

## Alyssa Pelish

### The Problem with Being a Final Girl

FIRST WATCHED *THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS* ON THE TV IN MY PARENTS' darkened family room. A sometime friend of mine had somehow talked me into renting it at Video Plus, and we'd pushed a bulky square of the sectional right up to the screen, where we hunched, knees tucked up to our chests, hands hovering over our eyes, as the movie played out. I have no idea how we got the video rental past my mother. We were in ninth grade, it was winter. The sliding glass door beside us reflected only a flicker of our faces in its blackness.

I remember watching the opening sequence—a lonely woods, a lone woman scrabbling up a hill, running through the woods, faster and faster. That mournful, eerie music, which somehow variously evokes a lurking menace, the violence of a chase scene, *and* the glass-breaking dawn of a new day. I assumed the young woman was being chased, that someone was coming after her, and that pretty soon we'd have to watch her die. I remember framing my eyes with my hands, so that I could shutter them as soon as I needed to. But the young woman isn't killed, it turns out. She's the one who survives. She's the one who figures out how to catch the psycho who's killing heavy, bosomy, seemingly dim-witted girls. *Say, are you about a size fourteen?* says the killer to his next victim, just before he knocks her unconscious. "I'm so glad I'm not fat," is what I remember saying aloud. I could feel my ribs through my sweater, and that was reassuring. That's mostly what I recall: me, at age fourteen, having barely survived my first season of cross country, my body worn down to the point where it looked more like a twelve-year-old boy's. The darkness and the cold. How I held my knees to my chest, nearly curled my body into itself as I watched, as if that might keep me safe.

Oddly, I remember almost nothing at all about the second time I saw the movie, this high-toned slasher about an FBI agent in training who becomes psychologically entangled with one serial killer in order to catch another one. It might've been the summer after my sophomore year of college, or maybe that fall. The precise where and when of it are strange blanks on the surface of my memory—as if such coordinates were irrelevant. Because what I do remember about that second time is its effect on me. Just how immediately that solitary figure on the screen—eyes straight ahead, jaw set like it was some kind of test, voice always carefully low—spoke to me.

Starling (as she's called at Quantico) was everything I had always been trying to be. Look how doggedly she trains, how disciplined she is. Look how steely her nerves are, how utterly un-girly she is—never giggling, never flaunting

her body, never talking about her hair or her makeup or her weight. And look how she proves herself, again and again, in a world of men, where women are otherwise expendable, mutilated bodies. I didn't know it at the time, but Starling is a Final Girl.

The Final Girl is the lone female character in a slasher movie who manages to survive the systematic slaughter of the more ditzy and voluptuous young things. And the thing about the Final Girl—the reason she alone survives—is that she's not like the other girls. "The Final Girl is boyish, in a word," is how Carol Clover puts it in "Her Body, Himself," her 1987 touchstone of a film studies article that I wouldn't come across until I was in my early twenties. The Final Girl is "not fully feminine." It's a designation that's no doubt problematic but comes to seem true by the lights of the old-school slasher movie's standard of femininity—whereby all the other girls are some combination of voluptuous, ditzy, or shrewish. They giggle, they gossip about guys, they have their petty squabbles, and they're just not smart enough to outwit the psycho-killer. But the Final Girl is different. As Clover notes, with the peculiar specificity of an Aristotelian taxonomy, the Final Girl's "smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance set her apart from the other girls." What sets her apart also happens to have the effect of marking the other girls, in their demeaned, caricatured femininity, as inevitable, even deserving, victims. What's the scene that opens *Hell Night* (just for instance) but a bunch of shrieking college sorority pledges in wet T-shirts? The Final Girl, significantly, is not among them. The Final Girl of *Friday the 13th Part II* never socializes with the other women on staff at the summer camp; she plays chess and hangs out with the guys. And then—if we stretch the genre to high-gloss Hollywood—there's Clarice Starling.

Despite, or maybe because of, the deluge of slasher movies in the seventies and eighties, it's Starling, in a 1991 prestige film, who seems to embody the Final Girl most fully. It's as if all those classic Final Girl traits have crystallized in her. In fact, in my early twenties, trawling the Internet for answers to questions I still didn't know how to form, when I first came upon Clover's anatomy of the Final Girl, I kept understanding it as a profile of Starling. In those slashers of the seventies and eighties—the heyday of the genre—you can see, sure, the broad strokes that informed Clover's definition: Straight-laced Laurie Strode, of *Halloween*, is more concerned with the fact that she forgot her chemistry textbook than with her nominal friends' chitchat about their boyfriends. Nancy, of *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, is more focused on building a deathtrap for Freddy Krueger than on appeasing her boyfriend's sex drive. Stretch, of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre 2*, is more wrapped up in sleuthing than in any kind of relationship. But the more of these slasher movies you watch, the more you realize that these Final Girls are "not fully feminine" only in comparison to the heavily stereotyped femininity of the other girls in the movie. I mean, Stretch, for all the Final Girl points she wracks up on the Clover scale, is in fact wearing Daisy-Duke-level cutoffs for the entirety of her *Chain Saw* ordeal. And Ginny, *Friday the 13th II*'s Final Girl, not only sweeps into camp wearing a long pink peasant skirt but also has a fairly intense make-out session with her boyfriend. Marti, the sole survivor of *Hell Night*, knows how to fix a car, but/and she spends

the entirety of her time on screen in a Halloween costume that consists most notably of a Renn-faire-like bustier and plunging neckline. What I mean is, the fact that these women, or “girls,” survive doesn’t hinge on a total eclipse of their more conventionally feminine characteristics. Starling, though, is allowed no such latitude.

What impressed me about Starling, when I would return to the movie every few years, like a cautious votary approaching a sacred text, was how she’s the sole woman in just about every scene. In an elevator crowded with men in identical polo-and-khaki uniforms; in the offices at Quantico, their cinder block walls a patchwork of crime scene photos; in the asylum for the criminally insane, with its gallery of leering inmates. Starling, no question, is trying to prove her worth in a man’s world. In this way, her aims are more deliberate than those of the typical Final Girl, who never actually sets out to prove herself in the traditionally masculine field of monster-slaying but simply finds herself having to fight off the psycho-killer and rises to the occasion. Starling, though, from the beginning, has her sights set on a job that—as far as we can tell from the Quantico personnel—is held only by men. She’s training in a field that’s mostly men, learning how to shoot and fight and contain her fears. Her jaw is always set—a form I could feel my own face hardening into, in sympathy, in emulation, when I watched. Because if being female means anything in the world of law enforcement she’s trying to navigate her way through, it’s a liability. And this was a liability I recognized. Those small-town cops ogle her when she’s left alone with them. Her status as the fairer sex is used as an excuse to move classified discussion of a crime scene into a private room, and away from her. She has to, continually, deflect lewd comments and come-ons that have only to do with her having a woman’s body. “A pretty young woman to turn him on,” Dr. Chilton leers as he leads Starling down to Hannibal “the Cannibal” Lecter’s cell. *I can smell your cunt*, is what one of the asylum inmates hisses at her. Even Lecter, such a model of decorum, questions her about her boss wanting her, sexually. And aside from Starling herself, the most ubiquitous female characters in the movie are the naked, mutilated bodies of the murder victims. They’re there in all those crime scene photos, in the coroner’s office, in the continual, matter-of-fact exchanges between Starling and her all-male superiors. (*Okay. Three days. Then he shoots them, skins them, and dumps them.*) I can feel my fourteen-year-old body shrinking into itself as I watched, knees pulled tight to my chest, chin tucked—as if such dangers could be, if not deflected, then avoided, by making myself as small as possible.

Starling, for her part, keeps her head down, her voice low, and her body inconspicuous. “That doesn’t interest me,” is her stolid reply to Lecter’s prurient question. She learns how to distance herself from those naked, mutilated female bodies. There’s a scene where, with her boss’s approval, she impassively dictates the forensic pathology report of another of these bodies: *The victim’s skin removed, this time in two large, diamond-shaped sections above the buttocks. . . . Ligature marks found around the wrists, not around the ankles. This would indicate that the skinning was postmortem.*

At age fourteen, I had already begun to distance myself from my own female body. When I remember myself during those years, I remember how acutely aware, how painfully self-conscious, I was of my body and its movements and how they signified. I policed my bearing and behavior constantly, especially in the presence of guys, especially in the presence of the older brother I idolized, and his friends. I was always trying to squelch any trace of feminine flounce from my walk and my gestures, to eradicate any curl of girliness from my voice. I had, then, a hunkered-down way of holding myself. I slouched, I slumped. What I wore at the time was a significant number of my brother's old clothes—all oversized. Cut-off Levi's, the threads trailing like indifference. Faded army fatigues spattered with the paint of my brother's art projects. Worn-out T-shirts lousy with holes, hanging past my hips. As if my body might disappear inside them.

If Carol Clover's best known for coining the term "Final Girl," Laura Mulvey is most reliably linked to the term "male gaze"—the kind of lingering look that reduces a woman to something even less than the sum of her body parts. Think of the shots of Marilyn Monroe's backside and legs in *The Seven-Year Itch*, or even the final shot of Marlene Dietrich's legs in *Morocco*. Or, to take some of the movies I saw as a kid, at slumber parties and multiplexes: the slow side of the camera up reporter Vicky Vail's legs in the 1989 *Batman*, or up astrophysicist's Charlotte Blackwood's as she walks to the podium to deliver a lecture in *Top Gun*, circa 1986. This way of looking, Mulvey found, dominated mainstream Hollywood movies. There's a word that she uses in her 1975 article on this default cinematic gaze: *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Despite the awkwardness of its seemingly translated-directly-from-German morphology, it stopped me cold when I reread the article recently. Or maybe there's even something about its contorted form that suggests a grotesque insistence on the passive structure, on passivity as a way of being. Like the eye of a camera decentering its gaze to focus solely on the shapely legs or the round bottom of an actress. *In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness*. Yeah. Mulvey's article isn't about puberty, but when I read it now, that's what it reminds me of. How, if you're an eleven- or twelve- or thirteen-year-old girl, you can't just quietly endure the sudden strangeness of your own body, this thing that's happening to it unbidden. It attracts glances, snickers, jokes, *gazes*. You—or this version of you that doesn't quite feel like you anymore—are now *to be looked at*. You connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*.

"Don't you feel eyes moving over your body, Clarice?" Lecter probes at one point, posing a question that turns out to be key to solving the case, to figuring out who's killing all those women. (Never mind that he already knows.) It's a question, though, that Starling is quick to dodge. Starling, we understand (or at least I came pretty quickly to understand), is never seriously at risk of ending up like the women the killer targets; her body isn't like theirs. These women are overtly female, with big hips, large breasts—*almost cow-like*, is what I remember thinking of these women who seemed so easily led to the slaughter. They paint

their nails and wear too much jewelry. Starling's body, by comparison, is small and neat. Even so, she clearly does feel eyes moving over her; she's just done her best to insulate herself from them in order to do the work she needs to do. What I noticed about Starling's body, from the very first time I watched the movie, was only how much it *wasn't* like the bodies of the dead women. How, if she uses it at all, it's to run and to shoot. How, when she's closer than ever to catching the killer, she hunches, in a dark coat and trousers, her body all but irrelevant. And significantly, the camera itself spares her; the camera does *not* move its eye over her body. The male gaze, as a framing device, is visually absent from the movie when the camera's on Starling. But it seems as if, in order to be afforded this dignity, in order to really be treated as just one of the guys, Starling's had to suppress any trace of sexuality from her being. "That doesn't interest me," is what she says to Lecter. Because the danger in being sexualized—as I dimly understood it back then, as I think the movie understands it—lies in the possibility of being objectified, and thus diminished, not even close to the equal of men.

Mulvey's article on the male gaze isn't explicitly about slasher movies any more than it's about female adolescence, but it's the slasher movie, of course, that extends that gaze to a violent conclusion—that turns Marilyn Monroe in *The Seven-Year Itch* into Janet Leigh in *Psycho*. At age fourteen, I'd only ever caught glimpses of slasher movies—a lurid flash on the TV screen before the channel got turned, or the gory recaps a boy in my fifth-grade class liked to divulge. But I knew as well as anyone what it meant when the camera lingered on a voluptuous young woman in a slasher movie. It was a death sentence. We could start with *Psycho*, that ur-instantiation of the genre, which reduced me to my usual shrinking posture when I first saw it in a college dorm basement. How the camera assumes Norman Bates's gaze, peeping at Marion Crane as she slowly undresses for her shower. Two minutes and forty seconds later, Norman is stabbing her to death, and Marion's naked body slides, lifeless, to the floor. We could jump to *Halloween*, which had the same effect on me, in the same dorm basement. Here—to pick just one example—the predatory gaze of the camera follows a babysitter in various states of undress—from the kitchen to the laundry room, back to the house, to the neighbor's house across the street, to her car, to the house to get her keys, back to the car—until at last Michael Myers lurches out of the darkness behind her, strangles her, and slits her throat. Or maybe *Friday the 13th Part 2*, which seems most especially like it was made to illustrate Mulvey's article. How the camera watches a camp counselor from a voyeur's perch as she strips nude at the edge of a lake, as she bobs in the moonlit water, as she emerges, dripping wet, still nude, limbs glistening, and wades to the shore—only to discover that someone has swiped her crop top and track pants. The thief turns out to be a jerk of a fellow counselor, and so we're confused, for an interesting moment, as to whether the voyeur was the jerk or the killer—but soon enough, the girl (and the jerk) is dead.

In *The Silence of the Lambs*, the violence of that gaze, of the psycho-killer lurking in the darkness, isn't fundamentally any different. We watch from the

still-unseen killer's point of view as he watches his next victim—"that next special lady," Lecter remarks to Starling, wryly. The killer, as we learn early on, has been nicknamed "Buffalo Bill," because—as Lecter is sure to make Starling tell him—"he skins his humps." That is, he removes the skin of the women he kills. All psycho-killers reduce their victims to bodies—first as objects within the crosshairs of their lurking gaze, then as corpses. Buffalo Bill actually reduces these women to body parts—like a grim rendition of the camera zooming in for a close-up.

The most obvious transformation in *The Silence of the Lambs* is, of course, Buffalo Bill's: down there in his dark basement, imported butterflies emerging from their pupas with metaphoric intensity, he's attempting to fashion a suit for himself out of women's skin. But there's another, nearly parallel transformation going on at the same time, in the special agent who's trying to catch him. It's just that it's such a standard trope—the woman who has to become like one of the guys in order to make it in a male-dominated field, in order to survive—that it's easy to miss.

I think that, for a long time, I'd been searching for a figure like Starling, a figure that so perfectly articulated what I was trying to be. In middle school, when all the girls were devouring the Babysitter's Club series, I remember somehow feeling that Kristy was the character whom the books tacitly condoned—a flat-chested tomboy who doesn't care enough about how she looks to ever wear anything but jeans and a turtleneck sweater and her hair pulled back in a messy ponytail. She's the one who has the smarts to found the business. But Kristy is still doing something as "girly" as babysitting, in an all-girls club. Still, I remember reading those books all the way into sixth grade, hoping, especially when I hit puberty, that someone might describe me the way Kristy is described. *Small for her age. Kind of a tomboy.* I remember, too, finding *Jane Eyre* when I was sixteen, and fastening on this stalwart loner who describes herself as *poor, obscure, plain, and little*, in pointed contrast to the showy, snobbish Blanche Ingram, with her elegant coiffeur, magnificent gowns, and "fine bust." Jane, as it happens, is essentially the sole survivor of the sadistic boarding school she's sent to in adolescence. I appreciated, then, how her enduring aloneness made her sharp and self-possessed, able to hold her own in ironic repartee with the saturnine Mr. Rochester—how she wins his approval for this. In fact, when I reread the novel in my early twenties, I was floored by the parallel I saw between Jane's first interview with Rochester, at Thornfield—that allegorically named course of tests and trials—and Starling's with Lecter, at an asylum for the criminally insane. Each exchange is an effective test by the cold men on whose approval these women's respective fates rest. But *Jane Eyre* ultimately hinges on the wedlock plot, and there was something disappointing in that. To marry a guy is not exactly to be accepted as one of the guys. There was also something, I felt, vaguely embarrassing about reading those books, which seemed so clearly written just for girls. They certainly weren't books that my clever older brother, whom I idolized, ever read.

It was something, then, to not only find Clarice Starling, but to find her in a movie so infamously gruesome. That is, it wasn't a *girly* movie. It said something about me, I thought, that I could steel myself through the dark straits of its nearly two hours. As if that somehow signaled my own, unfeminine toughness. As if that meant that I was "not fully feminine." I had, before this new viewing era of my life, been all but unable to watch any kind of horror movie: glimpses of them at middle school slumber parties and on the family room TV had triggered too many meltdowns—Grand-Guignol nightmares, feverish sobbing, parents summoned in the middle of the night to retrieve me from someone's sleepover. What I most remember of the very first time I saw *The Silence of the Lambs*, after all, is my own fear. But around age twenty, something shifted in me, something I can attribute only to a prescription medication that faintly dulled my raw nerves, and with it, this feminine weakness in me. A strange, but probably predictable, resolve emerged, and I launched a veritable campaign on this genre that I'd never before been able to withstand. These movies still terrified me—I could still barely watch them. But they had also, always, fascinated me. As if in the terror suggested by the wall of slasher VHS tapes I'd stared up at as a child in the local video store, in their lurid promo images of screaming women, was a kind of truth that the safe but boring fare of my childhood—reruns of *Little House on the Prairie* and *Diff'rent Strokes*—couldn't fully apprehend.

At one point, I even bought the *Silence of the Lambs* film score on CD—that orchestral, mournful eeriness—and would call up a friend of mine when he wasn't home in order to let it play on his dorm room answering machine. I thought it was funny, but mainly I just wanted him to tell other people that I'd done this. To make it clear that this was *my* movie. I'd come to have such a proprietary sense toward the whole movie—as if it were somehow my story it was telling, or as if no one could identify with Starling more than I did. Even after college, although I would laugh at myself when half divulging this adolescent identification to anyone, would then deliver some of her more quotable lines in a low, over-serious drawl (*Quid pro quo, Doctor . . . Most serial killers keep some sort of trophies from their victims . . . Yes, sir, you bet*), I still felt it. It never occurred to me, not for the longest time, what that meant.

One of the defining moments of the slasher genre is when, near the very end of what has been a torturous night, the Final Girl, as Clover puts it, "stops screaming, faces the killer, and reaches for the knife (sledge hammer, scalpel, gun, machete, hanger, knitting needles, chainsaw)." I have watched Laurie do this, in *Halloween*, picking up a knitting needle, then a wire hanger, *then* the knife—as if gaining more phallic firepower with each weapon—and stabbing at Michael Myers. I've watched Nancy, in *Nightmare on Elm Street*, luring Freddy into an obstacle course of weapons not so unlike the nightmare scenarios he sets up for his victims. I've watched Ginny, in *Friday the 13th II*, take up a machete from Jason's wood-shack armory and bring it down on his back. Over and over, I have watched this moment when, in other words, the Final Girl takes up the monster's weapon. These were not the movies of my childhood, not of middle

school or high school. But even so, this is a moment I recognize now. This is a moment that feels familiar.

It was not long after college, as a sort of outgrowth of my preoccupation with *The Silence of the Lambs*, that I became fascinated with serial killers. It was the early 2000s, and the Internet was newly at my fingertips. I could read true crime websites about the most notorious offenders: Their psychological profiles. The signs of the so-called sociopathic triad in their early childhoods. The spare details of their domestic lives, rendered lurid by the awfulness of their crimes. The grim tableaux of particulars at each crime scene. (At one point, a woman for whom I'd housesat came across the notes I'd accidentally left behind about the horrible crimes of Richard Ramirez, the California Night Stalker, and was duly freaked out.) I also spent a weekend reading *Whoever Fights Monsters*, the book by the FBI agent who came up with the concept of profiling serial killers.

Although at the time I liked to think it was unique to me, another sign of my being “not fully feminine,” this dilettantish fascination with serial killers is something I've since realized is not so uncommon among young women. I've seen it, for instance, in my undergrad students, two of whom, at separate universities and unknown to each other, wanted to find some way to write their final papers on Hannibal Lecter, even though it was not at all germane to the class. This fascination strikes me now as a kind of sad impulse toward mastery—given that it's typically women who are the victims of these particular monsters.

“I'm *obsessed* with Hannibal Lecter,” a first-year student declared to me recently. “I know *everything* about him.” This was a badge of honor for her, it was clear. To be an expert on—a devotee of, even—such a ghoulish figure. There was something theatrically tough, burstingly defiant, in her young face. And for a moment, I felt like I was being confronted by an embarrassing relative—this misguided, foolish girl who was valorizing exactly the wrong thing, who even thought there was something special about herself because of it.

But in fact Clarice Starling, Final Girl extraordinaire, seems to me a telling instance of this impulse toward mastering the monster's M.O. Her real mentor, the figure who teaches her the most about monsters, is a monster himself. Submitting to his coy philosophy and perverse puzzles, to his games of *quid pro quo*, in which she gives up more and more of herself, Clarice effectively apprentices herself to Lecter. The mutilated bodies are, after all, piling up. She learns to think like him, or at least to be guided by what he thinks. And Lecter is so clever, so strangely charismatic, it's almost an honor to win his approval. At least that was always my reaction whenever I would watch the movie back then. It was, after all, the kind of approval I sought in everyday life.

The summer after my junior year of college, the year I myself became *obsessed* with Hannibal Lecter, and with Starling, I subleased a room in a house with a bunch of other college-age students. There were two guys, a bit older than me, and two women who had just finished their first year of school. After not too long, I was hanging on the couch with the guys, shooting the shit, viewing the girls from a superior distance, raising an ironic eyebrow at them, at



their predictable girliness. I remember watching *Seven* with one of the guys, that movie where Gwyneth Paltrow's severed head ends up in a box. I remember how worthy I felt when he said he thought it was a movie I'd like. The girls in the house, they came to resent me—the kind of resentment you can feel in the kitchen going silent when you enter it, in a door slammed loudly in front of you. “You act like you're better than us,” one of them finally said to me. I protested, bewildered. But it was true. I was doing what I always did: hanging out with the guys, trying to get in good with them. Their approval was just worth more than anything the girls could have offered me.

So it's not that I couldn't understand the undergrad girl across from me.

In *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2*, the famous final shot is of the Final Girl, raising a buzzing chainsaw, triumphantly, above her head. It's an eerie, unmistakable echo of the closing image of the first movie, when the barely human Leatherface brandishes *his* chainsaw, maniacally, against the bloody backdrop of the rising desert sun. Here it is, the moment when the Final Girl takes up the monster's weapon. She does it out of self-defense, she does it in order to survive. But the fact remains that she's now wielding the monster's weapon.

The thing I wonder about is how much longer she holds onto it.

*Triumph of Wormboy*, produced in collaboration with former Vermont Cartoonist Laureate James Kochalka, is due in autumn 2020.

**Karla Marrufo** (Mérida, México) holds a Doctorate in Hispanic-American Literature from la Universidad Veracruzana and completed postdoctoral studies at the National Autonomous University of México. Her work has been recognized through several prestigious Latin American literary awards, among them the 2005–2007 National Wilberto Cantón Award in Playwriting, the XVI José Díaz Bolio Poetry Prize, and the 2014 National Dolores Castro Prize in Narration. Her books include *Mérida lo invisible*, a collection of stories entitled *Arquitecturas de lo invisible*, and the novel *Mayo*. A new book, *La dulzura de los naufragios* [*The Sweetness of the Shipwrecked*], is forthcoming.

**Melanie Mauthner's** translation of Scholastique Mukasonga's novel *Our Lady of the Nile* (Archipelago, 2014) was awarded the French Voices Grand Prize 2013. She later received a Hawthornden Fellowship to translate Mukasonga's short stories, some of which have appeared in the *New Yorker*, *New England Review*, the *Stinging Fly*, and the *White Review*.

**Shara McCallum**, originally from Jamaica, is the author of six books published in the US and UK. The poems in this issue are from her forthcoming verse sequence, *No Ruined Stone*, a speculative account of Scottish poet Robert Burns's migration to Jamaica to work on a slave plantation. Her previous book, *Madwoman* (Alice James, 2017), was winner of the 2018 OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Poetry and the 2018 Motton Book Prize from the New England Poetry Club. McCallum is a professor of English at Penn State University and on the faculty of the Pacific University Low-Residency MFA Program.

**Scholastique Mukasonga**, born in Rwanda in 1956, settled in France in 1992, two years before the genocide of the Tutsi. In the aftermath, Mukasonga learned that twenty-seven of her family members had been massacred. Twelve years later, Gallimard published her autobiographical account *Inyenzi ou les Cafards*, which marked Mukasonga's entry into literature. This was followed by *La femme aux pieds nus* in 2008 and *L'Iguifou* in 2010, both widely praised. Her first novel, *Notre-Dame du Nil*, won the Ahmadou Kourouma prize and the Renaudot prize in 2012, as well as the 2013 Océans France Ô prize, and was shortlisted for the 2016 International Dublin Literary award.

**Linda B. Marshall's** publications include scholarly articles and translations focused on German literature, landscape theory, and art history from the medieval to the modern period. Most recently, she edited and translated *Letters of a Dead Man* by Prince Hermann von Pückler-Muskau (Dumbarton Oaks, 2016).

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**Heidi P (Petersen)** is a Danish artist living in the countryside after many years in Copenhagen. She has exhibited extensively in both galleries and museums since 2004. Her work is inspired by the fragile cycles of nature, which she likens to the human life cycle. She is interested in change and transformation and contrasts such as life and death, light and darkness. See more of her work on [www.heidp.dk](http://www.heidp.dk) and Instagram.

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