

Spring/Summer 2008
Volume 3

The Aqueduct Gazette

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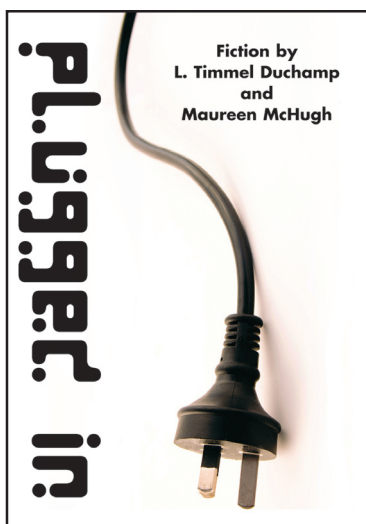
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Seeing Voices: A Conversation with Nisi Shawl

by Jesse Vernon



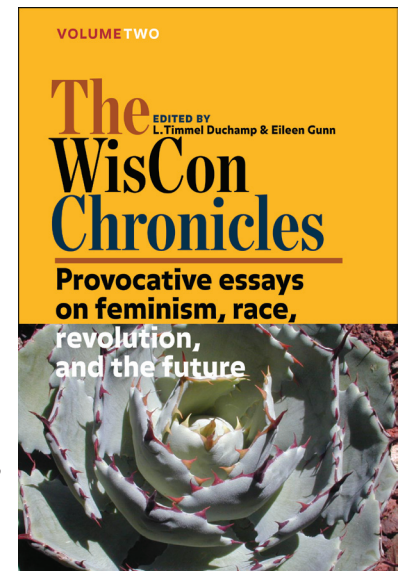
Whether drawing upon the protective power of watermelon vines, the healing power of funk, or the pragmatic power of intelligent women, Nisi Shawl's collection of short fiction sparks the imagination. Her synesthetic descriptions elucidate an often psychedelic perception of the worlds therein. The tales in *Filter House* leap forward and backward through time and space, deftly weaving all-too-real topics like resource depletion, colonization, and racism within fantastical worlds of persuadable dragons, fickle gods, and interstellar travel. In true Seattle fashion, we discussed these stories and their inspiration over the din of an espresso machine.

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WisCon Chronicles, Vol 2.

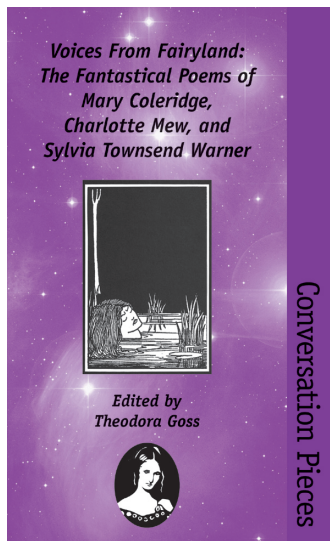
These provocative essays on feminism, race, revolution, and the future include:

- ✦ Kelly Link and Laurie J. Marks on books they love and asbestos pants
- ✦ Chris Nakashima Brown, L. Timmel Duchamp, and K. Joyce Tsai on the volatile "Romance of the Revolution" panel, with a transcript by Laura Quilter
- ✦ Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu, Naamen G. Tilahun, Catherynne Valente, Wendy Walker, and others on issues of race and gender
- ✦ Rachel Swirsky (and sixteen others) on how to deal with racism and sexism in writers' workshops
- ✦ Plus Elizabeth Bear, Rosalyn Berne, Susan Simensky Bietila, Nicola Griffith, Jacqueline A. Gross, Joan Haran, M.J. Hardman, Nora Jemison, Tom LaFarge, Mark Rich, Kate Schaefer, and Lawrence Schimel on WisCon past and future



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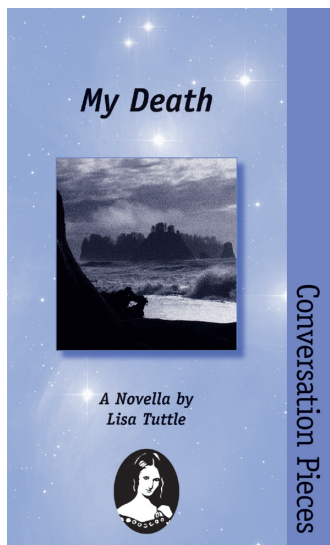
New and Forthcoming Conversation Pieces



See page 11 for a sampling of Coleridge's poems.

Forthcoming, Fall 2008

My Death by Lisa Tuttle



In *My Death* Lisa Tuttle brings us the story of the powerful, mysterious connection between the lives of two women writers, generations apart. Tuttle's evocative prose draws the reader on, to a shocking, inexorable climax only to invite a second, cooler reading, rich with feminist literary resonance.

The Fantastical Poems of Mary Coleridge by Theodora Goss

Some time ago, L. Timmel Duchamp asked me to edit an anthology of women poets of the fantastic for Aqueduct Press. For the anthology, I chose three poets: Mary Coleridge, Charlotte Mew, and Sylvia Townsend Warner. In this essay, I will tell you a little about Coleridge, who is one of my favorite poets, in part because she wrote one of my favorite poems.

I believe that "The White Women" is one of the most beautiful poems in the English language. (You can find it, and the other two poems I will discuss, at the end of this essay.) However, it is a difficult poem to explain to my students. The poem is a sort of dream, I tell them. Imagine that you are a woman living in the nineteenth century, with all of the legal, economic, and social restrictions of that time period. How would you envision a woman with the freedom and power you lacked? Perhaps you would envision her as a myth, based on classical references to the Amazons, the only examples you would have of women with that sort of freedom and power. So she would be beautiful, but also larger and stronger than men, a huntress frightening even to the predators of the natural world.

Perhaps you would write an alternate creation story for her, one that contains no Adam or Eve, and therefore no tasting of the Tree of Knowledge and no fall from Paradise. She would live in the world as it was originally created, in an eternal first morning. You could not imagine her in the world of men, the world in which you lived and in which she would become a curiosity, like the bearded woman in the sideshow. So she would live in a society of women, necessarily parthenogenic in the most literal sense—since parthenogenesis can be translated as "birth from a maiden," as Athena the maiden is called *Athena Parthenos*. And to protect herself, she would have a power even more deadly than her accurate arrows: she would be Athena and Medusa both, the maiden and "mortal to man." Envisioning her would itself be a potent and heretical act, a reclaiming and rewriting of mythical material that, because it comes from the Biblical and classical traditions, would be most available to male readers and interpreters. It would be, as the poem is, a beautiful heresy.

Seeing Voices 🌀 (cont. from page 1)

🌀 This collection of stories is entitled *Filter House*. What exactly is a “filter house”?

I like ocean things, I like marine biology [and] I enjoy anything oceanic. I found this article about appendicularia and was reading about them and then looked at other articles on the web and found out about filter houses. They are so, so gorgeous. They are so beautiful. And I was just really attracted to the idea of something that was so ephemeral and beautiful.

So [a filter house] is sort of like an underwater, 3-D spiderweb that [appendicularia] use to trap food. They are filter feeders but they build these filters outside their body that last for about two or three hours, until the appendicularia outgrows it or they become clogged, useless. Then they release them and they drift down to the lower levels of the ocean. If you’ve read about anything in marine ecology, you’ve heard about “marine snow”—all the lower levels of life subsist on [it]; that’s the basic element of their ecology. So [discarded filter houses are] a large component of marine snow. [I liked] the idea that it was something so basic, too.

I wanted to have the title of the collection not be a story and I wanted it to be the sort of combination of words that would make people think, “Well, what is that?” I also was drawn by this idea that the structure of the short story collection is ephemeral, that it’s made up of other elements that are brought together in this moment—because they are so short, short stories are sort of ephemeral too.

🌀 I noticed the theme of water throughout different pieces in this collection, although they were written over a span of eight years. Bodies of water seem to hold significant power in your many of these stories.

[Water has] pretty much always been a passion of mine. I feel very watery—I know we’re all composed of 90% water or something—but I really feel like not just my body is made out of water. When I think about astrology, I’m a Scorpio: a water sign. I practice this West African religion called Ifá and in Ifá, one of the things is that different orishas are said to rule different people’s heads. You’ll be closer to or have an affinity for a particular orisha. And the one that I’m close to is called Olokun, [who] rules the bottom of the ocean.

So all of that benthic stuff really, really excites me...I love it—it’s water.

🌀 The stories in *Filter House* contain a huge breadth of narrative voices—not only within the collection but within each story as well. They range from rural African-American dialects to a philosopher princess in a medieval Muslim community to disembodied prisoners. Will you talk more about what it’s like to make these shifts while you’re writing?

I’ve heard that there are people who write visually and people who write aurally. I hear everything—I hear the words. And so I hear those different voices—I hear the healer and I hear the aunt—and if I don’t hear them right, then I know I better not write them. ‘Cause they’ll be fake.

🌀 There is a lot of warmth in the relationships between your characters, especially the voices of children when they are narrating the stories. It feels like it captures something really familiar to me, even in stories that have nothing to do with my own history, or tradition, or culture, or spirituality....

I do write about children a lot. I use a child’s point of view quite frequently. Maybe it’s because you remember being a child. Some people forget that right away and I promised myself I would never forget what it was like to be little.

🌀 I told myself that too.

I think that some people really do forget. How can they live? [laughing]

🌀 In addition to writing stories, novels, and poetry, you also review books for the *Seattle Times*.

Yeah, I just turned in a review for a book called *In-cognegro* that’s a graphic novel, a mystery. Oh, it’s wonderful. It was the first graphic novel I’ve ever reviewed... I’ve also reviewed some science fact, like Oliver Sacks and stuff like that. And some books from Africa. Sometimes if a science fiction writer does something that’s not science fiction, I’ll review it—like I reviewed Molly Gloss’s *The Hearts of Horses* which is a western and the last two William Gibson books; he’s not writing science fiction anymore.

🌀 So you’ve had extra opportunity to be reading lots of different books. Who has influenced you in terms of your writing and who are some of your all-time-favorite authors?

Well, as far as who I want to emulate, for a long time I’ve really been influenced by Colette. She’s a French writer. She was most popular in the 1920s, 1930s, up through 1950—she had a good long run of a career. It’s very sensual writing; what I love about her writing is that there are no inanimate objects. They’re all characters.

I first got the idea that I could actually write science fiction and get other people to read it, besides my

“I promised myself I would never forget what it was like to be little.”

Seeing Voices 🌀 (cont. from page 3)

English teacher, from Suzy McKee Charnas. In the 1970s she came out with all this feminist science fiction. Particularly *Motherlines*—there's a nuclear war and all the head honchos have their little hideaway in the Colorado mountains and then several hundred years later the story starts with the civilization that developed in the aftermath of that. It was a very harsh story but it was really beautiful and courageous—a story of this woman who was one of the slaves of the patriarchy that developed from these war survivors and how she tries to find a mythical land where women were in charge. So I read that and thought, whoa, so you can write this kind of stuff, and get away with it. [laughing] So, that was a big influence.

When I'm not reading for pay (with the *Seattle Times*), when I'm not reading for the science fiction book club, which is another reading gig, or for my critique groups, I read Victorian literature. Because it's so different than, first of all, anything that I have to read for pay, and anything that's going on now. The class consciousness is so different and so unconscious. And the attention to detail and the attitudes—it's all sensawunda.

🌀 Hmm, that explains how you can capture so many different voices—that you're reading something that I don't think a lot of sci-fi authors are reading.

They're not reading the Trollope, they're not reading the George Eliot, no.

Who else? Samuel Delany. I found him early on. And Jack Vance, still very pleasant to read. I'm not gonna just sound cool here, I'll tell you the truth....

Let's see. I read a lot of romances at one point. Regency romances. They're the ones where, if it's getting really racy, the couple will hold hands. [laughing] Georgette Heyer, in particular was one of those. She has this great, great wit. And again there's a slang that they use in the Georgette Heyer novels. Those are set in regency period, you know, Jane Austen. She'll have the slang of the young blades, then she'll have the language of the older dames that are widows and dowagers and then she'll often have the language of people who are called Bow Street Runners—this was before police forces, they were freelance detectives. And then criminal slang. So maybe that has some influence on the different voices.

I'll tell you one more thing about different voices. Have you heard of the term code-switching'?

🌀 Yes.

Okay, so from the beginning I was code-switching. I was raised in a house where the people I lived with spoke different voices. You would speak one voice when you were talking to someone at a barbecue and another one when you were at a PTA meeting. So, it's like second nature, of course. I've carried it to such an extreme that one time I was taking orders over the phone at a natural foods warehouse—each person in the office had [their own] accounts and at one point, one of my favorite accounts said to me, about something that was suspicious that was happening with his order, he said, "There's a nigger in the woodpile." And I just never spoke to that person again. He had no idea who he was talking to, because I had been so good with the code-switching. So sometimes it's a little harsh on me.

🌀 How do you feel like your personal experiences with or political ideas around power and oppression influence the way you tell your stories? For example, in one story in this collection, "Deep End," prisoners are punished by being removed from their bodies and, in turn, given the bodies of their oppressors.

Well, that story, actually, was an invitation to write about colonization from a person-of-color's point of view. So I was drawing on the idea that a lot of times places are settled by prisoners, [like] Australia. And then I thought, corporations only get worse (or better depending on your point of view) at what they do. So what's one step further from sending you as a prisoner to do their dirty work of settling somewhere? The answer was, well, they don't really need the body. Just commodify the mind.

My take on politics...a lot of people would consider me really apolitical. When I was very young, like five and six and seven, one of my earliest memories was actually being on a picket line and picketing a drug store because they wouldn't hire black people. They were in a black neighborhood with all black customers, but they were all white. And I was out there marching on that. But when the World Trade Organization met here, I wasn't protesting. I didn't think that it would do any good, except make people that participated in it feel better, because they were doing something. But I didn't see that it would change anything. So I think that I probably have a pretty cynical view. I think that actually the ways to change things are to do things that are not necessarily considered political. I do them consistently. So, hopefully, people can change things by changing themselves.

"The fact that I write at all is pretty political."

I vote all the time. I've been told all the time that voting doesn't make any difference, but I know that people, that were my ancestors probably, fought for the right to vote. So, if someone was trying to keep them from doing it, then I'm going to do it. I think that the fact that I write at all, that I'm literate, is pretty political actually.

✿ Is there anything else that readers should know about *Filter House*?

I want to say one more thing. This goes back to when I was little. When I was little I heard [the saying], "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" and I couldn't understand that, because, one bird or two birds? Two birds are obviously worth more, plus you get this bush! Maybe it has berries on it and stuff. After someone finally explained it to me, I got the concept that having something in your hand is holding it and controlling it

"Two birds are obviously worth more, plus you get this bush! Maybe it has berries on it and stuff."

and that that is the boundary of yourself—your hand. But before that, no, the bush was mine too! And so what I want to give people is two birds and a bush.



To purchase *Filter House*, go to www.aqueductpress.com. More information about Nisi Shawl can be found at her homepage, www.sfw.org/members/shawl.

Endnote

- ¹ Code-switching is the alternate use of two or more languages or varieties of language, esp. within the same discourse. [*Dictionary.com Unabridged* (v 1.1). Random House, Inc. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/code-switching> (accessed: February 26, 2008).]

Feminist Science Fiction and WisCon: A Poly-Political Conversation with Eileen Gunn

by Jesse Vernon

For over thirty years, fans have been gathering in Madison, Wisconsin for the world's leading feminist science fiction convention: WisCon. After attending WisCon 30, L. Timmel Duchamp was prompted to begin *The WisCon Chronicles*, a collection of essays and conversations, rants and raves, reflecting on the preceding convention. Eileen Gunn, a short-story writer, editor, and Clarion West board member, joins L. Timmel Duchamp to co-edit the upcoming volume of *The WisCon Chronicles*. As a novice to the sf convention world, I sat down with Eileen to learn more about WisCon and the passions that inspired this anthology.



✿ Since I've never been to WisCon before, let's start with the basics. What is WisCon?

Well, I'm not necessarily the right person to answer that question. I'm just a participant, not an organizer of it, and I've only been attending for the last fifteen years or so. But I'll give it a try. It's a huge convention, about a thousand people, centering around the literature of science fiction and fantasy, and it's evolved over some thirty years to contain a bunch of smaller conventions—it's a local Madison science fiction convention, an international sf convention, a feminist convention, a convention that examines issues of gender, race, class, and culture in popular media, and lots more. From the very start, it was a feminist convention, but thirty years is a long time in terms of what feminism is, so its considerations have changed over time. And it's a local science fiction convention run by science fiction fans—not all of whom have necessarily been feminists....

✿ Has a lot changed since you first attended WisCon?

Well, yes and no. *I've* changed, the world has changed, politics has changed. There are a lot more women visible in sf now than there were thirty years ago, when WisCon started, and a lot more people of color visible in sf now than there were fifteen years ago when I started going. People of color have long written and read science fiction, but they haven't been particularly visible in the fannish community. Some of the white people at WisCon have not been particularly apt in dealing with race issues. Trouble has ensued. There is an annual panel on cultural appropriation that has been a particular point of stress because a lot of science fiction is built on cultural appropriation. Some writers think that all you need to do in order to write a science fiction novel is grab the features of some other global culture and set it on another planet. When those writers get up on a panel and start affirming their right to do that, the dialog can get pretty volatile.

Feminist Science Fiction and WisCon (cont. from page 5)

WisCon has demonstrated a commitment to pursue issues of race as well as gender, and I notice that WisCon 32 will offer several panels specifically on how to talk about racial issues.

🌟 How does WisCon compare with other science-fiction conventions?

Well, at WisCon, the focus is on exploring science fiction and fantasy from a point of view that is outside the middle-American mainstream. There are other cons that are not dissimilar—Potlatch, on the West Coast, is equally poly-political, and there are other conventions focused on feminist and gender issues, such as Diversicon in Minneapolis, and Think GalactiCon in Chicago. All sf conventions, including these, have wider interests now than in times past: comics, film, and anime, in addition to books, are likely topics for discussion. The focus at the big mainstream sf conventions, such as Norwescon, Boscon, and the Worldcon, is usually more about the details of a story or film than about its meaning or political subtext.

🌟 In the past, some feminist conventions have had controversial policies around transgendered people. How does WisCon approach the inclusion of trans folks?

In the past, some feminist conventions and feminist groups have been very unfriendly towards transgendered people. That has not been true at WisCon—WisCon has invited Guests of Honor who are transgendered. Gender identity issues are an integral part of the programming and the future and variety of human sexuality and gender is an ongoing part of the discussion.

🌟 So you and Timmi have edited the upcoming volume of the *WisCon Chronicles*. Why do you see a need for this kind of collection?

Well, partly because WisCon is so big. You can go to WisCon and only see a little tiny part of it. There are about sixteen tracks of programming, including an academic track, and then there are discussions during the con, every waking moment, continuing afterward on the Web. I see the *Chronicles* partly as a way of accessing interesting discussions you might have missed. Did you attend the panel “Romance of the Revolution”? Or “Colonialism... in...Space!”? Some of the salient points are re-considered here in the *Chronicles*.

In addition, each volume is a snapshot, a record. Each WisCon is different—as WisCon evolves and changes, the *Chronicles* are a way of tracking that change. I would love to have a bookshelf of the last thirty WisCons, and I would bet it would be of immense use to historians of feminism. Those volumes are not available, but with the *Chronicles*, we can go forward from WisCon 30, at least.

“Document, document, document!” as Liz Henry said. I see the volumes as being progressive, as giving, over time, a sense of history. We will be able to look back to see the spirit of the time—what we were interested in at any particular WisCon. The conference is too

“I see the WisCon Chronicles as being progressive, as giving you a sense of history.”

big for the *Chronicles* to provide even a summary of everything that was said and done, but both volumes so far have tried to provide both substantial essays and small snapshot-like comments on the convention. In this volume we asked people what they thought WisCon would be like in ten years, because it seemed to me that there was a lot of active change going on, both at WisCon and in the world as a whole, of which WisCon is a reflection. It gives participants a chance to voice their hopes and fears, whether they are worried that WisCon will change beyond their own interests, or whether they hope that WisCon will eventually pay attention to what they wanted to talk about most.

So to me the purpose of the book is both forward-looking and backward-looking, and it’s rooted in the individual year. So in some ways it’s a souvenir book, but it’s a souvenir of a con that maybe you didn’t actually get to, even if you were there. The book also includes formal essays by WisCon attendees on related matters that interest them.

🌟 Do you think the conversations that happen in the book will affect the programming/discussions at the next WisCon?

Well, I think that the discussions and arguments of past WisCons will inform the next one. That happens every year, and we have tried to document some of those issues in the *Chronicles*. The discussions about race and colonialism and revolution will continue. This is a passionate group of people, arguing about issues that matter to them, and they don’t all see things the same way. They are discussing changes that are needed both at WisCon and in our society.

“This is a passionate group of people, arguing about issues that matter to them, and they don’t all see things the same way. They are discussing changes that are needed both at WisCon and in our society.”

🌟 I think that the idea of putting that passion onto paper, externalized, makes it easier to deal with.

Yeah, it's very therapeutic.

🌟 Exactly.

Will you give readers a hint of what's to come in *The WisCon Chronicles: Volume 2*?

There will be discussions of feminism and race, of course, and about a lot of other topics discussed at WisCon.

Rachel Swirsky has collected sixteen short essays by writers and instructors on how to deal with sexism and racism in writers' workshops. Catherynne Valente contributes an essay on the journeys of certain fantasy heroines, Wendy Walker one about gender and race in the lives of the inventors of gothic literature. Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu tells how she worked with her publisher to make sure that the cover of her novel depicted the heroine as black. There's a totally charming essay by Tom La Farge that came out of a panel on how animals think.

It's not all politics all the time, but a lot of WisCon is politics and a lot of Aqueduct Press is politics, so we're being true to ourselves at both levels. Some of it is dialog about things that went on at the convention. There were some really intense discussions about race and about revolution, and we asked the participants, including K. Joyce Tsai, Chris Nakashima-Brown, and co-editor L. Timmel Duchamp, to continue them in the anthology.

🌟 It sounds like a lot of the discussions in this collection have come out of the cultural appropriation panel—is it an ongoing panel? Or have more panels stemmed out of that one?

There's a continuing (and volatile) panel at WisCon on cultural appropriation: every year, the discussion changes and the people who are on the panel change. No one came forward with an essay or detailed transcript of that panel, so we are not covering it directly, though the book includes substantial discussion about race issues and gender/race issues. I think people continue to want to be heard on that issue, and it will probably come up in future volumes.

🌟 What do you think the 2008 WisCon will be like?

I'm sure that in 2008 there will be more discussion about gender *and* race rather than *just* gender or *just*

race...partly because everybody's talking about it now, with the election. The outside world floods WisCon; it's not an isolated place. It's a place where everybody brings their present politics and their present opinions and their present interests to the discussion, which may or may not involve science fiction, may or may not involve comics.

Amid the current WisCon discussions about race, I am hearing a lot of familiar points being made, arguments that were used in discussions of feminist issues fifteen or twenty years ago. The discussion points haven't changed, but the people making them have changed. Twenty years ago there were not as many black fans, there were not as many black writers, and discussions of race were limited. People at WisCon didn't have a rock to rest that lever on. And now there are a lot of places to rest the lever: there are a lot of manifestations of racism, conscious and unconscious—we live in a racist society. A lot of the people of color at WisCon are simply demanding the same kind of respect that feminists were demanding thirty years ago. "You know, I'm actually a human being, and when you ignore me or treat me like an object or a symbol, that makes me *really mad*." That's the same point, whether you're making it because you're a woman or gay or lesbian or transgendered, or because you're African-American or Asian, or Hispanic, or whatever. "When you dismiss my ideas, my life experience, my right to say what I think, you really piss me off." I would say that's probably the ultimate WisCon comment, useful in all social situations.

"When you dismiss my ideas, you really piss me off." I would say that's probably the ultimate WisCon quote."

"The outside world floods WisCon; it's not an isolated place. It's a place where everybody brings their present politics and their present opinions and their present interests to the discussion."



For more information about WisCon, check out www.wiscon.info. More information about Eileen Gunn can be found at her webpage: www.eileengunn.com. To purchase *The WisCon Chronicles: Volume 2* or the previous volume, go to www.aqueductpress.com.

Hanging Out Along the Aqueduct...

by Ray Vanek

I have this weird relationship with books these days. I make money off them, but not in a way that affords me any literary cred. Not in a writing or publishing sense, in a retail sense. I'm a bookseller at a local independent bookstore. So this means that I'm around books all the time. I'm up on all the new stuff that's coming out, I know all about what people are saying about all the important authors, or those who are about to be important, or even those who were important a couple years ago (just to sound legit).

But, that said, I don't really read books that much. I should rephrase that. I don't finish new books as often or as quickly as I used to. It's been a long time since I was so caught up by a book that I was nailed to my seat till it was done and wanted to flip back to the beginning the minute I finished in order to stay in that world as long as I could. (Wait, I just lied: Kelley Eskridge's *Dangerous Space* did that to me. Before that it had been years.)

Working at Bailey/Coy Books is like being around a smorgasbord all the time: taking little tastes from all the different dishes to figure out what I'm hungry for, then realizing that I have filled up on mouthfuls and have no desire to sit down to an entire meal. Ever been at a party with a big spread that offers so many choices you can't eat? When I get to that point, all I ever want is something familiar. So I stick to home cooking. By that I mean books that I first consumed, most likely devoured, years ago and come back to often because I have now acquired a taste for them and they satisfy my specific appetite. My versions of literary soul food are things written by J. D. Salinger, particularly *Nine Stories* and *Franny and Zooey*; and Jeanette Winterson, mostly *The Passion* and *Gut Symmetries*. Sometimes I need to throw back even farther to the nostalgia of the young adult fantasy worlds of Ursula K. LeGuin's Wizard of Earthsea trilogy (oh, wait, there are four), Susan Cooper's The Dark Is Rising series, and my absolute favorite: Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy. If you haven't read this, you are missing an intensely satisfying taste treat delight—a full, many course meal of adventure, science fiction, fantasy, alternate world theory, religious philosophy, thought experiments, science experiments, and of course, love experiments.

When I'm not re-reading old faves, I find I can do short stories: bite-sized morsels like grapes that you can pop into your mouth and press all the juice out of in a moment, enjoying that burst of intense flavor that leaves you refreshed without feeling stuffed. 'Cuz it's hard to fill

up on grapes. And maybe that's my plan—to travel light. I joke with my co-worker, James, who has a penchant for thick, epic tomes, that my fear of commitment is so strong I can't even commit to reading a long book. Maybe too much of my life is about putting forth my own ideas, so that I don't want to clog my brain with other people's unless they are gonna to help inform mine.

That said, I have been very grateful to a few books I read this past year that now constitute the marinade in which my ideas have been steeping: the title story in the aforementioned *Dangerous Space*; a novella by Elizabeth Hand, called *Illyria*, about young lovers carving out a secret space for themselves in their family home; and *The Madness of Love* by Katharine Davies, a re-imagining of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* in modern-day England. In fact, that's my favorite of the bard's works; I just saw it at the Seattle Rep and it figures into *Illyria* too so it should go on the list...along with Everett True's *Nirvana: The Biography*. (I guess that makes me all about passion, music and cross-dressing...hmm...)

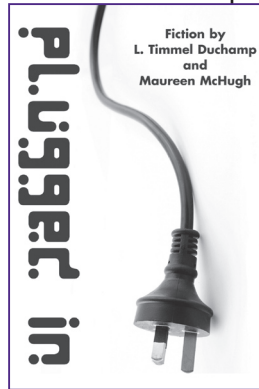
Maybe it's just that I'm picky. Sometimes, when work is slow, I find myself fishing the pools of the new title tables, trying to find something that matches the taste I want in my mouth, the specific hunger I feel rumbling. I grab a title that looks intriguing—a cover that catches my eye, something I remember reading a review of, something my coworker liked—and just as I'm about to crack the cover I balk at actually taking a bite out of this new dish. Most likely I already have an inkling as to its flavor. It's my job, after all, to know about these things—to be able to talk intelligently about them and make recommendations when needed. So what is it that keeps me from sampling the freshly caught specimen in my hands? The fear that it won't live up to my idea of it. That it won't be as luscious as I want it to be.

Cuz, like I said, my cravings are kinda particular. So much so, and so viscerally, that I don't know if I can put into words what I'm looking for. That haunting bitter memory at the back of my throat, that specific spiciness I keep trying to smell out, that savory flavor that never fails to make me salivate—these indicators of the perfect book to sink my teeth into waft to me from some strange bouillabaisse made up of the books, movies and music I love, the stories my friends tell me, the dreams I've had and the characters that occupy my brain. And maybe this means I should just sit down and write the book floating around and through my senses like the scent of bacon

on Sunday morning seeping into your dreams until your stomach wakes you up. But maybe I don't dare try cuz that same fear grips my throat again—that it won't live up to my idea. Cuz, you see, I'm just not sure if I'm as good a cook as my own special tastes require.



For more musings by Ray Vanek, go to rayvanfox.blogspot.com.



PLUGGED IN

In Maureen McHugh's "Kingdom of the Blind," Sydney, one of the codemonekys who maintain DMS, the software system that keeps the physical plants of the Benevola Health Network running, suspects the recent outages in the system may be a sign of the system's sentience rather than a simple corruption of its code. Her fellow geeks view the reset button as a possible if drastic solution for restoring the system's integrity, but Sydney fears it might be a much too Final Solution...

In L. Timmel Duchamp's "The Man Who Plugged In," Howard Nies becomes the first male to plug into a Siemens Carapace. And as an ad in the February 2013 issue of *The American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* notes, the Siemens Carapace is "a prenatal cradle of caring" at the cutting edge of technology, "made of the finest, strongest, most lightweight materials ever produced. Its clean, round lines and soft, silvery matte finish can't fail to reassure both the parents and the gestational carrier who wears it that the child within is getting better care and protection than any naturally gestated child..."

Fantastical Poems (cont. from page 2)

So, who was Mary Coleridge? She was born in 1861, into a famous literary family: her great-great uncle was Samuel Taylor Coleridge and her great aunt was Sara Coleridge. The Coleridges entertained important literary and artistic figures of the day, such as Anthony Trollope; Alfred, Lord Tennyson; Robert Browning; Sir John Everett Millais; William Holman Hunt; John Ruskin; Fanny Kemble; and Jenny Lind. Coleridge was educated at home, but was also tutored by William Cory. She learned Greek from him, which she spoke in addition to German, French, Italian, and Hebrew. Although Coleridge spent her life within a close circle of family and friends, the languages she spoke hint at what must have been significant intellectual attainment for a woman in the Victorian, or in any, era.

During her relatively short lifetime she published five novels, a collection of essays, and a biography of William Holman Hunt. She also regularly wrote short stories and reviews for popular magazines. Coleridge did not initially intend to publish her poems, but a friend who was related to the poet Robert Bridges arranged for him to see a selection. Bridges was so impressed that he arranged for the publication of her first poetry collection, and a second collection was published a year later. Coleridge died in 1907 following an operation for appendicitis. The poems published during Coleridge's lifetime were only a small number of those she wrote. When her collected poems were edited after her death, the editor chose from over three hundred that she had written. Most of the poems

"The problem with this recent scholarly approach is that it neglects the power of the fantastic to comment on social conditions, particularly by envisioning alternatives to them."

not included in that collection were destroyed, presumably by her family.

Scholars writing from a feminist perspective have recently brought necessary and overdue attention to nineteenth-century women poets like Coleridge who, although popular during their lifetimes, have never been included in, or have fallen out of, the canon. But the tendency has been to concentrate on women poets who were politically engaged, particularly with women's issues, who wrote, directly and in realistic detail, about contemporary social conditions such as the plight of working women. Coleridge is not one of those poets: she once said that "Woman with a big 'W' bores me supremely." The problem with this recent scholarly approach, I believe, is that it neglects the power of the fantastic to comment on social conditions, particularly by envisioning alternatives to them. "The White Women" is part of a tradition of feminist utopian writing that has always been fantastical; to understand its place in English literature, read it with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "Herland," Joanna Russ's "A Few Things I Know About Whileaway," and Suzy McKee Charnas's *Motherlines*. I believe that fantasy has a subversive power that realism lacks because, rather than showing us how things are, it allows us to envision how they might be. Coleridge's fan-

Fantastical Poems (cont. from page 9)

tastical poems are powerful examples of how fantasy can also be social commentary.

The most important critical consideration of Coleridge's work has been in Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic*. Coleridge's "The Other Side of a Mirror" is central to Gilbert and Gubar's argument that nineteenth-century women writers had to write themselves out of the speechlessness to which they were consigned by a patriarchal literary culture. For Gilbert and Gubar, the poem itself is a rewriting of the famous scene in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* when Jane looks into the mirror and sees the face of the madwoman, Bertha Rochester. Notice that, like Bertha in Brontë's novel, the image in the mirror is voiceless: "Her lips were open—not a sound / Came through the parted lines of red." If the woman on the other side of the mirror can indeed be considered Bertha Rochester, then Coleridge does not allow her to speak as powerfully as Jean Rhys does in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where Bertha is allowed to tell her own story. But Coleridge stresses, as Rhys does not, that Jane and Bertha are one, that Bertha's voice is Jane's. The rational voice is also the voice of the madwoman.

But there is another way we might think about the madwoman in the mirror. Coleridge tells us:

And in her lurid eyes there shone
The dying flame of life's desire,
Made mad because its hope was gone.
And kindled at the leaping fire
Of jealousy, and fierce revenge,
And strength that could not change or tire.

If you have read Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, you may recognize this stanza, aside from its female pronoun, as an accurate description of Victor Frankenstein's monster, whose revenge often does, quite literally, take a fiery form. I believe that, behind the reference to one important woman writer, Coleridge has hidden another: she has given us not only Bertha Rochester, but also Mary Shelley's monster, or perhaps his female counterpart, the female monster who is necessarily voiceless because Frankenstein refuses to create her. She too, if she were created, would have untiring strength, and Frankenstein's refusal is based in part on his fear that she will be as jealous and vengeful as the monster he has created.

In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar identify "The Witch" as a rewriting of Samuel Taylor

Coleridge's "Christabel." But once, a student of mine proposed what I believe is an equally interesting reading: that if one of Coleridge's White Women had been born not in a primeval forest but in nineteenth-century society, she would have been the Witch of the poem. Fettered by nineteenth-century social stereotypes, she would have appealed to those stereotypes: "I am but a little maiden still," she would have said. "My little white feet are sore." Once admitted into the house, she would become as deadly as the White Women, as mortal to man.

Gilbert and Gubar identify two social stereotypes that stifled the women writer: the angel and the monster. In "Professions for Women," Virginia Woolf famously tells us that women had to kill the angel in the house. According to Gilbert and Gubar, she also had to kill the monster, the cautionary image that society held up to her as in a mirror, to say, "This is what you could become if you are not angelic." But Coleridge does not kill the monster: she reclaims her. Her most important female characters, her Witch, her White Women, are monsters, and they have a range of voices. The Witch has "the voice that woman have," the deceptive voice that uses social stereotypes to gain what she desires.

However, The most interesting voice in Coleridge's poetry, I believe, belongs to the White Women:

Their words are not as ours. If man might go
Among the waves of Ocean when they break
And hear them—hear the language of the snow
Falling on torrents—he might also know
The tongue they speak.

Their voices are unintelligible to us because they belong to, and have a relationship with, the natural world that we have lost. The three poems I have discussed are centrally about voice. They can, as in "The Other Side of a Mirror," be about losing voice. But they are also filled with voices: the voices of women crying the "war-cry of the storm," pleading for their heart's desire, and identifying themselves in the mirror, because finally, even the madwoman in the mirror has a voice. "I am she!" says the woman whose reflection she is, speaking for them both, claiming her monstrosity. Entranced by the beauty of Coleridge's poetry, we may not at first recognize its power. But it is as powerful as Frankenstein's female monster, come to speaking life.



More information about Theodora Goss can be found at www.theodoragoss.com. To purchase *Voices from Fairyland* visit www.aqueductpress.com.

"The rational voice is also the voice of the madwoman."

The White Women

Where dwell the lovely, wild white women folk,
Mortal to man?

They never bowed their necks beneath the yoke,
They dwelt alone when the first morning broke
And Time began.

Taller are they than man, and very fair,
Their cheeks are pale,
At sight of them the tiger in his lair,
The falcon hanging in the azure air,
The eagles quail.

The deadly shafts their nervous hands let fly
Are stronger than our strongest—in their form
Larger, more beauteous, carved amazingly,
And when they fight, the wild white women cry
The war-cry of the storm.

Their words are not as ours. If man might go
Among the waves of Ocean when they break
And hear them—hear the language of the snow
Falling on torrents—he might also know
The tongue they speak.

Pure are they as the light; they never sinned,
But when the rays of the eternal fire
Kindle the West, their tresses they unbind
And fling their girdles to the Western wind,
Swept by desire.

Lo, maidens to the maidens then are born,
Strong children of the maidens and the breeze,
Dreams are not—in the glory of the morn,
Seen through the gates of ivory and horn—
More fair than these.

[...]

And none may find their dwelling. In the shade
Primeval of the forest oaks they hide.
One of our race, lost in an awful glade,
Saw with his human eyes a wild white maid,
And gazing, died.

From a legend of Malay, told by Hugh Clifford.

The Other Side of a Mirror

I sat before my glass one day,
And conjured up a vision bare,
Unlike the aspects glad and gay,
That erst were found reflected there—

The vision of a woman, wild
With more than womanly despair.

Her hair stood back on either side
A face bereft of loveliness.
It had no envy now to hide
What once no man on earth could guess.
It formed the thorny aureole
Of hard unsanctified distress.

Her lips were open—not a sound
Came through the parted lines of red.
Whate'er it was, the hideous wound
In silence and in secret bled.
No sigh relieved her speechless woe,
She had no voice to speak her dread.

And in her lurid eyes there shone
The dying flame of life's desire,
Made mad because its hope was gone,
And kindled at the leaping fire

Of jealousy, and fierce revenge,
And strength that could not change nor tire.

Shade of a shadow in the glass,
O set the crystal surface free!

Pass—as the fairer visions pass—
Nor ever more return, to be
The ghost of a distracted hour,
That heard me whisper, "I am she!"

The Witch

I have walked a great while over the snow,
And I am not tall nor strong.
My clothes are wet, and my teeth are set,
And the way was hard and long.
I have wandered over the fruitful earth,
But I never came here before.
Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!

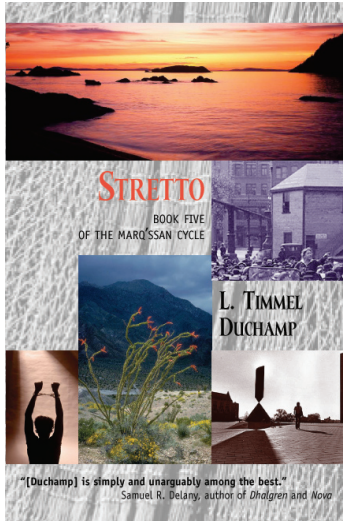
The cutting wind is a cruel foe.
I dare not stand in the blast.
My hands are stone, and my voice a groan,
And the worst of death is past.
I am but a little maiden still,
My little white feet are sore.
Oh, lift me over the threshold, and let me in at the door!

Her voice was the voice that women have,
Who plead for their heart's desire.
She came—she came—and the quivering flame
Sank and died in the fire.
It never was lit again on my hearth
Since I hurried across the floor,
To lift her over the threshold, and let her in at the door.

The Marq'ssan Cycle Comes to a Close

Book V: *Stretto*

by L. Timmel Duchamp



Stretto, the grand finale of the Marq'ssan Cycle, weaves together the major threads of the Marq'ssan story and encourages readers, as feminist critic Joan Haran says, "to write beyond the ending." The novel, like the series as a whole, inquires. Whose world is it? and shows several possible ways of answering the question through the respective perceptions and perspectives of the novel's five viewpoint characters: Alexandra Sedgewick, heir to the Sedgewick estate; Anne Hawthorne, Security operative; Hazel Bell, subversive activist; Celia Espin, human rights lawyer; and Emily Madden, star pupil of the maverick Marq'ssan, Astrea I Betut san Imu. As always, never predictable, never finished, the consequences of all that has gone before continues to play out.

"This is a series that is deeply invested in social transformation while resisting any temptation to consolation."

—Joan Haran, author of *Human Cloning in the Media*

"The latest book in the Marq'ssan Cycle might just be the best yet, part of a series that is the most important political SF published in the last decade. Praised by the likes of Cory Doctorow and Samuel Delany, Duchamp's accomplishment here is deadly, sharp, emotional, and intelligent."

—Jeff VanderMeer

www.omnivoracious.com/2008/03/science-fiction.html

Forthcoming, 2009

Cheek By Jowl

Essays by Ursula K. Le Guin

In this collection of eight essays Le Guin argues passionately for the necessity of fantasy in making and negotiating our world and refuses the ghettoization of both fantasy and "kid's lit" in favor of the supposedly more literary (and serious) realism.

"The monstrous homogenization of our world has now almost destroyed the map, any map, by making every place on it exactly like every other place, and leaving no blanks. No unknown lands..."

In reinventing the world of intense, unreproducible, local knowledge, seemingly by a denial or evasion of current reality, fantasists are perhaps trying to assert and explore a larger reality than we now allow ourselves."

~ from "The Critic, the Monsters, and the Fantasists"

Centuries Ago and Very Fast

by Rebecca Ore

A gay immortal born in the Paleolithic who jumps time at will, Vel has hunted mammoths, played with reindeer tripping on hallucinogenic mushrooms, negotiated with each successive wave of invaders to keep his family and its land intact, lived as the minor god of a spring, witnessed the hanging of "mollies" in seventeenth-century London as well as the Stonewall riots in twentieth-century New York City. He's had more lovers than he can remember and is sometimes tempted to flirt with death. *Centuries Ago and Very Fast* offers fascinating, often erotic glimpses of the life of a man who has just about seen it all.



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