The June 1940 cover of *Astonishing.*
The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction: From the Pulps to the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award

by

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Abstract

In this thesis I argue that science fiction is not a genre exclusively made up of written texts but a community or series of communities. I examine the science fiction community’s engagement with questions of femininity, masculinity, sex and sexuality over the past seventy years, that is from 1926 until 1996. My examination of this engagement is centred on the battle of the sexes, the lives of James Tiptree, Jr. and the Award named in Tiptree’s honour. I make connections between contemporary feminist science fiction and the earliest pulp science fiction engagements with sex and sexuality.
Acknowledgments

This thesis is, among other things, about the idea of community. The importance of the various science fiction communities to this thesis is evident in the necessary length of these acknowledgments.

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Editorial Note

Throughout this thesis I quote extensively from a variety of sources including personal correspondence, and letters and editorials from professional science fiction magazines and fanzines (amateur magazines) over an approximately seventy year period. I have not changed the lexis or grammar of any of these sources. () parentheses are original to these texts while [] parentheses are my additions.

Publication details of letters are not included in the bibliography but are given in the body of the thesis.

I make use of ‘they’ as the generic pronoun throughout the thesis.
Glossary

Apa
Amateur press association.

ArmadilloCon
The regional science fiction convention of Texas. It is held annually in Austin, Texas and has a reputation for being a sercon which attracts many pros. It also has a dance.

BNF
Big Name Fan. A well-known fan who is very active in fandom.

Fan
An active participant in science fiction fandom. The definition of what constitutes ‘active participation’ is varied. Some activities which would be considered to be fanactivities are attending science fiction conventions, reading and discussing science fiction, collecting science fiction, running conventions, publishing and contributing to fanzines. Many definitions distinguish fans from ‘mere’ readers.

Fandom
The field in which fan activities take place. Fandom is made up of fans and their productions such as fanzines and conventions.

Fanzine
An amateur magazine put together by fans.

Filksinging
The singing of science fiction songs. These songs are usually sung to well-known tunes with lyrics about fandom or science fiction stories or the like. The name is said to originate from a misprint on a convention program for ‘folksinging’.

Hugo Award
The amateur or fan awards for science fiction, called officially the Science Fiction Achievement Award, are given in honour of Hugo Gernsback. They have been awarded every year at the World Science Fiction Convention since 1955. They are universally known as the Hugos. Along with the Nebula Awards the Hugos are the best known and most prestigious of the science fiction awards. The categories have fluctuated but since 1973 like the Nebula there have been four categories for fiction: best novel (over 40,000 words), best novella (17,500-40,000 words), best novelette (7,500-17,500) and short story (under 7,500 words). There is also an award for best professional editor and non-fiction book. Unlike the Nebula, the Hugo also includes awards for fan activities: best fanzine, best fan writer, best
fan artist and since 1984 best semiprozine. This last award was introduced to accommodate the increasing number of publications which are somewhere in between professional magazine and fanzine.

**James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award**
Annual award given to the best science fiction or fantasy text or texts which explore and expand gender roles. The Tiptree Award was named in memory of the late James Tiptree, Jr. who began publishing remarkably gender-bending science fiction in 1968. Tiptree was found to really ‘be’ retired clinical psychologist Alice Sheldon in 1977.

**Media fandom**
Fandom devoted to television and film. Media fandom began with Star Trek fandom.

**Mundane**
Not science fictional. For example mundane fiction is all fiction other than science fiction.

**Nebula Award**
The Nebulas are an annual science fiction award which have been presented by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America since 1966. There are four awards, best novel (over 40,000 words), best novella (17,500-40,000 words), best novelette (7,500-17,500) and short story (under 7,500 words).

**Pro**
Someone professionally engaged with the field of science fiction.

**Prozine**
A professional science fiction magazine.

**Pulps**
Popular fiction magazines printed on poor quality coarse paper. They usually measured about 25cm x 18cm. The first pulp was Argosy which published a variety of fiction. There were adventure and western pulps as well as crime pulp magazines such as Black Mask where Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett were regularly published. Science fiction pulps included Astounding Science Fiction and Thrilling Wonder Stories. The term is also used more broadly to refer to the quality of the fiction published.

**Sercon**
A convention devoted to serious discussion of (mostly) written science fiction. Sercons tend not to have masquerades or pay much attention to media fandom. They don’t ban fun, however.
**WisCon**

The regional science fiction convention of Wisconsin. It is also the only science fiction convention primarily devoted to feminist science fiction. Held since 1977 in Madison, Wisconsin. The James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award was announced at WisCon and has been presented there on several occasions.

**WorldCon**

The biggest science fiction convention held annually in September. Cities bid to be able to hold it. Although it has mostly been hosted by cities in the USA it has also been held in Australia, Canada, Germany, Holland and the UK. The Hugo awards are presented at WorldCon.

**World Fantasy Con**

The annual fantasy convention. Like the WorldCon the World Fantasy Convention is held in a different city each year. It tends to attract a large number of pros and is generally considered to be a business convention with a relatively low number of fans.
Preamble

The primary field of my thesis is science fiction. More specifically I am concerned with science fiction which is explicitly about social constructions of maleness and femaleness. I examine the ‘battle of the sexes’ in science fiction, between 1926 and 1973, as well as the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award, and its formation from 1991 until 1996.

Central to my thesis are:

that social constructions of sex have always been under negotiation in science fiction

that the battle of the sexes is a clear site of this negotiation

that James Tiptree, Jr., the stories by and about Tiptree, and the award named after Tiptree are also sites of this negotiation

that Tiptree and the prize can be located as part of the battle of the sexes.

I take the term, ‘the battle of the sexes’, as it applies to science fiction, from Joanna Russ’ 1980 article “Amor Vincit Foeminam: The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction”. Russ uses the term to refer to science fiction texts which are explicitly about the ‘Sex War’ between men and women and which posit as a solution to this conflict that women accept their position as subordinate to men. She discusses ten stories published in the USA between 1926 and 1973. I have also limited my discussion to this period but I have broadened my study to include texts which posit a range of other ‘solutions’ to the battle of the sexes including sexes that are neither male nor female but hermaphrodite.

1926 is a particularly apt starting point for my thesis as it marks the first appearance of an English language science fiction magazine, Amazing Stories. This magazine is frequently mythologised as the beginning point of American science fiction and therefore all science fiction.
Many of the accounts of the relations between feminism and science fiction which appeared in the 1970s paint a picture of sf (science fiction) as a genre in which engagement with questions of sex, gender and the relations between men and women have been glaringly absent (Russ 1974; Friend 1972; Badami 1976; Wood 1978-79). More recent accounts such as those of Sarah Lefanu (1988) and Robin Roberts (1993) have complicated this picture. Roberts in particular argues that by “isolating moments of science fiction’s past, we can begin to see where, why, and how feminist science fiction was formed” (Roberts 1993: 1). I demonstrate that debates and stories about women, men, sex and sexuality have been a part of science fiction since 1926.

The battle of the sexes texts, however, considerably predate 1926 and Amazing Stories and the concurrent growth of fandom and science fiction publishing. These earlier texts were frequently collected, cited and listed by the science fiction fan and soon became a recurring theme within the science fiction magazines. Sam Moskowitz, a long time active fan and historian of fandom and science fiction edited an anthology of these stories, When Women Rule, which was published in 1972. His first selection is the fifth-century account by Herodotus of the Amazons. His last is “The Priestess Who Rebelled” by Nelson Bond which was originally published in the October 1939 issue of Amazing Stories.

I have been using the term science fiction without making it clear what my referent is. There is considerable debate about what constitutes science fiction. In the entry on “Definitions of Science Fiction” in The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction (1993) there are seven columns of discussion of just a few of these definitions. In this thesis I am not concerned with boundary delineation or maintenance of the genre. Any text published as science fiction, claimed by those engaged with science fiction to be science fiction (regardless of what else it may

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1 I am aware that Feminism is a contested term. I use it throughout this thesis to refer to engagements with unequal relations between men and women as well with the masculinist discourses through which understandings are constituted.
be), is, for my purposes, science fiction. My rationale is that the focus of my thesis is on those who produce and consume texts, as well as those texts themselves. As I discuss in more detail in chapter one, I use science fiction to refer to a community, or rather, communities. These communities’ physical location is centred on the United States of America although there are community members, like myself, who are located outside the USA.

Fandom, and science fiction as a commercial genre, emerged in the USA and the majority of the battle of the sexes texts I examine were published there. In 1993-1994, as part of my project, I spent five months doing research in North America, first in Toronto, then in New York City and San Francisco. My ‘fieldwork’ had the dual purpose of accessing texts that are unavailable in Australia, and making connections with science fiction communities. I interviewed writers, publishers, editors, fans, agents, as well as the sf buyers for the two major book chains - Dalton’s and Walden’s. I also went to my first sf conventions: the 1993 World Fantasy Convention in Minneapolis and the 1993 ArmadilloCon in Austin, Texas. These two conventions, coming early in my trip, while I was still based in Toronto, allowed me to meet many people in the community before I went to New York City and San Francisco. I was able to meet with and interview almost everyone I needed to talk to. I am grateful to the science fiction community in North America for being so welcoming and supportive of my project.

My thesis draws on, and is also a contribution to, a variety of fields, most especially feminist theory, semiotics, American studies, cultural studies, literary theory, science fiction, and histories of sexuality. I do not view these fields as being discrete, nor do I view them as consisting only of a body of written texts. Part of my project is to continue recent moves away from a practice/theory binary (Bourdieu 1977; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 70-71). I argue that science fiction texts, and indeed all texts, are engaged in a series of discourses about sexuality, knowledge, subjectivity, power, in short, social relations and the world. Texts are not merely examples of the operations of these discourses. My approach
involves moving away from a treatment of 'fictional' texts as the raw material of analysis; and 'theoretical' texts as the means of explicating such texts. In this light I view semiotics, literary theory and work on the history of sexuality as engaging in dialogue with the science fiction texts which are the focus of my thesis. The thesis emerges from this dialogue.

Reading these science fiction texts and talking and meeting with science fiction practitioners shaped my readings of Katie King, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Eve Sedgwick and Thomas Laqueur as much as my readings of these theorists influenced the way I have engaged with the field of science fiction.

All fiction is engaged in both theory and practice, indeed all writing, all speech is doing both/and rather than either/or. All language is metalanguage. However, here I am making a special claim for science fiction. Science fiction is more overt about its place within discourses of knowledge than other literary genres. For example, both the battle of the sexes texts in science fiction and the romance genre are concerned with relations between the sexes and hence both engage with discourses of sex, sexuality and gender. In romance the traces of these discourses are typically visible as part of the narrative patterns. In the battle of the sexes texts there are more overt, often didactic contributions, to these discourses. Questions such as - What would happen if a society were controlled by women? What would happen if there were few or no men? - are explicitly raised and answered. In Judith Butler's (1990) terms the performance of gender is what the battle of the sexes texts are about, whereas particular performances of gender are the given of the majority of romance genre texts (Radway 1984; Thurston 1987; Christian-Smith 1990).

That science fiction overtly engages with discourses of knowledge (stereotypically with science) is not a new claim. In 1960 Kingsley Amis argued that this is precisely what marks science fiction as being different from other genres. In a discussion of Philip Wylie's 1951 battle of the sexes novel, *The Disappearance*, Amis writes that
Amis suggests that this would not work in other genres: “one imagines how a reader of Westerns would take to a twenty-page discussion of frontier ethics” (Amis 1960: 79). Indeed, many of the battle of the sexes texts from 1926 to 1973 routinely include large sections of exposition and philosophical explication. In the novel mentioned by Amis, Wylie’s The Disappearance, Chapter XIII is billed as “An essay on the philosophy of sex, or the lack thereof”. Another battle of the sexes text, John Wyndham’s 1956 “Consider Her Ways,” includes a long dialogue between an historian and a woman from the distant past of the twentieth century. In this dialogue the use of discourses of romantic love as a means of keeping women subordinate is debated (Wyndham [1956] 1965: 43-64).

Both these instances of engagement with debates about the social constructions of women and men and the organisation of relations between them are made possible because they take place in science fiction. This is because science fiction is not tied to a “mimetic faithfulness to the world as it is” (Jackson 1995: 95). The process of imagining a world in which women are the dominant sex immediately exposes many of the processes which normally operate to keep women subordinate. Imagining a different world makes these processes of power visible.

Science fiction’s lack of “mimetic faithfulness” operates even at the level of its grammar. Samuel R. Delany argues that there are “clear and sharp differences” between science fiction and mundane fiction\(^2\) “right down to the way we read individual sentences” (Delany 1984: 88). He gives a number of examples of this difference in reading practices, such as, “he turned on his left side” (Delany 1984: 88).\(^3\) In the mundane sense this means that he turned over on to

\(^2\) A science fiction term for non-science fiction literature. Delany says that the term comes “from mundus, meaning the world; stories that take place on Earth in the present or past. Any other connotations? Well, turnabout is fair play” (Delany 1984: 88).

\(^3\) The article “Science Fiction and ‘Literature’ - or, the Conscience of the King,” from which this quote comes, was first delivered as a speech in 1979.
his left side; in the science fictional sense it means that he flicked a switch and
his left side lit up. I use systemic functional grammar to make clear the
difference in lexical and grammatical meaning:

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<table>
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<td>Actor</td>
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I find M. A. K. Halliday’s functional grammar valuable because it enables
me to talk about how word choices are combined with grammatical meaning.
The example above demonstrates that a grammatical analysis allows me to show
clearly the differences between two clauses with exactly the same wording. I can
demonstrate that in the mundane clause “his left side” becomes the location of
his activities, rather than an immediate participant in these activities as it is in
the science fiction clause. I discuss my use of Halliday’s functional grammar in
more detail in chapter one.

What do I mean by the terms sex, gender and sexuality? Eve Sedgwick
argues that the “usage relations and analytical relations” of these three terms are
“almost irremediably slippery” (Sedgwick 1990: 27). The distinction between sex
and gender has typically understood “sex as biological given and gender as a
social construction which overlays this biology” (Gatens 1996: 31). Charting the
moment at which the one begins and the other ends has proven elusive. Indeed,

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4 These two different reading practices explain much about those people who insist they can not
understand science fiction, that it is too difficult and boring, “All that technobabble.” I used this
example at a recent systems conference and was struck by the fact that the audience was totally
surprised by the science fictional reading of the clause. When I was doing the analysis the mundane
reading of the clause seemed ungrammatical to me and I had to concentrate to remember how to make
sense of it.
the very notion that ‘the body’ and its sex are biological givens and have remained so throughout history is no longer tenable (Martin 1987; Laqueur 1990; Oudshoorn 1994). Sedgwick argues that:

even usages involving ‘the sex/gender system’ within feminist theory are able to use ‘sex/gender’ only to delineate a problematical space rather than a crisp distinction. My own loose usage in this book will be to denominate that problematized space of the sex/gender system, the whole package of physical and cultural distinctions between women and men, more simply under the rubric ‘gender.’ I do this in order to reduce the likelihood of confusion between ‘sex’ in the sense of ‘the space of differences between male and female’ (what I’ll be grouping under ‘gender’) and ‘sex’ in the sense of sexuality (Sedgwick 1990: 29).

I find Sedgwick convincing on this point. I will, however, reverse her decision and use the term ‘sex’ to refer to this “problematized space”. I do this for two reasons:

for consistency - because in the battle of the sexes texts the term ‘sex’ is used in this way, and

because, as Sedgwick notes above, there is a confusion between ‘sex’ meaning “the space of differences between male and female” and ‘sex’ meaning sexuality and acts of sexual intimacy including intercourse (Sedgwick 1990: 29).

Confusion and blurring between the two is another characteristic of many of the battle of the sexes texts where a person’s sexuality is one of the most important aspects of what makes them either man or woman. This is also a central component of their subjectivity. Learning the categories that constitute a person’s sense of their self includes knowing that you are a man or a woman.

My understanding of subjectivity grows out of feminist post-structuralist accounts of the subject which problematise the idea that we are all historically continuous and unitary. Instead of viewing “contradictory positions as problematic, as something to be reconciled or remedied” I examine “these contradictions as important sites for understanding what it means to be a gendered person” (Davies & Harre 1990: 47). The battle of the sexes is one such site.

Constructions of sexed bodies, male, female, hermaphrodite, androgynous or something else, and their interactions, are also central to the James Tiptree, Jr.
Memorial Award which has been awarded annually since 1991 to “a fictional work which explores and expands the roles of women and men” (Murphy [1991] 1992: 9). The award was named for James Tiptree, Jr., a science fiction writer who began publishing in 1968. Tiptree was


The Award was also named for James Tiptree, Jr. because until that time there had been “no science fiction award named after a woman” and because Tiptree (who also wrote under the name Raccoona Sheldon) wrote many stories which “explore and expand the roles of women and men” (Murphy [1991] 1992: 9).

My thesis demonstrates that there are direct links between the battle of the sexes genre 1926-1973, James Tiptree, Jr., and the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award. Tiptree actually wrote battle of the sexes stories during the period 1926-1973. Indeed Russ discusses one of them, “Mama Come Home,” first published in 1968, in her battle of the sexes article. Battle of the sexes texts are overtly engaged in the kinds of exploration and extrapolation that the Tiptree Award was created to encourage and recognise, though frequently these texts work to contract, rather than expand, what it is to be a woman and what it is to be a man.

Summary of chapters and appendices

All the chapter titles in my thesis are taken from names of short stories by James Tiptree, Jr. In the first chapter, “The Girl Who Was Plugged In”, I discuss my theory and methodology. I make it clear that science fiction is a genre which is not just a series of written texts, but a community or field. I also examine my own ‘voyage of discovery’ and the transformation for me of ‘genre’ into ‘field’ and my becoming part of that field.

In the second chapter, “Faithful to thee, Terra, in our fashion”, I discuss the emergence of the field of science fiction and the closely related field of
fandom and the complex relationships between the two fields. I also discuss the relationship between the idea of “science” and the field of science fiction.

Chapter three, “Mama Come Home”, and chapter four, “Painwise”, concern the battle of the sexes from 1926 to 1973. I give close readings of a number of battle of sexes texts. In chapter three my concern is with texts which are most frequently read as being overtly anti-feminist whereas in chapter four I am concerned with texts which offer responses to the ‘Sex War’ other than the reversion of women to a status of inferiority.

In chapter five, “Fault”, I examine engagements between science fiction, women and feminism as they emerge in letters and articles in science fiction magazines and also some fanzines from 1926 until 1975. Most of these debates are concerned with whether there is any place for women in science fiction at all. I also make connections between these debates and the battle of the sexes stories that I discuss in the previous two chapters.

Chapter six, “The Women Men Don’t See”, is concerned with other engagements between science fiction and women and feminism from 1926 until the present. The debates in this chapter differ from the previous chapter in that they take it for granted that there is a place for women within science fiction.

In chapter seven, “I’m too big but I love to play”, I construct a biography of James Tiptree, Jr., Raccoona Sheldon, Alice Sheldon, Alice Davey and Alice Hastings Bradley who ‘are’ all the one ‘person’ but at the same time are not. I examine the sets of stories that surround him/her and his/her engagements with science fiction.

In chapter eight, “Her Smoke Rose Up Forever”, I look at the formation of the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award and its connections with James Tiptree, Jr./Alice Sheldon, as well as with the battle of the sexes and science fiction communities.

There are four appendices. The first appendix is a complete list of the battle of the sexes texts published between 1926 - 1973 which I discovered in the course of my research. The second appendix is an annotated list of all the Tiptree
Award winning and shortlisted texts as well as all the texts considered for the Award. The third appendix contains my grammatical analysis of three passages which I examine in chapter three. The last appendix is a brief account of the New York fan group, the Futurians.

There are many illustrations in this thesis. I have included these images for visual reinforcement of my arguments and also to give a feel for the material my thesis is concerned with.
"The girl who was plugged in"

*Journeys in science fiction*

Research is always a journey and in this chapter I detail the particular journeys through texts and fields, theories and methodologies, which have shaped this thesis. A journey implies a final destination. This thesis, however, is not a final destination but a part of the journey. In the course of charting this journey I examine my shifting relationship to the field of science fiction, which as I show, is not an homogeneous one.

I add a further metaphor to shape my discussion in this chapter, the metaphor of being ‘plugged in’. This metaphor is particularly appropriate to my work because this thesis engages with the field of science fiction, which is frequently about interactions between humans and technologies. Seen through this metaphor, my journeys and this thesis are part of the process of becoming ‘plugged in’ to the field of science fiction. Paradoxically I also discuss the ways in which I was plugged in to this field prior to beginning my production of this thesis.

I have been using the term ‘field’ with no explanation. My use of field is indebted to both Pierre Bourdieu and M.A.K. Halliday. In Halliday’s schema, field is part of a three part division\(^1\) to account for what Malinowski called context of situation (*Halliday [1978] 1986: 28*). For Halliday

\[\text{[field refers to the ongoing activity and the particular purposes that the use of language is serving within the context of that activity (Halliday [1978] 1986: 62).}\]

\(^{1}\) The three divisions are field, tenor and mode. Tenor refers to who is taking part in the discourse, their status and privileges (what Bourdieu would call symbolic capital), and mode to the part that language is playing in the discourse (*Halliday & Hasan [1985] 1986: 12*). The three are not entirely distinct and the same parts of language can constitute field, tenor and mode.
Malinowski's context of situation is not just the physical environment but also the social reality or culture in which language occurs.

Bourdieu understands a field to be a social space made up of social relations between people. He argues that to "think in terms of field is to think relationally" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 96). His use of field therefore is roughly equivalent to Malinowski's context of situation. At stake in Bourdieu's terms is 'capital'. Capital consists only in part of material goods. Bourdieu also takes account of what he calls symbolic capital (status and prestige) and also cultural capital which allows him to account for such phenomena as taste and education. Bourdieu argues that these different kinds of capital only realise their particular meanings within particular fields. For example, within the field of science fiction, names like Ursula Le Guin and Kim Stanley Robinson have enormous cache that they would not have within the field of athletics. Particular ways of being have meaning only within the terms of the field or fields that they are part of. When talking about social distance Bourdieu gives the following examples:

agents occupying a higher position in one of the hierarchies of objective social space symbolically deny the social distance which does not thereby cease to exist, thus ensuring they gain the profits of recognition accorded to a purely symbolic negation of distance ('he's unaffected', 'he's not stand-offish', etc.) which implies the recognition accorded to a purely symbolic negation of distance (the sentences I have quoted always have an implicit rider: 'he's unaffected, for a duke', 'he's not stand-offish, for a university professor', etc.) (Bourdieu 1990: 127).

In this thesis I investigate the particular meanings which the field of science fiction allows for the battle of the sexes. I am using field to mean "the ongoing activity and the particular purposes that the use of language is serving within the context of that activity" with "that activity" being science fiction (Halliday [1976] 1988: 62). Science fictional language is a particular concern of this thesis. I am also using field as Bourdieu does. Both Halliday and Bourdieu stress that the 'field' is dynamic, constituted as it is by the activities of humans. However, the metaphor can seem static, conjuring up images of a sports field, or a corn field, a designated area of space which does not, on the whole, move. The term 'community' gives a stronger sense of being embodied than does field.
Throughout this work I slide between field and community and use the two as near synonyms. The term field allows me to keep the sense of genre and texts but when I need to emphasise the importance of lived experiences and embodied subjects I use the term community. The latter usage is a reminder that I am talking about social relations, about dialogues between people, some of whom are still living and speaking and writing to each other, and that, of itself a written text is nothing but a series of markings. As Tarzan observed, on his first acquaintance with written language, it is nothing but “strange little bugs which cover...pages” (Burroughs [1912] 1990: 48). Or more explicitly:

[...]here are no ideas whatsoever in any libraries. All that is stored in any of these places are odd little patterns or marks or bumps (Reddy 1979: 309).

It is people who make sense of the “strange little bugs” with the “art of language” that is reading (Reddy 1979: 309). There is more than one “art of language” and part of becoming plugged into the field of science fiction is becoming fluent in its language or languages, as I illustrated with my readings of Delany’s phrase, “he turned on his left side” in my preamble (Delany 1984: 88).

Like any other theorist, student or scholar, I am engaged in the process of constructing the object of my investigations. At the same time my object, in this case, the field of science fiction, reconstructs the subject - me. Becoming part of the science fiction field and conversant in its language was a process which began before I thought of writing a thesis about science fiction. However, in the process of producing this thesis I have found myself much more overtly a part of the science fiction community as a practitioner and creator of this field. In calling this thesis ‘the battle of the sexes in science fiction’, I create an object - the battle of the sexes in science fiction. To tell a story about something is to shape that something. Katie King in her 1994 book, *Theory in its Feminist Travels: Conversations in US. Women’s Movements*, discusses this process:

Origin stories about the women’s movement are interested stories, all of them. They construct the present moment, and a political position in it, by invoking a point in time out of which that present moment unfolds - if not inevitably, then at least with a certain coherence (King 1994: 124).
The story I tell in this thesis about the battle of the sexes in science fiction is also an interested story. By beginning my story in 1926 with the advent of Amazing Science Fiction and ending with the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award in the 1990s I make the development of the Tiptree Award from the mostly virulently anti-feminist battle of the sexes stories from the 1920s onwards look both natural and inevitable. It begins to look like evolution. Yet my creation of ‘the battle of the sexes’ does not take place in a vacuum. As Judith Butler argues in Bodies that Matter, “discourse has a history that not only precedes but conditions its contemporary usages” (Butler 1993: 227). My ‘battle of the sexes’ is constrained by the various discourses of which it forms part. Samuel R. Delany makes the point that a practice of writing, like science fiction, is the collection of codes used to make texts said to belong to it “make sense”...But any single code exists as a response to historical pressures...in the real world. Discourse happens, and happens in response to the world: it does not merely exist in some timeless and innocent space of abstract language possibilities...Such awareness is particularly important in a field like contemporary science fiction whose demotic development has put it outside “literature” - in ways that have both healthy and precarious aspects (Delany 1984: 200). 

When I say that in this thesis I create the object ‘the battle of the sexes’, I do so constrained by the historical knowledge that Joanna Russ set out such a genre in her 1980 article of the same name, and she did so knowing that Sam Moskowitz had published an anthology of this genre of science fiction in 1972. Further, they were both aware of a body of texts published in science fiction magazines accompanied by blurbs declaring them to be a battle of the sexes story:

The war of the sexes has been the subject of story, poem, song, article, textbook - and just plain worry for as long as there have been men and women (Blurb accompanying “The White Widows" by Sam Merwin, Jr., October 1953 Startling Stories: 15).

Delany argues that 

[1]he working assumption of most academic critics...is that somehow the history of science fiction began precisely at the moment they began to read it - or, as frequently, in the nebulous yesterday of 16th- and 17th-century utopias. For both notions accomplish the same thing: they obviate the real lives, the real development, and finally the real productions of real SF writers, a goodly number of whom are still alive, if not kicking. This is why the best histories of science fiction remain the commentaries of Merril and

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2 This quote comes from a letter Delany wrote to Science Fiction Studies in 1979.
Joanna Russ also argues for an historical awareness of science fiction (sf):

the symbolic importance of certain material can be misread because the significance of the material in the cultural tradition that science fiction comes from...is simply not known to the critic (Russ [1975] 1995: 7).

I have to plead guilty to the particular kind of blindness that Delany and Russ point to. In 1992 I would have said that I was well-versed in science fiction, yet I had never read any histories of the field nor any critical accounts of it. I did not know that many considered the appearance of the first issue of the magazine Amazing Stories to be the beginning of science fiction. I had never heard of Amazing or any other science fiction magazine. I read mostly books that were published at the time I was reading them.

My sf was almost entirely written by women. I had heard of Asimov and Heinlein but I had never read them. The history of science fiction that had formed around my reading was almost completely at odds with the histories of the genre that I read in the course of producing this thesis - histories in which women appear on the peripheries, and where fantasy is the other side of the dichotomy from science fiction, at least as frequently as mundane fiction. I agree with Delany and Russ, that an historical awareness of science fiction is essential. There are, however, many science fiction histories, such as the one I tell about the battle of the sexes in this text, that have not been told or only partially told.

Science fiction is a field that consists of not only written texts but also people: writers, readers, fans, artists, critics and editors. Many of these people have been actively aware of their part in constituting this field and a significant number of texts have been taken up with just these self-reflexive activities of

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3 This quote comes from an article “Science Fiction and ‘Literature’ - or, the Conscience of the King” which was first delivered as a speech in 1979.

4 These are not necessarily separate categories of people, Judith Merrill, for example, has been at one time or another a writer, a reader, a fan, a critic and an editor.
The Girl Who Was Plugged In - Long drama

Setting: Future Earth, no aliens.

Ugly deformed girl tries to suicide, is blackmailed (willingly) into being wired up as waldo operator of a beautiful young-girl body. Body is a vegetable when not operated, but then can live and speak and move about world freely by means of satellite technology. Satellites are owned by giant corporation, part of whose business is to stimulate demand for luxury --- and other --- products in a world where advertising is tamed. Son of one of its powerful tycoons falls in love with the lovely girl-body, thinks she is a normal girl under brain-control; resolves to free her. Fight - flight scenes. He gains entrance to underground installation where ugly girl is operating his beloved --- thinks she is brain-controller, kills her. So of course the lovely body reverts to vegetable. Story is told by cynical man from this future, knocked back here by enemies. Message: Dreams can come true and kill you, like the Little Mermaid. Also: our world is run by greed. Also, blind adoration of celebrities is the opium of the people.

James Tiptree, Jr.'s summary of "The Girl Who Was Plugged In".
constituting science fiction. As a long time reader of science fiction I have always been, in a sense, part of the field of science fiction. The sense of belonging, of community, however, came about as a direct result of this thesis.

I have taken the phrase ‘plugged in’ from James Tiptree, Jr.’s 1973 story, “The Girl Who Was Plugged In”. Tiptree’s own summary of the story appears opposite.⁵ I am concerned not with the story itself but with its historical importance. “The Girl Who Was Plugged In” has been read retrospectively as a precursor to that eighties marketing success ‘cyberpunk’ and Tiptree has been called one of its mothers/fathers (Kadrey & McCaffery [1991] 1992: 21; Gordon 1990: 38).⁶ I use the metaphor more broadly to describe the process of connection between subjects and science fiction communities and the connections between the subjects which comprise those communities.

The term is particularly apt, for computer technology has shaped the production of this thesis: from word processing to image scanning, to the internet and the world wide web. I have been physically plugged in during the research for, and composition of, this work on two continents.⁷

At the same time I am plugged in to a series of systems of other knowledges which are located within and constitute the field of the academy. Charting my relationship to these sets of knowledges involves setting out the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of this thesis. It should immediately be apparent that there is a problem with this formulation - ‘theory’ on the one hand - ‘methodology’ on the other. I expressed dissatisfaction with this theory/practice

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⁵ I would like to thank Julie Phillips, Tiptree’s biographer, for supplying me with Tiptree’s summaries of his/her stories.

⁶ As I discuss below, the practitioners of cyberpunk have become notorious for their blindspot where feminism is concerned and Tiptree is one of the few ‘mothers’ that they have claimed (William Gibson qtd in Gordon 1990: 38). However Samuel R. Delany has observed the importance of the writings of Joanna Russ to William Gibson, noting the similarities between Russ’ character Jael from The Female Man (1975) and Gibson’s Molly from Neuromancer (1984) (Delany 1994: 173).

⁷ The existence of email means that I am in daily contact with other science fiction scholars as well as writers and editors. Email has made it possible for me to be in a continuing almost daily debate with Sylvia Kelso and Helen Merrick, both PhD students working on science fiction. Sylvia’s location in Townsville, Queensland and Helen’s in Perth, Western Australia would have made this intense dialogue much more difficult and a great deal slower without email. The three of us are also part of a feminist science fiction internet discussion group called fem-sc which includes writers, readers, fans, editors, artists and scholars of feminist science fiction from Australia, Argentina, Canada, the United States and Britain.
opposition in my preamble. I set out in detail below the ways in which the production of this thesis demonstrates the unworkability of such a dichotomy but also the great difficulty of speaking and writing about intellectual work without falling back into this binary. Bourdieu has said that

[...]his opposition between the pure theory of the lector devoted to the hermenautic cult of the scriptures of the founding fathers (if not of his own writings), on the one hand, and survey research and methodology on the other is an entirely social opposition. It is inscribed in the institutional and mental structures of the profession, rooted in the academic distribution of resources, positions, and competencies (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992: 162).

Another instance of the way this artificial dichotomy misleads is the impact of the work of systemic functional linguistics scholars such as M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan on my thesis. Is my use of Halliday a methodology for analysing texts or is it a way of thinking about language and discourse and therefore theoretical? I believe it is both. My familiarity with systemic functional theories of language has changed the way I read and think about texts and in this sense functional grammar is crucial to the thesis although it is not always obvious in my work.

Language and science fiction

I have talked above, and in the preamble, about the importance of Hallidayan functional grammar to this thesis. I was taught Hallidayan functional grammar as part of my undergraduate degree in an English Department. His understanding of language as social semiotic has had a profound affect on my subsequent work. However, this is not a linguistics thesis and I make only occasional use of his grammar, commenting only on certain meanings in the clause centred around the verbal meaning or the process.

I have already demonstrated in the preamble the efficacy of functional grammar for setting out the difference in the grammars of science and mundane fiction. I did this by looking closely at the meaning centred around the process. Halliday outlines two systems for understanding the function of the verb or process, the transitive system and the ergative system (Halliday 1994: 161-174).
Nina Puren’s\(^8\) use of Halliday’s work provides an excellent example of the usefulness of an ergative analysis. In her recent article on romance and the law, Puren suggests that Sharon Marcus’ compelling argument that the syntax of rape is transitive (as in ‘he raped her’, where ‘he’ is unambiguously the Actor assaulting ‘her’ who is the Goal of this process), does not account for the narrative the rapist frequently tells within the court room where he is not responsible. For this story Puren argues that ergativity is more useful:

\[
\text{[t]ransitivity is a grammatical movement of extension, in which a process extends (or not in the case of intransitives) from one participant to another...the ergative model of the event understands a verb or a process to be realised through the body of the participant, who is named the medium, for example, ‘he’ in the clause: ‘he went crazy’. When two participants are involved, the one who causes the action to happen in the other is called the agent, as, for example, in the clause: ‘Her beauty made him go crazy’, in which ‘her beauty’ is the agent, and ‘he’ is the medium that the process of ‘going crazy’ occurs through. In this kind of construction, the agent is coded as responsible for the action taking place (Puren 1995: 18).}
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The following tables demonstrate this difference:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transitive Analysis</th>
<th>Ergative Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He</td>
<td>Her beauty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>raped</td>
<td>made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>her</td>
<td>him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>Process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Puren makes it clear that using an ergative analysis allows power relations to be traced as they are explicitly worked out at the level of the grammar. Ergativity allows me to highlight the relations of power enacted in the inscription of ‘real’ femininity and masculinity in the battle of the sexes texts.

\(^8\) I am indebted to Nina Puren for making me see how essential an ergative analysis is in demonstrating how these sets of relationships are worked out at the grammatical level.
The inextricability of subject and object has been especially noticeable during this enterprise. I began this thesis with the idea of working on science fiction. If I had begun with an intention of examining questions of sexual difference as they are negotiated within science fiction my approach would have been different. Instead I began with science fiction. As I read and talked to people my understanding of what science fiction is shifted. In this section I start to tease out this relationship and the questions it has produced for me.

My relationship to science fiction is as important to the theory and methodology of this thesis as my relationship to the academy. This is because a crucial beginning was my love for literature which is not tied to a mimetic relationship with the ‘real’. Science fiction is certainly one genre which fits within this rubric and I have read it since I was a child. I have also been aware since childhood that it is not a majority taste and that there is a general expectation that children will grow out of reading fantasy, fairy tales and science fiction as they grow older. This never happened to me. Indeed one of the motivations for this thesis was the absence of literatures of the fantastic from the syllabus of my undergraduate degree. The only fantastic literature I was able to study was medieval literature - a period in which the binary realistic/non-realistic was meaningless - so I retreated into medieval literature as a way of quenching my thirst for the fantastic. I discuss this thirst in more detail below. Writing my thesis on science fiction was in some ways a reaction to these constraints.

Before beginning my research I viewed science fiction as a body of professionally produced texts. I knew few other people who read it and we rarely

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9 The idea that there is ever a direct relationship between the real and the written is always a tenuous one. The relationship takes place between texts. Jane Austen’s novels have has much to do with earlier novels as with the ‘reality’ of her life and times.
10 On one occasion when I suggested a non-mundane text by Angela Carter as suitable for a course on postmodernity the response was, “Angela Carter?! Lightweight!”
talked about it. I knew that Ursula Le Guin, Tanith Lee and Theodore Sturgeon wrote it and that *Left Hand of Darkness, Fool's Run, Synners, White Queen, Blue Mars* and *Doctor Who*\textsuperscript{11} were some examples of what was produced. I had never heard of fandom or fanzines and I had no sense of the people who produced the texts I loved.\textsuperscript{12} I was aware of who James Tiptree, Jr. was, but had read few of the stories, and knew only vaguely about Tiptree really 'being' Alice Sheldon.

In short, science fiction was neither field nor community - where the workings of capital, symbolic or cultural, could have a real affect - but books.

Mixed up with the books that constituted my science fiction was a texture or a feeling that these texts I read and (less frequently watched) produced in me. This sensation made me feel that there were infinite possibilities - if I just closed my eyes and imagined I could almost get there. In her paper delivered at WisCon 20, "Third Person Peculiar: Reading Between Academic and SF-Community Positions in (Feminist) SF," Sylvia Kelso discusses her own first experience with this science fiction-produced feeling. She identifies the history of this feeling:

...you know the cliche for it, it's the hoariest line in SF. It was my first experience with 'sensawunda', of course. But let me do a...quick academic detour here to tell you that 'sense of wonder' has a long and lofty pedigree...According to Greenblatt, Ancient Greek 'Aristotelian' philosophers saw wonder and pleasure as the end - the goal - of poetry. By the renaissance, an influential Italian critic thought that no-one who didn't "excel at arousing wonder...could be called a poet". Thomas Aquinas' teacher hit it best of all. Wonder, he said, wasn't just intellectual, it was visceral. It caused "a systole of the heart."

Despite its hoariness, that, I think, is a hallmark pleasure of the SF text; and although it's rare as a phoenix, it's a pleasure I've never lost (Kelso 1996: 2).

Before I began my research I knew the feeling but not the label for it. 'Sense of wonder' was not then the cliche for me it has become. Kelso delivered this paper to an audience who were well acquainted with various histories of science fiction and with many of its cliches. As I discussed above, my idea of science fiction has shifted considerably in the process of writing this thesis. Sense of wonder, however, although that is not what I called it, is a crucial shared

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\textsuperscript{11} This thesis, however, will not deal with science fiction media.

\textsuperscript{12} I was aware of Star Trek fans, popularly known as "Trekkies", but only as they were presented or rather, caricatured, in the mass media.
element between my understanding of what science fiction meant to me, and that of almost all the accounts of science fiction I have read over the past four years.

Tied to this 'sense of wonder' is the possibility of imagining different ways of being. Earl Jackson, Jr. calls his chapter on Delany's science fiction, "imagining it otherwise". Joanna Russ and Samuel R. Delany have both written about the utopic possibilities of science fiction for allowing this kind of imagination. And this understanding of science fiction has been crucial to feminist engagements with the genre.

Sarah Lefanu, whose 1988 *In the Chinks of the World Machine* was one of the first book length studies of feminism and science fiction, calls science fiction's freedom from representing the 'real' a "plasticity." She argues that

> it makes possible and encourages (despite its colonisation by male writers), the inscription of women as subjects free from the constraints of mundane fiction; and it also offers the possibility of interrogating that very inscription, questioning the basis of gendered subjectivity (Lefanu 1988: 9).

Science fiction, Lefanu argues, offers possibilities for imagining different worlds and different ways of being a sexed subject. While these extraordinary claims about the infinite "webs of possibilities" are frequently made for science fiction (Delany [1977] 1978: 81), it remains that a vast deal of science fiction is not overtly subversive in the manner that Lefanu and others desire (Knight [1967] 1974; Moylan 1986; Lefanu 1988). Frequently science fiction abounds with technological change which seems to have little or no affect on social relations. The rhetoric dating back to science fiction's pulp beginnings in the 1920s is full of ideas of limitlessness. At the same time, there have always been acknowledged constraints, most notably that of science itself. Part of the same rhetoric of the early pulps and of hard science fiction up to the present day is a glorified notion of science. Proper science fiction must derive "rigorously and systematically, from science" (Russ 1995: 4).

It is within this discourse that the distinction, which I gloss over in this thesis, between fantasy and science fiction is crucial. Fantasy is not rigorous, science fiction is. The letter columns of the early pulps are full of discussion and
argument about scientific accuracy. For a while one of the most popular professional science fiction magazines, *Astounding*, had a column called “Science Discussions” entirely devoted to letters about the scientific content of the magazines’ stories, while letters about other issues were printed in “Brass Tacks”. Of course the majority of science fiction stories have always, and will always, fly in the face of known science. Even when religious faithfulness to science is not observed there are other constraints. All texts within a field are constrained by all the texts that have gone before them.

I felt that I was actually seeing all those texts that had gone before when Pauline Dickinson who works in collection management at the University of Sydney Library first showed me around the Rare Book science fiction collection at the library (hereafter Rare Books). I was told about the collection by a lecturer when I wrote an essay about science fiction in the final year of my undergraduate degree. The core of this collection consists of the enormous bequest made to the library by long-time Melbourne collector and fan, Ronald E. Graham. Because of this bequest, the University of Sydney has one of the largest public collections of science fiction material in the world. The collection includes a very sizeable proportion of all the science fiction novels and magazines published up until Ron Graham’s death in 1978. There are complete or near complete runs of famous early magazines such as *Amazing*, *Astounding* and *Weird Tales*. I had never seen so many science fiction books together in the one place and I had never before seen any early science fiction magazines.

The collection has been crucial to this thesis. Without it I would not have discovered so quickly what Samuel R. Delany calls a “vast tributary system of informal criticism, comprised of ‘apas’ (amateur press associations), fanzines, reviews, and assorted commentary” (Delany 1984: 238). I began my survey of sf criticism in the traditional manner by reading articles published in the academic sf journals *Extrapolation*, *Science Fiction Studies* and *Foundation* as well as with book length studies. At the same time, however, I began to read fanzines. It soon became apparent that they and other forms of “informal criticism” were essential
sources for my work on the period 1926-1973. In fact, during this period they were virtually the only sites for sf criticism and histories. Delany makes the following comment about the particular importance of blurbs (his comments are themselves in the form of a blurb):

Science fiction had developed at least one critical form all its own: the annotated anthology. Traditionally SF magazine editors prefaced each story by a punchy, two or three line blurb. Collecting their own tales in volume form, SF writers from Sturgeon to Le Guin have stolen the blurb’s position for brief, informative paragraphs about their tales... A good deal of SF history is buried in these blurbs. Perhaps the most important historical document in this form... is Judith Merrill’s more and more heavily annotated Best SF of the Year volumes, running from 1956 through 1967 (Delany 1984: 36).

Throughout this thesis I make use of these blurbs from magazines and from anthologies such as those of Judith Merrill.

Fandom

In a number of places in this chapter I have used the terms, fan, fandom and fanzine without explanation. My introduction to fanzines and fandom took place in Rare Books where Pauline Dickinson steered me to two bookshelves piled with manilla folders of fanzines. In this way I discovered that fanzines are amateur publications put together by lovers of science fiction, who call themselves fans. Fans called what they were part of fandom. Fandom was generated by the letters to the editor that were published in professional science fiction magazines, like Amazing. These letters frequently concerned the stories published, the covers of the magazines, and science. Addresses were printed with these letters and before long the letter writers who lived in the same area were contacting each other and forming friendships and loose-knit communities and talking, among other things, about science fiction. Delany observes:

I doubt that any field in the first 60 years of its existence has generated a comparable amount of written demotic response as large as the one science fiction has - and generated it without state, corporate, or academic support. I am speaking of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of pages of...fanzines (Delany 1984: 239).

The fanzines that I worked with in Rare Books date from the mid 1930s to the late 1970s and were from the USA, Australia, England and Canada. They had been put into alphabetical order at one time but this was inconsistent. Very
MARS OR EARTH?

SHOULD MARTIANS TAKE OVER EARTH FOR THEMSELVES?

The Martians, who as everybody knows landed October 30th in New Jersey, have withdrawn. But before doing so, they contacted the Futurian Society to represent them in their future negotiations with the leaders of this planet. The Futurians, not entirely willing to give up the side of the stellar dunny, have delegated one of their number to present the viewpoint of the Martians to its members. Donald A. Wollheim, well-known science-fiction fan, has accepted the assignment and will take the rostrum at the next meeting to show why the human race should give up its planet and its existence in favor of the superior Martians. Dr. Isaac Asimov, another member, firmly in favor of terrestrial supremacy will oppose him in debate. It promises to be hot and heavy. Is the Earth worth saving? Is humanity worth fighting for? Should the Martians be allowed to take over, or opposed when next they return? Or should we swap planets? Nobody should fail to show up at this most timely of all debates. It will take place at the next meeting of the Futurians, Sunday, November 13th at 7:00 at 730 Westwood Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y.

SCIENCE-FICTION POETRY—YES OR NO?

Is there such a thing as science-fiction poetry? Maybe you think there is? Maybe you thought such writers as Francis Flagg, the Planet Prince and others had written it? Well, you may be right and you may be wrong! Cyril Kornbluth, one of the Futurian's poets contends that there is no such thing as "science-fiction poetry". He says so openly and boldly and has some remarkable arguments to prove it. Fred Pohl, head of the Science-Fiction Poets Guild challenges Kornbluth's ideas. A brief but hot sample of the debate comes was given by the two at the last meeting of the Futurian Society on October 30th. They flashed fire at each other and indeed were on the verge of coming to blows so strong were their individual convictions. Kornbluth arguing and, exploded. "Who is dreaming?" he cried, "science-fiction poetry, forsooth?" "Bah!" retorted Pohl, "Kornbluth has never awakened!" They will fight it out to a finish at a future meeting of the Futurian Society. Don't miss it!

few of them are professional looking. They are stapled-together pieces of paper with or without covers, often almost illegibly printed on a hectograph machine. An example of a one-page fanzine put together by the New York Futurian fan group appears opposite. Most of the fanzines were full of reports of fan activity, meetings, conventions, feuds, reviews and some debate about science fiction, though frequently discussion of science fiction is minimal. The fanzines are also full of their own language, and I soon became familiar with terms like ‘gafiate’ - an acronym for ‘get away from it all’ meaning to leave fandom; ‘fen’ the plural of fan; and ‘prozine’ a professional science fiction magazine like *Amazing*.

Although fandom grew out of the letter column of *Amazing*, and following it, other science fiction magazines, by 1944 the entry on ‘fan’ in *The Fancyclopedia* claims that although the term is

used by the scientifictionists who *merely* write letters to the editor and collect pro mags...the fen of fandom have a more restricted meaning in mind (My italics; Speer 1944: 29).

By this time ‘merely’ writing to prozines is not enough for authentic fanhood.

The entry then goes on to elaborate some of the more “restricted meanings”:

The IPO\(^{13}\) made no attempt to isolate an essential characteristic by which all fans mite [sic] be distinguished, but said that “A real fan fulfils practically all of the following requirements: He [sic] buys and reads most of the professional fantasy magazines (this was when there were less than half a dozen), collects them, and writes the editors. He subscribes to at least one fan magazine. He corresponds with other fans. S-f fandom is his ruling passion. He has probably tried his hand at writing, either for fan or pro magazines or both” (My italics; Speer 1944: 29-30).

A discourse of fan authenticity was already in operation. Though, as this entry demonstrates, the term ‘fan’ was contested. It is also clear that fans during this period were assumed to be male. By far the majority of the fanzines I looked at were produced by men and contained letters and articles by men. There were,

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\(^{13}\) The entry on IPO in the *Fancyclopedia* reveals:

IPO - The Oklahoma Institute of Private Opinion (title a take-off on Gallup), a poll series conducted by Speer. Post cards were sent out, with...questions heretofore thereon. Twelve sets of questions in all were put out, extending over a period of some two years around 1938. The number of replies was small, usually little more than 20, but were fairly representative till near the end (Speer 1944: 50).
The title page of the 1944 Fancyclopedia.
however, women fans and I found mention of women’s fanzines as early as the 1930s.

The entry gives other definitions of a ‘fan’ citing well known fans, or BNFs (Big Name Fans) as sources:

Widner said he thinks the essential thing about fans is that they have an ideal of a better way of life and want to change things; but this hardly sets them apart from millions of non-fans. [illegible] well received is Norman Stanley’s “sense of fantasy”, a taste for the imaginative analogous to the sense of humour (Speer 1944: 29).

This first definition is close to the notion of ‘imagining it otherwise’ which I discussed above. The second definition is an early appearance of the idea of ‘sense of wonder’. Both notions have a long history within the discourse of science fiction.

The *Fancyclopedia* is a perfect example of Delany’s “informal criticism”; there are many references to science fiction texts and writers who were considered important at the time. It is also an example of fandom’s self-awareness and self-reflexivity. Fans began writing their own history and naming their own periods very early. The *Fancyclopedia* appeared only fourteen years after the appearance of the first fanzine, Ray Palmer’s *The Comet* in 1930. In the *Fancyclopedia* there are entries for the various historical periods, First Fandom, Second Fandom and so forth which were already in use at the time. The *Fancyclopedia*, the title page of which appears opposite, was produced in association with NFFF (National Fantasy Fan Federation) and LASFS (Los Angeles Science Fiction Society) and also vetted and corrected by the New York Futurians and other well known fan organisations of the period.

One of the stories which became an important part of the discourse of fandom was the idea that it could lead to a professional engagement with science fiction. The transition of fan into pro (professional) is the process of the accumulation of cultural capital within the field. A number of the names I came

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14 Ray Palmer went on to be a science fiction writer, and well-known editor, editing *Amazing* from 1938 to 1949.
across in fanzines, Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, Lee Hoffman, Frederik Pohl and Judith Merril become pros. This notion of the fluidity of the science fiction community where you could go from being a fan to being a BNF (big name fan) to being a professional writer or artist or editor is not as important an aspect of fandom as it once was. Far fewer contemporary pros were once fans. However, most science fiction writers, even if they were never fans, go at least occasionally to science fiction conventions. At the same time there have always been fans who were uninterested in becoming pros as well as fans who were more interested in fandom than in science fiction for whom the motto 'fiawol' - 'fandom is a way of life' - is most apt.

While fandom is tremendously important to the formation of the field of science fiction and endlessly fascinating in its own right, it has been estimated that at most only 5% of the population who read science fiction are active fans (Hartwell [1984] 1985: 158). Fandom and science fiction are overlapping fields rather than one being a subset of the other. There is more than one science fiction and those science fictions are historically contingent. Fandom has also changed over time. In the 1930s and 1940s it was possible to say that there was only one science fiction fandom\footnote{Although the fans of Australia, the United Kingdom and Canada may well have considered themselves as separate from the fandom of the USA.} and almost every fan in the USA at least knew of every other active fan. Today that would be impossible and there are many different fandoms. Media fandom is now vastly larger than written science fiction fandom. I discuss early fandom and its relationships to the science fiction field in more detail in the next chapter.

\textit{The battle of the sexes and the construction of sex}

One of the first articles I read, sitting at my desk in Rare Books surrounded by this cornucopia of science fiction, was Joanna Russ' 1980 article "Amor Vincit \textit{Foeminam}: The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction". As I indicated in the
preamble, Joanna Russ' article was central to the formation of this thesis. It was particularly important because it gave me an object of study, the battle of the sexes. My engagement with Russ' article also further highlights how much my thesis has been shaped by my access to Rare Book's science fiction collection.

When I read "Amor Vincit Foeminam" I had not known there was a genre within science fiction which engaged explicitly with relations between the sexes. I immediately set about reading the texts Russ discussed. Having access to the Rare Books collection meant that I was able to read all the texts she referred to. Five of the ten texts Russ discusses are from the 1972 anthology by Sam Moskowitz, *When Women Rule*. The anthology has a long introduction by Moskowitz in which he lists more than thirty other battle of the sexes texts. The majority of these were also in Rare Books. When I finished reading those texts I posted a notice requesting assistance to a science fiction readers' newsgroup, rec.arts.sf.written. My list of battle of the sexes texts expanded, and again the majority of the texts mentioned were in the Rare Books collection.\(^\text{16}\)

Many of the battle of the sexes texts I have read in the past four years are overtly anti-feminist, frequently comically so. Joanna Russ in her foreword to the reprint of "Amor Vincit Foeminam" in her collected essays, *To Write Like A Woman* (1995), discusses how bad they are. This begs the question: if the stories are so dreadful why would anyone bother to read them let alone give them serious consideration? Russ writes:

Samuel Delany told me the stories were too idiotic to bother with, but they would not leave me alone until I gave them their place in the sun. Their crudity and silliness were worse than my representation of them, honestly; they were terrible. But it was fun. As a critic, a reviewer, and a teacher, I have spent my life reading a huge amount of extraordinarily bad fiction; sometimes the only way to discharge the emotion aroused by the incessant production of gurry is to beat the gurry to death, especially when it's as marvellously foolish as this was (Russ 1995: 41).

\(^{16}\) I also made contact with a long time Sydney science fiction fan, Graham Stone, through Pauline Dickinson. Graham Stone has been an invaluable source, pointing me in the direction of even more battle of the sexes texts, and helping me obtain those few texts not contained in Rare Books.
I bothered to engage with these texts because I found Russ’ article entertaining and could not quite believe that such stories existed. Most importantly, however, I saw many connections between the battle of the sexes texts and later overtly feminist science fiction texts. Many of the battle of the sexes texts differ markedly from the later texts in that they seek to contain the threat of change to the relationships between men and women. However, in attempting to do so they make these processes of constructing maleness and femaleness and the relationships between the two more visible. Many of the battle of the sexes texts make explicit the ways in which romantic heterosexual love and sexual intercourse are crucial to the shaping of ‘real’ women’s subjectivities and their integration into an economy of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980; Wittig 1992).

Looking at the way the battle of the sexes texts theorise sexual difference is part of the work of historicising sex and examining questions of difference. In these texts there are often many more sexes than two or even three. Being a man or a woman is not a given, it is always unstable. As it is in the mundane world outside science fiction.17

Foucault has underlined the instability of the category of sex. In his introduction to *Herculine Barbin Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth Century French Hermaphrodite* he asks rhetorically:

*Do we truly need a true sex?* With a persistence that borders on stubbornness, modern Western societies have answered in the affirmative (Foucault [1986] 1987: vii).

This stubbornness appears in many of the battle of the sexes texts where men and women are expected to be their true sex and to be that sex *properly*. However, these texts offer the possibility of being something other than a proper man or woman and thus they problematise the notion of a true sex in the same way that the existence of hermaphrodites and transsexuals in the ‘real’ world do.

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17 As I write the Olympic Games in Atlanta are a recent memory. Every female athlete was tested at those games to prove that she was authentically female and thus able to compete as a woman (Lorber 1994: 41). There is a vast deal at stake in being a ‘real’ woman.
Some of the battle of the sexes texts can be read in terms of the one-sex model discussed in Laqueur’s 1990 *Making Sex*. Laqueur argues that from the eighteenth century onwards, a two-sex oppositional model gradually came to be the dominant way of seeing sex, but until then the one-sex model “where the boundaries between men and women are of degree and not of kind” dominated (Laqueur 1990: 25). Women and men, in this model, are not opposites. They are composed of the same liquids, they both excrete sperm and have the same genitalia, except that the woman’s is hidden - her vagina is a penis (later the correlation is made between clitoris and penis) and her ovaries are testicles. Women are “inverted, and hence less perfect men” (Laqueur 1990: 26).

In *Making Sex*, Laqueur writes of the one sex world:

In this world, the body with its one elastic sex was far freer to express theatrical gender and the anxieties thereby produced than it would be when it came to be regarded as the foundation of gender. The body is written about and drawn as if it represented the realm of gender and desire...An open body in which sexual differences were matters of degree rather than kind confronted a world of real men and woman and of the clear juridical, social, and cultural distinctions between them (Laqueur 1990: 125).

There are certain similarities between this “elastic” one sex world with its “fluid boundaries of sex and more rigid distinctions of gender” and David Keller’s sf story “The Feminine Metamorphosis” (1929). In “The Feminine Metamorphosis” young women “were striving to occupy positions on a par with men” and eventually they take a concoction made from the gonads of Chinese men to make them turn into men (Keller [1929] 1972: 151). Laqueur recounts some sex change stories in which women who engage in masculine activities turn into men. For instance

a young man in Reims who lived as and anatomically seemed to be a girl until the age of fourteen, when he/she “while disporting him/herself and frolicking” with a chambermaid, suddenly acquired male genital parts (Laqueur 1990: 126).

The difference is that in the 1929 story this transformation is against nature and God and must be punished by madness and death. In Laqueur’s sex-change stories there is no problem in changing sex. Problems arise if once you have attained your new sex you do not behave in the manner it requires of you; in Foucault’s terms you must be your true sex. If the youth from Reims had not
transformed into a man while frolicking with the chambermaid then trouble would have ensued. On the other hand, it is possible to read the sex transformation in “The Feminine Metamorphosis” in exactly this manner because the women who turn themselves into men do not fulfil all the functions of their new sex - they do not play golf but bridge, they act like women while walking around in the bodies of men (Keller [1929] 1972: 171).

Both Foucault’s and Laqueur’s understandings of the historical changes in the shapings of the category of sex are central to this thesis. However, my understandings of their theses about the category of sex is shaped by my readings of the battle of the sexes texts, rather than vice versa. This is an extremely important point and one which Simon Goldhill makes in his book Foucault’s Virginity. Goldhill argues that Foucault’s focus on philosophical writing and medical treatises in the classical world leads him to ignore or minimise contemporaneous literary texts which might have complicated his arguments. Goldhill is worth quoting at some length:

A recent critic [Lois McNay in Foucault and Feminism (1992)] has commented, however, that there hasn’t been much criticism of these later volumes [of the History of Sexuality], except, she adds somewhat snidily, for the occasional classicist complaining of Foucault’s inaccuracies of interpretation (as if mere (mis)reading was unimportant when there are Big Ideas to be discussed). She herself goes on to analyse Foucault’s concept of the self and sexuality with barely a reference to the texts from which his conceptualization is developed. This is paradigmatic, it seems, of a difficulty in maintaining the balance between an engagement with the sweep of Foucault’s vision, and an engagement with the series of individual readings from which that sweeping vision is formulated. I will in my classicist hat sometimes point to places where systematic misreading seems to me to be more than usually debilitating to an argument (Goldhill 1995: xi-xii).

Sexuality and sex are negotiated in a variety of discourses, although it seems in most histories of sexuality like Foucault’s and Laqueur’s that their sweeping panoramas are privileged over the texts from which these panoramas are developed. This is part and parcel of the worship of Big Ideas to which Goldhill refers. The battle of the sexes texts also negotiate questions of sex and sexuality in ways that contribute to these broader understandings.
The Romance Discourse

As I have indicated in the previous section, the discourse of romance is a crucial shaping force in many of the battle of the sexes texts of the period 1926 - 1973. In this section I set out what I mean by the term ‘romance discourse’, as the discourse of romantic love is directly relevant to the constitution of the battle of the sexes.

In debates about the role of women in science fiction, the process of heterosexual exchange taking place between hero and heroine, and the woman’s role in it, is designated ‘the love interest’. In these debates, as I show in chapter six, there is a continual slide between the terms, ‘love interest,’ ‘romance,’ ‘sex,’ and ‘women’. They become one and the same. On the whole this equivalence between ‘women’ and ‘love interest’ disqualifies women from the field of science fiction since love belongs to the field of romance, or rather, literature for “sentimental old maids who like a bit of ‘slop’” (Astounding Science Fiction November 1938: 158). The battle of the sexes stories are an area of science fiction where the two fields, of science fiction and of romance are overtly in operation.

The discourse of romance, and of heterosexual relations upon which the discourse is predicated, is built upon the differences between the sexes. The romance discourse is part of the heterosexual economy and is a primary site “where gender difference is re-produced” (Holloway 1984: 228).

The violence of romance has been frequently observed, from the middle ages and the invention of romantic love until the present day. Indeed the formation of Western romantic love is said to be predicated on the antifeminist and misogynist discourses of the middle ages. R. Howard Bloch claims that the

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18 This slide is not unique to science fiction. Virginia Woolf observed that this was a frequent slide: “sex - woman, that is to say” (Woolf [1929] 1977: 27).
aceticism of the earlier [Christian] period, synonymous with the deprecation of the feminine, was, in the High Middle Ages, simply transformed into an idealization both of woman and of love (Bloch 1991: 10).

Bloch argues that
courtliness...is a much more effective tool even than misogyny for the possession and repossess of women in what Julia Kristeva terms “the eternal war of the sexes” (Bloch 1991: 196).

John Wyndham’s battle of the sexes story, “Consider Her Ways” (1956), also makes this argument. The women in his matriarchal world are happy and peaceful without men and recognise that romantic love was invented to subjugate women and make them love their chains:

[The] they were caught up in a process, and everything conspired against their escape. It was a long process, going right back to the eleventh century, in Southern France. The Romantic conception started there as an elegant and amusing fashion for the leisureed classes (Wyndham [1956] 1965: 49).

The coercive violence of the “Romantic conception” or discourse of romance is played out in many texts. Love stories are replete with metaphors of war alongside those of love. It is arguable that the discourse of romance is produced through the conjunction of war and love. Certainly the title of some of the battle of the sexes texts, and the phrase itself, are suggestive of such a conjunction: “The War of the Sexes” (1933), “The Priestess Who Rebellled” (1939), “Amazons of a Weird Creation” (1941), The Sex War (1960), “The Masculinist Revolt” (1965), “War Against the Yukks” (1965) and Sex and the High Command (1970).

The hegemonic force of the romance discourse can be seen in Leslie F. Stone’s “The Conquest of Gola” (1931). Stone was one of the earliest women writers of science fiction. See illustration opposite. Stone’s story is told from the point of view of the Golans who are a race where the women rule. The Golans are invaded by an all-male force from earth. Because of their technological superiority they are easily able to deal with the invaders. The Golans find the human men ugly:

[never before have I seen such a poorly organized body, so unlike our own highly developed organisms. How nice it is to be able to call forth any organ at will, and dispense with it when its usefulness is over! (Stone [1931] 1994: 33)
However, the human men, enlisting the aid of the Golan men rebel against their captors and seize the Golan women in their beds. The Golan narrator despite her amusement with the "poorly organized" human body responds to the male human body in typical romance style:

I started up only to find his arms about me, embracing me. And how strong he was! For the moment a new emotion swept me, for the first time I knew the pleasure to be had in the arms of a strong man (Stone [1931] 1994: 40).

In this brief moment the romance discourse finds its way into the text only to be dispelled almost immediately. The Golans soon expel the would-be invaders from their planet permanently.

**Feminist science fiction**

Joanna Russ' 1980 battle of the sexes article is crucial to this thesis not only because it contributed my object of study but also because it provided a perfect focus for me to engage with questions of feminism and science fiction, with questions of feminist science fiction, and with questions of women and science fiction.

What struck me about Russ' article and the texts she explored was that they illustrated that science fiction's engagement with feminism, sexual difference and with sex and sexuality was not a recent development. Science fiction, it appeared, had a *tradition* of engaging with these issues. This was very different from the claims I had been reading in accounts of women and science fiction such as the early article by Russ, "The Image of Women in Science Fiction" in which she argued that:

> speculation about the innate personality differences between men and women, about family structure, about sex, in short about gender roles, does not exist at all (Russ [1971] 1974: 54).

This is a rhetorical overstatement. In the same article Russ refers to the battle of the sexes stories, as well as pointing out that at the time of writing there was, in fact, some science fiction being published, not least her own, which did speculate about "gender roles". Throughout the seventies and eighties a number of similar
articles on women and science fiction were published which criticised science fiction’s lack of women practitioners, and the lack of representation of women (Russ [1971] 1974; Friend 1972; Badami 1976; Kaveney 1989).

The battle of the sexes texts complicate this picture of science fiction as a boy’s own genre. As mentioned earlier, I had no sense, as I was growing up, and reading predominantly texts by women with female protagonists, that science fiction was generally considered to be a boy’s own genre. However, I did not start reading science fiction until the 1970s, by which time, it is generally considered, feminism had begun to have a considerable impact on the field. I have since discovered other readers who have not experienced science fiction as male-dominated, such as Connie Willis, whose article on this subject “The Women SF Doesn’t See” I discuss in more detail in chapter five (Willis 1992).

The increase in feminist engagements with science fiction in the 1960s and 1970s was made possible not only by the increase in consciousness of feminism generally in the mundane, as well as the science fiction world, but also by science fiction’s prior engagement with feminism. This is demonstrated by the many battle of the sexes stories as well as by debates about the place of women within the field. I discovered these debates in the letters pages of prozines like Astounding and Thrilling Wonder Stories in the 1930s and 1950s respectively. I discuss these debates in chapter six, “Fault”.

The genre of science fiction has always contained some kind of engagement with the terrain of sex and sexual difference. However, science fiction engaging with feminism, and feminist science fiction are not necessarily the same thing. Many of the battle of the sexes texts directly engage with feminism. David H. Keller’s “The Feminine Metamorphosis,” (1929) certainly does. In the story women are dissatisfied with the glass ceiling in business and strive to improve their position. Their plans are undone because God does not intend women to do anything but raise families no matter how brilliant at business they are. Clearly this story responds to the feminism of the period and equally clearly it is not a feminist tale.
Russ' article allowed me to engage with feminism and science fiction, feminist science fiction, as well as women and science fiction. These distinctions are important. I have shown how a science fiction text can engage with feminism without being feminist. But what is feminist science fiction? There are as many feminist science fictions as there are feminisms and science fictions. Feminist science fiction is both a reading practice and a writing practice.

For example many of the feminists who take part in the on-line discussion group Fem SF, dislike Sheri S. Tepper's *The Gate to Women's Country* (1988), arguing that it is essentialist in its understandings of gender differences. Others on the list, including myself, have argued that the work is an ironic re-writing of earlier battle of the sexes texts. Many heated debates have arisen on the list when we have tried to delineate exactly what we mean by 'feminist science fiction'. One of the few things we can agree about is that the fact that there were women engaged with science fiction as early as the 1920s and 1930s, and that there have always been women fans, does not necessarily mean that women have always felt welcome within the field, or that these women were all feminists.

The difference between women's issues and feminist issues is a grey area. While not all of the women who have been part of the field of science fiction would identify as feminists, the fact of their participation has become a feminist issue. The mere fact of their presence created a tradition that other women could then become a part of. Connie Willis in her article "The Women SF Doesn't See" discusses stories by women she read while growing up in the 1950s:

> It never occurred to me that SF was a man's field that had to be broken into. How could it be with all those women writers? How could it be when Judith Merril was the one editing all those *Year's Best SFs*? (Willis 1992: 8).

Another tradition of women's writing sf is created by Jane L. Donawerth and Carol A. Kolmerten, the editors of *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference*, who argue that

utopias and science fiction by women - women's 'literatures of estrangement' - constitute a continuous literary tradition in the West from the seventeenth century to the present day (Donawerth and Kolmerten 1994: 1).
The problem, however, with locating women science fiction writers in such a tradition is that it tends to ignore the importance of the field of science fiction. A writer can be part of many different traditions. To read Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1975) as a utopia and read it only in relation to Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) or Margaret Cavendish's *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* (1668) ignores the ways in which it re-writes various battle of the sexes texts within science fiction, where worlds of all women are presented as dystopias not utopias. Russ' familiarity with both the utopian and science fiction fields, is a crucial force in the texts she produces.\(^{20}\)

Joanna Russ is a good example of positioning within a variety of fields. While the first publication of her "The Image of Women in Science Fiction" was in 1971 in a feminist journal, *The Red Clay Reader*, it was also reprinted in *Vertex*, a science fiction magazine.\(^{21}\) This located her critique of the genre in two fields, feminism, and science fiction. She is thus located 'inside' both, and in the juxtaposition becomes part of the formation of a third field, "feminist science fiction".\(^{22}\) As Lefanu writes, "[f]eminist SF...is part of science fiction while struggling against it" (Lefanu 1988: 5). This struggle was, in the seventies, very real. Susan Wood writes that

> Joanna [Russ], Vonda [McIntyre], and a very few supporters were rousingly trashed for being bitter, vicious, feminist bitches. One small but vocal trashin minority (like most of them, a man deeply afraid of women) cornered me at a party in Vancouver honoring Judy Merrill. He asserted, sniggering, that the only way Judy acquired the stories for her famous *Year's Best* series was by having sex with the authors (Wood 1978: 5).

In the 1980s there was talk within the feminist science fiction community of an erasure of the emergence of an overtly feminist science fiction culture in the previous two decades but particularly in the 1970s.\(^{23}\) Jeanne Gomoll, long-time

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\(^{20}\) Not least by herself. Her two articles, "Amor Vincit Foeminar: The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction" (1980) and "Recent Feminist Utopias" (1981) make this clear.

\(^{21}\) Indeed, the way in which Russ' article was taken up and debated in various fanzines and later editions of *Vertex* amply demonstrates Russ' position as part of the field of science fiction. I discuss these debates in detail in chapter six, "Fault".

\(^{22}\) The notion of insider/outsider is an enduring one in science fiction and to many is crucial to the formulation of the fan identity. I discuss this formation in detail in chapter two.

\(^{23}\) This is part of a wider attempt to dismiss the 1970s. See, for example, June Gallop's *Around 1981* (1992).
fan and editor of the feminist fanzine *Janus/Aurora*, wrote a rebuttal of this attempt at erasure. She quotes Bruce Sterling in his introduction to William Gibson’s collection *Burning Chrome*:

[All forms of pop culture go through doldrums; they catch cold when society sneezes. If SF in the late Seventies was confused, self-involved, and stale, it was scarcely a cause for wonder (Sterling [1986] 1988: 9).

Gomoll then responds to Sterling:

[With a touch of the keys on his word processor, Sterling dumps a decade of SF writing out of critical memory: the whole decade was boring, symptomatic of a sick culture, not worth talking about. Now, at last, he says, we’re on to the right stuff again... This new strategy not only attempts to detract from the critical assessment of SF writing by women, and to belittle the accomplishments of women in SF fandom..., but it has also been turned against the women’s movement as a whole. For the last couple of years I’ve begun to suspect that the phrase, ‘the me-decade’ is really a euphemistic attack on the changes made by the women’s movement. The phrase is both inappropriate and misleading (Gomoll 1986-87: 7-8).

Gomoll beautifully describes the impact of feminism on fandom in the 1970s, and the “exhilarating, exciting, unbelievable gathering of people, overjoyed to have found one another” that marked the period and her despair at this erasure (Gomoll 1986-87: 9).

This sense of unease about the ways in which the feminist science fiction of the 1970s was being devalued and even sometimes erased was part of the background to Pat Murphy’s 1991 announcement of a new award, the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award for science fiction which expands and explores gender roles. Murphy, and her co-conspirator, Karen Joy Fowler felt that feminism generally, and within science fiction in particular, had a long way to go. Murphy had “come to believe that to change the way that people think about women and men, we need to show people in different roles” (Murphy [1991] 1992: 8).

I first heard about the Tiptree Award while doing research in Toronto at the Merril collection which is part of that city’s public library system.24 I began immediately to make connections between the new award and the development

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24 This collection was made possible by the extremely generous donation of books by Judith Merril.
of feminist science fictions. Later while based in San Francisco I was able to talk to both of the originators of the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award, Karen Joy Fowler and Pat Murphy, as well as two of the judges, Debbie Notkin and Jeanne Gomoll.

Many of the battle of the sexes texts explore gender roles. When I read the first few Tiptree Award winning texts and some of the short listed texts, I noticed even more connections between what the Tiptree Award was recognising and the earlier sex battle texts. Here was an award that was drawing attention to texts which engaged with many of the issues that ‘my’ battle of the sexes texts 1926-1973 engaged with. The Tiptree Award fitted perfectly with my existing project especially as I had already decided to analyse at least one of James Tiptree, Jr.’s own stories.

When I returned to Australia after my 1993-1994 study trip to North America, I was able, using email, to stay in contact quickly and regularly with the many science fiction people I had met in North America. I was also able to contact three other Tiptree judges, Lucy Sussex, Susanna J. Sturgis and Brian Attebery and interview them over the net.

People I had made contact with in the USA would give my email address to other people they thought would be able to help me with my work. My North American contacts also enlarged my Australian contacts. By the time I came back from North America it was clear to me that science fiction was not just a body of professionally produced texts. The science fiction community, or rather communities, had become real for me, and I had become a part of it. This was most vividly realised when on a visit to Australia in June 1995 Karen Fowler asked me if I would be on the 1997 Tiptree Award jury. As the Award is given for the fiction of the previous year I now find myself in regular email discussion with Karen, Delia Sherman, Richard Kadrey and our chair, Janet Lafler, about the award, and the various nominated texts we read. I am indeed ‘plugged in’ to the fields of science fiction and feminist science fiction.
In the next chapter I discuss the constitution of the field of science fiction in more detail in order to provide the context for my later discussion of the battle of the sexes in science fiction from the pulps to the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award.
The cover of the first issue of *Amazing Stories*, April 1926.
“Faithful to thee, Terra, in our fashion”

*Stories about science fiction, fandom and community*

In this chapter I describe the development of science fiction as a community and the emergence of discourses which have shaped this development. In the first section I look at the articulation of these discourses as they are shaped in early science fiction magazines such as *Amazing Stories* and *Science Wonder Stories*. In the second section I examine the emergence of fandom out of the letter columns of these and other prozines. Finally I look at the self-conscious placement of science fiction as an active participant in the particular discourse of scientific knowledge.

**1926: Gernsback and Amazing Stories**

If Hugo Gernsback had stayed home, everything would have been different.

(Knight 1977: 1)

Science fiction as a community, and certainly science fiction as a publishing category, begins in the United States in 1926 with the first English language, science fiction magazine, *Amazing Stories*.¹ The front cover of the first issue appears opposite. Frank Cioffi argues for *Amazing’s* importance:

> Starting with Hugo Gernsback’s publication of *Amazing Stories* in 1926, the science fiction pulps gradually assumed a position of importance in the pulp fiction market...What before had been isolated stories, curios, or, more often, original ways of approaching fairly traditional literary endeavors, became in the thirties a self-conscious and discrete genre (Cioffi 1982: 6).

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¹ *Amazing Stories* is frequently referred to as simply *Amazing*. I will employ both usages throughout.
Samuel R. Delany also argues strongly for the 1920s and 1930s as the beginning of the science fiction field as opposed to much longer science fiction genealogies that have been proposed (Aldiss 1973; del Rey 1979). However, Delany broadens Cioffi’s notion of ‘genre’ to include the practices of reading and writing texts as well as the texts themselves:

"science fiction" I don’t mean the 19th-century didactic fables that include not only Victorian utopian writing but also the scientific romances Verne and Wells wrote in response to the 19th-century information explosion. I don’t mean the “fayned histories” and “fayned voyages” of the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries, before bourgeois science separated themselves out from another set of discourses differently organized - discourses primarily concerned with instruction, moral or factual. I mean the first intrusion of the modern 20th-century scientific imagination into the very texture and rhetoric of a pre-existing fictive field in the pulp magazines of the ’20s and ’30s, which, taking advantage of that fiction’s paraliterary status, developed a new way of reading language - a new way of writing it to take advantage of this new way of reading, i.e., a practice of writing, a discourse (Delany 1984: 165).

This practice of reading and writing, this discourse, is beginning to be articulated in the editorials and letter columns as well as the stories of Amazing Stories, Air Wonder Stories and Science Wonder Stories in the 1920s and in what the Fancyclopedia refers to as the “big three” of the 1930s, Amazing Stories, Wonder Stories and Astounding Science Fiction (Speer 1944: 7). In the 1930s this discourse of science fiction flows into fanzines and conventions and fandom generally. In fact one effect of emphasising the importance of 1926 and Amazing as the site of the emergence of the new discourse of science fiction is to make fandom a part of the emerging field of science fiction. This is what many histories of the field do not do. For example, Aldiss and Wingrove in Trillion Year Spree: the History of Science Fiction, are explicit about writing a history of written texts - “our concern is to present SF as a literature, not as social activity” (Aldiss & Wingrove 1986: 346). My concern is to present science fiction as a “social activity,” or rather a series of social activities.

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2 Astounding Science Fiction is also referred to as Astounding and ASF. I use the latter two forms throughout this chapter.

3 Aldiss and Wingrove are adamant about rejecting the pulp tradition:

[To] set science fiction down as something beginning with Hugo Gernsback's lurid magazines in the nineteen-twenties, as some histories have done, is a wretched error (Aldiss & Wingrove 1986: 142).
Amazing Stories was published and edited by Hugo Gernsback. For many members of the early science fiction community Gernsback was the inventor of science fiction. Sam Moskowitz has called him "the Father of Science Fiction" (Moskowitz [1963] 1974: 225-242). The centrality of Hugo Gernsback is reflected in the amateur or fan awards for science fiction which are given in his honour.\(^4\) Officially they are called the Science Fiction Achievement Awards but they are universally known as the Hugos. They have been awarded every year at the World Science Fiction Convention since 1955 and are the oldest and best known science fiction awards (Clute & Nicholls 1993: 595-600).

Gernsback's science fiction magazine publishing and editing career lasted from 1926 until 1953. During that period Amazing was not the only prozine Gernsback published. In fact, Gernsback was Amazing's editor for only three years, losing control of it in 1929. He went on to found other science fiction magazines, such as Science Wonder Quarterly, Scientific Detective Monthly, Air Wonder Stories and Science Wonder Stories. In 1930 the last two were amalgamated to form Wonder Stories. Gernsback remained in control of Wonder Stories until 1936. His publishing endeavours after this date had far less influence on the field, and throughout the 1920s and 1930s the editorial work on these magazines was done by T. O'Conor Sloane, C. A. Brandt and Wilbur C. Whitehead as well as Gernsback (Clute and Nicholls 1993: 490-91; Tymn & Ashley 1985: 14-57). This means that Gernsback did not necessarily write all or the majority of the editorial comments during the periods in which he was the publisher and editor of magazines like Amazing Stories and Wonder Stories. However such is the mythic force of Gernsback, the founding father, that in the majority of the work I have read on this period he is spoken of as though he wrote every word of editorial comment in the magazines he published. 'Gernsback' has

\(^4\) Gernsback is not the only science fiction editor to be canonical. Science fiction has a history of treating many of its editors as being as important as writers. Indeed John W. Campbell, who edited Astounding/Analog from 1937 until 1972, is still probably the most famous editor within the science fiction field.
A NEW SORT OF MAGAZINE

By HUGO GERNERACK, F.R.S.

Another fiction magazine! At first thought it does seem impossible that there could be room for another fiction magazine in this country, the reader may well wonder, "Aren't there enough already, with the several hundreds now being published?" True. But this is not "another button magazine," AMAZING STORIES is a new kind of fiction magazine. It is entirely new—entirely different—something that has never been done before in this country. Therefore, AMAZING STORIES deserves your attention and interest.

There is the usual fiction magazine, the love story and the sex-adventure type of magazine, the adventure type, and so on, but a magazine of "Scientifiction" is a pioneer in its field in America. By "scientifiction" I mean the Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and Edgar Allan Poe type of story—a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision. For many years stories of this nature were published in the sister magazines of AMAZING STORIES—"SCIENCE & INVENTION" and "RADIO NEWS.

But with the over increasing demands on us for this sort of story, and more of it, there was only one thing to do—publish a magazine in which the scientific fiction type of story will hold forth exclusively. Toward that end we have laid elaborate plans, sparing neither time nor money. Edgar Allan Poe may well be called the father of "scientifiction." It was he who really originated the romance, cleverly weaving into and around the story, a scientific thread. Jules Verne, with his amazing romances, also cleverly interwove with a scientific thread, came next. A little later came H. G. Wells, whose scientific romances, like those of his forerunners, have become famous and immortal.

It must be remembered that we live in an entirely new world. Two hundred years ago, stories of this kind were not possible. Science, through its various branches of mechanics, electricity, astronomy, etc., enters so intimately into all our lives today, and we are so much concerned in this science, that we have become rather prone to take new inventions and discoveries for granted. Our entire mode of living has changed with the present progress, and it is little wonder, therefore, that many fantastic situations—impossible 100 years ago—are brought about today.

It is in these situations that the new romancers find their great inspiration. Not only do these amazing tales make tremendously interesting reading—they are also always instructive. They supply knowledge that we might not otherwise obtain—and they supply it in a very palatable form. For the best of these modern writers of scientifiction have the knack of imparting knowledge, and even inspiration, without once making us aware that we are being taught.

And not only that! Poe, Verne, Wells, Ballamy, and many others have proved themselves real prophets. Prophecies made in many of their most amazing stories are being realized—and have been realized. Take the fantastic submarine of Jules Verne's most famous story, "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea" for instance. It predicted the present day submarine almost down to the last bolt! New inventions pictured for us in the scientifiction of today are not at all impossible of realization tomorrow. Many great science stories destined to be of an historical interest are still to be written, and AMAZING STORIES magazine will be the medium through which such stories will come to you. Postcrity will point to them as having blazed a new trail, not only in literature and fiction, but in progress as well.

We who are publishing AMAZING STORIES realize the great responsibility of this undertaking, and will spare no energy in presenting to you, each month, the very best of this sort of literature there is to offer. Exclusive arrangements have already been made with the copyright holders of the entire voluminous works of ALL of Jules Verne's immortal stories. Many of these stories are not known to the general American public yet. For the first time they will be within easy reach of every reader through AMAZING STORIES. A number of German, French, and English stories of this kind by the best writers in their respective countries, have already been contracted for and we hope very shortly to be able to enlarge the magazine and in that way present always more material to our readers.

How good this magazine will be in the future is up to you. Read AMAZING STORIES—get your friends to read it and then write us what you think of it. We will welcome constructive criticism—for only in this way will we know how to satisfy you.

The first Amazing Stories editorial, April 1926.
come to operate as synonymous with the magazines he founded, whether he was actively contributing to them or not. I will continue this practice allowing 'Gernsback' to stand for the editorial house voice.

*Amazing Stories* and the other early science fiction magazines did not come out of nowhere. There had been a long publishing history in the USA of general fiction magazines as well as science, technical and mechanical magazines which had published what Gernsback refers to as 'scientifiction.' Gernsback opens his first editorial for *Amazing*, which is reproduced opposite, by referring to the overwhelming number of fiction magazines at the time: "Another fiction magazine!" (Gernsback April 1926: 3). Pulps - as many of these magazines were called for the poor quality of their paper\(^5\) - were very popular. There were, among others, western, detective, crime, occult, sex, true confessions, as well as boys' and girls' adventure pulps (Ashley 1974; Tymn & Ashley 1985; Clute & Nicholls 1993).

Gernsback makes several claims for his new magazine in this first editorial which I now consider in some detail.\(^6\) Gernsback explicitly distinguishes his new magazine from these other magazines which he refers to as the "usual fiction magazine, the love story and the sex-appeal type of magazine, the adventure type and so on." They are "usual" not "different" or "new". The word "new" appears seven times as well as phrases like, "entirely different", "never been done before in this country", "a pioneer in its field", "the new romancers", \(^7\) "blazing a new trail" and "the first time." Once the newness of *Amazing Stories* is established Gernsback then explains "scientifiction." His 'explanation' underlines the indeterminacy and slipperiness of what Gernsback is trying to name. He

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\(^5\) *Amazing* was not, strictly speaking, a pulp, originally being published on better quality paper of thicker stock than the pulps proper (Ashley 1974: 22). As I have read through the early issues of the magazines they have not crumbled in my hands as some "true" pulps have, and are in amazingly (pun intended) good condition compared to others of the same period or even more recent times. The wartime pulps are in particularly poor condition because of paper restrictions.

\(^6\) All the quotes that follow are from this first editorial in the April 1926 vol. 1 no. 1 issue of *Amazing Stories*.

\(^7\) This nominal group "new romancers" sounds like the title of William Gibson’s influential 1984 novel *Neuromancer*. 
slides between a variety of phrases as he tries to explicate just what his
"scientifiction" is and what this new magazine will be concerned with. The limits
of the discourse are not yet overdetermined. They are, in fact, being shaped as he
writes. According to this first editorial, "Scientifiction" consists of, "the Jules
Verne, H. G. Wells type of story", "a charming romance intermingled with
scientific fact and prophetic vision", "clever romance [with] a scientific thread",
"amazing romances", "scientifiction stories", "stories of this kind", "amazing
tales", "science stories", "this sort of literature" and "stories of this kind."

Scientifiction it seems can be located in a body of pre-existing texts by
writers such as Poe, Verne and Wells. Gernsback argues that Poe "may well be
called the father of 'scientifiction'". However the choice of modality here, "may
well be called", together with his use of the term "romance" to describe what Poe
wrote, undermines Gernsback's own claim. He has Poe and Verne writing
"romances" but his unnamed "modern writers" produce only "scientifiction" and
"science stories".

After providing his "scientifiction" with a lineage, Gernsback then points to
the shaping force of modernity: "we live in an entirely new world. Two hundred
years ago, stories of this kind were not possible." And this new world has been
made possible by "science". Gernsback makes "science" and "progress"
synonyms. Science and progress are directly responsible for "stories of this kind."
because "[i]t is in these situations that the new romancers find their great
inspiration."

Gernsback's next claim is a critical one to the discourse of science fiction as
it was to develop in the next few decades. This "sort of literature" is not only
entertaining but also "instructive" "supplying knowledge that we might not
otherwise obtain...in a very palatable form". This idea of science as being good
for us, and science fiction as the ideal way to instruct us in its merits, has been a
persistent one which I examine in more detail in the third section of this chapter,
"The Science in Science Fiction".
For Gernsback, at the same time that the discourse of science and scientific knowledge enables "scientifiction", "scientifiction" also enables scientific change in the form of prophecy. An example of the latter is Verne's prediction of "the present day submarine almost down to the last bolt!" The use of the idea of prophecy and prophets shapes this new field of "scientifiction" as a quasi-religion of science fiction locked into a magical union with science proper. The knowledge that "these modern writers of scientifiction" impart thus becomes divinely inspired and is passed on to disciples in the form of the readership of Amazing. Gernsback is well aware of "the great responsibility of this undertaking." Its centrality is underlined in the motto which appears above each editorial: "Extravagant Fiction Today ---- Cold Fact Tomorrow."

The editorial ends with a call to its prospective readership to "get your friends to read it and then write us what you think of it." Many readers did and in their letters they took up many of the claims that Gernsback makes for "scientifiction" in his first editorial. All become part of the shaping of the discourses of science fiction and of fandom.

Many of the claims of this first editorial are taken up by Gernsback in subsequent editorial comment. For example his method of defining "scientifiction" by pointing to predecessors like Verne and Wells is one he returns to in later editorials. The word "scientifiction" might be new but its referent, Gernsback wants to say, is not. In the editorial, "The Lure of Scientifiction," Gernsback declares that:

Scientifiction is not a new thing on this planet. While Edgar Allan Poe probably was one of the first to conceive the idea of a scientific story, there are suspicions that there were other scientifiction authors before him. Perhaps they were not such outstanding figures in literature, and perhaps they did not write what we understand today as scientifiction at all. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), a great genius, while he was not really an author of scientifiction, nevertheless had enough prophetic vision to create a number of machines in his own mind that were only to materialise centuries later. He described a number of machines, seemingly fantastic in those days, which would have done credit to Jules Verne (Gernsback June 1926: 195).

However, his claims are tentative, "suspicions," modified with "perhaps" and "probably" and the statement that Da Vinci "was not really an author of scientifiction." This is an unstable genealogy but one that Gernsback attempts to
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### Our Cover

Devises an interesting scheme from "Off on a Comet" to the "Man Who Saved the Earth," and its rings in a cosmic view, are illustrated again.

### Copyright Acknowledgment


### In Our Next Issue:

- "A TRIP TO THE CENTER OF THE EARTH," by Jules Verne. This book, comparatively little known, is one of the most important of Verne's works. It holds your interest from beginning to end, and is by far the greatest work on this topic—namely the exploration of the earth's center—that has ever appeared.
- "THE CRYSTAL EGG," by H. G. Wells. One of the most amazing tales ever written by Wells. A story you will long remember by this manner of the unknown.
- "THE RUNAWAY SKYSCRAPER," by Murray Leinster. A story of the Fourth Dimension, in which the 51-story Metropolitan Life skyscraper vanishes into the Fourth Dimension. One of the most surprising tales we have ever read.
- "WHISPERING ETERNITY," by Charles S. Hall, a radio story that holds your interest and is responsible for a good deal of goodnight and chill running up and down your spine.
- "OFF ON A COMET," by Jules Verne (Conclusion). A number of other short stories by well-known science-fiction writers.

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The contents page of the first issue of Amazing, April 1926.
shore up with his choice of stories and serialised novels in his new magazine. As is demonstrated by the contents page opposite, the first issue of Amazing consisted entirely of re-prints including a story each from the three fathers, Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and Edgar Allan Poe, invoked by Gernsback in the first editorial.

While Gernsback maintained that “scientifiction” was “not a new thing on this planet” (Gernsback June 1926: 195) and had its antecedents in Poe, Verne and Wells, the newness of it was also part of the discourse. As early as 1930 one reader, Hegory Joywater of Brooklyn NY, writes that:

> [s]cience fiction is a new endeavour. Until the advent of Mr. Gernsback, it was strongly individualized, resting in such luminaries as Wells, Verne, Poe etc. But Mr. Gernsback knew that imagination was inherent in everyone; that suitable expression could be moulded by just a little coaxing or incentive. So from all America he culled the outposts of science fiction writers (Science Wonder Stories May 1930 vol. 1 no. 12: 1142-1143).

Gernsback responds:

> It is true that Science Fiction is in its infancy, and that the publishers of this, and our sister magazines, spend hundreds, perhaps thousands of dollars in advertising for Science Fiction writers, advising them, often teaching them the finer points and sometimes the fundamentals of their craft.

> But to a great extent we are aided by the readers of these magazines, amongst whom are many well-known scientists, and all of whom are above the average in mentality and intelligence (Science Wonder Stories May 1930 vol. 1 no. 12: 1143).

Sam Moskowitz notes that fans responded to this characterisation of the reader of science fiction:

> Hugo Gernsback did something for the science fiction fan that had never been attempted before: he gave him self-respect. He preached that those who followed this sort of reading-matter avidly were not possessed of a queer taste, but actually represented a higher type of intellect (Moskowitz 1964: 4).

According to Malcolm Edwards in his entry on Gernsback in The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction Gernsback “gave the genre a local habitation and a name” (Clute and Nicholls 1993: 491). Actually, Gernsback gave “the genre” two names: scientifiction and science fiction. In the first few issues of Amazing Gernsback’s editorials refer to the material it would publish as “scientifiction”. Gernsback admits to nursing a “secret hope that some day it [the word “scientifiction”] might appear in a standard dictionary” (Gernsback April
1928: 5). When he first aired the possibility of a fiction magazine devoted to this kind of fiction in 1923 he planned to call it just that - *Scientifiction*. In Gernsback’s editorial in the first issue of *Science Wonder Stories* dated June 1929, Gernsback refers to “science fiction”. Mike Ashley suggests that Gernsback coined “science fiction” in an effort to disassociate himself further from his old magazine *Amazing Stories* and thus the term ‘scientifiction’ that he had used before” (Tymn & Ashley 1985: 746-747). The two terms ‘science fiction’ and ‘scientifiction’ remained interchangeable for many years with ‘science fiction’ eventually gaining the ascendancy.

The place Gernsback gave the genre was his magazines, like *Amazing Stories* and *Wonder Stories*. In the pages of *Amazing Stories* fans begin to discuss their longing for this particular kind of writing which was unnamed before *Amazing*. The existence of the magazine allowed them to speak of their desire as well as to fill it. In this way the discourse of science fiction formed around these magazines and their readers and the interactions between the two. Before the existence of *Amazing*, regular readers were forced to look for these stories in the

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8 In the September 1926 issue of *Amazing*, Gernsback discusses readers’ criticism of the magazine’s name:

A number of letters have reached the Editor’s desk recently from enthusiastic readers who find fault with the name of the publication...

These readers would greatly prefer us to use the title “Scientifiction” instead. The message that these letters seem to convey is that the name really does not do the magazine justice, and that many people get an erroneous impression as to the literary contents from this title.

Several years ago, when I first conceived the idea of publishing a scientifiction magazine, a circular letter was sent to some 25,000 people, informing them that a new magazine by the name “Scientifiction” was shortly to be launched. The response was such that the idea was given up for two years. The plain truth is that the word “Scientifiction” while admittedly a good one, scares off many people who would otherwise read the magazine.

...After mature thought, the publishers decided that the name which is now used was after all the best one to influence the masses, because anything that smacks of science seems to be too “deep” for the average reader (September 1926 vol. 1 no. 6: 483).

9 This was not the first use of the term “science fiction”:

“Science-fiction” (with a hyphen) had earlier been coined by William Wilson, a totally forgotten Victorian writer, in a book entitled *A Little Earnest Book Upon a Great Old Subject* (London: Darton, 1851). It would be over 120 years before anyone rediscovered that book, during which time Gernsback and *Wonder Stories* had popularized the term independently (Tymn & Ashley 1985: 747).

10 In the stories of science fiction, names and naming become a site of contention. This happens most especially from the 1950s onwards with the popular appropriation of the much hated, but fan-coined neologism, “sci-fi”. Prior to that, the terms “scientifiction” and its abbreviation “sf”, and “science fiction” and its abbreviation “sf”, were the terms most commonly used to refer to this kind of fiction.
popular all-fiction magazines like *Argosy*\(^\text{11}\) and *All-Story*,\(^\text{12}\) or in a more specialised fiction magazine like *Weird Tales*,\(^\text{13}\) or in the fiction of Gernsback’s earlier, primarily non-fiction, technical magazines *Radio News, Science and Invention*, as well as in published books such as those of H. G. Wells and Jules Verne. While these readers may have found stories that they could retrospectively label ‘scientifiction’ they did not have the discourse that enabled them to talk about these stories until the advent of *Amazing Stories*.

The place Gernsback provided grew into the set of complex relations comprising and constituting science fiction communities. Jack Williamson, who began writing and publishing science fiction in the late 1920s, talks about this process:

> My own way into it [science fiction] wasn’t opened until 1926, when Hugo Gernsback launched *Amazing Stories*, the first magazine that was all science fiction...A friend loaned me a copy of it that fall, but it was the next spring before I wrote for and received a free sample copy of my own. Money was scarce, but Jo [his sister] helped me pay for a subscription. It was a cheaply printed pulp with lurid but wonderful covers, the early issues filled with the reprinted classics of Poe and Verne and Wells and Merritt. Completely infatuated, I began dreaming up and writing my own (Williamson 1979: 10).

Frederik Pohl, science fiction writer, editor and New York Futurian,\(^\text{14}\) expresses similar sentiments:

> at some point in that year of 1930 I came across a magazine named *Science Wonder Stories Quarterly*, with a picture of a scaly green monster on the cover. I opened it up. The irremediable virus entered my veins (Pohl 1978: 1).

In the next section I examine the spread of this “irremediable virus” and the concurrent growth of science fiction communities.

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\(^{11}\) *Argosy* which first appeared in 1896 was the first all-fiction pulp magazine (Tymn and Ashley *Science Fiction, Fantasy and Weird Fiction Magazines* 1985: 103).

\(^{12}\) The first issue of *All-Story* appeared in 1905.

\(^{13}\) The first issue of *Weird Tales* appeared in 1923. Its area of speciality was ‘weird’ fiction - a kind of precursor to the contemporary genre category of horror, but more general than that: “the stories were a mixture of sf, horror stories, sword and sorcery, exotic adventure, and anything else which its title might embrace” (Clute & Nicholls 1993: 1308-1309).

\(^{14}\) The New York Futurians was a fan group which was active from 1938 until the mid forties. Many members of the Futurians went on to become editors, agents, publishers, writers and critics of science fiction or all of these. The final Appendix is a brief account of the Futurians.
THE LURE OF SCIENTIFICATION

By HUGO GERNBACK, P.R.S.

Scientification is not a new thing on this planet. While Edgar Allan Poe probably was one of the first to entertain the idea of a scientific story, there are suggestions that there were other scientific authors before him. Perhaps they were not such outstanding figures in literature, and perhaps they did not write what we understand today as scientification at all. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) was a great artist, while he was not really an author of scientification, nevertheless he had enough prophetic visions to create a number of machines in his own mind that were only materialized centuries later. He described a number of machines, seemingly fantastic in those days, which would have done credit to a John Versa.*

There may have been other scientific prophets, if not scientification writers, before his time, but the past centuries are so sedentary, and there are so few manuscripts of such literature in existence today, that we cannot really be sure who was the real inventor of scientification.

In the seventeenth century there lived a Frenchman, the amazing as well as famous Roger Bacon (1214-1294). He had a most astounding and prolific imagination, with which he foretold many of our present-day wonders. But as an author of scientification, he had to be extremely careful, because in those days it was not "healthy" to predict new and startling inventions. It was necessary to disguise the manuscript—use ciphers—as a matter of fact, so that it has taken many modern minds to unravel the astounding scientific prophecies of Roger Bacon.**

The scientification writer of today is somewhat more fortunate—but not so very much more. It is true that we do not believe him or throw him into a dungeon when he dares to blaze forth with what seems to us, an impossible tale, but in our inner minds we are just as interested today, as were the contemporaries of Roger Bacon. We have not learned much in the interval. Even such a comparatively tame invention as the submarine, which was predicted by John Versa, was greeted with derisive laughter, and he was denounced in many quarters. Still, only forty years after the prediction of the modern submarine by Versa, it has become a reality.

There are few things written by our scientification writers, frankly impossible today, that may not become a reality tomorrow. Frequently the author himself does not realize that his very fantastic yarn may come true in the future, and often he himself, does not take his prediction seriously.

But the seriously-minded scientification reader absorbs the knowledge contained in such stories with avidity, with the result that such stories prove an incentive in starting some one to work on a device or invention suggested by some author of scientification.

One of our great surprises since we started publishing Amazing Stories is the tremendous amount of mail we receive from—shall we call them "Scientification Fans"—who seem to be pretty well orientated in this sort of literature. From the suggestions for reprints that are coming in, these "fans" seem to have a hobby all their own of hunting up scientification stories, not only in English, but in many other languages. There is not a day, now, that passes, but we get from a dozen to fifty suggestions as to stories of which, frankly, we have no record. Although we have a list of some 900 or 700 scientification stories. Some of these fans are constantly visiting the book stores with the express purpose of buying new or old scientification tales, and they even go to the trouble of advertising for some volumes that have long ago gone out of print.

Scientification, in other words furnishes a tremendous amount of scientific education and fires the reader's imagination more perhaps than anything else of which we know.

The June 1926 Amazing Stories editorial.
Science fiction communities

Oh, yes, letters, lots of letters, and probably they were the most interesting things in many of the magazines. Some fanzines, like the long-lasting West Coast *Voices of the Imagi-Nation*, printed nothing else.

(Pohl 1978: 33)

The most important location *Amazing Stories* provided for its readers was the appropriately named letter column, “Discussions.” The column was launched in the January 1927 issue with the following announcement:

In this department we shall discuss, every month, topics of interest to all our readers. The editors invite correspondence on all subjects directly or indirectly related to the stories appearing in this magazine. Only letters of interest to all of our readers will be published, and discussed by the editors (January 1927 vol 1, no 10: 970).

However, readers had begun to take up a visible space in the magazine as early as the second issue when Gernsback discusses letters from readers in his editorial headed “Thank You!”:

The first issue of *Amazing Stories* has been on the newsstands only about a week, as we go to press with this, the second issue of the magazine; yet, even during this short time, we have been deluged with an avalanche of letters of approval and constructive criticism from practically every section of the country (Gernsback May 1926: 99).

In the third issue Gernsback uses the word “fan” to refer to the passionate readers of his magazine. The editorial is reproduced opposite. This is the first appearance of the word referring to science fiction readers.

These fans who had their letters published in *Amazing Stories* were becoming part of the field of science fiction. Once part of the field they were part of the process of constituting that field. One instance of this is the search for antecedents that Gernsback refers to. Finding “old scientifiction tales” is part of constructing a history of scientifiction.

In the sixth issue Gernsback has this to say about *Amazing*’s readership.

We knew that once we could make a new reader pick up *Amazing Stories* and read only one story, our cause was won with that reader, and this is indeed what happened. Although the magazine is not as yet six months old, we are already printing 100,000 copies per month, and it also seems that whenever we get a new reader we keep him. A totally unforeseen result of the name, strange to say, was that a great many women are already reading the new magazine. This is most encouraging. We know that they must have picked up *Amazing Stories* out of curiosity more than anything else, and found it to their liking, and we are certain that if the name of the magazine had been “Scientifiction”
they would not have been attracted to it at a newsstand (Gernsback September 1926: 483).

This extract is typical of the editorials, the authoritative tone, the emphasis on the literature being discussed as more than mere entertainment but as serious, important and educational. Gernsback views his readers as disciples and continues the evangelical tenor of the first editorial when he writes of “capturing” readers. He shows gratitude for even the most ‘unlikely’ converts, “strange to say...a great many women are...reading the new magazine”.

This reference to women reading Amazing is not the only evidence of a female readership. Gernsback quotes readers, such as Michael H. Kay of Brooklyn NY, who share their magazine with daughters and wives:

[y]ou will generally find that when one has read your magazine he will become so enthusiastic, so elated over his discovery, that he will deem it a pleasure to extol its virtues to his friends. Even now my wife is anxiously waiting for me to finish this first issue, so that she may read it herself (Gernsback May 1926: 99).

Women were part of Amazing from the first issue, though their participation was mainly in the margins. On the cover of the very first issue, reproduced at the beginning of this chapter, there are figures clad in fur and skating, some of whom appear to be women. This is a tenuous presence, just a possibility, and all the figures are overwhelmed by the looming presence of the huge planet, Saturn, and by the huge Amazing Stories logo.

Less tenuously there were also letters by women published in “Discussions”. These are clearly signalled as anomalies with titles such as the following, “A Kind Letter from a Lady Friend and Reader,” by Mrs. H. O. De Hart of Anderson, Indiana who ends her letter:

Well, I’ve written Mr. Wastebasket a rather lengthy letter this time, but I do not really expect you to clutter up your columns with it. I am only a comparatively uneducated young (is twenty-six young? Thank you!) wife and mother of two babies, so about the only chance I get to travel beyond the four walls of my home is when I pick up your magazine (Amazing Stories June 1928 vol. 3 no. 3: 277).

The editorial response focuses on the fact that this “very interesting letter is from a member of the fair sex” (Amazing Stories June 1928 vol. 3 no. 3: 277). Marking the letter in this way makes it appear that it is “interesting” because it is by a
woman and undermines Gernsback's earlier claim that there are "a great many women" readers of the magazine.

Mrs L. Silverberg of Augusta, Georgia, states flatly that she thought she was the only woman reading Amazing. Again her letter is signalled as being from one of "the fair sex" with the heading, "A Lady Reader's Criticisms":

It is the letter of Mrs. H. O. De Hart in the June issue of your publication that is the cause of my writing my little say. For more than a year I have been a reader of this magazine, and this is the first time I have seen a letter from a woman reader. In fact I was somewhat surprised as I had believed that I was the only feminine reader of your publication. However, it is with pleasure that I note that another of my sex is interested in scientifiction (Amazing Stories October 1928 vol. 3 no. 7: 667).

The editorial response is almost identical to that which Mrs. De Hart received:

We are very glad to hear from one of the fair sex and would be glad if more of the weaker (?) sex were contributors to our Discussions Column (Amazing Stories October 1928 vol. 3 no. 7: 667).

A further letter comes from Mrs. Lovina S. Johnson of Lysite, Wyoming:

In the October issue of AMAZING STORIES, I noticed that a woman reader is heard from. I was glad to know that there are other women readers of my favorite magazine, than myself. Glad, also, to hear her reactions to the magazine (Amazing Stories March 1929 vol. 3 no. 12: 1140).

The editorial response reassures her that she is "not the only member of the fair (and voting) sex who writes us nice letters and contributes to our discussion columns" (Amazing Stories March 1929 vol. 3 no. 12: 1140).

In a similar vein is a letter in the January 1930, Science Wonder Stories, one of Hugo Gernsback's new magazines, after he lost control of Amazing. The letter is titled "No Discrimination Against Women." Mrs. Verna Pullen of Lincoln, Nebraska writes:

I have noticed that you print more letters written by men than by women, so I suppose this won't get in. Nevertheless, I wished to let you know how much I enjoyed your new magazine (Science Wonder Stories January 1930 vol. 1. no. 8: 765).

Gernsback is horrified:

As you see, we are printing your letter. We have no discrimination against women. Perish the thought - we want them!15 As a matter of fact, there are almost as many women

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15 I'm not sure that the Gernsback editorial voice was capable of irony.
THE READER SPEAKS

(Continued from page 6)

touch with someone who can construct a good story, but lacks the story material. We could bounce a story back and forth through the mails and maybe come up with something. I can supply outlined plots on everything from humor and murder to cowboys and rock bands.

Do you think anyone would care to try it? I have read that some of the mechanical gadgets to obtain plots, I have a drawer full. Any help you care to give to this matter will be greatly appreciated. —Edus Robinson, Cortez, Kansas, Texas

Your problem is now a world-wide problem. Writers everywhere are hereby invited to worry with you or to collaborate with you as they may choose. Just one of the services supplied as part of the entrance fee by this incredible column.

I REMEMBER MAMA

by Lula B. Stewart

Dear Sam: Way back then, circa 1928, I read science-fiction mag, and was infected. This chronic derangement might have culminated in the virulent stage known as acid fandom at a very early date had not fate intervened to save me. While I was madly crusading over my first epistle—it had to be both significant and scintillating—another document showed up.

That dawdling undoubtedly saved my hide, but, Cool! what happened to the other poor maiden? It shouldn't be done to a diarist! I can still hear the primitive screams of the man-pack clearing down the corridors of time. The rage of that mob was something awful to behold. Not only was I witness to that early kill, but covered in my cape as other fanatics were required to run the gauntlet. (You male fans who rail plaintively, "I can't see why the gals are so fussy about me") I sent up a few copies of these early reader columns. G'wan, I dare ya.)

Yes, I listened, shivered, and hastily swallowed back all those witicisms and criticisms that are the birthright of a sf fan. For, the first law is—SURVIVAL!

Now, at last, in the dawn of a new era, I dare creep forth, and claim my heritage of epothe. In the interim I have entered wedlock, produced two offspring, and survived the arrows of outrageous fortune according to each state. This Spartan training welded a will of iron, and hammered out a hide impervious to attack. Now, at last, backed by a formidable phalanx of fandom, I dare speak up. My life is sacred.

Permit me one last look at the long, thin line of both gems and grittles that have flowed from the pens of our splendid staff authors through the years, and afforded baters of incomparable reading material. There was Leigh Brackett's DANCING GIEL OF GANYMEDE, wonderful, memory-slinging mood piece—and so many whose titles are lost in the mist of time.

Oh, to think of all the praise I might have meted out—and didn't! Ah, to remember the unuttered bowls of protest (quit kissing my hand, boy—stop thanking me). "Tell me, the saddest words of tongue, or pen—"

(Aha, please, Sammy, that I may wipe the dewy drops from these dim old orbs—after you, dear boy, after you.)

Ah, well, frustrations gone. I, too, am a genuine, tin-carpet-too-tap, and contributor to that great, new, all-female Fandom (who's trying to sneak in a plug?). Once fandom appeared over the far horizon as a strange, uncharted land, but all that is changed, and I feel at home. This familiarity to tread the moment I learned, with unblushing glee, that fandom, like all the rest of good old California humanity, has its rigid social structure, too—a pyramid of subtle gradations that culminates in that awesome capstone, the mighty BNF (Big Name Fan), to which you grant immunities.

Remember the Big Name back in kindergarten—the kid who always sat and hit the finest with the worst? Or, the Jargon in high school who sported the loud attire, and louder larynx? Many older and wiser adults use no such trifling yardstick in electing our Big Nob—Sam. Name—a BN of the robotics is judged strictly by the intri-

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THRILLING WONDER STORIES

(Continued from above these days)

Six here's to fandom's BNF—be it him or her (especially if her name ends in Bradley):

I've never captured a BNF (pronounced if [aff])
And if I did, I'd lose one.
They get nuts, too.
That still is true.
I'd deride this one by one!

You may not print this, Sam, you missed old milioimeter, but just the same, you'll be seen me around. This fan's, fan's fan's is mighty hearty stuff for us old timers—#Gomond, R. D. #1, Harmony, Penna.

This fascinating bit of tribal history has touched us upon a tender spot—one of the few tender spots we have left. The days when the occasional femlan cowered in fear of the wolf pack are only part of our wistful folklore. Now the once lordly male takes to cover as the Amazons ride. And drunk with power hammers out the deadly cacophony with which the female has, from time immemorial, subdued the surly male. Ah, yes, power corrupts and hell hath no fury like a woman scorned and—by the way, have you dug slit trenches and rigged up the barbed wire around your post office yet?

Letter from Lula B. Stewart, Thrilling Wonder Stories, August 1953, p.133.
among our readers as there are men. The only difference is that our male readers usually bring up some point of scientific interest, while the ladies content themselves with general expression of approval or disapproval. We are always glad to hear from our feminine readers (Science Wonder Stories January 1930 vol. 1. no. 8: 765).

Another difference is that, if the numbers are nearly equal as Gernsback claims, women still had far fewer letters published than the male readers. Certainly the women who became actively involved with fandom were far fewer than the men. This could perhaps have been because, as Gernsback implies, women were less interested in science and therefore in science fiction than men, or it could be because their letters were less frequently published. At least one reader of the period thinks there are other reasons. The letter which appears opposite gives a history of one woman fan’s involvement with fandom. The letter is from Lula B. Stewart of Harmony, Pennsylvania (Thrilling Wonder Stories August 1953: 133).

Stewart here figures the letters columns of the prozines as a battlefield. Across this field the two sexes engaged in an uneven battle in which the women were outgunned until the 1950s. Her experience of a fandom where women are not equal and are only accepted on sufferance is echoed by Robin White’s much later “Are Femme Fans Human?” where a femme fan’s humanity depends on how male fans “accept her and treat her” (White 1968: 53). I examine the letter columns as the battlefield for the war of the sexes in more detail in chapter five.

Lula Stewart begins her letter by talking about her “infection” with science fiction. The infection is contracted through reading a science fiction magazine (in 1928 this could only have been Amazing Stories). Stewart only avoided entering “the virulent stage” by not writing into Amazing. Letters into prozines were the beginnings of fandom because readers’ addresses were printed with their letters and soon many of them started corresponding and meeting. By 1929 science fiction clubs began to be organised and by the late thirties science fiction conventions were beginning to be held.

These kinds of activities and, indeed, fandom itself, bear out the words of de Certeau:

But whereas the scientific apparatus (ours) is led to share the illusion of the powers it necessarily supports, that is, to assume that the masses are transformed by the conquests
and victories of expansionist production, it is always good to remind ourselves that we
mustn’t take people for fools (de Certeau 1984: 176)

Fans are not passive consumers. Many of the letters I read in prozines and
fanzines constitute reading as creation, compulsion, consumption, and belonging.
Fandom begins with the act of reading. It was, and is, at once an articulation of a
passionate involvement with texts, as well as being that passionate involvement.
The letters to *Amazing Stories* and other science fiction magazines like
*Astounding*, whose first issue appeared in 1930, give flesh to de Certeau’s
observation.

Fandom is a shifting set of relationships. The relationship to consumption of
the science fiction reader who becomes a fan who becomes a professional and who
frequently remains all three is exceptionally complicated. Marion Zimmer
Bradley discusses her own involvement with the field thus:

> Letters from the readers. Pages and pages of intelligent discussions of the stories, the
authors, the science in the stories...and a column of reviews of fanzines. Little magazines
published by readers, fans in my new language...Within a week I had written off for a
dozens of the little magazines, within six months I had started my own, and was writing
voluminously to fans all over the United States. My pocket money went for magazines—
yes, and sometimes my lunch money too. I took the train to New York City, all by myself
on the spur of the moment, called up a fan I’d exchanged letters with, and he took me to
a conference where a hundred fans sat in a room and listened to a group of scientists talk
about the possibility of man on the Moon before the year 2000 A.D (Bradley 1977-78: 13).

Marion Zimmer Bradley became an extremely successful science fiction and
fantasy writer. Until very recently the story of a comfortable transition from
fandom to a professional engagement with science fiction has been a dominant
one. So much so that there is a slight tone of annoyance when someone does not
follow this transition. For example, long time active fan, Jeffrey Smith in his
interview with James Tiptree, Jr. in his fanzine *Phantasmicon* also subscribes to
this notion of an evolution from fan to pro:

> [n]ot only do you have a magical sf place, but you find yourself in one of the upper
echelons. You are a respected writer...You never even spent your apprenticeship as a fan,
but as a non-fan reader. It smells of fantasy, Tiptree (Smith 1971: 12).

By skipping fandom altogether Tiptree is going against what was, in 1971, still
the accepted story of how an sf writer emerges. The overwhelming impression
that I received from reading accounts by pros in fanzines and prozines and books
Dear Mr. Campbell:

I picked up the latest issue of Astounding today and was immediately delighted. Your cover, too, is a joy to see. Let's have more of it, shall we? Let's have more from Herbert G. Zim, in particular. He has been working on the amazing new television, and he's really come on strong.

I have no idea what you mean by "philosophy," but I do know that you're right. We must work together to make the world a better place. Let's start with science fiction and fantasy, and then we can move on to other things.

Sincerely,
Ray Bradbury

Letter from Ray Bradbury, Astounding Science Fiction April 1939, p. 159.
of the period was of an almost effortless slide from fan to pro. This impression supports Smith’s idea that fandom is a kind of professional apprenticeship, an apprenticeship which Tiptree failed to serve. At the same time ‘fan’ and ‘pro’ are placed in an oppositional relationship, as characterised by the well-known term ‘filthy pro’ with its implication that to become a pro is to abandon and betray fandom.

Evidence of sf professionals serving their apprenticeships in fandom is thick in the professional science fiction magazines of the period. There are letters from people who went on to become well-known science fiction practitioners. I read letters by Isaac Asimov from the late 1930s which I discuss in more detail in the next chapter. I found letters from Ray Bradbury, including one reproduced opposite. I read letters by Damon Knight (Astounding July 1939); Harlan Ellison (Thrilling Wonder Stories June 1952) and an extremely long letter from George Turner in which he says he has been reading ‘stf’ since he was nine years old (Astounding January 1940: 155-57). In the late 1940s and early 1950s there is a letter from Marion Zimmer (who became Marion Zimmer Bradley) in almost every issue of Startling Stories. In the December 1952 issue of Thrilling Wonder Stories she refers to herself as a BNF (big name fan) and a veteran of six years (December 1952: 130). There are many other examples of letters from fans who went on to be professionally engaged in science fiction as writers and editors and publishers. Many continued to write to science fiction magazines and fanzines even after they had become ‘filthy pros.’

In the 1930s and 1940s, collecting professional science fiction magazines and writing in to their letters columns was an essential part of being a fan. The following examples articulate the importance for fandom of these letters to the editors. The first comes from Langley Searles of NYC, NY:

I got to thinking the other day. I do little correspondence with fellow fans, but almost without exception - when I do, that is - the fans mention in their reminiscences something like this: “Say, remember the reader’s columns in the old Wonder?” or: “Now take the old Wonder Stories; they had a reader’s department to be proud of!” (Startling Stories January 1940: 110).
By the late sixties some readers were nostalgic for the reader’s columns of the 1940s. Edward M. Osachie of Vancouver, Canada asks that an entire issue of the magazine be devoted to letters:

Can you see the idea? Well, if not, let’s have some fun like that in the old Thrilling Wonder and Startling Stories. They had grand old letter departments (If November 1969: 156).

The importance of the letter columns for the formation of science fiction fandom became more apparent as fandom grew. By 1952 letters like the following example by Marion Mallinger of Pittsburgh, Pa. appear regularly. Mallinger is explicit about the recruitist potential for fandom of the letters column:

The letter department of your magazine is good. I may go so far as to say as good as some of the stories. Instead of finding the stories reshaped, I find good, interesting letters that are worth reading. This is a good drawing card to people who have only now started reading S.F. If they find letters that talk about previous stories (this was good, that was bad) they lose interest and skip the section. Here maybe someone who would have turned into an active fan is lost. But in writing letters to the editor that actually discuss interesting questions a lot of people get pleasantly excited, talk about it and so spread the growth of S.F. a little faster (Thrilling Wonder Stories October 1952: 134).

At the same time, however, many fans were ceasing to read prozines altogether. The Fancyclopedia argues that the relationship between fan and the prozines is a changing one:

Quite a few long-time fans have at times completely given up reading the pros thru disgust, or preoccupation with fan and other activities. The course of fan history has varied form close to slieonnexion with the pros, and the wish has often been expressed that we could get along without the pros as a recruiting medium. This is principally a fanationalistic manifestation, however; the average stefnist eats up good sfantasy, has an exaggerated idea of its literary merit, and will leap to defend it against detractors (Speer 1944: 68-9).16

Another place that was created to accommodate fandom was the convention. Conventions were and are places where the communities of sf fans can make themselves visible. In convention spaces the fan’s sense of being one of many ceases to be imaginary and becomes actual. Conventions are a visible manifestation of what is, for the most part, a virtual community which stays in

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16 All spelling is as it appears in the Fancyclopedia.
touch via written texts although with the advent of the internet that communication is substantially faster.

Ten years after the appearance of *Amazing* the first convention was held. Joe Siclari writes that the “so-called” first sf convention was held on the 22nd of October 1936 when some New York fans, including Frederik Pohl and John Michel, caught the train to meet with some Philadelphia fans (Siclari 1981: 91-2). The entry on conventions in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* by Peter Roberts and Rob Hansen argues that “the first formally planned sf convention took place in Leeds, UK, in 1937” (Clute and Nicholls 1993: 261). In 1939 the first WorldCon was held in New York in conjunction with the World’s Fair. The WorldCon is now the biggest science fiction convention in the world and is held annually.

The convention swiftly became very important in the fan world - so important that by the fifties there were fans who were exclusively interested in conventions. By 1940 the form of the science fiction convention was more or less set:

One of the principal features of sf fandom, conventions are usually weekend gatherings of fans and authors, frequently with a program of sf discussion and events. In fan language conventions are usually referred to as cons. They are informal not professionally organised, and with no delegated attendants or, usually, paid speakers. Typical activities include talks, auctions, films, panel discussions, masquerades and banquets (Clute and Nicholls 1993: 261).

del Rey describes the WorldCons thus:

auction, banquet, masquerade - and numerous speeches from fans and professional...More than any other activity, the worldcons gave a feeling of unity and common goal to all the elements of the world of science fiction (del Rey 1979: 147-148).

Or, as was said on many occasions at WisCon 20 held in May 1996: “a coming together of the tribe”. The tribe being on that occasion not just del Rey’s “world of science fiction” but the world of feminist science fiction.

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17 For more information about this debate see Robert Hansen’s *The Story So Far...A Brief History of British Fandom 1931-1987* (Hansen 1987: 4-5 & 48-50).
The science in science fiction

Fans are Slans! (Fan slogan)

Science was simply an accumulation of facts, and the deductions of conclusions from those facts. And who better could bring divine order from intricate reality than the mighty-brained, full-grown, mature slan? (van Vogt 1953: 95)

As I argued in chapter one, the notion of ‘science’ has always been one of the constraints within which science fiction texts are produced. Arguments about the relationship between science, science fiction and readers and fans were an important part of the discourse. The notion of ‘science’ itself was a contested issue, as I discuss later in this section. The June 1926 editorial of Amazing Stories ends with the following paragraph:

Scientifiction, in other words, furnishes a tremendous amount of scientific education and fires the reader’s imagination more perhaps than anything else of which we know (Gernsback June: 195).

The only reason for an obsession with scientifiction was to educate yourself scientifically and perhaps become a scientist. Andrew Ross argues that “in Gernsback’s view, sf was more a social than a literary movement” (Ross 1991: 103). Gernsback was particularly keen to proselytise to the young:

if we can make the youngsters think, we feel that we are accomplishing our mission, and that the future of the magazine, and, to a degree, the future of progress through the younger generation, is in excellent hands. Once upon a time the youngsters read Indian stories, which were not at all educational; nowadays it is scientifiction, which is an education in itself. All we can say therefore is “More power to the young men, and let’s have more of them” (Gernsback October 1927: 625).

Amazing’s rhetoric was about progress and improving the world which was inextricably linked with science. This was a religious project as Gernsback makes clear when he refers to “our mission”. Fandom, growing out of its pages, would create a space in which “fans” could find others who were interested in fictional representations of scientific inquiry and endeavour. Gernsback’s pronouncements on the subject begin in the first issue of Amazing where he stresses the connection between this kind of fiction and science:
Not only do these amazing tales make tremendously interesting reading - they are also always instructive. They supply knowledge that we might not otherwise obtain - and they supply it in a very palatable form. For the best of these modern writers of scientifiction have the knack of imparting knowledge, and even inspiration, without once making us aware that we are being taught (Gernsback April 1926: 3).

Another example:

There are few things written by our scientifiction writers, frankly impossible today, that may not become a reality tomorrow. Frequently the author himself does not realize that his very fantastic yarn may come true in the future, and often he, himself, does not take his prediction seriously.

But the seriously-minded scientifiction reader absorbs the knowledge contained in such stories with avidity, with the result that such stories prove an incentive in starting someone to work on a device or invention suggested by some author of scientifiction (Gernsback June 1926: 195).

Gernsback and his magazine have been frequently identified with an idealist, naive science worship and certainly he published many letters that supported his views of science and reinforced his vision of science fiction as a recruiting tool for the scientists of tomorrow. Ted Mason of Los Angeles, California writes that the “science in most of the stories is an inspiration to me in my studies in electrical engineering” (Science Wonder Stories October 1929 vol. 1 no. 5: 467). Gernsback responds:

We are glad to get this letter from a student, and to learn the value to him of the science contained in our stories. He will find that the stories are written by men who are not only well-trained in science but who have a mastery of it. The instinctive understanding of scientific principles is necessary to a writer of science fiction. For his lack of understanding becomes painfully apparent to our critical readers (Science Wonder Stories October 1929 vol. 1 no. 5: 467).

Indeed the bulk of letters received are from readers pointing out the improbability of the science in a given story. The accuracy of the science in a story is, in these debates, the sole criterion for whether it is a good story or not. A large part of these readers’ pleasure in science fiction is in debating the plausibility of the stories with other readers.

The obsession with scientific ‘accuracy’ is spoofed by John Wasso, Jr. of Pen Argyl, Pa. who threatens that

[o]ne of these days I’m going to write a yarn so chockful of deliberate errors, flaws, contradictions and impossible science that it will drive all you error-mad hunters NUTS!!! (Astounding Science Fiction October 1940: 152).
There were also many letters published that echoed Gernsback’s recruitist hopes for science fiction. The following letter from Earl B. Brown of Amesbury, Massachusetts, is typical:

Science is good for everyone. If everyone knows a little science, the world will be better off, and will advance more quickly. But, if everyone delved a little into science, something else will happen. They will begin to think. My high school chemistry professor, when I first began that course, said to me, and to the class, “You are taking chemistry to learn how to think.” I have never forgotten that. And I have found that he was right. There are too few people in this world who do a little thinking (Amazing Stories February 1927: 1078).

The linking of science and progress and the strong belief in the onward upward impulse into a glorious future is often imputed to the early fans of science fiction - and indeed to many current fans. Henry Jenkins in his work on MIT Star Trek fans argues that they are part of “a long tradition of science fiction fans acting as arbiters of the scientific validity of popular fictions” (Tulloch & Jenkins 1995: 217). This tradition began with Amazing Stories.

There are not many letters which discuss what science fiction or scientifiction is in the early years of pulp science fiction magazines in the 1920s and 1930s. Everyone knew what ‘it’ was - it had something to do with ‘science’ - but everyone seemed to have a different notion of what constituted ‘science’. What does and does not belong to the universe of science fiction and who has the rights to make these decisions? What science fiction is, the genre, is taken for granted in the letters, but the texts, the instances of this genre, are not. So that the attempts at setting limits to the field are through a series of test cases about which there is not always agreement. By the 1950s, however, definitions of science are expanding and a letter such as the following from Virginia Winchester of Grimsby, Ontario is much more common. She asks,

[has any criterion been established to determine if a story is ‘Science Fiction’? What takes a story out of the pure fantasy category and gives it the title “science”? Science embraces many fields: physiology, archeology, history, crime detection etc. that this very diversity prompts this question (Thrilling Wonder Stories August 1952: 128).

In the 1930s and 1940s there were raging arguments among some members of fandom about the nature of science and progress and what kind of future was being and should be shaped. The connections between science, technology and
progress were not and are not unproblematic ones. The proponents of science and technology as the way of remaking the future were of a variety of political shades. Within fandom there were anarchists, communists and fascists who all subscribed to the idea of science as humanity’s saviour. One of these debates is summed up in this entry from the *Fancyclopedia*:

Gernsback delusion - (Michelists)

- The purpose, imputed to Gerns, of making scifiction fans into scientists by putting accurate scientific information into sf stories - sugarcoating it. This was proved wrong, said the Michelists, by the failure of the ISA, the purpose of science-fiction should be to make active idealists. Some fans who were working in or studying science replied that they believed s-f had stimulated their interest in science a great deal. Another reply was that Uncle Hugo never expected his readers to turn scientist wholesale, but that reading s-f puts the scifictionist well ahead of the average man in understanding science (Speer 1944: 42-3).

The debates within fandom among the mostly very young and very male membership were part of debates taking part in the wider community. Andrew Ross argues in his chapter “Getting Out of the Gernsback Continuum” that many of its [early pulp fiction’s] salient features, often considered to be ‘naïve’, were linked to central elements of progressive thought in the first three decades of this century (Ross 1991: 102).

Ross argues that “the national cults of science, engineering, and invention, [and]...technocracy’s role in the social thought of the day” were crucial to “North American SF genre formation” (Ross 1991: 103). Without going into Ross’ arguments in detail, his attempt to historicize the emergence of science fiction as a socially located genre in the USA stands in stark contrast to accounts, like that of Aldiss and Wingrove’s *Trillion Year Spree* (1986), which construct the genre as primarily a collection of books having almost no interaction with the social context in which they were produced.
However, by the 1950s many long-time fans of science fiction felt that the centrality of their notion of science to the field was being eroded. William Atheling, Jr.\textsuperscript{20} wonders why John W. Campbell, editor of Astounding finds it necessary to print an article about the science background of a story he had earlier published:

Why does Campbell want his readers to know that writing a long science-fiction story takes careful preparation before the more obviously fictional elements of the story are filled in? First, because he assumes that his readers don’t know it. In itself this is a revolutionary assumption. There was a time in the development of magazine science fiction when the most vocal part of the readership insisted upon minute attention to detail, and as much accuracy as the known facts of a given would permit. This is not a prejudice fostered by Campbell. It was implicit in T. O’Conor Sloane’s delight in listing every degree and academic honour his authors (or he himself) had ever earned... It was equally visible in Gernsback’s practice, and in Gernsback’s last magazine, Science Fiction Plus, the emphasis upon the scientific qualification was even more nakedly paraded, and sometimes even more dishonestly. Everybody once knew that to be a good science-fiction writer you had to Know Your Science (Atheling [1964] 1974: 46).\textsuperscript{21}

Many fans saw their engagement with science fiction and with science as marking them as different and more intelligent than those in the mundane world. Atheling’s comments here are a lament for the way science fiction once was.

The discourse of difference was an important one in the emergence of the science fiction community. While science fiction is a marker of the sf person’s difference it is also the reason that person turns to science fiction in the first place:

Damon Knight says that, as children, all we science-fiction writers were toads. We didn’t get along with our peers. We had no close friends and were thus thrown on our internal resources. Reading, particularly science fiction, filled the gaps. A more charitable explanation might be that most science-fiction readers were precocious kids who got little reward from the chatter of their adolescent schoolmates and looked for more stimulating companionship in print. Either way Damon was hooked and so was I, and so were some ten or twenty thousand people all over the world who comprise the great collective family called “science fiction” (Pohl 1978: 2)

This sense of difference was summed up in the well-known fan slogan quoted at the beginning of this section: “Fans are slans”. In the entry in the Fancyclopedia on “slan” the following claim is made:

Because the central character in the story was a youth in unsympathetic surroundings, and because of the obvious similarities to fans’ dreams of greatness, the unserious claim

\textsuperscript{20} William Atheling, Jr. is the pen name for the critical writings of sf writer James Blish.
\textsuperscript{21} These comments were first published in the Spring 1953 issue of the fanzine Skyhook.
The cover of the October 1940 issue of Astounding Science Fiction illustrating A. E. Van Vogt's "Slan". The cover is by Rogers.
to slanhood has become the Third Fandom parallel to the Second Fandom’s half-serious Star-Begotten\textsuperscript{22} claim (Speer 1944: 81).\textsuperscript{23}

The slogan comes from \textit{Slan} by A. E. van Vogt, which first appeared as a serialised novel in \textit{Astounding Science Fiction} in the September, October, November and December 1940 issues. The October 1940 cover based on “Slan” appears on the facing page. The novel became a firm part of the early fans’ conception of themselves. I quote the jacket blurb from the 1953 English edition:

\begin{quote}
Jimmy Cross was a Slan. Human beings had killed his mother, fearing the whole race of Slans as freaks, artificially created monsters.

Alone and friendless, Jimmy set out to solve the mystery of his own existence. He knew that his own kind had been almost wiped out in the Slan wars, which had left civilisation in the grip of an autocratic world-wide police state. Only by the slim tentacles that gleamed, half-concealed, in the hair of Slans, could Jimmy recognise his race.

How to organise resistance, how to free the world from the frightening hold of the police, these were Jimmy’s problems (from the 1953 edition published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson).
\end{quote}

The text engages with ideas of science and it is Jimmy’s mastery of various different technologies, as much as his physical superiority, that sets him apart. Many fans read this as an analogy for the way in which their engagement with science fiction set them apart. The blurb goes on to say that \textit{Slan} is recognised as one of the major classics of modern Science Fiction. First published in 1945, it was so much in demand that readers were willing to pay many times the published price to obtain a copy.

Now A. E. van Vogt has somewhat revised his story - although he found his earlier predictions about the uses of atomic energy had proved amazingly accurate (from the 1953 edition published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson).

In the thirteen years between its first appearance in \textit{Astounding}, \textit{Slan} has become a ‘classic’ and has proven to be prophetic - one of Gernsback’s marks for identifying the “most amazing” scifiction stories.

The volume of mail received by \textit{Astounding} after \textit{Slan} appeared was phenomenal. All four parts (the first part was equal first with “Blowups Happen”

\textsuperscript{22} According to the entry by Elmer Perdue in the \textit{Fancyclopedia} “Star-Begotten” comes from the novel of the same title by H.G.Wells:

And, since the ‘Star-Begotten’ are those people with abnormal intelligence, produced thru the direct or indirect agency uv [sic] brings upon another planet, and since these ‘Star-Begotten’ are misunderstood, intuitive, brilliant people, stphandom has adopted the name as a collective title phar [sic] themselves (Speer 1944: 85).

\textsuperscript{23} According to the \textit{Fancyclopedia} the term “First Fandom” was coined by Speer and describes the period up to 1936. He says the “Second Fandom” covers the period October 1937 - 1938 and “Third Fandom” covers the period from September 1944 on (Speer 1944: 37, 77 & 87).
ANALYTICAL LABORATORY

As of noon, December 2nd, at which time this issue went to press, "Slan" had set a definite and unchallenged record. The whole December issue of Astounding had drawn an unusually heavy number of reader votes, with "Slan" itself apparently the reason for the unusual number. The record lies in this: every voter had placed "Slan" in number-one position. So the scores stand:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Slan&quot;</td>
<td>A. E. van Vogt</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Fog&quot;</td>
<td>Robert Willey</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Old Man Mulligan&quot;</td>
<td>P. Schuyler Miller</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Legacy&quot;</td>
<td>Nelson S. Bond</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Spheres&quot;</td>
<td>D. M. Edwards</td>
<td>5.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

"Fog," incidentally, was the only other story to get any first-place votes; two readers tied it with "Slan."

I expect to wait a considerable time before another story comes along on which there is such surprising unanimity of opinion; apparently "Slan" merited the praise I gave it.

[Signature]

The Editor.

AST—5

The "Analytical Laboratory" vote on the last instalment of "Slan: from Astounding Science Fiction, February 1941, p. 67.
by Robert A. Heinlein) were voted first in the “Analytical Laboratory”24 (ASF: November 1940: 63; ASF December 1940: 112; ASF January 1941: 73; ASF February 1941: 67). The vote on the last part occasioned the editorial comment which appears opposite.

The following letter from Carl H. Anderson of Traverse City, Michigan is typical:

there is, it seems, a man named Van Vogt. The fellow apparently owns a type-writer, ten fingers well-skilled in its operation and a mind of a brilliance that has not been directed at the field of science-fiction since the halcyon era of Weinbaum-Smith-Campbell-Williamson and the zenith of imaginative writing.

This chap, who, within a single twelve months had written three or four of that year's ten best, had apparently finished a thing called, “Slan.” Again the effusive blurb - the extravagant promise - the kind of thing we've grown used to in a year of such tactics. “Ah, yes, the bonnie Campbell laddie is awa' again.”

Ah, yes, and the bonnie Campbell laddie was right again.

“Slan” is good. It is definitely great stuff. It is the stuff which is called classic. It is the unforgettable - the brilliant - the ultimate. It is the kind of thing that justifies science-fiction (ASF Feb 1941: 156).

All the letters in the February 1941 issue have extravagant things to say about Slan though there are some letters in earlier issues that are less enthusiastic. Edward Sumers of Long Beach, N.Y. writes that “Slan is not living up to all the advance publicity you have given it” (ASF December 1940: 113).

The discourses of science fiction precede, condition and constrain fandom so that it is difficult to separate the two. The slan-fan emerges from the fan's engagements with a particular science fiction text, Slan. The slogan “fans are slans” is a recognition of fans' difference from the mundane world and it is a location of this difference in the world of science fiction. The superior fan, the slan-fan, and their access to scientific knowledges gives them an access to discourses which allow the fan speech and a position from which to speak.25 Discourses of science thus become particularly enabling. Atheling is lamenting changes in these discursive relationships which he argues began in the 1940s.

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24 The Analytical Laboratory listed the rankings the readers made of the stories of previous issues of Astounding.
25 Like rocketry and space travel which the fan knows will happen one day - fans' accounts of the moment when 'man' landed on the moon are more about a vindication of faith than anything else: “we always knew it would happen”.
Science fiction, however, never attained the universally high standards of scientific accuracy that Atheling implies was the case. Although many fans who identify strongly with the science in science fiction articulate a dissatisfaction with the woeful scientific standards of the majority of science fiction they also demonstrate a great deal of pleasure in pointing out in minute detail the many scientific inaccuracies. Their pleasures in science fiction are not just in discovering the rare scientifically accurate stories, though this is a very real pleasure, but also in pointing out their absence.

There were other fans who did not take up these particular discourses. The scientific authenticity of science fiction was not the crucial shaping factor for them. In the midst of all the letters criticising the inaccuracy or praising the accuracy of the science of particular stories in *Amazing* there are letters praising stories for being a cracking good read. Bradford Butler, a “Counsellor at Law” of New York NY writes:

> once a month it [*Amazing Stories*] turns an otherwise amiable and attractive household into an inferno of selfishness - son against father, daughter against mother, and each against the field - each seeking to pre-empt the copy of the magazine to learn how Gerald got out of the mountains of Mars or how Octavius saved the fair Olivia from the machinations of the super-heterodyne monster of the Moon (*Amazing Stories* February 1927 vol. 1 no. 11: 1977).

Indeed, a strict definition of science fiction where a story is not considered to be science fiction unless the science is accurate, would mean that few of the stories in *Amazing* or *Astounding* were science fiction at all. Most of the stories offend against the known science of their time and are full of faster than light interplanetary travel, of humans being able to breathe unhindered on Mars or

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26 The editorial response makes much of this: “Here is a man of learning, an attorney at law” (*Amazing Stories* February 1927: 1077).

27 This idea that the science in science fiction has to be accurate is still central among some fans and consumers of science fiction. Henry Jenkins in his chapter on *Star Trek* fans at MIT found that science was a central discourse for their understanding and enjoyment of *Star Trek*.

The MIT students draw upon their textbook knowledge of real-world science to test the series’ technical claims, often relishing their superiority over the writers’ “pitiful” errors. Roberts, a senior physics major, protested, “sometimes they go a little far afield of science fiction. They keep getting Neutrinos wrong!” (1995: 225).

Jenkins notes that “[t]hese MIT students follow a long tradition of science fiction fans acting as arbiters of scientific validity of popular fictions” (1995: 217).
Venus and of humans who in just a few centuries have evolved wings. Edgar Rice Burroughs was a staple of *Amazing* and many of his stories would today be classified as fantasy.\(^{28}\)

Many fans had an obsession with the kind of ‘weird’ and fantastic fiction published in *Weird Tales* and other magazines that had little or no interest in science and its benefits for ‘mankind’. In the *Fancyclopedia* the general field is called fantasy and then divided into the trinity of “science-fiction, weird fiction, and pure fantasy” (Speer 1944: 33). All three areas were of interest to the fan, and there were many fans who were more interested in weird fiction and fantasy than science fiction.

In this chapter I have set forth the emergence of the field of science fiction in order to shape the context in which the battle of the sexes, which I examine in the following chapters, took place. The majority of the stories which I discuss in the next two chapters, “Mama Come Home” and “Painwise” were first published in the science fiction magazines like *Amazing* and *Astounding* and they and other ideas about the relations of men and women to each other and to science fiction were debated in the letter columns of these magazines as well as fanzines. These stories and debates are the focus of the following chapters.

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\(^{28}\) The distinction between the two genres was already beginning to be made. The division between fantasy and science fiction begins with the arrival of *Amazing*. It took up the space of the science fiction magazine and the existing *Weird Tales* became the home of fantasy and weird (a precursor to the contemporary category of horror) fiction. Fantasy as a fully fledged commercial genre does not begin to emerge until *The Lord of the Rings* was published in 1954-55 (Attebery 1992).
"Mama Come Home"

Introducing The Battle of the Sexes 1926-1973

In the next two chapters, I examine a particular body of stories within the field which are explicitly about relations between women and men. This group of texts, the battle of the sexes, raise many issues concerning men and women, and sex and sexuality. In this chapter I set up my arguments about the battle of the sexes which underpin my discussion in this and the following chapter.

The texts I discuss in this chapter are predicated on an unequal relationship between the sexes where male rule is naturalised and female rule is demonised. The texts I discuss in chapter four, however, are concerned to negotiate a less unequal relationship between the sexes. I begin my discussion with the narratives in general before going on to present a close reading of some specific texts.

The battle of the sexes genre is a site where the negotiations that produce and shape heterosexual subjectivities are explicitly realised. The title of Robert Wentworth’s “World Without Sex” (1940) is suggestive of these negotiations,1 because sex here actually has a very limited referent. This is not a world in which no sex acts take place but a world in which a specific heterosexual engagement of a dominant man and a submissive woman is (at first) absent. That engagement is symbolised by particular kinds of female bodies, the kind of desirable female bodies which were commonly represented on many of the covers of sf magazines. A world where desirable female bodies are not available to men is a world without sex. For a woman to become a part of the heterosexual economy, she must learn to perform her sex properly so that she can then be sex. “One is not

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1 Robert Wentworth was a penname of Edmond Hamilton.
born, but rather becomes, a woman" (de Beauvoir [1949] 1972: 295). Neither is one born a real man. In this chapter I examine the process of becoming a real woman or a real man in the battle of the sexes.

The majority of the battle of the sexes texts I consider here are those which Joanna Russ refers to in “The Image of Women in Science Fiction”. She writes:

The strangest and most fascinating oddities in science fiction occur not in the stories that try to abolish differences in gender-roles but in those which attempt to reverse the roles themselves. Unfortunately, only a handful of writers have treated this theme seriously.

Into a world of cold, cruel, domineering women who are openly contemptuous of their cringing, servile men...[Then] arrive(s) men (a man) from our present world. With a minimum of trouble, these normal men succeed in overthrowing the matriarchy, which although strong and warlike, is also completely inefficient (Russ 1974: 56).

This role reversal serves to demonstrate that female rule is misrule.\(^2\) The centre of these texts is the struggle to restore male rule and the ‘natural order of things’.

A central aspect of the natural order of things is a heterosexuality predicated on the romance discourse which I call the heterosexual economy. The matriarchal worlds are heterosexual yet they are outside this economy - men there exist only for reproduction, and if there are no men then there is no sex. The matriarchal women must be reincorporated into the heterosexual economy which they were a part of in their patriarchal past. For the women of these matriarchal worlds, reincorporation is a return, as a class, to the rule of the father.

In many of these texts there is both a literal war between men as a class and women as a class, and also a metaphorical war between two individual representatives of their class: the hero and heroine. In the process of rescuing the heroine from her matriarchal existence the hero transforms her into a real woman. The process of incorporation (not reincorporation because for the heroine this is her first encounter with patriarchy) to the heterosexual economy is achieved through some kind of heterosexual penetration, usually a kiss. Later in this chapter I give an ergative analysis of two ‘kiss’ passages in particular, one

\(^2\) Many of the battle of the sexes texts use the device of role reversal. This device is by no means unique to science fiction. See for instance Natalie Zemon Davis’ “Women on Top” (Davis 1975: 124-151).
from Nelson S. Bond’s “The Priestess Who Rebelled” (1939), and the other from Edmund Cooper’s *Who Needs Men?* (1972).

The field of science fiction during this period was not the only site in which debates about women, sex, sexuality and feminism were taking place. In 1928 Virginia Woolf was overcome by the number of books written about women:

One went to the counter; one took a slip of paper; one opened a volume of the catalogue, and...the five dots here indicate five separate minutes of stupefaction, wonder and bewilderment. Have you any notion of how many books are written about women in the course of one year? Have you any notion how many are written by men? Are you aware that you are, perhaps, the most discussed animal in the universe? (Woolf [1929] 1977: 27).

Wallace G. West’s battle of the sexes story, “The Last Man” (1929), which I discuss below begins with an epigram from Thomas M. Ludovici’s *Lysistrata or Woman’s Future and Future Woman* (1923). *Lysistrata* is one of the books by men about women contributing to Woolf’s “wonder and bewilderment”.

Ludovici’s philosophical treatise concerns the degeneracy the human race has fallen into because of Woman. He extrapolates from the present sad state of affairs two scenarios for the development of the future world. In one, women take over and eliminate all men. It is from this version of the future that “The Last Man” takes its epigram:

...By that time, however, a significant precedent will have been established and a lesson learnt that will not easily be forgotten. The superfluousness of men above a certain minimum will have become recognized officially and unofficially as a social fact...in a very short while it will become a mere matter of routine to proceed to an annual slaughter of males who have either outlived their prime or else have failed to fulfill the promise of their youth in meekness, general emasculateness [sic] and stupidity (Ludovici 1923: 95).

This state of affairs is Ludovici’s extrapolation from the current conditions of post-World War I degeneracy. For obvious reasons in the West women outnumbered men and had begun to join the workforce in increasing numbers. He writes that

there is still a fight to be fought with Feminism, ...we ourselves, though heart and soul pro-feminine, still remain active anti-Feminists...if anti-Feminism means resisting the further development of Feminism, to prevent it from culminating in some or all of the changes outlined in the previous chapter; if it means a struggle to maintain the natural functioning of male and female in reproduction; and if it also means the retention of the family, the home, and some beauty in our social scheme, then it certainly cannot yet be a lost cause (Ludovici 1923: 101).
These ideas about what the natural relations between the sexes should be are central to the majority of the battle of the sexes texts I examine in this chapter. Indeed the title of the chapter, taken from Tiptree’s story “Mama Come Home” (1968), is a direct reference to this desire to make the relations between women and men return to an imagined past when there was no feminism and all the mamas were at home.

**The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction 1926-1973**

The two main accounts of the battle of the sexes in science fiction during this period are Sam Moskowitz’s *When Women Rule* (1972)\(^3\) and Joanna Russ’ “*Amor Vincit Foeminam: The Battle of the Sexes in SF*” (1980). Part of the process of writing about the battle of the sexes is to decide what texts belong in this category. Moskowitz locates the stories in his anthology within the history of science fiction to show how inclusive the genre is despite claims to the contrary. He argues that the theme of “woman dominant...spotlight[ed] the female sex” and has “since the beginning...been regarded as legitimately within the province of science fiction” (Moskowitz 1972: 1). Russ, on the other hand, is concerned to show how appalling the battle of the sexes texts are and contrasts them to a more recent genre, which she calls feminist utopias.

Although Moskowitz’s anthology is titled *When Women Rule*, he includes two stories in which women do not rule. In “The Last Woman” (1932) there is only one woman left in the world, and in “The Feminine Metamorphosis” (1929) women are thwarted in their attempts to seize power. Joanna Russ excludes the texts she designates feminist utopias from the battle of the sexes although she argues that most of them are “concerned with the battle of the sexes” (Russ 1980: 13). She also briefly mentions some texts by men which she deems to be possibly

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\(^3\) The introduction of *When Women Rule* was first printed as an article in the August 1967 issue of *If*. 
pro-feminist but also excludes them from the designation battle of the sexes (Russ 1980: 13).

I have designated any text which is concerned with relations between the sexes as a battle of the sexes text. I include Russ' 'feminist utopias' as well as her 'pro-feminist' texts by men in this designation. I include texts where men rule as well as those where women rule and also less typical battle of the sexes stories, such as H. O. Dickinson's "The Sex Serum" (1935) and Philip Wylie's *The Disappearance* (1951).

That the battle of the sexes was a known sub-genre or theme of science fiction is highlighted by intertextualities between the stories. As well as the unconscious intertextualities which occur because writers are immersed in the same discourses and fields of knowledge, science fiction is also characterised by a great deal of conscious rewriting of earlier texts. For example, according to Moskowitz, "The Last Woman" first published in the April 1932 issue of *Wonder Stories*, was "deliberate[ly]" written as a counter to "The Last Man," first published in the February 1929 issue of *Amazing Stories* (Moskowitz 1972: 13). In "The Last Man" all men have been destroyed except for one, M-1, the Last Man, who is kept on permanent display in a museum. He is rescued by a woman who is a throwback to the time when the world was bisexual and they escape to the mountains. In "The Last Woman," all women have been destroyed except for one, the Last Woman, who is kept on permanent display in a museum. She is rescued by a man who is a throwback to the time when the world was bisexual.

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4 "The Sex Serum" (1935) concerns a serum which can change a woman into a man and vice versa. The woman experiences a boost in her intelligence when she becomes a man while the man becomes stupid and so is unable to invent a method of reversing his/her transformation. In *The Disappearance* (1951) all the men of earth find themselves having to exist in a world without women, and all the women find themselves in a world without men. I discuss *The Disappearance* in chapter four.

5 There was a debate between James Blish, writing as William Atheling, Jr. and Moskowitz in the 1950s about Moskowitz's "reputation for reliability in matters of fact" which Atheling contended was "somewhat overblown" (Atheling 1970: 39). In particular Atheling argues that Moskowitz detects influences between stories where there are none because he ignores the frequently long gap between a story's writing and its publication. Atheling cites as evidence stories written by himself some years before they appeared in print which Moskowitz claims were influenced by stories not yet published at the time of writing (Atheling 1970: 35-39). I have no way of knowing, other than Moskowitz's word, if "The Last Woman" (1932) was written in response to "The Last Man" (1929) however the similarities between the two texts are remarkable.
THE LAST WOMAN

By Thomas D. Gardner

They laughed and passed comments on the Last Woman. Her face flushed under their cold merciless humor. She was to them another animal of earth.

1338

Title page illustration of Thomas D. Gardner’s “The Last Woman” by Paul, Wonder Stories, April 1932, p. 1238.
and they attempt to escape into outer space. Richard Wilson’s *Girls from Planet Five* (1955) has a series of short “Vox Pop” sections where Joan and George, Mr. and Mrs. Everyman, gradually discover that the matriarchal world is abnormal and that George is meant to be the man of the house and undertake paid work to take care of his wife. In *Venus Plus X* (1960) there are a series of “Vox Pop” sections about Herb and Jeanette, Mr. and Mrs. Everyman, where they, though mostly Herb, consider questions of sex and gender and misogyny. *Venus Plus X* also refers specifically to *The Disappearance* (Sturgeon 1960: 71-72). These are just a few examples of the many instances of intertextuality between sexxbattle texts. The battle of the sexes stories also share many motifs such as the use of role reversals, matriarchal worlds modelled on insects and parthenogenesis.

**Real Men and Real Women**

In her article, “Gendering the Body: Beauvoir’s Philosophical Contribution”, Butler writes that

> there has been a great deal of popular and scientific thinking that has tacitly subscribed to gender as a kind of being. We speak quite often of someone being a real or true man or woman, being “manly” or “womanly” as if participating in an ideal Form of man or woman, and here we tend to assume that man and woman are substances that not only exist but are causally responsible for certain kinds of behaviour (Butler 1989: 258).

The majority of the battle of sexes texts which I discuss in this chapter are predicated on an ideal form of manliness and womanliness and show ways in which woman and man are distinct substances whose manliness and womanliness cause them to engage in certain behaviours. These behaviours mean that they are real women and real men and those who do not engage in these behaviours are not real men or women.

Thomas S. Gardner’s “The Last Woman” (1932) is set in a world - with the exception of one woman - entirely populated by real men. Men are the dominant sex having defeated women’s attempt to “feminize civilization” (Gardner [1932] 1972: 135). An illustration from the story appears opposite. The story ends with the last woman being executed and an all male “Science Civilization” triumphing. Russ (1980) discusses “The Last Woman” and its all-male scientific
utopia but by the end of her article she seems to have forgotten the narrative resolution which results in a world without women:

no Flasher book [Russ's alternative name for the battle of the sexes texts] I was able to find envisioned a womanless world (or dared to say so); about half the feminist Utopias matter-of-factly excluded men (Russ 1980: 14).

"The Last Woman" not withstanding there is no need to envision a world without women as there has always been science fiction which "matter-of-factly excluded" women. The following letter from Isaac Asimov makes this point:

[There is a great deal of significance, I think, in the fact that the four stories of the September issue of Startling Stories did not contain a single female character...[T]he September issue goes to prove that good stories can be written even with the total absence of the weaker sex (Startling Stories November 1939: 115).

The all-male world of Gardner's "The Last Woman" is world of real men not homosexuals. The world is achieved through the discovery of the Elixir, as

[All the energies that had been turned toward sex and the emotional side of life were released for thought and work. Every branch of science advanced and the Scientists began to control the money and power resources of the Earth (Gardner 1932 1972: 134).

The Elixir keeps mankind "intensely masculine", they do not become "thin-chested neuters" (Gardner [1932] 1972: 133). However, the invention of the Elixir is not enough for the triumph of the Science Empire. Women have to be eliminated because:

the female bred true to type and held the primitive characteristics longer than the male and...she reverted to the primitive type the quicker (Gardner [1932] 1972:135).

The elimination of sex means the elimination of creatures who divert man from his true role as scientist.6

That there is more than one sex in these texts is obvious: after all, they are about the battle of the sexes. The plural of sex, 'sexes', signals plurality. The battle of the sexes, therefore, takes place between more than one sex. In the majority of the texts the explicit assumption is that it takes place between two opposite sexes, male and female. However while many of these texts tell a story

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6 I discuss the ideas in "The Last Woman" about a man's strength and virility being drained by sex - that is women - in chapter five.
of two opposite sexes engaged in warfare, many also tell a story in which there is a multiplicity of sexed bodies. Some posit at least four: real women, real men, not-real men and not-real women.

The notion that there are ‘real’ men and ‘real’ women as well as ‘not-real’ men and ‘not-real’ women is explicit in the sexbattle stories I discuss in this chapter. In Nelson S. Bond’s “The Judging of the Priestess” (1940), the sequel to “The Priestess Who Rebelled”, the heroine, Meg, says of the hero, Daiv:

It is no Man-thing, Mother. It is a Man; a real Man such as were the Gods! Not a scrimping parody like our breeders, nor a foul brute like the Wild Ones - but a Man. He is Daiv, my mate! (Bond 1940: 46).

In Edmund Cooper’s Who Needs Men? (1972) Rura, the heroine, after she is captured by the renegade men asks, “What do you usually do with women you take prisoner?” Her captor, Diarmid, responds, “Ah, well, that is a double question, you see. Usually we divide them into two classes - women and exterminators” (Cooper [1972] 1974: 87). Later Diarmid tells her that she will “be seen not as an exterminator but as a free woman”. Rura asks, “Are your women free, then?” and Diarmid responds, “They are free to be women” (Cooper [1972] 1974: 94).

Joanna Russ argues that these texts are built around a central contradiction: “[w]hen women fight men, the battle is won by men because women are loyal to men” (Russ 1980: 12). On the one hand it is taken for granted that men and women are natural enemies and must be in conflict, in battle, and on the other hand that real, proper men and women, men and women as they are meant to be, are perfect complements to each other and can only live in harmony.

However, within the heterosexual economy of real men and real women this is not a contradiction. In worlds where there are more than one kind of woman, the real women are those who are loyal and the not-real women are those who

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7 Nelson S. Bond wrote three stories about the priestess Meg, the third is “Magic City” (1941). Throughout the three stories real Men are referred to with a capital M.
The front cover of the 1953 paperback edition of Jerry Sohl's *The Haploids* published by Lion Books.
fight against men. This is clearest in the texts where the women who work to wipe out the men are, in fact, aliens. There are a number of battle of the sexes stories where it is an alien race of women who are intent on wiping out the men. In Jerry Sohl’s *The Haploids*, a separate race of women, the haploids, look exactly like women except that they are unnaturally cold (Sohl [1952] 1953: 81).

The cover of the 1953 paperback edition appears opposite. They are a parthenogenetic race created by an insane female scientist, Dr Gardner. Gardner has also created a deadly radiation device which kills all men who are exposed to it except those who have AB blood. She is defeated because her daughter turns against her to help the hero who has AB blood. The daughter turns out to have been brainwashed into believing that she too is a haploid when she is, in fact, the doctor’s ‘natural’ daughter. She is therefore a real woman and, once she overcomes her brainwashing, loyal to the male cause.

This idea of alien women forming a secret conspiracy against men is also the centre of *The White Widows* by Sam Merwin Jr. The illustration for the title page appears on the next page. Larry Finlay has written a thesis on haemophilia examining the female carriers of the disease. In the process he accidentally uncovers a centuries old conspiracy among certain superhuman women to wipe out men, and develop a way of reproducing without them and rule the world:

> There had been a number of definite characteristics, some physical, some physiological. For one thing, haemophilia carriers tended to be women of a driving dominant type, which he had termed the “Empress Type” in his thesis - their drive intensified by their ability, with or without great native beauty, to make themselves attractive to men.

> They were strongly erotic, with a tendency towards lesbianism, basically heterosexual. Physically, in most cases they tended towards unusual length of limb, coupled to longevity and extranormal strength, and speed of reflex.

> ...basically these women are believers in a world of one sex. Amazons if you will (Merwin 1953: 63)

Marriage and love are a trap to destroy men. Finlay prevents the women’s conspiracy to launch germ warfare over Asia and so begin the destruction of

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8 *The White Widows* was first published in *Startling Stories* in the October 1953 issue and then as a book by Doubleday in the same year. Sam Merwin Jr. was the editor of *Startling Stories* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories* from 1945 to 1951. I refer to his editorial for the December 1950 issue of *Thrilling Wonder Stories* on the women’s invasion of science fiction in chapter five.
He stumbled onto a new version of the adventure...
mankind. However the novel ends with Finlay married to one of the Amazon women and aware that the conspiracy against men has been stalled not defeated.

In *The Haploids* and *The White Widows* the women who are involved in the conspiracy against men are not real women, they are aliens, “haploids” or “Amazons”. There are real women in these texts who are loyal to their men. In “The Misogynist” by James E Gunn all women are aliens. The narrator and his friend Harry sit and talk, or rather, Harry talks, and the narrator listens. The narrator says that “nobody tells stories like Harry”, though “women don’t think Harry is funny” (Gunn [1952] 1955: 16). According to Harry, women, “[t]he alien race,” are involved in a conspiracy to wipe out men (Gunn [1952] 1955: 17):

What better way...to conquer a race than to breed it out of existence? The Chinese learned that a long time ago. Conqueror after conqueror took the country and each one was passively accepted, allowed to intermarry...and eventually was absorbed. Only this case is the reverse. Conquest by marriage might be a good term for it. Breed in the conqueror, breed out the slave. Breed in the alien, breed out the human.

...It’s only in the last few generations that their plans have been coming closer to success. They have the vote, equal rights without giving up any of their privileges, and so forth. They’re outliving men - and it’s men, of course, who are extending the life span for them...And there’s something else men are doing for them... We’re experimenting with fertilization by salt water, electrical stimulus, that sort of thing. Once we work it out properly...

...They’ll just refuse to marry, use prenatal sex determination to produce nothing but girls, and then you’ll have a single race - the female race (Gunn [1952] 1955: 17-20).

Harry’s account includes many of the elements of other battle of the sexes texts including matriarchies (Gunn [1952] 1955: 18) and parthenogenesis (Gunn [1952] 1955: 20). As in *The Haploids* marriage is a conspiracy to destroy men by breeding them out. As proof of his theory Harry quotes and refers to a litany of misogynist sentiment: Homer, Ovid, Swift (“A dead wife under the table is the best goods in a man’s house”), Antiphanes, Menander, Cato, Shakespeare, Lord Chesterfield, Nietzsche and others (Gunn [1952] 1955: 20). Misogyny is transformed into reason. At the end of the story Harry is dead and the narrator is about to go down to the cellar where his wife is banging about with a poker (Gunn [1952] 1955: 24). An illustration appears on the following page.

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9 “The Misogynist” was first published in the November 1952 issue of *Galaxy Science Fiction*. 
The coldness of the haploids and these other alien women with their conspiracies against men is very like stereotypes of lesbians and indeed in *The White Widows* they are even said to have a “tendency towards lesbianism” (Merwin 1953: 63). Monique Wittig has argued that lesbians are not women because they can not be incorporated into the heterosexual order (Wittig 1992). There are undisguised lesbians in other sexbattle texts such as *The Disappearance* (1951), *Virgin Planet*, (1957), *World Without Men/Alph*, (1958, revised 1972), and *Who Needs Men?* (1972). However, as in *The Haploids*, the main function of lesbianism is to show how infinitely preferable heterosexuality is and to mark those women who do not instantly become heterosexual on seeing a man or being kissed by him as not-real women. I found no mention of male homosexuality in any of the texts I discuss in this chapter.10 Particularly not in “The Last Woman” (1932), where an all-male world is made possible by the eradication of “sex and the emotional side of life” (Gardner [1932] 1972: 134).

In these stories there are always only one kind of real men and real women. However, there are sometimes a variety of not-real women and not-real men. In Nelson S. Bond’s “The Princess Who Rebelled” (1939) there are three different kinds of not-real women: the warriors with
corded legs, the grim, set jaws. The cold eyes. The brawny arms, scarred to the elbow with ill-healed cicatrices. The tiny, thwarted breasts, flat and hard beneath harnessplates. Fighters they were, nothing else (Bond [1939] 1972: 198).

The mothers who were

full-lipped, flabby-breasted bearers of children. Those eyes were humid; washed barren of all expression by desires too oft aroused, too often sated. The bodies bulged at hip and thigh, swayed when they walked like ripe grain billowing in a lush and fertile field. They lived only that the tribe might continue to exist. They reproduced (Bond [1939] 1972: 199).

The workers:

Their bodies retained a vestige of womankind’s inherent grace and nobility. But if their waists were thin, their hands were blunt-lingered and thick. Their shoulders were bent

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10 Theodore Sturgeon’s story “The World Well Lost” published in the first issue of *Universe Science Fiction* in June 1953, was one of the earliest sympathetic portrayals of male homosexuality in science fiction and caused “considerable uproar at the time” (Tynan & Ashley 1985: 692).
with the weight of labour; coarsened... Their faces were grim from the eternal struggle with an unyielding earth... The workers' skin was browned with soil, their bodies stank of dirt and grime and unwashed perspiration (Bond [1939] 1972: 199).

The description of the workers' bodies as having "retained a vestige of womankind's inherent grace and nobility" shows clearly that women are naturally graceful and noble. If the worker's retain "a vestige" of these qualities and the warriors and mothers have none the implication is that they are not women at all. The same array of sexed female bodies is present in Wyndham's "Consider Her Ways," (1956) which is mostly set in a far future world where all men have been extinct for generations (Wyndham [1956] 1965: 14).

In "The Priestess Who Rebelled" there are two different kinds of not-real men. There are the men kept for breeding purposes in the patriarchal communities: they have "pale, pitifully hairless bodies" and "soft, futile hands and weak mouths". They "loll" about and make "small enticing" gestures (Bond [1939] 1972: 198). Then there are the Wild Ones who "roam the land...[s]earching for food" and "most of all for mates." The Wild Ones have "shaggy bodies", "thick, brutish faces", and "hard, gnarled muscles" (Bond [1939]: 207). The Wild Ones are male but they are not men.

As I have shown above, an identifiably male or female body does not, in these textual worlds, automatically grant the status of man or woman. Elizabeth Spelman in Inessential Woman (1988) shows how in "Plato's proposal for a kind of 'equality' between men and women... he is referring to a very small group of men and women" (Spelman 1988: 80). Males with womanly souls or females with womanly souls, who are almost invariably those of the lower classes, are excluded from the potential equality between the manly-souled philosopher elite.

In the real men/real women texts, the bodies are pared down to a bare minimum. There are, with few exceptions, only white, heterosexual, middle class and mostly North American bodies. And still there are those that do not qualify as real men and women. In the sex battle world bodies and behaviours rather than souls gain admittance to the exclusive caste of the real. In "The Priestess
Who Rebelled”, Meg the heroine, who by the text’s end has become a real woman, is described thus:

her legs were long and firm and straight as a warrior’s spear. Her body was supple; bronzed by sunlight save where her doe skin breech cloth kept the skin white. Unbound her hair could have trailed the earth...her skin was golden-brown, and pure gold where the sunlight burnished the fine down on her arms and legs; between her high, firm breasts (Bond [1939] 1972: 204).

Compare this to the warriors, mothers and workers above. The hero, Daiv’s

body is smooth and almost as hairless as her own. Bronzed by the sun. But it was not the pale, soft body of a man. It was muscular, hard, firm; taller and stronger than a warrior (Bond [1939] 1972: 208).

The two are linked together by the language choice: they are as “smooth and hairless” as each other and both have been “bronzed” by the sun. Daiv is more masculine than the women warriors of Meg's tribe and Meg is as straight and firm as one of their spears.

The different categories of not-real man and woman and real man and woman are fixed. However, the sexed bodies are fluid and can be transformed. Such a transformation results in the body moving from one category to another. An example of transformation occurs at the end of Richard Wilson’s The Girls From Planet Five (1955): the beautiful and tall non-Earth women, the Lyru, learn that their men - whom they have never taken seriously because they are shorter and less brave than they are - have been secretly working against the evil Crones for generations. After this revelation one of the Lyru, Lori “look[s] happily at Jason, who seem[s] almost as tall as she [is] as he stands beside her” (Wilson 1955: 180).

The wide range of sexed bodies in these texts is not a static one. All of the bodies discussed here, although (literally) textual bodies, are historically contingent. Moira Gatens argues that the “qualitative difference in the way we live out our particular balances (or imbalances) of masculine and feminine traits is crucially connected to our bodies” and this cannot be separated from “the meaning and significance of the sexed body in culture” (Gatens [1989] 1996: 30). Culture is not ahistorical. For instance in “The Last Man” the women of the
matriarchal world are described as “tall, angular, narrow-hipped, flat-breasted” (West [1929] 1972: 109). All of which sounds like a description of a 1990s high fashion catwalk model - one of the late-twentieth century ideal womanly bodies. However in the context of the story, it is a description of a kind of body that women developed once all the world’s men disappeared:

In the ages which followed, great physiological changes took place. Women no longer having need of sex, dropped it, like a worn-out cloak, and became sexless, tall, angular, narrow-hipped, flat-breasted and unbeautiful [my italics] (West [1929] 1972: 108-109).

These “tall, angular, narrow-hipped, flat-breasted” unwomen are contrasted with the heroine who has:

Hair red as a slumberous [sic] fire - eyes blue as the heavens ... Unafraid she wrinkled her nose at him, then wrapping about her a long black robe which but half concealed her deep breasts and the forgotten womanly grace of her carriage (West [1929] 1972: 110)

Some of these stories are more overt about their historical context than others. For instance in “The Feminine Metamorphosis” by David H. Keller M. D, published in the August 1929 issue of Science Wonder Stories, the sexual inequality of the contemporary world is foregrounded. Unlike many of the other sex battle texts, the women who wish to take over the world in “The Feminine Metamorphosis” have a clearly stated reason for doing so. Their dissatisfaction is put in the context of the erosion of the gains won by American Women in the workforce during the first world war:

During the World War the feminine sex had tasted the sweetness of responsibility with increasing incomes, so that at the close of the war they were reluctant to return to their former humble positions. Well educated, capable, and hard working women were striving to occupy positions on a par with men, and the situation had become so acute that many corporations had passed regulations, strictly limiting the advancement of women in their employ...

The result had not been a happy one. More and more women were preparing themselves for positions of trust and large salaries. Every phase of business activity, especially those requiring brain power, was being handled by the members of the fair sex, who, by their constant application to work, their ability to look after the smallest details, and their one-track minds, were far more capable of holding positions of trust than was the average business man (Keller [1929] 1972: 151).

The story begins when a Miss Martha Belzer is told that she will not be promoted because she is a woman. This despite being “brilliant”, “capable”, “shrewd”, and “intelligent” (Keller [1929] 1972: 149-150). The male business
She was called a biological chemist and would take the glands from the operations into her laboratory and work on them. When she finished she had a test-tube of clear liquid called "serum."
leaders of America have decided that Miss Belzer, and other women like her, must be prevented from

gain[ing] control of the great corporations of the nation...So, the word passed from the President of one great concern to the Chief Executive of the next that under no circumstances should a woman be promoted to certain positions in these companies (Keller [1929] 1972: 153).

Miss Belzer forms a conspiracy with other women to take over the USA and the rest of the world using a drug made from diseased gonads removed from Chinese men. They transform 5,000 of their number into men and these men take over the business world. The illustration on the facing page shows the women at work. They also invent a formula which causes women to have only female children and start investigating parthenogenesis. Unfortunately for the women’s conspiracy a detective, Taine of the Secret Service, uncovers their plans. At the same time the disease that was in the gonads, which seems to be syphilis, starts to drive the five thousand female men mad.

The justice of the women’s complaints is irrelevant. They are unnatural power-seekers and their intelligence, which had allowed them to prosper in the work force until their promotion was blocked, is marked as unnatural. The other women in the text who are not part of the conspiracy are not clever. Taine lectures the unnatural women:

You went on with your plans, but you forgot God. He had certain plans for the human race, and it was no part of His plan that women should live...without men...You took...loving wives and wonderful mothers - you took the best that we have bred, and through your desires to rule, you have changed them into...insane women (Keller [1929] 1972: 194-5).

The women have attempted to change the natural order of things whereby men work in the public sphere, and women in the private as “loving wives and wonderful mothers”. To go outside the heterosexual order is to go insane and a mad woman, like a lesbian, is not a woman. Further when the women have become men, they are unnatural men and are described in terms that imply homosexuality, they refuse to play “a real man’s game, like golf” (Keller [1929] 1972: 171) and the way they dress is suspicious:
Their clothing was masculine, but at the same time, it had a dash of color to it, a peculiar something that was different. When one of this group walked down on Fifth Avenue, his general appearance was such as to make passing women, and men also, turn to look again at him (Keller [1929] 1972: 199).

The initial desire by Miss Martha Belzer and other women to be promoted because of their ability soon becomes a “dream of a manless world...We do not want two sexes in this fair world of ours, not as long as one sex can run it so efficiently” (Keller [1929] 1972: 186). This equation between a desire for equality and a desire for power and dominion over men and their eradication is made frequently. Some examples are “The Last Man” (1929), The Haploids (1952), The White Widows (1953 reprinted as The Sex War in 1960), “For Sacred San Francisco” (1969), Sex and the High Command (1970) and Who Needs Men? (1972).

Parthenogenesis is a key element in these texts. Once this method of reproduction is discovered men become redundant. This is an old notion. Laqueur writes that the

Hippocratic writer would have to admit that there was something uniquely powerful about male seed...because otherwise he would have no answer to the question with which two-seed theorists were plagued for millennia: if the female has such powerful seed, then why can she not engender within herself alone: who needs men? (Laqueur 1990 [1992]: 40).

Once the women in these stories discover the secret to parthenogenesis men's days are numbered. The battle of the sexes texts take place in a universe in which non-sexual interaction, friendship and affection between men and women cannot exist because their relationships are constructed across a bridge of biology (Russ 1980: 3). Once the biological necessity for their interaction is removed, that is reproduction of the species, women and men cease to have any need of each other. If a society produces artificial ovum and incubators as in “The Last Woman” (Gardner: [1932] 1972: 135-136) then who needs women? And if parthenogenesis is achieved as in Who Needs Men? (Cooper [1972] 1974) and many other texts then, indeed, who needs men?
gave you all a piece of expensive jewelry. She gave you a piece of jade, Dr. Hamilton, and she gave the doctor whom you call Lucy this ring.

Lucy thought the little Chinese girl rather nice. Well, to make a long story short, I was that little girl. I lived in the hospital with you for some months. The Government sent me over to find out what you girls were doing there. I had some ideas then and during all these years those ideas have been slowly working into definite form. I suspected some of the things you spoke of tonight, yet, at the same time, you went a lot further than I thought sensible people would go. I know a lot about women, but I cannot understand what's the matter with you—unless you really are insane.

Dr. Hamilton shook his head gravely.

"I guess he is right, girls. I remember that little Chinese girl, and she did give me the jade. He would not have known about that unless he had been there. I have heard about him, but I had no idea that he was so damn clever. But is he clever? To get the best of Lucy and come here dressed to impersonate her? And then this chorus girl. Well, he says he is Taine, and I really do not think he has harmed Lucy—just locked her up somewhere.

So, the best thing we can do with him is to kill him right away. He knows too much—we can handle this chorus girl, but this man—he only way to keep him quiet is to kill him. I hate to commit murder, but I have been working on this plan for years and I am not going to have it go to pieces just on account of a man.

Miss Patricia Powers agreed with the Doctor.

"You are right, Hamilton," she said. "He knows too much. If he is dead, we will pass through our financial coup, and in a week it will not make any difference if they do find out he died here at the Club."

Suddenly the San Francisco doctor, Lucy, who was really Taine, seemed to change. His face grew hard, and his hands, within his coat pockets, twitched.

"Now, you sit down, ladies, and listen to me talk. You are not going to kill me or anybody tonight. There are about five hundred policemen around this building. If I am not out safely by midnight, they are going to find out why. No one is going to leave. You women have played a great game, but it was a selfish, inhuman sort of a game, and you are going to lose out and it’s not your fault or my fault, but just one of those happenings that make me believe in predestination. You want to run this world, and have all the men die off and make it a female Paradise, and you forgot there was a God and that He made man just the same as He made woman. I admit that some men are rather bad sort of fools, but some of us are really rather good sorts—take me, for example. My wife thinks I am wonderful—of course, all my boys are girls, but, at the same time, she would have been tickled had the last one been a boy. You go and change your bodies, and try and make men out of yourselves, and all the rest of what you call your programme, and now you think that you are going to win out by killing me. If it were not for the Misses and the kids, I would not mind much if you did, but even if you were able to, what good would it do you?

"I think your Dr. Hamilton is a rather bright expert. I always shall be indebted to her for operating on Ming Foo. She had a wonderful plan and she has worked it out in a wonderful way—but she did not know the Chinese people—not the way I do. I have lived with them and slept with them and I know a little more about them than you would think, just by looking at me. During these last two weeks I have been having long talks with scientists from all over the East. Perhaps your detectives know who they were, though they could not tell what we talked about. But I wanted to learn all I could about that medicine Dr. Hamilton prepared in that hospital, and these men told me. I said so and so and they agreed with me that my idea might be right. What you have said tonight convinces me that I was right.

Taine Explains

"YOU went on with your plans, but you forgot God. He had certain plans for the human race, and it was no part of His plan that women should live on, century after century, without men, as you were preparing them to do. So, this is what"
Sex and Science

A page from the middle of "The Feminine Metamorphosis" is reproduced opposite. In its centre is a newspaper cutting proclaiming that it is an illustration of how "fiction becomes fact". This evidence is used to legitimate Keller's story. The story is not merely a fiction but a science fiction.

Examples, such as this, from the real world of science were often used in sf magazines of the 1920s and 1930s to legitimate science fiction. The editorial blurbs which accompanied the stories frequently draw attention to the scientific accuracy or relevance of a story before pointing out its merits as an entertainment. The blurb for "The Feminine Metamorphosis" exactly follows this order:

When a physician-author writes a story on a biological subject, you may be sure that it will be more than interesting. Only during recent years have the functions of the various glands in the human body assumed a tremendous importance. It seems that the glands are responsible for almost everything imaginable in our mental and physical make-up. It is also true, very frequently, that these functions can be interfered with by altering or otherwise influencing the glands.

It has been known for some time, that extracts from various glands can be used as a stimulant to the live glands of human beings, although the extract has been secured from animals or human beings.

It may be safely said that the wonderful field of gland surgery and medicine is as yet practically untouched. Some of the most surprising and far-reaching discoveries will come when we know more about them.

In the present story Dr. Keller, with his usual insight, has written a most original story that is as good as it is amazing. And incidentally, he has given us a most clever O. Henry ending - a climax as surprising as it is unique (August 1929 Science Wonder Stories: 247).

It transforms the story into a serious engagement with discoveries about "sex glands" of "recent years". The blurb accompanying "The Last Woman" (1932) also legitimates the story by claiming a relationship between it and recent discoveries about sex glands:

Despite its title, this story is not calculated to appeal especially to our feminine readers. For it is a red-blooded story, and a bizarre one; yet it deals with events that are well within the limits of probability.

The understanding of how our sex glands function, and their effect upon us is just beginning to be understood. When we finally do understand, certainly a new era will dawn in the history of the race.

Some men already predict that women will eventually rule the world, and they will at least make the attempt to overthrow masculine domination. But suppose they lose, and man holds the undisputed sway, with but one woman left. Will men idolize her, will they fight over her like wild beasts; or will they enslave her? The answer that our author gives is much different than you will think. This is a distinctly original story, and deals with an absorbing idea (April 1932 Wonder Stories: 1239).
THE SEX SERUM

By H. O. DICKINSON

I think that my vanity is forcing me to write, although I know as I set down the words in this almost illegible handwriting that it will get no farther than the bottom drawer of my desk. Yes, it will be fortunate if it ends there, for I am a very impulsive person and the wastepaper basket is nearby.

But when I reflect, it seems hardly fair — back to myself and all those people who were cheated out of the answer to a first-class mystery. Consider, too, that eminent man, Sir John Norton. I think the satisfaction he would derive from this manuscript would more than compensate him for the inconvenience caused by striking out at least one case from his latest volume: "Unsolved Mysteries of the Twentieth Century."

I have read his fourth problem, "The Manor House Murders," with a smile upon my lips and that aloof and superior feeling which comes to a man who knows the truth. And why should I not smile? It is the only reward I will ever obtain from my knowledge. For you do not realize that I am the only person alive today who knows the real solution of a crime which baffled, and is still baffling, a whole country—a unique position to be in, you will agree, and one that arouses all man's latent vanity.

I have kept the secret for a long time now and no one would suffer from the telling of it—not that I think it would be believed, but it will pass as another of one of the more fantastic and imaginative theories that have often been advanced as explanations of a mystery which has for so long defied logical solution.

And again, further excuse for my vain and babbling tongue. Unusual stories are the fashion these days when every normal plot has fallen the prey of the modern literary mass-production machine, dealt with as a cow does its cud—chewed, twisted, turned about, contracted, reversed, dished up in a thousand different ways, then swallowed in disgust. And now it turns, with despairing howls, to Frankenstein's, covered freaks, and mummified horrors for its sustenance.

You remember the Manor House murders, non-existent reader—the strange disappearance of both Professor Neville, the famous biologist, and his daughter Jeanette. Then there was the finding of the dead and battered body of an old lady in Neville's study and the half-dead body of a young man, since thought to be the Professor's son, lying by her side.
Both these stories were published during the period Nelly Oudshoorn discusses in her book *Beyond the Natural Body: an archaeology of sex hormones*. Oudshoorn focuses on the period of the "1920s and 1930s in which scientists became confused by their own assumptions about sex and the body" (Oudshoorn 1994: 1). She investigates the scientists who were engaged at the time in understanding, as the blurb to “The Last Woman” puts it, “how our sex glands function, and their effect upon us.” Outside science fiction, scientists such as Jongh in 1936 were struggling “to define which observed characteristics can be considered decisive for our judgement [of the sex of a hormone]: male or female” (Oudshoorn 1994: 1) and others like Bell in 1916 were discovering that “there are many individuals with ovaries who are not women in the strict sense of the word and many with testes who are really feminine in many other respects” (Oudshoorn 1994: 37). Within science fiction these struggles were being translated unproblematically into “understanding...how our sex glands function”.

The struggles and negotiations Oudshoorn documents were popularly understood as scientific endeavour and therefore a series of discovered facts that could become the scientific basis for some of the battle of the sexes texts.

The editorial introduction to H. O. Dickinson's story “The Sex Serum” (1935) is reproduced opposite. Science in this passage is animate and has agency. It can solve mysteries, and make discoveries - the kinds of discoveries which will lead to a story such as “The Sex Serum” being transformed from science fiction to ‘actual’ science.

This rhetoric is also present in the following comments which accompanied “The Last Man” in the February 1929 issue of *Amazing Stories*:

According to Kipling, “The female of the species is always more deadly.” By that, he means that she is stronger in her own way, and we know that she usually is more numerous. Even among human beings, there are more females than males. Perhaps in thousands of years, evolution will have progressed in such a manner that the world will be entirely peopled by females. This is not so impossible as it would seem to be, because with many insects, the female of the species already predominates.

The present story then is founded upon an excellent scientific basis and the story itself is excellent as it is original and unusual. You will not forget it for a long time (*Amazing Stories* February 1929: 1050).
The leaps of logic here, from Kipling’s comment, to there being more women than men, to women taking over because amongst insects the “female of the species already predominates”, are fairly breathtaking. All these leaps however constitute an “excellent scientific basis” for the story. There is then a core of ‘truth’ to this story, therefore it is science fiction.

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, the idea of scientific accuracy was central to discussions of science fiction stories in the letter columns of these magazines. Sexbattle stories were also debated in these terms. For instance, John J. Kelly, Jr. of St. Paul, Minnesota wrote a long response, to Keller’s “The Feminine Metamorphosis” headed, “Is Man Made the Same as Woman?”. Kelly writes that “The Feminine Metamorphosis” is “unfair and one-sided” because the women were:

merely striving for economic liberation. Due to the intolerance of the male sex, the only way that the women could secure their freedom in this instance was by the annihilation of the men (Science Wonder Stories November 1929 Vol. 1 No. 6: 663).

Worse than being unfair the story is “unscientific”:

Detective Taine when he had the women trapped at their conference...said, “...and you forgot that he (God) made man just the same as he made woman.” Is this science? If it is, I am not acquainted with it. I have made the study of scientific subjects my hobby for years, but never came in contact with a statement like that.

Is not Dr. Keller familiar with the fact that at one time the female was the only animal in existence on earth?...the female organism alone existed as such but was fertilized by the male sperm cell, and that this cell was a part of the female organism. According to this, it would appear untrue that “man was made the same” as woman. The male organism (which characterizes the sex) was of later derivation by the processes of evolution. When Dr. Keller states that man was made the same as woman he is...making a scientific error (Science Wonder Stories November 1929 Vol. 1 No. 6: 663).

Kelly does not argue that “The Feminist Metamorphosis” is bad science fiction because it is misogynist. It is bad science fiction because it is predicated on “scientific error”.

11 All other responses I found were favourable but not very detailed: Louis Kurzeja of Chicago Illinois gave it an ‘A’ meaning excellent and remarked, “It gave me a humorous feeling when I had finished reading it” (Science Wonder Stories October 1929 Vol. 1 No. 5: 467).
Real man makes real woman

"The Feminine Metamorphosis" (1929) is unusual amongst the sexbattle texts because it has no central pairing of hero and heroine. The unnatural order of things is not resolved through a ‘romance’ between this pairing but by the will of God. The more usual romance pairing is very similar to Monique Plaza’s description of Lacan’s understandings of hysteria:

the hysteric is a woman who is struggling against men, and who doesn’t know if she is a man or a woman...she will emerge from her revolt when she meets the master she seeks, who will give her the desire to be a woman (Plaza 1984: 81).

If I amend this slightly to read “who will make her a woman” then Plaza’s statement becomes a description of a group of texts in which the hero makes the heroine into a woman. The hero does this by stripping her of agency and making her body into something over which she has no control. This process inverts the examples of Nina Puren which I discussed in chapter one. In Puren’s examples the fragmentation of the woman’s body, ‘her beauty,’ leaves her open to blame and responsibility for what ‘her beauty’ has caused in the man who then rapes her. In Puren’s story the woman is the agent of the violence which works itself through the medium of the man. However, in the sexbattle stories I examine in this section, the man is the agent of the change that works itself out through the body of the woman. The woman is allowed agency when it frees the man from responsibility that could cause him to be adversely affected, that is sent to gaol. Otherwise she is the medium, the site of change that is worked on her by a man.

This process of the hero making the heroine into a ‘real’ woman provides an Agent for Simone de Beauvoir’s famous words: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (de Beauvoir [1949] 1972: 295). It is a man who makes a woman. In the two battle of the sexes texts which I examine in this section,

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12 This story is by no means confined to science fiction. I have a vivid memory of an Elvis movie, Live A Little, Love A Little (1968), in which the heroine leaves a message in lipstick for Elvis on the mirror the morning after their (off-camera) night of passion: “Thank you for making me a woman.”
Nelson S. Bond’s “The Priestess Who Rebelled” (1939) and Edmund Cooper’s *Who Needs Men?* (1972), the process of ‘becoming woman’ takes place when the woman is incorporated into the heterosexual economy.

Another famous utterance which touches on becoming a real woman is the song, “You make me feel like a natural woman”, written by Carole King and most famously performed by Aretha Franklin. Judith Butler in her article, “Gendering the Body: Beauvoir’s Philosophical Contribution”, discusses “You make me feel like a natural woman” and its relations to Beauvoir. Butler argues that Aretha Franklin

uses a simile that suggests that she knows the natural woman to be a figure and a fiction. Her claim, then, seems to translate into the following: “you allow me a fantasy for a moment, the experience of a unity of my sex, gender, and desire that I know to be false but wish were true.” Aretha doesn’t dispute Beauvoir, but gives us some understanding of the emotional pull of the illusion of a natural and substantial identity (Butler 1989: 258-59).

Indeed “you make me feel like a natural woman” complements Beauvoir’s utterance and supplies agency: You, presumably a man, are the Agent that allows me as Medium to feel like (to begin to become) “a natural woman”. You are responsible for how I am positioned within the economy of heterosexuality. However a close examination of “Priestess” and *Who Needs Men?* shows that this cannot stand - as it is still framed from the woman’s point of view and so allows her some (small) control of the discourse. In the texts I discuss in this section the clause becomes “He made her become a real woman”.

The sexbattie texts in which man makes woman closely resemble the story of Pygmalion who, revolted by “the many faults which nature has implanted in the female sex”, created a snowy ivory statue, Galatea, who Venus blessed with life so that “the ivory lost its hardness, and grew soft: his fingers made an imprint on the yielding surface” (Ovid: 231-232).13 There is one crucial change: in the

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13 There are more overt versions of this myth in science fiction. “Helen O’Loy,” by Lester del Rey is a much anthologised story first published in *Astounding* in 1938. In it two men create the woman of their dreams - a robot.
The Priestess Who Rebelled

Into the valley of the Gods went the priestess to discover their secret, but when she saw their faces, she rebelled.
battle of the sexes texts, Venus disappears, and Pygmalion makes his creation real without the aid of a goddess.

The centre of my examination of the creation of these Galateas is penetrative intercourse and the kiss. To highlight the ways in which this romance narrative works to construct a compliant, heterosexual, 'real' woman's body I make a detailed comparison of some key passages from two texts - "The Priestess Who Rebelled," which was first published in Amazing Stories in October 1939, and Who Needs Men?, which was first published by Hodder and Stoughton in 1972.

In "The Priestess Who Rebelled", Meg, a priestess in a matriarchal post-apocalyptic world (the apocalypse came in 1960), meets a man, Daiv, who is unlike the soft weak men who serve her people as breeding stock. He comes from the one unmatriarchal people left on Earth. Meg is on her way to see the Gods, this being the last rite before she becomes the Mother, head priestess of her people. The title page opposite shows Meg on her journey. The man, Daiv, tells her that her Gods are men and implores her to be his mate as she is very beautiful - though his first words to her are: "You...talk too much. Sit down and eat, Woman!" (Bond [1939] 1972: 208). Before Meg goes to see her Gods Daiv kisses her, "the touching of mouths," and she is swept off her feet but still determined to do her duty. She arrives at Mount Rushmore which turns out to be the Place of the Gods and sees that her Gods are in fact men: Jaarg, Taamuz, Ibrim and Tedhi. Meg realises that her sterile unnatural virgin existence need not continue: she can become Daiv's mate and live happily ever after.

Who Needs Men? is set in far future Britain where the only remaining men are fighting for their existence in rugged Scotland. Diarmid MacDiarmid, leader

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14 The hero telling the heroine that she talks too much and should shut up is a recurring motif. In Who Needs Men? Diarmid tells Runa, "Be quiet, woman... you speak too much" (Cooper 1972: 80). There is a similar moment in The Feminists (1971), Girls From Planet Five (1955) and "War Against the Yukks" (1965). The Western world has an extremely long tradition of silencing women and equating that silence with virtue (Bloch 1991; Purun 1995: 18).

15 Who Needs Men? is not the only sexohate text which features one rugged area of the world holding out against female rule. In The Girls from Planet Five the only refuge in the woman-dominated USA is Texas. The only other place in the entire world is Australia.
of one rebel band, bests Rura, an exterminator, the highest caste of the new matriarchal world, whose function is to exterminate men. Diarmid kisses Rura. She is unable to forget him and realises that sex with women is empty. Eventually Rura is captured by Diarmid and they escape further north to live together. Their idyll does not last and they are killed by exterminators.

In both “The Priestess Who Rebelled” and Who Needs Men? the romance between hero and heroine is the battle of the sexes in miniature. The restoration of the natural order, of male rule and heterosexuality, will follow from this conquest if it is to happen at all. In the sequel to “The Priestess Who Rebelled”, “The Judging of the Priestess”, the head priestess of Meg’s Clan, the Mother, declares that

Meg was right...She rebelled against the Law that said a Priestess might not mate - but she was right in her rebellion.

List, now, for with the all-seeing eyes of one on the threshold of death I tell you truth. It is right that Women should mate with Men. There should be no Workers, no Warriors, no breeding-mother. Our Clan should own no stud-males, pale chattels like...horses. All this is wrong (Bond 1940: 59).

Heterosexuality’s place at the heart of the transition from female rule is made even more explicit at the end of the “The Judging of the Priestess”. One of the Wild Ones asks the Warrior Chieftain of Meg’s Clan, Lora, to be his mate:

Lora spoke, and her answer was the answer of all womankind to the new regime...

“You must be mad, Man!” she declared. “But - but I think I like your madness” (Bond 1940: 59).

In the 1972 text Who Needs Men?, however, the evil matriarchy triumphs and the heroine, Rura, dies with the already dead hero, Diarmid, in her arms.

In both texts a kiss is the turning point in the conversion from matriarchy to patriarchy. In “The Priestess Who Rebelled” the kiss is the climactic, in every sense, moment towards the end of the text:

“There is a custom in our tribe...a mating custom which you do not know. Let me show you.”

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Every ambassador and minister was female except the one to Australia. The Aussies, separated by thousands of miles of water from creeping femininity, had demanded and got a male ambassador - and a bachelor at that (Wilson 1955: 15).
He leaned over swiftly. Meg felt the mighty strength of his bronzed arms closing about her, drawing her close. And he was touching his mouth to hers; closely, brutally, terrifyingly.

She struggled and tried to cry out, but his mouth bruised hers. Anger thoughts swept through her like a flame. But it was not anger - it was something else - that gave life to that flame. Suddenly her veins were running with liquid fire. Her heart beat upon rising, panting breasts like something captive that would be free. Her fists beat upon his shoulders vainly...but there was little strength in her blows.

Then he released her, and she fell back, exhausted. Her eyes glowed with anger and her voice was husky in her throat. She tried to speak, and could not. And in that moment a vast and terrible weakness trembled through Meg. She knew, fearfully, that if Davi sought to mate with her, not all the priestly wisdom of the gods would save her. There was a body-hunger throbbing within her that hated his Mannness...but cried for it! (Bond [1939] 1972: 216).

This extraordinary passage is a description of a kiss or rather the touching of mouths. The constraints at the time "The Priestess Who Rebelled" was published against representing sex means that the text can only represent penetration and orgasm metaphorically and metonymically. The traces of standard representations of intercourse are here throughout: she falls back "exhausted" after the touching-of-mouths, her eyes "glow" and her voice is "husky". In later versions of this narrative, the kiss is sometimes transformed into penetrative sex which is, at least initially, like this kiss, resisted by the woman. For example in *Who Needs Men?*, the heroine Rura meets an old woman, once an exterminator, who tells her that rape is a myth because

[no woman - particularly an exterminator - who is conscious and uninjured can be raped. So I'll tell you what happened, sweet. I got tired of being punched, and I got tired of struggling uselessly. And the revulsion and the feeling of sickness just sort of died. And the weight on top of me seemed to be - well, interesting. And when he pinned my arms and bit my throat and dug his fingers into my breast, it all hurt like hell. But, chicken it aroused me. Goddess, how it aroused me. So I let him enter. And he grunted and I groaned, and we thrashed about like a couple of mindless creatures in a frenzy. I tell you, I never knew what a climax was until that red-haired animal squirited his semen into my womb (Cooper [1972] 1974: 46-47).]

Initially the woman resists and then she discovers that she likes it. Penetration is crucial to becoming woman. The rapist says to her prior to the rape, "They made

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16 My grammatical analysis of this passage begins on page 81.
17 A kiss standing in for sex is by no means unique to written science fiction. Just look at any film from the same period. This point is made explicit in the French/Italian co-production *Nuovo Cinema Paradiso* (Cinema Paradiso (1988) directed by Giuseppe Tornatore. The local priest is in charge of censorship and edits all the kisses out of the film. The projectionist creates a collage of these kisses which is shown at the film's end.
18 Hearing this account by the old woman ex-exterminator is part of Rura's process of unlearning the 'brainwashing' of her matriarchal society.

In Who Needs Men? the kiss appears very close to the beginning of the text and is just the first step towards the heroine, Rura, becoming a ‘real’ woman (she needs to be gang-raped and learn to love heterosexual penetrative sex and get pregnant before the process is complete).

He kissed her on the lips. She struggled, but with one arm he managed to hold her. The rifle was dropped. There was something terrible about the kiss. It was like no other kiss she had ever known. It was humiliating, it was degrading, it was disturbing. It drained strength from her limbs, filled her head with nightmares.

He let her go.

“Well, exterminator. That was a kind of rape, was it not?” [my italics] (Cooper [1972] 1974: 24).12

In Who Needs Men? there is no constraint against representing sexual intercourse. Yet the kiss is represented as an extraordinarily powerful force in the text and still functions in a manner very similar to the kiss in “The Priestess Who Rebelled”. This passage also links the kiss and rape: “That was a kind of rape, was it not?”

A belief in the necessity of female orgasm to conception, and indeed to heterosexual intercourse, is apparent in Who Needs Men? The old woman who tells Rura of her rape became pregnant. Rura also becomes pregnant immediately after having intercourse with her Diarmid. For both women it is the first time they have ever had an orgasm. The belief in the necessity of orgasm to conception is an old one. Thomas Laqueur writes that until the eighteenth century it was widely held that “[w]ithout orgasm...the fair sex [would] neither desire nuptial embraces, nor have pleasure in them, nor conceive by them” (Aristotle’s Masterpiece qtd. in Laqueur [1990] 1992: 3).

The women have vaginal rather than clitoral orgasms: Rura feels Diarmid’s sperm “pulse...excruciatingly, wonderfully, through her vagina” (Cooper [1972] 1974: 110) and the old woman declares that she “never knew what a climax was

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12 My grammatical analysis of this passage begins on page 82.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 3.1</th>
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<tr>
<td>she</td>
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<td><strong>Actor</strong></td>
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<th>Table 3.2</th>
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<td><strong>Actor</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Actor</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th>Table 3.4</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dav</td>
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<td><strong>Actor</strong></td>
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<th>Table 3.5</th>
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<td>There</td>
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<td><strong>Process:</strong></td>
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<th>Table 3.6</th>
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<td>that hated</td>
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<td><strong>Process:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>mental:</td>
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<th>Table 3.7</th>
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<td>but</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Process:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>mental:</td>
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</table>

\(^1\) This is a fascinating example because 'to mate' is an intransitive verb for what is an intrinsically 'transitive' activity. This is why 'mate with' is a phrasal verb, because without the 'with' the meaning of the clause changes entirely "Dav sought to mate her"... to something else.
until that red-haired animal squirted his semen into my womb" (Cooper [1972]
1974: 47). Both women have unusually sensitive vaginas. It is as though they
have an inverted penis for a vagina which was a feature of the one-sex model of
female anatomy (Laqueur [1990] 1992: 4). Coincidentally this is exactly how a
vagina is constructed for many male-to-female transsexuals. The procedure
utilizes the:

skin of the penis for the lining of the new vagina and retains a portion of the erogenous
tissue from the base of the penis for the clitoris...if accomplished correctly, [this] allows
for vaginal feeling (even vaginal orgasm) because the penile skin used to line the vagina
retains its nerve endings...Success is often measured by the ability to engage in penile-

Rura’s vagina, like those of many male-to-female transsexuals, seems to have
been designed specifically so that she will find most pleasurable what most men
are supposed to find most pleasurable - penetrative penile intercourse. For a real
woman to orgasm she needs a real man. Indeed, in many battle of the sexes texts,
such as “The Priestess Who Rebelled”, genital stimulation is not a prerequisite
for the real woman’s orgasm; they can climax from kissing.

In a transitive analysis of the passage (see Appendix III for my complete
analysis of the passage) Meg is the only Sayer or Senser. However, as it is Daiv
who speaks the opening paragraph, he is an implied Sayer. He also speaks his
Verbiage whereas Meg is unable to speak. Meg “tries to cry out” but is
prevented, she “trie[s] to speak” but cannot. When she is Senser her perceptions
are uncertain. In the first paragraph, she does “not know”, and later when she
does know something it is “fearfully”.

Meg is an Actor less frequently than Daiv and when Meg is Actor she does
not act on anything - there is no goal. Examples are given in tables 3.1 and 3.2
opposite. In the terms of traditional grammar these are intransitive verbs. That
is, the process is not extended beyond the Actor. By contrast, only once does
Daiv not have a goal. See Table 3.3. Otherwise Meg is his Goal as in Table 3.4.

However, various parts of Meg’s body and emotions/sensations are Actors:
angerthoughts (presumably hers) her veins, her heart, her fists, her eyes, a vast
and terrible weakness (also presumably hers as it “trembles through [her]”). This
### Table 3.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>He</th>
<th>let</th>
<th>her</th>
<th>go.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiator</td>
<td>Process: material</td>
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### Table 3.9

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>He</th>
<th>kissed</th>
<th>her</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process: material</td>
<td>Goal</td>
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</tbody>
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### Table 3.10

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<tr>
<th>with one arm</th>
<th>he</th>
<th>managed to hold</th>
<th>her</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Circ: manner: means</td>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process: material</td>
<td>Goal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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### Table 3.11

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<tr>
<th>It [the kiss]</th>
<th>drained</th>
<th>strength</th>
<th>from her limbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process: material</td>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Circumstance: location: place</td>
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</table>
fragmentation of her body into parts serves to demonstrate that before this kiss she was not an integrated, real woman. Her body is a series of parts which she struggles against and tries vainly to control. Her body parts know what she wants better than she does. The final sentence of this passage sets up this split subjectivity explicitly. Tables 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7 shows the analysis of the last sentence.

The “body-hunger throbbing within her” has consciousness, not Meg, and it is this “body hunger” which hates “his Manness” but also cries for it. Her body knows what she wants better than she does and it manifests this knowledge by acting in clauses where she does not or cannot. This split subjectivity collocates with that clause which is an indexical feature of the genre of romance, particularly of bodice-rippers - “her body betrayed her”.

In a transitive analysis of the kiss passage from Who Needs Men?, the heroine, Rura, is Actor only twice and, as in the passage from “Priestess,” she is only Actor when she has no effect on anything else. Indeed one of the clauses also appears in “The Priestess Who Rebelled”. See Table 3.2. The other clause in which Rura is an Actor is, “he let her go”. See Table 3.8 on facing page. In this clause she is only Actor in a process which he, Diarmid, makes possible, initiates. Literally she can act because he allows her to. Like Rura, Diarmid is Actor only twice but in both cases he affects something, the process extends beyond him to a Goal - Rura. See Tables 3.9 and 3.10 opposite.

The other Actor in the passage is not any of Rura’s body parts as in the previous passage but the kiss itself. See Table 3.11 opposite. In the previous passage Meg is overcome by her body’s response to the “touching of mouths” or kiss but the kiss does not become an Actor in this extraordinary manner.

The repetitious structure in the kiss passage from Who Needs Men?: “[i]t was humiliating, it was degrading, it was disturbing” highlights the tremendous importance of the kiss (Cooper [1972] 1974: 24). Rura is being transformed by its power and that transformation into a real woman is “humiliating”, “degrading”
### Table 3.12

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Angerthoughts</th>
<th>swept</th>
<th>through her</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agent</strong></td>
<td><strong>Process</strong></td>
<td><strong>Circumstance:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Location:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>place</strong></td>
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### Table 3.13

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>her voice</th>
<th>was</th>
<th>husky</th>
<th>in her throat.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium</strong></td>
<td><strong>Process</strong></td>
<td><strong>Range</strong></td>
<td><strong>Circumstance:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Location:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>place</strong></td>
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### Table 3.14

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<tr>
<th>a vast and terrible weakness</th>
<th>trembled</th>
<th>through Meg.</th>
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<tbody>
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<td><strong>Medium</strong></td>
<td><strong>Process</strong></td>
<td><strong>Circumstance:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>Location:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>place</strong></td>
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### Table 3.15

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<tr>
<th>Her eyes</th>
<th>glowed</th>
<th>with anger</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium</strong></td>
<td><strong>Process:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Circumstance:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Manner:</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>Means</strong></td>
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</table>
and "disturbing". This structure of repeated intensive attributive clauses is paralleled in a later passage in *Who Needs Men?*:

"Love me," said Rura. "I want to open myself for a man. Love me, please...
Diarmid lay upon her, caressed her, loved her.
It was not like the rape of the previous day. It was not like lying with women. It was not like anything she had ever known.
It was warm, it was disturbing, it was exciting, it was humiliating, it was proud (Cooper [1972] 1974: 108).²⁰

The parallelism could not be more exact. Not only is the grammar identical with the structure "it was x" repeated but there are also echoes in the lexical choice of "humiliating" and "disturbing". In this passage 'it' refers to penetrative penile-vaginal intercourse, in the earlier passage 'it' refers to the kiss. In both passages the power of the kiss and then of sexual intercourse is transcendental.

In an ergative analysis of the passage from "The Priestess Who Rebelled" (see appendix III for my complete analysis of the passage) Meg is never the agent. She is either the Medium or a circumstance of place, the site in which change is wrought. See Tables 3.12, 3.13 and 3.14 which appear on the facing page.

An ergative analysis makes it clear that Meg's body is literally not her own and that she is not responsible for anything that happens to it. Daiv is the Agent responsible for the process that takes place through the Medium of her body. Even when there is no Agent in a clause, see Table 3.15, it is not hard to infer that Daiv is the cause of this as he is the Agent responsible for everything else that takes place in the passage. Meg has no responsibility for the actions and behaviours of her body. Her body is literally not her own. "Her body betrayed her".

In an ergative analysis of the kiss passage from *Who Needs Men?* (see appendix III for my complete analysis of the passage) Rura like Meg never has agency. She is either the Medium, or parts of her become Circumstances of place,

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²⁰ Russ comments wryly about Edmund Cooper "determinedly charging into his favourite formula: 'It was X. It was Y. It was Z. It was Q'" (Russ 1988: 13).
Table 3.16

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agent</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>on the lips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He</td>
<td>kissed</td>
<td>her</td>
<td>on the lips</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.17

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<th>Agent</th>
<th>Process:</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>from her limbs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>It [the kiss]</td>
<td>drained</td>
<td>strength</td>
<td>location: place</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Circumstance: place
the location for the beginnings of her transformation from exterminator to woman as in Table 3.16 opposite. Diarmid, like Daiv in “The Priestess Who Rebelled”, is the Agent in this clause, the one who causes the kiss to happen. However, in this passage unlike the passage from “The Priestess Who Rebelled”, the kiss is also an Agent as in Table 3.17. In this clause the kiss is the Agent and once again one of Rura’s body parts, her limbs, is the circumstance of place. In this passage the centrality of the kiss to the process of becoming a woman is realised in the grammar.

**Becoming a real man**

In worlds where the natural order of things has been disturbed, it is not only females whose femininity is undermined; the masculinity and virility of males is also corrupted. As I have demonstrated, men can become the “breeders” and “Wild Ones” of “The Priestess Who Rebelled,” and once they are in this category they are not men. However, although the categories are fixed, the bodies within them are fluid. At the end of the sequel to “The Priestess Who Rebelled,” “The Judging of the Priestess,” one of the Wild Ones has acquired a name, Wilm, and is close to acquiring a mate - once he has bathed to remove “the smell from [his] body” and “shave[d] off that awful beard” (Bond 1940: 59). He will be incorporated into the heterosexual economy and become a real man like Daiv.

In Wallace G. West’s “The Last Man” (1929) the eponymous hero, M-1, believes what his custodians tell him:

But the world was perfect now, M-1 realised. No further change was necessary. He grew ashamed of his suggestions that new discoveries might be made. Everything was known! Life was complete, vibrant! The millennium was at hand, and he was the only discordant factor (West [1929] 1972: 109).

It is the atavist woman Eve who teaches M-1 to recognise that the matriarchy is stagnant and decaying. She seeks him out and utters blasphemies which he tells her are “wicked” (West [1929] 1972: 110). Eve introduces the idea
of escape and begins the process that will make M-1 into a real man using the
transcendental effect of her real woman’s body:

They stopped and looked at each other under the moon, which had just passed the
zenith. A great wave of tenderness and admiration swept over him. Awkwardly he seized
both her hands in his.
“You’re so different,” he marvelled. “You make me feel queer here.” He tapped his
chest. “Like tears,” he tumbled, “and sunshine and flowers.”
She smiled, and leaning forward, gently touched her lips to his. A shock, like that from
a dynamo, passed through him. He leaped back as though she had struck him, then
reapproached.
“What was that?” he asked stupidly.

The parallels between this passage and the “touching-of-mouts” passage from
“The Priestess Who Rebelled” are obvious. The kiss overwhelms and an orgasmic
wave passes through his body. However the roles are reversed - Eve, the heroine,
is the Agent and the hero’s lips are the Circumstance of place. See Table 3.18.

Table 3.18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>She</th>
<th>Process: material</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Circumstance: location: place</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>touched her lips to his</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agent</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Although Eve is the Agent the encounter is not violent as the kisses are in
“Priestess” (1939) and Who Needs Men? (1972). Eve touches her lips to M-1’s
“gently”, Daiv’s touches his mouth to Meg’s “closely, brutally, terrifyingly”.

This kiss seals M-1’s rejection of the matriarchy, “the human hive” (West
[1929] 1972: 105). 21 Eve also renames M-1: “My name is Eve...I gave it to myself.
I have forgotten my number...I shall call you Adam” (West [1929] 1972: 117) and
suggests they escape into the wilderness:

“We are doomed. I see it all so clearly now. There can be no more progress. There can be
no more superman to drag mankind forward in spite of its blindness.”
“No,” Eve whispered, “but there are atavists to drag mankind backward to a point
where it can get a fresh start.”
The idea dazzled him. “You mean - we - we could have children - and build a new,

---

21 “Consider Her Ways” (1956) is another matriarchal world modelled on bees or ants.
From that moment on Adam begins to behave like a real man and Eve ceases to initiate all the action. He comforts her when she bursts into tears and when they hatch a plan together to blow up the “life factory” Adam announces that it is his “place to do this thing” (West [1929] 1972: 126). Adam’s blossoming masculinity causes the text to try and rewrite itself describing the “growing love between the last man and the woman he had now chosen as his mate” ([my italics] West [1929] 1972: 124). Eve chose Adam. Although Eve made Adam (though not from her rib) into a real man once he has become a man she can not initiate anything without threatening his newly acquired manhood.

**Mama Come Home: parodies of the Sex War?**

The texts in this section are different from the majority of the texts I have discussed in this chapter because they are not predicated on the idea that female rule is wrong and do not necessarily re-inscribe the natural order of things. In this section I discuss *Search the Sky* (1954) by two of the Futurians, Frederik Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth, and Wyndham’s “Consider Her Ways” (1956) as well as Tiptree’s “Mama Come Home” (1968) and Bruce McAllister’s “Ecce Femina!” (1972).

Russ discusses these last two texts in detail (Russ 1980: 6-7 & 11-12). She describes Pohl & Kornbluth’s *Search the Sky* (1954) as containing “a brief satiric sketch of a role-reversal society” (Russ 1980: 13). Sam J. Lundwall says of this section of the novel that it is a “wry, tongue-in-cheek account of a world run by women” where

career men are frowned upon [and] the male protagonist is regarded as little more than a talking parrot when he starts to explain things to a leading business-woman...

...The protagonist is even subjected to an attempted rape by a drunk (female) truck driver. And suddenly he isn’t a hero any longer - he’s just a decorative piece of

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22 “Mama Come Home” was originally called “The Mother Ship” when published in *If* in 1968.
23 Actually she’s a jet pilot not a truck driver. A male Azoran says of the difference between truck drivers and pilots:

I know truckers are supposed to be rough and tough, maybe they are. But you can’t tell me that deep down a trucker isn’t a lady. When you tell them no that’s that. But a pilot - it just eggs them on (Pohl & Kornbluth [1954] 1979: 79).
furniture to be admired and used. If this seems far fetched, look around you. You have it everywhere here and now, only it is the other way around (Lundwall 1971: 149).

There were moments in this sequence from *Search the Sky* when I found the satire effective, for instance the reversed wedding vows:

Marylyn, you have chosen to share part of your life with this man. You intend to bear his children. This should not be because your animal appetites have overcome you and you can’t win his consent in any other way but because you know, down deep in your womanly heart, that you can make him happy. Never forget this. If you should thoughtlessly conceive by some other man, don’t tell him. He would only brood (Pohl & Kornbluth [1964] 1979: 99).

The hero observes that the groom is crying and decides that he “doesn’t blame the poor sucker”, then “being a man of conscience” wonders “if that was why on Halsey’s Planet [his home planet] women cry at weddings” (Pohl & Kornbluth [1954] 1979: 99). Yet the heroine is shown as helpless and giggling and when she works out how to operate the F-T-L drive it is because she is an idiot savant (Pohl & Kornbluth [1954] 1979: 107). The novel ends as follows:

Eventually he set up the combinations for Halsey’s Planet on the Wesley Board.
Helena was beside him, proud and close, as he threw in the drive (Pohl & Kornbluth [1954] 1979: 169).

“Consider Her Ways” by John Wyndham first published in 1956 as part of his collection, *Sometimes, Never* is often cited as an early example of science fiction’s engagement with questions of feminism. The heroine, Dr. Jane Summers, whose husband has been killed recently, volunteers to be a guinea pig for the testing of a drug. After taking the drug she wakes to find her mind in the body of a breeding Mother in a future Matriarchal world where all the men died centuries earlier as the result of a virus. The story’s centre is some twenty pages of dialogue between Jane and Laura, an esteemed historian of her age. Jane asks how the world managed to survive without the men. Laura gives her a condensed history of the role the discourse of romance has had in subjugating women:

... when the crisis came it turned out that hardly any of them knew how to do any of the important things because they had nearly all been owned by men, and had to lead their lives as pets and parasites.

... It wasn’t their fault... They were caught up in a process, and everything conspired against their escape. It was a long process, going right back to the eleventh century, in Southern France. The Romantic conception started there as an elegant and amusing fashion for the leisured classes. Gradually, as time went on, it permeated through most levels of society, but it was not until the latter part of the nineteenth century that its
commercial possibilities were intelligently perceived, and not until the twentieth that it was really exploited.

You see, the great hopes for the emancipation of women with which the century had started had been outflanked. Purchasing power had passed into the hands of the ill-educated and highly-suggestible. The desire for Romance is essentially a selfish wish, and when it is encouraged to dominate every other it breaks down all corporate loyalties. The individual woman thus separated from, and yet at the same time thrust into competitions with, all other women was almost defenceless; she became the prey of organized suggestion. When it was represented to her that the lack of certain goods or amenities would be fatal to Romance she became alarmed, and thus, eminently exploitable (Wyndham [1956] 1965: 48-51).

Jane is appalled and does not recognise this description of her world. She argues that this Matriarchal world is one without love and Laura observes that Jane is

repeating... the propaganda of [her] age. The love you talk about, my dear, existed in your little sheltered part of the world by polite and profitable convention. You were scarcely ever allowed to see its other face, unglamorized by Romance. You were never openly bought and sold, like livestock; you never had to sell yourself to the first-comer in order to live; you did not happen to be one of the women who through the centuries have screamed in agony and suffered and died under invaders in a sacked city (Wyndham [1956] 1965: 60).

Lundwall quotes part of this dialogue about romantic love and argues that while the dialogue “might not give much blood to the debate...it is still a healthy sign of science fiction recognizing the problem” (Lundwall 1971: 151). Amis calls “Consider Her Ways” a rare example of “female-emancipationism” in science fiction (Amis 1960: 99). He also quotes a large chunk of the text’s central dialogue, commenting that

Laura is not only a thoughtful and intelligent person but gets the best of the argument, saying all that can be said for the notion that women would be better off without men and making what seem to me some fairly damaging criticisms of the contemporary female role (Amis 1960: 77-8).

Russ says that “Consider Her Ways” is a “pro-feminist discussion of romantic love and the feminine mystique” (Russ 1980: 13). Russ has reservations, however, and observes parenthetically that “Wyndham creates another of those beehive-like societies structured by biological engineering” (Russ 1980: 13). The society is, in fact, deliberately modelled on ants. I would add another criticism. It seems fairly extraordinary that there would be no lesbianism or masturbation in an all-female world. Once again the assumption is that without men there can be no sex.
Joanna Russ includes Bruce McAllister’s “Ecce Femina!” first published in *Fantasy and Science Fiction* in February 1972, as one of her “Flasher” texts. After reading her account of “Ecce Femina!” I expected another *Who Needs Men?* and found instead a satirical text. Russ characterises this humour as “unintentional” (Russ 1980: 13). Russ’ satire “The Cliches from Outer Space” (1984) includes “The Turnabout Story” which is remarkable similar to “Ecce Femina!”; it features a “ravaging, man-hating, vicious, hulking, Lesbian, sadistic, fetishistic Women’s Libbers” motorcycle gang who terrorise the hero George (Russ [1984] 1985: 33). However, the moments in McAllister’s story where a motorcycle gang member, called Queen Elizabeth, uses “soda pop for strange purposes” (McAllister 1972: 127), and the gang members call each other “brother-muckers” (McAllister 1972: 131), seem to me far from “inadvertently” funny.

The magazine blurb which accompanies “Ecce Femina!” does not encourage a reading of the text as satire: “Here’s something different from Bruce McAllister: a tough and pungent extrapolation of women’s lib” (February 1972: 117). Rather, I read the text as a “tough and pungent extrapolation” of men’s fears of “women’s lib”, and a fairly dark one too. Most of the text is a role-reversal with female rather than male bikers in the Hell’s Angels mould. They become masculine and uncontrollable as a result of shooting up with E9. One man tells the narrator Mac how

> he had gotten sick and tired of supporting her - her bike, her E9, her arrogance, her appetite, her perversions (McAllister 1972: 133).

The narrator is not part of the heterosexual pairing that is at the centre of the majority of the texts I have discussed in this chapter. He is an observer. The pairing is between Jack, who is the biggest and most violent of the women and runs her own garage, and a beaten and abused man, or “papa”, who is brought in

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24 My thanks to Helen Merrick for drawing my attention to these parallels.
by the local motorcycle gang. She adds to the violent abuse the man has suffered and then nurses him, Oscar, back to health and keeps the gang members away from him. When one of the gang stabs Oscar, Jack kills her and, in a parody of the you-Jane me-Tarzan scenario of many of these texts, Jack grabs the injured Oscar who struggles against her, "she hit him. He went out, and in one easy motion she slung him over her shoulder" (McAllister 1972: 142). The text ends ambiguously with the narrator Mac looking at a photo that Jack and Oscar have sent him of Jack with her muscle gone to fat holding a baby:

No matter how you look at the picture, her eyes seem to be looking at you. They follow you around.
And you can't tell whether she is smiling or not.
But then, you never could (McAllister 1972: 144).

While Russ does not read "Ecce Femina!" as a commentary on the sex war she does read James Tiptree, Jr.'s "Mama Come Home" (1968) in this way. Joanna Russ argues that "Mama Come Home" is one of the "few attempts to write thoughtfully about the Sex War". According to Russ the reason for the story's "odd" treatment of the Sex War,

both inverting some of its elements and commenting critically on others...is not far to seek. As the SF community now knows, "James Tiptree Jr" is the pseudonym of Alice Sheldon. A woman does not, obviously, have the same stake in the myth as male authors may have (Russ 1980: 12).

Amanda Boulter, In her article, "Alice James Raccoona Sheldon Tiptree Sheldon Jr: Textual Personas in the Short Fiction of Alice Sheldon", discusses this tendency to read "a feminist subtext" in all of Tiptree's work and asks, "reading with hindsight what precisely do we choose to see?" (Boulter 1995: 6). When the story was first published James Tiptree Jr. was not known "to be" Alice Sheldon. I would argue that Bruce McAllister's "Ecce Femina!" (1972), also "invert[s] some of its [the sex war's] elements and comment[s] critically on others" (Russ 1980: 12). Russ' knowledge of Tiptree's 'true' sex makes her more alive to satire and subversion in Tiptree's work than she is in McAllister's story. At the same time Russ also argues that the heroine of "Mama Come Home," Tillie, is
"Mama Come Home" - Comedy with a message

Setting: Earth of very near future; offices, park, airport, etc.

Aliens are human-type girls with great smiles, nine feet tall. Hero is CIA man in love with colleague who was brutally gang-raped as child and has no use for men. Aliens land and tour around, everybody loves 'em. They claim they are the normal adult form of women (their men are earth-normal) and that Terra is a colony where they sent defective women who didn't mature. They are actually a gang of freebooters out to bring home a load of male sex-slaves. While praying, hero is caught by them and brutally raped (their sex-organs are peculiar). His girl was turned on by them; this turns her off, and she participates in a successful scheme to get them off Earth. Afterwards she finds she can stand hero; message: Victims and the raped can only stand other victims and rape-ees.

Note: This story and the one below are a set, same hero, etc.; designed to illustrate idea that when Earth is discovered by aliens we may go through analogous history of Third World when discovered by Europeans. "Mama" is the slave-taking phase; next comes the religious-conversion missionary phase.

James Tiptree, Jr.'s summary of "Mama Come Home".
presented as without family, without friends, indeed without a social context of any kind. Thus her choice is - as it is in all these stories, for all the heroines - between evil (or in some cases decaying and sterile) female tyranny and some version of the hero, i.e. men (Russ 1980: 12).

Tiptree's own summary of the story appears opposite. "Mama Come Home," like the later "Women Men Don't See", is told in the first person voice. The narrator is Max, a hard-boiled CIA agent who is, in the tradition of Philip Marlowe, a chivalric romantic, a sweet misogynist. Aliens land from the planet Capella. They are "brainy, lovely, man-crazy - and eight and a half feet tall!" (If June 1968: 81). Like the earlier The Girls From Planet Five (1955), the women are considerably taller than their male counterparts, blonde and beautiful, and their intentions towards Earth are not good. However, in The Girls from Planet Five the alien women Lyru are controlled by the evil crones whereas the Capellan women act for themselves.

The Capellan women use men as slaves and sex toys. The story revolves around defeating the Capellans but according to Russ like many of the other battle of the sexes stories

[the real struggle is for Tillie's loyalty, and it is her conversion to loving the hero that is the centre of the story (Russ 1980: 12).

Tillie's coldness towards men has a cause:

Tillie at fifteen had caught the full treatment from a street gang. Fought against knives, left for dead - an old story. They'd fixed her up as good as new, except for a few interesting white hairlines in her tan, and a six-inch layer of ice between her and everybody who shaved (Tiptree [1973] 1975: 60).

Tillie is operating outside the heterosexual economy and the story details her reincorporation. Unlike the earlier stories she is not overpowered by a kiss or sexual intercourse but by the proof that the Capellans are not her saviours, that they are rapists. When the Capellans get out of their spaceship and it becomes apparent that they are all eight feet tall, the narrator, Max sees

a funny look on Tillie's face. Several girls were suppressing themselves, and Mrs. Peabody seemed to feel an egg hatching in her uplift. The men looked like me - tense. Right then I

25 That is until the Lyru women of Girls From Planet Five discover that their men really are not wimps at which point either the women shrink or their men grow.
would have settled for green octopuses instead of these good-looking girls (Tiptree [1973] 1975: 57).

Tillie looks just like a Capellan only five feet tall. They adopt her as a kind of pet. Max the narrator sees Tillie becoming more and more involved with the Capellans and tries to warn her about them:

You think your big playmates are just like yourself, only gloriously immune from rape. I wouldn’t be surprised if you weren’t thinking of going home with them. Right? No, don’t tell me kid, I know you. But you don’t know them. You think you do, but you don’t. Did you ever meet any American blacks who moved to Kenya? Talk to one some time (Tiptree [1973] 1975: 64).

This collapsing of race and sex so that white women’s oppression and otherness is made equivalent to that of African-American men with no African-American women in sight is a sleight of hand that is sometimes practised in white feminist writing (Spelman 1988; hooks 1984; Ang 1995).

When Max is raped by the Capellans:

[m]y next clear view was from the ground where I was discovering some nasty facts about Capellan physiology through a blaze of pain. (Ever think about being attacked by a musth vacuum cleaner?) (Tiptree [1973] 1975: 66).

Tillie’s allegiances start to shift.

[the American black who goes to Kenya often discovers he is an American first and an African second, no matter what they did to him in Newark... She swung back her hair, slowly. I could see mad dreams dying in her eyes (Tiptree [1973] 1975: 71).

In order to defeat the Capellans Tillie has to relive her rape. This disturbs the balance between Tillie and Max because it means that she has, in a sense, been raped twice and he only once.

A trap is set to force the alien women, who want to use human men as sex toys, to go home. At the same time, as Joanna Russ, argues, the story details the traps that are set for Tillie so that she too will come home to the heterosexual economy. However, Tillie’s reincorporation, is not the joyous one that is for Meg in “The Priestess Who Rebelled”. She can barely talk about it:

...The closest we came - then or ever - to an explanation was over the avocado counter.
“It’s all relative, isn’t it?” she said to the avocados.
“It is indeed,” I replied.

And really, that was it. If the Capellans could bring us the news that we were inferior mutants, somebody could bring them the word that they were inferior mutations. If big, hairy Mamma could come back and surprise her runt relations, a bigger, hairier Papa could appear and surprise Mamma (Tiptree [1973] 1975: 78).
Tillie, like her sexbattle compatriots of the texts that I have been looking at, has been coerced into heterosexuality, into being a real woman. The difference is that her reincorporation into heterosexuality does not physically transform her. She is with Max because her dream of a women’s utopia, free from rape, has been dashed, not because of the magical force of a kiss.

Despite the overwhelming pessimism about the relations between men and women there are still remnants of the real man and real woman ethos. Tillie is asked about the male Capellan Mavrua - “He’s - I don’t know - like gay only not” (Tiptree [1973] 1975: 70). Max studies him on the monitors and notes that “as Tillie said, queer but not. Clean-cut, muscular, good grin; gonads okay. Something sapless in the eyes” (Tiptree [1973] 1975: 71). Clearly he is not a real man. Yet it is the story’s hero who is raped and the heroine who rescues him from that rape. Max observes that

Analogic reasoning works when you have the right frame. We need a new one. For instance, look at the way the Capellans overturned our psychic scenery, our view of ourselves as integral to this world. Or look at their threat to our male-dominant structure. Bigger, more dominant women who treat our males as sex-slave material (Tiptree [1973] 1975: 71-2).

But the psychic shock is overcome and life continues. Tillie has resigned herself to life behind enemy lines but will not talk about her capitulation. This is the same kind of coping strategy that is adopted by the mother and daughter in another Tiptree story, “The Women that Men Don’t See” (1973): “What women do is survive. We live by ones and twos in the chinks of your world-machine” (Tiptree [1973] 1990: 140). I discuss this story in chapter six.

“Mama Come Home” (1968) is as inconsistent and as contradictory as “Ecce Femina!” (1972), “Consider Her Ways” (1956) or Search the Sky (1954). Male rule is revealed, either by implication as in Search the Sky and “Ecce Femina!,” or directly as in “Consider Her Ways” and “Mama Come Home,” as violent and oppressive to women. Romantic love operates within the heterosexual order to keep women in their place. On the other hand different knowledges about women and their biological inferiority are upheld: in Search the Sky the heroine is considerably less capable than the hero and depends upon
him, in "Consider Her Ways" the only society women can bring about for
themselves free of the tyranny of Romantic Love is a near fascist one modelled on
ants, in "Ecce Femina!" the tough mountain of a heroine Jack melts into
motherhood, and in "Mama Come Home" Tillie gives way to the narrator
without a murmur because "It's all relative, isn't it?". On this level there is no
difference between the texts I have discussed in this section and texts like "The
Priestess Who Rebbled" (1939) and Who Needs Men? (1972) - both groups of
texts lay open the necessity of the heterosexual economy for making a female
into a 'real' woman.

In the next chapter I discuss battle of the sexes texts which offer solutions
other than the reincorporation of women into the heterosexual economy.
Solutions such as hermaphroditism and notions of equality between the sexes.
“Painwise”

Hermaphroditism and other solutions

In the final section of “Amor Vincit Foeminam”, Russ mentions some texts which “appear to be pro-feminist in intention”: Search the Sky (1954), “Consider Her Ways” (1956), Venus Plus X (1960) and Amazon Planet (1966) (Russ 1980: 13). I have already considered Search the Sky and “Consider Her Ways” in the previous chapter. In this chapter I examine texts, including Venus Plus X and Amazon Planet, which offer solutions or alternatives to the conflict between the sexes which do not involve the re-inscription of male rule. These solutions include, in the order I discuss them:

- a version of equality where men recognise that women are not necessarily the ‘weaker’ sex - Robert Vaughan’s “The Woman From Space” (1932), Philip Wylie’s The Disappearance (1951), Robert Silverberg’s “Woman’s World” (1957) and Mack Reynolds’ Amazon Planet (1966);

- women establish a society without men in which the lack of men is not a problem - Joanna Russ’ “When It Changed” (1972);

- a biological change is wrought so that there are no men and women but only one sex which is hermaphrodite or androgynous - Katherine Burdekin’s Proud Man (1934), Theodore Sturgeon’s Venus Plus X (1960) and Ursula Le Guin’s The Left Hand of Darkness (1969).

In the first section, “Equality?”, I examine the first group of texts, those which posit ‘equality’ between the sexes. In these texts the economy of heterosexuality which I examined in the previous chapter is still firmly in place. Relations between the sexes are centred on sexual exchange and reproduction. In Philip Wylie’s The Disappearance (1951) and Robert Silverberg’s “Woman’s World” (1957), equality is something that can be given by men to women.
In the second section, "When It Changed: A Different Kind of Female Rule", I look closely at Joanna Russ' story, "When It Changed" (1972). This text is set on a world which has existed for years outside the heterosexual economy and is one of the first of the texts which Russ refers to as 'recent feminist utopias' in her essay of the same name (1981). The text is a direct response to many of the assumptions of the earlier battle of the sexes texts. In the final and longest section, "Hermaphroditism", I examine those texts which posit a hermaphrodite or androgynous world where sexual difference has been erased. However, these one-sexed worlds have been frequently read as all-male worlds so that the erasure of difference becomes instead the removal of women.

Equality?

I discovered a number of stories which purport to offer 'equality' between the sexes as an end to the Sex War. Not all of these texts have the same understanding of what equality between men and women means.

Richard Vaughan's "The Woman From Space" was published in the Spring 1932 edition of Wonder Stories Quarterly. Sam Moskowitz gives the following plot synopsis:

The women of an as yet undiscovered planet between Neptune and Pluto unwillingly take over when their men have virtually destroyed themselves...They develop an extraordinary science and successfully clear the asteroid belt, then move their planet into a new orbit to be closer to the sun. The earth, rendered almost uninhabitable by a star that has brushed too close to our solar system, has lost most of its women. The two worlds, one almost devoid of men, the other short of women, agree to a happy accommodation. So logical an attitude was not long to prevail in science fiction (Moskowitz 1972: 16-17).

The women of the planet Arion seized power because it was the only way to stop the men from destroying themselves and Arion. The women's motivation for seizure of power is in marked contrast to the desire for power and the subjugation or elimination of men which is the most common reason for women's usurpation of control in the texts I examined in the last chapter. The women of the planet Arion are brilliant, and their society is not stagnant like many of the matriarchal
societies of the previous chapter, nor is it modelled on ants, termites or bees.¹ The Aronian women have built a technology and civilisation far superior to that of Earth. The heroine, who is telepathic, tells the hero, “I sense from some of your thoughts that your civilization is not quite the equal of ours, is perhaps younger in evolution” (Vaughan 1932: 369).

The story’s hero, Dirk Sarrazin, is Earth’s most formidable scientist. Sarrazin first meets one of the Aronian women, Lella, when she lands on Earth as part of a team of intrepid explorers who have been sent out to explore the new galaxy. Sarrazin is dazzled by his first sighting of an Aronian:

It was apparently of a shape similar to that of an earthly being and was completely covered by a transparent, glassy envelope or suit, as supple as gauze. Through it a pair of enormous and brilliant eyes looked at him curiously. Its skin, where visible, was the loveliest, luminous blue that Dirk had ever seen, its features human in outline, yet strangely alien, as though the spirit behind them were of another essence and tempered in unknown fires.

Although standing a foot or so taller than his own goodly height, it seemed almost to float with an effect of airy grace instantly noticeable and arresting as though it was impervious to the influences of gravity. Yet a sense of power and authority dominated all its effects (Vaughan 1932: 367).

The description is of an alien, and although the alien’s sex is unknown at this stage the neuter pronoun ‘it’ is used rather than ‘he’, which Ursula Le Guin described in 1976 as the “generic pronoun” (Le Guin [1979] 1989: 145).² In 1932 it would have been automatic to assume that an alien landing on Earth in a science fiction story was male. The title of the story, “The Woman from Space” and the use of the pronoun ‘it’ seem to indicate that the alien is a woman but it does not account for the way this being is described: the alien is “transparent”, “glassy”, “supple”, “enormous”, “brilliant”, “loveliest”, “luminous”, “arresting”, “impervious”, and has an “airy grace” while at the same time “a sense of power and authority dominated all its effects”. Most of the description fits the beautiful women of countless science fiction stories but power and authority do not. Yet

¹ Unlike “The Last Man” (1929) and “The Priestess Who Rebellied” (1939) which I discussed in the last chapter.
both sets of meanings, the grace and the power, remain Lella's throughout the
text. Both sets of meanings are also linked in medieval religious discourses on
saints' lives and mystical experience. It appears that Sarrazin has seen, not an
alien, but a saint or angel.

Dirk Sarrazin initially finds it very difficult to believe that beauty, power
and intelligence could be a woman's:

Sarrazin's eyes opened as the conception of a dominantly feminine planet, infinitely
distant, yet a part of his own solar world, dawned on his mind for the first time. The
undeniable beauty of the being from space seemed more natural now that he knew it to be
feminine. Although Earth had not lacked for brilliant women in the last few centuries, he
found it hard to believe that the virile power of the mind he found dealing with his could
normally belong to a woman. That a being who could navigate alone and undaunted the
boundless realms of space could be, even though of a different race, one of what on Earth
was called the gentler sex (Vaughan 1932: 369).

The choice of "virile" here to modify the nominalisation the "power of the mind"
is telling. Lella literally has a mind like a man. This construction is a projection
of his mental process: "found it hard to believe". The nominalisation "the power
of the mind" operates within the Cartesian mind/body split and locates manly
power explicitly in the mind. It is this virile mind-power of Lella's which is the
Actor "dealing with" "his [mind]". Although it is Lella's "power of the mind" she
is written out of the passage becoming a generalised "woman" or "being". At the
beginning of this passage "a conception...dawned on his [Sarrazin's] mind for the
first time". There is a fusing here of the conception of the body which is the
prerogative of the female and conception of the mind which is the prerogative of
the male.

Lella also has to reconcile herself to Dirk Sarrazin's difference from her
planet's ideas of 'manly' behaviour and tells him that:

No Aronian man would have been permitted to venture, as you have done, on a voyage
through space, and it has seemed continually strange to me to see a man daring the same
dangers as a woman and thinking with a mind equal to hers...stranger, indeed, than if
you had been some alien form of life.

According to Aronian ideas, you are more like a woman than a man; I can see that you,
with your Earthly conceptions, think I am more like a man than a woman. Our men are
of a timid, slothful disposition; they are capricious and weak in capacity for endurance or

3 See for instance St Teresa of Avila's autobiography or The Golden Legend by Jacobus de Voragine.
action. Little is to be expected of them intellectually, though now and then they have produced a distinguished mind (Vaughan 1932: 372).

On both planets a binary shaping of sex difference prevails. Daring and the thinking of the mind are the prerogative of the valorised sex. On each planet it is the “mind” sex which is dominant while the “weak” sex dwindles. Both planets are entirely heterosexual:

In our world one sees none but women. The men are so rare as to be considered too precious to expose to the hazards of everyday life. How happy your planet must be! With us, only one woman in a thousand may mate; and even then she can only keep her husband five years, unless he expressly refuses to leave her, for which he is considered unpatriotic. Only one woman in a thousand can be a mother (Vaughan 1932: 369).

The two planets begin to come together through the joining of the hero and heroine, Sarrazin and Lella:

“Would you take an Earthman for your mate Lella?” [Dirk] asked her hoarsely. She trembled in his arms and her eyes answered before her words. Dirk caught her close and for a moment she was as feminine and clinging as any woman of Earth (Vaughan 1932: 373).

Although there is no kiss this moment is similar to those kisses in the previous chapter which were the site of the inscription of the heterosexual order. The contact with a real man robs Lella of speech and her body answers before her mind. Dirk is the Actor and Lella, his Goal. As a result she carries the attributes of a proper Earth woman, femininity and clinginess. However, in the question Dirk asks, it is Lella who is the Actor taking the Earthman, her Goal, as her mate. Though this is also the grammar of a traditional marriage proposal, “Will you marry me?” Traditionally it is the man who asks as does Dirk Sarrazin here.

There is a rhetoric of equality between the two which Lella calls on while at the same time calling Dirk a “demi-god”:

[s]he told him that she had loved him when first she saw him...After the weak men of Arion he had seemed like a demi-god and companionship with him through the endless day of space had shown her that here was that thing undreamt of on her planet...a mate who was an equal and a friend.

“Imagine what you are to me, whose mothers have known only the inferior men of Arion,” she said when Sarrazin told her what she was to him...all the things man looks for in man and all those he dreams of in a woman (Vaughan 1932: 373).

On Arion Dirk meets an Aronian man, Luthor, who is not like the other inferior men of Arion. Dirk “rejoiced at the proof Norria’s husband [Luthor] presented,
that the men of Arion were the victims of environment rather than of inherent weakness” (Vaughan 1932: 376). There is nothing in the text that suggests that the Earth women might also be “the victims of environment rather than of inherent weakness”.

The women use their science to move their planet closer to Earth. Dirk says of this future union:

A few generations of intermarriage between Arion and Earth would equalize somewhat the proportion of men and women here, and the situation would become normal, so that each woman could have the right to marry if she chose, and men would be free as they were in the very old days (Vaughan 1932: 377).

Dirk talks only of an improvement in the status of Aronian men, he says nothing about how the relations between Earth and Arion would affect the status of Earth women. Indeed there are no Earth women anywhere in the story. Lella and Dirk discuss their future life together. Lella says that:

Arion needs me and I cannot refuse her my services. There will be much special exploration to do once we have achieved the success of this plan (moving Arion closer to Earth), but neither can you deprive the Earth of your knowledge, or live perpetually on Arion the life of onesecondary to myself. We must divide our time fairly between our two worlds. In Arion you must be Lella’s husband, though even there your position will be different and higher than that of our Aronian men. On Earth, I shall be only Dirk Sarrazin’s wife, and proud of my husband. Perhaps one day, after years of intercourse between Arion and Earth, men and women will come to have an equal importance on both planets. It is possible that we can help to bring that day closer (Vaughan 1932: 379).

Lella raises the possibility of a time when all men and all women of both planets will have “equal importance.” In the same speech, however, she accepts the status of an Earth woman while on Earth, while Dirk will enjoy superior status to Arion men though not as high as Aronian women. Also, like the Lyru women of The Girls from Planet Five (1955), Lella has shrunk. At the beginning of the text when Lella is still referred to as an ‘it’ and is still potentially male or something else, the Aronian is described as “standing a foot or so taller than [Dirk’s] own goodly height” (Vaughan 1932: 367). Once Lella has acquired the female pronoun and has agreed to be Dirk’s mate she ceases to be a foot taller and she is able to “lean against his [Dirk’s] strong shoulder” (Vaughan 1932: 376). The hegemonic force of the discourse of romance is irresistible.
In “Woman’s World” by Robert Silverberg, published in the June 1957 issue of *Imagination Science Fiction*, the hero volunteers to be put into deep sleep and sent into the future because of the “bust-up of [his] engagement” (Silverberg 1957: 110). He finds himself in a matriarchal world. The role-reversal is immediately obvious because the women are called Phil and Sam, and the men, Lola and Clara. He is seized by the men as a saviour who will lead a revolt against the women. He wakes up to discover that none of it was real, he was merely “under-going preliminary psychological tests” before being put in the “somnocasket” (Silverberg 1957: 113). On discovering that his experiences in the women-dominated world were induced dreams the hero decides not to go into the future:

I knew now that there was no sense in running off to the future; things weren’t any simpler there.
I knew what I would do: I would find my girl, take her out someplace [sic], talk over all our misunderstandings. I was confident we’d patch things up somehow.
All I had to do to make our marriage work was be a little more considerate - and let her share the responsibilities, instead of trying to run the whole show myself. Yes, I thought, as I started down the familiar dirty old twentieth-century street. Women needed to be given more responsibility in running things... (Silverberg 1957: 114).

Women need to be the Beneficiary of “more responsibility in running things” - a gift bestowed upon them by the men. If only men would treat women well the world would be a better place and open warfare between men and women would be avoided. It is no surprise that the hero’s “girl” is not the Actor in any of these clauses, no more than women are in the final sentence.

Philip Wylie’s *The Disappearance* (1951) appears to be making a similar argument to “Woman’s World” - if only men would treat women better we would

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4 I have found two other examples of the Sex War being only a dream: “The War of the Sexes” by Edmond Hamilton first published in the November 1935 edition of *Weird Tales* and “The Superior Sex” by Miriam Allen deFord first published in the April 1968 edition of *Fantasy and Science Fiction*. In “The War of the Sexes,” Allan Rand answers an advertisement for a young man without connections in search of exciting work (Hamilton 1935: 551). He is induced into a dream of a matriarchy to test whether he has “a cold-steel nerve” (Hamilton 1935: 569). He does and gets the job and the scientist’s daughter. In “The Superior Sex” William is the guinea pig for an experiment which will be able to reveal “hidden psychological impulses” (deFord [1968] 1989: 23). The experiment is being conducted by Professor Ranleigh and his associate Janet who is William’s wife. The experiment which throws Williams into a matriarchy proves to William only that his wife is having an affair with Ranleigh.
not have the tension between the sexes that exists. The contemporary unequal relationship between men and women is the fault of the men.

In *The Disappearance*, on the fourteenth of February at 4:04 and fifty-two seconds in the afternoon, all the men disappear from the world the women inhabit, and all the women from that of the men. For four years they inhabit parallel worlds. The story centres around William Percival Gaunt, mostly referred to as Gaunt, and his wife Paula and their struggles to cope with the newly unisex world. More chapters are devoted to Gaunt and the men's struggle to deal with the Disappearance (it is capitalised throughout the text) than the women's. Gaunt is called to Washington along with other experts to decide what to do. While they are gathered together the Soviets threaten to attack them. Nuclear bombs are exchanged - the USSR is devastated as is a great deal of the USA. In the women's world a Soviet ship of "liberation" comes to the USA and contact is established, the women becoming friends rather than enemies, and they pledge to help each other. The odds against the women are large because of their relative lack of professional and trade training. In the men's world there is lawlessness and fascism. In the final chapter, "Home-Coming and Conclusion," everyone returns to where they were at that final moment before the Disappearance: Gaunt at his desk, Paula in the garden, the two worlds have been reunited. They have not forgotten what happened and the world is full of joy and happiness at having survived God's trial or whatever the Disappearance was.

Kingsley Amis in *New Maps of Hell* discusses *The Disappearance* at some length, observing that only in science fiction could such an "examination not only of the part played by sex in contemporary society, but of the whole inner nature of sexual difference" take place (Amis 1960: 75). An entire chapter of *The Disappearance* consists of just this sort of speculation: "An essay on the philosophy of sex, or the lack thereof, extraneous to the narrative and yet its

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5 Needless to say in 1951 the cold war was already underway.
theme, which the impatient may skip and the reflective might enjoy” (Wylie 1951: 216). Robert Scholes, in “A Footnote to Russ’s ‘Recent Feminist Utopias,’” has this to say about The Disappearance:

If I could add a footnote to Russ’s essay it would be to mention Philip Wylie’s neglected novel The Disappearance....But for our present purposes one important idea emerges: though both worlds are horrible enough for everyone to desire a return to a world with two sexes, the women’s world is not anywhere near as horrible as the men's. I think Wylie reached this conclusion in spite of himself, by honest extrapolation; and I think any honest extrapolation would arrive at the same result (Scholes 1981: 86).

There is no moment when Gaunt has a sense of relief at Paula’s Disappearance whereas Paula,

[j]f she had told the truth to herself,...would have admitted that at times and in certain ways the absence of Bill had compensations....She enjoyed management free of criticism and safe from arbitrary change, change without adequate reason (from her viewpoint) and without notice. She appreciated being given, even by universal tragedy, her own way in every personal matter. She had put to good use the good brain she owned; she was in every possible respect, her family's head as a result. Besides, in a moment of national crisis, she had been valuable. Such conditions and facts were satisfying to a hitherto frustrated element of her nature (Wylie 1951: 201).

Gaunt comes to believe that men have long been thwarting women. In his essay he writes that

woman’s dilemma has for ages been far greater than even she imagined...it was not ameliorated in modern times, and...largely male attitudes have been the occasion of it all (Wylie 1951: 228).

According to Gaunt, men have to learn that a “‘person’ is a-man-plus-a-woman; with one or the other absent, there is no person” (Wylie 1951: 233). Other male characters come to the same conclusion. Teddy, who has had a brief affair with Gaunt’s wife, Paula, asks Gaunt rhetorically, “What in hell is a woman but a part of the whole person?” (Wylie 1951: 195). And the clergyman Connauth announces after men and women are reunited: “There is only one sex, Bill! Woman, man, are halves” (Wylie 1951: 348).

In his long essay on the philosophy of sex, Gaunt stresses the sameness between men and women

The actual differences between the sexes of genus Homo are not very great. Some women are larger than most men; some have bigger brains than most men; some are stronger. It is quite possible that by the use of genetics mankind could have reversed all conventional tendencies (Wylie 1951: 228).
In stressing this sameness, *The Disappearance*, while being informed by two centuries of a predominantly two-sex model, harks back to an earlier model of the relationship between man and woman, Laqueur’s one-sex universe. Women and men, in this model, are composed of the same liquids, both excreting sperm and having the same genitalia. Women are “inverted, and hence less perfect men” (Laqueur 1990: 26). Laqueur argues that according to Galen,

[n]othing could be more obvious...than to imagine women as men. For the dullard who could not grasp the point immediately, Galen offers a step-by-step thought experiment:

Think first, please, of the man’s [external genitalia] turned in and extending inward between the rectum and the bladder. If this should happen the scrotum would necessarily take the place of the uterus with the testes lying outside, next to it on either side. The penis becomes the cervix and vagina, the perineum becomes the female pudenda, and so forth on through various ducts and blood vessels (Laqueur 1990: 30).

Both men and women produce semen: “male and female semen...stand in the same relationship to blood that penis and vagina stand to genital anatomy, extruded and still-inside organs” (Laqueur 1990: 40). This understanding of the relationship between male and female biology is echoed in *The Disappearance*:

*Mankind has everywhere emphasized the sex differences. He has only recently known much of the identities and parallels.***

... The epithelial cords from the seminiferous tubes - or the mesenchyme. The Graafian follicle comes into being in one sex; in the other, from the same tissue, a transitory network in the mesovarium. The mesovarium in the female is, in the male foetus, mesorchium. Paroophoron and organ of Giralde; common Wolffian duct - and Mullerian duct, becoming Fallopian tubes, uterus, and perhaps vagina in the female, uterus masculinus in the male. So, endlessly, the anatomical parallel continues. And while each emergent body of protoplasm takes up its appointed form and situation, neither male nor female lacks in embryo the same entities, or their rudiments or vestiges. Our outward organs appear greatly different only to the mind that does not intimately know how alike they are and of what identical tissues they have been composed. How superficial, then, how ignorant it is to postulate an important differentness of spermatozoos or ova, clitorises or penes or any other aspect or characteristic of the sexes! (Wylie 1951: 229).

And later,

*We - male and female - are the same flesh and the flesh is beautiful. We have all the same organs, differing only in speciality. The same chemicals course in us both. When we love each other it is the same love. When we lie together we are in solemn truth that One. And until men made it so, in prestigious excesses of egotism, no such thing existed as a woman and no such thing existed as a man (Wylie 1951: 233).*

Gaunt, like the editorial blurbs I examined in the previous chapter, refers to the discovery of hormones. However, for Gaunt hormones are a sign of sameness not difference. His arguments have more in common with Oudorshoon’s (1994) arguments about sex hormones. In Gaunt’s essay he writes:
Lately we have discovered "sex" hormones: male, female. To the disquietude of some, we have also learned that each sex possesses both and that no more than a slight preponderance of one over the other exists in either sex. With pragmatic zeal we have caused cockscombs to grow on hens and found that female hormones relieve to some degree cancerous conditions of the prostate. We have even somewhat changed personality by injection, and disoriented libido. We might have done better. We might, for instance have wondered more what such facts mean (Wylie 1951: 230).

These arguments have much in common with many liberal feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Taylor and Betty Friedan - to name some examples over the past three hundred years - who accept "the underlying conception of human nature" but feel that there has been a startling omission, a blunder, in the treatment of women (Jaggar 1982: 21).

Yet, the model Laqueur outlines is most emphatically not one of equality:

*man* is the measure of all things, and woman does not exist as an ontologically distinct category. Not all males are masculine, potent, honorable, or hold power, and some women exceed some men in each of these categories. But the standard of the human body and its representation is the male body (Laqueur 1999: 62).

Despite Gaunt's long arguments for the sameness of the two sexes, and the injustice of man's tyranny over woman, the text ends with the restoration of the old sexual order. Paula's daughter, Edwinna, has been doing back-breaking work during the Disappearance, including hunting and farming. However, her newfound independence and self-reliance makes her realise that she really loved her first husband and that she wants to be a wife again:

I thought I was just a glamour-puss, for sale to the highest bidder...I thought he was weak and *that* was unfair and I thought the world was mean. I never tried to help Charlie. I didn't know what I had to try with. Now...I do know. I ought to be quite a wife, for *any* guy! And I picked him first, after all. In some ways, some very important ways, Charlie was a *man*!


Paula, who has spent the whole book leading a community, working hard and making endless decisions, discovers that she is a feeler not a thinker (Wylie 1951: 350). In the last few pages Paula asks her husband leading questions so that he can pontificate out loud:6

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6 There is a long tradition in science fiction of the female character performing this function. Sam J. Landwall notes this phenomenon:

The classic function of the woman... was to follow the hero as a kind of reverentially listening Dr. Watson. By her obvious ignorance of the most elementary things she would give the hero the opportunity to launch into long explanations as to why the devious
“Did God do it, Bill?”
“Well who made God? I don’t mean the real one that we have hardly tried to learn about. The God of the universe. Of evolution. Of instinct. Of the conscious mind and the unconscious mind. I mean, the squalid gods made in men’s images that men worshipped” (Wylie 1951: 349).

Gaunt even explains to her how a man has explained to him what she, Paula, feels:

Teddy made me perceive what you felt, that it never occurred to me any women really felt. So look, Paula. I don’t own you. I am you (Wylie 1951: 350).

In fact the text echoes Gaunt’s ideas about the ways in which men have tried to suppress women, because whenever there are men and women present the men dominate. In the chapters where there are no men, the women have as many long speeches as the men do in their chapters. When the worlds are re-united in the final chapter there are no long speeches from the women about the new world they are all facing. The longest speech by a woman is the one I quoted above from Edwinnna on her desire to be a good wife. By contrast, Jim, a neighbour, gives a ten line speech on the new world: “There is a passion in the hearts of all” (Wylie 1951: 343); Connaught has a seventeen line speech which leads to his announcement that “[t]here is only one sex” (Wylie 1951: 348); and Gaunt has a series of speeches. One is twenty lines long: “The blunder of both sexes, that grew out of their insane sense of separateness!” (Wylie 1951: 349-50). Paula’s longest speeches are of five lines and are explanations for Gaunt of what happened in the time they were apart (Wylie 1951: 342, 345). Gaunt dominates the final chapter and he is the most frequently recurring Theme. The men and Gaunt dominate the book with eleven chapters given to their experience under the Disappearance while the women have only seven. It is the men who make the discovery that men and women are two halves of a whole and they then announce it to the women. The women in their part of the text do far less overt philosophising and

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once white women and their men are restored to each other they revert to their secondary role as helpmate and angel of the house.

This notion of The Disappearance, that women and men are two halves of a whole, is as predicated on heterosexuality as are the Pygmalion/Galatea texts which I discussed in the previous chapter. On the back flap of the dust jacket there is “Mr Wylie’s own comment” which bears this out:

I became appalled by the ageless human view of women which holds them to be “second class” persons....I suddenly appreciated a long-standing blunder of our species....man...has perverted the truth, grading women down to enhance egotistical assumptions and so, ineluctably, degrading his whole kind. The fact is, no such thing as “man” or “woman” exists; one sex without the other has neither past nor future and is but death....

Carl Jung, viewing man in Nature...observed that instinct provides impulses for all we call “good” as well as all we call “evil”. Only man has attributed goodness to his conscious will and eschewed evil as a property of beasts. If Jung’s observation is correct...[i]t follows...that the old blunder could be undone, the chasm bridged, and the two sexes reintegrated, at which point woman would be restored to humanity and man to love. So my novel became a love story, a new kind (Wylie 1951: From the dust jacket cover flap).

The Disappearance is indeed a love story though I am not sure how new it is. There are many similarities with love stories like Who Needs Men? where Rura discovers that “[w]omen are not a species, they are only part of a species” and that “[t]here is a fine tuning between men and women” (Cooper [1972] 1974: 96). This is the language that Jane resorted to in “Consider Her Ways” when she tries to convince Laura that a world without men is a nightmare world, “[l]ots of us were complementary. We were pairs who formed units” (Wyndham [1956] 1965: 59).

This ‘equality’ between the sexes is something bestowed by men and is dependent on heterosexual love. The Disappearance like Who Needs Men? does include homosexuality as an option. But as in Who Needs Men? it is unnatural and both protagonists reject it. Paula turns down the attractive young Kate with the following words, “I’m not a child, thank God! Good night, dear” (Wylie 1951: 256). While Gaunt says, “Infantile business, homosexuality. Immature and unfortunate” (Wylie 1951: 145).

Like the narrow class of real men and real women of the texts I discussed in the last chapter, those who are part of the man plus women equals person
equation are still a small group. Those who indulge in same-sex love, male or female, are ruled out, as are African American women (there are no African American men in the text). When the Disappearance occurs Paula Gaunt allows Hester, her maid, to camp in tents in the garden with Hester’s daughters and her granddaughters and other black families. Only one other garden resident is referred to by name, Hester’s oldest daughter, Margot. This is when Paula graciously offers Hester’s family refuge from the hurricane in the big house (Wylie 1951: 238). While Hester and Margot and their other female relations are camped in the yard, many of the white women of the neighbourhood move into the house so that all the white women can work and organise together. The gulf between the two groups is thus made abundantly clear.7 When the women and men are re-united, only Hester loses control:

A confused ululation came from the rear of the house.
"It’s Hester," Paula said quickly, "having hysterics, poor darling! I’ll go talk to her" (Wylie 1951: 337).

Throughout the text Hester and her relatives are referred to as belonging to Paula Gaunt, they are part of “her coloured colony” ([my italics] Wylie 1951: 201).

In the world of The Disappearance the only axis of oppression is that of sex. If men learn to treat women better and give them more responsibilities, the world will be a much better place. That the ‘coloured’ people in the text are also second class citizens - only allowed inside the big house in times of hurricane - is not mentioned. Indeed, in both “Woman’s World” and The Disappearance it is the white men who are responsible for doing something to make the world more

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7 The Disappearance is one of the few battle of the sexes texts that includes people who are not white. In Keller’s "The Feminine Metamorphosis" (1929) which I discussed in the last chapter, part of the action takes place in China, but the only role any Chinese people play in the action is to supply the evil American women with glands from their diseased bodies. In “The Judging of the Priestess” (1940) the enemy are the Japanese who are the descendants of the Japanese who moved to Mexico, they are short and 'ugly', and they are all of them male. David H. Keller’s “The Little Husbands” (1928) and Dwight V. Swain’s “Drummers of Daquavo” (1943) are set in the Amazon Basin and Clark Ashton Smith “The Root of Ampul” (1943) is set in Mahoya. All three stories take place amidst "native" matriarchies. The majority of the other sex battle texts make no mention of the race of their protagonists and are illustrated with representations of clean-cut ‘white’ folk.
equal. These texts are concerned with specific men’s journeys toward discovering their own privilege and part of what that privilege is built upon.

The heterosexual economy with its basic unit of one man plus one woman is also at the centre of *Amazon Planet*. Joanna Russ describes the text as having “a role reversal facade... armed female guards and simpering men - only to reveal beneath it a peaceful and substantially egalitarian world” (Russ 1980: 13). Guy Thomas/Ronny Bronston is an operative for Section G of the Bureau of Investigation of the United Planets. He is sent to Amazonia, a female-ruled planet, undercover as an interplanetary trade commissioner to discover more about the planet. The Amazonian government give him an armed escort of Amazonia warriors dressed in bronze sandals and short skirts to protect him from other Amazonian warriors who might want to marry him. The majority of the novel takes place amidst this role reversal world where an ‘effeminate’ man is one who behaves in a ‘masculine’ way:

When they got into the small living room, before looking around, Guy said, “Look...The next person, man, woman, or child that makes another crack suggesting I’m effeminate, I’m going to award a very fat lip!”
His guide was taken aback. “A very fat lip?” he wavered.
“A bust in the mouth.”

There are many similar passages where Guy/Ronny’s exaggerated masculinity is mocked. At the end of *Amazon Planet* Guy/Ronny discovers that the wimpy men and Amazon women are all actors trying to prevent him from discovering how Amazonia actually operates. The last three chapters consist of explanations and justifications of Amazonia’s social system which supports Amis’ claims about sf’s “readiness to theorise and debate” (Amis 1960: 74). These chapters are also a neat role reversal of the science fiction motif of woman as ear, for it is women, the two civil rulers of the two continents of Amazonia, the Myrline and the Hippolyte, who give the explanations, and Guy/Ronny who listens and asks

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8 *Amazon Planet* was first published in three parts in the December 1966, January and February 1967 issues of *Analog* and was published in paperback form by Ace in 1975.
questions like, "When did you stop having a military?" The answer, is, "[f]rom the beginning. We're women, remember" (Reynolds [1966] 1975: 183). Then there are longer passages of explanation:

You see, at first I imagine we were something like the Mormons who settled Utah back in old times. We had a multitude of ideas, principles, beliefs, and a great deal of faith in what, as we look back at it today, was obviously extremism. But we were no incompetents. And like the Mormons we quickly became pragmatic. Just as they gave up their polygamy when it proved impractical, we gave up the domination of one sex over the other. Not so quickly, perhaps, but step by step.

...When our first colony ships landed all property was community owned, save, of course, personal things. Our original ideas of a female-dominated socioeconomic commonwealth proved nonsense within the year. The smallest unit of a life form is that unit which can reproduce itself. In the case of the human race, a woman and a man (Reynolds [1966] 1975: 182).

The relationship is of course that between men and women who are the basic unit of the human race. So as in The Disappearance "a-man-plus-a-woman" is the core of humanity (Wylie 1951: 233).

Much of Amazon Planet is in the same parodic mode as Search the Sky, (1954), or "Ecce Femina!" (1972). The me-warrior routine of Minythia and the simpering of Podner Bates parody previous sex-battle worlds like that of "The Priestess Who Rebelled" (1939). There is even a moment when Guy/Ronny is told to shut up by a woman (Reynolds [1966] 1975: 103).

Unlike The Disappearance, there is no mention of any sexuality but heterosexuality. Patricia O'Gara, a recent migrant to Amazonia, explains to Guy/Ronny about Amazonian laws on sexuality and marriage:

Amazonians don't believe in restricting personal relationships with too many laws. Actually, though, usage frowns on promiscuity and having close relations with even two or three persons at a time is considered rather far-out. However, some people are just built that way. They're not one-man women, or one-woman men. You've had the problem down through the ages (Reynolds [1966] 1975: 145).

The heterosexual unit is still at the centre of society - there is no mention of one-woman women, or one-man men.
The cover of the January 1957 issue of Venture Science Fiction illustrating Poul Anderson's "Virgin Planet". The cover is by Emsh.
When It Changed: A Different Kind of Female Rule

The cover from Venture magazine shown opposite illustrates Poul Anderson’s Virgin Planet (1957). In this story a male explorer discovers an all-female world where the women, in Russ’ words, “span the whole range of human temperaments and activities” (Russ 1980: 13). The women have “sweet-hearts” amongst themselves but one group of women, the Whitleys, have never had a sweetheart (Anderson [1957] 1973: 23). Two of the Whitleys spend the novel fighting over the hero. The significance of the Phallus is spelled out on the first page when Barbara Whitley sees the explorer’s spaceship:

The thing stood upright, afloat with steel pride, like a lean war-dart, though it lacked fins. As a huntress and arbaelester the corporal was necessarily a good judge of spatial relationships, and she estimated its height as forty meters (Anderson [1957] 1973: 5).

In Joanna Russ’ “When It Changed”, men arrive on an all-female world, called Whileaway and the women do not melt when they meet the possessors of the long lost phallus.

Terry Carr refers to “When it Changed” in his 1975 editorial on women’s progress within science fiction. He cites the story as an example of this progress, as a “blow struck for sexual rationality” and gives the following plot synopsis:

[the story] opened with a lost Earth colony on some distant planet where all the men died long ago and the women learned to reproduce parthenogenically. They’ve established a workable and happy society and pretty much forgotten, over the centuries that men ever existed. Then a spaceship from Earth happens to land on the planet, rediscovering this lost colony, and the men in the crew go around looking amazed at how plucky and resourceful the little ladies have been, and telling them rather pityingly that their long exile is over, The Men Are Here. The women just look at them blankly and wonder what the hell they’re talking about (Carr 1975: 124).

The inversion of the sexbattle mythos whereby the women, or at least one real woman, would be glad that the men have returned is undone. Terry Carr applauds this and notes that the story “promptly won the Nebula Award as the...

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9 Virgin Planet was first published in the January 1957 issue of Venture Science Fiction and first published as a paperback in 1959. There is more on Poul Anderson’s engagement with the battle of the sexes in chapter six.

10 First published in the 1972 anthology Again, Dangerous Visions. The story won the Nebula award for best short story for that year. The Nebulas are awarded by the SFWA - Science Fiction Writers of America.
best short story of the year” (Carr 1975: 124). This for Carr is another sign of science fiction’s progress.

Susan Wood in her guest editorial for the Spring 1978 issue of the feminist fanzine, Janus also comments on the impact of Russ’ work in the early 1970s:

I remember a talk Joanna [Russ] gave, I think at the Toronto Secondary Universe conference in 1972, wittily reversing sex roles; woman makes rite of passage into adulthood by killing bear, etc (Wood 1978: 5).

This is a reference to the rite of passage in “When It Changed.” Janet is thinking of her daughter, Yuki:

Someday soon, like all of them, she will disappear for weeks on end to come back grimy and proud, having knifed her first cougar or shot her first bear, dragging some abominably dead beastie behind her, which I will never forgive for what it might have done to my daughter (Russ [1972] 1983: 4).

The narrator, Janet, describes her first sighting of men:

They are bigger than we are. They are bigger and broader. Two were taller than me, and I am extremely tall, one meter, eighty centimeters in my bare feet. They are obviously of our species but off, indescribably off, and as my eyes could not and still cannot quite comprehend the lines of those alien bodies, I could not, then, bring myself to touch them, though the one who spoke Russian - what voices they have! - wanted to “shake hands,” a custom from the past I imagine. I can only say they were apes with human faces. He seemed to mean well, but I found myself shuddering back almost the length of the kitchen - and then I laughed apologetically - and then to set a good example (interstellar amity, I thought) did “shake hands” finally. A hard, hard hand. They are heavy as draft horses. Blurred deep voices (Russ [1972] 1983: 5).


This response to a first view of the manly form leaves the heterosexual unit of man plus woman equals person behind. Woman as love interest, woman who is not yet a woman until she is completed and moulded into being by heterosexual penetration, is absent. Nor is the one-sex world in view where “man is the measure of all things, and woman does not exist as an ontologically distinct category” (Laqueur 1990: 62). For the men who have just arrived on Whileaway men are still the measure of all things and they ask “Where are all the people?” They are told about the plague. The question is repeated:
“Where are all the people?” said the monomaniac. I realized then that he didn’t mean people, he meant men, and he was giving the word the meaning it had not had on Whileaway for six centuries (Russ [1972] 1983: 6-7).

People are men, but for Janet people are women. The two groups, the women of Whileaway, and the men from Earth operate in completely different paradigms. Janet tells the men where the men of Whileaway are:

I thought we had poleaxed him. He caught his breath. He made as if to get out of the chair he was sitting in; he put his hand to his chest; he looked around at us with the strangest blend of awe and sentimental tenderness. Then he said, solemnly and earnestly:
“A great tragedy.”
I waited not quite understanding.
“Yes,” he said, catching his breath again with that queer smile, that adult-to-child smile that tells you something is being hidden and will be presently produced with cries of encouragement and joy, “a great tragedy. But it’s over” (Russ [1972] 1983: 7).

For the Whileawayans the men’s arrival is the tragedy and Katy, Janet’s wife, even tries to kill one of the men but is stopped by Janet who regrets it: “Katy was right, of course; we should have burned them down where they stood” (Russ [1972] 1983: 10).

The men tell them that “sexual equality has been re-established on Earth” and that the Whileawayan world is “unnatural” (Russ [1972] 1983: 8-9). Katy counters that “humanity is unnatural” (Russ [1972] 1983: 9). The leader of the male party agrees:

“Humanity is unnatural. I should know. I have metal in my teeth and metal pins here.”
He touched his shoulder. “Seals are harem animals...and so are men; apes are promiscuous and so are men; doves are monogamous and so are men; there are even celibate men and homosexual men. There are homosexual cows I believe. But Whileaway is still missing something.”

...You know it intellectually, of course. There is only half a species here. Men must come back to Whileaway” Russ [1972] 1983: 9).

There is a need to restore the “natural order of things”, the heterosexual economy, but the Whileawayans are not willing to become real women. They resist the romance narrative which should swing into play when the men arrive. There is no joy here at the reunion. Janet muses:

[our ancestors’ journals are one long cry of pain and I suppose I ought to be glad now but one can’t throw away six centuries, or even (as I have lately discovered) thirty-four years (Russ [1972] 1983: 11).
It is no longer an equation that makes any sense, men have become “ten foot toads”. This all-female world challenges the equation by eliding it altogether.

“When it Changed” is the first text in this period in which the case for heterosexuality has to be put at all:

“There’s been too much genetic damage in the last few centuries. Radiation. Drugs. We can use Whileaway’s genes, Janet.” Strangers do not call strangers by their first names.

“You can have cells enough to drown in,” I said. “Breed your own.”

He smiled. “That’s not the way we want to do it. You know as well as I do that parthenogenic culture has all sorts of inherent defects, and we do not - if we can help it - mean to use you for anything of the sort. Pardon me; I should not have said ‘use.’ But surely you can see that this kind of society is unnatural” (Russ [1972] 1983: 8-9).

The man’s mistake here is telling, for that is exactly what these men plan to do. The Earth men want to ‘use’ the women of Whileaway - they want to get access to those genes in a ‘natural’ way - through heterosexual penetrative sex. To do otherwise would continue these women’s existence outside the patriarchal heterosexual order, outside the discourse of romance. Janet’s offer to give them all the genes they want is not enough. A society that is outside the heterosexual economy is unnatural. This is the absolute given of every other battle of the sexes texts from 1926 to 1973. This text marks a crucial shift in the battle of the sexes texts and is indeed a moment “When It Changed”.
Hermaphroditism

(i) Correcting Hermaphroditus

Indeed, how could one separate the idea of subordination from the existence of the sexes? Gabrielle de Foigny’s remarkably fictitious land of Australie (1673), a utopia of hermaphrodites, shows how close the link between the two was perceived to be. The Australian, in whom the sexes were one, could not understand how a conflict of wills could be avoided within the “mutual possession” of European marriage. The French traveller answered that it was simple; for mother and child were both subject to the father. The hermaphrodite, horrified at such a violation of the total autonomy that was the sign of complete true “men”, dismissed the European pattern as bestial.

(Davis 1975: 128)\(^\text{11}\)

“How could one separate the idea of subordination from the existence of the sexes?” is a very important opening question. The response in the seventeenth-century text cited above is to remove sexual difference altogether and replace it with Hermaphrodites or androgynes. This solution to the conflict between women and men has also been posited in science fiction, although texts with this approach to the Sex War are rare in the period 1926-1973. In this section I discuss Proud Man (1934), Venus Plus X (1960), and The Left Hand of Darkness (1969).\(^\text{12}\)

The term hermaphrodite comes from the name of the first hermaphrodite, Hermaphroditus, son of Aphrodite and Hermes. A version of Hermaphroditus’ story is told at some length in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. According to Ovid, he was so beautiful that

\[
\text{[e]ven blushing became him: his cheeks were the colour of ripe apples, hanging in a sunny orchard, like painted ivory or like the moon when, in eclipse, she shows a reddish hue beneath her brightness (Ovid } 1955/1964: 103).}
\]

When he was fifteen he went travelling until he came across a pool of water. In this pool lived the naiad, Salmacis. The moment she saw Hermaphroditus she

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\(^\text{11}\) Gabrielle de Foigny’s text was written and published before the eighteenth century European ‘discovery’ of Australia.

was lust-struck and set about luring him into the water. Once he had entered the
water, Salmacis tried to kiss him. Hermaphroditus struggled but “she twined
around him, like a serpent”. As she held him, Salmacis called out to the Gods,
“grant me this, may no time to come ever separate him from me, or me from
him!” Her prayers were answered instantly

for, as they lay together, their bodies were united and from being two persons they
became one....when their limbs met in that clinging embrace the nymph and the boy were
no longer two, but a single form, possessed of a dual nature, which could not be called
male or female, but seemed to be at once both and neither (Ovid [1955] 1964: 104).

Hermaphroditus called to his parents and begged them to change the waters of
the pool

if any man enter this pool, may he depart hence no more than half a man, may he
suddenly grow weak and effeminate at the touch of these waters (Ovid [1955] 1964: 104).

Both his parents were moved with compassion, and granted this request of their
child, who was now but half male, and half female. In this formulation
hermaphroditism is something that makes a man effeminate, that takes
something away from him so that he becomes “no more than half a man” (Ovid

Hugh Hampton Young (M.A., M.D., SC.D., F.R.C.S.I., & D.S.M) in his
extremely influential 1937 text *Genital Abnormalities, Hermaphroditism &
Related Adrenal Diseases*, gives a brief overview of the various accounts of
Hermaphroditus’ story. He is unhappy to concede that Ovid’s account is the most
well known and finds it “amazing” that the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* and the
*Encyclopedia Brittanica* accept Ovid’s “fantastic version” to which there are
many “obvious objections...especially from a medical standpoint” (Young 1937:
5). Apparently water cannot really turn a man into an hermaphrodite!

Despite Young’s disapproval of Ovid’s “fantastic version”, there is a basic
similarity between Ovid and Young’s view of hermaphroditism. For both,
hermaphroditism is a problem. In Young’s pioneering text book, and in every
other medical text book I looked at, hermaphroditism is something that must be
corrected. In Young’s book the actual or most viable sex for each individual
intersex has to be determined before the correction can be made. Is the intersex really a man or a woman? The questions that are pertinent in making this decision are not just which set of genitalia is more viable but also social questions such as what is the sexual preference of the intersex? If s/he prefers to have “sexual relations with” (Young’s phrase) men then the preference is to make the body female. Does s/he look more like a woman or a man?

In *Proud Man*, *Venus Plus X* and *The Left Hand of Darkness*, hermaphroditism or androgyne is transformed from a problem that must be surgically corrected into a possible solution to the problem of difference between men and women.

Unlike the other battle of the sexes text which I have been discussing in this and the previous chapter *Proud Man* was not published as part of the American pulp magazine tradition of science fiction. The book, by Katherine Burdekin writing under the name of Murray Constantine, was published in England in 1934. It is written in the form of a report on Earth by an alien visitor to England in the early 1930s. The alien, who is named Alethea Verona when passing for a woman, has visited England through a dream. While there Verona spends time with three different “subhumans”. Each of Verona’s encounters is covered in a separate part of *Proud Man*. Part II is “The Priest,” Part III “The Woman,” and Part IV “The Man.” Part I is called “The Person” and sets out the reasons for writing the account and explains the difference between the inhabitants of England and Verona’s own hermaphrodite race:

You will understand by this time the subhumans are of two sexes, like animals, birds, fish and insects. If evolution is a fact, the whole course of human evolution would seem to be from a single-sexed unconscious being, such as an amoebe, to a single-sexed conscious being such as you or I. The subhumans were beyond the animal stage, as they were certainly partially conscious, but they were still two-sexed mammals. They had abandoned a breeding season, and the interest of one sex in another was constant. They

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13 *Proud Man* was brought to my attention by Don Keller, science fiction fan and publisher and editor, who kindly gave me a copy of the 1933 Feminist Press edition.

14 Burdekin was not publicly known to be Murray Constantine until the 1980s. Daphne Patai writes that [with the cooperation of...friends, and of her publishers as well, Burdekin covered the tracks of her real identity quite effectively. As a result, when, in the early 1980s, I grew interested in Murray Constantine, it took considerable effort to learn that she was indeed Katherine Burdekin (Patai 1989: 165).
bore their young alive, and fed it at the breast. They had no conception of a *person*, that is an entity independent of others both physically and emotionally, who is self-fertilising, and can produce young, if it wishes to, alone and without help. No *person* so far as I could discover, had yet been born, though there have been cases of a clumsy sex fusion, making it difficult to say whether the individual was a male or a female. But such freaks, as subhumans call all their fellows who differ markedly from themselves, were not true *persons*, with a human mind or consciousness; and, as far as I know, I was, during the two years of my dream, the only *person* extant. The idea that one individual should be both male and female, wholly and practically and conveniently within itself, was repugnant to them, even though their bisexuality was the cause of unbelievable pain, discomfort, and grief (Burdekin [1934] 1993: 22-3).

Once again a person equals a man plus a woman but this time the man and the woman are contained in the same body. The person, who narrates the book, is also outside the discourse of romantic love which in *The Disappearance* (1951) and *Amazon Planet* (1966) coheres the unit of man plus woman together. This idea is, however, articulated within *Proud Man* by the woman, Leonora, who is the subject of Part III:

But I and my lover will be quite different. We sha’n’t be two people, we shall be a unit. A unit of far more power than either of us would be separately. We shall do the same work, together (Burdekin [1934] 1993: 176).

Later Verona asks Leonora if she has thought about the children of her “units of lovers”, wouldn’t they be different to children of more “disunited” “antagonistic” pairs? Verona suggests that

“with such perfect understanding between the parents children might in time be born who united the whole natures of the lovers in themselves, even to their own sexes.”

“Oh no,” cried Leonora. “There would be no more lovers, and the children would be cold, cold. They must stop short of that.”

“Now you are like your children who say they won’t grow up. How dull to be grown up, they say. Yet you like coldness. You like to have me with you.

“Naturally being sexual, you don’t want to be without sex. But being reasonable, you should not mind evolution” (Burdekin [1934] 1993: 191-2).

As did Jane in ‘Consider her ways’ (1956), Leonora finds the idea of a world without romantic love appalling. “One of you is lovely,” she says, “A world of you is terrifying” (Burdekin [1934] 1993: 192). This underlines how essential romance is to the formation of subjectivity. Leonora can not comprehend a world in which subjectivity would be formed in such a radically different way. For Leonora, Verona and her people are like the women of “The Last Man” who “no longer having need of sex, dropped it like a worn-out cloak and became sexless” (West [1929] 1972: 108-9); or the men in “The Last Woman” whom a drug allows
to turn "[a]ll the energies" that had been wasted on "sex and the emotional side
of life" to "thought and work" (Gardner [1932] 1972: 134). Or indeed the women
of the matriarchy in "Consider Her Ways" (1956) who have escaped the
enslavement of romantic love. Verona's people escape romantic love by being
hermaphrodite - a fusion of the perfect man and perfect woman and their love for
each other. In this way romantic love is transcended. Verona's people are the
apotheosis of romantic love, its fulfilment, but that means her people are neither
heterosexual nor homosexual, they are asexual.

(ii) Crime's Offspring

For a long time hermaphrodites were criminals, or crime's offspring,
since their anatomical disposition, their very being, confounded the
law that distinguished the sexes and prescribed their union.

(Foucault [1976] 1981: 38)

The centrality of sex and of romantic love to Leonora's sense of herself is crucial.
If you are neither man nor woman how can you signify within the economy of
heterosexuality? Indeed the word 'hermaphrodite' and various corruptions have
been used to refer to homosexuals. The term, 'moffie' derived from
'hermaphrodite' is a South African equivalent for the Australian term 'poofa'
(Branford 1987: 226). An hermaphrodite is neither man nor woman and so in the
West, especially since the 1960s, hermaphrodite bodies have been altered.
Modern surgical techniques prevent the blurring of the distinctions between the
two true sexes and their place within the heterosexual economy.

According to a 1990 textbook on paediatrics, "[m]ajor problems arise when
the genitalia are malformed to the extent where the gender cannot readily be
identified" (Warne 1990: 474). In 1969, English physicians, Christopher J.
Dewhurst & Ronald R. Gordon wrote about a newborn hermaphrodite:

One can only attempt to imagine the anguish of the parents. That a newborn should
have a deformity...affecting so fundamental an issue as the very sex of the child...is a
tragic event... conjuring up visions of a hopeless psychological misfit doomed to live
To exist legally and socially, for the past two hundred years, a body has needed to be sexed male or female. In the introduction to *Herculine Barbin* Foucault writes:

> everybody was to have his or her primary, profound, determined and determining sexual identity: as for the elements of the other sex that might appear, they could only be accidental, superficial, or even quite simply illusory. From the medical point of view, this meant that when confronted with a hermaphrodite, the doctor was no longer concerned with recognizing the presence of the two sexes, juxtaposed or intermingled, or with knowing which of the two prevailed over the other, but rather with deciphering the true sex that was hidden beneath ambiguous appearances (Foucault [1980] 1987: viii).

Judith Butler in a footnote to her article “Sexual Inversions”, discusses Foucault’s claims about the category of sex and the way it “constitutes and regulates what will and will not be an intelligible and recognisable human existence” (Butler 1992: 353). Butler writes that the political question for Foucault, and for those who read him now, is not whether “improperly sexed” beings should or should not be treated fairly... The question is whether, if improperly sexed, such a being can even be a being, a human being, a subject, one whom the law can condone or condemn.... The journals of Herculine Barbin, the hermaphrodite...demonstrate the violence of the law that would legislate identity on a body that resists it. But Herculine is to some extent a figure for a sexual ambiguity or inconsistency that emerges at the site of bodies and that contest the category of subject and its univocal or self-identical “sex” (Butler 1992: 353-4).

In Sturgeon’s *Venus Plus X* (1960) this violence is overt: when the human Charlie Johns discovers that the hermaphrodite race, the Ledom, are not a “natural” mutation but a self-imposed surgical alteration he is appalled and declares that humans would “exterminate you down to the last queer kid...and stick that one in a side-show” (Sturgeon 1960: 152). According to the *American Dictionary of Slang* queer meaning homosexual has been in “common use since c1925” (Wentworth & Flexner 1960: 415). If you are not heterosexual, according to Charlie Johns, you must be homosexual. However, it could be argued that the queerness of the hermaphrodite body puts it outside dichotomous sexuality and that the Ledom are both heterosexual and homosexual.
(iii) Leaking Bodies

In September 1960, a book, billed as “the strangest science fiction novel Theodore Sturgeon has ever written” (which was as much to say the strangest anyone had ever written) called Venus Plus X was first published. The cover of the first edition is reproduced on the facing page. In Venus Plus X the sexual inequality of 1950s middle-America is contrasted with a supposedly future utopia where the Ledom which spells model backwards, are “biologically androgynous”, being equipped with both male and female “sexual equipment”. All of the Ledom can impregnate and be impregnated. This is different from reproduction in Proud Man which only requires one “person”. Most of Venus Plus X is concerned with the story of Charlie Johns, who wakes up and finds himself in the world of the Ledom. They show him their world, explain its workings and ask for his verdict. This narrative is interspersed with the interaction between Herb and Jeanette Raile in suburban America on questions of sex and sexuality.

Venus Plus X is the first of the battle of the sexes texts published within the field of science fiction to postulate altering the bodies of women and men as a solution to the Sex War. This is a different approach from Keller’s “The Feminine Metamorphosis” (1929) where the alteration of ‘natural’ womanly bodies is viewed as an abomination and an act directly contrary to the will of God.

Venus Plus X explicitly locates itself within the sf battle of the sexes tradition. Herb and Jeanette discuss The Disappearance or rather Herb tells Jeanette about it even though she has already read it:

He [Wylie] says people made their big mistake when first they started to forget the similarity between men and women and began to concentrate on the difference. He calls that the original sin. He blames it for all wars and all persecutions. He says that because of it we’ve lost all but a trickle of the ability to love (Sturgeon 1960: 73).

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15 In 1961 it ran as a four part serial in the January, February, March and April editions of the British magazine New Worlds.
And like *The Disappearance* (1951) it is Herb who considers the big questions and explains them to Jeanette.

While *The Disappearance* and *Amazon Planet* argue for a recognition of the basic sameness between the sexes, the "actual differences between the sexes of genus *Homo* are not very great" (Wylie 1951: 228) as the solution to the battle, *Venus Plus X* sees the biological difference or humans’ perceptions of it as too huge an obstacle to equality. For equality to be possible, biology, for at least a time, has to be remade and physical difference has to be removed. In Gatens’ discussion of the sex/gender dichotomy she refers to the desire to efface (or ignore) difference between the sexes. She writes about

the claimed necessity of the neutralising of sexual difference. For example Firestone’s “cybernetic communism”, proposed the literal neutering of bodies by means of the complete technologization, and hence socialisation, of the reproductive capacity (Gatens [1983] 1996: 17).

*Venus Plus X*, published ten years before Shulamith Firestone’s 1970 feminist tract, *The Dialectic of Sex*, and in a completely different field, also sees biology as the problem but posits a slightly different solution. In Firestone’s text the solution is cybernetic wombs which remove the necessity for “clumsy,” “inefficient,” “painful” childbirth (Firestone [1970] 1988: 224). In Sturgeon’s text everyone gives birth because all of the Ledom possess penis, womb and vagina. The result is the same: inequality, which stems from physical difference is removed. Same bodied experience equals tolerance equals peace and understanding. And these Ledom bodies are almost identical: Charlie Johns, taken from Earth’s past to judge his humanity’s future, has great difficulty telling the Ledom apart. They are all roughly the same height, and shape. Only their dress sense distinguishes them. There is no mention of skin colour, although the accompanying illustrations in the *New Worlds* serialisation show the Ledom as white.

The story of the Ledom is threaded with that of Herb and Jeanette Raile. In their world there is no neat solution. The only conclusions that Herb and Jeanette reach is that they love each other and that they love their child. They
are not two halves of one whole and frequently they do not understand each other but the safety of the nuclear family will have to do.

In the postscript to the first edition of Venus Plus X Sturgeon writes that it "was my aim in writing Venus Plus X to, a) write a decent book, b) about sex" (Sturgeon 1960: 160). The implication is that although the earlier sexbattie stories may have fulfilled the second condition they definitely did not fulfil the first. Venus Plus X takes up where the less "decent" battle of the sexes texts I discussed in the previous chapter left off. Those texts close with the union of the hero and the heroine and the array of different sexed bodies neatly forgotten. However, this array of sexed bodies still manages to leak out of these texts. Sturgeon's Venus Plus X is an attempt to make use of some of this leakage. Ironically, however, it manages to shut down the range of bodies that had emerged from the earlier texts by surgically altering every one into a version of the same.

The Ledom may be equipped with a womb but they are breastless and appear to be men. One of the first observations of the story's narrator, Charlie Johns, is that he "saw no women" (Sturgeon 1960: 16). Later revelations of the "true" nature of the Ledom's sex do not dispel this impression of an all male world.

There are parallels between Venus Plus X and Ovid's tale of Hermaphroditus. The naiad Salmacis' plea for eternal unity with the beautiful boy leaves her with nothing, not even a self. She has become a component of Hermaphroditus in much the same way that the Ledom are women and men transformed into men with additional female parts.

Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass argue in their "Fetishizing Gender: Constructing the Hermaphrodite in Renaissance Europe" that Ovid's tale is an example of

\[\text{the absorption of the Other into the Same. For if Hermaphroditus's name suggests the intertwining of male and female, the name is that of a boy who, even as he intertwines with Salmacis, erases her name; henceforth, the name is transformed from the conjunction of two genders to the absorption of the woman's name into the man's, paradoxically at the very moment of the submission of the man to the woman (Jones and Stallybrass 1991: 88).}\]
This encounter and absorption is echoed in traditional marriage vows when the woman is submerged into her husband’s name. The hermaphrodite in this light is not the unity of two producing another kind of being - the hermaphrodite is half a man:

His prayer to the gods to make other swimmers leave the pond “less than men” obliterates the nymph as active ingredient in the metamorphosis. She is present not as the female half of a hermaphrodite but as the drainer away of Hermaphroditus’ masculinity; she defines him through negation. Thus Hermaphroditus’ change is represented as a problem of male identity (Jones and Stallybrass 1991: 96-7).

If woman is lack, and man is the one, then their unity will result in the woman vanishing altogether, or in the woman becoming a man. The Ledom are a version of men, but not a version of women. According to Moira Gatens:

implied neutrality is not neutrality at all but a “masculinisation” or “normalisation” (in a society where men are seen as the norm, the standard) of women - a making of “woman” into “man” (Gatens [1983] 1996: 17).

But if Hermaphroditus is only another kind of man why has ‘he’ been so consistently obliterated, renamed, ignored or punished under the law? Why is the human bisexual visitor to a world of hermaphrodites so horrified?

In Le Guin’s The Left Hand of Darkness (1969) the visitor to the hermaphrodite world is Genly Ai, an envoy from the Ekumen, a vast intergalactic association of planets and cultures. Genly Ai is sent to the planet Winter to contact the native inhabitants and see if they are ready to join this intergalactic association. The planet Winter, or Gethen as it is called by its inhabitants, is unlike any known world because its inhabitants are neither male nor female but neuter except for a short period of time when they go into heat or ‘kemmer’ and become either male or female. The story centres around Genly Ai’s interactions with a Gethenian, Estraven.

The edition of The Left Hand of Darkness which I own has the words, “A Classic of Science Fiction” across its cover under the title. On the back cover the blurb begins, “This outstanding classic of science fiction, which won both the Hugo and Nebula Awards when first published”. The book has been re-printed virtually every year since its first publication in 1969 and unlike the majority of
the texts I have been discussing, has a solid place within most canons of science fiction. *Left Hand of Darkness* is also one of the most written about texts in science fiction scholarship.

I have no memory of my first reading of *The Left Hand of Darkness* but when I re-read it for this chapter, the use of the male pronoun seemed in the opening pages to smooth over the difference, the hermaphroditism of the inhabitants of Winter, because it delays the revelation of difference. As the novel opens you are surrounded by men; it is only gradually that 'kemmer' is introduced and you learn the extent of the difference between the Gethenians and humans.

In Chapter 7 "The Question of Sex: from field notes of Ong Tot Oppong, Investigator, of the first Ekumenical landing party on Gethen/Winter, Cycle 93 E. Y. 1448," Oppong, a "woman of peaceful Chiffewar", observes that

...you cannot think of Gethenians as "it". They are not neuters. They are potentials, or integrals. Lacking the Karhidish "human pronoun" used for persons in soror, I must say "he": for the same reason as we used the masculine pronoun in referring to a transcendent god: it is less defined, less specific, than the neuter or the feminine. But the very use of the pronoun in my thoughts leads me continually to forget that the Karhider I am with is not a man, but a manwoman (Le Guin [1969] 1991: 85).

Here the female observer of the strange planet of Winter has internalised Thomas Laqueur's observation that "man is the measure of all things" (Laqueur 1990: 62).

The text is replete with the envoy, Genly Ai's binary thinking, his attempts to make the Gethenians male or female:

I was still far from being able to see the people of the planet through their own eyes. I tried to but my efforts took the form of self-consciously seeing a Gethenian first as a man, then as a woman, forcing him into those categories so irrelevant to his nature and so essential to my own (Le Guin [1969] 1991: 18).

Gethen is a planet of Crime's Offspring and to render its people intelligible, Genly turns them into a planet of men. But he is never comfortable with this move and it keeps sliding out of his grasp, because the Gethenians are not either male or female and they will not stay fixed as Genly would have them. It also forces him to think about his assumptions about male and female. Women are
the Other that shadow the text. Early on Genly speaks of men and women as though they are separate species. He writes of the Gethenians:

[they lacked, it seemed, the capacity to mobilize. They behaved like animals, in that respect; or like women. They did not behave like men, or ants. At any rate they never yet had done so (Le Guin [1969] 1991: 47).

This statement is at once a nice gesture in the direction of a branch of the battle of the sexes texts - only with an inversion so that ants are aligned with men not women - and also an example of Genly’s unease with women. Genly’s world is entirely sexed, so that when he watches Estraven making “food-ration calculations” he can only view them as “house-wifely or scientific” (Le Guin [1969] 1991: 204). Estraven asks Genly if women are “like a different species?”

“No. Yes. No, of course not, not really. But the difference is very important. I supposed the most important thing, the heaviest single factor in one’s life, is whether one’s born male or female. In most societies it determines one’s expectations, activities, outlooks, ethics, manners - almost everything. Vocabulary. Semiotic usages. Clothing. Even food. Women...Women tend to eat less...It’s extremely hard to separate the innate differences from the learned ones. Even where women participate equally with men in the society, they still after all do all the childbearing, and so most of the child-rearing....”

“Equality is not the general rule, then? Are they mentally inferior?”

“I don’t know. They don’t often seem to turn up mathematicians, or composers of music, or inventors, or abstract thinkers. But it isn’t that they’re stupid. Physically they’re less muscular, but a little more durable than men. Psychologically.

...“I can’t tell you what women are like. I never thought about it much in the abstract, you know. In a sense, women are more alien to me than you are. With you I share one sex, anyhow....” (Le Guin [1969] 1991: 200).

The “heaviest single factor in one’s life, is whether one’s born male or female.” Yet Genly is able to find more ground between himself and the Gethenians than with women because they are male sometimes and he can extend that further to give them humanity. Genly’s words echo those of the man landing on Whileaway in “When It Changed” - “Where are all the people?” People means men, Genly has accepted the Gethenians, they are men. At least the Gethenians he respects are men. He refers to the “voluble” Gethenian with whom he stays in Ehrenrang as his “landlady” (Le Guin [1969] 1991: 46). And he describes the unreliable and duplicitous King Argaven as laughing “shrilly like an angry woman” (Le Guin [1969] 1991: 33).
(iv) Pronouns are important

...a nice face, neither boyish nor too beautiful; and oh, it was not Laura; it's just that she had Laura's hair.
She:

"Y-y-you kept saying he!" cried Charlie stupidly.
"About Soutin? Yes, of course - what else?"
And it came to Charlie, yes of course - what else! For Philos had told his story in the Ledom tongue, and he had always used the Ledom pronoun which is not masculine nor feminine but which also is not "it"; it was he, Charlie, himself, who had translated it "he."

(Sturgeon 1960: 147)

Throughout Venus Plus X (1960), the Ledom have seemed just like men, partly because of this use of the masculine pronoun. This pronoun is the choice of Charlie, is his translation, and it is he who, discovering that the Ledom are not hermaphrodite as the result of a "natural" mutation, calls them all queer. Possessors of an unnatural alteration of their real selves they become homosexual and deviant but still male.

In the majority of the texts I have discussed in this chapter there is an unthinking use of 'man' for humanity and the pronoun 'he' as though it were generic. In Mack Reynold's Amazon Planet (1966) when the women rulers, the Hippolyte and the Myrine, are explaining the workings of Amazonia, they refer to the "human race" rather than "mankind". Hippolyte says:

"The smallest unit of a life form is that unit which can reproduce itself. In the case of the human race, a woman and a man..." (Reynolds [1966] 1975: 182).

and the Myrine chimes in for Ronny's benefit, "Or as Citizen Bronston would undoubtedly put it, a man and a woman" (Reynolds [1966] 1975: 182-3). Earlier in the text when Guy/Ronny is having the system of payment explained to him "she" is used as a generic. "Surely nothing is more just than to realize that each person's time is as valuable to her, as any other person's" (Reynolds [1966] 1975: 99). This was the only example of the female pronoun being used as the generic and it was during the part of the text when the Amazonians are still trying to convince Guy/Ronny that their world is a ruthless matriarchy. The page before the same character uses the male pronoun, "For every hour he puts in as a student, he accrues one hour" (Reynolds [1966] 1975: 98). In the last three
chapters when Ronny is having Amazonia explained to him the male pronoun and man as universal returns: “A highly trained man’s time can be worth several times as many hours as an unskilled man” (Reynolds [1966] 1975: 185). The Disappearance (1951) only uses ‘he’ as a generic pronoun and ‘mankind’ for humanity.

The question of pronouns is one that has been raised frequently about The Left Hand of Darkness. In his review for Fantasy and Science Fiction Alexei Panshin wrote:

> her hermaphrodites, seen only in public function, eventually seem purely male, partly because she chooses always to call them “he” (Panshin 1969: 51).

Le Guin responded to this charge in her 1976 article “Is Gender Necessary?”:

> But the central failure in this area comes up in the frequent criticism I receive, that the Gethenians seem like men, instead of menwomen.
> This rises in part from the choice of pronoun. I call Gethenians “he” because I utterly refuse to mangle English by inventing a pronoun for “he/she.”
> “He” is the generic pronoun, damn it, in English. (I envy the Japanese, who, I am told, do have a he/she pronoun.) But I do not consider this really very important.
> The pronouns wouldn’t matter at all if I had been cleverer at showing the “female” component of the Gethenian characters in action (Le Guin 1989: 145).

In 1988 Le Guin responded to her own article. She writes that her

> “utter refusal” of 1968 restated in 1976 collapsed utterly within a couple years more. I still dislike invented pronouns, but now dislike them less than the so-called generic pronoun he/him/his, which does in fact exclude women from discourse; and which was an invention of male grammarians, for until the sixteenth century the English generic singular pronoun was they/them/their, as it still is in English and American colloquial speech. It should be restored to the written language and let the pedants and pundits squeak and gibber in the streets (Le Guin 1989: 145).

Le Guin also writes in response to her earlier comments that if she had “realized how the pronouns I used shaped, directed, controlled my own thinking, I might have been ‘cleverer’” (Le Guin 1989: 145).

The use of the male pronoun as the neuter pronoun in Left Hand of Darkness is closely connected to the fact that the most frequent first person narrator is Genly Ai, the envoy to the planet Winter from the Ekumen. Genly is a man, the masculine pronoun is his. His use of it keeps the nature of the Gethenians at arm’s length. The use of ‘he’ keeps this world of Others in the realm of the Same.
So has Genly succeeded in making the world of Winter male, has his male pronoun, his 'he' erased the hermaphrodite neuter existence of the majority of a Gethenian's life? Or does the hermaphrodite neuter existence erase women? There is one near-erasure in the text - homosexuality. The heterosexual couple is at the heart of Winter. An Ekumen observer writes that when they go into kemmer:

either a male or female hormonal dominance is established. The genitals engorge or shrink accordingly, foreplay intensifies, and the partner, triggered by the change, takes on the other sexual role (Le Guin [1969] 1991: 82).

The Ekumen observer makes a parenthetical note, "? without exception? If there are exceptions, resulting in kemmer-partners of the same sex, they are so rare so as to be ignored" (Le Guin [1969] 1991: 82). But ignored by whom? The Gethenians or the Ekumen Investigators? In the Ekumen's account the vowing of kemmering is an equivalent to monogamous marriage and is perhaps Leonora's "units of lovers" from Proud Man. Man during kemmer plus women during kemmer equals the basic unit of society. But there is nothing to say that each partner in the kemmering will remain that sex every time they go into kemmer.

In this and the previous chapter I have looked closely at a wide variety of battle of the sexes texts, all of which raise issues about constructions of not only masculinity and femininity but of sexed bodies, men, women and otherwise. In the next chapter I examine how the discourse of the battle of the sexes operates in debates about the role of women in science fiction. These debates took place in the letter columns of the professional science fiction magazines, the same magazines in which many of the battle of the sexes stories were first published.
The February 1959 cover of Future by Emsh.
"Fault"

*Love, sex and women in science fiction*

In this chapter I trace a recurring debate within the letters and articles of science fiction magazines about whether women, love and sex have a place in science fiction. The letters I discuss in this chapter were published between the 1920s and the early 1950s. The articles I examine were published between 1955 and 1975. The battle of the sexes was played out in the debates in these letters and articles as explicitly as it was in the stories I examined in the last two chapters.

One set of arguments that is articulated within these debates clearly demarcates a division between public and private, where the public becomes the masculine space of science fiction from which women are excluded. In this division, intelligence (the mind) is located within the field of science fiction and is thus associated with men, and sex (the body) is relegated to the private sphere of women outside science fiction. This imaginary masculine space of science fiction is conjured up within the pages of science fiction magazines. John W. Campbell, the extremely influential editor of *Astounding*:

> wrote long chatty editorials...that had the style of an after-dinner speaker at the Elks Club. When he previewed van Vogt’s *Sian*, he wrote, “Gentlemen, it's a lulu!” (Carr 1975: 5).

To keep this imaginary space masculine and populated only by ‘real’ men the borders of the field have to be policed and women have to be excluded.

As I outlined in chapter two, the idea of the science fiction reader and fan as a superior kind of being, a slan, whose intelligence and knowledge puts him (I use the pronoun deliberately) head and shoulders ahead of the general public, had considerable currency. This scientifically interested, mostly young male should not be thinking about sex. Sex and the libidinal body are outside the
realm of science and therefore of science fiction. If he is not thinking about sex, then he is not thinking about women. This idea that sex is contaminating, even draining of a man’s masculinity is very similar to the highly influential classical idea that when a man ejaculates he loses some of his strength and virility:

[the most virile man was the man who had kept most of his vital spirit - the one, that is, who lost little or no seed (Brown 1988: 19).]

These ideas about virility, masculinity and celibacy are borne out in Thomas S. Gardner’s “The Last Woman” (1932) which I discussed in chapter three. In this story the notion that sex is outside the realm of science is pushed to its logical conclusion. Without women and sex the new scientific empire is dominated by virile strong men proving Soranus' claim of many centuries earlier, that “[m]en who remain chaste are stronger and better than others and pass their lives in better health” (qtd. in Brown 1988: 19).

The slide from ‘sex’ to ‘women’ also occurs in the debates in letters and articles in prozines. These debates shift from being about whether there is a place for sex and love in science fiction, to whether there is any place for women in science fiction. In the battle of the sexes stories which I discussed in the previous chapter there is a definite place for women because the stories are about the relationship between men and women. In other science fiction the presence of women becomes tenuous. A woman can only signify within science fiction when she is the ‘love interest’ and thus part of the heterosexual economy.

This conflation of woman, sex and/or love is vividly illustrated by the entry for ‘sex’ in The Fancyclopedia which appears on the next page. Women here are synonymous with sex, existing momentarily as independent ‘fannes’ before becoming secondary fans, part of fandom only as sweetheart, wife, daughter and so forth of some male fan, some “Joe Fann”. In the second paragraph, women or

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2 In 1952 the letter writers to Thrilling Wonder Stories take it for granted that there are many more than 20 female fans but the notion that these female fans are only there for the pleasure and convenience of
sex. The great majority of fans are males. It has been asserted that a female cannot be the psychological type of the s-f fan, but there are several dyed-in-the-wool fames to refute this. In addition, there are a lot of sweethearts, wives, daughters, sisters, etc., of the he-fames, who tag along at fan gatherings, make some appearance in the fandoms, and assist in dirty work such as mailing.

It is generally believed that Joe Fann is considerably later than average in associating with girls; at any rate, it was some two years after 1938 (when the average fan was 18) before into affairs received any great notice. In few discussions, who there had been some isolated criticism earlier, especially among the Futurians and the Moonmakers. Since 1940 both generalizations and particulars on fan-meets have appeared frequently in conversation and writing, and among the more "mature" Britifans have sometimes reached shocking depths. In America, a minority has been vociferously loud, and some seedy events have resulted from infidelity of married scienfictionists.

The entry on sex from the Fancyclopedia 1944, p. 78.
rather girls, become something that “Joe Fann” does or does not associate with as he discovers the wonderful world of heterosexuality. The Fancyclopedia entry on sex sets up two different meanings for sex. In the first meaning, sex is the category of sex, but it is only women which have a sex. Men are the unmarked sex, they are human, the norm, the standard. In the second sense, women are sex in that they are the embodiment of the libidinal body. This is why the second paragraph of the definition of sex is about heterosexual sexuality and about fan meeting femme. The unmarked fan is always male. It is also why more than twenty years later, Robin White can ask “Are Femme-Fans Human?” (White 1968: 51). This conflation between the category of sex, and sex in the sense of sexuality, occurs frequently in the debates about women as love interest within science fiction.

The longstanding idea that women are inimical to science fiction did not go unchallenged. For example, Peggy Kaye of Dorchester, Massachussets writes:

What gives with these characters who don’t want to have any female interest or illos [sic] in the stories they read? Are they trying to convince themselves that men are the only beings really important in this existence? Or do they take that reference to MAN as the only intelligent species on earth literally - meaning MAN and not WOMAN too?

If that is the case, no wonder it shakes them down to their poor misguided little souls when they read a story in which the hero finds himself romantically inclined towards a desirable (horrors!) heroine. Maybe they’d like it better if the guy were a eunuch, h’m’m? (Startling Stories July 1952: 130).

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male fans is still current and is made explicit in a debate about whether there are any beautiful femme fans? Earl T. Parris of Seattle, Washington responds to earlier letters:

I’ve been patiently reading of this argument concerning beautiful girls in fandom but my patience is at an end. Mr. Vick, can you give a clear, concise definition of beauty? Be rather hard to do since beauty is largely a matter of opinion. And you must really get around because obviously you’ve met all of the lady fans to know there are no beautiful ones (Thrilling Wonder Stories October 1952: 139).

Another letter from Joe Gibson of Jersey City, New Jersey lists, by name, female fans who are beautiful (Thrilling Wonder Stories April 1953: 144). This debate nicely shows an example of the kind of attitude to women in fandom which Jeanne Gomoll mentions in her “Open Letter to Joanna Russ”:

...I sit in the audience at all-male “ fandom of the 70s” panels (and so far, that is the way the panels I’ve witnessed have been filled, by men only) and don’t hear anything of the politics, the changes, the roles that women played in that decade (except sometimes, a little chortling aside about how it is easier now to get a date with a female fan) (Gomoll 1986: 87-9).

3 Her reference to eunuchs is particularly apt as during the classical period:

[t]he full-grown man who made himself a eunuch by carefully tying his testicles, became an aspores, a man who wasted no vital fire on others (Brown 1988: 19).

And was therefore more masculine and purer than other men.
During the 1950s more letters, editorials and articles in favour of the presence of sex, and therefore of women, within science fiction began to appear. Often this is couched in terms of the need for science fiction to grow up, to mature. Desire for sex and for women is a sign of adulthood and once science fiction has grown it will move beyond the childish need to repudiate sex. Women in this argument become a kind of angel of the house who is responsible for supporting and nurturing the field and allowing it to grow.

*Girl Germs: Love and Sex as Pollution*

One of the reasons most frequently given for a lack of female characters in early science fiction is that there was rarely any need for a love interest. Sam Moskowitz explains:

> [w]hile love interest is a standard ingredient in most fiction, the same editors who give lip service to the need for more natural dialogue and clear-cut characterisation fall even to note the omission of romance when evaluating the acceptability of science fiction. Stories in which female characters appear at all [his emphasis] are in the minority in the magazines of prophetic literature (Moskowitz 1972: 1).

Notice the slide here from “love interest” to “romance” to “female characters.” Moskowitz is implying that female characters can only appear in science fiction where ‘love interest’ and ‘romance’ are present. The romance narrative is, in this argument, one of the few narratives in which ‘woman’ can signify and be a meaningful subject.

This equation between women and the love interest is regularly played out in the letters that were published in the pulps. A typical example is by Edwin Todd of Parkville, Missouri. He writes of Don A. Stuart’s “The Cloak of Aesir”:

> [a]nother point in this story was the treatment of the love interest. It was never forced artificially into the scene. Too many stories throw a girl into the picture whether she has any logical reason for being there or not (*Astounding Science Fiction* May 1939: 159).

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4 Don A. Stuart was the pseudonym of John Campbell, the editor of *Astounding*. “The Cloak of Aesir” was a battle of the sexes story.
As in the quotation from Sam Moskowitz, the slide from “love interest” to “girl” is unremarked and the only “logical reason” for a girl being in a story is to function as “love interest”. The girl does not find her own way into the story. She is “thrown” in. This is a similar structure to the one I discussed in chapter three where the heroine is the Medium of her transformation by a man into a woman. The figure of a woman (more often a girl) being thrown or dragged into the narrative recurs in many of these letters.

This anxiety to keep the whole discourse of romance out of science fiction (talk about the impossible dream!) is a long-running one in science fiction. The idea of romance, and therefore women, polluting science fiction begins almost immediately in the pulps. Love was not what Gernsback had in mind for the pages of Amazing Stories. Not all readers of Gernsback’s magazines were happy with this separation between science and sex and love. Thomas Coffin of Whittier, California, writes:

> Why do authors not make a love plot more evident and important? It seems that such a plot could very easily be woven into nearly all the stories, and, instead of distracting the reader from the real plot, it would only heighten his interest and make him feel the stories were more true to life. True, many stories have love plots, but they seems so lifeless, and all have such an abrupt ending that it takes away all romance from the story (Amazing Stories July 1928: 373).

Love, here, is a mark of realism and will add to the “real” plot which is that generated by the discourse of science. Gernsback responds:

> Writing stories based on science does seem to have the tendency to cause the authors to put aside the love feature as an element therein. We presume that if our stories are to be scientific, this love element will be missing in most of them. The scientific features to a certain extent operate to exclude every day romance (Amazing Stories July 1928: 373).

Although he modifies his statement with “seem”, “presume” and “to a certain extent” the inference is clear: the hard, virile space of science operates to expel romance and thus women.

Another reader who was not averse to a love interest was Mrs. Helen Ammons of Chicago, Illinois:

> You know, Mr. Editor, that you have quite a number of woman readers and, although I cannot speak for all of them, still I can and do speak for a large group of them in Chicago. We eagerly read science fiction stories, but we like our stories to be flavored with the sugar of a good love element. Not too much sugar - you understand. We don't want
them gooey; just enough to give them interest (Science Wonder Stories November 1929: 567).

She understands that “a good love element” is bad for her, rots the teeth, and so will settle for just a little. However, in the same issue C. R. Paratico of Brazil makes four suggestions for improving the magazine. The last one is that there be no sugar at all:

(a) Refrain as much as possible, from reprinting stories by popular authors, who are widely known.
(b) Avoid the more glaring improbabilities.
(c) Read the stories yourself, and cut out such parts as would tend to give your readers false knowledge of scientific facts.
(d) Remember that love interest can only enter these stories if it is dragged in by the hair (Science Wonder Stories November 1929: 669).

Once again the love interest is “dragged in” this time “by the hair”. However, “love interest” is dragged into science fiction stories by an unnamed agent. The violence is actually being done to the love interest/woman and yet the implication is that it is she who is corrupting science fiction. This is reminiscent of Nina Puren’s arguments about the grammar of the rape trial where the woman who is raped is made responsible for that rape, “Her beauty made him go crazy” (Puren 1995: 18). In this case her presence in the science fiction field is destroying that field.

Not only was romance inimical to science fiction but so also was “sex-type literature”. In his editorial, “Fiction Versus Facts”, Gernsback quotes one of his authors, Mr G Peyton Wertenbaker:

Amazing Stories should appeal, however to quite a different public (referring to the sex-type of literature). Scientifiction is a branch of literature which requires more intelligence and even more aesthetic sense than is possessed by the sex-type reading public (Gernsback July 1926: 291).

Sex is nasty and brutish and anyone with an aesthetic sense would choose not to read “sex-type” literature. These superior types are drawn to science fiction. In fact, Wertenbaker defines “scientifiction” as a branch of literature in opposition to the “sex-type literature”. Gernsback was more direct about this in his editorial for the first issue of Science Wonder Stories:

The past decade has seen the ascendancy of “sexy” literature, of the self-confession type as well as the avalanche of modern detective stories (Gernsback June 1929: 5).
The June 1940 cover of Spicy Mystery.
This literature will not contaminate Gernsback's new magazine:

**SCIENCE WONDER STORIES** are clean, CLEAN from beginning to end. They stimulate only one thing - the IMAGINATION (Gernsback June 1929: 5). 

*Science Wonder Stories* frees the mind from the body, stimulating the one while leaving the other alone. By the 1930s the "spicies", pulp magazines which emphasised stimulating the libido, had emerged. They had names like *Spicy Mystery, Spicy Western Stories* and *Spicy Detective Stories* and lurid covers to match, as the example opposite demonstrates. Many at the time worried about the effect the spicies would have on science fiction. In 1938, the publisher, Martin Goodman, and the editor, Robert Ersiman, decided that their new magazine, *Marvel Science Stories* would give sf "a new direction" by making it "more spicy" (Ashley 1975: 36).

Goodman and Ersiman asked sf writer Henry Kuttner to add some spicy scenes to his stories. In the first issue he had three stories - one under his own name, Henry Kuttner, and two under the pen names, James Hall and Robert O. Kenyon. All three stories were strongly criticised (Ashley 1975: 36). According to Susan Wood the first three issues which "offered the fans sex and sadomasochism with their SF....proved unpopular" (Wood 1978-79: 12). Lester del Rey writes that

*Marvel* got off to a wrong foot with readers by featuring a lead story by Henry Kuttner which was considered somewhat sexy in its time. The publishers had decided that sex should increase its interest, but they soon found that it turned the readers off...The magazine never quite lived down that feeling (del Rey 1979: 122)

Many letter writers in *Marvel* advocate that the magazine abandon its 'spiciness'. Any change they detected in that direction was applauded. Bill Brudy of Wolverine, Michigan writes:

"It is gratifying to see the magazine sticking to good taste. The first issue tottered dangerously. Sex can only ruin science fiction. No class of pulp publications has higher standards than fantasy fiction and the reading public will keep them that way (Marvel *Science Stories* August 1939: 108).

In the same issue George Aylesworth of Mackinaw City, Michigan agrees with Bill Brudy:
The June 1927 cover of Amazing Stories by Paul.
Four issues of *Marvel* now repose in my files and on reading through them I note the rapid improvement "our" mag has made. At first, it is true the mag had a spicy atmosphere but now it seems to have thrown that off (*Marvel Science Stories* August 1939: 110).

An example of the kind of spicy material *Marvel* published is "Lust Rides the Roller Coaster" by Ray King, from the December 1939 issue. "Lust" is about a young man whose ex-mistress vows to destroy him. This is one of the 'spicy' passages:

Those long evenings - they had seemed so exciting when she danced for him, stripped to almost the last tiny transparent garment, and he had snatched her to him hungrily, devouring her with his hot lips and breathless passion (King 1939: 72).

After some supernatural occurrences involving a roller coaster, the hero discovers that he is better off with a nice girl than his evil ex-mistress. The story was not popular with fans.

**Prozine covers**

Much of the debate about sex in science fiction was focussed on the covers of the magazines. Sex was located in representations of women on the front covers of the sf magazines but not, on the whole, in representations of men. Indeed, this was the most obvious way in which women were present in science fiction during the period from 1926 to the late 1950s. Initially the covers of most science fiction magazines were not dominated by naked or scantily clad women. Although the covers of *Amazing Stories* during the 1920s did include representations of women, and some of them were considerably less clothing than men on the covers, the women were not the focus of attention. An example appears on the opposite page. However by the 1930s the representation of women on the covers was becoming increasingly genitally focussed and particularly obsessed with breasts. On many covers the women were the overwhelming focus of attention. These women were always white. The cover opposite is a typical example.

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5 He wrote more prolifically under the name Ray Cummings. His full name was Raymond King Cummings.
6 It is easy to dismiss these covers as exploitative of women but more complex readings are available. See for instance Robin Roberts (Roberts 1993: 40-65).
The cover of the October 1939 issue of Astounding Science Fiction illustrating E. E. "Doc" Smith's "Grey Lensman".
The cover is by Rogers.
In the debates about these covers, sex comes to stand for women’s bodies and vice versa. When covers focus on female physical embodiment there are complaints about the cover being too sexy or spicy. The following letter from G. E. Rennison of Blackburn, England illustrates:

[t]hough well drawn, they [the covers] represent what is the drags of sfn.-sex appeal. Why must you plaster the covers with half nude women? Though easy on the eyes, they do not suit sfn....Sure a Nice woman will do NOW AND AGAIN, but put some clothes on ‘em. Don’t get me wrong, I like pictures of half (?) nude women but not in sfn. mags (Planet Stories Spring 1942: 121).

However, when the cover features a muscular male figure there are no such comments. For instance, the cover of the October 1939 Astounding by Rogers, reproduced opposite, features the hero Kimball Kinnison of the immensely popular Lensmen series. He looks like the epitome of fascist chic in silver grey uniform with well-defined muscles, grim expression, and chiselled jaw. This cover generated an overwhelmingly enthusiastic response. Ray Bradbury wrote in to Astounding to say that:

[i]f you could have been at the Thursday meeting of the Los Angeles Science-Fiction League you would have heard a chorus of excited ohs and ah’s echo far into the night as Forrest J. Ackerman produced the October issue of Astounding. It is, undoubtedly the best cover of the year....Kimball Kinnison as coverized is enough to make Atlas melt away into his original ninety-seven pounds (Astounding December 1939: 101).

Covers which emphasised a woman’s physicality in this way rarely generated that kind of adulation. Magazines with scantily clad women on the cover were discussed in terms of whether their ‘sexiness’ was a good or a bad thing. Robert ‘Buck’ Coulson of Wabash, Indiana, writes that “your covers all look alike, and they are all definitely second-rate” (Future August 1958: 126). Future’s covers in the 1950s frequently featured representations of women. The cover reproduced at the beginning of this chapter is typical. Robert Ebert of Urbana, Illinois, writes:

Buck Coulson has a lot of truth in his statement about your covers; you seem to be in a sort of rut. You’ve had a girl on the cover of the last five issues - this may have been ok for TWS [Thrilling Wonder Stories], but not for good ol’ Future.

Don’t feel too badly - Infinity has had girls on all but one of its seventeen covers! Astounding has had one girl in the last twenty-seven issues, and she was a scientist with a turtle-neck sweater and a jacket on (Future December 1958: 115).
The cover of the February 1957 issue of Astounding Science Fiction illustrating H Beam Piper's "Omnilingual". The cover is by Freas.
"Astounding" was the leading science fiction magazine at the time. That "Astounding" has had so few 'girls' grace its cover is an indication of the magazine's superiority. The one girl who was represented on the cover was not just a girl, but a scientist, and a fully clothed one at that. This cover by Freas for the February 1957 issue is shown on the opposite page. It illustrates the story "Omnilingual" by H. Beam Piper. The story's protagonist is a linguist, Martha Dane, and it is she who is illustrated on the cover: forehead creased in concentration pouring over various texts, pen in one hand and her other hand held to her temple as though thinking. She is not stereotypically beautiful and her breasts are not noticeable. It is an unusual cover for the time as is the story.

The turtle-neck sweater and the status of scientist mean that she has ceased to signify sex. Her presence on the cover does not sully science fiction. In a sense she is no longer a girl in the same way that the girls who grace the covers of Future and Infinity magazine are. This is an image of a woman who has not been incorporated into the heterosexual order in the same way that the heroines of the stories I examined in chapter three were. Oddly enough, in the imaginary pure sphere of masculine science fiction, there is a small space for the woman who can exist outside heterosexuality as a not-real woman of a particular kind - the honorary man.

I discovered some letters by women demanding more men as sex object. Evelyn Catoe of Brunswick, New Jersey wanted to have covers where men signified 'sex':

I will say that I liked the cover on the December issue. It is nice to pick up one of my regular mags and find no girls, just lots of good looking men. Something for my sex at last. I am going to start campaigning for more men on more covers (Thrilling Wonder Stories April 1952: 132).

As well as debating the appropriateness of sex, that is 'desirable' women to the covers, and therefore to science fiction, the unscientific nature of these covers was also discussed. Most particularly images of women in space without the need for any breathing apparatus. The illustration on the next page is a typical example. Marian Cox writes:
The cover of the August 1951 issue of Thrilling Wonder Stories by Earle Borgoy.
I suppose we gals should be flattered by the obvious fact that men regard us as such indestructible creatures. According to them, we don’t feel heat or cold and so don’t need space suits. We must manufacture our own oxygen, or else we can exist without breathing at all. (Which is it, fellows?) They still call us the weaker sex, but I’m beginning to wonder (Thrilling Wonder Stories August 1952: 127).

In the same letter Marian Cox agrees with Evelyn Catoe that there should be more sexy men on the covers. This would result in the Kinnison body being acknowledged as an object of sexual desire, rather than simply a projection of what the male fans desired to be. I would argue that the scarcity of male fans expressing approval of representations of male bodies on the covers during the 1950s can be directly attributed to the production of knowledges about, and thus fear of, homosexuality.

The debate about covers did not often conclude that women should be kept off the covers altogether. This, though was implicit in the argument that sex should be kept off the covers. This conflation is explicit in a letter from B. W. Williams. He is referring to representations of women on the covers as well as in inside illustrations in the magazine: “What’s wrong with sex inside or outside as long as the gal shows expression in her eyes?” (Startling Stories January 1953: 136). This inadvertently funny comment is revealing. Sex is a gal.

The Love Interest Controversy

In this section I read closely a thread of letters which appeared in “Brass Tacks”, the letter column of Astounding Science Fiction, in 1938-39. In these letters readers debated whether there was any place for women in science fiction. The readers’ letters illustrate the terms of the debate; namely that science fiction is a masculine space whose borders must be carefully patrolled to keep the pollution of women out.

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7 The editor, Sam Mines, was unable to keep a straight face:
We’d like to make with the snappy answers to this missive, but we are helpless, having been broken up by one line above, to wit: “What’s wrong with sex inside or outside as long as the gal shows expression in her eyes?” If this doesn’t go down as a classic in the annals of sf we will make a pilgrimage to Mecca (Startling Stories January 1953: 136).

8 The title of this section comes from a letter by L. M. Jensen of Cowley, Wyoming (Astounding Science Fiction January 1939: 162). I discuss this letter later in this section.
Astounding at the time had a reputation for being a technology based magazine with a predominantly, and proudly, male readership. Buck Coulson claims in a letter to Aurora that women have never been suppressed in science fiction and refers to Astounding for evidence of this claim:

in the Good Old Days, Astounding was presumed to be for men only, but the other STF mags used women writers. And even ASF had MacLean, without a male pseudonym (Aurora Winter 1986-87: 5).

Science fiction writer Margaret St. Clair, who began publishing in the 1940s, writes that Astounding “wanted hard-core science only, and the editor there was reputed never to accept a story by a woman if he were aware of her sex” (St Clair 1981: 151).

In the letters concerned with love and science fiction to Astounding's readers' column “Brass Tacks”, the term ‘the love interest’ frequently functions doubly. Firstly, it functions as a synonym for ‘women’. Secondly it functions as a space in which the romance discourse can operate within the field of science fiction. If the love interest can be kept out of science fiction, then so too can the discourse of romance. The fear of the love interest in both these senses is part of the delineation of the science fiction field as masculine public space. This is why, in many accounts of the relationship of women to science fiction, the growing presence of women within the field is figured as an invasion. I discuss these accounts in the next chapter.

The main protagonist in this debate is Isaac Asimov of Brooklyn, New York who had three long letters published in contrast to the one or two letters published by the other participants. Asimov was born in January 1920, so at the time of writing he was in his late teens. The only other correspondent for whom I have an age is David McIlwain⁹ who was exactly a year younger than Asimov. I

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⁹ David McIlwain wrote science fiction under the name of Charles Eric Maine. He published his first short story under this pseudonym in his own fanzine in 1938 and began publishing novels in 1955 (Moskowitz 1972: 24-5; Chute & Nichols 1983: 768). In 1958 he published a battle of the sexes text, World Without Men (a revised version, Alph, was published in 1972).
suspect that most of these misogynist letters are from boys of eighteen or younger.

The role of the love interest and of women in science fiction was a topic dear to Asimov's heart, and I found letters from him on this subject in Startling Stories and Planet Stories as well as the letters in Astounding. The presence or absence of the love interest was one of his criteria for a good story: he typically condemns a story for having "no plot outside of one that would fit it for some future 'scieni-love magazine'" (Astounding Science Fiction July 1938: 158). Such a genre formed from the cross-pollination of science fiction and romance is for Asimov a patent absurdity. Asimov writes almost all his letters with tongue planted firmly in cheek. He argues for the sheer pleasure of argument and takes delight in being outrageous and provoking a response, contradicting himself whenever it suits him.

The first letter in the thread comes not from Isaac Asimov, but from a fellow traveller, Donald G. Turnbull of Toronto, Canada. The editor places the letter within the context of the battle of the sexes by giving it the heading, "Misogynist! Bet you hear from Miss Evans!". Patricia Evans of New York City
had had a few letters published in Astounding; none of her letters raised any questions about representation of women. Her name is simply being used as a sign of women in science fiction. Turnbull writes:

In the last six or seven publications females have been dragged into the narratives and as a result the stories have become those of love which have no place in science-fiction. Those who read this magazine do so for the science in it or for the good wholesome free-from women stories which stretch their imaginations.

A woman's place is not in anything scientific. Of course the odd female now and then invents something useful in the way that every now and then amongst the millions of black crows a white one is found.

I believe, and I think many others are with me, that sentimentality and sex should be disregarded in scientific stories. Yours for more science and less females (Astounding Science Fiction July 1938: 162).

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10 Such a genre now exists with titles like Anne Avery's Hidden Heart (1996). The back cover reads: "Heir to the Controllership of the planet Diloran, Tarl is saved by a ravishing stranger with plans to save her people".
This letter features the, by now familiar, equation of “females” and “love” and “sex” and adds another, “sentimentality”. According to Turnbull, women taint science fiction and only stories which are “free from women” are “good” and “wholesome”. His imaginary space of science fiction is one populated by the asporos - the men who become eunuchs once fully grown - who keep their sacred sperm to themselves. When he is immersed in the field he wants to leave the world of women behind. He is furious when this is not possible and his imaginary space is violated.  

For although science fiction is located in the public sphere, it is also frequently imagined by Turnbull and others as a private male sphere, much like a men’s club where a fellow can smoke his cigars and drink his port in the company of like-minded men. However, for all their malign influence, these females have no agency. They are dragged into the text by some unknown agent and they are part of the nominalisation “good wholesome free-from women stories”. The only exception is the “odd female [who]...invents something useful”.

Added to Turnbull’s dismissal of women is the implicit racism of his “white crow/ black crow” analogy. Although white women were by no means central in science fiction of the 1920s and 30s, women and men who were not white and middle class were even less visible.

Asimov was one of the “many others [who] are with [Turnbull]” on the question of love in science fiction:

Three rousing cheers for Donald G. Turnbull of Toronto for his valiant attack on those favoring mush. When we want science-fiction, we don’t want swooning dames, and that goes double. You needn’t worry about Miss Evans, Donald, us he-men are for you and if she tries to slap you down, you’ve got an able (I hope) confederate and tried auxiliary right here in the person of yours truly. Come on, men, make yourself heard in favor of less love mixed with our science! (Astounding Science Fiction September 1938: 161).

Turnbull’s depiction of women as unwholesome and having no place in “anything scientific” becomes in Asimov’s text a “valiant attack on those favoring mush”. The list of equivalences for women expands to include, “mush” and “swooning

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11 This is the same outrage, the same ‘rape’ which Charles Platt discusses in his article, “The Rape of Science Fiction” (1989) which I consider in the next chapter.
12 In the American context there is the added resonance that Jim Crow was a derogatory term for African-American men (Wentworth & Flexner 1960: 291-292).
Down with Love!

Dear Editor:

I just wish to amplify certain wise remarks by Don Q. Turnbull which appeared in the July
Erroz. Article,

"Love interest" has no place in serious science-
fiction—and it should not be necessary to in-
clude it. A good story, by which I mean a well-
written piece of science-fiction based on a sound,
tenacious plot, should be in itself sufficient to
grip the readers' attention. Without necessitating
the introduction of the sex bogey.

Science-fiction (especially Astounding) does not cater to sentimental old maid[s] who like a
bit of "sleepy" in their literature. Neither does it
cater to love sick nymphs who attempt to
 gain the Elysium of their frustrated desires via
the doorway of books.

Your male readers greatly outnumber your
female fans, so why not cut out the age-old
love idea, and give us newer themes?

The only kind of sex which I mind is in the humorous sense. When the "mighty emotion" is stripped of its
banality and dressed in the ludicrous garments of frivolity—it becomes bearable. If you don't
believe me, refer back to the works of S. T.
Weishuhn—particularly his Van Mauderpoate
series—and laugh.

There are few writers today who can handle
L. I. so effectively.

Congratulations on Brown's wonderful cover,
the best I've seen in years. I liked L. H. Hutt's
Hubbard's "Dangerous Dimension" too! Quite
amusing!—David McIlwain, 14 Catlaw St.,
Liverpool, England.

Letter from David McIlwain, Astounding Science Fiction, November
1938, p. 158. 234
dames”. He takes Turnbull’s cry for undiluted, wholesome science which is not “mixed with” love.

Asimov also transforms Turnbull the “misogynist”, with his attack on unwholesome women polluting science fiction, into someone in need of protection, offering to protect him from regular Astounding correspondent Miss Evans. However, it was the editor who invoked Miss Evans’ name and the charge of misogyny against Turnbull. Patricia Evans herself, was silent in the debate and made no attack on Turnbull. Patricia Evans did not join the fray. In a letter in a later issue Evans writes as an aside, “being, after all just a dumb dame”, which could be an ironic response to Turnbull and Asimov (Astounding Science Fiction November 1938: 157). If that is the case, it is the only response she made to the debate about the role of women in science fiction. Or the only one that was published.

In the same November 1938 issue, directly following Evans’ letter is one headed “Down with Love!”, from David McIlwain (who wrote as Charles Eric Maine) of Liverpool, England which is reproduced opposite. McIlwain is not saying there should be no women in science fiction stories but rather that there should be no “love interest” which is likely to attract female readership to science fiction. The binary opposition is still in place: female readers want love, men do not.

The first letter I found which opposed the views of Turnbull and Asimov is by Mary Byers of Springfield. The letter is reproduced over the page. Here Byers tries to counter the equation of the ‘feminine’ and ‘sex’. Women are not sex and therefore they do have a place in science fiction. She implicitly accepts, however, that sex is not good and does not belong in science fiction. She observes that

[u]ndoubtedly it has never occurred to him [Asimov] to wonder whether the girl fans like the incredible adventures of an almost-ridiculous hero any better than he likes the impossible romance of an equally impossible heroine. He probably still cherishes the outdated theory that a girl’s brain is used expressly to fill up what would otherwise be a vacuum in the cranium (Astounding Science Fiction December 1938: 160).

Byers wants the understanding of the audience to be expanded to account for the fact that there are girl fans as well as boy fans. Byers’ science fiction is not a
In other words, it isn’t what you say, it’s the way you say it.

Dear Editor:

After reading Isaac Asimov’s letter in the September Brain Ticks, I feel the necessity of taking the issue of “wooming dames” up with him.

To begin, he has made the grave error of confusing the feminine interest with the sex theme—derby proof of this turn back to the time-honored Ayerak stories and note well the fact that the presence of Dorothy detracted from the general worth of the story not one bit; then compare one of Kurtsner’s pieces of hokum with it, and the distinction will be evident to even the most unobservant reader.

Continuing this blighted line of thought, he goes on to express himself as regards much in a. Undoubtedly it has never occurred to him to wonder whether the girl fans like the incredible adventures of an almost-eccentric hero any better than he likes the impossible romance of an equally impossible heroine. He probably still cherishes the outdated theory that a girl’s brain is used expressly to fill up what would otherwise be a vacuum in the cranium.

To his plea for less hooey I give my whole-hearted support, but less hooey does not mean less women; it means a difference in the way they are introduced into the story and the part they play. Let Mr. Asimov turn the pages of a good history book and see how many times mankind has held progress back; let him also take notice that any changes wrought by women have been more or less permanent, and that these changes were usually made against the prejudices and bigoted arguments of men, and feel himself chastened.

Also, the fact that the feminine sphere of indifference carries over to Donald Turboll is shown by the inference that he reads a. to escape from an authority that didn’t exist. Mr. Turboll’s lack of regard to the supposed “white cap”—all famous people are “white caps,” according to him—which evidence that he has invented or done something useful makes a “white cap” of the person. There is no larger percent of famous men than of famous women—sure, but remember that women haven’t been actually included in the sciences except for the past hundred years or so. Note the number of successful women today, though!

Yours for more like “Who Goes There” and “The Terrific Time” and less like “The Legion of Time”--Mary Byers, Chauncey Farm, R. V. D.
5, Springfield, Ohio.

Letter from Mary Byers, Astounding Science Fiction, December 1938, p. 160-161. 234
masculine space. Mcilwain above has already rejected this argument on the
grounds that there are many fewer girl fans. She also argues that the
representation of males in sf is as absurd as that of women. She could be referring
to the overblown representation of Kimball Kinnison on the cover of the October
1939 *Astounding* which was so avidly received by male fans.

Byers continues:

To his [Asimov's] plea for less hooey I give my whole-hearted support, but less hooey does
not mean less women; it means a difference in the way they are introduced into the story
and the part they play (*Astounding Science Fiction* December 1938: 160).

Byers' argument here is almost identical to some of those of Russ (1971), Badami
(1976) and Wood (1978-79) more than thirty years later which I consider in the
next chapter. In the 1970s they argued for more exploration of 'gender roles' and
for more fiction which abandoned stereotyped representations of women.
However these women still have to be "introduced" into the story by someone
else. They still have limited agency.

Byers then switches the argument to changing attitudes to women
generally. Although Byers' challenges Turnbull and Asimov, she accepts one part
of their argument - she agrees that "sex" and "hooey" have no place in science
fiction. She does not, however, read them as synonymous with women.

Another letter by a woman which appeared around the same time makes a
similar argument. Naomi Slimmer of Russell, Kansas wants less 'sex' and
associates it with women but at the same time she wants better representations
of women:

As to the plots of science stories; keep 'em clean. If we wanted to read about "curving
pearl-pink flesh, blushing dimpled cheeks and passionate pulsing buzzums" we could get
a copy of one of the "Spicios." If you have to have a female in the picture, make her
sensible. Let her know a few things about space-ships, heat-guns and such. Phooey on
the huzzies who are always getting their clothes torn off and wailing an amorous eye at
the poor overworked hero. If she's fitten to be in the story, she's gotta be a pad to the
poor guy and give him a hand.

You'd be surprised how many women read magazines of this type. Even the pussy-cats
who go for sticky romances makes a grab for a copy when I'm dealing out magazines to
the patients at our hospital. The nurses read them too, as I said, to keep awake and
think of something besides a cranky patient. So how about giving us females a thought
when you are picking tales for futures issues? We like our men to be nice guys, maybe a
bit bigger and handsomer than our real boy-friends, and our women we want to be nice
guys too, good-looking but not soft. Sensible and good sports. (As we all imagine WE
are) (*Science Fiction* June 1939: 119-120).
And Simak's got a woman this time! Any way, 1000 years ought to be old enough!

Dear Mr. Campbell,

Having barely survived the bludgeonings of Miss Byrne in the December issue, I return unharmed to the fray.

First, I wish to point out that she herself considers the "sex theme" unsatisfactory "boobs." She tries to get out of it, though, by bringing in the idea of "female interest" and saying that it's not women in themselves, but the way they are handled that causes the whole trouble.

Very well granted! Women are pretty handy creatures! (What would we do without them, sniff, sniff?) But, how in the name of mercy are you going to enforce a rule that the "female interest" must be introduced in an insignificant manner?

There are certain authors (very few) that can handle women with the greatest of ease. The great Weinbaum simply permeated his stories with women and yet I never read a story of his that I didn't enjoy (may his soul rest in peace). E. E. Smith's women are swell, and I find I get along with them. Jack Williamson is pretty good, even when he brings in his godesses. However, that about exhausts the list.

In the rest of the authors, while all very good, there is the "feminine interest" into a story without getting sloppy. There is an occasional good one ("Final O'Casey" is a beautiful case in point) but for every exceptional one there are 5,239 terrible cases. Stories in which the whole interest drowns out everything, in which "weeping damselies" are thrown at us willfully, silly, too, that many top-notch, grade-A, wonderful, marvelous, etc., etc., author get along without any women at all. John W. Campbell, Jr. himself, is the most perfect case.

Clifford D. Simak has none. Rose Rocklynne has none. The list can be extended much further. The point is whether we can make every author a Smith and Weinbaum or whether we cannot.

What do you think? Therefore, let Smith and Williamson keep their women, but for Heaven's sake, let the rest forget about them. Party anyway. I say we're after science-fiction.

Of course, we could have women-scientists. Weinbaum was immortal, so are many others. Unfortunately, instead of having a properly aged, respectable, and scientific woman as a seaman, what do we have? When there is a woman-scientist in a story, what do we have? When there is a woman-scientist in a story, believe me, she is about eighteen and very beautiful and full of hopelessness in the face of danger (Greek).

Which is another complaint I have against women. They're always getting into trouble and having to be rescued. It's very boring indeed for me. I think the women themselves (proud creatures) would be the first to object.

In the third paragraph, Miss Byrne wants to know whether I think girls-ans are interested in the adventures of an "almost-ridiculous hero." Oh, don't I? How about Robert Taylor and Clark Gable? I'll bet all the females weren't just reading their names in Brass Tacks. Believe, if they don't go for heroes, what are they doing reading science-fiction? Let them go back to love stories (which aren't top-notch, aren't for women) and they'll find even slap-hapless heroes there.

Furthermore, Miss Byrne is very ill-advised in her attempt to bring up the greater influence of women as against men in the course of history. Let me point out that women never affected the world directly. They always grabbed hold of some poor, innocent man, worked their influences on him (poor unsophisticated, unsuspecting person that he was) and then affected history through him. Cleopatra, for instance. It was Mark Antony that did the real affecting; Cleopatra, herself, affected only Mark Antony. Same with Pompadour, Catherine de Medicis, Theodore and practically all other famous woman of history.

But I'll quit now before I create a national vendetta against myself on the part of all female science-fictioners in the United States. (There must be at least twenty of them.)

The answer may be taken as a defense of Donald Trump's courageous stand against the mob menace to science-fiction as well as a defense of my own stand. I say this because Donald may not find time to answer, and I have promised to defend him against attack with all the power of my good right arm—Isaac Asimov.

Irv Windsor, Place, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Letter from Isaac Asimov, Astounding Science Fiction, February 1939, p. 159-160.
Charles Hornig, the editor of *Science Fiction* responds:

You seem to know your science-fiction as well as most fellows do, and your suggestions are helpful. I'm trying to keep the science in the stories from becoming too heavy, and will not let love interest dominate the tales (*Science Fiction* June 1939: 118-121).

Hornig’s patronising reply demonstrates the same surprise at women’s interest in science fiction that Gernsback evinced ten years earlier. However he modifies Naomi Slimmer’s knowledge of science fiction, she only “seems” to know it well. He also fails to respond to Slimmer’s desire to see sensible women who “know a few things about space-ships”. Hornig does acknowledge Slimmer’s call for less gratuitous romance: it is a call with which he was very familiar.

In the January 1939 issue of *Astounding* L. M. Jensen of Cowley, Wyoming responds to the earlier letters by Asimov, Turnbull, Mcilwain and Byers. He or she also names the debate:

Now, maybe I’m sticking my neck out, but I’m going to put my two cents worth into the Love Interest controversy in Brass Tacks. I won’t comment on the subject in general, because I’m not qualified to do so, but I will say that I enjoyed the hearty and wholesome man-and-wife companionship of Dick Seaton and Dorothy -the elfin, half-impudent, half-sacred courtship of Larry and Lakia - the restrained love interest-in “Triplanetary” and “Space-hounds” (*Astounding Science Fiction* January 1939: 162).

Jensen here takes Turnbull’s word “wholesome” and reappplies it to refer to the relationship of a man and his wife. Wholesomeness is dependent then on the presence of women not on their absence.

These reversed terms are not acknowledged in Asimov’s next letter in the thread which is reproduced on the facing page. He responds to Mary Byers’ letter with a very long letter using violent metaphors which firmly situate him within the battle of the sexes. Asimov continues to take up the position of the male under attack, when in fact the debate began with Turnbull’s attack on women in science fiction. He begins by saying that although he has “barely survived the bludgeonings of Miss Byers in the December issue, I return undaunted to the fray” (*Astounding Science Fiction* February 1939: 159). The debate itself is a battle and Byers has been attacking him. Asimov’s first response to these “bludgeonings” is that Byers’ actually agrees with him, “she herself considers the
"Oh," she said. Then: "You're Phil, aren't you? Dave told me about you—that you helped make me."

by Lester del Rey

Title page illustration of Lester del Rey's "Helen O'Loy" by Charles Schneeman, Astounding Science Fiction, December 1938, p. 118.
'sex theme' as unadulterated 'hokum'” (Astounding Science Fiction February 1939: 159).

In his arguments about representation it is the women only whose representation is a site of trouble. They are like radioactive material which has to be “handled” carefully. Byers' attempt to separate that which is represented from the manner of their representation is to Asimov absurd and impossible to enforce. However, “[t]here are certain authors (very few) that can handle women with the greatest of ease.” (Astounding Science Fiction February 1939: 159).

The expertise of these writers protects them from contamination from women. Unfortunately, most writers are unable to write about women without having it turn their writing into “slop”. The act of bringing in the “feminine interest” is what ruins the stories. Presumably it was the writer who brought the love interest in but this contradiction is not explored. Once again the “swooning damsels” appear in the text against their own volition and are then held responsible for their presence in the text.

Asimov’s example of a successful use of a love interest in science fiction is a story in which the love interest is not a woman but a robot. “Helen O’Loy” by Lester del Rey appeared in the December 1938 issue of Astounding. The heroine of the title is a robot created by the hero and his best friend as their version of the perfect woman. Both men fall in love with her. An illustration from the story appears opposite.

The story was very popular with readers and has been reprinted frequently. However the letter immediately following Asimov’s, by Charles Johnson of Drexel Hill, Pa, is not full of praise for the story. He refers to the character Helen O’Loy as a “walking, talking, cooking, loving robot” and says that the story is a “bit of drivel” (Astounding Science Fiction February 1939: 160). More than thirty-three years later, Beverley Friend in her article “Virgin Territory: Women and Sex in Science Fiction” writes of the final line of the story, “there was only one Helen O’Loy”, that, one Helen O’Loy is “[f]rankly, one....too many.... a
walking, talking doll performs better as an android than she could possibly do as a human" (Friend 1972: 49).

Throughout his letter Asimov uses the pronoun ‘we’ to refer to the inhabitants of the space of science fiction. It is self explanatory that this is a space within which women are entirely marginal and that this “we” is masculine. Asimov also refers to the place of women outside science fiction and how this has not translated to science fiction:

Of course, we could have women-scientists. Madame Curie is immortal, so are many others. Unfortunately, instead of a properly aged resourceful, and scientific woman as a savant, what do we have? When there is a woman-scientist (which is very rare in fiction, believe me) she is about eighteen and very beautiful and oh, so helpless in the face of danger (gr-r-r-r) (Astounding Science Fiction February 1893: 180).

The woman scientist in “the turtle-neck sweater and jacket” on the cover of Astounding is taken out of the realms of the ‘spicy’ by being clothed. Another method of allowing a woman to operate within science fiction without being love interest is for her to be “properly aged” (unlike the young Asimov) and presumably asexual.

Asimov conflates women with the way they are represented in science fiction and then makes them responsible for that representation. There are actually many parallels between Asimov’s criticisms and later feminist critiques of representations of women in science fiction. He is clearly saying that the representations of women in science fiction at the time were, with a few rare exceptions, appalling. However Asimov’s complaint is “against women” rather than against the ways in which they had been represented in science fiction.

Asimov continues his rebuttal of Byers:

In the third paragraph, Miss Byers wants to know whether I think girl-fans are interested in the adventures of an “almost-ridiculous hero.” Oh, don’t I? How about Robert Taylor and Clark Gable? I’ll bet all the females swoon just reading their names in Brass Tacks. Besides, if they don’t go for heroes, what are they doing reading science-fiction?? Let them go back to love stories (which are written by women for women) and they’ll find even slapp-happier heroes there (Astounding Science Fiction February 1939: 160).

Men, “heroes”, no matter how illogical or unbelievable, belong in science fiction. A woman cannot be a hero and therefore does not belong. However, these heroes are also functioning in the space of the love interest. They are a locus for
heterosexual female desire in the same way that the female love interest is a
locus for male heterosexual desire. These are desires which Asimov is keen to
keep outside science fiction.

Asimov also refutes Byers claim that women have had any affect on
history:

Furthermore, Miss Byers is very ill-advised in her attempt to bring up the greater
influence of women as against men in the course of history. Let me point out that women
never affected the world directly. They always grabbed hold of some poor, innocent man,
worked their insidious wiles on him (poor unsophisticated, unsuspecting person that he
was) and then affected history through him. Cleopatra, for instance. It was Mark Antony
that did the real affecting; Cleopatra, herself, affected only Mark Antony. Same with
Pompadour, Catherine de Mediczi, Theodora and practically all other famous women of
history (Astounding Science Fiction February 1939: 160).

Asimov finishes his letter where he began by placing the debate in the
sphere of violence between men and women, which is arguably also where
romance is located. He talks of a ‘national vendetta against myself on the part of
all female science-fictioneers in the United States. (There must be at least twenty
of them!)” and terms his actions as “a defence of Donald Turnbull’s courageous
stand against the ace menace to science-fiction as well as a defence of my own
stand” (Astounding Science Fiction February 1939: 160). The warfare metaphors
are back to the fore, this debate is war. Asimov valiantly defends himself against
women and all the trappings of romance they bring with them.

In the April 1939 Astounding there are three responses to Asimov’s letter.
James Michael Rogers II of Muskogee Oklahoma objects to Asimov’s version of
women in history:

Mr. Asimov thinks women of no account in history. Points out that men are the famed
leaders. But history is a record of wars and sad oppression. Women are not famous for
such things as this. Let men have all credit as rulers in history. But wait - wasn’t there a
certain Maid of Orleans? Women are great in other things, too. I am reading what I
believe to be the best novel in my experience: “Kristin Lavransdatter” by Sigrid Undset.
Don’t give man too much credit for the better things of our world. There are women
Dostoeievsks [sic] and Einsteins, but I hope never a woman Napoleon or Hitler!
(Astounding Science Fiction April 1939: 159-160).

The second response comes from Mary Evelyn Rogers of the same address
in Muskogee Oklahoma who is obviously some relation to James Michael (I
suspect they are siblings). Her letter appears over the page. Continuing Asimov’s
We'll say this: the elimination of women would certainly have eliminated history!

Dear Mr. Campbell:

After I read your magazine it was pure misfortune that my eye happened to light on the good old typewriter. And once fired upon that organ of torture, I could not let it away. It became my intention, irrevocably to write my reaction of the current Astounding so that all (yes, all!) might read. I am glad that you might get my comment, that you could probably get it a little well without it, but, well, maybe I wanted to see my name in print again.

In any case, I just got mad at Mr. L. Sprague. I will take into Mr. Asimov's letters. Every week, I will take into Mr. Asimov first. He says he is against women in 'science-fiction' because the authors do not handle them properly. Mr. Asimov! Is that a fact? It would be equally just for the women readers of science-fiction to campaign for the elimination of men in science-fiction because of a few idiotic, imbecile males in science-fiction stories. We do not judge the men or the value of the men in science-fiction by a few blunders, so—why should you? Then, too, pictures of the future would not be complete without women. Or don't you agree that there will be women in the future? I agree with you that the women should be convincing, human creatures. Not goddesses, or silly, star-crossed points of sweet sixteen, but honest-to-goodness human creatures. However, there should not put a ban on the entire sex. Nor do I agree that all authors, except Smith and Campbell, give up writing about women. Practice makes perfect, you know, and how are the other writers ever going to learn the right way to write if they never try?

Another fault I find is your contention that women only affected the men who made history. Isn't that the same?

All, well, to leave Mr. Asimov for a space—until he answers, at least, I wish to say that I like the new artist, Rogers. No, he isn't related to me (he would probably be the first to deny it), I am not pulling for the family name. It is my sincere opinion that he is good. I think my favorite illustration of the issue was the one illustration: "The Shadow Of The Void." Jack Williamson's story was good, one of his best stories, I think. The "Living Fossil" was excellent. Oh, well, why go on? It is sufficient that I didn't find a single story in the magazine to make me disgusted or even mildly restentful. The forecast promises great things, too. I'll be sitting around waiting for the next Astounding to appear on the newstands with feverish impatience—Mary Evelyn Rogers. 2008 Court Street, Muskogee, Oklahoma.

Letter from Mary Evelyn Rogers, Astounding Science Fiction, April 1939, p. 160.
tongue in cheek tone she unpacks Asimov's conflation of representation with that which is represented and shifts responsibility on to the author:

I agree with you that the women should be convincing, human creatures. Not goddesses or silly, simpering saints of sweet sixteen, but honest-to-goodness human creatures. However that should not put a ban on the entire sex. Nor do I agree that all authors, except Smith and Campbell, give up writing about women. Practice makes perfect, you know, and how are the other writers ever going to learn the right way to handle the female characters if they don't experiment? (Astounding Science Fiction April 1939: 160).

Her call, like that of Byers, is for better representation of women which allows them to be included in the category of human beings rather then to exist merely as the "love interest".

Another letter in the April edition to engage with this debate is from Charles M. Jarvis of St Paul, Minnesota. He thinks that "Don Turnbull and Isaac Asimov are creating an issue where one doesn't exist when they take the stand they do on the 'female' subject" (Astounding Science Fiction April 1939: 160-61). Although Jarvis agrees that there is too much mush in science fiction, he believes that as the writing improves "such situations will be handled with more expertness and understanding" (Astounding Science Fiction April 1939: 160-61). He then conflates love with humanity and the love interest becomes the "human interest":

After all, science-fiction needs "human interest" as much as any other kind of fiction, and the high class of authors that are frequenting the pages of our magazine have the ability to handle their stories wisely and to the best advantage. Love is no more foreign to us than eating, and if a plot needs love to send the hero into the yawning cavity of space...by all means give the poor fellow love and send him out on his adventure (Astounding Science Fiction April 1939: 160-61).

This is a shift in the argument. Byers and Mary Rogers argued that women do belong in science fiction although "hooey" does not and that the two are not the one and the same. Jarvis is arguing that women and love in science fiction are a sign of the maturity of the genre. A grown up man needs a woman and having her is sign of his maturity. Heterosexuality makes the presence of women ubiquitous. Indeed the presence of women is an indication that males in science fiction have matured from their homosocial/sexual adoration of Kimball Kinnison.
Conspiracy!

Dear Mr. Campbell:

It's unfair! It's terribly unfair! It must be a conspiracy!

Do you mean to say you have received no letters upholding my courageous stand against slop? If not, why not? Are all the mail order and afraid to breathe a word lest the little wife lift the rolling pin? Bah! A fine state of affairs! They've heaped and all of them!

To take up the Rogers combination first: To wit, James Michael and Mary Evelyn, I state emphatically that this business of two against one is unprofessional. However, right is on my side, and right always triumphs.

Who says that only men are responsible for war and depression? Yes, I mean you, James Michael. How about Catherine II of Russia? How about Catherine de Medicis of France? How about Semiramis of Assyria? How about Queen Elizabeth of England? A sweet lot—no. The very Joan of Arc you mention, while an inspired national heroine, was chiefly remarkable in the fact that she led men to slaughter and be slaughtered.

On the other hand, the great philosophers and the great religious leaders of the world—the ones who taught truth and virtue, kindness and justice—were all, all men.

Mary Evelyn talks of a "few blunders" and "practice makes perfect." There have been too many blunders, and the most consistent offenders are those who have had the most practice and who, indeed, make literary (?) capital out of descriptions of lovely damsels and melting sappho scenes under the impression that that is what the readers want. I refrain from mentioning names, but no doubt certain ones spring to the mind.

Here I must admit that as the months pass by, astounding offends less and less, though there have been several lapses. The editor, I must say, does not seem to be very fond of slop himself. Judging from the stories he's written—except "Dolcina"—and the magazine he's edited.

Charles W. Jarvis says I am creating an issue. That is wrong. The issue exists and is vital. You have but to cast a look toward the outer darkness and see certain magazines which make their living out of purveying slop. This system has invaded sit, itself before this, and symptoms of such an invasion are appearing again. Not serious as yet, but in the keen eye none the less alarming. I have the best interests of sit, at heart, believe me—and I assure you that slop is put out merely to cater to a lower class of readers. There is an attempt to increase circulation by attracting certain groups. Very well! They want to make money, so they can have those groups, but they lose other groups far superior in intelligence, in emotional maturity, and sensibility.

Let me state my position clearly. I want no more love interest for the sake of love interest alone. I want love interest written capably, written cleanly, written logically, written indifferently. I want it written by those who can write it. Lastly, since my criticism makes long speeches about realism, let's have realistic love interest and not slop.

Is there anyone who disagrees with the last paragraph? If so, let him speak now or forever hold his peace, and let this be the last word—Isaac Asimov, 174 Windsor Place, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Fred Hurter of Red Rock, Ontario, Canada agrees with Asimov on that “much-battered love-interest question: In a well-written story, love interest is not necessary”, however, “if it is well written and not overdone” then “it is not objectionable”. He also agrees with Asimov about women’s secondary role in history: “I am not saying that many men were not encouraged by their wives, but then again many were hindered” (Astounding Science Fiction June 1939: 118).

In the next issue the ever active and ready pugilist Asimov returns to the fray. The issue also marks his first professional appearance in Astounding with the story “Trends”.5 The tenor of this even longer letter is consistent with the earlier letters and demonstrates Asimov’s obvious pleasure in the fight. His letter, headed “Conspiracy!”, is reproduced on the facing page.

In it Asimov is consistent in figuring himself as the one under attack. He is not so consistent, however, in the arguments he makes. His delight in combat and turning out pithy amusing phrases means that consistency is of no consequence. In his previous letter he had argued that women had never “affected the world directly” (Astounding Science Fiction February 1939: 160). In this letter he argues that women have affected the world directly in all number of nefarious ways, citing Catherine II of Russia and Elizabeth I of England as examples.

When Asimov switches back to discussing science fiction. He argues it is in grave danger from the “outer darkness”. This darkness is, presumably the ‘spicies’ and similar magazines. Science fiction is being “invaded” by some kind of disease which exhibits terrible “symptoms”. As I demonstrate in the next chapter, the appearance of women in the field of science fiction is frequently characterised as being an invasion which corrupts the field and drives out those best suited to science fiction, such as the super-intelligent Slan type of sf

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5 His first published story, “Marooned off Vesta”, appeared in the March 1939 issue of Amazing.
Of course, there are Lucretia Borgia as well as Heros.

Dear Mr. Campbell:

The Rogers combination desires to answer Mr. Anson. To begin with, we are not married! And second, he is mistaken when he says that all philosophers and religious leaders were men. Will he condescend to tell us the sex of the following: Mary Baker Eddy (founded the Christian Science Church), Clara Barton (founded the Red Cross), Florence Nightingale (nursing), George Elliot (author), Evangelism Booth (founded Salvation Army). Men who have advanced ideas of the strong over the weak are too numerous to mention, but I will give you a few of the same. Nietzsche formulated the doctrine used by Hitler. Then there was Napoleon, Mussolini, and Alexander the Great, whose ideas were supported by their minions.

All in all, we find the score about evenly balanced, with women in the lead because of suppression by men. In ancient Rome it was seriously debated as to whether women had souls. In the time of Shakespeare it was considered illegal for women to have an education. Witness the fact that women's part on the stage was played by men. Many universities today are closed to women. If men had progressed against such odds—

We thought the current Astounding very good and congratulate the editor on the capture of Plank for next month. The best interior illustrations were Schuerman's for "Greater than God". All of the stories were up to their usual high standard and we were perfectly satisfied.

—James Michael Rogers II and Mary Evelyn Rodgers, 2000 Court Street, Muskogee, Okla.
enthusiast like Asimov himself who are “far superior in intelligence”. The fascist implications of such an utterance in 1939 are hard to escape.

Asimov demonstrate his own “emotional maturity” in the last two paragraphs of his letter by shifting his position from a complete ban on “love interest” to a demand that the love interest be more “realistic”.

James Michael Rogers II and Mary Evelyn Rogers of Muskogee, Oklahoma write a combined response demonstrating that they are better read but just as capable of making sweeping generalisations. Their letter is reproduced opposite. The Rogers argue that it would have been amazing “if men had progressed against such odds” (Astounding Science Fiction September 1939: 97). These arguments are familiar libertarian feminist arguments of the time. The debate at this point has left behind the issue of women and science fiction for the issue of women and the world. These were issues that were discussed in some fanzines of the period. Six years later the following article appeared in one of the Futurian fanzines:14

FREE AND UNEQUAL

Somewhere in almost any blue print for a more reasonable social and economic order, the proposition of sexual equality is bound to occur. And perhaps rightly so; consideration of human females as inferior beings per se derives from the same emotional and socio-economic base as consideration of the foreigner, or member of an other than the “white” race, or “christian” faith as inferior per se.

[...]

Where women permitted to develop naturally without the false conditioning of a society which not only regards them as inferior, but refuses to accept them any other way (except under extreme circumstances, and for limited periods of time; already we see hints of the problem of “how to get women out of the war-plants back into the home” arising), lo the symptoms of inequality and/or “inferiority” would not be forthcoming (Agenbite of Inwit March 1945: 3-4).

The article equates women’s oppression with other axes of oppression and continues in the same vein.15

Asimov continued to extol the virtues of science fiction without women in other magazines. One of his letters to Startling Stories was published with the heading “Feminine-Less Issue”. I quoted part of this letter in chapter three. Sam

14 Asimov was a Futurian though by 1945 he was a much less active member of the group.
15 No author is given. However at the beginning of the fanzine, various Futurians are named as having different responsibilities and J. Bristol Speer is listed as being responsible for sociology.
FEMININE-LESS ISSUE
By Isaac Asimov

There is a great deal of significance, I think, in the fact that the four stories of the September issue of "Startling Stories" did not contain a single female character. Of course, I would be the last to claim that all females be abolished. Women, when handled in moderation and with extreme decency, fit nicely in science fiction as well. However, the September issue goes to prove that good stories can be written even with the total absence of the weaker sex.

There are some fans that claim "human interest" is necessary to sex since otherwise stories degenerate into uninteresting scientific or semi-scientific fantasies. That is a very correct stand, or would be if it were not that these one-trackminded fans know no other form of human interest than the love interest.

Well, let them read "Bridge to Earth" and tell me what it lacks in not possessing a heroine. Where would the story have been improved in having a heroine get caught by the microphone creatures and having the hero rescue her, getting her caught again, having the hero rescue her again, then the hero getting caught and the heroine rescuing him? That always happens when a heroine is brought in (usually by the hair) and if that's human interest or any other kind of interest then I'm a pickled herring.

Thrice cheers for S. M. Williams for refraining from falling into this morass of lack.

However, Mr. Williams falls into a different error of purely scientific nature, which, since it has been indulged in by various authors ever since the beginnings of SF, it is high time to correct once and for all.

In reducing a man to microscopic size by compressing the spaces between the atoms, you reduce his size all right but you don't reduce his mass—since all the atoms originally in him remain unchanged in mass or number. In short, the microscopic hero weighs his full quota of 180 pounds though no bigger than the dot of an i on this page. In such a condition, his density approaches pretty near neutronium, and normal human beings and normal matter (the Earth itself, even) are to him only a rather thick vacuum. When coughed out onto the carpet, for instance, he would stick to the very center of the earth, because nothing on earth can hold up 180 pounds compressed into a microscopic granite.

Of course, a small array of men, all weighing 180 pounds plus a military tank as well, all inside one poor suffering human is just too ridiculous. It is not to say that I did not enjoy the yarn. I did. But sometimes I do wish that authors when shrinking or expanding their characters either remember that mass remains unchanged or choose some method other than changing the amount of space between atoms.

—114 Windsor Place, Brooklyn, N. Y.
J. Lundwall in his chapter on "Women, Robots and Peculiarities," quotes this letter as an example of male science fiction writers’ attitudes to women (Lundwall 1971: 148). Susan Wood also quotes one sentence from this letter at the beginning of "Women and Science Fiction" (Wood 1978-79: 9). The letter is reproduced on the facing page. Ironically, the issue was not, in fact "feminine-less" at all as the cover reproduced over the page demonstrates. The cover is not based on one of the feminine-less stories Asimov praises but is instead the centrepiece of a competition. Readers are invited to send in stories based on this illustration of women in glass coffins being carried by robots. There is also a letter from Katherine Marcusson of Detroit, Michigan to pollute Asimov's men's only space (Startling Stories November 1939: 109).

**Women on Mars?**

A science fiction controversy in 1955 brought the conflation of woman and love interest, women and sex, and the positioning of all these within the private sphere, to the fore. Joanna Russ refers to this controversy in "The Image of Women in Science Fiction", writing that

within the memory of living adolescents, John Campbell Jr. proposed that “nice girls” be sent on spaceships as prostitutes because married women would only clutter everything up with washing and babies (Russ [1971] 1974: 55).

It was the astronomer Dr R. S. Richardson\(^5\) rather than John Campbell who proposed this. In the December 1955 issue of Fantasy and Science Fiction an expanded version of Richardson's article "The Day After We Land on Mars" appeared.\(^6\) Dr Richardson presents himself as being very forward thinking and permissive about sex. He has considered what would be involved in sending an exploratory party to Mars and his conclusion is that space travel may force us to adopt a more realistic attitude toward sex than that which prevails at present. I feel that the men stationed on a planet should be openly

\(^5\) Richardson published science fiction under the name Philip Latham. He wrote popularisations of science under his own name.

\(^6\) The original version had been published in the Saturday Review on 28 May 1955.
The September 1939 cover of Startling Stories.
accompanied by women to relieve the sexual tensions that develop among healthy normal
males. These women would be of the type which we are accustomed to call “nice girls.”
They would be nice girls before they went to live on Mars. They would be nice girls while
they lived on Mars. And they would be nice girls after they had lived on Mars.
Many will be outraged at the mention of such an idea. They will object that it is
shockingly immoral. But it is “immoral” only when viewed from the standpoint of our
present social reference system (Richardson 1955: 52).

Dr. Richardson’s underlying assumption about women is very similar to those of
Asimov, Turnbull and others who argued that women are not necessary in
science fiction. Women are not human beings, they are not part of Richardson’s
mankind which will colonise Mars.

In the May 1956 issue of Fantasy and Science Fiction, two rebuttals to
Richardson’s article were published.18 The first, “Nice Girls on Mars”, by
Anderson does not question the terms of Richardson’s argument. He just does not
think it will work. Anderson’s objections are as follows:

These nice girls would cost a lot more than their wages....Probably they could also do
housekeeping chores and secretarial work, but the fact remains that every additional
human being you send raises the cost by an astronomical figure.
Quite apart from the expense, though, the nice girls would generate tension and
discord merely by being there....If the idea is to work at all, the girls would have to be
accepted as full-caste members of the expedition; but that acceptance would remove any
psychological barrier to the men’s falling in love with them. Probably several men would
come to love one girl and resent the attention she paid to everyone else (Anderson 1956:
49).

Anderson then considers some alternatives. The first is homosexuality which he
rejects because “we.....are so powerfully conditioned against it that it is a quite
impossible ‘answer’”. Next he rejects “husband-and-wife teams” because,

|very few men show enough forethought to marry women whose own talents and training
fit ideally into the complex jigsaw pattern of organization that will be required. Of these,
many will already have children and thus be kept at home (Anderson 1956: 49-50).

18 In January 1958 The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction published a short story “Ministering
Angels”, by C. S. Lewis in response to Dr. Richardson’s article. In it an exploratory mission has been
sent to Mars, all-male of course. After six months two women arrive on a space ship which the
exploratory party had thought was the next crew sent early to relieve them. The women are volunteers
for “the first unit of the Woman’s Higher Aphrodisiac-Therapeutic Humane Organization (abbreviated
WHAT-HO)” which was set up to relieve the sexual tension that the men on Mars must be experiencing
(Lewis [1953] 1966: 111). One of the women is a prostitute who hasn’t got “the slightest chance of being
picked up in the cheapest quarter of Liverpool or Los Angeles” and the other is a “crank who believes all
that blah about the new ethicidity” (Lewis [1953] 1966: 112). The poem reproduced over the page was
printed at the end of the Lewis story.

In another story, “Cold Equations” by Paul A. Carter, published in the January 1956 issue of P &
SF but written before Dr. Richardson’s article appeared, the colony on Mars is the last remaining
group of humans when the earth is destroyed. Sexual tension builds up but is eventually resolved by
most of the unattached young women voluntarily becoming prostitutes who call themselves the Free
Companions.
Another solution is to send a "group of, say, 50 men and 50 women, all suitable for the work to be done, and let them figure out their own sleeping arrangements." Of course, this would cause trouble, as, "some of the girls will be more attractive than other, and the results are obvious" and "[d]isappointed lovers will have small chance to drown their sorrows" (Anderson 1956: 50). Obviously the only real solution is to send a team of men who can "forego sex, along with numerous other modern conveniences" (Anderson 1956: 50). He concludes that

[i]he question of how we will reach Mars in the first place is a tough one; the matter of feminine companionship and other recreations is relatively minor (Anderson 1956: 52).

The editorial blurb which follows observes that Anderson’s response is

as strictly a male viewpoint as Dr. Richardson himself. But most of the objections from correspondents stemmed from a different attitude - an immediate rejection of the basic male-centred assumptions. And, as is perhaps not surprising in such an audience, this rejection came as frequently from men as from women. The perfect writer to express this - no, not feminist, but merely human point of view is Miriam Allen deFord, who feels, with tart eloquence, that she has "News for Dr. Richardson" (The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction May 1956: 52-3).

Miriam Allen deFord begins her response thus:

I am going to tell Dr. Robert S. Richardson a secret.
Women are not walking sex organs.
They are human beings. They are people, just like men.
"I feel that the men stationed on a planet," says Dr. Richardson, "should be openly accompanied by women to relieve the sexual tensions that develop among healthy normal males."
I couldn’t agree with him more - if he would end that sentence at the word “women” (deFord 1956: 53).

Using Simone de Beauvoir as an authority deFord proceeds to point out that all Richardson’s assumptions are based on his notion that woman are not actually people. She finishes by reversing Dr. Richardson’s proposals:

Let us suppose that he had suggested that several hundred young women scientists be sent to Mars, and that “to relieve their sexual tensions” shiploads of “nice boys” be sent to serve them.
The mere thought of such a reversal would undoubtedly horrify him.
Well, that’s the way both women and men emancipated from his atavistic prejudices feel about his extraterrestrial bordello (deFord 1956: 57).

There are many connections between this debate and the earlier one taking place on the pages of “Brass Tacks” in Astounding Science Fiction. They serve to demonstrate just how deeply ingrained the notion of women as “walking sex
Amid the desert the treacherous Earthman's scheme to conquer the world of Otragen... 

"organs" has been in science fiction. These debates also demonstrate that feminism was a part of the debate around the ‘woman question’ in science fiction long before the publication of articles like Joanna Russ’ “The Image of Women in Science Fiction” (1971). Despite the claim in the editorial blurb that deFord’s positioning is a humanist one rather than a feminist one, it seems to me that her response is explicitly feminist. As I have demonstrated, arguments about woman’s place and their representation in science fiction have a long history in the field.

Women, Sex and Science Fiction 1960-1975

The idea that science fiction had always ignored sex and that this had retarded its growth, dominates the texts I examine in this section. In 1960, Kingsley Amis published New Maps of Hell which was billed on its cover as the “book that made science fiction grow up”. In it he criticises the lack of speculation about sex:

science fiction is a literature in which specific sexual interest of the kind familiar to us from other literatures, manifested in terms of interplay between individual characters, is rare, conventional, and thin (Amis 1960: 74).

Philip Jose Farmer’s first story, “The Lovers” (1952), is often claimed as one of those “rare” examples. The title page illustration appears on the facing page. The story concerns a sexual relationship between a human and a lalitha. Lalithas are parasitic insectoids who are more perfect than human woman because they devote themselves to men and have perky breasts:

He suspected that she either had an extra set of pectoral muscles or else an extraordinarily well-developed normal set. Her large and cone-shaped breasts did not sag. They were high and firm and pointed slightly upwards: the ideal of feminine beauty so often portrayed through the ages by male sculptors and painters and so seldom existing in nature (Farmer 1952: 49).

The lalithas’ only flaw is that they die if they get pregnant because their young eat their way out of their mother’s body. Robert Scholes and Eric S. Rabkin write that Philip Jose Farmer was “a pioneer in changing” science fiction. They argue that in “The Lovers” Farmer uses his “great skill” to make “this
potentially repulsive story...a moving study of the development of love" (Scholes & Rabkin 1977: 185-186).

"The Lovers" notwithstanding, the charge that sf avoided sex was made frequently during this period. P. Schuyler Miller responds to this charge in his book review column in the April 1961 issue of Analog (formerly Astounding). He writes that:

[one of the principal accusations made by intellectuals in general and high-literary critics in particular is that science fiction has an unrealistic attitude toward sex, and in most cases, no attitude at all. In judging this criticism, I think that we can assume that what our detractors would like to see is something like Tennessee Williams' ever-so-adult probings into psychopathology, and not a science fictional equivalent of the current school sex-and-bloodshed private-eye mysteries, so beautifully self-parodied in Henry Kane's Pyramid paperback, "Private Eyesful".

....

Before dissecting a few of the current crop, let's take one more look at the science-fiction field in general, and ask ourselves: "should the best science fiction be sex-centered?"

....

Overt sex is simply out of place in a large part of science fiction, and its absence is realism (Miller 1961: 167).

Here again is the notion that the intellectuality of science fiction perforce keeps sex and the body out of the picture. However, Miller is not so rigid in his proscription; there is a place where sex belongs in science fiction:

But mankind is by no means sexless, or he wouldn't be here, nor will he be in the future, unless certain science fiction becomes reality. So where does sex belong in science fiction:

In the first place, it can be treated maturely, casually, and incidentally to a story of the problems of real people in a real science-fictional situation, without "lookit me" exhibitionism or slavering. The best of this kind that we've had in the last year was in two Pyramid books of Judith Merril's Out of Bounds and The Tomorrow People. This is what I'm thinking of when I agree with the critics that sex isn't properly treated in science fiction - but I suspect some of the most outspoken critics are thinking more in terms of Tennessee Williams than Judith Merril (Miller 1961: 167-68).

In many of these discussions sex is a code word. However it is not entirely clear what it is a code word for. Is Miller talking about the act of sex? About sex roles? One of the books Miller goes on to discuss is Theodore Sturgeon's Venus Plus X which I examined in detail in chapter four, "Painwise".

When Joanna Russ' article "The Image of Women in Science Fiction" was reprinted in Vertex in 1974 it occasioned a great deal of hostility. One of the offended voices was that of science fiction writer Poul Anderson. 19 The nearly

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19 I briefly discussed Poul Anderson's Amazon Planet (1957) in chapter four.
twenty years separating his participation in the "Nice Girls on Mars" debate from his response to Russ show that his world view had shifted very little. In his article entitled "Reply to a Lady", also published in *Vertex*, Anderson tries to refute Russ’ charge that there are no real women in science fiction by listing examples from science fiction of "formidable" women and of women "hold[ing] down difficult, responsible, sometimes dangerous jobs" and being their "husband's able partner", and also by agreeing with her charge and explaining that, as Isaac Asimov did in the late thirties,

in what is probably the bulk of cases, women have not been relevant.
No insult whatever is meant. I simply point out that the stories have not been concerned with the relationship of the sexes. They've treated subjects like expeditions to distant planets, oceanographic engineering, the politics of civilization on a galactic scale. One can only get so much into a given wordage; and in the early days, book-length science fiction was not common. Besides, even in a novel, it isn't practical to play Dostoyevsky. That's better done in the 'mainstream' format.

Why should Hal Clement's *Mission of Gravity*, say, bring in a love interest? Its fascination lies in the depiction of an alien world and alien beings thereon...

Granted for the purposes of that tale they could as well have been women as men; or both sexes might have been present, casually mingling. But it didn't happen that way, and to suppose that it didn't happen because of prejudice on the author's part is nonsensical, especially since women play active roles in other works of his.

It should be remarked in fairness that I don't know if Ms. Russ has ever cited this particular book. But *Mission of Gravity* does go to show that the frequent absence of women characters has no great significance, perhaps none whatsoever.

Certain writers, Isaac Asimov and Arthur Clarke doubtless the most distinguished, seldom pick themes which inherently call for women to take a lead role. This merely shows they prefer cerebral plots, not that they are anti-feminist (Anderson 1974: 8 & 99).

Anderson’s response to Russ would have been equally at home in “Brass Tacks” in 1938 writing in support of Don Turnbull or Isaac Asimov.

Philip K. Dick also responds to Russ’ article in a later issue of *Vertex*. His response is quite different from Anderson’s “An Open Letter from Philip K. Dick” begins by claiming that “Ms. Russ” has “shrilled at [him] in print” and accusing her of using “the tactics of bitter fanatics”. He then switches to calling her “Joanna” and saying that he thinks she is right as Anderson does, but unlike Anderson, Dick does not see the absence of women as something natural and inevitable. Dick writes that Russ has delivered a needed message:

We are too sure of ourselves, as witness Poul’s article in response. His article was lovely. Literate and reasonable and moderate and respectable, and worthy in all respects except that it was meaningless, by virtue of the fact that it was just so much space gas. It was like telling the blacks that they only “imagined” that somehow things in the world were different for them, that they only somehow “imagined” that their needs, its articulations in our writing, were being ignored. It is a conspiracy of silence, and Joanna, despite the fact that she seemed to feel the need of attacking us on a personal level, shattered that silence, for the good of us all (Dick 1974: 99).
Dick talks about how he has “long said” that

science fiction may touch the sky but it fails to touch the ground. If by ‘ground’ we
substitute the time-sanctioned symbol and reality of woman, then maybe science fiction
will begin to turn out stories related to reality...if your attack serves to make us aware of
you and your previously-considered second-class group as our equals, our peers, our
friends - then I’ll take it. Like a man (Dick 1974: 99).

Dick has transformed Russ into a nurse administering badly needed medicine.

Dick writes that

Joanna is right - in what she believes not how she puts it forth. Lady militants are
always like Joanna, hitting you with their umbrella, smashing your bottle of whisky -
they are angry because if they are not, WE WILL NOT LISTEN (Dick 1974: 99).

The pronouns reveal a science fiction belonging to men graceuously welcoming the
new women to become “our equals, our peers, our friends” (Dick 1974: 99).
Women are not there because they are part of the field of science fiction, but
because Dick and Anderson have allowed them in.

Poul Anderson tried to clarify his arguments in Vertex in a letter to the
Canadian feminist fanzine The Witch and the Chameleon:

I never said that women should be in a science fiction story only if there is reason to have
a love interest. Rather, what I said - or tried to say - was that in many science fiction
stories there has been no reason for a love interest; therefore it was simplest to have all
the human characters be of the same sex; and, because most writers happen to be men, it
was easiest for them to use males. Thus no systematic discrimination is implied (The
Witch and the Chameleon September 1975: 29).

Joanna Russ responds to “poor” Poul’s letter thus:

Can we omit such stuff in the future? He’s a nice man in a personal way but it’s hopeless;
I feel like a rock climber at the 14,000-foot pass in the Rockies looking back through a
telescope at some enthusiastic amateur in the Flatirons (foothills outside my study
window) who’s proceeding Eastward, yelling “Hey! You’re in the wrong place! The
mountains are this way!” It’s a sheer waste of time to argue with him; we’d better just let
him go until he and his crampons and bolts (or whatever) hit Chicago (The Witch and
the Chameleon 1976: 13).

This debate about women’s place in science fiction was continued in the other
general fanzines of the period. In the November 1974 issue of Notes from the
Chemistry Department,20 Loren MacGregor wrote a response to Anderson titled
“A Reply to a Chauvinist”. He concludes that:

20 Without the internet, and the networks of fans who use it, I would not have been able to get access to
Notes. I would like to thank Bruce Pelz for sending me copies from the United States.
[d]ealing with “love interests” may indeed be the duty of “the mainstream,” as Mr. Anderson suggest, but dealing with speculation, in all its forms and variations, is a function of science fiction, and that has been neglected far too long (MacGregor 1974: 5).

There was an article response from Jerry Pournelle in *Notes from the Chemistry Department* which was more concerned with proving there are many sex linked differences between men and women than discussing science fiction, as well as further replies in a similar vein.

In the November 1975 issue of *Amazing* a guest editorial by Terry Carr appeared. In it Carr argued that the position of women in science fiction had changed dramatically for the better since the 1940s. He quotes examples from various 1940s pulp stories and compares them with contemporary stories by Russ, Dick and Tiptree. His editorial is built around the contemporary advertising campaign for Virginia Slims cigarettes which used the slogan, “You’ve Come A Long Way, Baby”. He describes the ads:

They always start with a faked photo from about 1910...showing Mrs Elspeth Suffragette sneaking a cigarette in the wings after the premiere performance of *Rite of Spring*, only to be discovered by her husband, who turns her over his knee and spanks her. Then they go on to show us how much improved women’s position is today...

Well I don’t know about you, but I find these ads extremely funny, in a black-humor way. What they’re really saying is that we’ve progressed so far in the last 65 years that we now allow women the right to kill themselves however they see fit to do it (Carr 1975: 4).

Women have no agency - men *allow* them to kill themselves. Throughout the editorial Carr keeps returning to a scene which he says has “archetypal relevance to men” (Carr 1975: 5). A man’s wife is threatened by a slimy monster emerging from the coal cellar, obviously come to rape his wife, and he breaks into a cold sweat, because *who knows*, maybe this monster has better technique in bed than he does (Carr 1975: 5).

This is a scene of white heterosexual male insecurity. At the end of his comparison of stories from the forties and early seventies Carr reimagines this scenario as his

idea for a science fictional variation on those Virginia Slims ads. It would start with a reproduction of an old pulp magazine done in sepia tone, showing Gerry Carlyle [a pulp heroine from the 1940s] sneaking a smoke beneath a Venusian *tobac* bush while a slimy
tentacled monster roars down on her intent on God-knows-what. And it would end with Gerry going calmly off into the bushes with the alien beastie - because who knows, maybe he does have better technique than we do (Carr 1975: 125).

Carr identified this scene as one of "archetypal relevance to men". The anxiety about the "better technique" of the alien beastie which Carr is mocking is identical to white male panic about miscegenation and the allure of the black buck for their white women. This scene, which Carr uses to demonstrate the extent of women's journey within science fiction in those thirty years, still figures Gerry Carlyle as synonymous with sex. Once again women in science fiction are sex. The only difference is that the male interested in her body has shifted from being a white American male to being an "alien beastie" male.

Of course all these debates about science fiction and women were also conducted in the two feminist fanzines of the period, The Witch and the Chameleon and Janus/Aurora. Another site was the November 1975 double issue of Khatri. The double issue was devoted to a symposium on women in science fiction. The participants were Suzy McKee Charnas, Samuel R. Delany, Virginia Kidd, Ursula K. Le Guin, Vonda N. McIntyre, Kaylyn Moore, Joanna Russ, James Tiptree, Jr., Luise White, Kate Wilhelm and Chelsea Quinn Yarbro. It was edited by Jeffrey D. Smith who also took part. The exchange of letters that make up the symposium took place over seven months. In 1993 the Symposium was reprinted, with comments from most of the participants looking back on the changes that had taken place over the near twenty years since it originally appeared. The reprint also included comments from others who had not been part of the original symposium: Mog Decarnin, Karen Joy Fowler, Jeanne Gomoll, Jane Hawkins, Gwyneth Jones and Pat Murphy. The inclusion of comments by Karen Fowler and Pat Murphy, the founders of the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award, makes explicit the connections between the prize and this repository of feminist debate from mid-970s. I look at the debates in these feminist locations in detail in the next chapter.

These various stories and debates about women and science fiction between 1926 and 1975 show that feminist issues have always been a part of the history of
science fiction. In the 1970s, feminist science fiction emerges from these debates within science fiction, as well as from wider cultural debates about feminism. In the next chapter I explore feminist and other stories that have been told about ‘women’ and ‘science fiction’.
“The Women Men Don't See”

In the previous chapter I looked at debates about whether love, sex and women had any place in science fiction at all. In this chapter I examine stories about women and science fiction which take for granted that women are part of science fiction. My examination includes a consideration of the competing discourses around the conjunction of ‘women’ and ‘science fiction’. I also construct a history of both ‘women and science fiction’ and the beginnings of feminist science fiction. As part of these constructions I look at various stories that have been told about women and science fiction, feminism and science fiction, and feminist science fiction. These stories, however, are not all told by feminists.

In order to examine these different versions of the complex relationships between women and science fiction and the ways they have been mediated by feminisms. I have divided this chapter into five sections. In the first section, “Other stories about women and science fiction”, I introduce my arguments about the relationships between women and science fiction through a discussion of the Tiptree story from which the title takes its name, “The Women Men Don’t See”. In the second section I look at the connections between two genres, “The Battle of the Sexes and Feminist Utopias” and argue that they are not separate genres. In the third section, “Absence or Presence”, I examine the ways in which women’s engagement with science fiction has been conceptualised in terms of women’s absence or presence in the field. In the fourth section, “The Great Invasion or the Great Erosion”, I examine the various originary moments that have been claimed for women’s engagement with science fiction and the way in which these originary moments have been frequently imagined as an ‘invasion’ or an ‘erosion’ of the field. In the final section, “Sweet Little Domestic Stories”, I look at how science fiction by women published in the 1950s has overwhelmingly been coded as “domestic”. I argue that this coding is a direct result of the ways
in which the history of women and sf has been conceptualised - a conceptualisation examined in the previous sections. The linking of women and the domestic is part of the same continuum that sees women as representing sex.

Other Stories about Women and Science Fiction

Feminist accounts of science fiction are as much a part of the historical moment in which they occurred as the texts they were engaging with. This is made absolutely clear in Tiptree’s “The Women Men Don’t See” and the ways in which the story has been discussed. The story is one of the best known battle of the sexes texts of the 1970s. John Clute, in The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction, calls “The Women Men Don’t See” James Tiptree, Jr.’s “most famous single story” (Clute & Nicholls 1993: 1231). The story was first published in the December 1973 issue of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction. At the time of publication, its author, James Tiptree, Jr., was not known to be Alice Sheldon by anyone in the science fiction community.

The story is told in the first person by the middle-aged Don Fenton, presumably some kind of government operative, which is what many speculated that the ‘real’ Tiptree was:

Because Tiptree lives just a few miles from the Pentagon, or at least uses a mailing address in that vicinity, and because in his letters he often reports himself as about to take off for some remote part of the planet, the rumour constantly circulates that in “real” life he is some sort of government agent involved in high-security work. His obviously first-hand acquaintance with the world of airports and bureaucrats, as demonstrated in such stories as “The Women Men Don’t See,” gives some support to this notion...Tiptree’s admission to one of his editors that he spent most of World War II in a Pentagon subbasement has contributed to this myth (Silverberg 1975: xii).

The story received a rapturous response and was nominated for both the major science fiction awards, the Nebula and the Hugo. Tiptree subsequently withdrew the story from consideration. At the time ‘he’ said it was because he wanted to give the younger writers a turn, however, it has been argued that Tiptree was

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1 The story is so well-known within the sf community that Connie Willis can refer to it in the title of her 1992 guest editorial for Asimov’s: “The Women SF Doesn’t See” without needing to explain her title (more on the Willis editorial below).
The Women Men Don't See- Social drama, intense

Setting: Yucatan sand-bar, crashed small plane, Cozumel airport; Aliens are tall white humanoids with black dish-facets & 6-foot arms.

"Hero"-narrator, two plain women (mother & daughter) and Maya pilot crash on a sand-bar in Asuncion Bay. Hero and the mother set off on foot to cross bay and bring back fresh water. That night they are awakened by strangers in military-type vehicle who do not respond to their cries for help. Narrator thinks they are revolutionaries; woman picks up a dropped artifact and deduces that they are aliens. When aliens return for their object next eve, woman persuades them to take her and narrator back to plane. Arriving there, she quickly gets her daughter in the boat and over narrator's horrified protests, begs aliens to take them off earth. They do. Story has lots of struggle, hardships, wounds, tension. Message is total misunderstanding of woman's motivations by narrator, who relates everything to self. Measure No. 2 is bleak future for feminism.

James Tiptree, Jr.'s summary of "The Women Men Don't See".
reluctant to win an award for his ‘masculine’ feminism (Le Guin 1978). Tiptree’s own summary of the story is reproduced on the facing page.

“The Women Men Don’t See” can be read in ways which coincide with many of the discourses I discuss in this thesis, such as the idea that women can only be represented within science fiction in discourses of romance or the domestic. In the story, Don Fenton, the narrator can only see women sexually. He describes Mayan woman thus: “the little Maya chicks in their minishifts with iridescent gloop on those cockeyes [are]...highly erotic. Nothing like the oriental doll thing” (Tiptree [1973] 1990: 122). When Fenton first encounters the two women, Ruth and Althea Parsons, on the flight from Cozumel Airport, they are merely a “double female blur...registering nothing. Zero” (Tiptree [1973] 1990: 121). On the chartered flight Fenton “see[s] the girl has what could be an attractive body if there was any spark at all. There isn’t” (Tiptree [1973] 1990: 121). The women become visible to him when they crash land together. Fenton’s perceptions of the women change when they are the only women present:

my eyes take in the fact that Mrs. Parsons is now quite rosy...with her hair loose and a sunburn starting on her nose. A trim, in fact a very neat shading-forty...Miss Parsons is even rosier and more windblown...A good girl, Miss Parsons, in her nothing way (Tiptree [1973] 1990: 128-129).

Fenton’s perceptions of the women echo the long-running debate within science fiction about women’s place within the field which I discussed in the last chapter.

A woman is only visible when she is a potential love interest.

Don Fenton misreads what is happening around him because he can only think of women within such a narrow perspective. Women exist for the convenience of men like himself. They exist within a chivalric order: there for him to desire, or for him to rescue. They exist so that he can see his ‘real’ manliness reflected back at him. In “The Women Men Don’t See”, neither of the Parsons will respond to his desire, and when the opportunity arrives for him to achieve the rescue, he accidentally shoots Ruth Parsons in the arm (Tiptree [1973] 1990: 143). When it becomes plain that Fenton does not matter to either of the Parsons, a “mad image” of a female conspiracy “blooms” in Fenton’s
mind, and he imagines "generations of solitary Parsons women selecting sires, making impregnation trips. Well, I hear the world is moving their way" (Tiptree [1973] 1990: 138). This scenario of a secret conspiracy of women against men is straight from the pages of texts like Jerry Sohl's The Haploids (1952), James Gunn's "The Misogynist" (1952) and Sam Merwin's The White Widows (1953) which I discussed in chapter three. "The Women Men Don't See" shifts the terrain of the battle of the sexes away from images of "mad" conspiracies of women against men, to that of women "surviv[ing]...liv[ing] by ones and twos in the chinks of your world-machine" (Tiptree [1973] 1990: 140).

Science fiction writer, Robert Silverberg, in his introduction to the Tiptree collection Warm Worlds and Otherwise, "Who is Tiptree, What is He?", was also struck by the way the story inverts earlier science fiction. He characterises the story's ending thus:

[the thematic solution is an ancient sf cliche - Earth-women carried off by flying-saucer folk - redeemed and wholly transformed by its sudden shattering vision of women, stolid and enduring, calmly trading one set of alien masters for another that may be more tolerable (Silverberg 1975: xvi).

Silverberg uses the story to prove that men can 'do' feminism, writing that "The Women Men Don't See" is a

profoundly feminist story told in entirely masculine manner, and deserves close attention by those in the front lines of the wars of sexual liberation, male and female (Silverberg 1975: xvi).

Terry Carr makes a similar argument in his 1975 editorial "You've Come A Long Way, Baby". He writes that

there are some male writers in the field today who are able to show some insight into the female point of view (Carr 1975: 125).

Tiptree is one of these writers. Carr gives his summary of the plot of "The Women Men Don't See". The story's resolution, with the mother and her daughter getting into the "alien's ship and tak[ing] off for spaces unknown" is a sign that "[w]e really have come a long way people" (Carr 1975: 125). Carr's sign of the most spectacular 'progress' of science fiction is that a man wrote "The Women Men Don't See". A woman writing a "profoundly feminist story" is not
such a revelation. Carr also discusses Joanna Russ’ “When It Changed” (1972) as a sign of the progress of science fiction. However, this story signifies change for Carr, not so much because the story inverts battle of the sexes tropes, but because the story won a Nebula. The story was accepted and lauded by the once “almost...exclusive province of male readers” (Carr 1975: 5).

The men who constitute the field of science fiction have grown up and are able to welcome women into their midst. Tiptree’s story demonstrates that not only can the men recognise women’s talent, they can even understand women. The revelation in 1977 that Alice Sheldon ‘was’ James Tiptree, Jr. undid this progress and caused the story’s feminism to be read differently. Instead of a uniquely sensitive, though very masculine male writer, James Tiptree, Jr., the story’s author had become a woman, Alice Sheldon. The story’s feminism had shifted and was no longer a proof of the adulthood of male sf writers.

“The Women Men Don’t See” is also a story frequently referred to in work on feminist science fiction (Barr 1987: 30-32; Cranny Francis 1990: 29-38; Kaveney 1989: 90; Lefanu 1988: 122-127; Pearson 1990: 18; Boulter 1995: 18-22). The story has become for some critics an “exemplar for feminist science fiction” (Cranny-Francis 1990: 26). Once again this reading seems to be largely dependent on the perceived sex of the story’s author. As I demonstrated above the initial response to the story was amazement that such a story could have been penned by a man. Amanda Boulter in her 1995 article, “Alice James Raccoona Tiptree Sheldon Jr: Textual Personas in the Short Fiction of Alice Sheldon”, argues that once Tiptree had become Sheldon, readings of ‘her’ stories become caught up with the story’s authorship by a writer whose writing life has come to embody a feminist lesson, “demonstrat[ing] that there was no inevitable connection between biology and writing, the penis and the pen”. Boulter argues that, “[t]his gender deception has made Alice Sheldon a particularly exciting figure for feminist critics of science fiction” (Boulter 1995: 6).
Sarah Lefanu in her 1988 book length study of feminism and science fiction, *In the Chinks of the World Machine*, discusses “The Women Men Don’t See” in conjunction with Robert Silverberg’s now-famous introduction to *Warm Worlds and Otherwise* where he wrote that “[i]t has been suggested that Tiptree is female, a theory that I find absurd, for there is to me something ineluctably masculine about Tiptree’s writing” (Silverberg 1975: xii). In his later postscript to the introduction to *Warm Worlds*, added in 1978, Silverberg says that “[s]he fooled me beautifully, along with everyone else, and called into question the entire notion of what is ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ in fiction” (Silverberg 1993: 5).

Lefanu agrees with Silverberg:

> [t]he notion of what is “masculine” or “feminine” fiction must indeed be questioned; it is too simplistic to say that male writers of science fiction concern themselves only with technology or “hard” science at the expense of development of character and the consequences in social terms of technological development. Such a distinction not only posits a crude sexual dualism - masculine is hard, feminine is soft - which anyway is anathema to Tiptree, but it also denies the connections between the different “hard” and “soft” sciences, connections that in good science fiction should be made (Lefanu 1988: 123-24).

This split between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ science has its equivalence in ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ science fiction. ‘Hard’ science fiction is frequently portrayed as ‘real’ science fiction because it is more ‘scientific’ than ‘soft’ science fiction. ‘Hard’ science fiction is predominantly mapped on to the male, and ‘soft’ sf, on to the female. Sheldon/Tiptree’s authorship of “The Women Men Don’t See” makes explicit the fragility of this opposition of ‘masculine’ to ‘feminine’.

*The Battle of the Sexes and Feminist Utopias*

The dual authorship of “The Women Men Don’t See” by Alice Sheldon/James Tiptree, Jr. puts it on the cusp between the mostly male-authored battle of the sexes texts of the period up to the early 1970s and the mostly female-authored texts of the 1970s. Joanna Russ in her 1981 article calls the later texts, Feminist

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3 This binary also plays itself out in the division between science fiction and fantasy with fantasy being the soft and feminine to science fiction’s hard masculinity.
Utopias. I maintain, however, that the battle of the sexes texts and the feminist utopias of the 1970s are part of the same genre. While giving the two groups of texts different names, Joanna Russ does make a connection between the two:

A discussion of these recent feminist utopias would be incomplete without some references to their anti-feminist opposite numbers: the role reversal (or battle of the sexes) science fiction novel which assumes as its given the sexist assumptions the feminist utopias challenge and attack (Russ 1981: 80).

Rosinsky makes a similar connection between the two in her chapter “The Battle of the Sexes: Things to Come” which discusses many of the same texts as Russ and refers to the Russ article, “Recent Feminist Utopias”. Rosinsky contrasts the feminist texts with:

their androcentric chronological predecessors which almost uniformly posit the reestablishment of the “natural” order of male dominance...Suzy McKee Charnas’ Motherlines (1978); Joanna Russ’ The Female Man (1975)...do not indicate which “camp” is or will be victorious (Rosinsky 1984: 65).

These references clearly indicate that Russ and Rosinsky see the battle of the sexes texts and the feminist utopia texts as being in conversation with one another. Indeed, Rosinsky takes the term “Battle of the Sexes,” which Russ uses only to refer to the earlier “androcentric” texts, to refer to what Russ names feminist utopias. Although neither Russ nor Rosinsky include “The Women Men Don’t See” in their discussion, Russ does discuss two other stories ‘by’ Alice Sheldon, “Your Faces, O My Sisters! Your Faces Filled of Light!” (1976), published under the name of Raccoona Sheldon and “Houston, Houston, Do You Read?” (1976) which was published under the name of James Tiptree, Jr. 4

Many of the texts that are frequently cited as being part of a utopian tradition in women’s writing, like Russ’ The Female Man (1975) and Suzy McKee Charnas’ Motherlines (1978), can be read as re-writings of the earlier battle of the sexes stories. Lefanu argues that:

[the stock conventions of science fiction - time travel, alternate worlds, entropy, relativism, the search for a unified field theory - can be used metaphorically and metonymically as powerful ways of exploring the construction of ‘woman’. Feminist SF,

4 Both were published for the first time in the collection Aurora: Beyond Equality edited by Susan Janice Anderson and Vonda N. McIntyre.
then, is part of science fiction while struggling against it (Lefanu 1988: 5).

Joanna Russ’ novella *We Who Are About To* (1976) re-works many of the stock conventions of science fiction in just this manner.⁵ *We Who Are About To* is in direct conversation with Marion Zimmer Bradley’s *Darkover Landfall* and the much earlier story, Randall Garrett’s “The Queen Bee”⁶ (1958). Lefanu argues that Russ

satirises that old pioneering spirit beloved of many a science fiction writer, which insists on the colonisability of many a planet (Lefanu 1988: 180).

In the second issue of the first feminist fanzine, the Canadian *The Witch and the Chameleon*,⁷ Vonda McIntyre wrote a long and detailed review of Marion Zimmer Bradley’s *Darkover Landfall* (1972) which criticised the novel for upholding this “old pioneering spirit”. Bradley’s novel is about a starship of the Colony Expedition Force which crashlands on the wrong planet and is forced to make many decisions about the colonists’ future. This involves an eventual decision to treat the women’s wombs as communal property because the propagation of the race takes precedence. McIntyre’s negative review of *Darkover Landfall* attracted many letters in subsequent issues of *The Witch and the Chameleon*. Joanna Russ was one of the correspondents on the subject. In response to Bradley’s rebuttal of the McIntyre review Russ wrote that:

> [t]he question, to put it bluntly, of whether a woman’s uterus belongs to her or to the community she happens to find herself in (or rather its male authorities) has been a very hot political issue in the U.S. and some parts of Europe for at least a decade; I am surprised that Bradley didn’t expect vehement reactions to a novel in which just this question is the central issue of the plot (*The Witch and the Chameleon* September 1975: 15).

Russ worked out her views on whether a woman’s uterus belongs to her or her community more fully in *We Who Are About To* (1976).

Women’s uteruses are central to Randall Garrett’s “The Queen Bee” (1958).

⁵ *We Who Are About To* was first published in two parts *Galaxy* in January and February 1976 and was first published as a book in 1977.

⁶ “The Queen Bee” was first published in *Astounding Science Fiction* in December 1958.

⁷ There were five issues of Amanda Bankier’s *The Witch and the Chameleon*. The first was dated August 1974 and the last appeared in 1976.
THE
QUEEN
BEE
BY RANDALL GARRETT

Elissa was intransigently determined to be the Queen Bee. And...you know, she got exactly the role she demanded!

Illustrated by Freas

ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION

Title page illustration of Randall Garrett's "The Queen Bee" by Freas, Astounding Science Fiction, December 1958, p. 70.
An illustration from the story appears opposite. However the question of whether their uterus belongs to themselves or their community, which is at the heart of Darkover Landfall (1972) and We Who Are About To (1976), is never raised. It is the story’s given that a woman’s uterus belongs to her community. Brytell’s Law is a set of interplanetary guidelines for what to do in case of a crashlanding. The fourth and fifth articles read:

the women must be isolated. All precautions must be taken to prevent any confusion as to parenthood.

Article V: In the ideal situation, each female would produce at least one female child and one male child by each male. Since this will not occur in the majority of situations, it is recommended that...(Garrett 1958: 76).

In Garret’s story, unlike Bradley’s novel, a small party of three women and four men, rather than an entire colonist starship, crashlands on an uninhabited planet. Before raising basic questions of survival they are already considering how to populate the planet:

“If we’re careful...and if we eliminate as much inbreeding as possible, we can have this planet populated within a few centuries...” (Garrett 1958: 73).

One of the members of the party, Elissa Krand, does not take kindly to the situation and to increase her autonomy and power she kills the other two women. The men want to kill her but they cannot as this would mean the loss of the only available womb. After enduring her bullying for a short while they decide upon an ingenious solution: they lobotomise her. The last sentence of the story is:

“[o]ne year later, the first child born on the planet Generatrix was a lovely baby girl, named Tina” (Garrett 1958: 96).

The baby Tina is named after the one ‘real’ woman of the original survivors. Neither Elissa Krand nor the third woman, Della Thorn, are real women. Elissa Krand is not a real woman because she actively resists the rule of the men, and Della Thorn is not one because she does not want to have sex with the man she has been allotted:

“Don’t worry. I told her I’d give her a week to get used to the idea. That week is up tonight.”

“Oh? Think she’ll quit being stubborn?”

“If she doesn’t,” said Fole flatly, “I’m going to beat the daylights out of her” (Garrett 1958: 87).
The next morning at breakfast there is an "odd atmosphere":

Folee had a placid look on his face as he cut into the purple melon on his plate, but when he caught Branson's eye, he flashed a grin that was both wry and rather sheepish. The side of Della Thorn's face was a trifle swollen and very faintly purplish, and she had an odd expression that Branson couldn't quite translate (Garrett 1958: 88).

Murderous rage at being raped perhaps? Folee's rape of Della is displaced on to the fruit on his plate. The link between Folee cutting the fruit and Folee raping Della is explicit: the melon is "purple" and the sign of Folee's violence on Della's face is "purplish".

In their introduction to Aurora: Beyond Equality, Vonda McIntyre and Susan Janice Anderson refer to "The Queen Bee". They are discussing the kind of stories they did not want for their anthology:

In one such story, a spaceship is wrecked on an alien planet and each woman is expected to become pregnant to ensure survival of the species. One woman refuses and later murders the other women. But her punishment is even more brutal than her crime - she is sentenced to lobotomy and continual impregnation. If you stretch the point, we thought, this story has more symbolic truth to it than its author may have imagined. Women in our society are conditioned to develop their physical attractiveness as a "weapon" to "kill off" other female competition. Confinement to a single role is, in a sense, a sort of psychic lobotomy (McIntyre and Anderson 1976: 11-12).

There are many parallels between Russ' We Who Are About To and Garret's "Queen Bee". In We Who Are About To four men and four women crash land on an uninhabited planet and the conversation soon turns to populating the planet. The story is told in first person by an unnamed woman of child bearing age rather than the third person of the earlier story. In Russ' version the mad selfish woman, Elissa Krond, has become the narrator and creator of the text. Both women are killers but Russ' narrator kills for entirely different reasons. She finds the urge to populate ridiculous and doomed, telling the others:

That if we could eat the local macro-life, the local micro-life could eat us.
That we could die of exposure in the winter because we had no way to make heat after our bungalow wore out and that was in six months.
That we could die of heat in a summer whose length we didn't yet know.
That a breech birth could kill. That a three-days labour and no dilation could kill.
That septicemia could kill (Russ 1979) 1977: 17).

The other characters argue with her replying that "Civilization must be preserved." "Civilization's doing fine", she tells them. "We just don't happen to
be where it is” (Russ [1976] 1977: 23). Eventually, and at first inadvertently, she kills them all and then spends her time waiting to die, talking to her vocorder and hallucinating. The womb as communal property along with a 1950s discourse of reproduce and colonise at all costs, has been overturned and destroyed.

**Absence or Presence**

The current version of women in science fiction before the 1960s (which I’ve heard several times lately) goes like this: There weren’t any. Only men wrote science fiction because the field was completely closed to women. Then, in the late 60s and early 70s, a group of feminist writers led by Joanna Russ and Ursula Le Guin stormed the barricades, and women began writing (and sometimes even editing) science fiction. Before that, nada.

... There’s only one problem with this version of women in SF - it’s not true.

(Willis 1992: 4)

The absence or presence of women within science fiction has, until recently, been central to accounts of feminist science fiction. Throughout this thesis I demonstrate that women have never been absent from science fiction during its seventy year history. However, the nature of this ‘presence’ within the field has not been stable, any more than the category ‘women’ is stable.

Versions of women in science fiction are shaped by the reading histories of the people telling the different versions. What the historian has read and seen is vital to their construction of history. Banal as it may seem, what you do not experience is often not included, and the context of your experience can be dramatically different from someone else’s. To make this point Katie King quotes Alice Echols talking about “[e]fforts to generate a black feminist movement” which Echols argues “were less than successful”. King describes her reaction:

[that absolutely true statement has a strange, hollow echo in my political memories. Woman Power, my first feminist reading, was by a Black woman who represented herself at the very “heart” of what both she and Echols call radical feminism (King 1994: 12).

King’s reaction is reminiscent of the comments of science fiction writer and multiple Hugo and Nebula award winner, Connie Willis, quoted at the beginning of this section. Willis is reacting to a version of the object “women and science fiction” which her own experience contradicts. Willis read many stories by
women writers when she was first reading science fiction in the 1950s. On the other hand Judith Raphael Buckrich did not:8

I think the 1960s social revolution caused a revolution in writing too and especially in SF which had in the 1950s been very “boys’ own adventure”. Suddenly women such as Le Guin emerged in the US who were using SF to talk about societal structure and sexism and oppression. This made SF attractive to women readers and writers for the first time and I believe has influenced all women’s writing here and elsewhere (Larbalestier 1995: 60).

At stake for both Buckrich and Willis is the presence or absence of women in science fiction. This is a question which has shaped many accounts of women and sf. Susan Wood observed this phenomenon in the late 1970s:

...there are more stories about real women, and real men, emerging in the SF field. And there are plenty of articles about their absence (Wood 1978-79: 9).

Sam Moskowitz, editor of When Women Rule (1972), also sees women as largely but not entirely absent from the field of science fiction:

[it]he readers of science fiction are predominantly men. It has been that way virtually ever since science fiction has been written (Moskowitz 1972: 1).

Kingsley Amis had this to say about the question:

Though it may go against the grain to admit it, science-fiction writers are evidently satisfied with the sexual status quo - the female emancipationism of a Wylie or a Wyndham is too uncommon to be significant (Amis 1960: 99).

Scott Sanders in “Woman as Nature in Science Fiction” writes that “[u]ntil very recently SF was written primarily for a male audience, about heroes for whom women are toys, threats or enigmas” (Sanders: 1981: 42).

Curtis Smith, in his preface to Twentieth Century Science-Fiction Writers, writes that:

...at least there are now woman characters in science fiction, and an explosion of science-fiction writers who are women: consider Zenna Henderson, Pamela Sargent, James Tiptree, Jr., Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Lee Killough, Suzy McKee Charnas, Anne McCaffrey, Octavia Butler, Marge Piercy, Zoe Fairbairns, and many others. These writers have brought speculation about the future of sex roles to science fiction. Science fiction, once totally the domain of men, has reversed itself and is now in the forefront of feminist thinking (Smith 1988: viii-ix).

8 Judith Buckrich and Lucy Sussex edited the first anthology of Australian women’s science fiction She’s Fantastical (1995).

Badami in her “Feminist Critique of Science Fiction” which appeared in the academic science fiction journal, *Extrapolation*, writes that

“there is little to discuss about ‘the role of women in science fiction’ because - Jirel of Joiry, Susan Wood, and Mary Shelley notwithstanding - until very recently women have had almost no role in science fiction. But it may be instructive to demonstrate that fact and to explore the various ways in which female sex roles in sf generally add up to The Invisible Woman. I propose to illustrate three theses about the non-role of women in science fiction.

Women have *not* been important as characters in sf;
Women have *not* been important as fans of sf;
Women have *not* been important as writers of sf (Badami 1976: 6).

Badami’s three-fold division is important because not all of the accounts of women’s absence from science fiction are referring to the same kind of participation (or lack of it). In Willis’ account it is women as practitioners, as writers and to a lesser extent, editors. Buckrich refers to “women readers and writers” (Larbalestier 1995: 60), Moskowitz to “the readers of science fiction” (Moskowitz 1972: 1), and Russ talks about “images of women” and does not claim that there were no women writing before the late sixties (Russ [1971] 1974: 57).11

I render Badami’s three part division thus: representation - the illustrations and texts; consumption - the readers and fans; production - the writers, artists and editors. These three categories are not as easily separable as I am implying here. They are all a mode of production - of the knowledge of the field and of the

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9 The article first appeared in *The Red Clay Reader*, a feminist journal, in 1971 but was reprinted in the science fiction journal *Vertex* in 1974.

10 In discussions of women and science fiction the role of editors, with the exception of Judith Merrill, frequently gets forgotten. Two examples are Mary Gnaedinger (1898-1976) who edited all 81 issues of *Famous Fantastic Stories* which was published from Sep/Oct 1939 until June 1953 and Cele Goldsmith (born 1933) who edited *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic* from December 1958 until June 1965, publishing the first stories of Ursula Le Guin, Thomas M. Disch and Roger Zelazny (Clute & Nicholls 1993).

11 Joanna Russ’ first story, “Nor Custom Stale”, appeared in the September 1959 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. In “The Image of Women in Science Fiction” she writes that “most science fiction writers are men, but some are women, and there are more women writing the stuff than there used to be” (Russ [1971] 1974: 56). Russ is not claiming that there were no representations of women in science fiction, just that the representations that had been available are not satisfactory because they are mere “images”.
field itself. Fans, of course, produce fanzines and conventions and costumes and filk songs and many other tangible artefacts but these are 'amateur' activities although they all inscribe, shape and document science fiction.

These three categories, production, consumption and representation are a hierarchy with 'production' at the top. This is made explicit within fandom with the idea of the 'pro' versus the 'fan' and the notion that all fans aspire to be pros. Economically it is also a division between paid and unpaid work. That consumption is the least valued of the three is apparent in the rarity of discussion of fandom in academic accounts of women and sf.5 There are many fanzines of the seventies that discuss women and sf6 and there were fanzines like The Witch and the Chameleon (first issue August 1974) and Janus/Aurora (first issue 1975) which were devoted to women and sf. However, Badami is one of the few writing about feminism and science fiction outside of fan publications to emphasise fandom. Susan Wood, who was, as Badami indicates, very well known for her fan activities and was most definitely a BNF (Big Name Fan), did not discuss fandom in her article, "Women and Science Fiction", though she did indicate that there were women readers of the genre and quoted a letter from a female reader published in a pulp magazine (Wood 1978-79: 11).7

The difference in these accounts of women's participation across these three categories, production, consumption, representation, is one of emphasis. Clearly no-one is saying that there were literally no women in science fiction until the late 1960s. However there is a danger in the argument that there were few women in the field for, as Connie Willis makes clear, the slide from few women and few representations to no women can easily happen. Work which retrieves women writers from the past is important and an argument that conflates overwhelmingly sexist writing of a period with the absence of women can

5 Lefanu is one of the exceptions (Lefanu 1988: 5-7).
6 I briefly discussed one of these debates, which took place in Notes From the Chemistry Department, in 1974-1975 in the previous chapter.
7 I discussed this letter in the last chapter. It was by Naomi Slimmer of Russell, Kansas and appeared in the June 1939 issue of Science Fiction.
actually lead to the forgetting of important women writers. This has been recognised by the existence of a body of feminist retrieval work. Pamela Sargent’s *Women of Wonder* series of anthologies of “sf stories by Women about Women” were particularly important in this work. In the long introduction to the first book published in 1974 she draws attention to writers like Francis Stevens, C. L. Moore, Leigh Brackett, Wilmar Shiras and Anne Warren Griffith (Sargent [1974] 1978: 14-29). Her anthologies make available the stories of writers like Hazel Heald, Helen Weinbaum, Leslie Perri, Margaret St. Clair, Miriam Allen de Ford and Katherine McLean who would otherwise be completely unavailable.\(^{15}\) In *The Witch and the Chameleon* and *Janus/Aurora* I found articles devoted to early women writers and a conscious effort to think of women’s involvement in science fiction as having a history. These include an entire issue of *Aurora*, the Summer 1984 “Invisible Women” issue. Another recognition of this history was the fact that Katherine McLean, whose first story was published in 1949 in *Astounding*, was the first writer guest of honour at WisCon.\(^{16}\)

Feminists are not the only people engaged in this kind of retrieval work. So much early pulp science fiction is out of print and unavailable, that the work of anthologists like Everett Bleiler and Sam Moskowitz in anthologising and cataloguing previously unreprinted work is invaluable for discovering the early science fiction of both women and men. In the authors’ note to the anthology of women’s sf from the 1920s to the present, *New Eves*, the authors discuss the unavailability of most early science fiction:

> Those eager to read more by these extraordinary writers, and to encounter the New Eves they, and their male colleagues, created, may be disappointed to discover there is no “recommended reading” list here. The reason is simple: with the exception of a rareanthologization, the works of all the women (and men) who wrote science fiction before the mid-1960s are out of print, and considering the current structure of the publishing industry, likely to remain so. Their books can only be found by lucky browsers in used

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\(^{15}\) Unless you are fortunate enough to have access to a collection like that in Rare Books with its near complete runs of most of the English language science fiction magazines.

\(^{16}\) The first feminist science fiction convention, held annually in Madison, Wisconsin. The first WisCon was held in 1977. The guests of honour were the writer Katherine MacLean and the fan Amanda Bankier.
bookstores; whereas stories by women who wrote science fiction before 1950, are simply unobtainable, except to the wealthy, who can afford to pay premium prices for the mouldering pulps that alone contain their work. Even the early books of many writers who began their careers in the 1970s and 80s are now out of print - while those of most current women authors can easily be found in one's local bookstore (Frank, Stine & Ackerman 1994: xvii).

In the wake of articles in prozines or fanzines on women and sf, the appearance of a letter by a long-time male fan pointing out some one or some text who has been left off the list is de rigueur. In response to Sam Moskowitz's article "When Women Rule" in the August 1967 issue of If, John Borger of Parkersburg West Virginia wrote that "I was rather puzzled by the omission, in "When Women Rule," of the matriarchy described in Search the Sky" (If January 1968: 161). Leland Sapiro of Richardson, Texas wrote in response to "The Invisible Women" issue of Aurora Summer 1984:

As to Tom Porter's "Women SF Writers You Probably Never Heard of"...How about names like Claire Winger Harris, Leslie F. Stone, L. Taylor Hansen, that shudda been listed, but weren't? (Aurora Winter 1986-87: 5).

This retrieval work does much to complicate the notion that sf before a certain point was wholly male. However, Sarah Lefanu has observed that there is a complex relationship between the presence or absence of women within the and misogyny within the field:

it [science fiction] has always reflected and continues to reflect a particular type of authority, that of men over women. The absence of women from much science fiction before the 1970s is only one expression of this: the presence of women within science fiction since the early 1970s does not necessarily undermine it (Lefanu 1988: 87).

Lefanu is not saying that there were no women in science fiction before the 1970s just that there were few.\(^\text{17}\) Her point is that the absence or presence of women in the field of science fiction does not of itself say anything about the feminism or misogyny of the field. As the example of Margaret Thatcher demonstrates, a female prime minister is not necessarily an advance for feminism. So you could ask what kind of presence did women have within science fiction

\(^{17}\) Indeed Lefanu discusses Judith Merril, Katherine MacLean, Marion Zimmer Bradley and C. L. Moore, all of whom were published before the 1960s (Lefanu 1988: 15-18). Lefanu’s examples of women writing before the 1960s are the same as those in Pamela Sargent’s 1974 collection Women of Wonder.
and the answer is extremely varied. Which women, which moment within science fiction, where in science fiction?

Many of the letters to prozines by women from the 1926 to the 1950s explicitly examine their position as women within the field of science fiction. These letters and the editorial responses to them indicate that while women were present within the field, their presence was still frequently viewed as an anomaly.

A letter from Naomi D. Slimmer of Russel, Kansas and her sisters, headed “Five of a Kind”, leads the first letter column of *Science Fiction*:

Am warning you that this is merely a women’s [sic] (five of them) opinion of your new magazine. Somebody brought home a copy of *Science Fiction* last week and it has gone the rounds. We noted your contest announcement and decided to take a crack at it. If you did not know that women read scientific fiction, give a listen:

- There are two housewives, an office worker, a high school girl, and a trained nurse among we five sisters and we all read *Science Fiction* (when we can beg it from brother and two husbands). With one accord we greeted your new magazine with whoops of glee and took turns curling up with the durn thing.

    - We all read a good many “slicks” and quite a few “pulps,” and we think you’ve got something there. Since we like our “pulps” to scare us, chill us, and give us to think, we go for *Science Fiction*. Looks like it might be going to fit the bill. It’s going to keep me awake and give me goose-bumps when I’m on night duty (I’m the nurse) and the other four sisters say they expect to read it when the baby is cross or the teacher isn’t looking or when the boss isn’t in. (Don’t think I’m trying to say we’ll all buy a copy every issue. I wouldn’t kid you)

    - We read *Science Fiction* to help us picture what the world will be in years to come, or to get someone’s idea of life in a different world. We know what present-day life is like on this earth (it’s a mess! And *Science Fiction* is about the only way we can forget that fact for a few minutes) (*Science Fiction* June 1939: 118-119).

The editor, Charles Hornig, replied:

It gives me great pleasure to start off “The Telepath” with such a breezy and informative letter as the above. It is a revelation to find five girls in one family so enthusiastic about our humble effort. I have received so many letters from women who read science-fiction just lately, that I must confess many of the fair sex have well-developed imaginations. Their group has grown to such proportions that they must certainly be taken into consideration by the male adherents (*Science Fiction* June 1939: 119).

Hornig’s comments here echo the Hugo Gernsback’s “strange” discovery, thirteen years earlier, that there were a “great many women...already reading” *Amazing Stories* (Gernsback September 1926: 483). The admission of women’s “well-developed imaginations” is something that Hornig has to confess.

In 1953 the editor of *Thrilling Wonder Stories* Sam Mines also linked the growth of women’s imaginations to what he saw as their growing interest in science fiction. For Mines, women’s interest in science fiction was an oddity that must be explained. He made the following comments in response to a letter from
Phyllis Grazer of Tillamook, Oregon:

Seems to be a mass movement of housewives away from the home and garden type of literature towards science fiction. Seriously - letters from housewives saying in effect, "Where has this stuff been all my life?" are mushrooming. And the key is right up there in Mrs Grazer's letter - it makes their imaginations work (Thrilling Wonder Stories August 1953: 142).

In Grazer's letter she writes that this is "my first letter to you but you can expect many more". Nowhere in her letter does Grazer mention whether she is married or not or that she is a housewife (Thrilling Wonder Stories August 1953: 142).

In the January 1953 issue of Startling Stories, Sam Mines wrote the following in response to a letter from a Stephanie Szold of Asheville, North Carolina. In it he is even more explicit about women's presence in science fiction occasioning surprise for him:

Ten years ago sf fans were practically all male, today with or without benefit of fan activities, a lot of girls and housewives and other members of the sex are quietly reading science fiction and beginning to add their voices to the bable [sic] of TEV [the Ether Vibrates - SS's letter column]. And a lot of them, tucked away in more or less remote places are beginning to ask, "Where has this stuff been all our lives?" and "Where can we meet other science fiction fans so we can talk shop instead of feeling alone?"

We confess this came as something of a surprise to us. We honestly never expected such a surge of female women [sic] into science fiction (Startling Stories January 1953: 136).

Zillah of San Bernardino, California in the February 1953 issue writes that she has been reading sf magazines "since I was about 14 years old - (back in the Hugo Gernsback days)". She discusses her opinion of contemporary fans and science fiction, and ends with the following: "here's hoping there'll soon be more women writers in SF" who are "willing to admit it" (Thrilling Wonder Stories February 1953: 133). For Zillah Kendall as for Lula B. Stewart of Harmony, Pennsylvania, whose 1953 letter to Thrilling Wonder Stories I discussed in chapter two, knowing that there are other women in the field is important to their own engagement with the field. Stewart ended her letter saying that now she is "backed by a formidable phalange of femfans, I dare speak up, brave lassie that I am" (Thrilling Wonder Stories August 1953: 133). Letters such as the following from Winifred Beisiegel of Sparrowbush, New York evince a very different picture of the field:

although I've been an S-F fan for over 20 years, I still like to re-read some of the earlier efforts. In fact, for that same length of time I've been searching for three oldies read by
my mother in her younger days. They were: The Return of She by Haggard, The Mughugs, author unknown and The Year of Our Lord, ditto.

...From what Mom recalls, they were darned good for that era and the last two named were as prophetic as any Jules Verne (Startling Stories May 1952: 132).

Beisiegel stakes her legitimacy within the field with her twenty year knowledge of it as well as having a mother who was also an avid reader of the genre.

I have more than amply demonstrated the presence of women in the field of science fiction before the late 1960s/early 1970s cusp which is frequently invoked as the time in which women emerged within the field. Indeed many of the women who are associated with the 1970s ‘emergence’ of feminist science fiction such as Joanna Russ, Marion Zimmer Bradley and Octavia Butler were science fiction readers and in the case of Bradley a long time fan.

However, it is equally clear that the period of the sixties and seventies did mark a change in the way some women perceived their relationship to the field of science fiction. They were already a part of science fiction before they discovered feminism but that discovery changed the nature of their presence within science fiction. SF writer, Nancy Kress, describes her changing relationship to the field of science fiction:

I discovered SF at the age of 14. The moment is still very clear to me. My first boyfriend was studying to be a concert musician. As a teenage girl, my job was to hang adoringly over his piano while he practised (it was 1962). However, I am, alas, tone deaf. I could hang adoringly for maybe ten minutes, tops. But in his family’s music room were bookshelves, and on the shelves were his father’s books, and among them was Childhood’s End the first SF I’d ever seen. One chapter and I was hooked.

Favorite early authors were Theodore Sturgeon and Frederick Pohl. Later, I discovered Le Guin and Wilhelm and other women writers. But for a long time my adolescent mind, had I thought about it at all (which I didn’t), would have assumed that writing SF was a male occupation. It took the women’s movement of the 1970’s to broaden my traditional Catholic-good-girl upbringing, and without the movement I doubt I’d be an SF writer today (Personal Correspondence November 1995).

For Jeanne Gornoll, well-known fan and one of the founders of Janus and WisCon the emergence of the women’s movement completely changed her involvement with fandom. She sees 1970s feminism as responsible for the transformation of science fiction fandom:

A lot of women had stopped reading science fiction during our teens, but hadn’t really examined our reasons for giving it up. But one of the first things you learn when you read books like Sisterhood is Powerful, GynEcology or The Obstacle Course, is how to see sexism, and when you start looking for it, it’s everywhere. It was a time of pointing out the obvious. “Robert Heinlein is sexist,” we said. But it was also a time of happy discovery, because just then, Things were Changing. Women were writing new kinds of SF, SF that some of us women were reading and which was bringing us back to the field.
Pamela Sargent published the Women of Wonder series (and more importantly wrote the introductory essays which gave us a historical grounding). Vonda N. McIntyre and Susan Janice Anderson published Aurora: Beyond Equality. Suzy McKee Charnas, Joanna Russ, Ursula Le Guin, Liz Lynn, Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, John Varley, James Tiptree, Jr./Raccoona Sheldon, Marge Piercy, Chip Delany, Joan Vinge and others were writing brilliant, wonderful stuff, and were changing the world. Terry Garey has pointed out that the best and practically the only feminist fiction was being written in the science fiction field. We started writing about the new women authors and set about changing our world, specifically SF fandom. There were Rooms of Ones Own at various conventions; there was a Women’s apa. There were awards bestowed upon the new generation of SF writers who were more concerned about people’s future lives than new toys. We discovered that SF was an essential resource for feminists: it gave us a place to dream about the way we’d like things to turn out. It gave us an arena in which to plan a strategy (Gomoli 1991: 8).

Susan Wood was one of the fans involved in starting ‘women and sf’ panels and ‘the rooms of one’s own’ at conventions. The feminism of the early 1970s was central to her relationship with the field. She writes about the way in which her own “click” of consciousness came in 1972, after I had been reading what the library clerk coldly informed me were “boys’ books” for some 15 years, happily substituting my female self for their male protagonists. In the December 1972 issue of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, I read “The Garbage Invasion,” by Keith Laumer. This one, unusually enough, featured a woman...She is in charge of the world; Retief is assisting her as “Acting Wildlife Officer” during a crisis. What happens? She spends all her time calling the crisis “perfectly horrid”...When Retief’s superior arrives, this woman, who is described by Retief himself as filling “a position...of considerable responsibility” with “commendable efficiency” is summarily dismissed with an order to “mix us a couple of tall cool ones...” at this point, I threw the magazine across the room (Wood 1978-79: 10).

This “*click*” of consciousness that Wood describes did not take place in a vacuum. In 1978 Susan Wood was the fan guest of honour at WisCon; and was invited to write a guest editorial for the Spring 1978 Janus, titled “People’s Programming” where she discusses her involvement with “women’s programming” at conventions, and the process of her transition within fandom from “Honorary Man to Woman Fan” which was made possible by the women’s movement (Wood 1978: 4). The process Wood describes is very close to Robin White’s account in the earlier “Are Femme Fans Human?” The difference is that in 1968 White was not troubled by being an “honorary man” or being accepted only through her association with her husband (White 1968).

Of course you can be part of science fiction and in conflict with it. Susan Wood’s “*click*” of consciousness was brought on by reading a science fiction

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18 Amateur press association.
story she hated. Many women writers of science fiction had a similar experience and as a result went on to write the kind of science fiction they wanted to read. Octavia Butler talks about consuming science fiction from an early age but not always liking what she consumed: “I started reading the magazines - that was my way into adult science fiction. I didn’t like them very much, but I kept reading them” (Roberts 1993: 45). In another interview Butler says

I didn’t decide to become a science fiction writer. It just happened. I was writing when I was 10 years old. I was writing my own little stories and when I was 12 I was watching a bad science fiction movie and decided that I could write a better story than that. And I turned off the TV and proceeded to try and I’ve been writing science fiction ever since (Beal 1986: 14).

This idea of writing in reaction, of being inspired by what you did not like as well as what you admired, is an important one. Russ too had the experience of being an avid reader of science fiction and finding many of the stories filled with women who were only “important as prizes or motives - ie. we must rescue the heroine or win the hand of the beautiful Princess”. Or the women were “active or ambitious” and therefore

evil - this literature is chockfull of cruel dowager empresses, sadistic matriarchs, evil ladies maddened by jealousy, domineering villainesses and so on (Russ [1971] 1974: 55).

As I demonstrated above, Russ used her own writing to transform these science fiction cliches and to provide different representations of women. Anne McCaffrey, in her article “Hitch Your Dragon to a Star: Romance and Glamour in Science Fiction”, also discusses her distaste for the dominant ‘images’ of women in science fiction:

[after seven years of voracious reading in the field, I’d had it up to the eyeteeth with vapid women. I rebelled. I wrote Restoree (1967) as a tongue-in-cheek protest, utilizing as many of the standard “thud and blunder” cliches as possible with one new twist - the heroine was the viewpoint character and she is always Johanna-on-the-spot (McCaffrey 1974: 282).

McCaffrey’s response was to rewrite the genre and produce her own version, “a space gothic” (McCaffrey 1974: 282).

The Great Invasion or the Great Erosion

There’s this revisionist history version where there were no women in
the field, and then in the late ‘60s Joanna Russ and Ursula K Le Guin stormed the barricades and suddenly women came pouring in like the Huns and took over. But that’s not true. There were all these women, and I know because I was reading them. They’re women like Mildred Clingerman and Shirley Jackson and Zenna Henderson and Margaret St. Clair and Carol Emshwiller, and a whole bunch I didn’t know about because they were all really C. L. Moore.

The field didn’t just have women writers - it had really good women writers. These were wonderful stories, and I don’t believe they were overlooked at the time, because when I read them they were all in the Year’s Best collections.

(Connie Willis 1992: 73)

Willis is referring to the way in which women have been figured as invading science fiction and this invasion has been located in the late 1960s or early 1970s. In the previous section I quoted a number of sources who make this claim. They link the emergence of second wave feminism and other social upheavals of the time with the transformation of science fiction. Samuel R. Delany, however, argues that it was, in fact, the 1950s which marked a radicalisation of science fiction:

The most striking element in American life in the early ’50s was McCarthy’s persecution and terrorization of Americans associated with the left, just as the Second World War had been the most striking element of the ’40s. Until McCarthy, however, the internal dialogue in science fiction was rather rarefied. Themes such as history, science, and, of course, time were seen as most significant...As McCarthyism became a threat to science fiction’s historical plurality, American science fiction began to deal directly with problems in the country. It began to touch on the racial situation, population growth, religious freedom, sexual roles, social alienation, “conformity”, and ecology (Delany 1984: 237).

Very few contemporary accounts of women and science fiction name the 1950s as a decade in which there was an ‘explosion’ or ‘invasion’ of women. As I have shown in the previous section this is something that is generally located in the late 1960s to the early 1970s. It is interesting, though, that most of the writers Willis refers to are closely associated with the 1950s. Mildred Clingerman, Zenna Henderson and Carol Emshwiller began their writing careers in that decade. Judith Merril is another writer closely associated with this period. Merril told me that in the fifties there were many more stories by women from “the woman’s point of view” appearing in science fiction magazines:

I don’t remember what I thought at the time, but I do think now that several of us were indeed writing women’s point of view for the first time in sf in those years [late forties - early fifties]. It wasn’t just me: Idris Seabright, Mildred Clingerman come to mind - maybe half a dozen others at first (Personal correspondence 13 October 1996).
A DEPARTMENT FOR SCIENCE FICTION FANS

For a number of decades the world of science fiction was pretty much exclusively a male world. While boys of all ages and castes, united by the umbilical cord of soaring impersonal imagination, dived into the works of Verne, Wells, Conan Doyle, Tom Swift and the like, the girls seemed content with Little Elite or the sub-erotic sublimations of E. M. Hull, Ethel M. Dell and other experts in the manufacture of machine-tooled glamour to provide frosting for the solid cake layers of recipes and fashion patterns and little essays on beauty culture.

Primeval clubs and gatherings of science fiction addicts were strictly Little Scorpion affairs. Only rarely did some space-minded Tomboy Taylor manage to crash them. And as a rule she had to keep her hair short and her mind on the refreshments rather than the boys if she hoped to survive in membership.

Women didn't really exist in the stories of the era either—save as opposite numbers to prophylactic Western heroes and such an occasional She-like creature as the late Stanley Weinbaum's Margaret of Urbe. Save for a few seldom-heard-from ladies like Lilith Lorraine and M. Rupert and a very few others, women did little writing in the field.

Yes, for quite a time as time is counted these days, science fiction was a world for men and men only.

The Great Invasion

However, at some indeterminate point in the nineteen thirties something happened. Just how or why it happened lies beyond our current ken but at any rate the girls got interested and began to move in. This meta-
morphosis—called either the Great Invasion or the Great Erosion depending upon the point of view—is too well and too long established to be regarded as any mere passing trend. The girls are in and in to stay.

A number of women writers, ranging from adequate to brilliant, began to turn out science fiction stories of such excellence that in magazine after magazine they grabbed their share not only of inside short stories but of lead novelettes and novels, hitherto an exclusively masculine prerogative.

Certainly the fantasies of C. L. Moore were and are as fine as any in the field. And right up alongside her work we have today that of E. Mayne Hull, Leigh Brackett, Margaret St. Clair, Judith Merril, Catherine MacLean, Betsy Curtiss, and Miriam Allen deFord, to say nothing of an ambitious plateau of youngsters who are promising to crash into print professionally at almost any moment.

Husbands and Wives

Naturally, with such a group of talented women writers practising successfully for more than a dozen years, the entire story-perspective on women in science fiction has changed. It is no longer uncommon to find a female chief protagonist in an stf story—and not a two-dimensional valentine or a cold-fire priestess-empress but a female who acts, talks and thinks like a woman alive.

Furthermore both Miss Hull and Miss Brackett married science fiction authors of renown—A. E. van Vogt and Edmond Hamilton respectively—and their influence on their talented husbands has made itself felt in the matter of endowing their menfolk's...
According to Sam Merwin Jr.\textsuperscript{19} women began to invade the field of science fiction as early as “some indeterminate point in the nineteen thirties” (Merwin 1950: 6). In a long editorial from the December 1950 issue of \textit{Thrilling Wonder Stories} Merwin tells the story of women’s invasion of science fiction. I have reproduced this editorial in full. The first page appears opposite and the second and third page overleaf.

In paragraphs 1-4 Merwin establishes the state of the field before the invasion of women. Women’s only method of surviving this men only world was to be a ‘Tomboy Taylor’. This is the method of survival that Susan Wood referred to above - becoming an “honorary man” in order to be accepted into fandom.

The next part of Merwin’s editorial is concerned with what he calls “the great invasion” of women. Merwin’s evidence for this transformation of the field is a series of women writers rather than readers or fans. He details the effects of the transformation in the next section, headed ‘Husbands and Wives”. The wives transform their ‘renowned’ science fiction husbands into better writers. This is the same story of women as nurturer and mother to men which I detailed at the end of the last chapter. Women are again given the responsibility for making science fiction “grow up”. Merwin expands on women’s role of angel of the house in the next section, “A Good Influence”.

This good influence on the males in science fiction is because within the heterosexual economy the presence of women means that the men will be more polite and neater. Merwin also locates the responsibility for women’s position within science fiction with the women not with the men. It is they who must “blossom” into a full partnership with the men. However this partnership with men is on the men’s terms as he details in the section headed, “Two Schools of

\textsuperscript{19} At the time Merwin was the editor of \textit{Thrilling Wonder Stories, Startling Stories, Wonder Story Annual} and \textit{Fantastic Story Quarterly}. Merwin was also a writer and in 1953 he published a battle of the sexes novel, \textit{The White Wolves} (it was republished in 1960 under the name \textit{The Sex War}), which I considered in chapter three.
THE READER SPEAKS
(Continued from page 7)

partner as yet—but give them time. Certainly they are well on the way.

Two Schools of Thought

There are, of course, two schools of masculine thought and feeling about this comparatively recent development in stf. One school withdraws into crusty male resentment toward feminine invasion of yet another masculine sanctum sanctorum. The other prefers mixed singles and/or doubles and makes no bones about it.

Personally, as our readers have doubtless gathered by this time, we belong to the latter group. It is our belief that this female uprisings, infus or whatever it may be termed is entirely in line with the world trend toward woman’s emancipation and equality that has endured at least since the fiery pronouncements of Mary Wollstonecraft and her companions.

The girls have won Nobel Prizes, Senatorial seats, Gaberatorial incumbencies and corporation directorships. They have served as front line soldiers, as day laborers, as top executives and horse trainers, as test pilots and parachutists. More and more they have been accepting the toil, the danger and the responsibility of our era, along with its Hollywood contracts and beauty prizes.

It occurs to us that when the first extra-Tellurian frontier is attained it will not for long be an all-male affair. If something big is going on, be it on Mars, Venus or Ganymede, the girls will be in on it.

We rather envy the space pioneers of the future in their lack of solitude. They may sit times weary of that inner tension which drives some women to talk for talk’s sake. But overall they’re going to have a lot more fun than pioneers of the dismal past.

female creations with a trio of dimensions. C. L. Moore’s sensitivity has been of immeasurable aid in giving depth and reality to the heroines and other she-creatures of her multi-faceted spouse, Henry Kuttner.

Seldom if ever has a single field of fiction been so thoroughly spanned by three such husband-wife combinations as Hal-von Veg. Brackett-Hamilton and Moore-Kuttner. Should you choose to regard this as an infiltration process, you will have to admit that the girls not only aimed high but got there.

It is our hunch that while the A-bomb, the V-2 rocket and the so-called Flying Saucer have had much to do with giving science fiction a far wider field of reader interest than the authors, editors and publishers conceived of a decade ago, it is these women writers who have played a vital role in making stf acceptable to a more adult market.

The space opera of ten, fifteen or twenty years ago—however clever its pseudo-scientific gadgetry, however vast its galactic scope—was basically little more than an elaborate Tom Swift or Rover Boys story. Its characters—we use the word in an entirely figurative sense—were mere appendages to its machinery and its dialogue was hopeless gee-whiz sub-adolescent.

A Good Influence

We think the girls had a large hand in fixing all that. Space opera—fine, but they wanted it peopled with folks who aroused emotional belief. They got them.

As these writers were establishing themselves other young women began to make their presence felt in the reader’s columns of this and other stf magazines. They leaped recklessly into hitherto stag fan-controversey, thereby living up same not only through the freshness of their approach but through the rebuttals they drew from protesting males.

Fan clubs and fan magazines began more and more to develop feminine brightness and neatness and the boys, forced to look to their laurels, lost much of that lingering disdainful which seems inevitably to accompany the all-male in print or in person. After all, why does the peacock preen? Hardly for other peacocks.

The girls have not yet bloomed into full
(Continued on page 140)

Second and third pages of the Sam Merwin Jr. editorial, Thrilling Wonder Stories December 1950, pp. 7 & 140.
Thought”.

At the beginning of Merwin’s editorial the invasion is located in the 1930s. At the end it has become a “comparatively recent development in sf” which Merwin links to feminism and “woman’s emancipation” generally. Merwin, is in favour of it because it benefits men. He also imagines a future in space for both women and men. However, like Dr Richardson’s ideas for the exploration of Mars which I discussed in the previous chapter, Merwin sees the men as the “space pioneers” while the women are their companions.

For Merwin women entering the field can be characterised as “the Great Invasion or the Great Erosion depending upon the point of view” (Merwin 1950: 6). Either women are an invading army or they are an influence which has corrupted science fiction. It is difficult to choose between these two characterisations of the effect of women on science fiction. Brian Aldiss in 1973 was also figuring women as the salvation of science fiction:

I concur with Harlan Ellison; much of the best writing in science fiction today is being done by women (and he didn’t even mention Christine Brooke-Rose, author of Such, 1966, and a fine modern novelist).

What has made the difference is the disappearance of the Philistine-male-chauvinist-pig attitude, pretty well dissipated by the revolutions of the mid-sixties; and the slow fade of the Gernbackian notion that sf is all hardware. Science fiction, in other words, has come back to a much more central position in the world of art. The all-male escapist power fantasy had at one time devoured all but what we have called the Huxleyan branch, those writings which occurred only irregularly as specific social criticism. Science fiction has returned from the Ghetto of Retarded Boyhood; and, truth to tell, it seems not to have suffered from its imprisonment (Aldiss 1973: 306).

This last sentence is bizarre. On the one hand Aldiss locates science fiction prior to women in the “Ghetto of Retarded Boyhood”. On the other hand science fiction does not seem to be any the worse for this “imprisonment”.

Aldiss’ position is unchanged in the 1986 expanded version of Billion Year Spree, the Trillion Year Spree, which he wrote with David Wingrove. They locate the “Great Invasion” which Merwin located in the thirties, forty years later:

\[\text{[In the seventies there was a great influx of women writers. The revolution they began is still under way and is having an effect on the kind of genre we now enjoy. By the end of the seventies it had become clear that SF was no longer a kind of juvenile men's club. Women were to be seen at the bar. SF's unexpressed half was beginning to speak out. Angrily, skilfully, persuasively, sometimes - as in all new causes - with ill-considered overemphasis, but in many instances speaking with a new voice, a new intonation (Aldiss and}]


Aldiss and Wingrove’s women “at the bar”, like those of Merwin almost forty years earlier, have done the boys a favour by arriving in science fiction.

It is interesting to look at the pronouns in this passage. Who is this “us” and “them” that are referred to? “They” are, clearly, the women writers. “Their” arrival from the outside is seen here as a blessing, for “they” arrive to civilise sf turning it into “the kind of genre we [boys like Aldiss and Wingrove] now enjoy”. Women writers in this passage are like the Victorian Angel of the House, taking care of the domestic sphere and making sure the master of the house is comfortable. Women become “SF’s unexpressed half”. The acceptance of an “unexpressed”, invisible, absent body of women until the “revolution” of the 1970s serves to rewrite and gloss over the complexities of the period prior to this “influx” or “explosion” of women in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In 1982 Isaac Asimov makes the same argument as Merwin in an article for Vogue called the “Feminization of Sci-Fi”, Asimov argues that this “feminization has broadened and deepened the field to the point where science-fiction novels can now appear on the bestseller lists” (Asimov 1982: 608). For Asimov “feminization” has rescued the field from being the “strongly masculine field” that it once was where the readers were

almost all young men [who were]...to a large extent, rather withdrawn young men who either had not yet come to be at ease with members of opposite sex or were actively afraid of them (Asimov 1982: 558).

This description, of course, would not apply to the Isaac Asimov of the late thirties who wrote the letters I examined in the previous chapter. Asimov ends his article by arguing that both sexes benefit from the “feminization of science fiction”: “It’s as I have always said: Liberate women - and men will be liberated as well” (Asimov 1982: 608).

The sf critic, writer and journalist, Charles Platt gives a less positive version of the arrival of the female hordes into science fiction. His is an account of “The Great Erosion”. In a piece titled “The Rape of Science Fiction” (1989), women are among the rapists eroding science fiction’s manhood:
A new “soft” science fiction emerged, largely written by women: Joan Vinge, Vonda McIntyre, Ursula Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Kate Wilhelm, Carol Emshwiller. Their concern for human values was admirable, but they eroded science fiction’s one great strength that had distinguished it from all other fantastic literature: its implicit claim that events described could actually come true.

Of course, if you had a whimsical, muddled view of the world - if you didn’t know anything about science, and didn’t care - soft science fiction could seem perfectly plausible. And many new readers related to it in these terms. Unlike the old core-audience, they didn’t enjoy mechanistic, technical stuff. They preferred mythic fables about dreamsnakes and snow queens (Platt 1989: 46).

He ends by saying that Vonda McIntyre and Joan D. Vinge are responsible: “for softening and sweetening science fiction, turning literary mind-food into conceptual cotton-candy that corrupted the tastes of naive adolescents” (Platt 1989: 49).

In Platt’s formulation the difference between “hard” science fiction and “soft” science fiction is embodied: men are “hard”, women are “soft”, and therefore, an eroding influence on the whole field. His arguments are not new as I demonstrated in the previous chapter. The science fiction writers Lisa Goldstein, Pat Murphy, and Karen Joy Fowler point out this equation in an interview by Wendy Counsil in the August 1990 Science Fiction Eye.

GOLDSTEIN: Well if we’re going to be in Science Fiction Eye this is something that really pissed me off. Charles Platt wrote an article...about who killed science fiction and he mentions Vonda McIntyre and Joan Vinge. And I was stunned! Here are two women who, as far as I know, haven’t been writing nearly as much as they should in the field, except for Star Trek novels and movie novelisation, and Platt is still annoyed that these women won major awards ten years ago. He’s annoyed that “soft science” has crept into the field in these women’s work. Like anthropology.

COUNSEL: And biology.

GOLDSTEIN: And biology! I know; it’s funny how the definition of “soft science” changes depending on if it’s a man or a woman writing it.

MURPHY: It’s because biology deals with soft, squishy living things.

GOLDSTEIN: Yeah, if a woman writes about it, physics is a soft science (Counsil 1990: 27).

Goldstein, Fowler and Murphy comment on the opposition between hard and soft sf:

FOWLER: You know, this whole hard science/soft science debate has begun to trouble me, because as I read more and more hard science fiction, I find less and less hard science in it. I don’t understand.

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20 Fowler and Murphy are the founding mothers of the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award.
GOLDSTEIN: There's no science in it! That Gibson stuff... You know Doug [Mr. Lisa Goldstein] reads this stuff and he's a computer programmer. He says the guy doesn't really seem to know anything about computers.

COUNSEL: Even Larry Niven has admitted that he often isn't writing hard science fiction, that he's writing science fantasy, because there is no such thing as travelling faster than the speed of light.

MURPHY: In a recent article in SF Eye, Charles Platt talked about science fiction back in the fifties. He claimed that back then science fiction was based on hard science.

Reading that made me start a survey - though the earthquake stopped me - on comparing four magazines from fifties to four from the eighties. I was going to categorize the stories: Faster than light travel? Science fantasy. A race of aliens living at the centre of the earth? Science fantasy, or just fantasy. I was going to compare the two groups of magazines to see how many hard science concepts there were in the 50s.

The first story I read in a 50s magazine was about aliens from the center of the earth who were using anti-gravity to steal the gold from Fort Knox. I never did find much of a hard science basis to that one.

GOLDSTEIN: But it was written by a man, right?

MURPHY: Yes, it was. No hard science; there was, however, a sexy babe in it (Counsel 1990: 23).

My own reading of science fiction magazines from 1926 up to the present day confirmed Pat Murphy's impression. Hard science fiction has always been under-represented in science fiction. Indeed the idea of science, closely associated with the masculine, has always been central to the genre but at the same time has always been lamented for its absence. As I demonstrated in chapter two, a continual theme in many of the letters I read is the absence or inaccuracy of the science in the published stories. The violence inherent in Platt's very title, "The Rape of Science Fiction" becomes in his text a "softening", "sweetening", a "corrupt[i]on". Women become a polluting influence whose very touch defiles.

The changes wrought in science fiction from the late sixties appear quite different in feminist accounts of the period. Rather than Aldiss and Wingrove's "influx" and "revolution" and Platt's "rape" Lefanu writes instead of an "intervention":

Previous to the intervention by feminist writers in the late sixties and early seventies science fiction reflected, in its content at least, what could be called masculine concerns, based around the central theme of space exploration and the development of technology: masculine concerns because access to these areas was effectively denied women in the real world, and science fiction, like all writing is written from within a particular ideology (Lefanu 1988: 3).

This "intervention," however, comes from the inside not the outside: "[f]eminist SF...is part of science fiction while struggling against it" (Lefanu 1988: 5).
Lefanu's women in science fiction are neither corrupting science fiction nor invading it.

Connie Willis also finds no horde of women storming the barricades. There was instead a 'tradition' of women's writing within science fiction. She writes in her editorial for *Asimov's Science Fiction* that the fact that there were women writing science fiction before the 1960s and 1970s was brought sharply home to me when I was looking up the stories I'd loved as a teenager. I'd never paid any attention to what the names of the stories were, let alone the authors, and, as a result, I found myself constantly saying, "there's this great story, I don't know what it was called or who wrote it, but it was about this town where they didn't have doctors..."

I finally got fed up with my own ignorance and went back to my hometown public library to look all these stories up in the rebound copies of *Year's Best SF, Fifth Series*, etc., that I'd read them in in the first place.

...I was surprised at how many of them had been written by women: Kit Reed and Mildred Clingerman and Zenna Henderson and Shirley Jackson and Margaret St. Clair and Judith Merrill (Willis 1992: 4-5).

Willis' reading history was crowded with stories written by women that were themselves crowded with representations of women. As a result she didn't know there were any barricades. It never occurred to me that SF was a man's field that had to be broken into. How could it be with all those women writers? How could it be when Judith Merrill was the one editing all those *Year's Best SF*s?(Willis 1992: 8).

Willis thus locates herself in a tradition of women writing science fiction. That she is part of such a tradition is so obvious that there is no need for her to say so explicitly. But access to a tradition of women and science fiction depends on what you were reading. It would have been just as possible to have grown up reading science fiction and read none of these writers as was the case for Judith Raphael Buckrich and Nancy Kress.

**Sweet Little Domestic Stories**

If there were any women in the field before that [the late 1960s and early 1970s] (which there weren't), they had to slink around using male pseudonyms and hoping they wouldn't get caught. And if they did write under their own names (which they didn't), it doesn't count anyway because they only wrote sweet little domestic stories.

Babies. They wrote mostly stories about babies.

(Willis 1992: 4)

The implication of Platt's arguments in "The Rape of Science Fiction" (1989) is
AUTHOR, AUTHOR!

WALLACE WEST, a veteran hand in science fiction, is a public relations expert in the oil industry. He's written numerous articles relating to the fuel problem of tomorrow, and is thoroughly familiar with the types of situations that arise in promotion campaigns—which adds to the credibility of the fantastic centennial described in this story.

DAVID GORDON, though not a pen-name for Gordon R. Dickson, is like Dickson in one respect: he has the light touch. It may be just a touch, as in “The Convincer”, or it may be uproarious, as in “Look Out, Duck!” And, as with Dickson, there’s always solid meat, along with the humor in Gordon’s stories.

CAROL EMSHWILLER’s stories do not show the “typical” characteristics of tales by some female science-fictionists. They aren’t attempts to swashbuckle so that readers will think she’s a man; nor are they heart-throb-and-diapers accounts such as you find in the slicks. They’re individual, and a needed reminder that God created science fictionists male and female, too!

ISAAC ASIMOV loves to see his name in print, even though this runs the horrible risk of misspelling it. Most editors and readers also love to see it, too. On the other hand, MICHAEL ZUROY is just starting to take the chance of having his name mishandled in type—but if he continues along the line of “Wheels”, I think you’ll agree that the risk will increase.

"Author! Author!” section from Future, February 1958, p. 5.
that women do not belong in sf because of their softening influence. In this section I look at the suggestion that much of the earliest science fiction written by women was overly concerned with the domestic and that this is, of itself, a bad thing. Connie Willis refers to this method for dismissing the writing of women in her parody which heads this section. Willis is referring to a dismissal that was happening at the time she wrote her editorial. However, this notion of women’s sf being “sweet little domestic stories” was already current at the time of their publication in the late forties and fifties. Anne McCaffrey, referring to the work of Judith Merril whose first and perhaps best known story, “That Only A Mother”, was published in 1948, writes that at the time Merril’s stories were referred to as “diaper stories” (McCaffrey 1974: 280). The editorial blurb about Carol Emshwiller from the “Author! Author!” section of Future magazine reproduced opposite also attests that the “diaper” label is not a later development.

In a 1962 review of a story by Rosel George Brown, William Atheling, Jr. (pen-name of James Blish) writes:

Mrs Brown is just about the only one of F&SF’s former gaggle of housewives who doesn’t strike me as verging on the feebleminded; in fact I think her work has attracted less attention than it deserves (Atheling [1964] 1974: 128).

Both Russ and Wood continue this dismissal of women’s sf stories of the late forties and fifties as being “sweet little domestic stories”. However, it is important to put their critique in context. As I argued in chapter one the idea that science fiction is a genre within which anything is possible is an extremely important one to criticism of the field. If extrapolation about anything is possible why is there such a failure to imagine anything new? Russ makes this point in “The Image of Women in Science Fiction” which is one of the earliest feminist critiques of science fiction:

[...] we would think science fiction the perfect literary mode in which to explore (and explode) our assumptions about ‘innate’ values and ‘natural’ social arrangements, in

21 This review first appeared in August 1962.
short our ideas about Human Nature, Which Never Changes. Some of this had been done. But speculation about the innate personality differences between men and women, about family structure, about sex, in short about gender roles, does not exist at all (Russ [1971] 1974: 54).

Russ felt that the “new” societies being invented did none of these things. They were either a kind of “intergalactic suburbia...the American middle class with a little window dressing” or worse a society based on “an idealised and simplified” past where men are men and women are in the background (Russ [1971] 1974: 54-55). After talking about men writers of sf Russ discusses science fiction written by women. Russ divides their work into four categories:

(1) *Ladies’ magazine fiction* - in which the sweet, gentle, intuitive heroine solves an interstellar crisis by mending her slip or doing something equally domestic after her big heroic husband has failed. Zenna Henderson sometimes writes like this (Russ [1971] 1974: 56).

The other three categories are galactic suburbia, space opera\(^22\) and avant-garde fiction (Russ [1971] 1974: 56). I only examine Russ’ first category of “ladies’ magazine fiction”. There is a strong inference in her description of this category that the domestic is intrinsically uninteresting, unheroic and somehow foolish in science fiction, and that the ways in which it has been written in science fiction only reproduce the stereotype of housewife.

This view is shared by one of the best-known female pulp writers Leigh Brackett:

[d]omesticity bored the bejesus out of me. Adventure stories were what I liked to read, so they were what I wrote. If I put a woman in any of my stories she was there because she was doing something, not worrying about the price of eggs or who’s in love with who! (qtd. in Bradley 1977-78: 17).

Russ’ reference above to the heroine solving a crisis by “mending her slip” sounds remarkably like Zenna Henderson’s story “Subcommittee” (1962)\(^23\) which Susan

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\(^{22}\) Of space opera, Russ writes:

(3) *Space opera* - strange but true. Leigh Brackett is one example. Very rarely the protagonist turns out to be a sword-wielding, muscular aggressive woman - but the human ethos of the world does not change, nor do the stereotyped personalities assigned to the secondary roles, particularly the female ones (Russ [1971] 1974: 56).

Russ finds it peculiar that women would write such fiction. This view is also expressed in the blurb about Carol Emshwiller from *Future Magazine* which declares approvingly that her stories “aren’t attempts to swashbuckle so that readers will think she’s a man” (*Future* February 1958: 5).

\(^{23}\) The story was first published in the July 1962 issue of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. 
Wood discusses in her article “Women and Science Fiction”. On the one hand Wood dismisses the story as “silly” and “sentimental”. On the other Wood argues that “Subcommittee” makes an important point. The men are automatically suspicious and hostile, thinking only of gaining power over each other. The women, with their shared concern for the nurture of life, quickly establish communication and trust (Wood 1978-79: 12).

Wood’s more favourable assessment of the story is embedded in an essentialism which revalues ‘female’ qualities as positive and ‘male’ qualities as negative rather than the reverse. However, she is still caught in the flipside of those valuations, wherein a concern with many women’s everyday domestic lives is viewed as “trivial” and “sentimental” and “boring”. At the same time, Wood wants to think about ways in which science fiction can talk about those women “whose primary concern is the family” (Wood 1978-79: 12).

Wood’s second reading of “Subcommittee” as a text that makes an important point about conflict resolution, is pushed further by Farah Mendlesohn in her article, “Gender, Power, and Conflict Resolution: ‘Subcommittee’ by Zenna Henderson” (1994). Mendlesohn argues that the story is “revealing as a critique of power structures and the language of power and, finally, as a study of gender” (Mendlesohn 1994: 124). Earth and alien invaders, the Linjeni, are at war, Serena has accompanied her General husband to the negotiations. While he spends all day attempting to secure a settlement with the aliens, Serena spends her days looking after her son, Splinter. Splinter makes friends with one of the alien children, Doovey. This friendship gives Serena the opportunity to make contact with one of the alien wives whom she calls Mrs. Pink. The time the women spends together allows Serena to learn some Linjeni and to discover that this alien people have not come to invade Earth but in search of salt, which is essential to their ability to reproduce. With this knowledge Serena breaks into the negotiations and by displaying the slip which Mrs. Pink made for her, she is able to prove to the men that common ground between humans and the aliens is possible.

Russ characterises heroines like Serena as, “sweet”, “gentle” and
“intuitive”. Their ability to deal with situations is something innate to them not something achieved by skill. Mendlesohn argues that “at no time is Serena portrayed as intuitive as such: she makes no guesses; rather, she listens and learns” (Mendlesohn 1994: 125). She is operating in a different social milieu from her General husband. Unlike him, Serena:

exists within a world of morning coffee and neighbourliness, with its own mores and codes of conduct. Her reaction to the stranger, therefore, is - metaphorically - to knock on the door with a cake. This is not feminine intuition or any innate feminine gentleness, but it is integral to a complex social community with its own values and demands (Mendlesohn 1994: 125).

In dismissing “sweet little domestic stories”, these early examples of feminist sf criticism by Russ and Wood accept the marginalisation of women’s writing. These are the very grounds for dismissing women’s writing that Russ outlines so brilliantly in her 1983 How toSuppressWomen’sWriting: “she wrote it but look what she wrote about” (Russ [1983] 1994: 48). This dismissal also serves to discourage others from going back and reading some of those “sweet little domestic stories”. For instance, I avoided Zenna Henderson, Judith Merril and other writers of the period because the accounts of 1950s women’s science fiction I read made their stories sound dull. It was only after reading Connie Willis’ “The Women SF Doesn’t See” editorial for Asimov’s that I finally made an effort to track down some of the “domestic” writing of women in sf in the 1950s.

Roz Kaveney also argues that pre-1960s science fiction by women was overly sweet and concerned with the domestic:

The women SF writers of this period tended to be marginalised in one of three ways: one, editors were keen on stories which were ‘feminine’ in the sense of being saccharine; the work of Zenna Henderson and Judith Merril does admittedly extend the range of SF material to cover issues like nurture but does so with that sentimentality which the SF of the time tended to confound with emotional truth. Two, women were encouraged to write light jokey fiction like that of Evelyn E. Smith, fiction which keeps a low temperature even in its humour. In some of the work of Evelyn Smith and of Margaret St. Clair there is a quiet anger from which Russ probably learned, her own early fiction appeared towards the end of this time and was in more or less that vein (Kaveney 1989: 84).

There is some evidence to support Kaveney’s claim that certain editors expected women to write certain kinds of stories and that it was difficult to publish other kinds of stories. Wood writes that
THAT ONLY A MOTHER

BY JUDITH MERRIL

A new (and delicious) science-fiction author gives a slightly different slant on one of the old themes—perhaps the bravest letter little story needles.

Married mothers were automatic. No way through the house without the tinniest sound from the little feet would start bridgette coughing. The doctor had said to eat as much breakfast as she could and here the paper out of the lacrosse machine. She kicked the long sheet against the "National News" section, and propped it on the bathroom shelf to save while she brushed her teeth.

No accidents. No man. No bed. No tears. No news at all. At least none that had been officially released to publication. Now, Maggie, don't get started on that.

Maggie reached over to the other side of the bed where Hilda should have been. Her hand touched the empty pillow, and then she gave a little start, wondering that the old lady should remain after so many years. Maggie tried to pull up, only to hear her own name. She wondered if it was any worse, and divined out of bed with a pleasant awareness of her seeming rather thinly bundled.

Maggie made no other response. As the way through the backstairs, she pressed the button that would start breakfast cooking, the doctor had said.

"Whatever you write, and tell me nothing! I'm finished, of course, but, well, not enough to mention these things, but are you certain the doctor was right?" Hilda had said all that morning or whenever it was all these years, and I know you are busy, as big, but nothing, and he said he was not yet ready assuming that might be dangerous, but you know he used to talk to the Ridge. Don't you.

THAT ONLY A MOTHER

Title page illustration of Judith Merril's "That Only A Mother" by Alejandro, Astounding Science Fiction, June 1948.

A well-known genre story, the medical news, said Hilda, was no different from the old doctor's. The doctor's was ready to tell with absolute certainty, if first known, whether the child would be normal, or at least whether the evolution would likely produce anything freakish. The worst cases of the race, at any rate, could be prevented. Of course, of course, the same thing applied to all these.

"And you set Maggie, stoppit?" The radiologist said Hilda's job couldn't have a pressure. And the hundred were more past... No, no.

THAT ONLY A MOTHER
In 1948 John W. Campbell [editor of Astounding] commissioned Judith Merrill's first science fiction story, asking her to provide "the woman's point of view" on scientific developments.24 The story, "That Only a Mother", deals with the effects of radiation in terms of a mother's blind love for her mutant daughter. The galactic house wives of 2050, happily dusting the robochef in the living unit while hubby tends the yeast farms, might represent a failure of social extrapolation, but they were, perhaps, a little more believable as human beings than all the princesses and priestesses. Perhaps (Wood 1978-79: 10).

Wood's shift from discussing "That Only a Mother" to talking about the "galactic house wives of 2050" implies that "That Only" is this kind of a story. Certainly the story was presented as being from the feminine point of view when it first appeared as the title page opposite demonstrates.

Willis offers a different assessment:

Although 'That Only' does have a baby in it, it hardly classifies as a domestic tale. It's a story about radiation, infanticide, and desperate self-delusion that manages to be poignant and horrific at the same time (Willis 1992: 8).

Judith Merrill gave me a different account of the story's genesis when I spoke to her at WisCon 20 in May of 1996. Merrill told me that Campbell did not commission the story. The following account comes from the working draft of Merrill's memoirs:

In August 1947 I went to Philadelphia for my first science fiction convention. At a very drunk hotel room party [Theodore] Sturgeon introduced me to the great editor, John Campbell. It was friendship - forever at first sight.

"John," I said, slurring only slightly, "John, I wan' tell you, I wrote a story so good I can' sell it to you, 'cause you couldn' pay enough for it." (Astounding paid top rates for a pulp, two to three cents a word).

"You' right," he said, with his own bit of a slur. "If you' story is that good, I can' pay enough for it." We beamed at each other.

Next morning I woke up more horrified than hung over - but six months later, when it had finished its rounds of the slicks...John did buy the story. It was published in the June, 1948 issue of Astounding (Merril 1996 work in progress).

Merril sent him another story which Campbell rejected saying that he preferred to see her writing stories from the woman's point of view. Merrill was less than pleased by this. She writes:

The woman's point of view request came in response to the second submission I sent him. I'd have to find the files to give you a title and/or exact quote, but it was a story with a male protagonist.

Yes, which ever it was, it did sell elsewhere. And yes, the request pissed me off. I felt

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everything I wrote was a woman’s point of view, but the only stuff I had (and to this
day, have) not been able to sell were my attempts to write the woman’s point of view as
perceived by the publishing world, i.e. romances, confessions, slick magazine stories!
I did not feel constrained to write woman’s point of view for Campbell or anyone else. I
submitted everywhere, but the only editor I ever consciously wrote for was Anthony
Boucher, and this was largely because he never attempted to superimpose his values on
mine (Personal correspondence 13 October 1996).

Marion Zimmer Bradley’s publishing experiences during the 1950s were
different. In “An Evolution of Consciousness: Twenty-five Years of Writing about
Women in Science Fiction” (1977) Bradley writes that

with the failure of both Web of Darkness and Window on the Night to find
publication,25 I realized that if I were going to write for anyone’s edification other than
my own, I would have to write about men; I would have to write novels with heroes
rather than heroines. This was simply the rules of the game, the economic facts of life in
the market (Bradley 1977: 35).

As late as the 1970s Joanna Russ and Suzy McKee Charnas had enormous
difficulty getting their women-centred novels, The Female Man (1975) and
Motherlines (1978) published.

One of Margaret St Clair’s stories, “Short in the Chest” (1954),26 does
indeed evince the “quiet anger” which Kaveney mentions above (Kaveney 1989:
84). However I would argue that it is closer to biting satire than “light jokey
fiction” (Kaveney 1989: 84). St. Clair experienced some difficulty in getting the
story published:

In the fifties and sixties sex was, if not quite a no-no, something one had to be careful
about. A short, funny story of mine, “Short in the Chest,” was rejected by Horace Gold
with the comment, “if you want to put me out of business, Margaret, I wish you’d do it
with French postcards” (St Clair 1981: 151).

The story is definitely not a “sweet little domestic story”. It is set in the
future where everyone in the USA is in the armed forces and all the different
services hate each other. A Marine, Major Sonya Briggs, goes to a huxley - a
computerised psychiatrist - because of problems she has been having “dighting” -
having sex with - a member of Air. She asks the huxley if it is “true that the

25 These are two novels Bradley wrote in the 1950s that were “almost entirely concerned with women”
(Bradley 1977: 35).
26 The story was first published in the July 1954 issue of Fantastic Universe under the pseudonym Idris
Seabright. It has been anthologised many times since. Most recently in Pamela Sargent’s Women of
dighting system was set up by a group of psychologists after they'd made a
survey of inter-service tension?" (St Clair [1954] 1995: 132). The drug they take
to get aroused, a "Watson," does not work for her. The huxley she goes to see has
a shot in its chest and advises her to shoot the next "yuk from Air" she is
assigned for dighting. At first she thinks that that "wouldn't reduce inter-service
tension effectively" (St Clair [1954] 1995: 137) but then she decides to follow the
huxley's advice. The huxley, it turns out

had had interviews with twelve young women so far, and it had given them all the same
advice it had given Major Briggs. Even a huxley with a shot in its chest might have
foreseen that the final result of its counselling would be catastrophic for Marine (St Clair

A story which is more typical of the kind of writing that Russ refers to as
"intergalactic suburbia" than "Short in the Chest" is Garen Drussai's "Woman's
Work" (1956). The editor's blurb describes the story as an extrapolation of "the
housewife in an age of the ultimate development of competitive salesmanship"
(Druussai 1956: 104). In the far future, the housewives' 'woman's work' is to deal
with the salesmen. As Sheila deals with the first salesman at her door (at four
am) and his array of gizmos, such as "a pneumatic float" to lull her into a "state
of acceptance" she is always thinking of her husband, Hal, "lying there in the
bedroom - trusting her to do her best" (Drussai 1956: 105). At the end of the
story it becomes apparent that Hal, too is a salesman. As he goes off to work,

[s]he looked numbly after him, thinking of the hours ahead till she could escape to the
shops and shows that made up her day. Then she straightened up determinedly.
After all, this was woman's work (Drussai 1956: 106).

The story then ends the way it started: "[t]he alarm on her wrist was giving off
small electric shocks. Someone was coming up the walk!" (Drussai 1956: 106).

"Woman's Work" takes for granted that the stereotypical household
economy of white middle America of the 1950s will remain unchanged into the
future. In Russ words, "assumptions about 'innate' values and 'natural' social

27 The story was first published in the August 1956 issue of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction.
arrangements", are neither "explored" nor "exploded" (Russ [1971] 1974: 54). "Woman's Work" can also be read as a satire of its present, overdrawing the stultifying pointlessness of middle class 'woman's' work of the period. For all science fiction's utopic striving towards various futures, it will always be as much about its now as about any imagined future.

It is difficult, however, to know if this reading of the text was available at the time of its publication. *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* where the story first appeared did not have a letters column and I have found no discussion of the story or its author anywhere else. There is a sense in which my historical distance from the text makes it easier for me to read it as a satire of what may have been seen as the suffocating monotony of fifties suburbia. However, I can imagine how a steady diet of the narrow confines of stories like Drussai's could be maddening. The cumulative effect of reading through countless pulp science fiction stories from the 1920s through to the early seventies was that it became much easier to understand what it was that Russ and Wood and McCaffrey were reacting to.

The coding of the work by women of this decade as "domestic" is part of the same move that sees women coded as the "love interest". It reduces women's ability to signify within science fiction outside the bedroom or the kitchen. The acceptance of this coding fits in with the accounts of women and science fiction which figure women invading science fiction from outside and bringing their feminine concerns such as domesticity with them. This is the same separation between the public and private spheres which I discussed in the previous chapter.

In the next chapter I examine the life of James Tiptree, Jr. or rather, of Alice James Raccoona Tiptree Davey Hastings Bradley Sheldon Jr. This biography allows me to examine the battle of the sexes within science fiction from the point of view of one of its participants, who, so to speak, participated from both sides. The life/lives of Alice James Raccoona Tiptree Davey Hastings Bradley Sheldon Jr is part of the rich terrain out of which the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award emerged. I discuss the Award in the subsequent chapter.
“I'm too big but I love to play”

Stories about James Tiptree, Jr.

“You will in the future have compensations for defeat.”
“I know...You are going to tell me that in a hundred years the readers of the whole world will have my books standing on their shelves to take them down with reverence and delight. I have had it said to me before.”
“But wrongly said, Milord, wrongly said...In a hundred years your works will be read much less than today. They will collect dust on the shelves.”
“I do not much mind,” said Lord Byron.
“But one book,” said Pipistrello, “will be rewritten and reread, and will each year in a new edition be set upon the shelf.”
“What book is that?” Lord Byron asked.
“The Life of Lord Byron,” said Pipistrello.


In the next chapter I demonstrate that the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award is a site where the battle of the sexes in science fiction continues. However, unlike many of the earlier battle of the sexes texts it is a site in which feminism is celebrated and the battle of the sexes is reworked and transformed. The Tiptree Award takes its name and its inspiration from the work and lives of James Tiptree, Jr. In this chapter I sketch out some of the stories that surround Alice Sheldon/James Tiptree, Jr. in order to begin thinking about how these stories have become part of a feminist sf mythos and so how these stories have helped make the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award possible.

For almost ten years James Tiptree, Jr. published science fiction stories which had a tremendous impact on the field, earning prizes and critical acclaim. No-one had met the writer but many had received letters from ‘Tip’ and curiosity about ‘Tip’ was enormous. During that period Raccoona Sheldon (from here on Raccoona) also published science fiction stories, though not nearly as prolifically as Tiptree. In 1976 it was revealed that James Tiptree, Jr. and Raccoona ‘were’ Alice Sheldon. So James Tiptree, Jr., and also Raccoona, were written into creation by Alice Sheldon: perhaps together they form a literary hermaphrodite.
Any discussion of Alice Sheldon/James Tiptree, Jr./Raccoona finds itself dealing with the problem of pronouns. Do I simply use the name Alice Sheldon to refer to writing under Tiptree’s name as well as writing under the name of Raccoona as well as writing under the name Alice Sheldon? Is Tiptree’s writing ‘his’ writing, ‘her’ writing or ‘their’ writing? This problem crops up frequently in writing about Tiptree et al. Jeffrey Smith begins his article “The Short Happy Life of James Tiptree, Jr.”:

How does one attempt a biography of someone who is more persons than person? When was James Tiptree, Jr. born? Was it 1915, when his alter-ego Alice Sheldon (then Bradley) came into the world? Was it at that childhood date when she discovered science fiction? Was it in 1967, when she began writing sf under the Tiptree name? Or not until March of 1968, when Analog published “Birth of a Salesman”? (Smith 1978: 8).

In writing about this “someone who is more persons than person” it is very difficult to decide just how to refer to ‘them’. Of course no-one is a unified subject: “[h]uman beings are characterised both by continuous personal identity and by discontinuous personal diversity” (Davies & Harre 1990: 46). At least for most people, there are no more than one or two names to refer to this “continuous personal identity” and “discontinuous personal diversity.” For the subject of this chapter, however, there are far more than one or two names and whatever shorthand I choose will give the stories I tell a certain emphasis.

Le Guin in her introduction to Tiptree’s Star Songs of an Old Primate (1978) names her/him Alice James Raccoona Tiptree Sheldon Jr. Amanda Boulter uses this naming in the title of her 1995 article, “Alice James Raccoona Tiptree Sheldon Jr.: Textual Personas in the Short Fiction of Alice Sheldon”. In this article, Boulter uses the pronoun ‘she’ to refer to Alice and Raccoona Sheldon, and the pronoun ‘he’, to refer to James Tiptree, Jr. This allows Boulter to set out the difficulties of a straightforward mapping of the ‘pen-name’ of James Tiptree Jr. on to the body of Alice Sheldon. Boulter closely examines Tiptree and Raccoona’s short fiction and the way these texts have been read by a variety of critics in terms of the human body that was presumed to have produced them. She argues that frequently the perceived feminism of Tiptree’s writing rests in the knowledge that he is really a woman.
I also follow this practice of referring to Tiptree as ‘he’. However the focus of this chapter is not the published science fiction stories of James and Raccoona. I am examining a cluster of texts that have built up around, and constructed the person(s) who was born Alice Hastings Bradley in 1915 and died Alice Sheldon in 1987. I examine a set of stories for which a series of names form a peg. To do this, I expand the title of Boulter’s paper, adding a few more names so that her/his name becomes: “Alice James Raccoona Tiptree Davey Hastings Bradley Sheldon Jr.”

I can not remember where or when I first came across the story of James Tiptree, Jr. Perhaps it was in Joanna Russ’ How to Suppress Women’s Writing, where, after discussing the changing reception of Emily Bronte’s Wuthering Heights depending on the perceived sex of the author, she gives a more recent example:

It would be nice to think that the exaltation of male authorship via the derogation of female authorship is dying out. In 1975, however, Robert Silverberg...introduced the collected works of a new, unknown and pseudonymous fellow writer as follows...“there is to me something ineluctably masculine about Tiptree’s writing...”

In 1977 it was revealed that James Tiptree, Jr. was the pen name of a sixty-one-year-old retired biologist named Alice Sheldon - who had found a pseudonym on a jar of marmalade while shopping in the supermarket (Russ [1984] 1988: 43-44).

Here are the bare bones of the fable of the woman, Alice Sheldon, writing sf as a man, James Tiptree, Jr., who ‘proved’ there was no essential difference between the way men and women write, but only in the way that what they write is actually read.

Part of the fable, of course, was what a joke the revelation of Tiptree’s ‘true’ sex was on the science fiction boys, particularly poor old Robert Silverberg and his oft-quoted observation about Tiptree’s Hemingwayesque ineluctable masculinity. This is in part what was behind the choice of Tiptree’s name for the first science fiction prize to be named for a woman. There is more to the fable because Alice Sheldon had done many of the masculine things ascribed to her when she was him. Sheldon worked for the CIA, in her forties she had gone back to university to earn a PhD. in psychology, she had spent her childhood in Africa and Asia, and so she had an
easy familiarity with such ‘masculine’ matters as guns, airplanes, the interior workings of automobile engines, and the military/espionage world” (Silverberg 1993: 5).

In reading these stories by and about Tiptree I found that I was not able to make a simple distinction between the stories of the life of the writer and the writer’s published stories. The more I read the more I needed to read. As I read many interviews with Alice Sheldon/James Tiptree, Jr. - they were never with Raccoona - I became increasingly fascinated by her/his stories of her/his life, of lives really, by the series of names and disguises which did not begin with James Tiptree, Jr. In this chapter I explore each of these lives in turn. Thus I devote a section each to Alice Hastings Bradley, to Alice Davey, to Alice Sheldon, to James Tiptree, Jr. and to Raccoona Sheldon. In the final section, The Revelation, I examine the impact of the discovery that James Tiptree, Jr. ‘is’ Alice Sheldon.

Alice Hastings Bradley b. 1915

And suddenly mother realized that Africa was only another fairy tale
to Alice, whose whole world was all half fairy.

(Bradley 1927: 68).

Stories in which Alice Hastings Bradley appears are told by more than one storyteller. However she is usually a minor character, the little girl in Africa who ‘became’ Tiptree. After cautioning that “the links between a writer’s work and her life are never simple”, Sarah Lefanu writes:

She spent much of her childhood exploring Africa with her parents, in the days when exploring meant walking 2,700 miles to the Mountains of the Moon in search of the black gorillas. Her parents were impressive: her mother wrote more than thirty-five books (Lefanu 1988: 116).

Adam J. Frisch offers no such explicit caution:

The daughter of naturalist Herbert Bradley and mystery writer Mary Hastings, Tiptree as a child often accompanied her parents on wildlife expeditions to Africa and Indonesia, trips that may have sparked her later interest in the study of behavioural psychology (Frisch 1982: 48).
The first story of little Alice that I read which offered more detail appears in Donna Haraway's Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science (1989) and allows Haraway to make a direct link between colonial presences in Africa in the 1920s, and science fiction of the 1970s and 1980s which "interrogate[s] the conditions of communication and reproduction of self and other in alien and home worlds" (Haraway 1989: 377). The link of course is a flesh and blood one as well as a textual one - it is Tiptree and Raccoona and Alice.

However Alice had been a literary persona long before she became Tiptree and Raccoona and long before Haraway's influential text. In the 1920s her mother, Mary Wilhemina Hastings Bradley, told stories of her daughter in travel books she wrote about expeditions to parts of Africa and Asia in the 1920s. Two of these were written for children and are ostensibly all about her daughter, namely, Alice in Jungleland (1927), and Alice in Elephantland (1929). Alice also features in three of Mary Hastings Bradley's other travel books, On The Gorilla Trail (1922), Caravans and Cannibals (1926) and Trailing the Tiger (1929).

In the Contemporary Authors entry on Alice Sheldon (in parentheses Raccoona Sheldon; James Tiptree, Jr.), Mary Wilhemina is described as a writer, explorer, linguist, and her husband, Herbert Edwin, as an attorney, explorer, big-game collector, and naturalist. In the 1942-43 edition of Who's Who in America Mary is an author and big game hunter, and Herbert a lawyer, traveller, big game hunter and explorer. In 1921 with their little daughter, Alice, the Bradleys were part of Carl Akeley's first expedition "to find gorillas for a group for the American Museum of Natural History of New York" (Bradley 1922: 1).

Mary Bradley relates her stories of this expedition in On the Gorilla Trail (1922) and Alice in Jungleland (1927). Both are illustrated with photographs.

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1 I would like to thank Sylvia Keiko for pointing out Haraway's Tiptree Story to me.
2 Thanks to Gordon Van Gelder and Julie Phillips for their help in getting me copies of some of Mary Hastings Bradley's travel books.
“Alice at a Kikuyu Dance” from Mary Hastings Bradley’s *Alice in Jungle-land*, 1927, p. 103.
from the trip and in addition the front dust cover of Alice in Jungleland proudly proclaims that it has "drawings by Alice herself!" Alice in Elephantland (1929) is also illustrated by Alice Hastings Bradley. The difference between the mother and the child's accounts of Alice in foreign climes could not be more marked: the determined cheerfulness of the mother's account where dangers of disease and cannibal are introduced to add colour to these fabulous adventures versus the melancholy alienation evinced by the grown child.

As I read Mary Bradley's travel books I found myself placing her stories alongside the later ones of her daughter. Here is Mary's story of a costume party amongst the white passengers on the boat bound for Africa. Mary dresses her Alice as a doll:

It gave Alice's Mummy a very queer feeling to see her little girl being carried off like a toy in a box, and she was glad when the cover was taken off and she could see Alice again. They stood the box up on end and there Alice stood, just like a doll. Every one had been afraid that she would never stand still, but she surprised them all by keeping perfectly quiet, just like a real doll in a box - in fact she felt so strange and shy that she didn't want to come out of the box at all.

One little baby was so sure that Alice was a real doll that she tried to pull her out to play with and that made Alice laugh and come out (Bradley 1927: 12).

The photograph reproduced opposite shows the child Alice at a ceremonial dance of the Kikuyu. She looks like a doll dressed in her small white delicate dress with her blonde hair in ringlets.

Tiptree tells a similar story about hiding:

Once I ran away: I got into a good patch of elephant grass, where I made a secret house by crushing the grass down. Mother led a search for me and hauled me back out. You know, being hauled out of my James Tiptree retreat, when everyone found out who I was and I had to go back to being Alice Sheldon, was a similar feeling (Platt 1983: 260).

Later in Alice in Jungleland, Bradley observes that the exotica of Africa, gorillas, lions, volcanoes, were now "so much a part of her life...that she did not think there was anything strange about them" (Bradley 1927: 130). The shift in Alice's view of what is normal caused problems for her when she returned 'home':

A long time after, when she came back to America and went to school with other girls and boys there was a geography lesson about mountains and volcanoes. The teacher asked them what a crater was.

"Up went Alice's hand. This was something she did know about."

"My mummy spent the night in the crater of an active volcano," she said.

"A small boy turned and looked at her. Looked and looked and his round face grew rounder and rounder with disbelief.

"She did not!" he said, indignantly.
For, of course, no one's Mummy ever spent a night in a crater. A volcano was something in a book to study about. It didn't happen, not in real life. Of course not. At least not in your real life (Bradley 1927: 130-131).

In the article about Alice Sheldon for Contemporary Writers, she writes about this period of her life in the third person:

And finally, she was exposed to dozens of cultures and sub-cultures whose values, taboos, imperatives, religions, languages, and mores conflicted with each other as well as with her parents. And the writer, child as she was, had continuously to learn this passing kaleidoscope of Do and Don't lest she give offence, or even bring herself or the party into danger. But most seriously, this heavy jumble descended on her head before her own personality or cultural identity was formed. The result was a profound alienation from any nominal peers, and an enduring cultural relativism (Gearhart and Ross 1983: 444).

In the first ever interview with James Tiptree, Jr., conducted by Jeffrey Smith, and published in the June 1971 issue of the fanzine Phantasmicon, Tiptree is asked a series of questions about his writing, and about his 'real' life which, as his mother observed almost fifty years earlier, is not everybody else's 'real' life. Tiptree is happy to talk about his writing and about SF generally but is less forthcoming about this hidden life of his. He responds as follows to Smith's slightly exasperated "how about telling us what you are willing to let us know about you?":

Well I...trailed around places like colonial India & Africa as a kid (and by the way, I knew in my bones that they weren't going to stay "colonial" any more than I was going to stay a kid, but nobody ever asked me) (qtd. in Smith 1971: 7).

The choice of word "trailed around places" echoes the titles of two of Bradley's travel books about colonial India and Africa, On the Gorilla Trail and Trailing the Tiger. The choice of word points up Alice's lack of agency in Mary Bradley's accounts of this period of trailing about colonial Africa and Asia. The child that Tiptree refers to in this fragment of interview, little Alice, was not asked but was told and then was told of.

As a little white girl, Alice was coming up against the boundaries of race and sex in a setting which is other and exotic in Mary Hastings Bradley's discourse:

[India] was an uneasy place in which to travel with a little girl of nine. Alice was a woman to these folk and we were told, by English residents, not to let her go alone from her room to the dining-room, even in big hotels. The Indian servants of the place are not always reliable, and there are the bearers of white travellers loitering about and servants delivering packages.
There had been no race problem in the heart of Africa, where Alice's native boy had been a dependable guardian, but here we could not let her go out alone with her Indian bearer. There are faithful and trusty Indian servants, of course, but a hasty traveller has no way of discriminating, and our warnings were earnest (Bradley 1929b: 14).

In Africa and India there was no possibility of Alice passing or even of hiding, as she was able to later via the CIA and science fiction. In every one of the photographs of Alice in Africa she is pre-eminently visible: the only white child, the only head of blonde ringlets, the little doll. Constantly looked at; never alone.

Donna Haraway's version of Alice in "Jungleland" is very different from that of Mary Bradley:

I have tried to fill Primate Visions with potent verbal and visual images - the corpse of a gorilla shot in 1921 in the "heart of Africa" and transfixed into a lesson in civic virtue in the American Museum of Natural History in New York City; a little white girl brought into the Belgian Congo in the 1920s to hunt gorilla with a camera, who metamorphosed in the 1970s into a writer of science fiction considered for years as a model of masculine prose (Haraway 1989: 2).

These first two "potent...images" from Donna Haraway's Primate Visions both feature Mary's daughter, little Alice. Alice Hastings Bradley was a member of the Carl Akeley's expedition in which that gorilla was made into a corpse in 1921 and of course the second image is Haraway's briefly sketched version of the Tiptree Story. It is a potent "verbal image" in a list of many such "verbal and visual images" which dominate Haraway's construction of her visions of the interaction between primates: monkeys, apes, humans. In her story the "little white girl", Alice Hastings Bradley, is unnamed, as is the "writer of science fiction" she "metamorphosed" into.

Haraway's telling of the story, beginning with the little Alice in the Belgian Congo, brings into conversation two literary personas, "the little white girl," and the masculine "writer of science fiction". Haraway reads Sheldon/Tiptree in terms of her other names "Bradley" and "Hastings" and the colonial heritage associated with those names. Haraway discusses briefly the 1921 Akeley gorilla hunting expedition, in her chapter titled, "Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-36." She describes a photograph which is reproduced on the next page, of Akeley, the Bradleys, two anonymous Africans
"The Big Gorilla of Karisimbi" from Mary Hastings Bradley *On the Gorilla Trail*, 1922. Frontispiece.
and the dead gorilla which when mounted and stuffed for the Museum is renamed
"the giant of Karimbisi":

The photograph in the American Museum film archive of Carl Akeley, Herbert Bradley,
and Mary Hastings Bradley holding up the gorilla head and corpse to be recorded by the
camera is an unforgettable image. The face of the dead giant evokes Bosch's concept of
pain, and the lower jaw hangs slack, held up by Akeley's hand. The body looks bloated
and utterly heavy. Mary Bradley gazes smingly at the faces of the male hunters, her own
eyes averted from the camera. Akeley and Herbert Bradley look directly at the camera in
an unshuttered acceptance of their act. Two Africans, a young boy and a young man,
perch in a tree above the scene, one looking at the camera, one at the hunting party
(Haraway 1989: 34).

In the final chapter of Primate Visions Haraway returns to this view of the
Bradleys and brings the young Alice into focus:

Tucked in the margins and endnotes of "Teddy Bear Patriarchy" was a little white girl in
Brightest Africa in the early 1920s. Little Alice Hastings Bradley was brought there by
Carl Akeley, the father of the game, on his scientific hunt for gorilla, in the hope that her
golden-haired presence would transform the ethic of hunting into the ethic of
conservation and survival, as "man" and his surrogates, sucked into decadence, stood at
the brink of extinction. Duplicitous, the little girl turned into James Tiptree, Jr., and
Raccoona Sheldon, a man and a mother, the female author who could not be read as a
woman and who wrote science fiction stories that interrogated the conditions of
communication and reproduction of self and to her in alien and home worlds. But
Tiptree's gender, species and genre transfigurations were only beginning to germinate in
the child placed in the world still authored by the father of the game and the law of the
father (Haraway 1989: 378).

Haraway reads the location of the little golden-haired Alice through the later
writing career of Raccoona-James. Haraway's "little white girl" became
Tiptree/Raccoona, man and woman who re-invents herself and transfigures
"gender, species and genre" and seizes the agency which was denied her as a
child trailing through Africa, pretending to be a doll silent in a box.

Alice Davey b. 1934

The brief existence as Mrs. Alice Davey, wife to William Davey, "poet and polo-
player", took place during Alice's first career as a painter. In the account Tiptree
gives of his complex 'me' in "Everything but the Name is Me"3 he talks about
this first career as a painter, to which the marriage and family are made into
background noise, relegated to the dependent clauses:

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3 This article first appeared in Khattru as "Everything but the Signature is me".
If you'd asked me any time from age 3 to 26, I'd have told you "I'm a painter." (Note, not "artist" - painter. Snobism there.) And I was. I worked daily, whether I was supposed to be listening to lectures on Chateaubriand, whether my then-husband was shooting at me (he was a beautiful alcoholic poet) whether the sheriff was carrying our furniture out, whether Father was having a heart-attack, whatever (Tiptree 1979: 32).

The photo which appears opposite was taken during this period.4 In Tiptree's story of the marriage, related to Charles Platt in an interview, the view of the economics of marriage where the woman is bought and then renamed for the master is made explicit:

I was made into a debutante, and I thought that meant I was on the slave block, so I married the first boy that asked me, three days later. I'd seen him for seven hours. He'd been seated on my left at the party, he was certified as a poet and a gentleman by the president of Princeton, so I ran off and married him in Waukegan. Broke my mother's heart, because she'd given me the most expensive debutante party ever seen, in the middle of the depression, and had intended a grand tour to follow, culminating in my presentation at the English court, to the King, with three feathers on my head. Anyway, I married this beautiful but absolute idiot - what they hadn't mentioned in the documentation was that he was maintaining half the whores in Trenton and was an alcoholic (Platt 1983: 262).

The following account comes from Mark Siegel's appreciation of Tiptree.

The text consists of his commentary as well as excerpts from private conversations and correspondence between them:

"He was beautiful, he was charming, he was a poet... He was like an angel possessed by demons. It was an extraordinary thing..."

"Mother quite rightly perceived that this was no father for her grandchildren, but unknowingly removed the possibility of grandchildren forever by having the head of gynecology at the University of San Francisco Hospital perform a legal abortion on me - just a D&C, but he muffed it, and he wouldn't admit he muffed it and discharged me from the hospital with a temperature of 104. We got in the car and started out through the Mojave Desert, which was only a one-track road at the time, you know, with signs saying "Last Water". Bill had brought cases of whiskey and one canteen of water, and halfway through the desert to Santa Fe, with me getting hotter and sicker, the day about 120, the car broke down. He said, "This is the end!", emptied the water, drank a quart of whiskey, and passed out in the back seat. Well, I drove the car the rest of the way to Santa Fe, found a sign that said "Doctor", and passed out on his steps (qtd. in Siegel 1988/89: 7).

Elsewhere Tiptree refers to not being able to have children because of a bad case of septicemia but does not mention the botched abortion. The marriage took place in 1934. By 1938 they were divorced.

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4 I would like to thank Franklin Berkowitz for providing me with this photograph.
Alice B. Sheldon b. 1945

"I'll never let myself outlive him," she said quietly, nodding toward the living room where Ting was watching TV. "His eyesight's going. He has to sit right on top of that set now to see anything." She told me, as she'd told other friends, that if things got too bad for him, she'd kill them both. "Unless of course I die first," she laughed, taking another hit off her cigarette and hacking loudly. The scar on her chest from her recent open-heart surgery purpled with anger.

(qtd. in Siegel 1988/89: 6)

Alice B. Sheldon's story begins in 1945 and ends in 1987 when Alice killed her husband and then herself. Charles Platt writes that

In 1945, she joined the Air Staff Post-Hostilities Project, devised by its commander, Colonel Huntington D. Sheldon, who had been Deputy Chief of Air Intelligence in the European Theatre...

Alice Hastings Bradley married Huntington D. Sheldon in a French mayor's office, very shortly after she had begun working in his project. They remain married to this day, a very strikingly close and devoted couple (Platt 1983: 263).

Every story I have read about this second marriage repeats this description of their relationship. Hartwell wrote that they "were an extremely close couple" (Hartwell 1987: 63). Jeff Smith wrote in his obituary for Alice Sheldon that

She and her husband (it was hard at first to think of this quiet but forceful white-bearded man as "Ting", but that soon passed) were extremely devoted. They watched each other constantly, and while you talked with one the other would lean forward and drink in the scene with pleasure and admiration. All told me once that the worst night in her life was the one when Ting's small fishing boat had been swept out to sea by a storm; the emotion in her voice, years later, was overpowering (Smith 1987: 16).

After their time in the armed forces and a brief stint running their own business, they both went to work for the CIA:

Ting...joined...at supergrade level; I was at mere technical level, helping to start up their photo-intelligence capability, which was then evaluating captured German aerial photography of the U.S.S.R. (Platt 1983: 263).

In the interview with Platt the next important moment is Sheldon's attempt to escape from everything and everyone. In the early 1950s

I wrote a two-line letter of resignation, and ran away from everybody. I used the techniques the CIA had taught me, and in half a day I had a false name, a false bank account, a false security card, and had rented an apartment and moved in. I was somebody else.

...I wanted to think. So I thought, then I got back in touch with my husband and we thought together, and decided we could really work things out (Platt 1983: 264).

Alice went back to university to get a PhD. in experimental psychology:
I dragged out the predoctoral fellowship, long after I finished my PhD. exams, so that I could do four years of solid research, and I'll tell you, there is no greater thrill I've ever had than to stand bare-faced in front of Nature and say, 'I think this is the way your creations work; tell me, am I right?' And Nature grumblingly and reluctantly makes you do - as I did - thirteen different paradigms of the god damned experiment before you get the thing without any uncontrollable variables, and then finally says, in answer to your question, a clear-cut 'Yes.' That is the most thrilling moment I ever had in my whole life (Platt 1983: 265).

She continued to work teaching experimental psychology and statistics at George Washington University, Washington D.C. until she retired because of ill health in 1968.

James Tiptree, Jr. b. 1967

It was a lovely life being nobody. But then of course the "nobody" became terribly obtrusive, so that in many ways I was glad to get rid of him because I was evoking too much curiosity

(qtd. in Gearhart and Ross 1983: 445)

This is the story with which the science fiction community is most familiar. The man with the "ineluctable masculinity" who turned out to be a woman. Sheldon created Tiptree with his own signature, bank account and post office box, and when mail came, "to avoid lying, she gave 'Tiptree' her own life history" (Platt 1983: 267). James Tiptree was not just a pseudonym - there have been other pseudonyms in science fiction - Alice Sheldon, with her CIA acquired knowledge, was able to create a whole new persona and keep Tiptree's "real" identity hidden from even publishers and even Tiptree's agent.

James Tiptree, Jr. was born in 1967:

I simply saw the name on some jam pots. Ting was with me; I said 'James Tiptree' and he says - 'Junior!' It was done so quickly, without conscious thought; but I suppose I couldn't have avoided having the thought - although I don't remember it - that the editor would take my stories more seriously (Platt 1983: 266).

James Tiptree, Jr. entered the world of science fiction with ease, writing four stories that were sent out and duly accepted. Smith recalls that they did not make an instant impact:

I remember reading Tiptree's first story, "Birth of a Salesman," in the March 1968 Analog and thinking it was funny (though I can't claim I predicted great things for its author). I had read a dozen or so Tiptree stories by 1970, when I wrote to him and asked him if he would participate in a postal interview for my fanzine, Phantasmicon. (This was based on no great perception on my part that Tiptree was about to blossom into the
I'm too big but I love to play

writer he became, but because in those New Wave vs. Old Wave days Tiptree was being claimed by both camps - and there seemed to be a story in that.) (Smith 1987: 16).

The first cheque to arrive came from John W. Campbell, one of the most famous science fiction editors whose name is synonymous with the so-called golden age of science fiction. Selling your first story to Campbell is a heady entry into science fiction. It is also an entry into a particularly boy's own version of science fiction. By 1974 P. Schuyler Miller, well-known for his review column in Analog, was acclaiming Tiptree as "one of the finest talents to appear in the field in some time" (Miller 1974: 152) and many concurred. Silverberg's well known introduction to Warm Worlds and Otherwise (1975), "Who is Tiptree, What is He?", is overflowing with his enthusiastic assessment of Tiptree's writing. Tiptree won three Nebulas and two Hugos for his work, all before the revelation of his 'true' identity.

Tiptree wrote many articles and letters to Phantasmicon (later named Khatru) as well as to other fanzines. He was one of the participants in the 1975 Khatru Symposium on women and science fiction. His voluminous correspondence and his contributions to fanzines mark Tiptree clearly as one of the many pros who did not disdain the fan world.

Though they had never met Tiptree in person, many in the field felt that they knew Tip (or "Uncle Tip" as he called himself) well through his many letters. Le Guin writes of her friendship with Tiptree:

He always types with a blue typewriter ribbon, and the only question I have asked him which he has always evaded is, "Where do you get so many blue typewriter ribbons?" When he himself is blue, he has told me so, and I've tried to cheer him up, and when I have been blue I've been turned right round into the sunlight simply by getting one of Tiptree's preposterous, magnificent letters. The only thing better than Tiptree's letters is his stories (Le Guin 1978: viii).

In these letters as well as in his articles and the interview with Phantasmicon Tiptree let slip various details about his background and current situation. In the "Galaxy Stars" department of Galaxy there is the following report:

James Tiptree, Jr., one of our more peripatetic writers, is just back from a fishing sojourn amid the primeval rocky lochs of Northern Scotland. Saw no Loch Ness monsters, he reports: also no fish (Galaxy January 1969: 194).
In the June 1971 issue of *Phantasmicon* Tiptree was interviewed by Jeff Smith. Smith opened by asking,

Your friends and associates are unaware that you are a science fiction writer, so you don't want sf people finding out who your friends and associates are. But how about telling us what you are willing to let us know about you? (Smith 1971: 7).

Tiptree responds:

Well I was born in the Chicago area a long time back, trailed around places like colonial India & Africa as a kid....I'm one of those for whom the birth and horrendous growth of Nazism was the central generation event.

... At any event, by the time I had finished the decade's worth of instruction in How Things Are provided by this event - you know, joining organisations, getting in the Army, milling around in the early forms of American left-wing sentiment, worrying about Is It Going to Happen Here - an occupation I haven't given up - getting out of the Army, doing a little stint in government, trying a dab of business, etc. etc. So ensued a period of more milling (I'm a slow type) including some dabblings in academia. And now the story grows even vaguer for the time being, Jeff, since I'm against lying on principle (Smith 1971: 7).

Jeff Smith then asks the obvious:

Why don't you want your friends to know about your "second career"? Don't you think that perhaps someday somebody will stumble across one of your stories? Will you then deny being the same James Tiptree, Jr. or what? (Smith 1971: 10).

The answer is "or what":

I could give you a set of plausible reasons, like the people I have to do with include many specimens of prehistoric man, to them the news that I write ugh, science fiction would shatter any credibility that I have left. (Sometimes I think that sf is the last really dirty word.)

Or that I'm unwilling to tarnish my enjoyment of this long-established secret escape route by having to defend it to hostile ears. (Coward!)

Probably the real reason is partly inertia, it started like this, I don't yet really believe it, let it be til [sic] it ripens. That too.

... Well, the last remaining part of my secretiveness is probably nothing more than childish glee. At last I have what every child wants, a real secret life. Not an official secret, not a q-clearance polygraph-enforced bite-the-capsule-when-they-get-you secret, nobody else's damn secret but MINE. Something THEY don't know. Screw Big Brother. A beautiful secret REAL world, with real people, fine friends, doers of great deeds & speakers of the magic word, Frodo's people if you wish, and they write to me and accept my offerings, and I'm damned if I feel like opening the door between that magic reality and the universal shitstorm known as the real (sob) world (Smith 1971: 11-12).

These bits and pieces of information fuelled speculation about Tiptree:

A squad of fans once actually staked out my McLean, Virginia, post-office box when the big science-fiction convention was in D.C. - luckily I was in Canada at the time (Sheldon 1988: 51).

There was a great deal of speculation about Tiptree:

James Tiptree calls himself "an amateur - I don't write to eat." Exactly what Mr. Tiptree does to eat remains unknown, however he tells us: "I do not, repeat it, work for the CIA,
the FBI, NSA, the Treasury, the narc or the Metropolitan Park Police." Well, sf people are a nosy bunch, and we won't give up, but meanwhile there is more than enough to consider in Mr. Tiptree's fiction. It includes perhaps thirty stories published during the last five years, a consistently high quality and inventive body of work which has earned him a reputation as one of the major new voices in science fiction (The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction December 1972 : 4).

In almost every review and every editorial comment or introduction to a Tiptree story or collection of stories there is some speculation about the secretive Tiptree. In his sf review of Warm Worlds and Otherwise for the New York Times Book Review, Gerald Jonas writes that Tiptree is the current mystery man of science fiction. He keeps to himself, does not show up at S.F. conventions to receive the awards that he wins, and is rumoured to work for a government agency in Washington. No one knows whether the name he signs to his stories is his real name or a pseudonym (Jonas 1975: 31-32).

In 1972 Silverberg wrote:

[the first of James Tiptree's science-fiction stories to see print appeared early in 1968 - a long time back, by the reckoning of some, but just an eyelash ago to those of us who have Cosmic Perspective. It attracted no particular attention, nor did his next two or three; but by 1970 he was finding his way into anthologies and getting nominated for awards, and now it is apparent that a major new short story writer is in our midst: deft, original, vigorous. What he can do in the longer forms is still something of a mystery as of this writing, but the odds favor him. Tiptree the man likewise remains something of a mystery at present. He lives south of Mason-Dixon, thought not very far, seems to travel a good deal, and describes himself as "a Midwesterner who batted around jungly parts of the globe when young and worse jungles with desks when old." Perhaps he's the Secret Master of the CIA; perhaps he's Ho Chi Minh in a clever plastic disguise. One thing is sure: he's a writer (Silverberg 1972: 21).

In the same year another well-known science fiction writer and editor, Harry Harrison wrote,

[it is with some pride that I say I printed this author's first story just a few years ago. He reluctantly admits that he spent most of World War II in a Pentagon sub-basement, and wonders what war it was he watched go by in Shanghai when he was ten years old. Other facts about him are hard to come by, other than the vital fact that he can write stories such as this one - that purports to be about the far future, but is about all science at the same time (Harrison 1972] 1976: 182).

In 1975 Silverberg summed up what was known about Tiptree:

James Tiptree, Jr., lives in Virginia, not far from the capital, and prefers to let public attention center on his stories, not on his private life - so not much is generally known about his profession, marital status, childhood and upbringing, and such. He is willing to admit that he is a man of middle years who had travelled widely; all the rest is conjecture, at this point (Silverberg 1975: 89).

It is inevitable - given their shared life histories (not to mention their shared body) - that Tiptree now gets read through those other lives and those other lives get read through Tiptree. However Tiptree with the same life story as Alice
Sheldon becomes someone different. The co-incidence of a supposed male body and the childhood in the wilds of Africa and the knowledge of guns and government workings, lead to different speculation than those about Alice Sheldon after the revelation.

*Raccoona Sheldon b.?*

And what of the much-neglected Raccoona? There are no articles about the short fiction of Raccoona Sheldon. Certainly her output was much smaller than Tiptree's. She, too had a separate life, with her own post office box and bank account in Wisconsin (Tiptree 1979: 34). For Jeffrey Smith it was easy to accept "Alli and Tiptree as the same person, but Raccoona has always been someone else to me". Raccoona

First surfaced as a fanzine artist, as Tip sent me a page of sketches by an "old friend" for my use. (I told him he should try to get her to illustrate his magazine stories: "She draws like you write.") The original scheme had been for Raccoona to establish herself as a writer, then for Tip to drown in Mexico and there'd only be one persona left. But Raccoona couldn't live in McLean so a Wisconsin Post office box had to be set up and mail shuttled back and forth. And neither could Raccoona have just picked up Tip's friendships. Raccoona was left out in the cold: since she couldn't be Tiptree she couldn't really be Alli either (Smith 1987: 16).

Raccoona initially had some difficulty getting published until Tiptree wrote covering letters recommending his friend's work. Raccoona writes:

I don't know too much about it, but I have a faint suspicion [sic] borne out of a smidgin of proof that mss. with a female name on them are read differently (*The Witch and the Chameleon* April 1975: 26).

This letter was published by the first feminist sf fanzine, *The Witch and the Chameleon*. Raccoona, like Tiptree, took part in fandom and more particularly she was a part of feminist sf fandom. In other letters she comments on feminist issues such as abortion (*The Witch and the Chameleon* 1976: 14). Raccoona also appears with a poem in which she refers to many of the prominent women sf writers of the period and thus links herself and her writing to them and the feminist sf they embodied: Joanna (Russ), Ursula (Le Guin), Kate (Wilhelm), Vonda (McIntyre), Quinn (Chelsea Quinn Yarbro), Suzy (McKee Charnas) and
Kit (Reed), Carol (Emshwiller?) and Shirley (Jackson?) (The Witch and the Chameleon September 1975: 1).

In a letter in the final issue of The Witch and the Chameleon. Raccoona writes, “[o]f course my instinct is to stick together as much as we can. We know who profits from us excluding each other” (The Witch and the Chameleon Issues 5 & 6 1976: 30). Her pronouns, her ‘we’ and ‘us’ refer to women and to the women’s liberation movement.

The feminism of Raccoona Sheldon was vastly different from that of James Tiptree, Jr., the author of a “profoundly feminist story told in entirely masculine manner” (Silverberg 1975: xvi), who along with the other men involved was asked to leave the Khatru Symposium by Joanna Russ:

I suggested asking Tiptree and Delany into this symposium and both have contributed a good deal, but it’s true that they are time-hoggers and that they – and Jeff – keep drawing our attention away from what (to me) is what is truly interesting: what we think (Smith 1978: 96).

These are Raccoona’s pronouns ‘we’ and ‘our’ referring to we women but they operate to exclude Tiptree. The revelation that Tiptree ‘is’ Alice Sheldon shifted the relationship of these pronouns to Tiptree.

The Revelation

James Tiptree, Jr. was revealed as Alice Sheldon in 1976:

Tiptree reported to few correspondents the death of his elderly mother. More than one of Tip's friends checked the Chicago obituaries and found Mary Hastings Bradley, novelist, travel writer, and explorer. The details matched up. Under “survivors” was listed Bradley’s only child: her daughter (Phillips 1996: 18).

Jeff Smith reports his confusion on reading Mary Hastings Bradley’s obituary:

The last line read, “She is survived by one daughter, Mrs Alice Hastings (Mrs Huntington) Sheldon.”

This left me very confused. Sheldon was Raccoona’s name, and it never occurred to me that Tip and Raccoona were the same person - I corresponded with Raccoona, too. But if Raccoona was Mary Hastings Bradley’s daughter, then why was Tip handling the affairs? (Smith 1978: 10).

He wrote to Tiptree for clarification and Tiptree confessed to ‘being’ Alice Sheldon. In December 1976
she admitted the truth to a small group of people like me whom she felt she might have offended by allowing them to persist in their error. "Honour, or something, compels me to do something after which I fear I may have lost a deeply valued friend...It hasn't been a put-on or attempt to take advantage, it just grew and grew until 'Tip' became me (Silverberg 1993: 6).

In 1977 Tiptree was revealed as Sheldon more publicly in the science fiction news magazine *Locus*. It was not really a Great Revelation but a series of revelations, you never come out just once, but over and over again. As Pat Murphy remarks:


Even now there are readers who pick up and read a Tiptree book without knowing his 'true' sex.

Tiptree, however, will never simply 'be' Alice Sheldon:

with "Raccoona" selling too, things had gotten fairly confusing. I was writing stories and letters as the female me, but from a place I didn't live in and without my own real past - and at the same time writing and corresponding as a man who for a decade had made himself part of me too. Tip owned my past life and my years of science fiction friendships, and he lived in my home, but my husband was his "gringo friend". I'm sure you sense the chaos? (qtd. in Gearhart and Ross 1983: 445).

The chaos did not end with the revelation of the 'truth' about Tiptree. Instead there was a furore within science fiction. There were some voluble criticism:

the more vulnerable males decided that 'Tiptree' had been much overrated. They sullenly retired to practice patronizing smiles (qtd. in Platt 1983: 267).

In a different interview Sheldon elaborates:

there were the male writers who had seemed to take my work quite seriously, but who now began discovering that it was really the enigma of Tip's identity which had lent a spurious interest, and began finding various more-or-less subtle ways of saying so. (Oh, how well we know and love that pretentiously amiable tone, beneath which hides the furtive nastiness!) I'd been warned against it, but it was still a shock coming from certain writers. The one thing I admire about that type of male hatred is its strategic agility. They soon get their ranks closed. Only here the timing was so damned funny, the perfect unison of their "reevaluation" of poor old Tip rather weakened the effect (qtd. in Gearhart & Ross 1983: 446).

Aldiss and Wingrove in their *Trillion Year Spree* have this to say about the revelation:

[...there is little that is overtly feminist in Tiptree's writing, even as Raccoona Sheldon, and she never tried to write like a man. Her stories and novels are humanistic, while her deep concern for male-female (even human-alien) harmony ran counter to the developing segregate-the-sexes drive among feminist writers. What her work brought to the genre was a blend of lyricism and inventiveness, as if some lyric poet had rewritten a number of]
clever SF standards and then passed them on to a psychoanalyst for final polish (Aldiss and Wingrove [1986] 1988: 462).

“Never tried to write like a man” is almost a direct quote from Alice Sheldon:

However, men have so pre-empted the area of human experience that when you write about universal motives, you are assumed to be writing like a man. And so when my identity was revealed, some people said it proved that a woman could write like a man. Now, in the first place, this assumes that I was trying to write like a man, which was the last thing I was trying to do. I was writing like myself, with the exception of deliberate male details here and there. Other critics talked about my “narrative drive” as being a male writing style, but narrative drive is simply intensity, and a desire not to bore. It has never been confined to men. Take one of the first women utterers that we know about: Cassandra. She was never accused of a lack of narrative drive. She was just a little before her time, which is often what women’s crimes consist of (qtd. in Platt 1983: 267)

Certainly Silverberg had believed that Tiptree “wrote like a man”. In

“Who is Tiptree, What is he?” Silverberg compares Tiptree to Hemingway:

Tiptree’s stories don’t bore. They are lean, muscular, supple, relying heavily on dialog broken by bursts of stripped down exposition. Although there is no real stylistic influence discernible, I think his work is analogous to that of Hemingway, in that Hemingway preferred to be simple, direct, and straightforward, at least on the surface. Hemingway was a deeper and trickier writer than he pretended to be; so too with Tiptree, who conceals, behind the aw-shucks artlessness an astonishing skill for shaping scenes and misdirecting readers into unexpected abysses of experience. And there is, too, that prevailing masculinity about both of them (Silverberg 1975: xv).

This is not simply a comic misreading on Silverberg’s part. Some women sf writers also thought that Tiptree had a “prevailing masculinity” which resulted in the above mentioned request for Tiptree to leave the Khatru symposium on women in science fiction. Tiptree responded to the request as follows:

Joanna [Russ], your piece inviting me out of the talk is exactly how I feel. My own concept of what I at least was supposed to do was simply to learn and perhaps talk enough to get knocked down after which I felt acutely that I should fade away but didn’t know how to...Without, you know, sounding like gimme my wagon and I’ll go home mad. So I just babbled on figuring that you could ignore me as well as I could. (After all, one possible use for a male participant is just to remind everybody of everything there is to be mad at. All the small exquisite wilenesses I mean) (Smith 1975: 96).

Alice Sheldon may have protested later that she was “not trying to write like a man” but it is hard to know how else to read these comments, or others made during the Khatru symposium. For example, Tiptree ‘confessed’ that the “motive for [flashing] is an obscure and yet apparently potent one, which seems to have missed me or be buried deep” (Smith 1975: 104). It is only when you know that Tiptree ‘is’ a woman that this, and other comments, become an ironic play.
Le Guin was a part of the Khatri symposium. She was also fooled by Tiptree:

[j]recently I've been hearing from people who have friends who say, "I knew all along that Tiptree was a woman. I could tell it from the prose style," or "from the male characters," or "from the female characters," or "from the Vibrations." I don't know any of these people who knew all along; they didn't say much about it; never even happened to mention that they knew, for some reason, until all the rest of us knew. We (the rest of us) knew rather suddenly and utterly unexpectedly. I don't think I have ever been so completely and utterly surprised in my life - or so happily. All I can say is I'm glad I didn't know all along, because I would have missed that joyous shock of revelation, recognition - the beautiful Jill-in-the-box (Le Guin 1978: viii-ix).

Many others experienced that "joyous shock":

The feminist world was excited because, merely by having existed unchallenged for ten years, 'Tiptree' had shot the stuffing out of male stereotypes of women writers (qtd. in Platt 1983: 267).

Amanda Boulter argues that Alice Sheldon's "gender deception" has made her "a particularly exciting figure for feminist critics of science fiction." However, the history of Tiptree's career makes him a problematic figure for feminist science fiction, raising certain, perhaps, awkward, questions about the feminist implications of Sheldon's gender disguise (Boulter 1995: 6).

These questions are clearly delineated in the Khatri Symposium, where the Tiptree revelation complicates how the pronoun of the writer is read.

Tiptree insists that there is more than one kind of white man. He argues that "a huge wrought-iron sign" he saw in Los Gatos which read "THE GENTILE WHITE MAN IS THE KING OF THE EARTH" excludes him just as much as Delany or any of the women in the symposium (Smith 1975: 103). Tiptree argues that he is a "natural lynchee" who "exudes the same smell of subversion which those good ole boys can smell a mile away" (Smith 1975: 103). Luise White replies:

you'll forgive me for wondering why, if you're such a "natural lynchee" you're still alive, and over one million Vietnamese who had no power at all are dead. And if it is just an historical accident, perhaps you could refrain...from baiting minority groups of any sort. If you say they're after you "the way they used to hunt gays" Used to? Next page you call Arthur Clarke "Jiggling-nuts": I assume that's queer-baiting, Jim. Perhaps me, Joanna, Chip and anyone else who can read find you "threatening" because if you did fear the
abuse of power” you wouldn’t try to please one audience by putting down a minority
group (Smith 1975: 122).\(^5\)

Tiptree’s insistence that white men are not a unitary class is not well received. In
1975, in the *Khattru* symposium, it is not something that can be heard coming
from a white man. It would be interesting to know how Luise White would have
responded if Tiptree had already been revealed as Sheldon.

This reading, shaped by the pronoun, has been for many feminist
commentators, the lesson of Tiptree. In her comments on the second printing of
the *Khattru* Symposium, Mog Decarnin writes that

> she became a living illustration of all that sexism means. I remember a male writing, I
> think in a prose, just very bluntly that if Tiptree had really been a man her stories
> would have been profound and compassionate, but since she was a woman those same
> stories were worthless and despicable (qtd. Gomoll 1993: 125).

At the same time that Tiptree was being critically acclaimed for stories like “The
Women Men Don’t See”, Russ, McIntyre and Charnas amongst others, were
being vociferously attacked and patronised for their feminism. Russ, herself felt
sad at losing Tip, the male feminist:

> oddly enough [I was] very tearful for a few days. I had been extremely fond of the man I
> imagined Tiptree to be and grieved at losing the one man who really seemed to
> understand (Boulter 1995: 8).

The shifting readings of Tiptree’s writings caused by the revelation of his
‘true’ sex has been glossed over by critics like Anne Cranny-Francis who in her
ten page discussion of “The Women Men Don’t See” accepts unproblematically
that Alice Sheldon is Tiptree and that this fact serves only to highlight
“patriarchal masculinity” (Cranny-Francis 1990: 38). She writes:

> [k]nowing that Silverberg’s “inexcutably masculine” writer Tiptree was actually the
> scientist and writer Alice Sheldon alerts contemporary readers to what is perhaps a more
> profoundly feminist story than even Silverberg suspected (Cranny-Francis 1990: 29).

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\(^5\) Tiptree explains that Clarke wrote an
unpleasantly patronizing reply to Joanna Russ in the SFWA (Science Fiction Writers of
America) Forum. She had tried carefully to explain to him why his “joke” about women-
should-be-excluded-from-space-because-in-zero-g-their-breasts-bobble-distractingly-to-
the-men was not a joke and contained characteristically deep bias.

My “jiggling nuts” line was a regretfully abbreviated reference to the point someone else
made more fully, that it would be as logical to exclude males because their genitals would
wave about quite as distractingly to women (Smith 1975: 122).
In my reading Cranny-Francis maps the body of Alice Sheldon on to that of James Tiptree, Jr. Cranny-Francis omits from her account that it is only the knowledge that Sheldon is Tiptree which allows her to read the story as “more profoundly feminist” than Silverberg suspected. At the time the story was published this knowledge was not available and the story was not read in this way. Cranny-Francis makes the essentialist move of equating feminism with biology: because a story is by a woman it is more feminist than if it were by a man.

In versions like that of Cranny-Francis, James Tiptree, Jr. becomes a powerful feminist science fiction fable, the embodiment of “all that sexism means” and the mere mention of the name “James Tiptree, Jr.” is code for a long history of women being marginalised in literature because of their gender.

Because the myth of Tiptree - who proved that women could write like men - has been so dominant, discussion of Sheldon’s other ‘persona’, Raccoona, has been almost entirely absent. Boulter refers to Raccoona’s claim that her first stories were not accepted until they were accompanied by a testimonial from Tiptree himself, which in turn provoked speculation that Raccoona might be his daughter, or alternatively his own pseudonym. Ironically, the dissolution of the female pseudonym into the male is repeated by contemporary feminist critics. Anne Cranny-Francis and Marleen Barr both discuss “The Screwfly Solution” as by James Tiptree. Lillian Heldreth credits Raccoona, but only in the notes as a pseudonym of Tiptree (Boulter 1995: 14-15).

The writings of Raccoona and the whole Raccoona persona is frequently conflated with Alice Sheldon. For example, in the index of Russ’ *To Write Like a Woman*, under the name Sheldon, Alice, a series of short stories are listed; those that appeared under the byline “Tiptree” have this noted in brackets, the ones published as Raccoona are not signalled in any way.

At the end of an entertaining, sensitive and very revealing interview conducted by Charles Platt and Shawna McCarthy, there is a biographical note:6

With the exception of a short story in The New Yorker, (“The Lucky Ones,” 1946) all of Alice Sheldon’s fiction has been published under the name of James Tiptree, Jr., or

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6 The interview is listed as being with James Tiptree, Jr. not Alice Sheldon. The interview for *Contemporary Writers* is listed as being with Alice Sheldon.
Raccoona Sheldon, the latter being used for five later stories when she felt she needed to write from an overtly female perspective (Platt 1983: 272).

The Raccoona pseudonym is not mentioned at any point during the interview.

The silence about the Raccoona pseudonym implies that this Raccoona is the real Alice Sheldon whereas Tiptree is her persona. Somehow it is presumed that Sheldon does not perform Raccoona because she is a woman and there is no need to perform your 'true' sex. However, Jeff Smith, in his description of his and his wife Ann's first meeting with Alice Sheldon, demonstrates that this was not the case:

While we were there, she was Tiptree often, the raconteur telling stories with little or no provocation, the speculator running with ideas to logical, illogical and evocative conclusions. Sometimes (particularly when she and her husband clattered around the kitchen fixing dinner) she was Raccoona, the rather dotty retired schoolteacher supposedly in Wisconsin. These were unconscious - whenever she thought about who she was, she was Alice Sheldon, the one who doesn't write science fiction (Smith 1978: 11).

Smith is perceiving sex here as a *performance*. Sheldon plays at being both Raccoona and Tiptree but also at being Alice Sheldon. They are all performances. The embodied nature of these performances is borne out in the three separate signatures of each name which is reproduced opposite.

The revelation that Tiptree was 'really' Sheldon can be read as a part of the battle of the sexes as it has been played out on the field of science fiction since the 1920s. The revelation both confirmed and confounded gender expectations about biological sex mapping neatly on to perceived sex. Tiptree's work was indeed profoundly feminist because 'he' was 'she' and at the same time 'she' had been able to fool everyone into believing 'she' was 'he'. The Tiptree revelation is thus used doubly to prove essentialist notions and to disprove them.

In the next chapter I examine the question of how all these stories operate in the construction of the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award. In discussions of the award to date the lives of "Alice James Raccoona Tiptree Davey Hastings Bradley Sheldon Jr." play very little part. The prize has been centred around the one story, of James Tiptree, Jr. who was 'really' Alice B. Sheldon. This feminist fairy tale has been the award's main inspiration, its starting point. Inevitably, however, five years after its announcement, the Award has moved away from its
inspiration. The term ‘Tiptree’ has now come to refer to this award and to the books that have been shortlisted for it, won it, or that people think are eligible for it. A Tiptree text is no longer only a text written by or about James Tiptree, Jr. The Tiptree Award has added yet another story to those of "Alice James Raccoona Tiptree Davey Hastings Bradley Sheldon Jr."
“Her Smoke Rose Up Forever”

The James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award

Tiptree/Sheldon? the Mistress of Illusion who brought such
sharpness of poignancy and point to this collective work that it’s
hardly bearable at times. Her writing made her beloved; her
masquerade made her legend. Mistress of Irony, that her suicide
should make her a monument, honored as only the dead ever are! Yet
honored in such a way as she would surely find hilarious, inspiring:
honored by bake sales, and the works of women!

(Decarnin qtd. Gomoll 1993: 125)

The James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award is an award given annually for a science
fiction or fantasy text which explores and expands gender roles. The award can
be won by men as well as women for a short story or novel. Each year the Tiptree
Award winner or winners are decided by a jury of five consisting of four women
and one man. The jury changes every year. Once the winner(s) are decided a
press release listing the winner(s), those short listed for the award and all those
texts considered (the long list) is issued.

The lives of James Tiptree, Jr. add many resonances to this relatively new
science fiction award named in his/her memory. In this chapter I examine the
first five years of the Tiptree Award and the many connections between the
award and the traditions within science fiction of feminism and engagement with
issues of sex and sexuality since 1926. The Award powerfully demonstrates
continuities of science fiction communities and is another site for the blurring
between fan and pro. Further, the Tiptree Award reauthors and reworks the
stories of James Tiptree, Jr. and her/his/their complicated relationship within
and with the field of science fiction.

Researching the Tiptree Award confirms the contested nature of the term
‘gender’ and what it designates. I encountered many different usages of the term
‘gender’. It was used to refer to the social construction of maleness or femaleness
while the term sex was used to refer to biological sex, thus maintaining the sex/gender distinction. It was also used to refer to the biological ‘fact’ of sexed bodies or to refer to both the social construction of the two normative sexes and sexed bodies. This variety of uses of the term ‘gender’ is a reflection of the range of different people who have been involved with the Award since its inception in 1991. That there are five different judges every year means that the interpretation of what a text that “explores and expands” gender is shifts. Throughout this thesis I have been using ‘sex’ to refer to this space of biological/social/cultural construction and performance of the sexed self. The variety of texts which have won and been shortlisted for the Award reinforce this approach to ‘sex’ in that the shortlist demonstrates that gender does not delineate a “crisp distinction” between sex and gender but rather refers to the “problematical space” of sex/gender (Sedgwick 1990: 29).

In the first section, “More Domestic Stories: feminist sf community and the Tiptree Award”, I consider the complex relationship of the Award to the idea of a feminist sf community, and the ways in which the running of and fundraising for the Award demonstrate that grass-roots feminism is alive and well in the 1990s. In the second section, “Reception”, I examine the various responses to the Award. In the third section, “Judging the Tiptree Award”, I look at the interaction of some of the Tiptree juries and their negotiation and re-negotiation of what exploring and expanding gender means. In the fourth section, “Tiptree Texts”, I examine the twofold effect of the Tiptree Award: on the one hand it rewards and encourages speculation about gender and on the other hand it recognises a tradition within science fiction of doing just that. I do this by examining some of the winning and shortlisted texts as well as considering the retrospective Tiptree Awards of 1996. Finally, in, “Alice James Raccoona Tiptree Davey Hastings Bradley Sheldon Jr. and the James Tiptree Jr. Memorial Award”, I trace the dynamic relationship between Tiptree and the Award named in his/her honour.
More Domestic Stories: feminist sf of community and the Tiptree Award

A few months ago, I was talking with Richard Kadrey, a born trouble-maker. We were talking about women in science fiction and Richard, just to make trouble, said, “You know what would really piss people off? You ought to give out a women’s science fiction award.”

Interesting idea. It would make certain people very cranky. It would get the conspiracy theorists going, wondering, “What are those women up to now?” We envisioned a little plexiglass cube with all this “women’s stuff” floating in it: little plastic babies and cooking pots and ironing boards and sewing machines.


Pat Murphy and Pamela Sargent were guests of honour at the fifteenth WisCon. The quote above comes from Pat Murphy’s guest of honour speech given on the second of March 1991. In this speech she brought the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award into existence. Murphy places the award in the context of long-running debates about the presence of women in science fiction. These debates, which I discussed in chapters five and six, frequently locate women in the sphere of romance or of the domestic, the one frequently, if not inevitably, leading to the other. Murphy and the writer Richard Kadrey mock this with their vision of a plexiglass trophy full of floating “women’s stuff”. Kadrey refers to “people” in this quote, Pat Murphy shifts this to “certain people”. “Certain people” who are “conspiracy theorists”. These are the kind of conspiracy theorists who believe that having women in science fiction is equivalent to a “great erosion” of the field (Merwin 1950: 6). As I have shown, part of the fear of women in the field is a fear of the intrusion of the private sphere into the public sphere, and further a fear of women invading their private men’s club within the public sphere.

Murphy continues her narration of the Tiptree Award’s genesis by conceding that,

...okay it was just a joke, nothing more. But a few weeks later, I had dinner with Karen Joy Fowler and I mentioned this joke. Karen is also a trouble-maker, but a very thoughtful one. She looked thoughtful and said, “You know, there is no science fiction award named after a woman.”

Let’s see: we have the Hugo (for Hugo Gernsback), the Theodore Sturgeon Award, the John W. Campbell Award, and of course the Philip K. Dick Award. No women. Frankenstein, by Mary Shelley, has been called the first science fiction novel, but there is no Mary Shelley award.

And then Karen, who tends toward brilliance, said, “What about James Tiptree, Jr.?”

Her Smoke Rose Up From Supper

The exciting sequel to The Bakery Men Don't See

The cover of SF's Her Smoke Rose Up From Supper illustration by Freddie Baer.
This putative award will be named for a woman who for most of her career in the sf field was a man. Murphy also locates the Tiptree Award in the context of other science fiction awards to mark out its difference. She continues:

And so I would like to announce the creation of the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award, to be presented annually to a fictional work that explores and expands the roles of women and men. We’re still in the planning stages, but we plan to appoint a panel of five judges and we plan to finance the award - and this is another stroke of genius on Karen’s part - through bake sales (Murphy [1991] 1992: 9).

Bake sales are the American equivalent of cake stalls. In Australia, and I presume, also in America cake stalls are a common fundraiser for schools and churches. They are invariably run and provided with cakes by women. Cakestalls/bakesales are associated with suburbia, the family and with motherhood. Karen Fowler’s genius is to link this cliche of suburban domesticity with a science fiction award and so to overtly blur private and public spheres.

Pat Murphy ended her announcement - and simultaneous enactment - of the Tiptree Award by asking for potential bake sale volunteers to talk to her after the speeches were finished. The response was immediate. Jeanne Gomoll writes,

A few moments later, after a thunderous round of applause, a bunch of us Madisonians clustered around Pat and began vocalizing such dangerous phrases as “I’ll help,” “We’d like to publish-,” “I could do-,” etc. A few months later we found ourselves organizing mailing lists, posters, bakes sales, and one of the largest publications that SF³ has ever produced (Gomoll [1991] 1992: 5).

Diane Martin concurs:

[t]here was electricity in the air. Trite, but I don’t know how else to describe it. In the five minutes after Murphy’s speech ended, I talked to at least three other women who had the same idea I did: “Let’s publish a cookbook!” (Martin [1991] 1992: 5).

Eventually there were two cookbooks both published by the Madison, Wisconsin science fiction group, SF³. Both are plays on the titles of Tiptree stories, the first is The Bakery Men Don’t See (1991) and the second Her Smoke Rose Up From Supper (1993). The cover of Her Smoke Rose Up From Supper is reproduced opposite the artwork is by Freddie Baer. The recipes and anecdotes were provided by pros and fans from within the science fiction feminist community. Although the cakestalls have not generated an enormous amount of revenue they
have been extremely successful in generating interest and knowledge of the award within the larger science fiction community. More financially lucrative fundraisers have been the marvellous t-shirts of Freddie Baer. The t-shirts commemorating each Award go on sale at the convention where the Awards are presented. Invariably they sell out quickly.¹

Many of the people who became involved with the Tiptree Award explicitly link the Tiptree to a renewal of a tradition of feminist science fiction. This is not only a tradition of writing but also a fan tradition. Diane Martin comments:

I arrived at WisCon 15 cautiously optimistic. I was reconciled to feminist SF being considered as a topic of historical interest, sort of like Latin. I was just hoping to meet up with a few other Latin scholars. Imagine my surprise when I found myself attending and participating in panel discussions that in feminist content and enthusiasm, rivalled the WisCons of the late 70s (Martin [1991] 1992: 3).

It was no coincidence that Pat Murphy announced the Tiptree Award at the only feminist-oriented science fiction convention in the world. The first WisCon was held in Madison, Wisconsin in 1977 as a direct result of, and participation in, the feminist explosion within fandom in the seventies. It was part of the new “women and sf” panels held at conventions and the debates about feminism and science fiction which were conducted in the Women’s Apa, The Witch and the Chameleon, Janus/Aurora as well as the Khatru Symposium. Karen Joy Fowler credits the “women of WisCon” for “mak[ing] it happen from the very beginning” and writes that for her the “best thing about the Tiptree Award is that it got a lot bigger than me and Pat. It did this really quickly” (Fowler 1996: 109). Without the continuing engagement between various feminisms and various science fictions over the sf community’s almost seventy year history, however, it is very unlikely that the Tiptree Award would have taken off in the manner that it did.

¹ At this year’s presentation at WisCon 20 in May the t-shirts were sold out within the hour. I was on a panel as the sale was underway and had to beg a friend to buy a fifth annual Tiptree Award T-shirt for me.
Murphy explicitly locates the Tiptree as a response to what she saw as the marginalisation of, and hostility to, women in science fiction. She relates this to the opposition of male ‘hard’ sf to female ‘soft’ sf which I discussed in chapter six. In her WisCon 15 speech she leads up to her announcement of the Tiptree Award with the following story:

A few months ago, I was talking to a science fiction editor who is a friend of mine. We were talking about this and that, and in the course of conversation he happened to say, “Of course, you don’t write science fiction.”

Now I don’t always care what people call what I write, but I do like to understand why they call it one thing or another. And I’m curious about how people define science fiction. So I said, “What about ‘Rachel in Love’? That’s science fiction.”

And my friend said, “That’s not science fiction.”

I was really puzzled, so I said, “Using a method of neural transfer that I can justify scientifically, more or less, a scientist transfers his daughter’s personality and thought patterns to the brain of a chimp. That’s not science fiction?”

My friend frowned and got a little flustered and a little embarrassed and mumbled something or other. After a bit more uncomfortable conversation, it became clear that he had confused my story, “Rachel in Love,” with...”Her Furry Face,” by Leigh Kennedy, and as it turned out, “Her Furry Face,” though an excellent story, lacks many of the overt trappings of science fiction.

What seemed significant about my friend’s confusion was that it related to a persistent rumbling that I have heard echoing through science fiction. That rumbling says, in essence that women don’t write science fiction. Put a little more rudely, this rumbling says: “Those damned women are ruining science fiction.” They are doing it by writing stuff that isn’t “real” science fiction; they are writing “soft” science fiction and fantasy (Murphy [1991] 1992: 7-8).

The other guest of honour at Madison 15 was Pamela Sargent, the editor of the extremely influential Women of Wonder anthologies. In her guest of honour speech she also engages with this debate and quotes from Charles Platt’s claim from “The Rape Of Science Fiction” (1989) that

they [women] eroded science fiction’s one great strength that had distinguished it from all other fantastic literature: its implicit claim that events described could actually come true (Platt 1989: 14).

Sargent’s response is:

Well, shame on me - I reprinted stories by all these writers [Platt lists Vinge, McIntyre, Le Guin, Russ, Wilhelm and Emshwiller] in my Women of Wonder anthologies. I never dreamed I was helping to erode science fiction. I suppose we can consider this another ambiguous advance. Once, women were discouraged from entering the boys’ clubhouse, and now we are influential enough to be responsible for the decline of the field (Sargent [1991] 1992: 11).

Sargent discusses a short essay by Lewis Shiner from the New York Times where he claims that what sf needs is

a new literature of idealism and compassion that is contemporary not only on the technological level but also the emotional (Sargent [1991] 1992: 11-12).
"I couldn't agree with him more," writes Sargent, "but some of us were writing exactly that kind of literature" in the seventies and eighties (Sargent [1991] 1992: 12). Sargent's arguments are very close to those of Jeanne Gomoll which I discussed in chapter one in which she characterises the dismissal of 1970s sf and fandom as 'boring' as a move to make invisible the upheavals and very exciting changes wrought by the women's movement (Gomoll 1986-87: 7-10).

Sargent's speech was given on the same night as Murphy's announcement of the Tiptree Award. Although neither woman had colluded on the contents of their speeches they both used the occasion of being guest of honour at WisCon to discuss the state of feminist science fiction and they came to very similar conclusions. Both women began their careers in science fiction in the 1970s and so had been actively involved in second wave feminism and its impact on science fiction.

In the second volume of the newly published Women of Wonder anthology Sargent begins by discussing the Tiptree Award. She argues that

[by 1991, the effect of the women's movement on science fiction had faded in the minds of many. There was a need by then for an award that specifically honored and called attention to works that dealt imaginatively and inventively with gender roles. Some of the writers who had created a stir in the '70s were being forgotten. Women were still writing science fiction and winning acclaim for their work; indeed some of the most honored, accomplished, and important writers in the field were women, so no one could say that the field excluded women or that they had no audience. The situation was more complicated and ambiguous than that (Sargent 1995b: 2).

The Tiptree Award is a site from which to contest these different constructions of an object called '1970s science fiction', as well as being an active part of that construction.

The first two Tiptree Award presentations were held at WisCon. It was decided to hold some of the following presentations at other science fiction conventions. Suzy McKee Charnas writes:

[The third Tiptree will be awarded in Boston at a convention called ReaderCon in July, 1994. Moving the ceremony to different SF conventions around the country is meant to maximize its educative potential (and to avoid burnout in Madison) (Charnas 1993).

The sixth Tiptree will be awarded at the International Conference for the Fantastic in March 1997. As Charnas indicates, the Award is not only about
fostering a feeling of community amongst those who are part of feminist science fiction, it is also about actively working towards change. Perhaps, if there are more texts imagining the world otherwise eventually the world will be otherwise. This utopian impulse is articulated by Fowler:

Just ask yourself, if we weren’t taught to be women, what would we be? (Ask yourself this question even if you’re a man, and don’t cheat by changing the words.)

The Tiptree Award is supposed to honor people who try to answer that question - people who try to help us unlearn what television and the movies and books and comics and advertisements for automobiles and cigarettes have taught us (Fowler 1996: 109).

For Fowler, like de Beauvoir and many others before her, sex is not natural but something that must be learned. And the Tiptree Award is a site in which this learning process can be investigated and deconstructed. Charnas hopes that this process will lead to change:

No one knows how long the Tiptree will continue to be given. What we who have been involved in the process so far would like best would be to see such changes, in fiction and in life, that an award to help illuminate issues of the sex and gender war would no longer be needed.

In the meantime, works by Tiptree nominees and winners provide an entry point for women readers into the genre where our own and our children’s futures are being imagined in their many possible variations (Charnas 1993: 20).

The existence of the Award and of the feminist science fiction community in which the Award is fostered and nourished already demonstrates that a series of shifts have taken place within the field of science fiction. The increasing number of varied texts that are nominated for the Award each year is also a strong indication that the Tiptree Award has had an impact. However, Fowler and Murphy and others involved with the Award would like the Tiptree Award to have an impact outside the world of feminist science fiction.

One way in which the Tiptree Award has had an impact outside the world of feminist science fiction is the role it played in the successful application of Nicola Griffith to remain with her partner the writer Kelly Eskridge in the United States. Griffith won the Tiptree in 1994 for her novel *Ammonite*. Permission was granted largely because she was able to prove that she had won ‘major’ awards within her chosen field:
Winning the Tiptree, and the Lambda,\(^2\) and being nominated for a couple of other things did help with my immigrant application, and I don’t mind being quoted, or having my real name used. I applied for an EB-2 visa, granted to “aliens of exceptional ability” in the arts, sciences and so forth. Winning “nationally and internationally recognized” awards is one of the conditions of that visa. So, obviously, the Tiptree helped there. But where it helped most, I think, was in the second part of the application—the “national interest” waiver.

Labour certification is something that everyone has to fight for except heterosexual spouses and people like Nobel prize winners (to get an EB-1, you literally have to win the Nobel prize, “or equivalent”). As a writer, I didn’t have a job, don’t have a job and never intend to have a job. So I needed a way around that labour certification. I needed a waiver. So me and my lawyers set out to prove to the US government that it was, literally, in the national interest for me to live and work in this country. So I had to prove that my work was not only brilliant, unique, exceptional, extraordinary, prize-winning (etc. etc.) but that American citizens would be worse off without it. And so I talked about feminism, the way literature that shows new possibilities, helps citizens imagine those new possibilities, gives them something to aim for (among them, of course, parity between the sexes). The writer, I said, is the imagination, the soul and spirit, of the people. I can’t remember the words I used, exactly, but they were positively stuffed with hyperbole. And I had to get testimonial letters to back all that stuff up. Many people in the SF, and lesbian and gay, and feminist, and literary communities helped me out. And, much to my pleasure, the Justice Department said that, yes, it was in the national interest for me to live and work over here. So I guess I’m about as important as a stealth bomber. Anyway, my case apparently made new law. As far as I know, I’m the first out dyke to be granted this status—and all on the basis of my lesbian feminist science fiction.

But what I haven’t told many people yet is that the existence of science fiction fandom directly helped my case. In my final interview at the US embassy in London, the consular officer took one look at my material and said, “Hey, do you know Roger McBride Allen?” I said I knew his work. She said, “He’s a good friend of mine.” And we talked about Star Wars and other science fiction franchises, and she knew what a Nebula Award was, and understood the Tiptree. I believe, of course, that even if she hadn’t known SF from a hole in the ground I would have been granted admission, but that fandom thing, the acknowledgment of shared status as part of an often scorned minority, certainly made the process easier. She smiled, and stamped my application and said, “Come back at two o’clock for your visa.” As good as a funny handshake (Personal correspondence 18 April 1995).

An award that was conceived initially as a parody of science fiction awards, was able to mimic legitimacy as an award to such an extent that it in fact became legitimate and allowed Griffith to win in a game where, as a lesbian and an alien, the odds were stacked significantly against her. Griffith’s anecdote also adds to the layers of the science fiction community that I have been discussing in this thesis. Within the community, writers like Roger McBride Allen and Nicola Griffith are very differently located. Allen’s work is frequently described as hard sf and Heinlein-esque while Griffith’s work is most frequently called feminist (which still seems to preclude being viewed as a hard sf writer). Despite this gulf, in the context of the US embassy in London, the science fiction community and fandom becomes knowable and inclusive. The overlapping science fiction

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\(^2\) The Lambda is an award for the best gay and lesbian literature. It includes a science fiction category.
Ursula Le Guin receives and eats her Retrospective Tiptree Award, WisCon 20, 26 May 1996, photo by Helen Merrick.
communities are also able to have an effect on mundane fields so that it is Griffith’s position within science fiction which enables her to become a resident of the US.

The Tiptree also functions as a playful comment on the field of science fiction as a whole and many aspects of the Award were a comment on the older science fiction awards. Vonda McIntyre insisted that there be no stomach-churning suspense for the nominees at the Award presentation. Fowler comments that this practice of publishing the “short list and the winners simultaneously” avoids “transforming the people honored on the shortlist into losers” (Fowler 1996: 109). These lists of all texts considered for the Award, the winners and the shortlist are now a part of the Tiptree Award homepage and include comments from the judges about how each text fits under the rubric of the Tiptree award. In this way the Tiptree works in an expansionary rather than exclusionary way.

Another part of the Award’s playfulness is the physical Award itself. Suzy McKee Charnas and Ursula Le Guin independently suggested that the Award be edible, Le Guin commenting that “I have seen and even received some awards that would be far far better eaten” (Humphries, Bill, “James Tiptree, Jr. Homepage,” a World Wide Web page with URL http://www.sf3.org/tiptree/index.html)

Several of the award winners have thus been presented with a typewriter and award plaque cast in milk chocolate. In 1996 the two writers whose idea the chocolate award was, Charnas and Le Guin, were named Retrospective Tiptree Award winners (along with Joanna Russ) and were presented with huge chocolate plaques. The photo on the opposite page shows Le Guin taking a bite of her plaque. Le Guin had already been a co-winner of the Tiptree in 1995. On that occasion she was given a chocolate typewriter.

As well as chocolate there is US$1,000 in prize money, airfare to and expenses at the convention where the Award is presented, as well as a specially commissioned work from a woman artist. In 1995, for example, Nancy Springer received a mask representing the central character, Lark, from her Tiptree-
winning novel, *Larque on the Wing*. The Lark Mask was created in ceramic and feathers by artist and writer Michaela Roessner. The mask also works as a metaphor for James Tiptree, Jr/Alice Sheldon’s own masquerade, which underlines the performativity of sex and sexuality which is always a masquerade of some kind. Springer’s book, about a heterosexual woman who wakes up on her fortieth birthday to discover she has changed into a young homosexual man, is also concerned with the performance of sex and sexuality.

The Tiptree Award has also managed to avoid the usual hierarchy that is maintained by many literary awards, where only professionals are invited to be on the jury panel. The Tiptree Jury has included fans, writers, editors, booksellers, academics, even postgraduate students researching the Tiptree Award.

**Reception**

Pat and I did want to make trouble, and the people we imagined we would annoy were some shapeless, peniséd force in the field, some vague locus of male power.

Whoever these men are, my sense is that they’ve managed to ignore the Tiptree entirely. We have failed to upset (I would love to hear I’m wrong about this). Instead, every year has seen some controversy from within our community. I don’t know why I didn’t anticipate this. Obviously, even when your motive is to honor work, you will inevitably create a second category of the un-honored. This is where the controversy has come in. I think generally people range from okay to ecstatic with the actual winners. It’s the non-winners that trouble.

(Fowler, Fem-SF Discussion group 10 June 1996).

For Fowler, the “vague locus of male power” in the field ignoring the Award is more invidious than if they attacked it. In fact, there has been some anti-Tiptree commentary from two prominent men in the field. Hugo and Nebula winning sf writer, David Brin, was negative about the Tiptree Award in an interview for *Holland SF* by Ruud van de Kruisweg. Kruisweg asks Brin about his novel *Glory Season* (1993). Kruisweg puts the novel in the context of the battle of the sexes:

For some reason the idea of single sex societies never died out (though there are enough awful books written about this theme). I could think of quite a lot of recent novels about this subject, like Sheri Tepper’s “The Gate to Women’s Country”, Nicola Griffith’s “Ammonite”, Pamela Sargent’s “The Shore of Women”, maybe even Lois McMaster Bujold’s “Ethan of Aths”. All these books were written by female writers, not male. What is the reason that men don’t dwell on this theme anymore? Is the subject too hot to touch? Are women more interested in the ‘war between the sexes’, because they still feel that humans are still not created equal, never mind the official word? (From The Linkoping Science Fiction & Fantasy Archive  
http://sf.www.lysator.liu.se/sf_archive/sf-texts/authors/B/Brin%2CDavid.mbox)
Brin responds by referring to the Tiptree Award:

As I say in my afterword, it is a topic in which men are often denied to have the same wisdom or insight as female authors. Fortunately, only a few silly people have said that about Glory Season... (although those few did make certain the book was not considered for the James Tiptree Award for gender bending SF) (From The Linkoping Science Fiction & Fantasy Archive
http://sf.www.lysator.liu.se/sf_archive/sf-texts/authors/B/Brin%2CDavid.mbox)

Brin firmly locates his book within the battle of the sexes by giving “Poul Anderson (Virgin Planet)....and especially Phillip Wylie (The Disappearance)” as examples of “other men who have written in this area”. Kruisweg asks if there is any “particular reason why you think that feminist politics had the upper hand in not considering the book for the Tiptree Award?” Brin does:

Are you kidding? The award was designed specifically FOR political reasons! The only question was -- would it be controlled by feminists who are true citizens of science fiction...who want to explore ideas and solve problems...or would they be self-righteousness junkies, holding everything and everybody to ideological litmus tests. I have met very many of the former, feminists such as Sarah Hardy and Betty Friedan. Also, there are also many of the latter in SF, who cannot bear the idea of a man writing about such topics...especially a man with liberal views, but views not on the officially approved list (although those few did make certain the book was not considered for the James Tiptree Award for gender bending SF) (From The Linkoping Science Fiction & Fantasy Archive
http://sf.www.lysator.liu.se/sf_archive/sf-texts/authors/B/Brin%2CDavid.mbox)

In fact Glory Season was considered for the Tiptree and was on the 1994 longlist with lengthy comments from two of the judges, Ursula Le Guin and Jeanne Gomoll.

Charles Platt in a letter to SF Eye questioned the need for another science fiction award:

Awards are always a bad idea, and the Tiptree Award is even worse than usual, because it separates books by men from books by women as if the difference matters. It also implies that awards discriminate against women, which they don’t (Pat herself has won her share) (Science Fiction Eye June 1992: 6).

It was immediately pointed out to him that the Award is open to anyone. Texts by men have been on the shortlist in every year of the Award, and in 1996 a man, Theodore Roszak, was the co-winner of the Tiptree with Elizabeth Hand. In some quarters this has been dismissed as ‘tokenism’. In a lovely piece of unintentional irony which many associated with the prize have found enormously amusing, I asked Susanna Sturgis who chaired the 1994 Tiptree Jury about reactions to the Award:
After I returned home from Potlatch and the Tiptree ceremony, I started a Tiptree Award topic on GEnie, a U.S.-based online service that has three huge SF roundtables, for the written word, media, and fandom. I hoped it would encourage discussion of the award criteria ("what is gender-bending?" etc.) and encourage people to recommend books and stories for the award. It has done a little of this, but mostly it served as a forum for two or three men to air their uninformed prejudices about the award: why there is only one man on the jury, who decides what the criteria are, why no man ever won the award, and so on. What struck me is that, although the award founders and supporters are very accessible within the f/sf community, the complaining individuals had made no attempt to contact any of them with their questions and concerns. I encouraged them over and over again to recommend titles for the 1995 award, but none of them has (Personal correspondence 13 May 95).

The Tiptree has received a lot of coverage within the science fiction community.

Outside the field of sf, the coverage has been largely confined to the feminist press with an article by Julie Phillips appearing in the December 1995 issue of Ms. Susanna Sturgis has written articles about the 'Tiptree Juggernaut' for Feminist Bookstore News May/June 1995; Sojourner: The Women's Forum September 1994 and American Bookseller September 1992. In her construction of the Tiptree, Sturgis shapes it in terms of joking:

With such a trickster as its guiding spirit, the Tiptree Award has been blessed with an exuberant sense of humor. Feminists running bake sales, after all? (Sturgis 1992: 11).

She locates the Tiptree Award within the debates about woman and sf which I discussed in the third chapter:

Through the 1980s, the death of feminism was assumed by many in the mass media and prayed for by others. Not unknown in the fantasy and science fiction field (which, since the 1970s, has been challenged by the increasing visibility of women writers) are male voices wailing that women (a) ruined the genre, messing it up with their concern for plot and character, and/or (b) can't write 'hard' (ie rooted in 'real' science) science fiction (Sturgis 1992: 11).

Sturgis also notes that:

many believe that [the Award] has significantly affected what is being written and published. In the first eligibility year (1991), I was surprised how few of the books I read took risks with gender-related issues. Each year there have been more, as reflected by the steady growth of the shortlist: 5 titles in the first year, 7 in the second, 10 in the third and 14 in the fourth. Some writers now talk about how the existence of the Tiptree prompted them to re-examine and challenge their own assumptions about gender (Sturgis 1995: 52).

By far the greatest amount of debate about the Tiptree has taken place within the feminist sf community. Most recently a large part of this debate has taken place on the Fem-SF discussion group. Most of this debate has concerned winning
and shortlisted texts. However, the most frequent criticism is not about the texts which are on the list, but those that are not.

**Judging the Tiptree Award**

I don’t think it’s instructive to talk about trends. Every jury has begun by inventing the wheel — by grappling with the phrase “explores and expands gender” all over again. I am unaware of any jury being led by precedent, except in a couple of cases, where they didn’t like what a previous jury had done and vowed not to repeat it. So if some year you see the Tiptree veering, I think you can expect it to right itself again (from whatever slanted position you personally think is upright) and I guess I hope that the more irritated a year’s choices make you, the more eager you will be to serve on the jury in your turn and set things straight. This award belongs to us, as Susanna points out, in a way that other awards don’t.

(Fowler, Fem-SF Discussion group 10 June 1996)

I have spoken to a number of Tiptree judges about their experiences judging the award. The first issue that became apparent in these discussions is that each jury is involved in producing the Tiptree Award and that each jury is different. This means that the Award, like science fiction, itself is always in a state of becoming. The more recent judges have begun their time on the Tiptree jury with a knowledge of what a ‘Tiptree text’ is. They can point to previous winners and previous shortlists of texts considered. When the first jury convened, a ‘Tiptree text’ was a text written by James Tiptree, Jr.3 When they began debating about which texts they would shortlist and which they would give the award to they were part of the formation of the objects, ‘Tiptree Award Winner’ and ‘Tiptree text’. That these terms are beginning to have currency and effects is demonstrated by phenomena like the review of N. Lee Wood’s *Looking for the Madhi*. In her review of this text Shira Daemon argues that the book comments on the “ways in which we perceive gender differences” and asks that the “Tiptree Judges take note” (Daemon 1996: 31). I have spoken to science fiction writers who have told me that they are planning or writing their ‘Tiptree book.’

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3 Though as I have demonstrated in the previous chapter that is, by no means, a straightforward proposition.
Just what a Tiptree book is becomes the site of negotiation for each successive Tiptree Jury. The first jury worked with the rubric that they were looking for texts which "explored and expanded the roles of men and women". They were also given a list of books that Murphy and Fowler would have given the Award to in the past. Their paradigmatic case was Carol Emshwiller's brilliant *Carmen Dog* in which women begin to turn into beasts and beasts into women:

Pooch...,now finds herself taking over more and more of the housework and baby-sitting, yet continues to be faithful. Her mistress is deteriorating rapidly - mouth grown wide, eyes suspicious...A guinea pig named Cucumber...although not very smart is taking over several of the easier tasks in the house next door...Philip the king snake down the block, has turned out to be female after all, as has Humphrey the Iguana. Neither of them, it is clear, has much maternal instinct, though, and they were last seen heading south on Route 95 with not so much as a good-bye kiss to the little ones who had watched over them tenderly, albeit not very consistently (Emshwiller 1990: 2-3).

Later juries have had the examples of previous year's winners and short lists. In a discussion of the Tiptree Guidelines in the electronic discussion group, Fem-SF, Lucy Sussex, one of the 1995 jurors wrote:

Also, as Susanna Sturgis wrote in the Potlatch programme book, each year the judging panel redefines the award, as what is challenging in '92 may be old hat in '95. I can't comment on other year's panels, but we did this by consensus.

And the award is really not for ersatz Tiptree stories. We're not going to see her like again.
(Sussex, Fem-SF Discussion group, 11 July 1995).

Jeanne Gomoll, the chair of the 1994 Tiptree Award responds:

My experience on the judging panel for the 1993 Tiptree pretty much matches Lucy Sussex's experience in that we spent a great deal of time in our correspondence discussing what we thought the term "gender bending" meant. We agreed that it is not a term that can be defined once and for all time. It changes from year to year, and we decided that our task as judges was to choose the fiction that best represented its meaning the year we read for the award.

It was an incredible experience, but I don't think any of us dug up Pat's "guidelines" published in a press release to help us in our task.

The Tiptree process reinvents itself anew each year. Guidelines written one year will probably become outdated in another year. Right now, that seems a very good thing to me. If we agree that human consciousness evolves, why shouldn't the prizes we award for it also evolve.

And I agree with Lucy that we're not about giving awards to Tiptree look-alikes (Gomoll, Fem-SF Discussion Group, 15 July 95).

This exchange neatly explicates the negotiation that goes on from year to year on the panels and also the shift in meaning of Tiptree book from something written by Tiptree to something that could be shortlisted for the Tiptree Award. Susanna Sturgis, as part of this exchange of Fem-SF, writes:
We were guided in our discussions primarily by the works we read and the comments made by previous jurors. Sometimes the latter gave me clues to areas that might not have been taken seriously enough, eg., exposing the incestuous potential of the Traditional Family in Robin McKinley’s _Deerskin_ (1993) (Sturgis, Fem-SF Discussion Group, 17 July 1995).

Questions like, What does “gender-bending” mean? What are we looking for? What are we rewarding and encouraging? And the arguments and discussion they are part of give voice to undercurrents and debates within the broader science fiction community and beyond. Debates about popular feminism and ‘political correctness’ are raised frequently. Indeed Murphy attempts to pre-empt this charge in her guidelines: the “aim of the award organizers is not to look for work that falls into some narrow definition of political correctness” (Bill Humphries, “James Tiptree, Jr. Homepage,” a World Wide Web page with URL http://www.sf3.org/tiptree/index.html). The award serves to show also that feminism is not a monolith any more than science fiction is - that there are many feminists and feminisms.

The term “gender-bending” has been the centre of much debate within the context of the award:

Even among award supporters, I think, the term “gender-bending” is controversial. It’s catchy and easier to repeat than “fantasy or science fiction that explores and expands the roles of women and men”! For some people, though, it means gender CHANGING -- characters that change genders, as in _Orlando_ (Susanna Sturgis in personal correspondence 13 May 95).

It is interesting to consider just how difficult it is for people to say what the award is for. The phrase most frequently used by judges and those involved with the Tiptree, to try and explain what it is for is ‘gender-bending’. This is a term that has an almost quaint historical overtone, coming as it does, from the olden days of so-called seventies feminism. I like the term even with its resonances of 70s glam rock - where the bending of gender enabled David Bowie to sell a few million records. It is a term that is full of possibility - making of gender a play thing that can be endlessly reshaped - and in science fiction, bodies are above all else plastic.

Each jury has also had different dynamics and negotiated these questions in different ways. I spoke to at least one juror from each of the five juries. Naturally
their deliberations while on the jury are confidential but most were happy to talk to me more generally about their experiences as a Tiptree judge. Fantasy and science fiction scholar, Brian Attebery was the ‘token’ man on the 1995 jury. He narrates his experiences of being a Tiptree judge in terms of negotiation and consensus:

One thing that surprised me was the degree of agreement among the committee members. I had understood that previous panels had been rather divided, and since this was a group of people I had never met (except Pat Murphy, and that was only on one social occasion) I rather expected that we would have different takes on issues and stories. Then when we got to discussing, the most frequent way of introducing comments was “Susanna is right when she says…” or “I agree with Lucy that…”

I wonder if one of the reasons it worked as well as it did was that we made an effort to present ourselves and our readings in personal, informal ways, rather than as impartial judges making abstract statements. There was always a bit of chitchat in and around the discussion: My dealings with pre-school-age children and travels around the wilds of Idaho, Ellen’s radio work, Susanna’s horseback rides on the beach, Lucy’s new neighbourhood, etc. All of this not only made us feel like old friends, but it also gave a groundedness to our readings (Personal correspondence 17 May 1995).

His discourse is predicated here on both/and rather than, either/or and located in the interpersonal. The 1995 jury was the first all-electronic jury, as by October all jurors had an internet account. This brought the jurors, who were located in Melbourne, Australia and various points of the USA, much closer together and made communication faster and more immediate. This belies the notion that computers and computer technologies are cold and alienating. The 1997 Tiptree jury, of which I am a member, is also entirely electronic. This enables us to pursue our negotiations about sex/gender/sexuality and how this plays out in terms of individual texts without long delays.

As a founding mother, Karen Fowler, who is on this year’s jury with me, has had an inside view on the deliberations of all previous juries. She writes that:

Each jury tends to start off with a round of letters discussing those words. It gets easier for them than for us here, because they are dealing with actual books. By which I mean that it is easier to say a particular book doesn’t do this, than it is to say exactly what “this” is. In effect then, with these vague guidelines, each jury does make up its own criteria, and in different years, different values have predominated. Some juries have valued expansion more than exploration of gender. Some have felt that feminism was a crucial component and the sort of book you propose, the one that argues some essentially feminine quality to women could not have won in those years, although perhaps in others (Fowler, Fem-SF discussion group, 19 June 96).

Jurors from various years have also told me that they were guided by certain things they did or did not like about an earlier jury’s decisions. Some thought
previous years' lists were too long or too short and decided to remedy that situation.

As a juror I have found that it is much easier to say whether a given book is or is not what I think of as a Tiptree text than it is to explain what a Tiptree text is. Juries are engaged in a meaning making process and these processes are dependent on paradigmatic contrast. You make meaning by saying whether a given thing is or is not part of a particular paradigmatic set, not by defining the paradigm. The meanings are thus made through exchange and negotiation between each of the jury members. What constitutes a Tiptree text is renegotiated every year. However, this process takes place in the deliberations around all literary awards, the notion of good writing and what text is the ‘best’ is as much under negotiation as is the notion of “expanding and exploring gender”.

The Tiptree Texts

(i) Encouraging speculation about gender: The Tiptree Award

Having a prize means that there must be winners, and in having winners and a shortlist the Tiptree award has created a visible canon of sf that speculates about gender, sex and sexuality. Every year as more winners of the prize are named and more texts added to the short-list, this canon grows. Up to this date the winners have been:


1993: Maureen F. McHugh, China Mountain Zhang, Tor, 1992

1994: Nicola Griffith, Ammonite, Del Rey, 1993


While the winning texts and shortlisted texts have as much differentiating them as they have in common, all these texts engage with the “problematical space” of ‘sex/gender’ (Sedgwick 1990: 29). Not all of the Tiptree texts are easily situated within the battle of the sexes. For instance, McHugh’s *China Mountain Zhang* (1992) set in a future world in which China is the dominant power and homosexuality is illegal, is not what I constitute as a battle of the sexes text.

However, in many of the Tiptree texts, tropes and themes of the battle of the sexes texts I discussed in chapters three and four are apparent: all-women or women dominated worlds - Elisabeth Vonarburg’s *In the Mother’s Land* (1992), Griffith’s *Ammonite* (1993) and Geoff Ryman’s “O Happy Day!” (1994); women at war with men - Alice Nunn’s *Illicit Passage* (1992) and Suzy McKee Charnas’ *The Furies* (1994); hermaphrodites - Graham Joyce & Peter F. Hamilton’s “Eat Reecebread” (1994) and Duchamp’s “Motherhood Etc.” (1993). In Melissa Scott’s *Shadow Man* (1995) the multiple sexes of the earlier texts are given names. Her book has five sexes - fem, man, woman, herm and mem.5 Le Guin’s “The Matter of Seggri” (1994) is set on a world in which “men have all the privilege and the women have all the power” (Le Guin 1994: 9). The text comments on early sexbattle texts like Bond’s “The Priestess Who Rebelled” (1939) as well as the later *Gate into Women’s Country* (1989) by Sheri S. Tepper. Springer’s *Larque on the Wing* (1994), about a woman who finds she has become a young homosexual man on her fortieth birthday, shares the central sex-change idea with Keller’s “The Feminine Metamorphosis” (1929) and Dickinson’s “The Sex Serum” (1935), although the text entirely re-works these transformations.

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4 See Appendix II for the full annotated lists of shortlisted and longlisted texts.

5 Scott’s *Shadow Man* (1995) was not shortlisted for the 1996 Tiptree but was part of a separate list of “Other Works of Note”.
The Tiptree texts, as well as being in conversation with pre-Tiptree Award texts which speculate about sex and sexuality, are also in conversation with each other. Each new list of winning and shortlisted texts redefines what it is to speculate about these issues in science fiction and comments on previous years of the award.

**Recognising past speculation about gender: The Retrospective Tiptree Award**

Vonda McIntyre wrote, quite rightly, "This is a kind of no-brainer, isn't it? The first retrospective Tiptree should go to Uncle Tip. If you have to have a title, "The Women Men Don't See," but better for the body of work". Was James Tiptree eligible for the Retrospective Tiptree Award? That question hadn't occurred to us. Alice Sheldon did, of course write the definitive Tiptree-Award-winning stories (and while doing it, lived a Tiptree-Award-winning-life). Ultimately, we decided that the existence of the award itself was a tribute to James Tiptree and that giving Alice Sheldon the retrospective award would be redundant.

(Murphy 1996: 119)

At the 1996 Tiptree Award Presentation held at WisCon in May the first Retrospective Tiptree Award was given to Ursula Le Guin for *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), to Joanna Russ for "When It Changed" (1972) and *The Female Man* (1975), and to Suzy McKee Charnas for *Walk to the End of the World* (1974) and *Motherlines* (1978). The decision was made by getting all the judges of the first five years of the Tiptree to nominate five works for the Retrospective Award. When the nominations were all put together the jurors were asked to choose three works. As well as the three winners, a list of all the other works that had substantial support from jurors was compiled. Pat Murphy writes that for her,

> this list has already served its purpose. There are books on it that I missed when they came out - and a few that I'd never heard of it! For me, this is a list of future pleasures - books to seek out and appreciate. But I'd also like to note that this is not the final, complete, never-to-be-changed list of what could have won a Tiptree Award. Like the award itself, the list may change over the years. Who knows? Five years (and hundreds of chocolate chip cookies) from now, we could torture another list of jurors with unreasonable requests (Murphy 1996: 119).

I have examined Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness* and Russ' "When it Changed" as part of the battle of the sexes, and had my time frame extended past 1973, I
How to run a James Tiptree Jr. Memorial Award Bakesale Pamphlet.
would certainly have discussed the two novels by Charnas. Giving these texts the Retrospective Award makes explicit the tradition of speculation about sex that has existed within science fiction since 1926. The existence of this Retrospective Award works to highlight these connections. It also makes explicit the way in which the genre consists of readers of texts, as well as texts and producers of texts. The annotated Retrospective Tiptree Award list is full of jurors’ reminiscences about the impact these texts had on them as readers. Debbie Notkin writes of *The Left Hand of Darkness* that it

> was for me, as I think it was for many readers my age, my first time. In all the science fiction I had read before that. I had only found hints, tantalizing glimpses, of what I knew could be there. *The Left Hand of Darkness* threw open wide the doors that had been left alluringly ajar and said, “Come in. There’s more room here than you ever imagined. Let me show you what some of it is like” (WisCon 20 Souvenir Book 1996: 120).

For Notkin and the other jurors the process of choosing the winners of the Retrospective Award involved them reliving their involvement with the field and what they see as crucial shaping moments of that engagement.

_Alice James Raccoona Tiptree Davey Hastings Bradley Sheldon Jr. and the James Tiptree Jr. Memorial Award_

And then Karen, who tends toward brilliance, said, “What about James Tiptree, Jr.?" James Tiptree, Jr., winner of multiple Nebulas...[who] was revealed in mid-career as Alice Sheldon, and forever after, in every introduction James Tiptree was again revealed as Alice Sheldon. James Tiptree, Jr., who helped break down the imaginary barrier between “women’s writing” and “men’s writing.” James Tiptree, Jr., author of “The Women Men Don’t See”.


As much as Tiptree enabled the Award to come into existence so too has the Award given James Tiptree, Jr. another life. In a pamphlet produced by SF³, the Madison science fiction group, “How to Run a James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award Bake Sale” there is a section on “Tips for the Gourmet (Optional suggestions and other hints)” which is reproduced opposite. The pamphlet demonstrates that part of the Award is to encourage interest in the writing and lives of Tiptree.
I spent much of chapter four looking at the figure of Hermaphroditus as an ambivalent symbol of both hope in the battle of the sexes, and of acquiescence, and of defeat. Tiptree is another ambivalent symbol, a modern day Hermes.\textsuperscript{6} Hermes is a charged and ambivalent figure, flitting between life and death, being the God of narrative, and the genitor of Hermaphroditus who is both male and female. Like Tiptree, not easily tied down and also like Tiptree/Sheldon et al - a trickster.

As a trickster she/he has come to play an important role for some feminists in the science fiction community. And it is this role of trickster which has been a strong influence on the formation of the Tiptree Award. The majority of the literature about the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award is littered with words like play, laughter, joking and parody.

The stories I sketched in the previous chapter about the lives of Tiptree et al, and other connected stories circulating amongst fan and pro, enabled the formation of the Tiptree award. Predominantly it is those stories about the mysterious Tiptree, and after the Revelation, about Alice Sheldon-who-is-Tiptree which have had the most currency. What contribution do stories about the life of a child in and out of Africa and Asia during the final decades of colonial rule, the life of a young woman married to an alcoholic poet, and a little later to an officer and a gentlemen, make to the meaning and constitution of a science fiction award and one that is pointedly not the Alice Sheldon Award?

All these Alices and Tiptree and Raccoona were, and are, part of the field of science fiction. The child Alice read science fiction:

The summer when I was 9 we were up in the woods of Wisconsin as usual, and Uncle Harry returned from an expedition to the metropolis of 1000 souls thirty miles away with his usual collection of the \textit{New York Times, The Kenyon Review}, etc...Out of his bundle slipped a 7 by 9 magazine with a wonderful cover depicting, if I recollect, a large green octopus removing a young lady’s golden brassiere. We stared. The title was \textit{Weird Tales}.

“Ah,” said Uncle Harry. “Oh. Oh yes. I, ah, I picked this up for the child.”

“Uncle Harry,” I said, my eyes bulging, “I am the child. May I have it, please?”

“Oh,” said Uncle Harry. And slowly, handed it over.

\textsuperscript{6} I am indebted to Judith Barbour for drawing my attention to the similarity of the figure Hermes to that of Tiptree.
The February 1929 issue of *Weird Tales* by Hugh Rankin.
And so it all began. He would slip them to me and I would slip them back to him. Lovecraft - oh god. And more and more and more; we soon discovered Amazing and Wonder Stories and others that are long forgotten (Tiptree 1979: 32).

The cover referred to is reproduced opposite.7 Tiptree and Raccoona were part of the fan world of sf as well as the professional one. More broadly they were part of science fiction communities. They were part of the kind of science fiction that is recognised and perpetuated by the feminist convention, WisCon.

In her introduction to The Bakery that Men Don’t See, Diane Martin argues that the award has to be called the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award to remind everyone of the palpable effects of being a male writer and how, if it is discovered that a male writer is ‘really’ a woman, there is a very different set of effects. I agree. However, it is important to remember that Tiptree is not a stable, easily mapped writer. Tiptree is also Raccoona and the three Alices I discussed in chapter seven. Tiptree was also none of them. And the fascination of Tiptree/Alice lies not just in her/his most public science fiction life but in the personal discontinuities that make up those lives. The Tiptree Award is given for texts which explore and expand gender. Alice/Tiptree’s lives do just that and in doing so they demonstrate that being male and being female are not opposites; there are a variety of ways of being either and both, and none of us is (or are) a unified subject (Henriques et al 1984; Davies & Harre 1990). I believe that science fiction is the perfect place to explore these diversities and that the Tiptree Award is a fantastic (in every sense) site for the recognition and propagation of this exploration.

7 However, the only issue of Weird Tales which fits that description is dated February 1929 when Alice would have been 13 or 14.
Epilogue

In order to know something we first have to make it...we produce the things we know, that's how we come to know them

(King 1994: xv).

In this thesis I have produced an object, the battle of the sexes in science fiction, and traced its journeys from 1926 to 1973; through the multiple lives of Tiptree et al, through the Award shaped by his/her life and the seventy year long story of science fiction communities and feminism and women. This complex, and contradictory object that I have created has enabled me to know the field of science fiction, and in knowing it, to become a part of that field. My science fiction is not the same as that which Aldiss creates in Billion Year Spree (1973) or Amis creates in New Maps of Hell (1960). Neither is it entirely the same science fiction that Lefanu creates in her Chinks in the World Machine (1988) or Roberts creates in A New Species (1993). My science fiction is a series of shifting communities, consisting of people, texts and knowledges and their engagements with each other. For my construction of this field, like Katie King’s construction of feminist theory, conversations are central.

I have examined a much longer period of sf’s development than is usually covered in feminist critical accounts of science fiction. This examination has enabled me to contextualise and historicise the debates about women and sf, within the field of sf, within the various science fiction communities and the debates and conversations between these communities. This makes my object, science fiction, different from those of Aldiss, Amis, Lefanu and Roberts who are predominantly concerned with fictional texts.

My construction of the field of science fiction has also been crucially shaped by my physical location. Having access to the Rare Books collection at the University of Sydney library meant that I was able to trace conversations about men, women and science fiction through the letters, editorials, articles and science fiction stories of prozines, fanzines and books over the past seventy years.
Conversations between Asimov, Byers, Mary and James Rogers, Turnbull and others in the pages of *Astounding* in the late 1930s; and between Russ, Anderson, Tiptree, Le Guin and others in the 1970s; and amongst Tiptree judges and the participants of fem sf on three different continents in the 1990s. These series of conversations are produced by, and also produce, the battle of the sexes texts, WisCon, the James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award and many other sites of these debates.

The conversations that I have charted throughout this thesis have been crucial in shaping it. So too have the conversations that I have had about, and as a result of, this thesis. I mean most particularly my discussions with other students and scholars and members of science fiction communities. Many of these conversations took place in emails between participants scattered throughout Australia, the USA, Canada and Britain. The internet has not been merely a means of speeding up communication, but has enabled an interaction that would not otherwise have been possible, and has thus been a crucial part of my production of the object of knowledge that is this thesis. This has operated in a variety of ways, from requests for information about hard to find fanzines, resulting in copies of those fanzines materialising in my letter box, to images for this thesis being sent to me in a matter of minutes from the other side of the world, to the sense of the science fiction community that I am reminded of every time I log into my email account.

Both fictional and 'non-fictional' explorations of the sexes negotiate and explore what it is to be a man or a woman or neither, and the political, social and cultural capital that attaches to that particular kind of being within the field (or fields) of science fiction. These discourses manifestly demonstrate that there is no one way of being any or either of these sexes - that being is a production, a performance - and it is continuing. These texts also demonstrate that their engagement with such issues is constitutive and explorative and not merely an exemplification of them.
The battle of the sexes stories that I examined in chapter three make explicit the inequality between the class known as women and that known as men. Most of these sexbattle stories attempt to teach that the rule of men is natural. Disrupting this natural order can only lead to anarchy and thus stagnation, or, to too much order, and thus stagnation. However, as I have shown, in the midst of their conservatism, rampant misogyny, heterosexism, and anti-feminism, these texts denaturalise essential differences between the sexes and reveal the existence of more than two sexes, and the fluidity of these sexed bodies.

At the same time, the texts I examined in chapters three and four locate all difference on the axis of sex: race and class are almost entirely elided. The worlds imagined in The Disappearance (1951) and Venus Plus X (1960) are predicated on an equality between white men and white women and yet the term white is never used, let alone explored. White becomes, not only unmarked, but invisible.

The texts I examined in chapter three seek to erase the bodies of not-real men and women. However, their existence is what enables the real women and men to signify as real and their erasure is never quite possible as the range of not-real sexed bodies leaks out. These leakages become the focus of some of the texts I examined in chapter four such as Russ’ “When It Changed” (1972) Sturgeon’s Venus Plus X (1960) and Le Guin’s Left Hand of Darkness (1969) and of many of the Tiptree texts, both those authored by Tiptree and those associated with the Tiptree Award. Many of these texts, such as Springer’s Larque on the Wing (1994) and Duchamp’s “Motherhood Etc” (1993) focus on those who perform their sex inadequately, rather than on the real-man real-woman dyad of sexbattle texts such as Bond’s “The Priestess Who Rebell’d” (1939) or Cooper’s Who Needs Men? (1972). All these texts, whether overtly feminist or anti-feminist, are also located within the discourse of romance and its enunciation and enforcement of heterosexuality. Some of the texts, including Wyndham’s “Consider Her Ways” (1956), Russ’ “When it Changed” (1972) and Jones’ White Queen (1991), interrogate this discourse.
The texts I have examined in this thesis are not simply theorising the performance of sex; they are engaged in the performance of sex. They are both practice and theory. Nor are those performances confined to written texts. As Pat Murphy writes of Tiptree/Sheldon: he/she wrote the "definitive Tiptree-Award-winning stories" and at the same time she/he "lived a Tiptree-Award-winning-life" (Murphy 1996: 119).

As I demonstrated in chapter seven, the lives of Alice James Raccoona Tiptree Davey Hastings Bradley Sheldon Jr. vividly demonstrate the groundedness of post-structuralist understandings of subjectivity. A concept of a fixed unitary subject is simply inadequate for mapping out these overlapping and intertwining lives. Even those texts which are predicated on this idea, such as those in chapter three, serve to demonstrate that the unitary subject is illusionary.

This thesis is also part of an examination of my own subjectivity. The journey of the production of my thesis has compelled me to examine my own relationship to the field of science fiction and to think about the ways in which the field has shaped my sense of self. Additionally, as I argued in chapter one, that process of exploration has changed my relationship to the field. I have become an active member of a community of which previously I had had only the vaguest inkling. The process of writing a thesis is frequently a process of initiation into a community, though usually that community is an academic one. This initiation has made real to me that texts are inextricably part of communities; that genres are embodied, are communities, rather than static collections of markings on paper.
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**Periodicals Consulted**

Appendix I

The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction 1926 - 1973

*All texts discussed in detail in the thesis are marked with an asterix.*


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Appendix II

The James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award Lists

The following lists were provided by Jeanne Gomoll, who manages the Tiptree Award archives.

The James Tiptree, Jr. Memorial Award

The James Tiptree, Jr. Award is given to the work of science fiction or fantasy published in one year which best explores or expands gender roles.

The Founding Mothers

Karen Joy Fowler and Pat Murphy

The Heroes

The people who made the bake sales, contributed to and produced the cookbooks, designed the t-shirts, sewed the quilt, donated unsolicited cash, attended the annual ceremonies, and otherwise contributed to the ongoing life and saga of the Tiptree organism. The energy and enthusiasm the award engenders is incontrovertible proof of just how hungry the science fiction community is for this award, and how ready everyone has been to make it happen and make it keep happening.

The Process

Each year Founding Mothers, Pat Murphy and Karen Joy Fowler appoint a panel of five judges to read and discuss among themselves the merits of gender-bending fiction published in the previous year. Anyone and everyone is invited to forward recommendations for novels and short fiction to Karen Joy Fowler (3404 Monte Vista, Davis, CA 95616), who will request copies for the judges from publishers. Publishers are encouraged to alert Karen about soon-to-be-published gender-bending fiction.

At the end of a year of reading and deliberation, the judges choose a winner who is invited to the Tiptree Award ceremony to accept their award and prize money. Each winner receives a check for $1000. Tiptree ceremonies have been
held at several WisCon SF conventions in Madison, Wisconsin, as well as at Readercon in Worcester, Massachusetts, and at Potlatch in Oakland, California.

Although the judges choose not to release a list of nominees before the actual award, thus creating an artificial set of "losers," they do publish a "shortlist" of fiction to which they wish to call readers' attention. In 1994 and 1995, the judges published both a "shortlist" and a "longlist."

"One of the most exciting things about the first panel of judges for the Tiptree Award was the intensity, care, and concern with which the judges read, and wrote about what they read. Everyone aired real concerns, everyone listened to each other.

"The James Tiptree, Jr. Award was started by visionaries, supported by nourishment, and selected with passion, patience and respect for difference. Alice Sheldon would have a lot to be proud of." - Debbie Notkin, coordinator of the first Tiptree panel of judges, 1992

The 1992 James Tiptree, Jr. Award

Judges
- Suzy McKee Charnas
- Sherry Coldsmith
- Bruce McAllister
- Vonda McIntyre
- Debbie Notkin (coordinator)
- Non-attributed commentary harvested from correspondence among the judges.

Winners of the 1992 James Tiptree, Jr. Award


"Four-square grumpy humor and effortless inventiveness. It explores the situation of a people much more obviously (if not more deeply) fixed in mammalian psycho-sexual wiring than we are (or think we are). No easy answers, no question begging, just a clean, clever job."

"That wonderful mix of 'sense of wonder' (alien-ness) and shock of recognition (humanity) which ... the very best science fiction has and which ... 'courage' in SF demands."

Gwyneth Jones, The White Queen, Gollancz, 1991
“The real reason this book is so good is its moral complexity. You don’t know whether to root for the heroes as they challenge the seemingly benevolent aliens or to pity the heroes for their xenophobia. Jones makes that decision as difficult for us as the decision to support the PLO or the IRA or the Mojahadeen (take your pick) is for people today. The book is infuriatingly and justifiably inconclusive; the characters are as confused as most of today’s viewers are.”

1992 Shortlist

John Barnes, *Orbital Resonance*, Tor 1991

“This book deserves serious consideration because of the viewpoint character (a teenage girl on a space station) and because of the changes Barnes postulates in people living in a new environment. It’s very good science fiction; excellent speculation. Quirky and interesting politics. He’s done a fine job of imagining what living in his creation would be like.”


Karen disqualified this one early, because she administers the Tiptree with Pat Murphy, but the judges didn’t let her keep it off the shortlist. “Every bit as distinguished as *The White Queen*. After eight years of cyberpunk as a more masculine than feminine endeavor, two very strong writers [Fowler and Jones] have invented a feminist reply. In so doing, they’ve made a long overdue contribution to the great dialog of the SF field.”


“Gentle not only successfully blurs the gender lines around rape, she raises all the questions so prevalent in contemporary culture about date rape, marital rape, and other situations where the lines are blurred. ... One of the best things about the book is that the protagonist understands what she’s done, and why, and through that, comes to understand what the rapist did, and why. Gentle also, in the relationship between the protagonist and her husband, deals with two [essential] gender issues (or at least relationship issues)-love without beauty and love in a context of controlled jealousy.”


“Women of various ages and stages and forms struggle over a most basic and grand ‘magical’ achievement, the accomplishment of the winter solstice and release towards spring. A victory is won without the toot of a single war-horn or clash of battle, and it works-without argument, without over-protection, without polemic of any kind, but just by being told, and well-told.”
Marge Piercy, He, She and It, Summit Books, 1991

"Women tend to talk differently from men ... Part of the reason women speak differently is because their concerns are different. I think that Piercy has taken on cyberpunk and made it answer the questions that women are most likely to ask about the future. Shira and Malkah, the protagonists, are not sleazoid-underworld-street-samurai; they're women who'd like to raise a kid successfully as well as jack in. ... This was new; it is not a minor triumph."

The 1993 James Tiptree, Jr. Award

Judges
Eleanor Anason
Gwyneth Jones
John Kessel
Michaela Roessner (coordinator)
Pamela Sargent
Non-attributed commentary harvested from correspondence among the judges.

Winner of the 1993 James Tiptree, Jr. Award

Maureen McHugh, China Mountain Zhang, Tor, 1992

"Homosexuality is a useful device for a political novelist—a male homosexual is a public agent who does not stand to benefit, in the terms of his own futurity, from anything the state can do. Throughout this novel there's an understated, building tension between the loveless embrace of the 'caring' state and the unassuming humane behavior of Zhang the outsider. Deep in the heart of China Mountain Zhang there's a very old riff: the wild talent, the young male outsider who is smarter, faster, much better than the system that rejects him. McHugh has given this old, old story an elegant transformation."

"A sympathetic and subtle portrayal of women and men in nontraditional roles."

"Avoiding preachment without abandoning thought is hard. Characters must seem real without seeming doctrinaire; issues must arise out of the story instead of being imposed on it. By this standard I'd say McHugh's China Mountain Zhang is the best political novel I've read in years, because for the most part it doesn't seem to be about politics at all."

"Rigorous science fiction, set in a non-western culture. It's well written and the characters live and breathe. It's got it all."
1993 Shortlist

Carol Emshwiller, *Venus Rising*, Edgewood Press, 1992

“Liked the alien sense of Emshwiller’s amphibious people. An explicitly feminist story which also has an underlying, rationalized yet subtle science-fictional rationale. I like the way *Venus Rising* can be read both metaphorically and as a ‘pure’ science fiction story.”

Ian MacLeod, “Grownups,” Isaac Asimov’s SF Magazine, 6/92

“This taps into some basic male discomfort with what pregnancy does to women’s bodies (although there is no pregnancy *per se* in the story), and also with adolescent fears about adulthood, the perception of growing up as a loss of vitality and identity.”


“A good science fiction novel about incest or the threat or possibility thereof. Moffett also does a good job of showing the connection—for many conservative Christians—between religion, consumerism, disrespect for the planet and fear of different people.”

“Moffett’s writing on gender issues, and on the future of humanity, is profoundly and insidiously pessimistic. Under the placid surface of *Time*, there’s a truly terrible, and grimly justified, vision of the relationship between the sexes.”


“Liked this book’s openly sexual interpretation of human power broking, and the way that sex-drive scrambling for dominance is shown as being destructive on every possible level.”

“If this novel isn’t explicitly about gender roles, they certainly underlie and drive the characters and their interactions. This is rich, realistic, beautifully done science fiction with the kind of detail that makes one feel the writer has actually lived in the world he creates.”

Sue Thomas, *Correspondence*, The Women’s Press, 1992

“Thoughtful, philosophical, intelligent exploration of human/machine interfacing and transformations.”

Lisa Tuttle, *Lost Futures*, Grafton, 1992
"This book is a multiverse riff, strongly reminiscent of The Female Man and Woman on the Edge of Time, but the device is used for a personal, not a political story. It's mildly yet pervasively eerie and disorienting."

Elisabeth Vonarburg, In the Mother's Land, Bantam, 1992

"Vonarburg's writing has a seriousness of purpose that much American science fiction, even some of the best, lacks; moral issues and intellectual debates are an important and exciting part of her work. Change may be necessary, but one has a sense, in this novel, of how problematic it is and how much pain it can cause. One of the delights of this novel is that the reader learns about the protagonist's world in much the way she does, first discovering her immediate environment and then, gradually, the world beyond it.

The 1994 James Tiptree, Jr. Award

Judges:
Steve Brown = SPB
Susan Casper = SC
Jeanne Gomoll (coordinator) = JG
Ursula K. Le Guin = UKL
Maureen F. McHugh = MFM

Commentary was harvested from correspondence among the judges and attributed by the judges' initials.

Winner of the 1994 James Tiptree, Jr. Award

Nicola Griffith, Ammonite, Del Rey, 1993

Griffith details a civilization—several generations old—composed entirely of women. Her novel displays uncommon skill, a compelling narrative and a sure grasp of the complexity of civilization. While avoiding rhetoric, cant and stereotype, Griffith's politics run subtle and deep. [SPB]

A well-written first novel of a world on which there are no males, the men having been killed by a virus long ago. The story is told through the eyes of a woman who goes there to study the society that has evolved. This is the story of how people interact, and the evolution and adaptation of the protagonist to a world that is different from the one she's always known. Also a novel which postulates that a society composed of only women would not be fundamentally different from one containing both genders. A real page-turner with beautifully well-drawn characters. [SC]
Ammonite is an interesting rite-of-passage novel in which the main character Marghe works out who she is and what she wants to do with her life. The culture of the planet Jeep-influenced by a virus fatal to most women and all men, that also facilitates genetic mixing and not-really-parthenogenenic births—was fascinating and believable. This book is not based on “difference” gender philosophy (i.e., that women and men are basically psychologically different), and therefore, the women-only culture wasn’t portrayed as a utopia for its lack of men. Greed and mindless violence exist in this culture as in ours. Its gender-bending message was that sexuality is only a minor part of human relationships. The characters all seem to take it for granted that sexual preference is an almost irrelevant aspect of understanding one another. In fact, the lack of men in this world is important only for the fact that because of it, Jeep is quarantined from the rest of the (mainly corrupt) Federation, until and if an vaccine is discovered. The human women on Jeep are never referred to as a lesbian community. They are simply a community of people, all of whom happen to be women.[JC]

A self-assured, unself-conscious, convincing depiction of a world without men, this is perhaps the strongest pure science fiction on the list-doing what only SF can do, and doing it with skill and brio. Is it a gender bender? It answers the question “When you eliminate one gender, what’s left?” (a whole world, is the answer). but a lot of books like Moby Dick, eliminate one gender, and yet nobody thinks anything about it. I believe Kate Clinton has the answer: “When women go off together it’s call separatism. When men go off together it’s called Congress.” [UKL]

When plague wipes out all the men and many of the women of a contingent of marines, a planet is declared quarantined. Marghe is sent to study the “natives,” women left from an earlier colonization attempt which was also infected. Ammonite could have been a didactic novel or a utopian fiction, but Griffith has made her world of women complex and full of people both good and bad. [MFM]

1994 Shortlist

Eleanor Arnason, Ring of Swords, Tor, 1993

A novel about human interaction with a culture where cross-gender relations are forbidden, and even contact is kept to a minimum. A lovely book, though the violent male, non-violent female aspects were a tad heavy-handed. Also suffers slightly from a read-the-next-book-in-the-series sort of ending. [SC]

This novel is both a rousing page-turner and idea-turner. The aliens in this book might be the technically advanced version of the aliens from Arnason’s
Tiptree-winning novel, *Woman of the Iron People*. In both books, Arnason created an alien race whose social stability stems directly from the separation of male and female cultures. Both books are also based on the arguable premise that the male tendency toward violence differentiates gender. Given that premise, the culture and story that follows are fascinating. Both Hwarhath and Human culture must re-examine all their assumptions when the two races meet one another and begin negotiations to avoid war. (JG)

Both the narrators of this book use an understated, slightly self-mocking, casual tone which may lead the reader to take the story lightly. It is not a lightweight story. It is intellectually, emotionally, and ethically complex and powerful. A great deal of it is told by implication only, and so the moral solidity of the book and its symbolic and aesthetic effectiveness may pass a careless reader right by. The characters are mature, thoughtful, imperfect people, the settings are vivid, the drama is tense, and the science-fictional reinvention of gender roles is as successful as any I have ever read.

The only physical gender difference between human and Hwarhath is that alien women are a little larger than the men; but the cultural gender differences are immense and their implications fascinating, both as a device for questioning human prejudice and convention, and as the basis for a very good novel. The shadowy presence of a third species runs through it both unifying its ideas and always putting all assumptions back in question—a beautiful symbolic device. A beautiful book. (UKL)

A story of alien contact where the male of the species is considered too volatile to have at home. Arnason examines some of our assumptions of gender by creating an alien race whose assumptions are just enough different than ours to bring ours into high relief. (MFM)


Two young girls, minor characters in *The Robber Bride*, demand that all storybook characters—good and evil—be read as female. So too does Atwood portray all the main characters of *The Robber Bride*—good and evil—as female. This fictional warping of gender role expectations forces an understanding that is ironically more complex than the so-called real world in which behavior and archetype are frequently divided into two sets, female and male. The hint of possibly supernatural motivations, give me the excuse to include this wonderful novel on the Tiptree shortlist. [JG]

Though in this book Atwood does not extrapolate from gender construction as she did in *Handmaid’s Tale*, gender construction and the behavior and relationships forced on people by their gendered sexuality is always one of her
central topics. In this case we have a major artist at the height of her powers telling a very grimm's fairytale about what a Bad Woman does to Good Men and Good Women. It is a splendid novel, and far and away the funniest book this jury got to read. (UKL)

Sybil Claiborne, *In the Garden of Dead Cars*, Cleis Press, 1993

To me this is the most original book we read, and the most honest. The grim, repressive urban future seems familiar, conventional, but it grows less so as we read: its vivid, gritty reality is not borrowed, but discovered. What has happened to men, how women have adjusted to it, who the "carnals" are, all this complex matter is told with a mature and subtle simplicity, as the background to a strong love story and to the yet more powerful relationship of a daughter and a mother. [UKL]

L. Timmel Duchamp, "Motherhood" in *Full Spectrum 4*, Bantam, 1993

Considers the very interesting premise that human sexual dimorphism (e.g., gender) is a physiological accident that might be swept away by a virus. A young girl reconsiders her body, her self and her relationship with everyone around her when she catches this virus. [JG]

A nineteen year old girl ! discovers that her boyfriend has given her a virus that makes her something not human, maybe not female, and the government wants to keep her quarantined. This story could have been the story of a victim but Duchamp has made Pat, her nineteen-year-old, both nineteen and anything but a victim. [MFM]


Robertson has crafted a vivid portrait of a Native American society-the Sioux, at a time when the events of Little Big Horn are occurring just over the horizon. His main characters are two women, one enacting a warrior role and the other transvestite, that seem startlingly unlikely to our eyes. Robertson fearlessly avoids presenting his Sioux with politically correct Noble Savage stereotyping, giving us several thoughtless, cruel, even stupid examples, and ends up with a three dimensional picture of a fully human milieu. [SPB]

A vivid story about Indian Wars of the last century that explores gender in both its look at a young woman who takes on the role of warrior to assuage her brother’s ghost, and her transvestite friend who has his eyes set on the white soldiers. [SC]

This story is interesting for its message that cultures based upon different understanding of humanity create dissonant communication when individuals
from those cultures try to understand one another. Indians and Whites; women
and men; White men and Indian women... [JG]

James Patrick Kelly, “Chemistry,” Asimov’s, 6/1993

In Kelly’s vivid story, all of the interactive negotiations that transpire
between lovers have been reduced to chemical transactions. One might think
that this love story would end up as interesting as the purchase of a used car, but
ultimately it is love story and a touching one. [SPB]

A lovely story which makes the distinction between love and sexual
attraction in a different way. A sweet love story and good science fiction. If
gender-bending can be construed to mean the way men and women relate to each
other sexually, as well as socially, this one nicely fills the bill. [SC]

a short story that starts by talking about love as if it were the interaction of
chemicals and ends by making the interaction of chemicals a sweet and poignant
story of love. [MFM]

Laurie J. Marks, Dancing Jack, DAW, 1993

Dancing Jack is a wonderful fantasy, with a very unusual portrayal of
magic and powerful portrayals of three women characters—the heroes who rescue
their post-plague world. This is a wasteland story: saved not be a fisher king or a
single knight, but by the combined magics of a riverboat pilot, a farmer, and a
toymaker. The land is infertile, crops are not growing, animals die; people have
mostly given up. The magic with which these three women reclaim life for
themselves and their land is the lesson that acceptance of pain brings the
possibility of joy. It turns inside out the formula of the quest and the knight-hero
with gender-bending insights. [JG]

I thoroughly enjoyed this very realistic fantasy, but found no genderbending
in it: just a fine depiction of competent, independent women working, and a very
satisfying, lesbian love-story. Fantasies about grown-ups are very rare; and this is
one. [UKL]

Ian McDonald, “Some Strange Desire,” in The Best of Omni III, Omni
Publications International Ltd.

McDonald has taken a well-worn fictional path, that of the non-human race
that has always lived in parallel with us (usually responsible for the generation of
vampire mythology), and reworked it into something new. His “vampires” have
a sophisticated form of pheromonal communication and an ambiguous concept of
gender. Their interaction with humans is compelling, and tragic. [SPB]
Aliens/changelings/unrecognized third sex? McDonald doesn’t quite say where these gender-shifting people come from, but they pay a high price for a desirability far beyond that of full-time women. Touching and well-written. [SC]

Any story that includes in its first sentence, “Mother says he can remember Grandmother taking him...” grabs my genderbending radar. It’s a suspenseful story about aliens-among-us who change their gender at will from female to male to hermaphrodite, and who are subject to an awful AIDS-like disease. I liked it a lot. [JG]


One of my favorite novels of recent years, Illicit Passage concerns the actual mechanics of a feminist revolution, a revolution from within. As the individuals in the asteroid mining town in Nunn’s novel learn self-confidence, their lives change. And as the people organize, the social order changes. The establishment panics and looks for “the usual suspects”—the revolutionary agitators, the bomb-throwers, and entirely misses the secretaries, mothers, factory workers, and servants plotting radical change right under their noses. Illicit Passage is a novel of mistaken assumptions, misdirected expectations. In fact, we never actually hear the main character (Gillie) speak. We only learn about her from characters who dislike or are intensely jealous of her. That we end up liking her very much anyway, in spite of the strongly biased points of view of the other characters, only strengthens our admiration for her. [JG]


This novel of an alien surgically transformed into a human woman who is gradually reverting-sloughing off one human attribute after another—and the confused human man who thought he was in love with her, is a dark and wrenching experience. Park explores the shadowy alleyways of the city of gender and studies the age-old imperialist clash between rich and poor civilizations. [SPB]

to me this ambitious and complex book is ultimately a failure both as a novel and as an exploration of gender. The self-conscious tonelessness of the narrative voice imposes a real lack of affect. As gender exploration it is seriously handicapped by the fact that there are no women in it, except a girl who is fucked on page 46 and killed on page 49. The alien called “Katherine” is supposed to have been transformed into a female or a woman, but appears, to me, merely genderless from beginning to end. The setting and mood is standard neo-Conrad-on-distant-planet. [UKL]
Simon, a human diplomat, falls in love with Katherine, a gifted pianist and more importantly, an alien who in 'her' natural state is not female. As a series of events deprive Katherine of the drugs that keep “her” human, she becomes less and less so. The book is written from multiple points of view and it becomes clear that while Simon continues to find human motivations in her actions, Katherine is more alien than he wants to know. [MFM]

1994 Longlist

Wilhemina Baird, *Crash Course*, Ace/Berkeley, 1993

I enjoyed this book for its idea about three characters trapped in a movie, not sure which events are real and which are part of the script. I especially liked the gumption of the main character, Cass, who-when it became clear that her movie was a dangerous one-didn't just sit around waiting for the next plot development, but went out (and behind the scenes) to find out more about the genre that was trapping her, and then defended herself against the movie makers rather than the script. The relationship between Cass and her two male housemates/lovers was an interesting one. [JG]

Michael Blumlein, *X,Y*, Bantam/Dell, 1993

The cover says “A psychosexual thriller,” and though I very much wanted it to be more, that’s what this book is. Starting with a self-perceived “man in a woman’s body,” it promises a subtle exploration of an anomalous psychology, but as sadomasochism takes over the story it loses direction, becoming disappointingly predictable. [UKL]

The more I think about it (and possibly rewrite it in my head so that it makes some sort of sense to me) the more I am convinced that there was no strange phenomenon in this story at all, simply an abused woman who wanted to fight back. But since she is convinced that society defines women as being incapable of the kind of worldview and behavior she aspires to, her subconscious provides her with an release for her “inappropriate” feelings: she’s not a woman after all.... I was disappointed however, that male behavior, for the purpose of this story, was almost totally defined as sadomasochism. [JG]


I was first impressed by how eager Brin seems to be to enter into the discussion of feminist issues in SF, enough so that he signaled his intentions by labeling various towns and groups “Ursulaburg,” “Vondaites,” “Tiamatians,” “Perkites,” and “Herlandia.” Brin’s main thesis seems to be that feminist utopian writing endorses the idea that technology is evil and the pastoral culture
is the only good culture. At one point in *Glory Season*, the male hero says that the galactic federation will not allow the pastoral, anti-technological culture to continue once it regains control of its lost matriarchal colony. Brin says throughout the novel that pastoral culture can only be maintained at the expense of humanity, history and finally, of survival. He says, by implication, (with all those towns and groups of women named after well known feminist SF writers) that feminist SF fiction endorses an anti-human, anti-historical, anti-survival ethic.

If anything, Brin attempts to strengthen the familiar gender assumptions. There is little gender-bending in this novel. [JG]

A very ambitious book with a courageous program of gender-exploration, seriously weakened by the author’s dislike or distrust of his own invention. It is worth asking why male authors inventing a society of women tend to make the women all alike: the old “hive worlds” of the pulp days, or, in this case, clones. It is worth asking why the male assumption so often is that a society genuinely run by women (as opposed to one run by women under the control of men) would be static, rigid, closed to change, closed to thought, needing to be saved from itself by a man. And it is worth asking why male authors so often show women as inherently anti-technological. Brin begs this last question in his afterward, saying that “This novel depicts a society that is conservative by design, not because of something intrinsic to a world led by women.” All the same, he chose to depict that society.

Though the book is unnecessarily long, the storyline is plausible and fast-moving, with well-imagined details; the social institutions of Stratos are carefully worked out; it is in the characters and the language that the book fails. p. 44: “Among the ambitions she shared with Leie was to build a hall of their own, where she might yet learn what delights were possible-unlikely as it seemed-in mingling her body with one such as those, so hisrute and huge. Just trying to imagine made her head hurt in strange ways.” p. 55: “I knew him,’ Odo went on. ‘Virile, summer-rampant in frost season, a sick envy of my own sisters!’ Odo leaned forward her eyes loathing, ‘He never touched you, yet he was and remains yours. That, my rutty little virgin, is why I’ll have a price from my Lysos-cursed clan, which I served all my wasted life. Your company in hell.’” The silliness of the language faithfully renders gender-stereotyped emotions (a woman irresistibly drawn to men; a woman hating another woman because of a man). This world of women is totally male-centered. Despite his excellent apparatus of clones and clans and sexual seasons, Brin hasn’t really got us any farther than
about 1955. It is too bad, because the book has a likable freshness and optimism. [UKL]

Poppy Z. Brite, *Drawing Blood*, Bantam

Brite mixes artists and rock and roll, New Orleans, comic books, computer hackers and a slow and sleepy southern town. The main characters are gay or bisexual, but not particularly gender bending. Horror isn’t my bailiwick, but if you like your books full of atmosphere and your heroes decadent in the long tradition that began with Lord Byron, you’ll eat this one up. [MFM]


A cute story in which Pan returns for generation after generation of Wendys, finding each less and less willing to take the convenient role of cook and housekeeper until finally one sets herself up in competition. A nice updated look at the Barrie legend. [SC]

This is a fun story. I’ve always been fascinated by Peter Pan: a play in which the main character is nearly always played by a female actress. I think of Peter as a splintered character. Peter and Wendy are two parts of the same whole, splintered by the society which carefully segregates boys’ behavior from girls’ behavior. I liked Cadigan’s take on this strange story in which it is suggested that eventually Wendy’s descendant won’t be content with her limited role. [JG]

Flynn Connolly, *The Rising of the Moon*, Del Rey/Ballentine, 1993

Women lead this Irish revolution, but I found them unconvincing both as women and as revolutionaries. Merely changing the hero’s gender does not undo the heroic fallacy; and a long history of women’s collision with their oppressors can’t be credibly reversed by a few fits of righteous indignation. [UKL]

M. J. Engh, *The Rainbow Man*, Tor, 1993

A culture in which an infertile woman is called, and treated as a man: this is a promising place to explore gender in. Somehow the exploration never seems to happen, perhaps because it is derailed by religious issues. I wanted this book to have the kind of power Handmaid’s Tale has; but it doesn’t—its somehow slides away from its own central issues. [UKL]


Harms Way is farcical Dickensian fantasy set in a universe that might have been constructed by Kepler or Jules Verne, A young girl plays the part normally
played by the male adolescent-the outrageously, naive youth who has picaresque adventures, learns the Shocking Truth about her ancestry and Grows Up. [JG]


This is a great SF love story. The SF element-the light-activated orchestral machines, and a person who can "play" it with her body-is a fascinating one. But does the fact that the lovers are lesbians make this gender-bending? [JG]

Stephanie T. Hoppe, The Assimilation of Leah Wennover, Evoe Press, 1993

This is the story of Holdfast and her two fellow time-travelers, Tai and Heart's-ease who attempt to rescue the spirits of women killed as witches in the Burning Years. The trio also play the roles of the three female archetypes: spinner, weaver, and cutter; symbols of birth, life and death. Invisibly they bear witness to the crushing of a woman's spirit (Leah Wennover) and assimilate her spirit, rescuing it from a time she was not allowed to live. The idea of this story bears a resemblance to the idea behind the Tiptree Award: to look again and rescue. [JG]


A cute little story about a metaphysical cat house where the prostitutes may or may not be female or male; one never knows until they come. The image of these androgynous creatures is nicely done. [JG]

Jonathan Letham, "'Forever,' Said the Duck," Asimov's, 12/94

A funny little tale about the uses we'll put our past and present lovers to, once we have the ability to make a virtual, keepsake copy of them. [SC]

S. N. Lewitt, Songs of Chaos, Ace/Berkeley, 1993

The story impressed me less than the setting-this fantastic, organic cyberpunked Brazilian rainforest transplanted onto a space station in which parrots act as living monitors, sort of. The outsider, Dante, discovers that the very thing that makes him an outcast in one world makes him a powerful genius in Mangueira. Skinny Fatima thinks she's an outsider and different from everyone else in Mangueira, and she too discovers that the thing that makes her different turns out to be her most valuable contribution to the community. Bisexual relationships on board the Mangueira are accepted as the norm. [JG]

Highly competent and enjoyable, with a nice, original take on virtuality, great parrots, good men characters, good women characters; but no bending of gender that I could see. [UKL]

Imaginative, funny, spirited, subversive, many of these stories explore and play with gender and gender-roles in one way or another. The title story sets the stuff about Man the Hunter and the Ascent of Man and all that on its ear: “The Daughters of Darius” is a haunting tale/meditation; and “Strange Things Grow at Chernobyl” packs immense power into six understated pages. [UKL]

Mary Mackey, *The Year the Horses Came*, HarperCollins, 1993

The story of The Year the Horses Came—a matriarchy demo posing as an adventure travelogue—is set at the crux of change, just before the patriarchal, misogynist, horse-riding hordes sweep across the continent from the east. The main character travels from the far western edge of the matriarchy, east into the territory of the marauders. I was sympathetic with Mackey’s conviction that culture is molded by the way its members raise their children and by its cosmological assumptions, but less impressed by the ponderous storyline. [JG]

Woman-centered, goddess-worshipping, free people of prehistoric Western Europe meet up with the male-dominant, aggressive horse-riders of the Steppes. The rather naive “agenda” overwhelms the novel, but there are some vivid scenes and good moments of culture-shock. [UKL]


Norma Marden’s *An Eye for Dark Places* is an extraordinary book. Its portrayal of a woman stifled in an unrewarding marriage reminded me strongly of Perkins’s *The Yellow Wallpaper*. Through a possibly imagined journey into a fantastic, utopian world beneath London, she comes to understand the kind of relationship and life she wants, and when she returns, she leaves her family and starts a new life. [JG]

I did a cover quote for this book, saying “This spare, radiant book emotionally exact and profoundly imagined, is an extraordinary first novel.” As a genderbender I think it breaks no new ground; but as an exploration of human/sexual/familial relationships up to and perhaps over the edge of madness, it is very fine. [UKL]

Robin McKinley, *Deerskin*, Ace/Berkeley, 1993

*Deerskin* reexamines fairy tale archetypes (the perfectly beautiful princess who falls in love with the perfectly handsome prince and the happily-ever-after period that is presumed to naturally follow such a perfect match). It’s a great story, and its genderbending aspect has to do with the way fairy tale archetypes get under our skin and get confused with morality and gender definitions. Its plot
follows the child of the perfect royal couple after her father rapes her, and her recovery from that experience. [JG]

A strong—indeed a superhumanly endowed and unerring-female protagonist does not in herself constitute a genderbending novel, even when she is an abuse survivor. This fantasy might be a good “role-model” book for girls, but I found the heroine way too tall, beautiful, gifted, etc. to identify with. [UKL]


Set in the next century after one of those pesky, gender-specific diseases has struck down most of the men in the world. At first, everyone expects that the world will become a more sane-or at least a less violent-place. Instead, war becomes more terrible than it ever was, because women feel they must prove themselves in the absence of men. The story is told by way of letter excerpts written by successive generations of women soldiers. Pretty depressing script, but jolting reminder that when the powerless gain power, they frequently adapt their behavior to their new role. [JG]


The foreground of Nagata’s story is a Moslem society in which the women characters struggle against powerful religious constraints. With the placement of a memory chip containing a mother’s personality into the brain of a daughter, Nagata also is able to speculate on some unusual potentials in the mother/daughter relationship. [SPB]

Melissa Scott, Burning Bright, Tor, 1993

An entertaining novel about a spacer and famous gamer/author, Quinn Lioe, who takes leave on the planet Burning Bright during its annual storm festival, in order to play “the game.” The game is played across several empires in the galaxy and involves one fictional world and several plot lines (empire, revolution, court intrigue, psi wars, etc.) which are mirrored in the situation Lioe finds herself enmeshed in real life on Burning Bright. In fact, by the end of the novel, it is clear that she has brought the game’s plot to a conclusion and will begin a new game that involve players in active commentary and involvement in the real world. The genderbending element of this novel has to do with the society’s tolerance of all sexual preferences. There are lots of ways to get into trouble in this world, but none of them involve personal sexual behavior. Most of the characters appear to be bisexual. [JG]

Maybe the world would be a better place if everyone was required to wear nametags identifying their sexual preferences. Soukup extrapolates upon this idea and imagines a world in which everyone must declare themselves monogamous, non-monogamous, celibate, or group family types. Fascinating. I couldn't figure out whether she believed that such categorization was doomed from the start—because we can't enforce who falls in love with whom; or whether she thinks that such a system would at least start to sort out the confusion. I liked this story a lot. [JG]

Martha Soukup, "The Story So Far" in *Full Spectrum* 4, Bantam, 1993

This story is a sort of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern based upon 1950s romances rather than Hamlet. The main character of this story is a mere spear-carrier in another story which centers around her husband, Dennis. Throughout "The Story So Far," Emily tries to figure out the plot of the short story in which she is enmeshed, and is dismayed to learn that the main plot line proceeds entirely while she is offstage. She learns that both she and another woman character are entirely superficial to Dennis and the plot, but despite this revelation the two fictional woman characters strive for actual existence. This genderbending story concerns itself with gender as defined by (B-rated) literature rather than by life. [JG]

Sherri S. Tepper, *A Plague of Angels*, Bantam, 1993

Like many of Tepper's novels, it contains a chunk of gender commentary. In nearly all of her books, and she deals with gender in a very interesting ways. A Plague of Angels further develops Tepper's favorite idea of gods created by people and the worlds they inhabit—sort of a self-conscious Gaan system, applied to all worlds with intelligent life. In Plague, the self-conscious earth deity intervenes in human history to repair the human/nature balance so badly skewed that people are on the brink of extinction. Along the way, Tepper delves into the idea that men and women cannot live together without damaging one another—given the way women and men are currently socialized. One of the few hopeful communities in this world is one in which men and women live mostly separately, getting together now and then, and learning—within their subgroups—to change their ideas about gender. [JG]

I wish Tepper would spend more time rewriting. There's great stuff in this, but it's shapeless and repetitive. As in so many of her books, a great beginning goes dry in pointlessly complex plotting about the villainous fools who run things. The paranoid element that was part of the strength of her real gender-
exploring novel, The Gate to Women's Country, here is a weakness; and the
gender roles are conventional. [UKL]

Amy Thomson, Virtual Girl, Acc/Berkeley, 1993

Virtual Girl is a re-working of the Pygmalion myth, of a man creating his
idea of a perfect woman, who then turns into a real person and leaves him. In
this case, the male creator is a nerdish hacker who creates a cyborg woman. In a
moment of crisis, the cyborg hears only a portion of a command/programming
input, “You are the most important thing to me.” All she hears is “You are the
most important thing,” and from that, she entirely re-programs herself. Self-
actualization saves her life, but dooms the odd couple’s relationship. [JG]

The 1995 James Tiptree, Jr. Award

Judges
Brian Attebery (BA)
Ellen Kushner (EK)
Lucy Sussex (LS)
Pat Murphy (PM)
Susanna J. Sturgis (SJS)

Commentary was harvested from correspondence among the judges and
attributed by the judges’ initials.

Winners Of The 1995 James Tiptree Jr. Award


“The Matter of Seggri” is a story that is bigger than it looks. Within its
thirty-some pages the world of Seggri is discovered, explored, and altered. Half a
dozen distinct and memorable storytelling voices give us comic
misunderstandings, tragedies enacted and averted, histories recounted and
dreams revealed, all within the frame of a convincingly strange society. Fourteen
hundred years are distilled into a few key moments. One of the ways Le Guin has
managed to pack so much into this tale is by making it a gateway—a mental
hypertext-to a lot of other stories, including her own explorations of gender and
society in The Left Hand of Darkness and A Fisherman of the Inland Sea as well
as the thought experiments of other gender explorers like Joanna Russ, Eleanor
Arnason, Sheri S. Tepper, and James Tiptree Jr. The world of Seggri invites
comparison with Gethen and Whileaway and Women’s Country without being
an imitation or a simple answer to any of them, just as it invites comparison with
aspects of our own world without being reducible to an allegory or a simple inversion of existing gender roles. Whereas Larque on the Wing uses the machinery of fantasy to get at the inner experience of gender, “The Matter of Seggri” uses science fiction to map out social implications. It asks how gender enters into institutions like schools and marriages and how it might do so differently. It asks how power and love and justice might be redistributed along gender lines, and what the effect might be on individual lives. It asks what stake society has in enforcing models of femininity and masculinity and what happens to those who fail to follow the template. Most remarkably, Le Guin makes us care about the people we meet: First Observer Merriment and her never-seen partner Kaza Agad, young Ittu and his sister Po, even the fictional-within-a-fiction lovers Azak and Toddra and Zedr. In the few pages each gets on the scene, we recognize their uniqueness even as we learn the social patterns of which they are a part. They make the Matter of Seggri matter. (BA)

It could be a how-to manual on how to explore gender issues through the use of science fiction. (EK)

A short story perfect in its parts as a snowflake, or Chekhov’s “Lady with a Little Dog.” This is the first time the Tiptree has been awarded to a work of short fiction, and “Seggri” proves that explorations of gender can be as efficient pithy as lengthy. (LS)

This deals with gender issues in a way that only science fiction can: by creating a society that has different assumptions than ours, thus forcing us to examine our own. It makes stunning use of different viewpoints to give us an understanding of the society that we couldn’t obtain any other way. Fascinating for its anthropological detail, “The Matter of Seggri” shows the emotional and societal consequences of a different social organization, and the consequences of changing or disrupting that organization. (PM)

Just when I was beginning to fear that no work of short fiction could stand up to the powerhouse novels contending for the Tiptree-along came “Seggri.” On Seggri, women far outnumber the men, an imbalance that, notes one Hainish observer, “has produced a society in which, as far as I can tell, the men have all the privilege and the women have all the power.” Men and boys over the age of 11 live in hierarchically organized “castles.” They gain glory by competing in games, cheered on by the women; the women do all the productive and political work of the society, and the two genders meet only in the “fuckeries.” The women may enjoy sex with men, but naturally they form their primary erotic and social bonds with other women. Both the society and the story are complex, covering several generations and told from various viewpoints. Though
undeniably different from our own society, Seggri eerily echoes it, and like several of this year’s shortlisted works—notably Arnason’s “The Lovers” and Charnas’s The Furies—the focus is on those who, by asking questions and/or not fitting in, become harbingers of change. (SJS)

Nancy Springer, Larque on the Wing, AvoNova, 1994

When is a middle-aged woman not a middle-aged woman? When she’s a ten-year-old girl and a young gay man. In Nancy Springer’s Larque on the Wing, the main character unintentionally releases her grim and grubby child self as part of a mid-life crisis. Her young doppelganger leads her to a place called Popular Street, which is both gay ghetto and enchanted land. There she is transformed from frumpy Larque to handsome Lark, who was, it seems, always there inside. Lark can have the adventures Larque has denied herself: can explore the dangerous night world, wear cowboy boots, beat up homophobic thugs, act on erotic impulses (gay because Larque is attracted to men). As engaging as Larque (and her husband Hoot) may be, what sticks in the mind from the novel is Popular Street. Cheerfully sleazy and genuinely magical, Popular Street manifests unpredictably wherever the forces of order aren’t paying attention. It is a place of desires and of truths, both of a sort that conventional society covers over. On Popular Street, features of homosexual subcultures—the lure of the forbidden and the secret, irreverence toward middle-class values, acknowledgment of the varieties of pleasure, a sense that gender identity is something that can be put together and tried on like a costume—become the basis for a powerful and transforming enchantment. What fantasy does best is to take the insides of things and express them as outsiders. An ent is the inside of a tree, a beast is the inside of a prince (and vice versa). Nancy Springer has used this property of fantasy to get inside gender and sexuality. She shows that the inside of intolerance is fear, the inside of art is truth-telling, and the inside of a woman is a whole cast of characters of all ages and genders. (BA)

Playful and outrageous, this book taps into some of our less-admissible and more potent fantasies! (EK)

Gender is 90 percent of comedy, but seldom does the comedy step outside traditional sex roles. Larque is the exception, managing to be simultaneously challenging, disturbingly so at times, and hilarious. (LS)

Springer’s novel considers the startling, funny, indescribable adventures of Larque, a middle-aged woman whose mid-life crisis takes on concrete form. A ten-year-old version of Larque (blinking into existence by Larque’s own uncanny abilities) leads Larque into an exploration of her life and the compromises she made while growing up. Along the way, Larque is transformed into Lark, an
adolescent boy, and works magic of many kinds. A rollicking, offbeat, thoughtful fable for our time. (PM)

*Larque on the Wing.* was a front-runner from the day I read it, very early in the year. In this wittily, wildly original contemporary fantasy, Nancy Springer expands, explores, and bends more gender conventions than most authors recognize. Most notably, Larque emerges from a makeover session not with a new hairdo but with the body of a 20-year-old gay man. And Springer restores scruffy, nose-wiping vitality to a useful concept turned tedious cliché: the “inner child.” Then there’s Larque’s mother, Florence, who sees what she wants to see with a vengeance. *Larque* does have a weak point or two. Larque’s best female friend, Doris, is characterized mostly by her carrot addiction. More significant, and striking in a novel that draws explicit parallels between the Otherness of women and gay men, is the absence of lesbians, from both Popular Street and the ranks of Larque’s inner selves. Lesbian characters, erotic love between women: these are still out on the gender-bending frontier. (SJS)

1995 Shortlist


Arnason has explored this territory before but finds new insights this time around. The story concerns heterosexual love in a world that allows no such thing. The lovers convincingly embody gender choices that neither their society nor ours is quite prepared to sanction. (BA)

Like Arnason’s other “hwarhath” stories, this poignant tale explores gender on several levels, like a mobile of mirrors that catches new reflections with each turning. Neither Eyes-of-Crystal nor Eh Shawin is a revolutionary, yet their love both grows from and profoundly challenges the deepest assumptions of their society. By incorporating comments about the “author” of the tale, and finally its evidently human translator/editor (who might well be Anna Perez of *Ring of Swords*), Arnason sketches a broader timescape of a culture in transition. I’m impressed! (SJS)

Suzy McKee Charnas, *The Furies*, Tor, 1994

Charnas follows up her groundbreaking novels about Free Fems and Riding Women with a dark and challenging story of revenge. The Free Fems have returned to Holdfast in order to tear it down. The question that is never resolved is whether they will be able to make a new life for themselves and the remaining men. Amid uncertainty, bitterness, and betrayal, the heroine of the earlier books
struggles to keep the Free Fems from become what they have escaped from. (BA)

The 1994 jury was both blessed and cursed with an abundance of riches. This is a book that not only encourages but forces the reader to question assumptions about gender. It connects the words/ideas “women” and “power” and “violence” in a way few authors have ever cared or managed to. (EK)

This continuation of Walk and Motherlines is powerful, brooding, and extremely dark. Somebody commented that the two previous novels embodied key moments in the history of feminism; if that is so, then The Furies shows we live in interesting times (in the Chinese sense). It shows women turning on men, then on themselves, but battles in the end towards a type of understanding, if not forgiveness. Very few novels indelibly impress upon the mind, and this is one of them. (LS)

Like its predecessors, Walk to the End of the World and Motherlines, The Furies explores the consequences, for both women and men, of a violently patriarchal society. Here at last the Riding Women, who have never been either slaves or slave owners, see the Free Fems in the latter’s own context—which is to say that they really see the Free Fems for the first time. There are acts of excruciating violence in this book, men against women, women against men, women against women; such is the power of the writing that I couldn’t look away. The Furies is one of the most important feminist novels I’ve ever read—why then did it place a shade behind the winners of this year’s Tiptree Award? Because its brilliance lies not so much in exploring and expanding gender roles—here The Furies clearly builds on the earlier books—but in asking the unaskable questions about revolutionary change, and in imagining, and facing, the unimaginable answers. What shapes the relationship of liberator and liberated? Leader and led? What to do with the despised but indispensable former oppressor? Langston Hughes asked what happened to a dream deferred; Suzy McKee Charnas asks what happens to a dream on the verge of fulfillment. (SJS)

L. Warren Douglas, Cannon’s Orb, Del Rey, 1994

Like Genetic Soldier, this novel hypothesizes that pheromones control large areas of human behavior that we think are rational.

Contact with an alien race has altered human pheromones, with the result that everything from sexual cycles to xenophobia is transformed. The book takes a wrong turn toward the end, but in the interim a lot of assumptions about gender and society are questioned. (BA)

The book begins in an interesting fashion—examining the biological roots of human behavior. But starting from there, the story went in a direction that
reinforces our cultures biases in what I consider to be a totally wrong-headed fashion. According to my reading of Canon’s Orb, the biological role of women is to control from behind the scenes by flattering and bolstering the ego of the man they have chosen as the alpha male. Women gain their power by supporting men. It sent chills up my spine—and I mean the wrong kind of chills. Because I had such a visceral reaction to the book, it did force me to examine my beliefs related to gender. (PM)


A frightening, and all too credible account of what might happen if corporate R&D capitalism ever decides to really cash in on homophobia. A scientific thriller par excellence. (LS)

Ellen Frye, Amazon Story Bones, Spinsters Ink, 1994

The opening stories, revised myths from a feminist perspective, seem a little smug, and I don’t believe traditional mythic figures ever talk quite so much. But when it gets to the central narrative, about the fall of Troy and its impact on the lives of Amazons and other women, the book is powerful and convincing. One of the most interesting touches is that the Amazons are never actually there—they’re either anticipated, in the mythic sections, or sought, in the more naturalistic narrative. They’re a possibility that changes the world, rather than an actuality that can be pushed into the margins. (BA)

Who says that history has to be written by the winners? A tantalizing, evocative account of some of the lesser-known losers of the Trojan war, and how their herstory might have been; at its best when rewriting Homer. (LS)

This book’s Amazons are always off-stage. They are a promise and an inspiration. I like that. (PM)

A fine, not to mention rare, example of what can happen when feminism and fantasy marry. The myths that open the book read like a First Contact tale; familiar gods and heroes are seen through the bemused, benevolent, and often fatally naive eyes of the goddesses they displace. A generation or so after the fall of Troy, a young girl, Iphito, dreams of the near-legendary Amazons and listens to the stories of two old women, one an Amazon herself. This unconventionally structured novel both describes and embodies how storytelling can expand gender roles, especially by sparking the imagination of girls. (SJS)

Gwyneth Jones, North Wind, Gollancz, 1994

In this follow-up to the Tiptree-winning White Queen, Gwyneth Jones continues to redivide the gender pie in most interesting ways. There is a war
going on between Men and Women—but the Men are not necessarily men. There are also aliens of undoubted sexuality but disputed gender. The narrative itself alternates between masculine and feminine pronouns for one of the main characters, depending on whose perceptions are being echoed. (BA)

A writer friend recently opined, apropos of White Queen that there is more in Gwyneth Jones’ paragraphs than there is in most novels. North Wind is a worthy follow-up to her earlier Tiptree winner, dense with ideas to the extent of almost being too much of a good thing. A fascinating read. (LS)


A study in demonizing the Other, in this case hermaphrodites. Even the sympathetic hero is implicated in their oppression, until the seemingly innocuous Reecebread of the title solves the problem. (BA)

The narrator, an English police officer in the not-too-distant future who falls in love with a hermaphrodite, tries to steer a course between the violent hatred of his colleagues and what he perceives as the extremism of some hermaphrodites—with predictably tragic results. Like several other works considered by the 1994 jury, this draws elements of Romeo and Juliet, not to mention Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner? and The Crying Game, into the service of defusing hostility to gender difference. (SJS)


Like “Young Woman in a Garden,” this novella explores the undermining of the assumptions about class, culture, and gender, dearly held by each protagonist, with immense compassion for both-and, by extension, all the rest of us. I loved the choice of “asset” to describe the slaves/bondspeople; it neatly extends the concept of unfreedom into the so-called free marketplace. (SJS)


The title story interacts intriguingly with “The Matter of Seggri.” The world of O could not be more different in its sexual arrangements from the strict separation of Seggri. A marriage on O requires two women and two men, each interacting sexually with two of the others—but not with the partner of the same moiety. That would be immoral. This is a story about having it both ways: not only heterosexual and homosexual but also living two different lives, thanks to the paradoxes of Churten physics. (BA)

Just about my favorite part of this collection was the Introduction, “On Not Reading Science Fiction,” in which, with her usual quiet panache, Le Guin
nails the use and purpose and intent of science fiction for even the meanest intelligence to perceive. (EK)

Though I enjoyed all of the stories in this collection, I recommend it for the shortlist because of one story in particular: “Another Story.” Le Guin is second to none in imagining interesting cultures. The culture in “Another Story” has marriage customs that, quietly and matter-of-factly, stand our assumptions on their ear. (PM)

“Another Story, or A Fisherman of the Inland Sea,” the only 1994 story in this collection, “only” redefines family and provides a scenario whereby one really can, in certain circumstances, go home again. Clearly a shortlist contender in its own right, it’s ably amplified by its impressive company here. Read, or reread, “Newton’s Sleep,” in which what one doesn’t see refuses to go away”; “The Rock That Changed Things”; and especially “Dancing to Ganam.” Reality, said Lily Tomlin’s Trudy, is “nothing but a collective hunch;” Ursula Le Guin shows how it works. (SJS)

Rachel Pollack, Temporary Agency, St. Martin’s, 1994

I liked about this book for its matter-of-fact use of demons and magic in an otherwise contemporary world. As for the book’s gender-bending credentials—Ellen, the main character, is a strong-minded, capable, heroic young woman (she’s a teenager at the start and an adult by the end), she ends up in a relationship with another woman; a group of transgender hackers assists her in her work. And (here’s the big one for me) in the end, Ellen and her lover, using limited resources and their wits, save the world. I’m always so happy when women save the world. (PM)

Geoff Ryman, Unconquered Countries, St. Martin’s, 1994

There is virtually nothing Geoff Ryman writes that does not explore gender or sexuality; his hand is so steady on that wheel that he can steer the vessel off in completely other directions, and still have more to say on gender than do many stories that use it as their focal point. While other writers struggle with questions of, “Gosh, can women be strong and nontraditional, and men complex and conflicted, and how can I show it ...?” Ryman’s assumption is that they not only can be but already are; he begins there, and takes the work where he wants it to go. This collection is notable for his 1994 story “A Fall of Angels, or On the Possibility of Life under Extreme Conditions.” (EK)

I’d recommend this for the shortlist because “O Happy Day!,” one of the four novellas it includes, is a powerful examination of the consequences of gender and power and violence. In this world run by women, a group of gay men are the
cleanup crew in a concentration camp where heterosexual men are exterminated. The story takes place in a concentration camp. It's a powerful and gripping story, one that I find impossible to ignore. (PM)

Melissa Scott, *Trouble and Her Friends*, Tor, 1994

Wild grrls invade the cyberpunk boys' club. Trouble and her friends are virtual amazons, at home inside the virtual world and outside the law. The story includes a lot of weird hardware, an on-line cross-dressing seducer, and a genuine love story between prickly Trouble and independent Cerise. (BA)

Lesbian relationships in F/SF, still lamentably scarce, tend to take place either on the peripheries of the main story or in societies-like those of last year's winner, *Ammonite*-where there are no men. Had Melissa Scott done no more than put Trouble and Cerise front and center in a near-future U.S., this novel would be worth celebrating. But Scott goes much further, exploring the challenges to and implications of unconventional relationships in a vivid social context. She uses the gender ambiguity of the virtual world to play an erotic joke on one of her protagonists, and to have fun with a U.S. mythos that generally excludes women: the Wild Wild Western. Perhaps most important, she examines with compassion and insight the slow recovery of a partnership from desertion and betrayal. (SJS)

Delia Sherman, "Young Woman in a Garden" in *Xanadu 2*, Tor, 1994

Delia Sherman delicately undercut assumptions about gender and art with this time fantasy about an artist, a lover, a model, and a scholar, none of whom are exactly the person one expects. (BA)

A lovely, haunting story that puts gender considerations in an intriguing historic perspective. (PM)

A young American graduate student finds more than a dissertation topic in this beautifully written story. True to its central imagery, the tale is about learning how to see what lies in plain sight, and here the "what" has much to do with assumptions about gender and sexuality, not to mention the complex relationship of artist/scholar and subject. (SJS)


In the future Earth of this book, social roles are predestined by genes and enforced by pheromones. Some are mothers, some are soldiers. Turner combines social and biological extrapolation to produce a very strange world that is at the same time a mirror of our own. (BA)
The influence of pheromones on sex roles has been explored recently in SF, but seldom with the narrative edge of Turner. A fascinating exploration that rewrites the theme of star-crossed lovers most nastily and inventively. If anything, this is a metaphysical thriller, with gender ultimately transcended.

(LS)

1995 Longlist

Milbre Burch, "Metamorphosis" in Xanadu 2, Tor, 1994
Karen Cadora, Stardust Bound, Firebrand, 1994
Chris Claremont, Sundowner, Ace, 1994
Allan Cole and Chris Bunch, The Warrior's Tale, Del Rey, 1994
Daniel P. Dern, "Bicyclefish Island," Tomorrow, 2:8, 4/1994
Susan Dexter, The Wind-Witch, Del Rey, 1994
Suzette Haden Elgin, Earthsong, DAW Books, 1994
Lisa Goldstein, "Rites of Spring" in Travellers In Magic, Tor and Asimov's, 3/1994
Alison M. Goodman, "One Last Zoom at the Buzz Bar" in The Patternmaker, Omnibus Books, 1994
Barbara Hambly, Stranger at the Wedding, Del Rey, 1994
James Patrick Kelly, "Big Guy," Asimov's, 6/1994
James Patrick Kelley, Wildlife, Tor
Marc Laidlaw, The Orchid Eater, St. Martin's, 1994
Lisa Mason, Summer Of Love, Bantam, 1994
Ian McDonald, "Legitimate Targets," New Worlds, 4, 1994
Vonda N. McIntyre, Nautilus, Bantam, 1994
Mary Rosenblum, "Rat," Asimov's, 10/1994
Jacqui Singleton, Heartstone and Saber, Rising Tide, 1994
Nancy Springer, Metal Angel, Roc, 1994
Caroline Stevermer, A College of Magics, Tor, 1994
Sheri S. Tepper, Shadow's End, Bantam, 1994
Connie Willis, Uncharted Territory, Bantam, 1994

The 1996 James Tiptree, Jr. Award

Judges

Sara Lefanu
Richard Russo
Nancy Springer

Winners of the 1996 James Tiptree, Jr. Award

_Waking the Moon_, by Elizabeth Hand, HarperPrism, 1995

The struggle between women and men, between the female and the male principles, dramatized with intelligence and humor in a novel that spans the 1970s to the present day and marries a nineteenth-century high realism style to a modern gothic content. The author offers no solutions but raises questions both metaphysical and emotional, confronting issues of power, violence and sexuality. [SLF]


A powerful book about, among other things, the sexual politics of science, and the relationship between gender and knowledge-how gender may affect ways of knowing, ways of approaching and doing science, and affect our world views. It posits that the domination of “male” ways of knowing and doing science, lacking an understanding of, and sympathy for, the Earth and Nature itself, have resulted in a world being ravaged and destroyed in the name of progress and science. And it does all this in the context of a variation on the book many believe marks the beginning of modern science fiction. You may not agree with everything in this book, but you will think about it for days and weeks after reading it. [RPR]

1996 List:


Deserves a spotlight. A new and stellar treatment of an old metaphor-theater as life-this story is an exquisitely written exploration of the shuddering fascination that gender-limited people feel toward androgynty. This is also a tragedy imbued with a clear-eyed, chilly-hearted beauty worthy of the biblical Salome herself. A must-read. [NCS]

Kit Reed, _Little Sisters of the Apocalypse_, Black Ice Books, 1994

An intriguing short novel, finely written, and thought provoking. Will probably infuriate many, but will encourage debate about our assumptions about men and women, social roles, and the effects on women of life without men. [RPR]
Lisa Tuttle, “Food Man,” Crank! #4, Fall 1994

A nicely finessed story about an eating disorder carried to the illogical extreme, gives food for thought (sorry) about body image. Who really “owns” the way we look—or try to look? Where is it written that women shall be thin? What are the sexual politics involved, the hidden connections between food and power—or empowerment? The ending was not unequivocally satisfying but the story explores some quirky gender issues and deserves to be recommended and read. A highly original story. [NCS]

Terri Windling, ed., The Armless Maiden and Other Stories for Childhood’s Survivors, Tor, 1995

This anthology includes stories and poems from writers known within and outside fantasy and science fiction, such as Louise Gluck, Jane Gardam, Emma Bull, Tappan King, Tanith Lee, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Jane Yolen, and the editor herself, Terri Windling. They are of a strikingly high literary quality. Through retelling fairy tales and folk tales they explore the grim terrain of abused childhood, Tiptree territory of pain and cruelty. But while they explore the pain of children cruelly exploited, they also recount the stories of their growing up and the piecing together of their shattered selves into women and men capable of loving and being loved. A powerful, haunting collection. [SLF]

Other Works of Note:

Isobelle Carmody, "The Pumpkin Eater," She’s Fantastical, ed. Lucy Sussex and Judith Raphael Buckrich, Sybilla Press

Julie Haydon, Lines Upon the Skin, Pan


Melissa Scott, Shadow Man, Tor

Stephanie Smith, Other Nature, Tor

Retro winners:

Walk to the End of the World, by Suzy McKee Charnas, 1974
Motherlines, by Suzy McKee Charnas, 1978
The Left Hand of Darkness, by Ursula K. Le Guin, 1969
We Who Are About to . . . , by Joanna Russ, 1975, 1976, 1977
The Female Man, by Joanna Russ, 1975

Retro Short List
The Handmaid’s Tale, Margaret Atwood
The Wasp Factory, by Iain Banks
Swastica Night, by Katherine Burdekin
Wild Seed, by Octavia Butler
Babel-17, by Samuel R. Delany
Triton, by Samuel R. Delany
Carmen Dog, by Carol Emshwiller
“When I Was Miss Dow,” by Sony Dorman Hess, reprinted in Women of Wonder: The Classic Years
Watchtower, by Elizabeth Lynn
Dreamsnake, by Vonda N. McIntyre
Memoirs of a Spacewoman, by Naomi Mitchison
Woman on the Edge of Time, by Marge Piercy
The Two of Them, by Joanna Russ
Women of Wonder, More Women of Wonder, New Women of Wonder, anthologies edited by Pamela Sargent
The Barbie Murders, John Varley
The Clewiston Test, Kate Wilhelm
Les Guerilles, by Monique Wittig, translated by David Le Vay
“The Heat Death of the Universe,” by Pamela Zoline, reprinted in Women of Wonder: The Classic Years
Appendix III

Analysis of the Transitive & Ergative systems in Kiss Passages from “The Priestess Who Rebelled” and “Who Needs Men?”

*Who Needs Men? Passage I*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>He</th>
<th>kissed</th>
<th>her</th>
<th>on the lips</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process: material</td>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Circumstance: location: place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agent</td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

She struggled

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Process: Material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>but with one arm</th>
<th>he</th>
<th>managed to hold</th>
<th>her</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Circ: manner: means</td>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process: material</td>
<td>Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agent</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The rifle was dropped.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Process: material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was something terrible about the kiss</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process: Existent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It was like no other kiss [she had ever known]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrier Process: relational: intensive: attributive Attribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sens Process: mental: cognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Med</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>it was humiliating.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrier Process: relational: intensive: attributive Attribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Range</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>it was degrading.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrier Process: relational: intensive: attributive Attribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>It</th>
<th>Drained</th>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>From her limbs,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process: material</td>
<td>Goal</td>
<td>Circumstance: location: place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agent</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>filled</th>
<th>her head</th>
<th>with nightmares.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Process: material</td>
<td>Beneficiary</td>
<td>Circumstance: manner: means?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneficiary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>He</th>
<th>Let</th>
<th>her</th>
<th>go.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiator</td>
<td></td>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process: material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agent</td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>That</th>
<th>was</th>
<th>a kind of rape,</th>
<th>was it not?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carrier</td>
<td>Process: relational intensive attributive</td>
<td>Attribute</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Who Needs Men? Passage II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You</th>
<th>have</th>
<th>much to learn.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Possessor</td>
<td>Process: relational: possessive</td>
<td>Attribute/Possessed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
<td>Range</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>will teach</th>
<th>you.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process: verbal</td>
<td>Receiver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
<td>Beneficiary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>will teach</th>
<th>you</th>
<th>in the heather and in the bed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process: verbal</td>
<td>Receiver</td>
<td>Circumstance: location: place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
<td>Beneficiary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You</th>
<th>will learn</th>
<th>[[what it is like [[to be a woman]].]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senser</td>
<td>Process: mental:</td>
<td>Phenomenon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cognition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrier</td>
<td>Pro:</td>
<td>Attribute/Circumstance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rel:</td>
<td>manner: comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>int:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>attr.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>you</th>
<th>may even bear me</th>
<th>a son</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process: material</td>
<td>Beneficiary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agent</td>
<td></td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"Priestess Who Rebelled" Passage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'...There is a custom in our tribe...a mating custom [which you do not know].</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pro:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exist</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sen</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Med</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Let</th>
<th>me</th>
<th>show</th>
<th>you -</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actor</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pro:</strong></td>
<td>Material</td>
<td>Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agent</strong></td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>He</th>
<th>leaned over</th>
<th>swiftly.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actor</strong></td>
<td>Process: material</td>
<td>Circumstance: manner: quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meg</th>
<th>felt</th>
<th>[the mighty strength of his bronzed arms closing about her, — drawing her close.]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sens</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pro:</strong></td>
<td>men: perc</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phenomenon</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Med</strong></td>
<td>Range</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actor</strong></td>
<td>Process: material</td>
<td>Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agent</strong></td>
<td>Med</td>
<td>Med</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>And</th>
<th>he</th>
<th>was touching his mouth to hers; closely, brutally, terrifyingly.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actor</strong></td>
<td>Process: material</td>
<td>Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agent</strong></td>
<td>Med</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>She</th>
<th>struggled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actor</strong></td>
<td>Process: material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and (she) tried to cry out,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Behaver</strong></th>
<th>Process: Behavioural</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

but his mouth bruised hers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Actor</strong></th>
<th>Process: Goal material</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agent</strong></td>
<td>Medium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Angerthoughts</th>
<th>swept</th>
<th>through her</th>
<th>like a flame.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actor</strong></td>
<td>Process: material</td>
<td>Circumstance: location: place</td>
<td>Circumstance: manner: comparison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agent</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But it was not anger - <<>> - [[that gave life to that flame]].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Carrier</strong></th>
<th>Process: relational: intensive: attributive</th>
<th>Attribute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium</strong></td>
<td>Range</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pro: mat</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Beneficiary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Med</td>
<td>Beneficiary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;&lt;it was something else&gt;&gt;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Carrier</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process: relational: intensive: attributive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attribute</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Range</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Suddenly</th>
<th>her veins</th>
<th>were running</th>
<th>with liquid fire.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Circumstance</strong></td>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process: material</td>
<td><strong>Circumstance:</strong> manner: means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Her heart</th>
<th>beat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Actor</strong></td>
<td>Process: material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| upon rising, |
| minor clause |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>panting breasts</th>
<th>[ ]</th>
<th>like [[something captive that would be free]].</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Carrier</strong></td>
<td>Process: relational: intensive attributive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attribute</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Medium</strong></td>
<td><strong>Range</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>[ ]</th>
<th>Pro: rel: int: attrib</th>
<th>Attrib</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>Carrier</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Range</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process: material</td>
<td>Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agent</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

but there | was   | little strength in her blows. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Process: existential</td>
<td>Existent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Then</th>
<th>he</th>
<th>released</th>
<th>her,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process: material</td>
<td>Goal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agent</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and | she | fell back, |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process: material</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

exhausted.

minor clause

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Her eyes</th>
<th>glowed</th>
<th>with anger</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actor</td>
<td>Process: material</td>
<td>Circumstance: manner: means</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and</td>
<td>her voice</td>
<td>was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrier</td>
<td>Process:</td>
<td>Attribute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>relational:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>intensive:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>attributive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Range</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

She tried to speak,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behaver</th>
<th>Process:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td></td>
<td>behavioural</td>
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And (she) could not.

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<th>Behaver</th>
<th>Process:</th>
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And in that moment a vast and terrible weakness trembled through Meg.

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<th>Actor Process:</th>
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<td>location:</td>
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<td>time</td>
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<td>place</td>
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She knew, fearfully,

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<td>that &lt;&lt;&gt;&gt;</td>
<td>not all the priesthood of the gods</td>
<td>would save</td>
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<td>Actor</td>
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<td>Process: material</td>
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<td>Agent</td>
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<th>Daiv</th>
<th>sought to mate with</th>
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<th>[[throbbing within her]]</th>
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<td>Circ: location: place</td>
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<td>affect</td>
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FUTURIAN NEWS

Published by the Futurian Society of New York to carry news and announcements of Futurians to their members and friends. (Member, Futurian Publishers Group)

Volume 1, Number 3

January 4th, 1939

WHO ARE THE FUTURIANS?

The Futurian Society of New York is an organization of imaginative young people in New York and vicinity who enjoy meeting together once a while (specifically, twice a month) in order to discuss literature, art, science, progress, poetry and the world at large and to enjoy each other's company and controversy. They are bound together by a mutual desire for betterment both of this world and of their own exists and appreciation of it. They believe that the future holds much in store for all and that the "Futurian outlook" is well worth cultivating. Science-fiction is a hobby and interest of most of them and that particular subject is often on deck, especially since many of the Futurians are old time fans and internationally-accepted authorities on that subject.

There is nothing aloof or suspicious about the Futurians. They are always glad to see newcomers and welcome them as friends regardless of their views or previous opinions. Meetings vary from small groups to large, formal ones. At a meeting you may find anything from a formal debate to jovial socialities (p.s. we do not blackball people on one vote. We trust our friends).

FUTURIANS IN PRINT

This month's issue (February) of Amazing Stories features "Harmoned Rift Posts" by Isaac Asimov. This young man is a member of the Futurians and a promising young writer. This story marks the first he has had accepted but we suspect, far from his last. John W. Campbell remarked of Asimov that he expects him to go far as a writer. His works, as far as the editor has seen, are very, very good. We suspect that it will not be long before his Futurian is accepted in all the magazines.

In the past many of the Futurians have broken into print in various publications, the future will undoubtedly see many more of them successful.

MEETING A GREAT DISEasad

A large and interesting meeting was held December 26th when almost the full membership of the Society turned up at the Pohl-Mikol apartment. The meeting was to have been held at a hall, but it seemed that at the last minute it would not be available. In spite of this, the members were not daunted and showed up at the Futurian H.Q. Among those present were Bob Wilson, Harry Doehmoller, Donald Williams, Jack Robinson, John Michael, Jack Gilmore, Sylvia Ruben, Robert W. Lowdon, Daniel Burford, Gertrude Lee Winters, Herman Lebowitz, Cyril Kornbluth, Isaac Asimov, Horace Hamlin, Edward Lando and many others. Leslie Perry and Terry M. Roth showed up later. The meeting was featured by a heated debate between Pohl and Kornbluth on the subject of "Is There a Science-Fiction Poetry?" Pohl won when Kornbluth died as Prog started reading one of Cyril's earlier indiscretions from JENNIRA. Discussions too numerous to list were also indulged in and threshed out by the members.

FUTURIAN MEETING TO BE SUNDAY, JANUARY 6th

The Futurian Society's first meeting of the new year will take place this Sunday afternoon about 3 P.M. The place this time is to be the home of Cyril Kornbluth, 346 West 23rd Street, New York City, (Manhattan). The nearest subway station is 6th St. station of the IRT line. This house is about a half block from the subway lines. DON'T FAIL TO SHOW UP.

Futurian fanzine. The Futurian News January 1939.
Appendix IV

The Futurians: fandom in action

Save Humanity with Science and Sanity!

(Caption from Science Fiction Advance July Aug 1938 Vol 1 No 2).

I began to notice the Futurians very early in my research. As I read through their various fanzines and notices and pamphlets I was aware of the operation of a particular estrangement. One of the first of the Futurian fanzines that I came across was a one page issue of the Futurian News which is reproduced opposite. The item headed “Futurians in Print” concerns the recent appearance in print of one Isaac Asimov.

Although I knew who Asimov was and recognised the names of some of the other Futurians, I had not heard of the Futurians. Fandom came alive for me through reading these fanzines. I learned about the first “world” science fiction convention held in New York City in 1938 in conjunction with the World’s Fair from reading the Futurian fanzines and their reporting of the feud between rival sf fan groups that led to four of the Futurians being barred from entering the convention. This included a copy of a pamphlet that the Futurians put together to be distributed at the convention after some of their number had been barred.

The New York Futurians were active from 1938 until the mid forties. Members of the Futurians included Isaac Asimov, Donald A. Wollheim, Leslie Perri, Frederik Pohl, John Michel, Richard Wilson, James Blish, Cyril Kornbluth, Damon Knight, Virginia Kidd and Judith Merill who were (and in some cases still are) actively engaged in science fiction as editors, agents, publishers, writers and critics of science fiction or all of these. The Futurians are invariably referred to in discussions of fandom. The notion that in fandom fans slide into being pros with ease is exemplified by the Futurians. Further, because many of their members went on to work professionally within the world of
science fiction they are well-documented. Frederik Pohl (1978) and Damon Knight (1977) have both written accounts of their involvement with the Futurians.

The Futurians had interactions with the two major editors of the period, Gernsback and John W. Campbell. John Michel and Donald Wollheim accused Gernsback of being a 'crook' after he did not pay them prize money they had won in one of his contests.¹ Campbell published some of their work, most particularly that of Asimov. The Futurians were also involved with the first 'world' science fiction convention in 1939.

Their fanzines varied from one or two page notices which were circulated in their share households to full scale productions with artwork, stories, poetry and articles. In the *Futurian News* they describe themselves thus:

The Futurian Society of New York is an organisation of imaginative young people in New York and vicinity who enjoy meeting together once in a while in order to discuss literature, art, science, progress, poetry and the world at large and to enjoy each others company and controversy. They are bound together by a mutual desire for the betterment both of this world and of their prowess and appreciation of it. They believe that the future holds much in store for all and that the Futurian outlook is well worth cultivating. Science fiction is a hobby and interest of most of them and that particular subject is often on deck, specially since many of the Futurians are old time fans and internationally-accepted authorities on that subject. There is nothing aloof or suspicious about the Futurians. They are always glad to see newcomers and welcome them as friends regardless of their views or previous opinions (From the *Futurian News* January 4 1939 No. 3, Brooklyn New York).

Later in the same year Frederik Pohl had the following letter published in "Under the Lens," the letter column of *Marvel Science Stories*:

Readers of your magazine will be interested in the new Futurian Federation of the World, an organization which will make strong attempts to enrol every science fiction reader in its ranks. It is not necessary to be one of the ten most popular fans to join The Futurians or to enjoy its organ; it is merely required that one have an active and alive interest in science fiction and in the future.

The official organ of the Federation, *The Futurian Review*, furnishes the most adequate and interesting coverage of what is going on in science fiction and allied fields of any fan magazine. Subscriptions to this paper are given free to all members of The Federation and can be obtained in no other way, but a sample copy, plus information on the club itself, may be had for 10c in coin of any country of the world sent to Frederik Pohl, Provisional President 280 St John's Place, Brooklyn, New York (*Marvel Science Stories* August 1939: 108).

¹ Gernsback was notorious for non- or late payment of his writers (Tynan and Ashley 1985: 17-18).
The Futurian fanzines are full of a sense of their own importance and that of science fiction. The idea of the fan as slan is strong. Reading through the Futurian material I was never able to forget how young they all were.

By the late forties the Futurians had ceased to exist as an active fan group, though members were still in contact with each other. Most of them had become pros, some even writing a number of the sex battle texts which I examine in chapter three: *Girls from Planet Five* (1955) by Richard Wilson and *Search the Sky* (1954) by Frederik Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth.