is going to hurt, a lot, but it has the chance to save him. Pak is totally patient about waiting for consent. When they get Yaran to safety, both are very thoughtful. Through their intersection Pak now understands something as alien to it as rain. The experience helps Yaran reevaluate his life and how he might move forward. Both

leave the encounter thoughtful and enlightened.

Finally, on the opposite end from "Dead Man Walking," Marissa Lingen's "Lines of Growth, Lines of Passage" starts with a killer opening: "I did not remember how I had gotten encased in a cherry tree. Though fragrant, this was inconvenient." A sorceress has been trapped by a business competitor while she was working on securing a defense contract. She does her best not to harm the tree, and eventually creates just enough space for herself to cast a spell and invite the cherry tree to exist inside her instead of vice-versa. She goes ahead and secures the defense contract. Her original idea had been to create weapons that might defeat some Iron Giants who have been preventing passage through an ice field, blocking profitable trade. As the result of her integration experience she instead works on communicating with them, uncovering other symbiotic relationships. And the tree is not simply a passive presence; in the end it uses some of her power to its own ends, with a kind of magic born out of a completely new synthesis. As the sorceress describes it: "And now we're—well, I still don't know what just a cherry tree wants, rather than a cherry tree plus me, but this is better, this is working together. Verloc didn't give the cherry tree the choice of going on through its life without a sorcerer embedded in it, so this is the best we could do." There's a lot to love in this story, both the theme and also the voice of the narrator, very practical in the face of impractical circumstances.

Here we see the gamut of integration, with the concept perceived as everything from a terrifying form of slavery to a mechanism for enlightenment. Obviously this theme is not new in speculative fiction—consider Kij Johnson's incredibly intense "Spar" for a particularly visceral depiction (*Clarkesworld*, October 2009). And it has been far from universally negative—two of Greg Egan's post-human protagonists go to incredible lengths to truly merge together in his short story "Closer" (*Eidolon*, Winter 1992) with interesting results. It is notable that in the cases discussed here the integration is not something sought out by either party; it's something they are forced into by circumstance, and the questions are whether they get to consent and what they make of it.

In closing, I'm always on the lookout for new voices and new venues to explore. If there's an awesome website, magazine, or fundraising campaign publishing short fiction that you think I should know about, please drop me a line at Karen.Burnham[at]gmail[dot]com.

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Karen Burnham is vocationally an electromagnetics engineer and avocationally a book reviewer and critic. She writes for *Locus Magazine* online and other venues. Her single author study Greg Egan is available from University of Illinois Press. She works in the automotive industry in Michigan, where she lives with her family.

Angélica Gorodischer's *Trafalgar*
(cont. from p. 11)

Mirroring the timeless micro-fiction "Borges and I," also published in *The Maker*, "Trafalgar and I" is a wonderful metanarrative in which Gorodischer splits the narrator into two separate entities, one observing the other in the act of writing, reflecting on the nature of the craft.

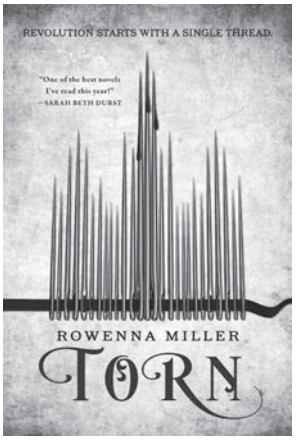
Playfulness in the telling of Trafalgar Medrano's travels is just apparent. While the planets he visits are all populated by humans, with societies mimicking the ones on Earth, they are stereotypical versions that serve Gorodischer to raise important questions on dependency, colonization, sexism, humanism, or political immobility. The author's unique approach to science fiction comes from her decision to seamlessly stage narrations within the cultural context of Argentinian daily life, using a non-reliable narrator and a humorous style to cover profound physical and philosophical questions without startling readers. The result is a wonderful series of chained stories, evidence that Angélica Gorodischer is as relevant nowadays as ever.

Cristina Jurado writes sf and fantasy in Spanish and English. She has won 3 Ignotus Awards (Spain's Hugos) as editor and author, and her first English story collection, *Alphaland*, will be published this year by Nevsky Books.

Doing 'That

Torn, by Rowenna Miller, Orbit, March 2018, 480 pp., $15.99.

reviewed by Kate Schaefer



I believe that Miller has better books in her and that we'll see them as she gains confidence and mastery of her work, but she's not there yet.

All book reviews are much more about how the reviewer read the book than about how the writer wrote the book. This is about how I read *Torn* by Rowenna Miller: I kept wanting to read a slightly different, better book, the book suggested by this book rather than the book in my hands. I believe that Miller has better books in her and that we'll see them as she gains confidence and mastery of her work, but she's not there yet.

Torn tells two main stories with one propeller. There's the standard romance plot of a beautiful, intelligent, lower-class woman, Sophie, who is also a small business owner, catching the fancy of an impossibly higher-class man, Theodor—a duke, an heir to the throne, though not first in line. The other story is about a revolutionary plot of the people against the oppressive, nearly feudal overlords; one of the leaders of the revolution is Sophie's brother Kristos. The plot propeller is Sophie's path as she simultaneously falls in love, learns about the revolution, acquires new clients for her sewing and good-luck charm business, and learns new magical skills, setting her up for torn loyalties between her brother and her lover, her class affinity and her desire for upward mobility, her beliefs about how her magical abilities should be used and how they can be used.

In the first sentence, Sophie says she doesn't do that. "That" would be cursing someone, rather than charming them. Since I have read more than one novel in my life, I know that at some point in this book, she will end up doing just that, even though she doesn't want to. Not exactly a spoiler: yup. Consequences follow, and she must scramble to find a way to undo her deeds.

The novel takes place in a fantasy country that looks suspiciously like late 18th-century Britain but with political developments more on par with pre-revolutionary France, and where magic is performed by a despised ethnic group. This magic works, but only weakly, as a way to improve luck, and it's pursued on about the same level one would expect in a world where good-luck charms don't work. As the danger to the aristocracy from the potential revolution increases, demand for the good-luck charms increases as well, rapidly growing Sophie's wealthy customer base at the same time as she supplies protective good-luck charms in hats for her brother and his revolutionary comrades.

In the world where we live, good-luck charms are ubiquitous, even though we know they don't work, so I'm puzzled why they wouldn't be ubiquitous in a world where they do. I'm puzzled why Sophie and her brother aren't already wearing charmed clothing throughout the novel and why sewing charmed underclothing is a novel suggestion from one of Sophie's new clients rather than one of her standard items. In our world, embroidery patterns to protect against the evil eye have traditionally been sewn on peasant shifts—that is, underclothing—in multiple cultures for thousands of years, generally replacing the same patterns painted or tattooed directly on the skin. (I've embroidered Transylvanian designs onto clothing myself; must have worked, since I haven't suffered from the effects of the evil eye.)

Some of my puzzlement is because Miller shows an intimate knowledge of historic clothing, both garments and construction methods, so I would have expected her to know more about the history of attempted magical clothing as well.

Miller is comfortable with showing class differences and the unfairness inherent in a system of hereditary aristocracy. She has a moderately sophisticated understanding of economic forces, in-

cluding making sure that all characters have jobs or some method of support. She's good at portraying the complexity of a society in which people are, for the most part, trying to do their best, though I think she works too hard to be fair to the aristocrats. No matter how much oblige the noblesse put in, the underlying economic reality is that they get their wealth by depriving the peasantry of the fruits of their labor by force, while the peasantry in turn get the privilege of not being oppressed by anyone else; Miller glosses over that truth.

The novel has more than one scene that passes the Bechdel test: female characters talk to each other about their work, about politics, about magic.

When new characters are introduced, their hair and eye colors are frequently mentioned, but skin color is only vaguely suggested. Sophie and Kristos have golden skin (and Greek names); Nia, a woman from the Equatorial States, has walnut-stained lips, the only character described in terms of food. Nia is also the first named character to die in the revolution.

Sophie has clearly considered the downsides of relationships with men: the danger of single parenthood and the worse danger of marriage and loss of economic independence. When she has sex with her lover, neither of them stops to consider a condom or even to talk about the possibility of pregnancy. For a woman worried about consequences and a man with a well-developed sense of responsibility—come on! That conversation has to happen. They do discuss bastardy early on in their acquaintance—way earlier than I'd expect them to—but when they actually have sex, they don't talk about consequences or protection at all. Their passion sweeps them along in such a clichéd fashion that I suspect Miller put the scene in to satisfy the demands of romance tropes rather than because she cared about it.

Should you read this book? You can't tell from what I've written so far, but I think it's not a bad romance novel with other somewhat interesting elements. If that's what you like, it may work for you. If you're looking for a thoughtful novel about how a revolution might work or fail, in all its complex messiness, I'd recommend that you read Ann Leckie, Max Gladstone, Kameron Hurley, or Robert Jackson Bennett instead.

She's good at portraying the complexity of a society in which people are, for the most part, trying to do their best, though I think she works too hard to be fair to the aristocrats.

Kate Schaefer's past includes financial analysis for a large but now-defunct bank, database programming, attending Clarion West in 1992, and a great deal of sewing. She plans to walk across the narrowest part of England sometime soon.

Five Uneven Voices

Liminal Spaces, by Beth Plutchak, Aqueduct Press, January 2018, 134 pp., $10.

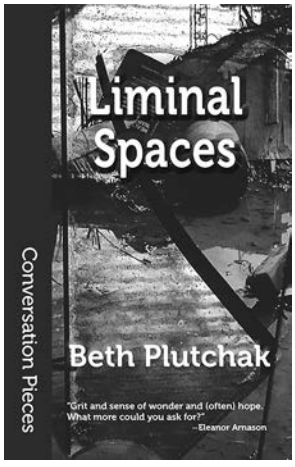
reviewed by Tonya Liburd

The first in this collection of five short stories, "Swan Sister," examines ideas of gender roles, specifically the treatment of women, in America in the middle to latter half of the last century. It does so by switching back and forth between the perspectives of two women, the Swan Sister and the sculptor. I liked the switching between the perspectives; nothing went on for too long.

"Skin and Bone" had a good hook; when I read, "It may cut away more than you desire," toward the beginning of the piece, I wanted to read on. But I precipitously lost interest when it became a story about an alcoholic tortured artist whose wife is relegated to picking up the domestic slack. The shaman scene in the beginning seemed clichéd, but I gave that a pass. Then, as I read on thinking about the shaman scene, it wore on me.

At least at the start, there were echoes of the previous story in each one that is next in the collection—neat! A hint here, a word there: there was enough to make you remember that you'd seen something previously, and tilt your head in remembrance.

So it was with the third story, "What She Thought She Knew." There was a speech given by a son about who should own the land, but this fell flat for me. It should not have. The story examined autonomy from more than one angle and level, and I found the arc about the female/AI seeking autonomy and freedom to be more engaging than the rest of the story, and its ending more satisfying.



Cont. on p. 16

Liminal Spaces
(cont. from p. 15)

For me, the strongest story of the collection was the first, "Swan Sister," followed closely by "A Matter of Time."

I didn't see a hint of the previous story in the remaining stories, though, starting with "A Matter of Time." It was told in an informal fashion, from the perspective of a mother whose son has special gifts as well as autism. His autism presented challenges for the mother. This read, quite frankly, like a story appearing in *Abyss & Apex*, a magazine I co-edit. I'm sure we would have accepted it. However, by the time I read the line, "If I had enough money, I could do all that and more for Matt," I started to predict to myself how things would turn out. The story didn't end quite the way I thought it would, but the conclusion had striking similarities to what I'd envisioned. Your mileage may vary, but it's a solid, comfortable story, and… you may *want* it to end a certain way.

"Game Theory" chronicled the travel of a generational ship from the viewpoint of one woman who also, until the end of the story, administers "games" with a Machiavellian feel. I read about red versus blue teams, and I think of Capture the Flag video games, and someone trying to extrapolate that to fiction; it doesn't always fit or work. I'm not sure what the case is here. I didn't see why someone would spread their legs and show young people their labia as Sophie Jouy does, when there's advanced technology to provide a much more detailed presentation of the body's parts. I didn't completely get the purpose of the "games," either. How the end result of one game played into the next wasn't at all clear.

Each of the five stories adopted a different voice. Not everyone can pull that off.

For me, the strongest story of the collection was the first, "Swan Sister," followed closely by "A Matter of Time." There were elements of the other stories that didn't work for me. I found the quality of the work uneven, and though the prose was acceptable, many of the stories simply didn't grab me. My overall impression is one of potential, but no real payoff.

Tonya Liburd's work is used in Nisi Shawl's workshops and in Tananarive Due's UCLA Black Horror course. She is the Senior Editor of *Abyss & Apex* magazine. You can find her blogging at http://Spiderlilly.com or on Twitter at @somesillywowzer.

First Wave Feminism and Self-Defense

Her Own Hero: The Origins of the Women's Self-Defense Movement, by Wendy L. Rouse, New York University Press, August 2017, 255 pp., $35.

reviewed by Nancy Jane Moore

Most of my knowledge about women training in martial arts at the beginning of the twentieth century has come from jokes and cartoons such as the *Punch* item, "The Suffragette Who Knew Jiu-jitsu," featured on p. 129 of Wendy L. Rouse's *Her Own Hero*. That cartoon shows a woman who has just thrown several cops over a fence standing ready and able to take on the horde of officers cowering away from her. As a woman martial artist, I know women can fight, and, as a feminist, I know that when men make jokes about women beating up men, they are trying to belittle something that scares them. However, I had no idea that so many women in both the United States and the United Kingdom took up boxing and jiu-jitsu to protect themselves in the early 1900s, nor that some of that training was tied to the suffrage movement and other radical feminism of the times.

Rouse gives us the story of those women, but she does more with the subject than that. While she is a serious martial artist who must have been delighted to find so many foremothers, Rouse is an equally serious historian—a professor at San Jose State University in California—who does not neglect the complex social issues of this period. It is impossible to talk about protecting women and avoid issues of both race and class. Further, women's interest in fighting skills was part of their general interest in athletic activities previously denied to women, and their push to do these things came at a time when, at least in the United States, there was a physical fitness push for men, particularly white, upper-class men. Rouse used a large number of pri-

mary sources such as newspaper and magazine articles as well as books published at the time, along with data from law enforcement and courts to definitively document the real experiences of women during those years. By pulling together all this information, Rouse has broken new ground and expanded our understanding of women's history.

This book is important for several reasons. First, it provides detailed data and analysis on the physical training that accompanied the feminist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The fight for the vote often involved real fighting, especially in the United Kingdom, and the push by women for expanded rights led them to recognize other areas, such as self-protection, that were important to them. The resistance of the powerful to efforts by women (and many others) to obtain reasonable rights often leads to radicalization, and the suffrage movement was no different.

Second, it shows that the issues surrounding women's physical skills did not suddenly arise with Second Wave feminism beginning in the late 1960s. The so-called medical opinions that physical activity of all kinds would harm women's reproductive systems that were used to keep women from playing sports into the 1960s were debunked more than a hundred years back. Rouse points to the work of Dr. Mary Putnam Jacobi, who received her medical degrees in 1864 (United States) and 1871 (France) and wrote of the importance of physical activity for women.

She also notes that while women studied both jiu-jitsu and boxing, many of the courses taught "modified versions of the manly arts in an effort to avoid upsetting traditional class and gender roles" (p. 190). The classes often morphed into ones aimed at shaping women's bodies into the ideal of the day—a pattern that has re-emerged in the present with the "kickboxing" classes offered to women at many gyms. But it is still important to note that many women did take up fighting arts for serious purposes at a time when most lacked the basic civil and political rights we take for granted today.

Third, Rouse is all too aware that self-defense studies, the suffrage movement,

THE SUFFRAGETTE THAT KNEW JIU-JITSU.

and the push for other rights of the time were affected by the racism and class issues of the day. The specter of danger from Black and "foreign" men in the narratives of stranger rape and "white slavery" encouraged middle- and upper-class white women to study self-defense, despite the fact that, then as now, most of the dangers for all women came from family, friends, acquaintances, and employers. The "mashers"—similar to today's cat-callers and other street harassers—tended to be professionals or skilled tradesmen, most of them white and native-born. (It is interesting that claims against mashers were taken seriously in the early twentieth century, since today that sort of harassment is generally ignored by the law.)

Rouse also notes that efforts to help working-class women deal with abuse and harassment were often do-gooder projects by upper-class white women, and that African American women rarely got the opportunities to learn self-defense or the protection of the law extended to white women in some circumstances. Unfortunately, some of that period of feminism is tainted with the same racism and anti-immigrant bias that was shown by many others at the time. Much of the push for physical fitness training for men—a campaign that was often taken up by women as well—was based on the idea that white men were becoming "weak" as they took up office work instead of more manly jobs, so that they needed to make themselves stronger to protect against Black and foreign men. With today's upsurge of racism and xenophobia along with misogyny, it is essential to be aware that while the leaders of early feminist movements pushed for

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Cont. on p. 18

First Wave Feminism and Self-Defense
(cont. from p. 17)

many good things for women, some of them also held appalling attitudes on race and made unwarranted assumptions about class. Rouse does a good job of making these points clear without undercutting the importance of the movement for women's self-defense and physical selves.

For me, this book was both inspiring and depressing. Inspiring, because knowing that women contemporaries of my grandmothers and great-grandmothers were challenging limited gender roles of the end of the Victorian area in such a strong physical way gives me new insight into what went into the fight for women's rights. Depressing, because the issues and myths that were common at the time are still with us today. Although we have finally reached the point—in the early twenty-first century—where women police officers are no longer an oddity, and where women in the military are being allowed into combat roles, the idea that women are physically incapable of fighting men still prevails in much of society here in the United States as well as in the rest of the world. Rouse's book makes it clear that the "but men are stronger" argument is an old one and, like most anti-feminist arguments, intended to derail the conversation instead of engaging it.

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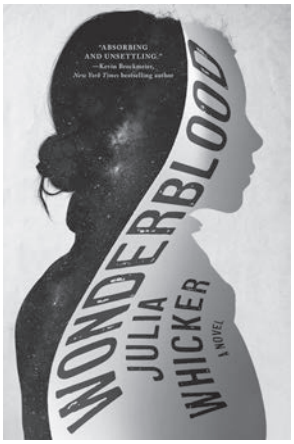
This book left me with a question that is beyond the scope of Rouse's book: why were there so many years between the "New Woman" era when women took up training, and the revival of interest in self-defense, martial-arts training, and sports that accompanied Second Wave feminism? My grandmother did not take up boxing, but she played basketball in high school in the nineteen-teens. My mother, though a tomboy as a child, did not have as much of an opportunity to play sports, and most major universities and large high schools did not field women's and girls' basketball teams until after the advent of Title IX in the early 1970s. I hope Rouse will explore this gap in future work.

Nancy Jane Moore has studied martial arts since 1979 and holds a fourth degree black belt in Aikido. She is working on a book on self-defense and also researching body learning. Her fiction includes the science fiction novel *The Weave* (Aqueduct Press 2015).

Prisoner of the Future Dark Age

Wonderblood, by Julia Whicker, St. Martin's Press, April 3, 2018, 304 pp., $26.99.

reviewed by Arley Sorg



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Wonderblood captivates from its very first line: it throws the reader into a land of savagery and danger. It sharpens readers' focus through shocking cultures of casual brutality, and engages us emotionally and intellectually with striking imagery and provocative world-building.

Hundreds of years in the future, after disease has ravaged the United States, what's left of the human population exists in a sort of Dark Age. Vast stretches of land stand empty, either overgrown or desolate. Such civilization as remains is ostensibly ruled by King Michael, whose throne stands within the glittering towers of Cape Canaveral. True control, however, is exerted through religion and its interpretation.

In this post-apocalyptic vision, history and various sciences as we know them are almost entirely lost, corrupted, or outlawed. The beliefs and superstitions that constitute religious power build upon a fragmented history of space shuttles. These shuttles have become sanctified icons, and most believers await the day the "absent" shuttles will return from the heavens to usher in a new era—and subsequently take those who are worthy back to the heavens.

Born into this terrible world is "the girl," whose mother's name is Gimbal. The first of three point-of-view characters, she does not use or give her name. She is the daughter of a "Walking Doctor," a practitioner of medicine and surgery, a group seen as heretical. After teaching her daughter a few fundamentals of anatomy and medicine, Gimbal meets a man and, seeing "the girl" as a threat, abandons her to her estranged brother.

The brother, Argento, is a perfect representative of the world in general: violent, selfish, and superstitious. He runs a carnival: a roaming group that executes people, enchants severed heads, and sells

all sorts of trinkets. Seminomadic tribes that rest in villages for the winter, carnivals often battle with each other, usually taking prisoners only to execute them.

Which brings us to the meaning of the term "Wonderblood": "The rinsing of the world in blood for one Eon." People in the tale believe they live in the "Eon of Pain," a time of wide-scale suffering for the world's overall sins. True believers hold that only massive, continuous bloodletting will cleanse the world of disease, and through this cleansing end the current "Eon," usher in a new one, and bring the shuttles back.

While laying out for readers the workings of this innovative and complex social system, the story moves the girl from one terrible situation to the next, teasing out questions about empowerment and gender, and simultaneously developing clever commentaries on fanaticism and faith.

Moreover, as the girl endures various kinds of imprisonment, *Wonderblood* undertakes a subtle but courageous study of emotional attachment. As the girl's feelings for each successive captor shift and grow, her introspective comparisons build. This causes her to articulate her own notions of love. Through this process, the relativity of the state or condition of love to any given individual's exposure to specific modes of human interaction becomes a compelling thematic argument. In other words, the narrative seems to say: what you see as love depends on what you've seen in life.

Meanwhile, Marvel Whiteside Parsons and John Sousa make up the other two point-of-view characters.

Parsons is the "High Priest of Cape Canaveral, Hierophant and Head Magician." As such he is second only to the King (and perhaps, debatably, to his daughter as well, the spoiled and everbored Queen Alyson). After coming to Cape Canaveral as a younger man and clawing his way to the top, Parsons finds his faith faltering and wonders if he should return to his birthplace, Kansas—the seat of the mysterious Mystagogue and home to a schismatic version of the primary religion. But returning to Kansas would be a dangerous trip. It would mean leaving behind both his daughter and his amassed power. And beyond these, beyond betraying his King, the very act of traveling to Kansas might be a sin.

Sousa is "Chief Orbital Doctor, astronomer, and scholar of holy texts," a sort of astrologist cum astronomer who has the ear of the King, much to the chagrin of Parsons. Having failed for decades to predict the exact date and time of "the Return," Sousa struggles with his own sense of purpose and the notion of being a fraud. When two streaks of light appear in the sky Sousa is desperate to interpret their appearance and pressured by not only the King but also his greatest skeptic and courtly rival, Parsons.

A few other important characters take the stage, often overshadowing the POV characters, but offering fascinating situations, personalities, and conflicts. Aside from the first POV character, women are sparse; yet those that appear are positioned in a number of interesting ways, creating a sampling of power dynamics about which papers could be written, and over which debates will doubtless become heated.

Wonderblood is brutal and stark, but it is also creative and engaging. The primary religion, its variations, and its subsequent cultures, all form a world both unique and well-developed. The writing slides easily from distanced and cold to elegant and occasionally gorgeous. The plot, while often careening along seemingly beyond the influence of its first POV character, is engrossing and at times surprising.

A few elements didn't land quite right. For example, dialogue sometimes wandered into the unrealistic, sounding more like a Shakespearian soliloquy than a conversation; and the storyline lost a little momentum towards the end. All the same, *Wonderblood* adds much to the already well explored tropes of post-apocalyptic fiction, while doing what the best science fiction does: challenging the reader with ideas bound to start conversations.

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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.

Erika Steiskal

Erika Steiskal is a freelance illustrator known for her whimsical paintings created for small and major publishers and arts organizations. She aims to illustrate atmospheric images that invite the viewer to linger and create their own story. Whether created for clients, galleries, or personal projects, she hopes her pieces help people escape from the everyday. A lover of speculative fiction, Erika finds much of her inspiration in literature. She works in both traditional and digital media and usually creates her pieces using a fusion of the two approaches. When not in her studio, Erika can be found reading or sketching the denizens of coffee shops.

Erika earned her BFA in illustration from the Columbus College of Art and Design. Her clients include Penguin Books for Young Readers, Central Pennsylvania Youth Ballet, Aqueduct Press, and Arkansas Art Center. Her work has been recognized by *Communication Arts*, *Spectrum*, *3x3*, *Lurzer's* Top 200 Illustrators, the Society of Illustrators, and the Society of Illustrators of Los Angeles. An Ohio-native, Erika now lives in a library in Seattle with her husband and a crazy springer spaniel. You can see more of her work at erikasteiskal.com.

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