

The

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

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Sometimes Anger Is the Necessary Response: Reading Chris Kraus's *I Love Dick*

by L. Timmel Duchamp

[W]ho gets to speak, who gets to speak about **what**, and **why** are the only questions.

—Joan Hawkins, “Afterword” to Chris Kraus’s *I Love Dick*

The genres of science fiction/fantasy and literary fiction both are currently revisiting issues raised by feminists decades ago. The Vida Project, for literary fiction, and Niall Harrison’s annual SF Count, for science fiction and fantasy, have brought glaring visibility to inequities in professional reviewing, which persists in favoring books written by men over those written by women and the nongendered, and novels featuring male protagonists over those featuring female protagonists. A related problem, but one that gets little attention, perhaps because it can’t be quantified, is the near-impossibility for women writers, poets, film-makers, composers, and artists to be credited with innovation in creative fields in which both men and women work. We all know of numerous cases in which literary or theoretical innovation undertaken by a woman is ignored or dismissed as personal idiosyncrasy and technical naïveté (presumably because a woman who breaks long-established rules must be assumed to not know what she is doing), or even due to insanity, only to be hailed for its brilliance (usually a short while later) when a man is so bold (rather than naïve) as to employ it.¹

The difficulty innovative women creators have being taken seriously lies at the heart of Chris Kraus’s endlessly ironic book, *I Love Dick*, a work that defies formal identification. Is it fiction? Or cultural theory? Certainly it’s not memoir or autobiography, as many

readers have assumed. First published in 1998, reissued by Semiotext(e) in 2006, it was recently released in the UK and is momentarily enjoying more favorable attention (including, weirdly enough, a television series based on the book, titled, *I Love Dick*) than it received at first publication. As Joan Hawkins notes in her afterword to the work, its first reviewers insisted on reading the book as naïve, raw, unprocessed memoir and simply ignored everything in it that did not fit such a reading. The book’s *cri de cœur* is not, as those reviewers had it, “Love me, Dick!” but, rather, “Why is no one hearing a word I and all these other women are saying?” A signature moment of *I Love Dick* occurs in the epistolary essay that appears late in the book, “Add It Up”:

I was at a dinner at Félix [Guattari]’s loft with Sylvère. The Berlin Wall had just come down. He, Félix and Tony Negri and François, a younger follower of Félix’s in French broadcasting, were planning a TV panel show about the “future of the left.” Sylvère would moderate a live discussion between Félix and Tony and the German playwright Heiner Müller. They needed one more speaker. It seemed strange that people would be interested in any conversation between such a homogenous crew: four straight white European men in their 50s, all divorced and now with childless younger women in their early 30s. Sometimes coincidence is depressingly inevitable. No matter what these four men say, it’s like they’ve already said it. In Félix’s book *Chaosophy*, there’s a great discussion on schizophrenia between him, Deleuze, and eight of France’s leading intellectuals. All of them are men. If we want reality to change then why not change it? Oh Dick, deep down I feel that you’re utopian too.

We all know of numerous cases in which literary or theoretical innovation undertaken by a woman is ignored or dismissed as personal idiosyncrasy and technical naïveté....

1 These cases are so numerous that I’d like readers to make an effort to call to mind instances they have encountered and then forgotten, since such recollection will mean more to them than reading the handful in my mind as I write this and then soon forgetting them, as one does.

*The difficulty innovative women creators have being taken seriously lies at the heart of Chris Kraus’s endlessly ironic book, *I Love Dick*....*

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Kraus composed her book in the mid-1990s, which in the US (where she was mostly living at the time) saw the peak of a backlash to feminism....

©
2

I read I Love Dick in 2016, not in the late 1990s when it was first published. And yet it took me months to finish it. I felt as if I had been plunged into a spectacle of abjection and for about the first half of the book wrestled with that feeling, a feeling that drove me to resist sympathizing (much less empathizing) with the narrator.

"What about Christa Woolf?" I asked. (At that moment she was founding a neo-socialist party in Germany.) And all Félix's guests—the culturally important jowelly men, their Parisianly-groomed, mute younger wives just sat and stared. Finally the communist philosopher Negri graciously replied, "Christa Woolf is not an intellectual." (*I Love Dick*, 226-227)

Kraus composed her book in the mid-1990s, which in the US (where she was mostly living at the time) saw the peak of a backlash to feminism that began in the early 1980s and by the mid-90s had taught most feminists to either alter their language or shut up altogether—which quite a few, unwilling to bow to the punishing pressure of the status quo, did. "Women's liberation" got downgraded to "feminism" (which sounded politer and less threatening and implied that the drive for liberation had become an anachronism); words like "patriarchy" and "oppression" were made unspeakable, and words like "agency" and "choice" became paramount declarations that women chose subordination, implying they were therefore already liberated, and that anyone who suggested that such choices weren't acts of "agency" were thus demeaning women. It was a painful time for me, personally. I still recall the sick feeling I got when I told a new acquaintance who identified as a feminist about my experience as a young composer trying to survive in an exclusively male environment. Only a few years earlier Joanna Russ had urged me to put my account—and the anger I expressed in relating it to her—into writing, but *this* feminist let me know that she thought that the take-away lesson for me was the need to take responsibility for myself and my actions and acquire the courage to transcend the limitations imposed on me. I'd once been deeply ashamed of that experience, and this woman's reaction triggered that old sense of shame. By the time I related the experience in my WisCon 32 GoH speech, the "reality" of the mid-90s had

receded, and I could again dampen my sense of shame with defiance, for many people shared my anger, and the few critical remarks I fielded from people who still saw feminism as purely a matter of women taking total responsibility for every difficulty they fail to overcome bounced off me.²

I read *I Love Dick* in 2016, not in the late 1990s when it was first published. And yet it took me months to finish. I felt as if I had been plunged into a spectacle of abjection and for about the first half of the book wrestled with that feeling, a feeling that drove me to resist sympathizing (much less empathizing) with the narrator. In her resonant foreword, "What about Chris?", Eileen Myles begins by recalling her sense of despair on seeing François Truffaut's *The Story of Adele H.* (1975). On reading Myles' description, I recalled my own reaction to the film: I seethed with fury at Truffaut and, on leaving the theater, turned my fury into ridicule—not of the character of Adele (as had the object of Adele H.'s attentions), but of Truffaut, for foisting bathos upon her and her story. In the film, Adele, Victor Hugo's daughter, obsessed with a British officer, follows him to Halifax. He repudiates and derides her. Adele descends into destitution and is ultimately returned to Paris and institutionalized. Bit by excruciating bit, Truffaut strips her of her humanity (for abjection is all about stripping its object of human dignity). Myles writes:

[B]ut watching I felt she *was* me.... I just knew in a quiet way I was ruined. If I agreed to be female. There was so much evidence on the screen and in books. I read Doris Lessing in literature class and that depressed the shit out of me too. I just hated reading work by women or about women because it always added up the same. Loss of self, endless self-abnegation even as the female was trying to be an artist, she wound

2 You can find the speech, "The Matter of Tongues," at <http://www.ltimmeldorfchamp.com/essays/thematteroftongues>.



up pregnant, desperate, waiting on some man. A Marxist guy, perhaps. When would this end. Remarkably it has, right here in this book. (13)

And so, Myles writes, "*I Love Dick* is a remarkable study in female abjection and in its fashion it reminds me of Carl Dreyer's exhortation to use 'artifice to strip artifice of artifice'" (13). Female abjection is painful to watch. And so it took me a very long time to get through the first 117 pages of the book, which depicts a woman artist, Chris, who is relentlessly marginalized by an intellectual and artistic milieu that values only men, caught up in a strange triangle with her intellectual husband (Sylvère) and a cultural theorist (Dick). Throughout the narrative, her films are continually sneered at. Dick's main interest in Chris is as a conduit to her husband, whom he admires and respects. Chris's desire for Dick along with his disdain for her offers a clear parallel for the novels and films she is driven to make and her world's rejection of them. And in fact Chris more than once declares that Lacan was wrong when he defined desire as "lack."³ Desire, Chris asserts, is a generative, creative impulse. I doubt any woman who does creative work could read *I Love Dick* and not get that it is about a certain sort of rejection that inevitably confronts creativity that speaks in a voice most people find too challenging or uncomfortable to listen to. Such a voice is typically either "too crazy" or "too shrill" or "too angry" to "deserve" attention. (And such voices typically belong to people of color or white women.) By conflating the spectacle of unrequited love with creative marginalization, *I Love Dick* takes us to the heart of female abjection and feelings that many, many women struggle with on a daily basis, whether or not

3 Lacan's discussion of "lack" is extremely complicated. Let's just say, as shorthand, that the lack in question is (when it isn't the maternal breast) the Phallus. Chris's innovation, here, is a refusal to talk about lack at all when talking about the desire that is at the heart of the drive to create.

they feel unrequited love for someone who doesn't take them seriously.

The world we live in fairly revels in spectacles of abjection,⁴ and the feelings that a sense of abjection rouses in most people are only occasionally anger. Feelings of shame and fear on the one hand (for those identifying with the victims) or defensiveness (felt for those identifying with the perpetrators) on the other distract us from the hierarchical dualism on which our sense of abjection depends. White male abjection, in fiction, is typically a subject for tragedy or exultation in transgression. Can you imagine someone watching *Lear* reacting as Myles did? "I just knew in a quiet way I was ruined. If I agreed to be female." Of course *Lear* has occasionally been played by a woman, though when Marianne Hoppe played the role at the age of 80, she remarked, "When Bob [Wilson] first asked me to do *Lear*, I laughed. The idea was so outrageous," she said at the time. "But soon its absurdity began to appeal to me."⁵ Glenda Jackson is apparently appearing in a production set to open in October 2016; it's not clear yet how it will be staged. Would *Lear* be a tragedy if the king were female and the

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*I doubt any woman who does creative work could read *I Love Dick* and not get that it is about a certain sort of rejection that inevitably confronts creativity that speaks in a voice most people find too challenging or uncomfortable to listen to.*

4 Just think of all the videos of gang rapes that so many young men share with glee. And also please consider the likelihood that sexual harassment is often deployed precisely to enact a spectacle of female abjection to make its perpetrator feel powerful. But women are not the only objects of spectacles of abjection. Remember the photo trophies of Abu Ghraib? And now we have videos of police officers beating or tasering unarmed civilians or shooting them in the back as they flee. Surely the most infamous spectacle of abjection has been the continual lynching of black people in recent US history. What all these spectacles share in common is that the victims are socially and politically subordinate to the perpetrators and the perpetrators almost always receive sympathy if not active support from the ultimate legal arbiters.

5 *The Telegraph* 12 February, 2016 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/theatre/actors/glenda-jackson-to-star-as-king-lear/>

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Sometimes Anger Is the Necessary Response (cont. from p. 3)

The experience of abjection is smothering. And without breath, one cannot speak.

daughters sons? Is the world ready to accept that a woman's madness, whatever the cause, could be a legitimate source of literary tragedy? Or that the story of a woman's destitution at the hands of her adult sons could ever be perceived as anything but maternal sacrifice or maternal foolishness and thus a different kind of story altogether? Presumably, since this play itself, however it is staged, must always be viewed through the prism of a half-millennium-old institution named "Shakespeare," Glenda Jackson's Lear might reasonably constitute an exception. Ever hopeful, I tell myself that surely exceptions can sometimes be a foot in the door (however poorly exceptions have served women throughout European history). But, claiming an exception that proves the rule still seems to set us a long way to go to render female abjection as tragedy rather than a grotesque obscenity (or absurdity), attracting sneering rubberneckers on the one hand and causing women to avert their gaze in disavowal on the other.

In the second half of *I Love Dick*, I discovered something in it that makes its tale of female abjection stand out from those that, like *Adele H.*, implicitly indict female insanity and foolishness for a woman's failure to know her place and stay in it. That nameless something provoked in me anger and recognition of something large and important, giving me a sense of what lies below the surface of the iceberg of institutional oppression that the VIDA and annual SF Count manifest. Joan Hawkins nails it when she raises the issue of who gets to speak and about what—those are the real questions that still drive feminism all right. (And those are still the questions that drive the fight against racism.) What I characterize as a "nameless something" is a provocation to anger embedded in the text; apparently, though, it is too subtle for people who don't already have that question on their lips (perhaps in the same way in which some men, in psychological studies, find it difficult to see anger in women's faces). This provocation emerges gradually, as Chris writes about Guatemala, Jennifer

Harbury, Hannah Wilke, and the figure of "the personal" (which is repeatedly the pretext for imposing silence on unwanted voices). Anger and defiance have long been taken as an emotion and attitude that disqualifies speech (public or private, scholarly or creative). But anger and defiance, I assert, are essential for burning through the shame of abjection. The experience of abjection is smothering. And without breath, one cannot speak. When people tell those who react with anger to a spectacle of abjection that their anger is inappropriate, they're basically wishing they could shut them up and reduce them to the fear and shame that are the only other responses available to them. And fear and shame, it should be obvious, can only lead to disavowal and the averting of one's gaze from abuse.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf famously deprecated Charlotte Brontë's anger, suggesting it diminished her art. And yet, all that playfulness in Woolf's essay in fact courts the defiance and anger of the women listening to or reading it. The very beginning of the essay is a provocation: the narrator has a Big Thought that she then loses because she is for a moment unconscious of the prerogatives of male privilege and wanders onto turf that she, a mere woman, is forbidden to trespass upon. She then imagines the constant stream of gold coins that has built a bastion of privilege that women are barred from. Later, in perhaps the most famous moment of the essay, she imagines a talented sister for Shakespeare who comes to a sad, sorry end. "For it needs little skill in psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift for poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by other people, so tortured and pulled asunder by her own contrary instincts, that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty" (51). How, I have to wonder, did Woolf expect her women readers to react to that? (I'm sure she thought male readers would express pity while feeling scorn or skepticism at *any* woman's ability, much as certain male writers still openly do today.) Would they be bemused, and say to themselves,

I understood that Woolf found her own anger beyond scary and left it at that. But on further consideration I don't believe for a second that Woolf got to that playful tone without going through seriously felt anger first.



Oh, yes, that explains why Shakespeare had to be a man. How very interesting! For a long time, I was fooled by Woolf's warning against anger. I understood that Woolf found her own anger beyond scary and left it at that. But on further consideration I don't believe for a second that Woolf got to that playful tone without going through seriously felt anger first. Myself, I've repeatedly swung between the state Myles describes ("I was ruined. If I agreed to be female") and that of rage with all its certainty. (And then sometimes I'm just quiet, too worn out to feel either shame or rage.)

We know that sexual harassment is important. We know that violence against women is important. I've been feeling, lately, that in the second decade of the twenty-first century we know this all anew, after a couple of decades in which women did their best to avert their gaze from the issue. And the issue is intertwined in a very complicated way with who gets to speak and about what. I don't think these can be separated.

I Love Dick offers up no scenes of graphic physical violence, but its elaboration of abjection confronts us with the invisible, apparently agentless brutality of marginalization (just as *A Room of One's Own* did). Kraus's insightful conflation of two experiences of abjection—a refusal to take her work seriously and unrequited love—usually seen as completely different illuminates "the only questions," as Joan Hawkins puts it. And that is what we need: more illumination. Our clear views of the surface remind us that the problem (or "question") is still with us. But we won't be able to remove the iceberg until we can see more of it. If we need to be angry to do that, then anger is necessary.

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L. Timmel Duchamp is the author of the Marq'ssan Cycle, *Love's Body*, *Dancing in Time*, and *Never at Home*. Her new novel, *The Waterdancer's World*, has just been released.



Una O'Connor unleashes her scream

by Gwynne Garfinkle

she's in her fifties
a diminutive woman from Belfast
with sharp, bird-like features
not pretty, no damsel in distress

she opens her mouth and splits the eardrums
of Frankenstein's Monster
the Invisible Man
and everyone else in range
her blistering shriek the only weapon she needs

in the guise of comic relief
she makes her way through the horror unscathed
men and monsters quail before her decibels

Gwynne Garfinkle lives in Los Angeles. Her poetry and fiction have appeared in such publications as *Strange Horizons*, *Interfictions*, *Mythic Delirium*, *inkscrawl*, and *The Mammoth Book of Dieselpunk*. She is working on a book of poems inspired by classic films, TV, and pop culture.



The Girl We Forgot (and Really Shouldn't Have)

Sarah Zettel on *Speak of the Devil* and Other Works by Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

Speak of the Devil/The Obstinate Murderer by Elisabeth Sanxay Holding,

Stark House Press, 220 pp., \$17.95.

You can tell as much about a society by what it condemns as you can by what it praises. Maybe more. And in a genre that focuses on discovery and punishment, you can tell a whole lot by who it kills, and whom it allows to get away, and when, and why.

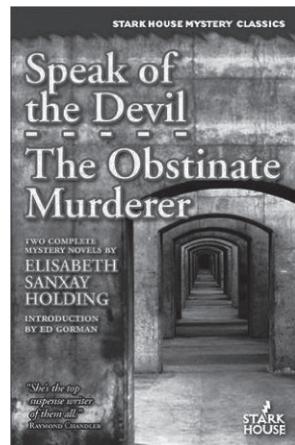
I will not be the first person to observe that we are in the middle of a literary love affair with Bad Girls. We are devouring their stories whether they are gone, or on a train, or even when they are just Emma Clune's *The Girls*. Women are writing about transgressive women—women who commit violent and other socially unacceptable acts, sometimes because they are victims of violence, sometimes just... because. These books are topping best-sellers lists and, like success always does, spawning dozens of imitators.

Leaving aside the linguistic debate about using the word "girl" to refer to adult female human beings, it is worth it to the feminist scholar, or just plain reader, to take a look at crime fiction and how the women in the genre, whether transgressive, or heroic, are portrayed. You can tell as much about a society by what it condemns as you can by what it praises. Maybe more. And in a genre that focuses on discovery and punishment, you can tell a whole lot by whom it kills, and whom it allows to get away, and when, and why.

Transgressive women are popular characters in the broad genre category of "crime fiction." What's notable about this fresh batch is the way the transgressive women/girls are portrayed. They are being written about as complex figures, even when they are the villains. Their motives, and their pathologies, are going way beyond the old crazy mom/femme fatale/woman scorned stereotypes. And the world of suspense and crime writing is sitting up and paying attention. This, it senses, is something new.

But is it all that new? Actually, no.

The history of women's participation in the multifaceted genre of crime fiction is long, broad, and deep. Agatha Christie is still often referred to as the Queen of Mystery. Her sales record is unassailable, and her ongoing popular-



ity second to none. Patricia Highsmith is the author of several murder set-ups that have become linguistic shorthand. Talk about "a strangers on a train scenario," and people will know what you mean. Many of the authors who brought us that durable, dramatic, dark subgenre of "noir" fiction were (are) women, like Dorothy B. Hughes (*In a Lonely Place*) or Lenore Glen Offord (*Skeleton Key*) writing about cold, closed-off enigmatic men, frequently through the eyes of the women who were their victims, their partners, or, occasionally, their saviors.

Then there is Elizabeth Sanxay Holding.

Who?

Yeah, I'd never heard of her either, that is until I read Sarah Weinman's fantastic anthology *Troubled Daughters, Twisted Wives*. In there, among the other gems, I found a story called, "The Stranger in the Car." I was fascinated. Hooked. Here was a perspective, a humanity, a level of intrigue I did not know existed in classic noir and crime fiction, not to mention some flat-out fantastic prose. I ran (okay, I walked really fast) over to my local mystery book shop and asked if they had anything more by this woman I'd never heard of. I was presented with an old Ace Double and a couple of reprints, which I devoured, and came away more of a fan girl (there we are with the girl

Grandmother Matilda



thing again) than ever. But the books I had in my hands were either heavily used or decades out of print. There are a few ebooks available, but not many.

Then I got the good news, and I mean the really good news, that an independent publisher, Stark House Press, is busy bringing Holding's work back into print. These are very nice trade paperback editions, each, like that old Ace Double, featuring two novels in one volume.

So, who was she?

Elisabeth Sanxay was born in the late nineteenth century, in Brooklyn. She got a solid liberal arts education and was able to follow her ambition to be a writer early, and as a young woman she wrote and published several mainstream novels (I've read a couple. Interesting Edith Whartonesque stuff, but they're pretty heavy and have not aged gracefully). She married George Holding, a British Diplomat and traveled the world with him. But when the Depression hit, she could no longer sell her mainstream work. To help support herself and her husband, she turned to the more popular and more lucrative mystery genre. That was where she truly came into her creative own. How good was she? Raymond Chandler called her "the top suspense writer of them all."

Much of Holding's work falls solidly into the realm of "domestic suspense." Domestic suspense is stories of crime that happens in the private sphere of the home and is driven by the relationships between characters who know each other intimately, or at least think they do. As such, a number, of Holding's works can be seen as direct predecessors of the current spate of popular "girl" books. But one of the many reasons I love Holding is she refused to be confined. Her crime novels covered the whole range of crime sub-genres.

Take the pair *Speak of the Devil* and *The Obstinate Murderer*. I read them as two halves of a double volume, but in terms of which book a feminist crime fiction enthusiast should seek out, there is no question. Read *Speak of the Devil*.

From the point of view of the prose, *Devil* is not as in-depth a book as a modern crime novel. It's short by modern standards as well. Today, we'd call it a novella rather than a novel. Some of the dialogue will come across as stilted to the modern ear, but no worse than some of the dialogue in, say *The Maltese Falcon* or *The Big Sleep*.

In fact, if I was casting this, I'd go straight for Lauren Bacall as the main character, Miss Peterson. It was Miss Peterson who caused me to dive into this novel with abandon. She was so unexpected, especially for a book originally published in 1942, that I was caught entirely off guard.

When *Speak of the Devil* opens, Miss Peterson is sailing to Havana to take a job. She's on her own, she's restless, looking for a change. She meets a charming Spaniard, Mr. Fernandez, who, after she skillfully deflects his declarations of love and proposals of marriage, settles on offering her a hostessing job in his hotel on a small Caribbean Island. She accepts, more or less on a whim, and soon has cause to regret it. Not because of Mr. Fernandez himself, I hasten to add. Very unusually, he's mostly willing to take no for an answer—eventually, anyway. But something is very clearly wrong in the hotel. Some of the guests are acting strangely, and then there is the young woman whose job she's taken over who is acting very, very strangely indeed. And then comes the hurricane, and then comes the murder. Miss Peterson tries to remain aloof from events. She does not particularly like the people involved, does not see it as her business, and does not want to take the risks, but she is caught up quickly, and must decide when and how, and for whom, she is going to risk hunting down the murderer.

Miss Peterson captivated me. She's a single, independent woman. When we first meet her she is dealing with Mr. Fernandez firmly and ably.... She has a full, active life that she feels no compulsion to explain, or justify, not even to the reader. She speaks a number of languages, a fact she does not necessarily advertise, and is clearly

To help support herself and her husband, she turned to the more popular and more lucrative mystery genre. That was where she truly came into her creative own. How good was she? Raymond Chandler called her "the top suspense writer of them all."

Miss Peterson captivated me. She's a single, independent woman. When we first meet her she is dealing with Mr. Fernandez firmly and ably.... She has a full, active life that she feels no compulsion to explain, or justify...

The Girl We Forgot (cont. from p. 7)

In short, Miss Peterson is a hardboiled detective. All she lacks is the dingy office and the bottle of rye in the bottom drawer. Neither of which are her style. She has more money than private dicks usually do, not to mention better taste. And anyway, she drinks gin and tonic.

very over-qualified for the position she's offered at the hotel. She's traveling on her own, for her own reasons, which she likewise feels no reason to justify. She has no hesitation in making her own sexual and romantic judgments. She trusts her personal evaluations of the men she might be romantically interested in, and of anyone else. She has a dry wit that she can wield like a stiletto when she chooses. She operates using a mix of experience, cold logic, and instinct. She is physically brave, and she is compassionate, although not always demonstrative, but she also gets angry, tired, frightened when there is something to fear, and sometimes she drinks too much.

Oh, and she knows how to shoot, and she is not afraid to pull the trigger.

In short, Miss Peterson is a hardboiled detective. All she lacks is the dingy office and the bottle of rye in the bottom drawer. Neither of which are her style. She has more money than private dicks usually do, not to mention better taste. And anyway, she drinks gin and tonic.

This makes her very different from Holding's heroines of her other brilliant novels, *The Blank Wall*, or, *The Old Battle Axe*. Those two are solidly domestic suspense, and as such very much worth exploring. There is debate in feminist circles about stories of crime and suspense that take place mainly inside the domestic sphere. These tend to be, no surprise, mainly written by women. Is this another pink collar book ghetto? I'd say no. It's something more, or at least it is in the hands of someone like Holding. Her domestic suspense is about the strength and the individuality of women who have been slotted into specific roles, dutiful middle-class wife in *The Blank Wall*, and spinster aunt in *The Old Battle Axe*. These women are each overlooked and devalued by those around them, seen only in terms of what they can do for others, or how they get in the way of those others. But when the safe world of home and family breaks apart, it is these women who fight back, fight through, and win.

And yet Miss Peterson has one point in common with the women of Hold-

ing's domestic suspense. As in those other books, the people who encounter Miss Peterson are constantly attempting to assign her a specific role—lover, victim, or fool depending on how they meet her or what they want from her. She spends the book deflecting, resisting, and ultimately defying their categorizations. She will be her own person: flawed yes; frightened, frequently; strong, always.

Speaking of categorization, it's important to say something here about Holding's presentation of people of color. People of color play a part in a number of Holding's books. She does not draw them as fully as she draws her European characters. They are all supporting players, such as the staff at the hotel where Miss Peterson finds herself in *Speak of the Devil*. They work, they run errands and provide the occasional local insight, but not much more. Holding does not, however, descend into cruelty, mockery, or racial stereotype. She acknowledges individuality and a personal agenda that can be in conflict with the dominant white characters without being detrimental or unreasonable, and no character is simply clownish. There is a blessed absence of attempt at phonetically rendering dialect. All of this means that her books have aged much better than some other works of the era that are considered classic.

I'll warn you though, not all of Holding's work is a series of lost gems. The second story in the volume I have, *The Obstinate Murderer*, does not hold up nearly as well. I said it before and I'll say it again: read *Speak of the Devil*. Read *The Innocent Miss Duff*, *The Blank Wall*, and *The Old Battle Axe*. Turn up your coat collar and pull down the brim of your fedora, and lock the door. It's going to be a dark and stormy night.

Sarah Zettel is an award-winning, bestselling, multi-genre author with enough pen names to populate a small village. When she is not writing, she hikes, cooks, reads, and tries to keep up with her rapidly growing son.

These women are each overlooked and devalued by those around them, seen only in terms of what they can do for others, or how they get in the way of those others. But when the safe world of home and family breaks apart, it is these women who fight back, fight through, and win.



A Death of Hippolytos

by Sonya Taaffe

You shine your hair with olive leaves and oils,
collar your throat with beaded crystal,
your finger with stamp-seal gold.
You sling the farthest-sailing discus,
wrestle the stronger challenger laughing to the dust.
Girls leave their hearts in your hand
like uncut apples,
boys like the trembling stillness of wild hares.
You drive the fairest colts,
the fastest sports car,
you take the road by the headland
where the shaking wave slams
white as teeth through windshield glass.
You see too late the bull, the storm surge, the bicyclist.
You try saying no to the Earth Mother,
see where that gets you.



The Other Lives

by Sonya Taaffe

for Rose Lemberg

When you held me on the ice
we were living
and when we came together down the snow
we were not dead
and even at stars' distance from one another's minds
we are not ghosts
resting within one shared shadow
like a hand within a hand
holding light.

Sonya Taaffe's short fiction and award-winning poetry has appeared in multiple venues. Her latest collection is *Ghost Signs*. She is currently a senior poetry editor for *Strange Horizons*.





The High Cost of Eternal Living

The Apothecary's Curse, by Barbara Barnett, Pyr, October 2016, 340 pp., \$17.

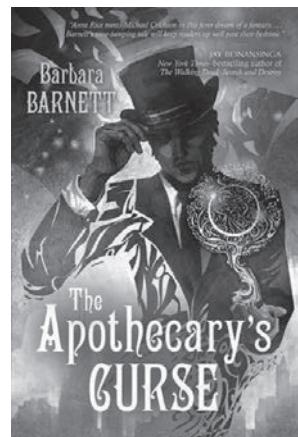
reviewed by J.M. Sidorova

The author's biology background and her care for accurate representation of the life sciences are unmistakable; as a practicing molecular biologist, I can put a stamp of approval on the nerd talk that surrounds the novel's genetic and medical mystery.

Dr. Simon Bell has a death wish. His wish is practically impossible to fulfill due to an honest error made by Mr. Gaelan Erceldoune, his longtime frenemy. The spirited Lady Elizabeth is a sister to Simon and the love of Gaelan's life. And Gaelan... Gaelan is hundreds of years old. And deeply traumatized.

Part Victorian romance, part pharmaceutical thriller, Barbara Barnett's *The Apothecary's Curse* is a likeable and entertaining read indeed. There are the beloved tropes: a book of ancient wisdom, a villainous corporation hell-bent on human experimentation, a curse of immortality and a quest to reverse it. There are love and darkness, faerie myths and glimpses of depravity. Barnett deftly ties it all together with the help of some nicely twisted strands of alchemy and pharmacology and a couple of well-placed loops of DNA. The author's biology background and her care for accurate representation of the life sciences are unmistakable; as a practicing molecular biologist, I can put a stamp of approval on the nerd talk that surrounds the novel's genetic and medical mystery.

The opening drops us into 1912 London and into the middle of a dinner with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and what we easily recognize as your classic British dinner conversation as recreated for us in books and movies, complete with the awkward remarks of a not-so-smart but perky Lady Such-and-such. Sherlock Holmes is mentioned, but this does seem to be but a vignette. The story unfolds in a direction that barely touches Conan Doyle or his detective. After a few pages thick with mentions of events, relations, and grievances we are not yet privy to, we get to the main trunk of the story—a dark night in London, 1837, when Dr. Bell convinces Mr. Erceldoune, an apothecary, to make a salve for his dying wife.



From that point on, Barnett effectively juxtaposes narrative pieces from the 19th and 21st centuries and succeeds in having her readers stay just a step ahead of the characters in putting the puzzle pieces together. Most of the time this adds to the suspense and grips you with concern for the characters' well-being; only on a couple of occasions toward the end may it cause some impatient fidgeting, some wondering why the characters still don't "get it."

It seems to me that the Victorian part of the book is where the author's heart dwells most eagerly, relishing a swish of a gown here, a diaphanous sleeve there: small, confined tête-à-tête scenes. The settings are just traced, more a nod to the images we already have in our minds if we've ever watched a single period drama. And that is quite all right, because more than half the fun, one realizes, reading, is in observing ladies and gentlemen get tangled up in the tenets of propriety and upbringing while trying to communicate. Ah, where else can the plot pivot so heart-wrenchingly upon the inability of the Lady X to tell something to Mr. Y? The *tell-don't-show* dialogue of hints, telltale understatements (*I ought to take a walk* means *I am about to have a meltdown*), and luscious verbal descriptions of one's emotion instead of actual emoting, titillates the reader and fills her

Reviews



with a single wish—that the prospective lovers break through the brambles of verbiage and finally fall into each other's arms. And it is thrice as satisfactory as usual when the lovers finally oblige.

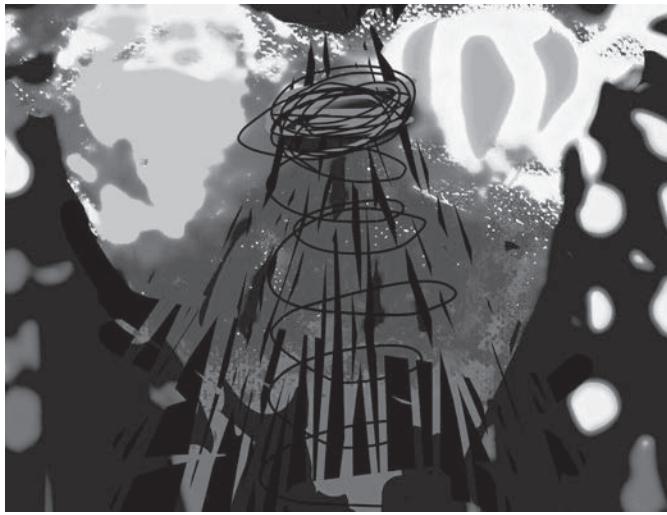
Which is not to say that Barnett's narrative stays in bedrooms and rose gardens alone; no, it also ventures into the basement of the notorious hospital for sufferers of psychiatric illness, Bedlam, where scalpels are wielded and blood flows copiously.

Perhaps because one's image of the present is more detailed and rich than that of the past, the parts of the novel that take place in 2016 seem less effective than those from the 19th century. The flow of the narrative in these sections appears rushed, and the newly introduced love interest—Anne Shawe, MD, PhD—less convincing, the hasty steps she takes to act on her attraction

to Gaelan a touch arbitrary. Do not get me wrong—I want them to get together, I just want to give them a bit more time to get to know each other, maybe. The buildup of pressure seems real, but the resolution all-too-easy, and the villain, once he turns up, is ready to be duped. In 2016 as well as in the 19th century, Barnett takes care only in having her characters plan a solution. Once the plan has been made, its execution goes without a glitch and is narrated quite briefly, or in hindsight. In the story's ending some will find a delightful symmetry to events elsewhere in the novel, while for others it will be mere repetition. I personally was not fond of the author's decision to put a happy, heart-shaped dot over every "i" of her ending. But I am sure that many readers, including readers of *The Cascadia Subduction Zone*, will be very pleased with them.

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J.M. Sidorova is a Russian-American biomedical scientist and author of several speculative fiction stories and the novel *The Age of Ice* (Scribner/Simon & Schuster, 2013). She's a graduate of the Clarion West Writers Workshop. Learn more about her at www.jmsidorova.com.



Scape, Madeline Galbraith



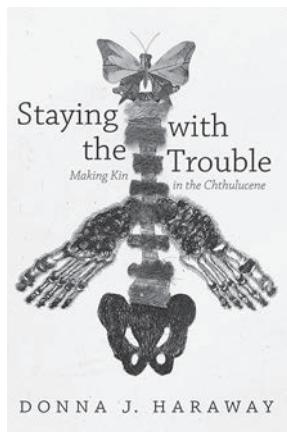
The Good Kind of Disturbing

Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene, by Donna J. Haraway

Duke University Press, September 2016, 304 pp., Paperback \$ 26.95; ebook \$26.95; cloth \$ 94.95

reviewed by Nancy Jane Moore

Her work is difficult because she makes the reader think deeply about everything she says. She repurposes old words, invents new ones, and moves complex ideas across disciplinary lines.



Staying with the Trouble doesn't mean enduring the changes that will come; it means working with them, fixing what we can and adapting to what we cannot, learning to speak for the dead and dying, and recognizing that no individual nor group nor even species has all the answers.

Donna Haraway, author of such titles as *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* and *Primate Visions*, is notorious for producing difficult work. While “difficult” is a common complaint about academic writers, it usually means an overwrought style and insider language. That’s not what makes Haraway challenging. Her work is difficult because she makes the reader think deeply about everything she says. She repurposes old words, invents new ones, and moves complex ideas across disciplinary lines. The result is material that differs—sometimes slightly, but often radically—from accepted wisdom. In reading Haraway, we cannot cheat by trying to graft a similar, maybe simpler, idea onto what she says. We must pay attention to every word she uses and re-think everything we bring to her work. Or, to use one of Haraway’s words, we must take responsibility for our reading.

Staying with the Trouble is no exception. Rather than use Anthropocene or Capitalocene to define the current and coming era of the Earth, Haraway calls it the Chthulucene. This name is not drawn from Lovecraft (who used a different spelling), but is rather a reference to “the diverse earthwide tentacular powers and forces,” also serving as a provocative and descriptive word “for the dynamic, ongoing symbiotic forces and powers of which people are a part, within which ongoingness is at stake.” Along with this creative approach to naming this age, she emphasizes that we need to make kin rather than babies and that the kin should not be limited to human beings. With these approaches, Haraway forces us to look at climate change, overpopulation, and economic inequities without either false hope or deep despair. *Staying with the Trouble* doesn’t mean enduring the changes that will come; it means working with them,

fixing what we can and adapting to what we cannot, learning to speak for the dead and dying, and recognizing that no individual nor group nor even species has all the answers.

There are many important words Haraway uses in this complex work for our “disturbing times”—“trouble” derives from the Old French “trubler,” which means “to disturb.” Critters—pointedly not “creatures”—refers promiscuously to microbes, plants, animals, humans and nonhumans, and sometimes even to machines.” Kin means much more than the other humans to whom we are related by blood; Haraway challenges the reader to make kin across not just various human lines, but across species ones as well—oddkin, to use her term.

“[E]arthlings are *never alone*,” Haraway writes in her chapter on sympoiesis and symbiogenesis. Sympoiesis means “making with,” she explains, but her expanded use of it and incorporation of the concept of symbiogenesis makes a powerful argument for everything being connected on a multitude of levels. Much of this section of the book looks at several projects where art and science interconnect. *Never Alone* is the English name for *Kisima Ingitchuna*, a computer world game developed in collaboration with the Inupiat, who are Native Alaskans, but the common use of the words applies as well.

Haraway manages to weave in such diverse elements as an *xkcd* cartoon on an orchid that looks like a now-extinct female bee (explained by Randall Munroe as “an idea of what the female bee looked like to the male bee...as interpreted by a plant”), the crochet coral reef that brings fiber arts to bear on environmental destruction, and PigeonBlog, which documented the study of atmospheric pollution using pigeons outfitted with monitoring devices, an example of



companion animals working with humans. She also covers in some detail the Navajo projects at Black Mesa, which include environmental activism, the raising of Churro sheep, and weaving.

Each science/art project she discusses “is a case of noninnocent, risky, committed ‘becoming involved in one another’s lives,’ ” she points out. The term “noninnocent” is crucial here and in other parts of this work, for Haraway is not letting any of us off the hook. No one can claim innocence in the disturbed times in which we live, just as no one can claim to have done anything without help.

Haraway is a devoted fan of SF, but she uses those initials to mean far more than science fiction: string figures, speculative feminism, science fact, speculative fabulation, science fantasy, so far. In all these variations on SF, she finds approaches that help us comprehend the current state of the world in a deeper, richer, more complicated way.

We must leave behind the classic hero’s journey for a different kind of tale, she says. Using Ursula K. Le Guin’s “The Author of the Acacia Seeds” as a jumping off point, she observes, “The last thing the hero wants to know is that his beautiful words and weapons will be worthless without a bag, a container, a net.” But things must be gathered. “It matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what concepts we think to think other concepts with. It matters wherehow Ouroboros swallows its tale, again.” Our world includes plants, includes seeds, and we must address “the question of finding seeds for terraforming for a recuperating earthly world of difference.” The right kind of science fiction—and other types of SF—leads us in this direction.

The final section of the book is itself science fiction, speculative fabulation, speculative feminism. It tells the Camille stories of the Children of Compost, a project begun at a writing workshop held during a 2013 colloquium run by Isabelle Stengers. In the workshop, the participants were divided into groups of two or three people and told to “fabu-

late” a baby and take the child through five human generations. She and her fellow participants have continued to work with their ideas of Camille and the Children of Compost since the workshop, sharing them at times, and writing alone at others. Part of the idea of the project as Haraway conceives of it is to be a model “for composing collective projects, not just in the imagination but also in actual story writing.”

In her stories, the Communities of Compost, while not starting from scratch—since that is not an option in our world—, form a system that requires all new children born to have at least three parents (of whatever genders). The person who bears the child chooses an animal symbiont for that child. In the Camille stories, the symbiont is the Monarch butterfly. Haraway gives us stories of five Camilles, beginning with the birth of the first in 2025, and ending with the fifth, who dies in 2425. Each of the Camilles has a different relationship with the butterflies. The summary of these five generations of Camilles gives us a snapshot of a human future that stays with the trouble.

In *Staying with the Trouble*, we find real SF: science fiction, science fact, science fantasy, speculative feminism, speculative fabulation, string figures, so far. So many ways to look at the world and ourselves, so many complicated ideas on how we critters will survive and thrive and die in the disturbing Chthulucene. Haraway is difficult to read. But the effort required is worth it.

“It matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what concepts we think to think other concepts with. It matters wherehow Ouroboros swallows its tale, again.”

In Staying with the Trouble, we find real SF: science fiction, science fact, science fantasy, speculative feminism, speculative fabulation, string figures, so far. So many ways to look at the world and ourselves,

Nancy Jane Moore is a speculative feminist/fabulist/futurist whose science fiction novel *The Weave* came out from Aqueduct Press in 2015. Her most recent short stories have catapulted from dragons to steampunk to military SF. A native Texan who spent years in Washington, DC, she now makes her home in Oakland, California, with her sweetheart and two cats.





In the Dreaming Darkness

Sleeping Under the Tree of Life, by Sheree Renée Thomas, Aqueduct Press, August 2016, 128 pp., \$12.
reviewed by David Findlay

Thomas's universe-spanning, Southern-inflected worldview yields a project that is lush, bold, and caring. It engages us with being embodied, being of the earth and of each other.

Sleeping Under the Tree of Life



Sheree Renée Thomas

Conversation Pieces

Thomas's text animates and illuminates, cries, sings, and celebrates. Some pieces, particularly some of the poems, feel perfect.

Wordsmith Sheree Thomas's poetry and short fiction collection *Sleeping Under the Tree of Life* is fearless, grownup-people writing. It doesn't need to hide indoors when back-country night wraps the world in blackness and magic.

This is grownup writing in other senses too. It is both demanding and generous in the ways that the best speculative fiction and poetry can be. Thomas's universe-spanning, Southern-inflected worldview yields a project that is lush, bold, and caring. It engages us with being embodied, being of the earth and of each other. Flesh, landscape, and their intertwinedness are present in every piece. So, too, is spirit present throughout, in a dazzling range of formulations.

The collection begins with poems, many of them engaging the idiom and structure of music, and progresses to longer pieces, some of which bridge prose and poetry. Overall, they build a potent, dense, intensely emotional experience, awash in rising waters and alive with ancestral voices. Thomas's text animates and illuminates, cries, sings, and celebrates. Some pieces, particularly some of the poems, feel perfect.

The extraordinary "Ring Shout for Survivors" finds caring and courage in a ritual of shared song:

...forgive the blood pumping
through temples and wrists
color in your own lifelines
and find a hand to clasp (*hold it now!*)
in your broken own...

Textures and patterns recur throughout: river water, spider silk, tree bark, and all the shades of darkness in a Tennessee night. Many pieces explore the relationships of mothers, grandmothers, and daughters to each other and to shared loss. Throughout also there are music and history, trees and more trees, and painful changes of state, as well as recovery, rebuilding, resistance. The poem "This by My Hand" speaks of crafting

a world from what the powerful have missed or discarded:

...With the seeds you spat out
and left to dry on the paths
you tried to bar from me
I pieced together my own company
A ragdoll made from homespun...

Thomas challenges herself to engage style and subject in personal, heartfelt ways. Most often the results are stellar. As with any brave exploration, though, not all of the explored directions are equally fruitful all of the time. I'm unsure about the structure of "A River Almanac," in which rhyming seems half-intentional. "Urban Blight" more effectively brings in a rhyming chorus, demonstrating (as many pieces here do) a fascination and deep familiarity with secular and spiritual musical traditions of the African Diaspora.

Thomas's expert ease with poems, songs, and the shortest fiction is apparent. "Origins of Southern Spirit Music" is a four-page rush of healing conjure-work that rings wise and true as the original Delta Blues. In it we find lines like, "If music is the space between the notes, then love is the space between lives."

"River, Clap Your Hands" weaves (in ten pages, twelve chapters) a claustrophobic, catastrophic, and quite brilliantly muddy floodwater soup of PTSD and transformation, in the wake of which this reader is uncertain whether to mourn or rejoice. At the brief length of this story uncertainty is an asset, form and content a seamless whole whose spookiness is unique and resonant.

Other ultra-short prose here, like the lovely two-and-a-half-page "Treesong," riffs on a single image or a single action, expanding upon and layering a moment. There is a gift to knowing just how many words to wrap around an idea, and in most of these works Thomas seems to gauge that metric exactly.

The two longer pieces that close this collection are vivid and entrancing. “Tree of the Forest Seven Bells Turns the World around Midnight” and “The Grassdreaming Tree” both aim very high. Both almost reach the mark they set.

“The Grassdreaming Tree” is lyrical, complex, and ambitious, but to me somewhat confusing. It completely succeeds in the realm of emotion; made me ache with its description of a black colony in another star system struggling to address the persistent re-intrusion of what has been excluded or left behind. Elements of the community’s response to an outsider feel poignantly familiar. The physical environment is exquisitely rendered and the sad, surreal mood lasts long after the tale is told. The story in total, however, could be clearer and more concise. It speaks to the author’s remarkably sure grasp of tone that this prose poem leaves me with a myriad of emotionally laden mental images, despite my frustration at what felt at times over-described and under-explained.

“Tree of the Forest Seven Bells Turns the World around Midnight,” the last story, features more character development than other pieces, blends horror with environmental science, and depicts a date that one knows from the outset is not going to end well. There is a wealth of sensory description and a creepy, implacable, high-energy momentum to the story. It is at points a ballad of doomed love, at points just pure nightmare. For all this, I found there to be something not fully satisfying about it on first read.

The second time through, I caught more of the elegant foreshadowing detail. Second time through I also homed in on a bit more of what had bothered me. Some of that is a sense that one more edit wouldn’t have hurt. There are some minor awkwardnesses of language and logic in this piece and some details that may not be helping, though none that seriously impedes the flow.

My primary concern here is about the story’s relationship to suffering and justice. The world we live in does not usually offer a readily apparent rationale for our suffering. Creatures just suffer. Some

of us suffer sooner, some of us worse. It is sometimes because of what we do, sometimes despite what we do, and often for reasons entirely unrelated to our actions. In reaction to this largely random, wholly unavoidable facet of our experience we have developed conventions of storytelling that imaginatively address cause and consequence. One common approach is to exaggerate random chance and minimize the ways in which people are responsible for our own suffering. Another is to downplay chance, linking suffering instead to character flaws and bad choices. Horror writing in particular trains readers to expect that characters will face either utterly undeserved or deeply deserved suffering.

An effective story, especially a chillingly effective horror story, needs us to care a lot about some of the characters, then needs some of those characters to suffer immensely (or believably to be threatened by immense suffering). When writing within the trope of bad consequences being earned, to make a main character simultaneously very relatable and deserving of great suffering is one heck of a challenge. If one is *not* structuring the tale as a morality play in which everyone gets their just desserts, in horror that choice also needs to be made apparent.

“Tree of the Forest Seven Bells Turns the World around Midnight” is an excellent story. It does not, however, articulate its own cosmology of consequence clearly enough for me. I found it hard not to wonder if the protagonist was being horrifically punished for insufficient optimism about the power of protest marches (and moss) to heal the world. A small quibble, definitely, but a noticeable one in the context of Thomas’s generally mature, compassionate, and well-considered voice.

On the whole, I enjoyed this strong, surprising collection. I recommend it unhesitatingly for readers ready to be drawn into the evocative, important world of Sheree Thomas’s craft.

“Tree of the Forest Seven Bells Turns the World around Midnight,” ...blends horror with environmental science.... There is a wealth of sensory description and a creepy, implacable, high-energy momentum to the story.

When writing within the trope of bad consequences being earned, to make a main character simultaneously very relatable and deserving of great suffering is one heck of a challenge.



Writer/artist David C. Findlay, a proud graduate of Clarion 2000, is also a recovering Canadian living in Southern California. His own work happens at the junctures of Afrofuturism, smut, politics, and other things that go bump in the night.



Madeline Galbraith: Utopian Environments

I like to think of myself as an escape artist: I like to draw and paint things that are not of this world that emulate utopian environments and creatures. I escape when I create the images, and hopefully, the viewer escapes as they see each piece.

These images were produced with a finger on various drawing iPhone apps within a space of 3" x 2." Most images originated in the Kik app. Some took a few minutes to complete; others took 10 hours or more, always in one sitting though. Some pictures were done using

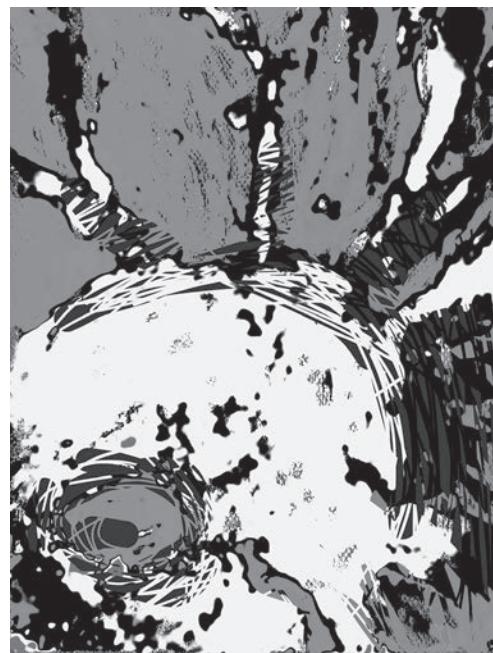
more than six different apps, while others needed only two apps. I let the images go where they want to go. I don't have any preconceived notions of what they will represent when I start, but then they either quickly or gradually become something, and I try to work toward that.

My college degree is in graphic design, and in the distant past I have had award-winning work published in various professional journals. For the past 25 years I've worked in higher ed.

Featured Artist

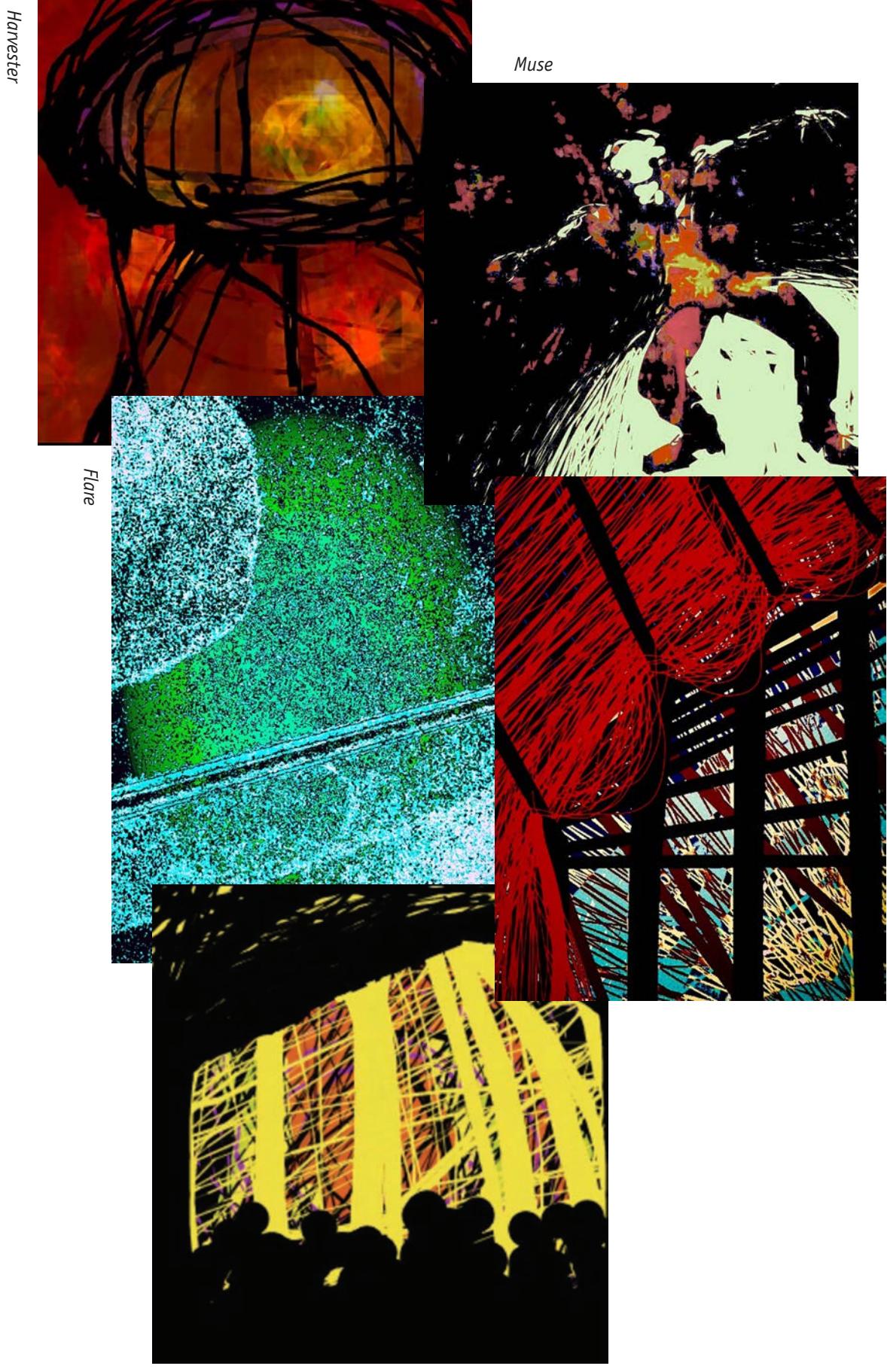


Hologram

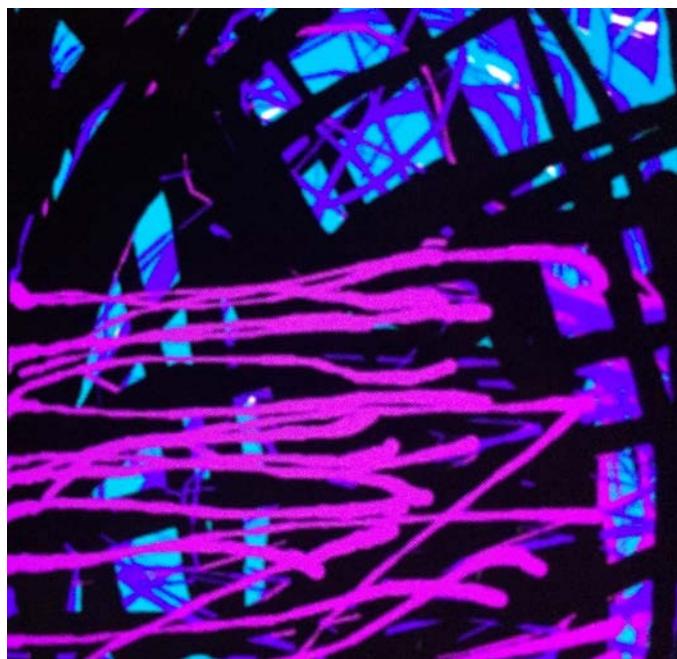


Aquature

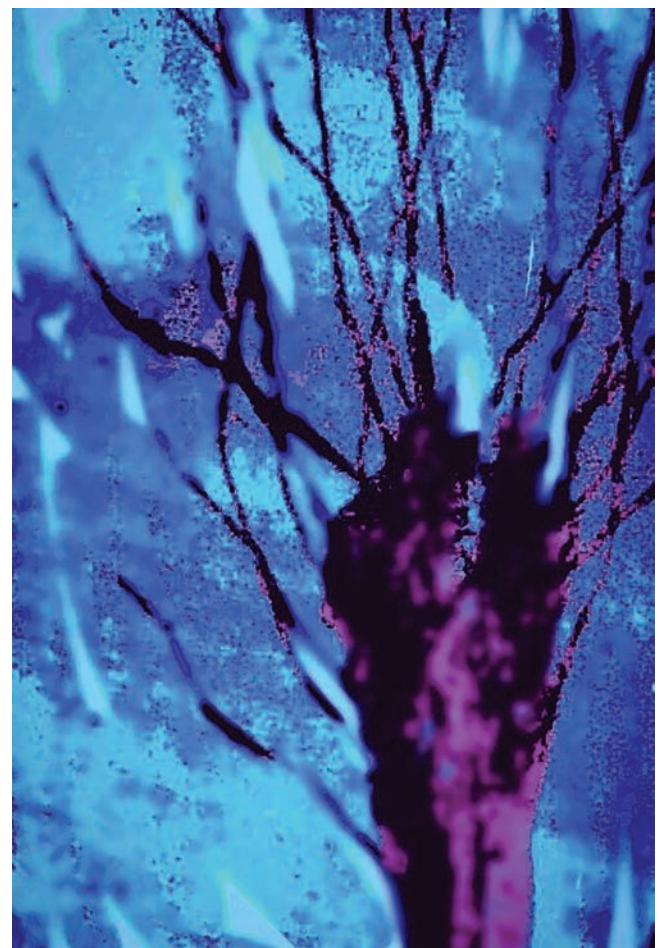




Observatory



Breach



Native Grass

\$005

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