*Silkie: World One, World Two,* a novel by David Rothgery, explores the tensions between living the safe life and reaching for meaning beyond it. The novel centers on Stephen—a divorced, middle-aged professor, disillusioned, weary of his mundane, circumscribed existence—and his new student, Silkie—a 23-year-old, homeless schizoaffective with a split personality.

By the dictates of convention and his profession, Stephen occupies the world of social mores, bureaucratic policies, and moral precepts. Since childhood, however, he has been afflicted by an acute awareness of the randomness of suffering, and, in recent years, has become increasingly troubled by the inadequacy of conventional thinking and perception to account for it. Indeed, Stephen’s quest to grasp the harsh terms of human existence has shaped him into a seeker.

Soaking wet from the Oregon rain, Silkie shows up in Stephen’s college writing class after enrollment has closed. Sensing a kindred spirit in her elusive but intense presence, Stephen decides to break the rules and, ignoring college policy, he lets her in.

Over time, reading through her journal full of Escher-like fractal drawings and puzzling, remarkable descriptions of distant times and places, Stephen is increasingly drawn to her eccentric, bifurcated vision of the universe. In fact, Silkie appears to already inhabit an uncertain, treacherous world, which Stephen braces himself to explore, while she continues to navigate conventionality, as both a student and a mother. He struggles to comprehend who she is: a quiet, lonely student living an unorthodox life, or a mysterious young woman caught up in a metaphysical journey. *Silkie* is an existential love story because a passionate search for comprehension and meaning, rather than for romance, drives their complex relationship.

This unusual tale of impassioned seeking, involving a professor and his enigmatic student, leads Stephen, as it does the reader, to confront the inexplicable nature of human suffering and to risk a glimpse into the fractured mosaic of life. Ultimately, Stephen jeopardizes his career, relationships, and even his sanity.

Inevitably, by way of a mysterious voice mail, his relationship with Silkie intensifies. He becomes obsessed . . . while she disappears. Reeling from Silkie’s disappearance, Stephen descends into near despair. Teetering between diverging perceptions of the world, and reflecting on Silkie’s appearance in his life and the resulting psychic disruption, Stephen discovers within himself an urgent need for an alternative truth outside the boundaries of normal life. One day he walks out of his classroom, to search for Silkie, and for meaning itself.

What Readers Say

*“This book is a very thoughtful read. The story is pegged to a myriad of world events that at first seem random and later begin to play a subtle part in the greater storyline. The author has very skillfully created a novel that weaves a personal dream which draws you in until you, like the Professor, are caught in a very different version of the world around us. Seemingly random events crowd each other for attention, demanding to be seen as important. [Silkie] stretches the mind to think in new paradigms.”*

*“Feels like all of life is being gathered in. . . . I was especially touched by the overall drive of the narration—the coming to grips with loneliness and whatever else might attack “normalcy.” The incipient madness—the narrator teetering throughout—offers the sense that a person’s secret inner pain can be acknowledged . . . .”*

*“When World One is no longer enough, and glimpses of World Two make you call World One into question, something like a disruption happens. I was glad to know that not only I, but also others, experience this disruption.”*

*“We, too, are split selves, mainly (competently) living in the World One of our jobs and family ties. Like the protagonist, we have our own evidence (and needs for) a realm free of space/time and the fragmentation of our file-cabinet minds. For men, this world may be accessed through a female guide. So Silkie speaks to us compellingly.”*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Rothgery, author of *Silkie: World One, World Two,* is a novelist and short story writer based in Eugene, Oregon, where he also teaches literature. David is currently working on *Little Mozarts, Little Kings*, a novel whose backdrop is the Civil Rights movement and is set both in 1950’s Ohio and in Freedom Summer, Mississippi, 1964.

In both *Silkie: World One, World Two* and *Little Mozarts, Little Kings*, Rothgery draws upon his living and teaching (secondary and higher education) in the United States, Nigeria, Kenya, and Micronesia, and on his travels to Africa, Europe, and Central America. The interweaving global news clippings, student and narrator journal vignettes in *Silkie*, for example, serve not just as a background tapestry but one into which the Silkie-Stephen tale is woven.

In both novels, Rothgery, an epileptic most of his life, transforms the affliction—seizures—into a very special form of disruption: revelation. An altered perception of life.