Galactic Suburbia

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MAGINE 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. 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 Merril 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 Merril 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, Merril’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 Merril, she also edited a number of SF anthologies including *The Best of Judith Merril* (1976), *Millennial Women* (1978), and, with Le Guin as coeditor, *Interfaces* (1980) and *Edges* (1980). Although Merril 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 Merril. 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 Merril, 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 Merril, 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 Merril and Kidd, these authors have been instrumental in creating and sustaining a vibrant, mutigenerational 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. 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.

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

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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.

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. 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 Merril, 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 Merril’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 Merril 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 Afrodisporic 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 Judy
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 *Symers, 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 Merril warned about the individual and cultural tragedies that come from forcing women to choose between work and family, others including Buck and MacLean (and Merril 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. 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 Ophiuchi 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.

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 millennium.

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.