

Dystortions: 100 Hues of Purple: Mystery, Murder, and Love in a Parallel Universe

Lisa Pell

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This is a thought-provoking science fiction novel full of mystery and excitement.

In her fascinating and haunting science fiction novel, *Dystortions: 100 Hues of Purple*, Lisa Pell examines the folly of man through the eyes of a woman on death row, with the help of some strange radio transmissions from a parallel universe.

The action takes place on the planet Malaprop, which is similar to Earth, but with various degrees of difference in its people, places, things, and ideas. The main character, Addy, is an intelligent and pragmatic woman who finds love where she least expects it—with her next-door neighbor. They marry after a whirlwind romance. However, the catalyst that brought them together will also tear them apart. Addy finds herself on death row, and with nothing but time on her hands, she learns the history of Malaprop by watching history programs and reading.

Pell provides insightful, witty, and biting commentary of Malaprop's history, laws, and social conditions. For example, she observes how different parallel Earths interpret sacred texts: "All these different versions, some slightly altering a single nuance to dramatically change the meaning of a particular commandment, admonition, or parable, like a hundred hues of prose." The analysis of a parallel universe—from the perspective of a planet that is, in turn, taking its cues from another parallel universe—provides a bird's-eye view that makes it easy to discern the good from the bad.

On both a macro and a micro level, Pell masterfully demonstrates humanity's need for narratives to explain where we came from and where we're going. On death row, Addy goes to a place in her mind where she can survive her current realities: "She could explore the cosmos and put thought together in amusing amalgamations of whimsy, hope, and maybe even a little healthy revenge to keep her sanity. Fantasy was becoming a way of life." Addy is an endearing character whose growth is enabled by her studies and the prisoners she meets along her journey.

Through Addy's encounters with other prisoners, she copes with the crushing gravity of her situation. She is able to find humor, and to give and receive sympathy. These interactions move the character development and the plot forward. Some are funny, while others are heartbreaking and maddening, but all of them give clues and glimpses into Addy's psyche and the strange parallel universe in which the story is set.

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DANIEL L. THACKER (September 7, 2016)

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