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The *SFRA Review* encourages submissions of reviews, review essays that cover several related texts, interviews, and feature articles. Submission guidelines are available at <http://www.sfra.org/> or by inquiry to the appropriate editor. All submitters must be current SFRA members. Contact the Editors for other submissions or for correspondence.

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fiction comic which gives the reader “classics and SF, and nothing in between” (309).

Whereas a classics scholar may be confused by the different approaches to defining and originating science fiction, *Classical Traditions in Science Fiction* is a particularly helpful work in orienting science fiction scholars toward a more historical approach to the genre. The work shows that even the most advanced and surreal worlds of science fiction hark back to classical origins in their reflections on humanity, knowledge, and ethics.

Quando la fantascienza è donna: Dalle utopie femminili del secolo XIX all'età contemporanea

Giulia Iannuzzi

Eleonora Federici. *Quando la fantascienza è donna: Dalle utopie femminili del secolo XIX all'età contemporanea*. Rome, Italy: Carocci editore, December 2015. Paperback, 190 pages, € 19.00. ISBN: 9788843077953.

UNFORTUNATELY, there is no science fiction studies undergraduate or postgraduate course in Italy, but students interested in writing their thesis on sf related topics, in American, English or Comparative Studies, will thank Eleonora Federici for this solid study of women's sf in English.

When Science Fiction is a She: From XIX Century Feminine Utopias to Contemporary Age [translations from the Italian are mine] offers a synthetic but comprehensive historical and critical profile of sf written by women, and of feminist utopian and sf texts. The matter is organized in a roughly chronological macro-structure (with moments of overlap accounting for the co-existence of different coeval tendencies in various decades).

The six main chapters are preceded by an introduction which answers the question “Why a female sf?” defining the object of study. Following the footsteps of scholars such as Jenny Wolmark (1994) and Marleen Barr (1992), Federici argues that sf written by women has offered, throughout the decades, a new relevance and characterization of female figures, as

well as alternative—*alien* in some respects—points of view, able to subvert consolidated social and cultural categories.

Despite sf being traditionally perceived as a male-dominated area of literary production and circulation, since the nineteenth-century women writers have found in utopian and science fictional tropes exceptional tools to deconstruct gender relations and the normative power of dominant discourses.

In fact, the subject matter of sf written by women—and in which the *alterity* of feminine writing is thematized—calls for a delimitation to be fit into a volume, which is established and justified with clarity in the introduction, and which passes the test of subsequent chapters. Federici's study is focused on English-language authors (given the centrality of the Anglo-Saxon cultural area in the trans-national genre field, but also the author's own competencies and interests, for Federici is Professor of English language and translation in Naples) and proceeds through selections—though extensive—of exemplary authors and works.

The first chapter is dedicated to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, examined as a cornerstone of (not only women's) sf, and a seminal work in exploring conventions of women's genre writing, such as the relationship between the feminine and monstrosity, and the problematization of techno-science's influence on the body. In this chapter the treatment of the secondary bibliography is exemplary: Federici's history of women's sf also includes a history of feminist sf criticism and, in many instances, of feminist thought. Through each chapter, footnotes and references point readers to seminal non-sf-oriented critical works such as Gilbert and Gubar or Cixous as well as to an impressive array of secondary sources (in which emerges Federici's long-lasting familiarity with issues of feminisms in genre literature), making this volume a crowning achievement for Federici's long writing career.

The second chapter, devoted to utopian narrations between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, includes useful comparisons between the British and the American contexts and authors (many of whom have never been translated into Italian).

The subsequent chapter explores the female presence in the genre between the 1920s and the 1960s, including early pulps, dystopias written between the two World Wars, and authors quite different from

each other, such as C. L. Moore, Leigh Brackett, and Judith Merril, the latter also discussed in relation to her participation with the Futurians (again, through the looking glass of women's sf, the reader is able to retrace a broader history of the genre and of historical shifts in culture and society at large). The third chapter concludes with the astronauts and space-ships of Naomi Mitchison and Anne McCaffrey, on the verge of the feminist utopias of the Seventies, to which the next chapter is devoted.

Here, the recognition of thought experiments offset in primitive and separatist utopias takes into account the new role that a harmonic relationship with nature and a spiritual dimension play in narratives such as Sally Miller Gearhart's novels, and the critical role of reflections on language and memory, and the body, in Marge Piercy *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976). In the same chapter, after discussion of the amazons and travelers of Joanna Russ' *Picnic on Paradise* (1968) and Suzy McKee Charnas' *Holdfast Chronicles* series (1974–1999), some pages dwell upon Ursula K. Le Guin's work before closing the chapter with one of the most interesting sections of the book, devoted to liminality and language, which includes brief analyses of Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue* trilogy (1984–1994) and Joanna Russ' *The Female Man* (1975), among others.

An ample fifth chapter accounts for technology, cyborgs, and cyberfeminism, outlining two main approaches of women sf writers to technology, seen as an instrument of emancipation from the biological constraints of the maternal role, or, critically, as a tool that allows for an unwanted manipulation of the body. From Alice Sheldon and Tanith Lee, to Donna Haraway and Marge Piercy, cyborgs and cyberspaces have offered new occasions to rethink gender identities and roles. Before concentrating on Pat Cadigan's work, Federici's overall critical assessment of the cyberpunk movement points out that the sub-genre canon is quite male-oriented (e.g. in the average choice and construction of main characters) and usually fails to exploit the sub-genre's potential for the subversion of traditional gender roles (following the critical steps of Fred Pfeil and Andrew Ross).

The sixth and final chapter offers original reflections on authors such as Connie Willis—who Federici reads with reference to 1980s–1990s Women's History and as a forerunner, in many respects, of New Historicism approaches—and Octavia E. Butler. Brief notes are then devoted to the deconstruction

of androcentric and heteronormative perspectives in lesbian and queer authors such as Camarin Grae, Jean Stewart, Judith Katz, Nicola Griffith, and to anglophone diasporic authors including Nalo Hopkinson and Andrea Hairston.

In conclusion, Federici manages to provide an extensive overview and a very synthetic yet very rich critical appraisal through close attention to common threads in women's sf: the centrality of the body and its relationships with technology, the power of language and narrations of history, and the deconstruction of hegemonic cultures and gender roles via a multitude of narrative devices.

The book fills a specific gap on the Italian market, updating a critical tradition established by scholars such as Antonio Caronia, Vita Fortunati, Carlo Pagetti, and Oriana Palusci among others. And the Italian reader will be pleased to find the systematic indication of (usually invisible) translators of the Italian editions of works cited, while she/he may be surprised by the publisher's choice of the cover image—a half-dressed yellow-blond woman, handcuffed and being dragged away by a macho military-like astronaut, while two other women are tied to a couple of columns or rockets in the background (the illustration is uncredited, but looks like a detail from a typical pulp magazine illustration). But, of course, one may read this as an intentional ironic visual counter melody to the book.

After the extensive works cited lists of primary and secondary sources, an index would have been useful (and was expected, as the publisher, Carocci, is renowned in Italy for its scholarly editions in the humanities). This, however, is an editorial detail that doesn't diminish the interest and quite exclusive position of Federici's work in the Italian market and scholarly field.

Science Fiction Research Association

www.sfra.org

The Science Fiction Research Association is the oldest professional organization for the study of science fiction and fantasy literature and film. Founded in 1970, the SFRA was organized to improve classroom teaching; to encourage and assist scholarship; and to evaluate and publicize new books and magazines dealing with fantastic literature and film, teaching methods and materials, and allied media performances. Among the membership are people from many countries—students, teachers, professors, librarians, futurologists, readers, authors, booksellers, editors, publishers, archivists, and scholars in many disciplines. Academic affiliation is not a requirement for membership. Visit the SFRA Website at www.sfra.org. For a membership application, contact the SFRA Treasurer or see the Website.

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