



Lambda Sci-Fi

DC Area Gaylaxians

(202) 232-3141 – Issue # 362 – May 2020

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The LSF Book Discussion Group

If you're interested in lively discussions of F&SF books (with an emphasis on elements of interest to the LGBT community), we invite you to join the LSF Book Discussion Group. Each month, we conduct fascinating round-table discussions of works by significant F&SF authors.

The LSF Book Discussion Group usually meets on the 4th Thursday of every month, starting at 7:00 PM, at Peter & Rob's home: 1425 "S" St., NW – for directions or more details, call 202-483-6369. The next book discussion will be held on May 28th (to be held via Zoom).

Here are the details for the next couple of discussions:

May 28 – *The Stars Are Legion* by Kameron Hurley (moderator: Conrad) – This discussion will be held via Zoom.

June 25 – *This Is How You Lose the Time War* by Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone (moderator: Rob G.) – venue TBA.

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LSF's April 23rd On-line Book Discussion reported by Carl

It was a new LSF experience!

Due to COVID-19 concerns, LSF cancelled the Book Discussion scheduled for March 26th. However, rather than continue to cancel future book discussions, Rob G. re-organized the April 23rd discussion of Matt Ruff's *Lovecraft Country* as a "virtual book discussion". The event, hosted on Zoom, was announced via LSF's social media platforms. Carl (the discussion moderator) created discussion questions and an informational handout; and Greg posted the discussion questions and handout to the LSF web page.

There were 10 attendees, including a couple of delightful surprises. LSFer Rob S. attended from his current residence in Thailand; and Rob G. invited special guest Nat Gertler (from California), who has published several facsimile issues of the original *Negro Travelers' Green Book* through his "About Comics" publishing house.

Prior to starting the actual book discussion, there was some talk about the upcoming HBO production of *Lovecraft Country*, which is based on Matt Ruff's book. The group also talked with Nat



Matt Ruff

Gertler about the original *Negro Travelers' Green Book*; and Carl referred everyone to items on his informational handout. Then came the discussion of Ruff's book. The event lasted about two hours.

If you're interested in what was discussed, the archived questions and the informational handout can be accessed on LSF's Book Discussion page:

<http://www.lambdascifi.org/books/>

The group also decided on discussion topics for the next two months: Kameron Hurley's *The Stars Are Legion* (May 28th discussion to be moderated by Conrad); and *This Is How You Lose the Time War* by Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone (June 25th discussion to be moderated by Rob G.). The May 28th discussion will once again be hosted on Zoom; and Rob G. will send out call-in information. The method for the June 25th discussion is still TBA. Rob will also talk with Zena about the possibility of rescheduling the discussion of Erin Morgenstern's *The Night Circus*.

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<< May 2020 LSF Meeting TO BE HELD VIRTUALLY >>

Due to Coronavirus concerns, we plan to hold the May 10th LSF meeting virtually. Anyone who would like to participate can contact Rob at rob gatesdc@gmail.com for virtual meeting information. Hope to "see" you there!



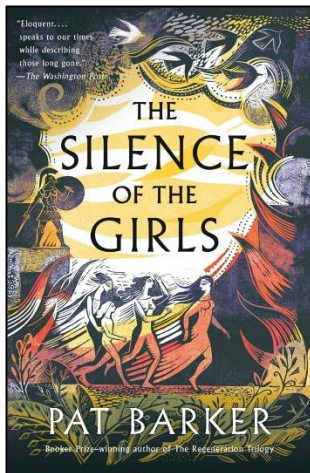
What's Inside?

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**Women of Greco-Roman
Myth & Legend
- Part 2 -
reviews by Carl**

Greco-Roman myths and legends mostly focus on men, particularly warriors, monarchs, and male deities. With very few exceptions (such as the mythological runner Atalanta), the ancient myths don't give mortal women much time "center stage". Some of the goddesses get "starring roles"; but mortal women seldom do. Yes, Greek tragedians occasionally give important roles to mortal women – for example, *The Trojan Women* and *The Bacchae* by Euripides – but it's more the exception than the rule. Modern fantasy writers seem more willing to center their novels around the women of Greco-Roman myths and legends; and I've been reading a number of them.



***The Silence of the Girls*
by Pat Barker**

(Anchor/Penguin Random House, 2018)

In Part 1 of this series (Sept. 2019), I reviewed Richard Purtill's *The Mirror of Helen* (1983). Like Purtill's novel, *The Silence of the Girls* tells the story of a mortal woman who is a key part the Trojan War legend: in this case, Briseis. If Helen's abduction is the purported cause of the Trojan War, it is Briseis who is arguably the inspirational source of all Western literature – she is the flash-point for the dispute between Achilles and King Agamemnon from which the events in *The Iliad* unfold.

**LSF's Scott Attends
North Country Gaylaxians
Book Discussion
taken from e-mails by Scott**

This evening [April 14th], I attended the North Country Gaylaxians book club discussion using Jitsi, a horrible tool no one should ever consider using. They may switch to Zoom.

We discussed Peg Kerr's *Wild Swans*, which is based upon the same-named fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen. I had not read the book.

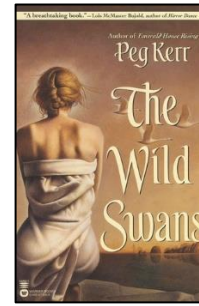
There were seven of us on the call – Don, David L. the librarian, Peg Kerr the author, Claudia (I suspect Rob and Carl know who she is), a guy named John, and some other guy.

Peg wrote the book 20 years ago and has not written anything since. [*The Wild Swans* (1999) was her second novel. Her first novel was *Emerald House Rising* (1997).]

Anyway, it was a fun discussion. There was not much of people talking over each other. It ran fairly well. It lasted about two hours. And that's tonight's book club report!

P.S. Peg mentioned that Greg McGuire is writing a book about the 7th swan – based upon the same Hans Christian Andersen tale.

Oh, and Peg Kerr mentioned that she attended Clarion back in 1988, which

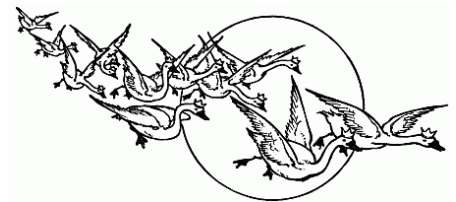


Peg Kerr

she thoroughly enjoyed. "The best six weeks of my life perhaps."

David L. mentioned that he is a judge for the MythCon awards (which he may have mentioned at his panel with Greg McGuire at Gaylaxicon). The MythCon awards announcement have been pushed, in case you wanted to know.

[In an e-mail response, Rob said: *The Wild Swans* is one of my absolute favorite books." Here's how Scott responded.] Not surprising that you would love this book, Rob, based upon last night's discussion. Claudia said that the book brought tears to her eyes in certain parts. **ΛΨΦ**



According to legend Briseis was the daughter-in-law of the King of Lyrnessus, a Trojan ally. Just before the events in *The Iliad*, Achilles sacked Lyrnessus and took Briseis as a prize. Then, right up front in Book 1 of *The Iliad*, King Agamemnon is forced by Apollo to give up the Trojan priestess Chryseis; and Agamemnon demands that Achilles turn the beautiful Briseis over to him as compensation for his loss. The ever-proud Achilles refuses to surrender Briseis, but he's eventually talked into giving her up to avoid causing a deadly civil war within the Greek army. As a result, Achilles goes off to his tent to sulk and refuses to provide any further support for the Greek siege of Troy until Agamemnon is forced to pay for this insult. Briseis had become a status symbol in a dispute be-

tween two powerful men; and all the events in *The Iliad* follow from this. As related in the first several lines of *The Iliad*: "The wrath sing, goddess, of Pel-eus' son, Achilles, that destructive wrath which brought countless woes upon the Achaeans [Greeks], and sent forth to Hades many valiant souls of heroes..."

The opening paragraph of *The Silence of the Girls* offers an interesting contrast:

Great Achilles. Brilliant Achilles, shining Achilles, godlike Achilles... How the epithets pile up. We never called him any of these things; we called him "the butcher."

(continued on page 3)

Women of Greco-Roman Myth & Legend - Part 2 -

continued from page 2

Barker's novel offers a unique perspective for viewing the events of the Trojan War – not from the point of view of the gods and kings and warriors who fought it, but from the point of view of the women who suffered as a result of it. The uproar from the great battles are only heard from a distance by Briseis and the other captives in the Greek camp. Instead we are given a close-up view of the drudgery and uncertainty of the captive women as they toil and serve and worry – slaves and servants and sexual playthings to the mighty Greek heroes who return each evening from the battlefield. It's a perspective that, as far as I know, is only shared by *The Trojan Women*, the classic anti-war play by Euripides.

Briseis is also uniquely positioned to give readers an intimate view of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus. Their relationship is no longer fueled by the flames of passion; they are, instead, a long-term couple who share their lives, their quarters, their meals, and (occasionally) their women. (No, they're not exclusively homosexual.) Their love is, however, still strong, a deep affection tempered by long years together. Briseis becomes inured to her subservient (and sometimes sexual) relationship with Achilles; but she develops a companionable (and mostly non-sexual) relationship with Patroclus, whom she comes to genuinely respect.

Through Patroclus, Briseis also learns of the very strange relationship between Achilles and Thetis, his mother. In Greek mythology, Thetis is a Nereid, a sea goddess; but, based on some of Briseis's early conversations with Patroclus, I wasn't sure if Barker was depicting her as anything other than a mortal woman who walked out on a particularly unsatisfying royal marriage when Achilles was still a boy. She also seems to have "soured" Achilles's opinion of marriage and women in general. During one of his quiet conversations with Briseis, Patroclus says the following about Thetis: "The thing is, she hated the marriage, it wasn't her choice, nobody asked her... I think she found it all disgusting. And she passed it on too..."

Well, you must've noticed? A certain... *distaste?*" Eventually, it becomes quite evident that Thetis is, indeed, a sea goddess and that Achilles has a rather unhealthy love-hate fixation on her – during one sexual encounter, Achilles even douses Briseis with sea water so that she will smell of salt like his mother. I don't think I've ever read any other story that shows the relationship between Achilles and Thetis in this light.

There are a couple of additional "odd" facets to *The Silence of the Girls*. First: Most of the novel is told as a first-person narrative from Briseis. But starting at Chapter 14 (about a third of the way in), there are occasional chapters which are told from the third-person point-of-view of Achilles. An unusual narrative choice, says I; but it allows the reader to observe events that Briseis simply would not have been present for and to get into Achilles's head and learn his view of events. Second: the novel's title. I could not figure it. Most of the Trojan captives aren't particularly "girl"-ish – they're mostly women, wives, widows. In fact, the closest quote I could find as a possible source for the title is a phrase repeated a few times throughout the novel: "Silence becomes a woman."

I was particularly jazzed by one of the final paragraphs in the novel, in which Briseis wonders how future generations will view the Trojan War:

... *I thought*: Suppose, suppose just once, *once*, in all these centuries, the slippery gods keep their word and Achilles is granted eternal glory in return for his early death under the walls of Troy...? *What will they make of us, the people of those unimaginably distant times? One thing I do know: they won't want the brutal reality of conquest and slavery. They won't want to be told about the massacres of men and boys, the enslavement of women and girls. They won't want to know we were living in a rape camp. No, they'll go for something altogether softer. A love story, perhaps? I just hope they manage to work out who the lovers were.*

Wow!

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(series to be continued)



**"And what do I care
about your Troy!"**
plate one from

***Physionomies Tragiques* (1851)
by Honoré Victorin Daumier**

"You know how European literature begins?" he'd ask, after taking the roll at the first class meeting. "With a quarrel. All of European literature springs from a fight." And then he picked up his copy of *The Iliad* and read to the class the opening lines. "'Divine Muse, sing of the ruinous wrath of Achilles... Begin where they first quarrelled, Agamemnon, the king of men, and great Achilles.'" And what are they quarrelling about, these two violent, mighty souls? It's as basic as a barroom brawl. They are quarrelling over a woman. A girl, really. A girl stolen from her father. A girl abducted in a war."

from

The Human Stain (2000)
by Philip Roth

*** * INFORMATION ABOUT LAMBDA SCI-FI: DC AREA GAYLAXIANS * ***

Lambda Sci-Fi: DC Area Gaylaxians (LSF) is an organization for gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and trans-gendered (GLBT) people, and their friends who are interested in science fiction, fantasy, horror and related genres in all forms (SF/F/H). LSF's primary goals are to have fun, to provide a community, and to:

- promote SF/F/H, with particular attention to materials of interest to GLBT people and their friends;
- provide forums for GLBT people and their friends to share their interest in SF/F/H;
- promote the presence of GLBT elements within SF/F/H and within fandom; and
- promote SF/F/H within the GLBT community.

Annual membership fees are \$10, for which you will receive an e-mailed copy of this monthly newsletter and a membership directory. Newsletter submissions are always welcome.

Meetings are usually held on the second Sunday of each month at a private residence. Due to Corona Virus concerns, the Lambda Sci-Fi meeting for Sunday, May 10th, will be held virtually. We will keep you informed of the status of future meetings.

Lambda Sci-Fi: DC Area Gaylaxians is an affiliate of **the Gaylactic Network**, an international organization for gay people and their friends who are interested in science-fiction and fantasy.

*** * Con Calendar * *** by Carl

May 22-25, 2020 **BALTICON 54**. CANCELLED.

July 10-12, 2020 **SHORE LEAVE 42**. Delta Hotels Marriott Baltimore Hunt Valley (Hunt Valley MD). Actor GoH: Denis Lawson (*Star Wars* "Wedge Antilles"); Brandon Routh (Superman & The Atom); Robert Duncan McNeill (Lt. Tom Paris); Brent Spiner (Data); Alex Kingston (River Song). Membership: \$105 for the weekend (\$120 at the door); daily rates available. Printable registration forms & on-line registration available through the Registration Page.

Website: www.shore-leave.com

July 29 – Aug. 2, 2020 **CONZEALAND, the 78th World Science Fiction Convention**. TSB Arena, Intercontinental Hotel *et al* (Wellington, New Zealand). GoH: Mercedes Lackey & Larry Dixon; George RR Martin; Artist GoH: Greg Broadmore; Toastmaster: George RR Martin. Membership: currently \$452NZ (approx. \$272US); it will go up! On-line registration.

Website: <https://conzealand.nz>

Aug. 20-23, 2020 **COLUMBUS NASFiC 2020, the North American Science Fiction Convention**. Sheraton Columbus Hotel at Capitol Square (Columbus, OH). GoH: Brian Herbert & Kevin J. Anderson; Artist GoH: Stephanie Law; Science GoH: Marc Millis (NASA). Membership: currently \$100 (will go up!). Make checks payable to "Columbus 2020 NASFiC" and sent to: Columbus 2020 NASFiC, c/o Kim Williams, 4227 Beechrun Rd., Whitehall, OH 43213. On-line registration also available.

Website: <http://columbus2020nasfic.org/>

Sept. 4-7, 2020 **TCEP 27** ("Ted and Craig's Excellent Party"). "A relaxed gaming convention." Hampton Inn & Suites Washington Dulles Airport (Sterling VA). Membership: \$30 for the weekend. Website: <https://www.barkingmad.org/>

Oct. 16-18, 2020 **CAPCLAVE 2020**. Rockville Hilton & Executive Meeting Center (Rockville MD). GoH: Peter S. Beagle and Troy L. Wiggins (editor/blogger); Connie Willis. Membership: \$55. On-line registration.

Website: <https://www.capclave.org/capclave/capclave20/>

Nov. 27-29, 2020 **CHESSIECON 2020**. Lord Baltimore Hotel (Baltimore MD). GoH: Charlie Jane Anders; Music GoH: Tom Smith. Membership: until October 31; \$60 at the door. Make check payable to "Thanksgiving Science Fiction Society" and send to: TSFS, Inc., PO Box 83032, Gaithersburg, MD 20883-3032. On-line registration also available via PayPal.

Website: <http://chessiecon.org/> Info at: info@chessiecon.org

Dec. 11-13, 2020 **AWESOME CON** (delayed from May 2020). Walter E. Washington Convention Center (Washington, DC). Guests include: Mario Lopez, Mark-Paul Gosselaar, & Elizabeth Berkley (*Saved by the Bell*); Ron Perlman ("Hellboy"). Includes "Pride Alley, a celebration of queer creators and fans curated by GeeksOUT." Membership: 3-day passes = \$80; 1-day passes = \$40-\$55 (depending on the day). Various selected "add-ons". Limited tickets – on-line purchase advised via their Tickets Page.

Website: <https://awesome-con.com/>