



The Best of C.L. Moore

C.L. Moore , Lester del Rey (Editor)

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Forty Years of C. L. Moore '75 essay by Lester del Rey
Shambleau [Northwest Smith] '33 novelette by C. L. Moore
Black Thirst [Northwest Smith] '34 novelette by C. L. Moore
The Bright Illusion '34 story by C. L. Moore
Black God's Kiss [Jirel of Joiry] '34 novelette by C. L. Moore
Tryst in Time '36 novelette by C. L. Moore
Greater Than Gods '39 novelette by C. L. Moore
Fruit of Knowledge '40 novelette by C. L. Moore
No Woman Born '44 novelette by C. L. Moore
Daemon '46 story by C. L. Moore
Vintage Season '46 novella by Henry Kuttner & C. L. Moore
Afterword--Footnote to Shambleau & Others '75 essay by C. L. Moore

The Best of C.L. Moore Details

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From Reader Review The Best of C.L. Moore for online ebook

Matthew Gatheringwater says

C.L. Moore is on my feminist history of science fiction reading list, but the role of women in her stories is not exactly liberated. In fact, it is pretty disturbing, even when considered within its own cultural context. Despite this, she turns out to be the author of stories I've never forgotten after reading them once during childhood. *Vintage Season* is timeless, despite having been written in 1946. Still, her particular kind of horror--dark, wet, clinging, and feminine--is not mine.

Yael says

C. L. Moore never fails to surprise. This collection of her work, *The Best of C. L. Moore*, contains ten of her signature stories: "Shambleau" and "Black Thirst" (both part of her Northwest Smith cycle), "The Bright Illusion," "Black God's Kiss" (part of her Jirel of Joiry cycle), "Tryst in Time," "Greater Than Gods," "Fruit of Knowledge," "No Woman Born," "Daemon," and "Vintage Season," that last story one of the most powerful science-fiction stories ever written. While C. L. Moore is remembered and cherished mostly for her Northwest Smith and Jirel of Joiry cycles, her other stories, including those cited here, are every bit as good as or even better than those of her story-cycles.

"The Bright Illusion," for example, is the story of Dixon, a man rescued from certain death by a God determined to take over a world ruled by a rival God, who, used by the one God in an attempt to dislodge and kill its rival, falls in love with a member of the followers of the rival God on that other world, who reciprocates his love. Dixon's entry into that alien world opens the door for the intrusion of the first God into that world. But IL, the God of the alien world, wins the battle between the two Gods. Finding that Dixon has somehow convinced the priestess of its own people to help him try to enable the first God to kill IL and take over that world, IL asks Dixon and the priestess what they will do now, given the priestess's betrayal of IL. They tell IL they wish to be together forever, and since neither can live in the other's proper environment, only in death can that be possible, and they ask IL for death together. IL grants their petition -- and then is left all alone after both Dixon and the priestess have vanished from its realm, wondering what came afterwards for both of them. So far, it sounds like a typical boy-meets-girl, boy-falls-in-love-with-girl, girl-reciprocates-and-betrays-her-God-to-help-her-lover story -- but it's anything but. The priestess's world -- IL's world -- is so alien to Dixon that the mere sight of it would drive him mad in minutes had not the God that took him as its tool provided a shield of illusion between Dixon and that alien world, including that world's inhabitants. The "priestess" has a form vaguely like a one-eyed snake -- except that that eye wanders all over "her" body, and "her" actual gender is nothing like any Earth has ever known. Dixon's physical form is just as weird to the "priestess" as "hers" is to him. Yet they have fallen in love with each other, because each has perceived the mind, the soul of the other, and it is *that* that each loves in the other. The physical form means nothing to either of them -- and the soul means everything. And it is that around which this story was written -- soul-deep love, love that ignores the body as the shell it is, and concentrates on the psyche of the beloved.

Her other stories in here are just as compelling. "Vintage Season," the story of time-travelers who visit Earth in what is to them the far past, but to us our own time, taking rented lodgings in a house whose owner also occupies at the time, have to come to witness one of several "vintage seasons," seasons of overwhelming beauty which, however, immediately precede some of the greatest tragedies of all human history, from the Black Death to the impact of an asteroid that brings down our modern civilization. It offers a view into some

of the darkest and most sinister aspects of the soul of mankind -- and of our descendants, who may or may not be absolutely human, who live safely in decadent splendour in the far future and come as tourists to view some of the most terrible disasters in history in all their horrifying lethality and destruction.

This book is worth tracking down and reading. Amazon.com usually has used copies in excellent condition -- I got my current copy of this anthology about five years ago from amazon.com (the first time I read it was around 1978, and I've worn out several copies of it since). Edited and with an introduction by Lester del Rey, and with an afterword by Moore herself, this collection contains some of the finest written work both in the genre of science-fiction and outside it.

Michael says

The book review

Will someone please explain to me why C.L. Moore is not a household name like Heinlein, or Asimov?? Okay, okay, she was obviously not nearly as prolific as those other Sci-Fi greats, and she is more known for her short stories than for her novels (as far as I can tell), but still, this collection has been a real eye-opener for me.

"She was so like a woman - an Earth woman... if he could forget the three-fingered claws and the pulsing eyes..."

First off, is the writing, which is lush and passionate and makes these stories of science leap off the page with a color and vividness that seems lacking in most other sci-fi of the era (these stories span 1933-1946). Moore's patient, decadent descriptions recall the atmosphere of an Edgar Allan Poe, or an H.P. Lovecraft, especially in the first four stories, which seem a demonic blend of sci-fi and horror.

"Bowled over, blinded and deaf, drowning in utter blackness, he floundered in the depths of that nameless hell where thoughts that were alien and slimy squirmed through his brain."

Second, is the clever way she has inserted female characters into the heart of her science fiction stories. This is the 1930's, remember. The U.S. doesn't realize yet that women will be the unsung heroes of WWII, and sci-fi authors aren't doing much more than sketching women in on the sidelines as secretaries or wives of the main characters. In this collection, C.L. Moore doesn't break tradition in an obvious way - there are still wives and secretaries, though she adds a doctor and a warrior to the mix - but she also manages to make a woman (or women) central to each story, almost with sleight of hand. Male adventurers make the discoveries and explore the universe, but a woman shows them unexplored worlds, or turns out to be an alien being, or becomes a bridge across alien species, or rewrites the story of Adam and Eve. The female characters in this collection (usually) embody familiar tropes - the seductress, the adoring helpmate, the beauty, the lover - but she places them central to the plot and as a focus for her speculative musings on science and philosophy. It seems like she is tricking the typical adolescent male sci-fi fan into discovering that women are indispensable to the exploration of the world at large. This is no small feat.

"... it seemed to her obscurely that they led into deeper darkness and mystery than the merely physical, as if... the peculiar and exact lines of the tunnel had been carefully angled to lead through poly-dimensional space as well as through the underground - perhaps through time, too."

Finally, it is the fact that these two revolutionary (at the time) approaches - lush storytelling and female-centric sci-fi - do not sacrifice varied and fantastic speculation one iota. Her tales explore time travel, and space travel, and ruminations on alien life and future Earth life, all with equal ease and enthusiasm. These stories have made me feel a bit like a kid again, though I admit it might be partly because science fiction is so young during this time period. In any case, I have now experienced C.L. Moore's indelible imprint, and I will do my best to make sure her name rings out alongside the other great founders of early science fiction.

"It was boneless and writhing, livid with creeping color. Its single great eye, lucid and expressionless, stared from an unfeatured, mouthless face, half scarlet and half purple, between which two shades a wedge of nameless green broadened as he looked away."

The story ratings

Introduction by Lester del Rey - 4 stars - Has some enlightening information in here, but because it describes many of the stories I would recommend waiting until after you've read them (that's what I did) if you don't like spoilers or want to form your own impressions. The only thing that seemed a little strange was how he speculated on why her writing style seemed to change after 1938. He cites biographers, who don't seem to agree, and it made me wonder why he didn't just ask Ms. Moore, instead of speculating out loud. He is the editor of this collection, after all, so surely he is consulting with her? (And del Rey's intro and Moore's concluding essay are both stamped "1975", the year this was published.)

Shambleau - 4 stars - Wonderfully horrific and tantalizing, my only complaint was that I experienced a strange woman-objectifying aftertaste by the time it ended.

Black Thirst - 4 stars - A fascinating idea, reminds me a bit of the old Star Trek plots. Again somewhat objectifying, and let's face it, racist, in how beauty is described, but with a hint of rebelliousness (and even a surprise (view spoiler)). It felt a bit like a simple hero/villain tale by the end, though.

The Bright Illusion - 5 stars - A startling treatise on what it means to be an individual, what it means to love. If you spun this just so, it could be a shout-out for LGBTQ equality.

Black God's Kiss - 4 stars - I really wanted to give this 5 stars: what a great protagonist! But the ending had a final barb that derailed it for me, not completely, but just enough to harsh my buzz.

Tryst in Time - 4 stars - And so she invents the Time Traveller's Wife! This one is a lot less complicated, though! But I found the ending to be... not quite comprehensible.

Greater Than Gods - 4 stars - A great rumination on free will, time travel, and the momentum of social forces. (Reminded me a bit of The Time Machine actually.) It's a bit dated, and promotes some stereotypes, but it was cleverly fleshed out, and challenged some stereotypes, too. I thought this was a great story to highlight how marriage affects men: what kind of people they are, what type of future they choose. Many men (including many authors!) seem to think (heterosexual) marriage is a woman's game and it's just a sideline for men. But they are just fooling themselves.

Fruit of Knowledge - 5 stars - I guess I am a sucker for Adam and Eve retellings. I have to nitpick and call this Fantasy, not Sci-Fi, but it was rich and engaging. Reminded me that I read another brilliant (although brief) Adam and Eve retelling, called "Sister Lilith", in this collection.

No Woman Born - 5 stars - Haunting and poignant. The characterization of the three principles in this one

and their responses to the situation are just extraordinary. The descriptions are vivid and surreal and complement the psychological unfolding. I really would have liked to have seen a novel version of this.

Daemon - 5 stars - A frightful tale with a taste of Robinson Crusoe; the fantasy element gives it both horror and religious aspects. The narration is organic and captivating, told in a reflective, reverent tone that keeps you glued to the page, eager, and terrified, as events unfold.

Vintage Season - 5 stars - A great mysterious piece, which again overlays a curious scientific premise with an atmosphere of decadence and fantasy, to haunting effect. This one I thought was particularly successful, because of the musings at the end. She is making an interesting sociological observation here, behind all the speculative elements, that I thought was quite profound.

Afterword by C.L. Moore - 4 stars - Nothing earth-shattering here, but it was nice to hear from the author. She shares some tidbits about where her ideas come from and how she does her work. She downplays the certainty of her success in the field, which may be humility, or it may be sober realism, but in any case the world is fortunate to have her stories.

Lindsay Stares says

I grabbed this volume from the library when I was researching early fantasy a few months back, and have to return it soon, so I had to read it now. I guess what I'm trying to say is that I may not have come to this book with a wholly charitable attitude.

Catherine Lucille Moore was one of the leading lights of early sci-fi and fantasy, and her prose is lovely. However, I was never quite blown away by the stories. I think I was expecting too much.

According to the introduction, Moore was one of the first (or the first) to write sci-fi from a more emotional perspective. "Her early stories were notable for their emphasis on the senses and emotions, which was highly unusual at the time." -Wikipedia Also she is lauded for her very alien aliens and her use of romance.

While I appreciate the stories for how groundbreaking they were, I must admit I was not that impressed by what they are. I've read too much that took her work as inspiration and spun off into further realms. I find these stories good, even very good, just not amazing. And I was really hoping for amazing.

Read more at [The Blue Fairy's Workshop](#).

Chris says

A wonderful selection of Moore's short fiction which highlights why she is one of the all time greats of science fiction and fantasy. These vary from the pulpy Northwest Smith tales, to the philosophy of No Woman Born, via the beauty of The Fruit of Knowledge. A must for anyone who is a fan of or has an interest in the 30s and 40s speculative fiction.

Mike (the Paladin) says

Library books always go to the head of the "currently reading" line!

Well, in reading this, I realized that I'd read many of them before back in days of "callow youth". They were better when I was a callow youth...

Some pretty good stories here, some not so good ones, at least one bad one. The stories are part of the "pulp tradition" which they carry on. There are the adventurous heroes like Northwest Smith (I actually think that ought to be "North West Smith" because he gets addressed as "N.W."), there are the thinly veiled yet somewhat "guilt ridden" sexual references, there are the science "fantasy" stories and strange aliens (an odd number of whom seem to be "almost" omnipotent).

I found that the stories were a lot more strained and a lot more juvenile than they seemed back in my teens and possibly early 20s and while they are readable, they didn't/don't hold up as well as some pulp writers have. I liked them pretty well when I was young, not so much now. I clearly remember the Smith stories from earlier. This time around as I trod the familiar ground, it just didn't do the job. I remember Shambleau and Black Thirst specifically. I recalled Jirel of Joiry's "adventure" in Black God's Kiss. They were okay, but not what I remembered the supernatural not being so dark and powerful as they were when I was young. I didn't recall Fruit of the Kingdom which I found silly and shallow nor did I recall Greater than the Gods which I thought an interesting story. There were stories that I found weak and others not so bad.

These are short stories so much detail will give unavoidable spoilers, but I think you get my take here. If you like the pulp era, which I do you might want to check this out. It pretty much runs hot and cold, good stories and poor, but you can sort of pick your own preferences (as I have LOL).

Ricky Kimsey says

Classic Stories From The Golden Age

This collection of stories were published during the Golden Age Of Science Fiction during the 1930s and 40s. They represent an author who works rival those of H.P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard and Edgar Rice Burroughs.

Lit Bug says

This is a review of only one of the stories in the book.

I take this liberty because **No Woman Born** is such a masterpiece, it must not be overlooked, and I cannot wait until I have finished reading every story to praise this amazing piece of fiction.

This is a truly memorable classic short story spanning a range of issues from ethics of resurrecting the dead with the help of technology, the ensuing dilemma of what is meat and what is machine, the delicate ramifications of transhumanism, not just from the perspective of humans, but from the perspective of the

humanoid itself (*itself?*), the explicitly painful issue of what makes us women, to how our bodies are appropriated and pigeonholed into what Judith Butler so correctly summarized in three words **"Gender is Performance"**.

This is an immensely rich, layered complex work with minimal plot and extensive social, biological and ethical dilemmas – all written in a deceptively simple narrative. It is an unparalleled critique of the limited ways in which we perceive the idea of transhumanism, how narrowly we construct the ideological arguments about the “*essential nature*” of a human mind in a new metal body, without for once speculating the issue from the perspective of the humanoid itself (*see? I've already labelled humanoids as “it”*).

The story begins with Harris coming, with palpable concern, to the lab of his friend Maltzer, who has, after a year's hard work, succeeded in recreating Deirdre, a theater icon beloved among the masses, after she died in a fire. Her body was burnt, but her brain was retrieved, now caged in a metal body. Deirdre is still what she was before, and now wants to go back onstage to perform, to the horror of her creator. She does go, however, and performs. There is only this much plot.

But the verbal exchanges that take place between Harris, Deirdre and Maltzer in between all this forms the real crux of the work – it is through these dialogues that we see what each of the three think about the nature of life and death, and about the resurrection of Deirdre in particular. Far from being didactic or preachy, the exchanges are food for thought – they stretch our sense of what we consider human, how we perceive womanhood and how we view ourselves, finally.

Maltzer's apprehensions about how she will be received by people reminded me of Emiko, the windup girl in Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* - heechy-keechy, as she was derisively referred to. Deirdre's combination of meat and metal often brought back memories of Andrew from Asimov's *The Bicentennial Man* - agreed, both Emiko and Andrew are robots that gain consciousness, while Deirdre is a human mind that gains a metal body, but the complex emotions that they face are reminiscent of each other.

The narrative style too, is reminiscent of Asimov – of course, they were both contemporaries, and it is astonishing, given the immense popularity of Asimov and the obscurity of C. L. Moore today, how similar their concerns were, how excellent their works and themes (I now find *The Bicentennial Man* a pale shadow of *No Woman Born*) and yet how different their fates!

Along with Tiptree's *The Girl Who Was Plugged In* and Kurt Vonnegut's 5-minute story 2BR02B, this story figures on the top of my favorite fiction - SF or otherwise.

"No Woman Born" online (not infringing the copyright, it has expired) - Read it here online - <http://www.thepit.org/books/Science%2...>

"The Girl Who Was Plugged In" (Same as above) - <http://hell.pl/agnus/anglistyka/2211/...>

"2BR02B" (Same as above) - <http://www.booksshouldbefree.com/book...>

Erik Graff says

Being a woman who broke into science fiction in the early thirties and then proceeded to introduce female protagonists, Catherine Lucille Moore rarely employed her own name, but is most commonly known as C.L.

Moore. Additionally, after marrying another science fiction writer in 1940, Henry Kuttner, the two of them often hid the fact of their joint authorship of many stories, using one or the other's name or even a pseudonym.

Jason says

C. L. Moore is one of the greats. She is also, as far as I know, the only female science fiction writer of note in the first decades of the 20th century. I will review the stories individually:

Shambleau: A moody and memorable beginning. It relies on setting and tone - a frontier town on Mars, a mob, a mysterious woman - and on one particular, extremely striking scene of Northwest's friend stumbling into Northwest's room and discovering him in a dark corner, helpless. This story is textured and well-paced. Justifiably famous, I think.

The Black Thirst: More Northwest, another frontier town, another mysterious woman. Overwritten in spots, and clearly following a formula. It feels longer than, but not as good as, the first one.

The Bright Illusion: Fascinating! Did nobody in the 30's and 40's realize that Moore was already, at this early stage in her career, questioning normative sexuality, and offering reasons for alternatives? Don't get fooled by the "love at first sight" trope - this is really a powerful metaphorical argument against the necessity for heterosexuality, among other interesting things. It's also another moody and textured piece, this time on a rather more cosmic stage, brought down only slightly by what seems to have still been a problem for Moore at this stage - overwriting, occasionally of the repetitive and purple variety.

Black God's Kiss: Feels like Lovecraft, in a good way; a passage in the dungeon leading to another dimension, angles that are all wrong, dark temples and one-eyed snakes....what makes this one stand out is the surprising intensity and complexity of Jirel's quest, her reason for being there, and especially her relationship to the usurper, Guillaume, the man who planted on her an unwanted and unforgotten kiss. Her realization at the end surpasses in interest and humanity what we normally find in the sword and sorcery genre at this point. Jirel's emotional state, her rage, her conflicted emotions, her regret, these are the things that make this story work.

Tryst in Time: Meh. The girl throughout time, found everywhere...the mysterious girl...what is it, anyway, with C. L. Moore and mysterious girls?

Greater Than Gods: Wonderful. Epic. Heartbreaking. And yet hopeful. Filled with so many things, so many ideas, and absolutely gripping from start to finish. It has that schematic structure that so much "Golden Age" science fiction has, that Asimovian tendency to have characters represent ideas, so you can feel those ideas being played out and put into conflict in, perhaps, somewhat mechanical and intellectual ways, but who cares? The concept is awesome. The choice faced by the main character is impossible, and haunting. The solution is the only right one. If you're a parent, this might bring tears to your eyes. And either way, it will stick with you.

Fruit of Knowledge: I didn't really care for this one. It's a perceptive re-imagining of the events between Lilith, Adam, Eve, and Lucifer in the Garden of Eden, but it was all just too silly and allegorical for me. It did, however, showcase Moore's continuing exploration, begun in "The Bright Illusion," of the problems of embodiment, and the contrast between ideals and reality, ideas which will culminate in "No Woman Born."

No Woman Born: A masterpiece. This is one of the best science fiction stories ever published, and it is an essential text in the genre. Read it, slowly, and then think about the many implications.

Daemon: Like "Fruit of Knowledge," this is a pure fantasy involving mythological elements. Again, I was indifferent. It's well-written, and shows Moore's progress as a writer, the tightening of her prose, but I can't seem to connect emotionally with these fantasy stories of hers. Strangely, they seem more distant, less "real" to me, than her science fiction does.

Vintage Season: And, another knock out of the park. This is wonderful - an incredible premise, loads of suspense, mystery, beauty, and terror. I love it. It's probably the best story in this collection.

So...at least 6 excellent stories; certainly worth the time, I'd say. And I also need to say that the best stories here (Shambleau, The Bright Illusion, Black God's Kiss, Greater Than Gods, No Woman Born, and Vintage Season) have not aged a day. They are still excellent science fiction, and excellent literature.

Jean-marcel says

I don't know if it's a fact that Catherine Lucille Moore published under her initials to downplay her womanhood to the pulp audiences of the 1930s and '40s. Certainly she was among some esteemed male company in doing this: H. P. Lovecraft, C. M. Kornbluth, R. A. Lafferty, and so on. Nevertheless, I have to admit that it is probable that a predominantly young male audience in 1933 would not have been predisposed to look as kindly on the debut story of this remarkable woman, not because it compares unfavourably to the work of her male counterparts, but simply because of the ethos of the time and because, well, without meaning to condescend in the slightest, you can tell there's something different about this: A direct connection between science fiction and myth, not a true stranger to the pages of *Weird Tales*, but told with such passion, such almost discomfitingly raw emotion. I don't think Moore was "passing" as a man when she wrote any of this stuff. I think she was aware of her audience, and gave them what they wanted, and imbued it with a certain aura that I can sometimes describe as challengingly feminine.

And Moore does burst right out of the gate, fully formed. The book begins with "Shambleau", one of her most notorious pieces, and believe it or not, her first published story. Lovecraft praised it. Indeed, it's been compared with his work. But I'm reminded more of his lesser known contemporary, Clark Ashton Smith, in both content and form. Lonely lamiae on a dark frontier, in this case, the old, vast cities of Mars. This is a story about Northwest Smith, a wanderer of the solar system, a hard man who is often on the wrong side of the law, and his encounter with a mysterious, silent woman. I've read a whole bunch of these Northwest stories now, and I'll grant you that mostly they follow the same pattern: Northwest is wandering somewhere, alone and maybe on the run, and encounters some kind of alien demigod/outcast/hybrid plant thing/beautiful woman, usually with vampiric tendencies, though often of the more soul-destroying rather than blood-sucking variety. What's really striking about these tales though is their huge, pervasive melancholy. The atmosphere and moodiness just seems to blow from the pages like a dusty Martian wind redolent of unknowable, terrible secrets that were old before man learned to stand upright. The rich, almost flowery prose helps with this, again calling some of Clark Ashton Smith's tales of Zothique (or indeed, old Mars) to mind. Both "Shambleau" and "Black Thirst" deliver on their promises of vampiric thrills, but there's definitely something more going on here. The way Moore describes sensations so sharply, with such depth of feeling, and also the most alien mental impressions, is something really powerful to behold. It's almost sensory overload at times, and I'm sure that's a part of what she was going for. The sensations depicted are so strong that you almost feel uncomfortable reading about them, but at the same time it's all oddly compelling

and, even, beautiful.

This all comes to an apotheosis in "The Bright Illusion". Imagine you become enslaved by an unfathomable godly presence, who sets you a horrible task. Then you fall in love with one of those Lovecraft-style amorphous beings from Beyond Time and Space, whose mere sight would drive you to absolute insanity. But we're not talking love here, this is **LOVE**, an all-pervading limitless thing that is greater than gender or time or space or dimensions beyond mortal ken. OH yes, Moore asks us to accept some pretty far-out stuff here on face value. But don't you want to? I mean yes, it'd probably all be a bit much for some; the sensory overload thing is turned up to maximum here, and Moore's aliens are *really* alien. If you liked David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus* as much as I did, you should be able to appreciate this, though. Indeed, the almost gnostic idea of a spiritual purity beyond all mortal experience is even a bit similar here, though I get the idea that Moore's not quite as grim as Lindsay. The ending is so appropriate and again we're traversing territory that sings of intense melancholy feeling laced with an aching wonder at the cosmos and the beings both vast and small who dwell within.

That **LOVE** theme recurs in quite a few of the stories here, although of course there's much more to Moore than this. It's true that "A Tryst in Time" reads like a science fiction romance, but it's short, feels ahead of its time, and the ending just adds more to the sense of mystery. I liked it.

"The Black God's Kiss" is a Jirel story and it's also great, but I didn't care for the ending. Don't let that faze you though; it's possible you will like the ending very much in fact, particularly if Moore's **LOVE** theme really resonates with you. It's also true that I haven't read the other Jirel stories Moore wrote (not in this volume) yet, and they might help to put this one into some perspective. Jirel is Moore's stab at sword and sorcery. You could almost describe her as a female Conan, but I don't think that would quite be doing her justice. Of course the setting is faux-medieval, and the world reads like fantasy, only there are science fiction elements present: portals to other dimensions, beings that are clearly aliens and not dragons or gods or whatever. But Jirel is a person of her time, so she still sees all that stuff as magic and sorcery, even if the reader draws different conclusions. It's pretty neat

"Fruit of Knowledge". Lilith, Adam, Eve and Satan, and the Garden of Eden. Yes, it's a biblical retelling/reimagining, with subversive tendencies. I was impressed by this story, but in a somewhat aloof way, perhaps because everyone does this sort of thing nowadays. I've no doubt though that for 1942 this was really fresh ground (although of course the real antecedent is *Paradise Lost*), and I'm really glad that she wrote it because it again proves how ahead of her time this writer was. And if you really like this sort of thing, as I know many do, it's entirely possible this will be a favourite in the collection.

Now we are moving away from the fantastic and horrific elements that characterized the older stories, and into more science fiction. If you thought the language of the 30s stories was a bit overwrought and excessive, I guess you'll have an easier time with these. You could say Moore's concerns are becoming more contemporary, and she's really starting to think about technological and social ramifications in unique and clever ways. "Greater than Gods" reads in many ways like so much old SF, in that much of it consists of guys in a room talking ideas passionately at one another. But the ideas! I think you'll be really surprised at just how far Moore is willing to take things, and this is a consistent strength of her work. She thinks big, but she's not afraid to start small, with the seed of an intriguing idea, as she does here, and turn it into something that will change the world forever. It's a story with a vast, broad scope, and immensely impressive.

"Daemon" is a brief return to a somewhat more fantastic milieu, and the only story in the book told in first person. It's not as heavy as some of the stories here but it's intensely atmospheric; very much in a "weird fiction" style. That emotional, heady melancholy is everpresent.

"No Woman born" seems so modern to me. What's it mean to be human? What makes us human? What's consciousness, really? Oh come on, he said, these questions are old hat in SF now. You get this on Star Trek every other week! But hang on a second..Moore was doing this in the early 40s! There are just a few characters here, and any synopsis would reveal that not much actually happens. A famous actress dies in a terrible accident, her body burned beyond recognition, but her brain is saved and downloaded into a robot body. But she is the same person she always was! Isn't she? And she wants to perform again, for an audience..an audience used to seeing a beautiful star image with her name attached to it. It's all in the dialogues. Such astute psychological observation. I would hesitate to call Moore an overtly feminist writer, yet here she is, before just about anyone else in the field, questioning the concept of the female image and identity.

And even with all the praise I've given this collection so far, it's possible they saved the very best for last. "Vintage Season". My god, what a story! It was published in 1946, but I swear to you that if it were written in 2016 more-or-less exactly as it is, it would pack just as much of a punch. It has the universal appeal of a classic Richard Matheson story, or at least that's how it starts. Petty domesticity's world intruded on by something strange and outré that is fascinating before it's disturbing. But I promise you won't predict quite where it goes. Once you get there, the ending is one of those ultimate game-changing revelations that will make you completely re-assess what you read previously and realize that things that didn't seem significant were in fact loaded with ominous meaning. The last couple of pages are so very, very haunting. What a way to end the book. If Moore had only written this one story, people would be perfectly justified in talking about her over seventy years later. There's so much in this one piece, so much to think about, so many haunting strange images that you'll never forget. I realize all I've done is shout vague praise and haven't really said a thing about it, but this one I really don't think you should have spoiled even a little. Come to it fresh and unprepared. Trust me, it's the best way.

And with that we close the book and sigh. I don't often say this but, I wish there were more! Ten stories just doesn't seem like enough, sensory overload and all. I hate to sound reprimanding, but the truth is that Moore just didn't write enough! There are of course other short stories collected in other places (though not very many), many shorts and several novels written in collaboration with her husband Henry Kuttner (their life together was tragically cut short when he died young of a heart attack)

, and, I think, a scant two or so novels of her own. She lived well into the 1970s but didn't write any fiction after Henry died. When I think about it, the two of them were actually perfect for each other as a writing team, complimenting each others styles and approaches rather than one coming out more strident than the other. It must have been amazing for them.

Emily says

Five stars for the smooth, layered writing but only two for the storylines themselves. Shambleau was supposedly the shining star of Moore's work, but I found it repulsive. For a writer in the 1930s, Moore's themes tended to be surprisingly dark, and as a result, I skipped over quite a bit of the content of this book. I did read "Tryst in Time" and found it poignant, although the ending was rather lost on me. Vintage Seasons was remarkable. This is the single work that both introduced me to and fascinated me with Catherine Lucille Moore's writing - I find her prose reminiscent of Daphne du Maurier's in its quality of texture; many of the sci-fi concepts of time travel and alien life predate Rod Serling's Twilight Zone, as well as Star Trek and Star Wars, although the latter may well have heavily borrowed from Moore. It is interesting that she gained comparatively little notoriety in her genre, despite what is generally believed to be superior craftsmanship in

her characters, descriptions, and tales.

Lisa (Harmonybites) says

Once upon a time when I was a little girl, before Buffy and Xena before the likes of Tamora Pierce in the YA section, I yearned for heroines, and found little beyond *Wonder Woman* comics. Then as a teen, I found Jirel of Joiry, a kickass sword and sorcery heroine in an anthology and was entranced. C.L. Moore was a pioneer among women in modern science fiction and fantasy who isn't as well-known as she should be today, so I'm glad I found this anthology of her pulp era short works in a used book store. She only wrote one novel, *Doomsday Morning*, which I haven't read and have heard doesn't represent her at her best. She's best known for her shorter stories--stories that don't tend to anthologize well as the introduction explains, since they all tend to be over ten thousand words, at the long end of the spectrum for short fiction. Besides her Jirel of Joiry, Moore was known for her stories about Northwest Smith, a kind of space opera Sam Spade more than a little reminiscent of rogues with a heart of gold such as Han Solo and Mal Reynolds. The stories were written from 1933 to 1946, and the earliest ones have a bit of a purplish pulp age tinge, but are sensuous and just great yarns.

The first two stories are ones featuring Northwest Smith, and "**Shambleau**" for all it's science fiction trappings (it's set on Mars) reads more like a classic horror story with a Lovecraftian feel. Her first published story, it's deliciously creepy with a truly alien character. I was less enamored of the other Northwest Smith story, "**Black Thirst**," another story with a horror feel set on Venus, I thought it was a bit too reminiscent of the earlier story, while being more than a little bit cheesy. "**Black God's Kiss**" is the Jirel of Joiry story, and yes I still love it. I wasn't crazy about "**The Bright Illusion**" or "**Tryst in Time**"--I find love at first sight eye-rolling. Although I have to say, both had truly striking premises, especially the first. "**Greater Than Gods**" is...interesting. Published in 1939 it anticipates DNA, a theory of multiverses I've heard connected with quantum physics--and concerns sex selection. Some might consider the premise at its base dated, but I'm not so sure. There's a strain even in some kinds of feminism today that sees matriarchy and the female gender connected to environmentalism and pacifism and patriarchy with war and crime. I even saw a recent book arguing that the growing gender ratio favoring boys may lead to a more aggressive culture. So I found it in the end surprisingly still relevant. The following stories take us into the 40s and a strengthening of style and vigor of ideas that commentators have connected with her marriage and collaborations with her husband. "**The Fruit of Knowledge**" is a delightfully subversive tale of Adam, Eve, Lucifer--and Lilith. "**No Woman Born**" is a story about a cyborg that asks what it is that makes us human. "**Daemon**" is the one first person story in the anthology--and I can see why she chose that form, because in this one the voice is so important. And finally there's the story many consider her best, "**Vintage Season**," a chilling and powerful tale about vacationing time-travelers.

Bill Swears says

A college prep classics teacher offered "Shambleau" as an optional short story because she'd found it so compelling and disturbing. I took the book home and read it cover to cover, which I don't often do with short story collections.

Like Edgar Rice Burroughs's Barsoom work, these stories set baselines that changed the worlds of fantasy and science fiction. I find the writing much better, more emotional, and far more appealing to the modern

reader than is Burroughs work. Several of the stories stuck with me, and I eventually found them again in other C.L. Moore collections.

Moore was one of those authors who couldn't sell as a woman, so wrote speculative fiction between the early 30s and the early 60s under male sounding pseudonyms.

Cheryl says

Satisfying... lived up to the hype. A couple of stories I knew already, but most were new to me. For shame - I must read more. These stories only cover 13 years of work, primarily before her partnership with Kuttner... surely there's more. I def. hope to find more Jirel of Joiry.

One story alone is worth the price of admission: Daemon. I feel confident that Pullman (His Dark Materials) and Martel (Life of Pi) and many others were influenced by it.

To think these were being written back in the 1930s and early '40s just blows my mind.

"There's a really great profile of Moore by io9 contributor Andrew Liptak, over in Kirkus Reviews. When her first ever story arrived at the offices of Weird Tales, they were so blown away they closed their office for the day in celebration. Moore's early work won the admiration of H.P. Lovecraft. And both her early solo stories and her later collaborations with husband Henry Kuttner were instrumental in helping to shape the face of early science fiction from the 1930s onwards. The Best of C.L. Moore is out of print but easy to get in paperback, and it includes pioneering stories about femme fatales seeking revenge, time travel, and cyborgs. As one Amazon reviewer notes, "The classic early SF/fantasy tales by Catherine Moore were so far ahead of their time that the extent of her influence is mind-boggling. In fact, many modern authors may consider themselves heavily influenced by other authors who were themselves heavily influenced by Moore."

Derek says

What I'm getting out of Moore's writing is that it is very internal, wrapped in the impressions, thoughts, and emotions of the characters. While this effectively conveys the power of the situations these characters get into, it sometimes tips over into a swamp of language that makes forward progress difficult. I suppose the best approach is not to expect a certain page count after an hour of reading.

I'm dissatisfied with the selections from the Jirel and Northwest Smith collections: "Shambleau" was so deeply internal that it turned me off, and I think that a second Jirel story would have been worthwhile.

Terry says

A collection of some of the best work from pulp-era SF writer C. L. Moore.

"Shambleau" - a very good introduction to her work that is also a variation on the old medusa myth. The main character, Northwest Smith, is very much in the mould of Han solo (or more accurately Han Solo was

very much in the mould of Northwest Smith) - he's a rough starfarer who lives in the criminal underbelly and has various adventures that showcase just how badass he is. This is an interesting tale about erotic desire, addiction and the dangers of what lurks in the great vastness of space. There's sort of a Lovecraftian edge to this story about what can happen when man goes out to space and meets creatures that have existed far longer than his own race and whose hungers and desires may prove dangerous to both body and soul.

"Black Thirst" - Another Northwest Smith tale that takes on another old world myth and turns it into a science fiction morality tale. Another one with a neat Lovecraftian vibe, though perhaps not quite as strong as "Shambleau".

"Bright Illusion" - A pretty good SF story about loving the alien with a valiant attempt at creating truly alien aliens (as opposed to humans in rubber suits), but they are mostly alien because the author says so than because of any exemplary job of description. Ok story, but I like Northwest Smith better.

"The Black God's Kiss" - The first tale of Jirel of Joiry, one of the the ur-Warrior-Princesses (Moore seems to have had a hand in moulding a fair number of archetypes for the genre), in which she follows a quest for vengeance when her demesne is conquered by a rival lord, the overbearing Guillaume. In order to enact her vengeance Jirel enters a tunnel in her castle dungeons which proves to contain a portal to another world. Given that the story takes place in a faux-medieval setting Jirel views this place as a version of Hell, but Moore's vivid depiction of it allows the reader to see the place just as easily as another dimension as presented by Lovecraft, or another planet in the mould of Clark Ashton Smith. Jirel gains an unorthodox weapon with which to defeat her enemy and brings it back to her world, only to find the taste of revenge bitter in her mouth. I'm not quite sure I fully 'get' the ending of the tale, but it's another morality fable in sword & sorcery guise. Not bad, but I wasn't blown away by it.

Lord Humungus says

I'd never heard of this author until she was recommended in an io9.com column. I managed to find a 1975 used hardcover and was thoroughly impressed.

The material within is definitely not your typical SF or fantasy fare and far more mature and accomplished than many works published at the time, or even now. At times it is reminiscent of old school space opera, modern Lovecraftian SF, the broadsword-wielding epics of Conan, the far futures of Gene Wolfe and Jack Vance, and some of PKD's more insightful psychological dramas. I hope she wrote more stories because these are effin gold.

Hazel says

Moore's Northwest Smith reminds me of *Spaceman Spliff* in Calvin and Hobbes. :-) This collection is pleasant, but I'm not sure nostalgic enjoyment will last long enough for me to finish it. Some science fiction doesn't age well. I may dip into it in future just to make sure I haven't missed something really good, but can't recommend it except for its historical value.

Several weeks later, I'd reexperienced the joys of *No Woman Born* and read Moore's afterword. I take it all

back. Some of this is timeless, and it's instructive to see the development of Moore's craft over her career; from Jirel to Deirdre. It's also interesting to read Moore's own thoughts on her work and Lester del Rey's account of her place in the field.

Not just historical value. :-)

Jerry says

If you crossed Lovecraft with Bradbury, you might end up with a writer as strange and lyrical as C. L. Moore.

Her first story in this book is her first story sold, *Shambleau*, a ground-breaking short from 1933. There's definitely a Lovecraft influence there, and by 1933 Lovecraft had been published in the magazine Moore was aware of and submitted to, *Weird Tales*.

I think my enjoyment of *Shambleau* was partially marred by the introduction, which gave some of it away. What it gave away was hinted at toward the beginning of the story, but combined with the introduction those hints were more conclusive than they otherwise would have been.

That said, the introduction is odd for another reason, too: it is reminiscent of the introduction for the later *Battlestar Galactica* series.

There are *two* Northwest Smith stories here, and both are weird. He appears to be the combination of generic space fantasy heroes—and Moore goes out of her way to evoke the space opera hero—with Lovecraftian weird and horrid fantasy. It's a surprisingly great combination, though by the end of four or five stories Northwest Smith must be insane and maimed beyond recognition.

The other stories except the final are also quite strong, especially when you consider they came from the beginning of the fantasy/science fiction genre.

If man could see all the possibilities of the future, would it bring a new purpose, or indecision and insurmountable doubt? And there's a Genesis retelling that is perhaps the best Biblical retelling I've read in fiction. No surprises are sudden reveals, just really good writing and characterization.

The Jirel of Joiry story is among the strongest, and I'm definitely going to be looking for a good Jirel collection.

The final story, which I think I've read before, is, not really a spoiler, a time-travel story; time travel is very, very difficult. Time travel necessarily means non-linearity when viewed outside the system, and often when viewed inside the system; that is, there is no requirement that things happen in the same order for more than one individual. There is the problem of sheer quantity, when popular destinations are open to all of time moving forward (oddly, or not so oddly given the writer's quality, Elliott S! Maggin addressed this nicely in *Superman: Miracle Monday*). There are problems of free will and/or individuality galore, especially when, as in *Vintage Season*, time is portrayed as self-correcting. *Vintage Season* falls afoul of all of these, and is in my opinion the weakest of all the stories.
