Book Reviews



Women in Science Fiction: An Annotated Bibliography

Judith Merril

Judith Merril is currently working on a study of the history of 'Women in Science-Fiction' for CWS/CF. This will be published in a later issue.

Women writing science fiction is neither new nor unusual: the first female science-fiction (s-f) author was Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley with *Frankenstein*. Early days: the genre was just being invented.

When the American specialty field ('pulp scientifiction') burgeoned in the late '20s, the early women practitioners hid in deference to the presumably all-male audience (not true), behind initials and pennames. Those days are long gone.

There are two major annual sets of awards made in science fiction: the Science Fiction Writers of America's 'Nebula' and the fan conventions' 'Hugo'. In 1979, four of the five top nominees for Hugo novel awards were women, as were two of the three top nominees for the Nebula. Both awards went to Vonda McIntyre's Dreamsnake.

The purpose of this listing is to provide some guidelines for people who are curious about s-f or have sampled it and

want to try more. Because s-f is still, largely a 'pop culture' rather than a 'literary' field, books tend to go out of print quickly. I have therefore concentrated on titles published (or re-issued) in the last 10 years, with just a few significant earlier titles which I hope may also still be available in libraries, if not bookstores. (Most larger cities now have a specialty science fiction and fantasy book store. Most universities have s-f clubs that can direct you to the sources.)

Today's publishers and booksellers lump many varieties of imaginative literature under the rubric of 'science fiction'. I am a purist. I read very little non-s-f fantasy, but being aware that many feminists have a special interest in female protagonist heroic fantasy, and that for nonindoctrinated readers, the borderlines are often confusing, I have included (mostly on the recommendation of other critics) some leading fantasy writers.

Illustration by Gail Geltner

Code markings after certain titles (where annotation does not supply the information) are:

(C) — Collection of short fiction, rather than a novel.

(F) — Fantasy (magic, supernatural, etc.).

(HF) — Heroic fantasy

(swords and sorcery).

(A) — Allegory in modern (future?) dress. (S/F) — Sciencefantasy - science fiction settings but fantasy modes or premises.

Occasionally, two categories blend, so there are a few notations like S/F/F (a bit more fantastic than most S/F). Lack of category notation means science fiction. although (S) is used in a few cases where needed.

An asterisk indicates a strong personal recommendation. Lack of annotation after a listing simply means I had nothing to say, or at least nothing to say J.M. briefly.

Leigh Brackett. The Best of Leigh Brackett. (Doubleday, 1977) (C)

The Book of Skaith. (Doubleday, 1976). Three novels.

The Halfling and Other Stories. (Ace, 1973). (C)

One of the handful (almost — with C.L. Moore, E. Mayne Hull, Andrew North/Andre Norton) of women writing successfully in science fiction during the first two decades of the American specialty field (1926-45). Brackett had the advantage of an androgynous name, and did not need to resort to initials or pseudonym for disguise. Her work is always at a high level of literate competence, occasionally really fine; it covers the categories, from 'hard' science fiction to outright fantasy, with the bulk of it in the 'planet stories' science/fantasy area. These recent reissues happened, fortuitously, during the five years before her death in 1978.

Marion Zimmer Bradley. The Ruins of Isis. (Pocket, 1979).

The Survivors (Daw, 1979). (With Paul Edwin Zimmer.)

Storm Queen! (Daw, 1980.) (Darkover Series).

Two to Conquer. (Daw, 1980.) (Darkover Series).

Bradley was an active science fiction fan for vears before she published her first story in 1953 (first book publication, 1961). For reasons unknown to me, her 'Darkover' novels, an integrated science-fantasy series, are so popular as to represent almost a cult. Ruins of Isis is competent science fiction.

Rosel George Brown. Sibvl Sue Blue. (Doubleday, 1966.) As Galactic Sibyl Sue Blue, (Berkley, 1968.)*

This book will be hard to find; but it is worth the search. Sibyl Sue was the first really tough lady (both tough and lady) in science fiction, an interplanetary agent who smoked terrible stogies and wielded a lethal stiletto heel. Sadly, Brown died very young after less than a decade of publication (1958-67).

Hortense Calisher. Journal from Ellipsia. (Little Brown, 1965.) *

An extraordinary novel which defies brief discussion or categorization. Because of Calisher's mainstream status, your public library might have it.

Suzy McKee Charnas. Walk to the End of the World. (Ballentine, 1974, 1977; Gollancz, 1979.) * Motherlines. (Berkley, 1978, 1979.)

One of the best of the good new people. First rate science fiction; good story telling, characterization, and serious extrapolative thinking about sex roles and potentials.

C(aroline) J(anice) Cherryh. The Faded Sun: Kutath. (Daw, 1980) (Third in the Faded Sun series.) (S/F) Fires of Azeroth. (Daw, 1979) (S/F)

A very popular '70s author. I like her short stories. (She won the 'Hugo' short story award in 1979.)

Diane Cilento. Hybrid (Hodder & Stoughton, 1970.) *

An unusual novel, impeccable near-future science fiction, vividly and literately predicting much of the reggae phenomenon.

Juanita R. Coulson. The Death God's Citadel. (Ballentine, 1980.) The Web of Wizardry. (Ballentine, 1978.)

Another long-time s-f fan, who writes first rate 'folk songs' (science fiction folksongs) and popular fantasy and heroic fantasy.

Grania Davis. Rainbow Annals. (Avon, 1980.)

New star in the fantasy firmament. Literate, with humour.

Miriam Alled deFord. Xenogenesis. (Ballentine, 1969.) (C) Elsewhere, Elsewhen, Elsehow. (Walker, 1971.) (C)

Two collections by one of the finest of the short story writers. Because of her status as a mystery and crime writer, these might still be on library shelves. Started writing S/F in 1950; died, 1975.

Diane Duane. The Door *Into Fire.* (Dell., 1979) (HF)

Carol Emshwiller. Joy in Our Cause. (Harper & Row, 1974.) (C)

Emshwiller began writing excellent conventional science fiction in 1956, but moved rapidly to the unique territory on the borderline of s-f and

surrealism represented in this extraordinary collection. Her topic generally is the survival stratagems of the weak. Hard to find: worth hunting for.

Sylvia Louise Engdahl. **B**eyond the Tomorrow Mountains. (Antheneum, 1974) (F) The Far Side of Evil. (Atheneum, 1972.) (F) Heritage of the Stars. (Gollancz, London, 1973; Puffin, London, 1976.) **(F)**

Susan Ertz. Woman Alive. (Appleton, 1935.)*

An Englishwoman's novel about the last woman alive, written when the few U.S. women practitioners were still hiding under male pseudonyms — and still vivid in my memory 30 years after reading it. But where to find it???

Gertrude Friedenberg. The Revolving Boy. (Doubleday, 1966) *

One-shot novel by a little-known author (reputed to be Canadian) - listed despite probable unavailability because of its extraordinary quality. Near-future psychological s-f.

Jane Gaskell. The Serpent. (Hodder & Stoughton, UK, 1963.) First in the Atlan series. Issued in U.S. with the second of the series, in two volumes, as Serpent and the Dragon. (St. Martin's 1977.) (F)

Some Summer Lands. (St. Martin's 1979.) Last of the five Atlan books. **(F)**

Phyllis Gotlieb. A Judgment of Dragons. (Berkley, 1980.) * O Master Caliban. (Harper & Row, 1976; Seal, 1979.) Sunburst. (Fawcett, 1964; Eclipse, UK, 1979.)* The same Gotlieb better-known in Canada as a Toronto poet. A superb craftswoman and impeccable s-f thinker. *Sunburst* is a deserved classic in the field.

Christie Harris. Sky Man on a Totem Pole. (McClelland & Stewart, 1975.)

The only 'juvenile' recommended here. An interweaving of Indian legend and space fiction which children *also* love.

Zenna Henderson. Holding Wonder. (Doubleday, 1971; Gollancz, UK, 1972; Avon, 1972.) (C) * The People: No Different Flesh. (Avon, 1967, 1968, 1970.) (C) *

The bulk of Henderson's work concerns The People, humanoid extraterrestrials with parapsychological powers hiding on Earth. Tender, convincing, consistent, charming; first-rate science fiction in an area most often treated with sloppy fantasy. Other stories are best characterized by the title, Holding Wonder. Very much worth hunting for.

Cecelia Holland. *Floating Worlds*. (Random House, 1976; Pocket, 1977.)

Horrible Example: what happens when a good mainstream novelist decides to capitalize on a popular theme (feminism) in a hotselling field (s-f). Her 'liberated' lady wins all her battles in bed, and the science-fiction thinking is on the same level.

Blanche Howard. The Immortal Soul of Edwin Carlysle. (McClelland & Stewart, 1977.) *

Novel by a Vancouver writer: a fine, almost unknown, careful science fiction (*not* fantasy) exploration of soulsurvival-after-death. The writing is as meticulous as the s-f thinking.

Marie Jacober. *The Mind Gods*. (Macmillan Canada, 1976.)

Competent s-f with female protagonist: it was runner-up in the annual Alberta writers' awards (for general fiction).

Tannith Lee. The Dragon Hoard. (Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1971.) (F) Sabella. (Daw, 1980.) (F) Kill the dead. (Daw, 1980) (F)

Ursula K. Le Guin. The **Beginning Place.** (Harper & Row, 1980.) (A/F) The Dispossessed. (Harper & Row, 1974; Ace, 1975.) (S) ³ Earthsea. (Gollancz, UK, 1977.) The three novels of the Earthsea Trilogy: Earthsea, The Tombs of Atuan, and The Farthest Shore. (F) * The Lathe of Heaven. (Scribner's 1971; Avon, 1973.) (S) * The Left Hand of Darkness. (Ace, 1969, 1976.) * Rocannon's World. (Harper & Row, 1977.) (S/F)The Wind's Twelve Quarters. (Harper & Row, 1975; Bantam, 1976.) (C) The Word for World is Forest. Berkley, 1976; Gollancz, UK, 1977.) (S) Le Guin's work covers the field. I have noted categories after her titles ('S' for straight science

categories after her titles ('S' for straight science fiction) to indicate the range, and rather than starring *all* titles to indicate highly recommended books, I have used asterisks here only to mark those I feel no one interested in science fiction (by women or any other sex) can afford to miss. Le Guin has taken seven major awards in the field in the last 12 years, and several outside it. Too rich, too varied, too significant for brief discussion.

Doris Lessing. Briefing for a Descent into Hell. (Cape, UK, 1971.) The Four Gated City. (Panther, UK, 1973; (c) 1969.) The Marriages Between Zones 3, 4, and 5. (Knopf, 1980.) The Memoirs of a Survivor. (General, 1974.) Shikasta. (Knopf, 1979.)

I have listed all of Lessing's s-f titles because of her importance as a mainstream writer and because my own lack of enthusiasm for her s-f is not universal. With the exception of the s-f epilogue to the otherside contemporary novel, The Four Gated City (which I loved). I find her s-f didactic, moralistic, and improbably dull. (Note: this does not resemble the case of Holland and other mainstreamers who have rushed in thoughtlessly. Lessing's material is meticulously worked out.)

Elizabeth A. Lynn. *A* Different Light. Berkley, 1978.) * Watchtower. (Berkley,

1979.) (HF) *The Dancers of Arun.* (Berkley, 1979) (HF)

One of the best of the new '70s people, Lynn moved from s-f to femaleheroic fantasy after her first fine novel — sadly for me, but apparently brilliantly for her, since she took both the novel (*Watchtower*) and short story ('The Woman Who Loved the Moon') World Fantasy Awards in 1980.

Katherine MacLean. The Diploids. (Ace, 1962; Manor, 1973.) (C) * Missing Man. (Berkley, 1976.) *

Trouble with Treaties. (Lanthorne Press, 1975.) Solid science fiction, and more; MacLean is one of the few writers (fewer yet, unfortunately, among women) who not only works through new ideas, but *introduces* mind-bombshells. Good writing, great thinking. *Missing Man* took the Nebula Award in 1972.

Anne McCaffrey. Dragondrums. (Bantam, 1980.) (S/F/F) Dragonflight. (Walker, 1969; Ballantine, 1968, 1971.) (S/F/F) The Ship Who Sang. (Walker, 1969; Ballantine, 1970.) (C) * The White Dragon. (Del Rey, 1979.) (S/F/F)

Everybody but me loves the Dragon World stories. They have won both Hugo and Nebula awards and sell like hotcakes. I love McCaffrey's short stories.

Vonda N. McIntyre. Dreamsnake. (Dell, 1978.) * The Exile Waiting. (Doubleday, 1975; Gollancz, UK, 1976.) * Fireflood. (Houghton Mifflin, 1979.) (C) *

For my taste, probably the most exciting of the new young women authors. Her writing is as evocative and memorable as her thinking is careful and original. *Dreamsnake* won both the Hugo and Nebula awards in 1979 and the novelette on which it was based took a Nebula earlier.

Judith Merril. The Best of Judith Merril. (Warner, 1976.) (C) Daughters of Earth. (Doubleday, 1968; Dell, 1970.) Survival Ship and Other Stories. (Kakabeka, 1974.) (C)

C.L. Moore. *The Best of C.L. Moore*. (Nelson Doubleday, 1975.) (C) *

Without question the best *writer* among the

Where Late the Sweet Birds Sang. (Harper & Row, 1976; Pocket, 1977.) *

Of all the women writing serious science fiction, Wilhelm is probably the best read for women who have always wanted to find out about science fiction, but found the jargon, mood or style forbidding. The style is highgrade mainstream: the content is superior science fiction extrapolation; the themes, most often, are familiar contemporary issues (scientific, social, political) carried into a near-foreseeable future. Wilhelm won one of the first awards ever given to a woman in the field (Nebula short story in 1968) and Sweet **Birds** took the Hugo novel prize in 1977. In addition to 14 novels and two short fiction collections, she has edited two anthologies.

Chelsea Quinn Yarbro. Cautionary Tales. (Doubleday, 1978.) (C) * False Dawn. (Doubleday, 1978.) Time of the Fourth Horseman. (Doubleday, 1976.) *

Another startlingly good young '70s writer. Cautionary Tales describes her work best. Yarbro's feminism is more concerned with near-future extrapolations of problems facing contemporary women than with the visioning of female fighting heroes of the far future or far space (Charnas, Lynn). **Closer to McIntyre, but** (probably more realistically) less positive in her future visions.

ANTHOLOGIES

In 1975, Pamela Sargent produced an anthology of women's science fiction which proved an immediate and enduring success. In the last five years, there have been at least a dozen more. I am listing seven of these, plus another that does not purport to be 'women's', but does fill the same functions: namely, an opportunity to sample the wares *and* (in most cases) to learn much more about the writers, the context in which they write and the prevailing (often conflicting) feminist viewpoints within the field.

Many of the writers listed above are represented in one or more of these collections, as well as four other significant authors omitted above because they have not yet published books.

Pamela Sargent (ed.). Women of Wonder. (Vintage, 1975.) More Women of Wonder. (Vintage, 1976.) New Women of Wonder. (Vintage, 1978.)

Sargent was the first and the most, and also provides long scholarly essays on the history of women in science fiction. The first book includes Bradley, Emshwiller, Le Guin, MacLean, McCaffrey, McIntyre, myself, Reed, Russ, Wilhelm, and Yarbro, as well as Sonya Dorman, doubling as storyteller and poet. More ... has Brackett, Le Guin, C.L. Moore, Russ, Saxton, and Wilhelm. New ... includes Dorman, Emshwiller, McIntyre, Reed, Russ, 'Tiptree', Yarbro, and as well Pamela Zoline's unique 'Heat Death of the Universe'.

Vonda N. McIntyre with Susan Janice Anderson (eds). *Aurora: Beyond Equality*. (Fawcett, 1976.)

An anthology of original stories (and one essay by Le Guin), which includes a couple of male authors: its focus was on stories about women's futures rather than by women. Includes Piercy, Russ, and Sheldon 'Tiptree' (one each). Alice Laurance (ed). Cassandra Rising. (Doubleday, 1978.)

This offers concise biographical information about each author with each story. A good catholic collection, with Coulson, Davis, Henderson, Le Guin, MacLean, McCaffrey, Norton, Paul, Saxton, and Yarbro, plus a story by Raylyn Moore, a fine short story writer who has yet to produce a book.

Virginia Kidd (ed). *Millennial Women*. (Dell, 1979.)

The densest and besttextured of the anthologies. Only six stories, but they work together to create a branching vista of women's futures. Lynn and Le Guin.

Ursula K. Le Guin and Virginia Kidd (eds). Interfaces. (Ace, 1980.)

This book claims only to represent the s-f tastes of the editors, but besides being a fine collection, nine of the 19 authors represented are women. You'll find Davis, McIntyre, 'Tiptree', as well as a grouping of Dorman's s-f poems and the only inclusion in any of these books of the fine British writer, Hilary Bailey.

Jessica Salmonson (ed). Amazons. (Dell, 1979.)

A collection devoted to fighting women largely heroic fantasy. The authors I don't know well enough to annotate adequately are all here, along with an introductory essay both scholarly and impassionate. Includes Cherryh, Lee, Lynn, Norton, Saxton (and a surprise appearance by Emily Brontë).

Childless by Choice

Jean E. Veevers, Butterworth & Co. (Canada) Ltd. 1980 Nancy Jackson

An 'intense curiosity about a fascinating and neglected minority' is how Jean Veevers describes the origins of her work on voluntarily childless couples. Her book is based on interviews with 156 men and women in southern Ontario who have remained childless in marriage.

Veevers explores the personal circumstances and the reasons for the choice not to bear children. She examines the impact of childlessness on the marital relationship, with particular emphasis on the struggle to maintain what she describes as a 'variant world view' in the face of pervasive pronatalist social pressures. She surveys the implications of the childfree lifestyle for the organization of work and leisure and in terms of its financial ramifications. She describes as her most important finding that 'at least some voluntarily childless couples do achieve high levels of personal, marital and social adjustment.' (p. 159) Veevers also indicates an

interest in the social policy implications of childlessness. Here she is concerned with constructing typologies ('rejectors' and 'aficionados') and predicting rates of childlessness in marriage. To this end she stresses the need for research funds to support work in this area, as opposed to her own work which, she points out, was funded 'out of pocket'.

Her objectives for the study are that it will 'contribute to the description of the social meanings of childlessness, and to the explanation of the dynamics of entering and defending the childless lifestyle.' (p.2)

104

early-day names. Started with Weird Tales fantasies and went on to superb s-f, most in collaboration with Henry **Kuttner** (as Lawrence **O'Donnell**, Lewis Padgett. and others. pseudonyms).

Andre Norton. Ouag Keep. (Daw, 1979.) Star Ka'ats and the Plant People. (Walker, 1979.) Seven Spells to Sunday. (Atheneum, 1979.) Lore of the Witch World. (Daw, 1980.) Latest of the Witch World series.

Immensely popular author of some 97 novels over almost 50 years, mostly juvenile science fantasy or heroic fantasy.

Barbara Paul. An Exercise for Madmen. (Berkley, 1978.) Pillars of Salt. (Signet, 1979.) Under the Canopy. (Signet, 1980.) Marge Piercy. Dance the Eagle to Sleep. (Doubleday, 1968; Fawcett, 1971.) * Woman on the Edge of Time. (Fawcett, 1976.) *

Well-known feminist author, activist, and poet. Her first s-f novel was a bombshell: one of the very few books in the field to treat the social transformations of the '60s excitingly and effectively. Woman on the Edge is less effective as a novel, I feel, but again, deals with a neglected theme women's 'madness' thoughtfully, sensitively and evocatively.

Doris Pischeria. Spaceling. (Doubleday, 1978; Daw, 1978) The Spinner. (Daw, 1980.) Star Rider. (Bantam, 1974.) *

Marta Randall. Dangerous Games. (Pocket Books, 1980.) Islands. (Pyramid, 1976.)

Journey. (Pocket Books, 1978.)

Randall's writing doesn't stir me and her characters don't grip me but she does broadcanvas 'saga' story-telling very well indeed — and she is one of the few s-f writers of any sex who consistently, intelligently and innovatively speculates on the varieties of possible societies in an interplanetary technology, without falling into the snares and delusions of medievalism. Always interesting.

Kit Reed. Armed Camps. (Berkley, 1971.) * The Killer Mice. (Gollancz, UK, 1976.) (C) * Mister da V. (Faber & Faber, UK, 1976; Berkley, 1973.) (C) *

Kit Reed's work is not susceptible to categorization. I could say she uses imaginative literature for social comment. I could say she's the equivalent of the New Yorker writer in science fiction. Neither conveys the quality. Good stuff, mixing fantasy/allegory/s-f uniquely.

Joanna Russ. And Chaos Died. (Ace, 1968.) The Female Man. (Bantam, 1975.) ' Picnic on Paradise. (Ace, 1968; Macdonald, 1969.) The Two of Them. (Berkley Putnam, 1968.) We Who Are About To. (Dell, 1978.) *

Russ started out in 1969 writing marvellously intricate and literate short stories. Her preeminence as the militant feminist spokesperson of science fiction began with her stories about Alyx, a female swordsperson-adventurer. The only novel I have really liked as a novel is We Who Are ...; The Female Man is the angryfeminist s-f novel. Russ

took the short story Nebula award in 1973 for 'When It Changed'.

Pamela Sargent. Cloned *Lives*. (Fawcett, 1979.) Starshadows. (Atheneum, 1977.) (C) The Sudden Star. (Fawcett, 1979.) * Watchstar. (Pocket Books, 1980.) *

Unfortunately, Sargent's work as an anthologist has overshadowed her reputation as a writer. One of the best of the new serious s-f novelists.

Wilmar Shiras. Children of the Atom. (Gnome, 1953.) *

This is overdue for a re-issue. Probably the best-ever about mutant super-kids: certainly one of the very few best.

Josephine Saxton. Group Feast. (Doubleday, 1971.) The Heiros Gamos of Sam and An Smith. (Doubleday, 1969.) * Vector for Seven. (Doubleday, 1970.)

Just on the borderline between s-f and surrealism. One nudge and it would be over the line. Not everyone's cup of tea, but beautifully done.

'James Tiptree Jr.' Star Songs of an Old Primate. (Ballantine, 1978.) (C) ³ 10,000 Light Years from Home. (Ace, 1973.) (C) Up the Walls of the World. (Berkley, 1978.) Warm Worlds and

Otherwise. (Del Rey, 1975.) (C) *

'Tiptree' is a unique phenomenon. Rattling good, solid, often funny s-f stories under this pseudonym began appearing in 1968. A few years later, the stories had gained so much in depth, content and impact that 'Tiptree' took both story awards (Hugo

and Nebula) in 1974. (By that time, too, 'Raccona Sheldon' had begun to appear.)

The quality of this author's work is best conveyed by two short quotes from Robert **Silverberg's introduction** to Warm Worlds and Otherwise. The first, written in 1975. 'It has been suggested that Tiptree is female, a theory that I find absurd, for there is to me something ineluctably masculine about Tiptree's writing. I don't think the novels of Jane Austen could have been written by a man nor the stories of Ernest Hemingway by a woman, and in the same way I believe the author of the James Tiptree stories is male . . .' And a postscript for the 1978 reissue: 'Just before Christmas, 1976, came a letter in the familiar blue-ribbon typing, hesitantly confessing that 'Tiptree' is the pseudonym of Dr. Alice B. Sheldon and hoping I would not be too upset about having gone so far out on a limb with my insistence on 'Tiptree's' maleness . . . She fooled me beautifully, along with everyone else, and called into question the entire notion of what is 'masculine' or 'feminine' in fiction. I am still wrestling with that.` 'Tiptree` is an author,

like Le Guin, whose gender is irrelevant except that no man so far has written stories like 'The Women Men Don't See' (in Warm Worlds). P.S.: The novella, 'Houston, Houston, Do You Read? (in Star Songs) took both prizes in 1978. As with Le Guin, the asterisks mean 'even better than the others.

Kate Wilhelm. Fault Lines. (Harper & Row, 1977; Pocket, 1978.) The Infinity Box. (Harper & Row, 1975; Pocket, 1977.) (C) * Juniper Time. (Harper & Row, 1979; Pocket **1980.**)