

# Gertrude Barrows Bennett

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(Redirected from Francis Stevens)

**Gertrude Barrows Bennett** (1883–1948) was the first major female writer of fantasy and science fiction in the United States, publishing her stories under the pseudonym **Francis Stevens**.<sup>[1]</sup> Bennett wrote a number of highly acclaimed



Painting of Gertrude Barrows Bennett (Francis Stevens) on the cover of her short story collection *The Nightmare and Other Tales of*

fantasies  
between 1917  
and 1923.<sup>[2]</sup>

*Dark Fantasy*, University of  
Nebraska Press, 2004.

Among her  
most famous books are *Claimed* (which H.P.  
Lovecraft called "One of the strangest and most  
compelling science fantasy novels you will ever  
read")<sup>[3]</sup> and the lost world novel *The Citadel of  
Fear*. Bennett also wrote an early dystopian novel,  
*The Heads of Cerberus* (1919).<sup>[2]</sup>

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## Life

Gertrude Mabel Barrows was born in Minneapolis

in 1883. She completed school through the eighth grade,<sup>[1]</sup> then attended night school in hopes of becoming an illustrator (a goal she never achieved). Instead, she began working as a stenographer, a job she held on and off for the rest of her life.<sup>[4]</sup>

In 1909 Bennett married Stewart Bennett, a British journalist and explorer, and moved to Philadelphia. A year later her husband died while on an expedition. With a new-born daughter to raise, Bennett continued working as a stenographer. When her father died in 1916, Bennett assumed care for her invalid mother.<sup>[1]</sup>

During this time period Bennett began to write a number of short stories and novels, only stopping when her mother died in 1920. In the mid 1920s, she moved to California. Because Bennett was estranged from her daughter, for a number of years researchers believed Bennett died in 1939 (the date of her final letter to her daughter). However, new research, including her death certificate, shows that she died in 1948.<sup>[4]</sup>

## **Writing career**

Bennett wrote her first short story at age 17. Her first published story, the novella "The Nightmare," appeared in *All-Story Weekly* in 1917. The story is set on an island separated from the rest of the world, on which evolution has taken a different course. "The Nightmare" resembles Edgar Rice Burroughs' *The Land That Time Forgot* (itself published a year later) and probably influenced the later story.<sup>[1]</sup>

Over the next few years, Bennett wrote a number of short stories and novellas. Her short story "Friend Island" (*All-Story Weekly*, 1918), for example, is set in a 22nd century ruled by women. Another story is the novella "Serapion" (*Argosy*, 1920), about a man possessed by a supernatural creature. Many of her short stories have been collected in *The Nightmare and Other Tales of Dark Fantasy* (University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

In 1918 she published her novel *The Citadel of Fear* (*Argosy*, 1918). This lost world story focuses on a forgotten Aztec city, which is "rediscovered" during World War I.

A year later she published her only science fiction

novel, *The Heads of Cerberus* (*Thrill Book*, 1919). One of the first dystopian novels, the book features a "grey dust from a silver phial" which transports anyone who inhales it to a totalitarian Philadelphia of 2118 A.D.<sup>[2]</sup>

Bennett's most critically acclaimed novel was *Claimed* (Argosy, 1920; reprinted 1966 and 2004), in which a supernatural artifact summons an ancient and powerful god to 20th century New Jersey.

## **Influence**

Bennett's writings influenced both H.P. Lovecraft and A. Merritt,<sup>[1]</sup> (with Lovecraft calling her novel *Claimed* "One of the strangest and most compelling science fantasy novels you will every read").<sup>[3]</sup> As for Mettitt, for several decades critics and readers believed "Francis Stevens" was a pseudonym of his. This rumor only ended with the 1952 reprinting of *Citadel of Fear*, which featured a biographical introduction of Bennett by Lloyd Arthur Eshbach.<sup>[1]</sup> Because Bennett was the first American woman to have her fantasy and science fiction widely published, she has been recognized in recent years as a pioneering female fantasy

author.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Bibliography

### Novels

- *The Citadel of Fear* (1918; reprinted in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, February 1942, and in paperback form in 1970, [NY:Ballantine Books] and 1984)
- *The Labyrinth* (serialized in *All-Story Weekly*, July 27, Aug. 3, and Aug. 10 1918; later reprinted as a paperback novel)
- *The Heads of Cerberus* 1st book edition. 1952, Cloth, also leather backed, Reading, PA. Polaris Press (Subsidiary of Fantasy Fress, Inc.) ill. Ric Binkley. Intro by Lloyd Arthur Eshbach (Thrill Book, 15 August, 1919; reprinted as a paperback novel in 1952 and 1984)
- *Claimed* (1920; reprinted in 1985, 1996, and 2004) 192pp, Cloth and Paper, Sense of Wonder Press, James A. Rock & Co., Publishers in trade paperback and hard cover.
- *Sunfire* (1923; original printed in two parts in *Weird Tales*, July-August 1923, and *Weird Tales*, September 1923; also reprinted

as trade paperback in 1996 by Apex International)

- *Possessed!* (2002)

## Collections

- *Nightmare: And Other Tales of Dark Fantasy* (University of Nebraska Press, 2004)

## Short stories

- "The Nightmare," (*All-Story Weekly*, 1917) [6]
- "Friend Island" (*All-Story Weekly*, 1918; reprinted in *Under the Moons of Mars*, edited by Sam Moskowitz, 1970)
- "Behind the Curtain" (1918, reprinted in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, January 1940)
- "Unseen-Unfeared" (*People's Favorite Magazine* Feb. 10, 1919; reprinted in *Horrors Unknown*, edited by Sam Moskowitz, 1971)
- "Serapion" (serialized in *Argosy*, June 26 and July 3, 1920; reprinted in *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, July 1942)

## References

1. ^ *a b c d e f* Francis Stevens entry in Scifipedia. SciFi Channel. Retrieved on 2007-05-16.
2. ^ *a b c* Nicholls, Peter; Clute, John (1993). *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*. St. Martin's Press, 1164-65. ISBN 031213486X. .
3. ^ *a b* (promotional page). "*Claimed*". James A. Rock and Company Publishers. Retrieved on 2007-05-16.
4. ^ *a b* "The Woman Who Invented Dark Fantasy" by Gary C. Hoppenstand from *Nightmare and Other Tales of Dark Fantasy* by Francis Stevens, University of Nebraska Press, 2004, page xvi. ISBN 0803292988
5. ^ T. M. Wagner. Review of Francis Steven's *Claimed*. SF reviews.net. Retrieved on 2007-05-16.
6. ^ Note: all short story information comes from Francis Stevens - Summary Bibliography. ISFBD. Retrieved on 2007-05-15. and The Fiction Mags Index. Retrieved on 2007-05-15.

## See also

- Women in science fiction
- Feminist science fiction
- Women science fiction authors

## External links



- Complete text of *The Citadel of Fear* (1918)
- Modern review of *Claimed*.

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