

Pearson, Wendy Gay, Veronica Hollinger, and Joan Gordon, eds. *Queer Universes: Sexualities in Science Fiction*. 2008. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010. 285 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1-84631-135-2 / 978-1-84631-501-5. \$35.95.

First published in 2008 and newly available in paperback, Wendy Pearson, Veronica Hollinger, and Joan Gordon's anthology is comprised of ten scholarly essays on sexuality in sf (two, by Wendy Pearson and Rob Latham, previously published), a dialogue between Nicola Griffith and Kelley Eskridge, and an interview with Nalo Hopkinson. The collection, part of Liverpool University Press's Science Fiction Texts and Studies series, continues to be the only critical book explicitly devoted to the convergences and intersections of sf and queer theory. The subtitle, *Sexualities in Science Fiction*, could easily describe a set of essays that would lay out the range of sexual possibilities that have so far appeared in sf stories, along the lines of an update on Eric Garber and Lynn Paleo's 1980 bibliographic catalogue *Uranian Worlds*. Pearson, Hollinger, and Gordon's introduction, however, makes it clear that the collection's goal is far more ambitious. From the epigraphic suggestion by J. B. S. Haldane that "the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we can suppose" onward, *Queer Universes* insists that both queer theory and sf share certain attitudes and commitments (1). Both open their readers' minds to the idea that worlds, people, bodies, and desires can be—and are—different than the norms mundane, straight realisms discipline us to expect. The essays in the collection show how sf scholarship can take up the challenge that this implies, and incite broader and deeper engagements with what it might mean to look at the universe from both queer and science-fictional perspectives.

The "queer" of queer theory offers a far more expansive set of possibilities than just the inclusion of LGBT subjects into formerly straight narratives, although the importance of such inclusion is never ignored (and is particularly addressed in the contribution by Griffith and Eskridge). Pearson, Hollinger, and Gordon explain queer critique as the undermining of exclusionary sexual norms, a radical political project that joins "feminist, postcolonial, postmodern, and critical race theories" to "make visible the naturalized epistemologies of sexuality, gender and race" that underline constructions of what it means to be human (6). As such, "sexuality never exists as a discrete category, but is always inflected by class, gender, race, religion, and nationality" (2). Among the collection's most important contributions are this cogent introduction and the thoughtful organization, which lays out how an expansive definition of queer can help rethink approaches to literary sf. We are urged in the collection's four sections to look queerly at the basic forms of genre ("Queering the Scene"), at sf's development over time ("Un/Doing History"), at the breadth of sexual possibilities, it enables ("Disordering Desires") and at new construc-

tions of possible futures that could emerge from all this (“Embodying New Worlds”).

The first section, “Queering the Scene,” offers two foundational texts as entry points for thinking about queer sf. The first of two essays by Pearson, “Alien Cryptographies: The View From Queer,” reprints an influential article first published in *Science Fiction Studies*’ 1999 special issue on queer theory. Laying out ways to think about sf queerly that go beyond the appearance of “visible gay or lesbian character[s]” within still-heteronormative plots (15), Pearson analyzes queer moments in ostensibly straight sf texts in order to show sf’s capacity to “interrogate . . . sexual subjectivities” (34). Cited again and again in the essays that follow, Pearson’s field-defining article sets the stage for the rest of the collection. It is followed by a conversation between queer sf writers Nicola Griffith and Kelley Eskridge, whose autobiographical contemplations offer first-person examples of the limitations of identity politics, and of a publishing world determined to narrow the breadth of queer experience to predetermined genre categories. Griffith and Eskridge’s often humorous, entertaining prose supplies a nonacademic and accessible—yet still complex—introduction to some of the ideas Pearson theorizes.

Section 2, “Un/Doing History,” showcases ways of thinking queerly about sf’s past. Rob Latham’s “Sextrapolation in New Wave Science Fiction” offers the most traditional literary history, taking us through the publishing history of the 1950s and 1960s to show some of the material conditions under which representations of queered sexuality within sf became possible. Next is a new essay by Pearson, “Towards a Queer Genealogy of SF,” which turns to John Greyson’s 1993 AIDS film *Zero Patience*, Geoff Ryman’s 1990 *The Child Garden*, and Theodore Sturgeon’s 1960 *Venus Plus X* to demonstrate how queering sf lets us engage with the pleasures and dangers of “becom[ing] different through the act of reading, of opening ourselves to the flow of possibilities, of new ideas, of new bodies” (73). The last two essays in this section, Guy Davidson’s “Sexuality and the Statistical Imaginary in Samuel R. Delany’s *Trouble on Triton*” and Graham J. Murphy’s “Stray Penetration and Heteronormative Systems Crash: Queering Gibson” offer analyses of Delany and Gibson that are inflected by queer scholarship on the history of sexuality. Both offer new insights into the construction of sexuality that go beyond the obvious queerness of Delany’s text and the obvious straightness of Gibson’s, but are likely to be of most interest to those already engaged with criticism on these writers.

The third section on “Disordering Desires” focuses on the mechanics of sex in sf. Hollinger’s “Something Like a Fiction: Speculative Intersections of Sexuality and Technology” is a comprehensive and impressively concise tour through sf’s encoding of sexuality at the intersection of technology and culture, from Lester del Rey’s classic 1938 fembot story “Helen O’Loy” through Cordwainer Smith, William Gibson, Samuel R. Delany, and Philip K. Dick,

to a sustained engagement with the politicized speculative embodiments of Joanna Russ's 1975 *The Female Man*. Patricia Melzer's "And How Many Souls Do You Have': Technologies of Perverse Desire and Queer Sex in Science Fiction Erotica" and Sylvie Berard's "BDSMSF(QF): Sadoomasochistic Readings of Quebecois Women's Science Fiction" both engage with structures of desire and embodiment that are common in queer subcultures but may be less familiar to some scholars of sf. Melzer's exploration of transgendered and disabled bodies as sources of erotic subjectivity in Cecilia Tan's sf erotica offers a sexy summation of politicized erotica's most successful attempts to articulate non-exclusionary desire. Melzer's essay is also valuable for its willingness to move beyond the canonical texts on which most contributions focus. Likewise, Berard widens that canon beyond the Anglophone in her study of sadoomasochistic imagery in Quebecois women's sf, showing how BDSM culture's "safe, sane, and consensual" dynamics of erotic power play work themselves out in fiction by Elisabeth Vonarburg, Esther Rochon, and Karoline Georges.

Pearson, Hollinger, and Gordon describe the final section, "Embodying New Worlds," as "concentrat[ing] on the impossibility of disentangling discourses of sexuality from those of race and gender in the imaginative effort to construct new futures" (9). The section opens with Nancy Johnson's interview with Nalo Hopkinson, who connects her fiction's refusal of heteronormative limitations on sexuality to its simultaneous inability to be limited by colonial and white supremacist racializing narratives. The last two essays offer some of the volume's broadest critiques. In "Queering Nature: Close Encounters with the Alien in Ecofeminist Science Fiction," Helen Merrick draws on ecofeminism, a discursive mode often critiqued for gender essentialism, and demonstrates recent queer updates to its critiques of gendered discourses of the natural through a reading of several novels, including Amy Thomson's 1995 *The Color of Distance*. Merrick argues that sf's encounters between women and aliens can unsettle the relationship between humanity and nature that is implied by normative subjectivity. Finally, De Witt Douglas Kilgore engages with one of sf's most embedded tropes, the idea of the future evolution of the human race, in "Queering the Coming Race: A Utopian Historical Imperative?" After delineating the history of this trope and its nineteenth- and twentieth-century imbrication with eugenics, colonialism, and white supremacy, he offers a reading of Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars trilogy (*Red Mars* [1992], *Green Mars* [1993], *Blue Mars* [1996]) that highlights the possibilities for making even the relatively straight historical timeline of evolutionary development function queerly.

Queer Universes' primary audience is those already engaged in the study of sf as a literary genre; its goal is to demonstrate why that audience must be attentive to the queer cultural politics that has emerged in fiction, practice, and theory over the past few decades. The essays collected here achieve that

goal with impressive scope. But, after reading the deconstructions of various traditions in which the contributors engage, it is difficult not to wonder why so few of the essays venture outside an established culture and canon of sf. Recent works of queer theory by scholars like Judith Halberstam, Jose Esteban Muñoz, and Elizabeth Freeman show how queer art participates in many of the world- and desire-imagining practices that we may be accustomed to associating with a narrowly defined “science fiction.” There are queerer science-fictional universes yet out there, in theory and in media and in social and cultural practice, and these are being documented by scholars who may not participate in genre criticism. If queer sf studies is to have a future, it must be willing to queer sf itself.

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