



From the Editor

Hello, faithful readers of the JOSF!

As 2018 draws to a close, the *Journal of Science Fiction* is preparing for a transition: this is my last issue as managing editor of the journal. I joined the staff as an editor in October 2015, when it was a brand-new publication, and it has been both exciting and rewarding to be involved with the launch of a scholarly enterprise.

Part of the reason I'm leaving the *JOSF* is to finish my long-languishing book—a critical study of the companions in the television series *Doctor Who*. As I've watched the most recent season of the show, I've been thinking a lot about the role of sci-fi, the evolution of sci-fi criticism, and the encouraging signs of greater inclusiveness and intersectionality in the world of science fiction.

If you're a *Doctor Who* fan—and maybe even if you're not—you know that the Doctor has been played by a series of different actors since the show began in 1963. One of the main conceits of the show is that, at the point of death, the Doctor can regenerate into a new body. The current incarnation, the Thirteenth Doctor (we'll just set aside that issue of

counting the regenerations), is played by Jodie Whittaker, the first female actor to play the part. The first female Doctor travels in her time-and-spaceship, the TARDIS, with Yasmin Kahn (a young Indian woman, played by Mandip Gill), Ryan Sinclair (a young black man, played by Tosin Cole), and Graham O'Brien (a middle-aged white man, if we use the common convention of using "middle-aged" to mean "significantly past the middle of one's life," played by Bradley Walsh). There's been a great deal of discussion about the race and gender breakdown of this TARDIS team; while of course some viewers were unhappy with the decision to overturn decades of precedent by casting a woman in the starring role, the overall response has been quite positive, and this season garnered strong ratings, giving proof that many viewers are not just ready to see a woman at the helm, but eager.

Did Series 11 *earn* its high ratings? Maybe not. I have serious reservations about the season—about its handling of a variety of cultural questions, about the development of the characters, about its engagement with the central ethos of the show. And I



have long felt that the show has not received proper credit for how progressive it usually is, which means that I do not see this season as a radical departure from Series 10. (Editorial Aside: the Steven Moffat era of the show is feminist and progressive, and if you want to hear more about why, my book will be out... someday.)

Regardless of how huge a step forward it really is, though, this season of *Doctor Who* fills the TARDIS with a diverse group of characters; has more than one story focused on people of color; and stars the first Doctor who is anything other than a white cisgender man. So, yes, it holds an exciting set of possibilities, and the creative team (headed by showrunner Chris Chibnall, creator of *Broadchurch*) makes an obvious and concrete effort to explore those possibilities.

Series 11 features more historical stories than most seasons of the modern show: three, out of a season of ten. In each case, the historical settings offer the opportunity to examine race, gender, or both. In this season, the TARDIS crew meets Rosa Parks; visits Lahore in 1947, during the Partition of India; and lands in the middle of a witch hunt in 17th-century Lancashire. While I don't feel that all of those stories handle these cultural questions with the sophistication or grace that I would have

hoped, the very presence of these stories is important. They have sparked valuable conversation among critics—both those who love Series 11 and those who do not. Critical reception of the season runs the gamut, from solidly positive to lukewarm to angry. Mainstream publications such as *The Atlantic* took notice of Series 11, too, running Kelly Connolly's wildly popular (if, in my view, also wildly problematic) opinion piece, "[The Radical Helplessness of the New Doctor Who.](#)"

What I find most heartening about these critical discussions is this: they hinge on the quality of the show. Few critics are still asking whether anyone will watch a show with a diverse cast headed by a female Doctor. That question is basically off the table now, because we're a whole season in, and the answer is "yes," just as the answers to the questions, "Will anyone watch a superhero movie about a black superhero?" and "Will anyone buy a movie ticket to see Wonder Woman?" are both "yes." These are stories that should be told—but they are also stories that can be sold, and the market has made it clear that commercial concerns are no reasonable excuse for placing white, cisgender, able-bodied men at the center of every narrative. We're seeing a wild burgeoning of different types of texts, too, with sci-fi making use of music and music videos, poetry, and audio drama podcasts, among



other forms. (Check out Nadine Knight's article in this issue, which compares Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* with the album *Splendor & Misery*, by the rap group clipping.)

In other words, it's an exciting time to be a sci-fi fan, not just a *Doctor Who* fan.

At any rate, I hope you'll forgive my foray into discussion of a show that many people would categorize as fantasy or fairy tale rather than sci-fi at all, because I offer it as just one example of a slow, sometimes subtle reshaping of the landscape of science fiction (and, indeed, of our culture at large). What's happening on *Doctor Who* is just one tiny fragment of the larger picture—I happen to get more of a view of the *Doctor Who* critical landscape because that's my favorite show, but readers and viewers can see these shifts happening everywhere.

Any quick survey of the current state of sci-fi and speculative fiction shows a vibrant, growing collection of diverse texts. The popular Syfy series *The Expanse* depicts a future in which the leaders come in all races and genders. Books such as Anne Leckie's *Ancillary Justice* explore the complexities of gender and break down binary limitations (picking up ideas popularized by Ursula Leguin). The recently-canceled Netflix series *Sense8*

melded queer representation and the transhuman. The 2018 Hugo Awards went to a diverse slate of authors, mostly women, including N.K. Jemisin (who won Best Novel for *The Stone Sky*, the third installment of her Broken Earth trilogy; both of the earlier novels also won the Hugo); Martha Wells (Best Novella, "All Systems Red"); Suzanne Palmer (Best Novelette, "The Secret Life of Bots"); and Rebecca Roanhorse (Best Short Story, "Welcome to your Authentic Indian Experience(™)").

It's not all about demographics, either; thoughtful sci-fi is all over the place, in every philosophical debate, asking the questions that sci-fi is supposed to ask. Jeff VanderMeer's Southern Reach trilogy and Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* take up environmental anxieties. Ted Chiang, Alex Garland, Kazuo Ishiguro and Marissa Meyer explore the complications of artificial intelligence, cybernetics, and cloning (in Meyer's case, while overturning age-old stereotypes about sci-fi being for boys by creating the Lunar Chronicles series, which is straight-up sci-fi aimed at young adult girls). I could spend all day—and more—listing examples of texts that present provocative, progressive characters and ideas, without scratching the surface, so I'm going to leave off, but you get the picture.



None of this is new. Science fiction has long been an incubator for ideas about what's wrong with the world, what could be better, and what "better" might look like (or what the worst might look like). But the landscape of science fiction is peopled with a constantly broadening range of different kinds of bodies and minds all the time, and it's radically exciting to see.

In the grand scheme of things, does it matter whether these texts—some of them long-established, much-beloved texts—embrace a wider range of representation? Yes, of course it does. In our current political climate, we need these gains.

If I had to name the element of the Journal of Science Fiction that I'm most proud of, it is this: the journal was founded with an emphasis on celebrating and interrogating inclusivity and diversity in science fiction, and we've worked hard to carry out that mission. Our founding editor, Monica Louzon, envisioned a publication of broad scope that covered texts from around the world, and we've invested a great deal of time and energy into offering editorial support for our authors, which has enabled scholars from many different disciplines and walks of life to make their voices heard. Some of our writers are from academic disciplines that seldom appear in literary journals (such as the sciences); some of them are not from academia at all,

but from other spheres. We're working to break down the divide between academic writers and the rest of the world. (That's also the main reason that the JOSF is, and always will be, open-access.) During my tenure at the journal, we have published arguments about everything from particle accelerators to zombies; produced our first themed issue; and been added to EBSCO's humanities index.

At the same time, Monica spearheaded the release of the Museum of Science Fiction's first take-home exhibit, an anthology entitled *Catalysts, Explorers, and Secret Keepers: Women of Science Fiction*, and Aisha Mathews (current assistant managing editor of the JOSF and my successor as managing editor) developed exciting new literary programming for the Museum's annual convention, *Escape Velocity* (including panels on Afrofuturism, gender and embodiment, disability, and more).

Every move toward more inclusive sci-fi and criticism is a move toward realizing the most significant promises of the genre. The JOSF aims, in its small way, to be part of the cultural machinery that pushes sci-fi forward. As the journal goes on—taking on new staff and streamlining editorial processes to manage our ever-increasing flow of submissions—we are committed to the mission of promoting scholarship



about sci-fi texts of all kinds, from classic tales to cutting-edge new works. Aisha, our assistant managing editor, will be taking over at the helm, and she has exciting plans for the *JOSF* in 2019. We are taking on new staff (let us know if you want to join us!), and we're planning a themed issue on disability in science fiction. And in terms of journal management, we're

streamlining our editorial processes to manage our growth, as we're getting far more submissions now that the word is out in the scholarly community. So, even though I am saying goodbye to the *JOSF* as an editor, I'm eagerly following its progress as a reader—I can't wait to see what comes next.

—Heather McHale, Ph.D.
Managing Editor, *MOSF Journal of Science Fiction*