

## Numinous Stones



# Conversation Pieces



A Small Paperback Series from Aqueduct Press  
Subscriptions available: [www.aqueductpress.com](http://www.aqueductpress.com)

1. The Grand Conversation  
Essays by L. Timmel Duchamp
2. With Her Body  
Short Fiction by Nicola Griffith
3. Changeling  
A Novella by Nancy Jane Moore
4. Counting on Wildflowers  
An Entanglement by Kim Antieau
5. The Traveling Tide  
Short Fiction by Rosaleen Love
6. The Adventures of the Faithful Counselor  
A Narrative Poem by Anne Sheldon
7. Ordinary People  
A Collection by Eleanor Arnason
8. Writing the Other  
A Practical Approach  
by Nisi Shawl & Cynthia Ward
9. Alien Bootlegger  
A Novella by Rebecca Ore
10. The Red Rose Rages (Bleeding)  
A Short Novel by L. Timmel Duchamp
11. Talking Back: Epistolary Fantasies  
edited by L. Timmel Duchamp
12. Absolute Uncertainty  
Short Fiction by Lucy Sussex
13. Candle in a Bottle  
A Novella by Carolyn Ives Gilman
14. Knots  
Short Fiction by Wendy Walker

15. Naomi Mitchison: A Profile of Her Life and Work  
A Monograph by Lesley A. Hall
16. We, Robots  
A Novella by Sue Lange
17. Making Love in Madrid  
A Novella by Kimberly Todd Wade
18. Of Love and Other Monsters  
A Novella by Vandana Singh
19. Aliens of the Heart  
Short Fiction by Carolyn Ives Gilman
20. Voices From Fairyland:  
The Fantastical Poems of Mary Coleridge, Charlotte  
Mew, and Sylvia Townsend Warner  
Edited and With Poems by Theodora Goss
21. My Death  
A Novella by Lisa Tuttle
22. De Secretis Mulierum  
A Novella by L. Timmel Duchamp
23. Distances  
A Novella by Vandana Singh
24. Three Observations and a Dialogue:  
Round and About SF  
Essays by Sylvia Kelso and a correspondence  
with Lois McMaster Bujold
25. The Buonarotti Quartet  
Short Fiction by Gwyneth Jones
26. Slightly Behind and to the Left  
Four Stories & Three Drabbles by Claire Light
27. Through the Drowsy Dark  
Short Fiction and Poetry by Rachel Swirsky
28. Shotgun Lullabies  
Stories and Poems by Sheree Renée Thomas
29. A Brood of Foxes  
A Novella by Kristin Livdahl
30. The Bone Spindle  
Poems and Short Fiction by Anne Sheldon
31. The Last Letter  
A Novella by Fiona Lehn

32. We Wuz Pushed  
On Joanna Russ and Radical Truth-Telling  
by Lee Mandelo
33. The Receptionist and Other Tales  
Poems by Lesley Wheeler
34. Birds and Birthdays  
Stories by Christopher Barzak
35. The Queen, the Cambion, and Seven Others  
Stories by Richard Bowes
36. Spring in Geneva  
A Novella by Sylvia Kelso
37. The XY Conspiracy  
A Novella by Lori Selke
38. Numa  
An Epic Poem by Katrinka Moore
39. Myths, Metaphors, and Science Fiction:  
Ancient Roots of the Literature of the Future  
Essays by Sheila Finch
40. NoFood  
Short Fiction by Sarah Tolmie
41. The Haunted Girl  
Poems and Short Stories by Lisa M. Bradley
42. Three Songs for Roxy  
A Novella by Caren Gussoff
43. Ghost Signs  
Poems and a Short Story by Sonya Taaffe
44. The Prince of the Aquamarines & The Invisible  
Prince: Two Fairy Tales  
by Louise Cavelier Levesque
45. Back, Belly, and Side: True Lies and False Tales  
Short Fiction by Celeste Rita Baker
46. A Day in Deep Freeze  
A Novella by Lisa Shapter
47. A Field Guide to the Spirits  
Poems by Jean LeBlanc
48. Marginalia to Stone Bird  
Poems by R.B. Lemberg

49. Unpronounceable  
A Novella by Susan diRende
50. Sleeping Under the Tree of Life  
Poetry and Short Fiction by Sheree Renée Thomas
51. Other Places  
Short Fiction by Karen Heuler
52. Monteverde: Memoirs of an Interstellar Linguist  
A Novella by Lola Robles,  
translated by Lawrence Schimel
53. The Adventure of the Incognita Countess  
A Novella by Cynthia Ward
54. Boundaries, Border Crossings,  
and Reinventing the Future  
Essays and Short Fiction by Beth Plutchak
55. Liberating the Astronauts  
Poems by Christina Rau
56. In Search of Lost Time  
A Novella by Karen Heuler
57. Cosmovore  
Poems by Kristi Carter
58. Helen's Story  
A Novella by Rosanne Rabinowitz
59. Liminal Spaces  
Short Fiction by Beth Plutchak
60. Feed Me the Bones of Our Saints  
Short Fiction by Alex Dally MacFarlane
61. If Not Skin: Collected Transformations  
Poems and Short Fiction by Toby MacNutt
62. The Adventure of the Dux Bellorum  
A Novella by Cynthia Ward
63. People Change  
Short Fiction and Poems by Gwynne Garfinkle
64. Invocabulary  
Poems by Gemma Files
65. The Green and Growing  
A Novella by Erin K. Wagner
66. Everything is Made of Letters  
Short Fiction by Sofia Rhei

67. Midnight at the Organporium  
Short Fiction by Tara Campbell
68. Algorithmic Shapeshifting  
Poems by Bogi Takács
69. The Rampant  
A Novella by Julie C. Day
70. Mary Shelley Makes a Monster  
Poems by Octavia Cade
71. Articulation  
Short Plays to Nourish the Mind & Soul  
by Cesi Davidson
72. City of a Thousand Feelings  
A Novella by Anya Johanna DeNiro
73. Ancient Songs of Us  
Poems by Jean LeBlanc
74. The Adventure of the Naked Guide  
A Novella by Cynthia Ward
75. Sacred Summer  
Poems by Cassandra Clarke
76. Disease  
Short Fiction by Sarah Tolmie
77. Goddess Bandit of the Thousand Arms  
Poems by Hal Y. Zhang
78. Resistance and Transformation: On Fairy Tales  
Essays by Mari Ness
79. The Silences of Ararat  
A Novella by L. Timmel Duchamp
80. Cabinet of Wrath: A Doll Collection  
Short Fiction by Tara Campbell
81. The Adventure of the Golden Woman  
A Novella by Cynthia Ward
82. Fricatives  
Short Plays to Nourish the Mind & Soul  
by Cesi Davidson
83. We've Been Here Before  
Poems by Anne Carly Abad

84. Bilabials  
Short Plays to Nourish the Mind & Soul  
by Cesi Davidson
85. When Home, No Need to Cry  
Short Fiction by Erin K. Wagner
86. Apollo Weeps  
A Novella by Xian Mao
87. To the Woman in the Pink Hat  
A Novella by LaToya Jordan
88. From Voyages Unreturning  
Poems by Deborah L. Davitt
89. Numinous Stones  
Poems by Holly Lyn Walrath



## About the Aqueduct Press Conversation Pieces Series

The feminist engaged with sf is passionately interested in challenging the way things are, passionately determined to understand how everything works. It is my constant sense of our feminist-sf present as a grand conversation that enables me to trace its existence into the past and from there see its trajectory extending into our future. A genealogy for feminist sf would not constitute a chart depicting direct lineages but would offer us an ever-shifting, fluid mosaic, the individual tiles of which we will probably only ever partially access. What could be more in the spirit of feminist sf than to conceptualize a genealogy that explicitly manifests our own communities across not only space but also time?

Aqueduct's small paperback series, Conversation Pieces, aims to both document and facilitate the "grand conversation." The Conversation Pieces series presents a wide variety of texts, including short fiction (which may not always be sf and may not necessarily even be feminist), essays, speeches, manifestoes, poetry, interviews, correspondence, and group discussions. Many of the texts are reprinted material, but some are new. The grand conversation reaches at least as far back as Mary Shelley and extends, in our speculations and visions, into the continually created future. In Jonathan Goldberg's words, "To look forward to the history that will be, one must look at and retell the history that has been told." And that is what Conversation Pieces is all about.

L. Timmel Duchamp

Jonathan Goldberg, "The History That Will Be" in Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero, eds., *Premodern Sexualities* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996)



Conversation Pieces  
Volume 89

# Numinous Stones

by  
Holly Lyn Walrath





Published by Aqueduct Press  
PO Box 95787  
Seattle, WA 98145-2787  
[www.aqueductpress.com](http://www.aqueductpress.com)

Copyright © 2023 by Holly Lyn Walrath  
All rights reserved. First Edition, April 2023

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission in writing from the author.

ISBN: 978-1-61976-244-2

This collection was originally published in Italian as *Numinose Lapidì*, Kipple Press, 2020.

Cover illustration:

Woman in graveyard, © Can Stock Photo / melis Stars, PIA09653, Courtesy NASA/JPL-Caltech

Original Block Print of Mary Shelley by Justin Kempton:  
[www.writersmugs.com](http://www.writersmugs.com)

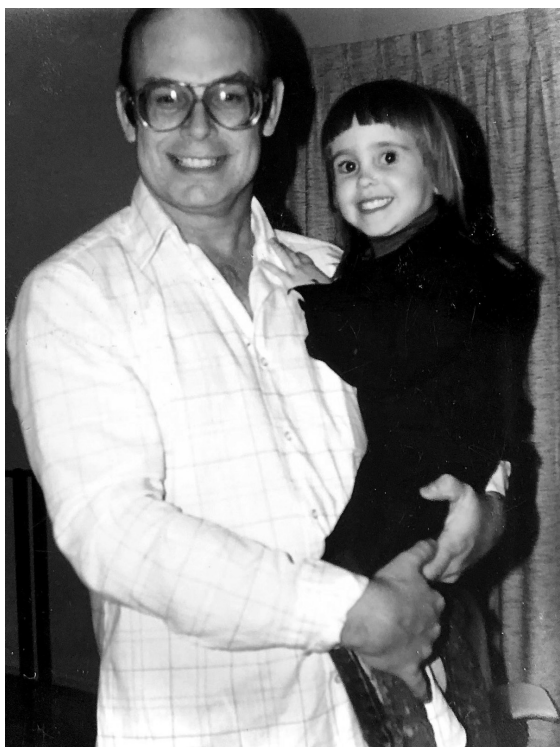
Printed in the USA by Applied Digital Imaging

*For my father,  
and for Marco.*



*“O falling numinous world at dusk  
O stunned and afflicted emptiness”*

—Edward Hirsch, “Idea of the Holy”



*The author and her father*



## Contents

We're Refugees Who Found Love	
Searching for Atlantis .....	1
On This Planet We Are All	
Hurtling Through Space.....	3
Dark Shapes Move in the Morning Before Dawn .....	5
A Graveyard for Fairytales .....	7
The Mountain Is so Close to Disappearing from Our Horizon .....	9
Thunder Walks the Earth .....	11
My Heart Beats Slower Now .....	13
Glowing Fish Swim Under My Skin .....	15
The Rain Formed a Man and Reader, I Drank Him ..	17
Bury Your Darlings in the Swamp .....	19
The Devil Kisses My Skinned Knees.....	21
One Kind of Love is Another Kind of Hate.....	23
A Black Fish Floating Belly Up in Regret.....	25
Romeo Opens the Tomb .....	27
Looking Back Everything Was as It Should Be.....	29
I Created Your Final Girl.....	31
She Is a Drenched Scream in a Gruesome Night.....	33
When I Ask, You'll Pull Me Out of the Water.....	35
Our Love is a Bridge between Countries at War .....	37
How to Make a Man Out of Sackcloth and Twine.....	39



To All the Skeletons I've Loved.....	41
Prayer for October.....	43
Poems Are Sacred Spaces We Burned.....	45
Gorging on the Dearest Morsels of Dirt .....	47
Walls of Wood, Walls of Stone.....	49
I Should've Prayed Better, I Should've Wept .....	51
Stop Putting a Name to Everything, Stop Trying.....	53
But Now I'm Telling Myself Stories about the Wind.....	55
From Stones You Were Taken To Stones You Will Return .....	57
Parkinson's is a Kind of Armageddon.....	59
The Path in a Fairy Tale that Leads to Grief.....	61
Author's Note.....	69



## We're Refugees Who Found Love Searching for Atlantis

The ocean is a vessel cast in the heat of the stars  
We walked there in the twilight and sang skysongs  
Our bodies were translucent and full of darkness  
How we carried our homeland in our bones

We walked there in the twilight and sang skysongs  
The molten gold we sucked from the statues burned  
How we carried our homeland in our bones  
What if the floating city is just a dream?

The molten gold we sucked from the statues burned  
We tied our boats to the edge of the moon  
What if the floating city is just a dream?  
I liked how you held me close and smiled

We tied our boats to the edge of the moon  
Our bodies were translucent and full of darkness  
I liked how you held me close and smiled  
The ocean is a vessel cast in the heat of the stars



## On This Planet We Are All Hurtling Through Space

If you stand still you can feel the massive pull  
Of an invisible force dragging you onward  
We cannot slow down or we will die  
Ruin is in the past and only the future knows

Of an invisible force dragging you onward  
How to die is a mystery to everyone now  
Ruin is in the past and only the future knows  
The way to quiet and gleaming oblivion

How to die is a mystery to everyone now  
If you could download a soul, would it be mine?  
The way to quiet and gleaming oblivion  
Would you peel open my skin like a salve?

If you could download a soul, would it be mine?  
We cannot slow down or we will die  
Would you peel open my skin like a salve?  
If you stand still you can feel the massive pull





## Dark Shapes Move in the Morning Before Dawn

They are like us but they are not human  
How do we know this? How can we tell?  
It is by their beating hearts worn on the outside  
We would never reveal so much in one go

How do we know this? How can we tell?  
An agreement we signed with our creamy blood  
We would never reveal so much in one go  
The magic of stones covered in a thin layer of skin

An agreement we signed with our creamy blood  
They are gentle when they speak to us  
The magic of stones covered in a thin layer of skin  
We want to touch these waxy hearts to know

They are gentle when they speak to us  
It is by their beating hearts worn on the outside  
We want to touch these waxy hearts to know  
They are like us but they are not human



## A Graveyard for Fairytales

A child hangs upside down from the barrel of a cannon  
In here, the air is bright and stale or else poisonous  
A princess crawls among the flowers and grenades  
Everything here is twisting or untwisting into itself

In here, the air is bright and stale or else poisonous  
A wolf is singing songs made of barbed jewels  
Everything here is twisting or untwisting into itself  
In the deep of the well, death unbraids his hair

A wolf is singing songs made of barbed jewels  
The dark forest is disillusioned and laid bare  
In the deep of the well, death unbraids his hair  
But this is the ruthless dream of a frightened child

The dark forest is disillusioned and laid bare  
A princess crawls among the flowers and grenades  
But this is the ruthless dream of a frightened child  
Who hangs upside down from the barrel of a cannon



The Mountain Is so Close  
to Disappearing  
from Our Horizon

When you cut it open, you see the history of the world  
Bits of rock and mud and fossil and white bone  
You have to break a geode to see its insides  
Someone has to decide the weight of land

Bits of rock and mud and fossil and white bone  
An old woman swallows hot decay and cries  
Someone has to decide the weight of land  
Limping, you know there is courage in brokenness

An old woman swallows hot decay and cries  
You walk under a grove of silver trees and scream  
Limping, you know there is courage in brokenness  
Something calls you to the cliffsides again and again

You walk under a grove of silver trees and scream  
You have to break a geode to see its insides  
Something calls you to the cliffsides again and again  
When you cut it open, you see the history of the world



## Thunder Walks the Earth

If you die at least I'll see you again  
You have discovered a planet inside yourself  
It is a place where you can walk alone  
Without the demands of higher beings

You have discovered a planet inside yourself  
And there are tiny people living there  
Without the demands of higher beings  
You wish you were smaller, more human

And there are tiny people living there  
I am one of them, born in your belly  
You wish you were smaller, more human  
Would knowing pain teach you to love?

I am one of them, born in your belly  
I still remember the day you walked among us  
Would knowing pain teach you to love?  
If you die, at least I'll see you again





## My Heart Beats Slower Now

I dream a dream that goes on and on  
Where she runs her lizard hands  
Between my thighs  
Is this the cost of freedom?

Where she runs her lizard hands  
Flowers like dusty ghosts bloom  
Is this the cost of freedom?  
My intentions are to ruin everything

Flowers like dusty ghosts bloom  
A hundred stars wink out at once  
My intentions are to ruin everything  
With the force of all this longing

A hundred stars wink out at once  
Between my thighs  
With the force of all this longing  
I dream a dream that goes on and on



## Glowing Fish Swim Under My Skin

Ask yourself

What is the cost of emptiness?

If we're willing to kill for autonomy

Can you blame us?

What is the cost of emptiness?

How many children are we willing to let die?

Can you blame us

For all the ships we sank?

How many children are we willing to let die?

How long does it take to melt a gun?

For all the ships we sank

We refuse to ask forgiveness from men like you

How long does it take to melt a gun

If you're willing to kill for autonomy?

We refuse to ask forgiveness from men like you

Ask yourself—



## The Rain Formed a Man and Reader, I Drank Him

Everything is soluble and numinous, nothing lasts  
He was a dreamscape made of pitter and patter  
His hands were so pretty they crushed me  
Inside of his grasp, I felt forlorn and brash

He was a dreamscape made of pitter and patter  
Stepping out of the downpour with maddening ease  
Inside of his grasp, I felt forlorn and brash  
I am not used to magical men, obtainable love

Stepping out of the downpour with maddening ease  
Like something I'd wish for if I knew how to wish  
I am not used to magical men, obtainable love  
Our love fell away simply like a moaning wave

Like something I'd wish for if I knew how to wish  
His hands were so pretty they crushed me  
Our love fell away simply like a moaning wave  
Everything is soluble and numinous, nothing lasts



## Bury Your Darlings in the Swamp

She tells me to follow the lights  
Oh—how sickly sweet is the taste of blood!  
She clamps iron on my fairy skin  
Our love is like a broken exchange

Oh—how sickly sweet is the taste of blood?  
I greet her on my knees  
Our love is like a broken exchange  
Every promise is a glittering spectacle

I greet her on my knees  
In the bayou where the bodies are kept  
Every promise is a glittering spectacle  
I was never taught I'm not rubbish

In the bayou where the bodies are kept  
She clamps iron on my fairy skin  
I was never taught I'm not rubbish  
She tells me to follow the lights