The Secret Feminist Cabal

A Cultural History of Science Fiction Feminisms

Helen Merrick

"...a terrific read" — Gwyneth Jones

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“Will the Real James Tiptree, Jr. Please Stand Up,” poster, 1978
“FIAWOL,” poster, 1977

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2

Resistance is Useless? The Sex/Woman/Feminist "Invasion"

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…

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.

⥤ Donald G. Turnball (1938: 162)

The growth of feminist activity within sf was a direct reflection of sociopolitical debates of the '60s and '70s, and of the impact of the women's liberation movement, as well as a result of trends within the field itself. Integral to the development of sf feminisms were debates about the role of women and the representation of female characters in sf, debates that have been present from the genre's beginnings in the pulp magazines. In contrast to earlier stories that situated sf's maturation (in terms of issues such as sex, women, and literary value) in the 1960s, a number of recent works find evidence for such engagements much earlier. Justine Larbalestier's study of early sf magazines and fanzines demonstrates that issues of sex and gender were not sudden arrivals in the 1960s but have always preoccupied the sf community in both its fictions and discussions about the field (2002). Tackling that preoccupation, Brian Attebery's *Decoding Gender in Science Fiction* examines the gendered nature of much of the "sf code" throughout its history (2002). Concerns about women in sf developed from the "sex in sf" question, which loomed large in the sf (un)consciousness from the late 1920s through the sexual liberation of the 1960s, to intersect with (and be partially absorbed by) feminist

narratives from the 1970s to the present. In this chapter I highlight key moments in which discussions of sex, gender, and women came to the fore, reinforcing the recent critical perception that such concerns were not merely triggered by an invasion of women's libbers, but are indeed central to sf history. As Larbalestier argues, "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" (2002: 168).

Statements about the overwhelmingly masculine character of sf—particularly in the early days of sf pulp magazines—are a commonplace of both malestream and feminist histories. As Jane Donawerth notes, "[b]oth traditional historians of science fiction and also feminist ones have expected women not to appear in the pulps, and have invented reasons for their absence" (1994: 137). Whilst some sources estimate that men made up to 90 percent of the audience for magazines such as *Astounding SF*, the continual (re)construction of sf as a masculine domain has concealed women's interaction with sf, as readers, as authors, and as subjects represented through female characters. Writers like Connie Willis and Pamela Sargent have reminded later generations of the existence of women sf writers from the 1920s onwards (Sargent 1978b, 1978c, 1979; Willis 1992). Sargent's anthologies and others, like *New Eves: Science Fiction About the Extraordinary Women of Today and Tomorrow* (Frank, Stine, and Ackerman 1994) and *Daughters of Earth* (Larbalestier 2006), document the contributions of earlier women writers and editors. Research on the activities of women writers and readers has slowly emerged over the last few decades. Donawerth (1990, 1994, 1997) has examined women's writing for the early pulps, providing more than occasional evidence of the presence of women as authors in sf from the 1920s, and Robin Roberts (1993) analyzed representations of women in pulp cover art. Larbalestier's *Battle of the Sexes* (2002) provides the first detailed feminist analysis of the letter columns and editorials of early magazines such as *Astounding*, providing evidence of the presence of women as readers, and of Woman as the subject of sf debate.

The sex question in sf: The early years of the pulps, 1920s–1930s

Debate about the stories that were forming the core of a nascent sf began as conversations between readers and editors in the pulp magazines, which printed readers' addresses to enable communication between them. Clubs such as the Science Correspondence Club and Sciences Club (both formed in 1929) began producing amateur publications (first known as "fanmags") such as *The Planet* (1930), *The Time Traveller* (1932), and what is generally considered the first fanzine, *The Comet* (1930) (Madle 1994: 37; Warner Jr. 1994a: 175). Hugo Gernsback (editor of *Amazing Stories* and *Wonder Stories*) was the first to identify these more active readers as "fans" (Larbalestier 2002: 23), and in 1934, through his magazine *Wonder Stories*, he created the SFL (Science Fiction League), which soon had chapters in many of the major cities of the US.

Larbalestier's reading of letters and editorials from 1927-1939 in magazines such as *Amazing Stories* (1926-2005) and *Astounding* reveals that a number of women readers wrote to the magazines and participated in overt struggles over the ownership of sf and whether or not women could be considered "fit" subjects for sf. A debate in the letter column of *Astounding* from 1938-39 illustrates, in Larbalestier's words, "that science fiction is a masculine space whose borders must be carefully patrolled to keep the pollution of women out" (2002: 117). Larbalestier's conclusion that the "battle of the sexes" has been a constant theme in sf since the genre's beginnings in the 1920s provides a very different historiographical view than the truism that, in the pre-1960s era, women signified in sf only through their absence. As her analysis demonstrates, debates about the appropriateness of sex in sf stories (or on the cover of the magazines in the form of scantily clad women) were always intimately connected with notions about women's place in sf.

While traditional histories of sf have emphasized the active rejection of sex as a topic suitable for sf, they have only rarely noted the slippage between sex and women (Carter 1977: 174). Although critics from the 1960s on would be virtually unanimous in their construction of earlier sf as a "sexless" space, again, reader's letters show that this was not a given. Paul Carter cites a series of letters provoked by the

use of female nudes in the cover art of *Weird Tales* in the 1930s (most of them by one of the first female cover artists, Margaret Brundage). While many readers, male and female, expressed outrage and disapproval, others were enthusiastic: "By all means let her continue with her nudes offending the prudes" (E.L. Mengshoel 1936, cited in Carter 1977: 177).

Later critical assumptions about the lack of sex in sf overlooked the sexualized (and gendered) nature of many sf tropes, such as the alien, the rocketship, and even the (masculine) scientific colonization of the "feminine" Mother Earth, and space. The alien or BEM (Bug Eyed Monster) could signify everything that was "other" to the dominant audience of middle-class, young white western males—including women, people of color, other nationalities, classes, and sexualities (Le Guin 1975). The interactions between aliens and human men were often inherently, if covertly, sexual in nature.

Further, as Larbalestier argues, in the name of keeping sf pure of "romance," "puerile love interests," and "sex," male fans, authors, and editors pursued exclusionary tactics in their efforts to situate women characters outside the masculine domain of science and sf. In discussions of sf, as in the sf texts themselves, women were conflated with sex, such that they could only signify in sf if "sex" or "romantic interest" were allowed in. The term "love interest" in the letters examined by Larbalestier "frequently functions…as a synonym for 'women'" (2002: 117). Although some readers contested the exclusion of this "natural human relationship," the majority argued that sex had no place in the logical, scientific, cerebral topos of sf, and, ipso facto, there was no place for woman. A particularly telling example of such conflation occurs in a 1953 letter that asked "What's wrong with sex inside or outside [the covers] as long as the gal shows expression in her eyes?" As Larbalestier notes, "This inadvertently funny comment is revealing. Sex is a gal" (117).

The contest over women's position was not always so covert. The letter by Donald Turnball (see preface quote) that sparked the 1938/9 debate in *Astounding* addressed the "woman issue" directly: "A woman's place is not in anything scientific… Yours for more science and less females" (Turnball 1938: 162). Another participant was the 19-year-old Isaac Asimov, who was one of the most vociferous opponents of women in sf in the late 1930s (Larbalestier 2002: 117-18).

He also, notes Larbalestier, assumes "the position of the male under attack, when in fact the debate began with Turnball's attack on women in science fiction" (123). An attempt by a female reader to separate "that which is represented from the manner of their representation [was] to Asimov absurd and impossible to enforce" (125). Criticizing the usual stereotypes of "swooning damsels" that figure for "women" in sf, Asimov placed responsibility not on the (male) writers, but on women themselves: "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 us men" (Asimov 1939: 160). In Larbalestier's words, "Asimov conflates women with the way they are represented in science fiction and then makes them responsible for that representation" (126).

Larbalestier notes connections between the issues raised in this debate and later feminist analyses, for example in a letter from Mary Byers countering Asimov's arguments:

> To begin, he [Asimov] has made the grave error of confusing the feminine interest with the sex theme... 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 wholehearted 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. (Byers 1939: 160)[1]

As Larbalestier comments, "Byers' argument here is almost identical to some of those of Russ, Badami and Wood more than thirty years later" (122).

The resistance of female readers to the notion that women were incompatible with "anything scientific" (and thus with sf) did not just express the attitude of a few enlightened, brave individuals, but actually reflected cultural shifts evident, if not dominant, in US society of the 1930s-40s. During and post-WWII women had, of course, moved in significant numbers into various technical and engineering roles, and some had begun to make visible careers in science. As Eric Drown reminds us, successful female scientists such as Marie Curie and

1 Reproduced in Larbalestier (2002: facing 121).

Barbara McClintock "were prominent in the Sunday-supplements" in the 1920s and '30s (Drown 2006: 6). Male fans' expressions of resistance to women in science were thus not so much reflections of "real world" science but evidence of the anxieties of "a particularly beset group of would-be wage earners…and in particular how young middle-class women's move out of the home and into self-supporting occupations affected [their] prospects" (8).

Complicating the absence/presence of women

Intimately connected to these debates over the suitability of females as a fit subject for or presence in sf were complex reactions to the bodies of the real women reading the magazines, writing letters, and becoming fans. The varied explanations and justifications for women's arrival in the field offers a measure of this complexity, for, as Larbalestier demonstrates, male fans repeatedly made claims of an "invasion" of women, beginning as early as 1926. Editors such as Hugo Gernsback, Sam Merwin Jr., Charles Hornig, and Sam Mines all at various times expressed surprise that their magazines (in the 1920s, '30s, and '50s) received so many letters from women. In the sixth issue of *Amazing Stories*, in September 1926, Gernsback's editorial mentioned the "encouraging" fact that "a great many women are already reading the new magazine." Gernsback attributed this "totally unforeseen result" to the name of the magazine—"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 1926a: 23).[2] Despite his rather patronizing tone (adopted by all of the editors discussed here), Gernsback highlighted an important factor in women's actual and supposed lack of interest in science, one well documented by feminist historians of medicine and science (see for example, Schiebinger 2001). The "feminine" character necessary for fulfilling one's socialization as a woman supposedly entailed a mind and character in opposition to the logic, rigor, and rationality required

2 By 1930, Gernsback was far from surprised at the number of female readers. In response to a letter from a woman who presumed her letter would not be published, Gernsback wrote: "We have no discrimination against women. Perish the thought–we want them! As a matter of fact, there are almost as many women among our readers as there are men... We are always glad to hear from our feminine readers" (Gernsback 1930: 765).

and epitomized by "Science." For many women, the association of sf with science was enough to deter them from looking at such stories, or from at least admitting that they did so—an association of ideas that, World War II notwithstanding, continued into the atmosphere of "professional housewifery" of the 1950s and of course continues in an attenuated but still effective way to the present.

A number of women still managed to read and enjoy this most "unfeminine" of subjects. Over a decade later, in 1939, Charles Hornig, editor of the unambiguously-titled *Science Fiction* was also surprised to receive mail from female readers:

> I have received so many letters from women who read science fiction 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. (Hornig 1939: 119)

Intriguingly, in this narrative, readers of the "fair sex" must possess "well-developed" imaginations to read sf, while presumably their male counterparts read it as an extension of their serious and rational interest in science and its future potentiality.

Another editor, Sam Merwin, also perceived a change during the pre-WWII years, noting the arrival of women writers and readers "at some indeterminate point in the nineteen thirties" (1950: 6). Merwin's editorial for the December 1950 issue of *Thrilling Wonder Stories* is worth citing at length:

> This metamorphosis—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 novelets 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 [sic] MacLean, Betsy Curtis, and Miriam Allen Deford [sic]…
>
> Naturally, with such a group of talented women writers practicing successfully for more than a dozen years, the entire story-perspective on women in science fiction has changed. (6)

Before this period of "invasion," however, Merwin (like other commentators well into the '70s) depicted sf as "a world for men and men only" (6). In Merwin's narrative, previous to the "invasion," a female reader was a "space-minded Tomboy Taylor" who had to "keep her hair short and her mind on the refreshments rather than the boys" if she wanted to "crash" the "primeval" sf clubs. Following "the invasion,"

> 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-controversies, thereby livening up same not only through the freshness of their approach but through the rebuttals they drew from resenting males. (7)

Merwin's comments make it quite clear that female intervention was met with less than approval on some sides, with one "school" withdrawing into "crusty male resentment toward feminine invasion of yet another masculine sanctum sanctorum." In contrast, Merwin situates himself in the "other camp," which believed "this female uprising, inrush or whatever it may be termed is entirely in line with the world-trend toward woman's emancipation and equality that has ensued at least since the fiery pronunciations of Mary Wollstonecraft and her companions" (140). Thus, unlike many of the narratives surrounding women's "invasion" of sf, women's entry into sf is characterized by Merwin as a natural development of equal rights activism.

The cycle of presumed absence followed by surprised discovery occurs again in the 1950s magazine *Startling Stories*. Writing only a few years after Merwin, editor Sam Mines locates the arrival of women at a later date: "[t]en years ago stf fans were practically all male," whereas by 1953,

> 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 letter column of SS]… 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." (Mines 1953: 136)[3]

In the British magazine *Authentic Science Fiction*, a response to a female reader also notes the existence of female fans in the '50s and rather than expressing surprise, invites participation in fan activity: "We've had letters from several female fans…and we're convinced that there are many of them. We keep trying to get them to form a club…why don't you come along to the Globe in Hatton Garden one Thursday evening? You'll meet other girl fans there" (Campbell 1955: 126).

Big Name Fandom: Females need not apply

These letters and editorials demonstrate without doubt the existence of female readers of sf. The question of women's status or role in fandom, however, is another matter. Since its beginnings in the 1920s, sf fandom has been characterized as being almost exclusively composed of adolescent males. Fan histories of the 1930s and 1940s reinforce the assumption that sf was almost totally male dominated, with only the occasional exceptional female writer and even fewer female readers before the 1960s. Although opinions vary as to when female fans became numerous enough to be visible, the earliest fans or "First fandom" are usually tacitly assumed to have been all male. David Hartwell, for example, states that "until the 1940s, there just weren't any women in fandom to speak of" (1984: 161). Others suggest that those who did exist should be discounted because they were often the wives, girlfriends, or female relatives of male fans. Harry Warner Jr. comments that in the 1940s there was "no such thing as an independent honest-to-goodness girl-type fan, because virtually all the females in fandom had a fannish boy friend, brother, husband, or some other masculine link" (Warner Jr. 1969: 26). The key word here is *independent*, the implication being that connection with a male delegitimated the female fan identity—that her interest and presence was dependent solely on male influence. In retrospect, this is a particularly fallacious argument—now that there are numerous women involved in fandom, many still make significant partnerships within

3 Cited in Larbalestier, *Battle of the Sexes* (159). The abbreviation "stf" stood for "scientifiction" a name used earlier for sf.

the community precisely because of the shared interests and commitments, and indeed many early female fans were independently involved before they found partners within the fan community. Considering the fact that the "lack" of female fans was "oft lamented by males active in fandom" (r. brown 1994: 90), the desire for "honest-to-goodness girl-type" fans may have been attributable to young men's desire for single women to be available within their own, rather isolated community. Even in the 1990s, accounts claiming a lack of "femmefans" (female fans) rest on the same erasure of the few women present: "Most female fans involved between the 1930s and 1950s were male fan's wives, girlfriends, or sisters" (Luttrell 1994: 158n3).

The discounting of "secondary" female fans obscures the fact that, whatever their connections, these women were not necessarily passive hangers-on, as such statements imply, but were sincerely interested in sf, writing letters, editing fanzines, and attending conventions. The contradictory nature of accounts that recognize the presence of women while simultaneously undermining the significance of their participation is evident in the fan publication *Fancyclopedia*, first published in 1944.[4] Two entries in a later version refer directly to female fans:

> FANNE (pronounced "fan"). A female fan; also femmefan.… Feminine objection to this term is caused by clods giving the silent E full value.
>
> FEMMEFANS. Explaining everything is contrary to our philosophy of education. (Eney and Speer 1959)

Reflecting the earlier conflations of females and "sex" discussed above, most of the information on female fans is found elsewhere. The entry on "Sex" states that "the great majority of fans are male, and it has been asserted that females cannot be the psychological type of the SF fan," but adds "tho there are many femmefans to refute this" (147).[5] In contrast to the examples above, this female presence is not counteracted; the entry continues: "*in addition* there are sweethearts, wives, daughters, sisters etc. of male fans" (my emphases). Thus the existence of "many

4 John Bristol (Jack) Speer, *Fancyclopedia*, Los Angeles: Forrest J. Ackerman, 1944. This was later revised and expanded as Richard H. Eney and Jack Speer, *Fancyclopedia II*, Alexandria, VA: Operation Crifanac, 1959.

5 This entry is the same in both issues, Speer, *Fancyclopedia* (78); Eney and Speer, *Fancyclopedia II* (147).

femme fans" who are not attached to males is implied; at the same time, even those "secondary" wives and girlfriends of fans seem to participate: they "*tag along* at fan gatherings, make some appearance in the fanzines, and assist in *dirty work* like mimeoing" (my emphases) (147). It would seem that assisting in compilation of a fanzine was not fanac in this case, but an accepted duty of the wife/girlfriend/sister; presumably women had to edit fanzines themselves to be considered a "true" fan. Since most fan histories concern those fen (plural of *fan*) who became well-known through their fan publications, fan editors, rather than the less active letter-writers or club and con attendees, are their main focus.[6] Correspondingly minimal attention is given to female fans, few of whom became well-known as editors until the 1950s.

The "liberation" of sf?: The 1950s and 1960s

The revolutionary decade of the 1960s seems the natural site to locate a radical shift in sf's relation to sex, women, and liberation. This was the period marked by the upheavals and turf wars of the New Wave with its turn to inner space and championing of the cultural and literary avant garde. It is in this period that most critics locate the new maturity of the genre and the "arrival" (again) of women writers and readers. Such stories obscure the extent to which a variety of social, political, and economic changes had impacted the field earlier. Recently, more nuanced accounts of the 1950s have emerged in works such as Lisa Yaszek's book on postwar women's sf (2008), Rob Latham's studies of the New Wave (2005, 2006), and Roger Luckhurst's cultural history of the genre (2005).

It is becoming increasingly apparent that the supposed invasion of women in the 1970s built on a significant legacy of female involvement in sf in the 1950s and '60s. Yaszek claims that almost 300 women began writing in the (US) sf field in the post-war, pre-Women's Lib period (2008: 3). A smaller, but still significant number is documented in Eric Davin's bibliography of sf writers, with 154 women identified as writing sf in the period 1950-60 (Davin 2003: 342). Women also had a visible impact in the field as editors: Judith Merril began her "Year's Best" series in 1956, and several women worked as editors for sf magazines, for example Cele Goldsmith (*Amazing* and *Fantastic*

6 In the early stages, fans who ran and organized conventions were likely to be those who were also most active in fan publishing.

Stories), Lila E. Shaffer (*Amazing*, *Fantastic*), Gloria Levitas (*F&SF*), Fanny Ellsworth (*Startling Stories*, *Thrilling Wonder Stories*), and Evelyn Paige (*Galaxy*) (Davin 2003: 345-6; see also, Frank, Stine, and Ackerman 1994). Moreover, opportunities for women writers were enhanced by the establishment of magazines such as *F&SF* (1949) and *Galaxy Science Fiction* (1950), founded by Horace L. Gold, who tried to include "at least one story that appealed to women" in each issue (Attebery 2003: 42). The rise of *F&*SF and *Galaxy Science Fiction* marked the waning of the significant editorial power of figures like Campbell, whose control had been "particularly inhibiting for authors whose work was in any way idiosyncratic or stylistically ambitious" (Latham 2005: 204). As Latham points out, the '50s also saw some significant explorations of sexuality that prefigured the avant garde innovations of the New Wave. Accounts that emphasize the New Wave's "'liberated' outburst of erotic expression" as a counter to the "priggish Puritanism of the Golden Age" obscure important continuities (Latham 2006: 252). Both New Wave advocates and later critics thus obscured significant developments in the 1950s by contrasting their calls for a more "mature" sf to a "caricatured portrait of the genre as naively juvenile prior to the advent of their fearless avant-garde" (253).

Indeed, by the early 1960s, it had become commonplace for sf critics, whether champions of the New Wave or not, to bemoan the field's avoidance of sex and sexuality on the grounds that it was inappropriate for an otherwise "progressive" and innovative genre.[7] Academic attention in concert with New Wave-type sensibilities resulted in a new focus on the literary qualities of sf. Criticism was leveled at the lack of characterization in sf—a problem that was seen to be at the root of sf's failure to portray (or even include) women and sex. As Larbalestier observes, critics promoted "the idea that science fiction had always ignored sex and that this had retarded its growth" (Larbalestier 2002: 137).

Additionally, as the sf paperback market continued to expand, authors were seen to be less constrained in their subject matter than they had been when the pulps provided virtually the only arena for sf. Publishers and editors of the pulps supposedly had to patrol their borders to ensure protection for younger readers, and many letters to the

7 See discussion in Nicholls (1979: 538-9).

pulps mentioned the possibility of "corrupting" younger readers (or sons) through unsuitable stories (Frank, Stine, and Ackerman 1994: ix-x; Nicholls 1979: 538).[8] However, as Eric Drown notes, the notion of the sf reader as a young adolescent may well be another truism not supported by historical research. On the contrary, Drown claims that "[w]hile there was a significantly visible contingent of precocious mostly middle-class boys among the letter-writers, most readers were the adults who provided the routine intellectual, clerical, mechanical and physical labor that made the new mass production economy function" (Drown 2006: 8). The idea that, no matter their age, sf was patrolled by "puritanical readers" as much as by editors is questioned by Latham who found mostly enthusiasm, rather than censure in the letter pages of magazines that had published sexually explicit stories such as Philip José Farmer's 1952 "The Lovers" (Latham 2006: 253).

The history of sf before 1960 was marked as an "innocent" and "naive" period, predicated on the notion that, in Larbalestier's words, "the intellectuality of science fiction perforce [kept] sex and the body out of the picture" (2002: 138). The earlier struggles over the subjects of "sex," "love interests," and "women" were not acknowledged in critical stories from the 1960s. Now the critical consensus decreed that "sex" was a "good thing" for sf, a sign of its maturity and a topic that did not automatically require consideration of the function of women in sf. And yet the slippage between sex and women had not disappeared. When the feminist critiques of Russ and others forced the community into consideration of the images of women in sf, many responses rested on the same assumptions displayed by Asimov and others in the 1930s. Indeed, the text that continues to be constantly valorized by critics as representing a watershed in sf's "maturity" in terms of sex is one that has attracted much feminist critique. Philip

8 While Frank et al. emphasize the power exerted by the owners of the publishing companies, Nicholls focuses on John Campbell's assistant Kay Tarrant commenting that she "was famous for her prudishness, and persuaded many writers to remove 'offensive' scenes and 'bad language' from their stories" (1979: 538). (This was, Latham tells us, a game amongst some authors known as "slipping one past Kay.") However, Latham counters this story, commenting that "Some of Campbell's admirers in the field...have attempted to absolve the editor of culpability for the excessive chasteness of his magazine, blaming it instead on the priggish Ms. Tarrant...but there can be little doubt that Campbell himself had, in this area as in so many others, quite firm and eccentric views of what was acceptable and what was not" (Latham 2006: 53).

José Farmer's "The Lovers" was identified by many critics in the 1960s and '70s as being one of the earliest stories to break sexual taboos and cited as evidence of sf's progression (Moskowitz 1966: 393; Scholes and Rabkin 1977: 185-6). It was left to later feminist critics to point out the misogyny of this graphic picture of interspecies miscegenation ending in the destruction of the *female* alien.[9] Indeed, Latham draws explicit connections between the emergence of feminist sf and the atmosphere of "sexual openness" of the '60s, arguing that "feminist sf served as a kind of conscience for the New Wave movement" with stories by the likes of Tiptree providing "corrective extensions of Farmer's pioneering tales of interspecies desire" and serving as "a counterweight to the more or less explicit misogyny of the sexual revolution" (2006: 262-3).

The "sexual revolution," in sf as elsewhere in society, did not by any means go hand in hand with gender equality. As Paul Carter (1977: 192) observes, "if the sexual behavior in the stories became more explicit, the conventions surrounding it remained archaic."[10] Even the slightest signs of women's increasing social independence could provoke defensive attitudes. In 1960, *Amazing Stories* published an article by sf writer Lester del Rey entitled "Polygamy, Polyandry, and the Future." Here the sexual revolution is figured as a way of *escaping* the possible revolution in sexual roles. The article opens:

> In a world where men do housework and women run offices, the old balance of the sexes is coming apart at the seams. Is a revolution in sexual mores the answer for the future, both here on Earth and outward in the new worlds of space? (del Rey 1960: 99)

Despite the classification of his piece under the "fact" heading, del Rey's hypothetical exploration of "the future of man's social patterns" is comparable to the misogynist "women dominant" sf stories that refigured and recontained the "threat" of women's independence

9 See for example, Roberts, *A New Species* (1993: 152). One critic who remained skeptical of the "breakthrough" begun by Farmer's example was Anthony Boucher: "one can complain no longer of the sexlessness of s-f after 1960's rash of novels which attempted to combine prognostication and pornography and achieved only boredom" (Boucher 1963: 379).

10 He recognized this as a trait not specific to sf: "many a supposedly avant-garde writer out in the literary 'mainstream' also commonly confuses freely available sex with genuine human liberation" (192).

and the "new woman" ideal of the 1920s.[11] Del Rey argues that the future demands of space travel would necessitate a complete restructuring of the family unit and sexual behavior, particularly the "western custom" of monogamy. He declares that there are "rather ugly factors already at work today" that augured against monogamous marriage, including the reduction of men's life spans due to marriage to the "modern" consumer-mad work-shy woman (102-3). This overtly misogynistic article expresses deep-seated contemporary fears concerning what were seen as unsettling social developments in "modern" culture, associated with the emerging "equality" of women. The article ends with del Rey's painting a picture of the rather "distasteful" but probable result of "man's desire to spread his seed to the stars"—the use of all-female crews and frozen sperm to colonize worlds. Del Rey hypothesizes that such a society would see men as a "necessary evil at first" then evolve into a specific form of polygamy rigorously controlled by women—a world that del Rey obviously "would keep far away from!" (106). Del Rey connects his vision with earlier sf texts positing "worlds of women without men," but cites only Poul Anderson (presumably referring to his 1957 *Virgin Planet*). In fact there were innumerable examples of this theme that together form a recognizable tradition, appearing first in the nineteenth century, and then in many pulp stories, through to the 1970s, where exploitation of the theme culminated in its radical reformation at the hands of feminist authors. The "world of women"—or what Russ and Larbalestier term "the battle of the sexes" story—is in fact one of the primary sites of female activity in sf and is a recurring concern in later critical works (Larbalestier 2002; Moskowitz 1976; Russ 1980).

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11 Sam Moskowitz (1976) uses this term to describe role-reversal stories, where women rule and men are subjugated, functioning most often as a warning against increases in women's social and political power. Examples include Wallace West, "The Last Man," *Amazing Stories*, Feb. 1929, and E. Charles Vivian, *Woman Dominant*, London, Ward, Lock and Co., 1930. One of the few critics to recognize that women and sex had been subject to debate in sf, Moskowitz noted that "Woman Dominant" stories had "since the beginning" been an sf theme "spotlighting the female sex" (70). Moskowitz acknowledged that many stories contained "snide digs at women" and commented that male authors "in every case, seem uneasy about this 'equality' (of women), claiming that it will end in domination" (90). One of the few such early stories written by a woman was M.F. Rupert's "Via the Hewitt Ray," *Wonder Stories Quarterly*, Spring, 1930, discussed by Moskowitz (80).

In 1961, Kingsley Amis provided a view of sf that better characterized the critical approach developing through the 1960s, especially concerning the "oppressively normal" nature of sexual interest in sf, which in his view was "rare, conventional and thin." He rather patronizingly added that: "No wife who finds her husband addicting himself to science fiction need fear that he is in search of an erotic outlet" (Amis 1962: 66, 87).[12] One of sf's "earliest advocates in the literary mainstream" (Parrinder 1979: xv),[13] Amis argues, in *New Maps of Hell*, that representations of both "sex" and women in sf were outdated.

> Amid the most elaborate technological innovations, the most outré political or economic shifts, involving changes in the general conduct of life as extreme as the gulf dividing us from the Middle Ages, man and woman, husband and wife, lover and mistress go on doing their stuff in the mid-twentieth-century way… The sentimental consensus that this is perhaps the only part of human nature that can never be changed…is a disappointing trait in science fiction writers. (1962: 114-15)

This statement resonates with later feminist critiques, yet Amis's emphasis here is still on sex and sexual behavior, rather than sexual identity and gendered roles, although he did consider the ramifications of such conservatism for the representation of women in sf.[14] With an ironic (and not wholly convincing) nod towards the desirability of female emancipation—"one of those interesting ideas that have never actually been tried out"—Amis noted that few authors had seriously attempted to reconsider normative sexual roles. He cites two exceptional examples, namely Philip Wylie's "The Disappearance" and John Wyndham's "Consider Her Ways," but argues that "the female emancipationism of a Wylie or a Wyndham is too uncommon to be significant" (1962: 99).

12 He also distinguishes sf from fantasy in this aspect; commenting on a fantasy story "The sound of His Horn," he quips that an sf story would have "wrapped up the young ladies in veils of abstractions and outraged modesty" (102).

13 For Amis's influence on the field of sf criticism, see Parrinder (1979: 156). (See also Scholes and Rabkin 1977: 237.)

14 Cf. Joanna Russ: "In general, the authors who write reasonably sophisticated and literate science fiction...see the relations between the sexes as those of present-day, white middle-class suburbia" (Russ 1974b: 54).

Amis's direct, albeit brief, critique of gender roles in sf presaged an increasing societal acceptance of equi-sexist beliefs. Amis explicitly notes the "anti-feminist prejudice on the part of selection boards for planetary survey teams," an observation much more amenable to feminist sensibilities than assumptions that scientific rigor precludes the inclusion of mere "love-interests." Amis concludes that sf should "go easy" on the puritanism, but also suggests that sex should be excluded altogether when functioning as no more than a "perfunctory love interest," thus conflating "love interest" and women and intimating that women were better absent than functioning only as an excuse for providing sex. His rather limited view of the ways women could enter sf was emphasized by his critique of writers' attempts to "introduce a women's angle" (an effort "perhaps harmless in intention but unspeakable in execution") (Amis 1962: 144). It is not clear exactly which writer he was referring to, but his objections concerned the portrayal of "gallant little" wives and mothers. Feminists could (and did) also object to such characters, but the implication of Amis's stance is that women can really only function in boring domestic roles (undesirable in sf) or as sex objects/love interests (all right in their place). Amis's contradictory view of sexuality in sf—at times pro-feminist and at others reactionary—is reflected in similar debates well into the 1970s and beyond, when feminist criticism began to have an impact on sf studies.

1970s: Incorporation

By the mid-1970s, the critiques of women's position in sf had achieved a much more visible presence in sf scholarship and were frequently framed in overtly feminist terms. General works of sf criticism and history responded to this development. Increasingly, critics recognized the contribution of women writers (especially from the 1960s on) and saw a trend towards the "softer sciences" and better characterization resulting from their influence (a judgment that could be either welcomed or lamented). Reflecting gynocentric analyses, many established (male) critics and fans acknowledged the appalling limitations of stereotyped female characterization in sf, but often attributed this fault to causes such as a deficiency in characterization generally, or to sf's "natural" concentration on technology. Usually only feminist

critics were prepared to admit the full extent of misogyny or sexism inherent in these problems of representation.

First published in Sweden in 1969, Sam Lundwall's *Science Fiction: What It's All About* presented a clear statement of sf's deficiencies when it came to representations of women. Obviously influenced by the insights of the Women's Liberation Movement (but without the benefits of the feminist critiques of sf that other commentators were soon able to draw upon), Lundwall argued: "In a world where women at last are beginning to be recognized as human beings, science fiction still clings to the views of last century" (Lundwall 1971: 145). Lundwall was also one of the few commentators on sf to recognize the explicit continuity between attitudes to women from the 1930s to the 1960s. Citing a 1939 letter from Asimov in *Startling Stories* (written in the same tone as his letters discussed above), Lundwall noted that little had changed in sf:

> [T]he woman is the same now as she was then. She shouldn't be in sf in the first place. If she nevertheless manages to get into it, she shall know her place. Period. (148-9)

In Peter Nicholl's *Encyclopedia of Sf*, the entry "Women" (dealing both with women who write sf and depictions of women in sf) states that "one of the more shameful facets of genre sf is the stereotyped and patronizing roles which are usually…assigned to women" (1979: 661).[15] Recognition of this problem, Nicholls notes, "began to filter, very slowly, into sf" with the rise of the feminist movement and its eventual influence in the sf world.[16] Citing several female critics who had "naturally been incensed at this chauvinism," he lists critical articles by Joanna Russ, Beverley Friend, Mary Kenny Badami, and also the special issue of the fanzine *Khatru* on women in sf (661).[17]

15 In the second edition of the *Encyclopedia*, the influence of the consolidation of feminist criticism over the next decade is obvious. The section "Women" is replaced by two: "Women as portrayed in science fiction" and "Women SF writers," and there is also a separate entry for "feminism": all of these entries are written by feminist sf author Lisa Tuttle (Clute and Nicholls 1993).

16 Nicholls noted that mainstream fiction had not had "this dishonourable history" to the same extent. He also made the interesting observation that the rise of feminism in the late '60s did not really have any repercussions in publishing until around 1974.

17 Nicholls lists a number of feminist sf works, including Sargent's *Women of Wonder* anthologies and Vonda N. McIntyre and Susan Janice Anderson's (eds), *Aurora:*

A number of male critics also (unwittingly) contributed to the recovery of herstory by situating Mary Shelley as the "mother" of the sf genre with *Frankenstein*. Although many critics had written of links between Shelley's Gothic novel and the sf genre previously, Brian Aldiss claimed he was the first to situate *Frankenstein* as the beginning of the sf genre (and commented in a later edition that most in the community found the idea that sf "was a Gothic offshoot" totally unacceptable) (Aldiss 1975; Aldiss and Wingrove 1988; Scholes and Rabkin 1977).[18] Another early female author who had been fairly consistently recognized was C.L. Moore. In his 1966 study, Moskowitz observes that Moore was the "most important woman to contribute to sf since Mary Shelley," and was additionally "one of the most perceptive literary artists in sf," who enriched the genre with her "rare feminine insight" (Moskowitz 1966: 305, 318). In a mostly biographical essay (that predictably focuses on her relationship with Henry Kuttner) Moskowitz raises some interesting points about the effect of Moore's gender on her career, including the way editors attempted to conceal her gender (until it was "discovered" by fans) and how the use of a pseudonym for her writing partnership with Kuttner largely detracted from and concealed Moore's influence and standing in the sf community (314).[19]

By the 1970s male critics at least recognized the existence of the increased number of female writers, even if they still gave little space to analyzing their works. Nicholl's *Encyclopedia*, for example, listed over sixty female writers in a special entry on "women," usefully in-

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Beyond Equality; and is one of the few critics (along with Aldiss) to mention Mitchison's *Memoirs of a Spacewoman*, a very early example of feminist sf from 1962.

18 By the 1990s critical opinion had changed to the extent that few critics would now argue the import of *Frankenstein* for the development of sf (see for example Freedman, 2000). Nevertheless, as noted in the Introduction, moves to connect sf to earlier literary forebears (including in gynohistories of sf) often proceed from the impulse to recraft sf as a more respectable and literary field (see also Duchamp, 2006b).

19 Indeed, much of the basis for recovering "herstory" was initially provided by fan historians such as Moskowitz, whose collections and knowledge of the early period of sf provided evidence of female writers (see Moskowitz 1976). Moskowitz's collection of "women dominant" stories, *When Women Rule,* was also important for preserving examples of what Russ terms "battle of the sexes" texts or "flasher" stories that demonstrate the long history of anxiety about gendered relations and the heterosexual economy in sf.

cluding those who used male or ambiguous pen names, such as Rosel George Brown, Murray Constantine (Katherine Burdekin), Lee Hoffman, J. Hunter Holly, A.M. Lightner, Wilmar H. Shiras, Francis Stevens, and Leslie F. Stone. Many of the women on his list have still received little if any critical attention: for example, Hilary Bailey, Christine Brooke-Rose, Mildred Clingerman, Miriam Allen deFord, Sonya Dorman, Carol Emshwiller, Phyllis Gotlieb, Zenna Henderson, Anna Kavan, Katherine MacLean, Naomi Mitchison, Doris Piserchia, Margaret St. Clair, and Josephine Saxton (Nicholls 1979: 662). Aldiss implicitly acknowledged the neglect of female writers' contributions to sf—whilst repeating that neglect himself. After a fairly detailed discussion of influential male writers of the 1960s, Aldiss adds, "[n]or have I mentioned the women writers of this period," giving a brief list of names followed by a few sentences on Ursula K. Le Guin and a long quote from *The Left Hand of Darkness* (Aldiss 1975: 349-50). Nevertheless it is interesting to note the authors he includes: "Even a brief list must contain the names of Angela Carter… Jane Gaskell; Hilary Bailey; Sonya Dorman; Carol Emshwiller; Ursula Le Guin; Anne McCaffrey; Naomi Mitchison; Kit Reed; Joanna Russ; Josephine Saxton; Kate Wilhelm; and Pamela Zoline." Like Nicholls, Aldiss brings attention to a number of writers who disappear from view in later feminist critical work. He is, however, overly optimistic about the circumstances that had "allowed" these women to appear.

> 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 Gernsbackian notion that sf is all hardware… Science Fiction has returned from the Ghetto of Retarded Boyhood. (350-51)

Indeed, in a number of accounts, female writers—in particular Le Guin—were given credit for "saving" sf from its "retarded" past (Scholes and Rabkin 1977: 75-88). Women writers were perceived to be addressing a previous weakness in sf: the poor quality of its characterization, or as Philip K. Dick put it, a failure to deal adequately with "the man-woman aspect of life" (1974: 106). Aldiss, for example enthusiastically concurs with Harlan Ellison's sentiment in *Again, Dangerous Visions* that "much of the best writing in science fiction today is being done by women. (And he didn't even mention Christine

Brooke-Rose…)" (Aldiss 1975: 349-50; Ellison 1972: 230). Robert Silverberg was another author to espouse such statements: "about two thirds of the best SF these days is being written by women" (Silverberg 1979: 82). Even some older authors who had previously appeared extremely resistant to the "intrusion" of women (as people or characters) into sf proselytized for women's beneficial influence. Lester del Rey welcomed the "emergence" of new women writers in the 1970s; he comments, "this evolution was probably the healthiest and most promising for the future" (del Rey 1980: 262). Asimov was another to proclaim the arrival of women in the mid-1960s, a development which, he argued, induced enormous changes in the writing of sf. Writing in 1982, he argues: "It is the feminization of science fiction that has broadened and deepened the field to the point where science-fiction novels can now appear on the bestseller lists." Asimov claims that this development was a "good thing"—incidentally reinventing himself from the adolescent letterhack who vehemently argued that women equaled sex, to someone who had "always said: Liberate women—and men will be liberated as well" (Asimov 1982: 608).[20] Asimov's explanation for the influx of women is a common and generally accepted one: he attributes it to the influence of mass-media sf, specifically *Star Trek*. Nearly every commentator on the 1970s arrival of women mentions the influence of this TV series. Women's attraction to *Star Trek* is figured in accounts such as Asimov's in a way that recalls earlier ideas displayed in the pulps that women's interest is dependent on emotional response (rather than scientific interest). *Star Trek*'s appeal, according to Asimov, lay in the "human interest" of the stories, and of course, "they had Mr. Spock… What's more, Mr. Spock had pointed ears and, for some reason, this, too, seemed to appeal to women" (608).

By the late 1970s, critics such as Carter, Robert Scholes, and Eric Rabkin went beyond welcoming the "feminine influence," to draw-

20 However, his view could be seen as contributing to an analysis situating the mass market novel as a "feminized" arena and thus a devalued element of culture. This opens up possibilities for rather more negative interpretations, not just in terms of preventing sf from being considered serious literature, but also, in sf terms, the "pollution" of the hard core or golden age of masculine-type sf, which has been threatened by literary experiments from the New Wave, by feminist propaganda, by the softening influence of women's fantasy, and by the diluted and contaminated Hollywood versions of sf in the movies. Such a tack is taken by Charles Platt in "The Rape of Science Fiction," *Science Fiction Eye*, vol. 1, no. 5, July 1989, 45-9.

ing on feminist critiques (particularly by Russ) in their analyses of women in sf. Scholes and Rabkin even drew on feminist criticism to minimize the influence of earlier female writers; Merril, they argue "introduced feminist themes in her fiction but in her form and content she could hardly be called radical" (Scholes and Rabkin 1977: 89). This is in contrast with an author they portray as the "leading edge of the American New Wave"—Joanna Russ, typified by her "alive, vigorous and daring" language and her commitment to radical feminism, which they say is "typical of the social consciousness of this movement" (89). Such enthusiastic approval of Russ's style and content was, however, far from the norm, as demonstrated by the many vitriolic reviews of *The Female Man* appearing only a few years earlier (discussed below).

While also drawing on Russ to validate his reading of the chauvinism of sf, Carter was unusual for his defense of the "domesticated" fiction of the '50s, dismissed by Russ as "'ladies' magazine fiction" (Russ 1974b: 56). There is some truth in his comment that,

> it was something to have persuaded male readers brought up on boom-boom pulp action and an engineering mystique to read and enjoy stories which told them that gentleness, intuition and domesticity are as legitimately part of the scheme of things as aggressiveness, logic and high adventure. (Carter 1977: 196)[21]

Although Carter's suggestion that these qualities were gender specific is problematic, his suggestion of the impact such stories may have had in the "thud and blunder" atmosphere of 1940s and '50s sf is worth considering, as is their contribution to the development of feminist science fiction (see Yaszek 2008, for example).

If many critics had, to a certain extent, "incorporated" feminism as far as accepting the contributions of female and even feminist writers, there were still limitations on the extent to which feminist analyses were seen as appropriate, or on considerations of the more subtle processes by which sexist and androcentric attitudes could persist in texts (and amongst readers, authors, and critics). Often critics who praised the influence of female writers still spent very little time analyzing their texts. A broader knowledge of feminist and female writers

21 Carter mentions Margaret St. Clair, Judith Merril, Wilmar H. Shiras, Miriam Allen deFord, Zenna Henderson, and Andre Norton (194-6).

was not seen as integral to the history of sf—an assumption still common today. For example, Scholes and Rabkin argued that while the scientific possibilities for genetic engineering came into existence in about 1970, such possibilities had (in 1977) "not yet made their way into science fiction stories" (Scholes and Rabkin 1977: 144). Against this statement could be laid a number of examples by women writers. Le Guin's "Nine Lives" (first published in 1968) was about groups of male and female clones from human cells, and Pamela Sargent's *Cloned Lives (1976)* and Kate Wilhelm's *When Late the Sweet Birds Sang* (1976) both dealt with cloning.[22] The Scottish author Naomi Mitchison had also written a novel describing a world ordered by cloning and human genetic manipulation in the 1970 *Solution Three* (although it was not published till 1975) (Mitchison 1995).[23]

Feminist critiques thus remained a partial and inconsistent influence in "malestream" studies of sf. While a survey like Sam Lundwall's was generally extremely critical of the representation of women in past sf (indeed earning him criticism from male fans in reviews), he still "naturally" combined the consideration of women with the subject of sex in his ironically titled chapter, "Women, Robots and Other Peculiarities." A review by Jeffrey Anderson gleefully pointed out that Lundwall's conflation of sex and women in the same chapter was somewhat problematic: "how ironic, says the Liberationist, that Lundwall should link women with sex while trying to be liberal about it all" (J. Anderson 1973: 232).[24] Even more tellingly, Lundwall concludes his indictment of sf's chauvinism with the rejoinder:

22 My thanks to Sylvia Kelso for reminding me of the Le Guin story. This is the only story Le Guin has published under the pen name U.K. Le Guin. In the introduction to the story in this collection, she noted "The editors [of *Playboy*] politely asked if they could use the first initial only, and I agreed... It was the first (and is the only) time I met with anything I understood as sexual prejudice, prejudice against me as a woman writer, from any editor or publisher; and it seemed so silly, so grotesque, that I failed to see that it was also important" (119). Portions of the Sargent novel were first published in 1972, 1973, and 1974.

23 The book was not originally published in the US and was out of print in Britain by 1980 until republished by the Feminist Press in 1995 (see Benton 1992; L. Hall, 2007; Squier 1995a).

24 This two-pronged attack did not go unnoticed; Adrienne Fein was one who replied with misgivings about both Lundwall's and Anderson's approaches (Fein 1973: 337-9).

> Of course, I am not demanding that all science fiction should contain women or even treat them as human beings—I am decidedly against stock characters, and those sf writers who think that women should be kept in the harem should of course be allowed to keep them there—in their fiction. (Lundwall 1971: 149)[25]

The notion that at least some sf texts were justified in omitting women was a common argument against feminist innovations throughout the 1970s. Such arguments were still predicated on the notion that science and thus sf involving scientists or space ships were and would remain masculine endeavors; therefore, the only mechanism for introducing a female character was as a love/sex interest. Interestingly, few, if any, sf texts set out to be all-male worlds in a conscious way similar to the feminist all-female utopias (or misogynist male-authored all-female dystopias)—women are not absent from the world necessarily: they just do not appear as actors.[26] Carter also contributed to the notion that women were not always "relevant" to sf topoi.[27] He attributed the

25 Lundwall also used Anne McCaffrey's "A Womanly Talent" as one of his pointed examples of appalling representations of "woman as appendage." McCaffrey took him to task for this criticism, claiming that originally writing the heroine Ruth as a "liberated woman," she was asked by John Campbell to "define Ruth in terms of a customary womanly role to cater to his readership." She went along with this–in her "inimitable fashion," which was an underlying "facetiousness"–a treatment Lundwall failed to appreciate:

> Because Ruth did, during the course of the story, what the men could never have done, and she did it in the traditional role of mother-mistress-healer. Actually, I was two up on the *Analog* readership: the woman not only bests the men in the story *but* there was an explicit sex scene in *Analog*'s virtuous pages. (A. McCaffrey 1974: 282-3)

26 Russ's survey of "flasher" or battle of the sexes novels found no book that "envisioned a womanless world," "Amor Vincit Foeminam" (1980: 14). One recent example of a womanless world is by Lois McMaster Bujold: her *Ethan of Athos* concerns an all-male world that relies on uterine replicators for reproduction.

27 Although Lester Del Rey presented the most overt example, arguing that sf should deal with "human values" that would "always remain relevant," rather than "current fads and ideas":

> Even such issues as the women's movement for equality should not normally be an issue in a story taking place in the year 2250; by that time, the matter will have been resolved, one way or another... Of course, there's nothing wrong with assuming that women do gain equality and trying to show a future society where that is taken for granted. But no

lack of "sexuality" (and women) in the pulp magazines to the masculinism of Science in general, and concluded, therefore, that "the Gernsback-Campbell engineering gadget kind of story—regrettably but realistically—required no female characters at all" (Carter 1977: 177). Putting aside the rejoinder that if these stories were being "realistic" about science they might have reflected women's entry into the sciences that began in the nineteenth century, such statements reflect resistance to feminist re-writings of history beyond the admission of absence. Such "sympathetic" critiques are thus distanced from Larbalestier's observations of the *active* patrolling against feminine invasion, and from feminist critiques of science, which provide more sophisticated analyses of the maintenance of the masculine culture of the sciences.

Yet for others in the sf field, even these "fellow-travelers" of feminism went too far. Jeffrey Anderson's review of Lundwall's book criticized him for mouthing "the rhetoric of the modern liberal outrage" as he "takes s-f to task for the sorry role it has relegated to women characters" (J. Anderson 1973: 232). Anderson clearly illustrates the "halfway" mark reached by the 1970s: feminist analyses had had enough impact for their initial point about the image of women in sf to have been incorporated into the critical view. There remained, however, a measure of defensiveness, expressed through critiques of "anachronistic" feminist historiography, and claims that sf as a field was no worse, and in many cases better, than other bodies of fiction. Thus Anderson argued:

> Admittedly, women haven't progressed far beyond the dependent-housewife image in s-f. But I think Lundwall comes down on s-f a bit harshly here. One must consider the culture from which it came; it is no worse than anything else written between 1920 (say) and 1970. (232)

Resistance...

The appearance of feminist sensibilities and awareness of feminist critiques in malestream sf criticism in the 1970s suggests some of

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great point should be made of that—because readers ten years from now, particularly younger ones, may also take it for granted and wonder what all the fuss is about. (del Rey 1980: 368-9)

the impact of feminist critiques on the field. A more immediate context for the reception of feminist critiques is found in the fanzines and magazine letter columns of the time, which responded to statements and fiction by feminist authors and critics. Indeed, the intense nature of debates around feminism and women in sf is suggested by repeated statements from fans and authors that, by the late 1970s, the whole issue was "old-hat." This is certainly not the impression gained from academic criticism in book-length studies and journal articles. In the more rarefied atmosphere of the academy and "sf scholarship," feminist sf criticism was by no means a constant, let alone "overdone," theme.

A wonderful example of the complex responses to feminist critique within the sf community is provided by the re-publication of Joanna Russ's article, "The Image of Women in Science Fiction" (Russ 1974b: 53-7).[28] The first critique of sf's representation of women consciously informed by the women's movement, "Image of Women" was initially published in a small literary magazine, *The Red Clay Reader*, in 1970, but the article did not appear to attract much attention in sf commentary until its second re-publication in the sf magazine *Vertex* in 1974. Subsequent issues of *Vertex* contained replies to Russ from two prominent male authors. The first reply was a rebuttal from Poul Anderson, whose tone of patronizing correction from a kindly, better-informed patriarch is signaled by his title "Reply to a Lady" (P. Anderson 1974). Beginning by situating Russ as a knowledgeable figure, "one of the perhaps half a dozen science fiction critics worth anybody's attention," he proceeded to recast her as a biased female (or worse, "lady") who had "let her fervor in a cause run away with her" and "let her political convictions influence her literary judgment to the detriment of the latter" (8).[29] Like a number of his contemporaries, Anderson believes that women simply are not relevant to much sf: "the frequent absence of women characters has no great significance, perhaps none

28 Joanna Russ, "The Image of Women in Science Fiction," *Red Clay Reader*, 1970; reprinted in Susan Koppelman Cornillon (ed.) *Images of Women in Fiction: Feminist Perspectives*, Bowling Green, OH, Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1972; reprinted in *Vertex*, vol. 1, no. 6, Feb. 1974, 53-7. All page numbers cited refer to this issue. Russ's article is discussed in Chapter Four.

29 Russ wrote a number of reviews for *F&SF* in the 1960s and 1970s including reviews of Anderson's work, as well as a piece that pointedly confronted those who believed "politics" had no place in such reviews (November 1979, 107 in Russ, 2007). For more on Russ' reviews see James (2009).

whatsoever" (99). Anderson's defense of sf recalls earlier arguments conflating women and sex; he argues that in many works there was no need to introduce women or to "bring in a love interest."

> 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 antifeminist.
>
> ...Ms. Russ' charge of sexism, like her charge of ethnocentrism, will not stand up unless one deliberately sifts the evidence... I think she simply let her fervor in a cause run away with her. (99)

After establishing women's irrelevance to the genre, Anderson claims that sf had never in fact been anti-feminist, but indeed was "more favorable to women than any other pulp writing." Amongst the writers he brought to his defense were Moore, Brackett, and Zenna Henderson, while additionally citing examples of sympathetic portrayals of female characters by male sf writers—including those of Heinlein and Asimov's "brilliant protagonist" Susan Calvin (99). These examples of course would not have appealed to feminists; even Lundwall had criticized Heinlein's "harem" and Asimov's Calvin (Lundwall 1971: 145, 148-9). (Incidentally, it may well have been the use of earlier female writers as "evidence for the defense" by male critics and authors who refused to acknowledge the validity of feminist critiques that led to their rather tenuous position in later feminist criticism.)

A couple of issues later, there followed a rather ambiguous response to both Russ and Anderson, ostensibly supporting Russ, from writer Philip K. Dick. Dick's "An Open letter to Joanna Russ" illustrates the very complex reaction to feminist critiques from sf authors and critics accustomed to viewing themselves as "liberals."

> Ms. Russ has in the most polemical manner, familiar now to most of us, hit where it hurts...to make her point, even at the cost of strewing the landscape with the wounded and puzzled corpses of otherwise reputable sf writers unaccustomed to such unfair attacks...
>
> And yet...I suddenly realized that beneath the anger and polemics and unfair tactics, which remind me of my old Left

> Wing girlfriends when they were mad at me for whatever reason—under all her manner of expressing her views, Joanna Russ is right. And Poul and I and the rest of us are wrong…
>
> So 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 whiskey—they are angry because if they are not, WE WILL NOT LISTEN. (Dick 1974: 99)

Dick's letter begins by positioning himself firmly in the camp of "male sf writers": he acknowledges Anderson as a personal friend and praises his article profusely, saying it is "superb" and "could not be bettered"—but for the fact that it is "wrong." In contrast to Russ's polemical tactics Anderson's article, although "reasonable and moderate and respectable" is, Dick concludes, nevertheless "meaningless":

> 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. (99)[30]

Unlike Anderson, the problem for Dick is not the substance of Russ's article, but the *manner* of its writing. However, he traverses a fine line between acknowledgment of the necessity of "Joanna's" anger and resentment toward what he perceives as a "personal" attack. A typical response to feminism(s), then as now, is that it inherently consists of attacks on individual men—on *their* sexism, *their* particular acts of power, discrimination, and so on. This problem was if anything highlighted in the sf community, where so many people did indeed know each other personally, so that when examples were brought forth to display sexism in sf, they had often been written by contemporaries—even friends—of the (feminist) critic.[31] Certainly

30 This comparison to the Black civil rights movement appears in a number of other instances as a comparative point for the women's movement and is used to argue both for and against the "justice" of women's liberation.

31 It is worth noting that not nearly as much personal invective was aimed at Samuel R. Delany's feminist critiques of the field.

the letters in *Vertex* suggest that Dick's and Anderson's perceptions of Russ's "anger," "militancy," and charges of "sexism" are derived from more than just this one article; perhaps influenced by personal interactions with Russ, her reviews of their work, or awareness of her fictional texts, such as "When it Changed" or *The Female Man*.[32]

This tension between feminist, anti-feminist, and more ambivalent positions was continued in a debate responding to Russ and Anderson's exchange in the fanzine *Notes From the Chemistry Department*. The conversation opens not with a direct reference to Russ, but a rebuttal of Anderson's article by Loren MacGregor entitled "A reply to a Chauvinist" (MacGregor 1974).[33] MacGregor's "A reply to a Chauvinist" refutes Anderson's article in much more decisive terms than Dick's reply. While MacGregor also initially aligns himself with the "cohort" of male writers (and in this case male sf fans), unlike Dick, he accepted Russ's "charges" without qualification. Initially expecting, and indeed wanting to agree with Anderson (as many of Russ's points "hit uncomfortably close to home"), MacGregor points out that "Mr. Anderson had managed to ignore, or misinterpret virtually all of [Russ's] assessments" (2). Most importantly, MacGregor notes that in Russ's article, "the charge was not one of antifeminism, but of male chauvinism." Further, in MacGregor's eyes, Anderson's attempt to defend sf from the accusation of "anti-feminism," by referring to "sympathetic" portraits of women, was ultimately stereotypical and chauvinist.[34]

A number of responses to MacGregor's article appeared in the following issues of *Notes*. As with other similar debates, many fans and authors who did not accept feminist characterizations of sexism and chauvinism in sf still claimed that they supported "equal rights" generally. These exchanges clearly display representational contests over the meaning of equality and whether feminists should control the

32 Although not published until 1975, *The Female Man* was in circulation in the sf community for a number of years previously, according to Samuel Delany (Moylan 1986: 57). See also the collection of Russ's reviews in *The Country You Have Never Seen* (2007).

33 MacGregor was commenting as a fan; he later went on to become an sf novelist himself.

34 The impact of MacGregor's reasonable assessment is somewhat marred by the fact that his title is illustrated by a three-cup brassiere (presumably for some "alien" female) hanging from the word "chauvinist"—a fact bemoaned by Russ in the next issue (see below).

delineation of what "equal rights" might encompass. The responses from fans and authors in the March 1975 issue of *Notes* present an interesting range of political positions that all to some extent agree with Russ's or MacGregor's conclusions about the limited portrayals of women in sf, even whilst some explicitly express opposition to "feminism" as a movement or theory. In many of these examples, Russ is positioned (often almost metonymically) as representative of a stereotypical notion of feminism that is anti-male, "rabid," and blindly judgmental.

The article "Sexual Stereotypes" by Paul Walker begins by stating that "in general" Russ and MacGregor are right, and Anderson is wrong, but goes on to argue that women are just as guilty as men are for promoting sexist stereotypes, and indeed are "*far more* to blame for the inequalities that exist" (italics in original) (P. Walker 1975: 9-10). Like many other commentators (including Dick), Walker evokes the "danger"—and ease—of inciting Russ's anger: "I'm sorry, but at the risk of bringing down the wrath of Ms. Russ, I do not beleive [sic] men and women are identical" (11). In a similar vein, a letter from Victoria Vayne expresses support for "a certain amount of equality in law, and justice, and working remuneration," but sharply delineates these issues from the arguments of feminists, who she refers to as "rabid" and a "paranoid bunch." Referring implicitly to Russ, Vayne observes that "Feminists seem to me to be a touchy lot; they get so caught up in their cause they seem to have a vendetta against men in general. They are generally too ready to boil over in anger over some slight" (Vayne 1975: 37). Jerry Pournelle also contributes, in a fashion very similar to Anderson, concluding (after a lengthy discussion of philosophy and biological determinism) that "a writer is no more compelled to accept the [sexual] equivalence argument, or its negation, than he is to accept or reject the possibility of faster than light travel" (Pournelle 1975: 9).

The issue also includes letters supportive of MacGregor and Russ. In contrast to the anti-feminist arguments of Walker and others who situated physical and biological difference as justification of sexual inequality, one letter emphasizes the sociocultural context of gendered assumptions: "The fault…does not lie with the fiction or its creators, however. It lies in the culture that produced the creators and those who appreciate their works" (Franke 1975: 37). In her own letter to

this issue, Russ also re-asserts the cultural, political, and economic elements of sexism: "sexism isn't a personal failing, it's institutionalized oppression" (Russ 1975b: 39).

The tone of Russ's letter is interesting to note; in the year that the *Female Man* was published, already a certain weariness in having to explain sexism and defend her theoretical position is more than evident. After opening with thanks to the editor for sending her a copy of the previous issue, she comments "I'm glad the exchange in *Vertex* has sparked something, though I sometimes wish someone else had done it. Because, you see, I must answer…" (38). Russ answers, presumably, because she cannot resist the pull to try and explain—once more—that sexism is not always conscious, or personal, but can inhere in "small things" like the ratio of female contributors to male in the fanzine index, or the use of hearts and a (three-cup) brassiere in illustrating an essay on women in science fiction.

Contesting the texts of feminist sf

The clash of invested narratives about sf occurred in response not only to feminist critiques of the field, but also to the overt feminist sf appearing in the 1970s. A good example is the reception of Russ's works "When It Changed" and *The Female Man*, which rewrote and challenged sf tropes and disrupted conventional narrative structures.[35] Many of the reviews and responses to her works in magazines and fanzines rehearsed the criticisms she predicted in the interjection in *The Female Man*:

> We would gladly have listened to her (they said) *if only she had spoke like a lady*. But they are liars and the truth is not in them.
>
> Shrill…vituperative…[…]this shapeless book…of course a calm and objective discussion is beyond…[…]no characterization, no plot…[…]this pretense at a novel…trying to shock…[…]a warped clinical protest against…violently waspish attack…[…]we "dear ladies," whom Russ would do way with, unfortunately just don't *feel*…ephemeral trash,

35 "When It Changed" was first published in Harlan Ellison (ed.), *Again, Dangerous Visions*, New York, Doubleday, 1972; *The Female Man* (1975), Boston, MA: Beacon, 1986.

> missiles of the sex war...a female lack of experience which... Q.E.D. Quod erat demonstrandum. It has been proved.
>
> (Russ 1986: 140-1)

Over a number of issues from 1973-74, an often heated round of letters graced the pages of the fanzine *The Alien Critic*, edited by fan and writer Richard E. Geis.[36] SF author Michael G. Coney led the attack, in a letter describing "When It Changed" as a "horrible, sickening story." According to Coney, Women's Liberation was a topical "bandwagon," whose oppositional stance could be distilled to the view that "the-majority-is-a-bastard," a critique he suggests could be better represented through "blacks" versus "whites," or Catholics versus Protestants (Coney 1973). The source of Coney's displeasure was made clear when he situated himself as part of that majority ("quite the opposite of a crank") attacked by Russ: "I'm a white non-religious male of heterosexual leanings, a member of a vast and passive majority which seems to be the target of every crank group under the sun" (53). Coney here sets himself up perfectly as part of the dominant group controlling the production of science and fictional meanings that is, and indeed continues to be, the target of feminist (and later postcolonial and queer) interventions. It is worth quoting Coney at length to indicate the depth of passion that feminist positions—via Russ—could inspire in some sections of the sf community.

> The hatred, the destructiveness that comes out in the story makes me sick for humanity and I have to remember, I have to tell myself that it isn't humanity speaking—it's just one bigot. Now I've just come from the West Indies, where I spent three years being hated merely because my skin was white—and for <u>no other reason</u>. Now I pick up A, DV [*Again, Dangerous Visions*] and find that I am hated for another reason—because Joanna Russ hasn't got a prick. (53)[37]

In narratives like Coney's, the sociopolitical basis of feminist and black critiques are refigured as biologically determined, direct attacks on his

36 Geis was the author of a number of "sf-and-sex novels" with titles such as *The Endless Orgy* and *Raw Meat*, which were described by Richard Delap as a "messy bit of sex-drenched but puerile humor" (Delap 1974: 5).

37 Not surprisingly, such reviews and responses to Russ's work rehearsed the criticisms she predicted in an interjection in *The Female Man* (Russ 1986: 140-1).

white, male person—who, because of his body marked by its color and penis, is vulnerable to (but not responsible for) such "bigoted," "unhuman" challenges.

Not surprisingly, a number of women responded, including Russ and Vonda McIntyre. McIntyre's letter expresses her discomfort with the sexist tone of the fanzine, including Coney's dismissal of women's anger "as penis envy (penis envy! In 1973 he talks about penis envy)" (McIntyre 1973: 47). Another letter from a female reader also ridicules the notion of penis envy and asks if Coney was suffering instead from "vagina envy" (Aab 1973: 47-8).[38] In contrast, a letter from a female reader describes herself as "one of the demon Women Libbers," but directs the brunt of her disapproval at McIntyre:

> I was goddamned mad to hear Ms. McIntyre refer to "the anger and hostility of women" because women includes *me*—and I love my husband. All I want is equality Mr. Geis [the editor]. I don't want to hate anyone. Why does Ms. McIntyre? (Plinlimmon 1974: 18)

In the following issue is a letter from Russ (who ironically only looked at the 'zine because it had a letter from McIntyre), which opens: "Please don't send me any more copies of *The Alien Critic*…You are certainly free to turn your fanzine into a men's house miniature world, but why you think I would like it or be interested in it—a mystery" (Russ 1974a: 36). Her letter focuses not on Coney's critique, but the editorial comments appended to McIntyre's letter. In a "one-man" fanzine like this, much overt sexism could reside in the "conversation" set up by the editor with other contributions. As in many of the letter columns of the pulps and other fanzines, Geis added his view to virtually every piece and letter he published. In his comments following McIntyre's letter, Geis argues that women's status as "sex objects" and "cultural victims" is due to men's capacity to commit physical violence upon women on a one-to-one basis. Russ in turn, feels compelled to once more adumbrate the argument that sexism is, rather, "enforced by ideology and economics" (37). Evidence of Russ's

38 In a letter to the following issue, Coney separates Aab from Russ and McIntyre, describing her as "young and nice and genuinely upset about my remark," but calling her reading of Russ's story "naïve." His tone of paternalistic tolerance reaches its peak in the final response to Aab's letter: "I find my penis just great and hope you are enjoying your vagina" (Coney 1974: 38).

frustration at having to explain "feminism 101" again appears in her letter's postscript:

> P.S. Apologies will be cheerfully read, but nothing else. No explanations of how wrong I am, or oversensitive, etc. etc. (the usual stuff). After all, you don't have to print this. And I'm damned if I will get into another long-drawn-out argument. (The first was with—via Harlan Ellison and *Last Dangerous Visions*—guess who? Michael G. Coney.) (37)

Not surprisingly, Geis ignored Russ's plea, and filled a whole page (twice the length of Russ's letter) with his rebuttals (Geis 1974: 37).

The reduction of feminist interventions to a "battle of the sex organs" was still prevalent two years later, when Richard Geis reviewed Russ's *The Female Man*, which, directly evoking the previous debate, was entitled "Pardon Me, But Your Vagina Just Bit My Penis" (Geis 1975: 64-5). Almost despite the title, the review attempts to be a "serious" consideration of Russ's book. Geis, like a number of more respected sf critics, focuses on Russ's failure to "resolve" the problems highlighted by feminism, rather than attacking her political stance per se. Geis accused her of writing nothing more than a "revenge fantasy" (1975: 64). And when Alexei and Cory Panshin refer to Russ's calls (in her role as sf critic) for representations of "whole women," they conclude that "the answer is not *The Female Man*" (Panshin and Panshin 1975: 52). In both of these reviews, the critics outline what kind of text they think would best serve the women's movement. Geis argues that Russ does not address the opposition of other women (64), while the Panshins believed she should have constructed a picture of "whole women" (51). As Russ's text does not meet these agendas, it is castigated for being a "tract" and "an exercise in self-indulgence" (Panshin and Panshin 1975: 51). Thus Russ's devastating critique of female stereotypes and masculinist sf tropes, her deconstruction of the drive for an acceptable, liberal "whole" woman, and her movement toward a multiple, shifting postmodernist sense of self was bypassed. Indeed, these critics place *The Female Man* outside of sf and even the novel form itself;Geis terms it "a non-novel…more vehicle than story," an example of Russ using sf "to grind her axe" (1975: 64). Similarly, the Panshins' review states, "*The Female Man* is advertised as a science fiction novel, but it is not one. It is not a story. It is not an action. There is no narrative thread" (1975: 51). Again, Russ satirized

exactly such critical responses to her work in *The Female Man* itself: "We would gladly have listened to her (they said) *if only she had spoken like a lady*…no characterization, no plot…really important issues are neglected while…this pretense at a novel…" (Russ 1986: 140-1).

So, by the mid-'70s, sympathetic and even chauvinist sf critics had incorporated feminist threads to the extent that they enacted a "colonization" of certain feminist critical insights and attempted to (re) direct a "Women's Lib" agenda.[39] In contrast to "official" sf scholarship (represented by monographs, collected essays, and the sf journals) where feminist criticism was still a novelty, by the close of the 1970s, feminist narratives within the "unofficial" field of magazine letter columns and fanzines were rendered banal. Some of the most blatant statements of the dissolution of feminist critiques occurred in response to fan Susan Wood's article on "Women in SF" in the semi-prozine *Algol/Starship* published in 1979 (Wood 1978/1979: 9-18). Ironically, Wood's article, which was so well known in the sf community and whose themes were supposedly "assimilated" with little difficulty, remains absent from the majority of feminist critical narratives of sf. Because it was published in a semi-prozine rather than a critical journal, Wood's work has rarely been acknowledged as part of the critical conversations producing feminist sf criticism. Amongst enthusiastic and receptive letters were a number that cast Wood's critique as unnecessary or overdone, such as the anonymous reader who commented "Talk about using an atom bomb to kill a flea!" (Anon. 1979: 66).[40] Such responses attempted to dilute the impact of Wood's feminist analysis by denying its radical or disruptive potential. According to one reader, Wood's article was a "bit trite" as it "belabor[ed] a point which is…chewed to death in the fannish literature" (Antell 1979: 67), while Gregory Benford claimed that Wood's thesis had been "conventional wisdom for years" (Benford 1979: 65).[41]

39 I am indebted to Sylvia Kelso's thoughts on the "synergy" of feminism and popular fiction: Kelso, "Singularities," PhD Thesis, James Cook University, Townsville, 1996. I have borrowed her use of the term "colonization," which she uses to refer to Marion Zimmer Bradley's partial engagement with "the areas feminism(s) opened for SF writers" (165).

40 "Anon" also bemoaned women authors' concentration on the "injustice of the past and near-present" rather than opportunities of the future.

41 Similar responses appeared in the next issue, when Dan Davidson asked "is it necessary to keep going over all this old ground?" (Davidson 1979: 89)

Robert Bloch (like the Panshins and Geis) attempted to redefine and guide the feminist critical agenda, arguing that Wood (and McIntyre) should "stop worrying about how many females can be counted in *Star Wars*...and address themselves to some of the more pressing ERA problems—rape, battered wives, child support and welfare, abortion legislation, etc." (Bloch 1979: 81).[42] Bloch's statement reflects a common stance concerning political activism in sf: that oppositional ideologies are "best" or properly expressed through direct sociopolitical action (and not, by implication, in the "pure" non-political space of sf and its fandom). Yet for many sf authors and fans, sf was figured as a site of cultural praxis or, to modify Katie King's term, as an apparatus for the production of scientific culture (K. King 1994: 92),[43] when it came to the future of scientific and technological developments and their effect on human society.

42 A good response came from Alexander Strachan, who claimed he was "mystified" by Bloch's statements: "Of course equal representation in *Star Wars* isn't the issue, but it's a symptom none the less" (Strachan 1979: 65). Strachan's letters are a good illustration of the complex responses to feminisms: he rebutted Bloch's attack on McIntyre and Wood (for not being feminist enough) and commended Wood's analysis of a "sorely neglected" topic, but comments in another letter: "As for the back biting between the 'feminists' and the 'chauvinists,' we can all do without it" (67).

43 Here King is referring to her analysis of various cultural or "writing" technologies (such as "poem," "story," and "song") as part of "the apparatus for the production of feminist culture."

3

Mothers of the Revolution: Femmefans Unite!

> *. . . feminist knowledge is rooted in imaginative connection and hard-won, practical coalition—which is not the same thing as identity but does demand self-critical situatedness and historical seriousness.*
>
> ➻ Donna Haraway (1997: 199)

The convoluted stories of women's arrival in sf traced by the last chapter suggest the extent to which their entry was actively contested or questioned, rather than passively awaited or accepted. Women confronted obstacles constituted by gendered discourses specific both to the sf field and society more broadly. The ways in which women negotiated such obstacles in sf provides an important context for the activities of later feminist authors, readers, and fans. I am interested in retrieving the stories of absent women not merely as a gynocritical recovery, or as an historical corrective, but also in order to present a more nuanced account of the kinds of countercultural activity possible in the genre at various times and places. That is, I wish to view the development of woman-centered and feminist positions amongst female sf readers and writers not just as an external import of women's lib into the sanctified space of sf (much as the "new wave" has in many accounts been viewed as infecting the genre with literary values) but also as a specific response to, and evolution of, factors internal to the field and community itself.

As Haraway's quote suggests, imagination is a powerful element in collective political identity. In relation to sf there are resonances here with L. Timmel Duchamp's insight that entry into sf feminisms involves an imagining into community, even if only as an isolated reader in conversation with texts alone (2004b: 4-5). The step from a community of the mind to actualized engagement with existing, self-identified feminist communities has of course become much simpler since the widespread availability of online communities starting in the 1990s. In the earlier decades of the twentieth century such a step was more uncertain and potentially confronting. Female readers

and potential fans had first to become visible to one another, then to discover or develop the language and opportunity to frame their understandings as part of shared experiences. Thus I am particularly interested in locating expressions of a desire or need to identify as female fans or members of the sf community. Whilst such affiliations were likely to be based on an undifferentiated notion of collective identity as women, rather than shared political experiences or goals, it is here we find key influences on later feminist developments.

My focus on uncovering these herstories also complicates accepted explanations for women's increased presence from the 1960s on. Alongside the *Star Trek* rationale (noted in Chapter Two), many versions see women's presence due to a snowball effect—the presence of more female writers "naturally" attracted more readers, thus encouraging more writers. Yet many female writers (including Ursula K. Le Guin, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Katherine MacLean, James Tiptree Jr., and Joanna Russ) first encountered sf through the pulps, reading male authors.[1] If the increase in the number of women writers in the '60s and '70s was initiated in part by their exposure to sf as girls or young women, we should be looking for changes in the sf community from the 1940s on.

As I noted in Chapter Two, until recently few commentators looked to the '50s as a period of significance in sf history. A growing body of work interested in this era has identified developments that at least lessened the obstacles for female readers of sf. Larbalestier points to Samuel R. Delany's belief that a radicalization of sf began in the 1950s, a time when sf "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; see also R. Latham 2006; Luckhurst 2005; Yaszek 2008). Another factor impacting on women's ability—and desire—to engage with sf was changes in the education system. In a letter to the feminist fanzine *Janus* in 1979, Linda Bushyager commented on the increase in women writers:

1 See Katherine MacLean, "The Expanding Mind" (MacLean 1981); Ursula Le Guin, "A Citizen of Mondath" (Le Guin 1992a); Margaret St. Clair, "Wight in Space" (St. Clair 1981); Marion Zimmer Bradley, "My Trip Through Science Fiction" (Bradley 1977/1978); Alice Sheldon, "A Woman Writing Science Fiction and Fantasy" (A. Sheldon 1988); and Joanna Russ, "Reflections on SF" (Russ 1975d).

> I think there is probably a correlation between the push in science and math education in the late '50s and early '60s (after Sputnik) and the increased interest in science and SF among men and women now. The push caused a lot of women to begin taking an interest in science, and now we are seeing the women who were in grade and high school at the time becoming readers and writers. (1979: 7)

Such initiatives included the 1958 National Defense Education Act, which provided fellowships for any student in the areas of math and sciences, and the 1959 NASA program "Women in Space Early" (WISE) (Yaszek 2008: 13). On a broader societal level, Yaszek suggests that developments in the intersection of technology, domestic spaces, and women's work in the postwar period also impacted women's involvement in the field: "postwar women turned to SF as an important source of narratives for critically assessing the nature of feminine work and identity in a technology-intensive world" (8). While Yaszek focuses on writers rather than on readers as such, the notion that many women would be looking for narrative explorations of their increasingly technologized domestic and working lives in places other than ladies magazines is suggestive.

The invisible female fan/reader

It is difficult to develop a clear picture of women's activities in the earlier days of the sf community. For one thing, fan histories glossed over the presence of active female fans, and for another, there would have been many fans, and even more readers, whose activities never went beyond writing letters to fanzines or the pulps. As Harry Warner Jr. has commented on fandom in general, estimating numbers is complicated by the fact that "there must have been large numbers of fans not visible"(1969: 24).[2] Female fans were more likely than male fans to remain "not visible." As rich brown has observed, social pressure against reading sf would have been even greater for women than for men, which means that young women would thus have found it difficult to obtain or read sf unless it was brought into the house by a male relative (brown 1994: 90). Numerous female sf writers report having to hide their copies of the pulps, or getting them from male relatives,

2 For example, fans who were primarily collectors (Warner Jr. 1969: 24).

often without parental knowledge. Author Katherine MacLean provides a wonderful description of her furtive and fascinated discovery of the pulps and the less than approving reaction from her parents: "When I got home my mother burned the science fiction magazine, and pledged my brothers to take my bike away if they caught me with another" (MacLean 1981: 87; see also A. Sheldon 1988: 43-58). Apart from such tacit obstacles to women's involvement, there may well have been, as the last chapter suggested, much to actively alienate women from the magazines, particularly the attitude of male fans.

The possibility that many female readers and potential fans are "hidden from history" is also suggested by the fact that most subscribers to the magazines would have been male, even though female members of the family may also have been avid readers. Indeed, a number of letters noted by Larbalestier make reference to whole families reading sf (discussed below). Such considerations complicate the figures drawn from surveys conducted since the 1940s by the magazines in their attempt to build up profiles of the average sf reader/fan. One would assume that the number of female readers would necessarily be higher than that of female fans, as readers provided the base for fandom. Yet surveys of readers may be even more misleading than fan surveys (where chances were everyone knew each other), because magazine questionnaires presumed only a single respondent, so in the case of a household of multiple readers, the survey would most likely be filled out by the male subscriber. As sf reader and fan Mildred D. Broxon pointed out in the 1970s, estimates of readership have relied on, for example, magazine subscription lists which, "if sent to a couple, [are often] in the man's name… Since it was my husband's subscription he filled it out. Does this mean I don't read *Locus*?" (Broxon 1974: 22). The number of readers "hidden" by the subscriber who usually filled out such surveys is indicated by a 1971 *Locus* readers' poll, which asked the question: "How many other people read your copy of *Locus*?" Fifty-five percent replied that one other person read their copy, 23 percent that two others did, and 16 percent more than two.[3]

One of the earliest fan surveys that considered the proportion of women, conducted in 1944 by Bob Tucker, showed that out of 74

3 *Locus*, #79, Apr. 4, 1971, p. 7 (survey, 3-8); the sample for this survey was 201. The poll did not always include this question, and such "invisible readers" were unlikely to be included in demographic statistics of readership.

respondents, 11 percent were female fans (cited in Warner Jr. 1969: 25-6). Figures for readers of magazines, rather than fans, were actually lower in this period, with Campbell's 1949 survey of *Astounding* readers finding that only 6 percent were women.[4] Similar surveys in the following decades showed a gradual, though inconsistent, increase in the numbers of women, with *New Worlds* (UK) in the 1950s showing figures ranging from 5-10 percent to the comparative highs of *F&SF* in the 1960s with 29 percent and *Analog* with 25 percent in 1974 (Berger 1977: 234).

More concerted efforts to provide demographical and sociological information are apparent in a small number of studies by fan/academics carried out in the '70s and '80s. One of the earliest sociological analyses of fandom was Linda Fleming's "The American SF Subculture," which mentioned changes in fandom's social structure, such as the increased average age of members and the proportion of females, but did not engage specifically with the gendered divisions of fandom (Fleming 1977: 266).[5] In the same issue of *Science Fiction Studies* (*SFS*), Alfred Berger provided a thorough demographic outline of the socioeconomics of fandom based on questionnaires filled out at the 1973 World Convention in Toronto (Torcon II). Out of a base of 282, 35 percent were women, which was the highest figure shown in his comparative table of the sex ratio of various surveys from the 1940s. This finding did not, however, lead Berger to reconsider the traditional view that "science fiction has been a literature written by males for males" as, he argued, this figure was still far from the proportion of women in the general population (Berger 1977: 234). Another example by Phyllis and Nora Day, "Freaking the Mundane," provided demographics from a number of Midwestern (US) conventions, with 45 percent of their 700 responders being women. The Days marked this as a highly unusual result, since "fandom has the reputation of being mostly composed of white middle-class men," even though, apart from the Berger and Waugh studies, there have been almost no other surveys of the proportion of women convention goers (Day and Day 1983: 95).

4 As Warner cautions, one should be wary of extrapolating findings of this survey to fans (25).

5 Other interesting examples of sociological analyses of fandom include Colin Greenland (1982/83: 39-45) and Stephanie A. Hall (1989: 19-31).

Femmefans among the slans

Considering the unreliability and scanty nature of demographic figures for female fans and readers, a sense of women's early presence in the field can be gleaned from magazine editorials and letters, which often provided fans with their first point of communication and a forum for debate. In the remainder of this chapter, I look more closely at examples of female fans and readers from the 1920s to the 1950s. Reading "between the lines" of the fan histories available and drawing on sources such as magazine letters and fanzines, it is possible to at least outline a broader spectrum of female participation in fandom. Such readings also reveal evidence of numerous barriers to women reading and becoming active fans of sf, ranging from their isolation from other women fans to the patronizing and sometimes hostile reactions of male fans and editors. As I noted in the last chapter, individual opposition to female fans was often expressed in terms of the sociocultural discourses that positioned women as other to science and thus sf.

Writing of her first encounters with sf as a teenage "potential fan" in the 1940s, Juanita Coulson eloquently evokes the difficulties encountered on the road from reader to fan.

> I can testify from personal experience that a potential fan needed a thick skin in those days, to endure teasing and occasional downright contempt… It was rough for boys. It could be exquisitely painful for girls. Girls didn't even have the consolation of hoping to be pilots, astronomers, or scientists—those versions of SF's heroes—when they grew up; so far as any girl then knew, those professions were strictly male territory. That might explain why so few girls became fans in that era. America's standard of the "right" enthusiasms for women ran counter to SF. One had to swim long and hard upstream before finding the refuge of fandom. (Coulson 1994: 6)

A similar sentiment is expressed by Leigh Couch, also a fan in the 1940s, who wrote in 1977: "I don't think a young fan of today can realize how suspect we were for reading the pulps, and for a girl to read it, that was almost proof of perversion!" (1977: 10). For many, if not most, women interested in sf, their engagement may have gone no

further than reading, or at best writing letters to the magazines, with little or no opportunity for participation in sf clubs full of single (and strange!) boys.

Many of the women's letters to the pulps identified by Larbalestier express this sense of being different or of concern about their reception. Indeed, such letters were often singled out by the editors, "signaled as anomalies with titles such as… 'A Kind Letter from a Lady Friend and Reader,'" while patronizing editorial responses emphasized their difference as members of the "fair sex" (Larbalestier 2002: 24).[6] A 1928 letter from a Mrs. H. O. De Hart (who described herself as a wife and mother of two babies) remarked "I do not really expect you to clutter up your comments with it" (De Hart 1928: 277). Other letters followed from women who had believed they were the only female readers of the magazine: "I was glad to know that there are other women readers of my favorite magazine, than myself" (Johnson 1929: 1140).

Another insight into women readers who may have wanted to write to *Amazing Stories* is provided by a letter written in 1953 by Lula B. Stewart, concerning her late entry into fandom.

> Way back thar, circa 1928, I read a science-fiction mag, and was infected. This chronic derangement might have culminated in the virulent stage known as actifandom at a very early date had not fate intervened to save me. While I was madly cerebrating over my first epistle…another damsel sent in a missive to ye ed.
>
> That dawdling undoubtedly saved my hide, but, Oooo! what happened to the other poor maiden! It shouldn't be done to a diploid! I can still hear the primitive screams of the man-pack echoing 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 cowered in my cave as other foolish females tried to run the gauntlet…
>
> Now, at last, in the dawn of a new era, I dare creep forth, and claim my heritage of egoboo… So, at last, backed by

6 See Gernsback's comments in *Amazing Stories*, vol. 3, no. 2, June 1928, p. 277; vol. 3, no. 7, Oct. 1928, p. 667; vol. 3, no. 12, Mar. 1929, p. 1140.

> a formidable phalange of femfans, I dare speak up, brave lassie that I am. (1953: 133)[7]

Such letters reveal the loaded discursive space into which these women had to write themselves, in claiming a right to be interested in science yet simultaneously affirming their continued performance of "proper" femininity as wives, mothers, or sisters. Their interventions brought into sharp focus the conflicted discourses around gender, work, the future, and technoscience central to the field's subconscious. As Eric Drown notes, these letters reveal that "the letter columns of the pulp science fiction magazines became for a time, a place where the gender politics of science fiction and SF fandom were explicitly debated" (Drown 2006: 25).[8]

Throughout the 1930s female readers continued to assert their presence, and they increasingly referred to the presence of other women readers as a way of countering resistance to their presence. In 1931 a letter from Virginia E. McCay claimed: "A great many men and boys seem to think that girls do not care for science magazines but they are wrong. Almost all of my high school girl friends do read *Astounding Stories*, or other science fiction magazines" (cited in Drown 2006: 25). Larbalestier cites a similar letter from a 1939 issue of *Science Fiction*, written by five sisters who all read the magazine (and apparently shared it with male relatives):

> 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 could snag it away from brother and two husbands)...
>
> 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. (Slimmer 1939: 118-19)

Such letters aim to justify women's interest in sf as readers and only rarely intimate more active engagement with the emerging fan

7 Reproduced in Larbalestier (2002: 26); In the same letter, Stewart also notes that she is a contributor to "that great, all-female *Femzine*."

8 See also references to other letters from women (24-27).

groups. However, one of the most famous accounts of early fandom, Sam Moskowitz's *The Immortal Storm*, provides evidence for women's involvement in active fandom in the 1930s. Moskowitz's account presents a strangely ambivalent picture of the few women who are briefly mentioned in this densely detailed text. Most are not singled out as women—to the extent that the gender of, for example, Morojo (Myrtle Douglas) and Leslie Perri (Doris Baumgardt) is at times unclear—although the women's connections to male fans is usually noted and they are marked as either girlfriend, wife, or sister.[9]

Describing one of the main events of the book, the exclusion of members of the infamous fan group, the Futurians, from the first "worldcon," Nycon, Moskowitz emphasizes the mediating role played by some female fans.

> Women Attendees such as Frances N. Swisher, wife of R.D. Swisher, PhD, and Myrtle R. Douglas, better known as Morojo, were particularly active in the Futurians' behalf, urging almost unceasingly that the barriers be dropped and that the Futurians be permitted to enter the hall without pledging good behavior. (1954: 243)[10]

Moskowitz mentions at least nine female fans by name, all of whom were members of clubs or involved with fanzines. Morojo was co-editor with Forrest Ackerman of *Imagination* ("*Madge*") and *Voice of the Imagination* ("*VOI*"); Leslie Perri was affianced to Fred Pohl and was one of the members of the Futurians allowed entry to Nycon. Others, such as Gertrude Kuslan, edited fanzines; Mary Rogers was a fan artist; and Kathryn Kelley was one of the board of directors of SFAA (Science Fiction Advancement Association of San Francisco).[11] Although this number seems small, these women could all be classified as active fans, which, considering Moskowitz's claim that only

9 Morojo's presence at the worldcon is also noted by Robert Madle (1994: 51) (the only mention of a woman in his article): "During the entire convention, Forrest J. Ackerman and Myrtle Douglas could be seen in their futuristic costumes, based on the movie *Things to Come*."

10 Moskowitz also mentions that many of the authors, editors, and artists attending the worldcon brought wives and children with them (213). This is the first time in the book that Moskowitz connects "Myrtle" with her pseudonym "Morojo," over one hundred pages after the first reference to Douglas.

11 Moskowitz, 1954; see pages: 63, 70, 137, 139, 184, 218, and 245.

around 50 fans (of either gender) existed at this time, is a fairly substantial proportion (114).

Reading issues of the zines *Madge* and *VOI* from the late '30s and early '40s reveals the presence of at least another twenty female fans (most members of the Los Angeles Sf League—LASFL). A regular column on members in *Madge* introduced the "First Feminine Member of the LASFL," Frances Fairchild, in 1938 with the comment: "Politics? None in particular. Believes in Women's Rights—& plenty of 'em" ("Among our Members," 1938a: 4).[12] Many of the women writing for these zines also contributed to what appears to be the first all-female zine (or femmefan zine), a one-off entitled *Pogo's STF-ETTE*, with material from Morojo, Pogo (her cousin), Gertrude Kuslan, Leslie Perri, and Leigh Brackett.[13]

Nineteen forties fandom is covered in the history monograph *All Our Yesterdays*, by another well- known fan historian, Harry Warner Jr. Warner restricts women's involvement in fandom to a two-paragraph discussion of "Feminine fans." The discussion mentions only three women and assigns Barbara Bovard "the pioneering role as an independent female fan," who, although not disqualified through familial connections to a man, was nevertheless aided by Forrest Ackerman, who "dragged her into Los Angeles fandom by brute strength" (Warner Jr. 1969: 26).[14] Warner also refers to Virginia Kidd as a "lone girl fan," but does not explain whether it is age or male affiliation that disqualifies her from Bovard's title. Also mentioned is the nine-year-old Mary Helen Washington, who was "more active than some more celebrated feminine fans, through her contribution of 'The Monster of the Cave' to her brother Raym's fanzine in 1942" (Warner Jr. 1969: 26).

12 Similarly, another female member was cited as saying: "I think we should hav a social systm...that woudnt b so wasteful, woud giv workingirls like me...th full fruits of their labor, & leav us all more chance to njoy life" (these are not typos: the LASFL under the direction of Forrest Ackerman had adopted for many of its zines a system of "simplified spelling" that removed many vowels and was based on phonetic spelling, also influenced by the interest in Esperanto among many members) (Among Our Members 1938b: 4).

13 *Pogo's STF-ETTE*, convention publication, nd, c. 1940 for Chicon (Chicago convention).

14 Bovard is first mentioned as an "upcoming fan" in a 1942 issue of *VOI* (#24, Aug. 1942, 3). Previously a number of female fans such as Morojo and Pogo were active and "independent" fans.

One female fan not mentioned by Warner is Marion Zimmer Bradley, who became a prolific letterhack towards the end of the '40s and is notable for being one of the first women to rise through the ranks of fandom to become a well-known pro.[15] Larbalestier notes that "[i]n 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*," and by the 1952 issue "she refers to herself as a BNF" (2002: 29). Another long-time fan, Leigh Couch, has commented of Bradley: "I remember her well from the old days when she battled one and all in the letter columns of the pulps… I admired her outspokenness in her letters" (1977: 10). It seems that Bradley's confidence was unusual; Karen Anderson has argued that many more female fans existed in the late 1940s than are remembered today, but that they were much less likely than men to become BNFs because they tended not to engage in this form of self-promotion.[16]

The 1950s saw a number of female fans becoming more visible. Camille Bacon-Smith's *Science Fiction Culture* for example includes reminiscences from a number of active female fans from this period, who comment that many more have disappeared from the collective fannish memory.[17] This decade also marks the appearance of Lee Hoffman, probably the best-known and most active femmefan of the

15 Others from around this time would include Virginia Kidd and Judith Merril. Bradley herself has noted this connection: "I have a great deal in common with such science fiction 'greats' as Harlan Ellison, Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, Robert Silverberg and Donald Wolheim... I came up through the ranks of fandom to become a pro writer. My first works, like theirs, were published in the letter columns of the old pulp magazines"; (Marion Zimmer Bradley, "Fandom: Its Value to the Professional" cited in Jarvis 1985). In a later article, Warner does mention Bradley as one author (the only female name in the list) who had been involved in fanzines before turning pro (Warner Jr. 1994a: 178).

16 Cited in Andrew Hooper, "A Report From ConFrancisco, the 51st World Science Fiction Convention" (Hooper 1993: 43). Hooper's report includes a description of a panel on "The First Femmefans," which presented the recollections of early female fans Karen Anderson, Martha Beck, Catherine Crook De Camp, and JoAnn Wood.

17 See for example, Karen Anderson's recollections of women and fandom in the 1950s in Bacon-Smith (2000: 97-100). Bacon-Smith's ethnographic approach means she only begins her account of women in fandom in the '50s (279n2), and focuses on interviews and activity at conventions. Not as much attention is paid to fanzines, particularly early ones. Yet fanzines would have been key for women fans, since they were a much more accessible site for communication, especially for those situated outside urban centers of fan activity in terms of clubs or cons.

1950s and one of the first women to win the accolade of BNF. Because she used her nickname "Lee" (her given name was Shirley), according to rich brown, "most fans just 'naturally' assumed that Lee Hoffman was male":

> This assumption went unchallenged despite attempts by Lee H to tell her best fan friends the truth in a subtle way: She sent [Walt] Willis a Valentine's Day card (Walt just thought "he" was a little eccentric) and asked both Max Keasler and Shelby Vick not to betray her secret when she engaged in a round-robin wire correspondence with them (she assumed her voice would give her away; they assumed "he" was a young fan whose voice hadn't changed yet and thus were left scratching their heads, wondering what "secret" they were not supposed to reveal). (brown 1994: 91)

This "hoax" was ended when Hoffman attended the 1951 World Con, Nolacon, but by then her popularity was already established.

In the same year, a 21-year-old Bradley wrote in the anniversary issue of Lee Hoffman's *Quandry*: "My fan career has been notable mainly for the fact that I got along for years without claiming any feminine privileges" (Bradley 1951: 89).[18] Bradley did not elaborate on this statement, and it is intriguing in light of later comments that she felt there were no specific impediments for women entering the sf field. Already, Bradley emphasized the staunchly independent nature of her success and her ability to compete in the field as "one of the boys" without special consideration for the "mere" difference of her sex. Bradley's statement takes on added significance in light of the fact that the editor of *Quandry* had just been revealed to be female. Hoffman's identity remained hidden long enough for this fanzine to make her a BNF (leaving unanswered the tantalizing question of whether *Quandry* would have made her reputation had she used her given name Shirley instead of her nickname Lee). At this point, Bradley was already married, with a small child, and living in Texas—circumstances that made her rapid rise in fandom no mean feat,

18 Bradley continues: "I've published five issues of *Astra's Tower*, two of *Altitudes*, one of *Saporific*, one of *Ambuso* with another fan, and co-edited five issues of *Mezrab*. I've had dozens of poems and stories printed in fanzines, under my own name and that of Mario Stanza." At this point (age 21) her professional publications consisted of three poems.

considering the enormous constraints on her time, budget, and access to magazines (see for example, Bradley 1977/1978: 11-13).

Bradley obviously approved of and was happy to support other female fans such as Lee Hoffman, and she was a regular contributor and letter-writer to the fanzine *HodgePodge*, edited by sisters Nancy and Marie-Louise Share. One of Bradley's letters to this fanzine praised Theodore Sturgeon's exploration of "passionate human attachments" and went on to discuss "love":

> Many men believe that women hate all other women but at the risk of being re-crucified by Laney and other seekers out of base innuendo, I love women. I love men, too… What woman doesn't? But I love women, too. I'm proud that I am one! Granted that some women are asses half-wits and obese cheats—still women are a wonderful institution, as HODGEPODGE can proudly proclaim to the world. (Bradley 1954: 27)

Yet Bradley did not appear to have been involved in the all-female *Femzine* (discussed below). The *Fancyclopedia II* cites a letter from Bradley published in the January 1953 issue of *Femzine*, which is taken as evidence for lack of support for the fanzine:

> Frankly I think it's impossible for women, with no help from the "sterner sex," to do anything in the literary fanzine field. Man alone can manage something of strength and talent without feminine influence. It may be graceless, even ugly, but it will be strong. Women alone, sans masculine influence, impetus, or admiration, produce nothing of any worth. (Eney and Speer 1959: 62-3)

It is hard to know whether or not to take this at face value; these sentiments certainly run counter to Bradley's own history of producing solo zines, her support of Hoffman, and her staunchly independent progress ("sans masculine influence") as both fan and "pro" writer (not to mention her sales of early lesbian novels under a pseudonym). There were also by this time an increasing number of women publishing their own zines: one fanzine index list includes nine women who between them produced almost twenty fanzines and APAs between 1950 and 1952.[19]

19 *Fanzine Checklist*, Autumn 1950-Spring 1952, a National Fantasy Fan Federation Publication, compiled by Eva Firestone. An APA (Amateur publishing Association)

By the mid 1950s, according to Warner, "females without brothers or husbands in fandom became more numerous"; and he notes: "England was particularly blessed with active female fans" (1994b: 70). This statement is supported by London fan Rob Hansen's astonishingly detailed history of British fandom, *Then*, which provides a wealth of detail about female fans. Hansen's work and fanzine lists suggest evidence for over a dozen women publishing fanzines and amateur publishing associations (APAs), many of which appeared in the first British APA, OMPA (Offtrail Magazine Publishers Association), formed in 1954. Among them were Ella Parker, who went on to become the 1961 TAFF winner and chaired the second world convention held in the UK, Loncon II, in 1965;[20] Ethel Lindsay, who produced *Scottishe* from 1954 through to 1981 and was active right up until her death in 1996; Joy Clarke, who with Vin¢ Clarke and Sandy Sanderson formed Inchmery fandom, the group that would become the focal point of British fandom;[21] Irene Gore (later Potter), Pam Bulmer, and Daphne Buckmaster. Women seem to have been much more prominent in British fandom than were their US counterparts at this time. Warner accords greater status to British female fans than to American female fans, including Ella Parker and Ethel Lindsay in a list of "large fannish names" and describing Parker as a "major stalwart in British fandom" (Warner Jr. 1977: 169). The higher visibility of these women may have reflected a more accepting and cooperative attitude from male fans, perhaps resulting from the comparatively small and close-knit nature of the British fan community (mostly centered in London, but with important centers in Manchester, Liverpool, and Northern Ireland).

Still, many women did not have access to this community and were unaware of other female fans, as shown by a number of letters

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is a compilation of mini-fanzines each compiled by individuals, then collated and sent to all the members—it resembles a "paper version" of online communities such as blogs or Live Journal.

20 TAFF stands for Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund, a means of raising funds to send fans from North America to the UK (and Europe) and vice versa as an exchange visit in alternating years. The fund is run as a ballot with at least two candidates, and fans from both continents vote on the winner, who usually has to be well-known to both fandoms in order to win.

21 'Vin¢' stands for Vincent. This is typical of fannish play with terminology, nicknames and nomenclature.

to the British magazine *Authentic Science Fiction* (*ASF*). A letter from Irene Boothroyd in 1955 comments that, while she corresponded with a couple of other fans and had written material for *Femizine*, she was isolated by her geographical position in Huddersfield (Boothroyd 1955: 138). A few issues later, Patricia Baddock asked, "Am I the only female science fiction fan in this country?" and received an editorial response inviting her to the sf meetings held in a London pub, where she would meet other "girl fans." Baddock also expressed the hope that her letter would be published to "show the other would-be science fiction fans (female) that they are not alone in their madness!" (Baddock 1955: 125). A few issues later, Catherine Smith wrote in reply:

> In issue no. 57, a girl wrote to "Projectiles" [the *ASF* letters column] thinking that she was the only female SF fan. Obviously she was wrong, but I, personally, know of no other reader who is of my own sex. There must be some in Birmingham, somewhere. But where? If there are any girl readers of science fiction, or any science fiction clubs here, would they contact me? (C. Smith 1956: 159)

Despite the increasing numbers of women involved in well-known core fandom groups, many readers of sf magazines were limited by their geographical location, and, without attending meetings or conventions, they would have had little chance of joining the network of fanzines and APAs through which they could have corresponded with other female fans. These letters also indicate that while fan publishing was an important part of community building, face-to-face meetings were also crucial. Women, particularly, may well have desired the opportunity to talk to others who shared the madness of this "perverse" interest.

An important development in the 1950s was the appearance of a number of femme-fan zines: fanzines that marked themselves as written for and by women. Arising seemingly independently within a few years of each other, such femme-fan zines were produced in the US, Britain, and even Australia. These fanzines mark an important phase in the history of women's involvement in sf fandom. Although previously other women had edited their own fanzines, these were among the first to create a women-only space, with women providing all of the contributions. Like the American female fans of the 1940s, these women used the label femme-fan as a positive sign under which they could consolidate some kind of collective identity and presence. One

of the first regular fanzines to be written entirely by women, the Australian *Vertical Horizons*, appeared in 1952 (and was defunct by 1955). This was followed by the American *Femzine*, which was produced by members of a female-only fan club, the Fanettes.[22] The last to appear—and longest-lived of this group—was the British *Femizine*, which ran from 1954 to 1956 (with a later revival in 1958-60).[23]

"Viewing Horizontally": women in Australian fandom[24]

Few though they may have been, women were involved in US fandom from the late 1930s, and at least a couple of women appeared on the British scene in the 1940s. Australian fandom, always small and isolated, maintained its adolescent male composition well into the 1950s. Vol Molesworth's history of Australian fandom before the 1950s mentions only one woman, his wife, Laura Molesworth, who was the first female member of the Futurian Society of Sydney (FSS).[25] By 1953, there were still only three "lady members," although many more were attending the less formal Thursday night meetings. So it is surprising to find appearing, almost immediately following the first few women to appear on the Sydney fan scene in the early 1950s, a fanzine produced for and by women. At the time of its first issue in 1952, only two women were members of the "official" fan group the FSS. With an initial membership of six, *Vertical Horizons* was not just a means of consolidating a small female presence in a male culture, but became for some their initiation point into fandom. The original members were editor Rosemary Simmons, Norma K. Hemming (also a pro-writer who published in the magazines *Thrills* and *New*

22 I have also seen the fanzine referred to as *Femizine*. I continue to use *Femzine* for the USA zine to avoid confusion with the UK zine of the same name.

23 I focus on the British and Australian zines, largely because I have been unable to locate copies of the US *Femzine*. Vincent Clarke (a London fan since the 1940s) kindly provided me with access to his extensive private collection of British fan sources and a great deal of background information during an interview; I am also indebted to fan Rob Hansen's history of British fandom, *Then*, which covers this period in detail. A member of the first Australian fan group, collector and bibliographer Graham Stone also kindly provided me with copies of *Vertical Horizons* and additional information during an interview.

24 "Viewing Horizontally" was the title of the news column in *Vertical Horizons*.

25 She is mentioned as attending an FSS meeting in 1947 (V. Molesworth 1994/1995: 26).

Worlds), Diana Wilkes, Pauline Roth, Norma Williams, and Laura Molesworth.[26]

Graham Stone, a member of FSS at the time, had suggested that the few female members should form a "women's auxiliary," an idea not well received by Rosemary Simmons and others but which may have contributed to the formation of the *Vertical Horizons* group.[27] Another catalyst was the 1952 convention SydCon, which brought the six members together for the first time (they were the only women present) (L. Molesworth 1953: 1-2). Initially providing only general news (albeit written by women), *Vertical Horizons* was specifically intended to help locate and contact other female fans and sf readers. Rosemary Simmons stated their aim in the second issue:

> The girls I really want to contact are those, who, like Chris Davison [a new member], for example, have been readers for years but have never entered fandom (by joining A.S.F.S. [Australian Science Fiction Society] or going to Thursday nights). (Simmons 1952: 2)[28]

The potential avenues for contact with fandom were limited for female readers. Although the largest fannish center in Australia, Sydney fandom was a small group with limited means (and at times desire) for advertising their presence.[29] Additionally, until the 1950s, the various permutations of the FSS were exclusively a male preserve,

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26 Fans mentioned in later issues included Christine Davison, Loralie Giles, Mrs. L.M. Chalmers, Betty Bramble, Ronnie Beach, and Judy McGuinness. For more on Norma Hemming, one of the few recognized Australian female authors before the 1970s, see Russell Blackford and Sean McMullen, "Prophet and Pioneer: The Science Fiction of Norma Hemming" (1998).

27 Interview with Graham Stone, July 1997; hereafter, Stone interview.

28 The ASFS was started by Graham Stone in 1950 in an effort to establish communication with fans outside Sydney; it was the catalyst for the formation of local groups in Melbourne, Adelaide, and Brisbane. (My thanks to Graham Stone for providing me with this information.) (See also V. Molesworth 1994/1995: 29.) The Thursday night meetings were regular get-togethers of fans, not necessarily members of the FSS. Originally starting out as the venue for regular FSS meetings in the 1940s, by 1949 the society had lapsed into infrequent formal activity, but people continued to meet on Thursday nights into the 1950s, as a separate, though often overlapping group.

29 On conflicts over whether to actively recruit more members, for example, by advertising the existence of the FSS in magazines such as *Thrills* (see V. Molesworth 1994/1995: 30-1).

often divided by factional conflicts and internal organizational struggles.[30] Later issues of *Vertical Horizons* suggest that the members wanted to encourage women's participation in club meetings and formal sf organizations to alleviate some of the pressure (and perhaps tension) on the small number of women usually present. As Laura Molesworth stated in an editorial headed "Wanted: More Women Workers in Fandom": "We want to see greater numbers of girls at meetings, at Thursday Nights, and putting all their efforts into keeping the mere males in their place!" (L. Molesworth 1953: 1). The activities of Mrs. Joy Joyce were often singled out as an example of what women fans could accomplish in this very male preserve.[31] Offering congratulations on Joyce's role in organizing a fan group in Adelaide, Molesworth wrote "This is an achievement which all femme fans can proudly proclaim" (1). Joyce's example was all the more "edifying" because she was a wife and mother (*not* married to a fan) who was still capable of actively pursuing and promoting her interest in sf as much as any "mere male."[32]

The zine also provides evidence of a broader awareness of the gendered nature of science fiction texts and themes. In a review article in the second issue, Norma Williams offered a scathing picture of 1950s sf:

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30 The FSS came into being in Nov. 1939 (following efforts at establishing a Science Fiction League and other junior clubs from 1935 on), and some form of the society existed, with regular lapses and changes in membership, organization, and goals, into the 1960s (see V. Molesworth 1994/1995).

31 Joy Joyce was one of two Adelaide fans to attend the 1953 convention in Sydney; her photo appears in the *Women's Weekly* coverage of the event; "Australian spacemen look into space: Science fiction fans are 'thinkers of tomorrow"' (1953: 16).

32 The difficulties faced, particularly by married women, in becoming involved in fandom are illustrated by articles and letters in another Australian fanzine from the early 1970s. Many female partners of fans became involved—if they weren't already—in fannish interests, not only to help out financially and physically, but also to understand an interest that could dominate a fan's life. Conversely this kind of dedication would have been much more difficult for women, especially once they were married or had children. Such problems were discussed in an issue of *Girls' Own Fanzine* on fan marriages: "The married housewife with fannish interests often has to fight tooth and nail in order to pursue them—for just one thing she's often financially dependent on her husband. This is part of the mundane double standard, of course": UK fans, Archie and Beryl Mercer (1973: 26). See also Jean Jordan (1973: 7). On the difficulties of being an sf fan in the 1950s, see Mrs. L.M. Chalmers, "I Refugee: An Addict Confesses All" (1953: 2-4) and Norma Hemming, "On the Trials and Tribulations of Being a Science Fiction Fan" (1953: 5-6).

> [W]hat about women in science fiction? Most of 'em, according to present authors, exist solely as robots "to serve man," to provide an excuse for lurid cover paintings, admire the hero's muscles, be snatched by BEMs, and provide a pretext for shooting up someone with a ray-gun. Then, at times, we have the opposite extreme—matriarchal societies, or emerald-eyed goddesses with destructive tendencies (but still to provide the hero with an excuse for showing his muscles). [But] woman as a real character, as a human being is still a rarity in science fiction. (1952: 6)

This resonates strongly with later feminist critiques such as that of Russ: "There are plenty of images of women in science fiction. There are hardly any women" (1974b: 57).

Vertical Horizons had a fairly short life and seems to have had little impact on Australian fandom in general, beyond the initial impetus of attracting and encouraging female members, some of whom, like Williams, were active into the 1980s. Nevertheless, the group and fanzine represented a significant intervention into the all-male adolescent microcosm of Australian fandom. Along with its counterparts in the US and the UK, *Vertical Horizons* indicated the changes in the sf community (and broader society) in the 1950s that saw more women able or prepared to move from the relative obscurity of sf reader to a more active identity as sf fan.

British matriarchy or "Hoax" community?

The climate into which the British *Femizine* arrived in the mid-'50s was one in which women fans were establishing a presence in the small but influential London fandom (the hub of British fandom at that time). In 1955, the fanzine *Science Fantasy News* marked the change in fandom since the previous decade: "Any more for the Matriarchy? London fandom now has more active female fans than males in its ranks" (Clarke and Clarke 1955).[33] According to Vin¢ Clarke, previously Daphne Bradley had been the only woman active in London fandom in the 1940s.[34] She was now joined by others in the London

33 Vin¢ and Joy Clarke, *Science Fantasy News*, Christmas 1955.

34 Interview with Clarke, London, 23 July 1996 (hereafter Clarke interview). A couple of other women are mentioned in Warner's history of 1940s fandom: Joyce Fairburn and Joyce Teagle, who helped produce a 1940s fanzine *Operation Fantast*

Circle, including Joy Goodwin (later Clarke), Pam Buckmaster (sister of Ron who later married Ken Bulmer), and Dorothy Rattigan. There were also women involved in other groups, such as Ethel Lindsay in Glasgow, Roberta (Bobby) Wild in Slough, Frances Evans in Manchester, Shirley Marriot in Bournemouth (all of whom moved to London in the mid-'50s), Madeleine Willis in Belfast, and Ina Shorrock in Liverpool. Rob Hansen's history of British fandom, *Then*, notes that "[a]s male fans of the time have since observed, somewhat ruefully, most of their female counterparts were assertive and self-confident, many of them feminists" (Hansen 1993).[35] Although the number of active women was relatively small, they made an impression on male fandom, as Vin¢ Clarke recalled: "they were strong feminist types of course, because you had to be!" Clarke remembered Bobby Wild as "a fiercely independent female—feminist I should say—who did some very outspoken writing in our apa [OMPA]." Another notable fan was Ethel Lindsay, who according to Clarke, fascinated all the other fans because she was a "professional" (a nurse, later matron) who never married. She produced the fanzine *Scottishe* (originally as part of OMPA), which went on to become one of the longest lived in Britain, appearing from 1954 until the 1980s with over 80 issues.[36] (Lindsay's interest in women in fandom is suggested by the fact she later read some of the American feminist fanzines, as documented by a letter published in *Janus* in the 1980s.)

One of the most visible markers of women's presence and activity in British fandom was the creation of the "all female" zine, *Femizine*. The editorial of the first *Femizine*, in Summer 1954 declared:

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when its editor, Ken Slater, was posted to Germany: "with the help of the girl he left behind him, Joyce Teagle, he produced from the continent a third *Operation Fantast*" (Warner Jr. 1969: 290-1).

35 "The Mid 1950s: Man and Supermancon." This is certainly the impression I got from Vin¢ Clarke, who told me "In the '50s there wasn't an awful lot of female fans around unfortunately, because they certainly brought up a different viewpoint," Clarke interview.

36 Clarke interview. Towards the end of the 1950s Ella Parker also emerged as a very active female fan, described by Harry Warner Jr. as "a major stalwart in British fandom during the latter part of the decade [1950s], both as a publisher and in socializing" (1977: 169).

> In various groups and clubs in the UK, the femme fan is in the minority. "FEMIZINE" is designed to unite these minorities in order that they can get a better hearing in the fan world.
>
> With one exception, all the material used will be written by femme-fans—but we hope men will still subscribe. The exception will be our letter section—"MAIL AND FEMALE"… We are looking forward to receiving, and printing, comments from the males. (Carr 1954: 2)

The editorial was signed by the main editor, Joan W. Carr "on behalf of all femme fans" (and co-editors Frances Evans and Ethel Lindsay). Reading this zine for evidence of the interests and passions of female fans of the 1950s is, however, complicated by the fact that Joan W. Carr was not, in fact a woman, but a hoax, a fictional persona created by male fan Sandy Sanderson. While Frances Evans was aware of Carr's real identity, co-editor Lindsay initially was not, and the hoax was not revealed to UK fandom and the readers of *Femizine* until May 1956. Sanderson originally conceived of Joan Carr as way of stirring up the Manchester fan group to which he belonged, which had only one female member, Frances Evans. With the creation of *Femizine* and an increasingly widespread correspondence, Carr grew beyond Sanderson's early conception to become a well-known figure in British fandom generally. The success of this hoax is evident in Harry Warner Jr.'s claim that Carr (along with another "hoax" fan Carl Brandon) "remain[s] more vivid in the memories of fans who remember the 1950s than many real, less colorful fans of the same period" (Warner Jr. 1977: 88).[37]

The experience of reading *Femizine* is reminiscent of the peculiarly "doubled" reading position we now have when reading some of "James Tiptree Jr.'s" writings—only in reverse. The calls to unite femme-fans and "show up" the men would seem to be compromised by the fact that much of the material was written by a man, with the

37 "Carl Brandon," like Carr, was a hoax with potentially disturbing effects, since he was meant to be a black fan, and indeed became the first black fan to achieve prominence in US fandom. He was the creation of Terry Carr, along with "Boob" Stewart, Ron Ellik, Dave Rike, and Peter Graham (91-2). Warner also gives a brief account of the Carr hoax (89-90). In recent years Carl Brandon has been reclaimed by the black sf community, through the Carl Brandon awards for speculative fiction addressing race (see Chapter Five).

original intention of playing a trick on a group of male fans. Nevertheless, much of the material in *Femizine*, and the reaction to this all-female venture, still provides evidence for a desire among fans to recognize some form of commonality between the women scattered through fandom, and to achieve greater recognition for their contributions to fandom. Indeed, in the first issue, Carr notes that Evans and Lindsay were "really the originators of the idea" of a fanzine for women (following the model of the all-female *Femzine* in the US) (Warner Jr. 1977: 89-90) and that the contributions from other women such as Ina Shorrock showed "that there is a genuine need for FEMIZINE" (Carr 1954: 18).

In May 1956, Carr's true identity was revealed in the ninth issue of *Femizine*—the "hoax issue"—which contained extended commentaries and reminiscences from those involved. Evans and Lindsay, the two co-conspirators, wrote of their role in the hoax and detailed their increasing misgivings about Joan's role in *Femizine*. Their discomfort was caused by the whole-hearted acceptance not just of this "fake female," but also of *Femizine* itself, which was so "wildly successful that it drew up to 100 locs [letters of comment] per issue" (Warner Jr. 1977: 90). When, for example, the second issue drew an unfavorable review, Lindsay recalled that,

> the other femme fans rallied to our side, and defended us stoutly. They did all they could to help, and began to take a real pride in FEZ. That was when my troubles really started. I had been thinking of Joan as a separate personality… However, I began to wake up to the fact that I could not expect the rest of fandom to feel the same way. I began to worry what they would say when the news came out. At the same time so did Frances, who asked me if I ever woke up in a cold sweat thinking about it. I did. (Lindsay 1956: 10)

By 1955, as Hansen notes, "Evans and Lindsay were becoming increasingly uneasy about the lie at the heart of *Femizine*, that a fanzine that had become a rallying point for Britain's female fans was secretly edited by a man." They decided to try and alleviate the situation by suggesting that *Femizine* be opened to male contributors, and discussed this with other female fans at the 1955 national convention ("Cytricon" held in Kettering, from then on held over Easter) But, as Lindsay recalled:

> It was no good. They turned the idea down cold, wanted us to stick to women alone. After they had gone Frances and I sat and looked at each other in dismay. “I feel sick,” she said. “I think we’d better emigrate,” I replied. We got hold of Sandy as soon as we could and told him firmly that, in one way or another, this monster Joan was going to have to be killed off. (Lindsay 1956: 10-11)

By this stage, the trepidation felt by Evans and Lindsay, “caused by the whole-hearted acceptance of FEZ by the femmes, by their pride in this ‘all female’ venture,” had overcome their amusement (Evans 1956: 11). So, as Sanderson reflected, “it was decided to make FEZ a really all-female fanzine by having Joan withdraw from it completely and ask Pamela Bulmer to take over the reins” (Sanderson 1956: 8).[38] Sanderson could not carry through his original plan to avoid confrontation by slowly “retiring” Carr from the fan scene, because too many people were aware of Carr’s real identity, so issue 9 was rushed together to prevent someone else from revealing the hoax.

Ultimately, fannish reaction to the revelation of the hoax was not the catastrophe Evans and Lindsay feared. According to Hansen, “[p]eople had been so completely taken in that they were stunned by the revelation and immediate reactions to it were muted” (Hansen 1993).[39] Vin¢ Clarke recalled that for many fans, it was as if a friend had died, producing “a sense of loss rather than laughter, or anger or anything like that.”[40] Many of the fans’ responses printed in *Femizine* and elsewhere expressed genuine regret at the passing of this fan—suggesting the welcoming and open climate of the British fandom, which could come to respect, admire, and feel so much friendship for a female fan whom they had come to know through correspondence

38 In the end, issue seven was put together by Vin¢ Clarke and Joy Goodwin, with only the 8th (March 1956) edited by Pamela Bulmer, who also let husband Ken into the secret.

39 “The Late 1950s: Gotterdammerung”; Thus Ron Bennett mourned “what I prefer to think of as Joan’s passing from the fannish scene, an enforced gafia as it were.” Ron Bennett, *Ploy*, no 6, Jun. 1956, cited in Hansen (1993).

40 Clarke interview. Another fan, Dean Grennell, responded: “I think it’s the most gloriously hilarious hoax I’ve ever heard of and I think anyone who takes offence is a blooming sorehead,” cited in Warner Jr. (1977: 90).

alone.[41] That the response of women fans was not as bad as the editors feared may have been due to the fact that many had secretly not found "Joan" as enticing as the men. As fan Pam Bulmer commented:

> The success of Sandy's hoax lay in the reality of Joan's personality. Not everyone liked Joan wholeheartedly. My own reaction was that she was another of those masculine sergeant-type women—horribly competent and out to prove they are as good as any man by acting like a man! (cited in Warner Jr. 1977: 90-91)

Inevitably, a hoax of this kind was detrimental to the growing strength and independence of the female fan community promised by *Femizine*'s beginnings. In Hansen's view,

> [h]aving such a prominent "female" fan and the editor of the fanzine they had taken as their rallying point turn out to be a man was to take the wind out of the sails of the emerging female fandom of the fifties. That issue of FEMIZINE was the last for two years, and revealing the hoax was to have just the effect that had been feared. (Hansen 1993)

The verdict of the American *Fancyclopedia II* in 1959 was even more dire: "When the hoax was revealed it dealt British female fandom a jolt from which it has yet to recover" (Eney and Speer 1959: 26). This was a rather harsh judgment; while the potential for a more solidified community of female fans may well have been undermined, women continued to publish their own zines and were active in various organizations (especially the London circle and OMPA). *Femizine* itself made a comeback, appearing as *Distaff* in September 1958 under editor Ethel Lindsay. Hansen reports that "[t]he fanzine was welcomed by Britain's female fans but the name-change wasn't," so the title reverted to *Femizine* and it "continued to be a showcase for the talents of female fans, until its fifteenth and final issue in September 1960" (Hansen 1993).[42]

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41 Though apparently the photo of Joan (actually Sanderson's young cousin) that circulated amongst fans (on request) reinforced many male fans' positive views of her. See Hansen, "The Mid 1950s: Man and Supermancon" (1993).

42 This was quite a respectably long run for a fanzine. The numbering followed on from the original *Femizine*; thus *Distaff* was no. 10, the new *Femizine* began with no. 11 and so on.

Certainly it appears that the hoax and its fallout overshadowed the achievements of the real women involved in *Femizine*, with attention directed instead toward the male fan. In retrospect, however, Sanderson's role in *Femizine* does not diminish its success or the fact that female fans were so enthusiastic about a collective women's endeavor. For, despite the hoax and its ramifications, *Femizine* was significant in providing a forum for women's writing and a focus for female fan activity. *Femizine* helped build a strong sense of collective femmefan identity, with articles often raising issues of gender equality in fandom and the "mundane" world.

The first issue of *Femizine* contained a "call to arms" from Ina Shorrock, declaring that "we—the feminine side of Fandom—must start to push much harder than we have been doing in order to equal the men in science fictional affairs" (1954: 17). This rather mild call for action from the women in fandom received a reply from Harry Turner: "Ina sounds like a belated follower of Mrs. Pankhurst…I've not noticed any of those poor down-trodden femmes, but then that may be just because I'm one of these arrogant fans that treads on 'em."[43] While obviously intended as a jocular comment, Turner admitted he shared Henry Ernst's disparaging view (in the tellingly-titled "Romping through Fandom with the Little Woman") that there were three types of femm-fans, and even the best could only be secondary or "fake fans" (Ernst 1953: 14). Much of the response to the first issue consisted of such letters from men "ribbing" the girls, in a manner that was obviously expected. Three letters, for example, asked who had modeled for the first cover: this cover was a joking dig at male fans and their proclivities, featuring a girl in a bikini with a bubble on her head. Carr's editorial stated: "Our cover is mainly for the men. Take a long last lingering look. Wave a fond farewell to the cover girl. From now on, we join Frances Evans in her campaign for 'more beefcake'" (Carr 1954: 2). Others responded with weak cries that women fans did not need to unite as they already had a powerful presence. Stuart McKenzie, for example, responded to the call to "unite the minorities to get a better hearing in the fan world" with amazement, saying that "the feminine element in this part of the world, at any rate (and indeed at all costs) gets a better hearing than the male. We HAVE to listen? <u>They</u> just ignore our 'idle chatter'" (McKenzie 1954).

43 Harry Turner, letter, *Femizine*, no. 2, December 1954.

His list of women who attended meetings at the Globe was indeed impressive: (his "ever-loving") Constance, Dorothy, Iris, both Pams, Daphne, Joy, Cathie, Hetta, and Margaret.

A much more strident "call to arms" appeared in the second issue from Pam Bulmer, signing herself as "Gloria Famhurst" (a pun on Pankhurst using fam as shorthand for female fan). While obviously tongue in cheek, with its opening "Women of fandom unite!," it targeted the pervasive stereotype of the woman as a secondary, non-productive fan whose role was to support the fanac of the active male.

> Now we cry out against their unjustness, we will fight to the bitter end. Break down the doors of their dens, snatch the duplicators, seize the ink, the stencils and all the paraphernalia of fanac that we have guarded so faithfully and so thanklessly.
>
> We will chain ourselves to the lamp-posts outside the Globe and every fannish club or meeting place and we will not go until we are acclaimed with due respect. We will go on hunger strike, and if any of us die in such a brave cause our deaths will lie like an inky black smudge on every fanzine…
>
> There will be no lack of volunteers to be the first martyr crushed beneath the wheels of the bearded motor-bike and the stain of her militant blood will turn in the wheels of the rider's mind… She will go down in history as the first martyr of famdom and we shall see that her sacrifice is not in vain.
>
> To arms you shackled slaves of marriage! You who economise with the housekeeping, going short yourselves, nay all but starving so that they might buy their duplicators, their ink and paper, their stencils and their infamous magazines. An end to all this. United we are strong. Let <u>them</u> brew the tea whilst <u>we</u> besmear ourselves with ink and swearwords, producing the gems of wisdom for which we are justly famed. Women for fams! Fams for women! (Bulmer 1954: 7)

Amongst the parody and references recalling the suffragists, Bulmer paints a picture that suggests a realistic characterization of many fan couples. Such women were often involved in the dirty work without receiving any of the glory, offering a range of emotional *and* economic

supports to their active fan partner, whilst receiving little or no credit themselves.[44]

This second issue received a cutting review in the fanzines section of *Authentic Science Fiction*:

> We thought that the girls of fandom would be able to turn out something that would at least rank equal with some of their male counterparts. Instead, maybe because mistakenly chivalrous comments on the first issue and the venture as a whole have gone to their heads, the editoresses have turned out a thing which is so obviously trying hard to be intelligently witty and just hasn't got what it takes. Also there is an emphasis on the smutty side of things that may well be unhealthy. No doubt these women will one day stop trying to act a part and will be themselves. (Fanzines 1954: 137)

These comments have a certain irony considering that at least one of the "editoresses" was indeed playing a part, which may also have accounted for the level of "smut" obviously considered by the reviewer to be inappropriate for women writers.[45] The reaction of female fans, as noted by Lindsay above, was to rally round *Femizine*, and an "advert" was inserted in the well-known zine **i** (Eye) by "LC [London Circle] femme-fans on behalf of FEMIZINE":

> BERT CAMPBELL LIES IN HIS BEARD! He alleges in *Authentic* that FEZ 2 is a Filthy Fanzine. Get one and judge for yourself! Then tell Bert what you think of him! (Classified Page 1954: back cover)

44 The femmefan entry in the *Fancyclopedia* (cited in the last chapter) confirms this picture. A similar scenario is suggested in a later article in an Australian fanzine, *Girl's Own Fanzine*. In response to the theme "Would you marry a fan?" Christine McGowan responds in the negative:

> The frequently itinerant nature of fannish employment and interests is another cause for concern... I wouldn't like being married to a man who only took a desultory interest in a series of more or less uninspiring jobs. Still less would I like a husband who spent every spare dollar on cruddy science fiction paperbacks and inky, clanking machinery. (McGowan 1973: 4)

45 The "smutty" side of Joan Carr was mentioned by others. In a conversation with Frances Evans, a fan known as "Machiavarley" (Brian Varley) commented that "from certain recent correspondence I've had with her [Joan] I feel sure that even tho' she is a sergeant she'll be a very 'amenable' type of girl. 'S'matter of fact, some of the sex and sadism she dishes out sounds quite shockin' coming from a woman." Evans replied "that's probably 'cos she's in the Army" (Evans 1956: 11).

Always a vocal and active group, for a brief time the women in London fandom had a unified presence in *Femizine*, which, along with their writing in other fanzines and apazines, challenged the male dominance of fandom. Although it may be problematic to describe these women as "feminist," the steps toward community they took obviously had some significance for the later development of consciously feminist fandom. In this period, mapping women's equality in terms of "feminism" was complicated by the lack of organized feminist groups or even singular role models—thus the references back to suffragettes and the Pankhursts. These women fans stand out for their interest in science and sf, in their outspokenness, their unwillingness to be given a supplementary role by male fans, and their belief in "equal rights" in matters such as pay. Yet, unsurprisingly in the post-war era of re-affirmation of feminine roles and the construction of the ideal female as the professional housewife and mother, such proto-feminist values were couched in (almost Victorian) terms of "equal but different" (see also Yaszek, 2008). Many of these women were opposed to an idea of gender equality that elided "essential" differences between the sexes, and often conflated "ardent feminists" with a "masculine" type. For example, in an apazine for OMPA around this time, Roberta Wild wrote "Let us have equality with men by all means, but equality does not mean similarity." Wild contrasted her view to those of women she met while in the forces who were "mannish types" (her description having resonances with the "mannish lesbian" stereotype of the '20s and '30s) and asked, "why are the most ardent feminists among my sex so damned masculine?"[46] The British female fans of the 1950s did not want to participate in the masculine world of sf as "one of the boys," but insisted on retaining their "femininity" whilst demanding equality under the inclusive yet distinguishing label femmefan.[47] Importantly, they obviously saw benefits from claiming this identity as a collective rather than on an individual basis, which would leave them more open to charges of aberrant performances of femininity.

46 She describes these women as wearing pin-striped slacks, man-tailored jackets, collars, and tie with no make-up and cropped hair! (Wild [1950s]: 13).

47 See for example references to beauty in Pamela Bulmer's "A Call to Arms" (Bulmer 1954: 6) and Ina Shorrock's, "A Call to Arms" (Shorrock 1954: 17). See also a letter from the 1930s, which makes similar claims both to intellect and beauty: Irene Frechette Bats, letter, *Amazing Stories*, July 1930, p. 379; cited in Drown (2006: 24-5).

While certainly fewer in number than the women involved in fandom in the USA, British female fans arguably maintained a stronger presence in British fandom as a whole than their US counterparts did. Judging by the limited lifespan of the US *Femzine*, community efforts were not as successful as those that sustained *Femizine*. None of the British fans attained the status of a Lee Hoffman, however, and none made the transition to professional writer, as did both Hoffman and Marion Zimmer Bradley.

However ephemeral or forgotten, these collective actions from the 1950s are important both for their attempts at community building and in their use of overt references to equal rights and opposition to sexism in fandom (even if often conducted in a jocular fashion). Like the US letter writers from the 1930s, these fans protested the reduction of women's role in sf to either sex/romance interest or as mere appendages to male readers or fans. A final example indicates the extent to which such sentiments might coalesce in direct critiques of the gendered nature of sf and its cultures, providing precedents for later feminist critique.

Proto-feminist criticism: The 1950s look forward

A fascinating instance of proto-feminist critique is found in a letter by sf author Miriam Allen deFord responding to an article by Dr. Robert S. Richardson in a 1955 issue of *Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* (*F&SF*) (Richardson 1955: 44-52).[48] Richardson's "The Day after We Land on Mars" examined the practicalities of future expeditions to Mars and proposed that the all-male crews should take along a few "nice girls" to relieve their sexual frustration. Richardson did not consider the possibility that women could be present as members of the crew in their own right and dismissed the inclusion of married partners—"Family Life would be impossible under the conditions that prevail. Imagine the result of allowing a few wives to set up housekeeping in the colony! After a few weeks the place would be a shambles" (50). According to the *F&SF* editors, this article elicited more letters than any other non-fiction article had, and yet "not a single correspondent expressed moral shock and outrage." This is an interesting comment intimating the (sexual) open-mindedness of *F&SF*

48 See also the responses in vol. 10, no. 5, May 1956: Poul Anderson "Nice Girls on Mars" (1956) and Miriam Allen deFord, "News for Dr. Richardson" (1956).

readers. It stems from Richardson's belief that his proposition would (only) cause problems because of moral objections to what was essentially a proposal for publicly condoned prostitution (Editor 1956: 47).

Two responses to Richardson's article were published, those by sf authors deFord and Poul Anderson. Anderson's letter took seriously the "practical" problems raised by Richardson's scenario and argued that girls would take up room and cost money, so the best solution would be a drug to inhibit sex drive. In contrast to Richardson, Anderson raises the possibility of husband and wife teams and the inclusion of trained women in the crew. But he believed this would still cause problems because some girls would be more attractive than others, producing frustrated lovers with no chance of escape. In any case, he stated "few women are good explorers; you might say they are too practical. Feminists pardon me" (P. Anderson 1956: 50). The editors commented that, in contrast to Anderson's strictly "male viewpoint," the attitude of most correspondents (male and female) was "an immediate rejection of the basic male-centered assumptions." They introduced deFord as the perfect writer "to express this—no, not feminist, but merely human point of view" (deFord 1956: 53). The use of the term "feminism" here and in Anderson's article is worth noting, since most histories assume that feminism was little discussed in the 1950s. The use of "feminism" in this exchange (and indeed in other fannish publications from the 1950s and up to the 1990s) functions negatively—signaling an extreme position and bringing automatic condemnation from men such as Anderson, in contrast to the more justifiable (and "fannish") position of "humanism."

Despite the editors' attempt to situate deFord as a more moderate "humanist," however, deFord's article is a thorough attack on the sexism inherent in much of the sf and scientific community. Not surprisingly, given her Suffragist background, her article is overtly protofeminist, foreshadowing later feminist criticism and invoking Simone De Beauvoir to support her argument. Her article begins "I am going to tell Dr. Richardson a secret. Women are not walking sex organs. They are human beings" (deFord 1956: 53). DeFord challenges the arguments about women's physical capacity or potential ability to become colonists to Mars. Instead, she attributes the low numbers of women in the sciences to "the discouragements and obstacles set in their path by people with Dr. Richardson's viewpoint." She also points

to the real world examples of women who have trained as physicists, chemists, astronomers, and engineers (54).[49] DeFord's rebuttal of Dr. Richardson could be extended to much of the sf culture at this time:

> It is pretty disheartening, after all these years, to discover how many otherwise enlightened and progressive-minded men still retain in their subconscious this throwback attitude toward half of humanity which relegates women to the position of possessions, of ancillary adjuncts to men—what Simone de Beauvoir calls the "second sex." (56)

In her defense of women's scientific abilities, and her condemnation of the "covert" sexism that informed "merely intellectual" scientific hypotheticals, deFord here raised one of the first critical feminist voices in sf.[50] Such challenges to the masculine world of sf were the basis

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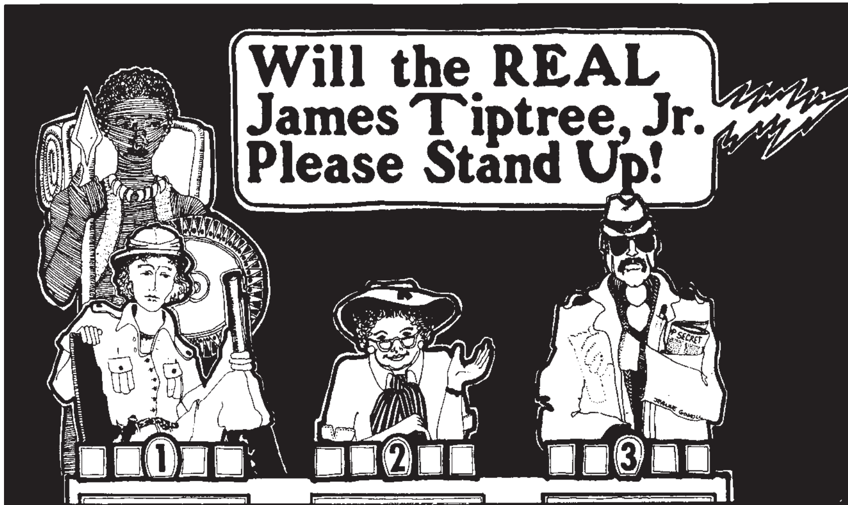
49 Along with the other attributes of women personnel, deFord stated that "there is much less bickering and backhand knifing in conventions of feminine organizations than in those of masculine" (1956: 54).

50 DeFord published her first sf story in 1946 (at the age of 58) and went on to publish over seventy stories (including a number in *F&SF)*, but no novels, which may account for her obscurity today. Born in 1888, she was also a noted Suffragist (see Fran Stallings 1984).

One of the first analyses of sf to recognize the exclusion of women as a significant characteristic of the genre appeared in Ednita P. Bernabeu's "SF: A New Mythos" in a 1957 issue of *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* (1957: 527-35). I have not included it in my analysis because it appeared outside the sf community; however, it provides a remarkable discussion of feminine symbolism in sf. Although somewhat dated in its positivist application of Freudian psychoanalytic readings, Bernabeu's use of this theory to read popular fiction led her to insights that foreshadowed later feminist readings. Outlining the various psycho-dynamic elements of sf, Bernabeu remarked that sexuality and women were "conspicuously absent," and argued that this constituted a "denial of femininity and feminine strivings." Her analysis situated the exclusion of women as deliberate (although perhaps unconscious) and integral to the sf mythos, rather than symptomatic of a general conservatism, or a narrow focus on "science." The presence of "Woman"—whether actual, threatened, or symbolically represented (i.e., as an alien)—signified concerns and fears immanent in even the most scientifically pure, technically focused sf. Bernabeu argued that:

> Women are feared as mothers and as sexual objects; yet there is a persistent preoccupation with "seeding" the outer galaxies with the human race... The insoluble question of childhood—where do babies come from?—is reopened on a cosmic level, denying the female as mother and conferring on the male the exclusive processes of direct reproduction. (1957: 532)

of woman-centered or gynocentric critiques that would intersect, and continue conterminously, with the development of feminist criticism into the 1970s and beyond.



"Will the Real James Tiptree, Jr. Please Stand Up," poster by Jeanne Gomoll, 1978. advertising a monthly meeting of The Society for the Furtherance and Study of Fantasy and Science Fiction (SF3). The program presented at this particular meeting was a rehearsal for a program of the same name showcased at WisCon 2.