Exploring Feminist Fabulations: Women's Science Fiction as Counter Science Fiction in Works by Leslie F. Stone and Lilith Lorraine

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Introduction

In her 1933 short story "Shambleau," Catherine Lucielle Moore presents a terrifying rendering of the traditional Medusa tale, as related by a bounty hunter who wanders the streets of a bustling Martian colony. After saving a mysterious veiled woman named Shambleau from a murderous mob, Smith, the bounty hunter, takes pity on his new acquaintance and takes her to his hotel room to give her someplace safe and dry to stay for the night. His initial reading of her situation, however, is soon complicated by his oscillation between perceiving her as a sexually available woman and the disgust he feels toward her more monstrous alien body parts.

On their first night together, Smith finds himself supernaturally compelled towards Shambleau after viewing her smile, clothes, and exotic feminine form more closely. His reading of her body is then juxtaposed with his perception of the other, distinctly alien aspects of her biology. He looks with disgust at her three-fingered hands, the claws on her feet that scratch against the floorboards of the room, and her velvety shoulders that, Smith notes, do not have "the texture of human flesh."[1] During this sequence, his arousal soon shifts to horror and loathing as he stares into the "green animal eyes" staring back up at him as he holds her in his arm. He notes: "what it [the shift in his perception] might be he had no words to tell, but the very touch of her was suddenly loathsome—so soft and velvet and unhuman—and it might have been an animal's face that lifted itself to his mouth—the dark knowledge looked hungrily from the darkness of those slit pupils—and for a mad instant he knew that same wild, feverish revulsion [towards her] that he had seen in the faces of the mob."[2] In his "feverish revulsion" at her alien appearance, Smith expresses his unease at being seduced by something inherently non-human, something Other, by violently throwing Shambleau to the floor. In this act of rage, Shambleau's

[1] Catherine Lucielle Moore, "Shambleau," in *Weird Tales* vol. 22, no. 5 (November 1933), 537.
[2] Ibid. 537-538.

veil becomes slightly dislodged from her head, revealing a momentary glimpse of the crimson, *squirming* hair that would soon both consume Smith's body and steal away his mind.

The following night, a similar sequence occurs, as Smith suddenly awakens in the middle of the night only to see Shambleau unraveling the turban which has, until this point, largely kept her hair out of sight. Upon meeting her gaze, Smith notes that "the green eyes were locked with his in a long, long look that somehow presaged nameless things…the voiceless voice of her mind assailing him with little murmurous promises."[3] Smith then notes that, "her lips moved, and in a murmur that blended indistinguishably with silence and the sway of her body and the dreadful sway of her—her hair—she whispered—very softly, very passionately, 'I shall—speak to you now—in my own tongue—oh, beloved!'"[4] They share no more words for the rest of the scene, as Smith finds himself increasingly seduced by Shambleau's odd movements and "living cloak" of deep, red hair. His final thoughts before slipping into "devouring rapture" are that, "this mingling of rapture and revulsion all took place in the flashing of a moment while the scarlet worms coiled and crawled upon him, sending deep, obscene tremors of that infinite pleasure into every atom that made up Smith…[soon] the traitor in his soul strengthened and drowned out the revulsion."[5]

Throughout this sequence, Shambleau's body, oriented at the intersection between seductively feminine and inherently Other, animal, and beast-like, takes the center stage, becoming not only the focus of Smith's narration, but also the central point on which the entire story pivots. Smith, who has been the primary narrator up until this section, is slowly seduced to the point where he loses all authorial control over the story. His very narration begins to mimic Shambleau's own unique way of speaking through an excessive use of em dashes, and the rest of the story must be told from the perspective of Yarol, a fellow bounty hunter who just barely

[3] Ibid. 543.
[4] Ibid. 543.
[5] Ibid. 544.

manages to save Smith from Shambleau's clutches. In effect, Smith's experiences at the hands of Shambleau, a powerfully seductive female alien, permanently changes his outlook on life, not only through the danger she presents to his bodily autonomy, but through the more fundamental effect she had on the ways in which Smith view and even *narrates* the world around him. The story itself further mimics this fact, as the narrative itself can be divided between Smith's confident prose at the beginning and the scattered, fractured conversations which occur between Smith and Yarol after they escape Shambleau's clutches. By the end of the story, he truly speaks in Shambleau's "own tongue."

In this way, this story is not so much about Smith's control over his own adventure as it is about his loss of authorial control to a female force situated beyond his rational perception of the world. Instead of taking control over his own narrative, Smith finds himself lost in a series of events that are rapidly spiraling out of control, pinned down and penetrated by the crimson hair of the Medusean monster in what some scholars have noted as a reversal of the "heterosexual economy" which had driven the story up until this point.[6] As noted by Susan Gubar and others, Shambleau is a character who represents, "a separate female culture that is beyond our known words and worlds."[7] Over the course of the narrative, Smith finds himself unable to even *begin* to imagine what this culture might entail, and throughout the story simply maps elements of his own culture onto Shambleau in a manner evocative of a misogynist misreading of her story.

The juxtaposition between the antagonistically powerful woman-figure and the misogynistic framing of the narrative thus allows for feminist possibilities to emerge in a conventionally male-oriented story. Put another way, "Shambleau" complicates the framing of

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[6] See Veronica Hollinger. "'Something Like a Fiction': Speculative Intersections of Sexuality and Technology," in *Queer Universes: Sexualities in Science Fiction*, edited by Wendy Gay Pearson, Veronica Hollinger, and Joan Gordon (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2008), 147.

[7] Susan Gubar. "C.L. Moore and the Conventions of Women's Science Fiction." *Science Fiction Studies* vol. 7, no. 1 (1980) 19. See also Lisa Yaszek and Patrick Sharp. *Sisters of Tomorrow: The First Women of Science Fiction* (Middletown, Connecticut, Wesleyan University Press, 2016), 164-166.

the conventional science fiction tale by reorienting this framing in a way which allows Moore to explore alternate ways of both viewing and narrating the relations between the genders, subverting her male narrator by stealing away both his mind and authorial power, if only for a few short pages. Narrative form thus takes on a thematic function as the words of the story itself reflect the internal changes happening in Smith over the course of the text.

I begin with this account of one of C.L. Moore's more popular works in order to suggest, in miniature, the potential that writers such as Moore saw in science fiction as a vessel for promoting more gender-egalitarian forms of thought to a broader American audience. While science fiction was historically a male-dominated genre, the boom of specialized pulp magazines in the 1920s not only allowed women authors to make a living off of their work, but also gave them a platform from which they contributed to a growing political, social, and artistic public female identity in this period. Just as Moore's "Shambleau" depicts the woman she'd liked to have been—red-haired, dominant, powerful—so too did many other women science fiction authors take advantage of the changing times and emerging publishing opportunities to explore new and exciting ways of telling their own types of stories.[8]

However, while critics have long noted that these writers use science fiction to challenge normative gender (such as the "heterosexual reversal" seen in Moore's "Shambleau), these critics have failed in many ways to note the significant importance that narrative technique had on this movement. Specifically, in subverting the traditional forms of science fiction in order to open up feminist possibilities in their stories, these writers were able to reach a much broader audience *while also* being politically assertive in their prose. They took advantage of the openness found in these early science fiction pulps to tell stories that engaged with feminist

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[8] For more on how Moore viewed her own work, see Lester Del Rey, "Forty Years of C.L. Moore," in *The Best of C.L. Moore*, edited by Lester Del Rey (New York: Ballantine Books, 1975): ix-xv.

issues of their time in unique and important ways. Further, this specific subversion of narrative in order to explore feminist goals has yet to be fully explored in the current critical conversation.

For this reason, I propose that we shift our understanding of this small subset of women writers away from simply situating them in a continuum of "women writing science fiction" as previous critics have done, and instead view them in terms that do justice to their innovations in using narrative form as a means of exploring future feminist possibilities. Specifically, this essay will explore three examples of specific narrative techniques used by two such insurgent writers in an attempt to show how they innovated beyond, and in many ways subverted, the traditional conventions of the science fiction genre in ways that would inform the works of the women authors who dominated the genre in the subsequent decades.[9]

While previous criticism has largely either focused on authors writing in the "Golden Age" of science fiction after World War II or explored the *topics* these authors chose to write about (eugenics, utopia, childbirth, etc.), I'll argue here that the contributions of these earlier authors are far more nuanced than previously thought, and suggest that they are actually subverting the precepts of narrative form in ways that have largely gone unnoticed in the critical conversation up until this point. These writers had something *important* to say about gender and, more importantly, used the narrative liberty found in science fiction to do so. Rather than writing explicitly about historically contemporary constructions of gender, these authors pioneered specific techniques and ideas that allowed them to challenge gender directly through both

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[9] To take three examples of more recent women writers who directly cite the pulps of the 1920s and 30s as the reason for their interest in the genre, see the excerpts cited below from Ursula Le Guin, Octavia Butler, and Joanna Russ. Ursula Le Guin notes that she grew up reading science fiction stories which "heavily influenced" her work (see Barbara J. Bucknall, *Ursula K. Le Guin* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1981): 5), while Octavia Butler notes that she shared a similar introduction to science fiction by reading these pulps, even if she "didn't like them very much" (see Robin Roberts, "The Female Alien: Pulp Science Fiction's Legacy to Feminists," *Journal of Popular Culture* vol. 21, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 49). Finally, Joanna Russ discusses her own introduction to the genre at length in her essay "What Can a Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can't Write., in *Images of Science Fiction*, edited by Susan Koppelman Cornillon, 3-20. (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press): 17.

complex and subversive narrative constructions and subtle meta-textual hints that promote multiple readings of how women fit into both the genre and the wider world these stories are meant to play off of.

Specifically, in my first section on Leslie Stone's "Out of the Void" (1929), I will examine two examples of how Stone places story and narrative into direct opposition as she experiments with shifting narrative frames away from narrated (male) experience and toward an emphasis on alternate, and sometimes chaotic, forms of storytelling. I will argue that she does so by subverting the conventional means of relaying plot by intentionally misdirecting the attention of the reader away from what emerges to be the true, authentic core of her story by obfuscating female testimony and knowledge *within* the stories of male narration, taking advantage of the male point of view in order to misdirect the attention of her reader away from the central feminist message in the text. Just as Smith misreads and misrepresents Shambleau throughout Moore's altered Medusa tale, so too does Stone complicate her narrative by questioning, at both the thematic and textual level, whether a male narrator can fully and properly convey the stories of the women surrounding him.

In my second section on Lilith Lorraine's "Into the 28th Century" (1930), I will expand upon this idea and bring it into conversation with the structural inversion present in the story as Anthony, the male protagonist, is slowly converted to the utopian and socialist views of his female companion Iris. In this text, Lorraine inverts traditional narrative structure by both giving full authorial power to the women in the narrative and converting her male protagonist to a point of view entirely antithetical to his original way of looking at the world. In this way, Lorraine challenges normative gender performance by showing a feminist utopia on par with other

contemporary works such as *Herland* (1915), but with sufficient room for both genders to live peacefully in perfect social, political, and technological harmony.

Publication History and Critical Reception

One possible point of entry into this topic lies in the shifting material conditions for women living in the United States at the start of the 20th century. Throughout the 19th century and into the start of the 20th century, women on both sides of the Atlantic faced extreme material inequalities when trying to break into the world of science fiction writing. For this reason, most of the women writing at the end of the 19th century chose to forego science fiction altogether, and instead published their speculative works as either utopian or Gothic narratives, usually under male pseudonyms. Meanwhile, science fiction itself during this period was totally dominated by male authors such as H.G. Wells, Jules Verne, and Arthur Conan Doyle, whose works would influence the mainstream conception of science fiction for years to come. However, at the start of the 20th century this tendency towards male writers began to change, especially in the United States.

Importantly, Moore was not alone in her experimentation with using science fiction as a vessel for more gender-egalitarian forms of thought. Pulp magazines in the United States published stories by hundreds of women in this period, many of whom used this platform to engage with and critique serious inequalities they saw in their immediate social and political moment. Notably, many of these authors started their careers by publishing short stories in one of the many science fiction pulps owned by Hugo Gernsback. As noted by Yaszek and Sharp: "Gernsback featured women writers in the scientific magazines he published prior to the founding of *Amazing Stories* [in 1926] and continued this practice in his genre magazines. Moreover, he encouraged authors to draw on literary traditions that had long been popular with

women writers, including utopian and Gothic fiction, and women easily adapted his conception of SF as a vehicle for scientific inspiration in order to explore how the genre might also serve as a vehicle for social change."[10]

This Gernsbackian mode is best summarized in the introduction to the first edition of *Amazing Stories*, where Gernsback wrote about his excitement for a new form of fiction magazine based in scientifiction: "By 'scientifiction' I mean…a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision." He continues later on the same page, "Our entire mode of living has changed with the present progress, and it is little wonder, therefore, that many fantastic situations impossible 100 years ago—are brought about today. It is in these situations that the new romancers find their great inspiration…[their stories] supply knowledge that we might not otherwise obtain—and they supply it in a very palatable form. For the best of these modern writers of scientifiction have the knack of imparting knowledge, and even inspiration, without once making us aware that we are being taught…Posterity will point to them as having blazed a new trail, not only in literature and fiction, but in progress as well."[11] This is the sentiment that would shape science fiction for years to come, as Gernsback's "charming romance" magazines became spaces where women could freely write science fiction that engaged with ideas such as these. In effect, Gernsback and other similar publishers used a genre that heavily promotes experimentation and prophetic thought to create a space where the voices of women could be heard, allowing these women to publish stories about gender which engaged the minds of their popular readership.[12]

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[10] Yaszek and Sharp, *Sisters of Tomorrow*, Xix. See also the introduction to Jean Stine, Janrae Frank, and Forrest Ackerman, *New Eves: Science Fiction about the Extraordinary Women of Today and Tomorrow* (Stamford, Connecticut: Longmeadow Press): 1994.
[11] Gernsback, Hugo. "A New Sort of Magazine." *Amazing Stories* vol. 1, no. 1 (April 1926): 3.
[12] For a more thorough look at how this occurred, see Justine Larbalestier, *The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2002): 15-38. See also Roger Luckhurst, *Science Fiction* (Malden, Massachusetts: Polity, 2005): 50-75.

In this way, the shifting material conditions present at the end of World War I, in conjunction with the new emphasis on women's rights, opened up new opportunities for women writers in this period. Recent scholarship has noted that around 450 women published science fiction professionally between the years of 1926, when Hugo Gernsback published the first dedicated science fiction magazine, and 1945, when the end of World War II brought on a new generation of women in science fiction.[13] These women writers made up approximately 16% of the total American science fiction writing community in the first two decades of its existence. Most were middle class, white, and highly educated, while a good number were also prominent social activists who "connected their art to their politics."[14] While there were certainly exceptions to this rule, this breakdown paints a picture of a highly educated group of emerging female authors who, due to recent societal changes and their own middle class freedoms, were able to pursue a career in writing science fiction. From this larger group of authors, a small subset—including writers such as Clare Winger Harris, Leslie F. Stone, Lilith Lorraine, C.L. Moore, Sophie Wenzel Ellis, and L. Taylor Hansen—began to explore new, more effective ways of telling stories which challenged the very constraints that had long kept them from publishing in the genre, thus opening up new possibilities for exploring gender through narrative form.

Critics themselves have long chosen to focus on this small subset of writers, who chose to engage with the constraints placed on women in their immediate social and political moment. However, criticism *about* science fiction written by women has long faced two major problems. First, that editors of science fiction histories and encyclopedias have "simply left women out of

[13] *Sisters of Tomorrow,* xvii.

[14] Ibid. Xviii. It should also be noted that there is some debate about the racial make-up of these women, as we only know about the large majority of them through their published work. While the women writing science fiction in this period are believed to be overwhelmingly white, there are of course exceptions. Lilith Lorraine and L. Taylor Hansen, for example, both proudly claimed Indigenous American ancestry. Further, due to the gender constraints of the time, there are most likely many more women authors that we don't know about simply because they chose to publish under pseudonyms.

their works"[15] in the first place, resulting in the loss of many of these authors to history due to a lack of available texts. Second, that even when these women were included, they were largely relegated to the footnotes of editions which focused on other subjects, such as early 20th century utopian authors or the more prominent authors of the science fiction Golden Age of the 1940s onward. While the first problem has largely been solved due to the extensive recovery efforts which have taken place since the 1990s, this second issue still affects the critical conversation even today.

Specifically, there have been several studies over the past few decades of the literary history of women writing science fiction in the 1920s and 30s, which, while excellent criticism, have failed to deal with this second problem. Mostly focusing on contextualizing their writing in their immediate socio-political moment, or framing them in a narrative of progress from Mary Shelley to more contemporary writers such as Ursula Le Guin and Octavia Butler, these critics largely explored the ways that these authors connected works and problems from the 19th century to the later New Wave science fiction of the 1960s and '70s.[16] Other critics further emphasize the escapist nature of science fiction, exploring how the genre which allows these early writers to explore different forms of "being" woman. For example, Sarah Lefanu notes that science fiction provides a safe, alternative space that offers both freedom "from the constraints of realism" and "a means of exploring the myriad of ways in which we are constructed as

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[15] Jane Donawerth, *Frankenstein's Daughters: Women Writing Science Fiction* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1997): xvii. See also Christopher Leslie's recent piece on this subject: "A Rocket of One's Own: Scientific Gender Bending by Isabel M. Lewis, Clare Winger Harris, and Leslie F. Stone in the Early U.S. Science Fiction Pulps," *Femspec* vol. 18, no. 2 (2018): 28-31.

[16] Marleen Barr has written extensively on this matter in her books *Lost in Space: Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina University Press, 1993); *Feminist Fabulations: Space/Postmodern Fiction* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992); *Alien to Femininity: Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1987). See also Robin Roberts, *A New Species: Gender and Science in Fiction* (Urbana, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Ursula Le Guin, "American Science Fiction and the Other," *Science Fiction Studies* vol. 2, no. 3 (1975): 208-210; and Beverly Friend, "Virgin Territory: The Bonds and Boundaries of Women in Science Fiction," *Extrapolation* vol. 14 (1972): 49-58.

women."[17] However, while these critical studies make mention of a few narrative techniques used by these women, they largely favor topic over narration, emphasizing *what* these women were writing about rather than *how* they chose to frame and convey their stories.

More recent works by critics such as Jane Donawerth, Justine Larbalestier, and Lisa Yaszek have done some work to correct this issue; however, even their work is insufficient to correct the disparity between the importance of these authors to subsequent generations and the critical interest in their works.[18] As noted specifically by Larbalestier: "the period from 1926 to 1973 is absolutely crucial to the formation of contemporary feminist science fiction, and yet very little critical work has been undertaken on this period…The importance of the seventies to feminist science fiction has been convincingly demonstrated…but the importance of the earlier period needs explication."[19] Similarly, there has long been a sharp divide in the critical conversation not only between the feminist recovery efforts of critics such as Pamela Sargent and Susan Gubar and the mainstream tradition of masculinist science fiction, but also between fiction written before and after 1970.[20] This divide has long fractured the critical conversion in a way which leaves works written by women authors before the 1970s behind, and this fact is even more apparent when discussing works written by women authors before the end of World War II.

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[17] Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction* (London: Women's Press, 1988): 5.

[18] Jane Donawerth offers the most comprehensive overview of this idea in her works which trace the history of feminist science fiction from the 17th century until the present day. For three good sources, see *Frankenstein's Daughters, Utopian Science Fiction by Women*, 1997; Jane Donawerth and Carol Kolmerten's introduction to *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women: Worlds of Difference*. (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994); and Donawerth's short essay "Science Fiction by Women in the Early Pulps, 1926-1930," in *Utopian and Science Fiction by Women*, 137-152. For more recent criticism, see Lisa Yaszek, *Galactic Suburbia: Recovering Women's Science Fiction* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008) and Justine Larbalestier, *The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction*, 2002.

[19] *The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction*, 2. For further criticism in the tradition of emphasizing the importance of the 70s to feminist science fiction, see Natalie M. Rosinsky, "A Female Man? The 'Medusean' Humor of Joanna Russ." *Extrapolation* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 31-36; Sarah Lefanu. *In the Chinks of the World Machine*, 1988; and Jeanne Cortiel. *Demand My Writing: Joanna Russ, Feminism, Science Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999).

[20] See Pamela Sargent's introduction to her anthology *Women of Wonder: Science Fiction Stories By Women About Women* (New York: Random House 1975). See also Susan Gubar, "C.L. Moore and the Conventions of Women's Science Fiction," 16-17.

In this way, while I in many ways agree with the tradition created by Marleen Barr, Sarah Lefanu, and Susan Gubar of understanding utopian and science fiction stories written by women as "feminist fabulations,"[21] in which women authors synthesize many different traditions into science fiction as a way of commenting on the patriarchal world around them (i.e. "topic"), I side more with Jane Donawerth and Justine Larbalestier in seeing the importance of understanding science fiction *not only* as a tradition unto itself, *but also* as a genre which opens up unique possibilities for female insurgents who are innovating in this primarily male-dominated field (i.e. "form").[22] However, I still feel that the disparity between the importance of form to this conversation and the actual critical work that's been done on the subject is a problem that still needs to be addressed. For this reason, to truly understand the challenge these stories mount to normative constructions of gender and women's subordination in the sciences, we need to understand how they operate at the level of narrative *as well as* topic. Topic remains an ever-important part of *why* these women were writing, but the narrative mechanism by which these women explored these topics have yet to be fully studied or understood due to the lack of criticism written on the women authors of this period.

Over the past three to four years there has been a small resurgence of interest in this topic, largely due to the publication of several anthologies which have brought many of these writers back into the spotlight.[23] However, even these efforts are not enough to allow for a full understanding of just what these women were doing with both narrative and gender at this moment in history. A revisiting of the importance of these early writers to the subsequent generations is necessary for a robust critical conversation about how women authors have shaped

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[21] By "feminist fabulations," I mean specifically, "feminist fiction that offers us a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the patriarchal one we know, yet returns to confront the known patriarchal world in some cognitive way," as noted by Marleen Barr in *Lost in Space: Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond*, 11.
[22] See Larbalestier, *The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction*, 39-41.
[23] For two of the most popular, see Yaszek and Sharp *Sisters of Tomorrow*, 2016 and Justine Larbalestier, *Daughters of Earth* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2006).

the genre over time from the footnotes of critical editions and pulp-pages of the early science fiction magazines. By emphasizing narrative analysis, we can more accurately examine heretofore unexplored dimensions in each of these stories' critiques of normative gender. Put another way, by re-examining their archive of works from the perspective of narrative analysis, we can expand on and modify the currently incomplete story told by current scholarship about exactly what these authors were experimenting with in their work. For this reason, we need to view these authors as individuals worthy of study *independent of* their influence on future writers, else they will yet again be lost to the footnotes and an important piece of the canon will once again fall prey to history.

In this vein, this paper will primarily examine three characters who are emblematic of how these writers paradoxically both limit their stories inside of this framework of male narration while simultaneously subverting this convention by exploring gender along a different axis of thought. We can distinguish this axis by noting instances where these narrators misdirect the reader's gaze and (intentionally) misread the lifestyles and actions of their female characters. In doing so, they resist any single narrative which might contain all the truth in favor of a slightly messier way of looking at and constructing the world, characterized by loose narrative ends, ambiguous gender roles, and a more complicated way of viewing the roles of women in society. In this intentionally obfuscated construction of narrative, these writers are able to engage not only with the wider conventions of science fiction, but also to expand their stories along previously unexplored, and only newly widespread, dimensions in the political and social spheres.[24]

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[24] Specifically in regards to first wave feminism, eugenics, birth control, and other movements happening in the United States at this time period. See Donawerth, "Lilith Lorraine: Socialist Writer in the Pulps," *Science Fiction Studies* vol. 17, no. 2 (July, 1990): 255-256.

The driving force behind these stories thus becomes the narrative tension built up by this intentional misdirection of the reader's gaze, as the narrator's version of events is often subverted or downright contradicted by women found in the later parts in each story, who themselves act as alternative sources of truth. Just as is the case in Moore's "Shambleau," these writers compromise their male narrators and replace them with images of powerful women who are able to find ways to resolve this tension between narrative and story.

For all of these authors, placing the events of a story into opposition with the one doing the telling was not only a common technique of their narrative craft, but a source of aesthetic, social, and political appeal. These writers manipulated the assumptions of the interpretive communities who were reading their works by intentionally framing their stories in ways that called the trustworthiness of their male narrators into question. In this way, these writers responded to and subverted the expectations of their readership by re-orienting their stories both within and away from an established conventional framework of male narration, not only situating their narratives and characters along a different axis of narration, but also both telling stories which explored the status of women in different ways and by questioning how women might exist in a technologically advanced society.

Exploring Gender in the Void

One excellent example of this narrational effect appears in Leslie F. Stone's 1929 short story "Out of the Void," in which Stone complicates the narrative of the first woman in space ("Dana Gleason") by calling into question the reliability of her male narrators in ways which point out their flaws as storytellers. Stone herself was a highly experienced science fiction author, who had published stories in local newspapers when she was only fifteen. After Gernsback purchased her first batch of stories in 1929, Stone would go on to publish over twenty

science fiction stories, primarily in magazines owned by Gernsback, before eventually retiring from science fiction in 1945. As noted by Yaszek and Sharp: "If stone was welcomed into the early SF magazine community on her own terms as a woman, it is likely because, regardless of her sex or gender, she produced fiction that was clearly in line with Gernsback's vision for the genre."[25]

In "Out of the Void," this vision is put on display as Stone portrays the first astronaut's trip to outer space on a backdrop framed by a revolving series of narrators who each take turns telling bits and pieces of her story, while simultaneously inserting their own prophetic interpretations, opinions, and experiences into the text. By nesting the narrative in this manner, the true events of the story become several times removed from the characters who are relating them, creating a disorienting effect that allows for the subversion of the conventional narrative frame.

The first in this series of narrators is an unnamed American stock broker, who has left his wife to go on a fishing trip before being captured by the aliens who had, in the previous pages, stolen his clothes. After his kidnapping and subsequent imprisonment aboard the alien ship, the story introduces us to the second primary narrator, the silver alien Sa Dak, who will convey most of the events which occur in Part II of the story. During his imprisonment, the unnamed male narrator begins exploring the ship, eventually finding a note, in English, written to Professor Rollins from Dana. Upon realizing that this is the same famous (presumably male) explorer he has read about in newspapers before; the male narrator subsequently relates his own first-hand knowledge of Dana as a larger-than-life globe-trotting adventure hero. Sa Dak finds the narrator reading the manuscript, and notes that he and his companion came to Earth with two goals in

[25] Yaszek and Sharp, *Sisters of Tomorrow*, 26.

mind: to give Dana's diary to Professor Rollins, the professor who helped build her rocket, and to relate the events which happened after she landed on their far-off planet.

The aliens and the male narrator soon arrive at Professor Rollins' lab, at which point the narrative slides away from the male narrator yet again in favor of events related by Elsie (Professor Rollins' niece and assistant), who is later cited as a co-narrator and editor of the actual physical text we are reading. Elsie describes how Dana came to accept Professor Rollins' invitation to go to Mars, and relates the events leading up to the launching of the rocket. Only after this series of flashbacks and descriptions of Dana's life as a man do all of the characters finally gather round a table on the spaceship and read Dana's diary aloud for all to hear. At this point, the humans find out that Dana was actually a woman all along, and are greatly surprised at this revelation. Elsie, who was tasked with reading Dana's journal, feels incredibly uncomfortable at this point, stating that, "I do not feel quite right reading this," due to the journal's intimate contents.[26] It is only after the initial shock that Dana's experiences aboard the spacecraft are related in full, as Elsie she reads each passage aloud to the collected group.

In her diary, Dana writes about how she grew up to hate women due to the loss of her mother and the influence of her father. She then describes her time at the Rollins' and the subsequent liftoff of the rocket, as well as how she claimed her womanhood aboard the spaceship by slowly falling in love with Richard Dorr, her close friend and sole companion on the journey. Finally, Dana relates the rocket's terrifying descent towards destruction, as the pair overshoot their target (Mars) and crash land on a far-off, previously unknown planet inhabited by several intelligent alien civilizations. Her journal ends after this crash landing, and Dana accordingly loses her "I" in the narrative as Sa Dak takes over and narrates the remainder of her story

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[26] Leslie F. Stone, "Out of the Void, A New Interplanetary Story in Two Parts - Part I," *Amazing Stories* vol. 4, no. 5 (1929): 452.

(published as a separate “Part II” in the following month’s edition of *Amazing Stories*) in which Dana and Richard Dorr take part in a slave rebellion on this far-off alien planet.

Over the course of Part II, Dana’s role as protagonist is slowly eroded as the story pivots to focus more on the rebellion itself and the competition between Richard Dorr and the alien antagonist Moura-Weit, who are both fighting for her affections. While Richard Dorr attempts a more violent approach in aiding the slave rebellion, Dana instead conspires with her servant and another friend to abscond with all of the spaceships of the ruling class. After a climactic final battle, Dana and Richard Dorr settle down and begin establishing peace between all the races on this planet.

As the story comes to a close, “Out of the Void” reveals that Sa Dak had actually been Moura-Weit all along, the now-reformed antagonist of Part II who Dana has sent to Earth in order to tell Professor Rollins about the events on this strange planet. Only after each of the characters come to terms with this sudden revelation does the narrative zoom back out, relating on its final pages the experiences of the two highest-order narrators: Elsie, who is said to have left to explore outer space on the aliens’ ship, and the unnamed male narrator, who must return to a wife who insists that he must have drunk too deeply from the whiskey in his fishing hut.

Through this progression of narrators, Stone is able to juxtapose the written and spoken testimony of her female characters against the interpretations and hearsay of the male protagonists who are relating their stories. On the surface, the unnamed male narrator and Moura-Weit have complete control over the course of the narrative. However, their readings don’t hold up under scrutiny, as Dana’s diary and Elsie’s own place in the story are slowly positioned as the two authentic cores of the text.

Through these discrepancies, Dana is positioned as a figure who is divided between two quite literal “readings” of her situation. On one hand we are presented with the figure of the male adventure hero through the male narrator’s own readings of newspapers and magazines, while on the other we are told Dana’s true thoughts and testimony of events through Elsie’s reading of her diary. Meanwhile, Elsie also becomes a figure surrounded by tension, as the domestic portrait of her given at the beginning of the narrative is slowly broken down over the course of the story, leading to the eventual realization that Elsie herself is well-versed in the science behind the rocket, as well as an adventure hero(ine) on par with Dana through her own departure into the Void in the final lines of the text.

In this way, Stone takes advantage of conventional science fiction framing techniques to obscure the authentic core narratives of her female characters, relegating their voices to diaries and footnotes, while simultaneously empowering them by giving them agency *inside* of these boundaries. In this way, “Out of the Void” questions whether masculine narrators can fully and properly convey the stories of the women they meet by positioning these figures inside of a seemingly awkward narrative structure which emphasizes, and in many ways subverts, the ostensibly subordinate role of each of these female characters. Stone is able to undermine the authority of both the unnamed male narrator and Moura-Weit by purposefully complicating and contrasting the relationships between her female characters and the men who surround them, either by showing how a woman can be “just as good as” a man (in the case of Dana Gleason), or by subverting the conventional masculine frame narration through both the presence of Elsie Rollins as a hidden narrator and through Dana’s written record of her experiences aboard the rocket. In this way, Stone sets up “Out of the Void” as a story where the reader is supposed to initially misread by raising expectations about the place of women in society, only for Stone to

later subvert and destabilize these notions in ways which foreground the experiences of her female characters.

Dana's Gender-Bending Presentation

As noted, one of the best examples of this tendency can be found in Dana herself, whose story is told primarily through conflicting written accounts of "his" adventures as a child and the physical diary through which the events on the rocket are related. In this way, Stone subtly presents Dana as a somewhat androgynous character who is unable to be bound by either narrative or gender, as the representations of her true authentic self are often juxtaposed against what the other character think she *ought* to be.

After finding Dana's note in a metal box aboard the alien spaceship, the unnamed male narrator begins listing off hearsay and information he has gathered from news articles, a list which centers on how Dana's father raised her with "a hatred of women" after the death of her mother. After this loss, and in conjunction with her father's banishment of all other women from her social circles, Dana goes on to live an almost impossibly idealized life as a male explorer and adventurer: navigating the arctic, climbing mountains, hunting in the orient, being abducted by Arabs, and, finally, joining the British forces in World War I as an ace fighter pilot.[27] The unnamed male narrator notes at the end of this short biography that, after the death of Dana's father in the third year of the war, "the name of Gleason was forgotten with the rising of new stars of front-page brilliancy. What happened to the son after the leadership of the father was

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[27] It is important to note that the idea of "cross-dressing" a female protagonist was an important and controversial topic around the time of this story's publishing. For two often-cited examples, see Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) and Radclyff Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), both published roughly a year before "Out of the Void" first appeared in print.

gone? Was this manuscript perhaps the answer? Had Dana Gleason, Jr., accomplished the last possible thing left for him to do?"[28]

This fall from "front-page brilliancy" is key, as it foregrounds a question of how Dana will later surpass these heroic actions. How, the reader might ask, will Dana return to the front pages that the unnamed male narrator so admires? In this reading, Dana is exactly the type of idealized macho-hero that one might expect to find in a pulp science fiction story, hopelessly romanticized and idealized by other men, yet, at the same time, fleeting in her position, and soon falling out of favor as newer and better stories rise to take her place. In this way, the meta-narration present in this passage serves two primary purposes. First, it gives the reader their first impression of Dana as a character, setting up expectations that (s)he will be a fantastical man of adventure, as is convention in the popular science fiction stories of this period. Second, this scene calls into question the impossible ideal that the narrator's reading maps onto Dana as a character, as (s)he is made larger than life, a fantastical figure, a myth of epic proportions who encapsulates all of the adventure stories which have come before.

This second reading soon rings true, as over the coming pages Dana's portrayal as male hero is broken down by new testimony, related ostensibly by the male narrator but really given by Elsie, in which Dana's physical body is coded as increasingly feminine. In Elsie's telling, Dana's deeds do not match up with the descriptions of her increasingly gendered body, as her image as an ideal masculine adventure hero is called into question by Elsie's increasingly romanticized descriptions. This section does not call into question the deeds themselves, but, rather, her positioning as male superhero, which is made contradictory to her biology.

In this way, Dana, as she exists in the eyes of Stone's readers, is portrayed as an inherently dynamic figure, despite never actually appearing in the story directly. First, she is a

[28] "Out of the Void - Part I," 445.

masculine ideal constructed from the unnamed narrator's news articles. Then, she is a figure of romance loved by Elsie. Only then does the reader arrive at Dana's own thoughts, as Elsie reads Dana's diary aloud to the gathered party. Most prominently, after the party finds out Dana's true gender, they are again surprised by her following exclamation that by leaving Earth in a rocket and by loving Richard Dorr, Dana arrived at some final understanding of "womanhood" which exists beyond the closure of this gender-bending narrative. As specifically noted by Dana in this section: "Did I, in losing a world, not gain something else, something more precious? Who could have said that Dana Gleason should be happy discovering her womanhood?"[29]

Note specifically the line which starts with "who could have said," as the uncertainty surrounding this third person statement raises several questions about the "who" Dana is referring to. Namely, is it an impersonal "who" which references society as a whole, or is it directly targeted at the reader who is still stuck between Dana's ever-flickering gender performances? In "discovering her womanhood," Dana is specifically referring to a break in the gender-bending narrative she has been a part of prior to this moment, choosing instead to impose a premature, conservative end on her own story by sliding into a conventional gender role in her romance plot with Richard Dorr. Instead of *breaking* the constraints of gender by continuing her gender-bending narrative of cross-dressing as a male adventure hero, she *takes on* the constraints of womanhood by placing herself into a submissive role to Richard Dorr, a fact which is explored in depth in Part II of the story. The real question, then, centers on whether or not this discovered womanhood is "precious" enough to justify this switch from an unstable portrayal of gender to gender in its normative form.

Critics have written several times on this particular passage, coming to the general consensus that this is not a fair trade. Specifically, as noted by Donawerth, "Dana, although the

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[29] Ibid. 445.

central narrator, is allowed a voice only to tell the story of her falling in love with Richard Dorr…[and] even though as a 'female man' Dana is the hero of Part I, as soon as she loves she becomes only a victim to be rescued, and the point of view shifts away from her."[30] In trading away her authorial agency, Dana places herself at the mercy of the constraints placed on women in the sciences and science fiction, subordinating herself to the men in Part II by shedding the "female man" persona that she has worn up until this point.

However, viewing Dana's choice as solely a bad thing misses the point of this section entirely. In leaving the Earth, Dana not only discovered her womanhood, but also took back control of the narrative itself on her own terms. Specifically, it is only in her departure that the scattered progression of narrators in the text takes on some form of consistency, as Elsie reads a direct and unabridged history of the events which occurred on the spacecraft through Dana's own diary. Unlike the other sections of Part I, which are told primarily by the unnamed male narrator, and Part II, which are told by Moura-Weit, here we are given an actual glimpse into Dana's interior thoughts for the first time in the text. We are still "reading" her character, however, this time we don't need to rely on a compromised narrator to do so.

At the conclusion of Part I, the climax of an individual story which focuses on Dana coming to terms with her ability to live as a woman in space, we are given our first and only representation of Dana as an individual, an existence separate from the misreadings performed by the other (male) characters in the text. The formal break between the two parts of "Out of the Void" not only highlights the different narrational cores of the story (that of Dana's diary in Part I and Moura-Weit's testimony in Part II), but also acts as a thematic break between these two distinct sections. Dana's story as an individual ends in this culminating moment in which she comes to terms with her womanhood, while the second part focuses more heavily on her

[30] Donawerth, *Frankenstein's Daughters*, 157-158.

positioning as a character in a totally different, though connected, story of revolution on a far-distant planet. By venturing out into space, Dana metaphorically throws off the gendered constraints which have bound her presentation in public up until this point. In parallel with the loss of gravity, Dana able to escape the gendered expectations created not only by her upbringing but as a result of living on Earth at all, a fact which is mirrored on the level of narrative by our first and only glimpse into how *she* feels about the events portrayed in the story.

In this way, Dana's "womanhood" is redefined to include not only her love for Richard Dorr, but also a meta-textual recognition that by claiming her womanhood she is placing herself at the mercy of the gendered constraints which bind both the technological access in the story itself and the narrative which seeks to tell this story. However, at the same time this framing allows the reader to have a glimpse into Dana's own, undistorted thoughts, allowing for a broadening of her character by both introducing the gender-bending twists and portraying a story which is fundamentally contradictory to the one that the reader was given up until this point. Dana's internal thoughts, as related in her diary, are much more dynamic than one might expect, as she comes to terms with what *she* wants out of life, rather than simply following a path of what male figures *want* her to be.

The conceit, of course, is that both the unnamed male narrator and Elsie are relating this story in hindsight. Despite their descriptions and misreadings of Dana throughout Part I, they both already know the entire plot of the story and are even relating it years in the future. In gradually building up to Dana's gender revelation, and the resulting acceptance of her womanhood, these two narrators (and by extension Stone herself) are able to subvert the conventions of the science fiction genre in a way which promotes female autonomy as it exists outside of male narration. The diary itself is a physical document, a testimony of Dana's

interiority that is not affected by the motives or recollection of the other narrators in the work. Just as the unnamed male narrator foregrounds her ideal male persona before the crash and Moura-Weit places her in a passive role in his later narration, we as readers are supposed to initially misread her true character in an aesthetic build-up to the revelation that this cultural artifact, this document quite literally brought to Earth from another world, is the only true rendition we will get of the events which transpired on the rocket.

In all of these scenarios, the men who are narrating Dana's story are made incapable of either telling or even understanding Dana as a three-dimensional character, pushing her individual autonomy aside in favor of their own misreadings of her character. By placing Dana's true thoughts in an artifact which exists *outside* of their narration, Stone is thus able to subvert this generic convention, and instead offer a new and different conception of female agency in which a woman can be both an adventure hero *and* a woman at the heart of a space romance.

Dana's gender-bending narrative thus becomes a locus of inconsistency in the text which complicates the convention of placing the male voice at the center of the "ideal" science fiction story. While Stone first presents Dana not only in the performative role of impersonating a man, but also as an active and self-proclaimed woman-hater, Dana's transition from this performative form of hyper-masculinity towards a more controlled (yet still powerful) form of feminized domestic bliss aboard the spaceship shows an interesting rhetorical move on Stone's part towards a better-informed understanding of how gender relates to scientific opportunity in science fiction narratives. While Dana's hyper-masculine presentation early in the story soon shifts into a more normative gender formation after her flight on the space ship with Richard Dorr, Stone's portrayal of Dana as a cross-dresser throughout the first half of the story also informs, and in

many ways prefaces, a more egalitarian way of looking at the world that would become common in the science fiction stories of later decades.

Exploring Elsie as a Hidden Frame Narrator

However, while I'd argue that Elsie, much like the male narrators in the text, fails in certain ways to understand Dana as a three-dimensional character, this portrayal of Elsie's character is actually misleading, highlighting a crucial aspect of Stone's "Out of the Void" which has not been written on in a critical capacity. Namely, there are two conflicting representations of "Elsie" in the work that, in their juxtaposition, embody the impossible constraints and expectations placed on female writers and characters in the genre.

On one hand, we have the Elsie who embodies the expectations of the pulp science fiction genre: a woman who embroiders by the fire and acts as a potential love interest for the hero before his expedition out among the stars. On the other, there exists an extra-textual, highly educated Elsie who assists the male narrator in the creation of the text and, eventually, sets out on an expedition of her own into the Void. In each of these conflicting representations—one rooted in the actualized past of the text (as reported in the words of the male narrators) and one existing in the futuristic, unrealized potential of women exploring both space and narrative form—Stone orients Elsie as a character who exists on two distinct textual levels, striking a contrast between the conventional representations of women in science fiction and the woman-adventurer who might be realized in the present text as well as the future. The marginalized woman-by-the-fire ends up being a primary character after all, as well as the character in which the story rests its final hopes of further exploring worlds beyond our own. In this way, the obfuscation of this second, "hidden" Elsie hints towards, and in many ways embodies, a potential future in which women write, and are represented in, science fiction in new and innovative ways.

As just one example of this tendency, the dissonance between these two halves of Elsie's character can be seen in the odd narrative tension surrounding her contributions to the text as a whole. This tension most often appears in places where the male narrator's point of view comes into contact with the "extra-textual Elsie" named above, who exists outside of the male narrator's understanding of how a woman in a science fiction story ought to act.

For instance, when the male narrator arrives as Professor Rollins' lab the first impression he has of Elsie is of "a slender girlish form…holding her dressing gown at her throat,"[31] only later noting that, "it is to her [Elsie] I owe the story of all that had gone before this date. When years had passed, she came to me in New York to help me in this work, and so together we compiled this record, giving facts and descriptions as we remembered them."[32] Without this one off-handed comment buried in the middle of several pages of exposition, there would be no way of knowing that this story was compiled with the help of a female narrator until the very final lines of the text, a month and roughly 100 pages later, when the male narrator recalls the events which happened *after* his trip to the launch site. In these final lines, the male narrator notes that, "the Rollinses went back with Moura-Weit, for the Professor was anxious to see the Void. Professor Rollins died aboard the *Yodverl*, but what Elsie Rollins experienced aboard the interplanetary vehicle is another story. She returned only to straighten out the effects of the late Professor Ezra Rollins. She came to New York and stayed long enough to help me compile the above story, which will not be published until I am dead."[33].

Note specifically the dissonance between "it is to [Elsie] I owe the story of all that has gone before this date" and the male narrator's note that Elsie merely "helped" him compile the narrative. In these sections, Stone makes it clear that, while the story is told from the point of the

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[31] "Out of the Void - Part I," 447.
[32] Ibid. 447.
[33] "Out of the Void - Part II," 565.

view of the male narrator, Elsie's contributions to the story are far from nominal, and in fact are greatly disproportionate to her actual representation in the text. After all, despite often being physically and social relegated to the fringes of the narrative, she is also a primary source for a large part of the story, giving the male narrator all the information he needs to relate how Dana came to board the rocket in the first place.[34] Further, when reviewing the sections that Elsie supposedly "helped" with, it becomes apparent that she knows a bit more than the male narrator might imply.

For instance, in the section titled "The Great Invention," it is directly revealed that most of the primary information about the rocket actually comes from Elsie herself. In the paragraph which comes right before this section, the narrator notes that, "Miss Rollins has described it [the rocket] to me and tried to make me understand the principle by which it worked. As I said before, I am a layman and have little knowledge of machinery."[35] The full section itself contains a detailed description of the rocket and its launch, but what is most interesting is the narrator's deference to Elsie's knowledge of the rocket not only as a first-person witness to what it looked like, but also as an expert on how it worked. Most interesting in this regard is the sole footnote in the text, which describes, in great detail, exactly how the rocket works from the perspective of someone who understands all of the physics and engineering behind its construction. The male narrator, or possibly even Elsie herself, makes an effort to note in the first paragraph of this footnote that, "because of his lack of technical knowledge, the writer has failed to explain the fundamental processes by which the rocket, when once out of the atmosphere of Earth, could hold and increase its speed as it flew through space," implying that the rest of the note's content

[34] See Christopher Leslie, "A Rocket of One's Own," 25-27.
[35] "Out of the Void - Part I," 448-449.

actually comes from Elsie's understanding of the physics behind the rocket.[36] In this subversion of the male narrator's role as primary author, Stone positions Elsie as a figure is fundamentally different from the character described by the male narrator at the beginning of the text. Or, as playfully noted by critic Christopher Leslie, this is where it becomes painfully obvious that "a female author [Stone] has employed a male narrator who has a female editor."[37] Despite being portrayed throughout the text as simply a wallflower-like character, existing on the fringes of the story as an observer who merely sits "mending and embroidering" while the men talk science across the room, this note implies that she is actually extremely well-educated, and possibly just as knowledgeably about the workings of the rocket as her uncle.[38] Not only that, she also positions herself in the important role as an editor of this story, correcting and in many ways orienting the story in these important moments which exist outside of the male narrator's knowledge of both the plot and the science behind the rocket itself.

It is in this vein of thought that the male narrator's note that, "what Elsie Rollins experienced aboard the interplanetary vehicle is another story" becomes a somewhat unsatisfying ending to the narrative. We are presented with a character who, at first glance, embodies all of the conventions of how women are represented in science fiction, only to find out later that she is both a rocket scientist who ends up exploring a foreign planet and a critical editor of the very story we are reading. Yet, we are never given a satisfying resolution to her story.

Instead, we must search for a resolution for this friction by understanding Elsie as existing on two separate planes in the narrative. She embodies everything conventional about representations of women in science fiction, while *simultaneously* stretching the boundaries of what women can do in science fiction by taking on the roles of both narrator and astronaut along

[36] Ibid. 449.
[37] Leslie, "A Rocket of One's Own," 25.
[38] "Out of the Void - Part I," 448.

the fringes and in the footnotes of the narrative. The Elsie who exists in the text is *also* a true Elsie, because she is being portrayed by the extra-textual Elsie who has editorial control over the narrative itself. Through this positioning, Stone is able to explore possibilities in female representation by purposefully hiding a separate female-astronaut-writer on the fringes of the text, inside of a higher order frame story that is only hinted at in the footnotes and tangents of male narrator's point of view. Put another way, just as Stone hides Dana's gender through the use of masculine clothes and mannerisms, so too does she dress up Elsie's narration to hide the fact that this story includes yet another highly intelligent female astronaut, who just so happens to also be a writer herself.

Elsie and Female Authorship

I emphasize viewing Elsie on two narrative levels because such a construction allows for a broadening of the feminist work being done by this story. For example, such a perspective allows us to look carefully at how Elsie embodies the idea of *narrative potential* in regards to female authorship. By "narrative potential," I mean specifically this friction between how Elsie is *described* and the actions she takes throughout the text, tensions that open up new narrative possibilities in the work's interpretation, but are never fully or even satisfactorily explored by the male narrator.

Like Dana, Elsie's interiority is never fully explored in the text. Instead, we are forced to rely on various tangential methods of understanding her motives, such as in the above example of reading her scientific knowledge through the voice of the male narrator. However, by carefully viewing the potential for further stories that Stone litters throughout the text, we can map the ways in which Stone is in fact challenging future writers to complete these stories, thus homing in on one of the most important social and political aspects of this work as a whole.

It's important to note that out of all the characters in the work, Elsie is the one whose circumstances change the most over the course of the text. Starting as a lab assistant and ending as a passenger and explorer on an interplanetary space-ship, Elsie's depiction at the start of the story does not align with her actual actions over the course of the narrative. As the first fully "female" character presented in the text, Elsie serves the important role of acting as a stand-in for the female observer for most of the narrative. In this way, the first half of "Out of the Void" often portrays Elsie as a subordinate figure, ostensibly pushing her to the periphery of the narrative by shaping her character inside the boundaries of the conventional "young female science fiction love interest." In contrast to Dana, who is first realized as an idealized masculine adventure-hero, Elsie's introduction positions her solidly in the role of an unfulfilled domestic woman who, by helping her uncle with his work, had squandered her precious youth. As noted above, when viewing her for the first time the male narrator describes Elsie as a woman who, "has already passed her twenties; the bloom of her youth was gone, given without thought of self to the service of the old scientist."[39]

Over the course of the next few pages, it becomes apparent that Elsie is slowly falling in love with Dana, as she begins to orient herself into the role of the "love interest back home" which is so common in other stories in this genre. In these two representations—first as the female lab assistant who helps her uncle with his work and second as a potential love interest—Elsie is set up as a character who embodies all of the conventions of how women are normally portrayed in science fiction pulp stories such as these. However, these conventions are never fully realized, and it soon becomes apparent that these tendencies are instead derived from the male narrator's own rendition of Elsie, the "conventional" Elsie who exists solely in her capacity

[39] Ibid. 447.

to serve the other characters in the work. In fact, many of these interpretations of her character are soon supplanted by instances where it's implied that Elsie has full control over the narrative.

As noted previously, Elsie's apparent infatuation with Dana ends up going nowhere as the feeling was far from mutual. However, the text surrounding this apparent infatuation paints a different story of Elsie's real intentions. In the events leading up to the launch of the rocket, for example, Elsie (in her role as the narrator of this section) notes that Dana, "never made any overtures of friendship to Elsie Rollins, preferring rather the society of men. He showed that he appreciated the fact that the girl had set him on a pedestal and admired him, and his attitude to her was one of consideration, but during the seven months of his sojourn on the veld, she was never one of his intimates."[40] Despite a kiss on the cheek as Dana entered the space ship before its launch, the "love" story between Elsie and Dana is squashed before it could even begin, with Dana's subsequent courtship with Richard Dorr instead taking on this role as "the love story." Critics have noted the queer implications of reading Elsie as in love with Dana. However, these reading miss the point by failing to take into account the *other* ways that Elsie challenged the status quo of her historical moment.[41]

Stone, through Elsie, manipulates the conventional heterosexual narrative not only by hinting at a queer reading of Dana and Elsie's relationship, but also by undermining any assumptions the reader might have about Elsie's place in the story. In her role as a side-character, Elsie has limited access to a suggestively sexual narrative register. She has a role in this narrative, but has no actual agency over the matter. On the other hand, in her role as a true narrator she has a much larger amount of control over the story itself, raising questions about *why* she would portray her relationship with Dana in such a suggestively queer fashion. In effect,

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[40] Ibid. 448.
[41] For the best sample of this criticism, see *Frankenstein's Daughters*, 158-159.

the first reading fails to account for the full complexity of her character, but hints that there is something more to her character by denying her a place in the traditional heterosexual narrative. Or, as noted by Donnawerth, “Elsie’s love for Dana exists in this area of virtual reality [where the transvestite marks out the space of desire], where Dana is both man *and* woman.”[42] In this way, Stone, through Elsie, marks out specific spaces of desire in the text, while simultaneously excluding Elsie from these spaces. Her representation in the story as a female love interest mirrors her position as a true narrator, as she is yet again subordinated by the appearance of a male alternate (in this case, in Dana’s rejection of Elsie in favor of Richard Dorr).

In a similar fashion, despite the purported loss of her physical “bloom,” Elsie takes on the role of interstellar explorer by the end of the text, supplanting the idea that her character exists solely for the benefit of others by allowing for further exploration and discovery after the death of her uncle. This change in perception marks a shift in Elsie’s implied *purpose* in the text from the target of implied male affection (which is supplanted by Dana’s coldness towards her and later gender reveal) to a character with agency of her own. In the first, she is a body placed on display by the male narrator. In the second, she gains agency over herself by choosing to continue her voyage in space, leaving New York after helping the narrator compile their draft of the story.

In both of these cases, there is a reversal of expectations as the male narrator’s *descriptions* of Elsie are soon supplanted by role-reversing *actions*. The narrative tension which arises as a result of these two conflicting, though complimentary, sides of Elsie’s character serve as yet another example of how Stone complicates the roles of her female characters. The male narrator views Elsie as a woman deprived of her youth. However, this reading is shown to be incorrect over the course of the text as Stone hints at the fact that Elsie is a far more intelligent

[42] Ibid. 159.

and central character than her initial representation might lead us to believe. She quashes her own love story through the note that she was "never one of [Dana's] intimates," while simultaneously ending her own story as a fulfilled single woman exploring the Void out among the stars. Through her omnipotence and omnipresence in the work, Elsie acts as a physical signifier of the *narrative potential* which is paradoxically embodied by and taken from the women who chose to write in a genre which views them as subordinate figures.

In this tug and pull between the conflicting sides of Elsie's character, there exists a very basic literary device in which a *conventional expectation* is supplanted by a foreword-thinking *narrative revelation* which gives more authority to Elsie both as a narrator and as a character in her own right. Elsie's character is central to the *story* (i.e. in her capacity as a primary frame narrator, providing the information for great stretches of the text) yet simultaneously peripheral to the *narrative* in ways which misdirect the reader from her true authorial role. Put another way, if Dana is the central figure which is meant to combat the idea that women can't be astronauts or adventurers, Elsie serves an almost meta-textual purpose of pushing against the idea that women can't *write* such stories.

Even if we only hear her through the point of view of the male narrator, her inclusion in the frame story, and, further, her role as the source of scientific knowledge, sets her character apart from other representations of women in the genre as Stone pushes the boundaries of how women living on the fringes of science are portrayed. Most importantly, these issues are all contained and explored in a character which operates inside the conventions of the genre itself, who challenges gender roles from the sidelines of the text, an omnipresent figure who is, at the same time, often either hidden from view or relegated to the corners of the room. In this way, Elsie operates as an insurgent figure who opens up even further possibilities for women in the

genre, embodying *not only* the space-faring adventures of Dana, but also the *narrative potential* of female authorship itself as it exists in the realm of science fiction publishing.

Though this narrative turn of supplanting conventional expectations by a later revelation is quite basic, it is also an elegant solution for resolving the problem of situating a non-conventional female character in a story and genre which is bound by convention. Elsie as a figure is able to take on two competing mantles in the story: on one hand embodying the conventions of the male narrator's expectations of who she *should* be, while on the other leaving open the possibility of female empowerment through her actions in the text. In place of interiority, we are given hints which suggest a dissonance between how she's described in the text and what she's actually doing in the "world" of the story. We view her actions through the lens of the male narrator, allowing for a continued suspension of disbelief for the reader, while simultaneously receiving hints of how future stories about female astronauts might come into being (after all, "what Elsie Rollins experienced aboard the interplanetary vehicle" is another story that I at least would very much like to hear).

Putting these two sides of Elsie's character together, we arrive at a figure which acts as a symbol of the *narrative potential* of female characters in the genre of science fiction. While Dana acts as a problematic heroine due to her woman-hating origins and reversal into a conventional domestic companion by the end of the story, Elsie instead arrives at the end of the text as a character brimming with narrative possibility, accompanying her uncle out into the void, returning to co-author and edit the story, then heading out again into the unknown on her own terms. While the first female astronaut could be viewed as a fluke, a character who only entered space while disguised as a man, a *second*, more effective female astronaut serves to further solidify the point that women are just as good at adventuring as men.

Elsie is the first fully woman-identified-woman to travel among the stars, leading the way for other women to follow by allowing for a scenario in which the stand-in for a certain kind of female reader is able to head out on an adventure of her own. By also including the *second* female astronaut in her text, Stone changes the terms of her story from one in which a single unique woman travels to space to one in which *women* explore the stars. Instead of a fantastic one-off story, she makes female space-travel into a pattern which could be explored in "another story."

In this way, Elsie's ending serves as a catalyst, a challenge to other writers to create these "other stories" which continue with this idea of women adventuring in space and other far-off places. Just as Dana acts in dimensions which threaten the boundaries of the science fiction genre through her impersonation of the male adventure hero, so too does Elsie *broaden* these horizons by, paradoxically, situating herself *as a character* firmly inside these narrative boundaries. Stone takes what would normally be a conventional love interest and broadens her horizons to include the uncharted stars which exist beyond the conclusion of the text, and live on in the narratives of the writers who take up this challenge afterword. In this way, Elsie's place in the story is paradoxically both one where she embodies all of the conventions of the science fiction genre and one where she acts as an emblem of the *narrative potential* of both women writers and female characters in science fiction as a whole.

Exploring Structural Inversion in the 28th Century

Lilith Lorraine's 1930 story "Into the 28th Century" works with many of the same goals, themes, and narrative devices I've outlined in my discussion of "Out of the Void."[43] However,

[43] Very little has actually been written directly about "Into the 28th Century," most of which is tied to Lorraine's other works, which are also primarily futuristic science fiction utopias. For a good source on this particular text, as well as a short biography on Lorraine herself, see Yaszek and Sharp. *Sisters of Tomorrow: The First Women of Science Fiction*, 106-107, 256, 314-315. See also Jane Donnawerth, "Science Fiction by Women in the Early Pulps,

Lorraine takes these issues one step further by directly tying her utopian vision to the material conditions of the women living in the United States at the end of the 1920s. Specifically, her narrative inverts the conventional framework of the science fiction testimonial narrative by choosing to explore the *background* of her story through the lens of the *foreground.* Put another way, the frame of her story acts to highlight the means by which such a utopian society could take shape, foregrounding her utopia not as some far-distant future or as some unexplored civilization, but as the product of a directly traceable path from the present to the future which can be brought about through social and political revolution. This frame, which would normally foreground the authorial agency of the protagonist Anthony, instead serves as an intermediary through which Lorraine (through Anthony) can explore how society was changed for the better over the course of 800 years.

Lilith Lorraine, one of five pen names for Mary Maude Wright, was a poet, editor, reporter, and high school teacher in her home town of Corpus Christi, Texas. She had a highly active career in science fiction, publishing numerous feminist utopias, editing at least five poetry magazines, and publishing at least eight anthologies of poetry written by fellow members at Avalon, a poetry association she created. "Into the 28th Century" was her second published feminist utopia (following *The Brain of the Planet* in 1929). In each of these stories, Lorraine foregrounds female storytelling as utopian prophetic vision, emphasizing the *how* of her possible future by tying it directly to the problems present in her immediate present. This is especially true for "Into the 28th Century," which builds upon many of the themes present in *The Brain of the Planet*. It is for this reason that much of the story roots itself in a communist and feminist dialect, as her prose is purposefully exploring not only a future in which such movements are no

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1926-1930," 139-140, from which much of the information about her in this paper is taken. Finally, see also Donawerth, "Lilith Lorraine: Socialist Writer in the Pulps (Lilith Lorraine: un écrivain socialiste féministe du roman populaire)," *Science Fiction Studies,* vol. 17, no. 2, (July, 1990) 252-256.

longer needed, but also the way that we as a society can reach such a future in the first place. Further, she uses science fiction as a means of giving such a utopian future the privilege of perspective, voicing her concerns through a female historian who is looking back on society's trajectory from the perspective of an academic 800 years in the future. In this way, "Into the 28th Century" acts as yet another challenge to the norms of science fiction, except this time Lorraine is going straight to the heart of the problem by directly challenging the societal framework which led to those conventions in the first place.

Published in the winter of 1930 in Hugo Gernsback's *Science Wonder Quarterly*, "Into the 28th Century" tells the story of a young man who, while on a boating trip in the Texas town of Corpus Christi, is swept up in a storm which flings him far into the future. Upon coming to his senses aboard a golden warship from his own age, Anthony (the narrator) finds himself among many beautiful men and women "with hair of every color of the rainbow." After revealing that their society is controlled almost entirely by the concentration and projection of thought, Iris, a renowned female historian traveling on the ship, spends nearly a quarter of the total length of the story relating how such a drastic change in society occurred in the first place.

In her story, Iris begins with the years leading up to and after 1950, during which dictators rose to power under a false pretense of socialism, heralding their rule with phrases such as, "there is no longer an excuse for idleness, he who will not work must starve." After numerous rebellions (and, at one point, a disintegration ray), peace is finally restored in the year 1955 and a woman is elected the president of the world. After explaining this series of historical events, Iris begins speaking about how the status of women also changed dramatically during this time, as this new society redefined the moral code and eventually shifted towards a new kind of chivalry in which, "men, casting aside the childishness that had always made women regard them

maternally rather than as comrades, became real men." She quickly follows this note with the comment that in this future age, "woman has found her compensation for motherhood as the mother of the World-State. She is supreme in the realm of government. She has enlarged the scope of maternity and the four walls of her home to include the spiritual and intellectual guidance of our planet, the home of the human race."[44]

With this dramatic change in government and society comes a related change in the *purpose* of government and of the place of women in society. Education becomes the government's highest priority, while maternity occurs through scientific means. As noted by Iris, "birth is entirely different from the horror that it was in your day. The embryo is removed from the womb shortly after conception and brought to perfect maturity in an incubator."[45] She continues for a short time about the society's religion before the boat arrives at Corpus Christi, at which point Anthony experiences living in this futuristic society first-hand by meeting the mayor, spending the night in a room filled with technological wonders, and eventually bathing and playing water games with Iris, with whom he slowly falls in love. Sadly, his visit is soon cut short when, upon touching a time-powder in a long-abandoned laboratory, he is swept back into his own time, leaving Iris and his utopian dreams behind. The story concludes with Anthony mailing this story to his aunt, herself an adventurer and writer, before returning to the tower to try and find a way back to the 28th century.

Female Authorship and Shifting Perspectives

On the surface, this story shares many similarities to other popular science fiction and utopian stories popular at the start of the 20th century. A male narrator on a boating trip is suddenly thrown into a fantastic setting, where he comes to terms with a being or society far

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[44] Lilith Lorraine, "Into the 28th Century," in *Science Wonder Quarterly* vol. 1, no. 2 (Winter 1930): 257.
[45] Ibid. 258.

outside the scope of his imagination, eventually returning to his own time or country changed for the better. However, as with Stone's "Out of the Void," Lorraine's short story merely *looks* like a conventional science fiction tale, taking on its skin while simultaneously subverting the very foundations the genre stands on. Just like Stone, Lorraine presents the background to her story through the testimony of a strong female protagonist. However, while Dana's diary serves to mark her shift from woman-hater to female astronaut, Iris instead marks a shift in society, noting how the United States changed over centuries into an egalitarian utopia run by women. Further, Lorraine explores this topic by inverting the traditional science fiction frame through her prioritizing of Iris as an authorial source of social, political, technological, and moral truth in the narrative. In this inversion, Stone hides an emphasis on female authorship by subverting Anthony's authorial power through a heavy emphasis on the social, political, and technological marvels of this utopian future. Put another way, "Into the 28th Century" is less a story about Anthony's adventures in the future than it is a frame narrative for staging and exploring this future itself, and the means by which society arrives at and accepts this utopian ideal.

This emphasis on female authorship and focus on telling stories of female empowerment in the near future is characteristic of many female authors who were published in Gernsback's magazines during this period. However, Lorraine's tale is special in that it provides an early example of a woman explaining in exceptional detail *how* such a future could come about. Psychoanalysis, socialism, and technology are all reoriented by Iris's history of the world in ways which open up a path for future empowerment for women in society as a whole. Riffing on feminist utopias and science fiction stories which come before, Lorraine uses technology as a *means* of enacting these changes, spurred on by the present material conditions of both women

and the lower classes, hints towards a more nuanced understanding of the possible futures which are both imagined in fiction and possible just over the horizon.[46]

After all, as noted in Gernsback's massive head-note to the story, "from past history, we must assume that if the world is to exist [in the future], and civilization is to go on, things must become better and better in many respects in the future than they are now…[Lorraine] has given us a most charming tale for the world of the future…and, incidentally, it speaks well of the times in which we are living, when women authors such as Lilith Lorraine have the vision to take science fiction seriously enough to make extended studies of it."[47] The *potential of female authorship* takes on a new role here not only as a catalyst for future stories, but as a social and political challenge to the ways in which women are treated in 1930s America. In Lorraine's story, not only does society divide labor and other tasks more evenly, but the means by which such a change occurred are explored in detail through an inversion the traditional authorial roles found in other science fiction stories. Just like how Stone employs a male narrator with a female editor, Lorraine uses a male editor to transfer knowledge from a highly educated female source, during which her male narrator is converted to this new way of thinking.

Further, these changes in the role of women in society occur through a combination of social change and scientific advancement. As noted in the second half of Iris's history, "any narration of the Great Revolt would be incomplete without a description of the changes that took place in the status of women. In your day woman was just beginning to demand and attain economic equality with man. Shortly afterward she demanded and secured the establishment of a single code of morals."[48] Then, later, "you will find a world of homes and our marriages

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[46] See Donawerth, "Science Fiction by Women in the Early Pulps, 1926-1930," 140.
[47] Hugo Gernsback, head note to "Into the 28th Century," *Science Wonder Quarterly* vol. 1, no. 2 (winter, 1930): 251.
[48] "Into the 28th Century," 257.

enduring. Why should they not be, since with the removal of all pressure, economic or spiritual, they are based on love alone?" In these lines, Iris paints a picture of Corpus Christi and her broader society as being detached from the physical, social, and political constraints of Lorraine's contemporary moment. For example, rather than basing marriage on societal pressures, they are based solely on love. Women are no longer obligated to marry for economic reasons because they are equals in the workforce and no longer even have to worry about the burdens of childbirth on their careers. Further, Lorraine ties this economic equality to a revolution of morals, as women realized that "the knighthood of the ages was but a sugarcoated pill that concealed a soul-killing poison, an opiate to drug the intellect."[49] Not only is this revolution cathartic for women, but also directly tied to a fundamental shift in the morals of men.

This lightening of social pressures, tied to technological and societal shifts in how people go about their everyday lives, acts on both the macro and micro levels, a cumulative shift which ultimately leads to a mutual respect between the sexes. Women are free to pursue careers and education through a decrease in the need for household labor and a decline in childbirth, while society as a whole is lighter due to the lifting of certain institutionalized pressures such as crime, poverty, and the drive of capitalism. Such a view of the future is truly utopian. However, the success of this society isn't really the point of this piece.

Rather, "Into the 28th Century" focuses more on connecting this utopian view, this lifting of the constraints on society, to the contemporary present, first in Iris's narration of how this utopia came to be, and then later in her insistence that Anthony can seamlessly join their society should he simply put in the effort. Through this connection, brought about by the story's seemingly awkward narrative shape, Lorraine is able to conceive of and write about a society which exists just over the horizon, a story which centers on exploring the possibilities presented

[49] Ibid. 257.

by placing women into positions of power both on the textual level as political or social figures and on the meta-textual level as recorders and promoters of history.

As noted by Anthony, "all around me were evidences of a higher culture than I had ever dreamed possible on Earth. It came to me that the keynote of their whole civilization could be expressed in three words: beauty-simplicity-spaciousness. There were no signs of the unsightly utilitarian structures of my day…instead I saw a city of airy homes nestling in the midst of cool and verdant parks."[50] Lorraine is presenting a society which embodies this theme of lightness, of lifting the constraints placed on both women *and* men, by placing on display all the ways in which these constraints no longer apply. A society which experiences no crime has no need for a prison. Similarly, a society in which the fundamental idea of work no longer applies has no need for factories, slums, or any other ugly products of a capitalist system. Instead, such a society can focus on lifting up all of its people to a new form of gender equality which is based on purer forms of emotion: love that isn't based on reproduction, work that isn't based on capitalist greed.[51]

This lightness plays out on the level of narrative as well, and ties back into the overall theme of connecting this utopian future to the immediate present, as every element of the story serves to juxtapose Anthony's dark, heavy past with Iris's light, utopian, *free* society. The present and the future are essentialized into a binary of Dark and Light, or, as noted often the text, the "Age of the Great Unrest" and the "Golden Age."

Embodying respectively utilitarian capitalism and a form of socialism devoid of all the conventional constraints, this juxtaposition also takes on a spiritual role, as Iris and the other

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[50] Ibid. 261.

[51] For further reading on this subject, see Donawerth, "Science Fiction by Women in the Early Pulps, 1926-1930," 142-143. See also Justine Larbalestier, *The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction*, 43-51, as well as sections from the related chapter by Marleen Barr in *Alien to Femininity*, 128-130, 149-152.

characters note that this Light/Dark duality is the foundation not only of their religion, but also of the technological framework which constitutes their society. Recognizing this imbalance, and working towards the Light (again, representative of a feminist utopia which exists just over the horizon), is foregrounded thematically as the means by which Lorraine's present society may advance to match the utopia represented in the text. Similarly, by orienting her own contemporary society into an additional binary of Light (implied to be the movements that promote freedom, such as the Birth Control movement and socialism) and Darkness (capitalism and the constraints it specifically places on women), Lorraine is able to simplify many complex issues into this sharply juxtaposed binary.

Actors who impel men to broader freedom and greater happiness represent the Light, while those that impel the soul to limits and constraints, who promote intolerant minds, selfish hearts, and imperfect bodies, are made to represent the Darkness. Put another way, Iris's society exists as the final product of the Light, while the United States of the 1920s embodies many of the qualities of the Dark. The economic and social appeal of this story is shifted into a moral angle, as striving for feminist utopia not only becomes an economic and social necessity, but a requirement for religious enlightenment as well. All of these ideas are bundled together and made to rest on this very simple notion of promoting freedom by subverting and throwing off the constraints of the present in favor of the lightness represented by this futuristic utopian vision. Accordingly, this is done in the text through *both* thematic means, as described above, and through the structural inversion of the conventional testimonial science fiction story into a pseudo-conversion narrative.

Further, and most importantly, Iris's narration and later comments to Anthony highlight the fact that this duality between the present and future isn't impossible to surmount, but, rather,

simply based on a difference in perspective. Such a conception is important here because it helps to point out the underlying framework of exactly *how* Lorraine is shaking things up in her story. She is fighting not only against the conventions of a genre which seeks to constrain her voice inside of male-oriented frameworks, but also directly showing how the very language and scientific orientation of society itself constrains women as a whole, and, further, the benefits of surmounting such constraints. Put another way, instead of relying on the science and narrative structure of her contemporary day, which both place artificial constraints on works created by women, Lorraine chooses to create a totally separate world wherein her own unique form of "thought" science may exist. She can't rely on the science of her day to tell the stories of a feminist future, she must instead create her own, based in this Light/Dark binary.

Lorraine chooses to orient the future in a different perspective, shifting away from a science which dominates nature in favor of a spiritualist science which seeks to moderate and broaden the powers of the mind and apply those powers to the material conditions of those who choose to frame their perspective in this way. Further, this shift in perspective is related through Iris, an idealized representative of this society who is also able to convey exactly *how* this shift occurred in the first place. The utopian science based on thought thus takes on a metatextual role, as, in this futuristic society, words and ideas quite literally become reality. That which is represented by words and ideas may take physical shape. The history told by Iris at the beginning of the story isn't only a collection of words and ideas, it is a pseudo-blueprint which details the method by which her society was formed. Thoughts and words lead to revolution and the resulting utopia, and presenting such a concept in a feminist utopia through the words of a celebrated female historian is an intentional choice on Lorraine's part.

The Potential of Female Authorship Lies in Conversion

The political and social utility of Lorraine's story thus lies in taking the *potential of female authorship* one step further by converting the traditional male voice to a female, socialist, and in many ways feminist ideal, as outlined by Iris and the other characters who live in Corpus Christi. I like to joke that no real adventure story from this era is complete without *someone* converting to the political or social beliefs of the male lead. However, in this case the relationship is reversed, and the male lead is instead converted to a more egalitarian (and inherently feminist) way of viewing the world. As noted by Anthony to Iris near the end of the narrative, "at least we have that bond of kinship between us…though you are eight centuries beyond me in evolution," to which Iris replies, "what a mistake you are making [by thinking that]…we have no more *capacity* to learn than you—we have simply unfolded more of the powers that have always been latent in man. You can do likewise—in time." Shocked, and eager, Anthony replies, "you mean, then, that the gulf between us is not so impassible after all, that I may someday become like your people?"[52] Iris's, and by extension Lorraine's, answer is an unequivocal "yes."

While Stone's "Out of the Void" tells a story which rests on Dana's shift from male adventure hero to domestic wife, Lorraine here inverts this relation entirely, telling the story of how the average American man might shift his perspective towards a more egalitarian point of view. How he might change his "morals" as Iris notes is the first step in this process. "Into the 28th Century" isn't just a representation of some arbitrary futuristic utopia, it is an *active conversion story* which seeks to change the perspective not only of Anthony, but of the reader as well, subverting the conventions of the genre to re-orient how the reader sees the world around themselves.

[52] Ibid. 264.

Further, Lorraine leaves open a path in her story which details how such an event might occur, how the dictator-filled capitalist hell-scape that was the 1930s could lead to an idealistic society that is just within reach. Not only is Corpus Christi a society the reader can imagine living in (thus this story's close relation to other feminist utopias of its day), but the path that society must travel to reach such a golden land is mapped out by a renowned female historian. Or, as noted by Donawerth, "having done away with war, men's game, Lorraine extends women's sphere of influence to all government."[53] Not only have women extended their sphere of influence to the government in the text, Lorraine has further extended this influence to the level of narrative form as well, mimicking the shift in societal norms in her bestowing of complete historical authority to a woman living in a feminist utopia. The potential of female authorship thus becomes forward thinking prophecy, a way of conceptualizing, portraying, and exploring new and different ways of life. Stories such as "Into the 28th Century" are important not only because they place women on display in positions of power (with Iris here literally given power over 800 years of feminist revolutionary history) but also because such authorship appropriates and expands contemporary methods of viewing the world in ways which incorporate women *into* these previously male-dominated fields of study, carving out a new space for women and exploring these fields along a different axis of thought.

However, as noted by Sarah Lefanu and Justine Larbalestier, we must be careful of attributing too much to such an incorporation of women into both the sciences and science fiction. To quote from Larbalestier: "the absence or presence of women in the field of science fiction does not of itself say anything about the feminism or misogyny of the field," later noting that the field would only go on to fully incorporate women into this field in the late 1960s and

[53] Donawerth, "Science Fiction by Women in the Early Pulps," 143.

'70s.[54] Yet, at the same time, stories such as Lorraine's contribute to an alternative narrative which centers on *promoting* such a shift from this much earlier date, working towards this shift by creating the blueprints for how such a society might come about. In this way, Lorraine takes certain creative liberties in her story detail the ways in which the lives of women *might* change in the very near future, and, further, how they can bring about such a change in society by shifting the perspectives and morals of the men who, in many ways, control their daily lives. To quote again from Larbalestier (here in reference to science fiction stories from the 1950s): "the coding of the work by women of this decade as 'domestic' is part of the same move that sees women coded as the 'love interest.' It reduces women's ability to signify within science fiction outside of the bedroom or the kitchen."[55] While these lines reference a period two decades after the publication of "Into the 28th Century," these rules still apply to this much earlier period as a way of characterizing Lorraine's *intent* to shift the field away from such a conception of normative gender roles. Much like how Stone orients Elsie outside of the conventional narrative framework by exploring how she can exist outside of "the bedroom or the kitchen," so too does Lorraine here emphasize, through narrative form, the ways in which Iris herself contains broader narrative potential, situating her, both physically and mentally, outside of these confined spaces by giving her the freedom to travel around the world and learn socialist, utopian, *feminist* history.

In this way, Anthony's way of viewing the world is called into question as a direct result of coming into contact with Iris's narrative, a story which exists outside of this confined, conventional means of viewing the place of women in society. However, Lorraine even goes so far as to take her story a step further by trying to actively *convert* both Anthony and her readership to this new way of thinking. "Into the 28th Century" thus begins with many of the

[54] Justine Larbalestier, *The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction*, 157. See also Sarah Lefanu, *In the Chinks of the World Machine*, 87.
[55] Ibid. 179.

same narrative conventions as other stories in the genre, but the tone and focus shifts dramatically as the narrator is drawn further and further into Iris's way of viewing both history and society as a whole. Through this shifting of perspective, Lorraine is able to unseat the conventional male narrator not only by calling his point of view into question, but also by bringing him totally and entirely onto her side. She is able to imagine one of the potential futures in which women are made equal, and, further, tell large chunks of the story about this potential future through the point of view of a well-educated woman. She is not only an insurgent operating in the conventions of the genre, but also a prophet who explores a possible future in which both women and men are allowed to live better lives.

Lorraine is thus able to directly challenge both the conventions of the science fiction genre and the conventions of society itself by presenting a new way of *doing things differently* at the levels of both society and narrative. Further, the frame story itself which surrounds Iris's history of the world acts as a testing ground on which Lorraine can show the conversion of an average American man to this new way of thinking. In the very final lines of the story, Anthony writes, "Ah! There it is! The light! But it is more than a light to me—it is a summons from the infinite. It is a challenge to plunge into the fathomless—to dare the Causeless—to live beyond the Law. More than all this, it is the call of Love. Across the deeps of time I hear the voice of Iris—the welcome of the Happy Laughing People, and I come! Bride of the centuries—I come! Take me to you."[56] Just as I read the concluding lines of "Out of the Void" as a challenge to write more stories about women in space, so too do I read this ending as a challenge to bring about the egalitarian society represented in Corpus Christi. Iris, the Greek god of rainbows and messenger of the gods, calls out across time and space to the men of the present, urging "the Causeless" to live *beyond* the laws and customs of the now, to respond to the call of love, to

[56] "Into the 28th Century," 276.

chase the bride of the centuries into the future, to follow the light to a potential society which exists both just beyond the horizon and in the true hearts of every man and woman. “Into the 28th Century” doesn’t just depict an egalitarian form of life in which women are made equal through technology. It also strives to show that, “the remedy [to our society] was all so simple…it needed nothing more than the realization that human brotherhood is the only remedy.”[57] Human brotherhood, based on a fundamental shift towards gender equality, is truly the only way to save our society.

In this text, Lorraine subverts the conventions of the genre by swapping the emphasis in her story from the foreground to the background, from Anthony’s experience in Corpus Christi to the very idea of the city as a product of centuries of social and political work. Further, the potential in Lorraine’s story lies not in Anthony’s attempts to learn more about this futuristic society, but, rather, in the privileged perspective given to Iris, the female historian who is actively trying to convert him to this new way of viewing the world. Much like other utopian stories of the period such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland*, “Into the 28th Century” offers a glimpse into a utopian society run by women, in which the burdens of childbirth and labor are solved through technology and societal progress. However, Lorraine takes this idea one step further by utilizing a seemingly awkward narrative shape to do feminist work by utilizing the very structure of her narrative itself to privilege the perspective of a woman living, thinking, working, and, most importantly, studying how such a society came to be.

Lorraine’s contributions to the tradition thus rest on this emphasis on converting the unsuspecting present man to a new way of thinking, of exploring the boundaries of female authorship by broadening the minds of the men who read and attempt to understand their works. “Into the 28th Century” acts as yet another challenge to the norms of science fiction, except this

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[57] Ibid. 276.

time Lorraine is going straight to the heart of the problem by directly challenging the societal framework which led to those conventions in the first place. By choosing to convert the male protagonist to the futuristic, utopian, and *feminist* point of view, Lorraine is able to make use of the quirks of science fiction to tell a story which presents these views, through the stand-in of Anthony, to a broader American audience. She takes advantage of constraints present in the mode by purposefully fighting against those constraints, not only disrupting and converting the narrative of her male protagonist, but also by taking on the heavy, Dark history of western capitalism by presenting a narrative filled with a spiritually, socially, and politically rejuvenating Light based on female representation and equality. In this way, she is able to shake of the internal misogynistic conventions of American society by staging her stories in worlds different from our own, worlds just out of reach, worlds which don't have these limitations or have moved past them in interesting and prophetic ways.

Science fiction is a way of re-imagining the world in new and interesting ways through this process of lightening societal constraints, through either throwing off conventions or replacing these constraints with an entirely separate and new set of rules. Writers such as Lorraine were successful because they were able to work as insurgent agents inside of this mode, detaching themselves from the patriarchal society in which they lived while simultaneously challenging the very ground it stood on through both their themes and their narrative style. Through the structural inversion in this text, Lorraine was able to not only imagine a better future for women, but also give a road map towards such a future. Put another way, the genre she chose allowed for such innovations in style in craft, which she took advantage of to unseat or convert the patriarchal structure which claimed science fiction in the first place.

Conclusion

In all three of these examples—Dana's gender-bending, Elsie's narrative potential, and Iris' structural inversion—there exists a hidden insurgent message which promotes the idea that conventional narratives written *about* or *containing* women never seem to adequately reach the true cores of these characters, forcing us to instead rely on the often incomplete renditions told by unreliable male narrators. In "Out of the Void" and "Into the 28th Century," Stone and Lorraine directly challenge these conventional narrative quirks by using strong female characters to target and challenge specific elements of normative gender. Dana's androgen nature challenges the idea that women can't be adventure heroes, as well as the fact that gender itself is stable in the first place, while Elsie's own place in the text subverts her initial presentation as she operates on two distinct narrative levels. Similarly, the inversion of the conventional conversion narrative in Lorraine's "Into the 28th Century" allows Iris to take on the role of narrator as she tells the history of utopia and shifts Anthony's view of the world into an inherently egalitarian—and feminist—register.

In all three of these cases, the underlying theme is a challenge to the conventional political and social frameworks of the authors' contemporary moments. These writers had something important to say about how gender was viewed in their moment, and were able to publish in a space and time when their innovations and arguments mattered. Further, they utilized the narrative space provided by science fiction to experiment with form in ways which highlighted the ways in which a text can offer to us, "a world clearly and radically discontinuous from the patriarchal one we know…[that] returns to confront the known patriarchal world in some cognitive way."[58] In all of these examples, these authors challenged a patriarchal

[58] Marleen Barr, *Lost in Space: Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond*, 11.

understanding of gender by utilizing creative narrative frames which allowed them to subvert the conventions not only of their society, but also of the very genre they were writing in.

For this reason, it is worthwhile to revisit these authors from a different perspective, to attend to the specific narrative forms and techniques they used more closely as a means of opening up further feminist possibilities in their stories. We as critics must emphasize narrative analysis when reading these stories, as to fail to do so would limit our ability to sufficiently explain how these stories critiqued and engaged with normative forms of gender. To quote once again from Christopher Leslie: “Female writers were not an ancillary force that should be mentioned out of an obligation to inclusion: they are at the very center of the genre.”[59] Failing to take this fact into account constitutes a fundamental failure to understand the role these women played in the formation of the genre itself.

For this reason, we as critics need to shift our perspective so that we view these authors not only as figures from the footnotes of science fiction history, but also as pivotal innovators of narrative form who challenged the conventions of their moment in ways which are worthy of study in their own right. Only by doing so can we fully grasp the full effect their works had on the authors, fans, and scholars—both male and female—who would follow in their footsteps.

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[59] Leslie, “A Rocket of One’s Own,” 34.

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