

- [< Results](#)

[Advanced Search](#)

- [Cite](#)

 [Send to...](#) [Download](#) [Print](#) [Get Link](#) [Highlights and Notes \(0\)](#)

Highlights and Notes

Sarah Monette *(Katherine Addison is a pseudonym)*

Date: Apr. 15, 2016

From: [Contemporary Authors Online](#)

Publisher: Gale

Document Type: Biography

Length: 2,453 words

Content Level: (Intermediate)

Lexile Measure: 1330L

About this Person

Born: November 25, 1974 in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, United States

Nationality: American

Occupation: Novelist

Other Names: Addison, Katherine; Smith, Sarah Elizabeth

Updated: Apr. 15, 2016

PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Born November 25, 1974, in Oak Ridge, TN; married Allen Monette, 1998. **Education:** Case Western Reserve University, B.A., 1996; University of Wisconsin, Madison, M.A., 1997, Ph.D., 2004.

Addresses: Agent: Jack Byrne, Sternig & Byrne Literary Agency, 2370 S. 107th St., Ste. 4, Milwaukee, WI 53227-2036. **E-mail:** labyrinthine@sarahmonette.com.

CAREER:

Writer.

AWARDS:

Gaylactic Spectrum Award, 2003, for "Three Letters from the Queen of Elfland"; Locus Award for best fantasy novel, 2015, for *The Goblin Emperor*.

WORKS:

WRITINGS:

- *The Bone Key* (short stories), Prime Books (Rockville, MD), 2007.
- (Editor, with David G. Hartwell) *Year's Best SF 14*, EOS (New York, NY), 2009.
- (Under pseudonym Katherine Addison) *The Goblin Emperor* (fantasy novel), Tor Books (New York, NY), 2014.

"DOCTRINE OF LABYRINTHS" SERIES; FANTASY NOVELS

- *Mélusine*, Ace Books (New York, NY), 2005.
- *The Virtu*, Ace Books (New York, NY), 2006.
- *The Mirador*, Ace Books (New York, NY), 2007.
- *Corambis*, Ace Books (New York, NY), 2009.

"ISKRYNE" SERIES; FANTASY NOVELS; WITH ELIZABETH BEAR

- *A Companion to Wolves*, Tor Books (New York, NY), 2007.
- *The Tempering of Men*, Tor Books (New York, NY), 2011.
- *An Apprentice to Elves*, Tom Doherty Associates (New York, NY), 2015.

Contributor to books and anthologies, including *The Queen in Winter*, Berkley Trade (New York, NY), 2002; and *Best New Romantic Fantasy*, edited by Paula Guran, Juno Books (Rockville, MD), 2007.

Contributor to periodicals, including *Alchemy*, *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*, and *Strange Horizons*. Author of blog, *Notes from the Labyrinth*.

Sidelights

Sarah Monette is a novelist and short-story writer who focuses on stories within the fantasy genre. Her debut book, *Mélusine*, is an "extraordinary first fantasy novel" that tells the story of two radically different characters from opposite ends of the social and political spectrum in the city of Mélusine, according to a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer. Mildmay the Fox is a citizen of the city's lower regions, a burglar and professional assassin who survives a rough, impoverished world deep within the city. Though Mildmay sometimes kills for a living, he still tries to live an honorable life. One of his past targets, however, may have been a mistake: a wizard, or hocus, whose death has made Mildmay hated by magic-users in the city. He is now outcast by a death curse that would activate if he ever again comes near Mirador, the city's upper-class area of concentrated magical power.

In counterpoint to Mildmay is the aristocratic Felix Harrowgate, an elegant, well-known Mirador resident who associates with the nobility and with those who hold extravagant wealth and power. The schemer behind Felix's stylish and powerful exterior is Malkar, who raised Felix from his lower-class

beginnings to his upper-crust celebrity status. Felix's training was brutal, however, and he still feels the effects of his past when he occasionally falls uncontrollably into a bout of madness. When Felix is exposed by the scheming Robert of Hermione as being a former slave and prostitute, his status is shattered. Remarkably, he simply walks away from the life he once knew. Meanwhile, Mildmay commits a burglary for hire, but he cannot escape the feeling that he has been caught within a wizard's spell.

Brought together while fleeing from their respective ill fortunes, Felix and Mildmay join forces in order to survive the downturn in their luck. As they travel together, they learn that their pasts are unexpectedly interwoven, and that they have more in common than either suspected. They encounter the strange magic that has recently infiltrated the city and come to suspect Robert of Hermione of plotting to destroy Mélusine. A rugged journey far from the familiar confines of the city brings them both into confrontation with a mutually held enemy.

The story's narrative shifts between Felix and Mildmay, until the two main characters meet in the latter part of the novel. A reviewer on the *GLBT Fantasy Fiction* website noted that the "two protagonists are built up in our minds with painstaking care." The reviewer continued: "The texture of the narrative itself, no matter whose head we were in, was lush and mesmerizing, so carefully constructed that I often found myself rereading passages as if letting the smoky flavors of a good red wine roll over my tongue." Paula Luedtke, writing in *Booklist*, commented that "while Monette's story engages, her characters deserve a standing ovation." A reviewer for *Library Bookwatch* called the novel an "outstanding story which focuses on close ties and alienation alike."

Monette returns to the world of the Mélusine in *The Virtu*, the second novel in the series. In the aftermath of the first novel, Felix continues to recover from the trauma he suffered when his former master, Malkar Gennadion, used him as the means to destroy the Virtu, the magical crystalline structure that served as the focus of the magical powers of all the wizards and magic users in Mélusine. Felix's own magical abilities were violently stripped from him in the turmoil, and he was driven almost completely mad by his experiences with his former master and the Virtu. Perhaps worse, he was driven out of Mélusine and branded a heretic and outcast. Now, Felix and half-brother Mildmay have found themselves far from the city of Mélusine, where the former wizard has begun to regain his physical and mental health. With his faculties returning, Felix decides he wants to regain his magical abilities, and with them the return of the status he enjoyed in his previous life. To do so, he plots the difficult task of returning to Mélusine and restoring the Virtu, thereby reactivating the magic and regaining the city's favor. Joined by a trio of companions, a governess and two wizards they rescued from execution, Felix and Mildmay return to the city that almost destroyed them. Their plan seems likely to work, until they again encounter the devious and dangerous Malkar, who is determined to let the Virtu remain demolished.

"This sequel is every bit as original and satisfying as its predecessor," remarked a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer. *Library Journal* contributor Jackie Cassada called the novel an "engagingly intelligent fantasy." *Booklist* reviewer Paula Luedtke commented favorably on many aspects of the novel, including the fact that Monette ties up plotlines from the previous novel. Luedtke concluded: "Perhaps best of all is Monette's authorial voice, abundantly blessed with originality, sophistication, and artistry."

The Mirador, the third in Monette's "Doctrine of Labyrinths" series, finds Felix restored to health and once again in charge of his faculties, enjoying his status as a formidable wizard within Mélusine. He has regained his membership in the prestigious Curia, the group that serves as advisors to the city's rulers. In the Mirador, a fortress within the city, Felix and other wizards work to aggregate and increase their power and influence. Elsewhere, Mildmay, a lower-born citizen, still finds himself struggling against the prejudices of Wizards and others around him in the city. Once again, the city experiences trouble as the political stability is threatened by the lack of a legitimate royal heir, and the general peace is troubled by a number of unsolved murders. When Mildmay's lover, actress Mehitabel Parr, becomes an unwitting spy for Felix's enemies, the wizards of the Bastion, all of Felix's careful reconstruction work is threatened. Monette "continues to evoke the wonders of an ancient and

mysterious city and its memorable" characters and residents, commented Cassada in a *Library Journal* review. In this installment of the series, Monette offers "virtuoso narratives of theatrical, political and magical intrigues," commented a reviewer in *Publishers Weekly*.

In *Corambis*, the fourth installment in the series, Felix, who has been exiled from Mélusine for committing heresy, journeys to Corambis, accompanied by his half-brother Mildmay, to face judgment in front of a ruling body of wizards. Once there, a chance encounter with a disgraced nobleman puts Felix and Mildmay in the middle of a dangerous plot that could put their world in danger. "*Corambis* breaks with tradition and takes place almost entirely in the Aristocratic/Commercial Republic land of Corambis, with no recurring characters other than Felix and Mildmay. Not only that, but *Corambis* has a completely different feel from the rest of the Labyrinths universe, with steam trains, subways, universities and technology-based magic called 'aether,'" remarked Liviu C. Suciu of the novel in a review for the *Fantasy Book Critic* website.

A Companion to Wolves is the first novel in the fantasy series "Iskryne," written with Elizabeth Bear. It is set in a harsh and violent northern land, reminiscent of the snowbound and mountain-lined homeland of the ancient Norse and Germanic peoples. There, vicious trolls and wyverns from the north lands threaten the land and its inhabitants. To combat these threats, the population relies on the strength and combat skills of the wolfcarsls, violent warriors telepathically bonded to ferocious fighting trellwolves. These hardened men and giant wolves are the main line of defense against invaders and creatures who sweep down from the north and leave death and destruction in their wake. When the attacks intensify, more wolfcarsls are needed to provide defense. Njall, son of a village jarl, is chosen over his father's objections to become one of the newest wolfcarsls. Soon after arriving at the wolfheall, where training and bonding take place, Njall is chosen by Viradechtis, a formidable wolf queen who is destined to one day become the powerful matriarch of her own wolfpack. When the man and animal bond, Njall takes on a new name, Isolfr, and finds himself in an unfamiliar world where loyalty is critical, violence is an everyday occurrence, and ritual forms the fabric of a strange but deeply honorable society.

Monette and Bear describe a social structure in which common human customs no longer apply; in which the bond between man and wolf is everything; and in which sex becomes a critical part of the connection between the men and their animal companions. "The world they depict is fraught with a sense of wonder rare even in fantasy," remarked *Booklist* reviewer Regina Schroeder. Monette and Bear "have boldly created a fascinating world that begs further exploration," commented a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer. Cassada, in another *Library Journal* review, named the novel a "well-written and emotionally powerful quasi-Nordic fantasy."

In *The Tempering of Men*, the next novel in the series, the war against the trolls has been won, and Isolfr and Viradechtis have created their own wolfhaell. Viradechtis has taken two mates, meaning the human pack has two war leaders now. Meanwhile, a new danger approaches Iskryne and the trellwolves, and their human counterparts must defend their land again.

A reviewer for the *Fantasy Café* website felt that "while the sequel is certainly worth reading and had a greater number of well-rounded characters, the first book worked better all around." The reviewer added: "It was easier to become immersed in and I preferred the focus on just one main character for a novel of this relatively short length." And a reviewer for the *Impressions of a Reader on Romance & More* website stated: "I enjoyed this book and loved the further in-depth development of already established characters and their relationships, world building, and men's perspective." Despite this praise, the reviewer also noted: "The wolves as the central focus are missed, and I have some concerns about the addition of new cultures to this already complex world building."

An Apprentice to Elves is the third installment in the series, and it tells the story of Alfgyfa, a young woman who has been raised in the wolfheall by her father, Isolfr.

"This story is rich in detail and slowly builds up not only the personalities of all the main characters, including the wolves, but also sets the scene of their daily lives," remarked Lynn Williams in a review for the *Speculative Herald* website. "Overall, *An Apprentice to Elves* is a well-rounded fantasy novel. The characters were quite complex and interesting," noted a reviewer for the *Dark Faerie Tales* website.

The Bone Key is Monette's collection of interconnected short stories presented in the elegantly mannered gothic tradition of largely forgotten ghost and horror writers such as M.R. James, Algernon Blackwood, and H.P. Lovecraft. The stories follow narrator Kyle Murchison Booth, a curator at the Samuel Mather Parrington Museum, as he interacts with patrons of the museum and some of the more unusual items within the archives and collections. In "Bringing Helena Back," Booth agrees to help an old friend resurrect his beloved wife from the dead, with terrible results. "Elegy for a Demon Lover" describes Booth's romantic entanglements with a seductive supernatural entity. In the title story, Booth encounters some previously unknown but repulsive relatives and learns unpleasant facts about his parents and ancestry.

"Monette's gift for vivid descriptions couched in elegant but not overwrought prose definitely shines in these stories," commented Schroeder in a *Booklist* critique. "Cerebral, ethereal and stylishly understated," Monette's "entrancing" collection of stories are directed at connoisseurs of "literary horror, dark fantasy and supernatural mystery," noted a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer.

The Goblin Emperor, which won the Locus Award for best fantasy novel in 2015, is a stand-alone novel that Monette wrote under pseudonym Katherine Addison. The protagonist of the novel is eighteen-year-old half-goblin Maia, the estranged son of the Emperor of the Elflands, who becomes emperor after his father and elder brothers are killed in an airship crash. When he discovers that his father and half-brothers were most likely murdered, Maia is determined to find the perpetrator, all the while suspecting that it may be someone close to him.

The novel was met with much praise from reviewers. In a review for the *Staffer's Book Review* website, Justin Landon noted that "the prose is pretty brilliant and the characters are, for lack of a more descriptive term, incredible." Foz Meadows, writing for the *Strange Horizons* website, was also impressed with the novel: "Combining elegant prose, intricate worldbuilding, compelling politics and, in the figure of Maia, a poignantly sympathetic protagonist, its appeal is nonetheless as much thematic as structural." The novel marries "the social change and new technologies of steampunk with the imperial trappings of high fantasy--elves, goblins, magic--to impressive effect. As such, and in addition to being a compelling novel of character and politics, *The Goblin Emperor* also addresses issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality in subtle but important ways," added Meadows. "Addison had to walk a tightrope between letting Maia's new responsibilities come unrealistically easily, making him seem like a Chosen One with special plot powers, and having readers get too frustrated with realistically bad decisions and lose their desire to read about him. Addison walks that tightrope magnificently," asserted a reviewer for the *Eyrie* website. "I liked Maia throughout this book, and that's the strength of it. He never felt like the typical fantasy coming of age hero who is magically protected by the plot," added the reviewer.

FURTHER READINGS:

FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

PERIODICALS

- *Booklist*, August, 2005, Paula Luedtke, review of *Mélusine*, p. 2009; July 1, 2006, Paul Luedtke, review of *The Virtu*, p. 43; September 1, 2007, Regina Schroeder, review of *A Companion to Wolves*, p. 65; December 15, 2007, Regina Schroeder, review of *The Bone Key*, p. 32; April 15, 2014, David Pitt, review of *The Goblin Emperor*, p. 22.

40 GREAT BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



bookriot.com

GENERAL BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What did you like best about this book?
2. What did you like least about this book?

3. What other books did this remind you of?
4. Which characters in the book did you like best?
5. Which characters did you like least?
6. If you were making a movie of this book, who would you cast?
7. Share a favorite quote from the book. Why did this quote stand out?
8. What other books by this author have you read? How did they compare to this book?
9. Would you read another book by this author? Why or why not?
10. What feelings did this book evoke for you?
11. What did you think of the book's length? If it's too long, what would you cut? If too short, what would you add?
12. What songs does this book make you think of? Create a book group playlist together!
13. If you got the chance to ask the author of this book one question, what would it be?
14. Which character in the book would you most like to meet?
15. Which places in the book would you most like to visit?
16. What do you think of the book's title? How does it relate to the book's contents? What other title might you choose?
17. What do you think of the book's cover? How well does it convey what the book is about? If the book has been published with different covers, which one do you like best?
18. What do you think the author's purpose was in writing this book? What ideas was he or she trying to get across?
19. How original and unique was this book?
20. If you could hear this same story from another person's point of view, who would you choose?
21. What artist would you choose to illustrate this book? What kinds of illustrations would you include?



BOOK CLUB DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR FICTION

22. Did this book seem realistic?
23. How well do you think the author built the world in the book?
24. Did the characters seem believable to you? Did they remind you of anyone?
25. Did the book's pace seem too fast/too slow/just right?
26. If you were to write fanfic about this book, what kind of story would you want to tell?

BOOK CLUB QUESTIONS FOR NONFICTION

27. What did you already know about this book's subject before you read this book?
28. What new things did you learn?
29. What questions do you still have?
30. What else have you read on this topic, and would you recommend these books to others?
31. What do you think about the author's research? Was it easy to see where the author got his or her information? Were the sources credible?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR MEMOIR

32. What aspects of the author's story could you most relate to?
33. How honest do you think the author was being?
34. What gaps do you wish the author had filled in? Were there points where you thought he shared too much?
35. Think about the other people in the book besides the author. How would you feel to have been depicted in this way?
36. Why do you think the author chose to tell this story?



THE BOOK SMUGGLERS

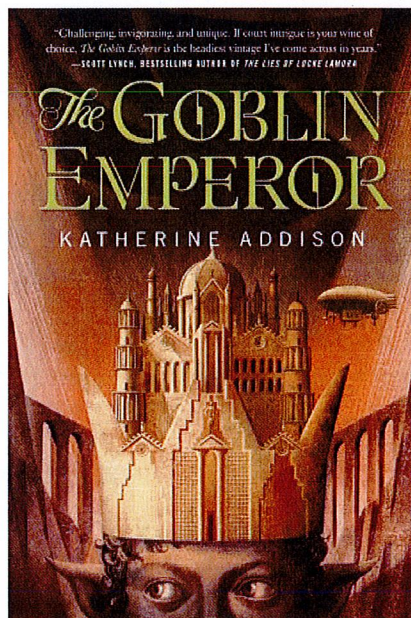
SFF IN CONVERSATION

SFF IN CONVERSATION: KATHERINE ADDISON ON *THE GOBLIN EMPEROR* AND GRIMDARK

Posted on April 22, 2014

SFF in Conversation is a new monthly feature on The Book Smugglers in which we invite guests to talk about a variety of topics important to speculative fiction fans, authors, and readers. Our vision is to create a safe (moderated) space for thoughtful conversation about the genre, with a special focus on inclusivity and diversity in SFF. Anyone can participate and we are welcoming emailed topic submissions from authors, bloggers, readers, and fans of all categories, age ranges, and subgenres beneath the speculative fiction umbrella.

We continue our ongoing new series of posts called "SFF in Conversation" with a guest post from Katherine Addison, author of the recently released *The Goblin Emperor*, **hands down our favourite book of 2014 so far**. Today, Sarah is here to discuss *The Goblin Emperor* within the Grimdark tradition.



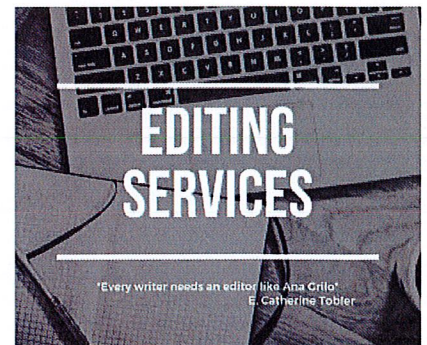
Search and hit enter...

THE BOOK SMUGGLERS

noun

- 1 : a book review blog specializing in speculative fiction and popgeekery for all ages since 2008.
- 2 : a publisher of speculative **short fiction** and nonfiction since 2014.
- 3 : 2018 Hugo Nominee for **Best Semiprozine**
- 4 : a duo of awesomely badass book nerds

EDITING SERVICES



SUBSCRIBE

Never miss a post! Receive your daily dose of Book Smuggler goodness directly to your inbox:

Email Address

Subscribe

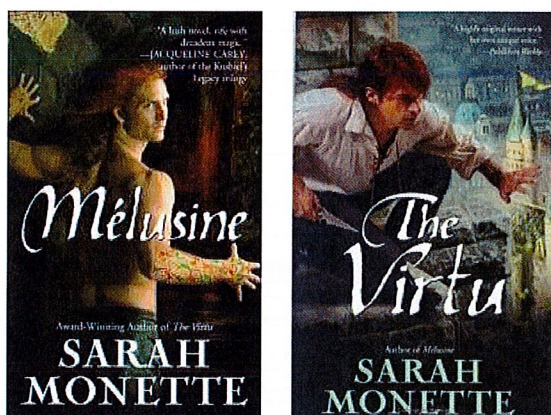
RSS - Dots

Privacy & Cookies: This site uses cookies. By continuing to use this website, you agree to their use. To find out more, including how to control cookies, see here: [Cookie Policy](#)

Close and accept

thing I did when starting this post was to look for a definition. TV Tropes, although it doesn't use the word, is probably the most useful (under [Darker and Edgier](#). Wiktionary, on the other hand, is the most concise. Urban Dictionary and Know Your Meme suggest the word first came into use around 2008, and sites like [Grimdark Reader](#) and [Goodreads' Popular Grimdark Books](#) give a sense of what fantasy novels fit the sub-genre definition. So for anyone who is no more familiar with the term "grimdark" than I was, voila, you have some pointers.

This whole etymology and definition hunt matters, in regard to *The Goblin Emperor*, because it would be very easy to claim that I wrote it as a response to grimdark, and while that makes a very neat and satisfying story, it's not true. I started *The Goblin Emperor* (according to my notes) in 2003, and if it's a response, or reaction, to anything, it's most likely my own books, the Doctrine of Labyrinths quartet (*Melusine*(2005), *The Virtu* (2006), *The Mirador* (2007), *Corambis* (2009)), which are as grimdark as anything, even if there wasn't a word for it yet.



In general, I'm in favor of the aesthetic being called "grimdark." I'm fascinated by dystopias; I love noir; I prefer antiheroes to heroes. And on its own merits, *The Goblin Emperor*'s set-up is fairly grimdark: the protagonist is abused and powerless, the empire is dysfunctional, if not actually dystopian, and of course the whole thing begins with a Hindenburg-esque disaster that throws the entire government into convulsions.

I don't entirely know why the story turned in a defiantly non-grimdark direction, except that my protagonist, Maia Drazhar, refused, resolutely and absolutely, to be an antihero. In Chapter 2, when he manages to get the better of his abusive cousin by using his newfound power as emperor, he barely gives himself enough time to appreciate it before recognizing that he can't allow himself to get used to using his power that way: "It was heady, but he knew it was also poison." Maia is alone at the beginning, and he's certainly in over his head, but in a very crucial way, he isn't lost. He has convictions to give him courage, and he follows those convictions with an obstinacy that becomes bravery, even if he himself doesn't recognize it.

If you find the convention of giving imaginary people agency too twee, I can reformulate the change to argue that after writing someone like Felix Harrowgate, who would have taken an entire book and a series of interpersonal disasters to come to the same realization, I wanted to write someone whose ethical compass could find true north and stick to it. Maia is self-aware in a way Felix isn't, and he remains determined to do the right thing even when it would be infinitely easier not to.

This could, of course, have turned into a *Candide*-like satire, in which Maia's compassion is met at every turn by betrayal and derision. And it's not that betrayal and derision don't *happen*, either; the Elflands are not a Utopia. But I wanted to write a story (reflecting my own ethical beliefs, which I get more fierce about as I grow older) in which compassion was a strength instead of a weakness. Grimdark is, in some ways, another iteration of Byronism, and it has the same potential flaw of becoming self-congratulatory about its darkness, pessimism, and cynicism. After a while—and this is, as I said, speaking as a practitioner of grimdark myself—I just get tired of it. It was a relief to write someone who didn't think that way, a relief to write a world that didn't *work* that way.

TACS

- APOCALYPSE BLOG TOUR
- BOOK SMUGGLERS PUBLISHING
- BSP ORIGINAL SHORT STORIES COMICS
- CONTEMPORARY COVERS DIVERSITY 2014
- DYSTOPIA FAIRY TALES FANTASY
- GIVEAWAYS GRAPHIC NOVEL HALLOWEEN
- HISTORICAL HORROR KIRKUS LGBTQIA
- LISTS LITERARY FICTION MIDDLE GRADE
- MOVIES MYSTERY
- OLD SCHOOL WEDNESDAYS
- OLD SCHOOL WEDNESDAYS READALONG
- PARANORMAL POC ROMANCE
- SCIENCE FICTION SLIDE SMUGGLIVUS
- SMUGGLIVUS 2010 SMUGGLIVUS 2011
- SMUGGLIVUS 2012 SMUGGLIVUS 2013
- SMUGGLIVUS 2014 SMUGGLIVUS 2017
- SPECULATIVE FICTION STEAMPUNK
- SUPERHEROES THRILLER TV SHOWS
- URBAN FANTASY YOUNG ADULT ZOMBIES

Privacy & Cookies: This site uses cookies. By continuing to use this website, you agree to their use. To find out more, including how to control cookies, see here: [Cookie Policy](#)

Close and accept