This essay first appeared in *Science-Fiction Studies*, Volume 5 (1978).

1. In "The Lost Continent," a piece on documentary films in Roland Barthes's *Mythologies* (U.S., 1975), pp. 94ff, Barthes deals with just such questions.
2. To give one example, the "tribbles," little furry creatures sold in various SF bookstores, were made by the writer of the "tribble" episode, a popular one in the *Star Trek* series. The amateur status of many of the creators of blueprints, etc. is one of the most endearing things about the whole Trekkie craze.
3. Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader* (1923–48; here New York: 1953), p. 186.
4. *Locus* 10, x (Dec. 1977), 1.
5. They are explained in *The Making of Star Trek*, by Stephen E. Whitfield and Gene Roddenberry (New York: Ballantine, 1968), the "beam" (matte shot), p. 372; the doors, pp. 199–200. The sliding doors, which produced a letter of admiring inquiry from an apartment-complex builder, were simply worked by off-camera stage-hands.
6. James Tiptree, Jr. (pseud. for Alice Sheldon), *Ten Thousand Light-years from Home* (New York: Ace, 1973).
7. Rebecca West, cited in *Thinking About Women* (U.S., 1968), p. 108.
8. Prospectus for the MLA forum on "Technology and the Literary Mind," April 25, 1977. The forum was held in December 1977. This paper, in altered form, was presented there.
9. Gérard Klein, "Discontent in American Science Fiction," *SFS* 4 (1977):3–13.
10. Ibid., pp. 5–6.
11. The earliest of the group in Monique Wittig's *Les Guérillères*, translated into English in 1971; the most recent, as of this writing, is Suzy McKee Charnas's *Motherlines*, to be published by Putnam's in 1978.
12. Klein (see note 11), p. 12.
13. Tillie Olsen, "Women Who Are Writers in Our Century: One out of Twelve," *College English* 34 (1972):13.

# 4

# *Amor Vincit Foeminam:* The Battle of the Sexes in Science Fiction

*As the following attests, the same post* did *bring Bamberger's and Cooper's work simultaneously in the late 1970s. (The following saw publication in 1980.) I saw red. Green, blue, whatever. So I went looking for others, in order to stamp out the whole tribe. Samuel Delany told me the stories were too idiotic to bother with, but they would not leave me alone until I gave them their place in the sun. Their crudity and silliness were worse than my representation of them, honestly; they were terrible. But it was fun. As a critic, a reviewer, and a teacher, I have spent my life reading a huge amount of extraordinarily bad fiction; sometimes the only way to discharge the emotion aroused by the incessant production of gurry is to beat the gurry to death, especially when it's as marvelously foolish as this was. I should add that when I first noticed James Tiptree, Jr.'s difference from the other authors treated herein, I did not know who (or what) "Tiptree" was. That came later. "Mama Come Home" was Alice Sheldon's first written story, or close to it and, in the whole canon of her work, quite crude and thin. Still it was fundamentally rational in its assumptions, unlike the other imaginings treated below. Those interested in the feminist utopias mentioned here can read the essay after this one ("Recent Feminist Utopias") to find more interesting and better-written fiction. Many of these novels and stories are still in print.*

That the same post should bring Parley J. Cooper's SF novel *The Feminists* and Joan Bamberger's "The Myth of Matriarchy" is not surprising[1]: modern feminist or anti-feminist concerns both turn predictably to

role reversals in the group relations between the sexes; and literal sex war, from civil war to secret cabal to street riots, does indeed appear in modern SF. What is surprising is that the myth of the matriarchy Bamberger describes as current among aboriginal South American tribal societies is the same myth given flesh by Pinnacle Books in 1971. Since it is highly unlikely that Cooper has been reading Bamberger (or vice versa), one must conclude that similarly sexist societies produce similar fantasies. As Bamberger puts it:

> . . . the secret object belonging to men (masks, trumpet, ritual lodge songs, and the like) . . . are badges of authority, permitting one sex to dominate the other. However begun, the myths invariably end with the men in power. Either the men have taken from the women the symbols of authority or have installed themselves as the rightful owners of the ceremony. . . . In no versions do women win. (p. 274)

Surprisingly, however, "concerns with female reproduction distinctions are nowhere in evidence. . . . The mythical message . . . stresses moral laxity and an abuse of power rather than any physical weakness or disability" (p. 279). According to Bamberger, the "ideological thrust" of the South American myths is "the justification . . . for male dominance through the evocation of a vision of a catastrophic alternative" (p. 279).

To summarize: the men's Sacred Objects—the badge of authority and means of domination over others—are stolen or contaminated by women, who then become dominant over men. (Or the story begins with the women dominant.) Women lose because they abuse this power or are immoral (in various ways, e.g., incest), whereupon the men seize or reclaim the Sacred Objects, sometimes with supernatural aid. The purpose of the story is to show that women cannot handle power, ought not to have it, and cannot keep it. This is the natural order of things. It is also extremely precarious. According to Bamberger, throughout the Amazon area women are punished by gang rape and sometimes by death for such misdemeanors as viewing the sacred male paraphernalia (p. 275).

In my subsequent remarks, I will be discussing the following ten tales from 1926 to 1973, all by male writers, as well as one tale by "Tiptree":

Thomas Berger, *Regiment of Women*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1973.

Nelson S. Bond, "The Priestess Who Rebelled," in *When Women Rule*, ed. Sam Moskowitz. New York: Walker, 1972. (Originally in *Amazing Stories*, October 1939.)



Edmund Cooper, *Gender Genocide*. New York: Ace Books, 1972. (Originally published in the U.K. as *Who Needs Men?*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1972.)

Parley J. Cooper, *The Feminists*. New York: Pinnacle, 1971.

Thomas S. Gardner, "The Last Woman," in *When Women Rule*. (Originally in *Wonder Stories*, April 1932.)

David H. Keller, M.D., "The Feminine Metamorphosis," in *When Women Rule*. (Originally in *Science Wonder Stories*, August 1929.)

Keith Laumer, "War against the Yukks," *Galaxy*, April 1965.

Bruce McAllister, "Ecce Femina!" *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, February 1972.

Booth Tarkington, "The Veiled Feminists of Atlantis," in *When Women Rule*. (Originally in *The Forum*, March 1926.)

James Tiptree, Jr., "Mama Come Home," in *Ten Thousand Light-years from Home*. New York: Ace, 1973. (Originally in *If* in 1968, under the title "The Mother Ship.")

Wallace G. West, "The Last Man," in *When Women Rule*. (Originally in *Amazing Stories*, February 1929.)

The modern SF writers, disregarding their South American brothers' indifference to biological distinctions, make biology itself the guardian of the Sacred Object: they install the Sacred Object on their own persons. All the stories to be discussed (with the possible exception of James Tiptree's "Mama Come Home") use as their Sacred Objects the male genitalia; possession thereof guarantees victory in the battle of the sexes. This victory is therefore a victory of nature, and so the battle may be won without intelligence, character, humanity, humility, foresight, courage, planning, sense, technology, or even responsibility. So "natural" is male victory that most of the stories cannot offer a plausible explanation of how the women could have rebelled in the first place. In three of the ten stories, women are not actively engaged in fighting men; they have merely withdrawn from men's company—but the challenge to male domination is seen as exemplary woman—by some form of phallic display, and the men's identical. The conflict is resolved—either for all women or for an victory (which is identical with the women's defeat) is not a military or political event but a quasi-religious conversion of the women. Although women in these stories constantly plan to do away with men, men (it seems) are not willing to do away with women—that is, do

without women. But they certainly do not want angry, defeated women who might secretly plan how to start the conflict all over again. Unfortunately the illogicality of the solution requires reliance on mystified biology, which makes hay of real biology. Every human motive becomes a sexual motive, and the authors are forced to falsify their characters, especially the men. Since a likable man might be liked (by a woman) for his likableness and not for his Sacred Object, the men in these stories (with perhaps one exception) are either sadistic supermen, who incarnate the power of the penis, or lackwits who have nothing but their penises to offer. A human reacting to a human would ruin the whole business; the only pure test case is a vagina acknowledging a godlike phallus, which is attached to nobody. In the overdetermined world of the Sex War, economics do not exist, everything everybody does is sexually motivated, promiscuity is frigidity and vice versa, and the cure for rape is rape. As we move from the 1920s and '30s to the modern versions (*The Feminists*, *Gender Genocide*, and "Ecce Femina!"), overt violence increases and coherence decreases, the men are more and more on the defensive, and in two ("Ecce Femina!" and *Gender Genocide*) the men win individual victories but are doomed as a group. But the story remains the same story.

The first question one might ask about The Rule of Women, as Bamberger puts it, is how it began. The stories' answers are uniformly meager. For example, the only explanation offered by *The Feminists* (it is the longest of any) is:

> It was a quirk of fate. . . . Women did not intend to take total control. Their takeover is the fault of the passive male. He allowed himself to be controlled for the price of sex and then emasculated. . . . Women . . . originally wanted only equality, but when they realized the ease with which they achieved it, they broadened their goals. (pp. 20–21)

*The Feminists* is a very badly written book, and for that reason the baldest example of the myth in the whole collection. In the world of 1992, which has no futuristic details whatever, "the poison of the atmosphere had completely destroyed the vegetation" (p. 8), the subways have collapsed in New York City, the buses run infrequently, there is no snow-clearing equipment, and the United States has become a police state with military rule and curfews. All women (including army soldiers) wear skirts; sex without permission of "The Committee" is punishable by death; and the gynocracy is pure high-society matriarachy. The hero, a member of the masculinist underground, is



wounded in the *thigh* and feels great pain "shoot up . . . *into his groin*" (p. 118; italics added). He is captured by a tall soldier with "a masculine swagger to her walk" and "bushy eyebrows" (p. 129) who is witness to the first explicitly phallic display in the novel:

> Instinctively he had covered his naked loins with his hands but now, realizing that she was laughing at his modesty, he removed his hands and boldly thrust his loins forward.
>
> She continued to smile, but he knew the gesture annoyed her. (p. 129)

Bushy-browed Captain Luttrell ("I want to see if you disprove my theory of the male's inferiority. . . . The foundation [of it] may already have begun to crack" [p. 154]) sends him back to New York City, where the mayor wants to use him as a scapegoat. So threatening (but fascinating) is his mere photograph that she has dreamed up a special execution for him; he finds himself facing "the gigantic blade of a guillotine" (p. 179). This symbolic castration is averted by the mayor's discovery that he is in reality her long-lost son. She faces the mob herself. The mayor's loyal aide explains: "The mayor discovered that she possessed *the major feminine weakness* she despised in others. *Before she was a Feminist, she was a Mother!*" (p. 187). Italics spent, the book goes on to tell us that the regime is crumbling and that the men will win.

The incoherence of *The Feminists* is right on the surface. Yet the Sex War myth produces some degree of nonsense in all the stories: centrally, the collapse of a gynocracy that is both impressively powerful and totally incompetent, before what might most politely be called the Sacred Object. (*The Feminists* is the only story in which the hero converts to normality not a potential sweetheart but his own mother.)

Keith Laumer's picture of the Rule of Women, "War against the Yukks," is intentional comedy. The two heroes are a scatterbrained professor called Elton and a British game warden called Boyd. The two stumble upon, and are kidnapped by, an 8,000-year-old space module directed by a Lunar Battle Computer buried under the moon's Mount Tycho, which adapts itself to their language within seconds and takes them to an automatically run dome on Callisto populated solely by women. Those are the remnants of an ancient sex war, started (as Elton says) by "some idiotic feminist movement somewhere" (p. 185), presumably the same idiots who built the Lunar Battle Computer. However, memory of the ancient war has degenerated into religion, as one Girl explains:

> The terrible power they [the men, i.e., the Yukks] had was that they made perfectly nice Girls want them to do . . . Strange Things. Even now, there's always the danger that a Girl will fall into Strange Ways—like dreaming about a Yukk chasing her, with all six hands reaching for her. . . . That's what makes the Yukks so terrible. (p. 183)

As in *The Feminists*, there is no masturbation or lesbianism among the Girls; instead there is perpetual blushing at the idea of Strange Thoughts and comic, innocent suggestions to sleep, bathe, or wrestle with the new "girls." But despite the Girls' naiveté, nature wins again; the two Girls' Strange Thoughts become uncontrollable, and all four try unsuccessfully to escape in a spaceship. Just as Mother is about to despatch them, we learn that the installation's frozen sperm providentially ran out twenty years before, and our heroes subside into a harem fantasy. "It should take us a year or so to work our way through, and then start over" (p. 194).

The oddest thing about "Yukks" is that atmosphere of super-heated sexuality among the Girls, with (simultaneous) total passivity. Whatever Strange Thoughts women may have, they can only wait (blushing and taking cold baths for 8,200 years) for the bearers of the Sacred Object to come along and start something.

Nelson Bond's "The Priestess Who Rebelled" is tragic in tone, and the heroine lives in a primitive matriarchy (in the year 3482 A.D., after WW III). The biology is badly mystified—e.g., in this society modeled on bees and termites (a common pattern for matriarchies in SF) not only have the Men gone hairless, high-voiced, and soft (moulting, perhaps) but the Warrior-class women have "tiny thwarted breasts, flat and hard" and the Mother-women are "full-lipped," with soft, white skins and humid eyes "washed barren of all expression by desires too oft aroused, too often sated" (pp. 108–109). Since all women choose which caste to enter after puberty, it is hard to understand why the warriors' breasts have become thwarted—or why often-pregnant women develop full lips, or why they spend a lot of time in sexual intercourse, or why a lot of sexual intercourse makes your eyes blank.

The story begins when Meg, who has become a priestess and is therefore vowed to virginity, undertakes a pilgrimage to what the reader soon recognizes as Mount Rushmore (the tribes' gods are Jarg, Ibrim, Taamuz, and Tedhi). Matriarchal woman meets patriarchal man when Meg is rescued from a "Wild One" (a homeless male) by Daiv. "'You,' said the man-thing . . . 'talk too much.'" His next words: "'You women!' he spat. 'Bah! You do not know how to train a horse. . . .'" And his next: "'You talk too much!' repeated the man-thing wearily" (pp. 208–209).



He propositions her casually; she refuses but is forced to his campfire to get food. "Priestess" has the most coherent (and morally respectable) account of the rise of the matriarchy of any of these tales; it was, we are told, a women's revolt against men's endless war-making. Finally the women become settled city-dwellers and the men homeless Wild Ones. How the Wild Ones generate more Wild Ones all by themselves is never explained. There is considerable quarreling over whether the "Gods" are male or female, which ends in "a mating custom which you do not know" (says Daiv) and the obligatory phallic display, here a kiss:

> She struggled and tried to cry out, but his mouth bruised hers. . . . Suddenly her veins were running with liquid fire. Her heart beat upon rising, panting breasts like something captive that would be free. . . . A vast and terrible weakness trembled through Meg. She knew, fearfully, that if Daiv sought to mate with her, not all the priestessdom of the Gods could save her. There was a body-hunger throbbing within her that hated his Manness . . . but cried for it! (p. 216)

Meg proceeds to Mt. Rushmore and receives the final blow:

> The Gods—were men!
> . . . Even the curls could not conceal the inherent masculinity of Jarg and Taamuz. And Tedhi's lip was covered with Man-hair. . . . (p. 219)

Against the psychedelic kiss, the discovery that God is male, and the attraction of a life that consists mainly of being told she talks too much, Meg's friends, family, her lifelong loyalties, her own traditions and her religion, count as nothing. The Sacred Object triumphs again—with a little help from the gods.

The defeat of the rebellious women in "The Feminine Metamorphosis" is due entirely to God, who invents for the purpose a special strain of syphilis that afflicts only Chinese, does not show up on Wassermann tests, and ends up driving into terminal paresis 5,000 American businesswomen who have masculinized themselves with Chinese androgens in an attempt to take over the world. At first the women's complaints look sensible:

> "I cannot understand why I was not promoted!. . . I am more competent than the man you appointed to that position, and . . . I have been in full charge of the department during the illness of the late occupant."
> "You were not promoted because you were a woman. . . ." (p. 149).

This explanation of female rebellion quickly segues into the plot described above, with the Sacred Object taking on an erratic, wandering life of its own, and smiting down the female thieves who have attempted to appropriate it. With fewer and fewer boy babies born (due to the machinations of the women) and parthenogenesis in the offing ("in Government laboratories and nurseries" [p. 187]), it is time to bring out the heavy artillery. As the detective hero says: ". . . you forgot God. He had certain plans for the human race. . . . You took five thousand of our best women, girls who would have made loving wives and wonderful mothers . . . and . . . you have changed them into five thousand insane women" (pp. 195–96).

Although the five thousand were dedicated businesswomen when the story began (many with "bachelor apartments," p. 152), the moral is clear: women not subjugated *in vivo* ("loving wives and wonderful mothers") will be raped *in vitro* and will die of venereal disease. And nobody human is responsible.

Bruce McAllister's "Ecce Femina!" is a story of women in motorcycle gangs; they shoot up "Vitamin E9—the 'ultravitamin that isn't really a vitamin'" (p. 119), thus endowing themselves with superhuman strength and sadism. Their favorite pastime is castrating and killing men, episodes commemorated by jacket patches of the female symbol with a skull placed inside the circle (p. 121). There are "hundreds of chapters" of "The Women's League" in California (p. 119); and, although Vitamin E9 may explain how the Rule of Women began (is the echo of "estrogen" intentional?), why it persists is a mystery:

> Soon I had him telling me about his wife, about how he had gotten sick and tired of supporting her—her bike, her E9, her arrogance, her appetite, her perversions [unnamed]. . . . He, like thousands of husbands each day, had found himself a weapon and gone nomad, traveling solo from tract to tract. . . . *The police never did anything. The courts never did anything. No one ever foreclosed* (p. 133; italics added).

The biggest, toughest woman of all, known as "Ripper Jack" [*sic*] because she has killed 200 men (p. 142), nurses a wounded man back to health, defends him against the gang, and finally flees with him. Here is Jack before her conversion, as the narrator, who has been *wounded in the leg* in Cambodia, sees her:

> She was a tower of strength. . . . Her boots were like hooves. Her levis . . . were like the tough, weathered hide. Her legs were like those of a buffalo. Her chest bulged like a truck's cab. Her arms were like swollen pistons and her long-sleeve Pendleton was like steel wool. . . . She was a god. From the waist down she was a bull; from the waist up, a man. (p. 132)



After the flight with the man she has come to love (because he is the only man she tries to fight who will not fight back—love is more effective in taking the zing out of these Amazons than any number of battles) the narrator receives a snapshot of Jack with her man and her baby. Jack now looks like this:

> . . . a heavyset woman, her muscle gone to fat, her breasts flabby under her flowerprint blouse. In her lap her big hands are cradling a baby, which is so young it's still pink.
> . . . And you can't tell whether she's smiling or not.
> But then you never could. (p. 144)

In short, a Hell's Angel turns into Mona Lisa in only one year, and the reason is biology; not only is Jack a mother, but, of all the women, only she never shot up Big E. Again we have the degradation of men, the lack of an explanation for the women's dominance (the explanation given is magic, considering the absolute lack of resistance to what are, after all, only motorcycle gangs), the view of the narrator as "emasculated" because he is terrified by a group of superhumanly strong, sadistic persons who are determined to torment him, the insistence that women's domination of men is unnatural (though presumably the pre–Big E situation was not), and the final redemption by heterosexual love. There is also, as in all these stories, the lack of any other kind of love or sex.

If the author of "Ecce Femina!" merely stumbled on the myth, Edmund Cooper, in *Gender Genocide*, is doggedly insistent about it. In this world set 250 years in the future, an all-female, technologically advanced society occupies southern England and periodically sends exterminators north to kill the primitive survivals of patriarchy in northern Scotland. Cooper knows what started the Rule of Women: present-day feminists, who are trying to build a world in which women kill men to enter adulthood and, if they are especially brave, are awarded the Silver Nipple. (Cooper's London contains a monument called "Germaine's Needle.") Cooper allows female homosexuality into his future world only to spend 195 pages denying that it's any fun; the story suffers even more than most from the usual contradiction: if love conquers women so automatically and dependably, how did the Amazon state ever come into existence? Indeed, Rura (the heroine) is a traitor to her nation, her upbringing, and her comrades by page 20; on her first expedition to kill "pigs" (and their "sows" and "piglets") she finds she cannot do it, and

even bandages the wounds of the man whose wife and child were killed by her now-dead comrades.

> Why was she doing this for a pig whose sow had just killed Moryn? She did not know. Perhaps it was because sunlight and death were incongruous. . . . She did not know.
>
> "You were trained to kill, yet you do not. Why is this?"
>
> "I don't know." (p. 21)

The man (not some knock-kneed little crofter, mind you, but MacDiarmid, the leader of the entire rebellion) then knocks her down, spares her life, and, announcing his determination to make a traitor of her, kisses her: "It was like no other kiss she had ever known. It was humiliating, it was degrading, it was disturbing. It drained strength from her limbs, filled her head with nightmares" (p. 25).

The kiss is followed by a meeting back in the south with an old woman whose story unsettles Rura completely. As usual, the reliance on mystical biology includes the most extraordinary nonsense: that rape is impossible, that first intercourse in the missionary position (after having been bruised and beaten) invariably produces ecstasy, that a woman can feel a man's semen enter her, that a vagina is a womb, and that clitorises are inferior in sensitivity to cervixes:

> No woman—particularly an exterminator—who is conscious and uninjured can be raped. . . . The revulsion and feeling of sickness just sort of died. And the weight on top of me seemed to be—well, interesting. And when he pinioned my arms and bit my throat and dug his fingers into my breast, it all hurt like hell but it aroused me. . . . So I let him enter. . . . I tell you, I never knew what a climax was until that red-haired animal squirted his semen into my womb. (p. 49)

A long period of inner conflict follows. Even the rewriting of history does not avail against nature, and when Rura goes out on another mission, and again can't fire her gun, she is gang-raped, called "hellbitch" and "screwmeat" (p. 77), taken to MacDiarmid, claimed by him to replace his dead wife, ordered to be quiet (some authors seem to think this is standard wooing procedure), slapped, and told: "You have entered a man's world. You have much to learn" (p. 84).

After a feeble attempt to kill him, she collapses into his arms with the words: "I love you" (p. 92). The next day, with his original wound still unhealed, suffering from stab wounds he got in a fight with a follower the day before, and with Rura only twenty-four hours away from having been gang-banged into insensibility, he teaches her "what it is like to be a woman" (p. 91).



> It was not like the rape of the previous day. It was not like lying with women. It was not like anything she had ever known.
>
> It was warm, it was disturbing, it was exciting, it was humiliating, it was proud. . . . A man—this man by her side—had washed away twenty years of conditioning. He had loved her; and . . . semen had pulsed excruciatingly, wonderfully, through her vagina. (pp. 114–16)

Rura's conversion occupies the first half of the book; the second half is an idyllic honeymoon, threatened constantly by "hellbitches." One of the most instructive omissions in the novel is the absence of social relations between the primitive Highlanders; men are rivals or subordinates in the feudal hierarchy (the way in which the men vie for power by dueling to the death with one another is hardly efficient for a community threatened by extinction), and social relations between women don't exist. In fact, there are no women except Rura.

What remains is to confirm Rura's conversion before the lovers die in a final *liebestod*, thus avoiding the question of what will happen to their idyll after Rura has had her baby and must, perforce, pay less attention to the Laird than to his son (both characters discuss the coming baby on the absolute presumption that it will be a boy)—or, God forbid, when she meets other Highlanders and finds out that heterosexuality does not necessarily mean monogamy. Cooper's novel is one long proof that, for women, heterosexuality is so much physically pleasanter than lesbianism that it binds a woman not only to sexual pleasure but to one man in particular and to a whole ideology of male dominance. Other possible alternatives—promiscuity, for one—are simply unthinkable.

I think it is clear by now that these stories are not only not written for women; they are not written about women. To quote Michael Korda, in *Male Chauvinism:* "[Men] don't as a rule hate [women]. . . . They just don't want to know anything about them."[2]

Elsewhere Korda says that men make women play roles "in a psychodrama that isn't even theirs" (p. 225). Perhaps the psychodrama of the Sacred Object is intended less to keep women down than to keep men up. (Sorry!) Penis worship *solus* is a lonely business and unconvincing. In this secular religion one cannot find another man to worship one's penis—he, after all, has got one of his own and is looking for a worshipper himself. (About the relation of homosexual men to the myth, I do not know and therefore cannot speak.) So women are drafted as a permanent class of worshippers. Under the hatred and fear of women evident in the myth, there is, I believe, a desperate appeal for *collusion*—the male victory in every one of the

dependent on the female reaction. Without the women's adoration, the men's genitals are not sacred or impressive but only a means to male sensual enjoyment, a self-indulgence strikingly absent in these tales. *Gender Genocide* describes Rura's passion at length but not the Laird's; "Priestess" (at the moment of conversion) describes Meg's arousal, which is taken as defeat. (For Daiv to be similarly disturbed would be a defeat and so cannot happen—he might then be converted to matriarchy.) Only in the comic stories can men be sexually aroused, but there it is the women who become overwhelmed and lose their heads, while the men (as in "Yukks") coolly exploit the women's excitement.

You'd think these authors had been reading Ti-Grace Atkinson. They certainly agree with her that heterosexual love is an institution designed by men to subjugate women. What they add is that it anesthetizes men.[3] And inculcates in them an intense fear of expendability—perhaps the reason why these stories simply and flatly equate an all-female world with female domination of men. The remedy in both cases is to link heterosexual pleasure inextricably to female subjugation.

In the fictional worlds in which the women have refused this equation there is no sexual pleasure at all and the world is in decay, as in West's "The Last Man," one of the stories in Sam Moskowitz's *When Women Rule*. "The Last Man," published in 1929, portrays a world of decaying technology and devolving intellect; the atavistic couple in the story flee into the wilderness and survive, the woman tempting the man with fruit (her name is Eve). Although there is no present-day Sex War in "The Last Man," there was one in the past, the woman's world is tyrannical and sexless, and the real woman—a throwback—initiates natural love and the couple's subsequent flight because she can't stand the all-female society's lack of liveliness and love. An interesting answer to the story, written in 1932, is "The Last Woman," by Thomas S. Gardner, in which the atavistic couple (led by the man; the woman is passive and beautiful) is recaptured and executed. The all-female world is given as the creation of the class of all women; the all-male world is carefully presented as the creation of one abnormal man. The all-female world is decaying and inept, and had to be produced by radical biological changes that are irreversible; the all-male world is scientifically brilliant, powerful, and productive, and has been produced by the action of a drug whose results are temporary and reversible. The asymmetry of the stories is striking. It is hard to escape the conclusion that these "worlds" are really portraits of the two sexes as seen by the two authors.



In "The Veiled Feminists of Atlantis" Booth Tarkington presses the familiar charge that women will not be content with equality but will desire superiority. After wheedling the secrets of magic out of their benevolent men, the ruling-class women of Atlantis become the men's superiors. The women's unjust insistence on retaining the veil (symbol of mysterious sexual power) produces a battle of magic, which sinks the island. Only the "uninitiated populace" (p. 103) survives. The great question, says the story, is who won, but considering that the Atlanteans' descendents are patriarchal (that the women go unveiled among neighboring tribes is a red herring), the "great question" seems deliberately mystificatory, especially in view of an earlier, very striking, image: "One might say that a Kabyle woman's eyes are the eyes of a woman who has seen her grandmother beaten to death, but has not been tamed by the spectacle" (p. 100).

Under the occult details and exotic atmosphere, one discerns the familiar charges: that the rule of women over men is unjust (but the rule of men over women was benevolent), and that women's use of power will be immoral and destructive. Tarkington does not defeat his women with the Sacred Object; rather he assumes it by predicting that feminists cannot have sexual power. He takes from his women what he sees as their Sacred Object—the veil—thus implicitly rendering them unattractive. The condescending mystification of "Who won?" is the comment of a gentleman (one European gentleman tells the story to another *about* a primitive tribe) fairly sure of his privileges. He does not, it seems, need the reassurance of a Sacred Object, except implicitly.

Thomas Berger's *Regiment of Women*, a role-reversal world in which women bind their breasts and rape men anally with dildoes, is cheery and inane, a world of diesel dykes and screaming faggots (all imagined by a very naive writer). It has hardly more overall coherence than *The Feminists*, although it is infinitely better written in its single scenes. The book betrays the conviction that a woman cannot dominate a man unless she has a penis somewhere about her (even is she keeps it in her bureau drawer) and that a man cannot be subjugated unless he acquires breasts, for which purpose silicone implants will do perfectly well. The year is 2047 but the clothes and props are late 1960s. The transvestism and artificial breasts seem to be in the service of rewritten history, although when the hero has his breasts removed late in the book, an army sergeant (female) only comments, "You boys! . . . cosmetic surgery has a tough time keeping up to date" (p. 146). Embryos are brought to

term in artificial wombs, although the book doesn't say who raises the children, a very betraying omission. The biology and sociology are zany: men who are totally anorgasmic and have never masturbated can be forced to ejaculate by machines, women rape men artificially, and the gynocracy, as usual, is totally in control and extremely incompetent, kneeing men in the groin or castrating them in adulthood, which ruins their minds and makes them fat and will-less. Men's Liberation is a single underground organization which cannot attract young men but only old ones, and the gynocracy triumphed because "men once had power but lost it through pity for women" (the only explanation ever given [p. 175]). In short, we are back in the usual world in which the rule of women is sexless and tyrannical, and all this with a literalness that destroys the role-reversal intention. The story ends with a misfit couple fleeing to the wilderness, where the heroine makes the hero into a man by teaching him to drive, running down her own accomplishments, insisting he hold up a gas station, and telling him nature meant him to dominate because his penis is shaped like a weapon. Their final love-making is engineered by little Harriet (who seems to shrink constantly during the last few chapters as George realizes more and more how tiny she is) but the author, who has the sophistication to see that Georgie needs collusion, cannot imagine that Harriet might actively make love to Georgie. She can only taunt him into making love to her, an act he experiences as both rape and murder.

Berger calls the relation they eventually settle into "a reciprocal arrangement" (p. 345), but here is the end of the book:

> She tried to stay on top. "You're too damned heavy!"
> But he easily rolled her over.
> "It's time I caught the rain," he said. And he inserted himself this time.
> If he was going to be a builder and a killer, he could be boss once in a while.
>
> Also, he was the one with the protuberant organ. (p. 349)

One of the few attempts to write thoughtfully about the Sex War that I can find is "Mama Come Home" by James Tiptree, Jr. Although the story contains eight-foot-tall women, they are part of a race from Capella of which we are a neotenic mutation; in its "mature" (i.e., Capellan) form, the women of the human race are two feet taller than men and dominate them, partly because they have the ability to rape men, which they do on Earth in parks and other deserted places, also



murdering their victims afterwards. When we learn that with their super-technology the Capellans "plan to turn off the sun a little. As they leave" (p. 68) in order to "kick us back to the ice age" (p. 69), it becomes clear that these ladies are very bad indeed: "The men of Capella were slaves. . . . A cargo of exotic human males was worth a good deal more than ore" (p. 68).

So far we are strictly in Sex-War Land. But the author (unlike others treated in this paper) explicitly observes: "The Capellans overturned our psychic scenery, our view of ourselves. . . . Look at their threat to our male-dominant structure" (p. 71). Then, pushing the myth rather far, the hero himself is raped.

> The navigator leaned down and said something in a velvety contralto. I didn't need a translator—I'd seen enough old flicks. . . . She casually twisted my arm until things broke. . . . The ensuing minutes I make a point of not remembering except when I forget not to wake up screaming. . . . I was discovering some nasty facts about Capellan physiology through a blaze of pain. (Ever think about being attacked by a *musth* vacuum cleaner?) . . . Presently there was, blessedly, nothing. (p. 65)

Still, in "Mama Come Home" the real struggle is not between Earth men and Capellan giantesses. One of the hero's CIA colleagues is Tillie, a woman under five feet in height who happens to look exactly like a Capellan, and whose impersonation of one is what saves Earth.

The real struggle is for Tillie's loyalty, and it is her conversion to loving the hero that is the center of the story. Gang-raped, knifed, and left for dead as a teenager, she becomes the Capellans' translator and mascot:

> She was different these days—her eyes shone and she had a kind of tense, exalted smile. . . .
> "Tillie, it's dangerous. You don't know them."
> . . . She gave me the bare-faced stare.
> "They're dangerous?" (p. 59)

As the hero remarks, it was "permanent guerilla war inside," with "a six-inch layer of ice between her and everybody who shaved" (p. 59). The story sees this both as an "irrational sex phobia" (p. 72) and as something else; at one point the hero says:

> "You think your big playmates are just like yourself, only gloriously immune from rape. I wouldn't be surprised if you were thinking of going home with them. But you don't know them. . . . *Did you ever meet any American blacks who moved to Kenya?*" (p. 63; italics added)

Elsewhere his reasoning is explicitly political: "The American black who goes to Kenya often discovers he is an American first and an African second, no matter what they did to him in Newark" (p. 70).

Only after the news about the new ice age does the hero see "mad dreams dying in her [Tillie's] eyes" (p. 70). He concludes, with immense relief, "we had Tillie" (p. 71). The heroine's decision to throw in her lot with the male-dominant society that has raped her—a decision partly dependent on the hero's having also been raped—results in a symbolic re-living of her own rape (she pretends to be a raped Capellan in the faked film, which scares away the Capellans). She is then able to touch the hero and comment, "It's all relative, isn't it?"; and finally he says, "My mama came home with me" (p. 78).

If the story treats the Sex War scenario oddly, both inverting some of its elements and commenting critically on others, the reason is not far to seek. As the SF community now knows, "James Tiptree, Jr." is the pseudonym of Alice Sheldon. A woman does not, obviously, have the same stake in the myth as male authors may have. Eight years after this story, Tiptree published another story, "Houston, Houston, Do You Read?" in which present-day men who expect to take over a future, all-female world (a utopia, in fact) are competently and dispassionately killed. As one character says, "We simply have no facilities for people with your emotional problems."[4]

When women fight men, the battle is won by men because women are loyal to men. This piece of doublethink is made possible by splitting the female enemy into two: thus there are Capellan women and Earth women; as in "Yukks" there are sexy young women who are sympathetic, and unsexy old ones; as in *Gender Genocide* there are men-hating Lesbians and real women; as in "The Feminine Metamorphosis" there are good wives and mothers and unnatural businesswomen; as in "Ecce Femina!" there are women who shoot up Big E and women who don't. The real conflict is evaded. Moreover, solidarity among women either does not exist or is ruled out from the beginning; for example, Tillie is presented as without family, without friends, indeed without a social context of any kind. Thus her choice is—as it is in all these stories, for all the heroines—between evil (or in some cases decaying and sterile) female tyranny and some version of the hero, i.e., men. As Michael Korda says: "We need women . . . and hope that we can somehow ensnare, entrap, charm, hold one of them, as if by making our peace (on our terms) with one woman we can hold her captive in our camp, a



prisoner of our side."[5] However, neither in marriage nor in the myths of the Rule of Women will this strategy work. Transferring the Sacred Object to one's own person and calling upon biology (or nature) to guard it only shifts the area of precariousness and consequent terror from the realm of artifacts to that of fantasy. Without such a shift (a very old ploy in Western history) phrases like "penis envy," "castrating bitch," and "emasculated male" would be meaningless as metaphors; "screw you" would not be an insult; and medieval "witches" could not have caused their "victims'" genitals to disappear. The centuries of coercion that lie behind the stories described here are not funny—heteroinstitutionality (as against freely chosen heterosensuality, which does not appear in these stories) is quite as dreadful as Ti-Grace Atkinson says it is.

Yet how unintentionally funny these stories are! Bruce McAllister's motorcycle gang member, "Queen Elizabeth," using "soda pop for strange purposes" (never specified [p. 127]); Edmund Cooper's determinedly charging into his favorite formula ("It was X. It was Y. It was Z. It was Q"); or Nelson Bond's teenage heroine who sobs, sticks out her chin, recognizes George Washington's essential maleness, and flings herself at the hero. The male ignorance betrayed by such fictions is appalling; the male wishes embodied in them are little short of soul-killing. But consider the title I almost used for this paper (and a very good one it is, too): *The Triumph of the Flasher.*

Not all SF concerned with role reversals, all-female worlds, or male domination, is, of course, of the Flasher variety. Some of the material mentioned in Moskowitz's introduction to the book cited appears to be pro-feminist in intention, as is Frederik Pohl's *Search the Sky* (which contains a brief satiric sketch of a role-reversal society), Theodore Sturgeon's *Venus Plus X* (a human, hermaphroditic society), and Mack Reynolds's *Amazon Planet,* in which the author sets up a role-reversal façade very like Berger's—armed female warriors and simpering men—only to reveal beneath it a peaceful and substantially egalitarian world. And the all-female world of John Wyndham's "Consider Her Ways" is a pro-feminist discussion of romantic love and the feminine mystique (although Wyndham creates another of those beehive-like societies structured by biological engineering). More doubtful is Poul Anderson's *Virgin Planet,* an all-female world in which the women span the whole range of human temperaments and activities. However, what will happen when men return to the planet (the women wished to be