

GALACTIC SUBURBIA



GALACTIC



T H E O H I O S T A T E
C O L U M B U S

SUBURBIA

RECOVERING WOMEN'S SCIENCE FICTION

LISA YASZEK

U N I V E R S I T Y P R E S S

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For Doug

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Δ C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

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I N T R O D U C T I O N

STRANGE READING

 **NEW SCIENCE** fiction (SF) magazine called *The Avalonian* hit the newsstands in 1952. The debut issue featured an anchor story by Lilith Lorraine—an SF veteran who had been writing for more than two decades and who also published *The Avalonian*—and half a dozen more pieces by writers largely unknown to the genre’s growing readership. Among the latter was a very short story by Helen Reid Chase entitled “Night of Fire.” In less than four pages Chase rallies a galactic civilization, recapitulates cold war nuclear fears, ridicules religious zealots, razes planet Earth, and finally saves a select fraction of humanity for a destiny among the stars. “Night of Fire” is both utterly typical and truly remarkable for its time. An intergalactic alien council decides that humans, with their deadly combination of advanced atomic technologies and apocalyptic religious impulses, have set themselves on the path to total annihilation. Exhibiting a rather fine sense of irony, the council stages a fake rapture and spirits away those few earthlings “of very unusual intelligence” who have adhered to the principles of rational and benevolent behavior, leaving behind a scorched earth for the very same religious fanatics who prophesied apocalypse in the first place (33).

Because Chase valorizes empirical science over fundamentalist religion and reasoned intelligence over rote faith, her story is very much a recognizable part of the SF tradition. But in a historical moment when science and technology (not to mention stories about them) were considered primarily the province of male scientists, politicians, and artists, Chase's story departs from tradition by focusing on the fate of *women* in the high-tech world of tomorrow. "Night of Fire" is told from multiple perspectives, including that of Mrs. Brandon, a woman of "meager intellect" who shuns science, technology, and education in general while embracing strict religious piety and merciless domestic order (32). Not surprisingly, when she is left behind with all the other anti-intellectual zealots, Mrs. Brandon loses both her faith and her mind. As a parodic embodiment of the conventional feminine virtues celebrated by many postwar Americans, the character of Mrs. Brandon serves as a powerful warning about the inadequacy of traditional sex and gender roles in the modern era. If women refuse to embrace scientific and social change, Chase warns, at best they will be left behind and at worst driven insane by the demands of a world that is rapidly evolving past them.

But Chase also insists that women who look forward to the future need not suffer this fate. On the apocalyptic "night of fire" the aliens make good on their vow to save the best of humanity, quietly whisking away scientists, engineers, and housewives alike. Of course, the housewives they save are radically different from Mrs. Brandon. As one of the baffled husbands left behind on Earth remarks, "I know [my wife] did some strange reading. Well, maybe it was along science lines. I didn't notice much. As long as she took care of the house right, that's all I cared about. I don't know how she'd find out about anything big though. But I know she's gone" (33–34). Chase celebrates the possibility that women in the home—much like men in the laboratory and on the assembly line—might contribute to a new technocultural world order. Even more significantly, she celebrates the possibility that they might do so by engaging in precisely that kind of "strange reading" that Chase's readers themselves participated in as they turned the pages of her brief story.

In "Night of Fire" SF storytelling emerges as a powerful tool for women interested in reading—and writing—about their roles as citizens of a high-tech future. And writers such as Chase had good reason to place their faith in SF rather than other literary forms. Like the forsaken husbands in Chase's tale, mainstream publishers of the 1940s, '50s, and '60s usually assumed that women had little or no interest

in scientific, social, or political issues. Feminist author Betty Friedan recalls that “by the time I started writing for women’s magazines, in the fifties, it was simply taken for granted by editors . . . that women were not interested in politics, life outside the United States, national issues, art, science, ideas, adventure, education, or even their own communities, except where they could be sold through their emotions as wives and mothers” (50). At best, such editors assumed readers might be interested in service articles about how to have a baby in a bomb shelter; at worst, they expected women’s eyes to drift away from such articles in search of more amusing tales about mischievous children and perfect party frocks. Either way, staff writers were expected to meet the supposed needs of readers by focusing on domestic issues at the expense of everything else.

But history is never that simple. Nearly 300 women began publishing in the SF community after World War II, and the stories they wrote both implicitly and explicitly challenged what Friedan called “the feminine mystique” by staking claims for women in the American future imaginary.¹ Leading SF author and editor Judith Merrill recalls that she turned to the genre in the 1940s because it was “virtually the only vehicle of political dissent” available to socially conscious authors working in a historical moment marked by political paranoia and cultural conservatism (“What Do You Mean” 74). Whether or not SF was the only vehicle for such dissent, it was certainly a useful one. As a wildly popular mode of storytelling that ostensibly revolved around future worlds and alien peoples, SF provided authors with ideal allegorical narrative spaces in which to critically assess the here and now.

This book is about Helen Reid Chase, Judith Merrill, and all the other postwar women writers who wrote SF set in a place called “galactic suburbia.” Feminist SF author and critic Joanna Russ first introduced the concept of galactic suburbia in her groundbreaking 1971 essay, “The Image of Women in Science Fiction,” to make sense of the large body of SF stories set in high-tech, far futures where gender relations still look suspiciously like those of “present-day, white,

1. Figures cited in this book regarding the number of women writers who began publishing in the SF community after World War II are derived from my personal count of those listed in Stephen T. Miller and William G. Contento, *The Locus Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Weird Magazine Index (1890–2001)*. My research assistants, Kellie Coffey and Jason Ellis, confirmed these numbers in two independent reviews of the *Index*. In all three cases we included only those authors who published short stories rather than novels because the paperback industry was still quite new at the time, and it is likely that authors who published novels also wrote short stories.

middle-class suburbia" (81). Although tales written by women including Chase and Merrill generally "contain more active and lively female characters than do stories by men," Russ concludes that they are little more than space-age variants of "ladies' magazine fiction" in which a "sweet, gentle, intuitive little heroine solves an interstellar crisis by mending her slip or doing something equally domestic after her big, heroic husband has failed" (88).

Russ clearly recognizes that women's writing about galactic suburbia put a feminine face on the future. However, in direct contrast to the feminist fiction that authors such as herself were beginning to produce, women writing for the postwar SF community rarely seemed to take the next logical step and show how new sciences and technologies might produce new sex and gender relations as well. For pioneering critics such as Russ, distinguishing between different types of women's speculative fiction was key to the project of defining feminist SF as an emergent narrative tradition in its own right. But as artists and scholars turned their attention to this new narrative tradition, earlier women SF authors were relegated to the margins of literary and cultural history.²

Galactic Suburbia reverses this trend by demonstrating the significant contributions that women writers made to modern SF in the decades following World War II. This project begins by expanding upon the notion of galactic suburbia itself. As Russ rightly notes, stories set in galactic suburbia generally revolve around what appear to be surprisingly conservative sex and gender ideals. But this does not mean that all women writers automatically agreed on the meaning and value of these ideals. SF became central to the American imagination after World War II because it enabled people to explore their hopes and fears about the emergence of a technocultural world order. This was particularly important for women because postwar technoculture hinged on what were then new understandings and representations of sex and gender. Accordingly, women writers used stories about romance, marriage, and motherhood in galactic suburbia

2. For further discussion concerning Russ's ideas about the necessary distinction between different eras and modes of women's speculative fiction, see my essay, "A History of One's Own: Joanna Russ and the Creation of a Feminist Science Fiction Tradition," in Farah Mendlesohn's edited collection, *On Joanna Russ*, forthcoming from Wesleyan Press. For more general discussions concerning the aesthetic and political implications of the feminist SF canon as it has evolved over the past three decades, see Robin Roberts's "It's Still Science Fiction: Strategies of Feminist Science Fiction Criticism" and Helen Merrick's "Fantastic Dialogues: Critical Stories about Feminism and Science Fiction."

as focusing lenses through which to evaluate these concepts. In doing so they produced a unique body of speculative fiction that served as a potent critical voice about the relations of science, society, and gender as they were articulated first in the wake of World War II and as they continue to inform American culture today.

Women's Science Fiction in Theoretical Context

As a cultural history of postwar women's SF, *Galactic Suburbia* fulfills one of the oldest and arguably still most important dictates of feminist scholarship: to recover women's history in all its forms. I do this by reading postwar women's SF in relation to three areas of feminist inquiry: SF studies, science and literature studies, and cultural histories of women's work. I am particularly indebted to feminist SF critics who, over the past three decades, have surmounted skepticism on the part of scholars and SF professionals alike to demonstrate the vibrancy of a centuries-old women's speculative writing tradition. Scholars including Marleen Barr, Sarah Lefanu, Jane L. Donawerth, and Carol A. Kolmerton paved the way for better understandings of feminist utopian and science fiction by connecting it to historical periods of feminist political activity. More recently, Brian Attebery, Justine Larbalestier, Farah Mendlesohn, Helen Merrick, Dianne Newell, and Victoria Lamont have extended the feminist SF studies project to address the progressive nature of women's speculative fiction in other eras as well.³ *Galactic Suburbia* continues this tradition

3. For pioneering feminist SF studies, see especially Marleen Barr's *Future Females: A Critical Anthology* and *Alien to Femininity: Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory*; Sarah Lefanu's *Feminism and Science Fiction*; and Jane L. Donawerth and Carol Kolmerton's *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference*. For more recent explorations of women's SF, see Brian Attebery's *Decoding Gender in Science Fiction*; Justine Larbalestier's *The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction*; Justine Larbalestier and Helen Merrick's "The Revolting Housewife: Women and Science Fiction in the 1950s"; Merrick's "Fantastic Dialogues: Critical Stories about Feminism and Science Fiction" and "The Readers Feminism Doesn't See: Feminist Fans, Critics and Science Fiction"; Farah Mendlesohn's "Gender, Power, and Conflict Resolution: 'Subcommittee' by Zenna Henderson"; and Dianne Newell and Victoria Lamont's "House Opera: Frontier Mythology and Subversion of Domestic Discourse in Mid-Twentieth-Century Women's Space Opera" and "Rugged Domesticity: Frontier Mythology in Post-Armageddon Science Fiction by Women." While Attebery and Larbalestier are primarily interested in the development of a feminist science-fictional sensibility over the course of the twentieth century, Merrick, Mendlesohn, Newell, and Lamont demonstrate how women writing SF in periods of feminist backlash strategically use conservative cultural beliefs about sex and gender to critique other social and political institutions.

of scholarship by demonstrating how what I call women's SF—that is, SF written by women about women—emerged in the postwar era as a product of both new cultural conditions for women authors and new narrative practices in the realm of SF itself.

To date, feminist SF scholars have been some of the most provocative theorists regarding the relations of gender and popular genre writing. Donawerth, Robin Roberts, and Patricia Melzer have been particularly innovative in this respect, as they have brought feminist theories concerning the relations of gender, science, and technology to bear on their studies of SF storytelling.⁴ These authors show how women writers have used SF for nearly two hundred years to debunk the myths of objectivity and gender neutrality that often marginalize or exclude women from scientific research and technological development. *Galactic Suburbia* extends such projects by situating postwar women's SF writing in relation to the technoscientific, social, and moral orders that emerged after World War II. In this respect it demonstrates both the material forces informing women's SF and the natural compatibility between feminist SF studies and other kinds of critical inquiry, including science studies, literary studies, and cultural history.

When scholars explore the relations of science and literature, they often focus on those technosciences that are most central to the American imagination today. With *Galactic Suburbia* I extend such lines of inquiry to consider how authors represented sex and gender relations vis-à-vis the technosciences that first emerged in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. As early as 1985, Donna Haraway called for feminists to attend to both women's participation in the "integrated circuit" of a technologically enabled transnational capitalism and the stories that authors tell about life in that circuit. In response, critics including N. Katherine Hayles and Susan Merrill Squier have demonstrated how information science and biomedicine give rise to new representations of human identity, and particularly gendered identity, in a range of scientific, literary, and popular narratives. Similar interests informed my own work in *The Self Wired: Technology and Subjectivity in Contemporary American Narrative*, which maps the emergence of what I call "cyborg writing" at the interface of new economic, technological, and literary practices. Meanwhile authors including Jenny Wolmark, Mary Flanagan, and Austin Booth have identified the nar-

4. See especially Donawerth's *Frankenstein's Daughters: Women Writing Science Fiction*; Roberts's *A New Species: Gender and Science in Science Fiction*; and Patricia Melzer's *Alien Constructions: Science Fiction and Feminist Thought*.

rative devices that women SF writers use to make sense of sex and gender in relation to cybertechnologies such as computers and video-games.⁵

By drawing attention to the scientific and technological developments that most profoundly impacted women's lives and captured their imaginations at the beginning of the contemporary era—ranging from nuclear technologies and rocket ships to deep freezers and televisions—I show how women's science-fictional storytelling practices have evolved since World War II. In doing so I provide a rich historical and cultural context that enables us to more fully understand representations of technoscience, society, and gender today. I provide this context by connecting stories about women's work in galactic suburbia to cultural histories of women's work in America. Feminist scholars including Ruth Schwartz Cohen, Annegret Ogden, Sheila R. Rothman, and Susan Strasser have written extensively about the manner in which the most traditional form of women's labor—housework—has evolved in relation to scientific, technological, and economic development. Meanwhile, Elaine Tyler May and the various authors included in anthologies edited by Joel Foreman, Lary May, and Joanne Meyerowitz call attention to debates over the nature of women's work in the cold war, a period when women were reconfigured specifically as subjects of an emergent technoculture.⁶ But these scholars do not address how women themselves represented such

5. For works examining new representations of human identity vis-à-vis information science and biomedicine, see Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century"; Hayles's *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*; and Squier's *Liminal Lives: Imagining the Human at the Frontiers of Biomedicine*. For more specific evaluations of technoscience and its impact on cultural understandings of sex and gender, see Hayles's "The Life Cycle of Cyborgs: Writing the Posthuman" and Squier's *Babies in Bottles: Twentieth Century Visions of Reproductive Technologies*. For discussion of feminist SF authors and narrative representations of cyberculture, see Wolmark's *Cybersexualities* and Flanagan and Booth's *Reload: Rethinking Women + Cyberculture*.

6. For cultural histories of housework, see especially Ruth Schwartz Cowan's *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*; Annegret Ogden's *The Great American Housewife: From Helpmeet to Wage Earner, 1776–1986*; Sheila R. Rothman's *Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present*; and Susan Strasser's *Never Done: A History of American Housework*. For studies that specifically address women's work in the cold war, see Elaine Tyler May's *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War* and Joanne Meyerowitz's *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945–1960*. Finally, for studies that explore cold war politics (including sex and gender politics) in relation to aesthetic cultural production, see Joel Foreman's *The Other Fifties: Interrogating Midcentury American Icons* and Lary May's *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*.

change in their fiction writing. By wedding cultural studies insights and methodologies to their literary counterparts, I show how postwar women turned to SF as an important source of narratives for critically assessing the nature of feminine work and identity in a technology-intensive world.

The postwar era marks a transitional moment in contemporary thinking about gender and technology. The processes of domestic industrialization that began at the turn of the century and that were fully realized after World War II fostered images of women as scientifically and technologically savvy home management experts and consumers. Yet other technocultural developments associated with the cold war complicated these representations. On the one hand, the threat of nuclear annihilation reinforced conventional ideals about gender relations, binding women ever more closely to the private sphere of the home in the name of national security. On the other hand, early Soviet successes in the Space Race paved the way, however tentatively, for new ways of valuing women as technocultural workers in public spaces such as the laboratory and the launch pad. And throughout this era, women writers made their own innovative contributions to debates over emergent technocultural relations by boldly going where few women had gone before: into the SF community of the 1940s, '50s, and '60s.

Women's Science Fiction in Historical Context

If postwar women authors turned to SF to explore the relations of gender and technology after World War II, it is likely because the technoscientific developments of this period were themselves nothing short of science fictional. These developments included new wartime inventions such as atomic weapons, computers, and global communication technologies that promised to bring about widespread change in conventional social, political, and moral orders. But many Americans first experienced technocultural life in a manner that was both more humble and more profound: through the industrialization of the home. This was particularly true for American women who were, like their nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century counterparts, defined primarily by their labor in the private sphere. But whereas earlier generations of Americans understood the home as a sanctuary distinct from the public world of technology-intensive capitalism, postwar scientists, politicians, and authors treated the home as

the fundamental unit of technoculture. By examining the changing relations of technology and domesticity, we can better understand how and why women became new kinds of citizens in a new kind of home.

The process of creating high-tech domestic citizens actually began at the turn of the century with four industrial innovations: modern plumbing, gas, electricity, and prefabricated household goods. Susan Strasser proposes that the first two were beneficial because they relieved women of the “staggering burden” that accompanied water transportation and fire building while “providing people the means for cleaner, healthier bodies, clothes, and houses” (103). Electricity and prefabricated goods also transformed housework, but in more complex ways. Wringers and washing machines saved many women from crippling bodily pain while the ability to purchase clothes reduced the visual problems that accompanied hand sewing in poor light. But these new technologies also produced new kinds of work. Washing machines tacitly encouraged housewives to do laundry more frequently, and new distribution centers for food and clothing required them to acquire new shopping skills and to engage in more travel as well (Ogden 156). Hence women’s work changed in accordance with larger patterns of industrial production and consumption.

New patterns of industrialized domestic labor in the first half of the twentieth century gave rise to new representations of women as sophisticated home management experts. As Annegret Ogden explains, “New information was surfacing in matters of sanitation, medicine, nutrition, and many other fields affecting the well-being of the human race. Technology for production and concepts regarding production efficiency were becoming highly sophisticated by the early 1900s. Certain women in the new century saw how the new information, technology, and patterns of thinking could be applied in the home. The result was a new approach to housework and a new kind of housewife—the domestic scientist” (139). The concept of the domestic scientist was a wildly popular one, invoked everywhere from industrial studies of worker efficiency to women’s service magazines. It also inspired a whole new field of scholarly inquiry: home economics.⁷ Furthermore, in an era when suffragettes and other progressive women were demanding equality between the sexes, housewives who positioned themselves as domestic scientists implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) made the case that women deserved the same

7. For a discussion of domestic science in relation to the Progressive Era concept of “educated motherhood,” see chapter 3 of Rothman’s *Woman’s Proper Place*.

social and political rights as men because they already had equivalent industrial skills and responsibilities.

Women's work as professional consumers also placed them at the interface of domesticity and technology. By the 1920s market surveys had established that housewives controlled almost the entire American retail dollar (Ogden 156). As the founding mother of home economics, Christine Frederick argued in her 1929 treatise *Selling Mrs. Consumer* that feminine demands for more and better goods were not mere vanity but signs of healthy self-expression that reflected women's growing confidence about their role in the marketplace. This role was crucial to the American economy because "the greater the demands made by women on industry, the more products industry would be able to turn out. . . . And the nation would be enveloped in prosperity" (Ogden 159). By putting housewives squarely at the center of the industrial world, Frederick and the businessmen she inspired demonstrated the increasingly close relations of the public and private spheres.

Of course, Progressive Era ideas about women as domestic scientists and consumers were primarily just that—ideas. In reality, women had uneven access to new labor-transforming technologies. For example, although prepared foods were available in most urban areas by the beginning of the twentieth century, three-fifths of the American population still lived in rural areas without access to modern grocery stores. Meanwhile, the urban poor still produced much of their own food to save money (Strasser 29–30). Efforts to fully modernize American homes were further delayed by the Great Depression and World War II, as industrialization projects were curtailed and individual households experienced dramatic declines in the liquid assets available for purchasing what suddenly seemed to be superfluous domestic technologies.

After 1945, new patterns of production and distribution combined with a booming postwar economy to foster the resumption of nationwide industrialization projects. By 1960, four-fifths of all American farms were wired for light, as opposed to the mere one-third that had electricity in 1940. Similar trends occurred in the dissemination of modern plumbing and gas lines: by 1960, 93 percent of American homes had piped water (up from 70 percent in 1940), and 65 percent had central heating (up from 42 percent in 1940) (Steidle and Bratton 222). It was not until the middle of the twentieth century, then, that Americans of all races and classes truly stood poised to take their place in the modern world.

As American families acquired homes with new technological amenities, they filled them with equally new appliances. By 1960, 10.5 percent of all modern homes had food waste disposals, 58.3 percent had automatic coffeemakers, and 56 percent had electric mixers. And although it might seem modest to us now, by this same year more than 15 percent of all American families had acquired the one device that truly makes every kind of work easier on warm and wet days: the air conditioner (Steidle and Bratton 222–23). If, in essence, Americans became technocultural citizens in the decades immediately following World War II, they did so largely in the privacy of their newly technologized homes.

The postwar diffusion of technological amenities and appliances had a particularly profound impact on American housewives as pioneers in the brave new world of postindustrial capitalism. Prior to this time, middle- and upper-class housewives often had both machines and servants to assist with household chores, while women with fewer economic resources relied on their own labor to maintain order in the home. After World War II, however, working-class women pursued new opportunities for work in America's rapidly expanding service sector. The gradual disappearance of servants combined with the increased availability of household appliances to create a unique situation. As Ruth Schwartz Cowan succinctly puts it, for the first time ever in the history of housework, both "the housewife of 'the professional classes' and the housewife of 'the working classes' were assisted *only by machines*" (199; my emphasis). Much like their male counterparts on the assembly line and in the computer lab, American women of the 1940s, '50s, and '60s were surrounded by the products of technoculture. Indeed, because many of these women spent so much time alone in the home with their machines, it may well be that they experienced a certain kind of technologically enhanced subjectivity even more intensely than those men who labored with both machines and other humans.

Given that the opening decades of the contemporary era marked the fulfillment of so many industrial ideals as they applied to the home, it is hardly surprising that this period also saw the revival and refinement of Progressive Era beliefs concerning women's work as domestic science and consumption. Not surprisingly, home economics books including Lillian Gilbreth, Orpha Mae Thomas, and Eleanor Clymer's *Management in the Home: Happier Living through Saving Time and Energy* (1954) and Rose Steidl and Esther Crew Bratton's *Work in the Home* (1968) continued to treat housewives as efficiency experts.

At the same time, prominent sociologists such as Talcott Parsons argued that modern technology had all but eliminated physical labor in the home, enabling women to pursue a new aspect of domestic science: the controlled production of happy children (Wajcman 239). Thus, the language of industry in the home extended to the efficient organization of the family itself.

And yet as the scope of domestic science expanded to include both people and things, women as family managers were systematically displaced from the positions of authority they had claimed for themselves just half a century earlier. Like their turn-of-the-century counterparts, postwar women were expected to be well versed in the newest and most effective modes of domestic management. However, family managers were rarely granted positions of authority in the new field of childhood development. Instead, they were treated as amateurs who needed the guidance of psychological experts such as Sigmund Freud and Erik Erickson and medical authorities such as Benjamin Spock to rear their children properly. "Ironically," cultural historian Annegret Ogden writes, "the role of supermother, in which women of the fifties put so much stock for personal fulfillment and social recognition, was really the role of an obedient child following rules drawn up by someone else—an authority figure in a far-off university laboratory" (177). As postwar women were drawn into the new networks of professionalized expertise and technoscientific knowledge that emerged at mid-century, they were required to give up what had long been seen as their natural authority over children.

One arena in which housewives were still treated as natural authorities was that of consumption. But the duties of "Mrs. Consumer" changed in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s in accordance with the changing priorities of the entire nation. As in the Progressive Era, postwar women were told that shopping was vital to the well-being of the economy. But now it was a fundamental aspect of cold war patriotism as well. Elaine Tyler May writes that postwar women's consumption "provided evidence of the superiority of the American way of life. . . . Although they may have been unwitting soldiers, women who marched off to the nation's shopping centers to equip their homes joined the ranks of America's cold warriors" (*Homeward Bound* 168). Consumption, then, remained a key sign of women's self-expression. But this expression took on new ideological significance as the United States sought to define itself in opposition to that other postwar industrial giant, the Soviet Union.

As May suggests, the cold war profoundly influenced popular representations of women's work as a kind of domestic patriotism, especially since housewives, as family managers and consumers, were perceived to be the first lines of defense against communist encroachment onto American soil. But at the same time that the Red Scare sent women homeward bound, the scientific and technological demands of the Space Race called them back into the paid workforce. When the Soviets launched their first artificial satellite, *Sputnik I*, months ahead of its U.S. counterpart, this unexpected event engendered a flurry of concern on the part of American scientists and government officials regarding the United States's ability to fully utilize American brainpower. The problem, according to studies published by the National Manpower Council (NMC) in 1957 and 1958, stemmed from the scarcity of American women in technoscientific professions: in Russia, women comprised 69 percent of all medical students and 39 percent of all engineers, but in the United States, less than 20 percent of all science and math majors were women (Kaledin 54).⁸ To resolve this dilemma, the NMC—along with every major women's and labor organization—recommended increasing womanpower through salary raises, the construction of new childcare facilities, more part-time jobs for women, and equal rights legislation.

Although few employers followed the NMC's recommendations, the U.S. government tried to provide new opportunities for scientifically and mathematically inclined women. In 1958, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act, which guaranteed fellowships for all students regardless of race, class, or gender in mathematics, science, foreign languages, and other defense-related areas of research (Rossiter 63). And in 1959 the nascent National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) quietly initiated the Women in Space Early (WISE) program, recruiting thirteen of the nation's top female aviators for astronaut training. Although it was unceremoniously shut down in 1962, the very existence of the WISE program in an era otherwise defined by exceedingly conservative notions of sex and gender ideals indicates the extent to which the imperatives of an emergent technoculture were already transforming those ideals.⁹

8. Furthermore, as Eugenia Kaledin notes, "between 1950 and 1960 the number of [American] women in engineering declined from 11 percent to 9 percent. . . . And in industrial and scientific technology the number of women dropped from 18 percent to 12 percent" (203).

9. The past few years have seen an explosion of interest on the part of feminist his-

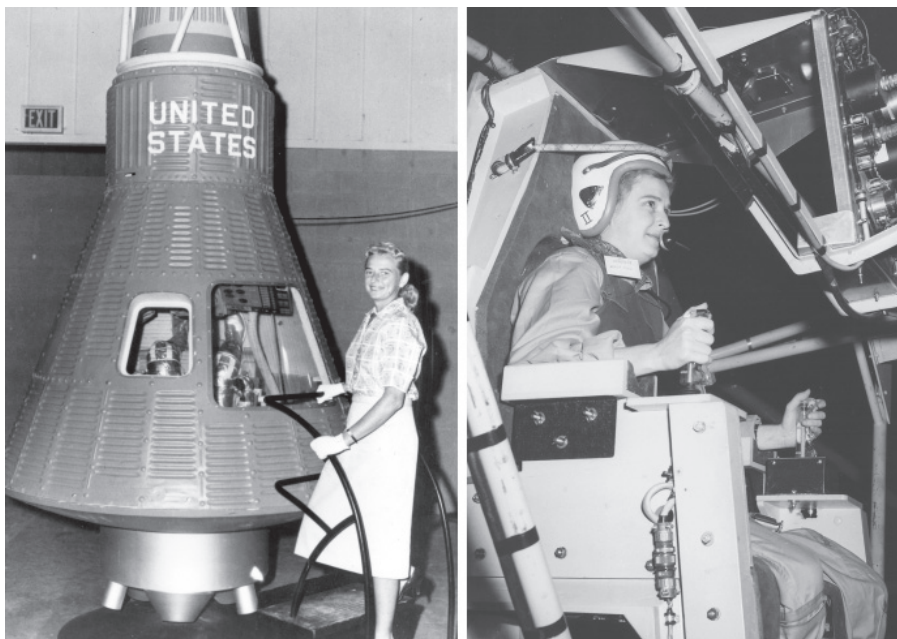


Figure 1. Changing images of women and technology after World War II. On the left, WISE astronaut Jerrie Cobb poses next to a Mercury spaceship in a conventionally feminine manner. On the right, she works a Gimbal Rig much as any male astronaut might do. (Images courtesy of NASA)

If nothing else, the WISE program gave Americans new images of women's work. In February 1960, *Look* magazine ran a cover article on Betty Skelton, a national aerobatic champion who trained with the Mercury 7 male astronauts (Nolen 92). In August of the same year, *Life* magazine published an equally extensive article on Jerrie Cobb, a commercial pilot who held distance, altitude, and speed records for several types of planes and who served as a spokesperson for the WISE program (Freni 53). Meanwhile, NASA officials carefully documented every aspect of the WISE program for both scientific and publicity purposes.

Whether they appeared in coffee-table magazines or government reports, pictures of the WISE women clearly reflected changing ideas

torians regarding the first astronaut training programs for women in the late 1950s and early 1960s. See especially Martha Ackmann's *The Mercury 13: The Untold Story of Thirteen American Women and the Dream of Space Flight*; Pamela Freni's *Space for Women: A History of Women with the Right Stuff*; Bettyann Holtzmann Kevles's *Almost Heaven: The Story of Women in Space*; and Stephanie Nolen's *Promised the Moon: The Untold History of Women in the Space Race*.

about gender and technology. For example, NASA photographers often depicted Cobb as an avatar of conventional American femininity, replete with modern sports clothes, carefully styled hair, and impeccable makeup. But they also photographed her much like any other (male) astronaut, spinning in centrifuges, floating in buoyancy tanks, and proudly looking off into the distant future as she climbed into her jet cockpit (see figure 1). Much like their domestic counterparts, early women astronauts such as Cobb were surrounded—and in many ways defined—by their machines. But suddenly it seemed that women might be at home anywhere from the familiar environs of their own living rooms to the mysterious hinterlands of the stars.

Women's Science Fiction in Galactic Suburbia: A Brief Overview

As I argue in the following chapters, both the industrialization of the home and the new technocultural situations engendered by the cold war fueled the development of women's SF in the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. A number of factors unite the authors and stories I associate with this mode of SF storytelling. While women's SF—like SF as a whole—is too diverse to subsume under a single, categorical definition, stories written in this tradition share a number of characteristics and concerns. For the most part, women's SF was produced by authors who began their writing careers after World War II but before the revival of feminism in the mid-1960s. These authors wrote under decidedly feminine names and claimed for themselves conventionally (sometimes even stereotypically) feminine roles as housewives, teachers, and nurses. Although they occasionally published in older, action-oriented SF periodicals such as *Amazing Stories* and *Astounding Science Fiction*, most of their work appeared in the new SF magazines that emerged after World War II with reputations for printing thoughtful, offbeat stories of relatively high literary quality, such as *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and *If*.

Most importantly, the new women writers who published in these new magazines engaged in unique storytelling practices. Women's SF was recognizable as SF because it depicted futures extrapolated from the scientific and technological arrangements of postwar America. Additionally, women writers used classic SF story forms such as the space opera and the nuclear holocaust narrative and classic SF tropes such as the heroic scientist and the alien other to convey these

futures. But women's SF was distinct from other kinds of postwar speculative fiction in two key respects: it revolved around the impact of science and technology on women and their families, and it was told from the perspective of women who defined themselves primarily (although not exclusively) as lovers, wives, and mothers.¹⁰

Taken together, these characteristics have led me to develop an account of women's SF that features somewhat different players than other SF histories. Some of the most famous mid-century women SF authors, including Leigh Brackett, C. L. Moore, and Andre Norton, are largely absent from this book. Although they were all innovative writers who used their chosen genre to critique the conservative tendencies of their own eras and espouse more progressive (and sometimes even profeminist) futures, they rarely dealt with domestic relations or featured average human women as protagonists in their stories.¹¹

Other SF luminaries who appear in these pages are presented in a new light. For example, while Judith Merrill is largely remembered for her editing and anthologizing activities, she features prominently in this book as one of the foundational figures in women's SF. Similarly, women writers who are best known now for their work in slipstream and fantasy fiction, such as Carol Emshwiller, Marion Zimmer Bradley, and Anne McCaffrey, are also presented as leading figures in the creation of SF stories that directly engaged the relations of science, technology, and gender after World War II. And finally, by focusing on SF stories set in galactic suburbia, I recover popular mid-century writers such as Alice Eleanor Jones, Mildred Clingerman, and Doris Pitkin Buck who stopped publishing original work by the late 1960s and were all but lost to modern SF history. Taken together, these authors brought a wide range of social interests and literary skills to bear on the development of women's SF.

In chapter 1, "Writers," I examine why women were drawn to the SF community in the postwar era and situate their storytelling prac-

10. Postwar editors and fans regularly noted the unique characteristics of women's SF and furiously debated its meaning and value. For further discussion, see chapter 1 of this book.

11. For discussions of the profeminist tendencies in Moore, Brackett, and Norton, see Sarah Gamble's "Shambleau . . . and Others: The Role of the Female in the Fiction of C. L. Moore"; Virginia L. Wolf's "Andre Norton: Feminist Pied Piper in SF"; and Robin Roberts's *A New Species: Gender and Science in Science Fiction*. For discussion of these authors in relation to other, more overtly politicized postwar women writers such as Judith Merrill and Marion Zimmer Bradley, see Newell and Lamont's "House Opera: Frontier Mythology and Subversion of Domestic Discourse in Mid-Twentieth-Century Women's Space Opera" and "Rugged Domesticity: Frontier Mythology in Post-Armageddon Science Fiction by Women."

tices in relation to broader patterns of literary production. Because women writers coupled stories about brave new worlds, sleek technologies, and exotic alien others with tropes of romance, marriage, and motherhood, fans and critics alike often treated their SF as a kind of literary anomaly, springing fully formed from the heads of a few isolated women. However, as my case studies of Judith Merrill, Alice Eleanor Jones, and Shirley Jackson demonstrate, this kind of SF is more properly understood as a dynamic mode of speculative storytelling with close ties to other literary forms that centered on domestic tropes and themes including feminist utopian writing, women's magazine fiction, and early postmodernist literature.

Chapter 2, "Homemakers," illustrates how women used SF to comment on modern domesticity. As domestic cold warriors, postwar women were expected to protect their individual families through carefully executed acts of caretaking and consumption. While this simple ideal was promulgated throughout American culture, women complicated the meaning and value of modern homemaking in their everyday lives by creating cooperative daycare centers and consumer activist groups to meet their own needs for critical engagement with the larger world beyond the suburban home. In a similar vein, SF authors including Garen Drussaï, Ann Warren Griffith, and Kit Reed used the figure of the female alien to advocate alternate models of caretaking and the setting of the media landscape story to imagine how women might use truly fantastic domestic technologies to either escape or reconfigure the home. By telling SF stories about women's work as homemakers, such authors powerfully challenged the logic of the feminine mystique while defining new authorial traditions within SF.


Chapter 3, "Activists," explores postwar women's SF in relation to political activism. The dominant discourses of cold war America glorified women as domestic patriots who could best serve their country through housekeeping and childrearing in the suburbs. Meanwhile, women involved with peace organizations and the civil rights movement revised this rhetoric to their own ends, positioning themselves as municipal housekeepers driven to political action by concern for their children's future. Women's SF both anticipated and extended such arguments. As my analyses of authors including Carol Emshwiller, Mary Armock, and Mildred Clingerman illustrate, women's stories about nuclear war and the encounter with the alien other mirrored the political tactics of their activist counterparts. As such, these authors insisted on the necessity of including women's

voices and values in ongoing debates about American policymaking.

In chapter 4, “Scientists,” I demonstrate how women authors responded to debates over women’s work in the fields of science and technology. Although the decades following World War II are now remembered as the golden age of American science, women were generally relegated to the margins of technoscientific labor as librarians, technical writers, and research assistants. At the same time, government agencies warned that the United States would fall dangerously behind the Soviet Union if it did not more fully utilize women’s intellectual and technical abilities. Women writing for the postwar SF community claimed scientific authority for themselves—and by extension, all women—in two distinct ways. Journalists such as June Lurie, Sylvia Jacobs, and Kathleen Downe invoked and updated a centuries-old tradition of women’s science popularization in the science essays they wrote for major SF magazines. Elsewhere, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Judith Merrill, Doris Pitkin Buck, Katherine MacLean, and Anne McCaffrey created stories that celebrated women’s domestic lives as inspiration for scientific and technological discovery while underscoring the danger of forcing women to choose between family and career. Taken together, these writers extended U.S. officials’ growing conviction that women were needed as scientists, engineers, and astronauts on the front lines of the cold war.

I conclude this study with “Progenitors,” in which I briefly explore how the thematic issues and narrative techniques of postwar women’s stories about galactic suburbia continue to inform SF storytelling practices today. Although galactic suburbia has all but disappeared from feminist SF, contemporary women writers still engage many of the same issues as their postwar counterparts, including the history and future of race relations, the role of women in the media landscape, and the impact of gendered perception on scientific research and technological development. Meanwhile, as men begin to rethink their own domestic roles and experience the kind of economic displacement and technological alienation traditionally associated with women, male authors increasingly incorporate the settings and character types associated with galactic suburbia into their own writing. Taken together, these trends demonstrate that postwar women’s SF is a major foundation upon which SF authors continue to build today.

PROGENITORS

 **IMAGINE IT.** One world where mothers and activists work together to save their children from the destructive religion of physical perfection called “Afterfat.” Another world where young women earn celebrity status for their work as globetrotting professional consumers. And yet another world where one lone scientist takes on the combined political and military force of the United States in a desperate attempt to save the superchild he has come to love as his own. By now readers of this book might assume that such stories are just a few more examples of the new women’s SF that flourished in the decades following World War II. After all, with their emphasis on women’s work and domestic relations in a high-tech world, they seem very much part of galactic suburbia.

And yet all of these stories were written years and even decades after SF authors supposedly turned their attention away from galactic suburbia to other, more radically estranging science-fictional settings. The first, Kit Reed’s *Thinner Than Thou* (2004), is a new novel from an SF veteran which recently received the Alex Award for outstanding adult/young adult fiction. The second, James Tiptree Jr.’s Hugo Award-winning “The Girl Who Was Plugged In” (1974), is a classic example of feminist SF and an important precursor to cyberpunk SF. And finally, Trent Hergenrader’s “From the Mouth of Babes” (2006)—

which *Fantasy and Science Fiction* editor Gordon van Gelder recently described as an “affecting little tale of father and son”—reflects an emergent interest in the future of domestic relations as they impact both women *and* men (106). Taken together, such stories demonstrate both the very real staying power of postwar women writers and the equally real extent to which the thematic issues and narrative techniques of galactic suburbia continue to inform SF today.

Throughout this book I have argued that postwar women writers used stories set in galactic suburbia to critically assess the new relations of science, society, and gender as they emerged in the decades following World War II. Although issues of romance, marriage, and parenthood might seem to have little or no necessary relation to images of sleek spaceships, strange new worlds, or exotic alien creatures, tales that combined them were part of the Golden Age effort to put a human face on scientific and technological development. Postwar women writers put this new literary ideal into practice by strategically revising SF story types so wives and mothers were at the center of technoscientific action. By telling tales about women who were equally at ease in laboratories and laundry rooms, such authors created new narrative situations that enabled readers to better recognize the impact of America's emergent technoculture on both interpersonal and social relations.

Women writing for the postwar SF community created these new characters and narrative situations by incorporating effects from other literary traditions into their speculative fiction. Most obviously, they drew upon feminist utopian fiction, mainstream magazine fiction, and postmodernism to create shocking—and sometimes shockingly funny—stories about space-age sex therapists, homicidal housewives, and shopping lists that herald the end of the world as we know it. But women writers did not limit themselves to these three narrative traditions. To better stake out spaces for women in America's future imaginary, they looked backward to older modes of women's science writing and antiwar protest and forward to new narrative forms created by civil rights activists, advertisers, and scientists as well. Thus, postwar stories set in galactic suburbia evince the kind of generic hybridity that Roger Luckhurst has recently claimed is a defining characteristic of SF as a literary tradition in its own right.¹ Little wonder, then, that postwar women writers such as Reed still

1. For a detailed exploration of generic hybridity in SF, see Luckhurst's *Science Fiction (Cultural History of Literature)*.

receive accolades for their work and that subsequent generations of SF authors including both luminaries like Tiptree and newcomers like Hergenrader continue to incorporate the themes and techniques of galactic suburbia into their own critical fictions.

But if traces of galactic suburbia are everywhere in SF, then why has postwar women's speculative fiction all but disappeared from our collective memory? As I explain in the first chapter of this book, the SF community vigorously debated the meaning and value of women's SF throughout the 1940s, '50s, and '60s. But within just a few decades this SF was relegated to the margins of literary history by artists and critics who wished to distinguish older modes of women's speculative fiction from the more overtly feminist SF that developed in the 1970s and that continues to flourish today. As women—and a few pioneering men—turned their attention to the question of how new sciences and technologies might foster new sex and gender relations, stories set in what Joanna Russ described as a future version of “white, middle-class, suburban America” seemed increasingly to be relics of a bygone era (“The Image of Women” 81).

This growing sense that galactic suburbia was a thing of the past was likely reinforced by the steady disappearance of postwar women writers from the pages of SF magazines and publisher booklists. This occurred over the course of several decades for several reasons. Science journalists including June Lurie and Mildred Murdoch left the SF community in the middle of the 1950s when *Fantastic Universe* folded and *Amazing Stories* and *Astounding Science Fiction* were revamped to meet the needs of what editors perceived to be an increasingly adult SF audience.² In the 1960s the careers of several popular fiction writers including Rosel George Brown and Shirley Jackson were cut short by their untimely deaths. And by the end of the 1970s, other leading architects of galactic suburbia including Margaret St. Clair, Mildred Clingerman, Zenna Henderson, Doris Pitkin Buck, Katherine MacLean, and Judith Merrill had all but stopped publishing original fiction. Stories by these authors were subsequently reprinted in a few SF anthologies and single-author collections, but by and large it

2. Editor Howard Browne explains why *Amazing Stories* eliminated science journalism and readers' forums from its pages in an editorial from May 1955: “Fandom, they said—with some justification—was growing up, and what was interesting science fiction ten years ago no longer could hold a reader's attention. The editors listened and believed” (“Editorial” 5). Interestingly, these changes had occurred nearly two years earlier without any editorial comment; at the time Browne published this editorial, *Amazing* had revamped itself once again to include more action-oriented stories and the much-missed letters page. Science journalism, however, did not reappear.

seemed that science, technology, and domesticity had all but disappeared as an object of inquiry from women's speculative fiction.

But postwar women writers did not completely disappear from the literary scene. Some simply took on different positions in the SF community. For example, Judith Merrill first earned the nickname "little mother of science fiction" for her key role in the development of women's SF as a discrete mode of storytelling after World War II. But she continued to live up to this moniker in subsequent years as editor of the groundbreaking *Year's Best in SF* anthologies and then, after she left the United States in protest against the Vietnam War, as a foundational figure in the development of Canadian SF. In 1965, Merrill's sister, Futurian Virginia Kidd, became the first female literary agent in speculative fiction, and over the course of the next three decades represented some of the genre's most important authors, including Ursula K. Le Guin, Anne McCaffrey, Gene Wolfe, Alan Dean Foster, and Kathleen Ann Goonan. Like Merrill, she also edited a number of SF anthologies including *The Best of Judith Merrill* (1976), *Millennial Women* (1978), and, with Le Guin as coeditor, *Interfaces* (1980) and *Edges* (1980). Although Merrill always called herself a feminist and Kidd generally avoided this label, both were, as editors and as mentors, instrumental in paving the way for a new generation of women writers.

Other women who published SF in the decades following World War II went on to literary careers in other fields. When Alice Eleanor Jones burst onto the SF scene in 1955 with five well-received SF stories, Anthony Boucher predicted that she would become another Judith Merrill. Although Boucher was correct to forecast literary success for Jones, he was wrong about the genre in which she would find that success. After 1955 Jones never published another SF story, choosing instead to work in the more lucrative (and at that time, still more respectable) field of mainstream women's magazine fiction. In addition to writing for *Good Housekeeping*, *Redbook*, and *Ladies' Home Journal*, Jones produced a regular column for *The Writer*, in which she provided young authors with advice about how to get ahead in the world of commercial fiction writing. Meanwhile, Cornelia Jessey went on to establish herself as a prolific religious author. In addition to publishing scholarly monographs with her husband, Irving Sussman, Jessey wrote at least half a dozen books of her own, including *The Prayer of Cosa: Praying in the Way of Francis of Assisi* (1985) and *Profiles in Hope* (1978). For such authors, SF writing was not an end in and of itself but the means by which they launched their multifaceted writing careers.

A good number of postwar women writers did stay within their chosen field, establishing themselves as leaders in feminist and other new modes of SF. Like Merrill, Kit Reed and Carol Emshwiller were regularly featured in early feminist SF anthologies such as Pamela Sargent's *Women of Wonder* (1974) and Virginia Kidd's *Millennial Women* (1978). In contrast to Merrill, however, both Reed and Emshwiller continue to produce new SF. Since the turn of the millennia alone Reed has published one collection of short stories and five novels, including the aforementioned award-winning *Thinner Than Thou* and, most recently, *The Baby Merchant* (2006). As the titles of these books suggest, Reed continues to write satirically about those domestic issues that are most central to the American imagination at any given moment in time. In the same time frame Emshwiller has produced over a dozen new short SF stories (many for *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, where she began her career), two anthologies, and two new novels including *The Mount*, winner of the 2002 Philip K. Dick Award. One of her best-known novels, *Carmen Dog* (1988), recently was republished by Small Beers Press. Like Reed, Emshwiller continues to explore many of the same themes that first interested her—including the relation of humans to alien others and the status of women under patriarchy—as they have evolved over time.

Two other women writers who began publishing SF in the 1950s, Marion Zimmer Bradley and Anne McCaffrey, also enjoy immense popularity as feminist SF and fantasy authors. Bradley, who passed away in 1999, is best remembered for *The Planet Savers* (1962), which initiated the Amazonian *Darkover* series, and *The Mists of Avalon* (1979), a retelling of the Camelot legend from the perspectives of Morgaine and Guinevere, which initiated the *Avalonian* series. As editor of the *Sword and Sorcery* series she mentored a generation of new authors including Diana L. Paxson and Mercedes Lackey who write about strong, nontraditional heroines. In a similar vein Anne McCaffrey established a huge fan base with novels such as *Dragonflight* (1968) and *The Ship Who Sang* (1969), which became the bases for her long-running *Dragonriders of Pern* and *Brainship* series. Like Bradley, McCaffrey is well known for mentoring new writers such as Margaret Ball, Elizabeth Scarborough, S. M. Stirling, and Jody Lynn Nye who have coauthored novels with her in various book series. Much like Merrill and Kidd, these authors have been instrumental in creating and sustaining a vibrant, multigenerational community of critically engaged and aesthetically innovative women writers.

Furthermore, although stories that combine the distinctive thematic interests and narrative techniques of postwar women's SF have all but disappeared, the themes and techniques themselves still flourish in the contemporary SF community.³ This is particularly apparent in feminist SF, where authors grapple with many of the same issues as their literary predecessors. As Joanna Russ explains in "The Image of Women in Science Fiction," postwar women's SF differs from feminist SF in that the former examines the impact of science and technology on what women already are while the latter explores the impact of science and technology on what women might someday be (88). As such, the differences between these two modes of speculative fiction are less a matter of kind than degree.⁴

As I discuss in the second chapter of this book, postwar women writers revised one of SF's oldest tropes, that of the female alien other, to demonstrate the debilitating limits of the feminine mystique for women as homemakers and to celebrate communal modes of mothering as a way to mitigate the isolation of the nuclear family. These same themes were central to the first-generation of feminist SF authors as well. For example, in *The Female Man* (1975) Joanna Russ uses the meeting between four women of the same genotype raised in different timelines to demonstrate the social construction of gender. In contrast to earlier stories like April Smith and Charles Dye's "Settle to One," Russ's protagonists are not divided by their interest in men but put aside their differences to engage in battle together against those who are most truly alien to them: men themselves. Meanwhile, Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) and Suzy McKee Charnas's *Holdfast* series (1974–99) both revolve around women much like ourselves whose encounters with female alien others (or more precisely, as in Russ's novel, women from different times and places) lead them to embrace the values of cooperative motherhood. But in contrast to the relatively safe suburbs of Rosel George Brown and Zenna Henderson's worlds, these seemingly alien women inhabit

3. Interestingly, *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* continues to publish a handful of stories set in galactic suburbia. Two recent examples include Delia Sherman's "Walpurgis Afternoon" (December 2005) and James L. Cambias's "Parsifal (Prix Fixe)" (February 2006). As this latter story indicates, men are now just as likely as women to write from the perspective of wives and mothers.

4. My thanks to the women and men who have compiled comprehensive lists of SF authors and themes on *The Feminist Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Utopia* Web site, <http://feministsf.org/bibs/>, and *The Ultimate Science Fiction Web Guide*, <http://www.magicdragon.com/UltimateSF/SF-Index.html>. I have used their work to supplement my own ideas about the thematic and technical development of women's SF throughout this concluding chapter.

wildly estranging postholocaust futures where men either modify themselves to participate in communal motherhood as well or are replaced altogether by bioengineered animals who provide both fresh genetic material and simple physical comfort to their lover/owners. In essence, then, feminist SF authors do not reject but extend the ideas of their postwar counterparts, imagining radical solutions to the problems first identified by women writers in the wake of World War II.

More recently, lesbian and gay SF authors have engaged similar issues in their own fiction. Both Rachel Pollack's *Godmother Night* (1996) and Melissa Kwasny's *Modern Daughters and the Outlaw West* (1990) address the promises and perils of lesbian motherhood in alternate futures much like our own. As such, it seems galactic suburbia (much like real-world suburbia) has expanded at least nominally to include women who refuse both the heterosexual norms of the feminine mystique and the heterosexual togetherness of the nuclear family. In a more fantastic vein, Storm Constantine's *Wraeththu* trilogy (1987–89) asks how androgynes that were once male might deal with the experience of birth and parenting. In Constantine's stories, the narrative drama emerges not so much from the radical differences between humanity and posthumanity but from the ways in which the two remain bound together through the desire for love, family, and children. Like Brown and Henderson before them, Pollack, Kwasny, and Constantine are profoundly interested in the different modes of parenting and family already available in our own society. The primary difference is that they expand their explorations to consider the complex and sometimes contradictory relations of science, society, gender, and sexual orientation.

Feminist SF authors also continue to use variations of the media landscape story to investigate women's roles as consumers. While the most obvious example of this is certainly James Tiptree Jr.'s short story "The Girl Who Was Plugged In," other classic feminist SF novels including Russ's *The Female Man* and Octavia Butler's *Kindred* (1979) incorporate aspects of the media landscape narrative into their critiques of patriarchal scientific, social, and sexual relations.⁵ Like Garen Drussaï before them, all three of these authors insist that consumption is a job much like any other one. However, while postwar authors such as Ann Warren Griffith and Drussaï locate that

5. For further discussion of Tiptree's story as a feminist critique of advertising, see chapter 2 of Jane L. Donawerth's *Frankenstein's Daughters*; for discussion of Russ and Butler's novels as critiques of the same, see chapter 3 of my book, *The Self Wired: Technology and Subjectivity in Contemporary American Narrative*.

work in the home, Tiptree, Russ, and to a lesser extent Butler show how women's work as consumers merges seamlessly with the work of production itself, as women leave the home to become professional spokespersons extolling the virtues of domestic goods to other women.⁶

Over the past two decades feminist SF authors increasingly have turned their attention to women's work as consumers and producers in what I call the "new media landscape" of cyberpunk. Pat Cadigan's *Synners* (1991), Wilhelmina Baird's *Crashcourse* trilogy (1993–95), and Melissa Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends* (1994) extend the interest of their postwar and feminist predecessors to explore the promises and perils of women's work as consumers and producers of information rather than material goods. While the protagonists of these novels are rarely wives or mothers, they are passionately committed to the other women, men, and children who comprise their communities. And much like the heroines of media landscape stories by Margaret St. Clair and Kit Reed, they use their skills to strategically rewire the world around them in accordance with their own critical and creative needs.

Feminist SF authors also extend the activist tradition of their postwar counterparts. In chapter 3 of this book I examine how women writing SF at mid-century used the nuclear holocaust narrative to protest the new social and moral orders of the atomic age, especially as they threatened to destroy those very families they were meant to preserve. Not surprisingly, women continued to write antinuclear stories throughout the cold war, such as those by Mary Gentle, Pamela Zoline, and Lisa Tuttle that feature prominently in Jen Green and Sarah Lefanu's *Despatches from the Frontiers of the Female Mind* (1985). Feminists also extend the project of their postwar predecessors through more general expressions of antiwar sentiment. For example, Kit Reed's *Little Sisters of the Apocalypse* (1994) imagines that women might take up arms to fend off the men who abandon them for war and then expect a welcoming return, while the seventeen women writers included in Lois McMaster Bujold and Roland J. Green's *Women at War* (1988) explore the diverse roles that women take on during times of conflict as mothers and soldiers, heroes and villains,

6. Butler is actually more interested in how black women—and all African Americans—are duped into consuming false images of their own past, but the point remains much the same: women both consume these images and, by embodying them in their own lives, reproduce them in dangerous ways. For further discussion, see my essay "A grim fantasy': Remaking American History in Octavia Butler's *Kindred*."

and artists and warriors. Much like Judith Merrill, Alice Eleanor Jones, Virginia Cross, Mary Armock, and Carol Emshwiller before them, contemporary women writers assume that the personal is always political and that war impacts individuals on the home front every bit as much as those on the battlefield. But they also extend the ideas first put forth by their postwar counterparts to show how women might move from the home to the front lines of war itself.

Feminist authors also continue to explore the notion that politically engaged women might work together with like-minded scientists to prevent war or build new kinds of community after war has occurred. Much like Merrill's *Shadow on the Hearth*, novels including Charnas's *Holdfast* series, Pamela Sargent's *The Shore of Women* (1986), and Joan Slonczewski's *The Wall Around Eden* (1989) illustrate the devastation wrought by nuclear war while treating such war as a potentially fortunate event that might herald the end of patriarchy and the rise of alternate social and political structures. However, while Merrill only provides readers with a glimpse of one possible new world order via the quasi-utopian community that her characters create within the confines of a single suburban home, later writers imagine that women might seize control of science and technology to actively create new and distinctly nonsuburban, nonpatriarchal societies. As such, they grant their protagonists a kind of critical and creative agency that postwar authors could only gesture toward.⁷

But perhaps the most significant evolution of themes in SF written by women over the past half century occurs in the treatment of race. In direct contrast to authors like Margaret St. Clair, Kay Rogers, Cornelia Jessey, and Mildred Clingerman, who told science-fictional versions of the mid-century racial conversion narrative centered on white people and their perceptions of race relations, feminist authors writing in the wake of the civil rights movement write about protagonists of color who live in worlds extrapolated from stories and histories of the protagonists themselves. For example, African American author Octavia Butler's *Patternist* (1976–84), *Lilith's Brood* (1987–89), and *Parable* (1993–98) series feature heroes and villains of color who must learn how to negotiate potentially disastrous encounters with alien others of different races and species. Meanwhile, Caribbean-

7. Other SF authors write ecofeminist variants of the "nuclear holocaust as fortunate fall" narrative in which manmade plagues and other ecological disasters engender the demise of patriarchy and rise of new cultures based on alternate sex and gender relations. For excellent examples of this, see Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1975), Emma Bull's *Bone Dance* (1991), and Starhawk's *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993).

Canadian author Nalo Hopkinson builds strange new worlds extrapolated from Afrodiasporic religions, mythologies, and histories in short stories such as “Ganger (Ball Lightning)” (2000) and “Greedy Choke Puppy” (2000) and in novels such as *Midnight Robber* (2000) and *The Salt Roads* (2003). But other feminist authors also tell stories about protagonists of color. Both Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) and Starhawk’s *The Fifth Sacred Thing* (1993) feature Latina heroines, while novels such as Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices* (1998) and Cynthia Kadohata’s *In the Heart of the Valley of Love* (1997) demonstrate the compatibility of Western speculative storytelling traditions with Indian mythology and Japanese history, respectively.

But post-civil rights SF stories are much like their mid-century predecessors in that authors continue to use romantic encounters with the alien other and interspecies family dramas as focusing lenses through which to explore larger race relations. Both Butler’s Hugo and Nebula Award-winning short story “Bloodchild” (1985) and her *Lilith’s Brood* trilogy revolve around humans and aliens who must relinquish their prejudices against one another and interbreed to ensure the survival of their races, while the Indian goddess Tilo of Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices* embarks on a love affair with an American man named Raven in part to better understand how she can help her people adjust to the new world of the West. As in Kay Roger’s “Experiment” and St. Clair’s “Brightness Falls from the Air,” the protagonists of recent SF stories about race relations quickly learn that attempts to build bridges across race and species lines are often thwarted by the ignorance, indifference, and even outright hostility on both sides. However, while this situation usually leads to death in early SF stories about race relations, later ones often end with scenes of marriage and birth—reflecting, perhaps, the very real hope that while love does not conquer all, hatred and fear do not always do so either.

Postwar and feminist SF authors also share a common interest in women’s work in science and technology. As I discuss in chapter 4 of this book, the decades immediately following World War II marked a difficult time for scientifically and technologically inclined women. On the one hand, the rhetoric of cold war domestic security suggested that women could best serve their country at home. Nonetheless, women continued to leave their homes to pursue science, math, and engineering careers in record numbers. SF authors including Judith

Merril, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Katherine MacLean, Doris Pitkin Buck, and Anne McCaffrey responded to this situation with their own inspirational stories about women scientists, engineers, and explorers. Similar characters featured in feminist SF include Mary, the biologist and alien communications specialist of Naomi Mitchison's *Memoirs of a Spacewoman* (1962); Margaret, the computer scientist of James Tiptree Jr.'s *Up the Walls of the World* (1978); and more recently, Anna Senoz, the geneticist of Gwyneth Jones's *Life* (2004). But feminist authors also imagine that women might practice alternative forms of science in the guise of magic or witchcraft, as in Andre Norton's *Witch World* series (1963–1998), Joan Vinge's *Snow Queen* series (1980–2000), and Melissa Kwasny's *Modern Daughters and the Outlaw West* (1990). Meanwhile, in novels such as Melissa Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends* (1994) and Pat Cadigan's *Synners, Tea from an Empty Cup* (1998), and *Dervish Is Digital* (2000), women play key roles in both the physical world and cyberspace as hackers, video artists, and cybercops. Like their counterparts from postwar women's SF, these feminist protagonists do not make tidy distinctions between work and home but instead draw upon their domestic lives as inspiration for scientific and technological discovery.

Feminist authors also continue to grapple with many of the same questions about the necessary relations of family and career for women that first emerged after World War II. While postwar authors such as Bradley and Merrill warned about the individual and cultural tragedies that come from forcing women to choose between work and family, others including Buck and MacLean (and Merrill once again) wrote about future women who avoid this mistaken choice by seeking out nonpatriarchal spaces (ranging from the kitchen to deep space) where they combine work and family as they see fit. Feminist utopian writers of the 1970s offered additional solutions to the dilemma of the mistaken choice. Women might use science and technology to bioengineer men so they could participate equally in childcare (thus freeing women to continue their work outside the family, as in Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*); they might abandon men altogether and use science and technology to transform animals into repositories for human genetic materials (as in Charnas's *Motherlines* trilogy); or they might use science and technology to kill off all the men and develop new reproductive technologies suited to a world of women (as in Russ's *The Female Man*). And so, feminist SF authors extend the ideas of their literary predecessors by imagining that women might not

need to leave their homes to escape patriarchal culture, but instead might use science and technology to eliminate the problem of patriarchy itself.

Feminist SF authors also extend the ideas of their literary predecessors with stories about the benefits that accrue to women—and all people—when female scientists combine family and career in new ways. Like the heroine of MacLean's "And Be Merry . . .," the women who comprise the community of Sharers in Joan Slonczewski's *A Door into Ocean* (1986) combine their laboratories and kitchens under the roofs of their individual homes. The new biological sciences that result from this arrangement enable the Sharers to reproduce parthenogenically and adapt themselves to life on their waterworld. In addition, this arrangement enables them to successfully thwart the plans of the invading male army that hopes to control this planet of women by destroying their scientific bases precisely because it never occurs to the invaders that anyone might practice science at home.

In a related vein, the protagonists of novels including Scott's *Trouble and Her Friends* and *The Roads of Heaven* series (1985–87) and Jones's *Life* survive the heterosexist, patriarchal cultures they live in and make astonishing discoveries about information security, star travel, and genetics in large part because they have the full support of their lovers and spouses. Much like MacLean, Buck, and McCaffrey, Scott and Jones use the trope of the nontraditional marriage to represent the dream of new communities that fully support women's work in science and technology. However, while postwar women writers depict such marriages in modest terms as those in which working husbands support their wives' careers, contemporary authors like Scott and Jones expand the concept of alternative matrimony to include lesbian relationships, group marriages, and role-reversed unions in which husbands serve as homemakers to better support the careers of their wives.

Finally, while feminist authors continue to explore many of those issues first raised by women writing for the SF community after World War II, today it is primarily men who incorporate the settings and characters of galactic suburbia into their SF. While a handful of mid-century SF stories written by men—such as Philip Jose Farmer's *The Lovers* (1961) and Theodore Sturgeon's *Venus Plus X* (1960) use tropes of love, marriage, and motherhood and even in Sturgeon's case the setting of galactic suburbia itself to raise questions about the necessary relations of sex and gender in technologically and socially advanced societies, such stories generally retreat from the radical

implications of their own premises, thereby ultimately reinforcing heterosexist and patriarchal ideals.⁸ In the 1970s and 1980s, however, male authors began to experiment with these tropes and settings in different ways. For example, John Crowley's *Little, Big* (1981) and many of John Varley's *Eight World* stories, including the *Picnic on Nearside* collection (1984), as well as the novels *The Opiuchi Hotline* (1977) and *Steel Beach* (1992), use family dramas as focusing lenses through which to explore the passing of humanity as we know it and the subsequent emergence of posthumans and other hybrid beings. In direct contrast to authors like Farmer and Sturgeon, both Crowley and Varley refuse to make traditional men the center of their stories, instead relating their tales from the perspective of socially progressive New Men and technologically enhanced mothers whose sex of origin may be either male or female. Much like their female counterparts in both the postwar and feminist SF communities, then, Crowley and Varley exhibit little or no nostalgia for the passing of patriarchy as they stake claims for new kinds of people and societies in the future imaginary.

And just as postwar women used SF stories about families to critically assess the new technocultural arrangements of the atomic age, contemporary men use SF stories about families to critically assess the new technocultural arrangements of the information age. This is particularly apparent in the work of Bruce Sterling, whose novels *Islands in the Net* (1988), *Heavy Weather* (1991), and *Holy Fire* (1996) all revolve around the efforts of women as wives, sisters, and lovers to maintain their families (and in the case of *Holy Fire*, to forge new kinds of posthuman families) in the face of widespread economic, environmental, and technological change. Sterling's work is particularly unusual in that all three novels are either examples of or heavily indebted to cyberpunk, a mode of SF that generally revolves around young, unmarried protagonists who explicitly define themselves in opposition to romance and marriage.⁹

8. Russ first described this tendency on the part of male authors who write about galactic suburbia to simply reiterate patriarchal notions of sex and gender in "The Image of Women in Science Fiction." For further discussion of Farmer's *The Lovers* as a prime example of this tendency, see Robin Roberts's *A New Species: Gender and Science in Science Fiction*. For further discussion of Sturgeon's *Venus Plus X* as another such example, see Brian Attebery's *Decoding Gender in Science Fiction*.

9. This is particularly evident in William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984), when Molly leaves Case because past experience teaches her that business partners who become lovers tend to get killed, and in the sequel, *Count Zero* (1986), when another character offhandedly notes that Case has dropped out of the data piracy business to get married and raise children in the suburbs of the Sprawl.

Significantly, many of the authors who write about men's loves and lives in galactic suburbia today publish their work in precisely the same venue as did their postwar predecessors: *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, which maintains its original mission to publish offbeat, off-trail stories. Like earlier stories set in galactic suburbia, current ones tackle a variety of subjects in a variety of ways. For example, Trent Hergenrader's "From the Mouth of Babes" (March 2006) uses the story of a father and son on the run from the law to explore how male scientists might resist the limits of masculinist scientific practices that reduce people to objects of manipulation—and how they might therefore embrace new and more holistic scientific practices, even if the penalty is death. In "Parsifal (Prix Fixe)" (February 2006), James L. Cambias playfully undermines masculinist myths of the Holy Grail with his tale of a young American couple that discovers the real grail is actually a stewpot in which a modest French family has simmered the world's most perfect soup for two millennia. While Cambias deploys a far more lighthearted tone than Hergenrader, both ask readers to think about the gendered implications of our culture's foundational practices and myths. Meanwhile, in stories such as "Animal Magnetism" (June 2006), Albert E. Cowdrey stakes out spaces for gay families in the future imaginary with a tale of two men (and a female dog) who make a new kind of home for themselves in galactic suburbia by embracing their inner werewolves. Like Cambias's tale, "Animal Magnetism" is a piece of serious fun that demonstrates how men also adapt the characters and settings first developed by women writing for the postwar SF community in their quest to creatively revise dominant understandings of science, society, and gender as they structure our thinking at the beginning of the new millennia.

More than mere historical curiosity, postwar women's writing about galactic suburbia has powerfully informed the development of contemporary SF. While some of the original architects of galactic suburbia have passed on or changed career paths, many others continue to participate in the SF community as authors, editors, and mentors to new writers. And over the course of the past three decades, new writers themselves have invoked, revised, and extended the thematic issues and stylistic techniques of early women's SF in their own fiction. This is most apparent in the work of feminist SF authors, who generally liberate their female characters from the confines of the patriarchal home but who continue to explore many of the same issues regarding women's work in a high-tech world. It is also evident

in the work of male authors who use the characters and settings of galactic suburbia in their own critical fictions about science, society, and gender. Taken together, these trends demonstrate how postwar women's stories about galactic suburbia comprise one of the key foundations upon which SF authors of all nationalities and genders continue to build today.

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