

real capacity to ripple through life, in all of its various shapes and forms. As the writer St. John Fox and his muse Mary Foxe play out a narrative back-and-forth over nine different scenes, it is the capacity of these narrative forays to increasingly bubble over and spill into the everyday landscape of St. John and his wife, Daphne's domestic life which finally forces the three to openly face one another. Through the character of Mary—character in a dual sense, as she is both a character for *us*, the reader, and questionably one for St. John and Daphne—each are able to examine what it means to be with one another.

The challenge becomes whether we, as readers, are able to follow Oyeyemi and her cast of characters in their processes of unravelling. By pushing the boundaries of relationships, by having them change—from love, to dependence, to aloofness, to harm, to name but a few states—her characters test the limits of how we conceive of being-with another. In many ways, *Mr. Fox* is a tale about “knowing”; how we uncover the knowledge that we have of others, of those with whom we find ourselves in relationships, and how we come to know ourselves in the process of relating to another. How, oftentimes, it takes the act of being with someone else to finally begin to know ourselves.

By the end of one's reading journey, it is clear that Oyeyemi has affectively moved her reader to reconsider the boundaries between fact/fiction and real/make-believe. As the character of Mary Foxe so aptly portrays, these divisions cannot be so easily made or steadfastly upheld. Abiding too rigidly to preconceived notions or perspectives—such as how one understands “reality” or, quite simply, the nature of relating to others—only guarantees that one's sense of the world will be rather limited.

For any reader that has been touched by a book, the ending is a

complicated matter; it is the slow working down of pages, and the culmination of events having passed, which mark the reality that those still-yet-to-come are dwindling. The reader, so touched, hopes that pages in some magical way do not correspond to an ending, or a closing, or anything which will signal that the finale is slowly creeping closer. It speaks volumes of Helen Oyeyemi's abilities as a storyteller and writer that she is able to affect her readers so deeply. While she taps into a wide genre of writing that speaks to the relationship between imagination and the experience of unbearable events, it is her ability to carry her reader into an “openness-towards” that marks her abilities as an artist; to be open to the potential that anything is possible. It is her gift of weaving-between, of folding stories, characters, and ways of knowing and perceiving the world together that affectively moves those who read her work. It reminds each of us to be wary of the rigid and inflexible borders that oftentimes shape how we know and what we can know; for it is these same borders which contain the ability to close us off from experiencing that which is truly extraordinary.

I almost forgot to mention another fox I know of—a very wicked fox indeed. But you are tired of hearing about foxes now, so I won't go on.

I for one hope that there will be more foxes.

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THE MERE FUTURE

Sarah Schulman
Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2011

REVIEWED BY ROBERT
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To many in the LGBT social justice and AIDS movement circles, Sarah Schulman is a well known figure, whose earlier works, for example the 1990 novel, *People in Trouble*, describes the turbulent lives and loves of queer women and men living and struggling with AIDS. It highlights how important queer women were (and still are) to a complex array of resistance and community-building that was necessary to save lives and to help dignify a complex terrain of emotional and health crises where activists responded to the murderous indifference governments displayed toward PHAS at the time.

A prolific author and activist, Schulman holds a position as Distinguished Professor of English at City University of New York, College of Staten Island. During the Reagan era in the US, which witnessed a juggernaut of anti-gay backlash in the midst of the AIDS crisis, Schulman participated in ACT-UP's many creative actions and was one of the co-founders of the Lesbian Avengers. These two radical queer organizations were responsible for advancing direct-action resistance with a queerly theatrical twist to the annals of radical resistance movements well before such tactics were more popularly taken up by the anti-globalization demos a decade later.

In her 2011 novel, *The Mere Future*, her first foray into the science-fiction genre, we are treated to startlingly angular prose where descriptions slightly off the mark of recognizable reality are yet all too often transposable to the over-familiar lexicon of marketing lingo and ad copy. In

this sharply satirical and humorous novel, the near future of New York City is depicted as a place where citizens have ostensibly been freed from pressing everyday material concerns, where rents are very low, food is available to all and the city's homeless population have become housed. This is a landscape of a new citizenship where the evacuation of risk from democracy is nearly complete as it secures populations for a managed life where human needs and desires become mere effluents of the media empire, known as the Media Hub, which is the only corporation that everyone, it seems, works for in some capacity.

The novel highlights an unnamed female narrator and her lover Nadine as they wrestle with the vicissitudes of love and companionship amidst a soul-sucking social order that is as deceptive as it is alluring. Schulman has managed to weave her characters' personal lives into a story about the social and economic order that asks implicit questions about the nature of social justice activism and interpersonal relations. Schulman, true to form, mines her vast experiences as a social activist, weaving together in an uncertain tapestry an emotional recognition of love, sex and sociality, the uncertain rhythmic pacing of the lovers' personal lives coalesced into indistinguishable form with the public life of work and the new social and economic order. Her characters are swept along with a visceral sense of uncertainty, the shimmer of unreality where what appears as new institutional arrangements in social and political life is, at one and the same time, creating desires and meeting needs ahead of the characters' anticipation of them; the super corporation organizes lives, language, and desires commensurate with the bottom line—the cultural, social economic and political totality that the Marketing super hegemony

that the Media Hub has become. The characters face a familiar horror of the banal, highlighting the way individuals become inducted into inhuman circumstances and modes of living that are deeply alienating, as the murder, taking place late in the book, seems to underscore.

The novel soars when it details the intricate emotional, verbal and gestural qualities of the uncertainties and sweetness of love and lusts, of being together and forging a life in the midst of an unforgiving context of work and survival. However, *The Mere Future* is less than satisfying when it tries, perhaps too hard, to be “futuristic” by naming new objects and practices without an accompanying context or narrative development, reminiscent of a geek-gadgetry obsession that one is more likely to find in sci-fi undertaken by a less than expert hand. Here, it seems to come as a surprise, yet it is not too flagrant as to detract from a complex narrative arc and the fullness of character that Schulman employs to drive the narrative.

This is a novel of biting satire and sharp humour which presents us with the dreadfully recognizable scenario of how lives are lived under the reign of a corporate behemoth that has reached deep into the consciousness and desires of its characters' lives, revealing an highly ambivalent state of “corporate citizens” in this mere future of New York City.

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A LARGE HARMONIUM

Sue Sorensen
Coteau Books, 2011

REVIEWED BY OANA SECRIERU

Sorensen's first novel is a year in the life of the protagonist, Dr. Janet Erlickson or Janey, as she's known to close friends. Janey is a university English professor at an unnamed university in Winnipeg, mother to three-year old Little Max, and wife to Hector Des Roches, a music professor at the same university. Sorensen's funny and witty style follows Janey as she juggles career, motherhood, self-doubt and depression.

The novel begins in April, in the last week of classes, when Janey's depression typically hits as she contemplates the summer ahead struggling to pin down an ever-elusive research project. Janey muses over writing about female characters in Robertson Davies, bad mothers in children's literature, writing a murder novel in which her mother-in-law is the victim, or starting an online academic journal, none of which gets too far off the ground since Janey gets easily side-tracked.

Deeply in love with her sexy husband, Hector, Janey needlessly worries that he's in love with his research assistant, Chantal. Janey's insecurities also seep through her role as the mother of a rambunctious toddler. Despite Janey having it all, something is weighing her down.

I examine my life and wonder what is the matter. All I can see is what ought to be health and happiness. Lovely boy, handsome and caring husband, blah blah blah.

Unexpectedly, Janey turns to Jake, the minister at her church,