**Science Fiction Book Club**
**Interview with Lisa Yaszek (December 2019)**

*Lisa Yaszek is a professor of Science Fiction Studies at Georgia Tech. Her research areas include issues of gender, race, and science and technology in science fiction*

*She wrote "Sisters of Tomorrow: The First Women of Science Fiction" and "Galactic Suburbia: Recovering Women's Science Fiction," which explore how women helped shape science fiction*

*She also edited the anthology "The Future is Female! Women's Science Fiction Stories from the Pulp Era to the New Wave."*

**Jim Dean: What are your thoughts about authors disguising their gender using pseudonyms or a pair of initials instead of a first name? Does it really make any difference in today's world?**

One thing I've learned from my research into the history of women's SF is that the whole issue of using pseudonyms and initials is really complex. Most of the women who used pseudonyms and initials in the past—C.L. Moore, Andre Norton, and James Tiptree, Jr., are probably the most famous examples—did it for economic and professional reasons that were not always or exclusively related to the science fiction community (Moore and Tiptree were worried about losing their day jobs in banking and psychology; Norton took on her pseudonym when writing boys' adventure fiction). And of course, we tend to forget those women were exceptions to the rule; throughout modern SF history, most people have published under their own names—and men have been just as likely to use pseudonyms and initials as women (Philip Klass used the penname William Tenn so he wouldn't compromise his academic career; and in the first decade as the editor of Astounding Science Fiction, John Campbell made all his authors use initials—presumably because it looked more "scientific.")

Any way about it, I'd like to think that we've made some progress in both gender relations and our thinking about dual careers over the course of the twentieth- and twenty-first century and to say, no, it doesn't make a difference anymore! In fact, with the advent of the internet and social media, you have to wonder why anyone would bother with pennames—after all, it's really easy to look people up online. And yet…. As late as the mid-1990s a young author named Joanne Rowling was advised to publish under the more androgynous name "J.K. Rowling" if she ever wanted to be successful—and she sure is successful! So sadly, I think it might still make a difference, at least to those who control mainstream publishing.

Actually, on the positive side, I can think of one excellent reason to use pennames and initials: SF publishing doesn't pay much, and it's a great way to make sure you don't flood the market with too much of your own product! And actually, another, related reason: many authors write in different genres, and at least two very different authors (one who is an award-winning SF grandmaster and one who just graduated from Clarion) have told me personally, using different versions of your name when working in different genres can really help keep your mind organized. So sometimes using alternative names can make a difference in an artist's productivity, which is good for all of us!

**Katie Polley: Who is the forgotten author you most wish would be "rediscovered" by today's readers?**

I actually have two answers to this question—which, by the way, I'm going to treat as being about forgotten female authors (just to narrow things down for myself!). So first—the author I helped rediscover and who I absolutely love introducing other readers to is Alice Eleanor Jones, a midcentury author who published just five science fiction stories before moving on to the more lucrative field of mainstream women's magazine fiction. Her SF career may have been short, but those five stories are brilliant examples of how women could use even the seemingly most conventional and even conservative character types (such as housewives and nannies) to tell incredibly strange and gripping stories about everything from nuclear war to race relations. She wrote a lot of professional columns about how to create compelling "offbeat" characters, and that is exactly what makes her stories so great—all of her characters are a little weird and yet very relatable. And her futures are all so awful you can't help but want to get out of your chair and Go Do Something About It All!

The other lost author I love turning people on to is amateur SFF editor and poet Edythe Eyde, who went by the penname Tigrina in the 1940s SF community. Tigrina was a member of the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society and close friends with SF superfan Forrest J. Ackerman. When I first encountered her poetry—most of which is about witches, vampires, and other supernatural creatures trying to survive modern society and connect with each other—I thought "Sheesh, this reads like terrible teenage goth poetry!" But when I learned that she was also an out lesbian looking to connect with other like-minded women (something a number of young people were able to do during WWII), I realized that all her poetry makes complete sense—she is using the tropes of science fiction and fantasy to explore her own alienation from a heterosexist world that can't come to terms with her out-of-this-world fabulousness (go look her up online, she really was fabulous—she worked at RKO Studios and looked like a movie star). What's even cooler is that Tigrina used all the writing and publishing skills she acquired in SF fandom to start an amateur newsmagazine for lesbians called "Vice Versa." This became the first gay newsmagazine in the world and started Tigrina on what would become her lifelong career as an LGBT+ journalist. We like to talk about how SF influences the real world, but when we say that, we are usually thinking about scientific rather than social influences. But as the case of Tigrina demonstrates, SF can do it all!

**Sara Sandy Gabai Zanger/ Willow Thomson: Do you think that women are better than men at writing "social" science fiction? Do women tend to write more character driven stories? Any particular trends or themes that you associate with female authors?**

I don't think that there is anything genetic that predisposes one sex or gender to be better at writing certain kinds of science fiction, and we can name some great male, female, and nonbinary social science fiction writers alike—Stanislaw Lem, William Gibson, Ursula K. Le Guin, Octavia Butler, Raphael Carter, Rivers Solomon, etc. But it's true that women are often associated with "soft" or "social" science fiction writing, in part, I suspect, because social science fiction and feminist science fiction became popular around the same time (in the 1960s and 70s) and there were a lot of authors (including men like Samuel R. Delany and John Varley) who were writing both kinds of SF, often at the same time.

Having said that, it does seem that women have been more associated with innovative character development than men throughout SF history! This makes sense because while there were many different subject positions for male readers to inhabit in nineteenth-century SF—the heroic or mad scientist, the creative engineer, the everyman, the soldier, even the bug-eyed alien monster—there were only two options for women: the love interest or the beautiful alien monster. This must have seemed incredibly boring and out of date to the brave new women of the early twentieth century who were inspired by feminism to make new lives for themselves outside the home—and to stake claims for themselves in the future imaginary.

Pioneering SF Author Leslie F. Stone—one of the first three women to publish SF under her own name in the genre magazines of the early twentieth-century—wrote the first modern SF story told from a female perspective as well as stories featuring the first black astronaut and the first aliens to win a war against humans. So she was literally inventing new character types! After World War II editors embraced what I call "domestic science fiction"—that is, SF set in private spaces like the home and told from the perspective of people who define themselves in relation to family rather than paid labor—as character-driven "sensitive science fiction told from a woman's point of view." And once again, women were indeed inventing new character types—lady scientists, housewife heroines, and mutant children—who reminded us that many different kinds of people have stakes in the future. In the 1960s and 70s, as the first generation of overtly-feminist science fiction writers including Joanna Russ and Pamela Sargent began to put together the first histories of women's SF, they told a similar story: women have always been part of the SF community and indeed, some of their first contributions were the creation of new and more nuanced character types, including alien queens, Amazonian warriors and witch-like scientists. And right now I'm editing an anthology about Afrofuturism (future-oriented black speculative fiction, usually from North America) in which one of the authors explores the many new character types (such as the griot and the cyberflaneur) developed by black women writers over the past two decades. So women definitely have a track record of invoking, revising, and creating new character types as they stake claims for themselves in the future!

Finally, yes, over time it seems that women have been associated with certain themes in SF. Historically speaking, women were the first SF authors to explore the impact of science and technology on the home and on domestic relations, and they've created a rich tradition of domestically-oriented SF that is every bit as diverse and complex as stories that take place in more traditional science fiction settings like laboratories and launchpads! In the first half of the twentieth-century, pulp era women writers (likely inspired by the suffrage movement) told a lot of stories about how new sciences and technologies would liberate women from domestic labor and allow them to pursue careers in science and society. After World War II, when women were encouraged to leave the workforce and return to the home in the name of domestic patriotism, female SF authors began writing "housewife heroine" stories that used the home as a focusing lens for exploring how new sciences and technologies might destroy those nuclear families they were meant to protect. With the revival of feminism in the 1960s and 70s, women become interested in telling SF stories about new reproductive technologies that radically reorganize both childbirth and the social relations amongst the genders. Today women and nonbinary people of color are producing a fantastic array of stories about science, technology, and sexuality—as Kinii Iburra

Salaam explained to me once, “for hundreds of years white people have controlled all the stories about black women and their sexuality. SFF is a great way for black women to take back our own stories—we can rewrite history and determine our own future.” But I think the biggest surprise to me has been that since the 1970s, we’ve seen more men than women writing domestic SF! It actually makes a lot of sense—many of the male authors we enjoy today grew up with feminism and are eager to incorporate its critical perspectives and creative techniques in their work; the globalization of labor has subjected men to the same kind of workplace vulnerability that women have always experienced and, last but not least…. As SF authors always tell me, they write what they know—and these days, quite a few male authors know a lot about being stay-at-home parents. So women aren’t just associated with certain themes in SF. More accurately, they are innovators who inspire others to try new themes in SF!

**SFBC Member/Jeff Minor: What's Ms. Yaszek's view on the importance of the author's gender on being able to write about the opposite gender? Which authors do you think do "the other gender(s)" best?**

It seems to me that if you want to be a SF great artist, you MUST to be able to write the other well—that includes writing from the perspective other genders, other races, and even other species. I say this in part because we live in a moment where we celebrate—and fight—over diversity and inclusivity. SF is fundamentally a genre that extrapolates from the present moment to imagine other worlds and times. And so if we are going to write “good” SF in this historical moment, we need to acknowledge all those different voices out there and use them as points of extrapolation. But there is another, even more important reason I think writing the other is essential to good SF: SF is unique in its potential to give voice to the alien and the other, and so it simply makes sense to take advantage of that unique generic quality!

Having said that, we also want to acknowledge that it can be difficult to write the other if you don’t have a lot of experience with people who are different from you. Even the best-intentioned authors can make terrible mistakes! Fortunately, this is a major topic of conversation in the SF writing community right now, and there are a lot of great how-to books on the subject. My personal favorite is Nisi Shawl’s Writing the Other: A Practical Approach, which is both practical and very generous—a very encouraging read. I also love this piece of advice that a visiting SF author gave my class when one student asked this same question: “if you want to include diverse voices and perspectives in your story, you need to include diverse voices and perspectives in your life. Make sure you’ve got all kinds of people in your social media feeds—including people whose views challenge your own. Read different kinds of newspapers, and try every day to talk to one person outside your normal life.” The more your hear and interact with different kinds of people in your everyday life, the more effectively you will be able to create them in your art.” I thought this was brilliant advice that we should all heed, whether we want to be great artists or just decent human beings.

**Michael Kilman: Have you ever heard of Grace Dillon? She focuses on Indigenous Sci-Fi and futurism. She has a great book called "A Walk in the Clouds."**

Grace Dillon is a brilliant scholar and a marvelous person! I am honored to call her a colleague and a friend. I find her work on indigenous futurism really helps me in my own thinking about women's SF (and in thinking more generally about "lost" voices in SF). I particularly appreciate how she uses the concept of "survivance" to characterize indigenous SF. If you're not familiar with it, "survivance" is a term that was popularized by indigenous author Gerald Vizenor to describe stories that celebrate indigenous survival, endurance, liveliness, and resistance in the face of Western-induced apocalypses. I thank Vizenor and Grace for sharing those terms with us. I think we could all learn from the concept of survivance, especially in a sociopolitical moment that sometime feels discouraging for those of us who want to change the status quo and build better futures for all.

**Mauricio Gonzalo Maldonado: What do you think about inclusive language?**

I'm down with it! English is such a wild and wonderful and very much living language—it is constantly evolving in relation to both internal and external pressures, and it seems to me that the move to inclusive language is just one more aspect of that. What does it hurt me to be respectful of other people? As members of the SF community, we would do well to remember that we all love a genre that celebrates how humans intervene into the material world to make it an easier and better place for us all. Humans intervening into social systems like language is much the same thing—when we respect other people's chosen genders and pronouns, for example, we open ourselves up to whole new ways of seeing the world. In fact, we might even think of inclusive language as a naturally science fictional, world-building activity!

This fact hasn't escaped science fiction authors. As early as the 1970s Marge Piercy proposed the use of "ze" and "per" in *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Part of what makes Ann Leckie's Ancillary Justice series so interesting is the fact that her protagonist—an AI stranded in a human body—can never figure out human sex or gender correctly. And one of my very favorite short stories, Charlie Jane Anders's "Love Might Be Too Strong a Word" (2012, http://www.lightspeedmagazine.com/fiction/love-might-be-too-strong-a-word/) derives a lot of its energy from the proliferation of sexes, genders, and words to describe all those things.

**Willow Thomson: I very much enjoy (and write) science fiction that has more social themes. I'd love to see more of that and often have trouble finding science fiction I like. Any recommendations?**

I enjoy social science fiction as well! I think a lot of New Wave authors fit this bill nicely—Samuel R. Delany, Joanna Russ, Ursula K. Le Guin, and John Brunner are some of my favorite authors from this era who use all kinds of social science filters to explore our individual and cultural reactions to science and technology. If you're looking for good short stories of that type from this period, I'd recommend Damon Knight's Orbit anthologies and Pamela Sargent's Women of Wonder series.

Many of the authors described by Jeff and Ann Vandermeer as "humanist SF" artists (artists who create speculative fiction that puts humans at the front and center of action, with technology present but subservient to humans, and that holds out the hope we can build new and better futures) write this kind of fiction as well—James Patrick Kelly, Kim Stanley Robinson, Karen Joy Fowler, John Kessel, and Nancy Kress. So books these authors have written and edited are good places to start. You might also check out

Jeff and Ann Vandermeer's *Big Book of Science Fiction*, which includes a wonderful discussion of humanist SF in relation to other kinds of SF from the 1960s forward.

I also like the *Big Book of Science Fiction* because it's a marvelous compendium of SF from around the world, and you realize quickly that a lot of these authors—especially those from regions with different relations to science and technology and who have been on the receiving end of colonial and military actions—write a LOT of social science fiction! My favorites there are Silvina Ocampo, Stanislaw Lem, Angelica Gorodischer, Kojo Laing, and Johanna Sinisalo.

Finally, I'd note that authors of color have been writing some really amazing social science fiction—well, as long as people have been writing science fiction, but there's been a lot of particularly great stories written in the last few decades. Of course anything by Octavia Butler and Nalo Hopkinson is going to be wonderful, but I'm particularly excited by new authors including Rivers Solomon (whose *An Unkindness of Ghosts* is maybe both the most horrifying and amazing thing I've ever read), Rebecca Roanhorse (I particularly like the short story "Welcome to Your Authentic Indian Experience"), and Tade Thompson's *Rosewater* Trilogy (what if an alien invasion took place in Lagos, Nigeria?). I hope you get a chance to check out one or all of these marvelous new authors!

**Molly Greenspring: How seriously is the study of science fiction taken in academia compared to other genres?**

That's a great and surprisingly complicated question. In short, it's taken more seriously now than it was even just a couple decades ago, but it has always depended on where you are in academia. As a discipline, science fiction studies is fairly young—the first scholarly panel on the subject happened at the 1959 MLA conference, and the first academic journals didn't appear until the 1970s. Universities—including my own institute, Georgia Tech—started offering SF classes for credit in the 1970s, when students demanded more socially relevant courses. Interestingly, many of those first SF classes were offered by science and social science professors, who used SF as demonstrations of various theories. For the most part, however, liberal arts people didn't take SF studies very seriously until the appearance of cyberpunk in the 1980s—and then literature professors, many of whom were trained in postmodern theory—got REALLY excited about what Frederic Jameson once optimistically called "the literature of late capitalism." That excitement has remained fairly high, as SF has gotten more global and saturated more media forms.

Today, most colleges and universities offer at least one SF class, but it's still pretty rare to offer minors or degrees in SF studies—if you look at the Wikipedia entry on this, there are maybe a dozen schools doing it. Likewise, while there are hundreds if not thousands of us who write about and create SF in university environments, most have to "pass" as professors of something else to get their paychecks—I'm maybe one of a dozen people working at an institute that allows me to be a self-described, full time Professor of Science Fiction Studies. Not surprisingly, certain kinds of institutes tend to be more favorably disposed toward SF than others. Places with strong traditional English programs are often wary of genre fiction as a whole, but those that embrace popular culture and transmedia studies are much more accepting. Not surprisingly, technical institutes like my own university also tend to take SF

studies just as seriously—in not more seriously—than their liberal arts counterparts. As one of my colleagues from Georgia Tech's College of Engineering put it to me once, "we get why you're here, but what's up with the Shakespeare folk?" (This isn't to say that engineers don't like Shakespeare, it's just that they REALLY appreciate SF!)

**Eva Sable: Are there any authors you've researched whose work affected you particularly strongly?**

Yes! It turns out I'm moved by stories with less-than-perfect protagonists. I love Leslie F. Stone's "The Conquest of Gola" because it's the first story told from a female alien's point of view, but she—and all her people—are actually vainglorious jerks who you still end up rooting for! I think that's hilarious, and an important reminder that women are people too. I like Alice Eleanor Jones's "Created He Them" and Sonya Dorman's "When I Was Miss Dow" for similar reasons—Jones's protagonist lives in a postapocalyptic dystopia and isn't above trading quality time with her two healthy kids for sleeping pills, and Dorman's alien experiments with gender, only to reject it because love is too hard. Those last two stories are a bit more sober than Stone's tale, but I think they all do a brilliant job exploring the complexities of women as people living in technology-saturated worlds.

I'm probably most moved not by the stories I researched and recovered, but by the lives of the artists themselves. These women didn't just write about new and better futures, they were actively creating them as well! Pioneering SF author Lilith Lorraine was one of the first people to use radio to do long-distance education; *Weird Tales* artist Margaret Brundage taught illustration to poor black kids on the assumption that if she could use art to break out of poverty, so could they; amateur editor and poet Tigrina used the production techniques she learned in the SF community to start the world's first lesbian newspaper; Zenna Henderson taught Japanese kids in American "relocation" camps… the list of accomplishments goes on. I'm humbled by the amazing energy, creativity, and productivity of all these wonder women and excited to share their accomplishments with the world.

**Sara Sandy Gabai Zanger/Eva Sable: Who were the authors who first got you excited about reading? Did you read science fiction as a child? Who was your favorite author? When did you start to differentiate between women and men authors?**

I have loved SF literally as long as I can remember—my very first memory is watching *Star Trek: The Original Series* reruns with my parents, both of whom are SF fans themselves! And I read SF as a child on my own as well. I devoured the two decent-sized shelves of YA SF in our elementary school library and was psyched whenever my teachers would read SF to the class—my mind was particularly blown by Madeline L'Engel's *A Wrinkle in Time* and John Christopher's *The City of Gold and Lead*. After that, it was on to the regular SF at the town library and in my parents' library. I remember reading Harlan Ellison's *Dangerous Visions*, Sam Delany's *Time as a Helix of Semi-Precious Stones*, and Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* when I was maybe 9 or 10—I didn't understand a fraction of it, but I couldn't put them down, and I kept going until I figured them out! Much later, when we went to different colleges, my best friend from high school and I vowed to stay in touch by reading William Gibson together (we grew up around Detroit and our teen years were pretty darn cyberpunk in their own right) and we are still giving each other reading recommendations three decades later!

I don't know if I had a favorite SF author as a child, but I have really strong memories of reading Judith Merril's Daughters of Earth and loving that anthology—three stories all about women navigating the future! One of whom was really just a girl my age! I guess I wanted a future of my own, just like all of Merril's heroines….

I'm not sure when I started thinking about the fact that an author's sex or gender might impact their writing. I've always been exposed to women writers; my parents were pretty excited about the Women's Lib movement—they thought they lived in the best time in history to raise girls!—so they gave me and my sister a lot of books by women—everything from Louisa May Alcott (whom I loved) to Ayn Rand (who totally freaked me out). I probably started thinking consciously about the relationship between gender and gender in high school, when I started taking humanities courses and hanging out with teachers who were feminists and who got me interested in those issues.

**John Grayshaw: Who are some of your favorite sci-fi authors now?**

I always have and always will love William Gibson—we even named our son after the protagonist of Neuromancer! Growing up in Detroit, I always loved a good techno-noir story, it felt like my daily life. And I still think today he is one of our wisest—and wiliest—theorists about what it means to live in a digital era. I will also always and forever love Joanna Russ—she is funny and angry and inspiring and she created the first female cyborg assassin! What's not to love about that? I also really appreciate Kim Stanley Robinson's work. His love of our planet—of all planets, really!—and his optimism that we really can become better people who use science and technology to build better worlds is inspiring. It's all too easy to be jaded and to want to disengage in unpleasant political moments. But Stan stays with the trouble—and writes mind-blowing books about it!

In terms of new authors, here are the top three I'm recommending to everyone right now. First, Rivers Solomon, whose *An Unkindness of Ghosts* is a mind-blowing meditation on how we treat the earth versus how we treat each other, all of which unfolds on a generation ship that just happens to be organized like a slave plantation (in any other writer's hands this might be cliched but here, it's brilliant and brilliantly science fictional). Second, Tade Thompson, whose *Rosewater* trilogy is an Afrobiopunk alien invasion-thriller set in near-future Nigeria. And finally, Naomi Alderman—in particular, her award-winning feminist dystopia *The Power*. I actually resisted reading that last novel for a long time (even though Margaret Atwood mentored her!) because there is already so much dystopia in the real world around us, but I'm glad I gave it a chance—first, it turned out to be what one of my friends likes to call a "rippin' good read"—I could not put that book down! Second, it actually has some very smart things to say about what kinds of futures we will build for ourselves if we continue to assume that power is a limited resource we must compete to the death for, rather than treating it as a something to be multiplied and shared by all. It's not an easy book or an easy message, but one we would do well to meditate on more often.

**Eva Sable/John Grayshaw: In the early days of Science Fiction publishing a small number of editors controlled and shaped the market for Science Fiction stories. Do you feel that they encouraged or discouraged female writers? Was it difficult for women authors to be published?**

It varied from editor to editor. Hugo Gernback and his editing team, especially David Lassiter, welcomed women into the SF community—Lassiter was a feminist and socialist and, as Leslie F. Stone recalls, Gernsback was a good-natured guy who "rather liked the idea of women invading the field he had created." (In fact, Gernsback had a record of hiring women writers for his technology magazines, so even though he professed some surprise in his editorial comments to the first SF story by a woman that he published, those comments seem to have been more performative than anything else. Or maybe he learned from Stone and her colleagues! Either way, by 1931, Gernback regularly addressed both boys and girls in his editorials, and that is saying something for the time!) Women also had good luck with all the editors at *Weird Tales*, whether they were male or female. I suspect that is because there is a long tradition of women writing weird and fantasy fiction, whereas both science and SF were being constructed as masculine efforts by some sectors of society. When Ray Palmer took over *Amazing Stories* in 1939, he hired a lot of women to write science fact essays for him—including his good friend L. Taylor Hansen, who explored the perils of scientific racism (and got Palmer interested in indigenous American activism) for nearly 10 years in her "Scientific Mysteries" column. Later, Anthony Boucher at *Fantasy and Science Fiction* would become one of the leading proponents of "sensitive science fiction written from a woman's point of view."

Many of the editors I list above came of age during the Progressive Era, the Harlem Renaissance, and the suffrage movement, and it's likely that conditioned many of them to be open to different kinds of writers in the field. But as the first two generations of women SF authors recall, there were indeed other editors who were less enthusiastic about women in the field and indeed, those editors mobilized the feminist backlash rhetoric of the 1930s and 40s to minimize their presence in the field. The most famous example is certainly John W. Campbell—a brilliant man who helped SF get the cultural recognition it deserved, but also one who had strong, often racist and sexist opinions about How Society Should Be Organized. Leslie F. Stone began publishing SF in the 1920s but never encountered sexism in the industry until the late 1930s, when Campbell returned an ms without reading it because, as he told her, "women can't write science fiction"—and he said this to someone who had spent more time in the SF community than he had at that point! Judith Merril writes extensively in her biography about how Campbell tried the same thing on her—and then when she proved him wrong by writing "That Only a Mother" (which he bought and which would go on to be one of the most reprinted SF stories of all times), how he tried to minimize her presence in the field by refusing to buy anything but domestic SF stories from her. Another author—I can't find the name in my notes right now, but I think it was Andre Norton, also explained in interviews that Campbell was awful to women but that fortunately by the 1950s women writers knew well enough to just avoid him and go elsewhere.

This is not to say Campbell was alone in his opinion about women in SF, just that his views have been extensively documented by artists and historians alike. We know that pioneering SF author Lilith Lorraine left the field in the 1930s because she was disgusted by what described as SF's turn to "crass commercialism" and the desire of some editors (probably those associated with *Amazing* between Gernsback and Palmer as well as everyone associated with *Astounding*) to eliminate political speculation from SF. So that's not specifically a gender issue, but it certainly affected Lorraine, who was one of the most prominent women in the field at that time, and one of the few who actively recruited and

supported other women writers. And Leslie Stone recalls that Campbell wasn't the only sexist editor she dealt with in the late 1930s and 40s: Groff Conklin expressed outright horror (to Stone's husband, of all people!) when he realized he had published a story by a woman in *The Best of Science Fiction*, and H.L. Gold of *Galaxy* similarly rejected one of Stone's stories because, as he directly told her, women couldn't write SF. Clearly, the Golden Age of SF was not so golden for everyone….

**Jan van den Berg/Molly Greenspring: Do female bestseller authors like Anne McCaffrey inspire other female writers to enter the field? How can we encourage more women to become science fiction writers?**

Yes they do—and they do so not just by example, but by using their economic, artistic, and cultural privilege to make room for other women writers. McCaffrey is a great example because she provided housing for authors who wanted to work on their craft and actively mentored younger authors such as Mercedes Lackey and Elizabeth Moon. But McCaffrey wasn't the first to do this—pioneering SF author Lilith Lorraine surrounded herself with other female artists and published them frequently in her amateur and semi-prozines, and since the rise of feminist science fiction in the 1970s, women authors have supported each other with conventions, awards, and publishing venues of their own.

How do we get more women in the field? That is the million-dollar question! SF author Kathleen Ann Goonan takes that question on in the conclusion she wrote for my edited anthology, *Sisters of Tomorrow: The First Women of Science Fiction*. One of the most fascinating points she makes in that essay is that since the 1800s, the percentage of women in SF has exactly mapped to the percentage of women in science: prior to the 1970s, women comprised about 15% of both fields, and since then, the number has hovered around 35%. So how do you get women more interested in both of these fields? We eliminated the legal barriers in the 1970s, but eliminating the cultural barriers clearly takes more time.

**Krikor Mandalorian: Do you consider the New Weird subgenre, of which writers like Jeff VanderMeer, Kelly Link, and China Mieville are pioneers, to be the modern equivalent of the New Wave? Is it as significant as the New Wave? Would you consider non-English language writers like Lem and the Strugatsky brothers to be part of the New Wave?**

To take the last part of your question first—yes, I definitely think that non-English language writers like Lem and the Strugatskys are New Wave writers. Their stories have all the characteristics of great New Wave SF—they shift focus from the hard sciences to the soft sciences and from outer space to the inner space of people and their cultures; the treat Earth as the only real alien planet (while exploring the alienation of humans themselves); and they are not afraid of SF's taboo topics—sex, drugs, rock and roll, and politics!

It's interesting to think of New Weird writers as the modern equivalent of the New Wave. When I teach them in my classes, I always talk about the New Weird as the Old Weird done with modern political and aesthetic filters. Given that most of those filters were brought to SF by New Wave authors, maybe what I really mean is that the New Weird is the Old Weird filtered through a New Wave sensibility. Thanks for

helping me think that through! (And I bet we can say the same thing about classic versus modern space opera….)

**Tony DeSimone: People often speculate that many of the pulp SF writers who used pseudonyms or of whom we simply know little or nothing about, may have included more women and/or even POC than we might think. I certainly love this idea, but do you think it is a very probable scenario?**

I like this idea as well, and scholars do recover female and authors of color in the course of their research—for instance, in *Sisters of Tomorrow* I map a lively tradition of female poets who published in SF magazines, and one of the authors featured in an anthology I'm currently editing has recently rediscovered a little-known black SF author named John Faucette who was living in New York City and publishing SF with the same editors at the same time as Samuel R. Delany, but the two never knew of each other until much later, and while we all know Delany, nobody reads Faucette anymore. And there is a reason for that—Delany writes great fiction, and Faucette was a pretty mediocre writer. That's been true of some—not all, but some—of the women I've recovered as well. Most of us know SF history through anthologies, and anthologies only capture a fraction of what was written in the pulp era—in theory, the best of the best, however you define that. That means there are hundreds and maybe even thousands of other perfectly competent authors who were writing science fiction, and I suspect that if we're going to find more diversity in early SF, it will be amongst that larger group that probably more accurately reflects the composition of the SF community.

Having said that, we also know from the historical record that women and people of color were indeed writing science fiction in the pulp era, but that they often chose to publish their work in venues they felt would be more receptive to their visions of tomorrow. So for example, Charlotte Perkins Gilman published her great feminist utopia, *Herland*, in her own feminist newspaper; Pauline Hopkins published her early Afrofuturist tale *Of One Blood* in the African-American periodical *Colored American Magazine*; George Schulyer published his black military SF fantasy *Black Empire* in the African-American *Pittsburgh Courier*; etc., etc. Samuel Delany theorizes that black authors stayed away from the pulp magazines because if you just looked at the covers, it seemed that there was no place for the kinds of stories they would want to tell. It's an interesting theory, and given that we are finding SF by women and authors of color in other publishing venues, one that makes some sense.

**John Grayshaw: How did you become interested in teaching and researching Science Fiction?**

I've always been an SF fan—as I noted in one of my other answers, both of my parents read SF and my very first memory in the world is watching *Star Trek*. I got interested in contemporary literature in college and trained as a postmodern literary and cultural theorist in graduate school, where I explored the impact of new sciences and technologies on literature and vice versa. That's actually when I came back around to science fiction and made it part of my larger course of study (and my first book, with the rather heavy title *The Self-Wired: Technology and Subjectivity in Contemporary Narrative*!). Upon completing my PhD, I got a postdoc at Georgia Tech, which I knew had an innovative, interdisciplinary humanities department organized around science, technology, and culture. I was especially excited to see that there were not just one but two faculty members doing full time science fiction research

there—I had no idea you could do such a thing. Of course both of those professors left the year I got there, but that meant their job lines opened up, I got the one for which I applied, and I haven't looked back since then.

**John Grayshaw: What/Who are you researching currently?**

I've recently completed editing a book and a special journal issue on the subject of Afrofuturism (a form of speculative fiction that uses the tropes and themes of SF both to entertain and to get us thinking differently about science, technology, and race) with my friend and colleague Isiah Lavender III. The book, *Literary Afrofuturism in the Twenty-First Century*, is an anthology of great SF critics and their ideas about black SF, and the special issue, *Beyond Afrofuturism,* showcases rising talent in SF studies and their ideas about what comes after Afrofuturism. Both will be out this year, but due to the vagaries of academic publishing, *Beyond Afrofuturism* will be out about six months before *Literary Afrofuturism*. And so it goes.

I also continue to research and recover the rich history of science fiction by women and nonbinary authors. I'm currently editing *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Science* Fiction with three other marvelous scholars from across the globe, and I'm working with the Library of America to figure out what ground we will cover in the sequel to *The Future is Female*. We're hoping to make this one more focused and to do a deep dive into SF from the 1970s and 80s. I'm glad we're looking at a smaller scope for this one—there are so many great stories out there, I don't know how we'd pick just one or two from the 1970s to the present!

**John Grayshaw: What are some fun anecdotes about your research? Like quirky, unexpected, or amusing discoveries?**

As I discuss below and in my answer to Katie Pollie, finding Tigrina and the connections between early SF fandom and the early twentieth-century LGBT+ community was pretty mind-blowing. Who would have thought?

My other favorite discovery was a year-long conversation in one of the very early (like, 1920s) pulp SF magazines that went something like this: if SF is the literature of the future, and black people are doing all kind of exciting things with the NAACP and the Harlem Renaissance, then why aren't there any black authors or fans in the community? I was surprised to see how many readers (and even a few authors) got involved in this conversation. And then one day, someone wrote in to say, "I hear there's one black (he said Negro, of course, but you get my point) fan in Atlanta," and everyone else on the thread gets very excited and starts planning to get in touch with said fan. And then that's it—the thread ends, and nobody brings this up again for a looooong time. I fear that having identified that one fan, everyone felt they had done their part as good liberals and that was that. I still think it would be awesome if someone wrote a story that explores what might happen if those well-intentioned Northern white SF fans had taken matters into their own hands and gone looking for that mythical black fan in Atlanta….

Another cool thing I discovered: authors had their pictures printed next to their bylines in the very early SF magazines! As a fan I totally dorked out on seeing what everyone looked like, and as a scholar, I think

this really troubles the claim we so often hear—oh, but how could anyone in the SF community know the race or gender of an author who corresponded by mail? Of course you could send in a fake picture, but my guess is that most people wouldn't go to the trouble.

My other favorite bit of trivia: Frank R. Paul, science fiction's first cover illustrator (for *Amazing Stories*), was really upset when Margaret Brundage (who usually illustrated for *Weird Tales*, and who became known as "The Queen of the Pulps") burst onto the scene. Apparently Paul—who was famous for his technical illustration skills—started losing jobs to Brundage because while editors loved his space ships and cityscapes, they thought Brundage, who was formally trained as a fashion illustrator, did a much better job with human bodies. To his credit, Paul never blamed Brundage for this, but claims that editors never gave him any humans to illustrate other than mutants and mad scientists, so he never got to show off his full range of talents. (Knowing that Brundage has that training also helps make sense of her *Weird Tales* covers—I always wondered why all those damsels-supposedly-in-distress look so calm, even as they are being threatened by creepy demonic beings—they are too busy vogueing to care!)

**John Grayshaw: What information did you find that really surprised you?**

Over the course of researching *The Future is Female* and my other women's SF anthology, *Sisters of Tomorrow,* I learned three surprising things:

1. Women were present in all parts of the early science fiction community—they were fiction writers, of course, but also editors, artists, science journalists, and poets. It hasn't occurred to me before I began this research to think about all the different ways women contribute to SF but it's been fun to learn about them—and, while doing so, to learn more about the history of SF editing, art, etc.
2. Science fiction can inspire real world change! This point was especially driven home in the research I did on Edyth Eyde, who went by the SF penname Tigrina (see my answer to Katie Pollie's question for details about Tigrina). Tigrina was an active member of the 1940s SF fan community and an out lesbian who wanted to meet other young lesbians, so she took what she learned about publishing in the amateur SF community and used it to create the world's first lesbian newsletter—and to become one of the world's first gay journalists. I just love this story. (And the fact that while he was helping Tigrina set up her newsletter, SF superfan Forrest J. Ackerman ended up writing a romance novel that won one of the first gay literature awards. Sometimes truth really is weirder and more wonderful than fiction….)
3. Just as women sometimes used male pseudonyms, so, too, men sometimes used female pseudonyms! Futurian Robert A. Lowndes published stories as "Carol Grey"; Charles Dye co-authored with April Smith under her name; and while I can't find my notes about it right now, I remember that we found a couple other instances like this while putting together *The Future is Female*. From what we can tell, men seem to have used pennames strategically, when they were writing about "feminine" issues or from the perspective of female characters.

**John Grayshaw: How did you choose the authors and stories for "The Future is Female"?**

It was a collaborative process between me, my editor at Library of America (LoA), and the half-dozen LoA employees who offered to be our slush pile readers. It was a real process of negotiation because LoA has traditionally focused on mainstream American literature rather than genre fiction, and we quickly realized that what the LoA people saw as "good" SF didn't always match what either I or people in the field at that time thought about as good fiction—in particular, my LoA colleagues were interested in fine writing and complex individual characterization, whereas early SF tends to celebrate big ideas and the relations between institutions almost more than people. But once we put all of our cards on the table it actually made it easier to select stories—we tried to focus on stories that had qualities associated with both kinds of fiction.

**John Grayshaw: Why do you think the woman writers of "The Future is Female" period are under appreciated/less well known than some of their male counterparts?**

There are several reasons that most of us cannot name nearly as many early female SF authors as we can name male ones. First and foremost—there were a lot more men than women publishing professional SF at this time. Between the 1920s and the 1970s, women comprised about 15% of the SF community—so they were a significant minority, but a real minority nonetheless (since the 1970s, that number has risen to about 35%). Second—while there were many one-hit wonders of both sexes, overall, men tended to stay in the field of SF production longer than women, so they published more had simply had more opportunities to write the great story that would make their names in SF history. But probably the biggest factor has to do with who has produced what kinds of anthologies at specific points in SF history. Two points are particularly useful to look at: the 1940s and the 1970s. First and foremost, let's be honest: the editors who put together the very first SF anthologies in the 1940s simply had a lot more material by men to work with than they did by women, so it's not surprising that, statistically speaking, many of the stories in those early anthologies would be by men. But we might also note that the editors who put those together came of age during the first period of feminist backlash across American society, and it's very possible that they were consciously or unconsciously writing women out of SF history—there's evidence that at least one woman who was supposed to be included in one of the first SF anthologies was disinvited when the editor found out she was a woman. So that might have been a factor as well—especially since we know this is a period when science was being constructed as a "masculine" field. Perhaps something similar was happening in some corners of the SF community.

But then something even more interesting happens in the 1970s: with the revival of feminism, the number of women in SF doubles, and suddenly there are enough women with enough visibility in the field that they are putting together their own anthologies and histories of SF! So you'd think this would have been the moment when many of the early women writers I've been anthologizing would have been reintroduced to the SF community. And while it's true, a few key names do show up—C.L. Moore, Leigh Brackett, Judith Merril—you don't get a sense that there were dozens and even hundreds of other writers out there like them. I suspect there are two reasons for this. First, we need to remember the intent of these anthologies: most were *feminist* anthologies, so the editors are looking specifically for

stories with feminist themes, not more generally for "stories by women." That's a much smaller pool of authors and doesn't reflect the diversity of women's SF (in fact, most of those feminist editors are very up front about that in their introductions). Second, you have to consider issues of technology and temporality: by the 1970s when women were putting together the first anthologies of their own, it would have been extremely difficult to access the pulp SF magazine catalog in an extensive way—the magazines were disposable ephemera, and even if some were preserved in libraries and universities, only a select few people could access them. So those 1970s editors had to rely on what they remembered reading in the SF magazines of their childhood—if they even read SF at that time—or on those older anthologies that had, for various reasons, already marginalized women's work in SF. It's really only in the last few decades, with the advent of digital tools that open up the SF archive and make it more searchable, that we're really able to dive in and appreciate how many women made their literary homes in SF in the early and middle twentieth-century.

**John Grayshaw: At the time, what were the biggest hits by women authors in this period? And as a corollary what are the stories that have only had success over time?**

The women writers who were most celebrated in the first generation of magazine SF (the 1920s-40s) were Leslie F. Stone, Clare Winger Harris, and Lilith Lorraine. Based on the rankings that fans did in the letters pages, I'd say they most enjoyed Stone's space operas (Especially "Out of the Void," which we reprint in Sisters of Tomorrow), Harris's planetary romances (especially "The Fate of the Poisedonia" and "A Baby on Neptune" (both of which you can read in her collected works, Away from the Here and Now); and Lilith Lorraine's "Into the 28th Century" (a time travel story).

While one of Stone's stories made it into one of the first SF anthologies from the 1940s, all of these other authors were lost until scholars went back into the SF archive. And while scholars now appreciate all the stories I mention above for their role in helping build SF as a genre, I find that modern readers gravitate toward those that engage the kinds of social issues we still deal with today—issues of how we meet and treat the alien other, issues related to ethics and the environment, etc. I suspect that is in part because the writing style of those early stories is very different than what we enjoy in SF these days, and so it's easier to connect through that kind of content.

By the late 1940s, of course, Leigh Brackett and C.L. Moore were both well-known and well-respected authors who were also regularly included in SF anthologies—indeed, so much so that for a long time, scholars tended to start their histories of women in SF with these two figures.

When we get to the second generation of women in SF, it's a bit easier to find who was most appreciated because by then the major magazines were publishing annual "best of" anthologies. In fact, that's how I got started on my research recovering women SF authors—I was in the stacks at Georgia Tech, looking at old SF anthologies from the 1950s, and I was blown away by the names of all these women writers who were immensely popular in their day but who have been, until recently, all but lost to SF history. Of course I knew the most famous names—people like Andre Norton, Judith Merril, Anne McCaffrey, and very early Joanna Russ—because these authors kept producing work well beyond the Golden Age of SF. But I had no idea that Margret St. Clair had written an entire saga about mutant

children that were probably the inspiration for the X-Men, that Mildred Clingerman's was seen by editors as the inspiration for many a *Twilight Zone* episode, or that Zenna Henderson's *People* series was later made into a made for TV movie starring William Shatner!

**John Grayshaw: Was there a community of female sci-fi authors in this period?**

In short—no. Of course, the early SF community was fairly small and close-knit, so a number of female writers did indeed know each other. This is particularly true of the Futurians, an early New York-based SF fan group that included Frederic Pohl, Robert Lowndes, Donald Wollheim, Judith Merril, Leslie Perri (Doe Baumgart), and Virginia Kidd—many of the women lived together while their husbands were away at World War II, and they all married and divorced the same male Futurians! So, there were a lot of personal connections between women, and sometimes they would help each other write and find publishers, but they did not see themselves or present themselves to the public as a distinct community. Indeed, during the pulp era, women often talked about their individual connections to feminism outside SF and they sometimes brought feminist sensibilities to their stories, but they saw their main job as that of helping build their chosen genre. During the Golden Age (when all those Futurian women were living and loving together), women still saw their main job as building the genre, but with the advent of a new generation who were writing new kinds of stories about the impact of science and technology on the home and on families, editors themselves started to think about an aesthetic community of authors who were creating what *Fantasy and Science Fiction* editor Anthony Boucher called "sensitive stories from a woman's point of view." While this domestic SF didn't automatically create a group of women writers who wanted to hang out together and start their own magazines/communities/awards, it did make the SF community aware that there were groups of authors in their midst interested in science, society, and sexuality—themes that would become even more prominent in the 1970s as feminist authors did band together to create new SF communities and artifacts.

For what it's worth, there is one place where early women SF authors did begin to create a community of their own—in amateur SF fanzines and prozines. Pioneering SF author Lilith Lorraine left the professional SF community in the late 1930s because she felt the new generation editors were gutting the political possibilities of SF in their quest for commercial success and started a number of SF poetry and short story magazines where feminist and other politically-progressive works were welcome, and many other women (including Virginia Kidd, Tigrina, and Orma McCormick) connected with each other through the Amateur Press Association). For those of you who are interested in the rich history of women and feminists in fandom, I'd recommend Helen Merrick's book, *The Secret Feminist Cabal*.

**John Grayshaw: Was early fandom supportive of women writers?**

This is such a great question. It was definitely a mixed bag, and the response to women writers changed over time as their writing changed. In the 1920s and 30s, fans were generally supportive of women in SF. If you scroll through the letters pages of early SF magazines, you'll find a lot of discussion about where are all the women authors and fans—and you'll see quite a few women writing in to announce their love of SF—and to connect with other female fans! It's probably important to note that editors often got involved with these conversations as well—they published photos of their female authors, corrected

fans when they got the gender wrong, and, in those few cases where early women SF authors wrote stories that criticized the limits of conventional masculinity, defended their authors heartily (probably because controversy makes for good sales, but hey, whatever works!).

Now, having said that, there was a fascinating debate in the pulp magazines about whether or not SF should include sex and romance, and it's true that some fans in the midst of that debate got "writing about sex and romance in SF" confused with "women writing SF." (Apparently no man would write about such things!) If you're interested in learning more, I'd recommend checking out Justine Larbalestier's *The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction*. I'd also note that the late 1930s saw a feminist backlash sweep the nation, and sadly, the SF community was not immune to that. Editor John W. Campbell famously proclaimed that women couldn't write SF, and a number of pioneering female authors have gone on record stating that they left SF at that time because they didn't need that kind of harassment.

Fortunately, a new generation of women (led by Judith Merril) were more than happy to prove the antifeminists wrong—as you may know, Merril even got Campbell to buy her first professional SF story, the antiwar classic "That Only a Mother," which is also the story that anticipated the explosion of domestic SF in the 1950s. (Ironically, Campbell refused to buy her second story because it was a Mars colonization story and didn't have any housewives or babies in it—so maybe he decided that women could indeed write SF, but only certain kinds….) With the advent of domestic SF, editors and fans began to treat at least some women SF authors as a coherent group with distinct thematic and stylistic tendencies, and that's when you begin to see real division on the subject of women's SF. Most editors loved it—Boucher thought it brought a new emotional dimension to SF, and H.L. Gold at *Galaxy* even did an all-sex and domesticity special issue. There were, however, a small but vocal set of fans who HATED this new mode of storytelling, dismissing it as "heartthrob and diaper" fiction. But again, as in the pulp era, this seems to have been a minority opinion not generally shared by SF professionals. I explore this issue in some depth in one of my earlier books, *Sisters of Tomorrow*, if you'd like to learn more.

**John Grayshaw: What (if any) are some of the common themes that unify the science fiction works of women during this period?**

See my answer to Sara Sandy Gabai Zanger/ Willow Thomson's question, and to your question right below!

**John Grayshaw: What makes the writing by female authors in the "Future is Female" period different than other eras of science fiction? And what makes them similar?**

I'd say there are two main characteristics of early women's science fiction that makes it different from the kinds of fiction that we see many women and nonbinary authors (and some feminist-friendly men) writing today. The first and probably most apparent difference is that while early women writers imagined their "sheroes" (and their occasional villainesses) inhabiting a range of social roles—everything from alien queen to working scientist to harried housewife—and building a range of new and sometimes even feminist-friendly futures, they rarely depict such women working together in groups to change the world—in pulp era SF, science and technology (rather than women's collective labor) liberates women

to pursue work in the public sphere, and in the Golden Age, women are often represented as the isolated targets and victims of technoscientific manipulation.  Since the advent of feminist science fiction in the 1970s, authors have more typically imagined groups of women (and men, and nonbinary people) using science and technology together to  build new and better futures for all. So what binds all these authors together is the sense that new sciences and technologies have a necessary and immediate impact on sex and gender relations (and vice versa)—and that thinking through those relations isn't just good for women, but good for the world as a whole.

The second  difference between early and contemporary women's SF has to do with how we represent sex and gender itself. Like their feminist counterparts, women writing SF up until about the 1970s tended toward identity politics—that is, the assumption that all women are bound together by biology and so face the same cultural and social challenges. This led early feminists and early SF authors alike to represent gender as a fairly straightforward, binary proposition and to assume that the experience of while, middle-class women could represent the experience of all women. Since the 1970s, however, both feminism and science fiction have seen an influx of women of color, queer women, nonbinary people, disabled people, and feminist-friendly men, all of whom ask us to think about how race, sexual orientation, able-bodiedness, and gender create overlapping but noncongruent forms of both life experience and social discrimination--what African-American lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw has famously described as "intersectionality." So while both early and contemporary SF authors evince a strong interest in personal identity as it interacts with social and scientific change, contemporary authors tends to explore this issue in even more nuanced ways than their counterparts.

**John Grayshaw: What is the legacy of the female authors from the "The Future is Female" era? Why are they still relevant?**

The legacy of women writing science fiction between the rise of science fiction as a unique popular genre in the 1920s and the advent of an overtly political feminist SF in the 1960s and 70s is threefold. First, women made complex character development a priority in a genre that initially defined itself in terms of big ideas rather than emotional depth. Sometimes this meant revising conservative ideas about humans versus aliens (in which humans are necessarily good and aliens are necessarily) bad; sometimes this meant creating more complex male and female humans (including men who have feelings and make mistakes as well as women who are heroines rather than damsels in distress). Second, women gave us new science fiction settings! Like their male counterparts, early women SF authors were really good at telling stories set in public spaces such as laboratories and launchpads. But they also reminded us that most people experience new sciences and technologies in private spaces such as the home, and they made homes in SF exciting sites of technoscentific action. Finally, early women SF authors anticipated their later, self-described feminist counterparts with a wide range of stories about the many different ways that science and technology might be used to literally reconstruct sexual identity and gender relations as a whole.

All of these themes are still and perhaps even more relevant today. Like our predecessors from the early twentieth-century, we use stories about human-alien relations to think through our own relations to the many different raced, gendered, and ethnic others we encounter over the course of our lives; we worry

about the impact of science and technology on both the workplace and the home (especially as they are knit together in strange new ways by computers and social media); and we see people using everything from new reproductive technologies to Facebook's offer of 47 different genders for users to expand our ideas about what is possible for (as one of my students rather puts it) guys, gals, and nonbinary pals. So reading all these old stories can help us make connections between the past and the present, and they allow us to think about if, how, and when we might approach these topics differently today.

But there is another, even better reason to read these stories: they are weird and exciting and fun and sometimes challenging and sometimes even maddening, but that is what science fiction is all about! This is a genre dedicated to big ideas and new perspectives and the belief that humans can intervene into the material and social worlds and build worlds of tomorrow that are new and different and hopefully better for us all. And while a lot about science, society, sex, and even science fiction has changed over the past century, the primary goals of this genre that we all love remains the same.