The Cascadia Subduction Zone

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Eye ๑ Jean LeBlanc

"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

My Friend Vonda

by Amy Wolf

Many in Seattle and beyond knew the late Vonda N. McIntyre in many incarnations: award-winning author, mentor, even beader of small sea creatures. To me, Vonda was all this, but for the last thirty years, I had the privilege of calling her Friend.

On April 1st, we lost her. This was a blow to the Clarion West Workshop, Book View Café (both of which she helped found), and science fiction as a whole. But to those who knew Vonda well, the loss had the force of a rip in the fabric of the universe.

I first met Vonda when I was a student at Clarion West '92. I only knew her then as a nice lady who showed up at parties. It wasn't until Vonda landed in my then-home L.A. to attend a Universal script workshop that I truly got to know her. First, let me state that Vonda was the best house guest *ever*—she made Miss Manners look sloppy. After she voiced her opinion about the coffee down south ("They make it so you can read your newspaper through it!"), and, knowing I liked mine strong, she bought me a coffee grinder. Since the way to my heart lies along a spurt of caffeine, from that moment on, Vonda and I were besties.

Now, I had worked in Hollywood as a studio drone, so Vonda nicknamed me "Arnie" and I called her "Vinnie" in the hope that male *nom de plumes* would earn us more Industry cred. I told her about the Business, and she returned the favor by filling me in on the "fun" that is Publishing. When the film of her Hugo-winning novel, *The Moon and the Sun,* was produced but not distributed, I used all my film smarts to try to find out why. I think I got it, but am not at liberty to say, lest I be locked up by Xi in the cell next to Fan Bing Bing, the star of the movie.

Since Vonda wrote serious SF, you might not know that she was wickedly funny. She once told me a story (repeated by Amy Thomson at Vonda's recent Memorial) that when some Washington State honchos were thinking of passing a bill that banned the teaching of yoga and witchcraft in schools, Vonda picked up the phone and dialed.

"Excuse me," she said. "I have a daughter, and I was wondering where she could go to study yoga and witchcraft." Amy says that Vonda stayed on that line, on hold, for a long, long time….

This anecdote brings me to one of Vonda's greatest triumphs: breaking the hold men had on science fiction. Starting in the '70s, concurrent with second-wave feminism, Vonda and peers like Ursula K. Le Guin showed the male bastion that women could write SF. In fact, Vonda, who went to grad school at the UW and studied genetics, had more hard science under her belt than many of her male peers. In her work, she manages to combine empathy with real science, always challenging gender boundaries and telling the rest of us: "See? Women too can fly to the stars!"

The one thing I loved the most about Vonda: for all her fame, awards, and movie deals, she was so down-to-earth that unless you knew this going in, you would never hear it from her. Her utter lack of ego, so rare in most people—especially writers—has always astounded me. Vonda positioned herself as a peer, a thoughtful aunt, and, for me, a true second mother.

Vonda would do anything for those she liked. For me, she formatted my Kindle books, read all my work, and explained, in her quiet way, the difference between an em and en dash.

In the thirty years I knew her, I never heard her raise her voice in anger. She was so infrequently negative that when someone pulled a boner (like that then-editor of a huge publishing house who came over to hers, used all of her food, and forgot to invite her to dinner), Vonda would not curse and rail. Instead, she would calmly relate the gaffe with something like sorrow—for *the offender.*

Even on her deathbed, Vonda was unfailingly polite. While I was watching over her as a member of "Vonda's Posse," she awoke and said intently, "Do I owe you any money?"

"Vonda," I said, "I owe *you* money!"

In fact, she was the most generous person I have ever known: with her time, resources, even her choice of restaurants.

Cont. on p. 2

My Friend Vonda (cont. from p. 1)

Amy Wolf is from LA and worked for the Hollywood studios. She is an Amazon Kindle Scout winner. She first met Vonda McIntyre while attending Clarion West '92 in Seattle and became a good friend for the next thirty years.

Over the course of our long friendship, when we were living in the same town, we regularly went to dinner together. Now, Vonda knew that I couldn't get good Chinese food since my local place in Issaquah had closed. Do you know that for *almost every month* over those thirty years, Vonda would come with me to Judy Fu's Snappy Dragon in the U district? She never said, "You know, Amy, I am actually sick of Chinese. Can we do Indian?" No. Vonda's thoughts were always of others. And so, for my posse shifts during the last weeks of her life, because I drove in from the eastside, Vonda went so far as to offer to pay for my gas! In fact, she would always buy whomever was sitting with her a meal. That, for me, encapsulates Vonda—patient, caring, engaged, right up until the day she died.

Sleep well, Vonda, my friend. I have the comfort of knowing that the stuffed Flamingo I bought you (we named him Fred) was in your hand that last day and that you managed to finish your book, *The Curve of the Earth,* before you were taken from us.

Although she is gone, Vonda has left us so much: groundbreaking books and stories, a film yet to come out, Clarion West, Book View Café, but most of all…memories of the person she was. Even three months after her passing, when I think of her, I'm in tears. Still, when I picture Vonda, she is wearing her brown leather "Universal" jacket, her cool L.A. shades, and is jaunting along down the street like someone at peace with herself.

Like a Fish Needs a Bicycle

by Nancy Jane Moore

The event of the year on Piscisterra—known to its inhabitants by their word for water and to some disrespectful humans as "Fishtank"—is the bicycle race around the planet's equator.

While ninety percent of the surface of Piscisterra is covered by water, a band of land ranging from a half kilometer to three kilometers in width divides the planet into two hemispheres. Piscians vie in a dozen shorter races throughout the year to qualify for one of the hundred slots in this twenty-thousand kilometer race. Many others work on pit crews, and it often seems as if every Piscian who is not participating is lined up along the route to watch for at least a few days during the race, which takes six of the ten-day Piscian weeks.

With the advent of new tanks that use the oxygen in water to create breathable air for humans and others who cannot breathe underwater—the atmosphere on Piscisterra contains almost as much water as its oceans—the Piscians were hoping to attract intergalactic tourists to the race. However, initial sales have been disappointing.

Alas, humans have never taken to the Piscians. The response of one human to the race was typical: "You want me to spend two months on a water-soaked planet watching fish ride bicycles?"

The Piscians did, of course, evolve from the cold-blooded creatures that live in their oceans, creatures not unlike Earth's fish. And although they, like humans, developed arms and legs over time, they do still breathe through gills, that being necessary on their planet. But not only is the typical human response rude, it is also misguided in its assumption that the Piscians are a lesser species. After all, they discovered us, not the other way around.

It is true that humans introduced the bicycle on Piscisterra. Some speculate that Annie Londonderry, who brought the first bikes to Piscisterra, did it as an obscure joke. But the Londonderry Bicycle Importing Company did very well, and worked with the Piscians to develop manufacturing facilities on the planet.

The Piscians are philosophical about the lack of intergalactic interest in their race. "We know that the bicycle has been around for millennia in most of the galaxy," a race official said. "For us, this is a delightful new experience; for other intelligent beings, it's merely an old-fashioned form of transportation."

A member of the Piscian Principal—the planet's governing body—echoed those sentiments. "Some outsiders have criticized our passion for bicycles. It is true that bikes are not a necessary part of life on Piscisterra. But they are fun to have around."

Nancy Jane Moore's books include *The Weave, Changeling,* and *Conscientious Inconsistencies*. At present she's writing nonfiction about empowerment self defense and fiction that incorporates Aikido, climate change, and a generation ship. She lives in Oakland, California.

In Memoriam: Joshua B. Lukin (1968-2019)

by L. Timmel Duchamp

Josh Lukin, an Aqueduct Press author, a frequent poster on Aqueduct's blog, and an early contributor to the CSZ, died on July 25 at age 50. He was married to Ann Keefer, the CSZ's second managing editor, and was well known to many in Aqueduct's community for his appreciation of feminist sf, his brilliantly imaginative intelligence, his never flagging sense of humor, and his constant openness to engaged conversation, especially when it focused on politics and ideas. And he was one of those teachers whose attention and brilliance are capable of changing students' lives, as attested to by his repeatedly winning awards for his teaching.

Josh was an Associate Professor in Temple University's English Department, where he taught writing and was a disability studies scholar and a critic. He edited a book published by Aqueduct Press, *It Walks in Beauty: Selected Prose of Chandler Davis,* and contributed essays to *Daughters of Earth* ("Cold War Masculinity in the Early Work of Kate Wilhelm") and *The WisCon Chronicles, Volume 7*. He co-edited, with Samuel R. Delany, a special issue of *Paradoxa* on the Fifties and was the editor of *Invisible Suburbs: Recovering Protest Fiction in the 1950s United States*, as well as a special issue on Samuel R. Delany for the *minnesota review.* He wrote numerous articles on the work of Philip K. Dick, Patricia Highsmith, Jim Thompson, and Chandler Davis, among others.

Josh's accomplishments were particularly extraordinary because they were achieved in spite of the debilitating illness, Crohn's Disease, from which he suffered for most of his life. He wryly wrote to me in 2001 that as a graduate student, he was constantly aware of the need to present his chronic disability as "an asset rather than a sin." His nearly lifelong consciousness of the politics of disability made him a fierce opponent of mind/body dualism and carnephobia as well as of "the bourgeois the myth of free will."

His clarity about issues that bore so harshly on the conditions of his own life is, perhaps, what was most remarkable about Josh, accompanied by his constant pursuit of what I can only call joy. He often cited Antonio Gramsci's insistence on "pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will." One of his favorite adjectives was "uplifting": he demanded, from his reading, an uplifting experience, and books that disappointed him were those that failed to "uplift" him. I understood, through the years of our correspondence, that Josh's highest compliment was to write to me with thanks for an "uplifting" email; such emails were never by any stretch of the imagination warm and fuzzy. His harsh clarity was complemented by his penchant for cracking wise, listening to music, inserting song into a social encounter, and taking pleasure in good food coupled with lively conversation; all these were an integral part of his life.

Josh was both fierce and joyful, and his voice was necessary and important. He made the world a richer place.

Dinner at the Duchamps': from left to to right, John Berry, Eileen Gunn, Kath Wilham, Nisi Shawl, Timmi Duchamp, Ann Keefer, Josh Lukin

Timmel Duchamp is the author of the Marq'ssan Cycle. Her latest novel, *Chercher La Femme*, published in 2018, was on this year's Tiptree Honor List.

The Nightmare of Those Who Walk Away, the Dream of Those Who Stay and Fight

by Steven Barnes

At the 2019 Norwescon Science Fiction convention last April in Seattle, I met with Nisi Shawl and K. Tempest Bradford and commented that Jordan Peele's new film *Us* reminded me very much of Ursula K. Le Guin's classic "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas." Nisi asked if I would be willing to explore that connection in an essay, and if I'd read "The Ones Who Stay and Fight" by N.K. Jemisin. She provided me with a copy of Jemisin's story, I put it on my calendar…and here we go.

In a series of confrontations of escalating violence, the "doppelgangers" torment Adelaide and her family, and when they escape, fleeing to Josh and Kitty's, they find that their friends have all been murdered… by their own set of doppelgangers.

(Warning: SPOILERS. If you haven't seen *Us* please don't read further. It's available on Amazon streaming…and worth the five bucks and two hours.)

The film begins with a little girl named Adelaide Thomas visiting a Santa Cruz beachside boardwalk with her parents. She slips away to investigate an abandoned house of mirrors, and there encounters something bizarre and frightening.

Many years later, adult Adelaide, husband Gabe, and children Zora and Jason return to Santa Cruz. Adelaide is nervous about going to the beach, but Gabe convinces her that their friends Josh and Kitty would be sorely disappointed if they didn't, so she goes. While there, she is haunted by the still-abandoned hall of mirrors, and Jason wandering away from the family. When she retrieves a son MUCH confused by her sudden panic, she insists they leave.

Us may be, in retrospect, the second bit of evidence that Peele is the next great genius of dark fantasy…of "Black" dark fantasy, or "Horror Noire" or "Afrofuturism"….

Once home, however, strange things start happening. Four strangers appear in their driveway, and rather than leaving when challenged become home invaders of weird, almost animalistic movement and behavior. These are bizarre doppelgangers of their own family, and only the "mother" can speak: in a strained, rasping, quasi-metallic voice she reveals that they have come to take back what is theirs by right.

In a series of confrontations of escalating violence, the "doppelgangers" torment Adelaide and her family, and when they escape, fleeing to Josh and Kitty's, they find that their friends have all been murdered…by their own set of doppelgangers. Something is happening across the country, thousands or perhaps even millions of doppelgangers coming out of some subterranean world to challenge those on the surface.

When Adelaide, seeking to rescue one of her children, follows doppel-Adelaide into the underground, she is captured and bound. There in the darkness, doppel-Adelaide tells her the truth: the tunnels beneath America are filled with doppelgangers with psychic connections to those on the surface. All those years ago, little Adelaide wandered into the hall of mirrors and was captured and replaced by her double. All this time Adelaide has thought she was human, but she was actually the duplicate. Meanwhile, "real" Adelaide has orchestrated a rebellion.

The two battle, and Adelaide kills her double and returns to the surface with her child. Together, the family flee…but discover that this rebellion is happening EVERYWHERE, and there may be nowhere to run.

Us may be, in retrospect, the second bit of evidence that Peele is the next great genius of dark fantasy…of "Black" dark fantasy, or "Horror Noire" or "Afrofuturism" or any of the other terms that relate to fantasy, science fiction, and horror created by, featuring, or thematically linked to the children of the African Diaspora.

Peele is biracial, and as such has struggled to find his place in the world. This can be seen in his first film, *Get Out* (2017) wherein a young man is victimized by white Liberals who say all the "right" things on the surface, but are actually seeking to steal his body. It is a terrifying film if you have ever wondered who in the world you can trust, and if even the people who claim to love you, or claim to be allies, might actually be monsters. From the white perspective, one might suggest that the film asks "is there so much pain and damage that we will never be able to communicate?"

Us, on the other hand, is less about race than class, although of course these intertwine strongly in the United States. It is probably impossible to separate them.

☯

If Jordan, like many bi-racial or mixed people, wonders about his place in the world, it is just as painful for people who have achieved unusual success to wonder about THEIR place. They leave their "tribe" behind and enter a new world. This can be destructive to the psyche, and the stories of lottery winners who destroy their lives, or rappers who bling themselves into poverty are legend. Some crash and burn. Some try to bring along a large enough chunk of their former community ("The Posse") to help them "keep it real." And some fortunate few manage to make the adjustment.

But the self-doubt remains: am I a sell-out? Did I hurt any of those neighbors and friends who couldn't come with me? If you accept "none of us are free unless all of us are free," does that mean none of us should be happy, healthy, successful, unless we all are? What IS our responsibility to our origins? Who are we, really?

And at what price comes our happiness? Even if you are NOT a member of a disadvantaged community, driving past a homeless encampment can be chilling. There but for the grace of God….

Or: Isn't there something I can do?

And ultimately, none of us have the time to live our lives, work our jobs, and love our families, and also care for the endless waves of the dispossessed and unfortunate. We make our peace with it. The poor will always be with us….

If you let it all in, it will drive you crazy, or tempt you to spend your entire life ministering to lepers. But if you don't act…it can destroy your soul.

☯

So the black family in *Us* isn't black by any specific actions: white families might listen to the same music and raise their children the same way. But the metaphor is obvious to anyone who wants to look for it. It ain't buried. The Wilson clan are clearly upper middle class, with a second vacation house and co-workers living La Vida Loca in a glass-walled computerized house. For a black family, being upper middle class is like being millionaires for a white family—the average inherited wealth differential is just that large.

So we can easily imagine that their families of origin were not as well-off. Nor were their childhood friends. They have excelled. In fact, considering that virtually every other character in the film is white, it is reasonable to assume that that is the world they live in: their level of accomplishment has isolated them ethnically, a very real phenomenon.

While they never agonize about this, the confrontation with their doppelgangers begs the question: Do the doppelgangers represent the very homeless and neglected our society refuses to see, that many of Calvinist leaning blame for being poor and dysfunctional? To what degree are we, by our complacency, complicit? Harsh questions. And would they be right to rise up against us? Take what is "theirs by right"? Are we on a collision path with disaster? Great questions. Thought-provoking, excellent film.

☯

Ursula K. Le Guin's classic short story "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" and N.K. Jemisin's worthy follow-up, "The Ones who Stay and Fight," deal with the same question. Specifically, the Utilitarian argument that suggests that the welfare of the many outweighs the needs of the few. Clearly, human beings accept this necessity: it is impossible to care equally about everything or everyone.

But it is also the road to hell. In "Omelas" Le Guin spends three pages describing the transcendent beauty of a utopian city, slowly inviting you to question how in the world it could be so perfect. And of course it is NOT perfect. All the beauty and wealth is dependent upon the suffering of a single miserable and misshapen child. Any attempt to comfort or free the child from the stinking cell will destroy the city. And so, some few of those who discover the truth choose to "walk away."

In Jemisin's work, a similarly beautiful and enlightened city, detailed in elevated prose, is unspeakably corrupt in that those who do not quite fit in are "painlessly" murdered. And the daughter of one such murdered man vows to act, to change the world. The story ends

If you accept "none of us are free unless all of us are free," does that mean none of us should be happy, healthy, successful, unless we all are? What IS our responsibility to our origins? Who are we, really?

Cont. on p. 6

The Nightmare
(cont. from p. 5)

with the suggestion that we'd best "get to work."

Shall we take this literally? If so, these two stories offer a thought: If the horror is happening to a child we do not know, we can walk away. If it happens to one of "us": a father or mother, son or daughter, we will stay and fight.

The price of being free to walk away, or ignore the misery of others, is to not now, not EVER treat them as if they are members of our family. Or more specifically… they are not you. Not "us." They are "Other."

The price of being free to walk away, or ignore the misery of others, is to not now, not EVER treat them as if they are members of our family. Or more specifically…they are not you. Not "us." They are "Other." We must do this to survive. But we must also engage, or our souls die. We can't share equally with everyone: that communist dream simply doesn't allow for human nature. But a pure demand economy, which rewards and cares for only those who can pay their way, ignores the damage societies often do to their most vulnerable. All bodies, all societies, have dividing lines between themselves and the outside world. Without that, you can't even define them as entities or beings.

As the potential for selfishness increases geometrically, the greater the separation: the self-righteous obliviousness of the guy who was "born on third base and thought he hit a triple" to not understand how your great struggles in life were real, but advantaged by generational support, sometimes at the cost of those who lost land, labor, or life itself, which was then invested in the dominator community.

There ARE no easy answers here. Perhaps there is nothing but honest admission of an issue. Perhaps only the ability to share our thoughts and concerns in art, or support that art, so that those artists know they aren't screaming into the wind.

Perhaps. Selfishness is not the problem. The definition of "self" is the problem. Most world religions suggest that when we extend our own "self" to include others, we begin to grow spiritually.

Perhaps. Selfishness is not the problem. The definition of "self" is the problem. Most world religions suggest that when we extend our own "self" to include others, we begin to grow spiritually.

Judaism says "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

Christianity says: "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another even as I have loved you."

Hinduism says "A man obtains a proper rule of action by looking on his neighbor as himself."

Buddhism says: "Full of love for all things in the world, practicing virtue in order to benefit others, this man alone is happy."

And Islam says: "None of you have faith until you love for your neighbor what you love for yourself."

It's all right there. This is what we are commanded to do, by every spiritual discipline. And yet, if we take that to the extreme, we have no life. There will ALWAYS be someone hurting. What do we do?

We do the best we can. We raise our families with love. We act with all the kindness we can. We are aware of our blessings and never stop fighting for social justice. We nurture our own strength AND softness, so that we are not afraid of, or seek to control, the opposite gender. And we remain aware, always, that there is more to be done. Those who need to leave may leave. Not everyone is a fighter. But those who stay and fight are warriors of the heart, and so long as they can balance it with joy in their own lives, and care for their own families… deserve the deepest respect of all.

What we ignore, what we disown, breeds in the darkness. And WILL come to eat us, one fine day. Either build your walls high…or open your hearts wide.

What we ignore, what we disown, breeds in the darkness. And WILL come to eat us, one fine day.

Steven Barnes is a NY Times bestselling author, television writer, and teacher. Nominated for Hugo and Nebula awards, his "A Stitch In Time" episode of *The Outer Limits* won an Emmy (Best Actress, Amanda Plummer) and his mystery novel *Casanegra*, won an NAACP Image Award. He lives in Southern California with his wife and writing partner, British Fantasy Award winning author Tananarive Due.

On *M Archive: After the End of the World* by Alexis Pauline Gumbs

by Christina M. Rau

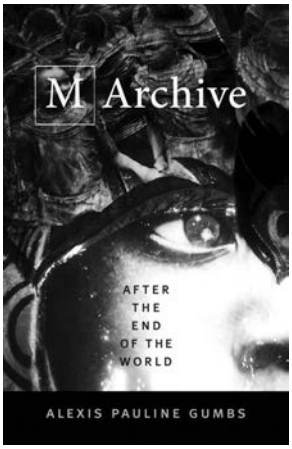
Science and speculation have crept into my poetry in recent years, both in the poems I read and the poems I write. In crowd-sourcing a solid list of sci-fi and speculative works for *Book Riot*, several members of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Poetry Association suggested *M Archive*: *After the End of the World* by Alexis Pauline Gumbs (Duke UP, 2018) as a must-include. Here's a collection that blurs genre as it destroys and creates a world. I was sold immediately. The prospect of seeing science-words, poetic devices, and prose poetry all together sparked my curiosity. When I found the book in my hands, I read it quickly, dog-earing page after page—loving the language, finding patterns of sound, and marking up the margins with visceral reactions to our prospective—somber—future.

The Earth as humans have known it no longer exists. What remains appears through the eyes of an anonymous researcher in *M Archive*: *After the End of the World* by Alexis Pauline Gumbs. Part poetry, part essay, and all vibrant in detailed speculation, this collection uses the Black feminist theorist M. Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Duke UP, 2005) as a foundational text from which these creations spring. Alexander is a writer, activist, and Professor Emerita at the University of Toronto whose work attends to race, gender, and LGBTQ movements around the world. These ideas drive the pieces in Gumbs's collection.

The opening note describes *M Archive*, a sequel to Gumbs's collection *Spill,* as a "speculative documentary, which is not *not* ancestrally co-written but is also written in collaboration with survivors, the far-into-the-future witnesses to the realities we are making possible or impossible with our present apocalypse." The narrator is a "post-scientist…you beyond you." Each section begins with a picture of a partial periodic table, indicating that the collection itself is the actual lab notebook and journal of the researcher. The voice maintains the objective tone of a scientist, which creates an overarching eeriness in describing a world falling apart.

Over the course of seven titled sections, Gumbs's researcher pieces together remnants of a new present that writes the history of what has unfolded, commenting on and critiquing today's real-world approaches to climate change, gender and race discrimination, mass shootings, and scientific and social paths that have caused the destruction in which the researcher lives. Most of the pieces are untitled prose poems and mini-essays using poetic techniques of repetition, polyptoton, and occasionally internal and end rhyme as well as allusions to other literature. In the first section, "From the Lab Notebooks of the Last Experiment" (note: "last" is a verb), the speaker begins with wordplay about time: "the engaged heart…ticked like the urgency of action…those specific people who had used the colloquial name for the heart 'ticker' were close to being right… running out of time." The researcher explains the further decay of living things: "it was not long before they started to long for longer, to plan for a plan that would sustain generations below. depth of a plan that didn't require, include, value, or chart a return." Here, the researcher notes the choice of blissful ignorance as the main problem. Later, in "Archive of Ocean," salt and sweat appear and repeat throughout. This imagery creates a portrait of living under water, a consequence explained with "this is what it takes to cool the planet. hold the world together" after fracking and other acts of destruction.

Gumbs calls on several pieces of literature throughout the collection to help understand the future it constructs. "Archive of Sky" pays homage to Audre Lorde's *The Cancer Journals* in a description of the new world setting. The speaker presents a female figure in the after-earth finding herself in a room with speakers repeating Lorde's words "on loop." The words begin, "*I'm gonna lay down my burdens*…" perhaps a tribute to persevering. "Archive of Sky" also seems to include Carl Sagan. Labeled as a "conversation a couple of our ancestors had," this line shines through: "everyone knows we are made of stardust." Here



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Cont. on p. 8

Science pushes boundaries of nature while the majority of people have chosen to neglect their environment. This combination leads to confusion and inaction.

Gumbs frequently deploys internal and end-rhyme to drive home memorable ideas, usually at the end of sections.

The satisfaction of the rhymes helps to create some logic and solace among the vivid imagery of a world torn apart.

is a gorgeous sentiment that hints at a natural world, untouched and in order. The later section "Baskets" references "'the Butlerian moment'…'Octavian Overture.'" This overt allusion creates a connection to Butler's works that drive at the same worries about the world. More subtly, "Baskets" also includes the lines "let's shape our new home in the contour of the last toddler foot- / prints, in honor of the ones who walked away." "The ones who walk away" is a probable reference to Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas," another dystopian tale. Here, the reference seems to build hope as "Baskets" is subtitled "Possible Futures," meaning the pieces here describe options for how to proceed in this new world.

Boundaries and disconnection emerge as issues. "Archive of Dirt" describes even food science as causing the problems that lead to the world's downfall. The speaker explains, "they were addicted to things like hydrogenated soybean oil and mutant chicken. their memories were linked to the taste of things the studies said were poison." Science pushes boundaries of nature while the majority of people have chosen to neglect their environment. This combination leads to confusion and inaction. "What did we each do then? on the day that everything went wrong. when transportation and communication technologies conspired against use individually…when we didn't ask for help…when the sun died. when we lost everything…how did we keep breathing past it (because we are the ones that did)." After this destruction, in the same section, the basic human need for connection appears: "they wanted to recognize *them*…still wanted recognition." The pieces in each section touch upon a variety of issues in a seamless manner.

At times, reading this collection becomes difficult. The events that unfold are sometimes unclear because they occur in a completely made-up post-apocalypse. These actions are fueled by sheer terror. The difficulty is brilliant and sad. In "Archive of Sky," sound becomes the main element to convey the world. The speaker says, "there was a world made of her screaming." This screaming continues through the pieces in this section. "Archive of Fire," the next section, begins by giving a visual shape to the sound. It begins, "her heart was accelerated coal… beautiful blackening heart." The screaming turns to crying, and the two merge about halfway through the next section, "Archive of Ocean": "her mother is not Africa…Africa is the place before she screamed chained there in the dark…her mother's name is a vessel she screams in alone." Now the chaotic movement and sounds have more certain bodies but are still under great strain, as seen through the unrelenting screams.

The discomfort for the reader finds some solace in "Baskets." While some pieces in "Baskets" refer to walls falling and planes crashing (allusions to terrorism), others are meditative and quiet. One such piece in the beginning of "Baskets" reveals the nature of everything but love being mutable. Some offer a solution, such as the piece that states, "if you think you would have survived without the love of fat black women you are wrong." This piece then enumerates the many tasks "fat black women" complete to support everyone around them, countering the image of a woman in chains screaming and crying that recurs through previous sections.

Gumbs frequently deploys internal and end-rhyme to drive home memorable ideas, usually at the end of sections. The following appears towards the end of "Baskets": "it was the half-blind poets and the beautiful remaining grandmothers who finally taught us to see. to remember. to be." "Archive of Ocean" ends in the same rhyming way, also showing some hope: "here the sun is not strip- / ping your skin. this is the dark water of renewal. offering only one / message: / begin." The satisfaction of the rhymes helps to create some logic and solace among the vivid imagery of a world torn apart.

This speculative collection creates a powerful, perhaps in some sections plausible, vision of future post-destruction both immediate and painful. *M: Archive* is a call for admitting undeniable truths and taking action that will lead to improvement without ruin. The book's language is simply beautiful, and its cataloging of observations builds through each section, evoking first pain, and then hope.

Christina M. Rau is the author of the sci-fi fem poetry collection, *Liberating the Astronauts* (Aqueduct Press, 2017), which won the SFPA 2018 Elgin Award. Her chapbooks include *WakeBreatheMove* (Finishing Line Press, 2015) and *For The Girls, I* (dancing girl press, 2014). http://www.christinamrau.com

Poems by Sofia Rhei
translated from Spanish by Lawrence Schimel

The Fairy Handkerchief

He found a tiny handkerchief in the forest and knew
that it belonged to the fairies. He discovered
that everything that was wrapped in it disappeared,
and he thought that the objects must go
to the realm of the fairies. So he thought to wrap his ear
inside the handkerchief, to be able to hear what goes on there,
thinking that he could live without an ear.
However, since the music he heard was so marvelous,
he also yearned to see what went on there, and he plunged
his entire face inside the handkerchief. But when the fairies saw
that face appear, they knew who to look for.

Sofía Rhei is an experimental and especulative author. As a poet, she was shortlisted for Rhysling awards and won the Dwarf Stars. Her novels for adults include *Róndola*, a Celsius award winning humorous fairytale retelling, and *Espérame en la última página*, a ghost story about books.

The Leaf Woman

He thought that perhaps the leaf woman
was a product of his dreams, but despite that
he continued writing verses to her about birds and harps
and leaving them near the apple tree. The next summer,
some of the apples had wings, and others, tiny strings.

Blancaflor

The princess whose tresses were
as subtle and as golden as the pollen of the flowers,
whose skin was as smooth as petals,
whose waist seemed like that of a flower,
wound up transforming into a lovely hyacinth.
And the hero had no other choice
but to become a gardener.

Lawrence Schimel is a bilingual (Spanish/English) author and literary translator based in Madrid.

The Ruby Flower

On pulling up the ruby plant, he heard it
shout in pain. Then he repented of his avarice
and did everything possible to plant it again.
But the roots trapped his hands and dragged them
down into the earth. At the last moment, he understood
where its ruby color came from.

The Language of the Birds

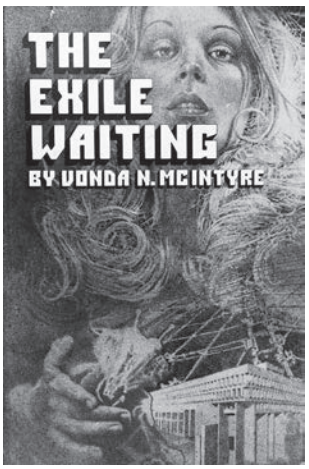
The key had appeared in the heights of the tallest tree,
but she couldn't reach it and didn't know
the language of the birds, for the birds flew too high.
Defeated, she leaned against the trunk,
and began to hear the voices of the ants.

The Guard's Name

She had to pass through that door
in order to save her beloved,
but there was a guard who never said a word.
After trying everything, she asked him for his name,
and he told her: that of her beloved.

The Exile Waiting by Vonda N. McIntyre

by Debbie Notkin



The first Women in Science Fiction panel, featuring Ursula K. Le Guin and Susan Wood, would be held in Australia at the 1975 World Science Fiction convention in the fall. A similar panel in 1976 in Kansas City would galvanize the US science fiction community and be the genesis of WisCon

In the middle of 1975, I turned 24. I had been embedded in science fiction fandom for just a couple of years, and was not yet a bookseller, let alone an editor, or Pat Murphy and Karen Joy Fowler's co-conspirator on the James Tiptree Jr. Literary Award. A small handful of us in fandom were just becoming aware of feminist science fiction as a separate way of thinking about either feminism (then more often called "women's liberation") or science fiction. The first Women in Science Fiction panel, featuring Ursula K. Le Guin and Susan Wood, would be held in Australia at the 1975 World Science Fiction convention in the fall. A similar panel in 1976 in Kansas City would galvanize the US science fiction community and be the genesis of WisCon, which began in 1977.

Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* had been around for several years, as had Joanna Russ's *The Female Man.* Suzy McKee Charnas' *Walk to the End of the World* was published in 1974. So Vonda N. McIntyre's first novel, *The Exile Waiting,* did appear in an existing context, although that context was thin on the ground and not at all well-defined. McIntyre herself had achieved a reputation among science-fiction readers: her extraordinary short story "Of Mist, and Grass, and Sand" was published in 1973, and won the Nebula Award for that year.

I don't remember first reading *The Exile Waiting,* but given who and where I was, I probably read it within months of its first publication. I remember liking it; one experience of reading it stands out very clearly: The protagonist is Mischa, a young woman, who turns out to be somewhat of a mathematical genius. Once that talent is revealed, at just over 100 pages into the story, I steeled myself for the moment when she uses her mathematical abilities to save the ship, or rescue her family, or some other heroic plot climax. I understand now why I didn't want that to happen; I'm not sure I understood it at the time. But when the book was over, and Mischa's mathematical talents turned out to be just one identifying characteristic and not a Heinlein-ian convenient plot saver, I felt a weight lifting from my shoulders. So for forty-four years, when I've thought or talked about this book, that's the aspect I've put front and center.

On the sad occasion of Vonda's death in April of this year, I decided to preempt the Le Guin stack that has been most of my re-reading since *her* death in January 2018, and pick up *The Exile Waiting.* I was expecting a good, strong read, and a protagonist whose math skills don't save the ship. I was not expecting a stunningly complex and rich novel addressing many themes I don't think I was even remotely aware of in 1975.

The story takes place on "old earth," a ravaged future vision of our planet, and specifically the city of Center. Center seems to be the most sophisticated and developed place on earth, and one way it protects itself is by sealing itself off during the stormy winters, when no spaceships or nomads can come in or out. Nonetheless, Subone and Subtwo ("pseudosibs") land their ship near Center in the midst of a storm and politely force their way into the Stone Palace, where Center's rulers dwell. Among their crew is Jan Hikaru, an itinerant poet, stewarding the corpse of the elderly navigator Hikaru has come to love, who only wanted to be buried on old earth.

Mischa, Subtwo, and Hikaru are the three viewpoint characters around whom the story unfolds. Mischa is a skilled thief in Center, shackled to her family by telepathic linkages beyond her control. Her telepathic bond with her brother has been her lifeline, but now she is not just

watching him fall victim to drug addiction—she's experiencing it in her body through her link to him. She yearns to take him off planet, where he might heal, but there is no escape from Center, especially during the winter storms. Worse, she is bonded to her physically and intellectually disabled younger sister Gemmi. When their unscrupulous uncle needs money, he threatens Gemmi, and Mischa is compelled to come and give him what he needs.

Subtwo is inextricably linked to Subone, though Subtwo's methodical, ascetic nature is constantly challenged by Subone's impulsive hedonism. Subtwo has never been apart from, or much differentiated from Subone. In an elision extremely typical of McIntyre's later writing, she describes the pseudosibs as "the behavioral equivalent of genetic twins" and then leaves an encyclopedia of speculation about nature and nurture unexplored. The pseudosibs' time on Center reveals how very different they are. While Subone revels in the dissipation of the Stone Palace, Subtwo is suffering in a space where corners are not square and people are not straightforward. He is also falling in love—in generous, empathic love—with a slave. He yearns after "Madame," a Stone Palace slave with major administrative responsibilities. McIntyre handles the complexities of a relationship across this chasm with a subtlety rare now and almost unheard of forty years ago.

Jan Hikaru, the third protagonist in the story, is having a completely different experience with bonds. A fully adult man, he seems to never have had an important lasting connection with another person until he met the aging navigator, and thus he is mourning her death when he barely had time to realize how much she mattered to him, let alone to make the jump to understanding that she has changed his relationships in the future as well as in the present.

Mischa inserts herself in Subtwo's life because he is the only possible avenue to saving Mischa's brother—and Mischa would not have survived so far if she ever wrote a possibility off as impossible. Subtwo foists her off on Hikaru, who will either teach her some basics or learn that she is not teachable, and either way they won't bother Subtwo. Mischa's knowledge of Earth is crucial to Hikaru in his yearning to bury the navigator's body in keeping with her wishes. That, plus Mischa's craving for the knowledge Hikaru can impart to her, is the core of a new bond between the two of them, as confusing to Hikaru as the first one was.

This *tour de force* of character and structure is also one hell of an adventure story. We get a hint of adventure early in the novel, when Mischa-the-thief leads the staff of the Stone Palace on a not-so-merry chase…and then is caught and punished for a crime she didn't commit. Later in the story, Mischa, Subtwo, and Hikaru find themselves on a psychologically and physically demanding journey, which they are all led into by slightly different paths.

As they undertake this escape/quest/trial together, the three unlikely companions are forced to rely on each other in ways unfamiliar to each of them. In the spirit of grand adventure, they are pursued by relentless enemies and supported by unexpected and unpredictable allies. In the spirit of excellent fiction, they also find deeper aspects of themselves.

The Exile Waiting would be a remarkable book if it had been written in 2019 by a well-established and experienced writer. As a first novel published almost 45 years ago, it was jaw-droppingly skillful and ahead of its time. I found it both more satisfying and more illuminating than I expected. I am confident that I will get even more out of it when I next re-read it. No reader of feminist or anti-colonialist science fiction should skip this one.

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In the science fiction world, Debbie Notkin has been a professional acquisitions editor, chair of the Tiptree Award Motherboard, a bookseller, a convention organizer, a fanzine publisher, and an award judge. She still loves the books and stories.

"Articulated Restraint" by Mary Robinette Kowal, Tor.com (Feb. 6, 2019), edited by Beth Meacham; "Every Little Star" by Fiona Moore, *Mad Scientist Journal* (Winter 2019), edited by Dawn Vogel and Jeremy Zimmerman; *Then Will the Great Ocean Wash Deep Above* by Ian Sales (Whippleshield Books 2013)

by Karen Burnham

In 2019 we're passing the 50th anniversary of the Apollo Moon landings and well into the second decade of efforts to reclaim women's place in that history. While the dominant narrative has been the (all male, all White) astronauts and the (all male, all White) mission controllers of NASA, there has been a lot of work done recently to remember that none of the NASA centers ran solely on testosterone. N. Katherine Hayle's book *My Mother was a Computer* (2005) reminds us that the words of her title once made a perfectly reasonable and not at all science fictional sentence: there was a job titled "computer" and most of those jobs were filled by women. Being a computer involved doing the extensive calculations by hand that were required by complex engineering problems before electronic computers evolved to a point where they were truly useful. Many of these women worked behind the scenes of famous historical moments, from the Manhattan Project (Richard Feynman was a bit ahead of the game in reminding people of the computers' role in his autobiography *Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman!* [1985]) to the Apollo missions. *Hidden Figures* by Margot Lee Shetterly (both book and film, 2016) brought this particular neglected bit of history into recent prominence.

Other early books like *Promised the Moon* by Stephanie Nolen (2002) and *The Mercury 13* by Martha Ackmann (2003) brought to light those women who were qualified pilots at the same time the Mercury 7 astronauts were being chosen, some of whom were able to pass the same extremely demanding physical and mental tests that the male astronauts were subjected to. They were kept out of the astronaut corps for reasons including bureaucratic requirements (which involved being a test pilot, which only US Air Force men were allowed to be), political considerations (no politician was willing to put a woman on a rocket that might blow up), and pure social sexism.

The astronaut corps has made enormous strides since the Mercury 7 were chosen in 1959. Valentina Tereshkova was the first woman in space (1963). Other noteworthy spacewomen include Dr. Sally Ride (first American woman, 1983), Dr. Mae Jemison (first Black woman, 1992), Anousheh Ansari (first self-funded woman, 2006), and Liu Yang (first Chinese woman, 2012). However, as much as sf can imagine the future, sometimes it also imagines the past. I'll forgo any debate about whether sf is sf when it is also alternate history. The stories I'll be discussing are comfortably both, and they all imagine a different past: one in which the mid-Century Space Race included American women.

First off is a story that hews as closely as possible to our timeline. *Then Will the Great Ocean Wash Deep Above* is part of Ian Sales' hard sf quartet of novellas, each imagining the Apollo era of NASA unfolding in different ways with Forteian events intruding into each alternate history. In this story the Jonbar Point (where the story diverges from our timeline) is simple: the Korean War stays hot much longer than the 1953 cessation of hostilities in our world. That ties up the American fighter pilots who were otherwise available for the space program in the late 1950s, but doesn't particularly slow down the Russians who were not actively fighting in Korea. In order to avoid falling completely behind, NASA enlists the Mercury 13, and Jerrie Cobb becomes our viewpoint character. The space exploration program unfolds along very similar lines as ours, but with ex-WASP Jackie Cochran keeping tight rein on all the female astronauts. In interleaving chapters, a Lt. Cmdr McIntyre takes the deep sea submersible Trieste II (a real ship in our world) down to the

supposedly barren sea floor to search for a film canister ejected by a spy satellite (also a real reconnaissance method used in the 1960s)—he ends up discovering a veritable graveyard of ships and airplanes beneath what is popularly known as the Bermuda Triangle. What develops from the film he retrieves hints at the connection between the two worlds, and Sales winds up with a history of both programs: the NASA/Mercury 13 history and that of Trieste II and military deep dives of the time. Sales does a great job with Jerrie Cobb as the viewpoint character, grounding her perspectives on the space program in her deep religious faith. He plays out the scenario quite realistically, both for good (the women fly many successful orbital missions) and ill (the clothes and makeup requirements of living that kind of public life, the ceiling that the space program hits when it stops before the Moon landings in this alternate history).

Writing fiction that uses real people as characters requires a very fine touch, and I believe that Sales does it quite well and respectfully here. I also recommend the bibliography that he includes at the end: if there's any topic related to the space programs of the 1950s, '60s, and '70s that you might be interested in, you can find excellent reference material for it there. I should also note that *CSZ* readers might be interested in the final novella in the series, *All That Outer Space Allows* (2015), in which sf is classified as women's fiction, and the Golden Age of sf unfolds with mostly women writing for the pulps.

Another story that caught my eye is in the Winter 2019 issue of the quirky quarterly *Mad Scientist Journal*. I warmly commend this periodical of short oddities to you; it is written as if by and for mad scientists, and the product reviews alone are worth the cover price. "Every Little Star" by Fiona Moore, written as if by the main character Evangeline Artemisia "Artie" Quelch, is the story of an agoraphobic Moonbase commander in 1967. She has to put up with some sexist press coverage, but her girlfriend is something of an open secret. More importantly, she's scarred from her experience of terrorist sabotage on Mars, which left her trapped alone in a space capsule for weeks. Quelch's 1967 differs from ours quite a bit: in their 1957, fictional Ludmilla Kovalenko became the first cosmonaut to reach space—and her transmissions when it became clear she wouldn't return in one piece were broadcast to the world. This blew open a secret Soviet space program and paved the way for ex-WASPs like Artie to apply for the astronaut corps.

For Artie that's in the British Commonwealth space program; America, China, Brazil, and others all have separate Moon bases established. Her world includes more tech than ours because they've cracked lightspeed travel and communications; her turn away from a settled life and back towards rockets is enabled by an FTL virtual reality system, one that helps her through an emergency situation on her base. This is a fun story that in some ways mirrors the structure of Heinlein's "Ordeal in Space" (1948) and dreams of a world where we've achieved the kind of technological breakthroughs that would have been needed to actually create the future that the Golden Age sf writers and fans wanted: Moon bases, Mars colonies, and missions to Alpha Centauri. And it's more international, more feminist, and more QUILTBAG friendly than any Golden Age writer or editor probably imagined as well.

The most extreme departure from our history is found in Mary Robinette Kowal's Lady Astronaut series, of which the first novel, *The Calculating Stars*, won the Nebula and Hugo awards in 2019, and the most recent short story, "Articulated Restraint," appeared at Tor.com in February 2019. Here the author literally drops a rock on Washington, DC, in 1952 pushing the space program (and all of human history) in a very different direction. In the novel, our heroine Dr. Elma York quickly realizes that the asteroid impact will gradually change the climate to the point of being an extinction level event. She's a computer at what becomes the NASA equivalent, while her husband is a chief engineer. The program is immediately and necessarily more international in scope, and because the goal has to be long-term colonization in-

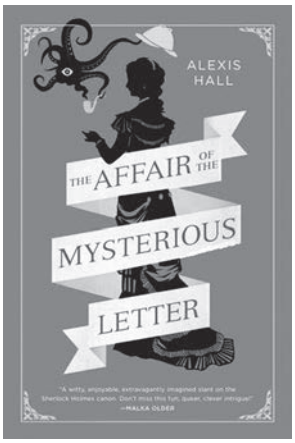
Cont. on p. 15

Flipping Off Holmes

The Affair of the Mysterious Letter: A Novel by Alexis Hall, Ace Books, June 2019, 350 pp., $16.

reviewed by Cynthia Ward

In the speculative fiction field, flipping is controversial and increasingly popular. Sometimes it also incorporates other genres. One such genre-blender is Alexis Hall's new novel, The Affair of the Mysterious Letter....



"Flipping" is the act of altering one or more significant aspects of characterization in a pastiche, remake, or adaptation. For example, the 1995 film *Richard III* relocates William Shakespeare's historical play to an alternate interwar Britain, turning the characters into 20th Century royalists and fascists.

In the speculative fiction field, flipping is controversial and increasingly popular. Sometimes it also incorporates other genres. One such genre-blender is Alexis Hall's new novel, *The Affair of the Mysterious Letter*, in which Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional consulting detective, Sherlock Holmes, becomes the cis lesbian sorceress Shaharazad Haas, and his friend and chronicler, Dr. John H. Watson, becomes the gay trans man Captain John Wyndham.

This is not to imply that Hall's newest novel confines itself to SH/JW flips with peanut butter magic in the chocolate mystery. It's also a mash-up in the tradition of the late Philip José Farmer's Wold Newton universe and Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill's League of Extraordinary Gentlemen series. *The Affair of the Mysterious Letter* mixes elements of many authors' creations, predominantly Lovecraft's aquatic race and the King in Yellow Mythos, along with a *soupçon* of Edgar Rice Burroughs's Barsoom and, I suspect, borrowings I missed. However, Hall takes the mash-up a giant step further, altering it so significantly as to comprise, ultimately, something else again.

Recognizable elements remain. Like his inspiration, Captain Wyndham is a medical man and disabled war veteran, complete with a migratory wound (cleverly explained). And, since veterans are as poorly pensioned in his world as in Watson's, the captain (an honorable and sympathetic prig) is in urgent need of affordable lodging. He finds a new living situation when he answers the following broadsheet advertisement: "Co-tenant required. Rent reasonable to the point of arousing suspicion. Tolerance for blasphemies against nature an advantage. No laundry service. Enquire S. Haas, 221b Martyrs Walk." Said new situation offers a tolerably accommodating landlady: Mrs. Hive, an ambulatory corpse inhabited by a wasp group mind. It also includes a roommate: a magic-wielding investigator of frightful insight, maddening eccentricity, multiplex addiction, and homicidal yet charming sociopathy, Ms. Shaharazad Haas.

And, as the Canonical Holmes had "the woman," Irene Adler, Ms. Haas has Miss Eirene Viola. In Haas's case, the woman is an ex-lover—and someone who has been even less reluctant to engage in dubious enterprises than her inspiration. However, the refugee from Carcosa has reformed, and become affianced to a respectable businesswoman of the triplet cities of Kelathra-Ven.

Alas, a criminal past leaves even the reformed vulnerable to blackmail. An anonymous letter threatens to reveal one of Viola's indiscretions (the one in which she and Haas persuaded a man to, "of his own free will, expose…himself to extradimensional forces that tragically consumed him"), unless Viola immediately breaks her engagement with Miss Cora Beck. Unwilling to sacrifice the couple's happiness, or at least her own, Viola spends much of the chapter wearing down Haas's understandable reluctance to search for the blackmailer—no easy task, given the ex-villainess has "left a veritable legion of jilted lovers, double-

crossed associates, and good old-fashioned victims" in her wake.

The plot consists of winnowing the vast slate of potential blackmailers until the sorceress-investigator and her faithful and intelligent-though-non-genius roommate solve the case (like Holmes, Haas values logic and deduction in personal interactions, however much it may not apply to sorcery). The solution to the mystery is one I rather quickly began to suspect—yet it's not what I expected. And the journey is as inventive as the prose, wit, and world-building.

The novel has some issues. Captain Wyndham's prudish circumlocutions for others' blunt language are too frequent to remain amusing, while blasphemy, scatology, and/or obscenity from practically everyone else in the Victorian-esque setting strains credulity. The principals' homeworld is a bit too inclined to present as alt.Europe with alt.Oriental trim. Too, the Carcosa section, wherein Wyndham experiences what I'll oversimplify as trans-spatio-temporal madness, offers rather too much of a tonal shift. Ultimately, however, this book is very much its own thing, and the most fun I've had with fiction in many months. I cannot help but hope devotedly for sequels. Bravo, Mr. Hall!

Ultimately, however, this book is very much its own thing, and the most fun I've had with fiction in many months. I cannot help but hope devotedly for sequels.

Cynthia Ward has sold stories to *Analog*, *Asimov's*, *Nightmare*, and elsewhere. She edited *Lost Trails: Forgotten Tales of the Weird West* , Volumes 1-2. With Nisi Shawl, she co-authored *Writing the Other: A Practical Approach*. Aqueduct published her short novels, *The Adventure of the Incognita Countess* and *The Adventure of the Dux Bellorum.*

Dust Lanes (cont. from p. 13)

stead of mere boots-and-flags, the door is just slightly cracked open for women to make their case to become astronauts. Elma is an ex-WASP, and some of the real world Mercury 13 make cameo appearances. Human computers, exclusively women, have a much greater role to play in the space program's development when it happens a decade earlier than in our timeline—and while Kowal doesn't mention it directly in her Afterword, I imagine that vaporizing a huge chunk of the Eastern Seaboard would dramatically upset the revolutionary work in electronic computer technology that happened at MIT in Massachusetts and Bell Labs in New Jersey in our world. Without those electric computers, even as "primitive" as they were, success boils down to the mental power of these women.

Eventually Elma is chosen as the first woman in space, overcoming a number of obstacles (and also acknowledging the racial divide—all of the Mercury 13 were White women, but Black women pilots have a storied history in aviation going back to Bessie Coleman). In "Articulated Restraint" we meet Ruby Donaldson in 1960. She's in the astronaut corps but feels the need to prove herself every day. (This isn't unique to female astronauts, I should note. With more astronauts than flight seats available, every astronaut is out to prove themselves worthy pretty much every day of their working lives.) She's scheduled for a training run in the Neutral Buoyancy Lab (a giant pool, the closest Earthly equivalent of a microgravity environment) at the space center. She'd sprained her ankle while dancing the night before, but this time it turns out the training run is deadly serious. Instead of normal practice, they have to figure out an EVA sequence that will allow a damaged shuttle, with passengers, to dock with the space station. Ruby's injured ankle almost leads to complete failure (Kowal's thoroughly researched description of just how immensely hard it is to work in space suits in the gigantic NBL pool is a thing of wonder). While the day is eventually saved, Ruby decides to put her dancing days behind her and let nothing even possibly compromise her dedication to space.

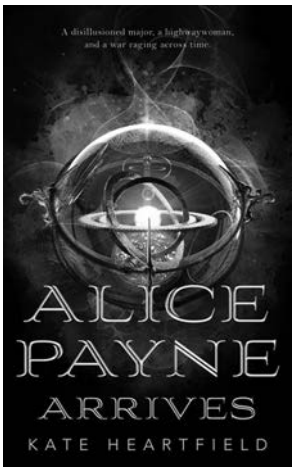
As more and more history has been uncovered, we've learned just how deeply involved women were in the development of space exploration in our world. There's simply no question that if they had been allowed to try, many of them would have been just as competent and inspiring as Yuri Gagarin, John Glenn, and Neil Armstrong. We can't change our own history, but we can enjoy these alternate versions—ones where women were given the chance to soar on their own and achieve in their own ways.

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 the University of Illinois Press. She works in the automotive industry in Michigan, where she lives with her family.

Women...in Time!

Kate Heartfield's Alice Payne duology: *Alice Payne Arrives* by Kate Heartfield, Tor.com Publishing, November 2018, 176 pp., $15.99;
Alice Payne Rides by Kate Heartfield, Tor.com Publishing, March 2019, 176 pp., $14.99.

reviewed by Arley Sorg



…if you long for adventure stories featuring women—robbing the rich, leaping through time, making decisions and driving the plot—pick up these books immediately. And, if you like a bit of depth to your fiction, good news: these adventures are seasoned with subtext and commentary, while never losing touch with the spirit of adventure.

How does time travel work? A cool, sparkly orb. There's a little more meat to this science fictional aspect than that, and the series loves paradoxes and intricate flows of consequence (you will need a spreadsheet to keep up), but these books aren't attempting to present a plausible time travel theory.

If you love good adventure stories, these books are for you. Better yet, if you long for adventure stories featuring women—robbing the rich, leaping through time, making decisions and driving the plot—pick up these books immediately. And, if you like a bit of depth to your fiction, good news: these adventures are seasoned with subtext and commentary, while never losing touch with the spirit of adventure.

Alice Payne Arrives begins with a robbery, which sets the tone perfectly: action, a strong-willed woman, and a touch of steampunk. By day, Alice is the half-Black (but fairly passing) daughter to Colonel Payne, a cruel veteran whose health is quickly declining, a condition which is mirrored by the state of his house. By night, Alice is a Georgian era highwaywoman, punishing the deserving and keeping coin flowing into her house at the same time. Ignorant of the lengths Alice goes to just to keep the house afloat, her father wishes her married off, but Alice has no interest. She's happily entangled with her companion and counterpart, Jane. Where Alice is daring and bold, Jane is brilliant, an inventor, and a scientist.

In another place and time, Major Prudence Zuniga is getting tired of the futility of a time war. Two ideological armies, the "Misguided" and the "Farmers," are constantly rewriting history, each side making calculated decisions that don't always end up as expected. Zuniga hatches a plot to destroy time travel completely, hoping to end the time war once and for all. As it happens, according to her calculations, she needs an individual who lives in 1788, specifically a native to that time. Enter Alice and Jane!

As *Alice Payne Arrives* is book one, foundational ideas must be presented. While the exposition is slightly clunky in a few spots, it smooths out early on. How does time travel work? A cool, sparkly orb. There's a little more meat to this science fictional aspect than that, and the series loves paradoxes and intricate flows of consequence (you will need a spreadsheet to keep up), but these books aren't attempting to present a plausible time travel theory. In fact, the ideas behind the ideological war and the societal notions of various times are where some of the most intriguing (social) science fictional concepts live.

Characters and motivations also have to be established, and the characters are great. The story navigates the challenges of being a lesbian, and a woman—a stubborn one at that—without making it too easy or too hard. The people and their situations are both believable enough and fantastic enough to be entertaining and engaging.

A great deal of the tale takes place in 1788. Descriptions are convincing, and the writing is confident, while the read moves along easily. You don't have to be a Georgian enthusiast to enjoy this book, but there are probably a few details the enthusiasts will love.

Whereas *Arrives* is mainly centered on Alice, with a strong secondary focus on Zuniga, *Rides* feels a bit more like time travel: A-Team through time, in a sense, but keeping the focus on Alice as the star. Essentially, a group has come together, and the focus of the story shifts for the group entire. The sparkly newness of setting and characters is replaced by the sparkly newness of sharp interpersonal tensions and complications, not to mention "new adventures!"

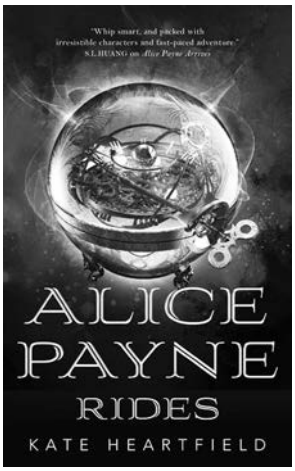
Parish constable Captain Wray Auden wants to see the notorious highwayman, the Holy Ghost, brought to justice. He doesn't know that the criminal in question is his own friend, Alice Payne. Meanwhile, the group's time travel mis-

sion goes awry, resulting in bringing (read: kidnapping) Arthur of Brittany from his own era. Things get worse: Arthur has smallpox, which poses a threat not only to the adventurers, but potentially to Alice's entire household and beyond. Zuniga goes (ahem: back to the future) to get a vaccine and is confronted by the military leader she tried to escape in book one. Because this is not nearly complicated enough for a novella, Alice contemplates her father's nature, specifically the way he was changed by a mysterious event during the war. She decides to don a disguise and head for the American Revolution, hoping to uncover his dark secrets.

Yes, it's a lot to follow. It's a whole lotta plot for 176 pages. But it works, it moves fast, and manages to stay fun.

Throughout the series, intelligent ideas are balanced by humor and great moments between characters, delivered through strong dialogue and straightforward prose. You can hardly have time travel conflict without certain ethical and philosophical questions rising: fate, the morality of impacting timelines, and so on. Both books also tackle the darkness of war and several social issues, especially those dealing with race and gender; they both play with the age-old conflicts between science/reason and passion; and there's a running conversation around notions of justice. They do all of this without being weighed down or becoming preachy, and so much of it happens by virtue of narrative resistance, rather than long monologues or grandstanding.

Alice cuts a superb figure as a hero, being charismatic, capable, and just impulsive enough. As a reader I want to hang out with her, I want to ride with her, I want to listen to her talk about the trouble she got herself into. And while she is at the center of it all, as a body, these works are about family, especially the family you choose. Overall the series presents solid adventure, but glitters with moments of wonderful, genuine emotion.



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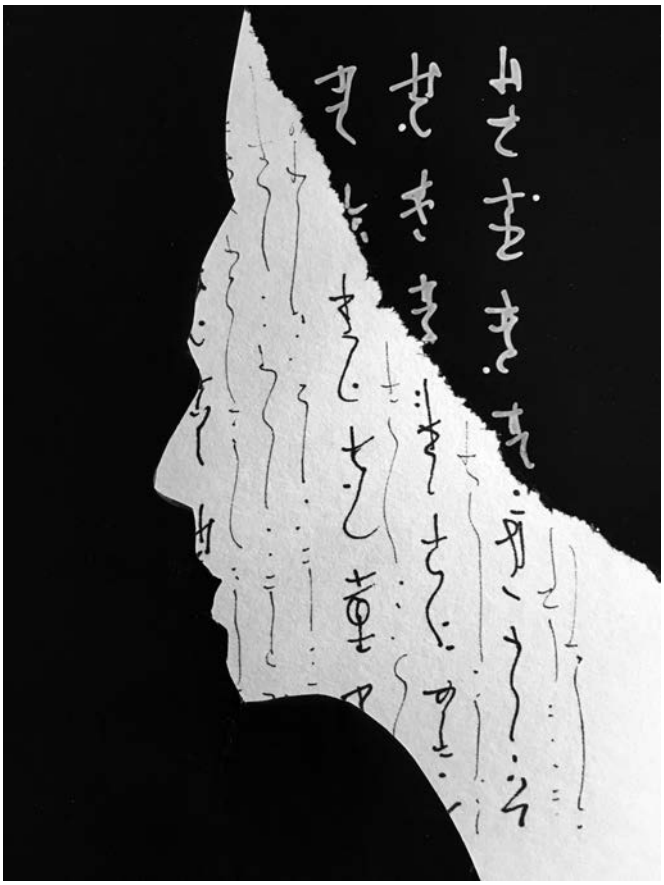


face

Arley Sorg lives in Oakland, CA. A 2014 Odyssey Writing Workshop graduate, he's an associate editor at *Locus Magazine* and does odd jobs for *Lightspeed Magazine*. He's soldering together a novel, has thrown a few short stories into orbit, and hopes to launch more.

Getting the Neurosexism Out of Neuroscience

Gender and Our Brains: How New Neuroscience Explodes the Myths of the Male and Female Minds by Gina Rippon, Pantheon Books, New York, August 2019, 424 pp., $30.

reviewed by Nancy Jane Moore

One of my favorite parts of British neuroscientist Gina Rippon's thorough analysis of scientific research into sex differences in the brain in *Gender and Our Brains* comes in a chapter titled "The Gendered Waters in Which We Swim—The pink and blue tsunami." In June of 1986 Rippon had just given birth and was in a labor ward in the hospital when she heard something that "sounded like an approaching steam train." It was a carriage of newborns being delivered to their mothers.

The nurse gave a newborn boy (wrapped in a blue blanket) to the woman next to her, saying "Here's Gary. Cracking pair of lungs!"

Rippon goes on to say: "The nurse then passed me my package, wrapped in a yellow blanket (an early and hard-won feminist victory), with a perceptible sniff. 'Here's yours. The loudest of the lot. Not very ladylike!' Thus at the tender age of ten minutes, my tiny daughter had her first encounter with the gendered world into which she had just arrived."

It is stories like this one that show just how much difference it makes to have women in science and technology as well as in all the other professions stereotyped as male. Rippon's personal experience with the "tsunami" of gender policing has given her added information when she evaluates research to determine which studies have been tainted by neurosexism as well as which ones might actually provide useful information about brains.

Rippon, professor of cognitive neuroimaging at the Aston Brain Centre at Aston University in Birmingham, England, addresses most of the significant brain research of the last half century in this book, contrasting early studies with the more detailed work available with modern imaging technology. She makes three key points throughout the book, points that undermine most of the differences attributed to sex.

So, for example, the often cited idea that men are better at spatial reasoning and map reading might well have to do with the fact that more boys than girls play with Legos and similar toys. Our ability to do things is not fixed at birth in the way some would like it to be.

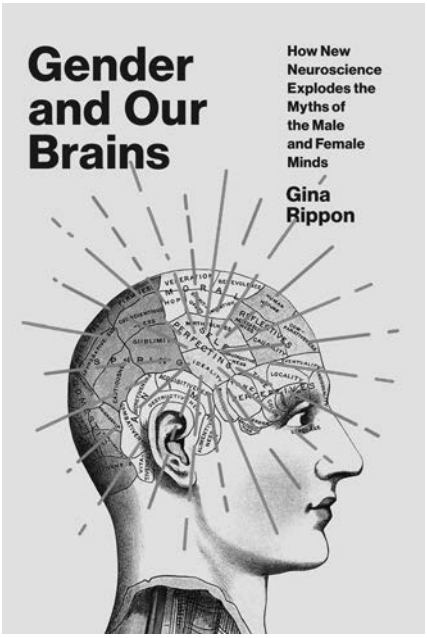
First, much of the reporting in both professional and general media on a great deal of brain research has overemphasized very tiny differences in the findings. This flaw is compounded by small sample sizes and limited information about the people studied. Given those gendered waters we're all swimming in, it's obvious that a lot of studies were promoted as finding significant differences when those differences were, in fact, quite small. Rippon also notes that studies that found no differences were much less likely to be published.

Secondly, and very importantly, brain plasticity has been found to continue throughout life, and the things we learn can have a major impact on our brain. So, for example, the often cited idea that men are better at spatial reasoning and map reading might well have to do with the fact that more boys than girls play with Legos and similar toys. Our ability to do things is not fixed at birth in the way some would like it to be.

Lastly, we are social beings, and we construct our brains to fit in with our social surroundings. "Social cognitive neuroscience is putting the self centre stage, making us realize that the construction of ourselves as social beings is perhaps the most powerful triumph of the brain's evolution," Rippon writes.

On that last point, Rippon cites many studies showing that even small boosts or insults to our self-esteem have an effect on our attitudes about what we can do and what we're good at, as well as how well we fit in. She notes that while some people can deal with the world with a "this is who I am, take it or leave it" approach, "self-esteem for most of us is determined by how well we seem to be embedded in the social groups in which we find ourselves."

For those whose work requires them to operate in a social sphere in which they are not well-represented—such as women working in tech—this can cre-



ate a substantial barrier, not just because they may not get the same opportunities as their coworkers, but also because they may begin to believe they are not qualified to be there. As someone who has spent a great deal of my life in male-dominated spaces, I am coming to recognize just how much that isolation from other women in my fields affected me and made me question my own worth.

Rippon points out that our social brain and our corresponding ability to cooperate has been seen as the underlying basis of evolutionary success. But, she warns, "our understanding of the rules of social engagement that determine our place in the world and our journey through it may be based on biased information…. Examining how different these rules seem to be for girls and boys, women and men, may reveal that this major evolutionary advance has not served both sexes well." She adds that the plasticity in the brain that allows us to develop these skills is present from the moment of birth. Babies start learning their place in the world very early.

This discussion of the effect of social experience on our construction of our brains brought to my mind the thesis psychiatrist Anna Fels set out fourteen years ago in *Necessary Dreams: Ambition in Women's Changing Lives.* Fels wrote of the importance of recognition, which includes the respect of peers, bosses, and teachers, in achieving one's goals. Recognition for one's accomplishments is a key element of social experience. Those placed in an environment where their worth is constantly questioned will have difficulty succeeding, and that, too, will show up in their brains. It also shows up in the drop of women in some fields, such as physics, at each level of education.

Brains grow in volume beginning at birth, Rippon points out. By the time a child is six, they have 90 percent of the brain volume of adults. Babies have twice as many synaptic connections as adults, partly because they are making connections with everything. During childhood and adolescence, these connections are gradually pruned back until they reach adult levels. This plasticity of brains coupled with social learning means that small children learn early on about the rules of gender and how they are supposed to act so that they will fit in.

But that plasticity doesn't stop. As Rippon points out, "The discovery of lifelong experience-dependent plasticity in the human brain means that, in studying sex/gender differences in the brain, we have to pay attention to more than just the sex and age of our participants." She adds, "We need to know what kind of lives these brains have lived." What people have done with their lives strongly affects what their brains are like. This is a crucial observation, and one that has rarely been mentioned in other discussions of neuroscience research. Rippon's argument suggests research studies should include a detailed biography and resume for each participant.

And that also leads Rippon and other researchers to come up with areas that should be considered in studies. She cites work by Professors Daphna Joel and Margaret McCarthy suggesting that studies add questions about whether differences are persistent or transient across a lifetime, whether they depend on context, whether they overlap, and whether they can be shown to be directly related to biological sex. A discussion of that leads Rippon to observe, "Alternatively, perhaps we should just stop looking for differences altogether?"

In urging the use of the large data sets and powerful analytical protocols that are now available for brain study, Rippon

As someone who has spent a great deal of my life in male-dominated spaces, I am coming to recognize just how much that isolation from other women in my fields affected me and made me question my own worth.

This plasticity of brains coupled with social learning means that small children learn early on about the rules of gender and how they are supposed to act so that they will fit in.

Cont. on p. 20

Gender and Our Brains (cont. from p. 19)

notes that these days we can look at multiple variables, not only biological sex. And she points out that gender imbalances in mental and physical health conditions leads to a need for studies that do include sex differences that may well matter.

But as she points out in her conclusion, "We need to persistently challenge gender stereotypes." She goes on to say, "Neuroscience can play a role here. It can help bridge the gap between the old nature versus nurture arguments and show how our world can affect our brains…. Despite earlier waves of neurobunk and neurobaloney, neuroscience explanations are not always seductive nonsense."

This thorough and readable book provides us with analysis and data to block the misogynist stereotypes to which people are constantly subjected. Rippon is not as wickedly witty as Cordelia Fine, whose *Delusions of Gender* and *Testosterone Rex* can make the reader laugh out loud. But Rippon has given us an easily understood discussion of how brain imaging began and developed, coupled with a rigorous analysis of the flaws in many studies and clear descriptions of what we need to do to develop real understanding of human brains. That makes this a useful resource for all of us looking for an end to gender stereotyping.

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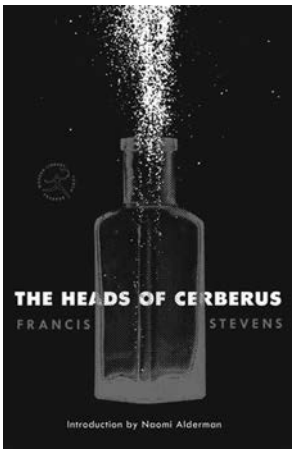
Nancy Jane Moore's books include *The Weave, Changeling,* and *Conscientious Inconsistencies*. At present she's writing nonfiction about empowerment self defense and fiction that incorporates Aikido, climate change, and a generation ship. She lives in Oakland, California.

The Dust of Purgatory

The Heads of Cerberus by Francis Stevens, Modern Library Trade Paperback, 2019, 198 pp., $15.

reviewed by Kathleen Alcalá



Originally published in serial form (in 1919's The Thrill Book*),* The Heads of Cerberus *was written by Gertrude Barrows Bennett, who was born in 1883…. Bennett, formerly a journalist, turned to pulp fiction when her husband died unexpectedly, producing about a dozen stories of which five were whole novels.*

"Sit down—sit down, man, and forgive me for a fool of an Irishman! Should you kill me right here for laughing, I'd not be blaming you."

And so the main characters in this novel, long acquainted, reintroduce themselves to each other, but mostly to the reader. A wealthy Irishman, a disreputable lawyer, and the Irishman's lovely young sister meet up in Philadelphia for a time travel romp.

The vehicle for their adventure is a mysterious gray powder kept in a glass vial with the heads of the dog Cerberus, guardian of the underworld, engraved on the lid. The lawyer, having left his native Cincinnati to begin a life of crime since he can no longer earn an honest living, happens to break into his friend's home, where he is knocked unconscious by another intruder. Because the vial has already been targeted, the Irishman is not surprised to see him, thus the inappropriate laughter. One accidently inhales some of the dust, and the rest follow.

Their destination, starting from 1918, is Philadelphia in 2118, a dystopic nightmare under the gaze of the huge statue of William Penn, transformed into a despotic god ruling over a closed city. Most of the action takes place in City Hall, where ignorance of history and the outside world is enforced on the sheep-like populace by a corrupt few. The descriptions in this book read like the sourcebook for novels such as *The Hunger Games* and *The Time Machine*. At the same time, we see the author dipping into the classical past with references such as the title; a wide, grassy expanse reminiscent of the Elysian Plane, and Jules Verne influences.

Originally published in serial form (in 1919's *The Thrill Book*), *The Heads of Cerberus* was written by Gertrude Barrows Bennett, who was born in 1883, under the pen name of Frances Stevens. Bennett, formerly a journalist, turned to pulp fiction when her husband died unexpectedly, producing about a dozen stories of which five were whole novels. The new edition of *The Heads of Cerberus* includes an introduction by British SF writer Naomi Alderman, who notes the

influence of the First World War in the treatment of individuals as interchangeable numbers to be flung into the breach. People in this politically themed fantasy no longer have names, but must display their numbers as lapel pins at all times. The ruling class holds a competition for their twelve positions as Loveliest, Cleverest, Quickest, et cetera, with foregone conclusions that insure a pampered position for life, until our time travelers arrive.

Terence Trenmore, the Irishman, suffers from stereotypes that include his distinct dialect, but also fits nicely into the current popularity of superheroes who can, because of their superior size and strength, get our protags out of a fix when things get a bit hot. His sister, Viola, is the epitome of the proper young lady, never left in danger of having her virginal status violated, although this danger is constantly implied. She also doesn't have as heavy an accent as her brother. Physical description is used throughout the book as a reflection of moral and intellectual standing, more common in literature of the early 20th Century, but still grating.

> A short, stocky, heavily built man emerged from behind the dais and took his place, standing fairly upon the eagle and dove symbol that covered the pit. Either his features or his title, in Trenmore's opinion, must be misleading. Those thin, cruel lips, narrow-set eyes, and low, slightly protruding forehead indicating several possible qualities; but benevolence was hardly of the number.

The Trenmores' Irish background serves a further purpose, however. The book is told in what literary critic James Wood calls "free indirect style," meaning, the point of view is in third person, but cycles through its closeness to the various characters.

Chapter Five starts out, "When the marvelous oversteps the bounds of known possibility there are three ways of meeting it." Because of their Catholic upbringing, Terence and Viola are able to face "every wonder as a fact by itself, to be accepted as such and let it go at that." The lawyer, Robert Drayton, "compromised on the second approach, and accepted with a mental reservation as, 'I see you now, but I am not at all sure that you are there or that I really believe in you!'" The third response would be madness. For this reason, the point of view sticks pretty closely to Drayton as the skeptic to whom things must be explained.

In trying to save each other from various forms of death, the travelers, along with a fourth companion, gradually find their own morality compromised. The Servants of Penn, as the twelve officeholders are called, constantly undermine and betray each other, drawing the travelers into their badly laid plans. Only when the four of them shake off the contagious behavior of the Servants and vow to die together are they able to find a way out.

By the end, Stevens manages to provide a workable explanation for all the goings-on, as well as leave things open for a sequel. While not a sequel, her most famous novel, *Citadel of Fear*, features many of the same tropes: a trio of two men and a woman as the adventurers, a lost city, and weird magic that draws on unsavory powers.

According to Scott Lazerus, in his Forays into Fantasy series (June 12, 2013), Stevens/Bennett published about a dozen stories, including five novels, between 1917 and 1923. Until 1952, her work had been ascribed to another writer, A. Merritt, who wrote in a similar style, and who acknowledged his admiration for her work. "Gertrude Barrows Bennett/Francis Stevens," says Lazerus, "deserves recognition both for her place in the development of weird fantasy, and for her writings themselves, which remain highly entertaining in a way that many of her contemporaries' works no longer do." *The Heads of Cerberus* is considered by many to be the first alternative history ever published.

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Kathleen Alcalá is the author if six books. She writes, teaches creative writing, and lives in the Northwest. More at www.kathleenalcala.com

what's the matter with

by Gwynne Garfinkle

no ingenue no leading lady hatchet-faced hag with eyebrows for days whatever happened to what's the matter with the matter is she won't go away how dare the faded ladies age hush hush why won't she shut up already whatever happened to sister cousin aunt Charlotte Alice Helen Jane what's the matter with Davis Crawford Stanwyck

the horror of the camera capturing her descent from dewy youth into middle age edging toward decay (unlike distinguished Jimmy Stewart William Holden Cary Grant) how dare she turn fifty-five fifty-six and even most unseemly sixty

this may-as-well-be-dead ringer for her former self no longer bankable/fuckable nothing to stop her going volcanic with rage feast your eyes on incandescent desperation time to sell her shattered scream her red-painted sneer her unhinged stare behold the movie star turned Medusa Medea in grotesque close-up she raises the axe and murders whatever happened to her

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Gwynne Garfinkle lives in Los Angeles. Her work has appeared in such publications as *Uncanny, Strange Horizons, Apex, Lackington's,* and *Not One of Us*. Her collection of short fiction and poetry, *People Change,* is available from Aqueduct Press.

The Salt We Take Away

by Mark Rich

Watery reachings arrive
and subside. Here, salt and sand interweave.
Sudsy risings for air. Subtle tuggings at feet.
I linger and wonder, and wait

for upwashings. Shells tumble like dice.
Snail spirals at wave-ebb all point to the life
had on land. In this way do they tell us to cleave
to our ways, ashore—to retreat

from upsweeping, turned tides? Yet their spires
may augur the way for keepers of lairs
in the deep. Their gazes I feel. Each roll
brings in chill, rippling fingers that pull

the sand from under my heels.
Should we urge them to air? Or swim for our fears?
This I ask of a crone, in the dark of her hut,
well inland. She gives me dry fruit,

nuts, and seeds, when I visit from fishing,
with briny-fresh catch. See this hourglass, filling
with sand, she says. Should they learn to breathe
in our air, on our land, we shall leave;

however much waves help relieve
our remembrance, our swept-away sorrows now give
to those forms—much like ours, with deeper blue skins—
cold longings. Say I: Salt runs

in our tears, in the wells of our eyelids—
our pulses mark surges, our own salted floods—
we eat salt, release it—our joy sings and sways
with the Moon—for we must be the sea's

as the sea's are these deep-keeping dwellers.
Why flee them? Her words mere sighs, she murmurs:
Such days are incoming, our hopes may well thin
in the way vision mists, as it dims

after gazing too long on green swells,
too long on gray foam—in the way touch dulls
in damp chill. Should undertow's emerald hand
then beckon, weak hearts might descend

to meet such strong as arise.
Yet air must we breathe. Even having had lives
swimming hard for forgetfulness, fresh in our salt
quicken dreams. In our salt, we depart.

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

And a Sleep Full of Sweet Dreams

by Sonya Taaffe

I dream of assassinating Endymion.
No one needs three thousand years of sleep
except me.
No goddess loved me the length of a dream
from Linear B through the Eurozone,
the fresco behind my eyes
Akrotiri in full sail and the no longer
emptiness
of the Akropolis,
no, what did he know of history
who dozed through Venizelos and the Bronze
Age Collapse?
Say Alexander lives and reigns,
say Endymion dreams
so long as he has a Greece to wake to,
no one envies a shepherd his endless pastoral
except me.
I too might have reckoned
a daughter each month of the Olympiad
a fair exchange for not being awake
for a one.

Uncle Sonya

by Sonya Taaffe

Uncle Sonya!
—Sebastian Wejksnora Garrott

…the play Chekhov inexplicably failed to write.
—Jean Rogers

Tell that hard-drinking doctor
we have left him the forests,
tell that second Schopenhauer
he can have the gun on the wall.
We are taking the piano, the pencils,
the desk where I wept into the accounts
before I tied them with my apron strings
to make a shipwreck in the Black Sea.
Think of the hayfields
white-crested with salt, not snow.
Tell that master of modern evasions
by his last act
he should have known better
than to leave a mermaid hanging.

Sonya Taaffe's short fiction and Rhysling Award-winning poetry have been collected most recently in the Lambda-nominated *Forget the Sleepless Shores* and previously in *Singing Innocence and Experience, Postcards from the Province of Hyphens, A Mayse-Bikhl*, and *Ghost Signs*.

Creating the World through Poetry/Collage
Jean LeBlanc

Featured Artist

Poetry is my way of exploring the world—my way to create a little corner of order and sense in the universe, as well as a way to travel through time. I use photography and collage to reinforce (for me) the primacy of the poetic image. For an image to begin to convey meaning, it must exist on literal and figurative levels simultaneously—this interplay of literal and figurative is what I strive to get onto paper, and what I experiment with through collage.

Each collage I create is a visual poem. Usually I begin with a human element: a face, an eye, a hand. Something botanical may follow, or something to add texture. Birds sometimes put in an appearance. A shard of text is usually present, and asemic calligraphy—abstract writing—adds to the mood and to the many possibilities of interpretation. Images in a poem can (should!) have different interpretations, and collage is a way to explore how meaning can transform from one viewer to the next—or even from one viewing to the next by the same set of eyes.

The interplay of literal and figurative is the key to the transformative power of literature and art. Metaphor, paradox, catachresis, pleonasm, anthimeria, tmesis—all these figures of speech have visual parallels in my collages. Synecdoche plays a central role in collage, where a part of something represents the whole. By using snippets of text in collage, I have come to understand the power, the magic, that can be contained in a phrase unburdened by context. "Rivers to slip." "Touches a question." Collage gives me a freedom in my poetry to let a phrase suggest meaning and something beyond. Suggest wonderment. Encourage astonishment.

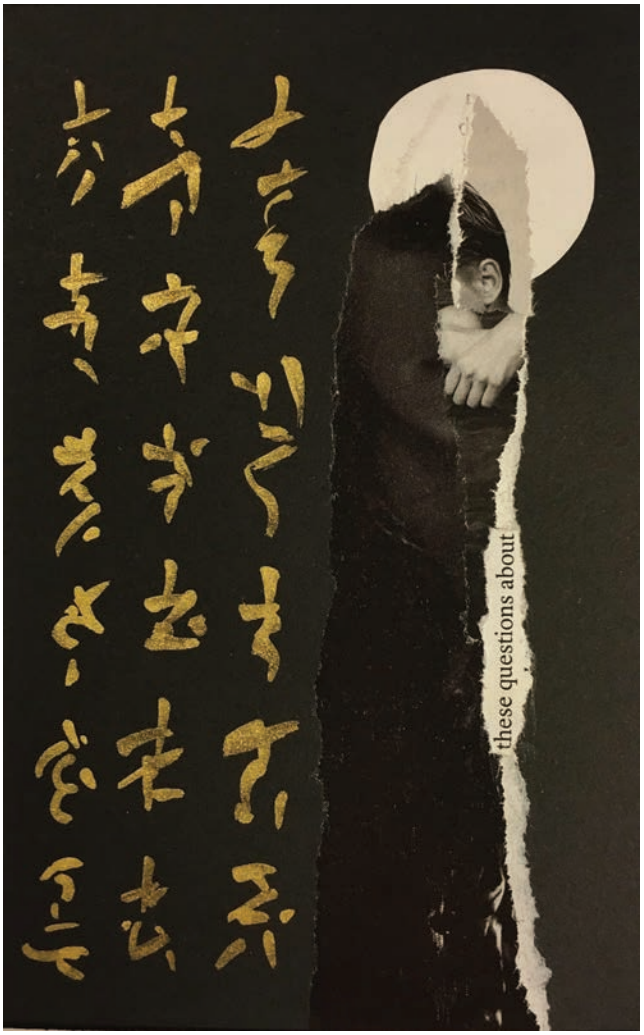
Finally, collage is a "feel thing." It is so satisfying to tear stuff up! Textured paper, tissue paper, glossy magazine paper—for me, every collage is a process of discovery, from materials to meaning.

I wrote above about poetry as my way to explore the world. It goes a little beyond "explore." For me, poetry is a way to create the world as it should be. At least for the brief interval of the poem, I am in control. I can bring to the foreground that which is beautiful and life-enhancing, and diminish that which would diminish me. And I hope that, for a reader, each poem is a portal to that slightly better world. I see now that this holds true for my collage work as well, especially the foregrounding of elements both visual and textual that enhance something thought-provoking or simply mood-provoking, some new way of seeing. From shape and color to subject matter and self, each collage I create offers a new way of seeing.

So much of life comes to us as collage. Dreams. Advertisements. Memories. Scrapbooks and photo albums. A small box of keepsakes. Gardens. Mosaics. Bookshelves. Junk drawer. Journal. Playlist. Birdsong. Map. All these quotidian things are composed of discrete yet interrelated images. Like poetry, these interrelated images can be organized (intentionally or accidentally or cognitively) as lyrical or narrative. The more poetry I write, the more I feel the terms "lyrical" and "narrative" present a false dichotomy. Collage is helping me get past these labels. My collages each tell a story. The story may be different for everyone who looks at the collage, but that's okay. Better than okay: It's the whole point.

To see more of my work and my thoughts on poetry, art, and the world around us, please visit:
www.jeanleblancpoetry.blogspot.com.
On Facebook: Jean LeBlanc Poetry.

falling fast



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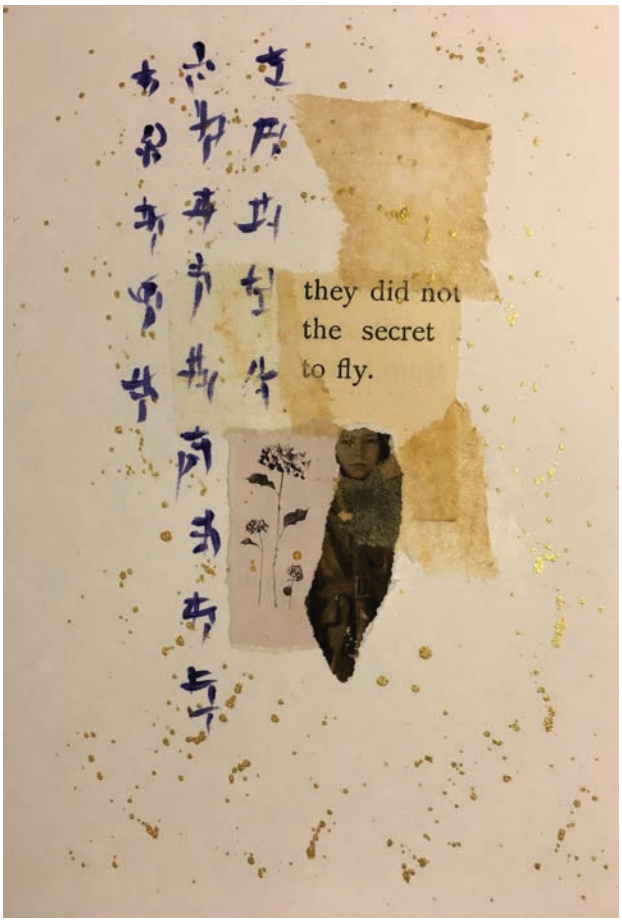

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