

Gender, Power, and Reproduction in Feminist Science Fiction

Introduction

Science fiction is constantly breaking and shifting boundaries. Feminist SF has always sought to challenge conventions and imagine alternative ways of being. My project explores the relationship between gender, power, and reproduction in SF.

Objectives

My summer scholars research was very general, but it has evolved into my thesis for the English department. My thesis will explore the limits and the nature of biology, technology, the law, societal systems, and cultural tradition on the childbearing body. My thesis is both a literary analysis and a study of what these texts reflect about our own world.

References

The novels and short fiction which I read includes authors such as:

Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Marge Piercy, Nalo Hopkinson, N.A. Sulway, Jeanette Winterson, James Tiptree Jr., Clare Winger Harris, Leslie F. Stone, Judith Merril, Katherine MacLean, A.E. Jones, Leigh Brackett, Margaret St. Clair, Zenna Henderson, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Naomi Mitchinson, and Samuel Delany.

Some anthologies and books I consulted as critical material:

Battle of the sexes in science fiction by Justine Larbalestier, *Technologies of the gendered body* by Anne Balsamo, *Lost in space* by Marleen Barr, *A new species: gender and society in science fiction* by Robin Roberts, *Utopian and science fiction by women: worlds of difference* ed. by Jane L. Donawerth, and *Beyond the Cyborg: adventures with Donna Haraway* by Margret Grebowicz

SET THE NEW COURSE!

A summary of where I am taking my research

Methodology

Over the summer I read dozens of novels and short stories. I paired these works with essays and criticism on corresponding topics. At the end of the summer, I organized my thought by situating each work in it's own movement, and compared it to the contemporary concerns of US feminists of the time. This greatly helped me understand how SF developed as a genre and the climate in which the piece was written.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Anne Moore and the Hopkins Fellowship for organizing and funding my Summer Scholars experience. I also thank my adviser Sonia Hofkosh, for guiding me and working with me. And I thank my friends and family for supporting me and keeping me sane.



THE UTOPIA

Herland- Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1915)

Reproduction is standardized, controlled, but exalts and enables those with a childbearing body. The ability to raise a child is a communal privilege. The world's structure reflects that childbearing is the most honored labor there is.

THE DYSTOPIA

The Handmaid's Tale- Margaret Atwood (1985)

Regulated reproduction and fertility methods are used to control the population and the individual. The childbearing body is politicized; the absence of choice reigns. Those who bear children lose their right to personhood.

THE POST-HUMAN WORLD

Dawn- Octavia E. Butler (1987)

Technology and alien biology have the chance to save humanity from our own self-destructive actions. Does this intrinsically change our status as humans, and if so, what does that mean for those who are meant to bear and train the new human race?



More research awaits!