

THE 2014 RHYSLING ANTHOLOGY – REDACTED MATERIAL

EDITOR'S NOTE¹

Welcome to the 2014 Rhysling Anthology, in which you will find monsters and space and fairy tales and science and folklore and all manner of earthly delights. It is my sincere hope that you enjoy it, that what is in it represents to you the best that speculative poetry had to offer the world in 2013, and that you will so choose, if you are a voting member, to make your voice heard regarding which six of all these gorgeous poems are the best of the best.

But before diving into the wealth herein, I want you to consider some painful facts. At the time of this writing, the earth's population is estimated to contain approximately seven and a quarter billion human beings. SFPA, in the years that its membership has been tracked, has never had more than three hundred members. Within the last two years, that figure dropped to below two hundred. Which means that either a percentage of the world's population so small that it literally requires an imaginary negative exponent to express cares about science fiction poetry, or the only game in town with respect to science fiction poetry is not reaching the world.

I believe it is the latter, and I believe I know why.

The SFPA is plagued by significant organizational, structural, and ethical concerns. Speaking organizationally, this is a hobbyist's club run less efficiently and sensibly than some hobbyist's clubs a fraction of its size. The Rhysling Awards do not have a social media strategy; they have a terrible drawn-from-Wikipedia auto-created Facebook presence. Their Twitter presence is minimal even though I have volunteered to assist with and have, to the best of my ability, monitored that presence and tried to increase it since taking on the Chairship. For at least the last three years, the Rhysling winners have been announced in real time on Twitter—not by the awarding organization, but by random people on the hashtag for whatever con was hosting the awards. The timing of con season meant the anthologies were being pushed out with an eye to speed over quality, culminating in last year, when I quite publicly criticized the glaring errors in the final product. The organization's tolerance for systemic bigotry in its official spaces has been and continues to be publicly exposed, and those exposing it given vicious, hateful, dehumanizing responses.

Criticism of the SFPA is not, then, well received. I learned this myself when I had the temerity to publicly criticize the 2013 Rhysling Anthology for being riddled with errors. Moreover, any criticism is generally met with "If you don't like it, why don't you do it yourself?" That's not how I expect a professional organization to attract people to take on commitments, major or minor. I work directly or indirectly for a minimum of five all-volunteer projects and events every year, and have for the past decade. Successful projects welcome well-focused and constructive criticism because they strive for quality and professionalism.

¹ By mutual agreement of Bryan Dietrich, the SFPA President, and Elizabeth R. McClellan, the 2014 Rhysling Chair, the Editor's Note that appeared in the first edition of *The 2014 Rhysling Anthology* was redacted for the second and subsequent editions. The original text of the Editor's Note edition appears here, along with Mr. Dietrich's President's Note and Ms. McClellan's Editor's Final Comment, included in print addenda to the first edition.

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Far more trenchant criticisms of the SFPA exist in some number. These are available to you with some Googling, but I can recap them: an in-group resistance to all change and accountability; a Constitutional setup that makes changing policies and procedures of any kind inordinately difficult and does not even call for regular election of officers; the production of substandard publications; unreasonable demands and working conditions for volunteers; a tolerance of bigotry in its professional spaces and publications; and outright hostility to any attempt to modernize either the organization's function or its attitudes toward allowing bigoted attacks to be made through its official channels. I've personally spoken to upwards of thirty former SFPA members who believe this organization is past saving, not worth saving, not worth even trying to change.

Because of what I experienced last year, my priorities were these: produce a professional publication in which the poets would feel proud to be included, and make that publication, as near as humanly possible, free of error in the nominated works. The primary purposes of the Rhysling Anthology are to showcase the best speculative poetry of a given year and provide the primary opportunity to the voters to decide amongst themselves which deserve to be singled out for highest honors. That purpose cannot be achieved if entire lines of the poems are deleted for being in non-English characters, if line breaks are omitted or introduced, or if poems are not reproduced as the poet intended them to appear. I spent two years of my life on law review making sure that scholarly articles longer than this entire anthology were correct down to the page numbers cited and the publication-specific formatting of those citations . . . but even that volunteer organization understood that could only be achieved by multiple pairs of eyes, by a team working in conjunction with the authors. Last year, those poets who received a Rhysling proof were asked for a completely unreasonable 24-hour turnaround time. The poets whose work appears herein have been given two opportunities to review their poems prior to publication, with reasonable turn-around time for such review, thus catching errors I never would have seen (often because of formatting issues in the original publications). Other than these authors who have volunteered their time, the team I've had to assist me were mostly those I recruited myself, relying on goodwill I built personally and independently of SFPA.

It has now taken me approximately the same time to produce the Rhysling Anthology I wanted to produce as it takes to fully gestate a human infant. In order to do so I have had to call in countless personal favors; been ignored by at least one publisher whose writers are routinely Rhysling nominated; undertaken (with some assistance) a "Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego"-like quest to find a past Rhysling winner and current nominee whose information the organization had not kept current; and been simultaneously thanked for the level of involvement I was extending to the nominees in proofing their works and eviscerated by long-time SFPA volunteers for errors in non-poetry related portions of those proofs, the existence of which was expressly noted in the accompanying correspondence.

Anthologies don't just happen. Organizations don't just happen. The poetry of the future should not be reflected in a web presence that would almost be ironically retro if it were intentional; a magazine making design choices that first-year design students wince at; content decisions that are questionable at best, covered up by bleating "free speech" as if "editorial discretion" equals "government suppression"; nor the tolerance of attitudes and conduct in its official spaces that actively drive away people who have the needed skills to make this

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organization look even moderately professional instead of like a badly-run high school club. The SFPA is in violation of its own Constitution right now: it has asked for volunteers for both the Secretary and Treasurer position within the last quarter, instead of advertising the position as laid out in its Constitution—which, given its age, states that the method for doing so is to do such advertising in a quarterly publication. Leaving aside the issues with the idea of volunteer, not-routinely-elected officerships in a professional organization, the fact that an organization ostensibly committed to the poetry of the future has never bothered to overhaul its own rules to account for the existence of the Internet is Kafkaesque in its ludicrousness.

A friend of mine, who in fairness doesn't put much stock into a lot of things including organizations, and who, while an inordinately talented writer, doesn't know anything much about this organization or its history asked me, when I was stressing out over this anthology: "Why? Why are you not walking away?"

I said, "Because the Rhysling Award is worth preserving. Because the Elgin Award deserves a chance. Because Star*Line is one of the highest paying markets in this corner of the poetry world and its reputation could be repaired. Because Suzanne Hayden Elgin's legacy deserves better than this, if it can be achieved."

I took this Chairship onto myself for those reasons. Because it would give me the opportunity, if not the right, to take these few pages to address you all.

This organization is deeply broken. This organization has wrecked its reputation more than once. This organization, if not overhauled to be operated like a professional organization, will continue to stagnate, will continue to diminish in relevance, will disappear into an obscurity of mostly its own making unless enough of you are committed to deep, fundamental change.

I became a ten-year member of the SFPA this year. I decided that I was committed to deep, fundamental change. I will be submitting, through the official procedures outlined in the SFPA Constitution, a complete Constitutional overhaul for the vote of the membership in 2015, to bring the organization in line with the Constitutions and governing documents of professional organizations of similar longevity and mission. If the Rhysling Award is going to be called the Nebula of the speculative poetry world, then we are damn well going to have standards more contemporaneous with the prestigious awarding organization to which we thus compare ourselves. Anything less is a recipe for disaster. Since the SFPA recognizes, in its Constitution, Part VI (B), the right of any member to propose changes to the Constitution and the creation of by-laws "to enhance the administration of this Association" and to have those changes voted upon democratically by the membership, this is my formal statement of intent to exercise that right, to take the three-decades-old Constitution into the future, to take the SFPA into the future where it should always be, given that its mission is defined as "to provide for communication and exchange of information among its members, and to engage in such activities which are appropriate to such an Association, the primary interest of which is promoting the writing, enjoyment, and publishing of poetry and related arts in the science fiction genre.

I choose to exercise this right not because I am the sole person who should dictate its future but because my particular skills in drafting foundational documents that bind corporations

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are a matter of public record. I welcome your input on the future direction of this organization as well as your criticism. (However, I will republish your hate mail, with commentary.) My inbox is open to discuss this and all related matters.

Thanks to every one of the nominees under consideration, especially those who gave kind words, who gave assistance, who spoke with encouragement. Thanks to David Lee Summers for handling the publication end of matters and cover design, and to David Kopaska-Merkel for extending the invitation to be this year's Chair and providing his assistance throughout the process. Gratitudes beyond measure are extended to InDesign Wizard (Level 1) Christopher A. Johnson, who handled layout, and InDesign Wizard (Level: CLASSIFIED) and Associate Editor Ashley Brown, without whom this anthology would not exist. All failings herein are ultimately my own; all other errors are the fault of the bookbears.

My work on this year's anthology is dedicated to my grandmother, Doris Marie McClellan, who died before it could be published and who was so proud of me for being its editor. She had the very first Rhysling anthology I ever appeared in in her copious collection of books and read it, even where she admittedly didn't understand some of it, with the same reverence for the literary arts that she instilled in me throughout her life. I miss her. She lives in song and story now—and in the words of speculative poet and mistress of the liminal arts S.J. Tucker, “storytellers never die.”

Enjoy the poetry.

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PRESIDENT'S NOTE

As the brand new President of the SFPA I find myself taking over in the midst of a maelstrom. I know science fiction, I know poetry, but I did not really know the organization until now. It has been a wild ride, but it falls to me to take the helm and try to steer us through the storm.

You will find in this latest edition of the Rhysling Anthology an Editor's Note. I hope you read it. I hope it gets the organization talking. But I also hope you understand the Editor's position does not reflect the views of the SFPA governing body. While I may agree with the Editor regarding some issues, neither I nor the other officers agree with all she says here. In many cases, I do not believe the facts are on her side, but neither do I believe that this is the most appropriate place for the airing of such grievances. Timing and the growing lateness of the anthology itself prevented a pre-print discussion of the note, but rest assured future printings of this and subsequent anthologies will be discussed more thoroughly.

That leaves us with the document you hold in your hands. It carries with it a series of claims that need to be addressed, but, alas, it also carries with it errors. The Editor and I have agreed that a public discussion would be helpful, so we will deal with the former issue—criticism of the SFPA—in some sort of public forum to be announced later. The latter problem, the textual and formatting errors contained herein, are amended in an attached errata sheet. Later print versions will revise these errors, and the PDF is being corrected as I write this.

Personally, I firmly believe in the rights of our members, our editors, and our officers to voice disapproval and critique. The struggle to attain or retain such rights is often at the heart of the best science fiction, but ultimately it seems to me that a document of great art, like the Rhysling Anthology itself, should remain what it was intended to be, a showcase of talent, a clarion call for creativity, and a bulwark against timidity and complacency. But it is my position that it should never be a polemical forum for the editors or officers. It should be protected and cherished as a home for the poets, and only the poets, whose vision demands we look to the future and leave the storms behind us.

Bryan Dietrich
SFPA President

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EDITOR'S FINAL COMMENT

To err is human; to forgive, divine. To question, to challenge, is part of growth. As S.J. Tucker sings, “there are no pretty words to say you are f***ing up real bad.” Some of my words have not been pretty. I own that.

I would like to first correct my own error in the Editor’s Note, as I did in my public criticism of the 2013 Rhysling Anthology upon receipt of more information. The procedure for selection of the Treasurer was done according to the Constitution, although the position was advertised in venues not addressed by the Constitutional procedure.

There were errata in the printed first edition that were my responsibility and for which, as I did in my Note, I continue to take full responsibility. Some perceived errors were deliberate choices by the poets. Other inconsistencies resulted from the lack of a house style guide, or from lack of communication regarding changes in SFFA publications and addresses, for which it is more important to create a future procedure to avoid repetition than to place blame.

My deepest thanks to Bryan Dietrich, who discussed issues with me honestly and offered his assistance in making mutual decisions regarding my admittedly controversial choice to use the Editor’s Note to address perceived issues. The Editor’s Note as it appears will appear in the first print and PDF editions, and by mutual agreement, will be partially redacted with a link to the original in future editions. Mr. Dietrich and myself will discuss these issues, as he has noted, in a public dialogue that I hope and believe will lead us toward positive results.

My additional deepest thanks to David Lee Summers, who pitched in to handle not just the printing but last-minute snafus and cover design, and to Bryan Thao Worra for his assistance, as well as my Associate Editor Ashley Brown, for everything.

And my thanks and admiration, again, to all the people, including the poets honored herein, who showed their understanding through this process, who expressed their sympathies when physical injury and grief interfered with my ability to work on this project, who showed their understanding of the enormity of this undertaking and expressed their thanks for my taking it on.

I am more hopeful as I write this than I was about the future of this organization when I wrote my original Editor’s Note. The last week has showed me sparks I wasn’t sure were still burning from which perhaps some fires can be relit. I look forward to future dialogue, to future change, to future poems and, above all, to the poetry of the future.

—Elizabeth R. McClellan
2014 Rhysling Chair
October 19, 2014