

Foundation

The International Review of Science Fiction



Foundation is published three times a year by the Science Fiction Foundation (Registered Charity no. 1041052). It is typeset and printed by The Lavenham Press Ltd., 47 Water Street, Lavenham, Suffolk, CO10 9RD.

***Foundation* is a peer-reviewed journal.**

Subscription rates for 2017

Individuals (three numbers)

United Kingdom	£22.00
Europe (inc. Eire)	£24.00
Rest of the world	£27.50 / \$42.00 (U.S.A.)
Student discount	£15.00 / \$23.00 (U.S.A.)

Institutions (three numbers)

Anywhere	£45.00 / \$70.00 (U.S.A.)
Airmail surcharge	£7.50 / \$12.00 (U.S.A.)

Single issues of *Foundation* can also be bought for £7.50 / \$12.00 (U.S.A.).

All cheques should be made payable to **The Science Fiction Foundation**. All subscriptions are for one calendar year; please specify year of commencement.

Address for subscriptions:

The Science Fiction Foundation, c/o 75 Rosslyn Avenue, Harold Wood, Essex, RM3 0RG, U.K.
Email: Roger Robinson, sff@becon.org – all messages should include 'SFF' in the subject line.

Back issues can be obtained from Andy Sawyer – see contact details below.

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Articles should be approx. 6000 words in length, double-spaced and written in accordance with the style sheet available at the SF Foundation website (www.sf-foundation.org).

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ISSN 0306-4964/258

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The International Review of Science Fiction

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'The Weaker (?) Sex': Women and the Space Opera in Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories*

Brian S. Matzke (University of Michigan)

The controversy surrounding the 2015 Hugo Awards constitutes a recent flashpoint in an ongoing battle for the identity of science fiction. When two factions within sf fandom, the Sad Puppies and Rabid Puppies, released slates of candidates that dominated the nominations, it was widely seen as a reaction against the genre's increasing inclusiveness toward female, racial minority, and LGBTQ writers. 'Puppygate' is part of a broader debate over authenticity raging within geek culture, also manifested in the #GamerGate controversy and 'Fake Geek Girl' meme. Across these cases, relatively conservative voices have asserted the existence of a narrowly defined 'original' community, defending that definition against progressives seeking to expand or otherwise revise it. As Amy Wallace wrote in *Wired*: 'the balloting had become a referendum on the future of the genre. Would sci-fi focus, as it has for much of its history, largely on brave white male engineers with ray guns ... [o]r would it continue its embrace of a broader sci-fi?' (Wallace 2015). Critiques such as these rarely question the notion that the genre's original definition marginalized women and excluded signifiers of femininity. In the case of the Hugo Awards, however, it helps to examine work published by the awards' namesake, Hugo Gernsback, so as to challenge traditional understandings of women and femininity in 'authentic' science fiction. Through a close reading of the letters from women and works by the two female writers, Clare Winger Harris and Lee Hawkins Garby, which Gernsback published in the thirty-seven issues of the magazine that he edited, it becomes apparent that women were instrumental in developing the adventure stories that the Puppies prefer. In a real way, women created the space opera.

While women were underrepresented during Gernsback's tenure as the founding editor of *Amazing Stories* from 1926 to 1929, their contributions were supremely valuable to the genre's development. Scholars have often overlooked or mischaracterized these contributions. Jane L. Donawerth and Carol A. Kolmerton have worked to overcome the dearth of critical attention by establishing a long tradition of women writers in utopian and science fiction extending from the seventeenth century to the present, with these early pulp writers as key figures. Donawerth shows that early women in sf brought women's issues to science fiction, as well as sophisticated social critique that grows out of 'a recognition that scientific "fields" and measurement of "progress" in science are shaped by social ideology' (1997: 13). She points to narratives of pregnancy and childcare as well as refutations of sociobiology in science fiction as examples. Still, this emphasis on women's issues has limitations when considering women in early pulps. Writing specifically about women science

fiction writers from 1929 to 1930, Donawerth asserts: 'Although these women shared with men the romanticizing of science, they offered one particular application that the male writers rarely offered: the transformation of domestic spaces and duties through technology' (1994: 138). Later scholars have echoed this sentiment; John Cheng for example states, 'female characters marked a broader domestic sensibility within science fiction' (2012: 112). This focus on domesticity, while valuable to constructing a history of women in sf, runs the risk of overlooking or minimizing women's contributions to action and adventure.

Justine Larbalestier builds on Donawerth's and Kolmerton's work while focusing on a narrower definition of science fiction, and specifically on 'battle of the sexes' stories from 1926 to 1973, where sexual differences and gender roles are explicitly constructed and debated. While not analysing Harris's or Garby's work specifically, Larbalestier emphasizes that women were present in the sf community from the very beginning as both readers and writers. The recent anthology, *Sisters of Tomorrow* (2016), shines a light on these women, bringing together contributions from female authors, poets, journalists, editors and artists from pulp sf's first twenty years. In their introduction, the editors, Lisa Yaszek and Patrick B. Sharp, identify four primary motivations that drew these women to sf: an affinity for science, a love of the genre, a desire to create new and better political sensibilities, and the opportunity for paid labour in a relatively egalitarian field. Simply by working in the genre, these women challenged a stereotype that always existed but was never actually true, that adventure and wonder were the provenance of male readers and writers. Larbalestier examines the assumptions underlying the conventional masculine gendering of the genre, writing: 'equivalence between "women" and "love interest" disqualifies women from the field of science fiction, since love belongs to the field of romance or, rather, literature for "sentimental old maids who like a bit of 'slop'" (from a letter by David McIlwain in *Astounding Science Fiction* [November 1938]: 158)' (2002: 10). Harris and Garby, while still sometimes employing the tropes associated with domesticity or the female love interest, belie the assumptions that Larbalestier identifies by troubling the dichotomy that places masculine sf in opposition to feminine sentimental fiction.

Women as readers

It would be inaccurate to say that *Amazing Stories* evinces a progressive gender politics, but it would be equally inaccurate to assume that early pulp sf was a single-gendered environment overrun with masculine themes and phallic rockets. *Amazing Stories* was never hyper-masculine like other pulp magazines, and women were never absent from the community that emerged around the magazine. It is a commonly-held misconception that, prior to the emergence of feminist sf in the 1960s, women were marginalized within if not entirely excluded from the genre's implied and empirical audience. Anne McCaffrey, evincing the conventional wisdom, writes, 'Originally science fiction

was predominantly male-authored and written for a specifically science-trained male readership' (1972: 287). However, Gernsback construed the reading of sf as the beginning rather than the end of scientific training, and frequently boasted that the stories he published were 'almost always instructive.' It is true that Gernsback's emphasis on scientific didacticism contributed to the magazine's marginalization of women; introducing Harris, for example, Gernsback writes, 'as a rule, women do not make good scientific writers, because their education and general tendencies on scientific matters are usually limited' (1927b: 245). The condescension that Gernsback displays here can be found elsewhere in his address of women readers and writers as well.

Nonetheless, Gernsback did explicitly recognize and court women readers. In his editorial to the second issue, Gernsback makes his often-repeated assertion, 'It is your magazine,' and he goes on to publish three readers' letters praising the magazine (1926b: 99). The selection of letters – one from Brooklyn, one from West Virginia and one from Iowa – seems designed to reflect the breadth of the readers on whom the editor conferred this sense of ownership. The writer from Brooklyn says, 'Even now my wife is anxiously waiting for me to finish this first issue, so that she may read it herself' (99). This letter can be placed alongside Gernsback's assertion, in his October 1927 editorial, that 'the younger generation makes a dash for each copy [of the magazine], even before father gets a chance to read it' (1927a: 625). Both children and wives, according to Gernsback's editorials, are clamouring to read scientific fiction. The implied readership consists of the entire nuclear family – parents and children, husbands and wives. Gernsback at no point excludes one group so as to more fully court another. This becomes more explicit in the September 1926 editorial, when Gernsback writes, 'A great many women are already reading the new magazine. This is most encouraging' (1926a: 483). Gernsback's solicitation of women readers was certainly strategic; *Amazing Stories* was not on a paying basis for its first two years, and Gernsback's propensity for investing in new projects rather than paying his creditors meant that he could not afford to alienate any potential readers (Ashley 2004: 131). The genre's failure to establish a broader readership during the 1920s may have contributed to the contraction that sf experienced during the Great Depression (Ashley 1977: 31). But as a strategy, Gernsback's inclusion of women is still striking. At the same time, *Black Mask* for example was selling itself as 'The He-Man's Magazine.' Gernsback's openness stands in contrast to this sort of highly gendered marketing employed by other pulp magazines.

The stereotype that sf was a men's genre existed even during the editor's tenure, but Gernsback attempted to correct it whenever he could. Writing to the magazine, Leslie Stone commented, 'I believed that I was the only feminine reader of your publication', to which Gernsback responded, 'We are very glad to hear from one of the fair sex and would be glad if more of the weaker (?) sex were contributors to the Discussions Column' (Stone 1928: 667). The editor's

comedic use of a parenthetical question mark seems to challenge contemporary gender stereotypes, but his solicitation of female readers is serious. In January 1930, Gernsback's new magazine, *Science Wonder Stories*, received a letter from Verna Pullen who supposed that Gernsback would not publish a letter from a woman. He replied, 'We have no discrimination against women. Perish the thought – we want them! As a matter of fact, there are almost as many women among our readers as there are men' (Gernsback 1930: 765). There are no data to support this boast, but the fact that he would make this claim goes a long way in dispelling the image of 1920s sf as a boys' club.

Furthermore, 1920s sf was not primarily an action/adventure genre; rather, Gernsback's frequent contributors during these years, including Clement Fezandié and Jacques Morgan, focused on gadget fictions in which new technologies solve minor everyday problems. For example, each instalment in Henry Hugh Simmons' series of stories, *Hicks' Inventions with a Kick*, sees the titular Hicks unveiling a new invention to ease some form of domestic labour, only for the invention to go comically awry. In 'The Automatic Self-Serving Dining Table' (April 1927), Hicks invents a robotic Lazy Susan that cooks and serves dinner, while in 'The Automatic Apartment' (August 1927) he develops a self-cleaning apartment. It is worth speculating that this prevalence of domestic settings in *Amazing Stories*, as well as the importance of wives and girlfriends as characters and the resolution of many stories in marriage, might reflect a somewhat unsophisticated effort on the part of the writers to court female readers. If so, Gernsback's male cohort very likely misread their female audience.

In June 1928, *Amazing Stories* published a letter under the headline, 'A KIND LETTER FROM A LADY FRIEND AND READER.' After commenting on what stories she liked and disliked, the writer, Mrs H.O. De Hart from Anderson, Indiana, concludes by writing:

I am only a comparatively uneducated young (is twenty-six young? Thank you!) wife and mother of two babies, so about the only chance I get to travel beyond the four walls of my home is when I pick up your magazine.

Ah, but then I travel indeed! For I journey to Mars and Venus, with side trips to the moon, and down to the heart of the earth, yea, even into the fourth Dimension! And *who* could do more?' (De Hart 1928: 277).

Mrs De Hart, precisely the sort of wife and mother whom Gernsback claims to value as a reader, enjoys the magazine not for the gadget fiction that imagines a better way of serving dinner; she enjoys it for the escapist qualities of interplanetary adventure fiction.

As Darko Suvin writes, 'At the beginnings of a literature, the concern with a domestication of the amazing is very strong' (1979: 4). Early sf, however, had

had an equally strong concern with an amazement of the domestic, as can be seen in the work of Fezandié, Morgan, Simmons and others. The balance between these two impulses remained dynamic throughout Gernsback's tenure, and it appears that women's contributions to the magazine as both readers and writers moved it toward the amazing. David Cheng asserts, 'For interwar science fiction, "amazing," "astounding," and "wonder" were more than magazine titles; they were also metaphors for a specific style to imagine science' (2012: 84). Insofar as this is true, it is due in no small part to the influence of women.

Clare Winger Harris

The magazine began to favour adventure stories precisely when the first woman writer entered the field. Harris published her first story in *Weird Tales* in July 1926 and her second in *Amazing Stories* in June 1927. She went on to publish twelve stories, nine of which were published in Gernsback's magazines. Her first story for *Amazing Stories*, 'The Fate of the Poseidonia', was submitted to a story contest accompanying the December 1926 cover. The cover depicts an ocean liner suspended from a spherical alien vessel with a group of nude, feathered, red-skinned humanoids in the foreground. The June 1927 issue published the top three stories submitted to the contest. First place was awarded to Cyril C. Wates' 'The Visitation', in which the creatures are a race of people called the Deelathon who live in a utopian island off the coast of South America. The story describes their rescue of a crashed ship by means of antigravity technology. The second place winner, George Fox's 'The Electronic Wall', depicts a Martian abduction of a military transport ship. Mars has a shortage of men, and the servicemen are asked to stay on the planet and breed with the beautiful Martian women.

'The Fate of the Poseidonia' finished third. In Harris's story, the narrator, George, finds himself competing with his red-skinned neighbour, Martell, for the love of Margaret. At the same time, ships and planes around the world are disappearing and ocean levels are receding. George breaks into Martell's apartment and discovers that Martians are stealing Earth's water and that Martell is a Martian spy. His realization comes too late, as the ocean liner Poseidonia, on which Margaret was traveling, has disappeared. Margaret eventually sends George a television message from Mars, explaining that Martell has abducted her and that the Martians have finished replenishing their planet with the water stolen from Earth.

All three stories exploit the creatures' nudity in the cover, but while Wates and Fox both take it to indicate utopian freedom and sexual possibility, for Harris it is a reminder of the threat posed by George's sexual competitor. The fact that George's romantic rival happens to be a Martian invader only amplifies an already familiar menace. This is a common thread in Harris's stories: addressing everyday twentieth century anxieties by taking the source of those anxieties to science-fictional extremes. Her next story, 'The Miracle of the Lily' (1928), figures

pest control as a 2000-year war between humans and insects. In the epistolary tale, a man named Nathano splices his own narrative with diary entries from the years 1928, when insects were a mundane concern, and 2928, by which time insects had ravaged all plant life to the point of extinction before becoming extinct themselves. Nathano, writing in the year 3928, discovers seeds and begins to grow lilies, the first plants the planet has seen in generations. At the same time, humans are in radio contact with Venusians, who claim to have their own insect problem. When television contact is established, however, Nathano describes the sight:

The figure that stood facing us was a huge six-legged beetle, not identical in every detail with our earthly enemies of past years, but unmistakably an insect of gigantic proportions! ... It spoke, and we had to close our eyes to convince ourselves that it was the familiar voice of Wayona, the leading Venusian radio broadcaster. (Harris 1928b: 54)

The Venusians go on to show their 'insects' which are in fact tiny ape-like mammals. In this twist ending, Harris provides the sort of satiric commentary on radio that Gernsback's technocratic optimism tends to overlook: radio can create a false sense of familiarity, generating the illusion of closeness where none actually exists. This satire works as both a literal commentary about communications technology and an allegorical commentary about humanity's place in the universe; the fact that Venus is feminine and the miraculous flower is a lily, a symbol of the Virgin Mary, pokes at the notion that Man is created in (an implicitly male) God's image, while also pointing to the generative power of women.

'The Miracle of the Lily' concludes with humans contemplating an invasion of Venus, but Nathano thinks that this will be unnecessary: 'A short time ago, when I went out into my field to see how my crops were faring, I found a six-pronged beetle voraciously eating. No – man will not need to go to Venus to fight "insects"' (Harris 1928b: 55). This ending suggests that history will repeat itself, and Harris has a recurring interest in tragedies of this sort, where humans confront the limits of what they know. The tragedies of 'The Fate of the Poseidonia' and 'The Miracle of the Lily' stem in part from what humans do not know about Mars and Venus, respectively – and, allegorically, what men and women do not know about each other. Harris returns to this theme in her next story, 'The Menace of Mars' (1928). The narrator, an astronomy student named Hildreth, recounts surviving a series of natural disasters along with Professors Harley and Aldrich, and Harley's daughter Vivian. Aldrich eventually discovers that Mars is responsible for the disasters by altering the Earth's orbit in order to better shield itself from the sun. Aldrich explains, 'Mars is a living world; vital, selfish, malignant! He is not vital in the sense that earth is – (Earth, a huge ball of inert ash covered with human fungi). He is intelligent as a *whole*, as an

entity' (Harris 1928a: 591). By the story's conclusion, Earth's orbit has changed to such an extent that humans can only live near the poles. The moral of the story comes early, when Aldrich is first developing his theory about Mars: 'Life may not always be vested with the attributes with which our existence clothes it' (589). This truth discovered about Mars becomes true for humans on Earth as well, as the disaster forces the survivors to adapt to radical changes in lifestyle.

This and Harris's other early stories show a persistent interest in scale. Whether they are romantic rivals, crop-eating insects or alien life forms, the antagonists are always literally larger than the characters initially anticipate, and they are metaphorically larger than what the characters have the capacity to handle in their everyday lives. Harris's use of exclamation points and italics drives home Aldrich's shock at his own discovery, and the other characters are incredulous at his findings. This contrasts substantially with the cool scientific composure that other writers' protagonists typically evince in *Amazing Stories*. Harris's stories develop a form of the sublime that, in its grandiosity as well as its concern with radically different forms of life, adumbrates the work of authors like Arthur C. Clarke and Stanislaw Lem. The fact that her stories feature such large challenges simultaneously diminishes the significance of individual people's problems while replicating those problems in a context with much higher stakes.

This motif comes across most strongly in the middle of 'The Menace of Mars,' just after Aldrich's musings about the nature of life and just before the definitive revelation that Mars is a living organism. Harris quotes the second and thirty-fourth lines of Alfred Tennyson's poem, 'Vastness' (1885), as an epigraph to one of the chapters:

Many a planet by many a sun
May roll with a dust of a vanish'd race.
Swallow'd in Vastness, lost in Silence,
Drown'd in the deeps of a meaningless Past.
(Harris 1928a: 589)

Harris alters the lines from how Tennyson presents them. She gives no indication that they are from separate parts of the poem and she divides the two lines in half, making four. She also alters the punctuation; in the original, lines 33-34 of the poem form a question: 'What is it all, if we all of us end but in being our own corpse-coffins at last, / Swallow'd in Vastness, lost in Silence, drown'd in the deeps of a meaningless Past?' (Tennyson 2009: 460). While the original poem serves as a meditation on death, Harris presents it as a discourse on the meaning of whole civilizations and species when considered on the vast scale of time and space. In so doing, she draws out a secondary theme of Tennyson's work that is central in Harris's fiction. In the poem's first two couplets, Tennyson writes:

MANY a hearth upon our dark globe sighs after many a vanish'd face,

Many a planet by many a sun may roll with a dust of a vanish'd race.

Raving politics, never at rest – as this poor earth's pale history runs, –
What is it all but a trouble of ants in the gleam of a million million of
suns? (459)

In the first two lines, individual homes and people bear a synecdochal relationship with whole worlds and species. The third line brings the reader back to Earth – not down to the individual but to the level of groups and nations, at which political discourse takes place. The fourth line brings the entire galaxy into view, emphasizing the unimportance of politics. The second couplet contradicts the first – the poem's speaker seems uncertain as to whether the small is significant in how it stands for the large or insignificant in comparison to the large. This tension recurs throughout Harris's early work. Hildreth feels it early in 'The Menace of Mars' when he and Vivian attend Aldrich's lecture. Hildreth describes his thoughts:

How insignificant seemed man, even as learned a man as Professor Aldrich, when one could lift the eyes but a little higher and behold with one glance the mighty Vega, Altair, and Deneb. Yet I knew in my heart that as much as I loved my astronomical pursuits, a certain small figure in yonder group of humanity was dearer to me than all the suns that shine in the eternal ether and so tell us we are not alone.

'And so we believe there is an analogy between the universe of chemistry and that of the stars,' the professor was saying. (Harris 1928a: 582)

Hildreth nearly plays out the scene that Walt Whitman describes in 'When I heard the learn'd astronomer' (1865), but where Whitman's speaker only moves his gaze from the classroom to the stars, Hildreth progresses a step further by returning his gaze to Earth and fixing on Vivian. The romance of the stars may prove more enticing than charts and diagrams, but romance between a man and a woman is more enticing still. Just at the moment when Hildreth starts to feel some metaphorical chemistry between himself and his infatuation, his thoughts are interrupted by Aldrich, whose lecture brings him back to the world of literal chemistry as well as astronomy. Aldrich goes on to explain the hypothesis that our universe may be an atom in another larger universe, an idea that Harris was the first to develop in her 1926 story for *Weird Tales*, 'A Runaway World' (Bleiler 1998: 172). This fixation on macrocosm and microcosm is thematically central to Harris's work: astronomy is chemistry enlarged by several orders of magnitude; planets are living beings on a grand scale; entire races are individual faces multiplied many times over.

Superficially, Harris's later stories move away from this theme towards more recognizable domestic stories with relatively modest scopes. Her fourth piece for *Amazing Stories*, 'The Fifth Dimension' (December 1928), centres on

a woman with precognitive powers who saves her husband from a train wreck. It is noteworthy for being one of the only stories in the magazine to feature a female narrator. Harris's fifth piece is 'The Diabolical Drug' (1929), a story in which a man experiments with drugs that alter his metabolism so that he can marry a woman who is older than him. Both stories extend Harris's concern with scale into the fourth dimension, toying with perspective by exploring the expansion and contraction of time similar to how 'The Menace of Mars' explores the expansion and contraction of space.

Lee Hawkins Garby

Harris's example reveals that, from the beginning, *Amazing Stories* evinced a dual set of sensibilities: on the one hand, small-scale domestic stories brought science into the realm of everyday life, while on the other hand, grandiose interplanetary adventures provided an escape from that everyday life. In that regard, August 1928 saw the publication of what was perhaps the magazine's single most significant issue. Two of the issue's five stories are relatively inconsequential: a reprint of H.G. Wells' 'The Moth' (1895) and a gothic story about keeping a severed head alive titled 'The Head'. But the issue also features 'The Perambulating Home', Simmons' last Hicks story and the magazine's last story to feature a bumbling inventor as the protagonist. The other two stories of the issue were 'Armageddon – 2415 A.D.', the origin story for Buck Rogers, and the first part of *The Skylark of Space*. The juxtaposition of Simmons' last piece with 'Armageddon' and *Skylark* is fitting. In this issue, the domestic setting literally walks away from *Amazing Stories* to be replaced by more of the adventure stories that Mrs De Hart preferred.

The magazine credits *The Skylark of Space* as written 'by Edward Elmer Smith in collaboration with Lee Hawkins Garby' (Smith and Garby 1928a: 390). Though the novel was originally penned in 1916, its appearance in *Amazing Stories* was its first publication. 'Doc' Smith would go on to become a highly regarded author but Garby's contributions to *Skylark* constitute her only credit as a science fiction writer. Even this recognition was lost for a time. The first two editions of the book retain Garby's credit as co-author, but Smith revised the novel in 1958, and her credit was omitted from that point on until the original edition became available again in 2007. By all accounts, Smith, a chemist working in Washington for the Bureau of Agriculture, conceived the idea for the novel. Smith approached the wife of his college roommate, chemist Carl Garby, about collaborating on the project because Smith did not feel up to the task of developing the novel's romantic subplot. The exact nature of the collaboration and the extent of Garby's input are unclear. However, it is generally agreed that the story and the scientific ideas are Smith's, while much of the dialogue and the character development, as well as the wedding scene late in the novel, are Garby's contributions.

The novel follows the maiden voyage of the *Skylark*, the first interplanetary

spaceship; its inventors, Seaton and Crane; Seaton's fiancée Dorothy; and rival inventor DuQuesne. Early on, Seaton gives Dorothy a tour of the ship:

We have all the comforts of home. This bathroom, however, is practical only when we have some force downward, either gravitation or our own acceleration... If I should want to wash my face while we are drifting, I just press this button here, and the pilot will put on enough acceleration to make the correct use of the water possible. There are a lot of surprising things about a trip into space. (Smith and Garby 1928a: 416)

Smith and Garby show a keen awareness of how space travel would alter the conditions in which people live and give readers the opportunity to take pleasure in learning about these alterations. But just as they present these 'surprising things' to readers, they also display the scientific know-how that allows Seaton to minimize inconvenience to the travellers' lifestyle. This passage is omitted from Smith's 1958 revision. Instead, that version has Seaton expounding on the ship's technology, only to be interrupted by Dorothy telling him, 'Enough of the jargon. Show us the important things – kitchen, bedrooms, bath' (Smith 1970: 50-1). This version sharpens the line between masculine concern with engineering and feminine concern with domesticity, which is blurry in *Amazing Stories*' version. The next line in the revision paraphrases several paragraphs of description from the 1928 version: 'Seaton did so, explaining in detail some of the many differences between living on earth and in a small, necessarily self-sufficient world let out in airless, lightless, heatless space' (51). This rendering substantially downplays the scientist's original interest in bringing the comforts of home into space.

Despite the strength of Seaton's initial interest in this regard, *The Skylark of Space* is not a colonialist narrative; the humans do not intentionally or unintentionally spread their bourgeois Anglo-American culture to the stars. Rather, they embrace alien social mores – though those mores are already conveniently similar to those of Earth. This embrace reaches its apotheosis with Dorothy's proposal that she and Seaton should marry on the planet Osnome. She explains, 'A grand wedding, of the kind we would simply have to have in Washington, doesn't appeal to me any more than it does to you – and it would bore you to extinction. Dad would hate it too – it's better all around to be married here' (Smith and Garby 1928c: 621). By this point, grandness is associated with Earth while, ironically, outer space is the realm of the personal. Again, a comparison with Smith's revisions is illuminating. In his version, Dorothy says, 'Dad would hate a grand Washington wedding, and so would you. It's better all around to be married here' (Smith 1970: 124). In Smith and Garby's version, Dorothy proposes an Osnomian marriage, first because she prefers it, and secondarily because Seaton and her father would prefer it. In Smith's version, Dorothy lacks any professed opinion of her own, and is motivated only by desire

to please the men in her life.

Smith's alterations are disappointing but even in the 1958 version Dorothy remains a substantial and strong character with an unexpectedly important role both in the story and in Seaton's work. Everett Bleiler inaccurately describes her simply as 'Seaton's presumably platonic girlfriend' (1998: 394). However, Seaton tells her early in the novel, 'I love you, mind, body, and spirit, love you as a man should love the one and only woman... I love you morally, physically, intellectually, and every other way there is' (Smith and Garby 1928a: 397). This does not suggest a 'presumably platonic' relationship. Nor is Dorothy an ignorant sidekick or a damsel in distress. In the novel, Crane praises her as Seaton's 'anchor, his only hold on known things' (396). At several points, Dorothy professes her scientific ignorance, providing the inventors opportunities to give exposition through dialogue, but she is not unintelligent; she is a talented violinist capable of speaking five or six languages. She even picks up conversational skills in an alien tongue within a day of their arrival on Osnome. And she stands up to DuQuesne's henchman when he abducts her, stealing his gun. She is by no means defined solely in terms of her relationship with Seaton.

Nonetheless, fans frequently characterize this aspect of the story as its most salient quality. Writing an account of *Amazing Stories*' early years, Robert Lowndes pauses on July 1928 to note that in the same month, two interstellar epics hit newsstands, *Skylark* in *Amazing Stories* and Edmund Hamilton's 'Crashing Suns' in *Weird Tales*. Lowndes notes, 'For those disturbed by the romantic mush in Smith's novel, Hamilton's all-male epics were welcome' (2004: 272). While 'Crashing Suns' was exclusively male, its February 1929 sequel 'The Star-Stealers' was not, and that story provides an interesting contrast with Smith and Garby in terms of how early pulp sf addressed sexuality and gender. 'Crashing Suns' and 'The Star-Stealers' were part of a series of stories about The Interstellar Patrol, a military fleet that in each story prevents some alien species from committing a planetary-scale atrocity. The stories take place 100,000 years in the future and are narrated by ship captain, Jan Tor. The science fictional character names and lack of romantic subplots both serve to eschew gender distinctions, but in 'The Star-Stealers,' Jan Tor's second officer, Dal Nara, is a woman. Aside from the use of 'she' throughout the story, Dal Nara's gender goes un-noted until the penultimate page when, crisis averted, the characters take leave. Jan Tor writes, 'Dal Nara, after the manner of her sex through all the ages, sought a beauty parlour' (Hamilton 1965: 89).

On the one hand, Hamilton's story provides a relatively progressive vision, where a woman can rise to a position of substantial authority in a military system. On the other hand, the beauty parlour reference suggests a strong bifurcation between a genderless professional realm and a very traditionally gendered private realm. When she steps aboard Jan Tor's phallic rocket, the fact that Dal Nara is a woman no longer matters, but as if to compensate for this genderless state, when she steps off of the rocket, her femininity matters in

a highly stereotypical way. By contrast, Smith and Garby do not depict female social and professional advancement, but Dorothy is the same person both off and on the Skylark. Although not a scientist herself, she constitutes an important intellectual partner in Seaton's and Crane's adventure.

Space Operas and Soap Operas

Gernsback, with his tendency to equate women with love interest, often failed to note what his own writers were doing with characters like Dorothy. When a reader wrote to ask why *Amazing Stories* did not feature more love stories, he responded, 'We presume that if our stories are to be scientific, this love element will be missing in most of them' (1928: 373). Larbalestier quotes this response and writes 'the inference is clear: the hard, virile space of science operates to expel romance and thus women' (2002: 108). Larbalestier points to significant gender biases in Gernsback's approach to both science and science fiction; however, even as they were reducing women to love interests, Gernsback and his writers were sometimes complicating those stereotypes. Neither of the women who Gernsback published in *Amazing Stories* were predominantly interested in exploring relationships between men and women, and consequently neither author is examined by Larbalestier. But close readings of these two women's contributions to the magazine reveal that kernels of a more complex and progressive attitude towards gender existed in the magazine right from the beginning.

It was almost a decade after Marie Curie's 1921 tour of the United States before pulp fiction depicted women scientists as characters. That landmark would come almost immediately after Gernsback's departure from *Amazing Stories*, when he published Leslie Stone's first story, 'When the Sun Went Out' (1929), as a paperbound booklet in his Stellar Science Fiction Series. Stone's story featured a professional female astronomer but that landmark was anticipated by earlier female characters including Vivian in 'The Menace of Mars' and Dorothy in *The Skylark of Space* who, though non-experts, participated in scientific discovery. Intentionally or not, *Amazing Stories* offered a democratized vision of scientific practice that extended to women. The depiction of strong, professional female characters rose along with the number of women writers: Eric Leif Davin identifies 203 women who published in American sf magazines between 1926 and 1960 (2005: v). But even in the three years that Gernsback was at the helm of *Amazing Stories*, both the sf genre and the community that formed around it incorporated women readers, authors and strong female characters. The contributions of women are also not what we would expect. Early women in sf expanded the genre beyond the domestic sphere, so that recovering their work enables an essential revision to the genre's history.

In both 2015 and 2016, Hugo Award voters roundly rejected the Puppies. In 2016, very few of the Puppies' slated candidates made it onto the ballot, and all four of the major categories were awarded to fiction written by women. In 2015,

the only nominee on the Puppies' slates that actually won a Hugo Award was the film *Guardians of the Galaxy*, a space adventure story whose overwhelming popularity transcended political ideologies. Not only was *Guardians* the first Marvel Studios film co-written by a woman, Nicole Perlman, but it was also credited as ushering a 'comeback' for the space opera (Barber 2014). In this respect, Perlman advanced a tradition that runs through acclaimed sf writers like Leigh Brackett, wife of Edmond Hamilton and co-writer of *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), and that begins with Harris and Garby. Planetary romances like Edgar Rice Burroughs' Barsoom series may precede their writing by about fifteen years, but Harris was one of the first to marry the planetary romance's use of action and adventure to a Gernsbackian focus on science and scientists. With Smith and Garby, those scientists built spaceships, and the space opera was born. In recent years, both the original version of *The Skylark of Space* and Harris's previously out-of-print story collection, *Away from Here and Now* (1947), have become available through print-on-demand publishers; hopefully, these pathfinding authors will begin to receive the recognition they deserve.

Acknowledging these contributions may complicate how we understand the intersection of gender and genre. However, the idea of women as creators of space operas should not be surprising; when Bob Tucker coined the term in 1941, he defined it pejoratively in comparison to the feminine soap opera: 'The morning housewife tear-jerkers are called "soap operas." For the hacky, grinding, stinking, outworn space-ship yarn, or world-saving for that matter, we offer "space opera"' (Hartwell and Cramer 2007: 10). This hacky genre, however, allowed authors to imagine alternatives to the domestic sphere as it was conventionally construed, enthusiastically envisioning the possibility of both material and cultural change. Many continue to believe in a binary that situates a traditional, masculine and 'pulpy' adventure genre against a more recent, feminist and 'literary' sf, but a close examination of the stories from early sf writers including Harris and Garby reveals that that supposed binary never actually existed.

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