

The Road Not Taken:

Sheri S. Tepper

and the Evolution of Feminist Science Fiction

by

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Abstract

Science fiction is a popular genre. This entails a set of conventions which feminist writers of the '60s-'80s have modified to rewrite the genre's inherent cultural and patriarchal assumptions. In the '80s feminist science fiction came to a branch in the road caused by the new 'post-feminist' condition of society and a change of focus in the feminist movement. Many female authors began to write novels that diverged in style from their foremothers', focusing more on strong female protagonists and less on disruptive narrative conventions. Sheri S. Tepper is unusual: she continues to develop the techniques of early feminist science fiction. Her fiction represents 'the road not taken'; it creates alliances with other oppressed groups, manipulates traditional science fiction conventions of science, the female alien, representation, the quest and narration, and blurs the generic boundaries between science fiction and fantasy to convey a strongly feminist message.

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Introduction

I entered this thesis with three related but disparate interests: Sheri S. Tepper's writing, science fiction and feminism. I was faced with the challenge of figuring out how they fit together. As it turned out, another interest of mine made the relation among the three quite obvious. I have always been fascinated by the way that an author's work reflects the personal, political and social contexts of his or her time. Indeed, my academic endeavours have been spent investigating the ways in which English literature evolves over time, reflecting changes in the world.

Science fiction as a genre had about a hundred years to evolve before it converged with feminism. The conjunction of the two came about as a result of the second wave of feminism, before which feminism and science fiction had not been concurrently popular. Once feminists noticed that science fiction was a likely vehicle for their message, despite its traditional conservatism and its patriarchal conventions, they began to explore ways to circumvent the generic ties binding science fiction. Their techniques and themes developed along a consistent pattern for approximately twenty years between the late '60s and the mid-'80s, embodying a radical message in textual formations that became ever more disparate from and disruptive of science fiction's norms.

As is to be expected, social contexts continue to progress, and not necessarily along a linear path. With the combined effects of the change in material conditions in the lives of many '80s women, changes in the feminist movement, and the public rhetoric of 'post-feminism', many women are eschewing the kind of feminism that ruled in the '70s. Since the label 'feminist' has a negative image in the popular media, and since the agenda of leading feminists does not necessarily reflect every woman's personal beliefs about

such controversial issues as abortion and pornography, many women are unwilling to call themselves feminists. This change in audience attitudes towards feminism has shown up in science fiction: the radical techniques that feminists had developed gave way to a new focus on strong female protagonists and more covert messages about independence and possible roles for women.

Tepper is different. Although she began to write at about the time that feminist science fiction diverged from its original path, she continued to develop radical forms and techniques in order to deliver strong, critical, revolutionary messages about feminism and society. The reason for this lies in Tepper's personal demographics: she did not begin to write until the age of 50 in 1979, and she did not really develop an individual style as an author until after 1985. As a woman who had lived the reality of patriarchal conditions in the earlier part of the century, she was less likely to be influenced by post-feminist rhetoric than the new generation of young women in the '80s. Her books are unlike anything else available on the current market. This makes her books valuable for their ability to raise the consciousness of young women. Her writing provides convincing evidence that the ideas feminism advocates should not go the way of the dinosaurs: there is more to be done before our society can rest on its post-feminist laurels.

Part one of this thesis will look at the relationship that genre fiction has with the society which produces and consumes it, and examine the hows and wherefores of its evolution. Having done this, I will briefly examine the history of science fiction, both as a background for the creation of a feminist sub-genre and as an illustration of the ways in which popular genres evolve. Subsequently, I will take a more specific look at the work that has been done on the development of feminist science fiction. Finally, the changing

contexts of feminism and its audience will be examined in order to determine why science fiction has changed from its original path.

Part two will examine the ways in which Tepper further develops the strategies laid out by her feminist science fiction ancestors. She combines criticisms of society's approach to race, class, and nature with her feminist concerns by illustrating how they all spring from the organizing principles of hierarchy and dominance. Her books apply feminist science theory to disrupt the patriarchal discourses of traditional science and to reflect the concerns of feminism. Tepper portrays women in a realistic manner showing that they are equal but different, and that that difference must be valued. She works to excise the embedded patriarchal nature of science fiction's narrative patterns. Finally, by combining fantasy with science fiction to fracture the rational world-view of traditional science fiction, she imparts urgency to her message.

Part One: Contextualizing Feminist Science Fiction

The Evolution of Genre Fiction

Although English literature has always been affected by its social context, in economic and other ways, science fiction is part of a phenomenon that is unique to the 19th and 20th centuries. In the past two centuries, mass publishing and mass literacy have enabled a type of fiction known as genre or formula fiction. This type of fiction bears a particular relationship to society, mediated by its economic contexts, its readership and its producers.

John G. Cawelti and Thomas Schatz are two important theorists of popular genre fiction. They argue that commercially motivated formulas evolve in response to the combined input of producers, distributors and audiences. The production apparatus inherent in popular texts necessarily means that if they do not follow a certified formula for success in the form of book sales or movie tickets, they do not get distributed. However, audiences are unwilling to ingest the same story repeatedly. This means that the successful artist must both stick to a tried-and-true formula and at the same time rejuvenate its component stereotypes and plot patterns.

Specific genres get their meaning from their grounding in a particular cultural context. Cawelti argues that “the world of the formula can be described as an archetypal story pattern embodied in the images, symbols, themes, and myths of a particular culture” (16). Schatz makes a similar observation about film genres, which can easily be extended to formula fiction: “the determining, identifying feature of a film genre is its cultural context, its community of interrelated character types whose attitudes, values, and actions flesh out dramatic conflicts inherent within that community” (21-2). A genre is

meaningless and will fail to attract consumers unless it refers to the ideological beliefs of its audience and addresses conflicting belief systems in order to resolve the resultant uncertainties and ambiguities in a positive manner. It is important to note that genre fiction usually depicts the conflict between one ideological system and another and resolves the opposition. Schatz notes that: “Still, the resolution does not function to *solve* the basic cultural conflict. The conflict is simply recast into an emotional context where it can be expeditiously, if not always logically, resolved” (31-2, italics in original). Above all, genre fiction is a societal construct.

Genre fiction illustrates which ideologies are acceptable and useful to the reading public at the time of their distribution. As Anne Cranny-Francis summarizes:

Genres work by conventions and those conventions are social constructs: they operate by social assent, not individual choice (in the same way that the red/orange/green configuration of traffic lights is a social contract, not a matter of individual interpretation). The conventions are themselves subject to social pressures and social mediation. (17)

Since the conventions that make up genres evolve as society changes, reading genre fiction allows a critic to take the pulse of the audience’s current ideology. Furthermore, genres can work in the reverse direction, helping to make new ideologies acceptable. Formula fiction provides a forum in which authors can challenge current ideology by manipulating the conventions in a manner that still fulfills audience expectation, but which does not fulfill what was historically the ideological intent of the genre. If the new ideology is sufficiently acceptable to readers, it can generate new conventions which become codified as part of the formula.

Analysis of genre fiction is further complicated by the autonomy of the reader. According to many theorists of popular culture, including John Fiske, Roland Barthes, and Susan J. Douglas, readers can participate in two different types of pleasure as they partake of popular culture. These consist of the hegemonic pleasure of accepting messages approved by the dominant culture, and the popular pleasure of resistance, wherein the message is subverted. A reader can enjoy a book while partly or fully resisting its embedded ideological messages. This problematizes the study of genre fiction. Commercial success indicates that the ideas encoded in a particular text or genre are useful to a large segment of society. However, without interrogating audience reactions, we cannot know if the audience is using the text to validate their acceptance of the ideology, or their resistance to it.

The dramatization of ideological conflict and resolution in a genre text serves several purposes. Cawelti proposes four disparate functions of formulaic fiction.

1. Formula stories affirm existing interests and attitudes by presenting an imaginary world that is aligned with these interests and attitudes. [. . .]
2. Formulas resolve tensions and ambiguities resulting from the conflicting interests of different groups within the culture or from ambiguous attitudes toward particular values. [. . .]
3. Formulas enable the audience to explore in fantasy the boundary between the permitted and the forbidden and to experience in a carefully controlled way the possibility of stepping across this boundary. [. . .]
4. Finally, literary formulas assist in the process of assimilating changes in values to traditional imaginative constructs. [. . .] (35-6)

As Cawelti's fourth function emphasizes, a genre is not a static construct. Both the conventions of the genre and the cultural attitudes behind those conventions are open to negotiation. Priscilla Walton and Manina Jones highlight the ways in which negotiation operates in genre fiction: "as regulating, contradictory, and transformable discursive sites. [which] generat[e] the intersection of a complex set of institutional, (inter)textual, authorial, and audience engagements" (84). Just as audiences must negotiate their ways through the contested meanings of a genre text, so too must literary critics.

The conventions that make up such genres as science fiction evolve in response to two stimuli. The first is a bored audience: there is a commercial need to keep the largest possible portion of the audience interested in the genre by giving them new things to hold their interest. The second is an audience whose ideological needs and interests have changed: genre fiction that is not in tune with the interests of its audience also tends not to be commercially successful. Changes developing along a consistent pattern can be attributed to the first stimuli, changes in the focus of a genre can be attributed to the second. It is easy to see these influences at work in science fiction after it becomes a popular genre.

The History of Science Fiction

Science fiction did not become popular as a genre until the 1920s and '30s. When it did, it built from the work of the first four science fiction practitioners. Science fiction was profoundly influenced by Mary Shelley, Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, and H. G. Wells.

Shelley's *Frankenstein* was, arguably, the first science fiction text. Her work married the Gothic tradition of adventure and romance to Enlightenment rationality. The

movement and effect of this dark and horrific tale came from its confrontation with the possibilities of science. As Jane Donawerth notes, it also set the tone for science fiction in other ways. Donawerth shows that Shelley perceived the story of science as male. This left Shelley with three complex problems: “making a science that does not exclude women, creating an identity for woman as alien, and finding a voice in a male world” (xviii). However, the tradition of science fiction as a male story about the possibilities of science was the most immediate legacy of Shelley’s work in the genre.

Edgar Allan Poe used science fiction elements in a different way. Despite Brian Aldiss’ belief that whenever Poe attempted to write identifiably science fictional stories, the quality of his writing went down, such stories as “Mesmeric Revelation” and “The Case of M. Valdemar” are undeniably science fiction. It is Aldiss’ opinion that Poe is science fictional in his sense of wonder and a central inarticulacy:

He knew of Another World, and could express it only in symbols, with a slightly self-conscious mellifluousness. [. . .] It is in the techniques Poe developed to skirt this central inarticulacy that he has made most impact on other writers. [These are] the symbols he uses, the worm riddled furniture of his sentences [. . . and] his pervasive sense of something waiting just out of sight [. . .]. The unsociable are in search of the unspeakable. [. . .] Such quests for the unknown and the infinite are very much in the science fictional vein. (60-2)

Poe’s experiments with the tone of science fiction prepared the way for the next set of writers.

Verne and Wells are viewed as the founding fathers of science fiction. The former

began writing in the 1850s, producing plays and an occasional short story, but in 1863 he published his first science fiction book, *Cinq Semaines en Balloon (Five Weeks in a Balloon)*. From this point on he wrote prolifically, making his living from the more than sixty works of science fiction he published before his death. His work helped to develop one subset of science fiction, a kind of adventure story where the plot revolved around technical marvels, which, if not always possible, were always described with strict attention to factual detail and an attempt to rest upon a scientific basis. "His didacticism, his love of rationality, his taste for adventure and even the optimistic tone of his early novels were all to be copied by other writers," (Lambourne, Shallis and Shortland 9). H. G. Wells originated another strand of science fiction; having a finer grasp of science, he was less interested in describing and using gadgets than in working with ideas. Thomas Disch sums up the difference between them succinctly: "Wells was a nimbler novelist, able to mix keen social satire with adventure and give the whole thing a gloss of psychological depth. His works were admired by the literati of his day, while Verne's had already been relegated to 'boy's adventure'" (67). These two authors molded and popularized science fiction, setting the stage for its explosion as a popular genre.

The science fiction of Shelley, Poe, Verne, and Wells was all intricately related to the society in which they lived. Science fiction grew out of late 19th and early 20th century culture wherein advances in science and technology fueled an increasing belief in the ideology of progress. A very specific audience was attracted to science fiction when it became a full-fledged genre with the advent of the pulps in the twenties. At that time science fiction implicitly valued the search for knowledge, and held the idea that science could eventually come up with answers to all of the problems of society (Tulloch 51).

This audience was composed of two segments: the small fraction of the educated middle-class who possessed access to scientific knowledge, and those who hoped to gain access to that knowledge. Both groups were certain that rational scientific knowledge would generate a new power base from which a better society would be maintained (Tulloch 51). The characteristic conflict in this type of science fiction was the dichotomy between the technological successes and the simultaneous sociopolitical failures of the present time (Tulloch 51). Typically the resolution involved an optimistic celebration of science indicating on some level that eventually scientific knowledge would be able to fix society.

Science fiction flourished in its pulp magazine incarnation for thirty-odd years, beginning in 1926 with the inception of *Amazing Stories*. The pulp magazines were cheap productions in which the quality of the stories was frequently lacking from a literary point of view. However, the first magazines generated enough interest and profit that competition quickly arrived. With competition came an early emphasis on science that, if not perfect, was at least not grossly inaccurate (Lambourne, Shallis and Shortland 18). Isaac Asimov identifies the Golden Age of science fiction as occurring during the 1940s and '50s (cited in Lambourne, Shallis and Shortland 20), when new editorship in the magazines produced much higher quality stories. It was not until the '50s that science fiction began to break into mainstream publishing in the form of novels (Aldiss 233), and from that time magazine domination of the genre dwindled. Nonetheless, magazines still help to cement the active science fiction fan community and provide a forum in which new writers can break into the field.

Once science fiction moved into the medium of the paperback, several changes

occurred. In the '60s, the New Wave movement rebelled against the standard universe of science fiction. It took a darker, less optimistic and less technologically oriented view of the future, and combined it with experiments in narrative and the relaxed standards and artistic freedom of the '60s (Cranny-Francis 41-2; Lambourne, Shallis and Shortland 27-8). While this movement was not a great commercial success, it did contribute to the broadening of the science fiction genre, arguably setting the stage for later feminist work. A further broadening--or fracturing--of the genre came when J. R. R. Tolkien's influence spawned high fantasy, a genre closely related to science fiction. The only recognizable movement of the '80s is that of cyberpunk, a genre set in the near future that holds a dystopic view of humanity's interface with the all-encompassing presence of computers, other technology and global corporatism.

The developments described above resulted from a substantial change in social conditions in North America. An initial change came about in response to the development of monopoly capitalism (Tulloch 53), when, as Gerard Klein explains, corporate executives "learned how to control--efficiently and not without brutality--scientists, technicians and other intellectuals, rather than coming to terms with them" (cited in Tulloch, 53). At this point, roughly coinciding with the New Wave, the treatment of the essential conflict changed. It lost its optimism and began to question the doctrine of progress. Science fiction began to appeal to a wider audience, an audience who never had the hope of or access to the power of scientific knowledge, and were, therefore, more suspicious of its effects on society. With this broadening of appeal, science fiction also broadened in scope. Now that there were readers who had been educated in the soft sciences such as literature, linguistics, psychology and sociology,

those subjects began to emerge as part of the scientific material of science fiction. In particular, the feminist writers of the '70s worked to expand the types of science addressed by science fiction. While the genre might have been composed of only one or two adventure or gadget-type formulas during the pulp era, this has not been the case for several decades. Science fiction has experienced a great proliferation of forms and traditions in order to address this broader scope and growing questioning of the rational scientific world-view.

Science Fiction as a Genre

Science fiction represents a rather problematic area of study for the genre theorist. Instead of breaking down into recognizable and self-referential formulas the way that the mystery genre breaks down into such formulas as the hard-boiled detective story and the spy/thriller, science fiction encompasses a large diversity of formulas and stereotypes. Conventions are further blurred by the inclusion of fantasy and utopian fiction within the same generic boundaries, both on the bookstore shelves and in critical consideration. Science fiction does not limit its authors to a small number of archetypal plots, with a finite choice of particular character types. Instead, it requires a specific attitude. Schatz considered the genre as it developed in studio film-making of the '50s and '60s to be quite limiting:

The genre articulated the conflicts and anxieties that accompanied the development of atomic power and the prospect of interplanetary travel. Because science fiction deals with so specialized a cultural conflict--essentially with the limits and value of human knowledge and scientific experimentation--it is considerably less flexible, but no less topical, than

the Western. (31)

The genre has expanded far past those implied limitations; but, nonetheless, Schatz's take on the essential conflict of science fiction is accurate. Science fiction has expanded into larger territories because popular ideas about science, human knowledge and scientific experimentation allow the exploration of much larger areas of knowledge than they did in the '50s and '60s.

Despite science fiction's diversity, a number of conventions can be identified. As noted above, conventions are created around story patterns, images, symbols, themes, myths and characters. While science fiction may not be proscriptive in its generic conventions, they are nonetheless concrete. First, the story pattern typically follows the quest narrative in which linear sequence is equated to causation as a way of organizing experience. Second, historically, the narrator was personalized as male. Third, science must be treated by the story in some way. The central conflict, as noted above, and, therefore, a guiding theme of science fiction, is the dichotomy between the optimistic ideology of scientific progress and the flawed reality in which people live. While this theme is often treated in a realist manner, the convention that divides science fiction from realist novels is that of cognitive estrangement. Science fiction presents a world that is recognizably not the reader's own in order to cast an instructive light on real existence. From this pattern proceeds the conventional images of aliens, alternate worlds, and scientific devices that are not yet manufacturable. In addition, women play very limited (and limiting) roles in traditional science fiction. Finally, science fiction is didactic in tone. It is meant to instruct and does so baldly on frequent occasions.

Feminist Science Fiction

In the '70s and early '80s science fiction was affected by the second wave of feminism as its proponents gained an increasing presence in the field. Women such as Joanna Russ, Ursula K. Le Guin, Marge Piercy and Suzy McGee Charnas began to write overtly feminist, separatist utopias, in which the conventions of gender were scrutinized and criticized. Further, critics started paying attention to early female authors who had been writing science fiction, and began to theorize how their books could produce coded, covert feminist readings. As feminists opened up science fiction, women writers began to write less coded and more radically feminist texts. Leigh Brackett and C. L. Moore are examples of early women writers whose work critics have reclaimed as feminist in its context, demonstrating how their work differs from the male tradition into which they fit. As the second wave hit, however, the work of writers such as Andre Norton and Marion Zimmer Bradley changed, becoming more openly feminist, and new writers such as Joan D. Vinge, Octavia Butler and Vonda McIntyre entered the feminist science fiction genre. An increasing number of women began to write science fiction.

As noted in the introduction, feminist science fiction seems to have changed. However, feminist science fiction criticism has not yet begun to deal with how the genre has evolved during the '90s, and for that reason there are no other critical voices proclaiming a change. To gather proof for my claim, I conducted an informal survey of the contents of the science fiction and fantasy section of one *Chapters* bookstore outlet. My survey looked at female authors to evaluate whether or not their books had feminist potential and whether they espoused the radical feminist messages and in-depth consideration of gender that the original feminist science fiction authors had. Admittedly, my survey was limited, but it did give me a sense of the state of feminism in science

fiction. Apart from the fact that there were 399 male authors on the shelf, and only 198 female authors, a sad statement in itself, it became apparent that most female science fiction authors were not at risk of being saddled with the label “radical feminist”. On the other hand, a quick glance showed that nearly all of the books could potentially be espousing feminist positions, in that they focused on strong female characters.

It is reasonable for feminism to have affected science fiction, given the changing status of feminism in the world. While feminists still agree that there is much to be done before our society will be free of the influence of patriarchy, a widespread media-delivered message is that women have achieved all of the aims of feminism. After all, women can be heads of state, have careers as highly-placed executives of large corporations, and become doctors, lawyers and scientists. There are women in nearly every traditionally male occupation now, so how can anyone say that women’s opportunities are limited? Post-feminist rhetoric has been documented by such feminists as Susan Faludi, Imelda Whelehan and Vicki Coppock. Deena Haydon and Ingrid Richter, who write:

Comment in the media, in politics and in industry became scattered with references to the 1990s as an ‘enlightened’ and ‘post-feminist’ period. Now, it was argued, all had been achieved, in fact over-achieved, to the point that many men were left confused, their identities shattered, and many women struggled with over-expectancy. (3)

Faludi places it in a more sinister context: “Behind this celebration of the American woman’s victory, behind the news, cheerfully and endlessly repeated, that the struggle for women’s rights is won, another message flashes. You may be free and equal now, it says

to women, but you have never been more miserable” (ix). The demands of juggling a career and motherhood are many, and it requires a superwoman to fulfill them all. This combines with family-values rhetoric asserting that a child raised with a full-time parent at home, or at least with high-quality day-care and a large amount of attention from parents when they are home, is more likely to succeed in life and become a productive, well-adjusted citizen. The net effect is a rhetorical push for women to return to the home. After all, we have achieved our aim of equal status and can now stop worrying about it. Unfortunately, this rhetoric ignores not only female desire for independence but the economic necessity for the majority of women to remain in the workplace in order to support their family. In truth, post-feminist rhetoric has sprung not from feminism’s achievements, but from fear of what women might achieve. Josée Lecomte notes that “The rise of conservatism, an ‘anti-feminist’ backlash and a generation of younger women lacking a feminist consciousness are all part of th[e] portrait [of the post-feminist era]” (7). With the combination of this rhetoric and the gains that women have made over the past decades, young women can be forgiven for believing that feminist activism is irrelevant to their lives.

In addition, there is still a stigma attached to the label “feminist” so that women who would not disagree with many of the tenets of feminism are unwilling to call themselves feminist. In popular belief, to be a feminist is to be a radical, to espouse a fairly rigid political agenda and be willing to make waves for it, to reject the conventions of society, in short to place yourself outside of regular society and become socially unacceptable. Lecomte investigated the relationship young ‘90s university women had to feminism and discovered a generation gap. The older generation felt that “a precarious

economic situation may discourage young women from ‘risking’ feminism [. . .] Overall, then, this generation has been characterized by some older feminists as afraid of feminism, lacking political courage and commitment and generally reluctant to identify themselves as feminists” (9). However, younger women perceived second wave feminism as authoritarian, out of touch with their needs and lives, and insistent on a collective, publicly active approach instead of their favoured ground-up approach involving working to enlighten personal relationships and their immediate environment (Lecomte 10-12). Elizabeth Fox-Genovese¹ affirms that today’s women feel out of touch with the feminist elite in her book, *“Feminism is Not the Story of my Life.”* She explains that despite feminist belief that the movement has opened up opportunity for different thought and experience, it is viewed by many as out of touch with the concerns of real women. This perception of feminism can lead people to avoid feminist ideology and writings because they are unwilling to ally themselves with such an unpopular or irrelevant position. The combination of these two factors leads to the creation of a group of women who are ignorant of, or unsupportive of feminist ideologies. It is no wonder that women science fiction writers of the ‘90s have become less radical than their ‘70s predecessors--though many would support the main tenets of feminist thought.

Feminist Science Fiction Criticism--A Review

I will be drawing my information about the techniques developed by second wave feminist science fiction writers from the body of feminist science fiction criticism. Therefore, an evaluation of its scope and effectiveness is necessary. As noted above, feminist science fiction criticism has focused on the fiction written during the strongest

¹ Fox-Genovese’s “feminism” has undergone large changes in the past decade; nonetheless, she aptly illustrates how problematic “feminism” is for many women today.

period of the second wave of feminism. There has not really been any criticism of books written later than 1988, and certainly no consideration of the state of the genre. Partly this is because there has only been one major critical work published after 1994, *Frankenstein's Daughters: Women Writing Science Fiction*, but even its author, Donawerth, included only sixteen authors who had published science fiction later than 1988, and of those, five were established authors who had been writing since the late '70s. Some critics have focused on building alliances for science fiction with more highly regarded literary movements such as postmodernism.

The first project of feminist critics working in the field of science fiction was to point out how patriarchal the assumptions of the generally male practitioners of the genre had been traditionally. This was largely accomplished by some of the first writers in the field: namely Russ and Le Guin, who, in addition to their fiction, have produced a large body of critical work². In performing this task, these authors also demonstrated how many possibilities there were in a genre whose only true constraint was, as Samuel Delany's famous saying goes, that its subject matter "must not offend against what was known to be known."

Other feminist critics have been interested in the task of recovery. There were many more female writers of science fiction and utopias over the past hundred and seventy years than would be acknowledged by a simple consideration of the science fiction canon. Early female writers such as C. L. Moore, Leigh Brackett, Alice Sheldon (as James Tiptree, Jr.) and Andre Norton tended to write under pseudonyms or gender-neutral names that would allow them successfully to cross-dress in such a masculine

² See *To Write Like a Woman* by Russ and Le Guin's *The Language of the Night*, both of which are collections of early essays.

genre. Pamela Sargent, Susan Gubar, Carol Kolmerton, and Jean Pfaelzer are some of those who have been performing this reclamation. While this task is of interest in that it demonstrates how women can encode feminist impulses in outwardly masculine texts, it does not deal with the present: wherein the genre is much more receptive to openly feminist ideas.

There have been a myriad of short essays in science fiction magazines and critical books that point out the liberating possibilities of science fiction for women and prove it with regard to one book or another. It seems that every new book on the relationship between science fiction and contemporary women's fiction or feminism includes such a chapter, for example, see: *Plotting Change: Contemporary Women's Fiction; Engendering the Word; Science Fiction, Social Conflict and War; and Still the Frame Holds: Essays on Women Poets and Writers*. While these chapters are important for raising the consciousness of the academic world with regard to the importance of science fiction, and they often form a necessary part of a survey, they are generally too brief to develop new insights or theoretical frameworks. However, several full-length books have been written on feminist science fiction, and they have been much more useful to this project.

The work of a handful of feminist science fiction critics has defined the depth and direction of study in the field. The earliest of the single-authored books written on feminist science fiction was Marleen S. Barr's *Alien to Femininity: Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory*. In it she drew upon a wide variety of feminist science fiction texts to establish a network of connections relating them to each other and to feminist theory. She focuses on three areas of confluence: sexuality and reproduction; heroism; and

community. Her book does not take a holistic approach and does not make use of genre theory; but it does have important things to say about the methods by which feminists revise masculinist traditions of science fiction.

The next important contribution to feminist science fiction criticism comes from Sarah Lefanu in her book, *In the Chinks of the World Machine: Feminism and Science Fiction*. Lefanu adds to the conversation by having a first section composed of ten brief chapters addressing the way specific patterns of feminist science fiction convey their message. While useful and provocative, the brevity of these chapters leaves much work to be done on their topics, and they obviously are not exhaustive of the possibilities. The second half of Lefanu's book consists of the detailed analysis of the works of four writers. While these writers are deserving of focused critical attention, the large amount of space devoted to them limits the amount of groundwork Lefanu can perform on the genre.

When considering feminist science fiction, Donna Haraway frequently springs to mind. However, her books, including *Primate Visions: Gender, Race and Nature in the World of Modern Science* and *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, do not actually center on science fiction. Instead, they apply the reading position of science fiction to demonstrate the fictionality of contemporary narratives about science.

Anne Cranny-Francis laid a ground-work of genre theory that should have helped to enable the creation of a framework for the study of feminist science fiction, but this has not yet happened. Her book, *Feminist Fictions: Feminist Uses of Generic Fiction*, is a useful starting point for feminist work, because she explores the generic possibilities for women in fantasy, science fiction, utopias, detective fiction and romance. She defines and

works with some of the conventions of each type of popular fiction. In science fiction, she identifies the conventions of estrangement, the alien, the extrapolative use of science and technology, and the masculine quest narrative, all of which she briefly discusses in relation to feminist writers.

Close Encounters: Film, Feminism and Science Fiction, edited by Constance Penley, *et al*, is a collection of essays that applies genre theory to science fiction movies. It describes the contested ideologies that influenced science fiction during recent decades in relation to specific movies. This endeavour was made possible by the more limited form that science fiction takes when it moves to the medium of film. This, unfortunately, means that its relevance to printed science fiction is limited.

Robin Roberts tried a different approach in her book, *A New Species: Gender and Science in Science Fiction*. Instead of working to establish relatively fixed conventions with which to study science fiction, she worked to establish the continuity of feminist science fiction endeavors from Shelley's *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* to the present day. In doing so she traces three patterns of science fiction: the revised opposition of masculine science with feminine magic or art, the Demeter/Snow Queen myth, and the idea of the apocalypse. These patterns inform the use of the woman as alien/ruler. This is a very useful critical text: the study of the past helps to explain the reality of the present. In its focus on historical and developmental connections, however, it leaves untouched the task of creating an authoritative framework for feminist science fiction theory.

At the same time as Roberts attempted to differentiate feminist science fiction as a genre by tracing its evolution, Barr repudiated that approach in favour of minimizing difference to place feminist science fiction within a larger framework. In both *Feminist*

Fabulation: Space/Postmodern Fiction, and Lost in Space: Probing Feminist Science Fiction and Beyond, Barr argues for the validity of her proposal to subsume differences between feminist science fiction and other feminist endeavours in the mainstream and postmodernism--putting them all under the umbrella term of feminist fabulation. While she claims that this is the only way to de-ghettoize science fiction with regard to academia, it is evident that other feminist science fiction critics feel betrayed by her change in approach. In "Strategies of Feminist SF Criticism" Roberts argues that Barr has returned to outdated tactics of eliding difference in order to categorize marginal writers together with those who have been accepted by the canon, thereby sneaking the marginal readers into the canonical fold (194). She forcefully rejects Barr's elision of difference:

[A]s her previous books and those by many other critics amply demonstrate, it is the position of literary alien that enables feminist science fiction writers to speak as powerfully as they do. [. . .] Instead of passively accepting the definitions of 'respected work' (*Feminist Fabulation*] 102) promulgated by the academy, Barr might consider joining those critics who are working, and in many institutions succeeding, in redefining the terms of the literary debate. (194)

Also, as Roberts notes, Barr's focus on knocking down generic boundaries leaves very little time for focus on individual science fiction novels.

Jenny Wolmark undertakes a similar task in her book, *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism*. Roberts asserts that the difference is that "While Wolmark uses postmodernism to justify studying feminist science fiction, Barr uses postmodernism to claim that science fiction is just as good as postmodern or mainstream

fictions” (194). However, as a science fiction aficionado and a believer in the importance of studying popular culture because of its impact on my world, I feel that such a justification is unnecessary. Still, the connections between postmodernism and (feminist) science fiction are undeniable, and Wolmark’s book also investigates the liberating possibilities of the convention of the alien, the separatist utopia, and the feminist possibilities of cyberpunk.

The most recent book of feminist science fiction criticism is also the most useful. In *Frankenstein's Daughters: Women Writing Science Fiction*, Donawerth implicitly picks up on Cranny-Francis’ ideas on generic conventions. She traces three main conventions of science fiction: utopian science, beautiful alien monster women and the male narrator (which results in women writers using cross-dressing narrative strategies). By doing an in-depth study of how different women writers have reacted to the strictures of these conventions, she illuminates the possibilities for feminist intervention in the genre.

It is obvious from this review of feminist science fiction criticism that there is much still left to do. The choice to label previous work in the field “criticism” instead of “theory” is deliberate. With the exception of Cranny-Francis and to some extent Donawerth, academic work in this area has limited itself to addressing only particular patterns of feminist writing, and has tended to ground itself in particular authors. Chapters of the books written above tend to focus on one or two authors--either extrapolating from what they do and applying it to other science fiction, or postulating ideas with reference to eight or ten books in brief and then looking at how those ideas work in practice by reviewing one book in depth.

The strategies followed by the major feminist science fiction critics are understandable in the light of feminist practice. Inclusion of difference, fragmentation and conversation are critical strategies which both work to encompass all female experiences of patriarchy and disrupt the attitudes towards absolutes on which patriarchy rests. It is not surprising that feminist science fiction criticism resembles a conversation and is reluctant to impose a restrictive framework on the genre. However, it means that the necessary task of mapping science fiction's generic conventions is either piecemeal, or not accomplished at all. Diagramming science fiction conventions and locating them in relation to each other is important: it helps to identify hidden loci of patriarchal ideology, and points to where feminist intervention can profitably be made. This is even more important in a genre like science fiction, which is so diverse that it regularly eludes definition, never mind allowing a firm identification of its generic conventions.

The Position of Sheri S. Tepper

Tepper is a notable feminist science fiction writer because she is an anomaly. Born in 1929, she began to write science fiction in 1979, after having lived through the Depression, WWII, the push to return to domesticity in the '50s, and the second wave of feminism. Further, as she herself notes on EosCon II's website, she did not really solidify her style as an author until after 1985. At that point, she stopped writing fantasy literature aimed at a younger audience and started writing science fiction with a serious bent toward social criticism. Her writing was informed by the work of feminist writers in the '70s and '80s. Presented with an open door of opportunity, she then used science fiction for very strong feminist, environmentalist, and liberal messages. Tepper is unique because most women authors who began writing around the same time as she did or, even

more particularly, those who began their careers after her are too young to have lived before the second wave of feminism. They would not have experienced the effects of patriarchy in its earlier more blatantly oppressive stage. In the face of the backlash and the rhetoric of post-feminism, it is possible that Tepper was one of the last writers to explore and develop the tradition of feminist usage of science fiction, before a different and more covert style of feminism became popular in science fiction.

Tepper has received some flak for her aggressive authorial strategies. Her message is so openly available to her reader, so radical and so vehemently propounded that she has been accused of moralizing. In an internet review of *Gibbon's Decline and Fall*, Steven Silver has this to say: "Unfortunately, I found her latest novel to be somewhat on the preachy side. I imagine that staunch feminists will be able to overlook this aspect of the novel, but in their case Tepper is already preaching to the choir. [. . .] She should have been more honest and simply issued a manifesto." While moralizing is seen as a fanatic and excessive attempt to bind others to a particular belief system, Tepper is making a case with conviction. Her pedagogical tone might be problematic in another genre, but science fiction has a grand tradition of didacticism, as Russ points out:

That science fiction is didactic hardly needs proof, either. The pleasure science fiction writers take in explaining physics, thirtieth century jurisprudence, the mechanics of teleportation, patent law, four-dimensional geography, or whatever happens to be on the tapis, lies open in any book that has not degenerated into outright adventure story with science fiction thrills. (*To Write 5*)

The tradition began with Verne, who tended to pack his stories with scientific and

geographic facts, paying great attention to particulars and explaining them in detail (Lambourne, Shallis and Shortland 9). It continued in the pulps. Hugo Gernsback had educational pretensions for *Amazing Stories*, where his monthly editorials, quizzes and a discussion section emphasized the clear understanding of science and attempted to ensure that readers could disentangle the science from the fiction in the content of the magazine. This trend continued with the magazine *Astounding Science Fiction*, in which John W. Campbell Jr. published a series of factual articles under the collective title "A Study of the Solar System" (Lambourne, Shallis and Shortland 22). He stopped writing the series when he took over as editor, but he continued to publish such articles in the magazine. Clearly, didacticism has had a long relationship with science fiction. Science fiction readers expect to encounter ideas and technology with which they are not familiar and to be educated about their workings, even if those workings might be entirely fictional.

Obviously, the combined impact of Tepper's feminism, environmentalism, and anti-hierarchical view of human society is too blatant for some readers. This might lead one to conclude that Tepper really is preaching to the converted. Indeed, Silver claims that she is only reaching those readers who already agree with her message. Alternatively, her publication rate would seem to suggest otherwise. There are probably not enough converted feminists in the world to support Tepper's production of one or two science fiction novels per year. The popularity of her books is further indicated by their appearance in hard-cover before their paperback printing: a common enough practice, but not one routinely granted an unproven author. So, even if Tepper's approach might alienate some readers, it obviously appeals to others. Without doing a survey of science fiction readers, it is impossible to know exactly who is reading her books, or what part of

her message is being read hegemonically, or even resisted. But, I would postulate that, in addition to committed feminists, her books are most likely to appeal to young women raised in the post-feminist era of Faludi's "backlash", and to readers who support the other components of her message. The women's issues she addresses will normally appeal to female readers, and her focus on environmentalism will interest those politically-active women who turned to the environmentalist movement in the '80s and '90s.

Tepper's books are capable of attracting non-feminist readers who are concerned about women's issues because they place feminist ideologies and arguments in a fictional context. This frees readers to consider feminist ideas without risking the stigma of the label. Instead of working to discredit feminist ideas by scrutinizing the evidence, thereby failing to absorb their impact, readers can consider the ideas on their merits. When Tepper refers to a particular instance of women's oppression, the fictional context means that readers do not immediately look for the reference to evaluate whether it constitutes sufficient proof. An example of this dynamic at work is apparent in a comparison between Tepper's *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* and Marilyn French's *The War Against Women*. It is not Tepper's purpose to provide proof that:

"Girl babies are buried beneath the mango tree. Their blood is in the mangoes." "Ashes of brides blow on the wind. Do you dare inhale?" "For every man who goes hungry, five women starve. Their blood is in your rice." "Watch out for women ghosts; they are all around you."

(*Gibbon* 183)

She plants ideas so that readers can consider them, and leaves it to the reader to verify her

facts. French presents her book as fact, as a call to arms against the horrible treatment of women all over the world. However, it leaves the reader scrutinizing the pages for her sources, giving them the option of deciding that her facts are insufficiently proven. For example, in talking about divorce in Israel, French says: "It is estimated that 10,000 agunot (the anchored) linger in a limbo state in Israel, unable to obtain divorces because the man refuses his consent. Many live in extreme economic hardship" (81). However, she does not provide statistics to prove her estimation, or indicate when the estimate was taken. Although this information seems plausible, it would be easy to reject if the reader were predisposed to do so. The use of fiction as a conveyer of feminist and other liberal ideologies leaves readers freer to consider those ideologies in the abstract. In the context of fiction, ideas can be less threatening. Once ideas about women's oppression have gained entry to a person's consciousness through fiction, it is much easier to connect them to actual conditions of existence.

In this manner, Tepper's writings represent effective didacticism. It opens up the possibility of conveying ideas about feminism, anti-hierarchy and anti-patriarchy to people who did not necessarily agree with them prior to reading the book. Tepper is inevitably going to be more effective at enticing people to consider these ideas than are writers who do not include feminist ideology. Further, she is able to confirm feminist ideas in people who already hold them. As Russ notes, "Of course, didactic fiction does not always tell people something new, often it tells them what they already know, and the retelling becomes a reverent ritual, very gratifying to all concerned" (*To Write* 6). Validation is a very useful literary function. The feminist reader of science fiction can gain that validation from Tepper's books because they confirm feminist beliefs and help

to create an awareness of a community of believers. Tepper's work is worthy of study because of its unique approach to feminism in an era that is less than friendly to radically-feminist messages and messengers.

Part Two: The Road Not Taken

In this section, I will be looking at only two of Tepper's twenty-plus science fiction novels: *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* and *A Plague of Angels*. I chose these two for a variety of reasons. Undeniably, one of my motives was personal preference. Another criteria was the time at which they were published, 1993 and 1996: I wanted to study books that were not written during the original period of the feminist intervention in science fiction. I chose these books because I felt that to investigate more would limit the depth of my study, and that to study only one would risk making conclusions about Tepper's writing style based on too little information. Finally, I chose *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* because it is Tepper's most strongly feminist novel (followed closely by *The Gate to Women's Country*, which falls into the category of separatist utopias). I chose *A Plague of Angels* because it is the book in which Tepper focuses least exclusively on any particular issue--environmentalism, religion, class, or feminism--making it easier to see how she handles feminism in conjunction with other issues. An examination of these books demonstrates how Tepper has further developed the techniques created by early feminist writers to subvert the embedded patriarchal nature of science fiction conventions. It places her in the context of the evolution of feminist science fiction, and proves that she has followed the road which most other female writers of the '90s have not taken.

Before proceeding to look at Tepper's books, I wish to identify what I am considering "feminist" for the purposes of this thesis. Feminism is a hotly contested and fragmented set of discourses; an "ism" that cannot be viewed as a single definable term, a concept or group of concepts and/or a holistic ideology. Nonetheless, it is clear that

feminism starts from the assumption that women suffer injustice because of their gender. For the purposes of this essay, any action shall be considered a feminist action--whether it be the writing of a book, the creation and maintenance of a women's center, a change in behaviour, etc.--which either questions and thereby helps to change the ideologies which support patriarchy, helps to weaken support for patriarchy, or helps to create a space for women in which they can evade the influence of patriarchy. In literary terms, this means that any book which questions the assumptions of patriarchy, either implicitly through the quiet subversion of patriarchal conventions or explicitly through a didactic message, will be considered feminist. Tepper's books are feminist in both senses. Unfortunately, this definition does not stand alone, as its central referent is the concept of patriarchy.

Patriarchy is such a diffuse yet pervasive phenomenon that it, too, is hard to define. Coppock, Haydon and Richter describe it in this manner:

Patriarchy defines the personal, physical and institutional power that men exert over women. Through the process of hegemony the dominance of men over women is achieved and maintained. This takes the form of social arrangements, cultural traditions and political management. Through these, personal relations are contextualised and accepted as 'normal' and 'right'. Thus, patriarchy maintains and sustains structures of male dominance through systems of ideas, beliefs and shared assumptions about gender, sexuality and reproduction, material subordination and coercion.

(18)

It is easy to see that this definition of patriarchy focuses exclusively on the relationships

between men and women. Many of the fragmentations of feminist belief have occurred over the differential experience of women in patriarchy; differences in class, race, sexuality, culture, religion, age, and geographical location all affect the experience of oppression felt by women (Coppock, Haydon and Richter 16). Many feminists have focused solely on specific conditions of patriarchal experience created along any one of the dividing lines outlined above. I believe that it is necessary to acknowledge and appreciate the differences in personal experience which change each woman's relationship with feminism. Tepper's books do this.

Reaching Out: Allying Feminism with Other Oppressions

The ideology of the two Tepper novels is comprised of environmentalism, anti-racism, and anti-classism. These positions are informed by a stringent critique of capitalism, territorialism, religion, and individualism. The ideology of the texts pull together with feminism to undermine two meta-narratives of North American society: hierarchy and dominion. By linking these issues, the texts build on previous feminist science fiction techniques. *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* and *A Plague of Angels* interconnect the issues so that a reader who might not agree with a particular one--say feminism--will be put in a position where their agreement with the others might predispose them to reconsider their beliefs.

Hierarchy and dominion have historically resulted in four kinds of divisions ordering society: whiteness over other races, men over women, elite over lower class, and humanity over nature. Tepper's novels attack all of these divisions. Her books show that race is not a valid category for the building of hierarchies. Race does not delimit a person's abilities or other characteristics in a way that makes it acceptable to discriminate

on that basis. Of course, the novels disrupt societal divisions based on gender. Women should not be restricted in their behaviour or opportunities because of their sex; and differences in aptitude for different tasks can often be attributed to the effects of gender. Tepper's novels do not regard individualism as a justification for class. They expose the negative effects of class, and posit that class divisions are a societal construct. The ideology of environmentalism present in Tepper's novels is explicit. Humanity does not have any right, God-given or otherwise, to use up and destroy nature for its own selfish purposes. Instead, humans have a responsibility to live in harmony and cooperation with nature, so that crucial resources will not be completely depleted.

The ideas about nature, race, and class which Tepper's books attack have been codified in other institutions and discourses. Capitalism, with its emphasis on consumption and competition, routinely discounts environmental costs. It combines with individualism to create the merit system of blame, wherein individuals of lower class or different race who do not succeed in the capitalist environment have only themselves to blame. After all, if they wanted to, they could pull themselves up by their bootstraps. Territorialism is the need to protect borders and to privilege one's own territory. Since military might historically has conveyed world power and dominion, it is closely linked with territorial success. Religious discourses have provided spiritual (irrefutable by logic) justification for humanity's dominion over nature and those associated with nature: women and other races. Society is constructed on a web of discourses justifying hierarchical and dominating behaviour.

Hierarchy and dominion are meta-narratives--two linked concepts that have influenced virtually every aspect of North American society. People speak of climbing

the ladder to success; students are evaluated with reference to each other and categorized by their abilities; sports competitions exist in order to rank teams from best to worst; and families are run by the “head of the household.” In education, family, work, and leisure, power traditionally has been divided along hierarchical lines. The identity of every person in our society is fixed, limited and empowered by their place in the hierarchies that form the superstructure of our lives. Some of these structures can be evaded by a considered choice of lifestyle: for example, people can choose to participate in long-term partnerships that do not follow traditional hierarchical forms of marriage, or they can choose only to participate in those leisure activities that do not stress competition against others. Nevertheless, it is impossible to evade these superstructures entirely: the legal position of each person with regard to government is non-negotiable, and very few people have the opportunity to evade hierarchy in their careers.

Capitalism and individualism are linked together and criticized in *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* and *A Plague of Angels*. John Ralston Saul argues that “The main tenet of faith in the last quarter of the twentieth century has been the promise of a rational paradise reached through devotion to competition, efficiency and the market-place” (164). Competition is supposed to ensure that consumers receive goods for reasonable prices; efficiency is supposed to decrease the cost of goods in order to enable companies to win in a competitive market; and the market-place is supposed to ensure that only desired goods are manufactured. Unfortunately, non-financial costs, such as damage to the environment, are not included in the balance. Tepper refutes the imperatives of competition, efficiency, and the market-place with her depiction of the fictional land of Artemisia. Artemisian society does function along capitalist lines in that it produces

goods for trade and sale. Yet, the profits go to the entire community and each person works for societal, instead of personal, gain. Artemisian society is efficient, not in order to bring the cost of goods down, but in order to make life more pleasant. This efficiency is extended to every aspect of society, including reproduction and child care. The imperative of the market place does not seem to have a high priority in Artemisian culture. In fact, Artemisians are careful to account for all costs of their economic activities, including human costs and environmental ones. Consumption is the activity which drives capitalism, and Tepper's novels also criticize the way in which our society is driven to consume. In *Gibbon's Decline and Fall*, a teenage girl realizes that a lot of the products she purchases are not useful or necessary: "I only did it [consume clothes, shoes and other elements of mall culture] because everybody else did. We're all through. We're saving for cars, for college, for something useful" (82). Capitalism is shown to be a problematic way of ordering production and consumption.

In Tepper's novels, individualism that stresses competition and excessive self-reliance is eliminated. This kind of individualism assigns the responsibility for a person's station and success in life to their personal motivation and ability. Mantras such as "the end is in the beginning," and metaphors like "civilization is received from our parents and passed on to our children, as a gift. If we don't have it to give, our children don't get it," (*Plague* 50) get repeated often. This combines with other evidence (such as a demonstration that motherhood is a learned skill which people who are not properly mothered can fail to acquire) to prove that kind of individualism to be problematic. As Farmwife Suttle asserts, competition is ineffectual:

First thing little boys do when they get together is make up rules for their

games. Somebody has to win, somebody has to lose. When they grow up, they do more of the same, then go fiddling with their laws and rules everlastingly because they don't work. Any woman knows rules have to give in to needs! (179)

Similarly, Jagger's need to win the case against Lolly Ashaler verges on the psychotic and is counter-productive to his career as an Alliance politician. Tepper's criticism of capitalism and individualism works to destabilize ideas of hegemony and dominion.

Tepper weaves a criticism of territorialism into her novels. A common criticism of large military budgets is that they waste large amounts of money on extremely dangerous technology. The money could be used better elsewhere and the technology had better not get used because of its destructiveness. Tepper parodies the ill effects of nationalism by showing an extreme version: in *A Plague of Angels*, the walkers serve as an object lesson in the stupidity of certain military endeavours. Olly makes a scary point about human nature when she comments about Ellel,

People like her have always been willing to risk things they didn't want to happen. Usually for power. Oh, she knows what the walkers may do! Men designed them to destroy the world. One tribe of men said to some other tribe, *If we are conquered, then let the earth perish! If we can't live as we like, then let us all perish!*" (466, emphasis in original).

Still, *A Plague of Angels* also demonstrates that there are situations in which territorialism is necessary: Artemisia is careful in monitoring its borders to ensure that reproduction is managed intelligently. The theme is less explicit in *Gibbon's Decline and Fall*. Instead of targeting nationalism, it problematizes the idea of territory. The book has men marching

in the Army of God instead of a national army. The task of this army is whipping women home if they are out after dark or if they they are not 'properly' clothed. Both texts effectively attack the drives to dominate and to make others subservient, drives that give rise to territorialism. Military might historically has conveyed world power and dominion to the wielder. Tepper's books criticize this method of relating to other nations.

Tepper also questions the idea of a God-given right to dominion over others. In *A Plague of Angels* Seoca remarks:

If, as some believe, man is a fallen angel [. . .] he has only to remember what goodness is. If man is an ascending ape, however, he first has to figure out what goodness is, and before he can do that, he has to admit he doesn't know. [. . .] Any system that claims to know what goodness is will also claim descent from heaven. Or expulsion from paradise, which is the same thing. (234-5)

The idea that God gave man dominion over all of nature, that Eve is the cause of humankind's original sin, and other common religious doctrines were interpreted to justify the exploitation of natural resources, discrimination against people of different races, the creation of classes, and the restricted role of women. The books attack many religious doctrines: asserting, for example, that there were women in the early Church, and that therefore the restriction of priestly power to those who were male because Jesus chose male disciples represents an untruth perpetuated to discriminate against women (*Gibbon* 162-3). The church is also criticized for being unwilling to help women, who are trapped in life-destroying marriages, out of the bonds of matrimony (131), and for putting the responsibility for child-care solely and unfairly on the shoulders of the mother.

Tepper demonstrates how religious organizations act as political entities when her book speculates that the pope and the imams could work together to oppose women's rights at international conferences (95). In *A Plague of Angels*, Tepper attacks religious beliefs more obliquely, confining her direct attacks upon them to a comment delivered by Farmwife Suttle:

You know as well as I do, boy, that the Edges are closed, them with their lawns and their trees and their tennis and their guard dogs. [. . .] You have to be born to one of their families, go to one of their schools, be confirmed in one of their faiths, and dress and talk as they do, and if you don't, out you go. (169)

However, by insistently promoting the world-view of the Artemisians, by pronouncing marriage and monogamous union unnatural, by denying humanity's right to dominion over nature, she is attacking some of the fundamental beliefs of most religious faiths. Tepper criticizes the ideas of hierarchy and dominion historically supported by most religions, which posit that man was given dominion over the world by God.

As previously mentioned, race is one of the divisions that the ideology of hierarchy and dominion helped to create. While the books do not focus exclusively on the issue of race differences and racism, Tepper matter-of-factly includes characters of different races. *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* incorporates main characters of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds, including a Eurasian character and a black character, Faye. Her race is made an explicit issue because of her commission to create a sculpture for a trade plaza:

Herr Straub had also said there had never been a great woman sculptor:

Faye's things were pretty, certainly, but not great. Besides, Herr Straub had said, the artistic tradition of her own people was quite foreign to the European tradition. Thus having insulted her womanhood, her artistry, her culture, and her race, he had departed in the self-congratulatory mood of one who had done his duty, however painful [. . .]. (143)

Tepper also includes a large population of Latina/o characters (as is appropriate to a novel set in New Mexico), most of whom aid the Decline and Fall Club (DFC). While she does not focus on racial issues, she is careful to include a variety of racial experiences. In *A Plague of Angels*, race has become largely a non-issue. At this point in the thrones' work, race seems to have become largely nonexistent because of intermixing. As Arakny explains about Artemisia: "We didn't used to be Artemisians. We used to be Dine, and Zuni, and Hopi, and Apache, and Ute. Some of us were Tewa or Tiwa or Anglo or Hispanic. [. . .] So the name-change team took all our fighting words away [by causing people who said fighting words angrily to fall asleep], and when we couldn't say the words anymore, we couldn't fight over it" (333). This kind of racial intermixing must also have occurred in the city, where the production of healthy children was difficult enough to obviate concerns about racial differences. *A Plague of Angels* includes an ironic comment on racism with its Black and White clans: "Our storytellers say they were different colors long ago. Long have they fought, capturing one another's women and fathering children upon them. They are all the same color now. Still, those who once were blacks call themselves blacks, and those who once were whites call themselves whites, no matter who their mothers were" (345-6). Tepper's inclusion of characters of different racial and ethnic groups strengthens the feminist message of her books by

opening it up to other forms of difference.

Tepper also criticizes hierarchy in the form of class structures. By demonstrating how class works in both ganger and Domer society, Tepper illustrates that it is not productive in a desirable civilization. In gangs, men follow the instructions of the leader to kill the members of other gang members, regardless of right or wrong, or whether the hit is innocent (367). Ellel's domination and abuse of Qualary proves that being part of the servant class in Domer society is to be subject to oppression, a lack of rights, and opportunity. Tepper's texts advocate a return to communities small enough that they work together in a neighbourly fashion (456), with no one exploiting anyone else and, therefore, no class structures of power. Classes are part of the Domer belief in the "eternal verities" of "world order" and "a united mankind" under an appropriate ruling class (154). In *Gibbon's Decline and Fall*, class is linked with poverty and attacked obliquely through the case of Lolly Ashaler. The text treats as common-place the assumption that class divisions create restrictions in terms of opportunity and education. Tepper's attitude towards the inequities of class hierarchy help to fuel her arguments against gender hierarchy.

Tepper's work attacks the assumption that nature is subject to man's convenience and governed by man's rule. She sets the tone for *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* with the idea of covenants between humankind and nature:

The wild covenant that destroys no habitat and hunts only to live, as the wolf or the puma hunts. The farmer covenant among mankind and those he houses and feeds. Out of millennial history, each owed to each, though the animals kept their accounts better than man did. Milk and meat and

wool on the animal side, food and care and a life kinder than that of the wild on man's side. In return for a place by the fire and the leavings of the table, stalking cats owed surveillance of the granary, and horn-throated hounds paid their way with keen ears and keener noses, assuring that no traveler, of whatever intent, should approach unheralded. (23)

Tepper also includes comments attacking humanity for the damage it has done, making sad comments about the pollution of oysters on the East coast (31), or the burning of centuries-old pinõn trees for momentary pleasure (41). The book asserts that half the species in the world have become extinct in the past century (118) and that "half the remaining species lived on in a kind of twilight world" (118). *A Plague of Angels* picks up the allegations of irresponsibility: in the distant past (what would seem to be our present or near future) there were "nations falling apart, holes opening up in the sky-blanket, all the forests being destroyed" (331). This was because of the attitude that humanity had a responsibility "for being intrepid and marvelous. Of becoming something wonderful. Of seeding the universe with intelligence [. . . which was] why he had license to use up the world as a chick uses up its egg: so we could hatch from it. So we could leave it behind, like a broken shell" (331). Ironically, the reader later learns that humans never did succeed in going to the stars (556)--they used up the world without ever leaving it. In contrast, this novel shows humanity engaged in the process of repairing the damage that was done: the six set on salvation are organizations in charge of cleaning up pollutants, ensuring the reappearance and proper management of forests, animals and seas, and regenerating the ozone layer to fix the broken shell that Earth has become. The symbolism of the ending makes it clear that humanity's relationship with nature must be

more responsible. Big Blue and Bear respond that “Us all” are the trail bosses on this new journey, and it is clear that “Us all” is to include all of nature--even humankind (559).

By attacking other hierarchical formations, Tepper’s novels strengthen their argument against discrimination on the basis of gender hierarchies. Her novels create alliances with other oppressed groups to gain support for female agency and to attack patriarchal oppression. This is in accord with the feminist realization that it was hypocritical and divisive to pursue feminist causes while ignoring other sources of oppression such as class and race. As will be seen, Tepper’s novels disrupt conservative ideas about gender roles in many ways: narrative techniques, a female reclamation of science, and characters who do not fit into stereotypical gender roles.

The Feminization of Science

Science has always been an integral part of science fiction. This tradition seems straight-forward and uncontroversial, and, of course, feminists are going to use science in their science fiction stories. Still, there are large differences in the way the second wave feminist writers used science compared to their male counterparts. The writers after whom Tepper models herself are interested in exposing the patriarchal nature of scientific, rational discourse. They expose the fallacies of the assumptions on which science rests and often attempt to offer feminist sciences with which to replace traditional masculine sciences.

Recent feminist science theorists have been investigating the ways in which the discourse of science has been used to support patriarchy. Anne Fausto-Sterling neatly summarizes the guiding assumptions of scientific discourse: “Science, according to definition, is knowledge based on truth, which appears as fact obtained by systematic

study and precise observation. To be scientific is to be unsentimental, rational, straight-thinking, correct, rigorous, exact” (8). Scientific discourse makes the claim that science is objective and is completely value-free.

Feminist theory of the past two decades suggests that these ideas are untrue. Ruth Bleier opens her book with this observation: “For the past few decades, historians and philosophers of science have effectively described science and its history as an integral part of a social context, growing out of and responding to the needs, values, ideas, technology, and hopes of particular forces within any culture” (1). What for her is more important is “that in the patriarchal civilizations that have been our cultural context for the past several thousand years, a particular, consistent, and profound bias shapes scientific theories in general, theories about women in particular, and scientific explanations of the perceived social and cultural differences between men and women” (2). The impartial scientist-observer cannot exist. The cultural context affects which questions get asked, how those questions are posed, what is observed, in what kind of language those observations are described, and what conclusions are drawn from the data. In fact, observations that do not fit into scientific theories can be and are often ignored by even the most respected of scientists: “Historians of science have become increasingly aware that even in the most ‘objective’ of fields--chemistry and physics--a scientist may fail to see something that is right under his or her nose because currently accepted theory cannot account for the observation” (Fausto-Sterling 9-10).

What allows this structure of science, replete with its rhetoric of (impossible) objectivity, to support patriarchy is its hierarchical, competitive structure, and its insistence on its conclusions as absolute fact. This belief persists--even though the facts

have been influenced by a particular world-view, one which constructs reality in terms of dualisms, including the idea that female difference is feminine inferiority. As Linda Jean Shepherd notes, “hierarchy has become so identified with the male organizational style that *The Synonym Finder* lists “patriarchs” and “men at the top” as synonyms for hierarchy” (124). Further, both dualistic thinking and conceptions of hierarchies structure conventional approaches to nature in restrictive ways:

The dualistic mode defines science itself, describes and prescribes participants as well as objects of study and orders and explains the world that science purports to analyze and explain. Not only is the dualistic mode of organizing thought a cultural construction, but the oppositions and universals it poses are themselves culture-bound concepts.

Hierarchies, relations of domination, subordination, power, and control are not necessarily inherent in nature but are an integral part of the conceptual framework of persons bred in a civilization constructed on principles of stratification, domination, subordination, power, and control, all made to appear natural. (Bleier 200).

There are more obvious difficulties with science in its twentieth-century practice as well.

As Jean Barr and Lynda Burke assert:

For women, access to scientific knowledge is problematic. That knowledge not only largely excludes women of all kinds; it also defines us--good reason why we should know more about it. Science is too powerful a kind of knowledge in late-twentieth-century western culture to be left to the boys. And it matters profoundly that the discourses of science

contribute to particular definitions of gender--usually to stereotypical constructs of masculinity and femininity. (8)

Barr and Burke also note that a typical woman's response to science is that it is irrelevant, and they postulate that this is partly because science has a place in the dominant culture as a master narrative which places women outside itself (9). Proceeding from such criticisms of science as it has historically been practiced and thought about, feminists have attempted to envision ways to make science more responsible to the cultural context it inhabits. Unfortunately this is largely a practice of imagination for theorists, and an endeavor in taking small, tentative steps for scientists.

Shepherd, who obtained a Ph.D. in biochemistry, is a scientist who has recently been participating in this endeavor. In her book, *Lifting the Veil: The Feminist Face of Science*, she lays out strategies for changing the practice of science which echo those adopted in feminist science fiction. She calls for science to begin to accept and include concepts which have traditionally been considered feminine and at which women have been socialized into excelling. She proposes that the cold, unemotional rationality of traditional science should give way to a science that accepts emotions as productive. She lists the positive contribution of emotions: "• Drawing attention to values and ethics / • Helping to evaluate relevance and establish priorities / • Motivating research by love of nature, rather than desire for control / • Respecting nature, rather than using nature as a commodity / • Considering the feelings of other people" (53). This last might seem a little unusual, but Shepherd points out how science is a highly social and collaborative activity, and effective group dynamics require understanding and respect.

Shepherd pinpoints the problem mentioned above of ignoring data that does not

fit preconceived outcomes for an experiment with a chapter on the need for receptivity. She feels that scientists must be open to their observations, and must take the time properly to consider what the evidence indicates, considering information from other fields as well, in order to discover the “truth” instead of imposing order upon nature.

Shepherd calls for the balancing effects of a subjective approach to science since objectivity is an impossibility in science. Even the matter of funding disrupts objectivity, since the issue of who pays for the research affects results. As literary critics have been discovering with regard to discussions of race, class, and gender, acknowledging the personal subjectivity of the individual and his or her work allows that subjectivity to be accounted for. Further, acknowledging subjectivity means the possibility of investigating cultural biases and helping to eliminate them.

This links directly to Shepherd’s next chapter, which is a call for a multiplicity of approaches and for increased diversity in the participants in science, in the interests of creating a fuller vision of the “truth”: “When multiplicity is valued, diverse perspectives complement and augment each other, each lending a facet of the truth, an aspect of reality, an equally valid experience of the world” (135).

Shepherd calls for increased attention to the nurturing both of future scientists and future ideas. She notes that ideas which fall outside of the current paradigm are often met with ridicule, but these are the ideas that produce great leaps in science. Therefore, she calls for supportive discussion of ideas to balance scientific skepticism, so that scientists can have the confidence to pursue their ideas even after they have been criticized by a skeptical scientific audience.

Pursuant to this idea is her call for increased cooperation in the sciences. Not only

is the competitive view of evolution being questioned these days, competition taken too far inhibits the lines of communication between different scientists and different fields, resulting in duplication of effort and slower progress.

Shepherd calls for greater acceptance of intuition in science, since the unconscious is a powerful tool. "Whereas sensation perceives objects as they are, in isolation, and in detail, intuition perceives objects as they might be and in totality, as a gestalt. The intuitive raises unconscious perception to the level of a differentiated function, by means of an especially sensitive and sharpened perception" (206). Insistence on rigorous logic can result in intuitive approaches failing to receive funding, when they can be quicker to produce results.

Shepherd notes that Western scientific endeavour has been exceptionally competent at breaking down and isolating systems for study, but she calls for a balancing inclusion of a holistic viewpoint, so that important connections between the particular scientific experiment and the greater world are not ignored. She calls for a multidisciplinary approach which uses integrative thinking; after all, if science is partly a cultural construct, it is important not to ignore that culture.

Finally, Shepherd refutes the idea that science is value-free. She calls for scientists to be aware of the social responsibility and moral obligations of scientific endeavour. She perceives these changes as a feminization of science because they have not been present in the male-dominated scientific institutions of the past centuries. Her ideas are in agreement with those of Bleier, who says that:

Doing science well requires what women, in general, have: the ability to listen and hear, to be aware and perceptive, to understand and appreciate

process and interaction. [. . .] It has to do with not imposing the ego in the form of preconceived, unalterable, unacknowledged, and constraining belief systems on the subject matter, but rather creating the circumstances that permit the matter to reveal some of its characteristics to you. (206)

These ideas about science have been finding their way into feminist science fiction with great regularity, and Tepper's work is no exception.

These ideas take on different forms in a fictional context. A few feminist science fiction critics have studied how these ideas about science manifest themselves in feminist texts. Donawerth, in her chapter "Utopian Science," suggests the following ways in which feminist authors have worked to question patriarchal, male-dominated science and provide alternatives: by demonstrating women's participation in science, by interrogating the definitions and discourses of science, by focusing on science that addresses itself to women's issues, by offering feminized versions of science as an origin story, and by portraying scientific endeavor as a partnership with nature in a subjective, relational science. Roberts, in a more general take on the subject, suggests that "Feminist science fiction looks at the dualities of masculine and feminine, traditional science and feminist science, and shifts the terms of the pairing to privilege the marginal over what is usually central" (90). She traces a body of work in which art and magic (mainly psionics)--the normally inferior half of the pairing--are given precedence over masculine science. Tepper uses all of the techniques of her predecessors, in some cases expanding upon them.

In both of her books, there is a great diversity in the participants of science. In *Gibbon's Decline and Fall*, Tepper depicts a primatology center with one female and two

male scientists: two are Eurasian, and the name of third scientist, Pinto, leaves his ethnicity unclear. She has chosen here to depict the only science, primatology, in which women's participation approaches fifty percent in the real world. Tepper also includes a female practitioner of medical science, and the text makes clear in the context of Lolly's trial that all of her female protagonists, with the exception of Lolly, are capable of understanding scientific information. In *A Plague of Angels*, science has been divorced from its present-day context of laboratories and experiments, but it is nonetheless practiced widely. Both the Artemisians and the six groups set on salvation practice science in order to manage the recovery of the earth. Women form a large portion of the participants, not only do the Artemisians work as a community including both genders. one of the six groups is all-female. The Sisters to Trees are in charge of helping to regrow the forests of Earth: any woman can join by planting 10,000 trees. Even in Domer society, an area where old science persists in its attempts to complete such tasks as building a spaceship, women are shown to be able participants. Quince Ellet learns to program the walkers, despite her father's perception that a girlchild is useless for his posterity. The unselfconscious inclusion of women in science in Tepper's books helps to provide role-models and to counter archaic ideas about women's innate inability to practice science.

Tepper's two novels disrupt contemporary discourse about and definitions of science. The argument Carolyn uses to win Lolly's case is essentially one against sociobiology; she disputes the idea that women naturally have such a strong maternal instinct that any woman who does not immediately want to care for a child must be criminal and reprehensible. Instead of using primatology to prove how natural dominance

and hierarchy structures are to humans, an endeavour in primatology that occurred earlier this century (Haraway, *Simians 7-20*), *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* shows primatology being used to prove that motherhood is learned in humans. The presence of the walkers in her other novel makes an important statement about what kind of science gets funded. The walkers represent a large chunk of technology unavailable in the present world, and their creation could only have been malevolent. As Berkli says, "I find Jark's digging for them easier to understand than why some pre-astral bureaucracy manufactured thousands of android soldiers and then left them in cold storage" (397). The whole ethos of *A Plague of Angels* disrupts current views of science; science is practiced as a way of nurturing both the environment and humans. The library used to store information in an artificially intelligent matrix helps to give humans answers they would be unable to find and accept on their own. Technology is not used to own and control nature, as it is now, but to help humans live within it.

Tepper's books depict science that affects women's issues. In *Gibbon's Decline and Fall*, she uses two main scientific discoveries as essential plot devices. The first device is the SLEPT and STOPPED tanks, which store people's artificially turned-off bodies--unconscious and conscious respectively--for the duration of a jail-term. The fictional society's justification of a punishment that does not even pretend to help rehabilitate the criminal is linked to the second idea, which is that hormones help to implement violence and aggressive tendencies in human beings:

Testosterone doesn't cause rape or violence, but it implements both. It's just like guns. Guns don't make people want to kill each other, they just enable it to happen very quickly. Nine times out of ten, if the killer hadn't

had a gun, he wouldn't have killed the other guy. Testosterone is the same. A man predisposed to kill, abuse, or rape is very unlikely to do it without some testosterone, say around 20% of whatever his natural level is. Take all his testosterone away through castration, and he may still hate women or think of sexually abusing children, but he won't act on it. (192)

This means that the justice system offers the possibility that the worst criminals will be less able or likely to commit crimes at the end of their sentence because of age-related changes in their hormonal balance. At the very least criminals will be prevented from harming society for a set length of time. The book's view of the cause of rape and violence is apparent when Jessamine links testosterone to serotonin in her explanation. Further, there is the suggestion that the plague, which lowers testosterone to a quarter of its natural levels, must also fiddle with other elements of the chemistry and genetics of the human body, since it causes reproductive organs to shrink and violent behaviours to decrease. This area of science qualifies as a women's issue because it helps to deal with domestic violence, a subject of great interest to any woman who has been subjected to it, and an area of feminist concern. *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* also warns against allowing science to appropriate women's reproductive power, placing Tepper in a common tradition identified by Barr as a response to the '60s practice of inducing labour for the convenience of the doctor (124-5). Jessamine's horrified reaction to the idea of being dosed with hormones in order to bear a child sums up the dangers of advances in reproductive science that are not geared towards women's needs.

"The idea disgusts me, Val. this poor old planet is so overcrowded already. why in hell do we need fiftyish-sixtyish women having more

babies.” [. . .] Could she do what Patrick wanted? Take some other woman’s ovum, let Patrick fertilize it, then she, herself, incubate it for him? Would that satisfy him? Probably not. What he really wanted was a younger, more biddable wife with whom he could procreate and prove himself a male (119-120).

A Plague of Angels does not focus on women’s issues as clearly, because most of its science is not directly mentioned. However, it focuses on women’s issues inasmuch as the alliance between environmentalists and feminists makes the nurture and care of the Earth a women’s issue. Further, its visioning of society as a fragile creation that needs to be mothered, disciplined and raised correctly signals its female intentions, as signaled by the Artemisian position of ‘Mothermost.’

Tepper’s novels also present alternative origin stories that compete with and disrupt the ideology behind evolutionism. *A Plague of Angels* effectively re-originates the world at the point when humankind left for the stars. Origin stories set the tone for what civilization is all about. For example, one interpretation of Darwinian evolution as an origin story posits that species evolve through competition, with only the strongest surviving to pass on their genes, and only the most successful species being able to expand their numbers into new territory. As a result, it is only natural that humankind should constantly evolve and expand, stamping out other species for its own benefit, and focusing on progress, competition and hierarchy. To oppose this discourse, the novel rests on a widely believed but untrue origin story in which humankind has already travelled to the stars. Abasio feels proud of this as a young child:

Going to the stars was adventure, all right! [. . .] Whenever Abasio thought

about it, it made him puff up like a cockerel, too, just to think that men had gone. Men like him. Even if he hadn't gone, he still owned the stars sort of by proxy. If men had gone to the stars, there was nothing they couldn't do! (20)

Olly explains that "That's why they started the story [. . .] What man has already done, he need not plunder his world to do again" (559). Further, the presence of the thrones, beings out of time, contradicts the strictly rational, linear logic of evolution. This alternate origin story works for feminist purposes, exposing the discursive effects of humanity's current myth about where we came from. In *Gibbon's Decline and Fall*, evolution is an accepted origin story, but it is framed differently and shown to have a purpose other than giving one species dominion over others. Tess explains that the saurians have been studying humans in an attempt to understand them:

Since you were in the trees, your people have contended, one with the other, making battles and then making peace, and then battles, and then peace again. You have been proliferate and violent and have demanded dominion over all things. You have fought language against language, culture against culture, convulsion after convulsion. Still, even very early in your history, we saw some of you following the path intelligence must follow as it evolves. the path all thinking races follow: You were gradually learning ways that would lead to wisdom. Ways of respect for nature. ways of peace, ways of quiet cooperation. (393)

This refiguring of humanity's origin works for feminist purposes: instead of nature being used as a justification for constant struggle for progress and control over the world, it is

shown to be natural for humans to strive for wisdom. This wisdom involves both inter- and intra-species cooperation; according to this origin story, it would not be wise for man to dominate woman or nature. The retelling of origin stories is a useful form of discourse in the battle for feminist meanings.

Tepper joins in the attempt to create an approach to science that is founded on a new attitude towards nature. Donawerth notes that “Feminist science historians have shown that male scientists from the seventeenth century on have conceived of nature as a potentially unruly woman to be mastered and penetrated for her secrets” (24). As well as her general attitude that humans have a responsibility to the environment as previously discussed, some of Tepper’s characters practise a kind of feminist science. For instance, Olly’s grasp of the way things are is not based on objective information, but on her intuitive understanding of how things are put together in patterns. Similarly, Jessamine is receptive to changes in the behaviour of her chimps. She notices that the bonobos have changed but she does not make assumptions about what could be the cause. She does not ignore information that fails to fit into her studies, nor does she jump to conclusions that fit with her theories; rather, she decides to obtain more information. Again, *A Plague of Angels* is based on the idea that the earth must be nurtured with scientific information that can help clean it up and restore health and stability to its environment. Most of the novel’s characters are involved in a cooperative, socially responsible, subjective kind of science that understands the interconnectedness of life.

Tepper’s books question the privileged place of science in our society. To do this they erase the dualistic differentiation between art/magic and science. Faye’s work as a sculptor proves just as important to the saving of the world as Jessamine’s work as a

scientist: her monument provides an (admittedly aesthetic) vector to spread the viral carrier which will return humankind back to a viably reproducing species, while Jessamine's show and tell provides the inspiration. The fountain also acts as a symbolic reminder of humanity's proper relationship with nature: a subjective artistic approach to knowledge is just as important for the well-being of humankind as an objective scientific approach. The presence of the plague also collapses the distance between science and magic. The plague is so complicated and effective as to seem like magic, and it comes from a goddess, but there is also a scientific explanation. A simple viral carrier spread genetic information that changed the DNA of the species. The line between magic and science is very thin. *A Plague of Angels* also uses magical science that is unidentifiable as one or the other. The creation of sophisticated IDDI's, drugs to trigger them, the technology which causes people to fall asleep when they say words that might cause fighting, clean and reliable 'fusion' power: all of these are possibly achievable by high advanced science, but they definitely seem magical in the context of our present level of technology and their presentation in the text. Similarly Olly's intuitive knowledge is opposed to the male-dominated science of our reality. The destruction of the science vs. magic/art dualism helps to promote new approaches to science that include the knowledge of other disciplines.

Feminist science fiction writers of the '70s and '80s, like feminist science theorists, concluded that the discourses of contemporary patriarchal science are oppressive and must be changed. The intervention of approaches that have typically been denigrated as feminine will help to make science more accountable and more productive of socially useful information. Tepper is helping to achieve this goal by using feminist

science as the basis of her science fiction novels. She addresses women's issues, provides role-models for female scientists, demonstrates a socially and environmentally conscious approach to science and collapses the dualism that designates rational science as better than the subjective knowledge areas of art.

Strategies of Representation

The main wave of feminist science fiction during the '70s had many female stereotypes to overcome. The pulp science fiction magazines featured covers in which barely-clad women were carried off by aliens or immense alien females towered over puny human males whose disadvantage in size could only be made up by their use of technology. Women were present in the actual stories only as maidens to be rescued, sex objects to be desired, or powerful alien rulers to be subjugated--and sometimes a single character could combine all of these aspects. As Roberts notes, "These stories describe a patriarchal symbolic order in which the maternal is expected to destroy itself to preserve the patriarchy" (42). So when the new wave of women science fiction authors began writing (these include but are not limited to Russ, Piercy, Le Guin, Bradley, and Anne McCaffrey) their heroines tended towards one of two extremes: the woman who could do everything a man could (the female man) or the woman whose feminine powers (powers typically characterized as feminine and associated with a feminine connection to nature including magic, psychic ability, intuition, and communication) allowed her to triumph within her society (be it a separatist utopia or a male-dominated society). As a way of opening the door for female heroes that could actually accomplish meaningful goals under their own steam, this technique worked extremely well. As Russ noted in her essay "The Image of Women in Science Fiction," prior to the '70s there were no women with

whom female readers could identify, because all of the images of women reflected a male perspective (91). However, only the most skillful of the '70s writers were able to escape a trap where the heroine was limited to a stereotypical mold: often she either triumphed in a male-dominated world because of her unusual adeptness at masculine skills, or because of her unusually strong and useful female skills. This incarnation of the heroine does not necessarily challenge conventional ideas about femininity and women's place in society. It is important to note that these observations are restricted to feminist science fiction: feminist utopias tended to focus less on the individual heroine and more on the community as protagonist. Regardless, the '80s and '90s backlash against feminism has made it necessary to transcend the limitations of this approach to the representation of women as hero in science fiction.

Tepper uses different strategies to refute gendered inequality. In both *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* and *A Plague of Angels* there are two approaches to the representation of women. The first is the use of a feminist incarnation of the figure of the beautiful alien monster-woman. The second is the way the books carefully avoid either stereotyping or anti-stereotyping women, creating female characters that are as complex and believable as is suitable to genre fiction. She is not afraid of having female villains as well as male ones, and her books contain a full spectrum of female characters. When critiquing Tepper's capacity for authentic character creation and her philosophic stance towards male-female relations and equality, it is important to reference the representation of women with the representation of men. Tepper's books show a range of male characters both positive and negative. They frequently make feminist points about patriarchal thinking by placing sympathetic female and male characters in a position where they are

forced to recognize that they, too, use and accept an oppressive kind of thinking.

Tepper's books may be just as strongly feminist as those of the utopian writers of the '70s, but her methods are different and represent an evolution in feminist science fiction.

The feminist incarnation of the beautiful alien monster-woman did not originate with Tepper. Donawerth examines the phenomenon in *Frankenstein's Daughters: Women Writing Science Fiction*. Donawerth finds that in early science fiction by male writers, bug-eyed monsters (BEMs) and beautiful alien monster-women (BAMs) represented a fear of difference, racial in the first case and gendered in the second (42). Roberts focused attention on the BAM convention in the early pulp magazines in "The Female Alien: Pulp Science Fiction's Legacy to Feminists," a chapter of her book, *A New Species, Gender and Science in Science Fiction*. She relates the pulp phenomenon to the post-WWII baby-boom, when femininity was being glorified as women were moved back to the home: "These stories describe a patriarchal symbolic order in which the maternal is expected to destroy itself to preserve the patriarchy" (42). Donawerth refers to Russ' essay "*Amor Vincit Foeminam: The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction*" when she says "In science fiction by men, the woman as alien has generally symbolized the erotic victim of masculine dominance who is a threat to reason and order" (42). As Wolmark explains: "To be different, or alien, is a significant if familiar cultural metaphor which marks the boundaries and limits of social identity. It allows difference to be marginalized and any dissonance to be smoothed away, thus confirming the dominance of the centre over the margins" (27). Both Donawerth and Wolmark go on to investigate how women science fiction authors have transformed the trope of the women-as-alien into a useful vehicle for female experience. Donawerth sees three major differences between male and female use

of the woman as humanoid alien: 1) women writers move the alien from a marginalized subject character to a position of central importance 2) women writers give the woman as alien a voice, either through point of view or some other means and 3) women writers evade the sadomasochistic erotics of the male plot of the alien woman (wherein the alien woman falls in love with and is subjected to a human man as his reward for completing a task) by having the heroine insist on her subjectivity, and by creating a mutual recognition between the man and the woman (45-6). Donawerth goes on to investigate other versions of the alien-woman trope: woman as animal, woman as machine and minority women as aliens among us. As these are not relevant to Tepper's work, they will not be examined here. The figure of the beautiful alien monster-woman is, however, central to Tepper's science fiction.

Following in the footsteps of other feminist science fiction writers, Tepper reverses the BAM convention to celebrate female power and subjectivity. Sophy and Olly represent the beautiful alien monster-women in *Gibbon* and *Plague*, respectively. As in the traditional version, Tepper's alien-women are powerful, but their power does not result from beauty, sexuality or prolific reproductive capacity. In an ironic twist, while both Sophy and Olly are beautiful, they hide their beauty: Sophy behind a nerd's disguise of hunched shoulders, bad make-up and glasses (19-20); Olly behind the Orphan's guise of dirt and ash (34). Instead, their power comes from knowledge that is gained through their alien capacity for understanding. In Sophy's case this capacity for understanding stems from her saurian ancestry. As the reader discovers late in the book, Earth is inhabited by a species of saurian beings far in advance of humans in terms of DNA manipulation, and Sophy is the genetically manipulated product of this community (408).

She has the ability to feel human thoughts, as is graphically illustrated during this outburst: “I don’t want men to ask me out. I don’t want them to think of me that way. I can feel their thoughts. It’s like being raped inside their heads, little pieces of me ripped off and taken into them, used up” (18). She can also communicate telepathically with her twin sister Sovawanea, each feeling what the other feels and knowing what the other knows (408). Sophy’s entire purpose for entering the human world is to discover the source of the increasing sexism in human society (398). Her unique capacity for learning languages and blending in with local societies (96-7) aids her in her quest. It is easy to see that the threat Sophy poses to patriarchy does not spring from her seductive allure or her reproductive capability. Similarly Olly has a peculiar aptitude for knowledge, for putting together and understanding the pattern of living things. She is precocious in her reading ability: learning young, reading difficult material at seven, and having finished all of the books in Oracle’s cavern by the time she was fourteen (49). She understands the world and human relationships intuitively: for example, at six she is not only capable of manipulating Oracle through crying, she is also able to recognize predatory men without being told:

“Bastard invited me to his house. He wants to read to me,” said Orphan.

Oracle stopped stirring and gave her a serious look. “You stay away from Bastard. He can read to himself.”

Orphan found a nut in her pocket and fished it out for Squirrel. “I told him you would say that because he’s dangerous, to females especially, and he said a lot of dirty words.”

Now there it was again. Oracle could not remember ever having said that particular thing about Bastard, and yet Orphan knew it was true.

She recognizes Young Kerf's situation as titular head just by watching the way the gang men interact (72), and she knows that Sybbis will keep the true prophecy secret, and find some way to get pregnant in order to safeguard her position (77). As the book proceeds, there are numerous references to her understanding of the pattern of things, which culminate in her decision to spend her life on the space journey, before receiving an explanation from Seoca as to why it is necessary:

"I feel the pattern, Abasio, mostly. I know that if the ship goes, there's a chance--more than a chance--that whatever comes back, it won't be me. But if I don't go, I see the pattern of what will happen here. Pain and terror. The walkers changing, becoming something else, something worse. [. . .] I can see them, towering, thundering, the very planet breaking apart beneath them!" (465-6)

It is easy to see that Olly is powerful because of her alien Gaddi ability to understand patterns and see what is necessary to be done.

The next piece of the BAM convention inverted in Tepper's novels is the subjugation of the powerful woman to the power of patriarchy. While patriarchy causes both Sophy and Olly to make sacrifices, it is not through the power of and for the good of patriarchy that they are forced to make those concessions. When Sophy refuses to go home with her twin sister (426) it is specifically in order to save humanity from the enemy, Webster, who is using patriarchy, hierarchy and dominance to create an apocalyptic period of death and pain on which to feed. Her actions are anti-patriarchal.

Indeed, at the end of the book she offers the women a choice, which will allow them to alter the very genetic-reproductive basis on which patriarchy rests. When Olly chooses to fly to her death among the stars, she is acting to root out hierarchy, dominance and tyranny. That the main villain of the piece is a woman does not erase how the described system of power rests on the patriarchal, hierarchical ordering of society.

Tepper's books, like those of other feminist science fiction writers, move the beautiful alien-monster woman from the periphery of the text to the center. The quests of Sophy and Olly form the main plot-line of both books, and in Olly's case she is given point of view for as large a portion of the book as any other character. Both Sophy and Olly insist on their personal subjectivity especially in the area of sexuality; refusing to allow themselves to be treated like or considered to be objects of desire. As Olly says to Abasio after telling him a hen-rooster analogy of typical ganger male-female interactions: "Well if you do [mean what you say], the more shame you, for it's nothing but cock-crow, Abasio. Nothing but habit. You're not talking to me any different than you'd talk to any other chicken!" (262). She explains to Abasio that she is not ready to have sex with him yet because she does not know who she is as a person--however, when she does know who she is, she makes the choice to initiate sexual relations with him (473-5). Sophy is similarly unwilling to be desired or made into a sexual object, as her taking on a disguise to avoid causing male lust indicates (19-20).

The final element of the BAM convention is that it embodies difference: in the pulp magazines, that difference signaled fear. Tepper's books celebrate the difference that allows Sophy and Olly to help understand and solve all-encompassing problems. Their unique capacity is shown to be positive and not a source of fear. This is most

clearly displayed in Agnes' fear that Sophy is demonic (293), which is refuted by Sophy's ties to the Goddess Sophia and the way she saves the earth from Webster. Tepper employs a capable inversion of the BAM convention which has the effect of reclaiming power for women and loosening the straitjacket of femininity.

Tepper fills her stories with a multiplicity of different male and female characters. In doing so, she covers the full spectrum of human personality and illustrates that identity is at least partly socially constructed. Her portrayal of women is powerful because it nevertheless involves some characters that either do or have overcome societal pressure towards a patriarchal version of femininity. She uses her conservative characters to illustrate errors in thought which are based on patriarchy, hierarchy, competition and dominance. Either the characters provide unquestionable illustrations of how a particular pattern of behaviour works itself out negatively or they are put in a position where they are forced to own up to the negative consequences of their patriarchal behaviour and attitudes. This will be examined later as part of the discussion on narrative technique.

Tepper's novels demonstrate a conviction that personality is socially and environmentally constructed: they show each character in greater depth by portraying his or her background. Tepper frequently includes vignettes of a character's formative years to explain their behaviour in the here and now of the book. This is done for Bettiann when she recalls telling the DFC about her beauty pageant childhood (84-89). The never-ending focus on winning beauty shows caused her to feel tremendous personal insecurity about her appearance throughout her life. It is done for Qualary when we learn how she was beaten over and over again by Ellel when she first started working (106): this made her the private, careful and discreet person she was when Tom Fuelry first approached

her. It is done for Jake Jagger when we learn of his neglectful, slightly abusive childhood; his prostitute mother used to torment him when she got drunk. His feelings about her combined with his longing for a father to spark the leap of logic that led to his decision that an important man must have been his father (43-6). This explains his hatred for women and his ambition for power and recognition. Even the ultimately evil witch Quince Ellel is given a societal as well as genetic background to explain her tyrannical character. Not only have the Ellel's been inbreeding for decades, becoming more psychotic and more clever with each generation (139), but Quince's initial spoiling and subsequent rejection by her father Jark Ellel III has also triggered her need to prove that she is better, more effective and more ambitious than any son could have been. The understanding of human development that structures the novels is given voice in the character of Carolyn when she silently observes Lolly: "Sullen once more. Thoughtful. though, the brows drawn in. There was a brain struggling for light under that mop of hair. IQ about eighty, maybe. Maybe born that way, but more likely stifled from whatever it might have been with a more challenging rearing" (176). The assumption that character is partly genetic and partly constructed by environment is a clear foundation of Tepper's work.

Despite demonstrating that human identity is developed partly through nurturing and environment, Tepper's books do not allow inadequate upbringing to be an out for the characters. By having some characters overcome patriarchal pressures that push them towards certain roles, attitudes and behaviours, Tepper's work makes it plain that everybody must be responsible for their own behaviour. The mere existence of the DFC in *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* is proof of this. The seven women made a pact:

They swore an oath to one another. Even after they left school, they would stay close to one another. They would meet every year, and each of them would find a place to stand where she could be woman as woman was meant to be, and thereafter she would never decline or fall from that place.

(20)

When Stace approaches her mother about defending Lolly Ashaler, Carolyn is reluctant and afraid to face Jake Jagger once more, but she refuses to give in to the pressures that would keep her safely at home and out of the courtroom. “Despite her fear, maybe she owed something to someone who had declined and fallen through no fault of her own. if Stace’s judgement was correct” (39). We see Sybbis progress from the ultimate conk (126), living only for and through her sexuality, to an eloquent speaker responsible enough to competently guide a new community. She forces the gangers to leave their guns behind (545) when they set off to Abasiostown after talking to the Artemisian women: “During recent days, Sybbis had acquired an almost regal dignity, which surprised her only a little less than it did anyone else. She had intended to be Queen of Abasiostown. Now she thought she might call herself Mothermost” (545). She overcomes the hierarchical, patriarchal patterns of her upbringing to become an effective, sensible leader. Similarly Bettiann overcomes her personal insecurity to manage a charity foundation (35), an ability which allows her to organize the search for Sophy’s past with great success (301-10, 321). Several of the DFC hold non-traditional occupations for women: Carolyn the lawyer, Ophy the doctor, and Jessamine the primatologist and genetic researcher (33-5). In *A Plague of Angels*, such ordinary people as Farmwife Chyne and Farmwife Sutton struggle to overcome patriarchal expectations about their

feminine behaviour. Farmwife Chyne helps strangers despite her husband's incredible mistrust and manages to lie to the walkers, defying normative feminine stereotypes about the weakness of women. Farmwife Sutton manages to run her farm without the aid of a husband, since her husband is abusive and angry at the world. In this way, the women of Tepper's novels overcome patriarchal expectations about their character and behaviour.

Some of the men in Tepper's novels also set an alternative standard of behaviour. In *Gibbon's Decline and Fall*, supportive, sensitive men such as Luce, Simon and Hal give the lie to the impression that all men feel threatened by women and need to possess them. Cermit and Tom Fuelry supply the same balance in *A Plague of Angels*. Since women are the focus of the books, these good men are not sketched in great detail. However, neither are most of the bad or evil men in her novels: we get short vignettes of Vince Harmston, Dale Martin and Raymond Keepe, just as we get small glimpses into Fashimir Ander, Thrasher, Masher and Crusher. Women are at the center of Tepper's novels. Her books investigate how their wisdom can help to right the imbalance caused by patriarchal patterns of thinking that involve hierarchy, domination, competition and rules.

The methods used by Tepper to portray her female characters represent one kind of evolution from the feminist science fiction of the late '70s and early '80s. By including a large number of sufficiently detailed characters, Tepper's novels convey how personality is at least partly socially constructed, and that therefore change must occur on a societal level in order for it to permeate the individual level. However, she also creates characters who overcome patriarchal pressures on an individual level to serve as role-models for those of us who must live in such a society on a daily level. By including both

good and evil characters Tepper saves her books from becoming an all-out attack on men, while still having them criticize conventional masculinity and patriarchal institutions. Finally, by reclaiming the BAM convention from earlier science fiction, Tepper is talking back to the tradition--and making a stand against the masculine origin of science fiction by using its ideas to bolster feminist arguments.

Manipulating the Narration

Historically, it has been a convention of the science fiction genre that the style of narrative be either a first-person male point of view or a personalized third-person point of view strongly defined as male (Donawerth 110). The past twenty years or so have seen this convention opened up and reconstructed as the increasing presence of female and feminist writers in the field takes effect. There are many ways of doing this: possibilities include such techniques as evading the narrative convention entirely with an omniscient or female narrator or utilizing the male narrator for feminist purposes. The latter is possible if the author converts a sympathetic male narrator, makes a mockery of a dumb, macho or naive male narrator or exposes the assumptions of the male viewpoint by alternating it with female or alien viewpoints. Tepper combines several of the above stratagems, as well as adding others, in an attempt to evade the restrictions of traditional science fiction narrative convention.

It is important to recognize that narrative strategies carry embedded and hidden ideologies, which do not require recognition to affect the impact of the text. As Anne Cranny-Francis explains: "A lot of science fiction employs the quest narrative with its familiar conventions of the tough male hero and helpless, passive female victim/prize: so that a masculinist gender ideology is encoded in the text before the writer even begins

telling the story” (69). She points out that this necessitates vigilance on the part of authors to ensure that an embedded conservative message does not conflict with or overpower the feminist story of the text (69). Janice Antczak further develops the idea of science fiction as the new embodiment of the quest narrative, developing the interconnectedness of myth and literature (3).

Both *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* and *A Plague of Angels* follow a typical quest pattern, but they carefully evade the patriarchal associations embedded within that narrative. Tepper's quest narratives do follow the entire tradition as follows: the hero is marked as special because of mysterious birth or some other device; the hero “sets out on a quest for harmony, identity or perfection” (Antczak 86); the hero encounters obstacles along the way; the hero is helped or hindered by minor characters; the hero is successful and finally is rewarded with a female love object, possibly in addition to power, status, material goods and spiritual fulfillment (Antczak 112). However, Tepper's books complicate the pattern to evade its patriarchal implications.

In *Gibbon's Decline and Fall*, the traditional narrative is modified by the inclusion of two quests undertaken by females: the reader participates in the DFC's quest to find Sophy, but discovers from afar--as does the DFC--Sophy's quest to find and conquer the enemy. The many early references to Sophy as alien make it clear that she is marked as special (16, 18, 33). The DFC are special by association: they are the only women on whom Sophy never laid her hands, which marks them as her friends, not her disciples (330). The difficulty of Sophy's quest is obvious--her travels take her into places where it is dangerous for women to go (96-7), and eventually take her into direct conflict with Webster (327, 446-454)--as are her helpers: the goddess Sophia and all of

the women she rescues and sets up as disciples, sent into the world as part of the First Dispersal (329). Sophy's reward does not come in the object-form of a love interest, but in the spiritual form of residence with the goddess. The later quest of the DFC further overturns the traditional quest pattern. While Sophy's quest flips the protagonist from male to female, the quest of the DFC fragments the protagonist, making it a communal journey undertaken for the general good of that community. The rest of the DFC quest pattern is traditional: the difficult journey with enemies obstructing the way in the form of Jagger, Keepe and Martin, as well as helpers in the form of Padre Josephus and the saurian community. However, the reward for their quest is also unusual: instead of romantic bliss, the DFC are rewarded with a difficult but important choice about humanity's reproductive future, implying that the end of the quest is not the absolute end it purports to be in the typical embodiment of the linear quest narrative. Responsibility does not cease with the end of the story--not for the characters and not for the reader.

In *A Plague of Angels*, the quest narrative is undermined in a similar way. The book fragments the quest by having Abasio take as large a part in it as does Olly, and, while they are both signified as special, it is clear that the woman is the chosen heroine. By obscuring the purpose of the quest for a large part of the book, the text illustrates that communities and their problems are too complex for it to be immediately clear what heroic deed must be performed for the collective good. Not having a clear objective also breaks up the continuity of the linear quest narrative. By having the walkers and the Survivors form the obstacles to Olly's quest, the book demonstrates that it is humanity's own creations that are most likely to damage the community. Further, by choosing talking animals and mythical creatures, as well as men and women to be Olly's wise

helpers, Tepper actively disrupts the human-centered nature of the patriarchal-quest narrative. Finally, neither Olly nor Abasio are rewarded by the simple consummation of their love interest for their part in the completion of the quest. Olly's body dies, and while her personality lives on in AI form in Arakny's modified library, she and Abasio are doomed to share their love only in exclusion from the world they helped to save. Such modifications help Tepper's books to evade the embedded conservative nature of the traditional narrative pattern of science fiction.

Tepper's novels use strategies of cross-dressing and innovative narrative practices in order to disrupt the effect of the conventional male narrator. These strategies are developed from the work of previous feminist science fiction writers. Donawerth cites Russ to show how compromising the decision to write in the traditional male science fiction narrator's voice can be, since the writer is then often creating a world where she herself as a female writer would be unacceptable or even impossible (111). However, Donawerth argues that, "a woman who cross-dresses as a male narrator is also refusing her cultural role as a woman, a rebellious act" (111). Therefore, feminist writers often still use the male narrator in sections of their work, and have found ways of making the male narrator work for them. These methods include converting the narrator, parodying a naively masculine narrator, and using multiple narrators to balance the story.

Tepper narrates her books in a third-person voice, a relatively unusual choice for a feminist writer. In her books, this takes the form of an omniscient narrator that zooms in on particular characters in sequence, giving the character's thoughts, opinions, and perspective of events as they occur. Most of the time, this narrator is very similar in tone (if not in gender) to those of typical science fiction: either a male first-person narration or

a third-person voice strongly defined as male. It bears a closer resemblance to the typical harlequin romance narrator, wherein the reader is acquainted intimately with the heroine's every feeling and desire, but where the narrator is unquestionably a third-person omniscient voice. This resemblance to the narrative patterns of romance means that Tepper's books have the effect of being narrated personally by a series of characters, with point of view switching frequently. Occasionally, Tepper makes the reader aware of the heterodiegetic narrator by giving insight into two characters present in the same scene (*Gibbon*, 146-9; *Plague*, 152-3, 170-1). She also makes the narrator visible by inserting such comments as: "Somewhere, of course, there had to be a Wicked Witch" (13). Since the books frequently give the illusion of being narrated in the limited point of view of particular characters, Tepper is able to employ the liberating techniques outlined above. Nonetheless, the sporadically obtrusive omniscient third-person narrator gives the books the impression of being strongly controlled and constructed. This effect means that Tepper can partake of the authority of print, without recourse to a male narrative voice, while simultaneously taking advantage of cross-dressing as a male narrator. This manner of conveying an attitude of didactic narrative authority is an innovation in feminist science fiction.

Tepper's books use the technique of conversion to expose the reality behind patriarchal thought. They contain characters who either do not believe in the feminist ideals she expounds, or fail to realize that their actions run counter to those ideals. By placing them in a position where they are forced to understand how they have bought into patriarchal thinking, and how that thinking is negatively affecting their lives, the books demonstrate the validity of feminist thought and the insidious nature of patriarchy. As

Abasio is attempting to chat up Olly in the city gang manner, he realizes that familiar male-dominant patterns of speech are limiting and unworkable: “Even with her, he tried the more familiar patterns of teasing and flirting and bragging, only to find that phrases meant to sound seductive came across as ugly and unenticing, the meaning muddy and uncertain, even to him” (260-1). He further admits that Olly is right about how the gangs treat women as interchangeable: “And she was right. His talk had been only habit. Now. But when he had seen her first, he’d been on fire, wanting her, Olly, separate and distinct from all other women” (262). When Abasio discovers that man never went to the stars, it takes a moment before he gets over his childish tantrum, “They ate up all our stars!” (558), until:

Something within him shuddered and sat up straight. substituting one vision for another. Instead of glory and power, instead of a gleaming shuttle pushed by its tail of fire. this slow creaking wagon behind this flatulent horse. [. . .] How far to Rigel, or to Betelguese? Or did one aspire to a different destination? [. . .] The forests of the east. And room perhaps for [. . .] a Mysterious Stranger. A storyteller, perhaps. (559)

By converting Abasio, Tepper’s books show that there are alternatives to patriarchal thought--and that those alternatives are not just acceptable but desirable.

However, unlike many previous feminists, Tepper does not limit this technique to male narrators. By also converting female characters, the books point out that women are often blinded by and bound within the system of thought in which they live. It helps create an effect of balance: not just male but also female characters believe the tenets of patriarchal thought. Agnes is also placed in such a position throughout *Gibbon’s Decline*

and Fall. After her vision of Sophy taking the vial, she believes that Sophy is demonic because she is different and powerful. As Tess states: "Then was the teaching about the devil, also male, and to his jurisdiction were assigned all enemies, all strangers, just as Aggie has assigned us that role" (394). Aggie's resistance to the idea of a goddess continues, but with it comes a recognition of how she has been restrained. In answer to Sovawanea's question about whether she has been made by the people around her to feel that everything female is inferior, Aggie replies: "Yes. They have. They laugh at the idea of female priests. They ridicule the idea of a female pope. They mock the idea of a goddess, belittling the very thought. All the Church is male, through and through" (427). Her final apotheosis comes after seeing Sophy: "All those years that I knew her, knew what she was like, and I actually believed she might have been evil. What kind of a life am I living that would let me believe that" (459)? Sybbis' transformation from the ultimate conk to a responsible matron, as discussed earlier, represents another such tale. The feminist ideas displayed in Tepper's books are more credible for being accepted by characters who originally could not believe in them.

Tepper also occasionally uses the technique of the dumb male narrator, parodied in his idiocy towards women. In *A Plague of Angels*, Abasio is a frequent target of this kind of criticism. His alarm at becoming impotent and his comedic attempts to work himself into a passion evoke a sense of the ridiculous. "He lay abed, summoning sexual fantasies that plodded flaccidly to no perceivable conclusion. He snorted and bellowed around the house, trying to stir himself" (262). This is a humorous send-up of how important virility is supposed to be to men in our society. The book continues to make points about male attitudes to female sexuality when Abasio explodes at Olly. After

implying that she would not be safe in the land of Artemisia because of its loose sexual mores, he denigrates her directly: ““You know so damned much!’ he shouted, irritated beyond control. ‘Too damned much for a virgin!’” (290). Tepper uses Abasio constantly to illuminate masculinity and femininity as they have been constructed by our society. Abasio firmly believes in the patriarchal quest motif as becomes clear when he assumes that it was not the real Olly who went to the stars, but a bit-part player (503). After all, the hero and heroine deserve to be rewarded with marital bliss, do they not?

The pattern most prominent in Tepper’s books is that of multiple narrators. As mentioned above, Tepper manages to retain the narrative control of an omniscient voice while offering many different points of view, thus partaking of two narrative strategies simultaneously. Multiple narration can be used for several purposes. Not only can it illuminate male/female relationships by displaying both sides at once, it can also portray an insightful model of how female friendships work, by using the same technique. Multiple narrators create a sense of community and build an ethic of connectedness and togetherness that supports Tepper’s demonstrated beliefs about each human’s responsibility to society and the environment. Multiple narrators also allow the story to be balanced from both sides, an important quality to a book such as *Gibbon’s Decline and Fall*, within which the final battle is fought between balance and dominion. Multiple narrators shed light on what part of human nature and behaviour allows people to behave in a negative and destructive manner. Hence, multiple narration forms an extremely effective tool for a feminist science fiction author.

By using multiple narrators Tepper’s books are able to focus on interpersonal relationships. As well as being an area that is typically of greater importance to women

than to men, it is an area that historically has not been explored effectively in science fiction. With women traditionally occupying the role of sexual object, and the main emphasis on humanity's relationship with technology, traditional science fiction was not normally interested in the soft science of human psychology and interaction. A feminist revisioning in this area is useful, for it can generate interest and help to make softer sciences more acceptable as science in a public context. In *A Plague of Angels*, the main focus in terms of human interaction is on the Abasio/Olly love interest. The reader knows that both characters are initially strongly attracted to one another and subsequently love each other with equal fervour. However, the novel gives the reader this information not to reiterate the timeless story of romantic love, but to disrupt it. The book uses the confusion accompanying these feelings to highlight the weighted power balance of a heterosexual relationship and to question that dynamic. Throughout the novel, we see Olly resisting her attraction to Abasio, unwilling to enter a relationship with him because he does not exhibit an acceptable attitude toward women. She is unwilling to lose her personal autonomy:

“Perhaps you’d find the city less stultifying,” he challenged. “I’d be glad to escort you there, if you’d like to see it.”

It was the worst thing he could have said. Her face closed, like an iron-bound door, shutting him out. “Do you think I’m a fool, cityman? I’ve been told what sleazy life awaits women there.” She gave him a contemptuous look, hating him for being what Oracle had said citymen were. Not her Prince Charming, but a serpent, his darting tongue laden with false words. (171-2)

Tepper deconstructs the romantic myth by portraying both sides and illustrating the patriarchal narrative often embedded in such fictional relationships. She also uses multiple narration to shed insights into human character, as she does when Farmwife Suttle thinks to herself that Drowned Woman's constant warnings to Abasio not to go to the city practically guaranteed that he would do it (174). In *Gibbon's Decline and Fall*, the focus is largely on female friendship. By shifting the emphasis away from the sphere of men, Tepper validates the importance of female friendships, showing their value as a support against patriarchal pressure. The DFC is not a group of women who share the same views on patriarchy. As Ophy comments: Carolyn and Faye take a radical stance. Jessamine and she are moderate, and Bettiann and Aggie are conservative, opting to follow tradition (282). Still, the reader sees them share their problems. Even fragmented in their views, they hold pow-wows out of concern for each other, in groups of twos and threes (281, 329-30, 246), or ponder each others problems singly (69-70), so that they can support each other in times of need. Multiple narration allows a fuller picture of each character to develop than would be possible with a straight omniscient narrator, since each character is viewed through the lens of several different personalities.

Multiple narration also creates a sense of community. Showing how people depend on each other, and how what one person does in one part of the world affects everybody else, demonstrates the interconnectedness of all life. In our society it is no longer possible for everybody to know their neighbour and his or her business, but Tepper's novels attempt to recreate the concomitant sense of responsibility to others. In *A Plague of Angels*, the plot revolves around the completion of Gaddi efforts to change society back into a state where everybody is part of a fully networked community, and

where everybody recognizes that they are responsible to their fellow humans, animals and the environment. In *Gibbon's Decline and Fall*, neighbourhood is not created on such a large scale, for there are too many people; however, the DFC is a demonstration of community. Its members enact a web of ties primarily to each other, secondarily to their significant others, and finally to the world in which they work. These ties are integrated into that neighbourly sense of responsibility: they use their individual networks to find information about and act on the way the world has become. By having the narrative switch from character to character, the reader is made to see the multiplicity of the ties and the mutual concern that characterizes community.

Balance is a very important part of Tepper's stories. She uses both sides of every story to make her points about human nature, patriarchy, and human-centered thinking. By telling the reader what the bad guys are thinking, Tepper demonstrates what characteristics of humanity are dangerous. The attitude behind Ellel's tyranny is flagged as problematic. Quince rejects the Artemisian viewpoint that common-sense should be relentlessly applied to lifestyle choices, and that humans must live in accordance with the needs of the earth of which they were only a part: "In Ellel's worldview, humans were the apex of creation, Ellel's were the apex of humanity, and she herself was at the very peak of Elleldom. It was her intention to 'civilize' the Artemisians. She'd probably end up killing every last one of them in the attempt" (95). Similarly, by filtering Jake Jagger's misogyny through his own thoughts it becomes clear that the social system must take much better care to ensure educated and competent parenthood--the book clearly opines that Jagger could have been a much different man with a better childhood.

Tepper's books disrupt conventional patterns of narration to evade the embedded

ideology of traditional science fiction. Multiple narration and particular uses of the male narrator open up space for feminist ideas. Subverting the linear quest narrative works to refigure patriarchal assumptions about plot. All of these techniques were developed from the work of earlier feminist writers.

Fantastic Interventions

The genres of science fiction and fantasy have been considered separate in their conventions despite their togetherness on the bookshelf since they moved into the mass publishing industry in the '50s and '60s. This was as true of the feminist science fiction and fantasy writers of the '70s and '80s as it was of the rest of the genre. Tepper's bald inclusion of fantasy resolutions to science fiction stories can come as a shock to the unsuspecting science fiction reader who is busy consuming the text with that certain sensibility appropriate to the genre. As Alexei Kronratiev notes in one installment of his column *Tales Newly Told*,

[T]he boundary has remained enough of a reality for both readers and publishers that its growing irreverence is felt to be a major change. Much new "science fiction" writing is more consciously mythopoeic, more willing to adapt the style and manner of traditional fantasy, and even willing to challenge the materialist canons [. . .]. (15)

Perhaps Kronratiev illuminates here the new technique Tepper is using in her science fiction.

The fantasy genre is, in its own way, as hard to define as science fiction. In some aspects a much older tradition, fantasy's modern conventions include such symbols and stereotypes as elves and unicorns, dragons and goblins, wizards and warriors; often these

are bound together in grand exploits where good battles evil across global landscapes. In the fantasy world, anything can happen: writers are not bound in any way to the realities of this world. The pattern of fantasy fiction has great diversity; it draws on centuries worth of myth and folklore.

The idea of subjunctivity is a useful way of distinguishing between fantasy and science fiction. Delany originated the idea in his essay “About Five Thousand Seven Hundred and Fifty Words”, and it has been picked up by numerous other critics including Russ. The fundamental precept is that each genre is informed by a particular practice of reading; the reader has learned to expect words to relate to each other in a specific manner. In a later essay, Delany further defines this concept: “A genre, to the extent that it can be said to exist as a genre, is constituted of a way of reading (what we may henceforth call a protocol of reading), a structuration of response potential” (*Generic Protocols* 176). All of the information which the reader perceives when reading a book is modified by the subjunctivity associated with the genre. In the case of naturalistic fiction, the subjunctivity level is described by “could have happened” (Delany *About* 43). Fantasy reverses this to become “could not have happened.” Delany says that this occurs:

At the appearance of elves, witches, or magic in a non-metaphorical position, or at some correction of image too bizarre to be explained by other than the super-natural. [. . . and that no matter how naturalistic the setting] once the witch has taken off on her broomstick, the most realistic of trees, cats, night clouds, or the moon behind them become infected with this reverse subjunctivity” (44).

Delany defines science fiction as “events that have not happened” (44). He divides this

into several categories: events that might happen, events that will not happen (these involve estrangement through the laws of nature), events that have not happened yet, and events that have not happened in the past (44). This distinction provides a useful way to approach the fantasy/science fiction conflict that is so distinctive in Tepper's works.

Tepper sets up both *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* and *A Plague of Angels* to be informed by the subjunctivity of science fiction. Her tales are obvious warnings, self-conscious in their preaching of "this has not happened... yet." Humans have not created hibernation tanks to replace prisons--yet. Humanity has not been so thoroughly overrun with IDDI's that the raising of non-infected children is an economic imperative--yet. Men are not chasing women out of the streets--yet. Humans have not been forced back to the agricultural age--yet. However, both titles build to the discovery that a super-natural force is at work to solve humanity's problems. The fact that the books so carefully maintain the science fictional tone of warning throughout the story means that Delany's pronouncement does not apply. The first event, too bizarre to be anything but supernatural, does not cause a shift in subjectivity in Tepper's novels. She concludes both novels with a final science-fictional element accompanied by a warning.

In the case of *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* two elements remind the reader that this is indeed science fiction: the jewel-coloured vials filled with a viral carrier that will change the DNA of the entire human race, and the habitation pod that will keep Webster trapped in an immobile and unthinking body for all of eternity. When the vials are given to the DFC, Sophy offers this last warning: "Remember the stories you have told me of yourselves, remember the stories I have told you of others. Remind yourselves how your world has always been. Much was His fault, but as much was not" (454). The tone of the

novel returns resolutely to “this has not happened yet”: patriarchy did not destroy the world in this fictional scenario, but it still could, if Carolyn has not chosen wisely, just as it could still destroy ours.

Similarly, in *A Plague of Angels*, it is the library that marks the final signpost of science fictive subjunctivity. The library is a device made in the Edge to store not just written but also sensory data and to correlate it to create meaningful answers to questions. It is recognizable to the science fiction reader as a kind of advanced computer containing an artificial intelligence to sort data and make connections. Abasio accesses the library and discovers that Olly has managed to imprint her personality on it. This event both grounds the conclusion in human technology and provides a final warning by transmitting the seven answers that Olly gave the thrones. The warning is stringent. When Hunagor wants to know why they had to go so far to correct human behaviour, Olly answers:

I said that men will not solve a problem unless they can find an ‘acceptable’ solution, and there are no acceptable solutions to some problems. [. . .] I told them what Oracle had taught me: that man believes what man wants to believe, and he always wants to believe that next time will be different. [. . .] The end is in the beginning. If children are taught to ignore their minds and merely believe, grown men will never do otherwise. (555-6)

Despite the intervention of fantasy elements in order to solve the threat to the human race, both novels remain resolutely science fictive in tone: they will not allow a reader to escape their implications by discarding them as mere fantasy, events that could not happen.

So, what has **Tepper** gained by introducing **fantastic elements** in a text that is resolutely science fictive? A look at the theory underpinning the fantasy genre is illuminating. **Le Guin** posits that **fantasy is important** for its ability to connect in a meaningful manner to the unconscious mind of the reader:

The great fantasies, myths, and tales are indeed like dreams: they speak from the unconscious to the unconscious, in the language of the unconscious--symbol and archetype. Though they use words, they work the way music does: they short-circuit verbal reasoning, and go straight to the thoughts that lie too deep to utter. [. . .] They are profoundly meaningful, and usable--practical--in terms of ethics; of insight; of growth. (62)

Rosemary Jackson makes this idea more rational and explicit. She envisions fantasy as a literature of subversion: "The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made 'absent'" (4). In other words, by dealing with what could not exist, fantasy highlights the boundaries between the real and the unreal, showing them to be fragile constructions. As Cranny-Francis puts it:

Fantasy thereby shows the fragmentation of the real, revealing the real as a negotiation of conflicting discourses engendered by specific socio-economic conditions and denying the definition of the real commonly proposed in realist texts as an essentially unchanging product of an essentially unchanging 'human nature'. (76)

A need to question the boundaries of existence does not spring from nothing, "fantasy

characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss” (Jackson 3). Le Guin observes that fantasy tends to explore the moral aspect of reality. The edges of reality are not only investigated, but judged: “Most great fantasies contain a very strong, striking moral dialectic, often expressed as a struggle between the Darkness and the Light” (65). With such a characteristic it is easy to see that the result of fantastic literature’s investigation of the real is not necessarily subversive. Jackson identifies its two functions as expressing desire and expelling desire (3). Nonetheless, in the context of feminist fiction, elements of fantasy can be very useful in questioning the patriarchal world-view prevalent in our society. Its impact remains in its ability to step outside the boundaries in a way that impacts upon the reader. As Le Guin says:

[F]antasy is true, of course. It isn’t factual, but it is true. Children know that. Adults know it too, and that is precisely why many of them are afraid of fantasy. They know that its truth challenges, even threatens, all that is false, all that is phony, unnecessary, and trivial in the life they have let themselves be forced into living. (44)

Fantasy can be used for a purpose that blends nicely with Tepper’s utilization of science fiction.

Given the literary effect of fantasy, it is only logical that in Tepper’s novels it problematizes the audience’s construction of the real. The fantastic intervention effectively disrupts the materialist, rational, secular viewpoint that has informed both the idea of progress and most of science fiction. Any readers trundling along waiting for a rational explanation for Sophy’s ghostly appearances at the beginning of the novel, for a

rational solution to the growing woman-hatred plaguing the world, or for a human power behind the book-burning teams will not have their expectations satisfied. The idea that technology and progress will be able to solve any problem that arises is flatly contradicted by the fantastic way in which these problems are resolved. In one book, powerful angelic beings solve the problems of humankind; in the other, an alien being calls upon an alien goddess, telling her what help is needed to right the balance of the world and receiving her assistance. Both of these powers are super-natural. Directly refuting the idea that scientific progress will solve any problem, Stace's husband Luce comments:

It's like hard science fiction. [. . .] You got a problem? Somebody better figure it out, maybe build a machine to solve it. You got a situation? Somebody'll invent something to handle it. That's the plot of a thousand stories. [. . .] I'm part of a generation of kids, boys mostly, that was raised to believe there's no problem we can't solve; that somebody--some elite--will always come up with something. [. . .] We don't need to change *people* so long as *somebody* can come up with a technical fix! [. . .] It's got to be somebody else, some elite. The people who create the problem won't solve it. [. . .] Miners and manufacturers and lumbermen believe destroying the earth is acceptable because it means jobs. [. . .] Someone else has to solve things. [. . .] All of us, we've got ourselves in a mess, so we're expecting somebody else to get us out. But what if it's like AIDS? What if they can't? (257, emphasis in original)

Technology proves insufficient to the task of creating and maintaining a successful,

balanced and just society. The rational world-view is disrupted by the introduction of fantastic figures. The simple blending of fantasy and science fiction conventions has a great impact on the world-view expressed in *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* and *A Plague of Angels*.

By using a form that strongly rejects a secular, materialist world-view, Tepper opens up lines of communication to a group that is strongly criticized in her novels. Tepper shows that she does condone spiritual beliefs when she uses a goddess and angels to right the ills that plague humanity. She is not flatly rejecting the idea that there could be a higher power watching over the universe, a being with the ability to intervene if required, and an interest in the goodness of the endeavours of humanity. This forms a sharp contrast to much science fiction which embraces a technophilic, secular world-view. In the light of her virulent attacks on religion in both books, discussed earlier, this is very important. She maintains credibility to readers who are spiritual and religious by indicating a willingness to believe in a higher power. Her use of religious characters is important too. In a conversation about the book, Karen Lange³ noted that she had found the spiritual aspect more plausible because the person who was seeing spiritual visions of Sophy was the person who was already religious, and therefore most prone to believe in the intervention of a higher power. By inserting a fantastic element in the form of a goddess and a god's traditional deputies, Tepper increases her chances of communicating meaningfully with the totality of her audience.

The use of fantasy to resolve problems Tepper portrays as inherent in today's society has the effect of intensifying the urgency of her message. Tepper does not offer a practical solution to the problems that her two novels warn against. Instead, her

resolutions are strongly fictive. Waiting around for them to occur in the real world seems fruitless with regard to *Gibbon's Decline and Fall*, and downright undesirable, if improbable, in relation to *A Plague of Angels*. Having received the warning about the inherent instability of human society and the individual beings it produces, the reader is left with the knowledge that a solution is urgently required. Since no real answer is provided, readers are thrown back onto their own resources. Unless they come up with ways to help change the patriarchal attitudes that currently guide the world's destiny, nothing will be done.

What initially strikes the unsuspecting reader as a dastardly use of fantasy in a novel that ought to be and comports itself as straight science fiction, turns out to be a clever and original mixing of genres in the interests of furthering the feminist cause. The disruption of the rationalist world-view acts to rupture the seamlessness of patriarchal discourse. The addition of a spiritual belief to the text reaches out to those who have faith in a higher power, either as part of an organized religion or as part of an agnostic belief system. The resolution of the text with impracticable solutions adds urgency to the tone of warning pervading it. Both *Gibbon's Decline and Fall* and *A Plague of Angels* use an admixture of fantasy conventions for feminist purposes, disrupting the metanarrative of traditional science fiction.

³Conversation took place on July 13, 1999 in Ottawa.

Conclusion

Tepper's science fiction represents how feminist science fiction might have evolved were it not for the ascendance of media-delivered post-feminist ideology in the late '80s and '90s. Her techniques for reclaiming science fiction from the patriarchal nature of its conventions rest upon the work done by feminist science fiction and fantasy writers between the late '60s and the late '80s. In some cases, she further develops the techniques handed down to her. However, the changing social contexts of the past decade and a half have meant that she is virtually alone in her approach to science fiction. Other feminist writers seem to have retreated from radical statements about patriarchal oppression and refocused on the independence and capability of women characters. This thesis has paved the way for an investigation of the evolution of feminist science fiction during the '90s. It will be interesting to see which feminist ideas and techniques have managed to survive the transition to a more covert, less deconstructive feminist science fiction genre.

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