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Feminist Science Fiction W/ Marleen S. Barr

Happy Feminist Wednesday! This week we chatted with science fiction author Marleen S. Barr about how Trump has inspired her work, why self-care is more of a chore than an indulgence, and why science fiction might be the next big feminist frontier.

Introduce yourself, tell us who you are and what you do?

I am Marleen S. Barr, a feminist science fiction scholar who teaches English at the City University of New York.

Most English professors have normal fields such as Shakespeare, Medieval Literature, or Modern Drama. I am the first female English professor to call Science Fiction my area of expertise.

More specifically, I am a founder of Feminist Science Fiction Studies. At the start of my career, science fiction was viewed as crap; feminist science fiction was viewed as being beyond the pale of crap.

Years later, I have been proven to be spot on right. Ursula K. Le Guin and Octavia E. Butler are venerated. *The Handmaid's Tale* speaks to contemporary feminist issues.

Most English professors who focus on generating scholarly texts do not write fiction. I have published two novels and several short stories. What I will simply call “contemporary feminist issues”—a.k.a. the Trump nightmare—led me to create my first short story collection, *When Trump Changed: The Feminist Science Fiction Justice League Quashes The Orange Outrage Pussy Grabber* (forthcoming from B Cubed Press).

The subtitle definitely does not have a scholarly ring to it.



Tell us how you got started interested in science fiction?

I voraciously read science fiction as a child. Reading in fact, was my best childhood talent. I always wanted to be an English professor. So I put the two together and, voilà, feminist science fiction criticism was a natural penchant for me.

I went on my merry way producing scholarly books and articles until I won the Science Fiction Research Association Pilgrim Award for lifetime achievement in Science Fiction Studies.

This award is huge to people in my field. After I received it, since I wasn't dead yet, I thought it best to keep writing science fiction scholarship—and to try my hand at another form of writing. I realized that I was naturally humorous in a New York way. And lo it came to pass that I turned my hand to fiction writing.

When Trump Changed springs from the fact that I can't abide Trump. I put my science fiction expertise together with my humorous voice; the combination resulted in the world's first single-authored satirical Trump-focused short story collection.

Tell us how feminism influences the work you do?

I took a life changing Women's Studies course as a freshman. My feminist professor taught me that since I had one life to live and I had to spend it as a woman living under patriarchy, it was

incumbent upon me to learn how to deconstruct patriarchal imperatives. I specifically turned to feminist science fiction because the genre provides power fantasies for women.

When Trump Changed is a feminist science fiction power fantasy aimed at readers who recoil from pussy grabbing. It is a guide to the Trump revenge fantasy galaxy in which I turn to science fiction to move beyond wishing for Trump's impeachment. Reaching into my feminist science fiction trope grab bag, I subject our "President" to close encounters with feminist extraterrestrials, alternative Hillary winning history, Godzilla-esque male metamorphosis, lock up in the Phantom Zone—and that's on a good day.

In the end, I transport Trump to a galaxy far far away from us.

By the way, the title alludes to my favorite feminist science fiction story, Joanna Russ's "When It Changed." The book is my contribution to using writing as an act of feminist resistance.

What do you do to avoid feminist burnout?

What's your favorite self-care practice?

I incessantly write feminist science fiction criticism and feminist fiction and attend all kinds of intellectual events in New York. In other words, I avoid feminist burnout by acting like the Energizer Bunny in the Energizer battery commercial.

As for self-care, well, I currently find it expedient to do something which is necessary rather than pleasant. Although it is definitely not burned out, my frenetic New York events attending mode is temporarily on an off switch due to the flu epidemic.

Do you have any advice for anyone starting out in your field?

I don't think people are lining up in droves to become feminist science fiction scholars who turn to writing power fantasy Trump resistance fiction.

To answer the question in a general way, my advice is to do what you enjoy, have the courage of your convictions, and believe in the power of your own voice.

Any links or social media accounts you want to plug

When Trump Changed: The Feminist Science Fiction Justice League Quashes The Orange Outrage Pussy Grabber can be ordered on Amazon and from the B Cubed Press website:
<https://bcubedpress.com/contact/>