

Craig Laurance Gidney writes both contemporary and genre fiction. Recipient of the 1996 Susan C. Petrey Scholarship to the Clarion West Writers Workshop, Gidney has published works in the fantasy/science fiction, gay and young adult categories. These works include "A Bird of Ice" (from the anthology *So Fey: Queer Fairy Fiction*), which was on the short list for the 2008 Gaylactic Spectrum Award; "The Safety of Thorns," which received special notice by editor Ellen Datlow in her 2006 Year's Best Fantasy Horror summary; and the young adult piece "Mauve's Quilt" (from the anthology *Magic in the Mirrorstone*).

Gidney's first collection, *Sea, Swallow Me and Other Stories*, was nominated for the 2009 Lambda Literary Award in the Science Fiction/Fantasy and Horror category. *Bereft* is his first novel. His website is [www.craiglaurancegidney.com](http://www.craiglaurancegidney.com).



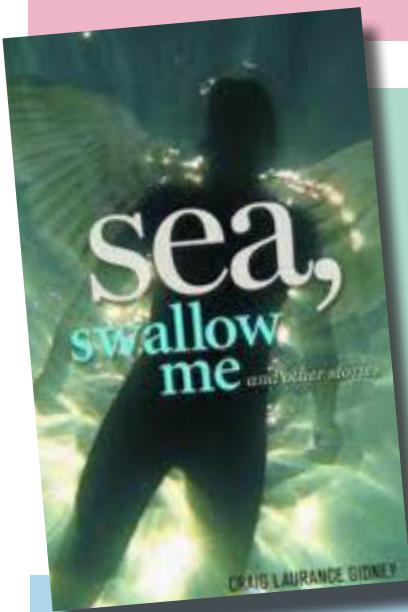
## PRAISE AND REVIEWS FOR THE FICTION OF CRAIG LAURANCE GIDNEY

**C**raig Laurance Gidney loves words ... sensually, sexually, omnivorously. He streams out floods of them in his stories so that you, too, can taste their deliciousness. He wields them with abandon and precision to create little worlds that rise off the page and engulf you in snow globes of sparkling beauty and perceptiveness. Each story in his latest collection, *Sea, Swallow Me and Other Stories*, has a strong immersive effect.

*The Fix*

**G**idney's stories often center around being African American and being gay, which is a fascinating viewpoint and part of why I like to read: because I get a chance to experience other lifestyles and racial backgrounds. The author, who is gay and black himself, creates vibrant and real characters that I identify with and care about. There is a lyrical mysticism in much of the writing that made me want to read the stories out loud.

From *Tor.com*, October 18, 2008



**S**ea, *Swallow Me* is a wonderfully original and eventful collection, whose stories range from the supernatural to the historical to the right-now moment. Craig Gidney combines an exceptional gift for prose poetry—often as dark and steely as it is beautiful—with an unerring sense of the preposterous and the horrifying. (But add to that also occasional hilarity that should make a stone laugh aloud.) He breaks rules and remakes them, as many talented writers will, and is undaunted by the murks of society or psyche. Though inevitably (and rightly) he brings to his work the voices of Black and Gay Experience, what speaks most strongly throughout is the Human Experience—yes, even when confronted by a god of the sea. Here are elements of the young Ray Bradbury, of John Steinbeck, of Toni Morrison and James Baldwin and Angela Carter. But most of all it is the uniqueness of Gidney's own take on life, clad in vivid, cunning and, in places, Dionysian language, that make this a must-read (and read again) collection. With new writers producing work of this caliber, the future of books looks bright.

—Tanith Lee, World Fantasy Award winner

I loved this book! It is the first short story collection from Craig Laurance Gidney and reading it, and then re-reading it, made me wish it was a longer collection or a part of a series. Gidney's voice is very assured and he expertly switches back and forth between first and third person narratives and different times and locales with ease.

Gidney's use of language is hauntingly beautiful and at once put me in mind of Tanith Lee or Storm Constantine. I also loved the way that he would play with myth and folklore, putting his own unique signature on them; from an African sea god to Desire personified, I found them all hard to shake as I proceeded to the next story.

It's hard to pick a favorite out of all these perfect gems but both "Etiolate" and "Strange Alphabets" spring immediately to mind. I loved the spin on the life of Arthur Rimbaud who is "cursed by poetry." And the story of Oliver, who must come to terms with what he desires and his own need to be wanted was darkly erotic. "Catch Him by the Toe" is straight up horror where a small town becomes a hunting ground for a creature bent on revenge, while "Circus-Boy Without a Safety Net" is a coming out story of a boy who follows his patron saint Lena Horne to New York.

Each and every tale in this collection is a joy to read and I was very happy I sought this book out. I hope you do the same! And thanks to Mr. Gidney; I can't wait for what's coming next!

from *Benito Corral Reviews*, January 2010

Craig Laurance Gidney's exciting and impressive debut story collection *Sea, Swallow Me* traverses centuries of time and different continents depicting characters across a range of races and sexualities. In "The Safety of Thorns" a slave named Israel Jones encounters a man he assumes to be the devil and whom he believes makes him and a girl temporarily invulnerable. In "Etiolate" a student artist named Oliver feels isolated and treated like a novelty in the Baltimore club scene because of his skin color. His self consciousness about being objectified is turned outward as he begins to objectify others. When his desire turns into a power that obliterates the men he picks up, he must find a way to radically redefine himself.

Often the stories in this collection dip into fantastical realms describing characters who detect regions of spiritual or supernatural existence that are not immediately apparent to others. In "Come Join We" the narrator Aime is literally able to detect people's auras and see and hear the dead like a medium. Frequently in these stories there is a sense that the characters are tempted to eschew the physical world in favour of a more ethereal existence. The title story "Sea, Swallow Me" describes a man who feels out of place as a tourist on a Caribbean island. Whilst longing for a deeper connection with the place which he feels rejected by, he sacrifices himself to the ocean in a religious ritual. Many of the characters' fractured sense of identity can only become whole again by traversing the boundaries of their circumscribed ordinary existence. A rare security of being is achieved in one of the more straight-forward stories "Circus Boy Without a Safety Net" where an

Rafael Fannen is indeed young (14 years old), gifted (recipient of a minority scholarship to an all-male Catholic preparatory school), and black. He is also caught in a world where everything he relied upon is changing as he himself is changing. Rafe must confront the strange culture of his new school while contending with a mother who believes she is talking to angels. On the weekends, he tries to relate to his ex-con father's latest commercial venture involving selling African related masks and spiritual items.

And at school he repeats to himself the mantra: "No homo." The primary characters in *Bereft* are full-bodied and real. Rafe is a young man caught between multiple worlds. As Rafe's mother, Ursele, succumbs to the images overcoming her reality, the reader can understand her needs and desires. His father develops into a real person, after his distance from being incarcerated. When Rafe is suspected of vandalizing the school and also of being homosexual, tension mounts, although not quite with the expected results.

Although it is difficult to determine where and when this novel takes place, Gidney's descriptions are strong and vivid. Rafe's experiences are full of sound, texture, and feeling. Gidney is masterful in his portrayal of the dichotomous elements of life—of light and dark; good and evil; black and white—and how Rafe must come to an understanding of the shades of grey.

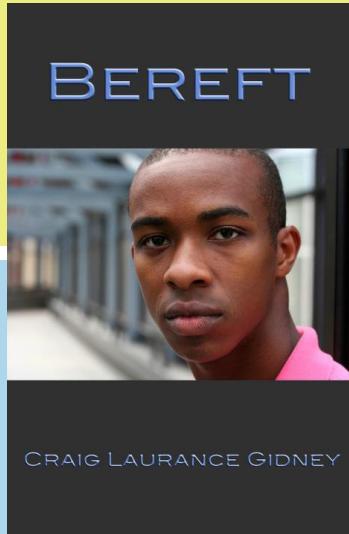
isolated boy from a rural area travels to Manhattan and attends a Lena Horn drag performance.

It's touching when we catch glimpses of the unique central characters in this collection through the eyes of other characters. The point of view is re-shifted from one immersed in a fable-like narrative to one grounded in a more physical reality. This frequently takes place throughout the stories when an encounter with a fantastical being is shunned in favour of a connection to an individual who genuinely values the dislocated central character. Such is the case in "A Bird of Ice" where a twelfth century Japanese monk develops a dangerous relationship with a shape-shifter, but finally relocates himself by achieving an intimacy with one of the other monks.

Gidney's imagery is inventive and his descriptions are sometimes like an impressionistic painting: "A suggestion of wings, the stem of a neck. Etched on the darkness, a transparent bird." One of the most ambitious stories "Strange Alphabets" describes the poet Rimbaud on a journey where the encounters he has and the things he sees are heavily coded with a meaning unique to the rogue poet genius. Each story in the collection is uniquely structured and laden with rich informed details showing that the writer has a strong sense of craft while being able to explore variations on his central themes of identity,

alienation and the interplay of the supernatural with the real world. The intriguing set of characters' flirtations with what is divine lead to surprising discoveries. These stories are engrossing, each confidently and imaginatively narrated while incorporating elements of mythology with a modern sensibility.

from *Chroma*, March 9, 2009



*Bereft* tells the story of a black male teen living with a family becoming more dysfunctional over time, who does not want to succumb to the allure of the streets, and is suddenly submerged into a predominantly all-white male, religion-oriented, and strange, world. Gidney introduces multiple thematic issues including racism (from more than one perspective), mental illness, homelessness, religious/spiritual perspectives, parent-child

relationships, and homosexuality. Given the number of complex, interrelated issues, which are indeed representative of an adolescent's life, the reader desires more than Gidney provides in the 200 pages of the novel. Essentially, the one flaw of the novel is that there is simply not enough. *Bereft* might be more satisfying to the reader if it had included enhancements to the characters, settings, and history. Because of Gidney's adeptness at characterization, description and emotionalism, there is a feeling this gifted author should—and could—provide more—that there is so much more Gidney wants and should say.

Gidney's storytelling abilities, complemented by his deftness with words and strong writing skills, result in an outstanding contribution to the young adult genre. The believably realized characters, strong description, and relevant knowledge of the adolescent experience, when combined with his willingness to take on the "hard" controversial issues facing today's youth's marks him as an author to watch. Undoubtedly his future work will be even more rewarding for readers.

from Lambda Literary Foundation, June 24, 2013