

Inaugural Pembroke Lecture of Fantasy Literature in Honour of J. R. R. Tolkien
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INTRO

Thank you, Will. And thank you all for coming to hear this inaugural lecture. I am in equal parts happy and honored to stand before you.

Thank you in particular to the master and fellows of Pembroke and all the people who have made me feel so welcome here. Thank you as well to the *Annual Fund* J. R. R. Tolkien Trust for creating this opportunity for me and in the future for many others to speak about fantasy literature in what can feel like its homeland.

I am in the happy position of giving an inaugural lecture, which means I have no precedents -- no one I will be compared to unfavorably, thank god. It is nevertheless intimidating to speak before an audience that includes some of the foremost scholars in the field of speculative fiction. I have read your works and learned from them; how much or little may become evident in the course of this talk.

An inaugural lecture also gives some leeway for content." I am not a scholar nor a critic. What I am is a writer, and such insights as I have about the field are rooted in this, a craftswoman's desire to understand the origins, conventions, and potential of her chosen medium. Tonight, I am going to talk a bit about some tools that I find useful as I consider my medium, and then explore how they become useful in my writing.

and as this is a lecture in honor of Tolkien but not nec.

about him, I am reaping the benefit of that

This year I accepted a post as an assistant professor at the University of Kansas, home to the Center for the Study of Science Fiction, and SF scholar and Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America Grandmaster James Gunn. I was hired primarily to teach writing, but there are occasional literature classes, as well. This fall I gave my first lit class, an introduction to fantasy literature -- starting with myths and trickster tales and ending with Kelly Link's short story, "The Hortlak." To frame the class, I drew heavily from Brian Attebury's critical work Strategies of Fantasy, from 1992. It was by no means the newest work in the field, but Attebury's opening chapters offered tools that helped us as a class define for ourselves what fantasy was and was not.

One tool was the very useful distinction he drew between fantasy as a mode of narrative, as a genre, and as a formula. Attebury describes the **fantasy mode** as a narrative approach broad enough to include myths, literary ghost stories, and surrealism. In contrast, the **fantasy formula** is a toolbox of elements, characters, and conventions used by writers and publishers to create works that satisfy a reader's demand for something that reminds them of something else that they have loved. When he talked about formula, Attebury was mostly thinking of the heroic or epic fantasy, which still dominated the field in 1992; but another that has become important in recent years is the urban fantasy -- Jim Butcher's Dresden Files and its many, many ilk.

His definition of the **fantasy genre**, then, was a synthesis of these two: fiction in the fantastic mode given shape by certain formulaic restrictions of content, voice, and the like. *My class, however, spent its time mostly engaged with fantasy in its broadest sense.*

Most critics of speculative fiction will agree with the statement that science fiction *(like mainstream fiction)* is fiction about things that could happen; and that fantasy is about things that could not happen. With science fiction, you can potentially see a way to get from here -- this world, here and now -- to there, the world of the story.

There is no break with reality, only some distance that has to be crossed, whether *that* of time, technology, or scientific understanding.

According to this distinction, fantasy does require such a break with reality. You can't get from here to there: there is no wardrobe; vampires don't exist.

Brian Attebury says that fantasy requires "some violation of what the author clearly believes to be natural law." Kathryn Hume refers to a "departure from consensus reality," which I like better. ~~These definitions give us a place to put medieval miracle tales and the more fanciful old travelogues and natural histories -- works in the fantastic mode.~~ Reality is not what is certainly possible, only what is believed to be possible. Many things are not real but according to the consensus reality of their times, they might have been. It was no great distance between headless men with faces on their stomachs and absurdities like elephants, at least to people who had seen neither.

Attebury also discussed Northrup Frye, who in his 1957 book Anatomy of Criticism argued that there is a fundamental division within literature, two opposing ^{modes} impulses. One is the mimetic ^{mode} impulse -- the ^{impulse} tendency to exactly reproduce things as they are seen to be. The other is the mythic ^{mode} tendency, which Attebury revised somewhat and called "the fantastic ^{mode} tendency," which opened the door to things did not and could not exist. My students and I worked with these opposing impulses as two poles anchoring a continuum, the mimesis/fantasy spectrum. We tried to set each story ^{we studied} somewhere on the spectrum, and found the determination was often quite complicated

The mimetic pole, at least as defined by my class, is personal experience. But not writing about personal experience: no matter how realistic or autobiographical a work of literature is, it's still not quite all the way to the pole. Mimetic literature is work that is imitative of reality, reportorial, ^{then} naturalistic. It is not necessarily quotidian but it is usually engaged with immediate details or description. It is Tobias Wolff, Raymond Carver, and Tim O'Brien. "You know," I would whisper in the secret recesses of my brain, "the dull stuff" -- though in fact I love Tim O'Brien, at least.

The mythic (or fantastic) pole is the place where anything is possible. It is an inchoate mass of ideas and images; without limit. It is dreamland logic, or god logic. Again, words enforce order, so we agreed that art was closer to the pole than literature: Rene Magritte and Leonora Carrington were obvious examples; and abstract art was even closer. Creation myths were our most extreme literary example, since god logic is in play, and there are no limits to what is possible.

There is no entirely mimetic or fantastic literature, because both extremes of the continuum are essentially inaccessible to the reader. The mimetic pole has no room for anything but the writer's unmediated reproduction of an experience she has had. The fantastic pole is an unshaped mass of the writer's unfiltered dreamstuff. Neither compromises with the reader and her own experiences, her own mythic impulses.

So there is always a balance between mimetic and fantastic in a story. In a high fantasy, the mythic impulse is obvious, though usually it is anchored by conventional narrative, and ^{tools} especially by descriptive, telling details. The Iliad and Beowulf -- two works unequivocally in the fantasy mode -- demonstrate exquisite attention to factual detail.

In realistic fiction, the fant. may be no more than the extrapolation necessary to imagine being a scientist on the Manhattan Project...

In modern-day fantasies such as urban fantasy, the fantastic impulse is clearly present, but the mimetic impulse toward real or imagined (but possible) experience is stronger than in heroic works. Stories are set not in Middle-Earth but in Seattle, or Minneapolis. Their protagonists wear clothes I can find in my closet, and they use the same Internet I do.

A third balance appears in some magical realism and slipstream fantasy -- The mimetic impulse can appear to dominate a story ^L at the heart of which is an single impossibility. This is where I live as a writer. In much of my fiction, the world is as close to our own as I can make it -- there are Subarus, there are state fairs. But there is one absurd, impossible element -- a river made entirely of bees; or a bathtub that teleports monkeys and only monkeys. Accept the single break with reality, and the rest -- characters, plot, voice, and so forth -- is naturalistic.

But the irrational break must nevertheless be there or I cannot write the story. It is the reason for the story.

By halfway through the semester we were cutting and pasting theories to suit ourselves, and we decided there was a third element that affected whether we perceived something as fantasy or not. A story did feel mimetic or fantastic because of its material -- elves felt like fantasy; divorces felt like reality.

But also important was how the narrative engaged with itself. Was it telling its story without reminding you that it was a story? Or, was it pointing to itself, calling the reader's attention to the fact that it wasn't reality? In other words, was it naive, or was it self-aware and metafictional?

A **naive tale** does not obviously observe itself. This is the majority of popular fiction, and this can be independent of voice, style, and content. I as the writer of a naive tale set out to tell the reader a story, and I do it in such a way that she may, if she chooses, fall into it, and be rewarded by experiencing the story from inside, as it were.

In contrast to the naive tale is the **self-aware story**, which engages directly with the nature of narrative. It forcibly reminds the reader that she is not in that place with those people. She cannot immerse herself, so must find other rewards for reading. And by calling attention to itself, the story also calls attention to the nature of narrative in general.

This was for us a worthwhile third axis: How self-aware is the story? How much does it engage with the nature of story? A story ^{can} ~~could~~ be about an entirely ^{can be seen as} meta.

realistic event such as a messy divorce, and still feel ^{like a fantasy is} if the writer ~~was~~ ^{is} engaging with the story as though it were ^{one} ~~fantasy~~.

As I writer I spend a lot of time trying to find the place where these three impulses balance to my satisfaction. One of my recent stories was an attempt to balance on that point -- a story that points to itself in the most obvious way -- it is called "Story Kit," and it is just that: a kit for telling a story: a collection of materials that a writer is using to create something we never actually get to read, but which ^{balances} ~~incorporates~~ her personal, very realistic, experiences ^{against} ~~with~~ a mythic tale. This is how it starts:

Six story types, from Damon Knight:

1. The story of resolution. The protagonist has a problem and solves it, or doesn't.
2. The story of explanation.
3. The trick ending.
4. A decision is made. Whether it is acted upon is irrelevant.
5. The protagonist solves a puzzle.
6. The story of revelation. Something hidden is revealed to the protagonist, or to the reader.

It has to start somewhere, and it might as well be here.

Medea. Hypsipyle. Ariadne. *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. *Madame Butterfly*. *Anna Karenina*. Emma Bovary. Ophelia.

Dido. *The Aeneid*. Letter 7 of Ovid's *Heroides*. Lines 143–382 of *The House of Fame*. Lines 924–1367 of *The Legend of Good Women*. A play by Marlowe. An opera by Purcell.

Wikipedia: *Dido*. *Aeneas*.

The pain of losing something so precious that you did not think you could live without it. Oxygen. The ice breaks beneath your feet: your coat and boots fill with water and pull you down. An airlock blows: vacuum pulls you apart by the eyes, the pores, the lungs. You awaken in a fire: the door and window are outlined in flames. You fall against a railing: the rusted iron slices through your femoral artery. You are dead already.

She can write about it if she is careful, if she keeps it far enough away.

Dido's a smart woman and she should have predicted his betrayal, as Aeneas has always been driven before the gusting winds that are the gods. His city Troy falls to their squabbling, the golden stones dark with blood dried to sticky dust and clustered with flies: collateral damage, like a dog accidentally kicked to death in a brawl. Aeneas huddles his few

followers onto ships and flees, but Juno harries him and sends at last a storm to rip apart his fleet. He crash-lands in a bay near Carthage. His mother – Venus; another fucking god – guides him to shelter.

Dido is Reynard; she is Coyote. No gods have driven *her*, or if they have, she has beaten them at their own game. She also was forced from her land but she avenged her father first, then stole her brother's ships and left with much wealth and a loyal, hard-eyed army. Rather than fight for a foothold on the Libyan shore, she uses trickery to win land from the neighboring kings. They cannot reclaim it except through marriage, so she plays the Faithful Widow card, and now they cannot force her into marriage, either. If she continues to play her cards well, the city she founds here will come to rule the seas, the world.

The neighboring kings understandably resent how this is working out.

She begins to build. When Aeneas arrives on her shores, Carthage is a vast construction site threaded with paths, its half-finished walls fringed with cranes and scaffolds, and hemmed with great white stones waiting to be lifted into place.

Aeneas comes to her court a suppliant, impoverished and momentarily timid. He is a good-looking man. If anything, his scars emphasize that. The aura of his divine failure wraps around him like a cloak. Dido feels the tender contempt of the strong for the unlucky, but this is mixed with something else, a hunger that worms through her bones and leaves them hollow, to be filled with fire.

There is a storm. They take shelter in a cave where they kiss, where for the first time she feels his weight on her. Words are exchanged.

And afterward, when they lie tangled together and their sweat dries to cold salt on her skin, he tells Dido that Jupiter has promised him a new land to replace his lost Troy. Italy. He is somewhat evasive but in any case she does not listen carefully, content to press her ear to his breast and hear the rumble of his voice stripped of meaning.

There is every reason to believe he will be no stronger against the gods this time, but Dido loves him.

Some losses are too personal to write about, too searing to face. Easier to distance them in some fashion: zombies or a ghost story. Even Dido may be too direct.

The writer kneels on the dark tiles of the kitchen floor and begs: anything, anything at all. She will die, she tells him. She will not survive this loss. Her face is slick with snot. *There's blood on your face*, he says. Her tears are stained red from where she has broken a vein in her eye. Her heart is skipping beats, trying to catch up to this new rhythm that does not include him. She runs to the bathroom, which a year ago they painted the turquoise of the Aegean sea. He kneels beside her as she vomits but does not touch her, as though he wishes he could help but does not know how.

She cannot figure out what has happened. It seems he cannot either, but the wind fills his sails. He is already gone.

This may or may not be fantasy, depending on the status of Dido's story within "Story Kit." Is it the tale that the story kit creates, or is it just background for a solidly realistic story? *Or something else?* You can't know because of the ~~aggressively~~ metafictional nature of the story. I, Kij Johnson, am writing about an unnamed writer, who is carefully not writing her own story, but is remembering Dido's tale, which the narrator of the story (who may or may not be either Kij Johnson or the writer), is remembering, or maybe telling. "Story Kit" ^{also} includes a number of abortive story fragments, none of which turn into the writer's final story. *What is the final story? It is both the story called "Story Kit" and something that is never seen.*

When my short story collection came out this fall, reviewers pretty consistently mentioned the range of the stories. They knew some of it was ~~science fiction and~~ ^{realistic, and some was} some was fantasy (though they guessed wrong sometimes about which was which), but after that the word "uncategorizable" got tossed about a bit.

To my mind there's great consistency in what I do. My work is always, at its heart, fantasy -- my stories don't exist without the thing that is not, the dream-moment. Without the story of Dido and Aeneas, I cannot tell the story of the divorced writer, no matter how many details from my personal life I use.

"Story Kit" was an attempt to get as close to the mimetic end of the continuum as I could. This is another recent attempt, *far into metafiction and yet at mimesis* a couple of entries from "The Apartment Dweller's Bestiary," which will be put out as a chapbook by Small Beer Press this year:

"The Aincolo"

You're showing your boyfriend what to put in a smoothie and you open a cupboard because he told you that he had toasted coconut somewhere and you figure sure, coconut, why not; and that's where his aincolo is: squatting in the yellow serving bowl his mom gave him last year for Christmas. That's cool. You have lots of friends with aincolos. They get in everywhere. But he was so weird about it, picked up the bowl with the aincolo hunched down now, nothing visible but two eyes in a cloud of cream-colored fur, and took it out to the living room and hid it somewhere. Why? Why.

But this got you wondering what else there was, what numbers in his contacts lists, what porn on his hard drive, what texts, what friends, what memories; and you realized you really don't know anything about him and, more, that you don't really want to. You have your own secrets, one of them that you aren't over your last boyfriend yet, and that his is still the only name in your Favorites list.

“The Lopi”

When you move into the apartment on Vermont Street, the lopi are already there, two or three of them fluttering in the corners of each room, just where the walls and ceilings meet. What exactly do they look like? Like bats, like insects, like tiny silent birds the color of smoke? They never seem to rest. And what do they eat? Do they chew on your soap, lick the shampoo residue from the bottles in the bathroom? Or late at night, when you are trying but unable to sleep, do they swoop down to eat whatever has fallen into the aluminum liners under the stove’s burners? Wikipedia is of limited assistance here.

Before you moved in, your landlord promised to replace the old windows and repaint the dirty walls, and also to take care of the lopi problem. The windows are done, the walls now a tasteful eggshell color, but the lopi remain, and really, it’s not worth calling the landlord about them. They’re not that bad. They replace the pictures you don’t hang. The whirring of their wings is a white noise that conceals the silence.

And there are nights when you are alone in the full-sized bed in the single bedroom in the new apartment, everything so much smaller than your old life, and just as you fall asleep, you feel their feet on your face, delicate as antennae or memories.

I could write stories about single people alone in apartments without peculiar little animals roving through them, but it would not satisfy me as the beasts do, the aincolo and the lopi and the begittes and the rest. The beasts become symbols for and defenses against isolation, in a way no merely realistic element could. For the characters, but also for me. The writer. Could I write unflinchingly about staring up at a ceiling alone, without lopi fluttering in the corners?

At the opposite end of the mythic-mimetic spectrum for me is my very short story "Mantis Wives," which was published by Clarkesworld magazine online this year. Here's a beginning of that:

Eventually, the mantis women discovered that killing their husbands was not inseparable from the getting of young. Before this, a wife devoured her lover piece by piece during the act of coition: the head (and its shining eyes going dim as she ate); the long green prothorax; the forelegs crisp as straws; the bitter wings. She left for last the metathorax and its pumping legs, the abdomen, and finally the phallus. Mantis women needed nutrients for their pregnancies; their lovers offered this as well as their seed.

It was believed that mantis men would resist their deaths if permitted to choose the manner of their mating; but the women learned to turn elsewhere for nutrients, and yet the men lingered. And so their ladies

continued to kill them, but slowly now, in the fashioning of difficult arts.

What else could there be between them?

The Bitter Edge: A wife may cut through her husband's exoskeletal plates, each layer a different pattern, so that to look at a man is to see shining, hard brocade. At the deepest level are visible pieces of his core, the hint of internal parts bleeding out. He may suggest shapes.

The Eccentric Curve of His Thoughts: A wife may drill the tiniest hole into her lover's head and insert a fine hair. She presses carefully, striving for specific results: a seizure, a novel pheromone burst, a dance that ends in self-castration. If she replaces the hair with a wasp's narrow syringing stinger, she may blow air bubbles into his head and then he will react unpredictably. There is otherwise little he may do that will surprise her, or himself.

What is the art of the men, that they remain to die at the hands of their wives? What is the art of the wives, that they kill?

It would be possible to say some of the same things in a realistic story. Perhaps a modern-day story about a couple -- Sue and Jerry, let's say -- and some particular ways they are cruel to one another. Sue and Jerry might argue, in a car

on a snowy night perhaps, the sort of fight that starts with a grocery list and ends in a sort of grinding despair and their realization that they have for years cut and cut and cut each other, and yet cannot find the courage to change things.

I could tell that story, but that would be to miss the point of this story, ~~the inhumanity of such cruelty.~~ We are all cruel to each other; or think we are; or permit or suffer or ask another to be cruel to us. *It is inhuman and yet it is universal.*

Much of what I have written over the years has been epistemological. What *is* real? How can I be sure my experience of the world is the same as anyone else's; what is the consensus reality and who determines it? Since these are the questions I ask, fantasy is the mode in which I ask them. It is a mode uniquely suited to the topic.

The answer I keep coming back to in my stories is that we can't know - and this is maybe the heart of why I write fantasy.

My mentor
^ Jim Gunn has occasionally gone out on a limb and said that science is "observation plus statistical probability plus faith" -- faith that, if you see a ball drop one hundred times, it will, all other things staying the same, also drop the hundred-and-first time. But it might not. And if it doesn't? Who are we, in a world where an apparently impossible thing might happen? It is possible that nothing is impossible. Science fiction says that faith can't move mountains, but we have seen it do so, every time the ground is cleared with earth-movers to build a church or temple.

There are wonders in the world that open themselves to fantastic explanations, and I am willing to let them be possible. Many years ago I was walking on the Oregon coast, and a stone caught my eye. It was a little brighter than its neighbors, a mottled rust and dark teal, rounded, just about the size to fit into my palm. So I reached down and picked it up. It was hard, grainy, salt-rimed. And when I turned it over in my hand, it broke in half and suddenly dissolved into sand that poured through my fingers.

Since then I have asked myself why this happened and come up with more than one plausible explanation, but the fact is? I have no idea. There are explanations that bridge the gap between here -- a world where it takes millennia to turn a rock to sand -- and there -- a world where a woman's idle touch can do so. The world is full of strange things, things that make no sense, and maybe this is one of them. Why should my fiction not acknowledge that?

All fiction is an attempt to make sense of a universe that doesn't care whether it makes sense or not. What is the difference between accepting that a bathtub full of monkeys may exist somewhere in this strange world, and accepting that for no reason at all, you may lose someone you love? Neither should exist; neither makes sense; and yet the one is real and the other one isn't.

In recent years, I have strayed quite far onto the wilder shores of metafiction. My work of late is usually in the fantastic mode, but not really in the genre, and it uses few formulaic elements. With my latest project, I decided I wanted to return to conventional characterization and a straightforward narrative structure.

work, I have been rediscovering stories that are you know, stories, interesting good looking people doing exciting things.

My CURRENT project is

essentially realistic, but it is historical fiction, which has a lot in common with certain sorts of fantasy ~~they are both about interesting people doing exciting things in clothes I don't have at home, remember~~ ^{And} ~~It also~~ because I cannot seem to write without engaging directly with strangeness, ^{it also has modes} ~~both~~ the fantastic break with reality, and the difficulty of bridging the gap people individuals and peoples.

Kylen: The Moveable City is ~~an adventure novel~~ ^{our} set in 1778 in ~~a~~ world ~~very like ours~~ with one exception: the existence of Kylen, a small city that has for more than a thousand years moved instantly and unpredictably from one location to another. It has been settled for nearly a decade in Hyde Park when Fanny St. George accompanies her husband into Kylen. The City relocates unexpectedly to Tashkent, in what is now Uzbekistan and was then a backwater of the Ottoman Empire on the moribund Silk Road. Seventy Englishmen and women find themselves transported with it, ^{and} ~~Fanny and her husband~~ assume responsibility for finding a way to return them to London. ~~many thousands of miles, and many, many months, Or years.~~

The story is also about capitalist anarchy, ~~Hak Nam~~ (which is also known ~~as~~ Kowloon Walled City), Central Asia's geopolitics, Orientalism, urban warfare, 19th-century natural history, Joseph Priestley, ^{the diaries of} ~~and~~ Fanny Burney. It's also about what it means to be a woman who is not a mother: what it is that invests her in the future. It is also about the way I felt the first time I read Patrick O'Brien and Hilary Mantel. It's also about how people cope with the impossible; and how people bridge the gap between the self and the other. But then, that's what all my

writing is about. No story is simple; it always combines the real, the mythic, and the self.

This scene takes place very close to the beginning, as the City moves unexpectedly from London to Tashkent. This is in draft and changes every time I read it:

It just past one in the afternoon, which Fanny knows for she has just heard a watch-bell ring. She sits on a narrow bench with her friend ~~Ma~~ Mai in Kylen's Well-yard, drinking hot sugared wine; but she is on her way out ~~of Kylen, into London~~ ^{in Little Queen Street} to call upon her father, with a folder of correspondence she has written out fair for him, and to give to her step-brother ~~Samuel~~ ^{Samuel} this birthday gift, a clockwork mouse that eats and ~~then~~ defecates wooden pellets. Her footman Thomas is with her, to carry her packages; he waits at one of the hatches set into the Well-yard's walls, drinking ale and exchanging ~~the~~ news with the seller.

Fanny and Mai, drinking hot sugared wine: they make an odd but pretty pairing, Fanny attired to walk in London, full skirts and panniers in dark rose, and her hair dressed high under a cap and tricorne; Mai a small woman with the honeyed complexion common to Kylenians, and her black hair unpowdered, short and worn close to her head, in a green gown that just reveals her ankles ^{and blue felt slippers}

The yard is not busy; only a dozen people are reading the ^{sojik} boards, papered over as always with messages ~~of every sort~~, but there has been no

great news lately, so it is all old or frivolous, mere gossip only. ^{At a table nearby} A woman
with a tiny spotted dog feeds it bits of sausage from a vendor.

It is a cold day, and the wind outside blows down the slender shaft of the Well-yard – fifteen stories down and twenty yards across; very like a well itself -- and sets to moving all the things that hang from the

buildings that ring it: signs, banners, ~~shutters~~, ropes, clothing hung from drying lines. ^{The shutters + windows on every wall are open, and planks} The sun at its highest never reaches to the yard's silver floor ^{and cat's-walks laid across the} and the well at its center, but one may judge what time of day it is by the ^{corners - short cuts from building to building} angle and depth of the light. ~~a scapho-sundial of sorts~~. In October it does not come far, a bright golden slant against the top stories of the Clusy building on the yard's north face. Beyond all this is the London sky, a small square of brilliant blue, and a few small fair-weather puffs of cloud: cumulus. ^{fly down,} Pigeons pick through the scattered straw and refuse.

~~The shutters and windows upon every wall are open and planks and cat's-walks laid across the corners, so that people may cut the corners, as the saying is, and avoid the labyrinth of halls and corridors and allees within the City's many buildings.~~

Fanny hears voices from the windows, and laughter. Music comes from far overhead: a lute-maker testing a new instrument, many chords in quick succession. A man sings a quick pattering tune in a rough voice. ^{The} Kylenians speak many languages and seem to mix them to their own taste: Fanny recognizes few of the phrases, and then of a sudden, in English: *The Pantana gargoyle leaves its place, and seeks a better name and face--* and then back into garble. Pantana is the name of a stairwell here, in the

Grasshopper-building, and they have a monster of some sort, like a lion, carved of basalt and very ugly, perched upon their roof and glaring down into an allée; beyond that, she has no idea of the meaning.

Five or six stories overhead, a clear voice: "Get along, now." Fanny looks up and sees the speaker leaning from a window, and one of Kylen's snakes pouring off a cat's-walk and onto a balcony. Fanny thinks the snake is Cheynah, but after six months here she cannot name them; they are so many, and all equally black and glossy. She can tell them only apart only by their size and hunting scars. This one is six feet in length, perhaps: a fine, large size.

Fanny stands to take her leave, ~~and she hears a low noise, a grumble in her bones.~~ The little spotted dog drops its sausage and barks suddenly, stiff-legged, fur bristling. Other dogs join in from everywhere until every dog in Kylen barks or howls. ^{There is a low noise: a grumble in her bones.} Thunder? She glances up toward the sky. ~~Kylenians seem~~ ^{Everyone else seems} to understand something she does not, for they stumble to the center of the Well-yard, away from the walls. Na Mai shouts something that Fanny cannot hear. Thom across the Well-yard does not wait but drops his mug, beer arcing out as it falls, and runs toward them.

The low noise grows suddenly much louder, louder even than the dogs. There is a groan and the crack of a tree struck by lightning. Fanny is tossed and then hurled with great force to the ground.

A wind bursts from the doors and windows of the Well-yard and whirls up in a great rising spiral defined by dirt and all the things ripped

from the sojok and the walls--and the pigeons, hurled up unwilling, wings and tails a-splay, outlines against the red sky. Fanny has some notion that one of the buildings encircling the yard must be collapsing. ~~Everyone is fallen.~~

A cat's-walk in one corner breaks free and crashes down. A barrel falls from a window many stories up and bursts, with a great explosion of water and splinters. Fanny hears the sound of shattering pottery somewhere above, and glances up from between her hands.

The sky: it has changed, and for a moment she cannot take this in, sees it as a trick, or even a failing of her eyes. The blue, the sunlight reaching down the face of the Clusy building, the cumulus -- are gone. It has altered in an instant to thin shreds of red-tinted cirrus, in a dimming sky; no direct light at all; the Well-yard suddenly gloomy. It is, somehow, incredibly, near sunset.

The City has moved.

Afterward, Fanny tries to make sense of it. She understands the altered time of day immediately – they have shifted their meridian, they have moved east. But the abruptness of the change. Was there an intermediate stage between London's sky and this new one, when the shreds pushed aside the puffs? A flash, an instant of darkness? She was looking up and it changed but there was no transition that she discerned. She has no vocabulary for a change so abrupt. Even an eye-blink takes longer. Though she knows she is a careful observer, Fanny saw nothing;

but the sky was much obscured by the flying rubbish. It is easier for her to believe it is her own failing.

The spiraling wind reverses itself and slams its gleanings back down the Well-yard, even the pigeons; and this new and colder wind tears still more free from the walls; and throws everything onto the base, the tables and benches, and the men and women. Crashing noises, cries, shouts, glass breaking, the continued barking of the dogs; and then a vast grinding crash somewhere inside Kylan, as she has always speculated an earthquake or a shipwreck must sound, that goes on for some moments. The buildings tremble, and dust puffs outward from the seams between the pink stones of the Clusy building.

Fanny pushes aside the things that have fallen on her — ~~it is~~
Providence ^{that} there is nothing heavier than a basket that contains some quills and a roll of scarlet paper spooling out -- and struggles to her feet, but falls back to the floor with darkness before her eyes, so short of breath that she fears she will faint away. She stands again, more cautiously. There is crying, shouts.

Everywhere papers, mugs, splintered wood. Her skirts are soaked through with water from somewhere. The awnings that sheltered the vendors are torn or gone, the hatches mere gaping holes; every bench and seat is overturned and buried in detritus. ~~The well itself remains intact, incongruous in all this chaos.~~

The little Dog that started the barking shakes itself out from beneath a tipped table and stands as though confused by what it has

wrought; sees its mistress and runs to her. She kneels in the welter beside a man who lies unconscious: weeping and shaking but useless. Fanny sees with a sudden sickness that the man's arm is crushed. Fanny feels herself distanced from all emotion: she steps toward them but a man, one of the wine-sellers, na Heron, comes to them first and seems competent enough, and she sees she can do little more than he and would be much in the way. ~~She wonders that anyone would have been fool enough to leave something so heavy in such a perilous place; but, how could they know? No one expected this move, not for years.~~

Mai is still on the ground. Fanny reaches down to help her to her feet; she takes her arm and tries to rise but then shakes her head, says something in a language Fanny does not know. And then, "Do not let it be broken." Her ordinarily honeyed skin is sheet-white. ~~Fanny is enough of an anatomist to see that no bones are dislocated, though already it swells.~~

The man with the crushed arm is thrashing with the pain, held down forcibly now, by two others. A few feet from them there is a woman who has fallen from one of the windows. She bleeds from her mouth: two are crouched there with her, a third staggering away, shouting for a physician. ~~No, not here, we must get you back to Michon building."~~

|| There is a pigeon on the ground only a foot or two away, stunned and fluttering weakly. *It will be stepped upon*, she thinks, and pushes it under a bench, a handful of hot feathers.

When I first began, the goal of my writing was to get inside other people and mess with them. I wanted to write about cold so convincingly that they would shiver, and make them afraid of their own dogs, and break their hearts, and change them. Writing is an invasive act, and I saw it as such: I will make you see this; make you feel this. All fiction is manipulative, but it means something different to me than it used to. Question: how can I be sure that my reality is the same as anyone else's? How can I be sure that we are communicating across the gap? Answer: I increase the likelihood if I show ^{you} ~~them~~ the gap. And I increase the likelihood if I change their reality.

How can I be sure you are experiencing the great experiences I want you to?

Thank you for listening.

I am happy to take questions after this.

When I first began writing, my goal was to get inside people and change them. I wanted to write about gold so convincingly that they would swear. I wanted to make them imagine what it would feel like to have a tail. I wanted them to open doors differently because of something I had written. I wanted them to break their hearts. Writing is an invasive, manipulative act, and I saw it as such: I will make you see this. I will make you feel this.

All fiction is manipulative, true; but this means something different to me now than it did then. It's not that I want to make you feel something so much as I want to feel we are feeling the same thing, that I have moved away from the poles of the spectrum - my unmediated experience and my uncontrolled dream stuff - and toward a place where we can share. And because I see the world as a place full of strangeness, I hope ~~to~~ that we both can. That is what I work toward as a writer. I think that is something fantasy ~~literature~~ does better than can any ~~of~~ other literature.

Thank you for listening.

I am happy to take questions after this