

ROOTS OF AN EDITOR: ELLEN DATLOW

JAN EDWARDS

Photograph by Peter Coleborn

Born in New York, Ellen Datlow lives in Lower Manhattan with two cats which she describes as 'One bitchy calico and one sweet tabby'. Ellen has an eclectic taste and, as she admits, collects far too many things: dolls, Native American pottery, Zuni animal fetishes, photography and other art, weird dolls, three headed dolls, voodoo dolls, books. Perhaps this gathering of things that are beautiful and unusual is what drives her to seek out all that is best and bizarre in the world of short fiction, combing publications world wide for new names and titles to add to her famous Best of Fantasy and Horror series.



Ellen gained a BA in English Literature, and began at the roots of the game building on hard work and dedication to become editor of Omni magazine and Omni Online from 1981 to 1998, and oversaw Event Horizon: Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror Webzine from September 1998 to December

1999. Ellen was also editor of SCI-FICTION until 2005. She had edited and/or co-edited approaching 50 anthologies. She has won seven World Fantasy Awards; two Bram Stoker Awards; an International Horror Guild Award; a Locus Award; and two Hugo Awards. So who is this power house of our time? What are her roots? 'Roots of an Editor' looks at where, when and how Ellen began to hone her craft so effectively, to become one of the best known names in the field?

What story first sparked your imagination and led you into a career in the fantasy field?

I don't remember just one but there were fairy tales and Greek myths that I read when I was young and also the *Mushroom Planet* series

of books by Eleanor Cameron. Later it was *The Twilight Zone* (original series) – I was too young to stay up for them so my mom told me the stories the next day (or sometimes, my sister and I watched from the direct line along the hallway from our bedroom to my parents', where we could see the TV if we weren't caught).

What was your earliest ambition? Did you always know that you would work with books or writers in some way?

I wanted to be a veterinarian because I love animals and I thought it would be wonderful to be around them all the time. Of course, as a child, I didn't realize that [1] I'd have to take maths and science courses (ick) and [2] I'd be around a lot of sick and dying animals – those two things put me off the idea pretty quickly (especially the maths part). Then I wanted to work in a bookstore because I loved being around books and reading them. I knew nothing about how one would work with writers when I was young. In fact, I'm not really sure how I discovered that editors existed and that one could work for a publisher and help produce books. But somehow the connection was made and by my early twenties I wanted to get into editorial work in book publishing.

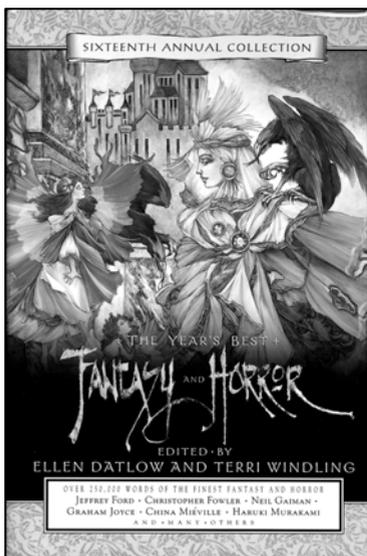
What were your first jobs before you became an editor?

Nothing very interesting before publishing: putting together cardboard boxes; bakery one summer; working in the university library in college; working in the Nizo-Braun camera factory in various jobs (machine room, assembly line-which was so boring I asked to do something else after a few days, helping in the kitchen) outside of Munich for several months after college.

You were born in New York, and still live in Manhattan. Do you feel that it was life in a big city that prompted you to explore the more colourful side of the human imagination?

I grew up in the Bronx until I was eight and hung around my block with a bunch of friends where we did things that kids do now in the suburbs. Play, build snow tunnels (yes, there was enough snow in the Bronx sometimes). My dad pulled me down the streets in a sled. I climbed bus poles (I was a tomboy), my friends and I practiced blowing bubbles with bubble gum. We practiced whistling (the only way I've been able to do it is the two fingers screech with the pinky and forefinger – you know? The taxi cab hailing whistle you sometimes see in movies. My father owned a luncheonette kitty

corner across the street from where I lived and even after we moved to the suburbs when I was eight, we'd come to the luncheonette for lunch every Saturday (my sister and I went to music school that day) and I'd read all the comic books in the store, from *Little Lulu* and *Superman* to *Classics Illustrated* and the ones with creepy crawlies on the covers (I don't remember the titles). So to answer your question – bet you thought I wasn't going to get to it – I don't know if it was the city per se that prompted my interest but certainly my upbringing encouraged it in some ways.



Who are the specific editors and anthologists who have influenced you the most?

Judith Merril, Harlan Ellison, John Carnell, and Maxwell Perkins.

What was your first editing job?

You mean editorial job? Then I was as editorial assistant at Charterhouse, an imprint of David McKay (neither which exist any more). If you mean actually editing, it was Arbor House, which at the time was owned by the monster Don Fine. No one lasted very long there and the six months or so I worked there I went from answering the phone to editing a couple of novels and doing publicity. But my first real editing job was at *Omni* magazine, when I was hired as Associate Fiction Editor by Ben Bova, and worked with Bob Sheckley.

You edit both novels and short fiction. Do you have a preference? And can you remember which was the first story you selected for your first anthology?

I much prefer to edit short fiction. I've done it longer and I think I'm better at it. Well, since I started editing at *Omni* way before editing any anthologies, the first stories I selected and edited there once I was promoted to Fiction Editor were 'Eyes I Dare not Meet in Dreams' by Dan Simmons, 'Burning Chrome' by William Gibson, and 'Petra' by Greg Bear. Before that, of course, I was not yet buying the

fiction myself but I was reading and editing all of it, including 'Johnny Mnemonic' and 'Hinterlands' by Gibson.

You write on the subject of fiction, but have been adamant in saying you are not a 'writer'. But given that you write often and so well as an editor and essayist, have you ever sent stories of your own to other editors (under your own name or a pseudonym)?

Nope. I have no interest in writing fiction.

Why did you decide to donate files to the Science Fiction Foundation in Liverpool? And what do the papers include?

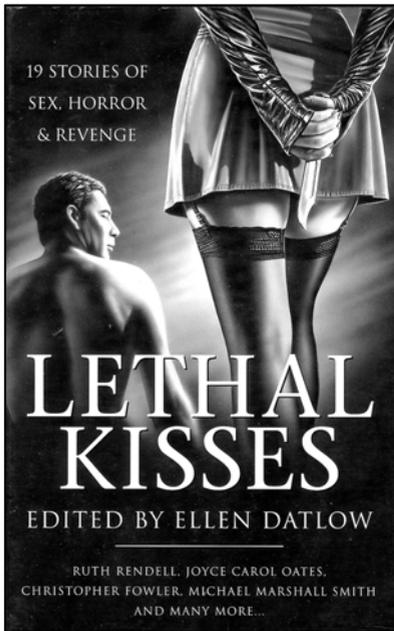
I had several years' worth of my *Omni* correspondence files in my office and at a certain point realised that if something wasn't done with them they might get tossed out at some point, which would be a shame. John Clute suggested I donate them to SF Foundation. He came over one day and helped me sort things out. Lucky he was there because I started reading the correspondence from the first years (which included pages of editorial mixed with personal correspondence (I kept copies of everything – I still do, mostly, even with email) and got caught up in the past and he said STOP! Don't do that or you'll never get the files out of here. So I stopped, packed up several years' worth and sent them on their way. I did it again a few years later. I think I sent them my *Event Horizon* files too. I had hoped to send them my *SCI-FICTION* files but they may still be languishing in the office... which reminds me.

If I recall correctly, no one is allowed to use them for research without my permission till I'm dead (or something like that). A Polish friend of mine asked for permission and I granted it, as I assume whatever he writes will be in Polish. But he told me he was looking through my files and almost got thrown out because he was laughing so hard. Hmm, I said. He told me he had two questions: Did I ever get a response from Gabriel Garcia Marquez for a story (no) and what was with the 'rabbit costume'? (There's a photo of me in it on my website.)

Anthologies have been scarce outside of fantasy and science fiction for many years. But in recent times the publishing houses have started to bring out more anthologies, especially in the YA ranges. How encouraging do you think this is for the future of fiction in general and fantasy in particular?

I'm not sure. Terri Windling and I have had luck selling a series of

Young Adult anthologies to Viking – we get good money for them and they sell very well. Will Viking continue to support them? Who knows? It's always a struggle to sell another anthology. I did an original horror anthology for Tor (*The Dark*) and it did well enough for them to commission a second from me (*Inferno*, out in December). If that one does well enough, I hope they'll have me do another. I've got feelers out about some other anthologies – horror and fantasy ones. I don't think mainstream publishing has much impact on genre publishing with regard to anthologies.



What are your latest projects?

The already mentioned *Inferno*, which is a non-theme, all original horror anthology coming out from Tor in December with stories by Paul Finch, Simon Bestwick, Glen Hirshberg, Joyce Carol Oates, Lucius Shepard, Jeffrey Ford, K.W. Jeter, Stephen Gallagher, Laird Barron, Elizabeth Bear, and a bunch of other terrific writers.

I guest edited issue 7 of *Subterranean Magazine*. It's got 60,000 words of original fiction, including a Lucius Shepard novella (which is on the Subterranean website as a teaser), and stories by M. Rickert, Jeffrey Ford, John Pelan & Joel Lane, Anna Tambour,

Terry Bisson, Richard Bowes, and Lisa Tuttle.

The Coyote Road: Trickster Tales with Terri Windling is our third volume of YA crossover to adult series – that was out in July from Viking.

A non-theme (and so far untitled – but hopefully it'll have a title soon) all original SF/F anthology for Del Rey which will be out in spring of 2008. Some very dark stuff in there and some wonderfully weird stuff too, with a dynamite SF novella by Paul McAuley and Kim Newman.

ELLEN DATLOW: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror*, with Terri Windling, St. Martin's Press (annual volumes) 1988-2002
- Blood Is Not Enough*, William Morrow 1989
- A Whisper of Blood*, William Morrow 1991
- Omni Best Science Fiction One*, Omni Books 1991-1993
- Snow White, Blood Red*, with Terri Windling, Morrow/Avon 1993
- OmniVisions*, Omni Books 1993-1994
- Black Thorn, White Rose*, with Terri Windling, Morrow/Avon 1994
- Little Deaths*, Millennium (UK), Dell (US) 1994
- Ruby Slippers, Golden Tears*, with Terri Windling, AvoNova/Morrow 1995
- Off Limits: Tales of Alien Sex*, St. Martin's Press 1996
- Twists of the Tale: Stories of Cat Horror*, Dell 1996
- Lethal Kisses – Revenge and Vengeance*, Orion 1996
- Black Swan, White Raven*, with Terri Windling, Avon Books 1997
- Sirens and Other Daemon Lovers*, with Terri Windling, HarperPrism 1998
- Silver Birch, Blood Moon*, with Terri Windling, Avon Books 1999
- Black Heart, Ivory Bones*, with Terri Windling, Avon Books 2000
- Vanishing Acts*, Tor Books 2000
- A Wolf at the Door and Other Retold Fairy Tales*, with Terri Windling, Simon & Schuster 2000
- The Green Man: Tales from the Mythic Forest*, with Terri Windling, Viking 2002
- Swan Sister: Fairy Tales Retold*, edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling, Simon & Schuster 2003
- The Dark: New Ghost Stories*, Tor 2003
- The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror*, with Kelly Link & Gavin Grant, St. Martin's Press (annual volumes) 2003-2006
- The Faery Reel: Tales from the Twilight Realm*, with Terri Windling, Viking 2004
- Salon Fantastique* with Terri Windling, Thunder's Mouth Press 2006
- The Coyote Road: Trickster Tales*, with Terri Windling, Viking 2007
- Inferno: Twenty Original Tales of Terror*, Tor 2007
- The Cinderella Game and Other Villainous Tales*, with Terri Windling, Viking due 2009

The Science Fiction Foundation Collection at The University of Liverpool contains holdings of the Ellen Datlow Papers that include the correspondence files of Ellen Datlow in her capacity as fiction editor of *Omni* magazine and *Omni Online* as well as some correspondence files from her role as editor of *SCI-FICTION*. All material within the Ellen Datlow Papers is available only to researchers for consultation in the University of Liverpool Library's Special Collections and Archives Reading Room. Special arrangements must be made in order to use the collection.