

Women of Science Fiction in the 1970s

Introduction

Science fiction is the genre of possibility, and is nearly boundless. The only limitation is that of what the reader and writer can imagine. What drew me to both science fiction, and this research is what draws many to science fiction: exploring new worlds, new ideas, new species, but importantly the depths of the human mind. Science fiction of the 1970s was transformative for the genre, as there was a distinct shift on who was writing best selling and award winning novels. Men had long dominated science fiction, especially during the “golden age,” but during the 1970s published science fiction novels by women gained the attention of those who loved the genre. Women such as Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Kate Wilhelm, and James Tiptree Jr. (Allison B. Sheldon), all wrote award winning science fiction, but their stories also challenged readers with themes of equality. The question then arises, why did so many female authors take to science fiction to express their messages of equality during the 1970s? Author Suzy McKee Charnas, author of *The Holdfast Chronicles* wrote of this in the *Khatru Symposium: Women in Science Fiction*: “instead of having to ‘twist’ reality in order to create ‘realistic’ female characters in today’s totally unfree society, the sf writer can create the societies that would produce those characters” (Charnas 4). The women of science fiction in the 1970s were responding to an issue in science fiction: women were not represented accurately in text, nor were they given the same chance as their male counterparts. Thus, as Charnas wrote, women writers took to science fiction, the genre of possibility to address these issues.

I traveled to the University of Liverpool to conduct research in their vast speculative fiction archive where I would focus on fan fiction of the 1970s. I approached my study of fan fiction with the expectation that it would be a progressive force, since the critical consensus is that fan fiction provides a voice for the marginalized or otherwise disenfranchised readers who want to be heard in a dominant discourse that excludes them. So I expected to see a feminist presence in the collection, but I was surprised to find that the fan fiction of the era was full of misogynistic material. Editors and publishers often would overlook female authors, disregarding their story for the only reason that the story came from a woman. Published science fiction offered reader's unrealistic female characters created to fit the desires of male writers. It took a large group of writers, mostly female, to write stories where female characters were created realistically and importantly with possibility.

After researching fan fiction of the 1970s, I looked at an academic study by Anne Jamison *Fic: Why Fan Fiction Is Taking Over the World* (2013), Joanna Russ's *To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction* (1995), Jeanne Cortiel's *Demand My Writing: Joanna Russ/Feminism/Science Fiction* (1999), and briefly at Justine Larbalestier's *The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction* (2002). While Jeffrey D. Smith's 1975 *Khatru Symposium: Women in Science Fiction* became the centerpiece, as it is an important historical look at what the women authors of science fiction felt and desired about the genre they love in the 1970s. I used Julie Phillips' *James Tiptree Jr. The Double Life of Alice B. Sheldon* (2006) to get a closer look at the life behind the pen of James Tiptree Jr., as well as a collection of Tiptree Jr. stories, *James Tiptree Jr. Her Smoke Rose Up Forever* (2014). Numerous stories in Harlan Ellison's *Again*,

Dangerous Visions (1972) were used either showing positive or negative representations of female characters. Ursula K. Le Guin's *Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975) and *We Who Are About To...* (1977), Kate Wilhelm's *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* (1976), and Tiptree's "The Woman Men Don't See" (1973) were used to show how these writers stories were used to give possibility to women. These writer's stories not just inspired and empowered readers, but they challenged the then socially accepted roles of women.

Chapter 1: *Khatru* Symposium

Science fiction is the fiction of possibility, social, technological, and even temporal. As such, it offers an unusual degree of thematic and generic freedom. The characters and worlds authors create are not bound by contemporary ideas of race, sex, and technology, which allows writers to create characters and worlds that fit within their stories to reach a conclusion they wish. Science fiction creates its own universe, or adapts the current world to tell the story. Futuristic worlds can even offer the reader glimpses of what, for better or worse, they can look forward to for humankind. These worlds may not just present scientific and technological advances, but also evolution of social issues. Science fiction pushes all boundaries, and thus has the potential to make crucial progressive interventions into social and political issues. Indeed, one might say that if science fiction does not inspire the reader to reconsider contemporary social and political norms in some way, then it has failed in its duty.

In November of 1975, Jeffrey D. Smith edited and published the *Khatru Symposium: Women in Science Fiction*. Participants included both established and emergent female science fiction writers, including Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, and Kate Wilhelm, and male writers, such as Samuel Delany and James Tiptree Jr. Tiptree, whose fiction was seen as addressing issues of gender. Delany's fiction had and has a longstanding interest in gender and queer sexuality, while Tiptree, who would later be revealed as Alice B. Sheldon, was thought to be a somewhat anomalous figure—a middle aged man viewed as a feminist writer. This symposium's main idea was to discuss through letters the significance and future of woman in science fiction, and how

the group sought to inspire members of oppressed groups, here specifically women. They discussed their own roles as authors, and how women characters were created in science fiction at the time. These well-known authors spoke their minds hoping to promote new female writers and inspire realistic female characters, and to replace the unrealistic figures so prevalent at the time.

Smith opened the symposium by writing, "SF is suited to the needs of any group that feels itself to be oppressed" (Smith 1). In 1975, the presence of sexism and racism in everyday life were for the first time being actively disputed by a wide swath of the American public, and some writers of science fiction saw their role as both artistic and explicitly political. Science fiction was seen as a way to harness the reader's own imagination to inspire real-world action, to offer respite for those who are oppressed, to offer an escape for readers by helping them travel to worlds away, where their own troubles no longer exist.

Despite being a potential gateway for those who are oppressed, "Golden Age" SF offered little in the way of realistic female characters or even female writers. Ursula K. Le Guin early in the symposium noted that "Golden Age writers were not writing a fiction of character or passion; they were writing in an impersonalized genre of ideas-technology-adventure; and so all their characters were necessarily two-dimensional" (Le Guin 1). Although here she refers to both male and female characters, she also indicates that female characters were less prevalent (Le Guin 1). Golden Age SF was inspiring, but as Le Guin points out it inspires readers to think of the future outside of race and sex, to think of flying to distant worlds, to think of technology, and how humans

interact with it. Such fiction lacks an important part of SF itself, which is attention to what Smith calls “to the needs of the oppressed.”

Khatru brought together male and female SF writers who created realistic female characters, but in general science fiction stories of the 1970s were full of very what Kate Wilhelm calls “women characters [who] are written in extremes, bitch, whore, paragon good, step-mother, grandmother” (Wilhelm 6). This quote is immensely important as well as very true in SF, as this chapter will demonstrate. Female characters, like their real-world counterparts, have for generations been mistreated and poorly represented in SF. Written female characters in SF are constantly created to fit a certain role or fill a stereotype as Wilhelm points out. One egregious example will serve to illustrate the general trend: In the fanzine *Tangent*, editor Ian Garbutt created a “cheerleader” figure named Tesla, who is scantily clothed, always drawn in very sexual or promiscuous positions, and meant to be “eye candy” for the reader (Garbutt 13). This type of female character was not just in *Tangent*, but throughout much of the fan fiction of the 1970s reflecting the preoccupations of mainstream science fiction.

I view SF as providing a glimpse into the future of humanity, maybe not an accurate picture as older SF has shown to us, but a way for the writer and reader to think of what could be. It can offer a way to think of other worlds or revision of our own Earth where the social issues that occupy us are not known, to provide a landscape or view to show us into a world that is a preview to give hope or an idea of where humanity could be. Even in 1975, the writers in the Symposium were fearful of the future; Kate Wilhelm, for example observed that she thought the world would not survive the next 30 years (Wilhelm 79). One might ask, then, where is the hope or reason for discussing the

role of female characters and writers in SF? Clearly, despite their anxieties about the future in a world grappling with fears of nuclear confrontation and just recognizing the challenges of potential environmental disasters to come, these authors found it worthwhile to contemplate the role of their art in the struggle for gender equality.

The 1975 *Khatru Symposium: Women in Science Fiction* brought together top female writers in SF, such as Ursula K. Le Guin writer of the *Earthsea* series and *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Kate Wilhelm who wrote the Nebula Award winning novel *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*, and Joanna Russ who wrote *The Female Man*, as well as two male writers, Samuel R. Delany, and James Tiptree Jr., the pseudonym used by Alice B. Sheldon, who was assumed by all participants to be a man. Both Delany and Tiptree wrote realistic female characters, and were considered feminists. The symposium consisted of written questions pertaining to the issues relevant to women in science fiction in the form of letters sent to each author. The panel of authors would respond, then would be able to read the others' responses, and respond to those as well, allowing the authors on the panel to have discussions (or arguments) over the questions and responses. The project gave these talented authors a single purpose, to discuss the current state of women in science fiction, and how this issue was relevant for them personally and professionally. This publication allowed them to collectively inspire readers to see the important matter of gender equality, and how the stories that these writers created pushed the accepted boundaries of character and story development in SF. Importantly it also allowed these writers to express their frustrations, and goals in regards to equality.

Characters created in science fiction, as in most mainstream fiction and film of the era, conformed to stereotype, be it the damsel in distress, the killjoy woman ruining some kind of (masculine) adventure, or the housewife. The authors in the symposium sought to create realistic female characters in their stories to do what they believed science fiction was intended to do, address needs of oppressed groups. Since SF is supposed to be a glimpse into the future, a problem was that female characters did not represent possibility. These characters still were confined to what the world at the time thought of them, represented by the tropes of, “bitch, whore, paragon good, step-mother, grandmother” that Wilhelm helpfully enumerates (Wilhelm 6). This obviously was and is still a problem not just for science fiction, but also for all of literature. What makes it more of a problem for science fiction, is the fact that science fiction is intended to expand what we as humanity know and experience currently, to create possibility for humanity. Where was the possibility for women in these stories?

The symposium is important to consider because it gives us, four decades later, not only insight into the views of science fiction authors in the 1970s, but also a view of the complex discussions surrounding the feminist movement as well. These authors show the reader how SF written by female and male feminists is different than other SF, and thus shows their view of a potential future. The 1970s were a crucial decade for the feminist movement especially in the U.S. The civil rights movement of the 1960's had reached some degree of resolution, despite race still being an issue, and women sought to fight for their equality. These so called “second wave” feminists shifted the focus from suffrage to social issues that women dealt with. Debates raged over the Equal Rights Amendment, which would in theory eliminate discrimination based on sex, and which

nearly was passed. (The ERA has been held up at the state level since the late 70s, which shows that these problems of sexism are still active and impact women to this day.) These second wave feminist wanted equal opportunity in all fields of life, which is exactly what the authors that took part in this symposium wanted.

Questions in the symposium were at first created by the editor, Jeffery Smith, but as it progressed, the recipients would write questions of their own, making the symposium very organic. Letters were sent back and forth from October 9th, 1974 until May 8th, 1975. The very first question, what drew the authors to SF, was deceptively simple. How did the “Golden Age” of SF, which was mainly a man’s field, inspire so many female authors, such as the ones on this panel (Smith 1)? This question is a wonderful entry point for two reasons: first, how did a male dominated field inspire so many female writers to engage and create stories of their own, and second, as Smith observed, “why the change” from male to female writers? (1). Smith observed that “many of the best SF writers are the women on this panel,” (1), also implying that women had begun to show creative dominance in science fiction, as the popularity of writers like Le Guin suggested.

Immediately many of the writers stated that they did not believe that the “Golden Age” of SF was in fact a golden age. Chelsea Quinn Yarbro, author of *False Dawn*; Le Guin; and Raylyn Moore, author of *Mock Orange* immediately questioned this designation. Yarbro writes that most “Golden Age” SF had been forgotten by all except “the most determined collectors” (Yarbro 1). Moore calls it the “Gilded Age,” and arguing that they were then, in 1975 actually in the real “Golden Age” (Moore 2). Both agreed with Le Guin that “Golden Age” writers were not writing a fiction of character or passion;

they were writing in an impersonalized genre of ideas-technology-adventure; and so all their characters were necessarily two-dimensional” (Le Guin 1). According to Le Guin, the problem was less one of the deliberate sexism than of hackneyed writing: not only were female characters stereotyped in the “Golden Age,” male characters were “just as wooden, vapid, and stereotyped” (1). The “Golden Age” to these authors appeared to be but a stepping stone, and where “Golden Age” stories inspired those who read them to think of aliens, technology, and the stars, modern SF was meant to inspire on a social level.

Following Smith’s assertion that SF is inherently suited to the needs of the oppressed, many of these authors wrote that this was exactly what drew them towards SF. They relished the idea that they could be anyone, they could do anything, and they could create any story in any world as long as they could imagine it. Such freedom holds creative power, not just for the creator but for the reader as well. Science fiction offered a perfect getaway vehicle for these writers, through which they could create stories where female characters enjoyed equal rights or where these female characters could fight and win. They made female characters real, rather than following stereotypical norms in science fiction. What is important is that they gave their female characters possibility, and there is power in characters that have possibility.

Vonda N. McIntyre, author of *Dreamsnake* (1979), was the first to answer the question of what attracted her to SF (McIntyre 1). Her answer reflects the general consensus that “it provided an escape from a generally boring and intermittently unpleasant reality” (1). Suzy McKee Charnas, author of *The Holdfast Chronicles* (1974-1999), relates the story of how she and a friend as children at sleepovers used their

imaginations to create: “nothing bound us but the limits of our imaginations and what they fed on” (Charnas 3). Using that as an entry point to SF, and using her own imagination, Charnas found that creating female characters who were capable and realistic was possible. Nevertheless, many male writers never wrote realistic female characters in science fiction. Charnas loved science fiction despite not finding herself, a woman, in the stories, but what stood out to her was the potentiality in science fiction (3). She was struck by the simple idea that she could write any kind of situation she could think of. She could write or create anything; she was given complete freedom over what kind of characters she could create.

What was inspiring about SF for Charnas, freedom, led her to fight back against then popular male science fiction writers, who responded to the challenge of a lack of female characters in their stories, “with flippant or savage misogynistic paranoia” (3). Doing so inspired her as a writer to create realistic female characters, like other female writers of that time, who all saw a need for stories in which they wanted to find themselves. As Charnas puts it: “So I think that a lot of women can independently and even subconsciously came to the decision to write SF books that they wanted so badly to read, because the men were, for the most part, clearly not capable of doing it for them” (3). Just as women around America were fighting in the “real world” for gender equality, Charnas and other female science fiction writers were doing the same thing in the world of fiction. The first step in fighting a stereotype, after all, is to change what people read or view. With this idea of female characters in science fiction, these writers were changing, or fighting against the stereotypes present in science fiction. In their stories there are realistic female characters that are more than stereotypes. They are

not whores, step-mothers, evil spies, or housewives; rather, they are given purpose and an identity that is based on what they achieve. In this way, these writers were pointing the way toward real-world change offering their readers realistic fictional female models.

The need and desire for women to have realistic characters in the stories they like to read or write, science fiction, led women to become writers. Given that science fiction is nearly boundless, stories can be created that do not adhere to the times social boundaries, which allows the writer an unusual degree of freedom to create. Science fiction offers an interesting path to finding equality, because, as Charnas writes, “instead of having to create “reality” in order to create “realistic” free female characters in today’s totally unfree society, the SF writer can create the societies that would produce those characters” (4). She was implying that only way to create realistic female characters is to write science fiction, but rather that she can do it freely without the concern how her current world impacts the lives and freedoms of women. Charnas’ work thus offered readers, both male and female, the chance to read realistic depictions of female characters.

Thus, as the participants in the Khattru Symposium clearly indicate, science fiction pushes the boundaries of what we as people view as real, like traveling to distant solar systems, aliens, and technology, but science fiction also bends the ideas of our own reality of social issues. In response to the implication of the first question that science fiction was a man’s field, Kate Wilhelm shot back that “science fiction, for me, has always been the place where art and intellect come together, where literature and ideas are compatible” (Wilhelm 5). Her words sum up what these women writers were doing in the science fiction category. They were using their own creative ideas, intellect,

and social ideas to create stories that were meant to inspire the reader. This also shows the reader that the possibility of change in the realm of gender equality exists not just in literature but also in actuality.

Smith's next question asked, "since SF was written by men, for an audience of men" (Smith 6), what did they think were the problems of representing the opposite sex? This question is very interesting because Smith acknowledges that science fiction in the "Golden Age" was a man's field, and that these male authors wrote very poor female characters. He also asks if the female writers were worried about being critiqued for their portrayal of male characters (7). This spurred a series of responses from many of the authors, starting with Vonda N. McIntyre, that women do a better job of writing male characters for many reasons. After all, McIntyre writes, "women are trained to pay attention to and anticipate what men feel, want, need, etc. Men are trained to pay attention to what men need" (McIntyre 7). That response fulfills stereotypes for men and women, suggesting as it does that men do not care for anything other than themselves, while women are meant to deal with the needs of the men around them. One might add that they have been exposed to numerous fictional representations of male characters for thousands of years, whereas they have seen few realistic representations of female characters. Thus, when they write, they will tend to write from those models.

Wilhelm's observations are thus applicable to both real life and to fiction: in their dealings with real women or when writing stories with women characters, men will draw on what they have seen and read, and what their culture around them says of women, however inaccurate this may be. In other words, as Wilhelm puts it bluntly, "men have fewer examples of real women in fiction to draw upon, and when they copy the models,

they come up with terrible characters” (Wilhelm 7). Men wrote about men for men, not just in science fiction but in all forms of literature. This idea is echoed by many of the authors in this segment, which solidifies the idea that they are in fact needed and inspired to write realistic female characters to show readers that women are more than a stereotype. Thus social issues can be addressed not just through protest and legislation, but through the art and popular culture that individuals consume on an everyday basis.

Clearly these authors wanted to change the way female characters were written, but more importantly they wanted to change how women, and what they considered to be women’s values, were perceived. Adherence to a “masculine” ethos of aggression and violence had, in their view, led humankind to the brink of destruction. With typical bluntness, Wilhelm sums up her hopes for the future of the human race in a single sentence: “I believe humanity’s chances of surviving the next two or three decades are not good” (Wilhelm 66). Given the likelihood of impending doom, Wilhelm felt pessimistic; she writes that “solving the sexist problem of our society isn’t likely to raise the odds a fraction of a percent for survival” (Wilhelm 67). Still, Wilhelm notes, the general crisis of humanity lends additional impetus to the fight against the crisis of sexism. She describes a novel she is reading, where the wife refuses to admit she is not being irrational, when she objects to being raped by her husband, and who risks her marriage for the sake of her employment (67). Narratives like this emerge at this moment of extreme crisis because human beings can no longer accept the status quo; they must demand “the right to be an individual human being with certain inherent needs, the most important of wish is to be free to choose” (67).

Wilhelm may have seen little hope for humanity, despite gains in gender equality, but others disagreed. In the 1993 reprint of this symposium, Suzy McKee Charnas makes her disagreement with Wilhelm's assessment very clear. Charnas argues that in 1975 Wilhelm was allowing "larger" world issues to get in the way of the fight for equality, which Wilhelm saw as separate, and Charnas saw as the same (Charnas 67). Unlike Wilhelm, Charnas believes that the cause of many problematic issues around the world is overpopulation, the root cause of which is "the oppression and exploitation of women" (67). For Charnas, both in 1975 and two decades later, the right to clarify that women's rights are human rights is ongoing and still as crucial as ever.

Wilhelm and Charnas's conflicting views indicate that these authors were not all carbon copies of each other. Indeed, although their beliefs and goals were in fact similar, the methods of achieving true equality was in fact different. Wilhelm wanted to use art to inspire people, to change their own lives, and in turn the lives of others, and to see freedom to choose is the ultimate goal. However Charnas saw sexism and oppression of women across the world as the root of many if not all larger world problems. Charnas and Wilhelm appeared to have completely opposite views on what was a "larger world" problem, and on the feasibility of saving humankind, but they showed in the first publication of the symposium, is that they were still both fighting for equality.

The views espoused by Wilhelm and Charnas established them as products of their era, a period in which political and social turmoil seemed to many Americans to have reached a crisis point. As these writers were speaking of equality the Vietnam War was coming to an end for America, but the effects of it still lingered. Professor Luise

White, *Speaking With Vampires*, wrote that world events formed an important context for discussion of equality: "I've been reduced to guilty tears for caring about my own oppression more than that of the napalmed inhabitants of the DMZ. That's real too, and I try to live with that reality. And it hurts" (White 73). Her world perspective of life is an important one, as it shows how she viewed her own "oppression" itself, which she viewed as less compared to those who were in Vietnam, who were losing their lives, homes, and families. White's ambivalence marks her sensitivity to the question of whether or not her own experience as a white American woman allowed her to speak for other women in other parts of the world. This ambivalence, which stands as an important qualifier to the essentialism embraced by some of the other participants, can be seen as a marker of the evolution of feminist thought from the second-wave ideal of "difference" feminism to the more nuanced approach taken by subsequent "third-wave" feminists, who sought to broaden their understanding of women's experience to include issues of class, race, ethnicity and region.

In this movement toward a more complex view of gender, no figure is more central than that of James Tiptree Jr., whose theories of gender as constructed, and fluid both reflect his own public identity and anticipate the world of later feminist writers such as Judith Butler. At the time of this symposium no one who was a part of the symposium knew of Tiptree's actual identity. Being invited to take part in the symposium is ironic as Tiptree was invited, like Samuel Delany, to offer a male perspective on women in science fiction. The first item that Tiptree addresses is the fallacy of the "yin-yang" model of gender (Tiptree 13). This idea proposes that men and women operate in a reflexive relationship with each other, so that one is a certain way, and the other is

thus the opposite or complementary. The problem with the “yin-yang” idea is that it strips away any form of freedom for the less dominant sex, and positions women as just the reflexive of men. With this theory, women are simply what men are not forcing women to adhere to certain traits and duties. This binary replicates the assumptions and hierarchy of thousands of years of patriarchy according to Tiptree. Furthermore this system not only gives women a set list of assigned, but also does the same to men. A major emphasis throughout the symposium is freedom and possibility, and as Tiptree writes, the “yin-yang” model of gender identity takes away both of these.

Tiptree begins by establishing the idea that it is impossible to speak of women in science fiction without writing of women in general: “what we think and feel about women in SF is only a byproduct of what we think and feel about women and men in the whole bitter chuckle of life, I think we take for granted that women are human beings who have been drastically oppressed, deprived, and warped out of shape by our male dominated and largely lunatic culture” (13). Yes, “women in SF” is obviously an important discussion as these writers have shown, but Tiptree shows the need to use that as a bridge to the “women and men in the whole bitter chuckle of life.” He (I will use a male pronoun for Tiptree) writes that both in literature and philosophy are filled historically with the idea of the “yin-yang” theory seemed to make sense to many due to: “on no greater evidence than that occasional men and women do get along and that the race as a whole hasn’t yet died out” (13).

After showing the fallacy inherent in the “yin-yang” theory, Tiptree offers a theory of his own. Rather than the sexes being in a reflexive relationship, they operate in a transitive relationship. Rather than referring to them genders he proposed patterns, “I

see them as patterns, which may or may not be present singly or together in a given individual at a given time” (14). This was not an attempt to strip identity from the sexes, but rather to embrace the idea that each pattern has various qualities and in that “sex” becomes muddled, so that true identity comes not from a person’s gender, but from their inner person. The importance of such a statement is that this gives power to men and women alike, but specifically to women who have been subjugated and forced into certain roles within society. Thus, this idea importantly offers possibility to women in such a way that empowers or enables them to choose what they wish to be or do, but also to truly be themselves.

Tiptree explores this idea further: “the problem is to try to understand real people, and to determine whether a handful of genes on chromosomes has any identifiable effects on their way of being human” (14) Are we really able to define a gender based on what genetics says of them? His idea of understanding real people is vastly important in that despite what science and history has told us about the genders, that men have always dominated culture, which washes away the women’s ability to deviate from a set path put before them. These patterns are not precise, and not inherent to set sexes, but able to change and adapt. In this way, Tiptree’s model provides a certain sense of freedom. Yes, there is a distinct difference between the two sexes, which Tiptree explains as: “a coherent pattern of behavior necessary to the reproduction of the species” (14), rather than absolute blueprint for all human experience. There is still a difference between the sexes, but the line begins to blur, and rather Tiptree sees two patterns, male and Mothering (14). In the Mothering pattern Tiptree has the ability to

give birth, so that one aspect of many traits is needed to further life. Still, many traits that are found in the Mothering pattern can be exhibited by both men and women.

In these two patterns the male pattern is well known and Tiptree writes that it is “simple and almost trivial” (14), and that the male pattern “may be lethal to humanity” due to its shared neural pathways with aggression, and the fact that those who follow the “male” pattern are ultimately led by their “immediate genital gratification” (14).

Tiptree sees aggression as the peril in the male pattern being aggression. When Tiptree worked for the CIA, he was a part of an attack drill where prominent Washington officials were escorted into a bunker underground. What he realized when they arrived was that they had forgotten an important element, their families. The majority of the male government and military officials were in the safety of the bunker, but what of the women and children? How would humanity survive without the woman? (14). Tiptree used this to show how destructive the male pattern has been, and continues to be, by starting wars or engaging in acts of aggression, and ultimately forgetting how important others are in preserving humanity, especially the women who are needed to preserve life.

In contrast to the simplicity of the male pattern, Tiptree describes the Mothering pattern as being very complex. However, the Mothering pattern is extremely unknown, as the male-dominated societies have long suppressed this pattern. This creates an interesting issue in that Tiptree himself is unsure how to describe this pattern. Still his description of the pattern is important. Tiptree describes traits that he views as a part of the Mothering pattern: bringing children into the world physically; monitoring, teaching, leading to a child to become self sufficient, and also showing leadership without

aggression, instead emphasizing empathy, giving of food and shelter, and protection of the young (15). These traits are what motherhood involves and many of them are attainable by either sex, furthermore, these traits are stark differences from the simple male pattern traits, with non-aggressive leadership and empathy standing out as complete opposites of the male pattern. The important idea here is that yes there are two different patterns, and that is important, but that these patterns can be attained by any gender. The value of this is that identity determined by a persons actions, rather than their gender. The identity, passions, and actions of person should be what defines an individual, not predetermined ideas based on one's sex.

To fit with Wilhelm's dark comments about the survival of humanity, Tiptree sees that the survival of humanity rests on a simple but difficult idea, our need to develop good Mothering (15). Mothering does not reside only with the women as it takes the assistance of men, who, according to Tiptree, need to focus on assisting the Mothering pattern rather than focusing on their "irrelevant male activities" (15). If men and women cannot embrace and join together to focus on Mothering humanity may very well end, which is the opposite of Wilhelm's view that equality will not help solve world problems (Wilhelm 66). This idea is paramount in that men and women are both needed to "mother" future generations, and need to work as one in order to protect future generations, even as men forget or alter how they operate in society. However, Tiptree writes: "are women doomed? Can they achieve true liberation and acceptance as full humans in our society? I have grave fears. Because of their physical, political and economic weakness, the women's movement is dependent on the civilized acceptance of men" (Tiptree 16). The system in place was and is run by men, and thus the fate of

women, rests in their hands. Women involved in the fight for equality needed to work with men in order to achieve equality and a future for humanity. However the issue is not women's willingness; rather the question is whether men will allow women to fully operate in society. In this Tiptree offers a different idea than any other in the symposium. While still desiring equality, Tiptree is able to argue, in a more appealing way to men, that women need the men in charge to assist in the fight. The hurdle there rests in the hands of men accepting women, or rather men accepting that the Mothering pattern is important to the future of humanity. They need to accept that the male pattern is inherently flawed, and that the male pattern needs a fully accepting Mothering pattern to operate together to assist humanity. As stated above, Charnas felt gender equality was needed to ensure humanity's existence. Tiptree would agree that gender equality is needed, but gender needs to be more flexible, more fluid, to accommodate both the attributes of the male pattern and those of the Mothering. Gender equality will provide the avenue for the Mothering pattern to be fully accepted by all, which in turn would ensure gender equality.

The lack of oppression creates possibility for women, as well as humanity as a whole, which relates back to the symposium's idea of science fiction. Tiptree sees humanity "as something to be realized ahead. But clearly human beings have something to do with the luminous image you see in a child's eyes—the exploring, undestructive quest for life. I see that undescribed spirit as central to us all" (16). This is where Tiptree's ideas become involved with these writers' ideas of science fiction, that they have a place where they can describe themselves, and Tiptree's Mothering pattern in a way that does not need our current society's approval. Science Fiction is a place for

possibility and thus the possibility for women to be free from oppression. Virginia Kidd, editor of numerous novels and short stories who partook in the symposium, reasons that what attracts people to science fiction is “a willingness to consider questions with no answer, open-ending questions, radical assumptions, revolutionary paths. And not just a willingness, but a passion!” (Kidd 37). These writers showed just that not only in their stories they wrote, but in this symposium itself, and importantly they wanted change, and science fiction was their avenue for that change.

Chapter 2: Gender Bias in Science Fiction

The *Khatru Symposium* was a direct response to the state of women's participation and representation in science fiction in the 1970s, a call to action meant to inspire both readers and writers. . The 1970s marked a time of change and movement for many as they fought for equal rights for women, yet the depiction, participation, and acceptance of women in science fiction of the 1970s lagged behind the progressive trends seen elsewhere. Women who sought to take part in the world of science fiction faced hurdles deriving from sexist genre conventions, assumptions from the publishers, and even the bias of the largely male readership. It was not conducive to creating female characters realistically or equally compared to the male characters. While female characters often fit tropes that Kate Wilhelm said were written in extremes, "bitch, whore, paragon good, step-mother, grandmother" (Wilhelm 10), male characters were malleable and diverse. Thus, the goal for the writers who took part in the symposium, and many others, was to create positive and realistic depictions of female characters in science fiction in order to give the readers a look at what could be. Tiptree's essay on sex "patterns," which challenged the contemporary view of gender, challenged this rigidity and called for flexibility in describing femininity and masculinity.

The polarized nature of gender depictions on the page was matched and reflected by the treatment of male and female science fiction writers. Female science fiction writers were not only stepping outside what was normal in regards to the female characters they created, they were also fighting against sexism themselves, being women in a male dominated field. Writer Samuel R. Delany, author of the successful 1975 novel *Dhalgren*, responded to Jeffrey D. Smith's request to evaluate the accepted

truism that “women science fiction writers don’t sell” (62) by writing of a story of an interaction with editor Piers Dudgeon in regards to author (and fellow symposium participant) Joanna Russ. Dudgeon asked if Delany was familiar with her work, and said that he had, while working for a different publisher, been told to turn down Russ’s stories because “women science fiction writers don’t sell” (62). However he admitted his English publisher, Panther, had successfully published Ursula K. Le Guin. Dudgeon then, according to Delany, began to refer to Le Guin as “he” rather than she “at least six times” (62). Dudgeon’s unconscious error clearly reveals the gender bias at heart of his evaluation of the authors whose work he read and judged. As a famous and successful science fiction writer, according to Dudgeon, Le Guin could only be man.

In the conversation with Delany, Dudgeon also wanted to discuss Joanna Russ’s “When It Changed,” as he had been “just knocked out by it” (63), and wanted to consider publishing another work of hers called *The Female Man* in England. Despite Dudgeon’s positive view of Russ’s works, he was still operating under the assumption that “women science fiction authors don’t sell,” so he felt that to publish Russ’s works would be to do something radical. Relegating Russ’s work to the status of curiosity within the world of science fiction publishing, Dudgeon shows how skewed the mindset was towards women writing science fiction in England during the 1970s. Delany remarks that the situation in America is better, but notes that still the issue is apparent in the mindset of publishers (63). Delany comments that if Dudgeon agreed to publish Russ’s work “within the context of ‘women SF writers don’t sell,’ then he sees publishing women SF novelists as doing something extraordinary, possible quality overcoming innate non-commercialism, pushing something that has a block to overcome from the

beginning” (63). That is unfair and untrue, as Le Guin had previously shown as well as a score of other women science fiction writers. Delany remarks that this mindset furthermore made it even harder for female science fiction writers to be published, since they were all competing for the same few openings that publishers were willing to offer them.

Delany’s story of Russ’s challenges in the publishing world is corroborated by Harlan Ellison, whose work is an integral part of science fiction, including hundreds of published stories, the *Dangerous Visions* collections, and screenplays for *Star Trek* and *Outer Limits*. In his introduction to Joanna Russ’ short story “When It Changed” in *Again, Dangerous Visions*, Ellison speaks of Terry Carr who published Russ’ first novel, *Picnic on Paradise*, after it was passed on by all other major publishers. Ellison reasons that Russ’s difficulty in finding a publisher stemmed from the fact that she was a woman, “I would be willing to bet that at least one of those hardcover editors, males all, unconsciously put the kibosh on the novel because it came from a woman” (Ellison 233-234). Ellison notes that he has no proof for such a claim, but adds dryly that “I’ve been in this business a couple of minutes and I’ve encountered ingrained prejudices that are imbedded so cellular that they are wholly unknown to the men from whom they leach so much fairness and rationality” (234). Delany and Ellison’s honest appraisal of the publishing situation makes the work of female science fiction writers during the 1970s still more impactful and inspiring. Their strength to persevere makes their stories of worlds where women were not defined by stereotypes much more monumental, especially since the grim reality was that editors were ingrained, to a cellular level as Ellison put it, to overlook women writers and completely disregard them.

In a letter to the British fanzine *Algol* Vonda N. McIntyre, author of *Dreamsnake*, which won the Nebula and Hugo awards in 1979, reveals a story of a friend of hers, another female writer that illustrates the sometimes outrageous assumptions which women writing science fiction had to contend. The writer was owed \$150 by her editor for sales of her book, but when she demanded payment the editor replied, “but, my dear, if you need money you should get some from your husband!” (McIntyre 25). McIntyre says that that editor is no longer in the business thankfully, but the anecdote remains a powerful indicator of the publishing climate. The editor’s response implies that this author, despite being published, still should not rely on her own talents for income, that she is still reliant on her husband for money. The mentality of the editor shows not only that he does not care for this writer, but that he does not respect her need and desire to work for herself and feels that her creative achievement is just for her own pleasure.

Obviously, female writers had much to overcome to enable their works to be published. The prevalence of male writers in science fiction also meant that female characters in stories were created in ways that accommodated what the male writers wanted, to fit in their stories to pander and assist male characters in whatever they wished. Published male authors misrepresented women with their female characters, giving readers stories in which female characters were not like real women and contributed to misogynist ideas that were already in the “cellular” makeup of many. Chad Oliver’s short story “King of the Hill,” which deals with how humanity is slowly destroying the Earth from our excessive overuse of land and our carbon footprint, provides a good illustration. The main character, Sam, is the richest person on the

planet, and nearly a hundred years old thanks to his doctors. His wife, Lois, is thirty, attractive, and intelligent. In comparison to her successful husband, her goals appear to have been very trivial, “she had climbed the highest pinnacle on her scale of values; she was the wife of the richest man in the world. She didn’t want a settlement. She wanted it all” (Oliver 181). Her character is defined by what she has accomplished; marrying the richest man in the world and that’s what she has, nothing more. She wants money, but can only become wealthy by marrying a wealthy man. Lois has superficial, self-serving goals, which doesn’t give the reader a positive representation of her.

The story makes clear that Lois does not love Sam. At one point, for example, Sam and Lois are drinking wine together, when Sam announces he is going to bed and she should join him. She replies she will help him, and Oliver writes that she is “reporting for duty” (182), which implies that she is doing what she is supposed to do, going to bed with him and doing her “duty” as a wife. Lois has succeeded in marrying Sam, becoming rich by not by her own means or talents, and now she has no self. Rather, she must “report for duty” with him not out of love, but because she has no other choice. She doesn’t move the plot forward and simply fulfills the role of “Sam’s wife.” She is also depicted as hypocritical and insincere. As Sam and Lois are walking along his estate after he has been working hard, she begins to talk to him and the narrator makes sure to inform the reader of Lois’s insincerity, “she always professed to adore what she called Nature, but she walked along as though every blade of grass were poison ivy” (185). Lois asks Sam a question, and despite being bothered by her presence, he answers her to his own surprise because “he wanted to talk to somebody...Failing that, he talked to Lois” (185). This can be seen as Sam’s internal

monolog, but it also shows how negatively Lois is written. She is portrayed as someone who is lesser; her goals are superficial and that she only completes her “duty” and offers Sam nothing else.

The work of novelist, journalist and screenwriter Bernard Wolfe, also offers excellent examples of the rampant sexism that characterized the genre at this time. In a short story called “Bisquit Position,” found in *Again, Dangerous Visions* in 1972, the reader is introduced to a news reporter named Blake who meets a neighbor named Mari, who is given the name “Master Greg’s Mistress, Mum of Greg Areas” (Wolfe 289), Greg being her husband whom she often escapes to go about adventures on her own or with Blake. She is found at the beginning of the story on Blake’s porch, having escaped from her husband’s party. She is wearing a revealing dress and Blake makes a note of how her legs look: “the mesh-held thigh exposed in one of the gown’s slits looked lank enough to be circled by two unexact hands but worth taking hold” (288). There is no mention of her allowing him to take hold of her thighs; rather the implication is that he is thinking of taking hold regardless of what she wishes.

As the title indicates, the story focuses on Mari’s dog Bisquit, or just Bisk, who is described as a beautiful female dog (294). While Blake is over to dinner with Mari and Greg, he watches as Bisk rolls on her back to allow Mari to pet her. Blake sees the dog “expose herself” to Mari, and immediately connects the dog’s behavior to Mari’s: “Blake was trying not to see those furred legs abandoned to the air, Mari Selander’s stinky legs exposed to the lap and flamboyantly parted too” (294). Here the narrator creates a parallel between Bisk and Mari. Bisk is often found in “total invitation” (295) stretched out on the floor, and the same language is used for Mari, who stand with her “legs

planted wide in taunt more than invitation” (295). Bisk does this in order to be petted, and thus receive a bisquit, and according to the narration Mari does the same, acting like a dog seeking pleasure from Blake. The story progresses as Blake arrives at his home to find Mari in his bathroom and she tells him, “you come here and give me all the best bisquits” (296) and then “be my lavish bisquit man” (297). The comparison is as obvious as it is crude: Mari is a (literal) “bitch,” demanding treats in exchange for submission.

In a publishing environment hostile to the participation of the female science fiction writers, it is perhaps unsurprising that the examples given above represent different types of depicted female characters common at this time. If male editors and writers produced sexist representations of women in established science fiction publications, what about the readers themselves? If we turn our attention to fan fiction of the 1970s, do we see a substantial difference in the attitudes towards women? After all, fan fiction gives voice to the fans themselves as they write stories they want to read, often dealing with themes that did and do not exist. Today with the assistance of the internet, there are readily available fan fiction stories about popular characters in media, but fan fiction began in paper publications created by fans and for fans who were then able to read stories that directly embodied what fans desired from whatever story or popular character of the time. As the popularity of science fiction growing rapidly during the 1950s, so too did a corollary industry in fan fiction. In her comprehensive study on the ever growing popularity of fan fiction, *Fic: Why Fanfiction is Taking Over the World* (2013), Ann Jamison describes the emergence of science fiction-based fan fiction, which grew as the fans needed more stories that they enjoyed reading. These “zines”

have always been and remain popular with fans and those in academia. Jamison writes, “when you talk to early science fiction fans, what they want to talk about are zines: writing content to ensure they could get their hands on copies” (Jamison 75). These fans did not have the content or amount of content they desired, so they took it upon themselves to create stories that they and others would enjoy reading.

The importance of fan fiction is that it is the voice of the fans coming into print through zines, making their stories and voices heard without the need for the publishing establishment. There are obvious differences between zine writers and published authors then and now, but the quality or style of these stories are not as important as the stories they tell, and what they then in turn inspire. Many popular science fiction writers began their careers writing fan fiction, even sending letters to their “idols” of fan fiction. Recognizing a marketing opportunity, even successful writers themselves got involved with zines, replying to stories and artwork they found enjoyable. Jamison writes that Ray Bradbury himself “was a lifelong fanboy; he wrote to artists and authors he admired for autographs throughout his career—long after he become not just a writer but a global public institution in his own right” (75). Relationships such as these powered science fiction fandom, as the fans writing for or reading zines were able to interact with their heroes of the genre and have their own stories be part of the growing genre as well as being appreciated by their heroes. The readers and writers of zines played a major role in growing science fiction in ways that enabled young fans to later become successful science fiction writers.

It is generally accepted among critics that fan fiction has historically operated as a way to “open up” genres to new ideas, interpretations, and even identities. For

example, fan fiction has long existed that focuses on “queering” representations of same sex relationships, such as the famous partnership of *Star Trek*’s Spock and Captain Kirk, that would seem, on the surface, to deny such readings. As Jamison writes, “fanfiction transforms assumption mainstream culture routinely makes about gender, sexuality, desire, and to what degree we want them to match up” (19). In this sense, fan fiction is often regarded as a progressive force in generic change. Was this also the case in fan (science) fiction of the 1970s? That is, did it better reflect the real-world concerns of the growing feminist movement?

Early fan fiction writing, or zines “were almost entirely male-dominated” (Jamison 75), and so many of these early stories were dominated by characters that were created by men before widespread acceptance of the feminist movement, making many of their created characters very unrealistic, and suited only to what these writers wanted or needed their female characters to be. While there were zines published that catered towards female fans, such as *Femizine* during the 1950s, they were very much anomalies. The majority of zines were created for men and catered to men, just as much of the published science fiction did. The zine *Algol* for example, featured naked and nearly naked drawings of women in nearly every issue, sometimes even their covers. That some readers found this objectionable is unsurprising. In 1978, for example, *Algol 14* published a letter was published from a reader named Miriam, who had written to state her dislike of the centerfold women in each issue. The editor, Andrew Porter replies dismissively, explaining that “75%” of “his” readers are men, and thus that he gears each issue specifically towards them. He also jokes that he will consider drawing one naked man for each 3 naked women (Porter 60). Clearly he does

not view this to be an issue and continues mockingly that “I’ve been informed, however, that my new printer has sensitive young high school girls—child labor if I’ve ever heard of it before—in their employ, so perhaps *Algo!* will print fewer artistic pictures in the future” (60). Porter clearly does not see Miriam’s complaint as important. Miriam is obviously a paying subscriber to Porter’s zine, but her opinion is thrown by the wayside, and in a way that her opinion itself is shown as non serious. Interestingly, Porter does not even consider the possibility that there may be other female readers with similar complaints; rather, he suggests that the only women likely to come into contact with his publication are the “girls” who are hired to help print it. Female readership is marginalized and Miriam’s legitimate concern trivialized simultaneously.

Numerous *Algo!* issues feature drawings of naked women throughout, and often on the cover of each issue. Though the participants in the Khatru symposium were writing stories with realistic female characters, much of what *Algo!* contained was doing the opposite, showing the polarity of female characters created, in the most literal way possible, through illustrations. Another feature in *Algo!* used pictures representing writers of different genres of literature, and every genre is represented as a man except for romance (*Algo!* 15). This is the visual representation of women throughout fan fiction in the 1970s. Even when a zine deliberately chose to include female characters, it did so in a way that undermined their importance. For example, *Tangent* the editor Ian Garbutt decided to create a mascot for the zine named Tesla, because “she helps to add atmosphere to the mag in the form of an editorial ‘mascot.’ She’s nice to look at and fills up space” (Garbutt 13). Tesla is meant to be a futuristic human female, but she is often show drawn with little clothing, and in promiscuous positions. Her purpose is to

“add atmosphere” and “fill up space”; in short, she was created to be eye candy for the zine when they needed something or someone to occupy blank parts of the pages. This is no different than professional sports and their cheerleaders being used as eye candy, of course. However, science fiction should be the fiction of possibility, and Tesla does not represent a futuristic female who is full of possibility. Rather, she occupies a female stereotype created to fill men’s desires. Yet even as sexualized as Tesla was, she still did not gratify all of *Tangent’s* readers. A few issues after Tesla’s introduction in *Tangent*, a reader named Greg voiced his displeasure calling the new mascot, “Tesla: a boobless wonder, arms too thin” (Hills 5). Even Tesla, created to be eye candy for the readers of *Tangent* still appears to not fit the wants and needs of her male “fans.”

Clearly, science fiction zines in the 1970s were littered with male-created female characters that fit tropes that men wanted them to fit. What is interesting here, again, is that fan fiction is and has been historically a place where misrepresented groups have had a place where they can tell their stories, as film and literature often do not tell stories about them properly. As Jamison writes “fic provides a venue for all kinds of writers who are shut out from official culture, whether by demographic or skill or taste” (Jamison 19); she further notes that “the majority of this not-for-profit writing is written by women” (19). Yet it is important to note that science fiction fan fiction was not dominated by women at this time, clearly. Women had been represented poorly in science fiction since its inception, and thus one would reason that they would be very involved in science fiction fan fiction. Fan fiction has always been a place where underrepresented people are given a voice to tell their stories about themselves where they were not

created falsely. However, as my research will show, this was not the case for women in science fiction fan fiction in the 1970s.

In a 1964 issue of the science fiction zine *Alien*, editor Tony Edwards writes, in a review of a novel by A. Bertram Chandler, “I want my heroes to have approximately the same weakness as myself, namely swearing and women” (Edwards 23). These “weaknesses” are actually strengths, in that Edwards can relate to the “hero” of Chandler’s novel. Both of these weaknesses are not something the “hero” must overcome in order to save the day or achieve a better understanding of himself, but rather make him relatable to male readers, and idolized in a way that brings this “hero” closer to the male reader. What this does for the reader is he is able to accept that womanizing is acceptable because a “hero” does the same thing. Edwards laments that he thinks most science fiction lacks “sex”, and argues that “I believe that the use of swear words plus sex, has done a lot to give people in the story real character” (Edwards 23). What is suggested by Edwards’ belief that profanity and “womanizing” are ideal masculine traits, even in a futuristic hero? Giving characters faults or weaknesses is needed as it makes created characters relatable. However, here the idealization of the hero comes at the expense of the nameless female characters he “womanizes.” Edwards’ logic ensures that male readers can root for male characters that interact and desire female characters that fit a set trope, but there is no freedom for the female characters.

The fans of these zines truly did want sexualized, two-dimensional female characters, and many of the stories I found showed this. For example, David J. Wingrove’s short story “L’Esprit Nouveau” published in *Tangent*, describes a fortune

teller that the male main character interacts with as very sexually active: “this evening she would return to her large, modern ranch to spend a few sensuous hours with her latest lover” (Wingrove 7). In sharp contrast to the “womanizing” male hero, the fortune teller is shown to be merely promiscuous. Sexuality in women is generally defined negatively in 1970s science fiction fanzines. In a story by Steev Higgins published in *Tangent* called “Flight,” two characters, a male named Harris and an unnamed female, who are both dealing with some kind of mental turmoil. The female character is “a whore” and is never given a name. “She had been born a whore” (Higgins 13), the narrator observes, and Harris derives comfort from sex with her, as well as sharing with her of the entire story of why he is struggling emotionally. The reader is told that “the whore” is also struggling but never once does Harris ask her why or what he can do to assist her, as he gets what he needs from her and is able to move on with his life. Only once in the story does she begin to speak of her life and why it has been difficult; Harris replies, “you care too much to be a whore” (12). Her problems do not matter to Harris, since he only needs her for his own sexual pleasure and an escape from his problems. This is another example of what Edwards wants in his “heroic” male characters, but this emphasis on the importance of male experience continues to rob these female characters of any sense of possibility, as well as skewing male and females in their ideas of what makes a heroic male and female character.

Other stories show even less regard for female suffering. In Mike Gibson’s “The Magician and the Tree Sprite” published in *Nebula*, the main character, a magician named Huffig, saves a tree sprite, who is female, naked, and beautiful from peril. Huffig’s heroism in saving this “shy and beautiful” tree sprite (Gibson 12), is undercut by

his selfishness; he claims that she owes him for his actions, that she must come with him. When she declines, he hits her and forces her to travel with him even though she tells him she cannot leave the forest as she will die, to which Huffig replies, "Then a short life and a sweet one for you! Your pleasuring though brief, shall provide many a sweet memory!" (13). Huffig's initial "heroic" actions allow him to enslave and force this tree sprite into a form of slavery in order to ensure himself and others pleasure, which will lead to her death, something that he shows no remorse over as he is getting what he desires, even if he has to force her in order to get it. Huffig is able to do as he wishes with the sprite while her purpose is to give what male characters want from her, and ultimately to die because of it.

It would be easy to dismiss the examples I've given above as exceptions or anomalies, but unfortunately, that is not the case. Women readers and authors of science fiction in the 1970s were both under attack from within their chosen genre. Editors of the genre often overlooked or actively discriminated against female authors, despite their talents (As Harlan Ellison wrote in 1972, "as far as I'm concerned, the best writers in sf today are the women" [232].) Male authors and editors in established publications depicted women in degrading images and languages, reducing them to two-dimensional figures and stereotypes. Finally, as biased as these representations were, they were evidently still not misogynist enough to satisfy a largely male fan base. While fan fiction has traditionally been an avenue for under- and misrepresented groups, 1970s fan fiction intensified, if anything, the assault on women readers. It remained up to a few far-seeing mainstream writers to open up the genre of science

fiction to progressive, empowered, and realistic images of women, as the next chapter will show.

Chapter 3: Differing Approaches

Fan fiction is often the desired path or voice of underrepresented groups, who have no voice or characters in published fiction and film. However fan fiction in the 1970s was not that and contained rigid female characters that were nothing more than entertainment for the dominant male reader group. If it was not the fans who created realistic characters in the 1970s, who was writing for the women? It took the writers themselves to create stories for underrepresented groups. Writers such as Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Kate Wilhelm, and James Tiptree Jr. (Alice B. Sheldon), led the way, creating realistic female characters that challenged the ideas of how female characters should be written, and accepted. Their stories gave female characters possibility, gave them a chance to be what they wished to be. Through this their voices were heard as women were battling to receive equal rights. In their stories they were showing the readers that women could, and are capable of anything they wish, which is opposite of how culture has treated and shown them. They however took different paths in showing these ideas to readers, Le Guin and Wilhelm use an indirect theoretical approach, while Russ's intervention is much more direct. Tiptree, meanwhile, is similar to Le Guin's and Wilhelm's, but with twists of his own.

Ursula K. Le Guin is not just known for being a prolific female science fiction writer, but for being one the best science fiction writers of all time. She is one of the few recipients of the Damon Knight Memorial Grand Master Award recipients, given by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, the highest level of award given to a science fiction or fantasy writer. The two most important science fiction awards given for a novel are the Hugo and the Nebula. In 1970 no one had won both in the same year,

nor had a woman ever won the award for a novel. Le Guin broke both records as she won both awards for *The Left Hand of Darkness* in 1970, a feat she would repeat in 1975 with *The Dispossessed*. This acted as a statement, and inspiration to other female writers as Le Guin won these awards with a feminist work, but also a story that guides the reader towards a greater understanding of what it means to be a human. Le Guin winning these awards opened these awards ushered other women towards the spotlight. Three different women would win the Hugo for best novel in the 1970s, Le Guin in 1970 for *The Left Hand of Darkness* and in 1975 for *The Dispossessed*, Kate Wilhelm for *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* in 1977, and Vonda N. McIntyre for *Dreamsnake* in 1979, which also won the Nebula award for best novel.

The talent of Le Guin is in her subtlety, as she conveys themes throughout her works that do not jump out to the reader as being feminist, or environmentalist, but rather just exist and are shown in a way that eases readers towards a better understanding. Le Guin's works can be described simply as humanist, but even that is undercutting the quality and themes of her writings. Le Guin does not make her themes readily apparent to the reader, unlike Joanna Russ, as I will show; rather Le Guin's themes are found throughout often nearly hidden to the reader. This makes the reader very important in interpreting the novel's meaning, even as important as the story itself. Doing this, Le Guin avoids appearing as an author of propaganda, as Russ's writings can be viewed as. This is shown throughout *The Left Hand of Darkness*, a story of the alien planet of Winter, home of the Gethenians. The story centers around Genly Ai, a Terran (human) ambassador, whose goal is to establish a treaty in the form of a trade deal with Ekumen, a confederation of planets. Ai finds the Gethenians a difficult people

to understand, as they are like Terrans except for one aspect, which is that they have no sex unless they are in their period of mating, called kemmer. During this time they take on either a male or female gender in order to mate, then return to their ambisexual form, with no gender defined.

Ai has a difficult time understanding the Gethenians as he calls them all by male pronouns, but even finds that does not seem to accurately label them. This is where the novel separates itself from Le Guin, as the reader is able to analyze the reasons why Ai uses male pronouns for all the Gethenians. Le Guin decision to write her characters this way, is up to the reader to figure out and decide. Still, as Christine Cornell points out in an article in *Extrapolation* of Ai: “if we accept for a moment that Genly experiences an inability (or near inability) to image a fully realized androgynous being, then assigning gender is inevitable” (Cornell 318). Ai’s closest and only true friend on Winter is a Gethenian named Estraven, whom Ai has a difficult time labeling as him or her, “my efforts took the form of self-consciously seeing a Gethenian first as a man, then as a woman, forcing him into those categories so irrelevant to his nature and so essential to my own” (Le Guin 12). No matter how Ai labels Estraven, he feels he is not labeling him correctly. His identity is not derived from gender, as Gethenians have none, but rather, as Ai will find out, through his actions, personality, and class. Ai does try, he notes that labeling one based on gender is “essential” to him as a way to simplify the way a person is. The question the reader can ask, is why is it essential that Ai and ourselves find it essential to name a person male or female based on their appearance? Our world and our culture have spent generations labeling male and female, which often places both genders into a set category, a set identity. Our gender is an important part

of our identity, but as Le Guin shows us throughout the novel, our gender should not be the only thing that defines us. It is important to note that Ai is the only male on the planet, he is out of place surrounded by Gethenians, who he does not understand, and must find a way to deal with his loneliness. A way he does this as Cornell writes: “in order to cope with his situation Genly has populated the planet with others like himself” (Cornell 318). Cornell’s observation of Ai is that he is alone, so he creates a way through his own narration to surround with something, a gender, that he is familiar and comfortable with, men.

Ai is not the first Terran to visit Winter. Investigators have been sent long ago to conduct reconnaissance. These investigators were befuddled by the Gethenians lack of gender, and ultimately saw their ambisexuality as a negative. The Investigators assume that the Gethenians were created or planted by Terrans long ago, and their best guess at their lack of gender is due to some kind of accident, “accident, possibly; natural selection, hardly. Their ambisexuality has little or no adaptive value” (95). That leaves the question of how did they evolve to be without gender? And does ambisexuality really have no adaptive value? Their planet is dominated by kemmer, the period in which their bodies are able to have sex, and thus transform to male or female, and their society is built around kemmer. Even their gender during kemmer is not chosen by the individual: “they do not know whether they will be male or the female, and have no choice in the matter” (97). A key aspect of their society is that both individuals take responsibility for raising the child, and each has an equal chance of being the one to birth the child. However the investigator sees this as negative, “therefore nobody here is quite so free as a free male anywhere else” (100). This ignorance is astounding as it

shows that the investigator sees the Gethenians as being slaves to kemmer, slaves to their random selection of who will carry and birth the child. This guides the reader to an important question: are the Gethenians slaves of chance, or rather are Terrans slaves to our dualistic society? The investigator offers no answer but poses a theory, “in fact the whole tendency to dualism that pervades human thinking may be found to be lessened, or changed” (100). This idea of duality, that occupies our way of thinking, is challenged, and shaken to the foundation of what this investigator knows and believes. The importance of a persons gender is stripped away on Winter, allowing the individuals to define themselves, which relates to feminist movements where women want to be identified by their actions, not forced into certain categories that are based on their gender. The investigator brings this to the reader's attention, “one is respected and judged only as a human being. It is an appalling experience” (101). This “appalling experience” from Ai is him not being first judged based on the fact of his gender, but rather by his actions.

In *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Le Guin challenges ideas that have long plagued humanity, the idea of a set separation between genders. Rather than emphasizing explicitly feminist themes, which could alienate some readers, she deconstructs the very notion of a gender binary as a way of exploring how we understand identity. Her subtle but profound approach ushers in a decade of science fiction where feminist novels appear often. She challenges the reader to rethink how we view gender, and how we, like Ai, automatically place genders with certain stereotypes as that is what we are used to. Ultimately, Ai realizes that gender does not matter. While Estraven and Ai are hiking across a vast ice sheet, Estraven asks Ai about women and their differences from men.

To this Ai does not how to give a direct answer but states that the single most important event in one's life is being born male or female (253), as that will dictate the rest of the individual's life. That response is sadly true for our own society, and one that both challenges and pushes us to question how to change that fact. Estraven then asks a question of human females that through his perspective appears harmless and innocent, but through the reader's eyes is taken another way: "equality is not the general rule, then? Are they mentally inferior?" (253). Ai does not know how to answer this question and lists the female's physical differences. Still this is vital to the message that Le Guin is writing. If we do not have equality, then are women inferior? If women are not inferior, why do we not have equality?

Joanna Russ, like Ursula Le Guin wrote feminist science fiction, but unlike Le Guin, Russ doesn't write the feminist message in a narrative that forces the reader to uncover it. For Russ each page in an opportunity to force the reader to question their own perspective on how women are treated and viewed. Despite Russ's almost propagandistic political messages, her writing style won her many prominent fans. As I mentioned in a previous chapter, Harlan Ellison was a noteworthy fan. He wrote that science fiction up to the 1970s had been dominated by men, "but squatter's rights to the territory simple aren't good enough anymore. Not with talents like Joanna Russ" (Ellison 235). Russ not only science fiction, but also taught at universities, and produced many literary critiques, such as *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, and academic studies such, as *To Write Like a Woman: Essays in Feminism and Science Fiction*. Her fictional works won her awards, and gained the attention of many, for better or for worse.

Importantly through her writings, she challenged the cultural norms for not just how to create female characters, but also how to view women's roles in society.

For her short story "When It Changed" and novel *The Female Man*, Russ sends the reader to her created world of Whileaway. In this world the male population has been killed off by a plague, leaving the women to fend for themselves. This seems like a tragedy, but those on Whileaway have survived just fine without men to protect them, to hunt, to build cities, and raise children. On Whileaway, women have found that they are quite capable and carry on with their lives without needing assistance from men. On Whileaway all at age 17 must learn how to "run routine machinery, dig people out of landslides, oversee food factories. They lay pipe. They fix machinery" (Russ 51), and by age 21 everyone "is able to do any job on the planet" (52). The idea that women are not capable of doing certain jobs is thrown out the door. This also hints to resolve issues of class inequality as well. On Whileaway a woman is able to do many things, and ultimately capable of doing and being anything she chooses. Their lives are full of possibility. The idea of Whileaway may seem farfetched, but that should not be what the reader sees. What these stories do is show an idea that women are capable of anything and not reliant on men. Important, it is meant to show the readers a new way to view and think of the women around them. "When It Changed" gave the first look at Whileaway and was published in 1972, a time when women were fighting for their equality. Whileaway supposes that women are more than capable of living without men, but importantly that they are equal.

In "When It Changed" men from Earth arrive on Whileaway and are taken aback by the lack of people they see, and continually ask "where are all your people?" (Russ

237). Those from Whileaway say that a plague killed half their population, thinking that is the answer the men want. However, the main character of this story, Janet, realizes that when these men from Earth ask, “where are all the people,” they specifically mean men (238). This idea that “people” implies men, rather than humanity is common throughout history and culture, and is challenged by Russ. The women on Whileaway have survived without men, found ways to reproduce, and have continued their lives, and their culture, without men. However, the men from Earth need the women from Whileaway, as well as their technology, as they have destroyed Earth through warfare, and have lost their home. This idea that women do not need men, that they can survive on their own, compared to the men of Earth, who have sought out Whileaway because they need their help to survive is interesting. It is the men that need the women, due to the men of Earth destroying their own planet, that they have come to Whileaway begging desperately for the women of Whileaway to save them. The leader of the men from Earth meets and discusses how vital Whileaway is for the continuance of “mankind,” even attempting to tell Janet, and her wife Katy that they had true equality on Earth (280). Both Janet and Katy doubt the truth in his words. Equality here is used as a bribe, and can be read as empty words as the leader from Earth attempts to sway the Whileaway women that he can and will offer them equality. The leader seems incapable of understanding that the Whileaway women do not need him, they do not need his idea of equality, and they are surviving just fine without men.

After their first encounter with these men from Earth, Janet ponders the meaning of the men’s arrival, and thinks over all the questions the men asked, and of the sole question they wanted to ask but did not, “which of you plays the role of the man?” (241).

While the men do not ask this, it is implied. In the standards of the men from Earth, all the women in *Whileaway* play “the role of men.” Janet is a winner of three duels, and a police officer, while her wife, Katy “drives like a maniac” which causes their daughter Yuriko to fall asleep (236). Yuriko will soon turn twelve and “will disappear for weeks on end to come back grimy and proud, having knifed her first cougar or shot her first bear” (236). Russ throws the reader into *Whileaway* showing how capable women can be, implying that women are not the “weaker” sex that perhaps men have just taken away possibility from them by forcing them into roles created by men. Shortly after Janet and Katy leave the leader from Earth, Katy grabs a rifle and points it at the man through the window, but Janet stops her from killing the man. Katy’s act reflects pure rage due to the fact that the man sees them as lesser, that these men will attempt to take away freedom from her and Janet’s daughters, take away possibility (241).

Janet appears again in the novel *The Female Man*, a story about four women, including Janet herself, Jeannine, Joanna, and Jael who is the one who brings them all together for the purpose of establishing women soldiers in their worlds to fight the men. Jeanne Cortiel’s academic study *Demand My Writing: Joanna Russ, Feminism, and Science Fiction*, Cortiel argues that: “all of the worlds have in their present or in their past a patriarchal society that shapes the existence of each of the protagonists” (Cortiel 83). In Jael’s world men and women are at war with each other, as the women are attempting to overthrow the male patriarchy. Jeannine’s world is a “stark patriarchy” (83), and Janet’s world has eliminated males. Each of these characters give the reader a different window into different worlds. However, this is not a “call to arms” for women to rise up against men in an act of war, but rather showing how destructive men, the

patriarchy has been in suppressing women. The reader is not introduced to Jael until much later in the novel, but Joanna and Jeannine are in awe of Janet, a woman from a Whileaway where she occupies roles in society that in their worlds are limited to men. The men who meet Janet are also confused by her and she even gives an interview to a man who is taken aback by many things about Janet. He asks if those on Whileaway miss men. Janet replies him that the first generation of women missed men, but as each generation was born, they missed men less until the fourth generation did not care that men were gone (Russ 10). The interviewer implies in his question to Janet, that the women of Whileaway have lost something important, something crucial to their existence, but Janet shows him, and those watching, that they did not lose anything that they would care about in just four generations. Four generations is all that it takes for women to forget, to not care about what men “offered” to them.

Not all of Russ’s works use such a direct method to address her political sentiments. In *We Who Are About To...* she uses a method similar to that of Le Guin. The story is of a spaceship that crashes far away from all other human life with no chance of rescue, whose survivors decide to start a new colony in the hope of a rescue coming many years later. The survivors of the crash come from all walks of life, including a rich woman named Valeria who has purchased a good looking husband Victor, and their daughter Lori who has spent most of her life very sick. The group also includes a woman Nathalie, who was on her way to attend military training, and the narrator whose name, which is only hinted at, may be Elaine, a drug addict. What the crash does to the survivors is erase all forms of identity, and they all are forced to redefine themselves based on abilities, actions, and ultimately their sex. The male

survivors decide that they must begin a colony in order to ensure that humanity, is able to survive. Obviously in order to do that they need the young women of the group to be willing to assist, something that the narrator does not wish to be a part of. What this does to the women that are capable of childbirth is force them into a category of importance, since they must survive, and thus they are relegated to tasks in around their small compound. Their purpose becomes birthing children, with or without their consent. The narrator does not wish to have this life foisted upon herself. Russ is not writing a novel that deems childbirth as a negative experience, but rather she is writing a novel that suggests that women ultimately need to be in control of themselves, rather than letting others to dictate what they can and can't do. It is important to note, that Russ's novel belongs to a group of science fiction novels and films that considers the role of fertile women in a post-apocalyptic world. From novels as Wilhelm's *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang* (which I will discuss), Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), and Meg Elison's *The Book of the Unnamed Midwife* (2014), and films such as Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* (2006) and George Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015).

The narrator's concern for the groups survival is their need for food and water. The ship only has a certain amount. The men refuse to let any of the women attempt to eat or drink anything on the planet in fear of it poisoning them. If the women who can give birth all die, then the possibility of their survival dies with them. The narrator sees the futility of their actions, she does not believe rescue will ever come, nor that they will be able to survive. The narrator is not seeking death, or has a death wish, but she sees that their chances of surviving and establishing a colony are slim to none. She does not

want to spend the next many of years of her life giving birth to children, and damning them to a planet to die. The narrator wishes to explore the planet, she wishes to live her life in ways that she desires it to be lived, she wishes for possibility. There is a distinct difference between her and the other women, as the narrator is the only woman to openly disagree with being forced into pregnancies. She and the other young women are viewed strictly as vessels for future children; as fellow survivor John tells the narrator: "Nathalie's life and yours and Lori's and Cassie's are too valuable to put in danger. You are childbearers" (18). Their chance to establish their lives is taken away, their possibility to be anything else is taken from them. The narrator refuses her given identity and kills all of the survivors out of self-protection. Speaking into a voice recorder, she gives her reasons for murdering the other survivors: "you killed them. Why? *They were trying to kill me.* Why? *To prevent me.* From doing what? *Dying*" (84). Her words are dark, but truthful. With their survival nonexistent on the planet, she refuses to accept a role that would take away her sense of self, her own identity. She did not want to be used to ensure temporary survival that would still mean her, the others', and potential children's, deaths. They were "preventing" her from dying on her own terms, preventing possibility, preventing her own choice.

Kate Wilhelm's *Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang*, which won the Hugo award for best novel in 1977, deals with the a similar theme as *We Are Who About To....* Wilhelm's novel is about humans who have destroyed Earth, causing disease, infertility, chaos, and eventual wars. The story focuses on a family that creates a community that survives the collapse of society brought on by environmental changes created by humanity. This community relies on cloning in order to reproduce, rather than natural

means as the majority of humanity are infertile due to environmental changes. The initial “family” of the community creates clones, and then the clones rid themselves of the original members, establishing their own community of clones. Still they are not able to solve the problem of fertility; only in rare and random cases are the clones fertile, and when they are found to be so they are forced to be “breeders.” Molly, a clone who becomes cast away from the others due to her thinking independently from her other clones asks of another clone, Ben, if these breeders are free, if they feel happy. To this Ben tells her they are sad due to having to give up their children over and over, that they are heavily medicated, and live apart from their children and the rest of the community (Wilhelm 126-127). They are slaves due to their ability to have children. Later in the novel Molly has a child, Mark, and manages to keep him away from the others for nearly five years before being found and herself taken to become a breeder. During her time there, in which she is never able to have another child, she describes her emotions, “it was not the separation, it was the humiliation of being treated as an object, of being drugged and used forced to cooperate in that procedure unquestioningly” (139). Molly and the other breeders become what the narrator of Russ’s novel fears to be, and kills in order not to become.

James Tiptree Jr. fits awkwardly into the categories I have outlined here. He wrote feminist science fiction in the form of short stories that dealt with themes of violence towards women, sex or lack thereof, and death. His stories often appear void of hope, in that their characters battle their own identities, and often at the end of the stories characters die, or depart from the world which the stories take place. Tiptree’s biographer Julie Phillips, notes that Philip K. Dick wrote of what it means to be human,

and that Tiptree's stories posed the question "can the body be trusted? Will it betray us? What does it want? Can we get rid of it?" (Phillips 2). Tiptree's stories show this battle between what our physical bodies actually mean and how they represent themselves, or betray us. Much mystery revolved around Tiptree in the 1970s. Who was he? Where did he come from? Why didn't he show himself at the popular science fiction conventions? The general answer was that he enjoyed his privacy, which was partially true. However in 1977 James Tiptree Jr. was found to be a pen name, and the talented individual behind the pen was Alice B. Sheldon.

To understand the deeper themes that are found in Tiptree's stories, one needs to understand Alice B. Sheldon or as she preferred Alli (8). She lived an interesting life full of adventure, and questioned her own identity. Her mother, Mary Hastings Bradley was a prolific writer of children's travel books based around Alli's travels to Africa. Much of Alli's childhood was spent in Africa with her parents taking part in safaris across dangerous lands. During this time she saw firsthand strange events that many adults have not seen, such as the hunting of exotic animals. Her time in Africa felt as though she was visiting an alien world, so distant and different from her home in Chicago. She also experienced other "strange encounters" with the native populations of Africa, who were often naked. She heard stories of severe violent acts on women, saw the grotesque effects of diseases, and watched a girl her age dying of leprosy (40). Her travels greatly impacted her childhood as well as themes in her stories.

Robert Silverberg, winner of both Hugo and Nebula awards and author of dozens of science fiction stories, wrote of Tiptree in an introduction to a collection of Tiptree stories that, "it has been suggested that Tiptree is female, a theory that I find absurd, for

there is to me something ineluctably masculine about Tiptree's writing" (3). This perspective is not negative towards Tiptree or women, but rather an observation of the times. In the 1970s men and women wrote science fiction differently in many ways, as my earlier examples make clear. Contrary to Silverberg's assumptions, Tiptree was a woman. But where Alli's childhood experiences, as well as her own struggle with her identity, benefit Tiptree's writings, is that Tiptree writes male characters so well. Perhaps Alli's time on safaris, seeing the world from a different and rugged perspective gave her writings more of a masculine but also sensitive tone, or perhaps it was her own issues with identity. Another aspect of her youth was growing up in 1920s and 1930s America, in which women had to fight for the right to be taken seriously. As Phillips writes of women at this time, "they were handed, not the keys to a fast car, but the handle of a shovel, and saw that they would first have to build the roads themselves" (79). Women were not given their freedom or possibility, but in fact they had to pave the way themselves.

Alli was always a woman in a man's world. She spent her youth in undeveloped Africa, then worked at the CIA in the 1950s, earning her Ph.D, and became a science fiction writer at a time when science fiction was dominated by men. Her own identity, her view of herself as being female, was in question. She noted that most of her troubles were due to the fact that she was born a woman, not that being a woman is a negative, but rather that in the world we live being a woman does not grant one the same advantages as being born a man does. She wrote in an essay, part of which is reproduced in Phillips' biography, in which she lists positive and negative traits, and things she had done and reasons that the majority of them were a direct result of her

being female (Phillips 180). Taking a new name, James Tiptree Jr., and a new identity allowed her to fully dive into her thoughts in the genre of science fiction, a perfect fit for her, since “it made her feel taken seriously when she wrote about what she knew: guns, hunting, politics, war” (6). Importantly, too, science fiction has a power to “predict change [and thus] it is highly suited to talking about women’s experience” (6).

Tiptree’s stories deal with gender identity, and the important issue of not understanding others’ gender identity, which is made evident in “The Women Men Don’t See.” The story centers around government agent Don Fenton, a pilot Esteban, and a mother and her daughter, Ruth and Althea, who survive a plane crash together. The story is told through Don’s perspective, which is important as through his eyes the reader sees the turmoil he goes through, not related to the plane crash, but in his interactions with Ruth and Althea. His first time seeing Ruth and Althea is on a previous flight when he is tossed into Ruth’s seat and apologizes to

a double female blur. The near blur nods quietly. The younger blur in the window seat goes on looking out. I continue down the aisle, registering nothing. Zero. I never would have looked at them or thought of them again (Tiptree 155).

Ruth and Althea are just “blurs” to Don, and they mean nothing to him. Don is defending himself for encroaching on them, but his defense of himself is unneeded. There is little reason he must reassure himself about how he views the women, his response is inherently male. He assumes he wronged or rather bothered two women and must justify himself to himself that the people he wronged have no place in his mind. Why? To protect himself from an event where the women he bothered may seek him out to in

turn bother him in some regard. That answer does not appear logical, but deconstructing his response, leads to that explanation.

After the first flight lands Don is invited on their charter flight by Ruth. His first reaction is not of gratitude, but rather confusion that Ruth would allow him, a stranger, to accompany them on their flight: “how come this woman has already looked me over carefully enough to accept me on her plane?” (116). His fear is not for the women, but rather a possibility that he could act violently towards them, he thus fears himself. After sitting in their chartered plane he notes that Althea “could be an attractive body if there was any spark at all. There isn’t” (116). This happens directly after his judgment of Ruth allowing him to join them on their flight. Don almost allays his own fears as the first thing he does on the plane is acknowledge how attractive young Althea is, only to claim she isn’t because she has no “spark,” whatever that is to him. This initial thought that Althea is attractive, only to be taken back by himself due to her lack of “spark” show his inherently male tendencies of viewing women as attractive, only to then find a reason to think that the young girl is unattractive because she is young. Don reduces Althea into an object even before he considers whether or not she has a “spark.” The charter plane has engine troubles and begins its descent towards the ground, but Don notes how calm Ruth and Althea are, observing that “the women behind me haven’t made a sound” (117). When the plane crashes they all survive. Only Esteban, the pilot, is injured, and the first noise either of the women make is Althea saying “mother, mother” (117) in order to get her Ruth to release her protective grip. No chaotic screams, no wailing, nothing and Don notes that Ruth is “sane as soap” (117).

Ruth and Althea appear to be in good spirits in regards to their situation, even making jokes about Esteban's landing (118). However, Don is struggling with the situation, because, as he says, "something is irritating me. The damn women haven't complained once, you understand" (120). He even questions Ruth to see if they go camping (they don't) as way to justify to himself why these women are not panicking. This boggles his mind to the point the only way he is able to control his thoughts of them is to think they are insane (121). His reaction is astounding, is it truly difficult to believe that two women would not give into panic? Don is bothered by their lack of fear, and only way he can accept their actions is to believe that they are insane. This brings to the reader's attention Don's inability to understand not just Ruth and Althea, but women. Don's lack of comprehension mirrors that of readers who were unable to fully understand Tiptree, as it was not Tiptree they were trying to understand, but a complex Alice B. Sheldon, who also struggled to understand herself, and what role gender played in her identity.

Tiptree's "masculine" gender pattern for Don, becomes apparent as he and Ruth are searching for fresh water and have to stay overnight apart from Esteban and Althea. Don and Ruth are sleeping next to each other for warmth, and he once again thinks that Ruth does not mean anything to him, but "the obtrusive recessiveness of her, the defiance of her little rump eight inches from my fly—for two pesos I'd have those shorts down and introduce myself" (125). The word usage of "obtrusive" implies that he views her and her "rump" as being unwelcome to him, both in this moment in time as well as their entire time together, but still he thinks of a self-gratifying sexual encounter with her. This follows Tiptree's gender patterns, as well as a theme he uses in many of his stories

of sexual violence on women, or the thought of it. Don can't stop thinking about how different Ruth is, how he doesn't understand her, and to him his only reaction to her and Althea is either claiming they are insane or through sexual violence. The suggestion is that in a moment of confusion can only operate in anger or some kind of violence.

As Don and Ruth spend time together in conversation, Don's lack of understanding continues, as when he questions the fact that she is not married and thinks that she should be. Then when she doesn't agree with him, he asks if she is a lesbian (133). This is another moment where his confusion leads him to create simple explanations for Ruth, who is truly alien to him. He asks if she hates men and if there is any kind of trauma, to which Ruth replies, "there wasn't any trauma, Don, and I *don't* hate men. That would be as silly as—as hating the weather" (133). She tells Don how different men and women are, that women have no rights compared to men, and that ultimately men control what happens to women, similar to what Tiptree wrote of in the symposium. Shortly after this conversation in the story, aliens arrive and Don notes his fear during this, but Ruth is unafraid as she begins to talk to the aliens (137). He even attempts to "protect" Ruth by shooting at an alien approaching her, but missing the alien instead shooting Ruth, who is also alien to him. His aggression, and fear lead him to make a mistake that harms Ruth, whom he doesn't understand. Ruth and Althea decide to travel with the aliens, away from their homes, away from what they know, which also puzzles Don beyond belief: "How could a woman choose to live among unknown monsters, to say good-bye to her home, her world" (143). Yet Don cannot see that women are living in an alien world full of men who don't understand their simplest of actions, or, according to Don, lack thereof.

Joanna Russ, Ursula K. Le Guin, Kate Wilhelm, and James Tiptree Jr. all used similarly effective but artistically different approaches to fight against society's treatment of women. Their work is not only an important and vital part of feminist science fiction, but of all science fiction written. These writers not only won numerous awards, but also inspired the future of women science fiction writers, so that their voices could be heard by many, and proved that their stories matter. They created stories in which women were given a chance, hope, possibility, so that the future can be a better place for everyone. Importantly these writers wrote of a future that would be better for women, they wrote of equality. They challenged the cultural norms of society in creative ways, and their stories are still read today, and their stories still impact readers. In concluding Tiptree/Sheldon's biography, Phillips writes, "she spoke for women and men. She reminded us to laugh" (Phillips 460). Tiptree and these other writers were writing to better the world around them. They were writing to inspire women, they were writing to challenge men to view women in a different way, and as Phillips wrote, they were also writing to use all the opportunity to laugh.

Conclusion

Despite the many issues women of science fiction faced in the 1970s, women still persevered and succeeded. Authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Kate Wilhelm, and James Tiptree Jr., all wrote science fiction that was widely accepted, and also won many major awards. I would argue that while the purpose of science fiction is to entertain, it must also inspire the reader in some way, and that is exactly what these writers did. They used their own passions and creativity to inspire readers to see themselves or women in a less marginalized way. What science fiction does is allow writers to create a story in which marginalized people groups have a voice, they have a place, they are the heroes, and importantly they have possibility. Author of The Root Code trilogy Sunny Moraine wrote on TOR's website: "as a genre, speculative fiction allows us to remake our own present. It allows us to imagine a future for ourselves. It allows us to make a way out of whatever unbearable moment we seem to be stuck in" (Moraine). That provides people with hope, a hope that life, their life can be better. Despite the world around, they can imagine a future through stories, where they are no longer marginalized. The misogynistic science fiction fan fiction of the 1970s may have reflected the bias of the society from which it grew, but the perseverance and continued engagement of the committed and talented female science fiction writers ultimately created new models that allowed both writers and their fans, male and female, to embrace a science fiction world in which women (as writers, readers, and characters) had important roles to play. Ultimately it's important to understand the past marginalized women of science fiction in order for us to hope for a truly egalitarian culture.

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