**The Fault Mirror Media Kit**

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**Author Bio**

Catherine Fearns is a writer and musician from Liverpool, UK. Her Amazon-bestselling *Reprobation* series of crime fiction novels is published by Northodox Press, and her first historical fiction novel, *All The Parts Of The Soul*, was released in October 2023 by Quill & Crow Publishing House. She has also been widely published as a music journalist, specializing in heavy metal. As a composer her sheet music is published by Universal Edition, and her solo albums released on Blue Spiral Records. She has four children and lives in Geneva.

**Author Blurb**

*Everyone sees the house they want to see…*

Paris, 1900: Amidst the decadence of the Belle Époque, American heiress Lydia Temple falls in love with ethereal aristocrat Séraphine de Valleiry, and builds her a whimsical castle in the Swiss mountains. The Chateau des Miroirs becomes a bastion of spiritualism until it is taken over by sinister forces during the First World War. And then it disappears. Or did it ever really exist?

Oxford, 2035: Elderly professor Cyrus Field is rapidly losing his sight and his will to live, when student Haydn Young presents him with a collection of letters previously lost to history. These letters may contain the answer to the philosophical problem that has been his life’s work. But does he really want to know the truth? With war closing in, Cyrus and Haydn must decide whether to risk everything in the quest for knowledge.

The mystery of the Chateau des Miroirs reverberates through the generations, connecting two souls that are destined to find each other.

**Genre:**

Historical/speculative fiction

**Theme/vibes**:

Belle Epoque, First World War, steampunk, dark academia, time, war, romance, quantum physics, the occult.

**Short Book Excerpt:**

“So, there you have it. The Problem of the Disappearing House. It wasn’t there, then it was, then it wasn’t.”

Professor Cyrus Field varied his telling of the story each time, embellishing a detail here and there, adding or removing a little piece of dialogue. But he always followed the telling with a dramatic flourish of his black gown as he moved from lectern to window. Once, his movement had been a sudden trademark dart, an impassioned flurry of almost unhinged energy to rouse the students’ minds. Nowadays, it was more of a shuffle.

The seminar room was as much a relic as he was. The top floor of the chapter house, annexed to the college chapel, had been built in the 1500s and changed little in over five hundred years. It was ice cold year-round, and dust gathered in the low vaults where crumbling Protestant whitewash gradually revealed the Catholic frescoes beneath. The only furniture consisted of an old wooden lectern that had once, many centuries before, been a pulpit in the cathedral; two rows of wooden desk-bench structures that students had to slide into awkwardly; and a battered whiteboard on wheels, with its built-in tray of colored marker pens and cloth eraser. The whiteboard was a palimpsest of decades of his scribbles. He kept it partly because he preferred to write things the old-fashioned way, and partly because he knew the students found it quirkily twentieth-century.

The window looked out of the back of the college. He turned away from the students and gazed out across the sea of low morning mist, blanketing the city and pierced by spires. He took a pipe and a silver tobacco box from his tweed pocket and used the window ledge as a table for his ritual, trying to ignore the shake in his hands that was making this process increasingly difficult. Flakes of tobacco spilled onto the windowsill as he tipped and pressed them into his pipe, and he swept them carelessly onto the floor with his fingers. He lit his pipe languidly and looked out across the cloudsea.

He enjoyed the silence of his students deep in thought, as much as he enjoyed the clichéd silhouette that he made, the wistful old professor. He tried to ignore the failing sight that meant he could no longer make out the legions of gargoyles adorning the sandstone spires. Now it was only a general impression of Gothic elegance, with the details filled in by memory. But memory could get you far. Memory was malleable, elastic, molded by desire. If he wanted to embellish the stone figures and grotesques in his mind’s eye, make them into something they were not, where was the harm?

Finally, Cyrus turned to the room in a puff of smoke, with the nihilism that ensured no one had ever complained.

“Thoughts?”

He would vary the way he said this, too, because his tone colored the students’ responses, and wasn’t his life’s work to get as many responses as possible? Today, he opted for earnest, approachable, open to ideas. The room was gradually bathed in a tobacco haze as he awaited the first brave soul. Twenty of the world’s finest young minds taking Introduction to Philosophy, minds sent to him each year to attempt to solve the unsolvable.

A few tentative hands raised. He knew there would be some prepared answers. Professor Field’s Disappearing House Problem was a college legend, and this new crop of young people would have been prepped by the second-year philosophers, just as decades of second-year philosophers had done before them. Last year’s group had come in terrified, a couple of them almost in tears, as they had been pranked with the rumor that Cyrus was a tyrant who would have them sent down from the university if they got the answer wrong.

He pointed to a confident-looking boy. He could gauge the confidence by how the boy leaned back in his chair, twirling a pencil. Body language was everything to Cyrus nowadays, since he could no longer make out people’s features. Encroaching blindness was bringing out his other senses, making him realize how little he had made use of them before. He guessed this boy was from Eton or similar, most likely.

“She has schizophrenia. The house is in her head.”

*Never heard that one before.*

He scribbled on the whiteboard. The red pen squeaked and ran dry, so he threw it on the floor with the abandon that was part of his act, and picked up a green, inhaling the chemical scent of toxic ink as he removed the lid and poised to write. “Next?”

“He’s gaslighting her,” said someone. “The house is there, but he refuses to see it and convinces her that she is imagining things.”

“Not bad, but since this is a philosophy and not a psychology class, let’s go a bit deeper. Clear your minds of preconceptions. What is it they say in those tech companies and consultancies that most of you will end up in? Blue sky thinking. No wrong answers.” He winced to himself as he said this, a relic statement of his from seminars past. Seminars from times of hope. They all knew that few of these students would be following their dream careers.

“They’re in a movie.”

“A computer game.”

“It’s a drug-induced hallucination.”

“A timeslip into a different dimension.”

“They’re in two different versions of a multiverse.”

“It’s a hologram.”

*“Déjà vu*—past life regression.”

“She’s been hypnotised.”

“He’s been hypnotised.”

“She made a mistake with the geography. She’s mixing memories, conflating the place with another where she had actually been.”

“It’s entelechy—merely the potential for a house.”

“It’s a thought-form, a manifestation of the subconscious. Everyone dreams of their perfect house, their fairytale castle. And so everyone sees the house they want to see. Perhaps the guy just doesn’t have a dream house.”

“It’s Aristotle—the paradox of place. If the house has a place, then that place must have a place, ad infinitum—therefore it cannot exist.”

“It’s a metaphor for the difference between the male and female brain.”

“It’s a metaphor for the breakdown of a marriage.”

“It’s a metaphor for the decline of religion—they’re on a pilgrimage, and it failed. The holy grail was just a mirage.”

“It’s a made-up problem by a philosophy professor, an abstraction to make us think.”

There was nothing here he hadn’t heard a version of before, but he noted everything on the whiteboard and stored it in his mind. He loved the energy, the opening of minds to possibilities, the whirring of cerebral cogs.

**Quotations:**

*She wondered if they would spend the rest of their lives breaking their own hearts out of fear of breaking each other’s.*

*Here we are at the end of the world, and I have never been this happy.*

*Nothing is possible without love… for love puts one in the mood to risk everything.*

*Perhaps we cannot choose the path of romance without also choosing the path of ruin.*

*We look at ourselves in the fault mirror and see exactly what we are. And we carry on regardless.*

*If I had a God’s eye view of time, I would make sure no-one else did. I would do whatever is required to conceal that Archimedian point from the rest of the world. We must not know. We must believe that time exists. For without urgency, there is no yearning.*

*I must have done something good in a previous life, he said, suddenly. To be here with you now. After all my mistakes. I don’t know what on earth you see in me.*

*He felt he could sit on this bench for eternity. He felt he probably would.*

*If only the world were run by women, how easy everything would be.*

**Key points about the book**

* The Fault Mirror invites the reader to decide how a house could disappear. Depending on who you are, you might decide it’s a book about history, or geology, or physics, or philosophy… but it is also a book about love.
* The story is told using multiple timelines; part of the book is set in the 1900s, and this is told via letters from American heiress Miss Lydia Temple to the psychoanalyst Carl Jung. Another strand is set in the 1980s, while Cyrus, Haydn and Kathryn’s story is set in the near future. Everything is woven together through recurring motifs.
* *The Fault Mirror* is based on real places in the Haute Savoie area of France, just over the Swiss border near Geneva. La Mandallaz is a mountain that is filled with sulphuric springs, so it never snows there. It lies at the end of a geological fault and does indeed have a fault mirror. The Chateau des Miroirs is based on a real chateau in the area (Chateau des Avenières) which was built by an American heiress for her female lover in the 1920s and was indeed a centre for occult practices. It is now a luxury hotel. And the Gorges des Usses is a spectacular gorge, spanned by a whimsical bridge, that has a ruined C19th at the bottom.
* The phenomenon of a fault mirror is real. A fault mirror occurs when rocks slide past each other along a fault line during a seismic event, revealing a smooth, reflective new layer. But I made my fault mirrors far more shiny and spectacular! The Rochester effect, whereby a series of mirrors can make something invisible, is also a real optical phenomenon. The quantum physics in the book is also based on observable phenomena (wave function collapse, the Zeno paradox, monopoles). I am cavalier with my science but it is all theoretically possible!

**Main characters**

Lydia Temple

Miss Lydia Temple is a 35-year old American heiress who is a member of the Amazons, the demi-monde of intellectual lesbians who scandalised and entranced Belle Epoque Paris. She is a fictional character but is based partly on the real American heiress Mary Shillito who built the Chateau des Avenieres, and is also an amalgam of several of the real Amazons, who are her friends in the book – Natalie Clifford Barney, Pauline Tarn, Liane de Pougy.

Seraphine de Valleiry

Seraphine is an ethereal young French aristocrat with bright red hair, emerald eyes and paper-thin skin. Her impoverished family take her to the Folies Bergère in the hope of snaring a rich husband, but instead she falls in love with Lydia and they elope together to the Swiss mountains. Seraphine is interested in social welfare, left-wing politics and the occult. She brings theosophist and occult thinkers to the chateau, with otherworldly consequences.

Professor Cyrus Field

Cyrus is an 80-year old professor of philosophy at an Oxford University college. It is 2035 and the world is on the brink of nuclear war. Cyrus is a has-been, still peddling the same ‘Disappearing House’ problem to his first-year students that he has been teaching for fifty years. Since the mysterious death of his wife in the 1980s, his life has been dedicated to this one problem: how can a house disappear?

Haydn Young

Haydn is a first-year philosophy and physics student, who claims to be from Hong Kong and claims to be a great-niece of Carl Jung. She has bright red short hair, tattoos and piercings. She is quiet but strangely single-minded, determined that Cyrus help her investigate a collection of letters from the 1900s that she believes will solve his disappearing house problem.

**Prior publications**

Crime fiction: The Reprobation Series (*Reprobation, Consuming Fire, Sound, Lamb of God),* published by Northodox Press.

*Historical fiction: All The Parts Of The Soul,* published by Quill & Crow (2023)

Short stories and non-fiction pieces have appeared in: Here Comes Everyone, Toasted Cheese, This Is Lockdown, Offshoots, Succubus, Black Metal Rainbows, Metal Music Studies, Writing Magazine, Motherdom. Widely published as a music journalist.

**Prior awards**

*Reprobation*: Reader’s Favorite Silver Medal (2019), Page Turner Ebook of the Year (2020).

**Sample interview questions with answers**

Where did you get the idea for The Fault Mirror?

I was hiking on the Salève, a mountain just outside Geneva that I thought I knew well, when I suddenly came upon a magnificent stately home, almost a princess palace, that I had never seen before. I felt like it had appeared out of nowhere. And I wondered if I had dreamt it, or if a house could disappear. When I looked into the Chateau des Avenières (which is now a luxury hotel) I discovered that it had a fascinating and occult history.

On subsequent hikes in the area I discovered the Mandallaz fault mirror and the Gorge des Usses with its abandoned C19th spa, and a story began to write itself in my mind.

At the time I was also fascinated by the pre-WW1 period – the poignancy of it as a world on the cusp of modernity sleepwalks into horror.

Why did you decide to compose music to accompany this book?

For me writing and composing are all part of the same creative process, and when I’m in a writing mode I’m usually in a composing mode as well. The Impressionist composers Debussy and Ravel are mentioned in the book, and I love how they were able to create moods and tell stories. Satie’s *Je Te Veux* waltz is also a recurring motif in the book, so I incorporated a similar waltz effect into my Fault Mirror piece. I thought it would be interesting to combine book launch events with a concert and make a multi-aesthetic experience.

Who is your favourite character?

Lydia is my favourite character and was the easiest to write – her voice came to me very naturally. She is based on the real heiress Mary Shillito, but I also made her an amalgam of several well-known ‘scandalous’ literary women of the Belle Epoque – I even took some of her figures of speech from the letters of Natalie Clifford Barney.

What were the technical challenges of writing this book?

Switching between voices was definitely the biggest challenge, as the book takes place in several different time periods, and some of the story is told by letter.

The scientific aspects were challenging too. Even though is it speculative fiction, I wanted the science to be believable, so I did a lot of research, delving into fields of physics, optics and geology that I barely understand.

And finally, reaching a denouement that resolves the questions of the book while leaving some aspects open to reader interpretation. The reader is almost invited to be one of Cyrus’ students.

What are you working on now?

I have returned to my crime fiction series, *Reprobation*, after a couple of years writing other things, and I am working on the 5th instalment in the series which has a working title of *At The Gates.*

What themes keep recurring in your novels?

Time, quantum physics, geology and maps, the occult, unintended consequences of technology. There are motifs that recur across my books as well: TS Eliot, monopoles, birds as augurs, the scarab beetle and the nature of coincidence, houses that defy geometry, cliff edges… I’m only just realising this now!