



The Plot Genie

Gillian Conoley

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The Plot Genie—in its momentum, imagistic vitality, and cinematic and often improvisational arc—resembles the movement of a film more than of a poetry collection. Rich in scene, spanning and recombining a wellspring of story—both visual and literary, old and new—into a simultaneous present, these poems also examine our culture's endless hunger for and production of narrative. The Plot Genie culls and questions what it is that holds any narrative together, and exposes some of the ways that characters behave and take shape when inhabiting a construct created by ideas. At its core, this collection looks at the ways in which we are recreated, inspired, aroused, and persuaded by the power of the stories that we listen to, tell each other, and find ourselves within, searching for human enchantment and meaning.

The inspiration for this book is a plot-generating device created in the 1930s by an ex silent screenwriter, Wycliffe A. Hill. The original "Plot Genie"—used widely by Hollywood writers until the late 1950's—relied on a numerical game of chance, including a cardboard spinning wheel used to divine character traits and plot points. A murky underworld constantly created and recreated, peopled by hapless figures waiting to be "dialed up" and sent along multiple and fragmentary narratives, Gillian Conoley's THE PLOT GENIE includes characters of her own invention, contemporary film actors stripped of their veneer by the rapid, shape-shifting powers of the plot genie, and characters from other, older texts, such as Frankenstein. All are ruled by the insatiable plot genie, who herself becomes a character, a force neither fully in charge nor culpable, much like our leaders or guides today. In the plot genie's world, as in ours, the demands put upon characters by the plots in which they participate can be very high, and very hard to appease.

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