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## Sherman and the Burning of Columbia

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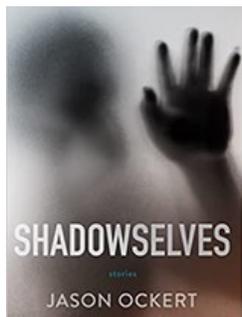
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## REVIEWS

### Shadowelves



Jason Ockert  
Ann Arbor: Dzanc  
Books, 2022  
ISBN: 9781950539390  
192 p. \$16.95 (Pbk)

*Shadowelves*, Jason Ockert's third short story collection, includes ten stories previously published in prestigious, well respected literary journals, as well as one which appeared in an edited volume (*We Can't Help it if We're From Florida: New Stories from a Sinking Peninsula*). While not all of the stories are set in the Southeast, many are, including one with a hilarious (yet, for locals, I think for the most part accurate) depiction of the many different aspects of daily life in a South Carolina tourist beach town. Throughout the collection, the prose is artful and often surprising, with almost unnoticeable transitions between the real and the unreal and back again. The stories frequently work to upend readers' expectations and make them question what is happening. Although the stories are often dark, readers are not left with a sense of hopelessness but rather a sense of wonder, challenged to appreciate the beauty in even the unbeautiful aspects of life.

Fiction writer Jason Ockert knows the Southeast well. Although he is originally from Indiana, his family moved to Florida during his childhood and he currently teaches creative writing in South Carolina, at Coastal Carolina University (where, in the interest of full disclosure, the author of this review also works as a librarian, but where paths do not cross often). Ockert is the author of three collections of short stories, the first of which, *Rabbit Punches* (2006), was just re-issued in a new edition by Dzanc books in the fall of 2021. He has also written a novel, *Wasp Box*. His work has won many awards, including the Atlantic Monthly fiction contest and the Mary Roberts Rinehart award, and has been praised by

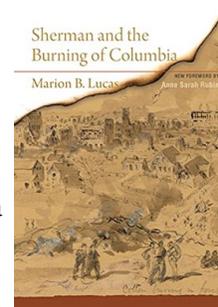
many other contemporary writers, including George Saunders, Karen Russell, and Padget Powell.

Libraries that collect contemporary fiction by Southeastern writers will not want to miss adding this volume to their collections. Critics have noted that Ockert "...is a natural heir to the grotesquery of Flannery O'Connor with his interest in misfits and his dark, powerful language" (Publisher's Weekly, October 4, 2021). Stories in the collection should be of interest to readers who value that tradition, and the modern twist that Jason Ockert brings to it.

Allison Faix, Coastal Carolina University

### Sherman and the Burning of Columbia

Marion B. Lucas  
Columbia: University of South  
Carolina Press, 2021  
ISBN: 9781643362458  
200 p. \$21.99 (Pbk)



Ann Sarah Rubin gave a presentation at a symposium sponsored by the University of South Carolina, in February 2021, where she introduced her talk, "Who Burned Columbia? Not I." According to her, she was setting the stage to promote a healthy discussion of the various opinions of the burning of the city and promoting the book *Sherman and the Burning of Columbia* by Marion Lucas. Drawing upon historians' opinions at the time, Rubin shared she "ultimately drew the same conclusions that many other historians have drawn - that the city burned through a combination of Confederate mismanagement and lax Union discipline" (Foreword). She explained that her audience "became aroused, shouting quotations, holding up books and sheaves of documents to prove her wrong" (Foreword). While she wondered why in 2021 so many voices were stridently opposing her sharing of historical research that supported a combination of factors leading to the burning of Columbia, she eventually surmised that "Columbians in particular clung to a sense of righteous indignation and victimization about

their city being burned, finding identity in destruction” (Foreword).

The audience reaction was troubling to Rubin given the excellent research provided by Marion B. Lucas in *Sherman and the Burning of Columbia* (2021). Documenting and illuminating his research, Lucas shared official reports, newspapers, and eyewitness accounts, maps of Columbia, black and white photographs of buildings, churches, and public places. According to the author, upon reading and examining historical documents, it seemed clear that fear, confusion, disorder, fires, and disorganized military strategies contributed to the eventual destruction of the city of Columbia. Also relying on old newspapers such as the Columbia Tri-Weekly South Carolinian (January 21, 22, 1864), Lucas writes, in attempting to analyze the cause of the fire, “the fire is supposed by many to be the work of an incendiary, but it is equally probable that it may have originated from the cinders of a passing locomotive, and been smoldering for hours before it was discovered.” The assessment continued, “It is a well-known fact, however, that cotton is the most difficult of all substances to control when once attacked by the insidious element, and a week or two may elapse before this will be subdued” (p. 22).

Lucas continues to note that there “were the errors, miscalculations, mistakes, and misapprehensions of the Southerners and Northerners in Columbia. But there were, in the midst of all the horrors, some redeeming factors which tend to place the entire episode in a new perspective. Many accounts of Columbians told of Union soldiers who acted in a civil manner, of humane treatment in the streets during the fire, a general nonviolent behavior, and of actual aid in saving goods from houses which were on fire. . . . There were few accounts of actual attacks on citizens, no reported rapes, and no confirmed murders of any citizens. The only deaths authenticated were those of the two Union soldiers killed when the riot was suppressed. In short, Sherman did not conduct war against civilians in the sense of killing women, children, or non-combatants in general” (p. 166).

A fascinating book that is recommended for academic, public, and school libraries as well as historical societies and state libraries.

Carol Walker Jordan, Ph.D., MLIS

### ***Such a Woman: The Life of Octavia Walton LeVert***

Paula Lenor Webb  
Intellect Publishing, 2021  
ISBN: 9781954693098  
395 p. \$14.95 (Pbk)



In *Such a Woman*, Paula Lenor Webb chronicles the life of Octavia Walton LeVert, an educated and influential Southern woman of means. “Socialite” does not do Octavia’s lived life justice; she was a master of social relationships. A descendant of one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence (George Walton), she benefited from being born to prestige and politics. However, birthright is only part of the story. Webb describes the intersections of Octavia’s education, personality, geographical and temporal location, creating a full and layered picture of this 19th century woman. Using excerpts from letters, journals, diaries, and newspapers, the author constructs Octavia’s biography in the context of her time and from the perspective of her peers, colleagues, and family.

Octavia Walton LeVert was born in Augusta, Georgia on August 11, 1810. She passed away on March 12, 1877, in Augusta. During the intervening years, Octavia lived in frontier Florida (Pensacola), and Mobile, Alabama; she traveled to New Orleans, Washington, D.C., New York, London, Florence, and Paris, establishing a diverse network of friends and allies along the way. Her relationships culminated in the Salon that she maintained in Mobile, until 1865. Octavia, “Madame LeVert,” brought together thinkers and doers, men and women from all regions of the United States and other parts of the world. She believed in the value of civil discourse, and the Salon modeled her belief in the promise of meaningful human connections.

Octavia’s education not only prepared her for the opportunities of her time, but also generated opportunities as well. By the age of twelve, Octavia could speak English, French, and Spanish, and assisted with translation of professional communications. Her mother and grandmother guided her early education, exemplifying women as educators and experts. Her grandmother high-