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Alan Michael Brennert

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About this Person

Born: May 30, 1954 in Englewood, New Jersey, United States

Nationality: American

Occupation: Novelist

Other Names: Brennert, Alan; Bryant, Michael

Updated: Dec. 6, 2013

PERSONAL INFORMATION:

Born May 30, 1954, in Englewood, NJ; son of Herbert Edward (an aviation writer and sheet metal operator) and Almyra E. (an apartment rentals manager) Brennert; married Paulette Claus, 1996. **Education:** Attended William Paterson State College, 1972-73; California State University, Long Beach, B.A., 1977; University of California, Los Angeles, graduate study, 1977-78. **Memberships:** Writers Guild of America. **Addresses:** Home: Los Angeles, CA. Agent: Molly Friedrich, Friedrich Agency, 136 E. 57th St., New York, NY 10022. **E-mail:** alan@alanbrennert.com.

CAREER:

Freelance writer, 1978--. Worked on television series, including *Buck Rogers in the Twenty-fifth Century*, story editor, 1979-80, *The Twilight Zone*, executive story consultant, 1985-87, *L.A. Law*, supervising producer, 1991-92, *Odyssey 5*, consulting producer, 2002-03, and *Enterprise*, consulting producer, 2004-05.

AWARDS:

Writers Guild of America Award nomination for outstanding teleplay in a dramatic series, 1983, for "Closed Circuit"; *Kindred Spirits* was named one of the most outstanding books of the year by the University of Iowa's Books for Young Adults Program, 1985; Emmy Award for outstanding drama series, Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, 1991 (with others), and nominations for outstanding writing in a drama series, 1991 (with others), and outstanding drama series, 1992 (with others), all for *L.A. Law*; Nebula Award for short story, Science Fiction Writers of America, 1991, for "Ma Qui."

WORKS:

WRITINGS:

NOVELS

- *City of Masques*, Playboy Press (Chicago, IL), 1978.
- *Kindred Spirits*, Tor Books (New York, NY), 1984, reprinted, Forge (New York, NY), 1999.
- *Time and Chance*, Tor Books (New York, NY), 1990.
- *Batman: Holy Terror* (graphic novel, illustrated by Norm Breyfogle), DC Comics (New York, NY), 1991.
- *Moloka'i*, St. Martin's Press (New York, NY), 2003.
- *Honolulu*, St. Martin's Press (New York, NY), 2009.
- *Palisades Park*, St. Martin's Press (New York, NY), 2013.

SHORT STORIES

- *Her Pilgrim Soul and Other Stories* (also see below), Tor Books (New York, NY), 1990.
- *Ma Qui and Other Phantoms*, Pulphouse (Eugene, OR), 1991.

Work represented in anthologies, including *Soul: An Archeology, Readings from Socrates to Ray Charles*, edited by Phil Cousineau, HarperCollins (San Francisco, CA), 1994; *Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman Present Treasures of Fantasy*, edited by Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman, HarperPrism (New York, NY), 1997; *The Year's Best Science Fiction: Fifteenth Annual Collection*, edited by Gardner Dozois, St. Martin's Griffin (New York, NY), 1998; and *The American Fantasy Tradition*, edited by Brian M. Thomson, Tor Books (New York, NY), 2002. Also contributor of short stories to periodicals, including *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*.

OTHER

- "Closed Circuit" (television play), *Darkroom*, American Broadcasting Company (ABC), 1981.
- "Her Pilgrim Soul" (television play; also see below), *The Twilight Zone*, Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), 1985.
- (With Jeff Melvoin) "Outpost" (television play), *CBS Summer Playhouse*, CBS, 1989.
- (Author of book) *Weird Romance: Two One-Act Musicals of Speculative Fiction* (contains "The Girl Who Was Plugged In," based on a short story by James Tiptree, Jr., and "Her Pilgrim Soul"; first produced Off-Broadway at WPA Theater, 1992; revised version produced as a staged reading Off-Broadway at York Theatre, 2004), lyrics by David Spencer, music by Alan Menken, Samuel French (New York, NY), 1993.
- (With J.D. Feigelson) *The Lake* (television play), National Broadcasting Company (NBC), 1998.

Author, sometimes under pseudonym Michael Bryant, of more than thirty scripts for television series, including *Buck Rogers in the Twenty-fifth Century*, *China Beach*, *L.A. Law*, *Outer Limits*, *Simon and Simon*, *The Mississippi*, *The New Adventures of Wonder Woman*, and *The Twilight Zone*. Author of comic book scripts for *Detective Comics*, *Batman: Black and White*, *Brave and the Bold*, *Daredevil*, *Christmas with the Super Heroes*, and *Secret Origins*.

Sidelights

Alan Brennert is the author of novels, short stories, and plays for both stage and television. According to a contributor to the *St. James Guide to Horror, Ghost and Gothic Writers*, Brennert "believes in ghosts. Not literally, perhaps, but he recognizes that most people's lives are perpetually haunted by images of 'phantoms': the people we've lost touch with, the people we've never met, the people we no longer are, the people we may or may not become. And while conveying this philosophy in fiction logically leads Brennert to forms of the ghost story, the results are rarely horrific, for his spirits are usually benign, ready to help characters better understand themselves and possibly gain a second chance in life."

Among Brennert's popular novels is *Kindred Spirits*, the story of a man and woman who separately attempt suicide at Christmas and who, while recovering in the hospital, meet on a spiritual plane and become friends. Upon reawakening, the pair forget their otherworldly meeting and go their separate ways but remain changed by their experience. Observing that the tale is sometimes "cloying," the *St. James Guide to Horror, Ghost and Gothic Writers* contributor nonetheless found that the characters eventually "transcend self-pity ... and their final happiness seems fully earned."

Among the author's numerous dramas is *Weird Romance: Two One-Act Musicals of Speculative Fiction*. First performed in 1992, the musicals include music by Alan Menken and lyrics by David Spencer. The first play, "The Girl Who Was Plugged In," is based on a story by James Tiptree, Jr. Set in 2061, it is a love story featuring a bag lady who is given a new body created from several cells collected from a placenta. "Her Pilgrim Soul," based on a story by Brennert, features a holographic image that develops an individual life, which includes a potential relationship with its creator. Writing for *Back Stage*, Roy Sander called "Her Pilgrim Soul" an "ultimately touching blend of romance and the supernatural."

Published in 2003, Brennert's novel *Moloka'i* features Rachel Kalama, a native Hawaiian with leprosy. The story follows Rachel beginning in Honolulu in 1891 through the 1960s. Rachel contracts leprosy, and she is eventually sent to the Kalaupapa leprosy settlement on the isolated island of Moloka'i to be cared for in a hospital staffed by Catholic nuns. Except for her father, Rachel has no contact with her family. Many of the young friends she does make end up dying. It is only her relationship with Sister Catherine that helps her make it through the tough times. The novel follows Rachel as she witnesses historic events in a changing Hawaii. The author also details the disease of leprosy and the search for a cure, which occurred in the 1940s with the advent of sulfa derivatives. Eventually, a cured Rachel returns to Honolulu only to find that the sleepy village she left behind is now a major metropolitan city. "Leprosy may seem a macabre subject, but Brennert transforms the material into a touching, lovely account of a woman's journey," wrote a reviewer in *Publishers Weekly*. Noting that the novel is "not a comfortable read," a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor nevertheless called *Moloka'i* "certainly instructive."

Brennert returns to Hawaii for his 2009 novel, *Honolulu*. This time Brennert tells the immigrant story of a young Korean girl named Regret who becomes a "picture bride" and travels to Hawaii in 1914. In an interview for the *Copperfield Books* Web site, the author commented on why he chose a young Korean woman as his protagonist. He remarked: "I became fascinated by the role of women in Korean society; it was probably a more oppressive environment for women than in any other Asian culture of the time. It wasn't hard to see why so many women jumped at the chance to become picture brides: to gain a degree of freedom and adventure in their lives that they might never have experienced had they stayed in Korea. It struck me as an ideal motivation for my protagonist."

Although Regret is promised to be married to an affluent man who would provide her with an education, she instead is matched with a poor laborer who takes out his embitterment and anger on his new wife. Regret ends up renaming herself Jin and eventually decides to forge a new life. Helped by a group of fellow "picture brides," Jin's growth into a prosperous life coincides with the growth of Honolulu from a small territorial capital into a large city made up of people from numerous cultures. The events in Jin's life mix with

actual events in Honolulu's history, including the notorious Massie Affair of 1932, in which authorities wrongly accused five Hawaiian men of raping a naval officer's white wife. Writing for the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Regan McMahon called *Honolulu* "a moving, multilayered epic by a master of historical fiction, in which one immigrant's journey helps us understand our nation's 'becoming.'" In a review for *Booklist*, Carol Haggas commented that the novel is "immense in its dramatic scope yet intimate in its emotive detail."

The "protagonist" of *Palisades Park* in a larger sense is the title character, the New Jersey amusement park that provided entertainment for generations of people along the East Coast. The novel begins in 1922, when Eddie Stopka first visits the park with his family and is enchanted by it. Later, he suffers the effects of the Great Depression and his home life collapses, but he returns to the park to become a french-fry vendor. He marries Adele, a former child actress and also a park concessionaire, and in time they have two children, Toni and Jack. During World War II, Eddie joins the navy, but he returns to the park after the war. The novel goes on to chronicle the postwar fortunes of the park, including the impact of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, when the park's policy of admitting only whites to the pool comes under intense scrutiny. Meanwhile, the novel focuses on Toni, who has become a lifeguard and who pursues her dream of becoming one of the nation's only female high divers. The novel follows the fortunes of both the family and the park for a half century until the park's closure in 1974. In a larger sense, the novel, according to Sarah Grant in a review in *Booklist*, "effectively captures twentieth-century American history from the unique perspective of the park and the lives of those who work there."

Critics uniformly greeted the novel with high praise. Beth Gibbs, in *Library Journal*, praised the novel for its "strong sense of place" and for being "thoroughly researched." Focusing on Toni, Gibbs concluded that the novel is a "nostalgic coming-of-age tale of a little girl with big dreams" and calls it "the perfect read." A contributor to *Kirkus Reviews* called the novel "thoughtful" and "literate," as well as a "pleasure to read." A *Publishers Weekly* contributor, lauding the novel for its "evocative descriptions," wrote that Brennert "convincingly incorporates into the narrative authentic figures and anecdotes about the park" Finally, Jacqueline Cutler, in a review for *NJ.com*, called the book "a perfect novel" and concluded that Brennert "gracefully conjures up a place and time that is no more, reminding us of the park's intoxicating scents and its thrills."

Brennert once told *CA*: "Throughout my career I've tried to divide my time between writing books and writing for the screen. In actual practice, for many years the majority of my work was done for television, with occasional books and short stories written in between script assignments. With the success of my novel *Moloka'i*, however, this ratio has been happily reversed and I'm now able to write novels full-time, with occasional sidebars of script work.

"The characters of my novels have also changed since *Moloka'i*. My earlier novels, character-driven contemporary fantasies, had fair amounts of autobiography in them. *Kindred Spirits*, as I told *CA* back in the day, had its roots in a period of my own youthful despair. *Time and Chance* was written shortly after my mother's death at the age of sixty-seven, and much of her is present in the character of Richard's mother, Elsie (Elsie was my mom's middle name). And I've written elsewhere of how 'Her Pilgrim Soul' was written as a farewell to a friend who died much too young, at thirty-seven.

"But these days I find myself more interested in historical lives. Maybe this is part of the process of maturing: When we're young we think our feelings and experiences are unique and we can't stop talking about them; but as we grow older we start to see things in a logical perspective, and realize how much of what we go through in our lives has been happening to human beings for millennia, and that our lives are just part of a larger story. Whatever the reasons, I'm now a historical novelist. Writing historical fiction is in some ways similar to writing fantasy: in each genre you're creating a different world for a reader to experience. In fantasy you have to craft a world in which fantastic things happen plausibly and realistically; in historical fiction you're creating a past world, one that also has to be realistically crafted or it will not convince. I find I enjoy doing this, both the research and the writing, and though I continue to write the occasional fantasy short story (such as the one I recently published in Carol Sterling's fiftieth-anniversary *Twilight Zone* anthology) I think I've found my niche as a novelist. I'm currently researching a new novel, and though it's set in one of my childhood haunts in New Jersey, the time period is more that of my parents' era (primarily the 1930s, '40s, and '50s).

"It's been immensely gratifying to find a whole new readership with these novels, but it's been equally satisfying to hear from readers of my fantasy, television, and comics work, who've followed me to this new genre. My career has really been all over the map, and I truly appreciate all those who've taken this journey with me."

FURTHER READINGS:

FURTHER READINGS ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

BOOKS

- Lofficier, Randy and Jean-Marc, *Into the Twilight Zone: The Rod Serling Programme Guide*, Virgin (London, England), 1995.
- *St. James Guide to Horror, Ghost and Gothic Writers*, St. James Press (Detroit, MI), 1998.

PERIODICALS

- *Back Stage*, July 3, 1992, Roy Sander, review of *Weird Romance: Two One-Act Musicals of Speculative Fiction*, p. 24.
- *Booklist*, February 15, 2009, Carol Haggas, review of *Honolulu*, p. 30; February 15, 2013, Sarah Grant, review of *Palisades Park*, p. 37.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, September 1, 2003, review of *Moloka'i*, p. 1086.
- *Library Journal*, January 1, 2009, Beth Gibbs, review of *Honolulu*, p. 77; February 1, 2013, Beth Gibbs, review of *Palisades Park*, p. 59.
- *New York Times*, June 23, 1992, Mel Gussow, review of *Weird Romance*, p. C14.

- *Publishers Weekly*, September 1, 2003, review of *Moloka'i*, p. 63; October 20, 2008, review of *Honolulu*, p. 29.
- *San Francisco Chronicle*, March 21, 2009, Regan McMahon, review of *Honolulu*, p. E2; February 25, 2013, review of *Palisades Park*, p. 138.
- *Time*, July 6, 1992, review of *Weird Romance*, p. 77.

ONLINE

- *Alan Brennert Home Page*, <http://www.alanbrennert.com> (May 7, 2013).
- *Copperfield's Books Web site*, <http://copperfieldsbooks.com/> (February, 2009), "Alan Brennert Interview."
- *Internet Movie Database*, <http://www.imdb.com> (May 7, 2013).
- *NJ.com*, <http://www.nj.com/> (April 14, 2013), Jacqueline Cutler, review of *Palisades Park*.*

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