



APRIL NEWSLETTER
2018-2019 NUMBER 8

Editor: Shirley Baugher
Designer: Norman Baugher

FRIENDS OF AMERICAN WRITERS CHICAGO

www.fawchicago.org

President's Message

CHRISTINE SPATARA, *President*

It's Spring --a time of renewal. The days are longer, the sun is brighter, and happiness fills us. Spring is the poetic response to our human selves. Science would call it the natural order but we at American Writers, who are readers, proponents of the arts, and sponsors of writers prefer a more literary interpretation. Those familiar with Greek mythology might recall the story of Persephone, the goddess of spring and queen of Hades. The daughter of Demeter and Zeus, Persephone was

kidnapped by Hades, the god of the underworld, who had fallen madly in love with her. Eventually, Zeus manages to convince Hades that it would benefit all mankind if he would allow Persephone to live with him for four months of the year and spend the next eight months with her mother, Demeter. In this way, order would be restored, nature could flourish and



mortals would be fed.

So what has any of this have to do with FAW? My whimsical self and the calendar tell me that we are one month away from our awards luncheon when we will recognize the winning authors. These literary creators, like Persephone, use their gifts throughout the

year to feed our bodies, our minds, and our souls. And because of their creativity, we all flourish.

A P R I L P R O G R A M

Leslie Goddard: As Rachel Carson

KAREN PULVER, *Chair*

Earth Day falls during the month of April, so it seems appropriate that Rachel Carson visit our April FAW luncheon. Not the real Rachel, of course, but actress Leslie Goddard portraying her.

Leslie, an award-winning actress with a Ph.D from Northwestern University and several other advanced degrees, has written two books on Chicago history. She works full time as an historical interpreter, author and public speaker.

Dr. Goddard's versatility as a portrayer of notable women is very impressive. She can be a convincing Louisa May Alcott or Clara



Leslie Goddard

Barton in Civil War garb. She is equally effective as the three sisters from Alexander Hamilton's life. And audiences appreciate her versions of two very different First Ladies—Eleanor Roosevelt and Jackie Kennedy.

Now, she brings us Rachel Carson who has alerted the world to the dangers of pesticides. Her work as a marine biologist (although she was actually afraid of water and could not swim) was made famous through her award-winning books, *The Sea Around Us* and *Silent Spring*. We will all come away more knowledgeable and enlightened after experiencing Dr. Goddard's spirited and insightful presentation of the life of this amazing woman.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Attention All The following members have been nominated to serve on the FAW board for a two-year term unless otherwise noted:

Nominative Slate for 2019-20

by ROBERTA GATES

President: Chris Spatara (1 year)

Vice-president: Tammie Bob

Secretary: Karen Burnett

Treasurer: Vivian Mortensen

Literature awards co-chairs:

Ida Hagman and Karen Pulver

Young people's literature awards chair:

Angela Gall

Newsletter editor: Shirley Baugher (1 year)

Membership chair: Patricia Schneider

Luncheon chair: Carol Eshaghy

Yearbook/awards program:

Pat Adelberg

Web master: Karen Baker

Revisions chair: Dale Davison

Sustaining clubs chair: Diana Adams

Foundation Fund trustees:

Karen Burnett and Roberta Gates
(3 years)

Voting will take place at our April 10 meeting. Nominations from the floor are welcome so long as the person being nominated has agreed.

Many thanks to my committee:
Diana Adams, Tammie Bob, Tanya Klasser and Peggy Kuzminski.

Luncheon Reservations

The April 2019 meeting of the Friends of American Writers will be held on Wednesday, April 10, 2019. Luncheon reservations for this meeting are due no later than 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, April 7. Please note, this deadline is firm. No reservations will be accepted following this date and time.

To reserve, contact only Pat Adelberg (847-588-0911) or Peggy

Kuzminski (1-773-710-8637).

If you wish a permanent reservation, please mention it to Peggy or Pat when you call. All Board members automatically have permanent reservations.

Luncheon will be served at 12:00 noon in the main floor dining room of the Fortnightly Club of Chicago, 120 W. Bellevue Place. The cost is \$45 per person, payable by check (preferred) in the front lobby on the day of the meeting. For group reservations, we ask that only one person make the reservation to avoid confusion. Please note, if you make a reservation and you cannot attend, you must cancel no later than 6:00 p.m. on the Sunday preceding the meeting. Reservations not cancelled must be paid for by the member.

Looking forward to seeing you there.



ANNUAL AWARDS

Young People's Literature Committee

By ANGELA GALL, *Chair*

It is my pleasure to announce the winners of this year's Young People's Literature Awards:

***American Panda* by Gloria Chao** is a heartfelt and hilarious story about a Taiwanese-American teen whose parents' rigid expectations force her to decide between a future of her own making, that may or may not include her parents, or a lifetime of unhappiness.

***Darius the Great Is Not Okay* by Adib Khorram** is a powerful story of a teenage boy's battle with depression while navigating his place in his nuclear family in America, as well as his extended one in Iran.

***Thank You, Omu!* by author/illustrator Oge Mora** is a remarkable children's story about community and sharing, delivered to us by a generous grandmother and her delicious stew.

This year we had so many great stories to choose from that we felt obliged to award three winners. We love that each of our authors emphasized multiculturalism in their writing. Each book seamlessly interweaves information about various cultures--Taiwanese, Iranian and Nigerian-- while crafting

unforgettable stories and characters that deepen the fabric of our American culture. We cannot wait to meet our authors and share in their life stories and careers.

For many of our Young People's Literature Committee members, this has been a rough year. Dealing with surgeries, ailing loved ones, and the loss of our dear Lorraine has only emphasized to us how much our love for reading pulls us through the toughest of times. Thank you, Tanya, Peggy, Colleen, Vivian, Betty, Deb, and Jane for your continued commitment to our crew and craft.

Literary Awards

By TAMMIE BOB, *Chair*

Here are the 2018 FAW Literature Award Winners.

This year, the adult literature committee has two award winners, both novels by two very talented new writers. The committee received many wonderful entries, and our decision followed months of reading and hours of spirited discussion. Both prize winners are beautifully written, with thought-provoking, and entertaining plots. Neither book is easily categorized. I am proud to describe the books to you here.

First Prize: *Severance*, by Ling Ma

In a way, Ling Ma's shocking and ferocious novel, *Severance*, is a play on the "Why I left New York" theme; but it's one you'll actually want to read. The novel's protagonist, Candace Chen, departs the city she's called home for years not because of a tough job market or skyrocketing rent, but because the world as we know it is coming to an end. It's a fierce debut from a writer with seemingly boundless imagination.

Candace's life in New York might not be what she dreamed of, but it's not all that bad. She has a respectable job at a publishing production firm, where she outsources printing jobs to facilities in China. She and her boyfriend pass the time watching movies in his basement apartment. As a hobby, she maintains NY Ghost, a blog featuring her photographs of life in the city.

But then things start to get complicated. A mysterious disease called Shen Fever, a fungal infection that originated in China, starts to move through the country, turning its victims into a unique type of zombie. The death count rises so quickly that the news media, fearing a panic, stops reporting it.

Severance goes back and forth in time, contrasting Candace's tedious office job with her travels across post-apocalyptic America. It's a technique Ma uses to great effect — it's jarring in a great way, making the horror of her new circumstances all the more intense. It works especially well in the novel's most terrifying scene in which Bob orders Candace to execute a young, ailing girl. Directly afterwards, Ma shifts scenes to Candace's job interview, where she tries to explain to an executive why she'd be good at overseeing the production of Bibles.

While *Severance* has elements of a horror novel, there's much more to it than that. It's a wicked satire of consumerism and the work culture. The character of Bob comes across as a typical, power-hungry middle manager. Ma seems to be suggesting that even in the event of an apocalypse, you can't escape pointless bureaucracy. But Ma never overplays her hand. Art that's critical of capitalism (or any political or economic system) can turn didactic and humorless very quickly, but *Severance* never does.

We're not the only ones who loved this book: Ling Ma, who is an English professor at the University of Chicago, will be participating in the Sydney Writer's Festival in Australia the week of our Awards Luncheon. However, we will make every effort to have her as one of our Luncheon speakers next year.

Second Prize: *The Wonder that was Ours* by Alice Hatcher

"Really, though, what did Franz Kafka know about cockroaches?" Not much compared to Hatcher, who makes a group of roaches the narrator of her debut novel. Although the concept seemed revolting to nearly all of us at first, the dirty little creatures soon endeared themselves to us for their wisdom and compassion.

It isn't necessary to know the history of banana republics or labor movements to follow this bright novel. For readers who could use a refresher course, the cockroaches (speaking in


the royal "we") offer a humorous yet painstaking political and social history of a fictitious Caribbean island that runs parallel to political movements throughout history.

An assortment of quirky characters brings this history to life—most notably the cabbie/bartender Wynston Cleave, known as Professor Cleave by family, friends, and the cockroaches that permeate his taxi. Years earlier, Cleave had the misfortune of picking up a tipsy American heiress who then died in his car. Wrongly imprisoned for her death but now free, he is suspicious when he picks up a bedraggled couple, recently kicked off an American cruise ship.

Suspicion turns to anxiety when a viral contagion overtakes the ship. A bloated body washed ashore ignites rumors, thoughtless acts, riots, and finally martial law. Hatcher's training as an historian is evident in this well-constructed novel.

However, it's the cockroaches that are the true stars of the show. Sharp-witted, well-read, and with a long view of history, their voices are dignified, erudite, and often funny: "Woe to us, who suffer the curse of stubby little wings, vestigial appendages suitable for neither flying nor fanning ourselves on a hot day. One can hopefully appreciate our love of air conditioning in light of this one regrettable aspect of our anatomy."

It would be wise to heed the narrators' observations on Hatcher's fictional world, as well as on political history and human shortcomings. Although hilarity abounds, Hatcher's take on colonialism and racial and class divides is timely, powerfully imagined, and moving.

Although she now lives in Tucson, Arizona, author Alice Hatcher immediately accepted the invitation to our Awards Luncheon. It will be exciting to hear from her. 



**FEATURE
ARTICLE**

by **SHIRLEY BAUGHER**

**APRIL
FOOLS'
DAY**

CONTINUED

Just What Is April Fools' Day?

April Fools' Day is a Western celebration of sorts that takes place on the first day of April. Its main purpose is to play practical jokes on unsuspecting people. Those playing the "joke" shout out "April Fool!" at its conclusion, and the poor recipient who falls for the ruse is the fool. Sometimes newspapers and magazines will publish one fake story (usually on the first page) on April 1 to dupe readers. This happens in Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Sweden. Further along in the publication, the joke is usually explained to everyone's satisfaction and relief.

How Did April Fools' Day Begin?

One of the first references to April 1 as a day of foolishness is found in Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales.

It's a pretty obscure allusion made in "The Nun's Priest's Tale." A vain cock Chauntecleer is tricked by a fox in Chaucer's text which begins, "Syn March bigan thritty dayes and two...." It goes on from there to relate the tale. Some reader's took this to mean the 32nd of March, which would have been April 1. This is, however, an interpretation, not an absolute explanation. Others explain it away as a copying error and maintain that what Chaucer actually wrote was "Syn March was gon."



Chauntecleer

Another attribution is found in early French literature. In 1508, the French poet Elroy d'Amerval made reference to a poisson d'avril literally "fish of April," or April Fish. Poisson d'avril, involved one person attempting to attach a paper fish to another person's back without being noticed. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Poisson d'avril postcards were printed and became very popular.

Still others say that April Fools' originated in the Middle Ages when, in most European towns, New Year's Day was commemorated on March 25 and lasted until April 1. Those who celebrated the beginning of the new year on January 1 made fun of people celebrating on April 1, calling them April Fools and designating the day April Fools' Day. Eventually, the French also adopted January 1 as New Year's Day and gave up the March-April celebration.

In 1539, a Flemish poet named Eduard de Dene came up with his own explanation. He said April Fools' Day came about because of a nobleman who sent his servants on foolish errands on April 1—hence April Fools' Day.

Who knows why he chose that day?

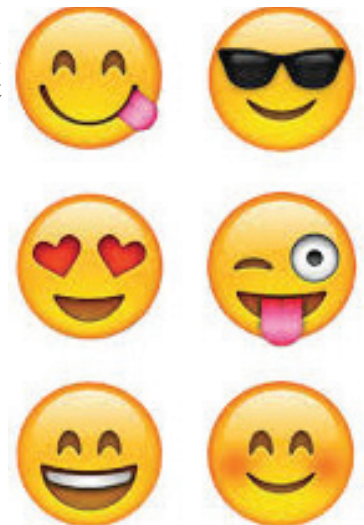
In the Netherlands, historians attribute April Fools' Day to a Dutch victory at Brielle in 1572. In that battle, the Dutch troops defeated the Spanish Duke Alvarez de Toledo. Historians wrote of that battle "Op 1 april verloor Alva zijn bril," which translates to, "On the first of April, Alva lost his glasses." "Bril" means glasses in Dutch. So, a fool's loss of his glasses resulted in the loss of the battle. April Fools' Day.

The British call the April fool different names around the country, including "gob," "gobby," or "noddly;" and have yet another explanation of the day. In 1686, John Aubrey, a philosopher and writer, called April 1 "Fooles Holy Day." Several years later, on April 1, 1698, many Britishers (April Fools) were tricked into going to the Tower of London to "see the Lions washed." Of course, no Lions were washed. An important feature of April Fools' Day in the UK is that all joking has to stop at noon. Anyone playing a joke after midday is considered an April Fool.

In Poland, *prima aprilis* (Latin for April 1) is celebrated as a day of jokes and hoaxes by people, the media, and even public institutions. Many Poles avoid serious activities on that day and every word they say can be regarded as a lie or a joke. Historically, Poles have taken April Fools' Day very seriously. For example, the Polish-anti Turkish alliance with Leopold I signed on April 1, 1683, was backdated to March 31. In Poland, as in Great Britain, *prima aprilis* must end at noon. Jokes after midday are considered inappropriate and low-class.

Not all fools are recognized on April 1. Some countries have similar traditions that take place at different times of the year. In Spain, people celebrate "The Day of the Holy Innocents" on December 28. On that day, everyone, including the media is allowed to play practical jokes without punishment.

And so, dear readers. It seems appropriate at the end of this article to announce that this will be my last literary effort for the FAW newsletter. I have truly enjoyed writing for you and communicating with you and look forward to the publication that will succeed my efforts of the past six years.



**Gotcha.
APRIL FOOLS!** 🇩🇪

The Reading Corner

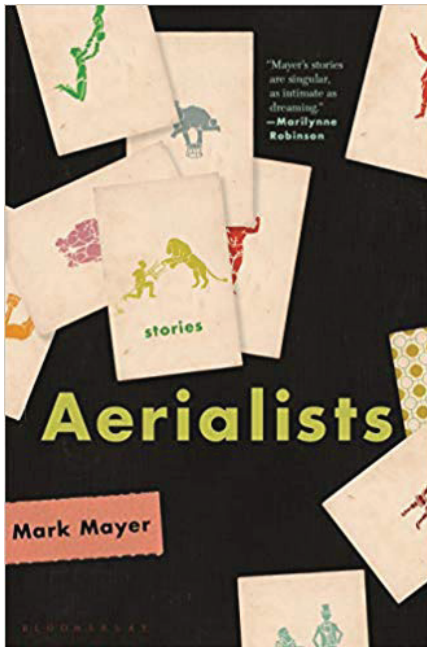
AERIALISTS

by Mark Mayer

Reviewer ROBERTA GATES



Mark Mayer



If you're looking for stories that are meatier and smarter than the usual collection, look no further than Mark Mayer's *Aerialists* (Bloomsbury, \$26). Loosely organized around a circus theme, this Michener-Copernicus-winning debut features nine quirky but compassionate stories. There's "The Evasive Magnolio" about a circus elephant and the peach farmer who must bury her, as well as "The Wilderness Act" about a 48-year-old man whose foray into dating leaves him confused about just how wild (or tame) he ought be. And "Aerialists," as the title story, is particularly astute in conveying the heartbreak and rage a young man feels as he wrenches himself away from his employer, his girlfriend and his family to join the Navy.

Mayer is especially skilled at rendering the lives of children, as four of his other stories demonstrate. In "Strongwoman," Junior, an 11-year-old boy whose dad has split, is forced to make room for a new person in his mother's life—in this case Klara, a female bodybuilder who bungee jumps, makes her own hot sauce, and wears "a magnetic bracelet that balances her blood flow." She is almost more than Junior can handle.

In "Solidarity Forever," Jacob, a nine-year-old boy being raised by his aunt and uncle, spends a disorienting summer immersed in the milieu of communism. During the day, he marches with his Aunt Rebecca outside a Coors brewery, protesting with workers who don't even have a union. Meanwhile, Uncle Bart—upset by the sight of Boris Yeltsin "on top of a tank, stamping his fists and ending the Soviet Union"—remains at home where he's sequestered himself in the basement, eschewing meals and trying to prove the merits of communism through math. Jacob, uncertain what to think, watches assiduously from the sidelines while seeking solace in whatever patterns he can discern in the world around him.

"Twin," a story employing magical realism, is especially moving. In it, 11-year-old Maple is able to communicate "mind to mind" with her friend Sasha, an aphasic girl so disabled she's confined to a wheelchair and has to wear diapers. Though they're perfectly matched mentally if not physically, circumstances beyond their control threaten to separate them.

And in "The April Thief," a junior high-aged boy named Parker tries to conjure his missing mother using a number of bizarre strategies,

many of which involve his best friend, Javier, and Javier's smelly dog, Sid. "Your family is weird," Javier tells Parker one day, before immediately adding, "I love them."

The two final stories in the collection are real winners. In "The Clown," a Lexus-driving realtor serves as the perfect example of the weirdness which lies just beneath the surface of everyday life, because, while he's good at his job, he's much more interested in his hobby—which is murder, always undertaken in full regalia (a wig the color of a "bruised strawberry," porcelain teeth filed to a point, and nails that he made himself from molded tin).

By contrast, "The Ringmaster," which is the last story in the collection, is bittersweet, describing the efforts of an unmarried retiree to find a home for the massive train set which was his life's passion.

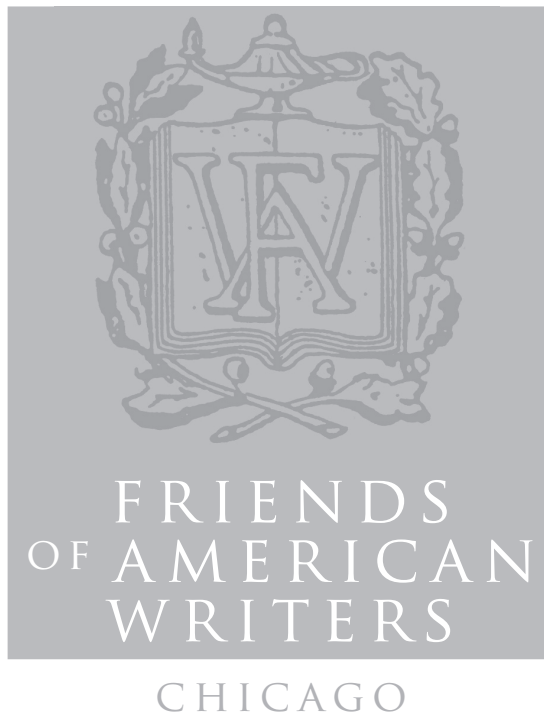
Mayer's use of both language and humor is nimble and surprising. A young girl's eyes are "green with little sunflowers," while a circus elephant smells like "a paper bag of crickets." And "Nope [is] a soapy bubble. Its denial floated there, casual, coolheaded, certain, then swallowed itself with a terminal pop."

And the humor, though gentle, is firmly rooted in close observations of the world around us: "Prairie dogs [on the trail] hustled half-heartedly for cover; they knew the humans didn't have teeth" or "It sounded like a VCR guzzling magnetic tape," but was actually "the squeaky mewling of gerbil babies blindly drawing milk."

If you think that short stories are less satisfying than novels, give *Aerialists* a try and find out for yourself how delightful and gratifying a collection of well-told stories can be. ■



SHIRLEY BAUGHER
1710 N. Crilly Court
Chicago, IL 60614



FAW MEETINGS 2018-19

A reminder of the FAW meetings for 2018-19. Be sure to mark your calendars. You won't want to miss a single one!

OCTOBER 10, 2018

Steve Venturino
Speaking on Daniel Deronda

NOVEMBER 7, 2018

**Exploring Historical Fiction:
A Panel of Three Writers**

Connie Hamilton Connally
(author of *The Songs we Hide*)

Kelly O'Connor Mcnesse
(author of *Undiscovered Country*)

Devin Murphy
(author of *The Boat Runner*)

DECEMBER 12, 2018

interFRIENDtions will perform
Christmas and Hannukkah music

JANUARY 9, 2019

The American Writers' Museum
will send a representative

FEBRUARY 13, 2019

Adult-Books Editor
Booklist Reviews

MARCH 13, 2019

Patricia Frazier
National Youth Poet
Laureate

APRIL 10, 2019

Leslie Goddard, actress
As Rachel Carson

FRIDAY, MAY 3, 2019

Awards Luncheon