

Dear Dr. Dolidon,

Cordial, substantive way to open the letter

I have thoroughly enjoyed reading your manuscript; thank you for giving our class the opportunity to edit it! It has been a great learning experience. The ideas in this book are fascinating, and the analysis of the short stories and novels were nuanced and enlightening. I particularly enjoyed your close readings, especially when you get into the exact words used in the stories and explain the nuance between French and English words from the stories that can be lost in translation because of differences in connotation or when French has words that just don't have equivalent words in English. Because of your compelling analysis, I have started reading *Continuum* and have been loving the short stories. The first, story, "Les Bulles" stopped me right in my tracks; it was that good kind of devastating that short stories are particularly good at, including that slightly ambiguous ending that really made think, and then I went back to read your section on Verlanger to learn more about her and to see the background of this particular story—if this is representative of her work, I definitely see the importance of her contribution to French SciFi! ✓

I will also mention that I have a background in studies adjacent to much of your analysis here, including studying French language, culture, and literature in my undergrad and then philosophy, literary theory, and in particular contemporary science fiction (particularly dystopia) and the discourse surrounding it in my English MA. This proved useful in my editing suggestions and enhanced my understanding of your arguments and evidence, though my understanding is, of course, informed by less experience and knowledge than you have. So, of course, feel free to take my suggestions that relate to my own studies with a grain of salt and use your good judgment.

absolutely

Concept

US vs UK spelling

First, I would like to briefly look at the overall content of this book—the idea, or “concept” of it, in editorial terms. This will lead into some suggestions on the arguments of this book and how the more specific arguments in the chapters have contributed to that.

The title of the book, *When Women Write Tomorrow: Reading Contemporary French Science Fiction by Women*, gives the reader an expectation of its concept—that this book will focus on women's writing, but also that the fact that they are woman will be essential in your content. You describe something different in the beginning of your book, in both the preface and introduction. Instead of a focus on women and how their womanhood specifically informs their writing, which is what a reader will generally expect from the title, your concept has a slightly different focus that can feel jarring to the reader. I would invite you to consider this as you revise. Is there a way you can imply your actual focus, that women's texts are just as valid in the Francophone Sci-fi canon and the discourse around it? This kind of nuance may be hard to convey in the few words of the title, but I wonder if there should be a way to just imply it in either the title or the subtitle. Perhaps the subtitle could be something like, “the importance of studying stories by women in French science fiction”? That may not be very elegantly worded as is, but it's an idea I invite you to think about the idea of more accurately reflecting your book's actual concept and content.

good — identifying contradiction

yes — keep the title bold!

Moving on from the general concept of your book, I'd like to spend some time looking at what exactly you're saying about that topic—the argument, or thesis, or whatever word might be helpful to borrow from the academic spaces you spend much of your time in. I can definitely see

your argument developing just through what you have written so far, and I think it's a strong, persuasive, and compelling one. However, before getting into the details of your arguments, I do have some points for you to consider about the structure and content of your book.

The first is related to your intention to make this book accessible, interesting, and entertaining to a general (educated) audience who are not necessarily, and indeed mostly *not* specialists in this area of study. The genre that we call "trade nonfiction," as opposed to academic nonfiction, looks and feels quite different from an academic paper or book: it has different conventions and reader expectations. Don't worry, though: following trade nonfiction's conventions does not mean that you have to simplify your ideas: rather, you just need to consider presenting them differently in presentation, structure and tone. *good*

For examples of how this can be done, I'll briefly introduce two recently popular trade nonfiction books that still approach complicated and nuanced ideas while using trade paperback style and structure. There is no pressure to read these texts; I think they can be learned from without doing so.

First is Robin Wall Kimmerer's lovely book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, in which the author explores how indigenous knowledge can inform scientific study. One notable thing about this book is that it is deeply personal in the importance of the author's background, contains a lot of narrative, and uses the author's personality to drive the voice and content. Your involvement in the content of your book may not be so deeply personal, but it could still take a similar approach. When you visited our class, I remember that one of the things we talked about was your reluctance to insert yourself and your personality into this book, but I would invite you to consider rethinking this reluctance to "make it about you" (as I believe you said, though probably in different words), because a personal touch and voice, a compelling and relatable narrator, can really increase the interest and excitement of readers. *the strategy of modeling is a useful one*

Secondly, another author of trade nonfiction that does really well presenting academic study to the educated layperson is Malcom Gladwell, who wrote many fascinating books in this style. The one I will note here is *The Tipping Point*, which presents his sociological study of how and why trends and ideas move through society. In this book, narratives, *stories*, are intrinsic to the structure and presentation of evidence that supports his overall arguments. Though it is much less personal than *Braiding Sweetgrass*, it still contains narratives via case studies of the concepts he is talking about, referencing compelling characters (who are real people!) whose experiences illustrate his claims.

The thing to be learned, both in the excellence and popularity of these nonfiction books among laypeople, is that narrative and personality of the author really drive reader interest, entertainment, and even buy-in. We humans love stories—they help ground us and make sense of things. In that spirit and considering the particular content of your book, perhaps consider presenting yourself as a narrator in in this book, almost a character yourself, who is explaining your own thoughts, enjoyment, and emotional reaction to the stories you include. You could perhaps narrate the story of you reading them, or even the story of researching them. As far as personality goes, you have a particularly lovely snark that comes through sometimes, and I would love to see more of that side of your personality! Strategies like will really help to cater your book to your target audience of educated non-specialists, whereas, as you know, this book currently reads more like a paper presented for discourse to the Academy and is less friendly to the layman reader. ✓✓

To get into the organization of your content, trade nonfiction doesn't really need to have the strict structure of a paper written in an academic style: the traditional literary analysis

progression from introduction, to thesis, then supporting points, and eventually to conclusions and calls for more study. However, these elements can absolutely (and perhaps should) still exist in this book in some form, stretched out over the length of a book rather than a tighter academic paper. This makes the organization of the ideas familiar to your audience in their claims and supporting audience, but different in style, organization, and of course length. This length, and the expectations of your target audience of non-expert readers, gives some wiggle room that can reveal your voice, personality, presentation of information, and even content in a more creative way. For example, you mentioned when you came to our class that it's a paradigm shift to move from the academic requirement of making claims and immediately backing them up with clear evidence, to a more freeform structure that allows for more tangents, hypothesis, and interesting ideas. But, for some consolation that your instincts are correct about not needing to have such a rigorous presentation of evidence (and a bit of further persuasion on my part), this, shall we say "squishier structure" gives room for narration, for exploration of interesting ideas outside of the claim-evidence structure, and for ideas that may not cater to or even stand up to the academic rigor you're used to. you really did well with this idea in several ways: ✓

First, your rejection of a feminist or gender studies-based critical lens allows you more freedom in the points you make and the evidence in the text that you reference. This also caters to the non-specialist reader who may not be familiar with critical lenses and the way they tend to focus on particular aspects of stories rather than considering the text as a whole. It's a good move. I will mention, however, that in certain analyses, especially in chapter 2, you do consider things through an ecocritical lens, which I think is very well done—you deftly show how such a lens can be useful and enlightening, while not letting it limit your analysis.

This lack of prioritizing critical lens also, perhaps more importantly, illustrates your desire to present women SciFi writers' stories as just as worthy of study as those written by men. You communicate this by not particularly prioritizing the writers' gender in your analysis, though you do sometimes mention it when it is relevant. For example, on page 15 of your introduction, where you talk about, and disagree with on some points, Vonarberg's claim that women's writing is very much different than that of men, and so their womanhood is essential to the analysis of their texts. A critical lens that informs the entirety of your analysis, looking only through the ideas of gender and feminist theory, would miss this point which is so essential to your concept and argument. This was a good choice on your part! However, put a pin in my discussion of your use (or not) of literary theory because I will be addressing it again soon, within the context of your argument(s), in the next section of this letter.

lots of facets to consider, for sure!

Argument

✓ As for your argument itself, I think it is strong, but it could be made a little less implicit by stating it more directly. You do have several places, especially in your preface and introduction, where you hint at the argument of this book is, or *why* this is the argument—some of them even seem like thesis statement and the way you've woven them into your writing rather than following an academic formula really lends itself more for the style of this kind of book. Here are a few of those statements that do this work:

- "This book is not about unearthing women's texts—they can be found very much above ground—but seeks to demonstrate with the help of a limited, rich, and accessible corpus

who these texts, that happen to be written by authors who identify as women, deserve attention” (pg. 1, preface)

- “In this overall and extremely brief setting for French SF, the role of women has been largely erased; there is no need to linger on this fact” (pg. 2, Introduction)--this serves less as a statement of your argument than it is a premise, or reason, the argument is being made.
- “This approach, the one I have adopted, invites us to read women’s texts on their own merit [...]” (pg. 16, Introduction)
- “Women do not write like women. However, as Donawerth points out, they may write *as* women, that is, from a marginalized social and political opinion” (pg. 16, Introduction)--this goes on to explain that not every woman writes *as* a woman, and this means that their perspective may not differ from that of men; putting them in a box, of sorts, that only allows them to be viewed as women authors rather than just authors does them a disservice.)

(the inducts vary in size and existence throughout)

These all state the *idea* of what argument you want to develop in your book, but they all make a claim that is slightly different, and even sometimes seems contradictory. However, I don’t think they are necessarily contradictory, but might rather point to a more subtle argument that simply needs to be expressed more clearly (and repeated often when new angles and evidence are introduced). Here is what I see to be the main argument from this draft, in a very short summary:

- The premise: French women Sci-Fi authors are understudied and ignored in the French SciFi canon and the discourse surrounding it.
- The “so what,” or the reason for writing the book: it is important to discuss this and include them in the discourse.
- Argument: French (Francophone) women’s work can actually add to the understanding and study of French SF
- Evidence: explanation of what kind of deep analysis we can do of these texts, which is just as valid to the discourse as that which has already been done on texts written by men.

nice to break it down this way

There are still some subtleties here, like, for example, your statements on pg. 1 of the preface (“...these texts that happen to be written by women”) and pg. 18 of the introduction (“But I don’t want the premise of this book to be a comparison between men’s and women’s texts”). You clearly state that you do not want to use a Feminist or Gender Theory critical lens. This is the part I felt could come off as contradictory to your target audience, which largely will not be practiced in synthesizing an argument through scattered statements rather than telling them right away what they should be paying attention to. To overexplain is usually better than to underexplain.

I feel like sometimes you are arguing the first way, saying that the fact that these authors are women doesn’t matter. The content you present in the two chapters support this: there is no gender lens on the content or analysis there. However, the introduction still contains points such as “Then, sometimes I see a statement or claim that argues the opposite, that them being these

authors being women is significant,” such as on page 17 of the introduction where you say “..SF is a wonderful ground for women writers to develop female characters that have already changed the SF landscape today.” Is the study you do in this book *exactly* the same treatment you would give to an author who is a man, and that’s why these texts are worthy of the same kind of analysis? Or, is this study informed at all by the fact that these are women, and that gives them something unique that is not found in books written by men? You include statements that imply both.

You are doing a lot of fantastic analysis in this book, forming a very complex and nuanced argument. I really enjoyed reading it, especially with my own interest and study of these topics. Because of its complexity, I think the wording and placement of those statements that clarify the argument are extra important. Particularly, it needs a clear statement of the argument that is all in one place, rather than scattered through the preface and introduction. This will do some of the brain work for the reader, which is really helpful to them in terms of accessibility to the text in terms of reading comprehension and therefore understanding the content that relies on that reading comprehension. Additionally, it makes crystal clear what argument they are supposed to be following and analyzing the merit of (which you invite them to do both on pg. 3 of your preface, as well as the inclusion of discussion questions to help them think critically), and gives them buy-in to keep reading because the argument is the juicy bit, the part that piques interest the most.

five re:
placement

In this statement of argument, or thesis, or what have you, I do have a concern that I want to bring up: in my bullet points earlier of premise, “so what” evidence, and argument, it can be seen that some of these things address the same idea. That is, in particular, that the reason for writing is also the argument. I would encourage you to push this further, to state an argument that is more than “this is worth studying.” What do we learn from this study? Is there a pattern in these texts, when they are all considered, that can be articulated as an overall claim? Does this relate to an overall claim that these texts should be studied on their own merits, as texts written *by women*” instead of studied as texts where women authors *may* write “as women” (or not).

To get into this further, let’s look at each chapter, its individual argument(s), and what kind of overall argument they could support. To aid in this, let’s have a look at the individual argument “mini” arguments, if you will, of each chapter. You have actually summarized them in your overview of the chapters of the book at the end of your introduction (including chapters that have yet to be written, though only the titles of those chapters are given so we won’t include them for this purpose.”

- Chapter 1—Knowledge:

[Through these stories], I look at concepts of knowledge, truth, information, and self-awareness: how is knowledge acquired, disseminated, manipulated, recuperated? How does knowledge deceive empower, confuse?

- Chapter 2—Animals:

“... this chapter looks at the relationship between human and non-human animals and how authors de-center humans in the world of the living taken as an interdependent ecosystem.”

Looking at these together, what overall, book-level thesis can these be synthesized into? How does chapter one build on chapter 2, if it does? Can you perhaps state a research question, and then make the answers into a thesis? Does this have anything to do with women authors, and how their gender is not relevant to the study of their texts? If that is your thesis, or something like it, can these chapters be constructed as explicit and clearly stated evidence for this claim? One way to do this, perhaps, is to take time in each chapter to relate it to the points stated in your preface and introduction, clearly pointing out how gender is not relevant to their analysis (or it sometimes is?). I think this could be done well at the end of the chapter, though I think it could work well at the beginning, or even weaved throughout and frequently returned to.

so many options
do you have a favorite?

Moving on from concept and argument, I'd like to go over some writing style and then mechanical suggestions within your manuscript, and then I'll move onto some chapter-specific suggestions that were not included in the previous discussion of concept and argument.

Voice and Style

As you already know, this manuscript is written in a very high-level academic style, and it needs to be revised to be at a level comprehensible and enjoyable to your target audience. There are two aspects of this to consider.

- First, the vocabulary itself: One of the things that plays a huge role in accessibility is the use of the more specialized academic vocabulary: words and phrases that are used in this particular field of study that will be very unfamiliar and confusing to a reader. This is a tricky one, because many of those words are highly specialized exactly because they describe a concept that English just doesn't have a good word for otherwise. Some of these that I noticed in your manuscript were, for example: "potential essentialist recuperation" (13) uses two difficult words—"recuperation" is already a high level word for most English speakers, though perhaps less so with a college-educated audience, and adding "essentialist," a reference to a particular philosophical paradigm, makes the entire phrase difficult for most people to parse. Another couple of examples, words and phrases that are borrowed from French or Latin such as "vis-à-vis" and "a-priori" (8) might be difficult for most readers. Similarly, Foucault's idea of the panopticon, though it is probably widely known among the college-educated (at least in literature and philosophy), it probably deserves a bit of explanation, though for the most part the text around it gives good context clues. Another idea from Foucault is that of the "heterotopia," which the idea of is also given via context clues but could use an explicit definition.
- Overall, I would strongly recommend trying to reduce the amount of vocabulary as a whole, just to make the reading level that much more accessible. Lots of big words, even if they are defined, is a lot of brain work for a reader that is likely to be intimidating and tiring. Consider, is the specialized vocabulary actually necessary? Can the text and logic stand on its own with layman's terms instead? Is the use of these more niche ideas relevant to your claim, or could they potentially be a distraction that may be confusing for your reader?
- A corollary to this is that many of the direct quotations, especially block quotes, that you include in your discussions of theory also include this academic vocabulary, and of course you have less control over the use of that than you do in your own writing. My suggestion here is that you have a look at whether these direct quotes are strictly necessary. Is the wording of the quotation essential to understanding it, or could these sources instead be paraphrased or summarized,

perhaps with some phrases from the original wording that are not that high-level vocabulary? If quotes are necessary, some more explicit breaking down of their vocabulary and ideas would be appropriate after giving those quotes, or in the introduction of them.

The second aspect to the use of high-level theory and where it is located in the text; I would encourage consideration of the actual structure and organizing of the writing, which tends to give analysis and related theory first, and then analysis of stories later. Sometimes, you have large sections of one and then the other in the chapters, and sometimes it is largely just at the beginning of the chapter. The result of this separation (which is common in academic contexts but less common in trade nonfiction) is my instinct that a non-academic reader may forget the nuances of these theory sections by the time they get to the stories, and then have trouble applying those ideas. I would suggest seeing if the theory can be more integrated into the summary and analysis of the stories themselves, because the narrative examples from the story will make the theory more concrete.

Use of French

- ☞ As was previously discussed in your visit to class, the inclusion of French quotes especially the long ones, is a bit of a barrier to the non-Francophone reader for a couple of reasons. First, when the French is given first, it will probably be skipped over in favor of the English translation. If you want to include the French for the curious, I encourage putting these translations in footnotes or endnotes at the end of each chapter.
- ☞ Secondly, there are a lot of times when French wording is used in smaller quotes where I am not sure it is really relevant. In some cases, that French vocabulary *is* essential because it contains a connotation or nuance that English just does not have the ability to explain concisely. One important example of this is the difference between the French verbs “*connaitre*” vs. “*savoir*,” which describe different types of knowledge when the English word, “knowledge,” does not make a distinction between the two, which is which is essential to your focus on knowledge in Chapter 1. I also found the nuance of French wording very enlightening, especially in your close reading of “*Si Thébalduis rêve*,” where the French wording is essential to the claims and insights you are making via that close reading. However, there are several cases where the inclusion of French wording does not seem essential to a claim or argument and seems more for flavor, which you can decide if it is or not the mood you want to project.
- ☞ Also, the most important consideration here is the effect that French has on the reader and how competent they feel in reading this book. The French language has a particular prestige in American culture that is a bit scary. Seeing the use of it, especially in those long quotations, could easily put them off reading past the first few pages. For that reason alone, it is worth taking a very close look at how much French is used in this manuscript that is aimed largely at people who don't speak French.

Having gone over some considerations for your manuscript as a whole, let's move into some for the chapters individually, including the preface and introduction.

good - you're
employing a
funnel approach

Preface and Introduction:

Quite honestly, I think these two sections are very well done. The major suggestion I have for them is to make that main argument, that thesis statement, crystal clear. I would suggest doing this in your introduction and leaving the preface to describe the concept and “so what” of this book. Then, at the end of that preface, you can transition into your introduction which supplies the necessary history needed to underscore your argument that women SciFi writers are understudied. Then you can bounce off of that to move from the background to the actual argument/thesis of your book. This thesis still needs to be developed a little bit, which I have already discussed.

always
good
to make
some
distinction
btw.
Preface
intro
and fore

Chapter 1

In addition to the points discussed above, of relating your chapters to the overall thesis, I do have a couple of chapter-specific suggestions. First, I will contradict my point slightly by saying that chapter 1 *does* connect back to the content of the introduction, though I’m not sure it connects to the overall argument specifically. Interestingly, you do hint at a larger argument here that could very well turn into your overall thesis: the idea that SciFi is a genre that allows a particular challenge to our assumptions about the world, which is supported by this chapter’s argument that analysis of these stories reveals that knowledge in and of itself that is gained (or not) in the stories is perhaps not as important as the way that knowledge changes perspective.

OK!

Chapter 2:

Though the internal logic of this chapter is excellent, I do have a harder time relating it to the ideas presented in the Preface, Introduction, and Chapter 1. The discussion of how nature and humanity relate to each other, as separate or as a single interrelated ecosystem, is well argued in the texts that you analyze.

However, I do have a few things I want to look at in particular:

First, I do not think you need to include the chart of chapter titles in each text, unless you go into much more detail and analysis of what those titles mean and the significance of that to chapter 2’s argument, or perhaps why the order of them is important—especially since the titles of these chapters contain very unfamiliar words that will not do much to enlighten your reader unless you discuss them in more depth.

Second, the section on assemblages was difficult to follow. After reading it, I still don’t think I have a good idea of what an assemblage is, though I did mark some of the points within that discussion and followed them. I was also confused by the smaller point within Latour’s theory, that of plateaus as a type of assemblage, or what exactly a plateau was in relation to the stories discussed. However, this idea of assemblage is a large part of this chapter and informed much of its analysis, I assume in such a way that the insights gained by using it to inform your analysis are better seen with this theory as a guide. To that point, I would suggest much more explanation

of what assemblages actually are, what Latour's theory is, and why this theory is a good one to inform your analysis.

✓ ABSOLUTELY
important question
to ask

As to the largest point, of how this chapter informs your overall argument, I don't see that connection. I am sure it is there, but perhaps take my experience as a reader as a suggestion that these chapters, used as evidence for the argument you're making, need to be explained as supporting evidence for the thesis much more clearly.

I did absolutely love this chapter, though some of it was confusing to me. The discussion of the relationship between humanity and animals and all living things hit close to home, as this topic was a major part of my own study of SciFi. I also think, outside of my own background, that this discussion on how we relate to nature, is an important one, even a universal one, in our culture that many people will enjoy seeing touched upon in your book.

Again, thank you so much for the opportunity to read and give feedback and suggestions on this manuscript. I am sure the final version will be amazing, and I'll keep a lookout for when it's published—I'd love to read more!

Best wishes in future revisions and continued writing!

Dory Hammersley Wheeler