

The Devniad, Book 21

Bob Devney

25 Johnson Street, North Attleboro, MA 02760

508-699-7885 bobdevney@aol.com

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On First Looking into Perret's *Faces*.

"Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain," said the Wizard. But a sensible command like that is often ignored if you're the kind of person who's always looking for Oz.

That's why it's so fascinating to peer into *The Faces of Fantasy*. Here, photographer Patti Perret has collected more than 100 of her black-and-white portraits of current-day American and British fantasy writers. (Large-format Tor softcover, October 1996, 244 pages including covers, introduction by Terri Windling with added historical photos, \$22.95, ISBN Tor 0-312-86216-4.)

Given the state of contemporary fantasy, you might at first fear what you'll find looking back at you here. Not so much the visage of the Wizard as the face of the sausage-maker. But the selection is wide-ranging and first-rate.

There are class acts like Crowley, de Lint, Gaiman, Gilman, Holdstock, Le Guin, Powers, Ryman, Shepard, Sherman, Shiner, Wolfe, Yolen.

And more-than-promising upcomers including Brite, Brust, Bull, Ford, Friesner, Goodkind, Hambly, Kushner, Shetterly.

Plus young readers' stars such as Alexander, Coville, Jones, L'Engle.

The obligatory blockbusters like Bradley, Brooks, Jordan, Kurtz, Lackey, McCaffrey, Pratchett.

Even classics and slipstreamers such as Beagle, de Camp, Dunleavy, Oates, Straub, Walton, and Williamson.

Names to conjure with, all.

The format puts a large portrait of each author on the right-hand page of each spread. Plus what's billed as an "insightful personal statement" from said author on the left page.

I look first at the pictures. Make it a little game: how many will I recognize, from back-cover shots, or cons, or *Locus*?

But turning the pages, gradually the effect becomes cumulative, collective, mesmerizing. Seeing so many writers flipping past, patterns begin to emerge. You focus on repetitions, on details.

Cats and beards, books and eyeglasses.

For instance, this thing is an optician's paradise. Hard on the eyes, all this writing, apparently. As are some of the styles shown: what were you thinking of, Kara Dalkey?

Photographer Perret knows she's got a challenge here. She faced a similarly daunting task with her 1984 treasure *The Faces of Science Fiction*. How do you fight the sameness? All portraits, all black-and-white. All of subjects who make their living with their fancies, not their faces.

So she changes things up.

Shows writers at work, at play; at their desks (Joel Rosenberg, you should be ashamed of yourself. Clean this pigsty *immediately*, young man!) and in their yards.

Close up and far away (Is that you way back there, Lisa Tuttle?).

Dressed up like lords and ladies; and, in one memorable case, naked but

for a paperback. (No, unfortunately it's not Kristin Kathryn Rusch or Storm Constantine. But count your blessings. It's not Gordon R. Dickson or Jack Williamson either.)

With craft and composition, Perret shows you where to look. Directing your attention to Robert Holdstock's forehead. Ursula Le Guin's hand. Judith Tarr's smile.

Ellen Kushner's ass.

You may take a kind of talk-show attitude to your guests here. Who looks prosperous? Who's holding up well considering they must be a thousand years old? How are their houses decorated? Can I read their book titles?

You can play The Lookalike Game.

Gee, Gene Wolfe is just like Benjamin Franklin in aviators. (Only kinder and perhaps even more wise.)

Marion Zimmer Bradley could be the slightly-cleaned-up mother of a serial killer.

Alan Garner looks like the fire chief (Cyril Cusak) in the movie of *Fahrenheit 451*.

Fred Saberhagen is Bill Moyers without a PBS production deal.

John Lee must be Lewis Shiner's urbane older brother.

Gosh, C. J. Cherryh looks more like Liz Taylor every day.

Some look more like characters.

Paula Volsky is the wicked Queen of Disney's *Snow White* to the life; all she needs is a mirror and an apple.

And in that case, saturnine Terry Goodkind is the evil captain of the Queen's Guard.

In a more serious mood, you find yourself searching for context. In a portrait, that often means backgrounds, props. Clothes.

Rembrandt showed us a universe of grace in a lace collar. Looking at a (archival) picture of the early Irish fantasist Lord Dunsany, I become fascinated by the heaviness and boldness of his country-house tweed. They say the authentic article must be steeped in the stale of a stallion; here's a true horse-piss Harris if I ever saw one.

A certain wariness (or paranoia) and a hauntedness about the eyes seem to be major motifs here. Perhaps not inappropriately for the authors of such cheery works as *Lost Souls*, *Bone Dance*, *Ghost Story*, *In the Empire of Shadow*, *Those Who Hunt the Night*, *Nightmask*, *Darkspell*, and *Darker Than You Think*.

Certainly P. C. Hodgell, peeping from her mirror, shows body language suggesting she confronts an insurance salesman from beyond the grave.

The reader himself can start to share the darker vibe. Where, you might ask, are Cole and Bunch, Donaldson and Eddings, Adams and Asprin, or Fowler, Hoffman, McKinley? Is there a sinister reason behind their exclusion? Were they merely camera-shy? Simply out of town that day? Or forever imprison'd within a dark tower in Avalon?

On the other hand, some writers try to look relaxed; adopt more of an Everyauthor stance. Just us folks.

James Blaylock looks so regular-guy he must be running for President. Raymond Feist, arms folded, shows you some weeds he's growing. Gordon Dickson shares a cuppa tea.

Tracy Hickman leans on his club smiling, listening to another lie about your golfing prowess. For Judith Tarr, obviously, happiness is just riding a horse. Jane Yolen, hands weighing some alternative, converses clear-eyed and animated by the stairs. Gene Wolfe lets

you talk as he sits on the couch petting the dog. Make that wolf.

Perret (and her editor, Jim Frenkel) do know how to give jewels the right setting. The cover shows handsome leatherboy Neil Gaiman with his slightly haunted Midwest manse looming behind him. And Kristine Kathryn Rusch says grace right from the first page inside, poised with dark-eyed beauty in some enchanted ferny forest of the magical Northwest.

About the statements each author has included. As you might expect, the quality varies wildly, running the gamut from A to about D.

Called upon to caption a photo of a seascape, stone dagger, mitochondria, or teapot, I suspect most of these writers might do a better job than when the subject is A Picture of Me. Plus almost everyone seems to have figured that no one else would realize this is the perfect opportunity to define, say, the eldritch nature of fantasy itself, or why they write it. Yawn.

Terry Pratchett has the best answer there: "I'm having a lot of fun and people keep giving me money."

I'd been thinking lately that I liked to read science fiction, mostly. That I had decreasing interest in fantasy.

The names and faces in this book remind me that these statements aren't as accurate as I thought. And that the distinction is pretty misty anyway when you walk a little along the paths these writers have made.

It's a fabulous company that's gathered here. I recommend you spend a little time with this book, and with them, face to face.

FlimFan

Noteworthy movies seen since last time include *Rebound: The Story of Earl "The Goat" Manigault* (HBO), *The English Patient*, *Goldeneye* (HBO), *Mars Attacks*, *Michael*, *Jerry Maguire*, *Secrets and Lies*.

The winner would have to be *Secrets and Lies*, by the working-class English filmmaker Mike Leigh. It elevates kitchen sink drama to high art.

Backchat

on APA: NESFA #318, November 1996

To Tony Lewis

Well, after you saw the previews for *Mars Attacks*, I saw the movie. While it was as you indicated a hoot, it was a fairly subdued hoot.

In *LaserTron*, what strategy would I have followed had every hundredth beam been real? Immediate and unconditional surrender.

To Nomi Burstein

Glad you're happy with your Star Trek flip phone. I'm holding out for a teleporter.

To Jim Mann

Another fellow Aubrey/Maturin fan! Well met, shipmate! I keep looking in music stores for a CD of the piece that introduced them, that fateful little ditty of Locatelli's.

To Joe Ross (twice)

Not one but TWO quotes that should definitely make your year-end Hall of Fame! Let me rerun them here just for sheer pleasure.

Comedian Andy Kindler: "There's something wrong with people who go to *Star Trek* conventions. I mean, I like Mary Tyler Moore too, but I don't rent out a big hall and dress up like Rhoda."

And this classic from *The Simpsons*, with Homer begging two hungrily threatening aliens: "Don't eat me! I have a wife and three kids . . . [pause] . . . Eat them!" The night of the show, I promptly e-mailed that one to my nephew Jarrod in Madrid so he'd be homesick for the true spirit of America.

To Mark Olson

The Pais bio of Einstein sounded great albeit challenging; may try to dip in.

Disagree that *Memory* is one of Bujold's best. I found the Miles-is-depressed stuff simply depressing; not a mood I expect (or welcome) in light adventures. Tolerable, no more, for me.

But I agree about the wonderfulness of Anderson's *The High Crusade*. Must excavate for that one soon.

Thanks for the alert on "Whales" in OmniMax at the Science Museum. But the last two OmniMax shows I attended left me dizzy and faintly nauseated; afraid with "Whales" I'd get seasick.

Or harpooned.

To Paul Giguere

You say you "perseverate" on deadlines. Have you tried roll-on deodorant?

To George Flynn

Liked your Spanish "*Servicio Tributario*," or "Tribute Service," for the IRS.

One of my most cherished multilingual bloopers came from the guy who told me his favorite sight in Florence was, and I quote precisely, "the old Ponte Vecchio bridge." Which I translate loosely as "the old old bridge bridge."

To Michael Burstein

If we ever play LaserTron again, I'll try to rope in you and Nomi. Always need more laser cannon fodder.

To Anna Hillier