



[Home](#) [About Gene](#) [Contact Gene](#) [Gene's Art & Imagery](#) [Gene's Publishing Credits](#) [Q & A](#)

The Madness of Empty Spaces by David E. Cowen, a review

Posted on [March 4, 2015](#) by [Gene Stewart](#)

The Madness of Empty Spaces:

The Dark Poetry of David E. Cowen

Weasel Press, 2014, 61p

Introduction by Danel Olson

ISBN: 978-069-233-2962

A Review by Gene Stewart

A poetry collection featuring cover art, front and back, by the poet, published by a small press imprint, introduced by an academic; let's examine it.

The cover art, in black and white, is moody and evocative. This matches the poetry, which also has the grace to root itself in reality. Some of the poems herein are gritty, others cynical, and a few eerie. All are tactile, realistic, and noir. Not that metaphor is not present. Merely that everything is rooted in everyday things, daily sensations, quotidian thoughts.

A trial attorney, David E. Cowen is rooted in Galveston, TX. His tropes stem from what he experiences and has considered. Evoking crossed purposes, thwarted ambitions, and the dust of lost desires, his work here shares a mood with noir detective fiction and no-nonsense suspense. Tricks are eschewed in favor of concrete correlatives chosen carefully to bring the reader to a grounded, context-heavy realization.

“Seven Hauntings In Seven Storms: Galveston, TX”, a favorite of mine, offers glimpses of murders and crimes at a house spanning the years 1900 to 2008. Each vignette is chosen perfectly to reveal both situation and character. Each syllable carries us inexorably through a hall of horrors. It is like a dirge dancing a macabre with a medieval ballad, all in language plain enough for the crime pages of a newspaper.

About Gene

- [About Gene](#)
- [Contact Gene](#)
- [Gene's Art & Imagery](#)
- [Gene's Publishing Credits](#)
- [Q & A](#)

Samples

- [Art I Like](#) (5)
- [Autobiographical Writing](#) (27)
- [Gene's Art](#) (16)
- [Poetry](#) (51)
- [Sample Essays](#) (99)
- [Sample Fiction](#) (22)
- [Sample Reviews](#) (38)
- [Stewartoons](#) (10)
- [uncategorized](#) (21)

Recent Posts

- [The Madness of Empty Spaces by David E. Cowen, a review](#)
- [To Call the Dark](#)
- [Victorian Now Literacy](#)
- [My Name is Marnie by Tracy L. Carbone Shadow Ridge Press, 2014 trade pb, 245p, ISBN: 978-989-77963-0 cover design by Kealan Patrick Burke](#)
- [Lily Dale: The True Story of the Town that Talks to the Dead by Christine Wicker Harper trade pb, 2004, 282pp, \\$13.95 8pp b&w photo insert, ISBN: 0-06-008667-X](#)

Archives

- [March 2015](#)
- [February 2015](#)

“The Choice of the Last Child of Proveglia” shows us a parallel to the notorious Italian death isle, where plague victims were sent to die. Echoes of both defiance and despair captured by murderous intent are offered in counterpoint to a little girl’s insight as aristocrats are ushered toward execution. Passing through doors, led by axemen, she chooses instead of freedom to run toward another door, another axe, and certain death. Is it release? Is it fulfillment?

I read this book in one sitting, mesmerized. The poems kept drawing me back to examine how this was done, why that was cited, what words carried the most impact. “Palmetto Ghosts” gives us a tour of a battlefield long forgotten, a place where spirits mingle with fog in a confused bleat of pain and death. “Prayer to the Killer of Children” makes explicit our cries into the void for surcease and understanding, cries never answered. The titular poem, “The Madness of Empty Spaces” discusses abandonment by theological concepts, ours and the deities we create.

“Gothique” mixes love, sex, and death with predatory chills and false assurances. It is overtly a poem of horror, not merely darkness.

Taken together, this is a consistently excellent collection throughout. Each poem pulls you into a moment, an insight, a world. As they flow together this collection demonstrates a unified effect, if not quite a theme. It gives the impression of a down-to-earth mind perceiving the eyes in the shadows most of us pass by every day. Definitely worth seeking out, The Madness of Empty Spaces by David E. Cowen did not quite make this year’s Stoker Award final ballot, but exposure to it lingers. Find a copy and see for yourself what quality dark poetry is all about.

/// /// ///

Posted in [Sample Reviews](#) | Tagged [dark](#), [poetry](#), [review](#), [Stoker Award](#) | Comments Off

To Call the Dark

Posted on [March 3, 2015](#) by [Gene Stewart](#)

“To Call the Dark”

Dust between its teeth;
Dessicated unbrushed food
Or simply years of absence
Ignored by apathy?

Condemned house
Taken apart, torn down;
Floorboards revealed
Confusion, surprise, shock.

Details delivered disgust:
Crushed cranium,
Shattered teeth,

- [January 2015](#)
- [December 2014](#)
- [November 2014](#)
- [September 2014](#)
- [August 2014](#)
- [July 2014](#)
- [June 2014](#)
- [May 2014](#)
- [March 2014](#)
- [February 2014](#)
- [January 2014](#)
- [December 2013](#)
- [November 2013](#)
- [October 2013](#)
- [September 2013](#)
- [August 2013](#)
- [July 2013](#)
- [June 2013](#)
- [May 2013](#)
- [April 2013](#)
- [March 2013](#)
- [February 2013](#)
- [January 2013](#)
- [December 2012](#)
- [November 2012](#)
- [October 2012](#)
- [September 2012](#)
- [August 2012](#)
- [July 2012](#)
- [June 2012](#)
- [May 2012](#)
- [April 2012](#)
- [March 2012](#)
- [February 2012](#)
- [January 2012](#)
- [December 2011](#)
- [November 2011](#)
- [October 2011](#)
- [September 2011](#)
- [August 2011](#)
- [July 2011](#)
- [May 2011](#)
- [April 2011](#)
- [March 2011](#)
- [January 2011](#)

Blogroll

- [Documentation](#)
- [Even Trade at PARAPHILIA](#)
- [Gene Stewart's Blogspot](#)
- [Gene Stewart's LiveJournal](#)
- [GeneStewartArt](#)
- [H. P. Lovecraft Archive](#)
- [J.S. Wayne's Blog](#)
- [Jethro Tull Official Site](#)
- [LJSellers Blog](#)
- [Paula Cappa's Blog](#)
- [Plugins](#)
- [Rachel Johnson's Godless Vagina](#)
- [Rebecca Snow Interviews Gene Stewart](#)
- [Suggest Ideas](#)
- [Support Forum](#)
- [The Reluctant Famulus](#)
- [Themes](#)
- [WordPress Blog](#)
- [WordPress Planet](#)

Fractured eye sockets.

Violence summed this
Figure of hidden death.
Murder, they whispered,
Those humbled laborers.

Underfoot all those years.
Babies played on this floor.
Mice lived inside it.
Did they eat it hollow?

No other bones, look.
Where could they be?
Hidden in the walls?
Half the workers quit that day.

Demolishing continued,
Costing more time and cash.
No further bones arose.
Her skull remained mysterious.

Across town a grave unnoticed
Contained all but Harriet Alvira Morten's
Empty little head; her daddy's words:
If it weren't attached you'd lose it.

She had, when Samuel Dryden Post
Detached it for his experiments
In arts he considered dark.
He had it for years in a velvet bag

Until his mother found the skull
While finally cleaning his room.
Appalled, she smashed the horror,
Calling it abomination when he got home.

He made a midnight gathering to
Put the pieces under floorboards.
No one knew he slept over her,
Dreaming of what he'd been taught
To call the dark.

/// /// ///

/ W B Kek

Links of Interest & Use

- [Stephen King's 22 Writing Tips](#)
- [Thunderstruck](#)

Meta

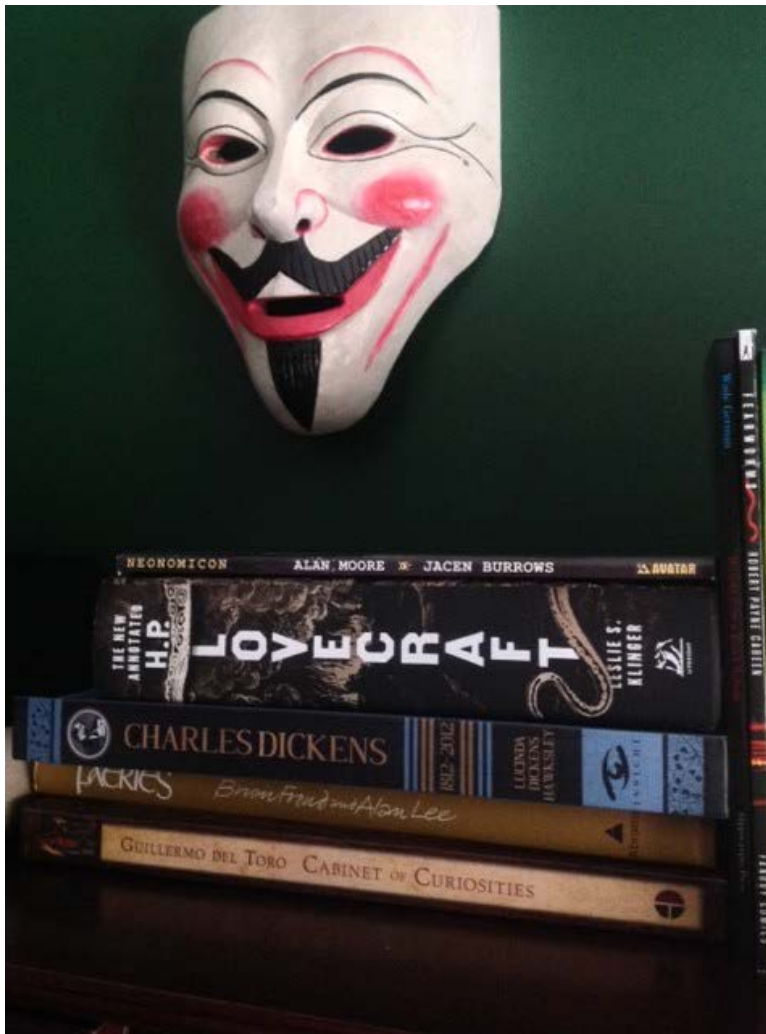
- [Log in](#)
- [Entries RSS](#)
- [Comments RSS](#)
- [WordPress.org](#)

Tull Radio

GeneStewartArt at Zazzle

Victorian Now Literacy

Posted on [February 12, 2015](#) by [Gene Stewart](#)



Why has 50 Shades of Gray sold like crazy despite everyone of any relevance condemning it as a badly-written, badly-conceived infantile book unworthy of attention?

No one reads for style. Maybe a handful of us, sure, but mostly people read ONLY for plot-points, with a strong preference for a fourth-grade reading level in sentence and scene construction. Keep the vocabulary simplistic, with the occasional big word carefully explained so they can feel oh so smart. Best exemplar is the prose of Arthur Conan Doyle.

This means discussion of quality falls on not only deaf but ignorant ears. Readers do not know what we're talking about. Oh, good readers do. Literate readers, that tiny group, they know, but the masses who make 50 Shades a big seller have no clue. Tad's right, it's not a zero-sum game, it's just Gresham's law, is the thing: Bad writing forces out the good writing.

That's what worries me about the popularity of empty fakes like 50 Shades. ERB did not preclude PKD but Gerald Kersh is already forgotten and Harlan Ellison will be, once he actually croaks instead of taking about it.

What's sad but true: the best boil off. They become "writers' writers" and are known in tiny coterie of literate appreciators. Meanwhile the bad forces out the good, there being no

room for it, no patience. Exploitative pulp will always sell wider and faster than quality.

So maybe we should stop grouching when sub-literate crap floats. Instead, decide: Are you commercial or serious in your writing? Can't be both, they won't let you. Those who mix in quality with popularity are the ones we tend to admire but it's deucedly hard.

As an example, Dickens is far less sentimentalist than he's so often charged with being. Yes, he did indeed address the masses in their concerns, and spoke for the common man. However, he did not write down to them. His prose is as eloquent, as high and pure as any; the public back then was far more apt to be largely illiterate but those who were literate were actually up to reading Dickens.

When his installments came out, people who could read would stand on boxes and read the work aloud to rapt listeners. His stories penetrated to the whole society the way addictive mini-series or binge-watched shows do now, despite being "too hard to read" as many modern students complain.

Read the Victorian newspapers, or try to, and you'll see what I mean about the standards and levels of general literacy having been higher in Victorian times. Today's readers cannot read the average front page of a Victorian newspaper meant for general consumption.

We've lost much by thinning and diluting literacy in order to spread it wider, and now we see the GOP destroying literacy and education so it can rule with impunity.

Back to the debtor's prisons and indentured servants, etc. Slavery in the mines, child labor, etc. Will this also mean a return to writers writing for themselves and for the people, the readers, by-passing corporate editors and gatekeepers in order to shrug off limitations and controls?

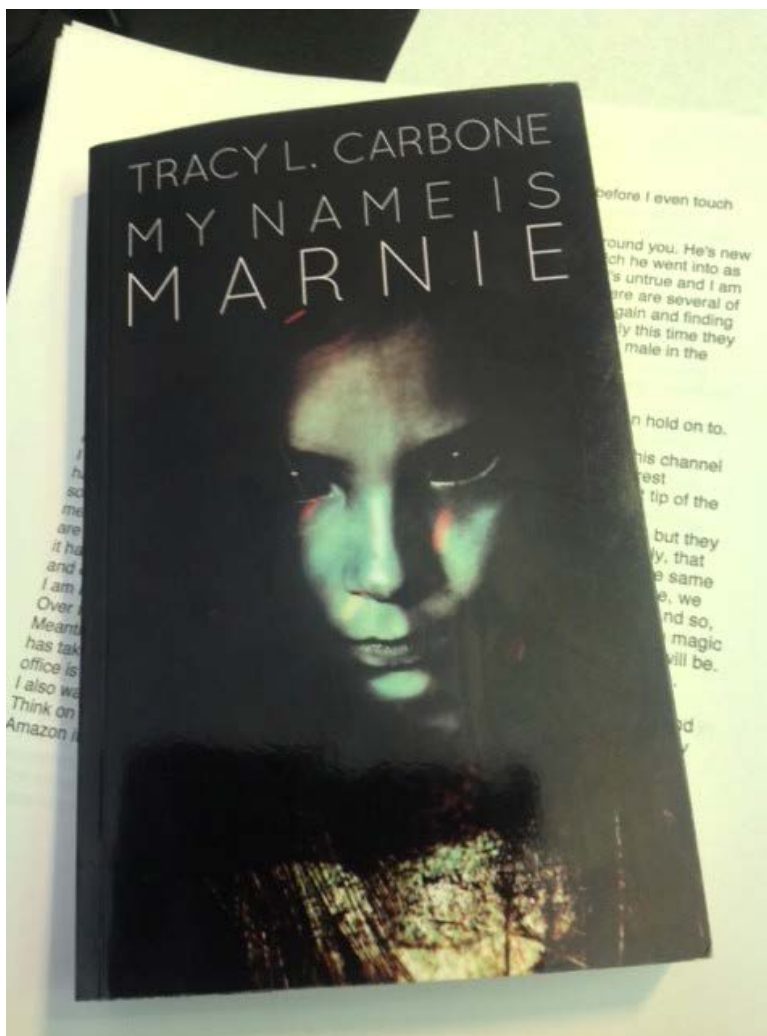
Let's hope so.

/// /// ///

Posted in [Sample Essays](#) | Tagged [50 Shades](#), [Dickens](#), [plot](#), [pulp](#), [quality](#), [style](#) | Comments Off

**My Name is Marnie by Tracy L. Carbone Shadow Ridge Press,
2014 trade pb, 245p, ISBN: 978-989-77963-0 cover design by
Kealan Patrick Burke**

Posted on [February 10, 2015](#) by [Gene Stewart](#)



A mystery ghost story with oomph, crisply written, with sharply-drawn characters, this book is a one-sitter. It pulls you through seamlessly, adding layer, shadowing the tangles, and delivering you to a denouement that has you wondering how it got so complex so fast.

Carbone's prose is clean. Her approach to scenes is to being in media res and let the actions carry you through. It's effective, especially when she is dropping hints about the crimes, the ghostly goings on, and the possible reasons for it all.

A complete professional, Carbone does not let the reader lapse into dull spots or wander off for a cup of coffee. Her story, and the plight of Marnie, is compelling: Fired from her job after her husband is murdered, pregnant, Marnie seeks a place of refuge so she can have the baby and get her shattered life back on some kind of acceptable track.

She finds a lovely cottage in a charming New England village. Almost at once, though, unsettling aspects arise. A déjà-vu familiarity with the cottage and town, for one. Her importunate, perhaps crazy neighbor, an intrusive guy who keeps saying upsetting things that make little sense. Dire warnings, hints of hauntings, and a hair-trigger nervous energy make the man seem crazy, yet Marnie senses things that might just confirm some of what he's saying.

Who is he? Does she know him? Does he know her? Is he a stalker?

Then the little girl shows up. Sad, silent, and misty. The visits are short and spectral, puzzling Marnie. She moves from startled through fearful to curious. What is the ghostly little girl trying to lead her to? What does she want her to realize? A part of her must know. Another, deeper part screams at her to stop, to run, to get away from the deepening shadows.

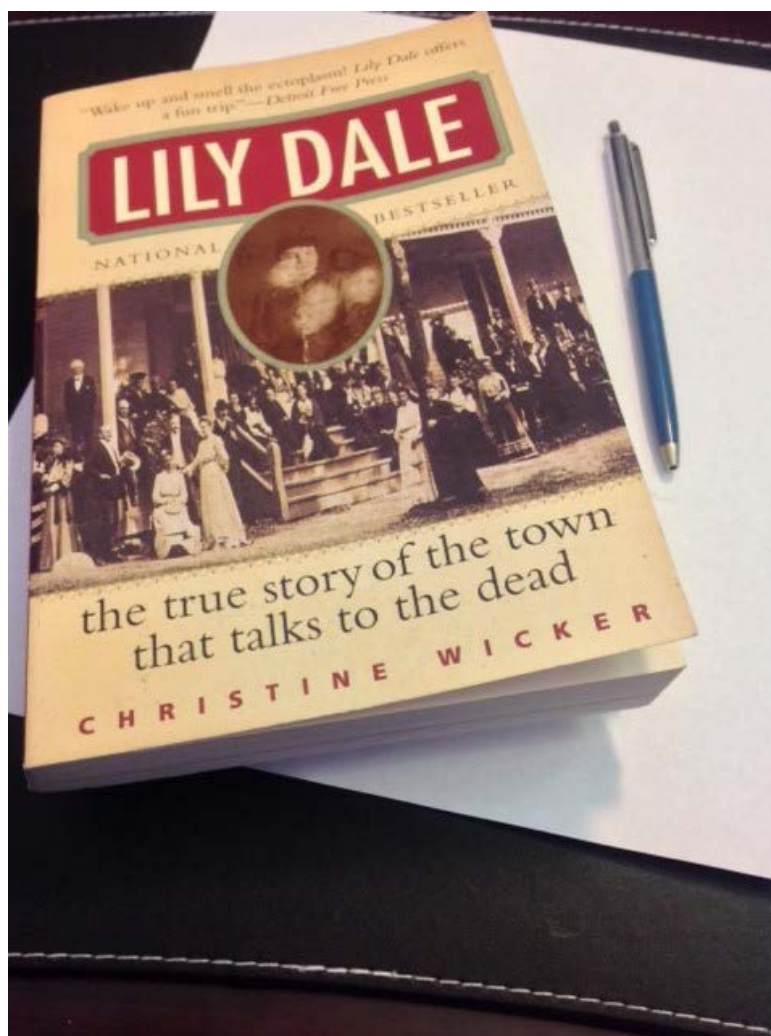
When the revelations come it is an unraveling worthy of a Hitchcock film and darker than one of Clive Barker's night frights. This is an enjoyable horror mystery ghost story that deserves to be filmed in 1940s style. Grab a copy at www.shadowridgepress.com or from your favorite small press source.

/// /// ///

Posted in [Sample Reviews](#) | Tagged [Carbone](#), [ghost](#), [horror](#), [Marnie](#), [mystery](#) | Comments Off

Lily Dale: The True Story of the Town that Talks to the Dead by Christine Wicker Harper trade pb, 2004, 282pp, \$13.95 8pp b&w photo insert, ISBN: 0-06-008667-X

Posted on [February 10, 2015](#) by [Gene Stewart](#)



Lily Dale, on Cassadagah Lake in upstate New York, is one of those places where a spell

has been cast, or conjured. It is a small town, a hamlet or village really, of Spiritualists. Founded in 1879, it is the oldest Spiritualist community in the world. That we know of.

At the time Wicker wrote this book it had a population of 450 residents in the summer, although upwards of 20,000 tourists flocked there. In winter months the place shrinks as registered mediums go elsewhere, usually south, leaving only about half the houses inhabited year-round.

Spiritualism is generally credited to, or blamed on, the Fox sisters, Kate & Margaret, who communicated, they claimed, with spirits who used knockings or table or wall rapping in elementary codes. This began in 1848 when their family moved into a house in Hydesville, NY. Later confessions said these knockings were faked, and those confessions were later recanted, having been issued in order to get money offered them by religious groups opposed to encouraging spirit communications. One's conscience, or cynicism, must be the guide here.

While it is evident such things as spirit boards, divining rods, pendulums, crystal gazing, scrying, and other means of communing with spirits had existed for millennia — ask the Delphic Oracles, for instance — the Hyde Sisters created a huge public stir and interest in Spiritualism, or the communication with spirits, exploded in popularity. Spirits were generally thought to be the shades of dead people but demons and djinn and other forms quickly got into the act, much to Harry Houdini's disgust.

Christine Wicker is an excellent, sharp-eyed reporter with a charmingly ironic take on things. Her approach to Lily Dale is part personal quest, curiosity, and assignment. She is skeptical but open-minded and fair, and eventually learns to let things flow without questioning them too much at the time. This helps her experience things she otherwise might have missed.

This is an engaging, amusing book full of wonderful anecdotes, trenchant character sketches of various eccentrics, and a human, genuine affection for her subjects, even as she keeps their claims mostly at arm's length. Turns out, most of the folks in Lily Dale are highly skeptical of each other, too. Turns out, they are a contented, happy lot, and not nearly as mindless as many would have us think.

Finding ways to be happy in this world, this veil of tears, is not easy, but it can be, if we get out of our own way. Wicker finds this out slowly, and never fully. By fighting and struggling and straining to make her way in life, she made things hard for her. By learning to accept things as they are, and as they come, she was able to relax into a much more productive mode, even though she was never a slacker. Far from it.

We meet so many folks she includes a partial list of characters in the back of the book. She also includes a couple pages of excellent suggestions for further reading, prime among them the work of William James, the famous and ground-breaking American psychologist, brother to writer Henry.

Much of Lily Dale is Wicker confirming, to her own surprise, James's conclusions from the 1800s, when he was a founder and active in the Society for Psychical Research. Where Houdini found only cynical exploitation of the bereaved, James found genuine flashes of amazing ability amidst the dross of fakery and fraud. He even understood that some

genuine mediums learned to fake in order to continue pleasing clients when their natural gifts got tired.

Wicker does not set out to prove or disprove. Her interest is the people. Why do they believe and behave as they do? Does it help or harm them? Is it based on delusions, projected hopes, or is it mere patter, a carny barker's advertisement for this or that type of ESP? She is also deeply interested in the spiritual impulse in most people. Why do we respond to such things so deeply? Why do some crave it enough to allow themselves to be duped?

These and other questions she raises are serious but the book maintains a generally light, bemused tone. It sprawls among many people she meets, to the point she must remind us now and then which person she is now talking about. Oddly, this lack of overt order doesn't matter by the end of the book. It was never about portraiture.

Christine Wicker is a hard-core physics devotee. She is a hard-headed skeptic. She is reality-based and grounded in materialism. These flaky folks with their readings are alien to her and she is justifiably curious. She is as unlike today's cheating, lying debunkers as a poltergeist is from a residual haunt. She is not desperate to dismiss even the discussion of things paranormal, as the debunkers are. She has no fear, no dread, and no mistrust of reality, despite baggage from her religious upbringing, which she readily admits to.

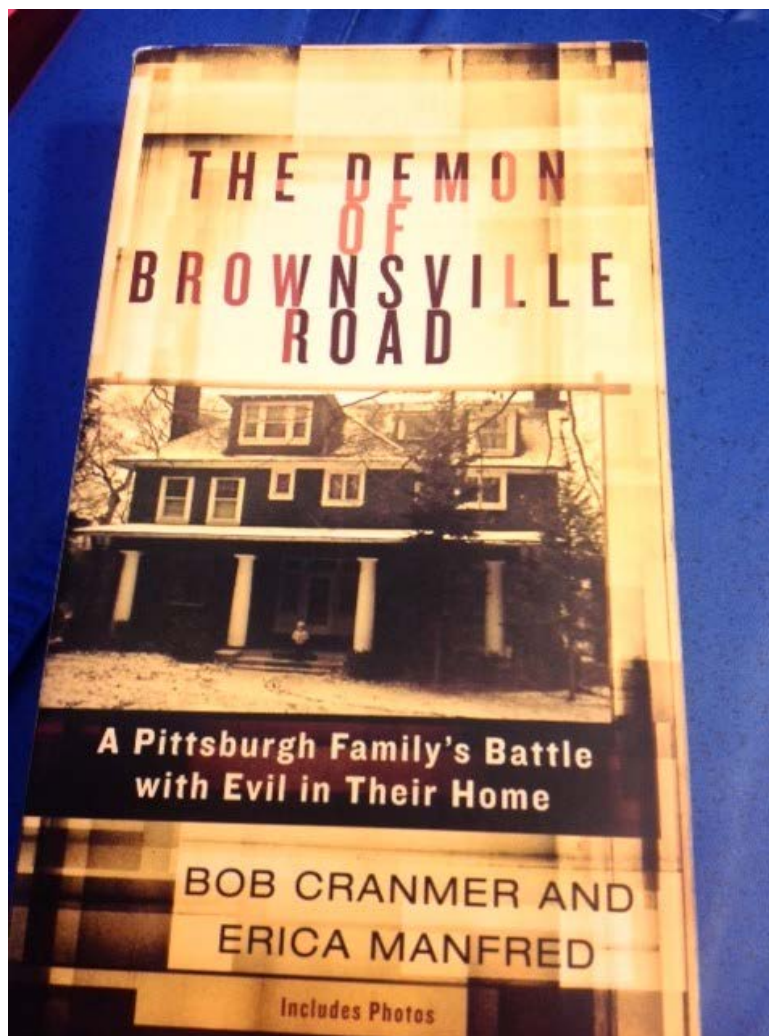
This book was a brief sensation when it first came out but it's nearly forgotten now in the welter of ghost hunting merchandise flooding us today. It's well worth finding and reading; check your library or the used books section of your favorite online provider. Skeptic, believer, or anyone else will enjoy this book thanks to its discursive style and level-headed, honest accounts.

/// /// ///

Posted in [Sample Reviews](#) | Tagged [Christine Wicker](#), [Fox Sisters](#), [Hydesville](#), [Lily Dale](#), [mediums](#), [New York](#), [Spiritualism](#) | Comments Off

The Demon of Brownsville Road: A Pittsburgh Family's Battle with Evil in Their Home by Bob Cranmer and Erica Manfred
Berkeley mass market pb, 2014 \$9.99, ISBN: 978-0-425-26855-1
appendix, 8pp b&w photo insert

Posted on [February 10, 2015](#) by [Gene Stewart](#)



Well made book, physically, with a striking sepia cover, soft paper, and clear typesetting. Well-written book; the ghost writer Erica Manfred, an experienced journalist and essayist, does a very good job of delivering Bob Cranmer's story of a haunting and his response to it in his own distinct voice.

Too good a job. His self-impressed, fatuous bragging, his ego mania, and his narcissism combines with a huge urge to testify about the massive religion chip on his messianic shoulder to make him one of the most repellent liars one could hope to encounter. He makes Holden Caulfield almost tolerable.

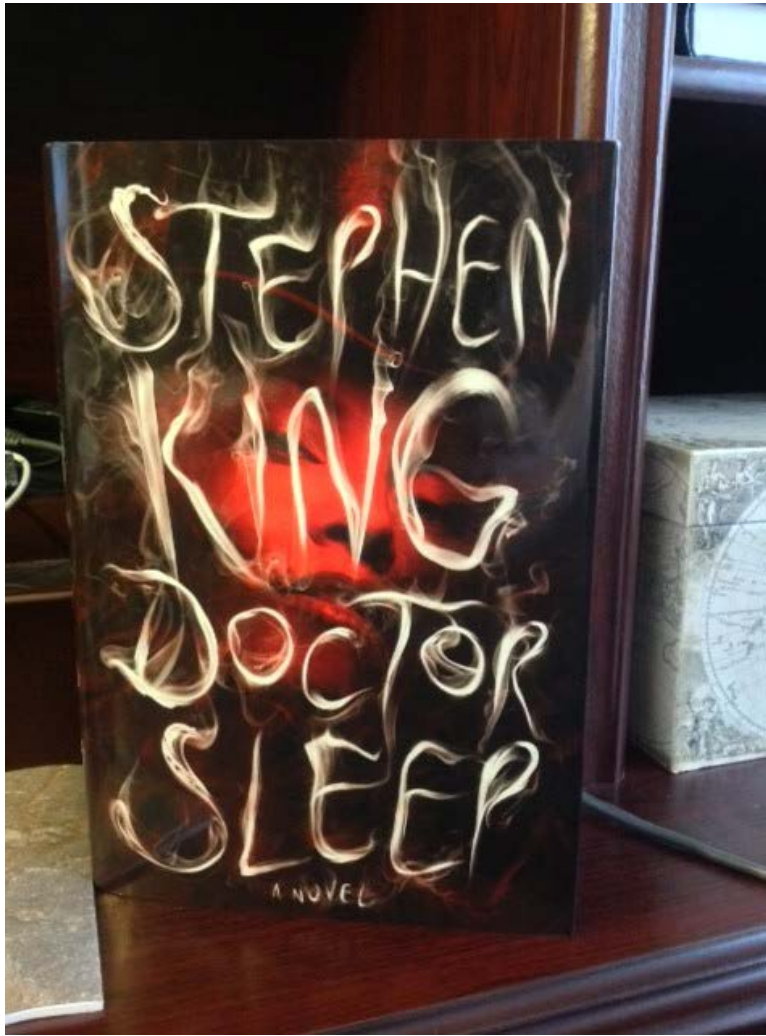
In consequence I abandoned trying to ignore Cranmer's twittery for any meat that might be in the book. Unreadable for anyone allergic to right wing entitlement, religious bigotry, and dumb-ass pronouncements about the paranormal from a typically fearful and willfully ignorant god-yap view. Avoid.

/// /// ///

Posted in [uncategorized](#) | Tagged [avoid](#), [Cranmer](#), [Demon Brownsville Road](#), [haunting](#), [Manfred](#), [revolting](#), [right wing](#) | Comments Off

Doctor Sleep by Stephen King Scribner hc, 1st edition, 531pp
ISBN: 978-1-4767-2765-3

Posted on [February 10, 2015](#) by [Gene Stewart](#)



Doctor Sleep by Stephen King
Scribner hc, 1st edition, 531pp
ISBN: 978-1-4767-2765-3

The sequel to *The Shining*, in which Danny is all grown up, succeeds in remaining consonant to the original novel enough to justify considering them a duad, a single whole in two distinct parts.

This is not to say the tone is the same. This is not a direct sequel, until the very end, where there is a show-down scene at the site of the now-burned Outlook, in Colorado, where Jack Torrance, Danny's father, died. Where spirits wait for vengeance. Where there is emotional and spiritual power for all, light and dark.

Prior to that we see that Danny has had a rough life. He's inherited his father's propensity to get drunk; in his case, to dampen the shining, which can otherwise drive him crazy with all the ghostly chatter and appalling insights. He takes the latter syllable of redrum to heart for a long while.

We meet him during his last-ditch effort to pull himself out of the self-destructive downward spiral he has been in too long. He comes to a tidy New England town that has a small gauge steam locomotive for tourists during the season. He falls for its charm and,

even better, finds a job at a local hospice where his skills with the shining allow him to help ease dying patients' final moments.

He's doing well and even psychically links with a little girl named Abra who may well be even stronger and better at shining than he is. His bond with her grows through occasional mental images, words on a chalk board, and other hints, winks, and nudges, but eventually they are communicating fully. They are birds of a feather and support each other. He's like an uncle to her.

Less avuncular, more threatening is the True Knot. This is a group of travelers who look like slightly below-average retirees and families in battered RVs who roam the United States in a ragged group. What is not evident at first glimpse is how dark a group this is, and how old, and how powerful. Seems they like to feed on people, on the energies they release when tortured to death. They even bottle this energy and feed off it during lean times.

They're hungry again, and if they don't get what they call steam, which is what Danny calls shining, they will perish. Can't have that, now can they?

Sensing Abra's great power like an X station from across the border of humanity, they zero in, trying to find her so they can torture her to death or maybe, just maybe, keep her alive and tortured so she keeps producing that sweet steam.

Danny and Abra just can't catch a break, and will not be left alone to enjoy their unusual lives. Not with the True Knot around.

King weaves the story lines well, bringing things together naturally into the kind of all-out show-down we crave. Shades of *The Stand* struck me, but perhaps that is in the nature of such chiaroscuro tales. Harsh contrast breeds apocalyptic conflict, and readers benefit.

Not knowing what to expect from a sequel to *The Shining*, I trusted King and let the book work its charms. It satisfied me in surprising ways and one can but applaud the bravura performance. Stephen King is King Stephen for a reason, and he continues to get better with age and experience. That can be said about few writers at his current stage of career.

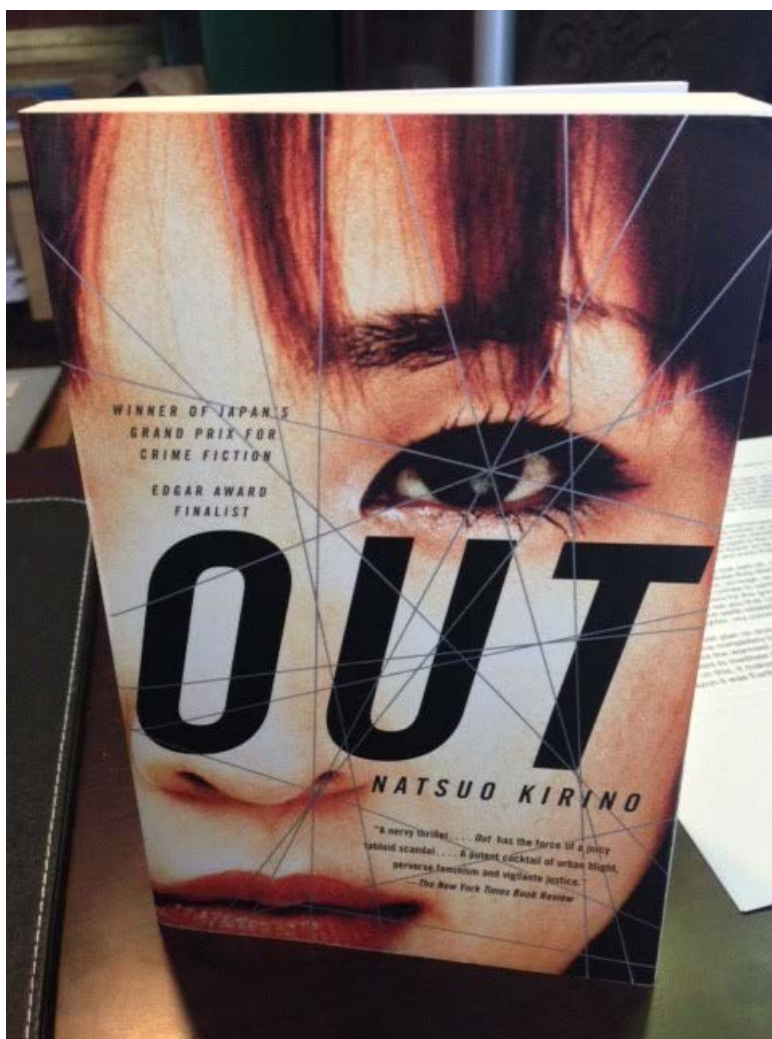
Ignore the naysayers and grab a copy, especially if you loved *The Shining* and always wondered what happened to that intense little boy and his finger-pal who lives in his mouth, Tony. Incidentally, King also supplies some rational, reasonable explanations for his concept of the shining. Bonus material, no strings of goo attached.

/// /// ///

Posted in [Sample Reviews](#) | Tagged [Danny](#), [Doctor Sleep](#), [Jack Torrance](#), [King](#), [novel](#), [Overlook](#), [Stephen](#), [the shining](#), [Tony](#), [True Knot](#) | Comments Off

Out by Natsuro Kirino First Vintage International Edition, Jan. 2005 Translated by Stephen Snyder for Kodansha, Ltd. pb, 400pp, \$13.95, ISBN: 1-4000-7837-7

Posted on [February 10, 2015](#) by [Gene Stewart](#)



Out by Natsuro Kirino

First Vintage International Edition, Jan. 2005

Translated by Stephen Snyder for Kodansha, Ltd.

pb, 400pp, \$13.95, ISBN: 1-4000-7837-7

Perhaps the title confused browsers into thinking this is a book about someone coming out of the closet in some way. It is not. Yet it is.

In it, a small group of women in Tokyo who work in a bento boxed lunch factory, on night shift to earn a fraction more money per shift, decide to help one of their own when, during a typical fight with her husband, one of the women kills.

Murder is not such a big deal to them, turns out. Not murder of a man. Males so dominate females in Japan, so unfairly exploit, manipulate, bully, and discard them, that the practical concerns kick in without much of a moral or ethical blink.

Masako Katori is the focus of this gritty, realistic, and grim novel. It is a crime, rather than a police, procedural. It lays out in unblinking detail how Katori decides to help her younger, stupider friend when that friend confesses to having killed her useless husband. Katori enlists others to help, too, and keeps them in line. They use their lunch factory skills at cutting up meat. They use their skills in packaging and distribution, too.

They dismember the corpse, put it into small packages, and discard them all over Tokyo, but one of them does the lazy thing, typical for her, and this leads to the discovery of the body. Well, parts.

Tension mounts slowly with such realism and insight into character that we read fascinated and breathless. A pall of doom seems to hang over everyone so readers tend to expect the worst.

In a sub plot that gradually blossoms into quite a touching and bizarre set of scenes, one of the men at the factory, Kazuo Miyamori, is a stalker, a lonely man of Japanese descent who was born and raised in Brazil. He is in Tokyo hoping to earn enough money to go back home and set up a business. He's reduced to night shift at the box lunch factory, his hopes dashed. Is he dangerous or merely truculent? Is he crazy or merely strange?

That he fixes on Masako, a blunted woman in her forties who does nothing to enhance her own looks, only adds to his ominous qualities. It is while he watches her from concealment that he sees her drop some things into a sewer as she walks to the factory one evening. Turns out he investigates, and finds personal affects from the murdered man.

Pressures mount, loyalties tilt, and Masako is faced with bad choices all around. Her world has become unstable. It does not bother her unduly, however. In many ways it's what she's needed. She has craved something more, something different. Independence, yes, but a kind of freedom, too, found outside society. This is a clue to the otherwise puzzling title.

When gangsters get wind of how efficiently Masako has rid herself of a corpse, and offer to pay her to do the same for some of their inconvenient messes, money beyond insurance pittance enters the drama, with predictable effect. Not that Masako's responses are ever typical; she is a surprise all along, though hardly a delight.

This story of Masako Katori is remarkable on many levels, not the least of which the damning indictment of how women are viewed, treated, and abused in Japan. This is modern industrial Japan, not some Samurai fantasy. It is presented in such detail, so matter-of-factly, and with such intense scrutiny of individual lives that we are held spellbound as we read. It's best, we discover, to keep reading, to lop off as many paragraphs, scenes, and pages as possible with each sitting so we can pop our head up for a gasped breath when we're done.

Women ignored or abandoned by drunken husbands intent on gambling and bar girls. Women burdened by invalid mothers-in-law or unwanted babies, left to earn the money to run the household because the husband's wages all go to his hedonism. Women abandoned by men, beaten and left for dead by men. It's a brutal, even savage depiction that rings all-too-true. Add to this poverty the need for menial labor that deforms the body and crushes the soul and you, too, would want out, by any route possible.

/// /// ///

Posted in [Sample Reviews](#) | Tagged [Crime](#), [grim](#), [gritty](#), [Japan](#), [Kirino](#), [novel](#), [Out](#), [procedural](#), [realism](#) | Comments Off

Eschaton's Fate by Gene Stewart, From Out of the Dark anthology, Robert N. Stephenson, editor, Altair Publishing, Jan. 2015

Posted on [February 1, 2015](#) by [Gene Stewart](#)

[Eschaton's Fate by Gene Stewart](#)

Posted in [uncategorized](#) | Tagged [Nebula](#), [Novelette](#), [reading copy](#), [SFWA](#) | Comments Off

I Still Carry A Knife

Posted on [January 5, 2015](#) by [Gene Stewart](#)



Root causes are often breathtakingly ugly. We don't generally let boys play with dolls because they might become... good fathers. This turned up in a brief online discussion.

By the way, dangerous toys were mooted, too, and I have to say that, thinking back, many of the toys I had great harmless fun with would today be considered unconscionably dangerous. Know what changed? Responsibility shifted from parenting to lawsuits. In my childhood, we were taught, "Look. This can hurt people, so when using it we be careful, and if you're going to be irresponsible with it, then we'll take it away until you grow up some more." Hell, we were proud to demonstrate how grown up.

Know how old I was when I got my very first real pocket knife? Six. Today that would be considered a crime and child abuse and unthinkable crazy. Knives are demonized now, even though they are arguably the most useful tool ever invented and should be part of everyone's accoutrements.

I had a set of toy pistols that shot plastic, spring-loaded bullets. We had cap guns. We had chemistry sets with instructions on how to make explosives, radioactive stuff, and so on in the kit. I helped my father and his father in a wood shop from age 4 or 5. Sure, they gave me tasks suited to me, but I was occasionally taught to run a radial saw or how safely to do this or that atrociously dangerous thing. I have all my digits and limbs intact.

Political Correctness and lawsuits have rendered us helpless fat soft moronic saps, incompetent and incapable, entitled and pampered, the worst combination of deluded and ignorant.

Look around. You really think this is better than that? Is helplessness and panic an improvement over competence and stoicism? Why did we lose confidence in our individual ability? It was taught out of us by a thuggish, all-pervasive media serving the psychopathic greedy corporate fascists, who want us so absurdly infantlike that we must call AAA to get a flat tire changed or pay to have some schlub come build a knock-down shelf for us. Using those terrifying dangerous tools that are considered terrorism weapons by officials.

Fuck all that.

I still carry a knife and always will.

Posted in [Autobiographical Writing](#), [Sample Essays](#) | Tagged [Boys](#), [dolls](#), [Fascism](#), [knife](#), [political correctness](#), [toys](#) | Comments Off

← Older posts