

Chimeric Machines



by Lucy A. Snyder

Introduction by Tom Piccirilli



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Creative Guy Publishing
Vancouver British Columbia Canada

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Chi*mer"ic a. [Gr. a she-goat, a chimera]

Imaginary; fanciful; fantastic. Of or relating to a chimera, a monster represented as vomiting flames, and as having the head of a lion, the body of a goat, and the tail of a dragon.

Ma*chine" n. [F., fr. L. *machina* machine, engine, device, trick, Gr., from means, expedient.]

1. In general, any combination of bodies so connected that their relative motions are constrained, and by means of which force and motion may be transmitted and modified.
2. Any mechanical contrivance, as the wooden horse with which the Greeks entered Troy.
3. A person who acts at the will of another.
4. A combination of persons acting together for a common purpose, with the agencies that they use; as, the social machine.
5. Supernatural agency in a poem.

Taken from: *Webster's Dictionary*, 1913.

for Gary

Introduction

by Tom Piccirilli

Okay, so you've picked up this collection, which already proves that you're sharper than the kid you sat behind in Homeroom who used to spit in his textbooks, your step-brother George who used to call you "bookworm" and thumb your glasses, and the automotive shop teacher who caught you with *Leaves of Grass* in the tenth grade and told you that poetry is just "namby-pamby rhymes about rocks and rivers."

You, pal, have a head on your shoulders, and you're eager to dip deeply into Lucy Snyder's verse and prose poems. You've laid out your hard-earned cash and you're expecting good things. And I'm here to tell you that it was a smart move on your part because you're about to receive. You surely are.

Let me show you what I'm talking about. Perk up in your LA-Z-BOY for a second and just listen to this for a title: "And There in the Machine, Virginia Finally Stood Up." Now, is that a hook or is that a hook? It's impossible for anybody with two functioning brain synapses not to immediately have their imagination fired up the moment your eyes rest on those words. Snyder knows that the first hurdle between a writer and reader is the title. It's not the first scene or the first paragraph or even the first sentence. It's the title, and she's going to grab you by the guts early.

And if there's the faintest echo of that auto shop teacher or your goddamn brother George still wafting around at the back your skull telling you that maybe you've stumbled upon a Susan Polis Schultz wannabe, and you're worried that those rhyming couplets are going to sneak out from behind the next page, then check out these pitch-perfect, hammer-hard lines from "Subtlety":

Subtlety came to us from Latin
(by way of the clever French)
in that thin, gossamer term
subtilis, which in turn
is a web of under-stitched
subtext. What joe really gives

a flying doublefudge fuck
about lacy coy underwords?

Go ahead and read it again. I'll wait.

All set?

Snyder's work is complex yet grounded. You can read it on several levels and it'll work on each and every one. It's lyrical but rooted in authenticity and validity. There's truth here, and tackling the truth is the highest calling of any poet.

So many amazing lines just leap out at the reader, like this one from "After the Funeral": *Mom's a brick of ash in a Baptist wall/and the nest I made stayed empty.*

Doesn't that slip a knife between your ribs and

tickle your heart?

That's the effect of a hard-fought gospel. Lucy Snyder has seen some shit, brother. She's been through the trenches; she knows the way the world comes down. You can feel it in the work. You're not just looking at words in a book, you're regarding a life that's been opened up and splashed down on the page. You think that's easy? This lady is not only courageous, she's fearless. We need more like her to give us that grand plucking of the guts.

So be brave, Chuckles, and be ready.

Because you're about to be disturbed, fascinated, entranced and bruised. Now thank your lucky stars and move on to what awaits....

Part I
Technical

Modernism

The statuesque dove lay perfect
in Old World gray and white
folded pinions parallel
head perpendicular
a classic sight.

A meter above the dove
on the plate glass where
the bird had mistaken open air
was an abstract slanted splash
of translucent crimson.

And There in the Machine, Virginia Finally Stood Up

Class, settle down, get out your textbooks, and turn to page 43. After we're done reading, we can have show-and-tell for thirty minutes. No, Virginia, you can't go first – we'll go in alphabetical order like always. Sit down, Virginia; you can tell us about your trip when it's your turn. I'm sorry we ran out of time before we got to you last month, but you still have to wait your turn. Now, everyone: turn to page 43.

You're a good player, Virginia, but Joseph is two grades ahead of you. He's had private lessons, and he's got a much better instrument. It's his turn to be first chair. You have to blend with his sound; don't draw attention to yourself.

Oh, Ginny, you're not going to wear *that* dress to the party, are you? It's far too loud; don't you want to wear your nice pink one instead? You don't want the boys to get the wrong idea, do you? Now, remember, you mustn't be too forward; if a boy wants to dance with you, he'll ask. Don't talk too much. Remember to smile. Boys like girls who smile.

He's out of your league, Gin. You're no cheerleader. No, you shouldn't even try to talk to him. Just hang

out with us at the dance; we're your *real* friends. He's out of your league.

Hey, Gin, why are you wasting your time in front of that old typewriter? Come to the party with us! You don't want to be a nerd, do you?

Ginny, I'm really proud that you got into MIT, but we just can't afford it now that your father's retired. I'm sorry, honey, but the scholarship just isn't big enough. I know we sent your brother, but that's different. He's going to be an engineer; you just want to major in English, right? Boston is so far away, and big cities are terribly dangerous. Now, honey, be reasonable! The local college is perfectly decent. That's better. I knew we could count on you to be a good girl.

Ms. Wilson, you did a very nice job in fiction class, so your "A" was well-deserved. What? No, I'm afraid I can't let you take my upper-level workshop. Yes, I know there's a seat left, but I simply can't allow non-MFAs into my workshop. The undergraduate program is one thing, but our graduate school is *quite* exclusive. We prefer students who are not local. Your fiction is very competent, but I doubt you could compete with writers from larger schools.

Miss Wilson, I realize you've been working here longer than Mr. Jones, but he's got a degree from Harvard and a family to support. He's got the go-getter attitude

that we want to see in our managers. I understand your frustration, but I can't promote every deserving employee. Be a good team player; we might be able to find a secretarial position for you in a year or two.

Hey, Gin, what's up? Haven't seen you in years. What? You wrote a book? Oh. That's cool, I guess. I could write one too, you know. If I *wanted*. Been working on my golf game, you know? Golf's *hard*.

Miss Wilson, I'd appreciate it if you didn't have your book cover on display in your cubicle. It's not conducive to a productive work environment. Yes, I know the others have football and Nascar posters up, but sports are ... normal. Some of the others think you're ... overstepping yourself. After all, anyone can self-publish ... what? You mean someone *paid* you to write that? Who on Earth would want to read a book written by a *secretary*? Well, then, the cover's a commercial. Employees are forbidden to use company resources for personal gain. The cube wall is a company resource. Take the cover down.

Miss Wilson?

What's that in your hand?

Subtlety

Subtlety came to us from Latin
(by way of the clever French)
in that thin, gossamer term
subtilis, which in turn
is a web of under-stitched
subtext. What joe really gives

a flying doublefudge fuck
about lacy coy underwords?
Twixt the stark, sooty verbs
it's card tricks in a tar-dark hall,
earnest *Kama Sutra* recitations
to a rubber smutstore doll.

A horse is a horse unless
she's a Mississippi queen, an allegory
crawling from a swamp of contempt.
I metaphor lunch, but the queen
wouldn't listen, baffled by menus
plain as her face. Moot.
Mute. Mote. Moat.
The meanings collapse,
drown in that lazy river.
Undercurrents churn mud.

Sympathy

Sympathy evolved peripherally,
a selective way to keep the tribe alive
through the secondhand pangs of trial,
tributaries of tribulation shared by blood,
our hardwired love of Rover and Fluffy just
a shadow of family need in the genes.

But what if we could feel the flesh we eat,
taste the fatal throes ol' Bossie endured
as the butcher put a hammer to her head?
What if every whitemeat nugget sliding
greasy down our throats held a grindhouse
flash of Chicken Little, debeaked and choked?

Would we shun personalized burgers
and embrace plates of cheerful fruits?
Would we eagerly flee from carnivory,
ban the slaughter and celebrate salad,
glorify veggies, their tales of pain so dull;
no yardman names the blades he mows.

But righteous sadists might dictate diets of woe:
priests would curse the sins in mother's milk
and tell their flocks to feed the babies Bambi.
Hardening souls for a Heavenly shine, pious
soldiers would savor Apocalyptic glory
in the soylent flesh of every blessed enemy.

Trepanation

The first migraine-plagued caveman
who countered his aching cranium
with crudely pounded flint (and lived)
surely shared his medical breakthrough.

Headcutting is old as woodcutting.
Andean shaman or Alpine physician,
a good doctor knew the value
of airing out a fevered brain.

In dark ages before Lister and Pasteur,
chirurgeons didn't know a virus
from a curse, but they needed a name
for the rusty saw they used to open
a blow-swelled skull: the trepane
saved careless patricians from coma.

Modern surgeons' steel is clean, but treat
tyro trepanation with trepidation. Teen
mystics sing high of tuning third eyes
and praise their cordless doorknob drills
for opening new windows of perception
even as they lie blinded, bacterial feasts.

Tech Support

We sit at gray monitors, listening
to confused Eloi in tusky towers
divergently evolving. Always
there's a compatibility problem
between the overfocused poets
and the language of machines.

The Eloi cry doom over bright wires,
voices spores. Our minds fuzz mycotic.
No dystopia's perfect: we have a bitter savior
so we shamble, spidery, pale, seeking ambrosia.
Faith's no narcotic once you've lost humanity,
so we take noon communion in free hot coffee.

The Fish and the Bicycle

Consider the physics:
how could she pedal
with fragile membranous fins,
sit with slippery tail,
steer with gasping mouth?

She breaks the surface,
peeks up goggle-eyed
at his bold chrome frame,
his knobby cocked handlebar,
his rugged hunky tires.

Dory knows that Schwinn's can't swim.
Undersea, the salt and wet
would rot his shapely seat,
rust his shining chain,
blister his pearly paint.

But she'd be happy to drown in the air,
flip and flop on the gritty boardwalk,
shake to flakes in the stinking heat
for just a single slimy ride
on her Adonis machine.

Part IV
Crete, Kentucky

Passie Fay's Lament

I know it's white-trash as a whole
box of Little Debbie's for breakfast,
a baloney sandwich fried in Crisco
because you can't afford real butter,

but I swear to you, I never knew
that boy was growing inside me;
I'd birthed six kids for King;
it didn't feel a thing like before.

I was trying to ditch these hips.
I was buying celery, broccoli
and cabbage on sale at Aldi
so I thought he was just gas.

Ari kept telling me, "Momma,
there's a purdy lady inside you
just waitin' to make a jailbreak
from that fulsome prison of fat."

It sure weren't June Carter come bustin'
out when my water broke all over
the Wal-Mart's restroom floor;
a trucker helped deliver my surprise.

King threw me out of the house that night;
one look at the baby, he knew I'd fucked
Bull White. Lil' Terry favors him so close
it's like Whitey's juice just grew on its own.

Mama warned me not to eat rotten apples,
but King's dick went dead from pills
and booze. Whitey is a brutal fool,
but a gal like me is lucky for anyone's fancy.

My life's leaking through my redneck mistake;
even Ari left me to fend for myself in this maze
with a bullhead boy who laughs while he breaks
my grandma's china and chowhounds our trailer.

Flyboy

The baseheads call me Daddy Luzz like I'm fly.
I was my momma's first, a cream-faced baby boy.
Pops thought I was ace, raised me like a king,
named me for the light of the Las Vegas sun.
Or maybe pale Lucifer. No one would know
to see me now: sun burnt my skin as dark as Coke.

In college, I gene-spliced corn to make cocaine.
With a chemistry book in my hand, I could fly.
I wish I'd made Christian use of what I know,
but like Momma said, "Folly, thy name be Boy."
She hoped I'd be a NASA man blazing past the sun,
but my Supernaut Jiffypop made me campus king.

It's a crackbrain thing to think you're king;
I tossed around cash from frankenstein coke
and party girls loved me like God's risen son.
But I was just a buzzing mosquito, a robber fly
sucking profit from the uptown mobster boys
who lectured me with fists and guns. I knew

to blow to cowtowns where I wasn't known.
Spit-quick, I found hilljack saviors: Mr. King
and Passie Fay made me their moonshine boy,
kept me copsafe while I cropped up their coke.
For a while, life was stingless as a butterfly.
I took a woman, built my manor in the sun.

My wife stroked out giving birth to our son.
When I held bawling Russ, in my gut I knew
it was time to get real, get straight, time to fly.
That wasn't The Man's pharming plan. Ol' King
flared hot as a blast furnace combusting coke
when I asked if I could stop. He said, "Boy,

I'll throw you to the narcs; they'll bury your boy
in the county home while you bust rocks in the sun."
So. I've plotted our route while I plow out the coke.
I found a broken-down turboprop in a barn. I know
more than chemistry and genes: engineering's king.
With parts and practice, my boy and I can fly.

I've got to keep my son safe; I've got to quit this coke.
Russ thinks he'll be Sky King; boy's gotta watch the sun,
fly for the sea, get free of this mazed-up life I've known.

Terror White

I work alone on the snowman's land,
sleep on rags behind a maze of doors.
Coulda been a star like my old man.

When Luzz split, it all hit the fan.
Never saw King hate anyone more.
I work alone on the snowman's land.

King told me I was part of his plan;
he'd never wanted me around before.
Coulda been a star like my old man.

Took my lessons in a windowless van,
learned guns and grams and gore.
I work alone on the snowman's land.

King made me quit school to serve his clan,
told me a quarterback's arm is made for war.
But I coulda been a star like my old man.

When the bitches get into my van,
I do what I want to them and more.
I kill alone on the snowman's land
cuz I shoulda been a star like my old man.

Cissy Cocalus

It ain't right for a girl in my line of work to fall
in love, but I gotta say, that Luzz is some fine
man. He always talkin' 'bout his cute lil' boy,
make me think maybe I'd be happy with a baby
someday. Anyway, he always clean, and tip
real good. Then this guy King come to town,
ready to fuck up Luzz for pure wicked sport.
Luzz give me a triple fee and packets of sweet
laced with dope. Tell me to go to this one motel.
King like to get head in the bath and sip moon;
all I gotta do is fluff him, spike his drink,
draw the tub water and just let him drown.

I sit on the john as his breath blubs away;
murdering makes a damn sexy payday.

Ari, Pushing Forty

Back home, they figure sixteen
is a fine ripe time to drop your first pup
but I tell you: it's a bone dumb age.

I still thought Pa was sweet as Christmas pie.
I still believed the prunefaced TV preachers
when they said human need's some kind of sin;

I shouldn't have turned my back on my own
mama, even if her baby wasn't my Pa's. Who
else was gonna help her? Macho jock Bull? Ha.

Terry was still my brother, my blood, even at the end
when we found all those poor Mexican girls cut up
like fryer hens all over Luzz's abandoned mansion.

Luzz. That man was a piece of work.
When I was twenty-three, he gave me
the keys to Club Cirque and I believed

that he was gonna leave his wife,
take me out dancing every night once
she was done having his son. Dumb.

I'm sorry to say I ain't been much smarter since then.
Ed Shutes? He's a real piece of *something*. I showed him
the way thru the mansion. Easy to lose yourself in there.

Ed swore that he just wanted to talk to Terry about my daddy's drugs, but I guess finding a mess of tortured corpses is gonna change any cop's mind.

FBI, DEA ... whatever. A cop's a cop, even if he's got pretty blue eyes and knows "Freebird" on slide guitar. He played me all the way from Crete to Daytona Beach,

said he was going out for a cigar and never came back. I waited forever, got a clue, went down to the hotel well and told my sad story to Donnie, the bartender. Bar *owner*,

it turned out, and wouldn't you know, three weeks later he proposed. Sure, he's been a fine husband, good guy, keeps me in pretty threads and makes a rockin' martini.

Speaking of: my glass is dry, sweetie ... want to go back to my room for tonic and gin? Donnie's in Hackensack, and you look like a boy who knows all my favorite sins.

About the Author

Lucy A. Snyder is the author of the forthcoming Del Rey novel *Spellbent* and the short story collections *Sparks and Shadows* and *Installing Linux on a Dead Badger*. Her poetry has appeared in *Full Unit Hookup*, *Strange Horizons*, *Chiaroscuro*, *Snow Monkey*, *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*, and *Greatest Uncommon Denominator*. She also served as a poetry editor for *HMS Beagle*.

Lucy was born in South Carolina but grew up in the cowboys-and-cactus part of Texas. She currently lives in Worthington, Ohio with a pack of cats and her husband/occasional co-author Gary A. Braunbeck.

You can learn more about her at:

www.lucysnyder.com

About the Cover Artist

Ursula Vernon is probably best known as the creator of the webcomics *Digger* and *Nurk*. She is also the author of *It Made Sense At The Time*, a book of her selected sketches. Vernon is the daughter of an artist, but didn't begin drawing until she was 17. Much of her art is digital, but she also uses combinations of acrylic ink, fluid acrylic, watercolor, gouache, and colored pencil. She currently lives in North Carolina with cats and far too many art supplies.

You can find more of her artwork at:

www.metalandmagic.com

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- “Trepanation” – *Strange Horizons*, July 2006.
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- “Flyboy” – *Strange Horizons*, April 30, 2007.
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- “Ocean” – *Lady Churchill’s Rosebud Wristlet*, Issue #6, May 2000.
- “Permian Basin Blues” – *Lady Churchill’s Rosebud Wristlet*, Issue #7, October 2000.
- “Photograph of a Lady, Circa 1890” – *Lady Churchill’s Rosebud Wristlet*, Issue #7, October 2000.

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About *Chimeric Machines*

This collection from rising author Lucy A. Snyder offers three dozen poems to delight readers who enjoy sly wordplay and subtle allusion, high intelligence and fierce heart.

“Snyder’s work is complex yet grounded. You can read it on several levels and it’ll work on each and every one. It’s lyrical but rooted in authenticity and validity. There’s truth here, and tackling the truth is the highest calling of any poet.

“She’s been through the trenches; she knows the way the world comes down. You can feel it in the work. You’re not just looking at words in a book, you’re regarding a life that’s been opened up and splashed down on the page. This lady is not only courageous, she’s fearless. We need more like her to give us that grand plucking of the guts.”

— Tom Piccirilli, author of *The Midnight Road* and *Waiting My Turn to Go Under the Knife*, from his introduction

“There is nothing illusory or mechanical about these poems. They take us on a marvelously eclectic journey, with a cast that includes a black hole voicing its thoughts and a dead man coming ‘Home For the Holidays.’ Read and be dazzled.”

— Christopher Conlon, author of *Mary Falls: Requiem for Mrs. Surratt* and *Midnight on Mourn Street*