

# Interview with Ellen Datlow



*Ellen Datlow*

*As fiction editor of Omni magazine and Omni Online from 1981 through 1998, Ellen Datlow encouraged and helped develop an entire generation of fiction writers, and has published some of today's biggest names in the science fiction, fantasy and horror genres.*

*Ms. Datlow is currently tied for winning the most World Fantasy Awards in the organization's history (seven); has won, with co-editor Terri Windling, a Bram Stoker Award for The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror #13, has received multiple Hugo Award nominations for Best Editor, and won the Hugo Award for Best Editor in 2002.*

**Shimmer:** For about twenty years, you've been editing in the various speculative genres. What seems different about the science fiction, fantasy and horror of now, versus when you started?

**Ellen Datlow:** When I first began editing science fiction in the early 80s, cyberpunk burst onto the scene in the voices of William Gibson, Pat Cadigan, and some other writers whose work I regularly published. Today, there is a burst of creativity by a group of writers like Kelly Link, Elizabeth Hand, Christopher Rowe, Jeffrey Ford, Kim Newman, Richard Bowes, and others whose work ranges across the fantastic spectrum. In between I published (and continue to publish when I can and when they write short fiction) Lucius Shepard, Bruce McAllister, and dozens of others. The names change, the voices change, great short fiction is published, and too often short story writers move onto novels and no longer have time (or the inclination) to write short fiction.

**Shimmer:** On the forum at Nightshade Books, you've said that you don't get enough science fiction; does that tend to go in waves or is there always a dearth of science fiction?

**Ellen Datlow:** I haven't been receiving enough science fiction for at least as long as I've been editing SCIFICTION—that's six years already. I get wonderful fantasy and wonderful dark fiction, bordering on horror but not enough science fiction.



*Tunnel in Glasgow*

**Shimmer:** Since you edit the horror half of the *Year's Best Fantasy and Horror*, you clearly have a love for horror. What do you get out of horror that you don't get out of other forms of fiction?

**Ellen Datlow:** Effective horror (whether it be terror tales, supernatural fiction, contes cruel, psychological horror, or science fictional horror) provides goosebumps—literally or figuratively. It creeps me out.

**Shimmer:** Do science fiction or fantasy have a similar unique impact for you?

**Ellen Datlow:** Horror provides an entirely different effect than fantasy or science fiction. But for me, it's always the *telling* of the story that makes me enjoy it.

**Shimmer:** You've been editing young adult anthologies lately, such as *Green Man* with Terri Windling. How do the trends in young adult fiction compare with adult fiction?

**Ellen Datlow:** We've co-edited specific theme anthologies (adult, young adult, and middle grades) and because we commission the stories for each of them it's difficult to perceive any kind of trend. I can say that publishers of young adult and children's anthologies pay better than do publishers of adult anthologies.

**Shimmer:** The photo galleries on your website, [datlow.com](http://datlow.com), show that in addition to your editing skills you have a strong visual sense.

**Ellen Datlow:** I toyed with the idea of becoming a professional photographer in the 70s and was a member of a New York photography group that got some decent shows around the city. Once the group broke up I no longer had room to display my photos and I realized becoming a pro would be no fun. I wanted to shoot what I wanted to shoot. I think there is some excellent science fiction/fantasy/dark fantasy and horror art today.



*Black Cat,  
Untermeyer Park (1972)*

**Shimmer:** In terms of breaking new ground, do you think science fiction, fantasy and horror art is keeping up with fiction?

**Ellen Datlow:** Absolutely! It's a pleasure to look at the art in the three fiction magazines published by Andy Cox in the UK: *Interzone*, *CrimeWave*, and *Black Static* (formerly called TTA). *Realms of Fantasy* uses some excellent artists as does *Argosy*, *Subterranean Press* and *Nightshade Books*.



## *Green Cay*

**Shimmer:** Presently, what are you reading for pleasure?

**Ellen Datlow:** Ha! I don't have time to read for pleasure. I try to combine the reading I have to do (for YBFH) with what I want to read so I may pick up *Specimen Days* by Michael Cunningham (I'm on the third and last novella now)

**Shimmer:** What 2005 novel would you recommend to our readers?

**Ellen Datlow:** I've only read a few. *Glass Soup* by Jonathan Carroll (which I acquired and edited for Tor Books) is magical and surreal and sparkles with the author's wit and warmth. *Beyond Black* by Hilary Mantel, a strange and dark British novel about a psychic and her assistant. It's very believable in its depiction of what the experience of connecting to the afterlife would really be like. *Specimen Days* (mentioned above)—I love the first two sections and will have to see where the third goes before I make a final judgment overall.

**Shimmer:** Online forums, such as at Nightshade Books or SCIFICTION provide an easy way for the public to interact with authors and editors. Do you find that interaction rewarding, or has responding to the public quietly snuck in and become part of your duties as editor?



*Ellen's cat,*

**Ellen Datlow:** It's fun but time consuming. *Dinah, relaxing*

**Shimmer:** Do you have a favorite editing story? You know, the one that starts—Oh you think that's bad, I once...

**Ellen Datlow:** Only the typical ones of being rejected by the rejectee and they're just boring. Writer insulted by rejection letter responds with an over the top nasty note to editor claiming they'll never submit a story again. A few years later, said writer does indeed submit another story, never acknowledging nasty note sent five years earlier. I save everything and it *all* goes to Foundation at the University of Liverpool.

**Shimmer:** Now that SCIFICTION is wrapping up, what will you do in 2006?

**Ellen Datlow:** I'm working on some anthologies, two with Terri Windling—one of them due in April. I can't really say more about them right now. And I hope to find another full time job editing short fiction.