



# The Aqueduct Gazette

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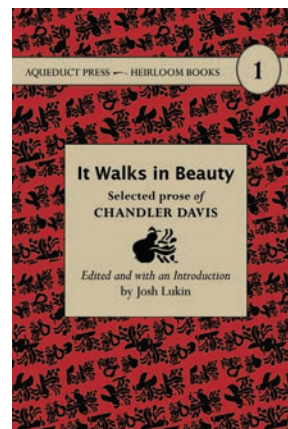
## New from Eleanor Arnason

### TOMB OF THE FATHERS: A Lydia Duluth Adventure

In this witty romp of a planetary romance, Lydia Duluth joins a motley crew of intergalactic travelers to explore the long lost homeworld of the Atch, who have a mysterious history they'd like to keep buried on the planet they left behind. But the expedition goes alarmingly awry when a rogue AI, determined to keep the planet and its system quarantined, destroys the stargate, and the expedition is stranded on the planet. The travelers soon encounter the native Atch and discover the Tomb of the Fathers—and what can happen when childcare becomes the dominant issue for a species.



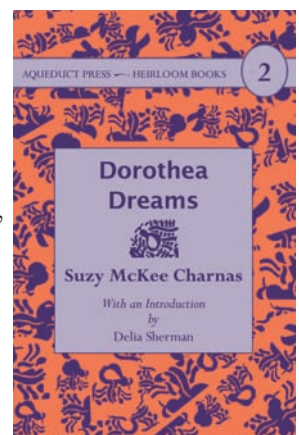
...thought-provoking and entertaining  
~ *Booklist*, May 2010



what it is today—work that though clearly of its time is still pleasurable to read, work that is thought-provoking, work that can still speak powerfully to readers. The series takes its name from the seeds of older strains of vegetables, so valuable and in danger of being lost. Our hope is to keep these books from being lost, as works that do not make it into the canon so often are.

## Aqueduct Launches a New Series: Heirloom Books

*It Walks in Beauty, Selected Prose of Chandler Davis*, edited by Josh Lukin, along with Suzy McKee Charnas' *Dorothea Dreams* are the inaugurating publications of the new Heirloom Books series. The series, launched at this year's WisCon, aims to bring back into print and preserve work that has helped make feminist science fiction

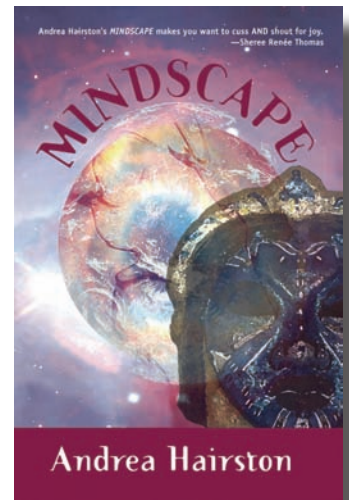


# Mindscape Wins Parallax Award

The Carl Brandon Society has belatedly awarded Andrea Hairston's 2006 novel *Mindscape* its 2006 Parallax Award. *Mindscape*, as you may recall, was on the Tiptree Honor List and was also a finalist for the Philip K. Dick Award.

Sheree Thomas said this about *Mindscape*: "Science fiction at its best, Andrea Hairston's *MINDSCAPE* makes you want to cuss *AND* shout for joy—its vision, raw humanity, and ultimate hopefulness are exhilarating."

The Carol Brandon Society's Parallax Award is given for speculative fiction by writers of color as well as works that deal with race and ethnicity. The Society was conceived at the 1999 WisCon and named after a 1950s hoax of a fake black fan (an account of this bizarre occasion, plus the emergence of the Carl Brandon Society, can be found in Helen Merrick's new book, *The Secret Feminist Cabal*).



## ➤ Toward a New Narrative ➤

"In the study of history, control of the narrative controls power... The right narrative in politics can win an election, gather a mob, destroy an enemy, start a war."

From Eileen Gunn's Introduction to *Narrative Power*

Many of us live in a culture that dislikes, devalues, and dismisses narrative in its overt form, only to embrace it uncritically in other ways. This collection of thoughtful, conversational, and often brilliant essays grapples with narratives of politics, of race, and of national identity, among many others. And each of the sixteen writers in *Narrative Power: Encounters, Celebrations, Struggles* deals, in their own way, with questions about the nature of fiction and truth, and the endless permutations of the two.

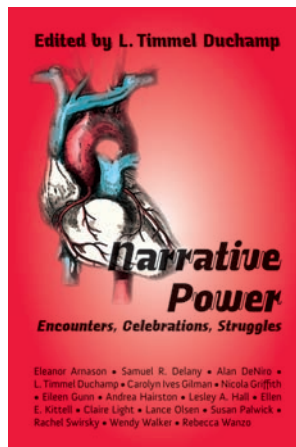
One difference between theorists and artists is that theorists can be content to dismiss an artform as irredeemably flawed. The artist can't afford to—it's her business to make the art work. Likewise, while this book engages head-on with criticism of narrative failure, it also contains energetic affirmations of narrative potential. There is a sense of responsibility here, to the text and to the audience, even as those two slippery factions elude attempts to pin them down. *Narrative Power* is full of faith in the unknown and unquantifiable part of narrative, and also impassioned suggestions for a new kind of writing, a narrative in spite of all.

*Narrative Power* is divided into three sections: Narrative and History, Narrative Politics, and Narra-

tive and Fiction Writing. Within that structure, the collection has an organic rhythm, a coherence that seats fiction writers and academics at the same inclusive table. Andrea Hairston proclaims that stories are "more important than facts." Susan Palwick asks us to "dream of better futures, even if those futures initially seem like unreachable utopias." Samuel Delany moves elegantly from a Clarion anecdote to a discussion of the relationship between cliché and racism, to a reflection on the particular pleasure/use of science fiction.

For every celebration, a caution. While acknowledging narrative as a fact of life, Carolyn Ives Gilman examines the devastating ways that some of our most invisible stories—how time works, for example—play out when they encounter unlike stories. Rebecca Wanzo examines how narrative shapes why the disappearance of white girls in the US is a national crisis, while the disappearance of black girls is just a fact of life.

Many of the critiques offered in this book speak critically of the Western taste for stories of conflict, heroism, and individuals, in a world whose reality operates at the level of systems and forces, and whose individual women often make their mark through collaboration and group-members. Lance Olsen makes an appeal for the uneasy, the strange, the opaque—in order to tune a satellite array of minds in just the right direction necessary for a broad shift in consciousness. Alan DeNiro's "Rereading Van Vogt" looks at how consciousness shifts themselves were the focus of some of the Golden-Age Granddads of SF—making the New Wave not the breaking point, but a successive one, in the history of science fiction.



## ↻ A Conversation with Helen Merrick ↻ by Paige Clifton-Steele

*You've just been nominated for a Hugo in the "best related work category." How do you feel about that?*

I have to admit, when I first found out I was short-listed for best related work, I felt sure it was the work of the aussie mafia—there was a great homegrown campaign here to get local writers into the limelight for Hugo nominations, since Melbourne is hosting the Worldcon for 2010. However, when I saw the final short list I was truly blown away! Not just because of who I was up against, but the fact that there were three pretty obviously feminist-related works on the ballot!

Sadly, none of our great Australian sf writers got nominated, although there are four of us on the list, including three from Western Australia (which is a coup given we are the most isolated and sparsely populated part of Australia). The timing is amazing, as the only reason I will be able to attend the ceremony is because Worldcon is in Australia this year, and I am co-convening the academic stream so I have no excuse! The last time a Worldcon was in Australia was Melbourne 1999, which was my first (and I thought only) Worldcon, and where the WisCon-related book *Women*

*of Other worlds* was launched. It's wonderful to know I will be at the ceremony and hopefully have the chance to do a global/Australian launch of *SFC*—I'm not sure if I can manage lamingtons this time, but I know that I will be making the most of a Worldcon on my doorstep and can't wait to meet up with many old and new friends!

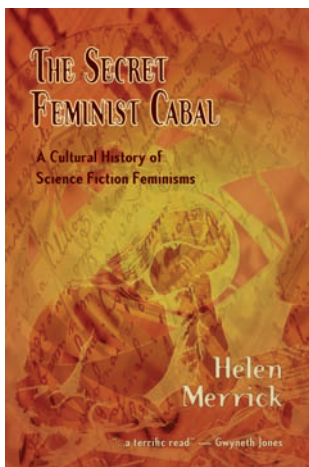
*In the beginning of your book, you immediately identify yourself as a fan among fans. Do you think it's important that works like this should be written by people who claim that title?*

That old question of "who can speak".... Well, it was important for me to locate myself as a fan as well as academic, although I am not as active in the fannish community as many, and I discovered fandom through academia, so I'm what you'd call an "acafan." For me, discovering fandom changed what I thought of as my "object of study"—it was no longer solely sf texts, but the sf community more broadly. As someone trained as a historian, rather than a literary critic, I am much happier poring over old magazines and fanzines than focusing on analyzing the fictional texts. Really, I've never been that comfortable or happy doing "lit-crit," usually because I like to read sf as a (very greedy) reader, rather than with my critic's hat on!

So there are particular reasons my journey through feminism and sf turned out this way, but I certainly wouldn't argue this is the only way to do it, or that one must claim membership of any particular community in order to reflect on the meaning of "sf feminisms." Whilst there may have been a time when academic sf criticism divorced itself—consciously or otherwise—from fan communities and writing, I think most people writing about the genre have at least a sense of the importance of the sf community in making the genre what it is. Yet, as the contentious online debates of the last few years have made very clear, terms like "feminist sf" and the "sf community" continue to obscure very important differences in opinion and experience, particularly in terms of race.

In practical terms, having connections within fandom makes available certain resources and stories

### *The Secret Feminist Cabal* Nominated for a 2010 Hugo



*Conversation with Helen Merrick* (cont. from p. 3)

that would be difficult for those outside the feminist sf community, for example, to access. For me, it was a comfortable place to write from—I don't think I could go out and write in the same way about, say, slash communities, or vidding communities. This is not to say I couldn't, or shouldn't, but it would be a very different kind of study; one that wouldn't come from the same place of shared passion and pleasure.

*You've done extensive research and turned up surprising results about a science fiction community that has, in some ways, been more progressive than the feminist mainstream. Did you have a strong sense, when you began writing this book, of the kind of history that you would find, or was much of it a surprise?*

There were of course surprises along the way—that's one of the joys of doing research after all. However, pretty early on in my fascination with feminist sf, I became aware of the fact that, despite the assumption that sf was a "boy's genre," there was this long history of women's involvement. I was in contact with Justine Larbalestier while we both researched our PhDs, and she pointed me to Connie Willis's article "The women SF doesn't see." So right from the beginning I was aware of the counter-narrative to the notion that women only entered sf in the '60s and '70s. But the devil is in the detail, and it was a revelation to read the kinds of battles that went on between authors like Joanna Russ and Vonda McIntyre with various male authors, fans, and critics, and to realize how fraught, politically and personally, some of those battles with other authors and friends (both male and female) could be. And to admire the tenacity of those women who kept trying to do the feminism 101 lesson over and over again. Sadly, too many of those debates don't sound so dissimilar from those we might read today. Nevertheless, what has always struck me in reading such debates is that at least people were and are talking—and sometimes listening. As I think both Avedon Carol and Nalo Hopkinson say in different ways—sf hasn't been perfect, but it has seen some change, and offered the space for these vital, hopeful conversations.

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*Donna Haraway cautions against viewing the cyborg as a product of technophilia, specifically "for example, those who relegate the cyborg to an odd, attenuated kind of technophilic euphoria." But I think a lot of people come to sf in childhood, and embrace it prior to any understanding, out of something that looks a lot like a technophilic (gee-whiz!) impulse. Is there some contradiction buried here? Can that impulse be trusted to serve greater purposes sometimes?*

That's a tricky question! Before I talk about sf, it is important to remember the context in which Haraway

was writing the Cyborg Manifesto, which has been harnessed to all sorts of very different political and theoretical projects than those Haraway was speaking to. The Manifesto was a historically specific response to the state of "feminism/s" in the mid 1980s Reagan/Star Wars era, where essentialism was not yet a dirty word and the state of engagement between feminism and techno-culture was mostly antagonistic. As your question acknowledges (but many techno-culture critics do not) Haraway was never an advocate of technophilia in any form. But (as I trace more complexly in the book) she argues that feminism cannot afford to ignore techno-science and all its political, economic, and material ramifications in our society—we need to contest for and within the "belly of the monster" that is our contemporary militarist techno-scientific context.

As a trained scientist, and someone who appreciates and indeed "loves" biology, Haraway wants to critique the practices and end-goals of techno-science, whilst still remaining fascinated and invested in its "objects of knowledge." Not that different, really, from many sf authors. You investigate, interrogate, and rage against the things you most love and care about. You wonder, "where will this take us," "who do we become when we think this way"? To return to your question, I don't think it is so much the "gee whiz" impulse as the *sensa-wonder* "what if" impulse that in my mind links Haraway, sf writing, and my own adolescent experience. Technology—like the cyborg-hybrid—is only a part; what is important is the mindset that is open to knowing, to recreating the world as we thought we knew it. For Haraway, openness to sf world-building is an important element of techno-cultural literacy

*Conversation with Helen Merrick* (cont. from p. 4)

that we all need in order to be able to think through, and beyond, the kinds of relations between human/animal/machine that contemporary western society demands we think about seriously as feminist critics and activists.

*Can you talk about your experiences as a judge on the Tiptree panel?*

It is a long time ago now, so I'm a bit hazy, but I do remember loving every minute of it—both doing the reading and having the conversations about our texts. Like many other judging experiences, it is always interesting to compare such personal, private modes of reading—to be shocked into the realization that not everybody reads the way you do, values what you value, or measures “merit” or “good writing” in the same way. Like many other years, my panel faced a tricky decision that demanded a certain amount of compromise. Which is not to say that I didn't love the winner that year (which was one of my two top picks). However, this experience, and reading other judges' experiences, was the impetus for writing the final chapter of the book on the Tiptree award.

That was a scary chapter to write. The award is such an important part of our community and builds on the hard work and commitment of so many people, I was actually quite nervous about writing about it in any way that might be considered critical. However, I personally had been feeling quite surprised and sometimes discomforted by some of the winners in recent years, and from my own experience in judging, understood that some themes that were very close to my heart were not really in the forefront of “gender bending” for other people. So it seemed an obvious thing to look through the past commentary and see how much various judges “valued” or maybe better, responded to, issues such as race, or science and technology as they intersect with gender. And, quite rightly, the award has changed and shifted with the community over the years as it has grown bigger. From my perspective, it seems quite clear that the Tiptree award is not as obviously a

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“feminist” award as it once was. That is, the jury has a different mandate than if it was an overtly-named “feminist” award. To me, this speaks volumes both about the shifts in the feminist sf community, and also the broader relation between gender and feminism in contemporary theory, criticism, and praxis. I tend to

feel that “feminism” is a more inclusive framework than “gender” for addressing the problems mainstream Anglo-American feminism has had with race, for example. This isn't necessarily true for everyone—I can see how for others the term “feminism” could be difficult to work with

because of its white, middle-class history.

Having done the research, I admit I was surprised at the extent to which it became apparent that my assumption that the Tiptree was a feminist award probably wasn't quite right. I was also sad that the level and richness of commentary from the judges lists has become slighter over the years—due no doubt to the ever-growing list of works judges have to contend with. Certainly from my perspective as an on-going judge for the Australian SF awards (The Aurealis awards), we have a much easier job, as there are separate panels for sf, fantasy, horror, etc., as well as a division between short and long fiction for sf and fantasy. Despite any potential criticisms, I think the Tiptree continues to be a really important award, and, as I use it in the book, a key indicator of the “health” of sf feminisms, nomenclature aside!

*Can you talk a little bit about the book you are working on now?*

I will happily talk about it now that it is (mostly) finished! I have been working on a co-authored book about Donna Haraway, who as anyone who has read *SFC* will realize, is a theorist and feminist very close to my heart. Indeed I hold her directly responsible for most of my academic and fannish activities over the last decade and a half!

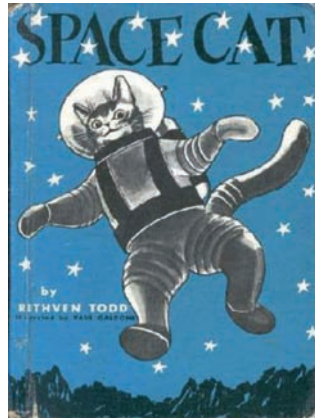
I'm writing it with Margret Grebowicz, whom I “met” (online) whilst writing a chapter for her fantastic collection on sf and science studies, *Sci-Fi in the Mind's Eye*. (Let's not talk about the title—which wasn't her choice—it also includes great sf authors like Timmi Duchamp and Nicola Griffith.) Margret

## Written on the Water by Nisi Shawl

Our minds are malleable, our memories fluid. Do you recall the first instance of your engagement with the literature of the fantastic? For most of us that moment occurred too early to be easily recoverable—fairy tales told as we fell asleep, cartoons, films, puppet shows. What about your first engagement with science fiction? For some that instance came at a time more choate. Take a moment to remember it if you can.

My first verifiable encounter with a science fiction text was with a juvenile book called *Space Cat* by Ruthven Todd. Paul Galdone was the illustrator. I say verifiable because this book does exist, though I don't own a copy. You can buy one on eBay, along with others in the series, including *Space Cat Meets Mars* and *Space Cat and the Kittens*. Todd was a Scot and a conscientious objector, but that probably didn't figure into my enjoyment of this story of a cat clawing up jewels from the rubbery surface of the moon. Or perhaps it did, but without my conscious knowledge.

Another book—*Tatsinda*, by Elizabeth Enright, illustrated by Irene Haas—came into my life later, but has had as big an influence. It is one of those stories I reflect on frequently and use as a benchmark for others. All of us who care about such things have an inventory of what are sometimes referred to as sacred texts: those we prize because of how powerfully they have affected us. Those we hold dear. Nowadays I'd classify *Tatsinda* as a "Lost Race" narrative, part of a subgenre peculiar to Victorian literature. Usually these narratives are set in the homelands of people of color at a moment just prior to, or during, their colonization—Africa, South America, Australia—and involve a white explorer discovering the decadent remnants of a white civilization in the midst of nonwhite savages. But in *Tatsinda* the white race is located in an



even whiter wilderness at the North Pole ("the top of the world," Enright calls it), and the interloper is a slightly-less-white girl. I didn't know how iconoclastic this take on the Lost Race narrative was at the time, but my mind and heart found great comfort in descriptions of Tatsinda's brown eyes and golden hair as contrasted with the Lost Race's blue eyes and "glittering white hair like snow crystals."

As you can probably tell by the quotes, I *do* own a copy of *Tatsinda*. I've reread it several times over the last twenty years. Reread it with changed eyes, a changed heart. My mind being malleable, my needs have changed—those I now bring to the book. So of course I come away from it now with new and different sorts of satisfaction than those I found in my encounters with it at the school library as an eight-year-old.

As a child of nine and ten I was a fan of Burroughs's Tarzan novels. I somehow managed to make of my imaginal self an adult white Englishman, far superior to the ooga-booga blacks I impressed with my strength and rationality. At this point Burroughs's Tarzan books are as good as unreadable to me—the closest I can

come to them is Pat Murphy's *Wild Angel*, the tale of a feral child of the California Gold Rush named Sarah McKensie who is raised by wolves.

The character of Sarah is a much better fit with the identity I've established and accepted for myself. It's not so much that I carry a model of my identity about with me as I read so I can match a book's characters against it. No. The process feels more to me

as though I use my identity model as a mode of transportation, a way of traveling through the story. I become a Nisi Engine, tracing a track the book's author has laid out for me. The track often winds through the mental and emotional interiors of a story's characters, and often it leads me into mimicking their actions. You might say my imaginal self peers out at the story



## *Written on the Water* (cont. from p. 6)

through eyeholes that pierce these characters' heads, experiences the story by the grace of their senses. I'm an infiltrator. I'm an echo. The closer the resemblance between my model of my identity and the character being evoked, the truer the echo, the more seamless my infiltration. And since adolescence it has become extremely difficult for me to array my identity model in a Lord Greystoke suit. Though the Tarzan texts remain essentially the same, they are for the moment inaccessible to me because of this. The mind on which I rewrite them as I reread them has become an incompatible medium, rejecting their inks.

In the case of *The Enchanted Castle* by E. Nesbit, a Fabian Socialist and a famous Victorian children's author, the text itself has changed. Or actually, it had been previously changed, and as an adult I have discovered the original. With its racism intact: when one young hero named Gerald applies boot polish to his hands and face to pose as an Indian conjurer at a fair, his brother declares that he looks "just like a nigger!" I'm quite sure that even in fifth grade I would have recognized name-calling of that nature as unacceptable, and been thrown completely out of the book. So though I no longer have a copy of a Bowdlerized edition, I'm sure that's what I first read. I was taught not to forgive that taunt, and I doubt I would have, even in so indirect an application, even if it meant foregoing the pleasures of *The Enchanted Castle*. And the pleasures are considerable; it's my favorite book by Nesbit, who is one of my very favorite authors, and I find it at once hopeful, disturbing, and elegiac. Still.

These are some of my sacred texts, sacred in the sense that I hold them dear.

Sacredness has another definition, too, a more strictly religious one. I practice a religious tradition based in West Africa and known as Ifa, and we have a sacred text to which we refer when doing divination. It, too, is known as Ifa. A text that is sacred can also be called "canonical," and this word carries connotations of orthodoxy and definitiveness. Canonical texts are conceived of as finished, as complete and unchanging, but in this sense Ifa is non-canonical in its very sacredness, because the Ifa text is constantly being revised based on the observations of those invoking it via divination.

Ifa is composed of 256 *odu* (literally "vessels") containing thousands of verses. To the verses passed down from generations of diviners in Yorubaphone Africa and the lands of its diaspora are appended contemporary commentaries; these commentaries include the names of those divining and of those posing the questions divined upon, as well as interpretations and applications of the verses referred to and their results. Thus one who practices Ifa transforms a holy text by that practice. What is sacred changes. And it does so through a sacred process.

In Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, her heroine Lauren Oya Olamina declares:

"The only lasting truth  
is change.

God  
is change."

Olamina creates this text and others as part of a religion called Earthseed; this manufactured religion is the social tool with which she intends to help the human race leave the planet Earth. Cynical though this view is in the way it sees religion as a means to an end rather than as an end in itself, the Earthseed religion did attract sincere followers in the world of the Parable books—and it has done so in our world, also. This is because Earthseed is full of compelling concepts, among them the equation of the sacred with change. Change is inevitable, and ineffable. It is omnipresent, inescapable. It occupies the core of my periodic return to my sacred texts.

I change. The world around me changes. I reread my sacred texts to learn how they have changed in response to my changes or those of the world—changes in actuality, or in interpretation or emphasis, or all of the above.

Rereading is always, to me, rewriting. As I reread the texts I love, those that are dear to me, their words spill away from me into new meanings, filling up the fresh impressions I have left on the world by making my way through it. The hollow places and questions and emptinesses I have come upon in my continuing explorations open to receive thoughts that were always waiting to occur.

Heraclitus, an ancient philosopher, is famous for saying no one can ever step in the same river twice. Can you read the same story twice? Not if it's a sacred

## Octavia Butler and the HeLa Cell Culture by Paige Clifton-Steele

“I have a scar,” she said, touching her abdomen... What did your people do to me?”

“You had a growth,” he said. “A cancer. We got rid of it. Otherwise, it would have killed you.”

“What did I lose along with the cancer?” she asked softly.

“Nothing. My relative tended you. You lost nothing you would want to keep.”

Not an *Aqueduct* publication, but a story of science and social justice, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot is the first book-length biography of its subject: the originator of the first immortal human cell tissue line: HeLa. *Immortal Life* unfolds those famous but cryptic syllables into a portrait of the life and posterity of Henrietta Lacks, a black Virginian, descendant of slaves and slaveowners.

Lacks died in 1951 of a cervical cancer triggered by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). The HPV had transformed her cells with an enzyme that caused the telomeres on the end of her DNA strands to rebuild indefinitely instead of reaching the preprogrammed limit on normal cell division. Long after her death, her extracted cancer cells continued to divide. They are still dividing in hundreds of labs all over the world. Henrietta Lacks became, in death, “the first immortal human cells ever grown in a laboratory.”

Those cells, in turn, were reproduced on a massive scale during the search for a polio vaccine, and have since figured in the development of treatments for countless diseases and the answers to other scientific questions. However, white doctors took the cells from Lacks without her knowledge, and her children have had no say in how they were used.

That tangle of injustices is the focus Skloot’s book. The book both asks and invites questions: what if she had been born now? What if she had not been a black woman in a racist system? What if the HPV vaccine had existed? What if the people who were so tantalized

by the prospects her cells represented were able to save her? What if those same people had been interested in her as a person, rather than as the donor of a couple of syllables and cells?

The quotation that I prefaced this piece with, though it could almost have been lifted directly from the novelistic dialogue of *Immortal Life*, in fact belongs to Octavia Butler’s 1987 book *Dawn*.

Notwithstanding its 1980s cover art, which showed a white woman, *Dawn*’s protagonist is an American black woman. Lilith Iyapo is a college-teacher, mother of a dead son, and wife of a dead husband. And, like Henrietta Lacks she is, in her late twenties, incubating the tumor that will eventually kill her.

Lilith Iyapo is “rescued” from the irradiated earth by the alien Oankali, only to be “rescued” again from her own cells. In *Dawn*, Octavia Butler uses the power plays between Oankali and humans to ask how real, and how desirable, such rescues are. In Lacks’ life, there was not even the appearance of rescue: Henrietta Lacks was merely harvested.

In drawing attention to a possible affiliation between Lacks and Lilith Iyapo, I am not being merely figurative. Popular accounts of the story of the HeLa cell culture had reached the public years before *Dawn* came out. In June 1976 *Ebony* published an article called “The Miracle of HeLa,” while *Jet* published another called “Family Takes Pride in Mrs. Lacks’ Contribution.” Moreover, Michael Gold’s related book *A Conspiracy of Cells* came out in 1986, just a year before *Dawn* was published.

It is poignant to imagine Lilith’s rescue as a kind of intervention in history, a way to reach back and recuperate this incredible figure in this history of science, *as a human woman*. If Lacks lives one afterlife in her undying tissue, she perhaps lives another one in the stories she has inspired, and particularly in *Dawn*, *Imago*, and *Adulthood Rites*. Those books present a future in which a woman like Henrietta Lacks might live to be honored for her very bodily contribution, and

*Long after her death, her extracted cancer cells continued to divide. They are still dividing in hundreds of labs all over the world.*



HENRIETTA'S AFTERLIFE (cont. from p. 8)

where a *body's contribution* might be seen as integral, rather than incidental, to a person's value.

Lacks' son consented to an autopsy based on the suggestion that any results might medically benefit her descendants. Since then the world over has seen the benefit of HeLa; she has a wealth of spiritual descendants. It's her real descendants for whom the benefits have been scarce. Most of them live without health insurance. None of them have ever been included in the profits that are made off of HeLa cells both directly (through their sale) or indirectly (through the vaccines, medicines, and cosmetics that have been developed using HeLa) by pharmaceutical corporations (Johns Hopkins gave the cells away for next-to-nothing at the time).

In contrast, Lilith's cancer is transfigured into a regenerative technology/talent that one day saves the life of her child Jodahs. Octavia Butler's books seem to represent a timeline in which Henrietta Lacks' *literal* kin could benefit from their mother's deadly happenstance.

I have tried mapping Henrietta's context onto Lilith's. In this equation, the Oankali begin to look like the medical establishment, those mingled children of colonizers and colonized who descend hungrily on the HeLa cells. The ooloi, the "treasured strangers," look like the white scientists who yearn to discover, to taste—for whom the cancer is a tantalizing draw. In this guise, their thirst for knowledge, stripped of biological compulsion, looks less than innocent.

But to imagine Lilith as a latter-day Henrietta brings me so far and no further. Science fiction is of course not allegory. The oankali are themselves, real rather than figurative aliens. Lilith is not Henrietta. Yet I hope that part of her is present in Lilith—encoded in a structure that has made the transgenic leap from scientific discourse to literature.

*The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* closes with a summative consideration of the complexities and ambiguities of the ethical and scientific issues at stake in the debate about HeLa. It explains how laws designed to keep people from possessively guarding their own genes from scientific incursions have resulted in a system where corporations exhibit that very behavior.

While the problem is obvious, the ideal policy is not. I don't want corporations to own my genes, but neither do I want the opposite position to coalesce around *purity of kind*, as much of the opposition to GMO crops has.

In March, a federal judge struck down a patent on the breast cancer gene, throwing corporate ownership of genes into doubt. As we play out the contest over genetic material and implementation of a fair system,

a similar contest concludes Butler's books. But the fragile solution she bestows on her characters—total partition—is not a tenable policy for those of us who live in the closed system that is the Earth.

None of these issues map onto the characters of the Xenogenesis cycle with total nicety because, of course, this is science fiction, not allegory. And even with a solution that departs as wildly as it does from any present options, *Dawn* still speaks to me as a daughter-strain of HeLa and an investigation into the embodied voice of Henrietta herself, about the many unheard voices that *should* be involved in playing out this contest.

...the world over has seen the benefit of HeLa; she has a wealth of spiritual descendants. It's her real descendants for whom the benefits have been scarce. Most of them live without health insurance.

Final note: a Google search shows me that Dr. Priscilla Wald of Duke has found a similar connection between these books and the Henrietta Lacks story. She will be presenting her paper at the Christina Conference on Gender Studies in Helsinki. <http://www.helsinki.fi/genderstudies/conference/wald.html> for more information.

## *Written on the Water* (cont. from p. 7)

one—though you may reread the book containing that story four or five times. If it's sacred, it's alive. If it's alive, it changes. It is written on the water, and water flows.

I can never again read *Tatsinda* for the first time. Or the third time, the fifth, the eighth. But each iteration has its own beauty, its own strength. Most recently I read it aloud with a (now ex-) lover, who scorned it as a mere child's tale, who deliberately mispronounced its neologisms and mocked its improbable bestiary. None of his dissing made me cherish the book less; I only added a level of defenses between that man and the part of me that keeps returning to Tatsinda's realm, Tatrajan, to find there the old and new, the familiar and unexpected.

In my rereadings of *The Enchanted Castle* I often run into earlier models of myself. The memories it evokes are a potent element of the book's charm: memories of the marble-floored rooms where I first immersed myself in it, and the way I equated those rooms' coolness with the secret spaces within living sculptures of dinosaurs, where the story's heroes hid themselves; memories of imitating the roofless-mouthed speech of the Ugli-Wuglis, hilarious and horrible at the same time. Rereading the Space Cat books reminds me of our family's orange tabby, Archibald Fitzrowr the Third, who I quite naturally conflated with Todd's feline adventurer Flyball. These are memories of earlier encounters, but they did not exist at the time of those earlier encounters. Though they reference them, these memories belong to later visits to my sacred texts, later versions of them.

My knowledge of the racist epithet version of *The Enchanted Castle* did not exist until my rereading of it, either. I add that understanding to my relationship with this story and the relationship changes. That change is not an end.

When will I be able to reread—and thus re-write—*Tarzan*? I do need to reclaim his crocodile-dispatching knife, those mighty thews, the majestic solitude of his treetop fortress in the depths of a viridian darkness. Would an ability to radically alter my identity model help? Or ought I to try another strategy? I may attempt to add a bit more insulation between my identity and the character of Lord Grey-

stoke—insulation such as the firm intention of filling that awkward gap with another novel, one all my own.

Holding onto an intention such as that I'll be able to dig new courses for the stories of Tarzan to run through. I'll break down dams. The books' meanings will be transformed, becoming sacred once again.

## Forthcoming

### *The Universe of Things*

Short fiction by Gwyneth Jones

The stories in *The Universe of Things* span Jones's career, from "The Eastern Succession," first published in 1988, to the just-published "Collision." Each opens a window into a richly depicted culture in which its intelligent, resourceful characters struggle to make sense of the mysteries of their world.

### *Eighty Years of Ursula K. Le Guin: A Celebration*

edited by Karen Joy Fowler and Debbie Notkin  
October 2010

### *Redwood and Wildfire* a new novel by Andrea Hairston April 2011

## *Conversation with Helen Merrick* (cont. from p. 5)

and I kept in touch and were talking about our love of Haraway's work and our mutual frustration about the ways in which the Manifesto for Cyborgs overshadows so much of her other work. We had both been re-reading some of her earlier work and talking about how relevant it was today in terms of her focus on the material and the animal. Somehow the idea of a book came up, and next thing we knew we had written a proposal (just for fun), and Margret had sent it to someone she knew (just in case), and suddenly we had a contract (just breathe deeply)! Unfortunately for me, this came at exactly the time I was editing, proofing, and copyediting *SFC*, so the last year or so has been a bit fraught.

I'd thought that writing *SFC* was the hardest thing I'd ever done, till this book. This was easily the hardest thing I've done. ☺ Provisionally titled *Beyond the Cyborg: Adventures with Haraway*, our aim with the book was to challenge the hold that the cyborg has in the understanding of Haraway's work, and trace the other key themes in her work and how they are important for feminists today. I'm really pleased that one chapter is a close look at how Haraway uses sf—it has always seemed to me that most mainstream feminist and other theorists may nod to her fascination with sf, but they don't really take it seriously, or follow her in taking on sf as an aid to theorizing. So that chapter was really fun to write. We go through a number of different ways in which sf inspires Haraway's theory, pointing to some of the key sf texts she uses. My hope is that this is another avenue for educating a broader feminist audience about the potential and pleasures of feminist sf.

One of the scariest things for me in this project was the knowledge that Haraway herself would be reading everything we wrote in draft. Being the insanely generous person she is, she had agreed in principle to contribute to the book as a kind of afterword. It has become much more than that! It has also led to communications with Haraway herself that remind me of the wonderful experiences I have had in the sf community. Just like most of the sf authors I have had experience with, Haraway has been unbelievably generous and excited about our book and her contribution to it. (And I have had the same fan-girly "squee"

moments when I realize who it is I am emailing with!) Just to add to the tension and excitement, one of my thesis examiners, who was a grad student of Haraway's asked if I would mind if she sent Haraway the *SFC* book, as she thought she would enjoy it. So for those, like me, who might have wondered at the relative decline in her references to sf over the years, I can report that Haraway is still reading sf, keeping up with recent feminist work (like Gwyneth Jones's *Life*, which she apparently loved), and looking for new sf to read (when she has time, which given our experience of her dedication to writing and teaching, must be limited indeed!).

## *Aqueductistas Shine*

Ursula K. Le Guin's *Cheek by Jowl*  
is a finalist for the 2010 Locus Awards

Helen Merrick's *The Secret Feminist Cabal*  
nominated for the 2010 Hugo Award

Rebecca Ore's *Centuries Ago and Very Fast*  
nominated for the 2009 Philip K. Dick Award  
& Finalist for the 2010 Lambda Award

Vandana Singh's *Distances*  
on honor list for 2009 Tiptree Award

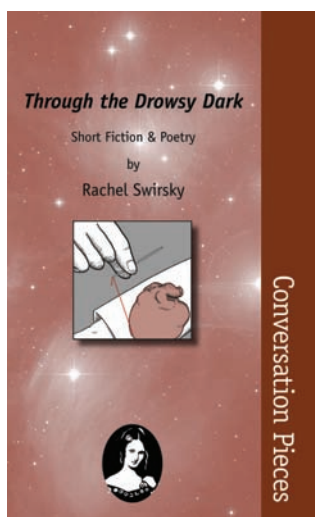
L. Timmel Duchamp's *Marq'ssan Cycle*  
awarded Special Honor by 2009 Tiptree Jury

AND

**Andrea Hairston's *Mindscape*  
wins the Carl Brandon Parallax Award**

## New Conversation Pieces

Conversation Pieces, Vol. 27



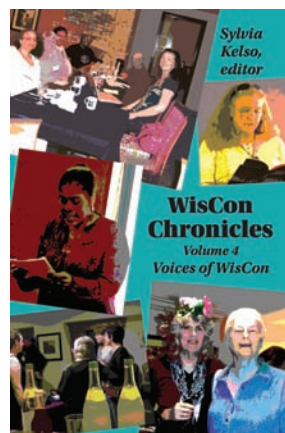
### *Through the Drowsy Dark:* *Fiction and Poetry* by Rachel Swirsky

Ten stories and nine poems by Nebula- and Hugo-nominee Rachel Swirsky, “a terrific writer who’s been making a name for herself with a string of intelligent, perceptive stories,” as critic Jonathan Strahan characterizes her. In *Through the Drowsy Dark*, Swirsky’s characters struggle with too much and too little emotional control, with heartbreak, with grief that has gone deep underground; they search for nothingness, for difference, for oneness. Swirsky’s explorations of the heart and mind are fearless and dangerous fictions.

Coming fall 2010  
Conversation Pieces Vol. 28.

*Shotgun Lullabies: Stories and Poems*  
by Sheree Renée Thomas

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New for WisCon 34  
*WisCon Chronicles,*  
Vol. 4  
*Voices of WisCon*  
edited by  
Sylvia Kelso

### *Without a Map* by Mary Anne Mohanraj & Nnedi Okorafor

*Without a Map* is the limited edition chapbook published in honor of the appearance of Mary Anne Mohanraj and Nnedi Okorafor at WisCon 34.

The third in Aqueduct’s series of Guest of Honor books, *Without a Map* comprises a long excerpt from Okorafor’s book in progress, *Stormbringer*, and a varied medley of works from Mary Anne Mohanraj, including poetry, bits of nonfiction travelogue, and fiction—speculative and otherwise.

Set in the same post-apocalyptic future-Niger as her previous novel *The Shadow Speaker*, Nnedi Okorafor’s excerpt follows the meeting of sixteen-year-old ex-slave rainmaking Tumaki and his burka-wearing, computer-whizzing, Nag Champa-loving paramour. Among its other wonderfully statistically improbable phrases: e-legba—“an electronic god of the best sort!”, a type of Blackberry if blackberries really were part plant.

Mohanraj’s collection deals with queerness, sex, identity, marital skirmishes, birth, and the gentle art of parenting a small child on a spaceship with two co-parents. It includes the accessibly incisive “Racism 101” that serves as a how-to and a call to action, in the wake of RaceFail ’09, for writers and people striving to write the other without contributing to patterns of systemic oppression in publishing.

