

Brit Mandelo's Editorial from Beyond Binary

There are many ways to break, transcend, challenge, subvert, and fuck with strict binary ideas about gender, sexuality, and identity. Speculative writers like James Tiptree Jr./Alice Sheldon and Samuel Delany have done it for decades; in 1969, Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* posited a world in which people are agendered for the majority of their lives, and the novel won both the Hugo and the Nebula. We still have the Tiptree Award, devoted to fiction that plays with and challenges ideas about gender, and it's been going strong for two decades. After all, speculative fiction is the literature of questions, of challenges and imagination—and what better for us to question than the ways in which gender and sexuality have been rigidly defined, partitioned off, put in little boxes?

The thing is, stories about genderqueer and sexually fluid identities are still hard to find, even in a field active with speculation on gender and sexuality. They tend to pop up here and there, scattered throughout magazines and collections, and in queer publications that get less attention from the SF readership. This book is an effort to collect and present some of the best of those stories in one place.

I have a personal investment in the creation of this book, also—as a queer person whose gender expression is fluid, and whose sexual identity is *moreso*, I have longed for books that speak to and for people like me. Non-binary identities and expressions are often marginalized; our voices are silenced, our identities are effaced, and our stories go untold. That has begun to change with the publication of more and more genderqueer, bisexual, pansexual, and otherwise non-binary narratives, and I am overjoyed to be able to contribute. Putting together *Beyond Binary* has been a moving experience, and I hope that the end result can do as much for readers as it did for me.

The people in these stories do not accept the proscribed gendering of their bodies, and their bodies may not conform to normative, restrictive expectations. They refuse to choose “one or the other” in their gender, sexuality or relationships. They redefine what the terms “man” and “woman” can mean, how “he” and “she” may be used. And—most importantly—they embrace their own selves, their own definitions, and their own needs, physical and emotional. On our world or off of it, in our past or our future, or somewhere else entirely, these are stories in which the queer and the speculative unite to explore the ways in which we can go beyond binary.

In choosing these stories, I had two major concerns. First, I wanted to put together a tapestry of positive narratives that challenged all-too-common destructive tropes about queer and trans* people. There are no tragic “big reveal” stories here; no one is shocked by anyone else, and in the stories that feature physical discoveries, the lovers in question are always pleased and open to the wholeness of their partner's self. Second, I wanted to represent a broad range of gender and sexual identities, not only those exploring a spectrum but also those who occupy spaces outside of it. To that end, there are stories in which the protagonist is never once gendered by other characters or the author, stories with asexual protagonists, and stories in which sex is defined and enjoyed a little

differently than mainstream expectations. There are a variety of relationship-structures, too; no limiting things to couples, here.

Finally, the thing that strikes me most about Beyond Binary is that I could do two or three or ten books of genderqueer and sexually fluid stories without ever representing everyone, and every way in which we can live, be, and love. In these pages you will encounter all manner of people who have made a flexible grid out of a binary, an incorporated whole out of a dualism, or refused the mess of labels entirely, and yet: there are so many more stories to be told.