THE WISCON CHRONICLES
VOL. 10

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VOLUME 10

Social Justice Redux

Edited by Margaret McBride

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Welcome to WisCon Chronicles Volume 10: Social Justice Redux

Margaret McBride

At WisCon 2014 when Timmi Duchamp and Kath Wilham asked me to edit *WisCon Chronicles 10*, I immediately suggested that the focus be Social Justice. Why? The night before I had listened to Alaya Dawn Johnson's guest-of-honor speech with her discussion of the violence against women and discrimination in the publishing field and Kim Stanley Robinson's speech marshalling the many facts showing environmental problems (see transcripts of the speeches following). A bit later I decided to add *Redux* to the title in homage to Ursula K. Le Guin's willingness to re-examine her beliefs about gender and language in "Does Gender Matter (ReDux)" from 1989. *The WisCon Chronicles Volume 9* edited by Mary Anne Mohanraj also had articles that fit under the broad rubric of Social Justice. Obviously Social Justice has been written about, so why did I want to ask writers and readers to examine it again? According to Grace Paley "Although writers may not want to be in charge of justice or anything like that, to some extent they are if they really are illuminating what isn't seen (*Listen to Their Voices*, edited by Mickey Pearlman, 31).

Here are some other reasons I think social justice issues must continue to be addressed:

1. "In the United States in 2013, 45.3 million people lived below the official poverty line, with incomes of less than $12,000 a year for a two-adult, two-child family. A third of them were children. Twenty million people live in what economists call deep poverty, with in-

comes of less than half the official poverty line. That's almost three times the number of people who lived in deep poverty in 1976" (Wright, Kai. "What Recovery?", *Harper's*, August 2015, 55).

2. "From 2010 to 2014, states enacted 231 new abortion restrictions. Abortion clinics have closed at a rate of 1.5 a week in the last two years…. The extra time and money involved [to get an abortion] has skewed the patient population toward women who are white, educated and insured…." Redden, Molly, "How the War on Women Was Won," *Mother Jones*, September/October 2015, 28-27; see also Little, Anita, "Black Women Left Behind," *Ms*, Summer 2015, 10 for more information.)
3. According to the Department of Defense, an estimated 26,000 people in the military were sexually assaulted in 2012 (most recent year for which data is available) (*Sierra Magazine*, November/December 2015, 4).
4. Multiple articles are available on the increasing problems of climate change, plant and animal extinction, loss of natural habitat, pollution, etc. and most of the areas needing extreme environmental cleanup are in or near poor and/or minority living areas. For example, *Sierra Magazine* in its November/December 2015 issue notes the environmental concerns/toxic hazards for those living in or near most US prisons (24-26).
5. Eight of the ten most challenged books in US libraries during 2014 have main characters who are non-white or LGBT (*Harper's*, July 2015, 9).
6. The publishing and art businesses continue to discount people of color and women. For examples see:

   "I Gave a Speech to the Publishing Industry and No One Heard me" by Mira Jacob, Buzz Feed, 9/17/2015;

The many online comments about the use of a Chinese name by a white male poet in *Best American Poetry 2015* edited by David Lehman and Sherman Alexie;

Siri Hustvedt's novel *The Blazing World* for comments about women artists such as noting that when the art world "has been about women, it has often been about correcting past oversights. It is interesting that not all, but many women were celebrated only when their days as desirable sexual objects had passed" (69);

Nicola Griffith's blog in May 2015 with statistics about the major literary awards— "Of the past 15 Pulitzer prizes for literature, eight were won by men writing about men and boys, three by women writing about men and boys, three by women writing about both men and women. There were no winners written wholly from the point of view of a woman or girl…. It's hard to escape the conclusion that, when it comes to literary prizes, the more prestigious, influential and financially remunerative the award, the less likely the winner is to write about grown women. Either this means that women writers are self-censoring, or those who judge literary worthiness find women frightening, distasteful, or boring. Certainly the results argue for women's perspectives being considered uninteresting or unworthy."

7. The number of homeless continues to increase in the United States.
8. The many incidents of deaths of men and women and even children of color by police or security guards and the way "black lives matter" slogans & rallies have been discounted by the media.

9. Many other examples could be added every day looking through newspapers or reading blogs and Facebook.

Unfortunately in our own field of Speculative Fiction, we can easily think of examples that fit under the topic:

1. The many blogs/news articles written about the Hugos in 2015.
2. RaceFail, Gamergate, and the controversy over changing the World Fantasy Award from a Lovecraft bust (See Steven Erikson's "Awards or Bust" on TheCriticalDragon.wordpress.com on 11-14-15).
3. Continual troll racist and misogynist comments on the internet.
4. Why should the label Social Justice Warrior be seen as derogatory? (I like Social Justice Wizard—thanks to Pablo M. A. Vazquez III in *Lightspeed's Queers Destroy Science Fiction!*). Working to help all people have fairness and equity in their lives seems like a no-brainer. As so many people have written in objection to the pejorative use of "political correctness," refusing to use language that others find hurtful seems like common courtesy; yet some continue to find controversy in the terms. See Greta Christina's "What You're Saying When You Use the Phrase 'Politically Correct'" at Freethoughtblogs.com for a wonderful discussion of the problems with using the term negatively. Another online essay well worth reading is "How to Write a 'Political Correctness Run Amok' Article" (https://medium.com/@juliaserano/how-to-write-a-political-correctness-run-amok-article-9b828d443018).

We can all think of other examples, but fortunately more positive examples are also possible:

> The novel *The Three Body Problem* by Cixin Liu (translated by Ken Liu) and the novelette "The Day the

World Turned UpSide Down" by Thomas Olde Heuvelt (translated by Lia Belt) were the first Hugo wins for fiction in translation.

Worlcon 2017 is scheduled for Finland with Nalo Hopkinson and Johanna Sinisalo as guests of honor. Johanna's novel *Not Before Sundown (*aka *Troll: A Love Story)* was the first translated work to win a James Tiptree Award.

Kat Tanaka Okopnik's online work on the Dictionary of Social Justice and other related issues; Annalee's blog on Diversity Panels she'd like to see (thebias.com 8/31/15); Lavie Tidhar's blog on world science fiction and the *Apex Book of World Science Fiction*, Vol. 1-4; Geoff Ryman's efforts to increase knowledge and interest in African Speculative fiction—see the African Fantasy Reading Group on Facebook; the Sierra Club highlighting the links between social justice and environmental concerns in its magazine and campaigns

The Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Oregon is one of many regional theaters that are including diversity in race, gender, and disability. In 2015 Don John in *Much Ado about Nothing* was played by a woman who uses a wheelchair; the ensemble soldiers in *Anthony and Cleopatra* were both men and women and Anthony was a black man. An actor who signs (with others translating for him) has been included in several plays including *Hamlet* in very creative ways. Lear had daughters of three different "races" in an earlier production. *The Tempest* had a Prospera instead of Prospero several years ago.

Important anthologies have been published in the last several years:

- *Long Hidden: Speculative Fiction from the Margins of History*, edited by Rose Fox & Daniel José Older
- *Octavia's Brood,* edited by Adrienne Maree Brown & Walidah Imarisha
- *Kaleidscope: Diverse YA Science Fiction and Fantasy Stories,* edited by Julia Rios & Alisa Krasnostein
- *Stories for Chip,* edited by Nisi Shawl & Bill Campbell
- *Sisters of the Revolution,* edited by Ann & Jeff VanderMeer
- *Letters to Tiptree,* edited by Alisa Krasnostein & Alexandra Pierce
- John Joseph Adams' *Lightspeed* volumes:
  Women Destroy Science Fiction!, edited by Christie Yant,
  Women Destroy Fantasy!, edited by Cat Rambo,
  Queers Destroy Science Fiction!, edited by Seanan McGuire,
  and the upcoming *People of Color Destroy Science Fiction!,* edited by Nalo Hopkinson
- *Black and Brown Planets,* edited by Isiah Lavender III — "Invoking race and racism in an outwardly white genre is necessary. Coloring science fiction *is* an absolute and radical commitment" (10).

If you've missed any of these, I recommend you read them all!

The University of Oregon held a two-day James Tiptree Jr. Symposium celebrating the papers of Alice Sheldon/James Tiptree Jr. given to the Special Collections Archives. Other science fiction authors' papers are collected there also: Suzette Hayden Elgin, Sally Miller Gearhart, Damon Knight, Ursula K. Le Guin, Joanna Russ, Kate Wilhelm. The University hopes to

have a symposium in 2016 on Joanna Russ and in 2017 on Suzy McKee Charnas.

The James Tiptree Jr. Award continues to thrive with dedicated Motherboard members and panels recommending great fiction for us to read.

WisCon is celebrating 40 years!

The articles in this volume of The WisCon Chronicles suggest other aspects of the science fiction and mundane worlds where we can all continue to work toward meaningful change.

> The promise of fiction is the promise that everyone gets to speak, that every voice is heard, and we listen to one, and we listen to the other, and we listen to the third, and that's the glory of being a reader and being a writer. (Jane Smiley, *Listen to their Voices*, edited by Mickey Pearlman, 102)
>
> Our obligation as writers is to make people uncomfortable, to push the borders of what is possible. (Terry Tempest Williams, *Listen to their Voices*, edited by Mickey Pearlman, 132)

Margaret McBride taught science fiction for more than 20 years at the University of Oregon, including three classes using fiction from the James Tiptree Jr. Award. She was chair of the 2004 Tiptree Award panel. She has been on many panels at WisCon since WisCon 20. She thanks Kath Wilham, Timmi Duchamp, and Arrate Hidalgo for working on this volume.

A Million Mirrors: WisCon 39 Guest of Honor Speech

Alaya Dawn Johnson*

I'm going to start with a phrase: "We need diverse books." The hashtag campaign founded by YA novelist Ellen Oh has become a major movement that has materially impacted con runners, booksellers, publishers, authors, and readers. It has a struck a chord that has resonated with thousands and thousands of readers. And the reason for that, I think, is a deep well of need. Generations of us have grown up stifled by the dominant narrative and longing to see, *see more*. No novel, no short story, no work of art can give us the diversity of the whole world. Every story is necessarily a reflection of that reality. Every story is a mirror distorted with varying degrees of deliberation and unconscious bias. And every time a story reflects the world, it changes it—just a little. A thousand reflections change the world a little more. It starts to get a certain idea of itself. Five thousand reflections? Ten thousand reflections? A million?

If stories are reflections, then imagine all of those reflections, all of those stories, as mirrors placed around a tree. This tree is the world, and our lives in it. For various reasons of historical entropy and class and race and gender and a hundred other factors, it's come to be understood that the best kind of mirror is a *certain* kind of mirror. It can be very wide, let's say, but it's rude or déclassé for it to be too tall. It can have beautiful gilt edges, but sharp points are out of the

* Alaya Dawn Johnson began her 2015 guest of honor speech by playing the guitar and singing "The Body Electric" from a band called Hurray for the Riff Raff, with lyrics by Alynda Lee Segarra.

question. Too plebeian. Too racialized. You get the picture—some of those mirrors might be works of art, but at the end of the day they're still reflecting the same roots of the same tree. It might get to the point where most people, who spend their time looking in these mirrors and being entertained by these mirrors, forget that the tree has leaves and branches and flowers at all. And those people who live on those branches? Who tell stories about those flowers that the root people are half-convinced are an urban legend, and besides, a little vulgar; sure flowers are fine for light entertainment, but they aren't *serious literature*? Well those branch people can start to feel like they're invisible. They can see themselves but no one else can see them.

Every story is a mirror. And in a world of diverse mirrors, of different heights and shapes and sizes and distortions and colors—well, in that world, no one would forget the whole tree. They'd laugh if someone tried to tell them that the only reflections worth having are the ones of thick, gnarly, manly—ahem—roots. They'd be able to point to a dozen beautiful mirrors, famous, Pulitzer-prize-winning mirrors, that reflect the leaves and branches and tiny knots and even the ant colonies that live in them. In that world no root people would act as if the branch people were somewhat offensive for even attempting to make mirrors.

And no branch people would feel that painful sense of atomization, of being in a place which no mirror is even allowed to reflect.

Before I beat the metaphor so hard that tree falls over, let me turn to one of our great African American thinkers, W.E.B. DuBois, who over a century ago articulated beautifully this painful contradiction:

> "After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight

> in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. *The Souls of Black Folks*, 1903)

The sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others. That's a phrase that sent shivers through me the first time I read it. Across a gap of a century, from 1903 to 2015, DuBois speaks clear truth about the lives of so many of us. To black people in particular he gives us the profound metaphor of the seventh son born with a veil, a mark of difference, which is a burden and a gift. We have second sight, he says. The ability to see outside of ourselves and within ourselves. This doesn't always feel like a gift. Double-consciousness, as DuBois amply demonstrates in the rest of that essay, can wear you out, and waste your mental and cultural resources. Double-consciousness means always being aware of and having to navigate the opinions of a dominant class who barely grant you your humanity. Like every person of color in this country, I've become an expert at it. For me, double-consciousness was hearing Brown Sugar and trying to convince myself that it was a critique of white male attitudes toward the sexual availability of black women. Double-consciousness was reading a hundred fantasy novels as a teen and almost never encountering a black character. The one time I did, he died. Double-consciousness was me deciding I would rather have falsely whitewashed fantasy worlds than

falsely whitewashed contemporary ones—picking my poison, I guess. I attended mostly white schools and lived in mostly white neighborhoods all of my life. Even when I didn't want to, I would find myself clinging to the other black kids like a life raft in a sea that denied the validity of my own existence. We had to stick together just to see each other.

And though I tried to imagine different mirrors, sometimes it was hard. I remember a persistent daydream of mine, a portal fantasy. You all know portal fantasies, where our intrepid heroine stumbles across a door in a hedge or an overlarge wardrobe, emerges in a fantasy kingdom and has adventures. There's not many a thirteen-year-old fantasy lover who hasn't daydreamed about this, I'd guess. But I remember that in these daydreams I would persistently hit a snag that I could not think my way past. Because I had braids. And for the life of me, I could not imagine how I was going to deal with braids in fantasyland. Let's say that I spent a couple of days in the inn on my adventure, and I took them out. Well then I'd have a mess of almost-dreds and if I didn't have a pick and some good hair oil I might as well shave it all off. Did fantasy worlds have picks, I thought? Where would I get hair oil? Conditioner? Maybe I could commission someone to make me a pick? But what would they think of my hair? Would they think I was weird? Would they even let me into the castle?

And here's the thing: not once in probably a year of having this awkward daydream and never getting to my adventure because I was so damn worried about my hair—it *never occurred to me that the fantasy kingdom did not have to be entirely populated by white people*. It did not occur to me—not once—to imagine myself in a Ghanian kingdom fantasy world, or, for that matter, a modern Washington, DC, fantasy world! I had grown up with such a dearth of those mirrors that even though I could feel my own hair I could not imagine its reflection.

So we grow up. And we write science fiction and we write fantasy and we write YA and we say—because we of the double-consciousness have had to make great sacrifices to gain this second sight—we know your world! We've lived in it every day of our lives, alongside of ours. But now we need more mirrors. We need diverse stories.

And slowly, our stories change the narrative. Which means, our stories change the world. Because *we* don't just need diverse stories. *They* do. The ones who sneer at that hashtag and counter with things like: we need *good* stories. The deeply clueless (or outright malevolent) people who like say that "all lives matter"—of course they do, of course we want good stories, and that is the entire goddamned point. *Those people* need diverse stories as much as we do.

Because the fact is, no one is at the center of most of the stories on the planet. What we seventh sons, the seventh children, have learned after a lifetime of double-consciousness, some brutal, some benign, is that *we don't have to be*. A world where you have received from birth the unquestioned, unassailable right to see someone like you at the heart of every single story? That's a fucked-up world. You want a dystopia? Well take a ticket and here's some popcorn. We need diverse stories because without them we raise generations of narcissists who feel entitled to rampage through the world, erasing our stories and *our lives*, because they have never been taught of the existence of the former and value of the latter. Changing the narrative is nothing less profound than changing the world. Not just so that we can see ourselves—

So that *they can see us*.

So that we can *all* learn the second sight, to have double—hell, triple and quadruple consciousness. So that we can all see *others*—let me put this plainly, not just white people—as the heroes of their own stories.

And this is what I love about WisCon. I see here a space where the narrative is changing. Painfully at times, and cer-

tainly not completely, but this is what I tell everyone when I recommend spending their money on a flight to Madison over Memorial Day weekend: I have never in my life seen more POC at an SF con. I'm not saying that I haven't been mistaken for five other black women here. I'm not saying I haven't felt othered or overlooked or confused. But I have never felt like I didn't have a place. Of all the conventions I've attended since then, I come back here because I feel that I am seen, that diverse stories are valued, and that I can enjoy myself without hiding in the bar with my friends. My friend K Tempest Bradford, who has had to endure abuse of a kind I wish I couldn't believe for her suggestion that people try spending a year reading other people's stories, tells me that last year seventy people attended the WisCon POC dinner. Seventy people! I remember my first convention, the Boston Worldcon in 2004. I wandered through the halls like a ghost. I didn't see one other person of color. I had come from anime conventions where POC were a major, regular presence. I couldn't understand what I had gotten myself into. Should I try a different genre? I felt so invisible, both online and in public spaces, that I seriously considered defecting from the genre that had captured me since I read Diana Wynne Jones. I didn't, and I'm glad I didn't, but it was hard. And the knowledge that someone like me, just graduated from college, with stories to tell that she hasn't seen before, could go to a WisCon and feel like what she wants to do is possible—well, if that's not changing the narrative, I don't know what is.

K. Tempest Bradford is changing it. Nisi Shawl and Kiini Salaam and Ellen Kushner and Delia Sherman and Nalo Hopkinson and Doselle Young and David Anthony Durham and Malinda Lo and Sarah Micklem and Ellen Oh and our two fabulous Tiptree winners, Jo Walton and Monica Byrne are changing it. They, and hundreds of others, are showing the world a different reflection.

Which brings me back to the song that I started all this with. The song is called "The Body Electric," and it is by a band called Hurray for the Riff Raff, which is fronted by Alynda Lee Segarra. A Puerto Rican woman from the Bronx who crossed the US on freight trains and plays the banjo in a New Orleans' folk band. She's a woman of color making a splash in a genre whose default tropes towards women range from unfriendly to pathologically violent. Just a few brief examples:

"Down By The River," Neil Young
"My Good Gal," Old Crow Medicine Show
"Delia's Gone," Johnny Cash
"Little Sadie," Bob Dylan]

[Clips of folk songs whose lyrics mention the narrator killing women.]

So what is "The Body Electric" about? It's about violence against women. But not from the point of view of the man. For once, it's about a woman living in the shadow of that violence, speaking not to a man, but another woman. "He shot her down, he put her body in the river. He covered her up, but I went to get her. And I said, my girl, what's happened to you now? I said, my girl, we gotta stop it somehow."

This is not the same old story. But it knows the old stories. It had to, just to survive. And at the end of a song about this bloody legacy, she contemplates the likely consequences of not having enough mirrors.

"Tell me what a man with a rifle in his hand is gonna do for his daughter when it's her turn to go."

We need diverse stories, we need a million mirrors of different shapes and sizes. Not just so we can see ourselves. So that they can see us through our own eyes.

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Alaya Dawn Johnson is the author of six novels for adults and young adults. Her novel *The Summer Prince* was longlisted for the National Book Award for Young People's Literature. Her most recent, *Love Is the Drug*, won the Andre Norton Award. Her short stories have appeared in many magazines and anthologies, including *Asimov's*, *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, *Interzone*, *Subterranean*, *Zombies vs. Unicorns* and *Welcome to Bordertown*. Most recently, she has contributed to the collaborative serial project *Tremontaine.* In addition to the Norton, she has won the Cybils and Nebula Awards and been nominated for the Indies Choice Award and Locus Award. She lives in Mexico City.

WisCon 39 GoH Speech

Kim Stanley Robinson

Thank you for that kind introduction, and thank you everybody at WisCon for inviting me to be your guest of honor. It's one of the great honors of my professional career, a kind of a capstone for a strand of my work that has been central to both my writing and my life, as a reader, as a Mr. Mom, as a husband, and as a friend.

Today I want to talk about the idea that we are in for an interesting time in the coming century and discuss a few concepts that might be helpful for us in negotiating the coming years in a successful and graceful way.

First, I want to point out that we have been technological since before we were human, so taking an anti-technological stance is not a good way to cope with what's coming. The various primate species that preceded us by a few million years were technological species, using fire, stones, and other materials to help cope with the world. It's something we were born doing, so to speak, so we are used to it, and good at it, and even when it seems like technology is somehow swamping us, we are good at negotiating that and figuring out what is truly useful to us.

Then I want to suggest that the technologies we are good at include not just the stones, or the fire, but also, crucially, language. Language is a technology. The way to conceptualize this in our modern technological set is to remember that software is as important as hardware. We make that distinction in computers, we know computers don't work without functioning software—they turn into frustrating lumps of metal and plastic. Once you grant that software is a technolo-

gy, it becomes clear that language is a technology, and indeed all human systems can be regarded as technologies, including law. That's a stretch for the usual definition of the word technology, but it's one we need to make. People hope for a technological solution to our current problems, and one can always agree with them: we do need a technological solution. We need to change our laws.

This of course tweaks most people's idea of a technological solution, which they often describe using the metaphor of a "silver bullet solution," a nice metaphor, as it seems to refer to the killing of vampires. To speak then of changing the laws as a silver bullet solution plays with people's brains a bit, but that in itself is a good idea, because we are entering an emergency century, an emergency that's going to last longer than any of us, so we need mental flexibility to deal with it. It's important that we grant that yes, we need technological solutions to get us out of the problems of the coming century; one can agree, yes, climate change, mass extinction, these need a technological solution—we call it justice. That's one of the true silver bullet solutions—just laws. Then you move on from there, and hopefully the discussion gets shifted in a useful way.

Another set of concepts I find useful: E.O. Wilson, when he published his book *Sociobiology* in 1972, got a lot of shit for suggesting our origins as social primates might be worth studying for lessons we can apply now. Many objections to his notion were from the left; many were from feminists. The assumption was that he was returning us to the bad zone of Herbert Spencer's social Darwinism, as it was assumed that if we studied humanity as a species of social animals, we were necessarily going to have to conclude that we were naturally ruled by gangster males; that in the natural way, might made right; and that women were there to have babies and take care of the kids. It was assumed that these notions would be proved by looking at the other primates still alive on the planet. So

the attack on Wilson was quite ferocious, though he's a mild-mannered southern Baptist, who always replied politely by saying that he was just pointing out that we are a social species and ought to be studied as such. This is a hard argument to refute, because we are in fact social primates evolved from earlier social primates, and by studying the other social primates, we might indeed learn useful thing. So the political attack on him as being a social Darwinist was misplaced; he never said anything like that. But the attacks on his approach began to chop off at the knees a very important human study for conceptualizing justice. This was made very clear by the work of Sarah Hrdy, a student of Wilson's, who wrote a book called *Mother Nature*, in which she pointed out that different species of primates have different organizational principles. They vary quite widely, but in all of them, there's no evidence to suggest that alpha males and their little group of gangsters really run the societies involved. The closer you look at many of these primate species, the more you begin to see that they are organized somewhat like the parliamentary systems in Europe, wherein the alpha male is like the president and cuts the ribbons on ceremonial occasions, while the prime minister, usually a female, does all the necessary work of arranging the functions of social reproduction, of taking care of the kids and the elderly, of managing who gets to mate with whom, which then influences what kind of babies get born, and who lives and dies. All that business happens in the realm of the so-called alpha females, who were usually the oldest of a little group of females.

It sounds familiar. And at that point, learning all this, you have focused attention in a new way on what humanity might have been like before patriarchy and capitalism changed us, and this is a very useful conceptual tool—it's a kind of science fiction, but then again so much political thinking is. We look at what we were like in the Paleolithic, and can see better what changed when we started creating the agricultural

surpluses that eventually allowed us to run the planet under the hierarchies of class, race, age, and gender.

This kind of historical thinking is crucial to us now. About 10,000 years ago, some technological successes that had not just to do with tools but with organizational systems, began to change us in big ways. It's worth studying that long, durational history to give us some tools to move on to the next stage of human history. To cut to the chase, I'm going to simply say that our current crisis, of climate change and mass inequality, is primarily a bad result of the often positive successes of capitalism, and that capitalism, though never really planned as a system, developed out of feudalism and earlier political hierarchies, and the power relations of those earlier systems, full of brutal injustice, have been retained in capitalism, such that now it is one of the two great bads in global civilization, along with patriarchy. Both these dominating systems are power structures that are tremendously destructive to human potential and human happiness, and to the other species on the planet, and thus to our long-term survivability. This is part of what is meant when we say these hierarchical systems are unjust.

I don't want to spend too much time reiterating things we already know, so I will quickly describe the climate situation in what may be new terms to some of you. We can burn 500 gigatons more carbon before we tip the biosphere into an unstoppable mass extinction event. However, we have already identified 2,500 gigatons of fossil carbon in the ground. There are companies that claim those 2,500 gigatons as corporate assets, and nation-states that claim them as national resources which add to the power of their nations—the USA for sure, but also Russia, Brazil, Australia, Canada—the list goes on. Many of the most powerful nations on earth are literally banking on using their fossil carbon as financial leverage, and as the source of the electrical energy that runs their countries. But in ecological terms, meaning survival terms,

at least 2,000 gigatons of that fossil carbon need to become what economists might call stranded assets, in that they need to be left in the ground; otherwise we will destroy the material basis for our existence. This is a big problem: if you take the current price of carbon and try to estimate the dollar value of 2,000 gigatons of carbon, it comes to about 160 trillion dollars, give or take a decimal place or two. For sure it represents a lot of money, and people want that money, and they're going to go after it regardless of the ecological consequences for the biosphere; they will continue to want to pull it out of the ground and burn it, and then hope that their mansion island is going to be okay for them—which it won't. But many people will not see that, and they're going to do what they want; in sociobiological terms, they're still thinking in terms of kin selection, where you take care of your kin and let all the others deal with their problems however they can; they haven't noticed that at this point all the people living on the planet have become a single kin unit.

I only bring up this vast but theoretical amount of money to suggest how hard the fight is going to be. It will sometimes become a physical fight, but in any case it will always be a political fight, and a discursive struggle. This struggle is unavoidable. So, as we go forward from WisCon into a discursive battle that will never end, we need to be thinking about the arguments that will be persuasive in the world at large. One of the nice things about WisCon is that this is a society of like-minded individuals, by and large. Rather feminist, rather progressive. It's fun to talk amongst ourselves, to argue fiercely about theory and tactics, because there are underlying principles already agreed on which allow us to argue coherently (sometimes). But when you go out into the world, and encounter neighbors and coworkers and family and strangers who don't agree on underlying principles, we need to be able to engage with them, to argue with them, in ways that might be persuasive.

So, we can perhaps say, Yes, there needs to be a technological solution, and there is one; we call it social justice. The first response to this from people with differing worldviews, will be to suggest that you're just being an idealistic hippie. That's a very common attack on me, that I'm just another aging white male hippie from the Sixties, and since this is true, there's not a lot I can do to fight that one. Everybody's got their weak point in these arguments, which is simply their identity as an individual. But even so, when you talk to people, you can say, Yes, yes, I am a hippie, but I agree we need a technological solution, because the impact we are making on the environment is a multiplication of three crucial factors—population, appetite, and technology—and each one of these can be solved by a technological solution.

This means making use of Paul Ehrlich's famous I=PAT formula. I love it partly because it does not work mathematically, as numbers can't really be produced to fill all three terms. It's a metaphorical equation, therefore, a heuristic equation; it exists to teach us what matters. Population is the easy one; there are about 7 billion humans, that's a number, and it is undeniably true that it's a big number, and that sheer population matters. So there's one number all can agree on; but the T in the formula refers to technology, and there, it's the cleanliness of the technology used that is being referenced, because a clean technology will have much less impact on the biosphere than a dirty technology. That could possibly be given a rough number by calculating how much the given technology burns carbon, but carbon burn is just one aspect of the matter, even if it is important. In any case, there's a rubric there that could lead to a kind of number.

Then we come to the A in the middle, and that one is also problematical. I called it appetite, but Ehrlich first called it affluence. I don't think affluence is the right word, because Henry David Thoreau could be said to be an affluent person because he loved walking the back roads of Concord so much,

and thus his affluence was not material but conceptual. Affluence as a term doesn't automatically have to do with consumption, in other words, so maybe appetite is a better term; meaning, simply how much we choose to consume beyond the necessities. But that too is a bit problematic, because real appetite, meaning hunger, is real and crucial. So I think now that the middle term should be changed to economics, and it should become the I=PET formula. Our impact on the planet is a function of population, times technology, times the economic system that we choose to measure and value things.

Whatever you call that middle term, all of them multiplied together make humanity's impact on the planet. So, if you hear people saying, as you will, that if only there were fewer people we would be all right, you know that the speaker is suggesting that really the problem is not the relatively lightly populated first world, but rather all those brown people on the other continents, say in India or China—maybe everywhere that isn't the speaker's home. So it's not that person's problem. But then you can point out that population itself is only one-third of what matters, and explain that every first-world citizen uses about thirty times as many resources as the poorest people on the planet, and suggest to the speaker that they do the math and see what it comes to. Thirty times 350 million is actually a lot more than one billion; and suddenly it's our problem again.

Then also, even granting sheer population alone is a problem (which it is), you can point out that in every place on earth where women have full legal rights over their lives, equivalent to the men in their society, the population replacement rate in that place is about steady state, meaning 2.2 kids per woman; in many places it actually dips under 2.2. On the other hand, in poverty-stricken places where women's rights are much reduced, the kids-per-woman rate can go as high as 5 or 6. Then going further, one can note that in countries with high birth rates where the laws were changed such that

women suddenly had more legal control over their lives, the population replacement rate dropped sharply in a single generation. This happened in Thailand, Indonesia, and parts of Mexico, so it's not just a theory, or a mere wish that women's rights would make a difference to the larger ecological situation; it's a demonstrated demographic fact. The world has run this experiment by accident, pressured by women demanding the basic rights outlined by the UN after World War Two, and the results are clear.

It's also been demonstrated that the biggest impacts on the planet come from the richest and poorest people among us. From the poor it usually comes down to deforestation and topsoil loss; if you need food on the table that night to feed your children, the small actions taken repeatedly by many can become environmentally destructive. From the rich, it happens by way of over-consumption: marble tabletops, doing things to show one has enough money to waste it for the fun of it. Because of these documented facts, social justice thus becomes an environmental technology, and the A or E in the Ehrlich equation becomes the crucial element: the laws that we agree to live by, economic system that we agree to live in, these have to change or the biosphere gets ruined.

Of the three parts of the formula, the technology part turns out to be the simplest—you simply substitute clean technology we have already invented for the dirty tech we use now. We arrange to pay ourselves for the work it will take to install it, and make the swap out from dirty tech to clean tech as fast as we can. Again, the hard part here is the economics and politics of it, not the engineering.

The population part of the equation can be best managed by justice and women's rights. And I want to acknowledge here that the idea that we would want to institute justice for instrumental environmental reasons is a bit grating to one's sense of what justice is. One would want to say that we institute justice because it's the right thing to do, that it is

inherently right, and doesn't need to have an instrumentality. That's true; however, I have to point out that the fact that justice is the right thing to do has gotten us a certain distance along the way, but not all the way along the way, as we can see when we look around. So the fact that that it's not only the right thing to do, but has also become a necessary survival tactic, is not a bad thing. It's not something to object to. It's just more fuel for the fire, more ammunition for the fight that we're in and can't avoid. We now need to institute global justice and equality for all, for two reasons that bond together into a single reason: It's the right thing to do morally, and it's the survival thing to do, just in sheer utilitarian terms. We might as well accept that utilitarian necessity and play both sides of the game, depending on which side helps us the most in any particular argument.

Ultimately, I'm saying the discursive and political struggle we can't avoid is a really broad front. Almost everything we do in the coming century is going to be an engagement in this battle. Can we make a sustainable permaculture, a civilization where everyone has adequacy and understands the idea that enough is as good as a feast? Adequacy, for at least half the people alive right now, would be a huge upgrade; adequacy itself counts as utopia, if you are living hungry and in fear. And if others of us have to downgrade toward adequacy, it might be considered to be an upgrade anyway, as much of what we call affluence comes down to being cocooned in crap, which makes people unhealthy and reduces the sensory pleasures of being alive, as if eating everything coated in thick oil. In any case, adequacy for all has to come first, then we can figure out which luxuries are actually fun.

So it's a broad front, and it will be a long emergency. An exciting time. And to end, I want to suggest that we are going to achieve a decent and sustainable civilization by stages, and by a process that is always, at every point, involved with our idea of government. Government, in the capitalist world

order, can be conceived of as the people's company, and the biggest one of all, not because it has the most money, which it doesn't, but because it makes the laws we live by. So government needs to be fought for. It's the battlefield where the great American science fiction story, maybe the greatest American science fiction story, is constantly being fought. The science fiction story goes like this: that government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from this earth.

That's a beautiful story, and it's science fiction because the "shall not" is future tense. Imperative, too; a call to action, to utopian action, in fact, because it would be great if it were true. It's not always true, it's not inherently true; it has to be fought for. Lincoln told this story during the battle against slavery, and now we still have to fight for it, in the courts and the legislatures and the discursive spaces, and in all the conversations we have with everybody in our culture.

I realize that this is a somewhat horrific way to end a speech, because political struggle is so incredibly tedious and boring. Politics! What a dismal fate! What a sad stupid soap opera! But we can't escape it. And I'm also thinking of WisCon now, and thinking specifically of women. Women do the bulk of social reproduction in this world. They do the majority of the taking care of kids, and the educating of kids; they do the majority of the taking care of sick people, and the taking care of the dying. They already do all that; I've seen it myself, and we've all seen it, or done it. So if I threaten you with the idea that you have to add to that kind of hard, tedious work, the going down to meetings, to city councils, to school board meetings, to sitting through the boredom and the cone of stupidity that sits over all the political functions of our country—how bad could it be? It can be a chance to speak one's mind. And it has to be done.

Two things to finish. An ounce of law is worth a thousand pounds of rhetoric, so let's not get caught up too much in Oh he said that to me, and we said this to them, and blah blah

blah. Let's focus on alliances and on changing the laws. The laws are what matter, and they're hard to change. On the other hand, to be fair to both sides here, rhetoric, though easy, is definitely part of the battle. We can make a thousand pounds of it in a single weekend, and eventually it helps change those ounces of law. So both are necessary in the end, and rhetoric is more fun. So keep talking. Talking and acting out are what changed the laws recently that legalized gay marriage: WisCon was part of that change. Our community has a very powerful rhetoric, because we speak science fiction and fantasy, in a historical moment that is a science fiction story, and includes fantasies coming true. But laws have to change, so keep that in mind, and keep the front strong. Remember that everyone might be an ally of some kind, even if they're obviously confused people from your perspective.

The other last thing is this: There's a word that I ran across recently that I want to share with you, I don't recall where I saw it, but it's a good one: the verb DEOLIGARCHIFY. The oligarchy that is now trying to take over the world, and to an alarming extent has succeeded, is full of bad ideas, and needs to be defeated. So we have to DEOLIGARCHIFY this planet. The noun, in case you need the noun, must be DEOLIGARCHIFICATION. I recommend we put both words on T-shirts, and explain what we mean at every opportunity.

Thank you.

Kim Stanley Robinson is an American science fiction writer who lives in Davis, California, with his wife and two sons. He is the author of several novels and story collections, including *Aurora, Shaman*, *2312*, *Galileo's Dream*, and the Mars trilogy, an international best-seller. He was sent to the Antarctic by the US National Science Foundation, resulting in his novel *Antarctica*. His works have won Hugo, Nebula, and Locus awards, and have been translated into 25 languages. He was named a "Hero of the Environment" by *Time Magazine* in 2008 and serves on the board of the Sierra Nevada Research Institute.

"I Begin to Meet You at Last": On the Tiptree-Russ-Le Guin Correspondence

Julie Phillips

This was a talk given at the University of Oregon, December 4, 2015, at a symposium to honor the life and work of Alice B. Sheldon and celebrate the donation of her papers to the University of Oregon Libraries.

Thank you for inviting me to speak, and let me just say how great it is that you've all come together for Alice Sheldon this year, the 100th anniversary of her birth. I'm especially pleased to be at an event in honor of the Alice Sheldon papers. They've been donated by Jeff Smith, who did a terrific job of keeping them all these years, and putting together editions of Alli's work, and loaning them to me to write Alli's life story. I know I became very possessive about her papers while I was working on them, so I can imagine how hard it must be for Jeff to give them up—Jeff is now making crying faces in the audience—and I hope the University of Oregon appreciates his gift.

The papers are especially important because Alice Sheldon's entire impersonation of a male writer went on on paper. It went on in the fiction she wrote as James Tiptree Jr. and also a few important stories she wrote under a female pseudonym, Raccoona Sheldon. And it went on in pages and pages of correspondence with other writers. Alli's papers are the place where Tiptree lives.

Apparently archival research is the hot thing in academia right now. Students and scholars have taken a new interest in letters and diaries and the private discourse that goes on underneath and around the public story. Archives are full of discussions that are taking place below the radar and outside the official view. I was just talking to Timmi Duchamp about what she called "the amazing power of conversation to shift your perspective." And that's it exactly; that's what letters can do.

So when I heard this about archives I immediately said, yes, of course, women, and LGBT people, and so on. But it's also true of another, particularly verbal and talkative group of outsiders: science fiction writers and fans. Unofficial communication is important to all these groups, not only because it's beautiful and fun and lively and sometimes extremely funny, but also because it can help you learn to be yourself. It seems to me that's the story of science fiction: it's the literature of imagination, but also the literature of loneliness, of alienation, and of connection. If you're not like other people, and you can't imagine what it might be like to be you, you've never seen yourself reflected anywhere, you're wondering what planet you'd have to go to to discover like minds, that's when you start trying to dream up new possibilities. And if you're lucky, you can find other people who can tell you something about who you are.

Within that conversation, I want to talk in particular about three writers whose lives were connected with each other's through the letters that are here. Three writers who never met but who knew each other intimately through their letters. I hope the University realizes just how lucky they are to have the papers not only of Alice Sheldon, but also of two other great writers, Joanna Russ and Ursula Le Guin.

Alice Sheldon, also known as Alli, also known as Tip, also known as James Tiptree Jr. Born in 1915, she was an African explorer, a debutante, a painter, an army officer in the Second World War, a chicken farmer, a research psychologist, and

finally, became a published science fiction writer under the name of a jar of jam.

From a young age, she'd felt herself to be different from everyone else, being bright and imaginative and also falling into hopeless love affairs with other girls—one of whom died from a botched abortion, just as Alli herself nearly died. She'd been well-liked, and very pretty—which creates its own problems—and she learned to use her looks as a mask for her differences, which served her fairly well until at fifty-two she wound up, by accident on purpose you might say, taking the intellectual role of a man. Her performance as James Tiptree Jr. went on for about ten years, from 1967 to 1977, and during that time she wrote fan letters to, and started corresponding with, a number of her colleagues, especially Russ and Le Guin.

Ursula Le Guin was born in 1929. She grew up in Berkeley, California, where I think she must have absorbed science fiction in the atmosphere. In the seventies, after a visit to her family, she wrote to a friend, "I don't understand how anybody who has ever lived in California can ask me where I get my crazy ideas from. Science Fiction is *far* behind Berkeley."[1]

Like Alli, she wasn't at home in the world; she called high school a "Siberia" of mysterious social codes.[2] She was at home in her family, but there was a certain amount of competition between her and her three older brothers—all four blessed with great intellectual gifts and not shy about expressing them—and she grew up determined to hold her own.

Ursula never transformed herself into a man, but for a long time the main characters of her stories were all men. It had to do with a distance she needed between her life and her fiction, but it also had to do with her sense of what heroes could do, and what heroines couldn't. The fiction that was

1 Le Guin to Virginia Kidd, 18 April 1978.

2 Le Guin, Ursula K. "My Libraries." In *The Wave in the Mind: Talks and Essays on the Writer, the Reader, and the Imagination.* Boston: Shambhala, 2004, 21.

being written by women in the 1950s was alien to her, and feeling alienated from a woman's voice, she ended up, like Alice Sheldon, writing from a male point of view.

She and Tip started corresponding in 1971, after Tip sent her a fan letter. They communicated in part by exchanging jokes. They loved playing around with each other's names—Tiptree becomes "Tree," Ursula becomes "Bear"—and Ursula sent him cartoons and drawings to cheer him up. But the main thing was the support they gave each other as intellectual women. There were very few women writing science fiction then, and very few people in science fiction with the range of interests that they had, who could go from Philip K. Dick to Virginia Woolf and back in the blink of a paragraph.

Tip tended to put Ursula on a pedestal, and he certainly wasn't alone in this. While she was wrestling with the problem of feminist anger she wrote to Tip "I find […] that to some portions of our dear mutual Readership I have come to represent Refinement, with a touch of Motherhood. Le Guin is the kind of sf writer it is safe to give your aunt for Christmas. Jesus. Better, perhaps, they should know the ugly truth. Some aunts are safe with me, others not. Bears just *look* cuddly."[3]

Joanna Russ, the youngest of the three, was born in 1937, a child of the 1950s. Like Alli Sheldon she was an only child; like all three women she grew up very bright and with a feeling of being isolated and unrecognized. She was a senior in high school at sixteen, when she was a finalist in the Westinghouse Science Talent Search for 1953. At the awards ceremony in Washington, she remembered saying to some of her fellow finalists, "Even if we don't know what electrons are doing, it's a comfort to know that *they* know, don't you think?" and suddenly realizing with a terrible feeling that even here no one else could make sense of what she'd said.[4]

3 Le Guin to Tiptree, 23 March 1975.

4 Russ, Joanna. *What Are We Fighting For?: Sex, Race, Class, and the Future of Feminism*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998, xv.

When she and Tip started corresponding, in 1973, she was a committed feminist and of the three she was the most determined to find out what it meant to write in a female voice. She was immensely good at tossing out ideas, though she could be very angry, too. She was a kind of brilliant loose cannon, partly I think because it just seemed so impossible to her to be a woman and an intellectual, at least in her public life as a professor.

> Every woman in academia I know has had in some way to give up being female (this means various things) in order to be a scholar, or intellectual, or even artist. I gave it up very young, not even understanding what was going on in words—but by 14 I knew that popularity, love, admiration, etc. etc. was not for me. The price was too high. […] I have been told by a colleague that I was an honorary male (!), and that "Of course your sex doesn't affect your teaching."
>
> No, of course not; it's this nasty, furtive little vice I practice on my off-hours.[5]

So here we are with these literary exchanges, letter-writing being also the kind of vice one practices on one's off-hours. And I feel like I should talk about the differences between a letter on paper and electronic communication, and the way letters create a community that's different from online communities, and anonymity online versus anonymity by mail. But that's someone else's essay, and I hope one of you will write it. Actually what I really wanted to do with my time up here was read all the parts of the letters that I couldn't fit in elsewhere, all the funny bits, like Joanna wondering why men would like vampire movies, and Tiptree's brilliant comments on literature, and so on. Or I thought I would stand up here and do a PowerPoint of Ursula's cartoons.

5 Russ to Tiptree, 18 September 1973.

But as I was rereading the letters I realized there's a story I didn't really deal with in my book on Tiptree, or not enough. It's about who you are when you're corresponding—and of course letters are as potentially dishonest a form as any other. You're always using a persona when you're writing, and there's a certain amount of distortion for effect, especially with writers, and the story that is told to an audience of one may not be the complete story. But the story I want to tell you here—and it's an unofficial story, full of outtakes and digressions—is about who your friends can help you to become, when you're alone and don't know what to say or which self to be.

After the revelation of her identity, Alice Sheldon was trying to write as "herself" and wondering what that might mean. Of course "being yourself" is one of those mysterious things. I think one reason people respond so strongly to Alli Sheldon's life is that a lot of people have been in that place. They've been in a situation where they're trying to figure out their identity and they don't always have a lot to go on. Or they have a lot of different selves to draw on—and those are the people who end up becoming great writers, and of course great biography subjects. There's nothing more wonderful to write and think about than a complex, contradictory personality. But they don't necessarily have an easy time of it in life.

And if you're a student, and you're wrestling with this question, which you almost certainly are, I should warn you that you're never going to get it figured out, and it doesn't go away. And that's not a bad thing, because it's kind of at the core of living, but there are times when it isn't easy.

Alice Sheldon dealt with "being herself" by becoming someone else, Tiptree, in her letters and her fiction. After nearly ten years of more and more intense correspondence and more elaborate impersonation, it didn't fit her very well.[6]

6 Joanna, who had an uncanny ability to see through Tiptree straight to Alli without knowing she was doing it, got into a discussion of secret identities in which she wrote to Tip: "The really awful thing about

But after the revelation (for lack of a better word), at the end of 1976, Alli Sheldon really felt like she didn't have any self left at all. It happened at the same time as the death of her mother, and her death and Tiptree's death, or departure, or unmasking left Alli stuck with what felt like nothing. She felt like the writing was gone and here she was in real life, "nothing but an old lady in Virginia."[7] She wrote to Ursula:

> My "real," daily-life self is a long-elaborated kind of animated puppet show, with its own validity to be sure—it gets married and holds jobs and does things like that [...]—but those 8 years in sf was the first time I could be *really* real. [...] Now all that is gone, and I am back with the merry dumb-show as life, and it doesn't much suit.[8]

For a long time Alli struggled with depression, and her health, and her husband's health, and with a lot of other practical problems, like their house, which was falling apart, and the demands of her mother's estate. (I tell you all this because some people who read the book think, "Oh, her identity was revealed and then she got depressed and committed suicide," and it wasn't like that.) She had heart surgery, and that interrupted her correspondence for a long time.

But a couple of years after the revelation Alli and Ursula, in their letters, started working at picking up the thread between them. Alli wrote Ursula that she didn't know what to write, or in what tone, or even on what stationery. She complained about the clumsiness of age and said: "It's so odd writing you as me—'just another woman'—with all that somehow

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having a cover, I should think, is that you must *be* it (in order not to betray it) so it ends up being not an act but a schizoid split in your very soul." (24 November 1973).

7 Sheldon, Alice B. "A Woman Writing Science Fiction." In Dupont, Denise, ed. W*omen of Vision: Essays by Women Writing Science Fiction*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988, 52.

8 Sheldon to Le Guin, 23 April 1977.

implies. Everything I said was true—all the feelings are still there—yet some mold is broken and a new one yet to form. […] Who is she? Who am I? *Do* we correspond?"[9] She worried that Ursula would never trust her again.

Ursula wrote her back saying not to worry, "You aren't the person who wrote me—but I'm not the person who wrote *you*, either, so we proceed (as always) from here. No?—But my dear Alice please stop pulling *age* on me!! I'll be 50 in October and I get my god damn period every 3 weeks *for* 3 weeks (now there's something I would not have told James) and quite often feel as old as anybody *need* feel and twice as tired!"[10]

And in the rest of the letter she wrote about things she was doing, told about her mother, who was then going through her last illness, and invited Alli into her life. Alli responded with sympathy and with delight at the renewed warmth. "Your letter was […] spring rain after a drought so long I had forgot to feel parched. And the pleasure— Do you know, I believe I begin to meet you at last?"[11]

And before you know it the two of them are discussing the use of the present tense in fiction, and Ursula's reading of Lukacs, and the rise of Margaret Thatcher, and cats, they're making language jokes and brainstorming titles for Alli's new novel. And Alli was able to transform what I think must have been real love, in-love-with love for Ursula into deep sympathy and concern.

Alli had always seen talking as a woman as a genuinely different mode of communication, and being female as being a persona in its own right. In a letter to Ursula in 1980 she asked:

> Do you have the problem, when chatting seriously with someone (I'm sure I can't imagine chatting with no one—or can I? […]) that your mind contains not

9 Sheldon to Le Guin, 14 April 1979.
10 Le Guin to Sheldon, 19 April 1979.
11 Sheldon to Le Guin, 23½ April 1979.

> only the main stream of converse, but a sort of ever-changing scenic panorama of asides, associations, peripheral qualifiers, etc. etc., much of which comes across naturally in speech, especially with women, who are infinitely better conversers, but which make trouble on the printed page? A lot of it is junk, of course […] but a certain quantity *is* necessary for the larger accuracies.[12]

By "larger accuracies" she said she meant the "truth-in-context," "the quality of the emotional rapport." In other words, all this digression and joking around is important; it isn't an aside to the story, it *is* the story. What Alli really means is that she refuses to see her gender or her sexuality as "furtive little vices that she practices in her off-hours." This was at a time when both she and Ursula were rethinking their writing, and were having a difficult time with it. Ursula was just starting to turn to feminism, and to explore what writing as a woman might mean for her work. And in this they were able to see each other, partially, but nonetheless, to meet each other at last and to talk about what it might mean to be the Other, writing.

So this is my problem in talking to you, because how can I convey the importance of this correspondence without myself becoming parenthetical, without telling you all the junk that's so important for the larger accuracies? The junk *is* the selves, or maybe it's what rubs off when the selves scrape against each other; it's the funny bits and the asides that go straight to your heart. It's the junk that's so valuable that it's preserved in boxes in a climate controlled room, to be studied by students who will determine its value for future generations.

The other person with whom Alli went on sharing all this essential "junk" is Joanna Russ. Joanna, in letters, is a difficult

.12 Sheldon to Le Guin, 16 August 1980.

character, with a lot of anger, which did a lot of real damage, to Ursula among others. Yet the anger is part of the way Joanna can recognize Alli's experience. Where Alli directs her anger inward, Joanna gives her a model for turning it outward, and for using the imagination to transform situations and points of view. What I mean is, in one of her earliest letters to Tiptree she fantasizes about turning on one's oppressors, "like the rat who runs up the broom handle (they do this) when you're trying to hit it. I like rats and bats (who are not only mice, but they *fly*). Imagine a mamma bat saying to baby bat: 'Show your teeth, dear. Look rabid. That's right.'"[13]

And Joanna didn't have the problem that Alli and Ursula had of being cautious around difficult subjects. She waded right in, with an honesty and a directness that made it possible for her to address some of Alli's dilemmas, and show her that they were shared dilemmas, that Alli wasn't alone, and to talk about what might be the path forward to being or becoming oneself.

I want to finish up with one exchange between Alli and Joanna that took place in 1980, nearly four years after the big reveal and seven years before Alli, worn out by bad health and depression, committed suicide. Alli had written to Joanna saying,

> It occurred to me to wonder if I ever told you in so many words that I too am a Lesbian—or at least as close as one can come to being one never having had a successful love with any of the women I've loved, and being now too old and ugly to dare try. Oh, had 65 years been different! I like some men a lot, but from the start, before I knew anything, it was always girls and women who lit me up.[14]

13 Russ to Tiptree, 18 September 1973.
14 Sheldon to Russ, 25 September 1980.

Joanna responded with a nine-page letter, and here's some of what she said:

> I've been reading your letter and crying, on and off. I'm very moved. No, you never told me. I always wondered, though—first of all because I find you very beautiful in your photographs, in that high-handed sort of way I love in women. I mean you look *real* and full of Tiptreeness. As well as, objectively, quite lovely, something I know you'll never believe.

Joanna also mentions the attractiveness of Tiptree's female characters, and Tiptree's "amazing facility at male impersonation"—except that he was a man who was too good to be true. "I was madly in love with Tiptree and sensed uneasily that this was odd, since no real man, and no real man as truly revealed in literature has ever had that effect on me of intimacy and 'I know *you.*'"

Alli's depressions also made her suspect, she said.

> I think I asked you once point-blank about the connection between Lesbianism and depression and you said Mmfp wmpf murble yes no never mind.
>
> The terrible thing is how all this is *hidden from us*—what *is* a Lesbian anyhow? It's unthinkable, invisible, ridiculous, Somebody Else, duck-tail haircuts and leather jackets, all that nonsense. […]
>
> Dear Tip, have you any IDEA of the women all over the U.S. of A. who would trample each other into mulch just for a chance to kiss your toes?

And then Joanna confessed that she herself had really had very little experience with women in bed.

> It takes such a lot of WORK!!! First there are the decades of finding out—making headway against the whole world, it seems—and then the decade finding out What To Do (which depends entirely on one's

> circumstances and what year it is) […] and then learning that sex isn't all that crucial. We're so surrounded with ersatz images that the real thing has to be disentangled utterly—and it *is* important, to know and feel it, but so unimportant to live up to all that magazine-y, book-y, movie stuff. […] If I go to my grave celibate, at least I'll be *me* and have the kind of friendships with women that sexuality *makes possible.*
>
> […] Erotics *is* important, I guess. To dive down into the bottom of it and come up with a silly smile on one's face, saying Burble. And then sink to the bottom and lie there twiddling one's toes, a small chain of bubbles rising…
>
> […] *I didn't know.* I followed women all over and loved women and was jealous and anxious and in love and *still* didn't know!
>
> […] Oh, yes, I know those woman-woman loves: just absolutely right and recognizable, something inside that says "*I know*" in the face of suppression and confusion. Which is a gift.
>
> […] I'm so glad you wrote me and so moved. […] A world that slices up human feelings into separate parts and sticks them in compartments marked "personal," "impersonal," "normal," "abnormal"—all that nonsense! Well, it's bad.[15]

This is the value of correspondence, of all the asides and the humor and the sudden flashes of insight. It's about refusing to divide up human feelings, refusing to separate the personal from the official, celebrating the way people live and love each other and drive each other crazy.

15 Russ to Sheldon, 29 September 1980.

Pseudonyms have so many uses, and not all of them are harmless. We've seen a lot of examples of that online lately. Another name can provide a safe cover for cruelty and slander. Another self can let a troll express the unacceptable, and not only to the outside world; I imagine it makes a safe compartment in the psyche for hate—oh, no, all that hating is just a thing this other person does; it isn't really me. When anonymity is magnified by the echo chamber, it can enable anything from Occupy to Gamergate.

I think one thing everyone loves so much about Alice Bradley Tiptree Sheldon is that she used her pseudonym for good. She used it to escape from a place in which she wasn't being seen as herself. She became another to say something about that self, and in keeping her letters she offered her conversations to us, her readers, so we can meet her, and ourselves, at last.

Note: Permission for publication of the correspondence has been given by Ursula K. Le Guin, the estate of Joanna Russ, the estate of James Tiptree Jr, and the University of Oregon Libraries as owners of the physical property rights to the collection: Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries.

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Six Haiku about WisCon

Nancy Jane Moore

From My Joy Project

Books. Conversations.
So many friends, old and new.
Ready for WisCon.

Sun shines on the lake.
My friends are in the hotel.
Adventures begin.

So many choices:
Talk to friends; go to panels;
Write; walk in the sun.

An unsettled mind:
New people, new ideas, change.
Reintegration.

A lucky weekend
On the hotel's thirteenth floor.
Room 1413.

Hurry. Worry. But:
Enjoy the view of the lake
Before bustling off.