

FOR FANS BY FANS: EARLY SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM
AND THE FANZINES

by

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ABSTRACT

FOR FANS BY FANS: EARLY SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM AND THE FANZINES

Rachel Anne Johnson

The fanzines, which combine the words “fan” and “magazine,” are the print products for fans by fans. Many current fan practices—fanspeak (jargon), conventions, cosplay—all have their foundation in the early days of science fiction fandom from the 1930s to 1950s. However, current science fiction criticism often overlooks the earliest fanzines. The academic neglect of these literary artifacts propagates a false history of science fiction and erases gendered and liminal voices from the foundational years of fandom.

To validate the form, this thesis explores multiple layers of fandom and the fanzines, including the active engagement of fan culture; parallels between fandom and modernism; and female-authored contributions to science fiction. These neglected literary documents are far from being negligible offsprings of a disposable literature. In fact, the fanzines exemplify the active reading of genre fiction; the creation of a networked community of readers; and the development of multiple liminal voices.

INTRODUCTION

Under the looming threat of US involvement in World War II, a group of aspiring writers banded together in a Brooklyn apartment, which they cleverly referred to as “The Ivory Tower.” While the Ivory Tower was home to four young writers, the apartment served as headquarters for a larger group of rising talent. The communal living arrangements certainly had economic benefits for a group of individuals trying to break into the professional world of publishing, but more importantly, the Ivory Tower nurtured their developing talents through easy access to endless feedback and collaboration. These future authors, editors, and agents maintained an air of elitism over their peers, leading one frequent visitor to write that the Ivory Tower ““is nothing more or less than a shell or an attitude built up by several people to separate their group from the general mass of people. It is a method for keeping the group intact at the expense of everything else. The group tries to deny the existence of anybody except its members”” (qtd. in Pohl 97). Although unsuccessful, the group’s attempts to block the outside world ultimately created an exceedingly close-knit community. As one member explains in his memoir, the Ivory Tower “was [the] solar plexus for [our] nerve network for the next couple of years...there was a floating population of whatever other [members] chose to crash for a while, and all of us used it as an operating base” (97). These shared physical spaces fostered experimentation and collaboration, while simultaneously creating a subcultural community, and they published small-circulation coterie magazines that featured their fiction and ideas. Given these qualities, one might expect the group of writers in and around the Ivory Tower to be yet another coterie group of highbrow modernists rather than the home of the science fiction fan club the Futurian Science Literary Society. The magazines that they produced were the earliest fanzines.

My goal is to draw critical attention to these often-overlooked fanzines and validate them as significant literary documents rising out of fan culture. While fandom studies is a burgeoning field, this area of study often neglects its own foundational history, and in so doing inadvertently creates its own canon that privileges television and film fandom over literary production. Many current fan practices—fanspeak (jargon), conventions, cosplay—all have their foundation in the early days of science fiction (sf) fandom. Even the established academic field of periodical studies ignores these early publications despite the critical attention to their offspring, for example, riot grrrl zines.

One reason behind this academic neglect of sf fanzines is that they stem from popular genre fiction, which often is disregarded by academia as simple entertainment; but, as evidenced by the brief vignette of the Futurians' Ivory Tower, the early fans interacted with sf in a way that extends far beyond escapism. Ultimately, this project is about early sf fan culture (from 1930s to 1950s), and more specifically, the fanzine. This broad scope, for a difficult to define form, at times necessitates some over-arching claims regarding the general form. Making large claims about such a rich fan culture and array of publication, involves a certain level of reductivism, which I try to avoid by focusing each of the following sections on a specific aspect or form of fan culture and the fanzine, though all are aspects of the same burgeoning dynamic.

First, I examine the active engagement of fan culture with professional materials, which challenges notions of passive readership. Second, I explore the coterie nature of early sf fandom in relation to modernist coteries as well as the similarities between little magazines and fanzines. Finally, I present close readings of Judith Merrill's professional and amateur work and survey sf fandom's influence in the creation of Edythe Eyde's *Vice Versa*, the first lesbian magazine. Through examining these multiple, but interwoven, layers of sf fan culture and their material

artifacts, this project contends that fanzines, far from being negligible offsprings of a disposable literature, exemplify the active reading of genre fiction; the creation of a networked community of readers; and the development of multiple liminal voices.

What is a Fanzine?

The fanzines, which combine the words “fan” and “magazine,” are the print products for fans by fans. The first fanzine, *The Time Traveller*, appeared in 1932 and the fanzines multiplied exponentially following its success.¹ They were amateur undertakings even though they often contained professional contributions, and they varied widely in size, contents, and quality. For the most part, fanzines were patterned after the science fiction pulp magazines, which fans called “prozines,” and included many of the same features and departments. The pulp magazines were popular and sensational all-fiction magazines made from inexpensive wood-pulp paper that flourished during the first half of the twentieth century. The prozines had numerous other departments besides fiction; they included scientific articles, editorials, illustrations, letters to the editor, and reader polls. Similar to their professional counterparts, most fanzines were a collaborative production rather than the work of a sole creator.

Given their amateur nature, the exact number of fanzines produced is difficult to gauge. The only extensive catalog of early fanzines is Bob Pavlat and Bill Evans’s *Fanzine Index*, which lists approximately two thousand titles.² Even after this exhaustive effort, the compilers readily admit that the work is not inclusive. Fan historian Harry Warner, Jr. states, “One tabulation

¹ There is not a complete consensus over the true “first” fanzine. Some cite *The Planet* and others *The Comet*, but *The Time Traveller* has more in common with the general trends that developed in the subsequent fanzines.

² The titles in the index are not numbered, so this estimate was achieved through gaining an estimated average of the titles listed per page (14) and multiplying it with the total page count (141) for a total of 1,974.

showed 47 different fanzines publishing one or more issues in 1940. ... This output rose to 95 titles in 1945” (“History” 177). However, these numbers do not include “apazines,” which were fanzines produced for an Amateur Publishing Association (APA): “an organization that produces a publication consisting of fanzines or other works created by its members, which are sent to an editor who collates them and distributes the bundle of combined works back to the members” (Prucher 9). Many apazines were a form of direct criticism and communication between APA members and are more exclusive in audience and content than fanzines.³

Technological developments in printing allowed fans to reach a wider audience with their unique contributions to fandom and sf. A brief examination of the *Fanzine Index* shows that the majority of fanzines were mimeographed, but the fans used a wide variety of printing methods such as hectograph, carbon copies, handwritten, and print. It is difficult to trace circulation data because no public venues sold fanzines, but Warner estimates that “the majority of fanzines must have appeared in editions ranging from 100 to 250 copies, rarely selling more than two-thirds of the total press run” (*Yesterdays* 352). Some fanzines sold for cash, and others operated on a system of reciprocity. In these cases, an article, story, or letter that appeared in a fanzine would automatically result in a complimentary copy for the contributor. Materially, the fanzines were generally standard letter size, sometimes folded in half, and bound with staples. Damon Knight outlines the steps involved in creating a mimeographed fanzine in his memoir *The Futurians*: “The editor cut the stencils himself, ran them off, collated the sheets, stapled the magazines, mailed them to an exchange list of other fan editors and to a few paid subscribers, and waited for the letters of comment which, far more than cash, are the rewards of amateur publishing” (8). Of

³ For more information about apazines, see Bernadette Bosky’s chapter, “Amateur Press Associations: Intellectual Society and Social Intellectualism” in Joe Sanders collection *Science Fiction Fandom*.

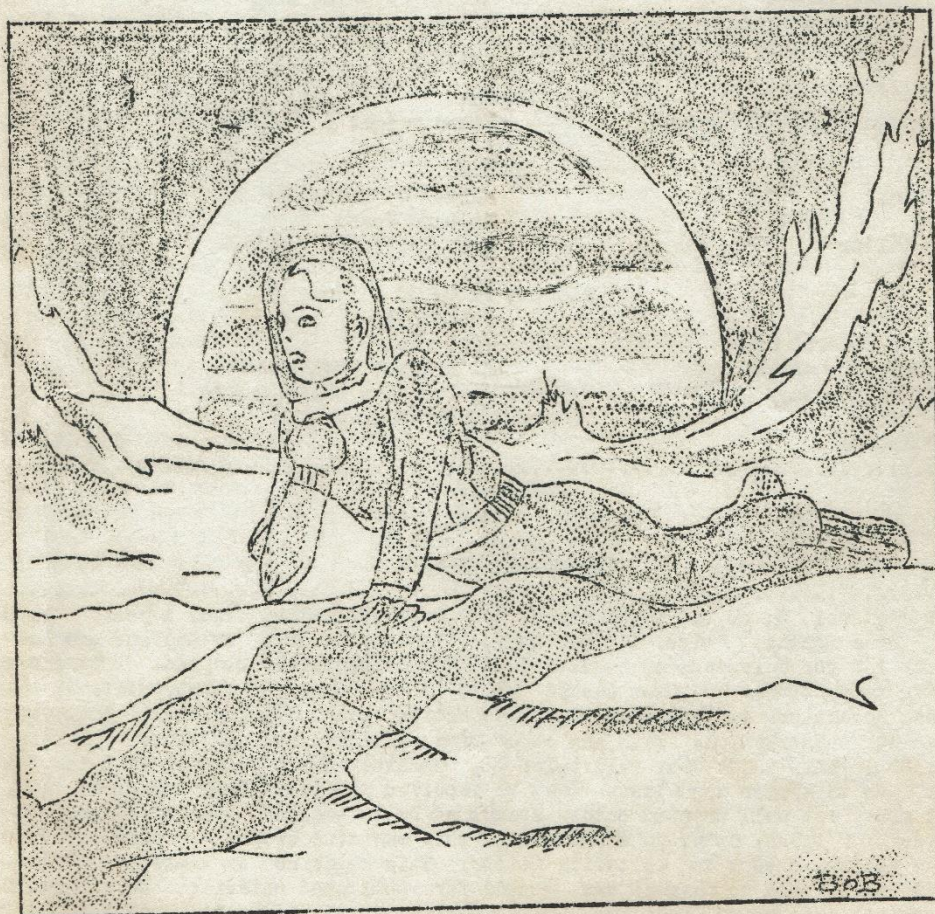
course, with the wide variation and extreme proliferation of these early fanzines, it can be difficult to apply a singular definition.

Harry Warner's fanzine, *Spaceways*, accurately exemplifies a typical fanzine.⁴ *Spaceways* had a four year run and largely emulated the professional sf magazines. Warner wanted to keep the virulent debates and personal attacks out of his own fanzine, so he adopted an editorial policy that discarded all salacious material: "Opinions expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of the editor, except in editorial matter...Do not submit manuscripts concerning political, religious, or similarly controversial topics" (*Spaceways* 2). He removes himself from any potential controversy with a standard disclaimer about the larger arguments of the fiction not reflecting his own personal beliefs. The purpose of *Spaceways* is to supply fans with more fiction, poetry, letters, and news. Although he actively attempts to curb the political potential of the form, he is also contributing a safe space free from some of the hostilities inherent in fandom. Warner acts as a moderator of the open forum and although his contributions lack controversy (and hence are often ignored for flashier or more controversial titles), they strengthen the network of readers.

Spaceways was published from 1938 to 1942 and usually ran between 20 and 42 mimeographed 8x11 pages, stapled and bound with crudely illustrated covers. The sf pulps often inspired these covers and the illustrations depicted a variety of space landscapes and futuristic technology (Figure 1). Other fanzines might include typographical covers to keep production simple. Interior illustrations were usually simple line drawings and always monochromatic. The

⁴ Fanzines often emulate the prozines or heavily reflect the editor's personality. For example, Bob Tucker and Forrest J Ackerman's humorous fanzines reflect their own humor and opinions about fandom. This second type tends to focus more on aspects of fandom rather than sf.

Spaceways



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Figure 1. Example of an illustrated fanzine cover, illustration by Bob Jones.

authors were other fans, but some fanzines printed (or reprinted) fiction by established, professional authors. The magazine was composed almost entirely of fan contributions, from articles to fiction to letters.

Although *Spaceways* exemplifies a usual format for the fanzine, the purpose of this thesis is not to define the form. There will always be exceptions, and such an in-depth look at the true breadth of the early fanzines is far beyond the scope of a single paper. For the purposes of this project, the fanzines are the material products of reader involvement and active reading.

THE FANS WRITE THE GENRE: FANZINES, ACTIVE READING, AND PROFESSIONALIZATION

At the same time that fans were busy publishing fanzines and establishing fan clubs and conventions, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer published “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” one of the most damning indictments of mass entertainment. This influential essay is generally indicative of the academy’s stance on popular entertainment, at least until the rise of Cultural Studies. The arguments in “The Culture Industry” are a direct result of Adorno and Horkheimer witnessing the rise of Nazism, but the chapter condemns all forms of modern popular entertainment because they see it as eradicating critical thinking through its endless repetition. For Adorno and Horkheimer:

When the detail [idea or thought] won its freedom, it became rebellious and, in the period from Romanticism to Expressionism, asserted itself as free expression, as a vehicle of protest against organization. ...the totality of the culture industry has put an end to this. Though concerned exclusively with effects, it crushes their insubordination and makes them subserve the formula, which replaces the work.
(125-126)

The sameness of all entertainment marks the end of the “rebellious” detail. The culture industry, as Adorno and Horkheimer see it, acts as a form of psychological conditioning. The individual no longer chooses how to react; the standard conventions dictate the reaction. This reasoning removes an element of humanity from the individual and creates the image of the automaton, “Even though the effort required for his response is semi-automatic, no scope is left for the imagination. ...All the other films and products of the entertainment industry which they have seen have taught them what to expect; they react automatically” (127). The consumer loses all

sense of agency, and with it, the ability to question or challenge the barrage of advertisements embedded in entertainment. Adorno and Horkheimer's insist, "Pleasure always means not to think about anything, to forget suffering even where it is shown. Basically it is helplessness. It is flight; not, as is asserted, flight from a wretched reality, but from the last remaining thought of resistance. The liberation which amusement promises is freedom from thought and negation" (144). This assertion makes the viewer completely complicit in his or her passive consumption. Worse still is the idea that this barrage of soul-crushing entertainment is completely inescapable: "Marked differences such as those of A and B films, or of stories in magazines in different price ranges, depend not so much on subject matter as on classifying, organizing, and labelling consumers. Something is provided for all so that none may escape" (123). Through targeting specific consumer groups, mass entertainment becomes universal. The reach of Adorno and Horkheimer's culture industry portrays mass entertainment as a controlling force that tricks consumers into the passive consumption of entertainment and advertised goods or services.

I have gone into detail about Adorno and Horkheimer's essay because it illustrates the modernist mindset against which I hope to define the validity of fanzine. Other intellectuals, such as Aldous Huxley, parroted these attitudes and numerous studies on the reading and viewing practices of the American public supported Adorno and Horkheimer's conclusions. Such attitudes help explain the neglect of the sf fanzine.

Fandom and Active Reading

Fanzines directly challenge Adorno and Horkheimer's assumptions about genre fiction and passive audiences. Sf fandom relies on active participation at every level; otherwise, fandoms cannot survive. David G. Hartwell describes how fan involvement in sf culture is central to the very ethos of fandom:

a science fiction fan is not merely one who consumes or observes...SF fandom is made up of people engaging in one or more of the following activities: participating in local science fiction clubs or discussion groups...writing letters to magazines that publish SF; writing letters to other SF fans; attending regional or national SF conventions...publishing or participating in amateur publications about SF... [or] SF fandom. (216-217)

Hartwell's definition is applicable to a minority of sf readers, but the individuals producing sf content and creating networks of readers cannot be passive. Fans, therefore, escape from Adorno and Horkheimer's totality of the culture industry because they have a desire for entertainment that is not covered with the professional offerings. The fans are anything but complacent with sf as many fans fill the gaps with original fiction.

Besides Adorno and Horkheimer's assertion that entertainment breeds passivity, they also create a link between pleasure and boredom. In other words, pleasure and boredom are two sides of the same coin, and one that actively suppresses critical thought. Fanzines challenge the equation of pleasure and boredom because fans actively produce a print space for open debate, criticism, collaboration, and experimentation. In fact, the genre's founder, Hugo Gernsback, had political motivations for creating the first sf pulp magazine. He promoted active readership and set up the Science Fiction League, a nationwide network of sf fan clubs. Not only was he a technocrat who sought to triumph the rise of technology, but he was also a capitalist who had a stake in selling the technological devices that he promoted. Using fiction for such a purpose falls perfectly in line with the criticism that Adorno and Horkheimer level at mass entertainment; however, sf fans derailed Gernsback's goals through the abundant fan input that occurred "at every level" and "rapidly rose to transform the direction of the genre as a whole" (Ross 415-

416). No one remembers Gernsback for his technical magazines, but he is remembered for his sf pulps and his role in creating the genre.⁵

Fandom's reliance on active participation presents a great challenge to notions of passivity. The genre began with the intention to spur readers into action and help generate interest in the sciences. However, Gernsback's failure serves as an even greater reminder that readers were not passive vessels or automatons.

Common Criticism: Readers' Voices in the Magazines

The passionate responses in the letters to the editor sections directly influenced the fanzine dynamics. These letters helped establish the community and engaged fans in a critical conversation with the professional sf that sparked the creation of the sf fanzines. The fanzines from APAs were largely letters of comments on other fanzines and Forrest J Ackerman's *Voice of Imagi-Nation* only contained fan letters. Similar to the many personalities of the fanzines, the contents of these pulp letter sections vary widely, ranging from discussions of favorite stories to defining the parameters of the genre to explaining complex scientific principles and mathematical formulas. However, even the letters declaring a reader's favorite story are actively engaging with the text, making the reader a de facto literary critic. For example, Winifred Claire Eversleigh wrote a letter to *Amazing Stories* published in May 1934, stating:

The love life and adventures of Posi and Nega [two atoms] are quite a treat, and also original. Mr. Skidmore made these infinitesimals so human in their emotions and ambitions, and if Posi had "aired his knowledge" a little more, I would have been still more greatly delighted. However, he is such a dear little fellow even

⁵ His contributions to sf are memorialized through the Hugo Awards.

though he does aim high, I would like to keep in touch with him and his proud little consort. (139)

Eversleigh clearly outlines what she enjoys about the particular fiction story and provides specific suggestions for improvement. The letter exemplifies a general reader's level of involvement with the fiction and quality of discourse surrounding a commonly disregarded form and genre. The level of discourse for avid fans, both in the letters sections in the pulps and in fanzines, shows a much deeper engagement with the material and more specialized discourse. For example, letters sections of *Weird Tales*, the preeminent horror and fantasy pulp, throughout the 1920s discussed the relationships between different genres, debating inclusion and overlap of science fiction and "weird" detective stories in the magazine. Charles D. Hornig's well-respected *The Fantasy Fan* also contributed to the sf versus "weird" fiction debate in the editorial of his second issue, "We feel that the weird fans should also have a magazine for themselves - - hence THE FANTASY FAN. But don't get discouraged, you science-fiction guzzlers, we have dozens of articles composed just for you" (Hornig 13).

The letters sections offered a forum for debate between fans. Reader L. Westfall writes a letter in response to Mr. Kenton's attack of Francis Flagg's story in the August 1932 issue of *Wonder Stories*. Westfall writes, "Does Mr. Kenton realize that one of the authors he dismisses so sophomorically—Francis Flagg—has had a story win an honorable mention by the O. Henry Award?" (281). While Flagg did not outright win the award, the honorable mention sets his work above others. Critics may not find genre material worthy of academic analysis, but the fans often apply similar hierarchical and cultural standards. Here, Westfall's criticism of Kenton's dismissal stratifies community levels through a hierarchy of knowledge. Kenton's ignorance of Flagg's literary credentials automatically discredits his critique of Flagg's work. The prozines

selectively choose which letters to print, and thus the letters are not necessarily a representative sample of all readers, but the act of providing feedback troubles the idea of passive readership.

Even the letters that did not directly contribute to structuring the genre often sought out reader networks through clubs or conventions. For example, Wilson Shepherd wrote to *Amazing Stories* to recruit members for the International Science-Fiction Guild. Shepherd stresses the open and accepting nature of the community, “the only requirement to join is *A love for science-fiction*” (139, original emphasis). The rest of the letter outlines the steps to join before emphasizing the importance of developing reader networks: “To get what they want the readers and lovers of science-fiction must organize” (139). Shepherd’s letter does not directly contribute to a critical conversation about fiction in the prozines, but he attempts to create a network of readers that can, and will, mold the genre to suit personal tastes and preferences. In other words, he looks to create an active subculture based upon literature.

Genre fiction does not immediately promote passive consumption, as Adorno and Horkheimer and detractors of the pulp form would have it. If removed from the stigma of sf or the pulps, these fan letters would be accepted as contributions to a literary critical conversation (sometimes diluted, sometimes rigorous). However, the status of these individuals as fans undermines their critiques in most academic settings. Joli Jenson attempts to breakdown the us-versus-them dynamic between academics and fans, explaining, “the real dividing line between aficionado and fan...[is] differentiated not only on the basis of the status of their desired object, but also on the supposed nature of their attachment. The obsession of a fan is deemed emotional...and therefore dangerous, while the obsession of the aficionado is rational...and therefore benign, even worthy” (21). This new hybrid of fan and professional collapses and blurs the boundaries between rational and emotional attachment. The perceived lack of critical

distance between subject and object could explain the scholarly neglect and continued perception of genre fiction as promoting passivity. It is precisely these dedicated fans' closeness and passion for development and improvement that spurred the genre forward—out of the pages of the pulps and into a quickly growing cultural phenomenon.

Amateur v. Professional Dichotomy

Many fanzine writers, editors, and publishers made the jump to careers in professional magazines. The easy transition from fan to professional troubles boundaries between consumer and producer. Fans take on a plethora of roles—reader, writer, editor, critic, gatekeeper, artist, anthologist, tastemaker—and this is particularly true for the fans publishing fanzines. Fans, like professionals, operate within the expectation of active participation. To choose not to participate is to lose one's identity as a fan. As such, the commonplace professionalization of fans is a logical conclusion to the variety of their fan activities. A large majority of the Futurians ended up with a professional career in science fiction publishing, yet as Judith Merrill notes, "Most were without academic discipline; drop-outs, either from high school or after a short period in university" (Merrill and Pohl-Weary 43).⁶ In other words, the sole requisite for many of the professionals was an emotional investment in sf. After publishing one issue of *The Fantasy Fan*, 17-year-old fan Charles Hornig became a managing editor for Gernsback's *Wonder Stories*.

Besides fans turning their passion for sf into a career, fanzines and prozines often entered into direct conversations as "fannish" material passed into the prozines, as easily and frequently as professionals contributed to the fanzines. For example, Forrest J Ackerman's well-received fanzine, *Voice of the Imagi-Nation (VoM)* ran for 50 issues without ever containing more than

⁶ The Futurians had "ten novelists, a publisher, two literary agents, four anthologists, and five editors (with some overlapping roles)" (Knight vii).

letters. Warner states that “After 41 issues, someone with too much time to spare counted up and discovered that 687 letters and articles had already been published from the typewriters of 233 fans and even pros like E. E. Smith and A. Merritt” (*Yesterdays* 157). *VoM*’s ability to remain in print with quite an impressive list of contributors shows the discursive nature of fandom and its interaction with professional material.

The symbiosis worked both ways as fan material entered the prozines. *Future Fiction* “published fanzine-type articles” and *Startling Stories* contained “fanzine reviews regularly” (*Yesterdays* 56). Taking the blending of professional and fan one-step further, Bob Tucker’s August 1940 issue of his fanzine *Le Zombie* reports (Figure 2):

AH—THOSE MOGULS, THE PROFESSIONALS! DEPT: If you read the latest issue of Startling Stories from cover to cover, you will have learned that a new one has popped up: Margulies has selected six fans, “men who have been reading sciencefiction for the last decade,” six “famous fans” who are now to choose, each issue, a famous story from the past for reprinting in their “Hall of Fame” dept. (Tucker n.p.)

Here, *Startling Stories*, hands over the editorial choices to the fans. Although they are working within the limitations of reprints, the power to declare the best of the best resides with these six fans. In this way, the fans become anthologists and take the final step in the genesis from fan to tastemaker.

The professional sf editors and writers understood the importance of interacting with fanzine readers as a way to breed goodwill and promote their professional endeavors. The 1943-1944 Winter issue of *Nova*, a fanzine from the communal living experiment in Michigan

LE
ZOMBIE

AUGUST
1940
~
no. 31



FOR YOUR AL - BUM



-- the Washington wonder --

Jack Speer



(photo by HW, jr.)

Figure 2. Bob Tucker's *Le Zombie* covers often included an attached photograph.

known as the “Slan Shack,” also focuses on the relationship between fans and professionals.⁷

Alden H. Norton, editor of *Super Science* and *Astonishing Stories*, details the quality of feedback from all fans, “I have grown to respect fan letters...I have also found the average fan is quite generally fair and constructive in his criticisms as well as most explicit in what he likes and does not like. It is truly a rare and wonderful thing in the magazine business” (Norton 7). In general, fans tend to be the loudest supporters and critics, but the prozines must consider a larger readership. This need to balance the demands of both groups created the space (and desire) for specialty publications like the fanzines. The market for specialized content exemplifies that Adorno and Horkheimer’s culture industry is not universal in scope.

Although the fanzine rarely has monetary motivations, a wider readership expands the network, thus providing more content, more criticism, and more collaboration. Norton explains the symbiotic relationship with fanzines and *Super Science*:

We have a department which is, to a certain extent, a fan magazine within the book. But since it has to do with fandom in general rather than any definite group, and since it contains outstanding excerpts from fan magazines with due credit, it should help rather than hinder such books, both in a publicity sense and from a circulation angle. (7)

Norton’s statement curbs any resentment from fandom in encroaching on a niche market.

Similarly, editor Mary Gnaedinger’s article, “Prozines and Fanzines,” attempts to control self-promotion in fanzine announcements, but encourages critical conversations: “In the case of [*Famous Fantastic Mysteries*], we like to have announcements, included with criticisms or praise

⁷ “Slan” is the title of a short story by A.E. van Vogt that first appeared in the October 1940 issue of *Astounding Stories*. It later became a general term for sf fan.

of [our] material from fan editors, who write some of the most entertaining letters we have” (Gnaedinger 8). In other words, Gnaedinger wants the fans, especially those deeply involved in fandom, to provide constructive criticism. The professional editors are aware of the talent in fandom and seek to harness their enthusiasm to improve their own products.⁸

The early sf fans infiltrated every level of professional publishing and troubled standard hierarchies and gatekeeping practices in sf publishing. Rather than formal schooling or training, the new generation of fans-turned-editors achieved prominence through an understanding and knowledge of sf. Furthermore, the fans did not blindly accept the products of the culture industry as their prolific publishing and letter writing inspired a new form of entertainment: the fanzine. The onslaught of fan production completely refutes any notion of passivity. The academic neglect of fandom or popular genres reaffirms false dichotomies and hierarchies of culture. Adorno and Horkheimer’s influence continues to reinforce prejudice against the popular and, as such, we perpetuate false histories and exclude liminal voices. If we ignore the cultural devaluation of sf, we quickly discover that the extreme critical engagement led to the development of multiple coteries that mirror many aspects of highbrow modernism.

⁸ This type of behavior is still quite common today. Many video game companies use fans to beta test their games to help ensure a smooth release experience, which can make or break a game’s reception.

THE IVORY TOWER: SCIENCE FICTION, FAN COMMUNITIES, AND MODERNIST COTERIES

This section shows the ways that multiple fan groups and fan activities mimic the dynamics of modernism, such as the coterie aspects of the movement, their print publications, and their posture of superiority. Specifically, I look at the interplay between modernist communities and their print publications—little magazines. The shared aesthetic values in little magazines often led to a network of authors and readers, as Peter Brooker and Andrew Thacker explain (2). Various groups of sf fans experimented with communal living for both practical and philosophical purposes. The prolific output from these fan communities occurred because the environments enabled feedback and collaboration. The print products, fanzines and little magazines, offer critical insight into the atmosphere of these literary movements. Both forms function on a hierarchy of knowledge and deploy specialized language to reinforce community bonds and boundaries. The networks created through these print publications facilitated collaborations and opened up multiple professional publishing opportunities.

Coterie Writing Communities and Intellectual Relationships

Modernist coteries, often distinguished by a posture of cultural elitism, were groups of artists, often with similar political, social, and aesthetic goals. Modernism was not a neat or cohesive literary movement, and the various “-isms” often created manifestos or little magazines to unify, and broadcast, their particular movement, whether artistic or political. Malcom Bradbury and James McFarlane explain Renato Poggoli’s *The Theory of the Avant Garde*, which captures the most applicable facets of modernism for this project: “One of the distinguishing features of the modern arts, he suggests, is to be found in the life-style from which they are generated...given to distinctive mannerisms...and manifestations of group cohesion and

solidarity” (193). These groups often coalesced around small, rarified little magazines that espoused their aesthetic (and philosophical) agenda. As seen in the opening vignette about the Futurians’ Ivory Tower, there are striking similarities between the communal living arrangements and the modernist coterie dynamics and print publications, such as “manifestations of group cohesion and solidarity,” shared aesthetics, and “distinctive mannerisms.”

The Futurians (not to be confused with the Italian Futurists) had multiple shared residences, which both strengthened the group and kept them separate from the mundane world. Judith Merrill and Virginia Kidd lived at “The Parallax,” another Futurian clubhouse, “where they rented low-priced adjoining flats, knocking out the party wall in one of their closets to surreptitiously create an eight-room apartment that encompassed an entire floor of the building” (Newell and Lamont 28). Similar to the Ivory Tower, it acted as a communal space for all Futurians. However, the space was not an exclusive club, but rather “Merril remembered it as a sort of bohemian existence: ‘Living with Virginia was lots of fun against the backdrop of great intellectual stimulation, caring for children, coping with relationships, buying groceries...We lived a marvelous Parisian existence in our apartment’” (28). The Parallax and the Ivory Tower both inspire a connection to modernist coterie environments. Merrill specifically recalls “great intellectual stimulation” as the main advantage to her shared living space with Kidd. While it is easy to dismiss the various Futurian communes as simply a way of cutting costs and sharing household responsibilities, these practical benefits created the time and space for political and intellectual debates, experimental fiction, and collaboration. These shared spaces fostered a close-knit, almost familial, community that became a major force in sf.

The Futurians were only one of many such sf coterie groups. A shared aesthetic ideology led a fan club from Michigan, the Galactic Roamers, to devise a plan to purchase an entire block

for their ideal compound. The compound never happened, but the Galactic Roamers shared the “Slan Shack” for almost two years. Warner notes that the Galactic Roamers’ living arrangements “was inspired by more philosophic considerations about fandom as a way of lives [sic]” (*Yesterdays* 62). These fans felt such a kinship within the sf community that they desired to create an idealized setting that revolved around their identities as fan-producers. The Slan Shack was a large eight-room house, but the overall plans for the compound echo the assertion that the Ivory Tower was an attempt to banish the outside world. Although never realized, “Slan center was to contain a cooperative grocery store, a general store, a common heating plant, and as final proof of the disdain for mundane facilities, its own electrical generating plant” (62). Even without the expansive extra facilities, the Slan Shack was a monument, “Slan Shack instantly became a mecca for every fan who could surmount wartime travel problems to make a pilgrimage. Upwards of twenty ate there at some meals. It was the scene of Michicons, [National Fantasy Fan Federation] crises, publishing sessions for some of the finest fanzines of the era...[Fantasy Amateur Press Association] mailings emerged” (63).⁹ These communal spaces were linked with substantial creative output (Figure 3). The residents of the Slan Shack, Ivory Tower, and Parallax found extreme creative success in professional and amateur publishing outlets because these living environments fostered literary growth. Just as the movement of “Modernism” was made up of many distinct but similar coterie groups founded on literary aesthetics and magazine publishing, so was early sf. These fan groups were instrumental in shaping the philosophical tenets, generic tropes, and publishing industry of sf.

⁹ The National Fan Federation crises that Warner refers to involve some controversies surrounding the club’s constitution, particularly the restrictions for “new, unproven fans” combined with several abrupt shifts in the power structure. For a more detailed account, see Warner’s Chapter, ““Ah! Sweet Idiocy!”” in *All Our Yesterdays*.

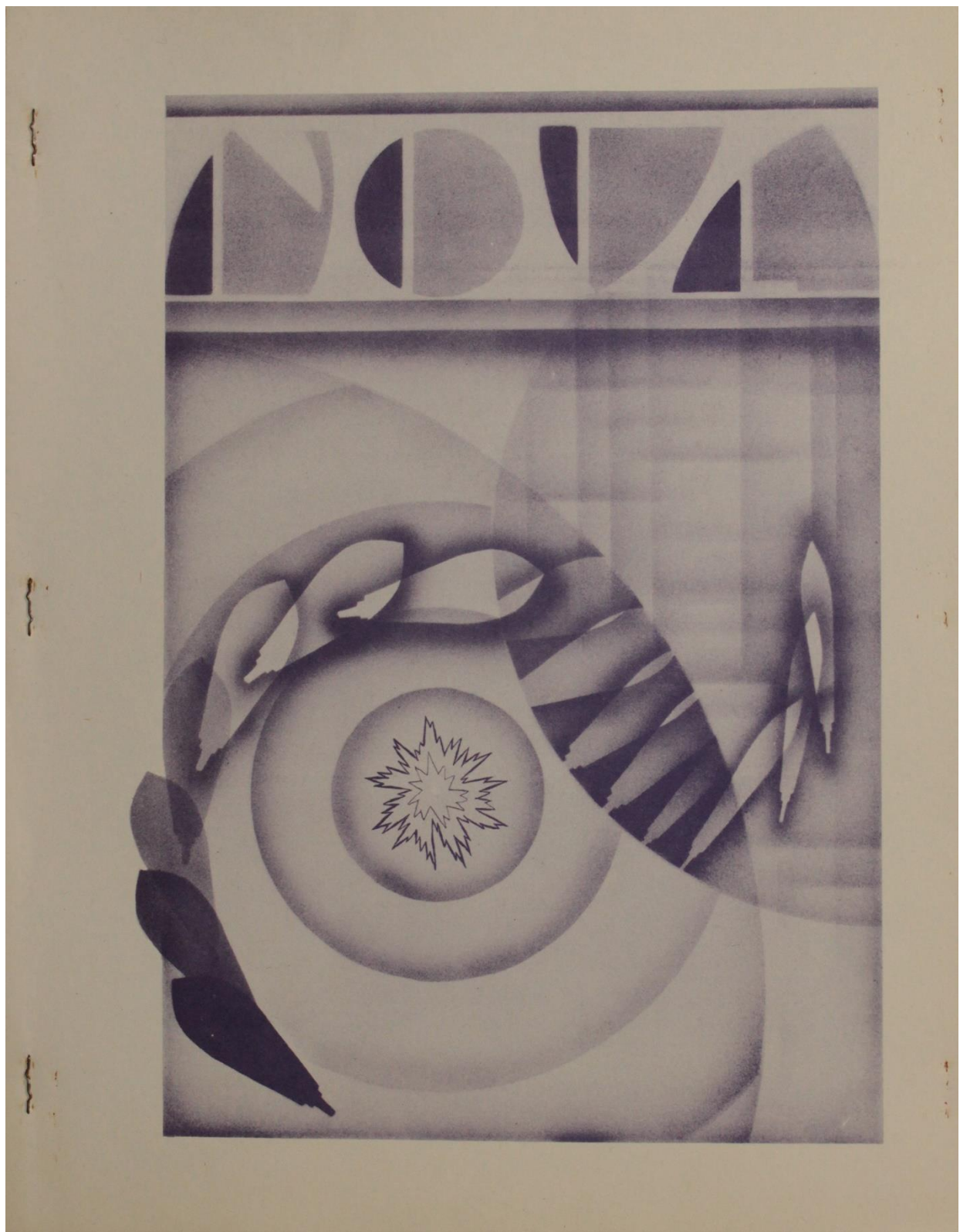


Figure 3. Nova, the fanzine product of the "Slan Shack," 1943-1944 Winter issue.

Ackermanese as Modernist Jargon

Fandom functions on a hierarchy of knowledge. Fanzines contain a dazzling amount of jargon that leaves an uninitiated reader struggling to understand while simultaneously stratifying levels of fandom. Sf alone created a new vocabulary, and this specialized language permeated into fans' critical conversations. Their jargon, or fanspeak, creates a system that both unites the initiated and deflects the mundane. The jargon can confuse new readers, but the fanzines also rely heavily on acronyms because of the limited space in most fanzines.¹⁰

Although much of fandom experimented with acronyms and merging words, Forrest J Ackerman contributed to the "distinctive mannerisms" of sf with his playful language and typography. He attempted to create a simplified language, which Warner notes "quickly got the name of Ackermanese" (*Yesterdays* 154). The variations in the ways that Ackerman spells his first name—4e, 4s, 4sj—exemplifies his simplified spelling, but he did not stop there. Warner continues, "To the spelling change he added a telegraphic style that was further contracted by a Joycean habit of running words together when the terminal and initial letters or syllables happened to be the same" (154). These stylistic and spelling choices permeate his fanzine contributions.¹¹ In the opening two pages of the June 1942 issue of *VoM* (Figure 4), Ackerman uses terms like "fanation" (2), "Widnerebellion" (3), and "fanograficover" (2). While these combinations are easy enough to parse out and understand, the barrage of acronyms, jargon, and

¹⁰ In fact, many book-length discussions of sf or sf fandom include a glossary section and Jeffrey Prucher compiled an Oxford English Dictionary, *Brave New Words*, for sf, but his work also traces the etymology of words in the fiction as well.

¹¹ Ackerman's style continued outside the boundaries of his own fanzines. Bob Tucker pokes fun at Ackerman's eccentricities in his August 1941 issue of *Le Zombie* by following Ackerman's contribution with the heading, "EXPLANATION TO THOSE WHO DON'T SPEAK OUR REPORTER'S LANGUAGE, DEPT" (Tucker n.p.)



Figure 4. June 1942 issue of Ackerman's *VoM*, featuring a "fanograficover" made with reader submitted photographs.

Ackermanese can be quite daunting. The specialized language is a distinct marker of the sf community, and it acts to reinforce feelings of inclusion and separate from the outside world.

Besides this hierarchy of knowledge intrinsic to fan culture, Ackerman's jargon parallels aesthetic practices common to many modernist artists and facilitators. Ackerman's use of contractions, created words, and typographical experimentation echoes the ideograms that Ezra Pound utilized in his poetry as a way to "activate" language, make it visual, and challenge the reader. For both Ackerman and Pound, typography and word-play become ways to "make it new"—to create a division between the common reader and those "in the know."

Sf fandom operates outside of highbrow culture, but there is a distinct usurpation of modernist practices and references within early sf fandom: specialized language, experimentation, honing of skills, hierarchies of knowledge, and elitism. Futurian Robert Lowndes published a fanzine through the Fantasy Amateur Press Association titled *Agenbite of Inwit*. The phrase is a direct reference to James Joyce's *Ulysses*, and it is a variant spelling of *Ayenbite of Inwyt*, "a medieval manual of the virtues and vices intended to remind the layman of the hierarchy of sins and the distinctions among them" (Gifford 22). A more direct translation is "remorse of conscience" (22). Lowndes's title operates on several different levels; it links his work to the modernist circle and there is a strategic political statement in crafting a strong connection between the fanzine and Joyce's *Ulysses*. *Agenbite of Inwit* likely seeks to elevate sf out of the "ghetto" and into a respectable genre. However, not all fans had similar desires. In Joe Fann's *Willie Acquires an Italian Hand*, he critiques Lowndes's fanzine: "All this furor about the advancement of science fiction seems damn silly. As long as pulp editors take the unreasonable view that they must make money, you're going to have to swallow the pulp hack they dish out. Sickening" (Fann 1). The conflation with hack writing and profit inadvertently raises the

fanzines themselves above the pulps and mainstream culture industry. *Agenbite of Inwit* is a vehicle strictly about sf and related matters, not the desire to make a profit. Fann's critique lessens the fanzine's role as elevating the genre, but also recognizes that profits are to blame for the "sickening" of sf. As such, Fann is promoting the ideology of art for art's sake.

In both sf and modernism, the establishing of a specialized insider language acts to stratify and delineate communities. For modernists, the jargon was an avant-garde movement that worked to "make it new." On the other hand, sf fandom used jargon—or fanspeak—to unite the burgeoning subcultural community.

Fanzines and Little Magazines: Coterie Publications

Thus far, I have established the social and aesthetic parallels between sf fandom and high modernist literary practices. This parallel can be taken further by examining how fanzines resemble modernist little magazines. Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible note the difficulties of defining little magazines because each parameter risks eliminating important titles, similar to the challenges of defining fanzines. However, Churchill and McKible give a broad definition:

little magazines are non-commercial enterprises founded by individuals or small groups intent upon publishing the experimental works or radical opinions of untried, or unpopular, or under-represented writers. Defying mainstream tastes and conventions, some little magazines aim to uphold higher artistic and intellectual standards than their commercial counterparts, while others seek to challenge conventional political wisdom and practice. (6)

Fanzines, like little magazines, were non-commercial publications that celebrated a spirit of experimentation and collaboration. Lowndes's *Agenbite of Inwit* and the Futurian Ivory Tower instantly demonstrate a desire "to uphold higher artistic and intellectual standards."

The similarities between fanzines and little magazines extend past definitional parameters and into the way each affects the given genre or literary movement. The fanzines are important material artifacts because they capture the personalities, thoughts, relationships, and literary output of an original literary subculture. As Churchill and McKible note, "little magazines pulsed with the excitement of their times, and they often anticipated or forged future literary and political trends. By reading little magazines carefully, we can see how they set the stage for surprising collaborative efforts, wove webs of interaction and influence, set trends, established and ruined reputations, and shaped the course of modernism" (18). The fanzines did this exact thing for the development of sf, but because it is not a lauded literary movement, the contributions of early fandom are fading. The early sf fans were spread out across the country and this physical distance placed a premium on correspondence and print publications. Although many fans were prolific letter writers, the fanzines present a different dynamic than personal correspondence. Specifically, the fanzines bring together multiple diverse voices and more accurately capture the overall trends in early sf, many of which were politically motivated.

The Futurians were famously left-leaning, and many members were card-carrying communists. Michelism, a school of political sf, developed as a result of Donald Wollheim's reading of John Michel's speech "Mutation or Death" at one of the early science fiction conventions. Similar to Gernsback's technocratic agenda, the followers of Michelism ultimately felt that sf had the power to change the future. They started the Committee for the Political

Advancement of Science Fiction and published a fanzine, *Science Fiction Advance*. In the fanzine *Novae Terrae*, Wollheim explains:

MICHELISM believes that science-fiction is a force...acting through the medium of speculative and prophetic fiction...that logical science-fiction inevitably points to the necessity for socialism, the advance of science, and the world-state; and that these aims, created by science-fiction idealizing, can best be reached through adherence to the program of the Communist international. (Moskowitz 160)

Wollheim's explanation of Michelism sparked a widespread debate that continued in the pages of *Novae Terrae* and slipped into other popular fanzines. Similar to modernism's little magazines, many sf fanzines acted as manifestos for specific beliefs and agendas. Michelism never became a universally accepted belief or practice for sf, but this highlights the fanzines' experimental and discursive nature.

Early sf fandom was a relatively small group, which facilitated the development of a networked community of readers, writers, editors, and agents. The transition from fan to tastemaker was abundant, so much so that Knight titled his memoir, *The Futurians: The Story of the Science Fiction 'Family' of the 30's that Produced Today's Top SF Writers and Editors*. While Knight clearly understands the community ties within the Futurians, he does not explicitly acknowledge how the community's network expedited the transition from fan to professional. During the Futurians' residence at the Ivory Tower, Frederik Pohl became an editor for the prozines *Astonishing Stories* and *Super Science Stories*. His inclusion of Futurian work was not favoritism, but necessity, "to get enough publishable material, [Pohl] had to write stories for himself, and he had to get stories from his friends" (31). The Futurians gladly pitched in with collaboratively authored stories, including one story that used the pseudonym "Ivar Towers"

(32). More importantly, as Knight notes, “Begun as a means of getting into production quickly, these Futurian collaborations became a way of life” (32).¹² Just as communal living arrangements began as a way to cut costs, the necessity of publishable work led to a deeply entrenched spirit of collaboration.

As McKible and Churchill note, “little magazines pulsed with the excitement of their times,” and the sf fanzines reflect a similar dynamic. More importantly, reading fanzines and little magazines creates a rich picture of the various trends, feuds, and collaborations that shaped literary movements. Even though the sf fans are not part of highbrow culture, the parallels with that culture demonstrate a need for further scholarship. We obscure the community dynamics of early sf fandom through a lack of critical or scholarly attention. Although the modernist canon continues to expand and grow to correct previous omissions, the majority of sf remains in the “ghetto,” despite the fact that these early fans clearly engaged in literary production with the same dedication as the modernist coterie. An examination of the sf fanzines reveals these dynamics, but the genre and form need to escape from the deleterious attitude that popular culture breeds passivity.

¹² Merrill mentions in her memoir that every member of the Futurians had a pseudonym with the family name Conway (Merril and Pohl-Weary 46)

“THAT ONLY A MOTHER”: THE REBIRTH OF LOST FEMININE VOICES

Although recent trends in scholarship have been working to revise the erasure of women from modernism and sf, there remains a significant omission: that of female authors, editors, and facilitators of sf. Of course, no single work can effectively address the scholarly neglect of women authors like Judith Merrill, Amelia Reynolds Long, and Leslie F. Stone from the sf canon, or the omission of fanzines from academic archives. Expanding our subject beyond canonized forms of literary production (books, pulps) promises to move scholarship forward as well as fix past omissions.

Revisionist works, at least since the 1980s, have revisited multiple literary movements to reclaim lost or gendered voices. New modernism studies have recovered female modernists or expanded the role that they played in the construction of modernism, including Peggy Gugenheim, Mary Butts, Djuna Barnes, and Sylvia Beach. For example, Shari Benstock’s study, *Women of the Left Bank: Paris 1900-1940*, examines a diverse cast of women working behind the scenes of the movement yet traditionally overlooked in histories of modernism. She claims “Modernism, we should not forget, was a literary, social, political, and publishing event. And these women saw to it that this message had its medium” (21). By expanding her examination of the women in Paris to booksellers and publishers, Benstock captures “rich and complex experiences” in her revision of modernism (3). Similar revisionist work has now begun on the canon of sf. Eric Leif Davin’s *Partners in Wonder*, for example, identifies 203 known women writers in the sf pulps. But no scholarship has explored the role that women played in both establishing sf fandom and sf itself. In order to tackle such an omission, we must first expand our search parameters. Benstock notes, “Perhaps most importantly, a reexamination of women’s experience in this community challenges received notions about and accepted definitions of

Modernism” (30). Similarly, by recovering feminine voices not just as writers, but also as fans and tastemakers, we are forced to readjust our common perceptions of sf.

In order to demonstrate the role of women in sf as both fan and creator, I examine the amateur and professional contributions of two overlooked female authors: Judith Merrill and Edythe Eyde. Merrill’s transition from fan to writer to anthologist illustrates the way that fans took over the direction of the genre. Eyde, who was also known as Tigrina and Lisa Ben, was a self-declared Satanist who continuously challenged boundaries and moved on from sf fandom to create *Vice Versa*, the first lesbian magazine in America. These two women affected the genre in very different ways, but their involvement stretches beyond simple participation in the early years of fandom. These authors problematize complacent acceptance of the genre (its history and dynamics) as purely patriarchal. Much like how in *Refiguring Modernism*, Bonnie Kime Scott justifies her decision to look at Virginia Woolf, Rebecca West, and Djuna Barnes because “It is helpful in refiguring modernism that had diverse attachments to the historical events, early canonized works, and theories that provided the tentative scaffolding of high modernism. It is equally critical that their lines of interest ran beyond and askew from this limited but long-accepted fame” (xxiv). Scott selects these three women because they both follow and challenge certain tenets of high modernism. Similarly, Merrill and Eyde both conform to and reject sf and fandom. This section aims to elucidate the importance of fanzines and sf as worthy of scholarly attention because of their potential to recapture liminal voices.

Judith Merrill and Domestic SF

Judith Merrill discovered sf and fandom in the early 1940s. She quickly fell in with the Futurians, participating with Virginia Kidd in communal-living experiment at the Parallax. She also published a few fanzines: *TEMPER!* and *Science*Fiction* with Larry Shaw. *TEMPER!* was

published by a group of sf fans, the Vanguard Amateur Press Association, an APA dedicated to sf zines which Merrill describes in her memoir as “elitist”: “It was not open to just anybody, and had a relatively high literary level” (Merril and Pohl-Weary 47). Merrill’s honest assertion of elitism fits the standard outlook of the Futurians, but her fanzine is not a typical sf amateur publication. While some fanzines included poetry, Merrill dedicated one issue of *TEMPER!*, temporarily retitled *DISTEMPER!*, “which was entirely poetry, and criticism of poetry”—a rarity for fanzines (47).

Merril’s interest in domestic issues does not reinforce the idea that women should remain in the domestic sphere. The July 1945 issue of *TEMPER!*, renamed *TEAPOTEMPER!*, reflects the issue’s domestic focus about motherhood. Merrill uses the “elitist” audience at her disposal to force her readers to consider the changing role of women at the conclusion of WWII. Despite the domestic concerns of the issue, Merrill ultimately argues for women to remain in the workforce, stating that confinement to the home is detrimental for mother and child.

The four-page fanzine discusses the difficulties facing women who refuse to return to the domestic sphere after WWII. Merrill states, “They liked their jobs and in fact didn’t want to leave them. So the sloganeers sicced the paper-pulp industry on them. Now the bland authority is issuing dire predictions about the terrible fate that lies in wait for the nursery-trained child” (Merril and Pohl-Weary 63). Merrill challenges the sensationalism of journalistic scare tactics and she blatantly rejects the idea that a mother will harm her child by remaining in the public sphere. Aimed at the many male sf fans returning from the war who are dealing with the complex issues of re-acclimation, Merrill’s editorial serves to remind sf fans that men are not the only ones facing a drastic change. Furthermore, Merrill clearly asserts that she can be both mother and writer through her disavowal of the “paper-pulp industry.”

Merril's conscious choice to explore domestic issues continues into her professional career. Merrill opens the fanzine with an observation about newsstand magazines at the time:

Of recent months, the digests and women's magazines have broken out in a rambling rash of rhetoric on that most unassailable of subjects, Mother Love.

They are joyously enumerating the emotional and psychological pitfalls that lie in wait for the child cruelly deprived of the understanding and constant affection *that "only a mother"* can give. (62, emphasis added)

From the outset of the issue, Merrill defies the usual conventions of sf fanzines and draws her largely male audience into a discussion of motherhood. Merrill is concerned with outside influences defining and constraining the relationship between mother and child, and she was part of multiple group living arrangements, specifically as a way to help balance her professional and personal responsibilities. The deeply collaborative nature of her professional work likely influenced her thoughts on child rearing—a community environment was ideal. The magazines, on the other hand, present a picture that defies community bonds and insists on isolation for mother and child. This dangerous combination of solitude and entrapment in the domestic sphere reappear in her first sf story, "That Only a Mother." In this story, she disseminates her feminist ethos in fiction by examining the "emotional and psychological" ramifications of motherhood in an alternate future ravaged by nuclear war.

Merril's haunting short story first appeared in the June 1948 issue of *Astounding Stories*. Renowned editor John W. Campbell introduced the story as "A new feminine science-fiction author gives a slightly different slant on one of the old themes—and a brilliantly bitter little story results" (Merril 88). Campbell's introduction immediately genders the story and perhaps enforces the expectation that the story will deal with more feminine or domestic themes. The

story focuses on Margaret, a woman expecting her first child while her husband is away at war in a post-nuclear 1953. Merrill's near future imagines a world inundated with nuclear exposures, which increase birth defects and infanticide. Much of the story is told in epistolary form, which allows the narrator to leave out information and skip over months at a time, but more importantly, it mirrors the dynamics of fanzines. As Knight notes in his history of the Futurians, "the letters of comment...far more than cash, are the rewards of amateur publishing" (8). In other words, if Merrill is now using the literary form as a political mode, she is also blending it with the main mode of communication that avid sf fans—the readers of the fanzines—were used to. In her letters, Margaret relays her daughter Henrietta's remarkable mental development (the child can speak and sing before she is a year old) to her husband Hank, and insists that Henrietta is physically normal. Hank's return reveals that Henrietta was born without arms or legs. The discovery of the malformed child is juxtaposed with the revelation that Margaret is completely unaware of any physical abnormality. Motherly love blinds Margaret. The story concludes with Hank tightening his grip on the child, which hints at the possibility of him committing infanticide. The illustration accompanying the story does not provide any clues to determine a possible conclusion (Figure 5). There is nothing immediately unusual about the image, which portrays "Mother Love" that the slick women's magazines were force-feeding readers at the time. Merrill's feminine narrator separates the setting of the story from the dangers of combat in order to examine the psychological consequences of modern warfare.

Even though the majority of the story's action is confined to the domestic sphere, "That Only a Mother" blurs the boundaries between public and private, feminine and masculine. The opening sequence involves Margaret going to work and fulfilling her civic duty during wartime,

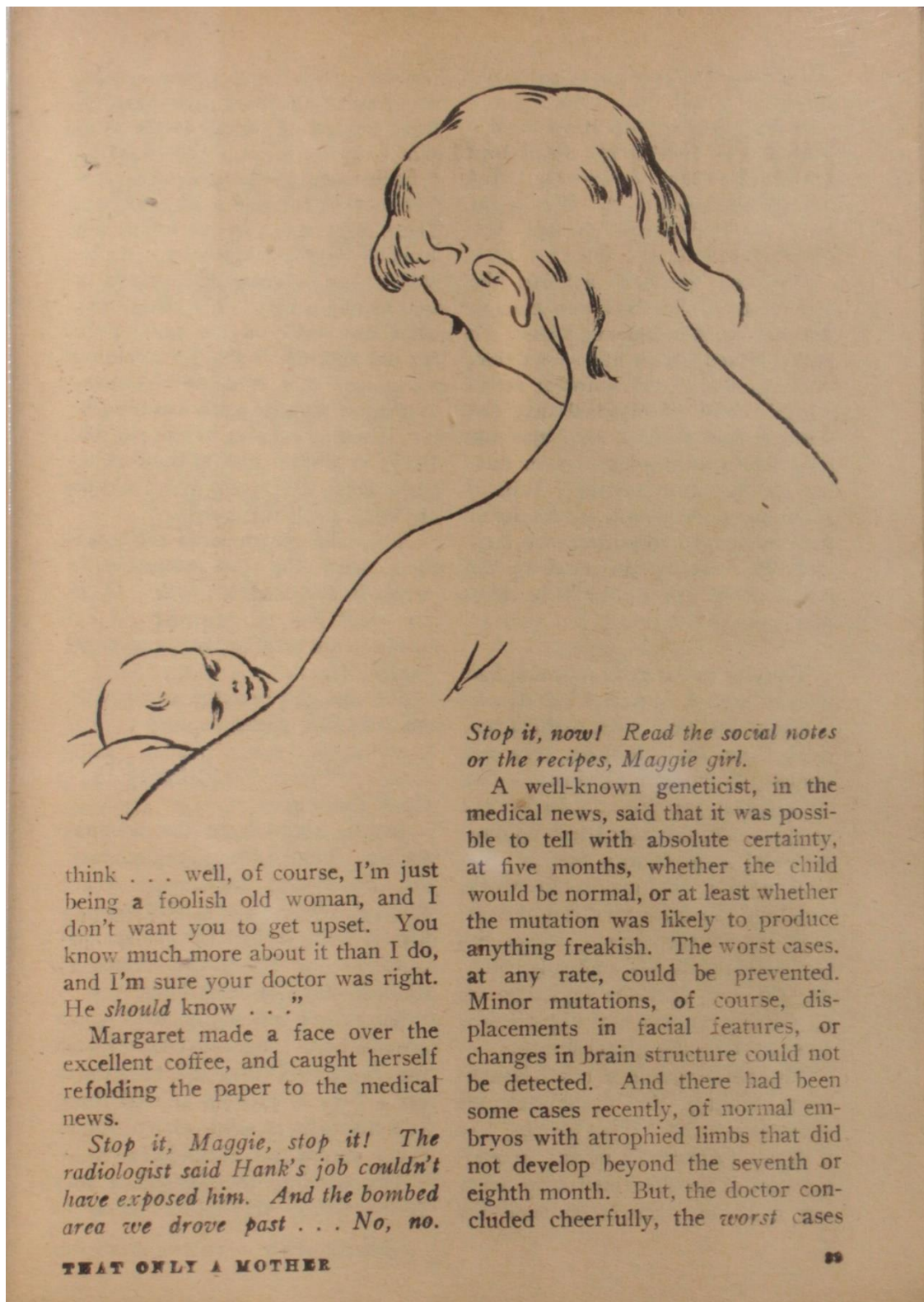


Figure 5. Accompanying illustration for Merrill's debut sf story, "That Only a Mother," illustrated by Alejandro.

“But you didn’t just stop working these days. Everyone who could do anything at all was needed” (Merril 90). Complications with her pregnancy immediately recall her from her job and she remains in the domestic sphere for the remainder of the short story. Merrill criticized this exact scenario three years earlier in her fanzine, “Right after V-E Day, we started getting these little gems about the working wife whose problems are all solved when she discovers she’s pregnant, can’t work...and is really in love with her husband” (Merril and Pohl-Weary 63). In this case, Margaret’s problems are only beginning. The cause of the genetic mutations exists both inside and outside the domestic sphere. Related in a paranoid stream of consciousness, Margaret thinks, “*The radiologist said Hank’s job couldn’t have exposed him. And the bombed area we drove past...*” (Merril 89). In other words, Hank’s exposure to radiation could be the source of mutation or Margaret’s exposure in the public sphere could be at fault. The story never reveals the exact cause of Henrietta’s mutation, largely because of Margaret’s later denial of Henrietta’s physical differences.

Henrietta’s mutation, the development of the mind rather than the body, “troubles the ‘normal’ distinctions between rational masculinity and natural femininity” (Newell and Lamont 32). Although never explicitly stated in the letters, Margaret mentions a discrepancy regarding Henrietta’s gender in a letter to Hank: “the nurse was wrong if she told you that. She’s an idiot anyhow. It’s a girl. It’s easier to tell with babies than with cats, and I *know*. How about Henrietta?” (Merril 92). Again, the epistolary narrative shows the reader Hank’s letters. Merrill’s story leaves plenty of space for multiple readings through the various gaps in information. Further destabilization of the gender roles occurs at the story’s conclusion, “Hank, not Margaret, is the hysterical one” (Newell and Lamont 33). The text’s role reversal of gendered stereotypes undermines traditional characterizations of gender. Margaret does not flinch during Hank’s

questioning: “Margaret’s poise was the immemorial patience of a woman confronted with man’s childish impetuosity. Her sudden laugh sounded fantastically easy and natural in that room” (Merril 95). Margaret assumes that Henrietta is wet, not that she has any physical deformity. The description presents Margaret as completely rational and in control, despite the reveal of Henrietta’s physical differences. In comparison, Hank loses all control, “His hands, beyond control, ran up and down the soft-skinned baby body, the sinuous, limbless body...his muscles contracted, in a bitter spasm of hysteria. His fingers tightened on his child—*Oh God, she didn’t know...*” (95). The closing image of a hysterical father on the verge of infanticide lingers long after the final ellipsis. Merrill’s first short story moves away from the action-adventure sf and uses the fantastic to explore an eerily possible immediate future.

Along with the period’s typical construction of gender and gender roles, Merrill’s sf story deeply challenges the notions of generic formulas. Dianne Newell and Victoria Lamont note that “the story was rejected as too scandalous by mainstream magazines, but was published to high praise; it became a classic in the field and remains one of Merrill’s most warmly regarded and most anthologized and translated stories” (30). “That Only a Mother” certainly leaves a lasting impression and pushes the genre past a reputation for simple escapism. Besides injecting a feminine perspective into a male-dominated genre, Merrill’s story asks serious political and ethical questions, particularly in the aftermath of Hiroshima. The text questions the journalistic integrity given the deleterious effects of the “sensational” newspapers reporting birth defects and infanticide. These articles often trigger Margaret’s anxieties about genetic defects, which link the story back to Merrill’s own fanzine editorial that condemns women’s magazines for attempting to guilt women into returning to the domestic sphere.

The influence of “the paper-pulp industry” over ideas of motherhood and the “proper” role of a mother both in and out of the home clearly concerns Merrill. With this in mind, “That Only a Mother” is the logical conclusion of the overbearing attitudes sublimated in the products of the culture industry. Therefore, Margaret is not an inspiring mother figure. Her removal from the public sphere and placement in the home as sole caregiver subverts her own rational mind. It is certainly no coincidence that printed publications repeatedly spark Margaret’s worried inner monologues. Even with the added insight from *TEMPER!*, “That Only a Mother” slips away from easy conclusions, like Henrietta squirming in Hank’s hands.

“That Only a Mother” leaves space to interpret and shape the text based on individual experience, while still presenting a feminine approach to a frequently male-dominated discourse. Similarly, Merrill’s anthologies spark conversations rather than merely assigning aesthetic value. Merrill published her first anthology *Shot in the Dark* in 1950 and four more titles followed between 1950 and 1955 before she started a twelve-year run compiling *SF: The Year’s Greatest Science Fiction and Fantasy* in 1956.¹³ It is important to remember that not all collaborations in sf were formal affairs as the community environments enabled opportunities for informal debates and brainstorming. The constant availability of feedback blurs notions of “the persistent belief that the best writing is single-authored, and that creativity is best fostered in solitude” (Newell and Lamont 115). While many anecdotes about early sf may embellish feuds and personalities, the overwhelming constant in early sf fandom remains a desire for collaboration and community.

Merril’s consistent formal and informal collaborations directly aid her work as an anthologist. The impressive scope of these anthologies, specifically the year’s best annuals, can

¹³ The annuals changed publisher and titles, for a complete list of Merrill’s anthologies, and other works, see Appendix 1 in *Better to Have Loved: The Life of Judith Merrill*.

be seen in J.G. Ballard's tribute to Merrill, which states that her "annual anthology stood out as practically the single beacon of knowledge and taste" (qtd. in Newell and Lamont 142). While not every reviewer shared Ballard's high praise, her contributions clearly influenced the genre. These anthologies were not simply a collection of stories lumped together in a single volume:

The science fiction dialogue these volumes created—through Merrill's introductions, editorial comments...honorable mentions, and, above all, the editor's summation of the year's "S-F"—became her unique contribution to promoting and shaping the field. Her acknowledgments each year signaled the impressive scope and intensity with which she collaborated with fans, publishers, editors, and writers. (142)

It is important to note that Newell and Lamont see her anthologies as part of a dialogue.

Particularly in the earlier years, the world of sf is always part of a larger conversation—a result of the networked reader community.

Merril's transition from fan to professional to tastemaker parallels the development of the genre. Her gender and perspective make her unique, but her instrumental role in the shaping of sf illustrates the need to recover the lost voices in early sf history. Newell and Lamont note that "[in 2012] Merrill has been dead for less than fifteen years, and already few students and readers new to science fiction know her name, much less the role she played in shaping the genre they now study and read" (210). Merrill was an active member of a notorious fan club, published fiction in successful prozines, and collaborated with multiple big names before becoming a highly celebrated tastemaker. Even with such a substantial contribution, she remains marginalized in the larger sf history.

Vice Versa

Merril's anthologies sought to raise literary standards and bring sf out of the "ghetto," but Edythe Eyde's work inspired a brand new literary subculture. The fanzines have a much farther-reaching effect than one literary genre. Ultimately, they inspired an entire movement of underground publications. Eyde, known to sf fans as Tigrina, existed on the "outskirts" of fandom (*Yesterdays* 160).¹⁴ However, her involvement with sf fandom shaped her approach to community building through DIY publications.

Eyde famously wrote a letter to Forrest J Ackerman's *VoM* in May 1942 about her Satanist practices that drew a myriad of responses in the subsequent issue, but most were remarkably accepting and non-judgmental. Professional pulp writer Henry Kuttner wrote a lengthy response to Eyde, in hopes of making sure that Eyde understood the core tenets of Satanism. Kuttner writes, "It seems to me probable that she may have mistaken the sensational, hokumy fictional devil-worship for the genuine article" (6). Kuttner is not judgmental, and only shares his concern lest she be misled by the very stories he earned a living writing. Given the sheer quantity of letters concerned with Eyde's Satanism, Ackerman gives space for her to respond in the issue with a letter and cartoon (Figure 6). Eyde responds to the plethora of interest in her religious beliefs, writing, "Let me say once and for all I am definitely not a spiritualist and I am not superstitious. I try to keep an open mind and try never to scoff at anyone's beliefs and theories, yet I do not accept everything I read about the Occult as true facts" (7). Eyde's proud assertion, and defense, of her Satanism sets the stage for her later subversive publishing ventures. In fact, Eyde tried her hand at fanzine publishing and produced one issue of the fanzine *Hymn to*

¹⁴ Warner mentions Eyde in his discussion of Forrest Ackerman, but he states that the two have a "proposal correspondence." Given Eyde's later identification as a lesbian, this clearly illustrates the current flaws in the accepted history of sf.



Figure 6. Cartoon included with Eyde's response to concern regarding her declaration of Satanism in the June 1942 issue of *VoM*.

Satan. The truth to Eyde's assertions, and her one-off fanzine, are not as important as the acceptance that she found in the sf community. Eyde claimed a nonconforming identity and found respect. These moments in the fanzines clearly empowered her later amateur publications.

When Eyde decided to re-enter the world of amateur publishing, she changed her name to Lisa Ben, an anagram of lesbian, and started *Vice Versa*. Given that most early communication between fans occurred through letters, with maybe one face-to-face meeting at a convention each year, some fans were able to keep their private lives separate from fandom. Both Ackerman and Eyde were members of the Los Angeles Science Fiction Society, which Warner notes had a controversy about the sexuality of members, "Survivors of the era still contradict one another about how many fairies were members and how ardently they pursued their sex lives in public" (*Yesterdays* 317). The controversy certainly shows that not all of fandom was openly accepting of all lifestyle choices, and Warner's use of "fairies" betrays a lingering bias. However, the more interesting aspect of this particular scandal is that this feud remains hidden. In *Science Fiction*

Culture, Camille Bacon-Smith explains “the scandal often draws comparisons to the McCarthy-era redbaiting, and I have *never* heard the instigator discussed in approving terms” (136). In fact, Bacon-Smith’s informant for the matter asked to “remain anonymous” (136). The controversy is one of the few mysteries regarding early fandom, but not all of fandom felt the same way about homosexuality. The general negative feelings towards the instigator imply that most disliked his accusations and homophobic behavior. More importantly, the positive dynamics and community building practices from the fanzines provided a model for Eyde’s work with *Vice Versa*.

Ackerman openly supported the gay and lesbian community, and he reports that he played an influential role in Eyde’s acceptance of her own identity. Bacon-Smith publishes a section of his “guest of honor essay for the 1994 Gaylaxicon” in her ethnography of fandom:

I had befriended “Lisa Ben” (the pioneering editor/publisher of *Vice Versa*, “America’s Gayest Magazine”) and, for the purpose of contributing to that publication, adopted the persona of “Laurajean Ermayne.” This was in 1947, when lesbianism was a subject (quote) “spoken of only in whispers.”... [I]n the December 1947 issue of *Vice Versa*, I contributed what (as far as I know) was the first lesbian SF story ever published, “Kiki.” (136)

Eyde’s continued friendship with Ackerman and his contributions directly link early fan publishing to the beginnings of an underground movement that opens the way for transgressive publications beyond sf aesthetics.¹⁵ Remarkably little scholarship exists about Eyde’s contributions, despite her induction into The National Lesbian and Gay Journalists Association’s

¹⁵ Ackerman claims a crucial role in Eyde’s acceptance of her identity as a lesbian: “It finally dawned on me—before she herself even realized her nature—that she must be... [a] lesbian! I sort of nudged her out of the closet” (137). Although this shows the close friendship between the two, Ackerman’s declaration is problematic as it implies that patriarchy is necessary to recognize a queer identity.

Hall of Fame in 2010 (as Lisa Ben). Few individuals make the connection between Ackerman and Eyde, and the failure to acknowledge their friendship is detrimental to understanding the editorial style of *Vice Versa*, which clearly mirrors Ackerman's fanzines.

Vice Versa's birth in 1947 represents the start of a new literary subculture. The first issue declares its role in the flooded literary market, "Hence the appearance of VICE VERSA, a magazine dedicated in all seriousness to those of us who will never quite be able to adapt ourselves to the iron-bound rules of Convention" (qtd. in Streitmatter 78). Eyde's history of challenging traditional roles and conventions as Tigrina resurfaces in the dedication of her new publishing venture. Besides a few brief encyclopedic biographies, Rodger Streitmatter is the only scholar to deal with Eyde's life or zine. Streitmatter calls for more scholarship because "examining *Vice Versa*, then, increases the scholarly understanding of a diverse American media," yet he looks at Eyde's zine without understanding its origin in the sf fanzines (79).

As the first lesbian magazine, it is important to understand its genesis as it acts as a model for future publications. The founder and curator for the International Gay and Lesbian Archives Jim Kepner explains, "'*Vice Versa* established the basic format for the general gay magazine—with editorials, with short stories, with poetry, with book and film reviews, and with a letter column. It set the pattern that hundreds have followed" (qtd. in Streitmatter 82). *Vice Versa*'s inspiration is the sf fanzines. Although Streitmatter's attempts to recover *Vice Versa* for modern periodical studies are commendable, he frequently discredits the zine for replicating dynamics that he cannot understand through examining the zine as a singular publication. In fact, in the moments that Streitmatter derides, he clearly elucidates Ackerman's influence, "Ben's attempts at humor sometimes resulted in a sophomoric tone. In one review, she labeled the film 'unsitthroughable'...the January 1948 editorial urged readers to 'Co-oper-8 in 48'" (83). The

simplified spelling and merging of words are trademark Ackermanese. However, Streitmatter claims, “While such frivolous language generally can be excused as the product of youthful enthusiasm, the tone sometimes trivialized substantive messages” (83). Ackerman faced similar criticisms during his prolific involvement with fandom and Streitmatter has a valid concern, but his lack of knowledge of the full genesis of *Vice Versa* ultimately undermines his critique.

The continual misreading, or misunderstanding, of Eyde’s publication is symptomatic of a much larger issue. Sf is slowly gaining acceptance as a valid literary genre, but serious critical work needs to repair the damage from years of neglect. Eyde’s *Vice Versa* is not a sf fanzine, even with the inclusion of Ackerman’s self-professed “first lesbian SF story.” However, Eyde’s years in fandom clearly affected and enabled the publication of the first lesbian magazine.

Merril’s unique contributions to both professional and amateur publications destabilize the current myth that women did not exist in the early years of sf fandom, and Eyde completely ruptures all boundaries through her Satanism as Tigrina before (somewhat) publicly acknowledging her identity as a lesbian. Merrill’s “domestic” sf presents the true political potency of the genre as she uses her haunting story and fanzine to criticize the publishing industry. Her final transition to anthologist and tastemaker cements both the power of the networked community of readers and an acceptance of women within fandom. This acceptance, and a supportive community, is exactly what Eyde is looking for when she begins to publish *Vice Versa*. She seeks to empower another liminal group. The fanzines fostered a sense of freedom and experimentation that galvanized a generation of creators. The riot grrrl zines that erupted in the 1990s also exemplify the political potency and real world importance of DIY magazines. Scholars continue to collect, archive, and analyze these feminist publications, but their genesis in sf fanzines remains little more than a footnote.

CONCLUSION

Although the fanzines find their origin in the sf pulps, they developed and grew with the emerging fandom from the 1930s to the 1950s. Because the fanzines are for fans by fans, they were able to escape many of the financial pressures (often embodied in the need for advertising) that professional publications face. As such, the fanzines reflect the thoughts, politics, relationships, and ideologies of fandom in a way that no other form can replicate.

Despite their “emotional” attachment to a popular genre, fans resist notions of passivity at every turn and their passion created a global network of readers. From the moment the fanzines initially usurped the capitalist goals of Hugo Gernsback, the form became a self-reflexive, reader-based genre. The fanzine helped give the fans practical experience, as well as supplied a safe space for collaboration and experimentation, which further moved the genre forward from its pulp beginnings.

With approximately two thousand titles in a twenty-year span, these abundant, but quickly disappearing, material traces of fandom mirror aspects of highbrow modernism. Both modernists and sf fans sought to use literature to assert their political and aesthetic goals. From the superiority of the Futurians to Ackermanese to Michelism, the early sf fans share remarkable similarities to the high modernist coterie. However, without revising the canon and looking to the fanzines and popular genres, these parallels will be lost.

While the self-reflexive aspects and modernist parallels of the form are valuable possibilities for scholarship, the true value of the fanzines lies in recovering the genre’s lost, liminal voices. Merril’s work is widely available, if largely unknown, but Eyde’s contributions are much harder to find. These two examples drastically challenge preconceived notions of the fanzine, science fiction, and much popular literature. Just as these two women found acceptance

and support in sf fandom, it is this community support that enabled and empowered a generation of likewise suppressed individuals to find their voices. These cultural artifacts are more than material embodiments of the sf community; they are links to a quickly disappearing past.

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