Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature Study Guide

Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

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Introduction

Aliens, time travel, sorcerers, and dragons! The domains of Science Fiction and Fantasy literature are recognizable to many people, but it is the messages and social commentary behind these icons that has captivated readers, and more recently critics, in the past two centuries. Science Fiction and Fantasy appear from the outside to be two distinct forms of literature, and yet the two genres share some similar characteristics and roots. This paradox has inspired much debate over the past century, while the movement itself has grown into a booming publishing industry that shows no signs of slowing.

Critics and historians share widely different viewpoints about the origins of Science Fiction. Still, many have conceded that Mary Shelley's 1818 British novel *Frankenstein* was the first novel to explore the hypothetical implications of modern science. Most agree that Jules Verne's novels from his "Extraordinary Journeys" series, including *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* and *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, helped to define the movement. Although most of the early works were published in Europe, in the first half of the twentieth century, Science Fiction and Fantasy literature exploded in the United States. This was due in large part to inexpensive, genre "pulp" magazines like *Amazing Stories*□which reprinted novels like H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds*□and to more expensive magazines like *Astounding Stories*□which helped introduce influential new writers like Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein. Science Fiction and Fantasy literature inspired many related movements in film, television, and art, and profoundly influenced the development of science and culture in the twentieth century. The field remains dominated by American authors, many of whom continue to use their speculative creations to comment on current realities.

Themes

Science and the Supernatural

Science Fiction often reflects the time in which it is written. So it is that in the early twentieth century, when society was still heavily focused on technological innovation through science and industry, stories were often exploratory in nature. These stories were usually dominated by natural sciences like physics and astronomy, which often manifested themselves plot devices like spaceships or evolution. These plot devices were often incorporated into tales about humanity's future or alien races on other worlds. In the more metaphysical 1960s, however, books like Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* experimented with pseudosciences (theories or practices considered to be without scientific foundation). A good example is when Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* protagonist, a human given paranormal abilities by the Martians, is first asked to demonstrate his telekinetic powers: "'Mike, will you please, without touching it, lift that ash tray a foot above the desk?' . . . The ash tray raised, floated above the desk."

Many Science Fiction purists prefer stories that employ "hard" sciences, and some maintain that pseudoscientific elements like telekinesis marks a work as Fantasy. The same is generally true of magic, which is often incorporated into Fantasy works like Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. When Gandalf, the wizard, is surprised by goblins, he uses his magical powers to defend himself: "there was a terrible flash like lightning in the cave, a smell like gunpowder, and several of them fell dead." In the imaginary realm of Fantasy, however, wizards are not the only ones with magical powers. Sometimes objects contain special powers as Bilbo discovers when he finds a mysterious ring: "It seemed that the ring he had was a magic ring: it made you invisible!" Bilbo's supernatural power to turn invisible is not only interesting, it also serves as an important plot device in the novel.

Time

Of all of the themes in Science Fiction and Fantasy, the manipulation of time has been one of the most frequently used. Most Science Fiction or Fantasy stories take place in another time, either the past or the future. In some cases, as in Wells's influential novel *The Time Machine*, the protagonist travels in a machine, which physically takes him either backward or forward through time, the fourth dimension. Says the time traveler, "I am afraid I cannot convey the peculiar sensations of time travelling. They are excessively unpleasant."

Other forms of traveling through time, such as near-light-speed space travel, are more physically pleasant for the traveler. Following Albert Einstein's theory of relativity, Science Fiction writers have created a host of spaceships capable of traveling near the speed of light. Theoretically, as a ship like this approaches the speed of light, time will

slow down for the ship's passengers, so that they will age less quickly than those who remain at the point where the ship started. Joe Haldeman demonstrated the potential emotional and psychological ramifications of this technology in his book *The Forever War*, in which elite soldiers retain their youth by traveling at near-light-speeds throughout the universe, chasing an elusive enemy.

In the book's conclusion, the soldier protagonist, Mandella, finally returns to his planet of origin, where he finds out that "the war ended 221 years ago." An even bigger surprise is that Mandella's lover, a fellow soldier who was separated from him by space and time during the war, left a note for him 250 years ago. However, the note includes detailed instructions on how his lover is manipulating space and time to try to meet him while they are both still alive and young.

> So I'm on a relativistic shuttle, waiting for you. All
> it does is go out five light years and come back . . .
> very fast. Every ten years I age about a month. So if
> you're on schedule and still alive, I'll only be twentyeight
> when you get here. Hurry!

However, some Science Fiction and Fantasy writers avoid the issue of time travel altogether and choose to simply begin their stories in the future or past.

Salvation and Destruction

From the very beginning of Science Fiction, most writers have expressed one of two diametrically opposed ideas concerning the development of science and technology□it will save humanity or it will destroy it. Many of the works that have received favorable criticism or which reign as "classics" fall into the latter group. Perhaps it is because of their darker qualities that these works stand out from the others; Science Fiction has always been strongest when it issues warnings. Readers need look no further than Verne and Wells. Verne's "Extraordinary Journeys" novels tell predominantly positive tales about man's use of the machine to explore and conquer the unknown. However, it is Wells and his dark tales of scientific progress gone bad that most later Science Fiction writers claim is the stronger influence. This focus on dark, sometimes apocalyptic visions had its heyday in the years after World War II, following the advent of the atomic bomb, when the end of civilization was a distinct possibility.

One of the most chilling expressions of the global destruction idea takes place in Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*. Throughout the novel, a genius child trains, using military war simulation games in space. At the end of the story, after he has successfully completed a simulated mission in which he obliterates the alien enemy's home planet, both Ender and the reader learn the last battle was real. Without his knowledge, Ender has coordinated an interstellar attack on the aliens' home planet. The sense of despair in Ender, as he comes to realize how the military tricked him into launching a weapon with a destructive power exponentially greater than nuclear weapons, is almost palpable: "they were real ships that he had fought with and real ships he had destroyed.

And a real world that he had blasted into oblivion." This is the dark stuff of which some of the best Science Fiction is made.

Style

Utopia and Dystopia

A utopia is a literary form that features an idealistic imaginary society. In most cases, these ideals are unattainable. The author writes about this imaginary place not because he or she hopes to achieve this ideal but because the author hopes to inspire debate about the issues expressed in the work and so bring about social change. In Science Fiction, writers have in turn commented on the unattainable quality of utopias by writing dystopias□visions of a future society that, in striving to achieve an ideal, instead becomes a nightmare. The two most famous Science Fiction examples of dystopias are Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *1984*.

In Huxley's bleak future, the dystopian society has achieved its goal of eliminating sickness, disease, and war, but in the process it has sacrificed much of what makes humanity human. People are genetically engineered to fit into a certain social class and follow a uniform way of life, and any abnormal or creative behavior is suppressed through drugs. In one of the final scenes, after a human born of natural means attempts to stage a revolt against the system, he meets with one of the world government leaders, who explains why they have sacrificed many human interests, including religion, for technological progress: "Call it the fault of civ- ilization. God isn't compatible with machinery and scientific medicine and universal happiness. You must make your choice."

At least in Huxley's vision, the brainwashed citizens themselves are happy. Not so in *1984*. In this society, fear and paranoia are what motivate the citizens to conform to the government's demands. Politics rule, and people are wise to remember, as many posters in the society state, "Big Brother Is Watching You." The book's protagonist, Winston Smith, is unfortunate enough to attempt a revolt against Big Brother, which results in Smith's being mentally and physically destroyed by the totalitarian regime.

Description

Science Fiction by its very nature incorporates some form of scientific description in its tales. In some works, such as Asimov's *I, Robot* stories that examine the use of robots in human society, the science is meticulously explained as an integral part of the plot. Asimov writes, "Inside the thin platinum- plated 'skin' of the globe was a positronic brain, in whose delicately unstable structure were enforced calculated neuronic paths." This robot brain, like a human's, fits "snugly into the cavity in the skull of the robot." Throughout the stories, the robots' "thinking" processes feature prominently in the plot.

Other Science Fiction stories, however, incorporate minor descriptions of technologies that are not central to the story's plot. For example, in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the human ambassador sent to the planet Gethen, which is light

years away from his planet, demonstrates how he can communicate across the distance nearly instantaneously with his ansible communicator. "The principle it works on . . . is analogous in some ways to gravity. . . . What it does . . . is produce a message at any two points simultaneously." The king to whom the ambassador shows the device is not impressed and does not pay much attention to this technology. Nor do Le Guin's readers. Although the communicator is an interesting device, the real story in the book is the lack of gender bias due to unique biology that Le Guin creates for her alien society.

Setting

One of the most important choices Science Fiction and Fantasy authors make when creating stories is the setting. Because most Science Fiction and Fantasy works involve "rules" established through generations of other writers such as Asimov's famous "Three Laws of Robotics" the choice of a setting can introduce potential constraints. While writers sometimes bend or break those rules, deviating from them requires the formulation of a convincing and compelling alternative.

The choice of a setting is also one of the indicators of the type of tale the story is intended to be Science Fiction or Fantasy. Although there is much debate over what distinguishes the two genres, Card, in his book *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy*, offers one possible definition based on his own experiences as a Science Fiction and Fantasy writer: "A rustic setting always suggests fantasy; to suggest Science Fiction, you need sheet metal and plastic. You need *rivets*." Especially since the New Wave of Science Fiction and Fantasy, which appeared in the 1960's with seminal authors such Heinlein and Harlan Ellison, a definition of Science Fiction and Fantasy by their settings is no longer so easily applied.

Historical Context

Science Fiction has its original roots in the nineteenth century, a time when the world experienced an explosion in new inventions and an appreciation of science and scientific methods as a means of progress. With the advent of the daguerreotype (the precursor to photography) in the first half of the century, humans harnessed the power to record images quickly and accurately. This technology is further explored with the advent of motion pictures at the end of the nineteenth century.

As science and technology grew in popularity, its practitioners challenged established thought. With the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origins of Species* in 1859, the idea of man as a being of singular importance in the universe is shattered. With the help of geologists who date the Earth as much older than suggested by the Bible, Darwin's theories propose that humans and apes share an ancestry.

The early years of the twentieth century introduced new transportation technologies both on land in the form of gasoline-powered automobiles and in the sky in the form of airplanes. World War I introduced new weapons technologies, including tanks that are first used on battlefields in 1917. These new technologies helped fuel the ideas behind Science Fiction and Fantasy literature, which exploded in the 1920s with Hugo Gernsback's publication of several Science Fiction and Fantasy pulp magazines□named for the cheap wood pulp on which they were printed, although some used the term to indicate a lack of quality.

In 1926, American scientist Robert H. Goddard tested the world's first liquid-fuel rocket, the advent of which eventually triggered a race in the 1950s and 1960s between the United States and the Soviet Union to develop rockets for propelling weapons and space shuttles. On October 31, 1938, Orson Welles made media and literary history by dramatizing H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* on the radio. Told in the style of a newscast, hundreds of thousands of listeners mistook the story of a Martian invasion as real, and widespread panic ensued as Americans believed they were under attack.

Also in 1938, John W. Campbell, an American editor, took the reigns of the Science Fiction magazine *Astounding Stories*, which he later renamed *Astounding Science Fiction*. The magazine, which placed more emphasis on quality than other pulps, quickly distinguished itself and helped to nurture the careers of many talented, new Science Fiction writers. It effectively launched the golden age of Science Fiction, a period that lasted until a few years after the end of World War II.

When World War II began in 1939, the world experienced paper shortages that affected the publication of Science Fiction and Fantasy magazines. Publishers cut magazines that did not have strong circulations. *Astounding Stories* was one of the few that survived, and its issues, which contained stories from such heavyweights as Heinlein and Asimov, helped to define modern Science Fiction. In 1945, the United States dropped the first atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, two Japanese cities, effectively ending World War II.

In the 1960s and 1970s, amidst the New Wave of Science Fiction and Fantasy, a period marked by experimental writing in the field, more female Science Fiction writers began to publish under their own names. The predominantly male readership of Science Fiction works had not allowed for many works by women writers previous to this time. Those women who were published often wrote under male pseudonyms or used intentionally genderambiguous pen names, such as C. J. Cherryh or Leigh Brackett. The publication of Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* in 1969 was a direct response to the bias of the genre. In the story, a human ambassador visits a far world that has ideologically and biologically evolved to the point where gender issues are nonexistent.

The advent of the first computer, ENIAC, in 1946, had the greatest effect on modern society. Although Science Fiction writers had predicted that robots would become the most important technology in future societies, it was the computer that won out in the end. At the beginning of the twentyfirst century, as new technologies most of them based on computer technology are introduced, Science Fiction and Fantasy writers continue to react to them in their works, reworking themes that have been used in Science Fiction since the nineteenth century.

Movement Variations

Science fiction had a profound effect on the development of motion pictures. From almost the very beginnings of film, Science Fiction movies have pushed the envelope of special effects, starting with the first real Science Fiction film, George Méliès's, *A Trip to the Moon* in 1902.

Since then, Science Fiction films have had a hit-or-miss history, and many literary classics have been made into highly inaccurate adaptations that sacrificed plot for special effects. In 1926, Fritz Lang released his monumental *Metropolis*, a nightmarish vision of a potential future in which the city is large and impersonal and the working-class is intended to be replaced by a new race of robots.

In 1963, the British Science Fiction television series *Dr. Who* began its unprecedented, 26-season, 695-episode run. In 1966, Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek* debuted in the United States to little fanfare. Eventually, Roddenberry's characters and ideas inspired several related television series, a host of movies, countless book tie-ins, and a widespread cultural movement of sorts. The terms Trekkie and Trekker continue to be used to refer to ardent *Star Trek* fans. The 1999 film *Galaxy Quest* is a goodnatured parody of *Star Trek* fandom.

With Stanley Kubrick's 1968 criticallyacclaimed adaptation of Arthur C. Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, Science Fiction films gained new respect. The release of George Lucas's original *Star Wars* trilogy in the 1970s and early 1980s helped to further revitalize the Science Fiction film and inspired widespread devotion reminiscent of the *Star Trek* phenomenon. Lucas has gone on in the early twenty-first century to create a popular trilogy prequel to the original *Star Wars* films.

In the 1980s and 1990s, several influential films were released. *Blade Runner*, a film loosely based on Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, is one of few literary adaptations to film at that time. Both the film and author acquired a cult following as a result of the film. Original Science Fiction films of note during the last two decades of the twentieth century include Steven Spielberg's blockbuster *E. T*. (rereleased in an updated version in 2002), James Cameron's *Terminator* movies, and the Science Fiction comedy film series *Back to the Future*. In the early years of the twenty-first century, Science Fiction films and television shows□many of which continue to create groundbreaking new special effects□ are alive and well.

Representative Authors

Isaac Asimov (1920-1992)

Isaac Asimov was born January 2, 1920, in Petrovichi, U.S.S.R. (the former Soviet Union), and moved to the United States with his parents in 1923, becoming a U.S. citizen in 1928. Asimov was a voracious reader. His love of science led to a doctorate in chemistry from Columbia University and a subsequent post as a professor of biochemistry at Boston University's School of Medicine□a position he held for much of his writing career. Although he published more than 450 fiction and nonfiction books, making him one of the most prolific writers in history, Asimov is most remembered for his Science Fiction works, which influenced many writers in America during Science Fiction's golden age. Asimov has been credited with coining the term robotics, and with creating "The Three Laws of Robotics," which make their first appearance in his early robot short stories, collected in *I, Robot*. Asimov died of heart and kidney failure on April 6, 1992, in New York City.

Ray Bradbury (1920-)

Ray Douglas Bradbury was born August 22, 1920, in Waukegan, Illinois. During the depression, Bradbury's family moved to Los Angeles to find work. Bradbury began, like many other Science Fiction authors of the golden age, publishing his fiction in the fanzine he edited. In 1941, Bradbury published his first short story, and six years later, published his first story collection. It was not until the publication of *The Martian Chronicles*, a series of interconnected short stories about the human colonization of Mars, that Bradbury achieved enough critical success to break out of Science Fiction genre magazines into the more reputed mainstream magazines□which were off-limits to most Science Fiction writers. Bradbury lives and works in Los Angeles, California.

Robert Heinlein (1907-1988)

Robert Anson Heinlein was born July 7, 1907, in Butler, Missouri. Unlike many of his contemporaries, who started writing Science Fiction in their youth, Heinlein did not enter the field until he had already worked as a naval officer and studied physics and mathematics at the University of California, Los Angeles. As one of the Science Fiction writers for genre magazines during Science Fiction's golden age, Heinlein's sophisticated writing style raised the bar on Science Fiction literature and influenced many other writers. After working as an engineer in World War II alongside fellow Science Fiction writer Isaac Asimov, Heinlein published several Science Fiction "juveniles," or young adult novels, then began a series of controversial novels, including *Stranger in a Strange Land*, his best-known work. Heinlein, considered by many to be the most influential figure in American Science Fiction, died of heart failure on May 8, 1988, in Carmel, California.

Aldous Huxley (1894-1963)

The grandson of T. H. Huxley, a noted biologist and proponent of Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory, Aldous Leonard Huxley was born July 26, 1894, in Godalming, Surrey, England. Huxley originally intended to pursue a career in medicine, but an eye disease that led to temporary blindness prevented him from doing so. Although Huxley wrote in several different fiction and nonfiction genres, his most famous work is *Brave New World*, a Science Fiction novel that draws on evolutionary theory to create a nightmarish vision of the future. Five years after the novel's publication, Huxley moved to Los Angeles, California, where he wrote more mystical works until his death on November 22, 1963, in Hollywood, California. Huxley died on the same day as his British contemporary C. S. Lewis and on the same day that United States President John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

Clive Staples Lewis, known to readers as C. S. Lewis, was born November 29, 1898, in Belfast, Ireland. An atheist as a teenager, Lewis slowly came to renew his faith in Christianity, then incorporated his beliefs into his writing. After attending Oxford University, Lewis taught English literature at Oxford for almost thirty years. During his time as a professor, Lewis, along with fellow Christian Fantasy writer J. R. R. Tolkien and others, founded the Inklings, a casual club that met to discuss the writers' works in progress. Although Lewis wrote nonfiction, Science Fiction, and Fantasy, it is his fantastical writings that made him most popular. His seven-volume children's series "The Chronicles of Narnia," a Christian allegorical Fantasy, has delighted generations of popular audiences, particularly children. Lewis died of heart failure November 22, 1963□the same day as Huxley and U.S. President Kennedy□in Oxford, England.

Mary Shelley (1797-1851)

Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley was born as Mary Wollstonecraft August 30, 1797, in London, England. The daughter of two well-known authors, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary's early years were unstable. Her mother died shortly after her birth, her father remarried, and she grew up in a chaotic environment with siblings from her father's two marriages, her stepmother's previous marriage, and her mother's previous affair. When she was fifteen, Mary met and fell in love with a friend of her father's, the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley. Mary had an affair with Percy, who was already married, and the two of them fled to Europe when she was seventeen, where Mary wrote *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*, which many critics consider the first true Science Fiction work. Following the suicide of Percy's wife, Mary and Percy were married. Four years after *Frankenstein* was published, Percy Bysshe Shelley drowned. Mary Shelley lived for almost thirty years as a widow, then died of a brain tumor February 1, 1851, at the age of fifty-three, in London.

J. R. R. Tolkien (1892-1973)

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, known to readers as J. R. R. Tolkien, was born January 3, 1892, in Bloemfontein, South Africa. When he was four years old, Tolkien's family moved to England. After attending Oxford University, Tolkien taught English language and literature first at Leeds, then at Oxford. During this time, Tolkien, along with fellow Christian Fantasy writer C. S. Lewis and others, founded the Inklings, a casual club that met to discuss the writers' works in progress. Tolkien's passion for language and literary history culminated in his creation of Middle-Earth, a mythical world, modeled on northern and ancient literatures. Middle-Earth made its debut in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, the prelude to his trilogy "The Lord of the Rings." Because of these works, Tolkien is considered by many to be the father of modern Fantasy stories. Tolkien died of complications from an ulcer and chest infection on September 2, 1973, in Bournemouth, England.

Jules Verne (1828-1905)

Jules Verne was born February 8, 1828, in Nantes, France. At age twenty, he left for Paris, where he studied law, intending to join his father's law firm. After passing his law exam, he struggled in Paris for several years, attempting to make a living off his writing. Although one of his plays was produced in 1850, it was not until 1863, after working as both a secretary for a theater and a stockbroker, that Verne's writing attracted the attention of Jules Hetzel, the magazine publisher who printed the majority of Verne's novels in serial form. The most famous novels are those that Verne called "Extraordinary Journeys," including *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, which helped to establish Verne's reputation as one of the two founding fathers of modern Science Fiction (along with H. G. Wells). Verne wrote up until his death on March 24, 1905, in Amiens, France.

Kurt Vonnegut Jr. (1922-)

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. was born November 11, 1922, in Indianapolis, Indiana. While serving in the United States Army in Germany during World War II, Vonnegut was captured by the Germans and kept as a prisoner of war in Dresden, Germany. There he witnessed the Allied firebombing the city on February 13, 1945, and was one of few survivors of the firestorm that killed an estimated 120,000 people. This experience earned Vonnegut a Purple Heart and, more importantly, gave him the basis for much of his fiction. Vonnegut deals with war themes in many of his early novels, but it was not until the publication of *Slaughterhouse Five: or, the Children's Crusade* that Vonnegut told the full story of his Dresden experience through his characters. Vonnegut lives and works in New York City.

H. G. Wells (1866-1946)

Herbert George Wells, known to readers as H. G. Wells, was born September 21, 1866, in Bromley, England. He won a scholarship to the Normal School of Science in London, where he studied under T. H. Huxley□the famous proponent of Darwin's theory of evolution and grandfather of noted Science Fiction writer Aldous Huxley. Although infatuated with his first-year studies with Huxley, Wells spent most of his remaining school years performing extracurricular activities like founding and editing a college magazine. It was in this magazine that he first published "The Chronic Argonauts," which was later published as *The Time Machine: An Invention*, and which details a possible outcome of human evolution. This short novel, along with many of Wells's other early novels, helped to define what he called "the scientific romance," and established Wells as one of the two founding fathers of modern Science Fiction (along with Verne). Wells died August 13, 1946, in London.

Representative Works

Brave New World

Huxley's internationally acclaimed work, *Brave New World*, first published in 1932, is a nightmarish vision of what could happen in the future if politics and technology supersedes humanity. Huxley's novel depicts a futuristic, "ideal" world where there is no sickness, disease, or war. However, to achieve this ideal, people are massproduced in test tubes; social classes are created through genetic manipulations that predetermine a person's intelligence and body type; and unwanted emotions are suppressed with soma, a hallucinogenic drug. In this inhuman system, an outsider born of natural means is considered a savage. Critics have noted Huxley's cynicism in the work, and have examined it in context of life during the post- World War I era, when governments sought scientific and technological progress at all costs. The novel ranks with George Orwell's equally disturbing *1984* as one of the great dystopian works of Science Fiction literature.

"The Chronicles of Narnia"

"The Chronicles of Narnia," Lewis's sevenvolume Fantasy series, was originally published between 1950 and 1956. The series (which followed a different order than current editions) started with *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, a story about four English schoolchildren who find a portal to Narnia□a parallel Fantasy world□through a wardrobe. In Narnia, they learn they are there to fulfill a prophecy. In the process, they meet fantastical creatures, battle a witch, and witness the Christlike death and resurrection of a lion named Aslan. Christian themes permeate the series. Since their publication, "The Chronicles of Narnia" have found a wide acceptance, especially among young readers. Some critics, however, do not care for the violence in the series, in which might sometimes makes right. Like the works of his contemporary and friend Tolkien, Lewis's books created a new world that inspired later writers.

Frankenstein

Shelley wrote her novel *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* when she was in her late teens. The story was her entry in a writing contest between herself; her lover, poet Percy Bysshe Shelley; the infamous poet Lord Byron; and John Polidori, who was Byron's doctor. Shelley's work, commonly referred to simply as *Frankenstein*, was published in 1818, and is widely regarded as the first true Science Fiction work for its reliance on scientific, rather than supernatural, methods. The original novel differs greatly from the screen adaptations, which focus on the horrific aspects of the tale. The story details Dr. Frankenstein's scientific experiments to galvanize a mismatched corpse into life. The unnamed monster, lacking a soul, becomes an outcast of society and goes on a vengeful killing spree, finally fleeing to the Arctic North. When Shelley first

published the novel in 1818, critics treated it as just another Gothic novel and failed to recognize the depth of the work. Since then, the work has enjoyed a strong critical and popular reception.

The Hobbit

Tolkien's *The Hobbit* was first published in 1937. The story details the adventures of Bilbo, a hobbit (an imaginary creature that exists in Middle- Earth, Tolkien's mythical past world), who has a number of adventures involving other fantastical beings, including dragons, goblins, wizards, elves, and talking animals. The story also introduces a magical ring, which Bilbo finds and which features prominently in Tolkien's sequel trilogy "The Lord of the Rings." Since the publication of the four-volume series, critics and popular readers alike have been fascinated by Tolkien's imaginative tales and literary artistry. The four-volume epic influenced many later Science Fiction and Fantasy writers and also inspired a cult following.

I, Robot

Although Asimov was not the first to write about robots, he revolutionized the method of writing about them. In his early robot short stories, originally published in Science Fiction magazines in the 1940s, Asimov defined and demonstrated the Three Laws of Robotics:

> One, a robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm. . . . Two . . . a robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law. . . . Three, a robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.

Asimov's robot stories were collected in 1950 in one volume, *I, Robot*, which brought him widespread critical acclaim, mainly for the "Three Laws," which were accepted and used by many other Science Fiction writers. Critics praised the ethical example that Asimov set with the laws, which were so influential that many assumed they would be used as a basis for future robotics design and production.

The Martian Chronicles

The Martian Chronicles, a short story collection first published in 1950, made Bradbury famous, and was one of the first Science Fiction works to garner positive critical attention. Although many critics regard Bradbury as one of the best living Science Fiction writers, Science Fiction purists note that much of his "Science Fiction" work, including *The Martian Chronicles*□which features a Mars blatantly different than what science has revealed□ is really Fantasy. The stories detail repeated efforts made by

humans to colonize Mars, and feature space travel, robots, and other scientific scenarios. However, it is the emotional depth, not the scientific setting or plot, that distinguishes the work. The chilling blend of future reality and Fantasy in the story collection earned Bradbury respect from critics and popular readers alike. Unlike many of his pro-science contemporaries, Bradbury is against too much scientific and technological development at the expense of humanity, a fear that he expresses in *The Martian Chronicles*.

Slaughterhouse Five

Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* draws on his experiences as a witness to the 1945 firebombing of the German city of Dresden. Vonnegut's main character, Billy Pilgrim, escapes the horror of these memories by traveling through time and space to visit the planet Tralfamadore. It is here that he relives the good moments in his life. Whenever he is faced with the horrors of war, Pilgrim remarks, "so it goes," a seemingly impartial phrase that resounds in the reader's mind, creating a feeling that death is inevitable. Originally published in 1969, the book was a hit with its Vietnam-era audience, who identified with the war issues the novel raised. The novel was well-received by critics, which was rare for a Science Fiction novel at the time. Although Vonnegut does not like to be called a Science Fiction writer, novels like *Slaughterhouse Five* have helped bring positive critical attention to the Science Fiction field.

Stranger in a Strange Land

Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, first published in 1961, was Science Fiction's first bestseller. With its controversial exploration of human philosophy, religion, and sociology□as opposed to technology□it was a striking departure from his previous novels and from other Science Fiction novels. In the book, Valentine Michael Smith, a human raised by Martians, returns to Earth and experiences human culture as an outsider. With demonstrations of his paranormal powers given to him by the Martians, he becomes a messiah-like figure and inspires the establishment of a religious movement. The novel embraces the supernatural and so is perhaps Fantasy, but it caused a major upheaval in the Science Fiction world, and greatly influenced future Science Fiction writers. It was received with enthusiasm by members of the 1960s counterculture, who recognized and emulated its message of free love. It was not loved by early critics, many of whom labeled Heinlein a fascist for his radical ideas.

The Time Machine: An Invention

The first of many Science Fiction novels that would make him famous, Wells's *The Time Machine: An Invention*, commonly referred to simply as *The Time Machine*, was published in 1895. Wells drew on the evolutionary theory he had studied to tell of a future, more than 800,000 years hence, in which humans have evolved into two separate species. The attractive and ignorant Eloi, descended from humanity's upper

class, become food for the working-class, ape-like Morlocks, who live underground. The time traveler who witnesses this then travels thirty million years into the future, witnessing the death of the Sun and the subsequent death of life on Earth. Critics in Wells's time regarded *The Time Machine* as a brilliant work, and later critics and popular audiences agree. Although both Wells and Jules Verne are considered fathers of modern Science Fiction, Wells and his unique literary inventions like time travel have generally been considered more influential.

Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea

Verne's novels in his "Extraordinary Journeys" series, particularly *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, have delighted international audiences for more than a century. First published in 1870 in serial form in a French magazine, *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea* details the adventures of Captain Nemo on the submarine *Nautilus*. Although many regard Verne as a predictor of scientific inventions, most of his futuristic ideas□like the submarine in *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*□were extrapolated either from history or from reading current scientific research. Many of Jules Verne's books, including *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, were inaccurately translated into English from Verne's native French. Consequently many outside of the Science Fiction field regarded Verne as just a children's writer until more recent translations revealed the literary depth of his works.

Critical Overview

Science Fiction has always faced three problems from a critical standpoint: definition, history, and literary reputation. First, there is the two-part question of what is Science Fiction and how does it differ from Fantasy? As Frederick Andrew Lerner observes in his *Modern Science Fiction and the American Literary Community*, "the Science Fiction professionals themselves□writers, historians, and critics whose careers are closely associated with Science Fiction□have reached no consensus." Perhaps the only definition that everyone can agree on is that given by Harry Harrison in his article "The Term Defined": "The definition of science fiction is: Science fiction is."

Science Fiction is often referred to as a form of Fantasy. Critic Julius Kagarlitski maintains in his essay "Realism and Fantasy" that "all fantasy is 'scientific' in the sense that it is engendered by that type of thinking whose mission it was to determine the real natural laws of the world and to transform it." Kagarlitski also notes that "the history of fantasy is a very long one," unlike Science Fiction, which most critics agree has only been around for the last couple of centuries.

The problem of defining Science Fiction's history is steeped in controversy. Although some critics and historians claim that writings several hundreds of years old are Science Fiction, the leading argument□and the one that has seen the most acceptance□was offered by British Science Fiction author Brian Aldiss. In his book on the history of Science Fiction, *Trillion Year Spree*, Aldiss maintains that Shelley's *Frankenstein* is the first true Science Fiction work due to its reliance on scientific methods. "Frankenstein's ambitions bear fruit only when he throws away his old reference books from a pre-scientific age and gets down to some research in the laboratory," says Aldiss.

The arguments of definition and history are often laid aside, however, when it comes to discussing the literary merits of Science Fiction and Fantasy. Although some very notable authors like Wells and Verne wrote critically acclaimed Science Fiction works, it has taken a while for Science Fiction and Fantasy works to gain acceptance in the mainstream. This is due in large part to Gernsback and his publication of Science Fiction and Fantasy pulp magazines. The same magazines that helped increase popular readership in the field, also served to distance critics.

It has been through the works of specific writers like Bradbury and Vonnegut that the genre has been able to transcend its pulp image and garner the positive attention of critics. Works like *The Martian Chronicles* and particularly *Slaughterhouse Five* have also found favor with academia and are often taught in the classroom. Jack Williamson noted this trend in his 1974 article "SF in the Classroom": "From a standing start only a dozen years ago, Science Fiction has now become a popular and reasonably respectable academic subject."

This trend continues today. As for the mainstream critics, they tend to favor the types of stories they always have: the ones that transcend the genre of Science Fiction and illustrate more universal themes of humanity.

Criticism

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Critical Essay #1

Poquette has a bachelor's degree in English and specializes in writing about literature. In the following essay, Poquette explores the similarities and differences among Science Fiction and Fantasy works, by examining three aspects of Wells's The Time Machine *and Tolkien's* The Hobbit.

With the introduction of pulp genre magazines like *Weird Tales* and *Amazing Stories* in the 1920s, modern Science Fiction and Fantasy stories were lumped together, with no attempt to define or separate each genre. Although many critics have since tried to define each genre, no consensus has been reached, and Science Fiction and Fantasy are often referred to as one field. This is true in the popular sphere as well. Orson Scott Card (who is a Science Fiction and Fantasy writer himself) notes in his book *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy*, "in most bookstores, fantasy and science fiction are lumped together in the same group of shelves, alphabetized by author with no attempt to separate one from the other." However, one can make a possible distinction by examining the *specific* ways that Science Fiction and Fantasy writers use *general* ideas and techniques shared by both genres. By exploring the general similarities between Wells's *The Time Machine* and Tolkien's *The Hobbit*□ two works that helped to define the modern Science Fiction and Fantasy genres, respectively□ these specific differences can be identified.

The first general similarity between the two genres is in their views of science and technology. Both genres tend to take a negative view toward science and technology. In fact, much of Fantasy literature is, by its very nature, anti-technology. Fantasy authors like Tolkien often stage their tales in a rustic environment that hearkens back to a preindustrialized past and is generally derived from a nostalgic blend of human history and mythology. In some Fantasy, however, the feelings against industrial progress are more pronounced. Take this passage from *The Hobbit*, in which Tolkien is discussing the goblins, one of many evil races in the book: "It is not unlikely that they invented some of the machines that have since troubled the world, especially the ingenious devices for killing large numbers of people at once." By associating this evil race with troublesome machines□a clear sign of industry□Tolkien is implying that technological progress itself is evil. It is particularly telling that Tolkien wrote this story as humanity was gearing up for World War II, during which a number of killing machines were invented. As Michael Wood notes about Tolkien's works in *New Society*:

> The enemy is science, or rather the complacency of science, the self-satisfaction of people who think they can explain everything, who have no time for myths, for forms of truth which will not fit within a narrow rationalism.

Unlike *The Hobbit*, the anti-technology view in *The Time Machine* is not apparent at first. In the beginning of the novel, the time traveler is hopeful about science and technology as he displays the model of his time machine to his assembled guests□who

use scientific arguments to discuss the prospect of time travel. Says the medical man, one of the time traveler's guests, "if Time is really only a fourth dimension of Space, why is it, and why has it always been regarded as something different? And why cannot we move in Time as we move about in the other dimensions of Space?" Later, when the time traveler has returned from his journey into the future, he explains to his guests what he had hoped to find there. "I had always anticipated that the people of the year Eight Hundred and Two Thousand odd would be incredibly in front of us in knowledge, art, everything." But as the time traveler soon sees, human society has evolved from upper and lower classes into two separate species, both of which have regressed physically and mentally to the point where they have lost their humanity. The time traveler, a man from the nineteenth century, possesses more knowledge than these distant descendants, a fact that taints his view of the inevitable future.

In his history of Science Fiction, *Trillion Year Spree*, Brian Aldiss discusses the sense of despair inherent in *The Time Machine*: "Its sceptical view of the present, and its pessimistic view of the future of mankind□and of life on Earth□challenged most of the cosy ideas of progress, as well as the new imperialism, then current." Wells set the pace for many other Science Fiction writers, who imparted this dual idea of initial hope and crushing despair into their own works.

Another area in which general parallels between Fantasy and Science Fiction can be drawn is in the setting. Both Science Fiction and Fantasy works usually involve a setting that is something contrary to the writer's current reality, an "other" reality. The majority of Science Fiction works, like *The Time Machine*, take place in a future reality, which is often drastically different in either a distinctly positive or negative sense. As Aldiss notes, "Utopianism or its opposite is present in every vision of the future. There is little point in inventing a future state unless it contrasts in some way with our present one." In Wells's case, the future world his time traveler encounters is a nightmarish future Earth, where the ape-like Morlocks, the descendants of the working class who dwell underground, tend the pretty but naïve Eloi like crops. The reader, like the time traveler, is drawn to detest the Morlocks, who feed on the Eloi.

While many Science Fiction "other" realities take place in the future, Fantasy works like Tolkien's Middle-Earth are constructed as part of the mythical past. Here, Tolkien also portrays a nightmarish vision of Earth, although his is much richer than Wells's portrayal. While Morlocks served as the detested race in Wells's novel, Tolkien offers trolls, goblins, and the imaginary beast that is found in much mythology and Fantasy□the dragon. The dragon is especially nasty in *The Hobbit*. After Bilbo narrowly escapes being burned from the fire that the dragon spews from its mouth, Bilbo hides where the dragon cannot get to him or his dwarf companions. The dragon, Smaug, in a fit of rage, instead takes out his fiery anger on the nearby Lake-Town, the inhabitants of which have done nothing to the dragon. Tolkien describes Smaug's many destructive passes over the town, then gives Smaug's next thought: "Soon he would set all the shoreland woods ablaze and wither every field and pasture. Just now he was enjoying the sport of townbaiting." Fortunately for the town members, a bird carries Bilbo's news of the dragon's weakness to the town, and the dragon is slain.

A third area in which general similarities can be found between Science Fiction and Fantasy is the use of the quest, or journey, as a narrative structure. In journey stories, a protagonist travels to somewhere else, has an adventure, and is transformed. In Science Fiction, many of these stories have followed the trend set by works like Wells's *The Time Machine*, in which the traveler is a willing participant. In fact, in the time traveler's case, he travels on his journey through an invention of his own making. At the end of his first adventure through time, the time traveler has indeed changed. He has seen the bleak, far future, which saddens him, but he refuses to give up. In the end, he makes another journey, to an age not quite so far in the future, where he can try to warn people before they make the same mistakes that lead to the future he has seen. However, at the end of the book, after three years, the time traveler has still not returned, and Wells ends the book on an ambiguous note. The reader never finds out the conclusion of the time traveler's journey, or how it ultimately transforms him.

In fantastic journeys□many of which follow the ages-old storytelling form of the heroic quest□the journey's beginning, end, and outcome are clearly defined. The protagonists in Fantasy stories do not always choose to begin their journeys. In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo does not ask for his quest to rescue the treasure hoard from the dragon. At the beginning of the tale, Bilbo is happy with his quiet life in the Shire, and does not want anyone to change that. It is only with the intervention of the wizard Gandalf that Bilbo is called to go on the quest. Gandalf asks Bilbo outright to do it, but Bilbo refuses: "We are plain quiet folk and have no use for adventures. Nasty disturbing uncomfortable things! Make you late for dinner!" Gandalf leaves but, unbeknownst to Bilbo, the wizard marks Bilbo's front door to indicate that he is available as a burglar-for-hire for a group of dwarves.

After the dwarves start to arrive and Bilbo's world begins to tumble, Gandalf reveals his stunt. At this point something happens that makes Bilbo change his mind about going on the journey. His "Took" side, the adventurous line of his ancestors, gets offended when the dwarves say he could not handle the adventure. As Tolkien writes about Bilbo, "He suddenly felt he would go without bed and breakfast to be thought fierce." For a hobbit, who is constantly thinking about food, this is a brave admission and is one of the first signs that Bilbo has "more in him than you guess, and a deal more than he has any idea of himself," as Gandalf puts it to the dwarves.

Throughout the quest, Bilbo slowly begins to trust his instincts and risks his life to save the dwarves from being eaten by giant spiders, imprisoned by elves, and finally, consumed by their own greed while trying to hoard the dragon's treasure. Bilbo does indeed undergo a transformation, proving himself worthy of Gandalf's prophetic praise. Unlike Wells's time traveler, the transformation is a distinctly positive one, and the book ends on a clear upbeat note. The debate about what constitutes Science Fiction as opposed to Fantasy has been going on for more than a century. Although no consensus has been reached, many publishers label certain books as belonging to either the Science Fiction or Fantasy field, and fans generally know when they are reading one as opposed to the other.

Source: Ryan D. Poquette, Critical Essay on Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature, in *Literary Movements for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, Roberts explores feminist Science Fiction and the "images of women in science fiction."

One of the major theoretical projects of the second wave of feminism is the investigation of gender and sexuality as social constructs. . . . The stock conventions of science fiction□time travel, alternate worlds, entropy, relativism, the search for a unified field theory□ can be used metaphorically and metonymically as powerful ways of exploring the construction of 'woman'.
(Sarah Lefanu . . .)

Women's science fiction, or feminist science fiction, is a more recent development than the genre as a whole, but today constitutes one of the most exciting and most vigorous aspects of the mode, in terms both of actual SF texts and of criticism. It is also, following on from the previous chapter, a development that dates primarily from the 1960s, one that has grown up in dialogue with the more maleoriented SF of the Pulps and the Golden Age. Examining some of the features of women's SF writing, then, allows us to interrogate many aspects of New Wave (the experimental, avant-garde movement in SF that started in the 1960s) and more recent developments in the mode.

After exploring various aspects of the representation of gender concerns in SF, this chapter will close with a reading of Ursula Le Guin's 1969 novel, *The Left Hand of Darkness*. But it is worth noting at the beginning how contentious Le Guin's position is within the body of female SF, as a means of pointing up that 'female SF' is not a straightforwardly or narrowly single quantity. *The Left Hand of Darkness* is one of the acknowledged classics of SF; it won, for instance, both a Hugo and a Nebula award, the two most prestigious awards in SF publishing. But much of the feminist criticism of Le Guin is rather cold, sometimes dismissive, and occasionally outright hostile. Critic Sarah Lefanu finds Le Guin's writing fatally limited, too character-based to be SF at all, and not very well realised as character studies either. Of the characters in *The Left Hand of Darkness* Lefanu asks 'how realistic are [they]? Who remembers what they look like? or what they say? Or feel?' Lefanu prefers SF writer Joanna Russ. Joanna Russ herself thought *The Left Hand of Darkness* a failure, though an honourable one. Jenny Wolmark's *Aliens and Others: Science Fiction, Feminism and Postmodernism* omits Le Guin altogether, and the critic Susan Bassnett, whilst conceding that Le Guin has been 'ex- tremely popular and successful' for 'both adults and children', none the less points out in Lucie Armitt's edited collection *Where No Man Has Gone Before* that she 'has not always been treated very kindly by those critics who have actually considered her work'. There is a great deal of valuable criticism of SF from a feminist or women's writing point of view. In order to understand why as talented a writer as Le Guin has received such a poor showing in that criticism, and why her novels are so consistently judged in terms of her representation of gender, we need briefly to put her work into context.

One of the reasons why feminist criticism of SF has a radicalism that seems almost old-fashioned when compared with the subtler, more complex feminisms that characterise criticism as a whole is that women are a relatively recent arrival in the realm of SF writing itself. 'Golden Age' SF, the argument goes, was almost exclusively male; it was written by men, purchased by men or boys; its conventions were shaped by the passions and interests of adolescent males, that is to say its focus was on technology as embodied particularly by big, gleaming machines with lots of moving parts, physical prowess, war, two-dimensional male heroes, adventure and excitement. From the dawn of SF through to the end of the 1950s the female audience for SF was tiny, and those women who were interested in reading it did so with a sense of themselves as alienated or at least sidelined spectators. This is to skim swiftly over the surface of a large and complicated subject here, so a certain crudity of generalisation is inevitable; but it cannot be denied that the Golden Age readership of SF was predominantly, even overwhelmingly male; whereas the audience for SF today, particularly in America, is in the majority female. There are two things that account for this shift.

The first was the establishment, slowly at first but then, as it gained in popularity and sales, more rapidly, of a body of SF novels written by women and read in large part by women. This is something that happened particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, and there are three names associated with the success of this new mode. They are: Marion Zimmer Bradley, Andre Norton and Ursula Le Guin. Bradley has written dozens of novels set on a planet called Darkover, the chronicles of which span the world's history from a pre-technological, medievalised culture to a spacefaring technological one. Andre Norton's series of Fantasy novels set on what she calls the *Witch World* provided the first, and one of the most popular, reworkings of the Tolkien style of Fantasy Epic from a female point of view. Ursula Le Guin has not written an on-going series of novels in the SF idiom, as have these other two, but her novels have included some of the most acclaimed works in SF, not only *The Left Hand of Darkness* but also *The Dispossessed* and her Fantasy sequence *Earthsea*. For our purposes the interesting thing about all three of these writers is the way they began by writing male-centred, technological SF derived heavily from the Golden Age conventions, but as their confidence, and audience, grew, each of them shifted her perspective to female-centred studies that explored concerns more crucial to her own life. Marion Zimmer Bradley is one example of this. One of her earliest Darkover books, *Star of Danger*, has a 'Boy's Own' plot about two young lads travelling through a wilderness area of the planet, undergoing a series of adventures whilst on the run from a bandit chief. There are no major female characters in this novel, and virtually no women of any sort. More than this, the protagonist, Larry Montry from Earth, falls under the spell of the unreconstructed machismo of Darkover culture. He meets a young nobleman of that world, Kennard Dalton, after bravely fighting off a gang of toughs. Triumphing in this fight wins Larry respect. Darkovans, or at any rate male Darkovans, find it incomprehensible that people on Earth rely on the police to sort out their difficulties: on Darkover, if an individual is wronged it is that individual's duty to obtain retribution. Earth's is 'a government of laws', but, says Kennard proudly, 'ours is a government of men, because laws can't be anything but the expression of men who make them'. At no point in the novel are the masculinist prejudices of the Darkovian world challenged, or even mentioned without a sort of starry-eyed respect. But a later Darkover novel,

Stormqueen, is more women-oriented, and marks the feminist evolution of its author's sensibilities. It is set several hundred years before the Darkover of *Star of Danger*, in an age before the technologies of space flight have reached the planet, and it is far more explicit about the perils so macho a society involves for the women who live in it. One character, about to make a sort of marriage of convenience to a powerful noble, explains to her son that 'life is not easy for a woman unprotected'. Without this unwanted marriage, the alternative would be an effective concubinage; 'for me there would be nothing but to be a drudge or a sewing woman'. As the novel progresses, the main character reveals telepathic capacities, known as *laran*, and the book explores the compensations that *laran* offers to women in a brutal and oppressive society. Bradley has talked about her shift of interests. In the introduction to *The Best of Marion Zimmer Bradley*, a collection of her short fiction published in 1985, she said her 'current enthusiasms . . . are Gay Rights and Women's Rights□I think Women's Liberation is the great event of the twentieth century, not Space Exploration. One is a great change in human consciousness; the latter is only predictable technology, and I am bored by technology'.

This emphasis on the affective, the personal, rather than the technological was also the reason for the second significant catalyst from the 1960s, one that introduced a large body of female fans to SF, fans that had previously been put off by the masculinist 'boys and their toys' posturings of Golden Age books. This catalyst was the TV series *Star Trek*. Indeed, although its importance is often underplayed, it seems clear to me that *Star Trek* brought more women to SF than all the other authors mentioned so far put together. It remains a cornerstone of female SF fandom. The success of this syndicated show in the late sixties, particularly amongst a female audience, brought hundreds of thousands of women to the genre. And this was a success based less on the technological or maleego strands of the show, and had more to do with the way *Star Trek* represented, in the first instance, human interaction and the social dynamic as being at the heart of the SF story; and, in the second instance, and less obviously, because *Trek*, unusually for a 1960s US TV show, was interested in representing difference. The encounter with the alien is at the core of *Star Trek*, and of most SF; and questions of difference, of alien-ness and otherness, were also powerful and relevant to the female perspective on the old patriarchal world. This is why the show built up, and maintains, so large a female audience. Nor is this female audience merely a body of passive viewers; there is a vigorous and wide-ranging body of fanzines and even fan-authored novels based upon the *Star Trek* universe. As Henry Jenkins has exhaustively demonstrated, '*Star Trek* fandom is a predominantly female response to mass media texts, with the majority of fanzines edited by and written by women for a largely female readership'.

It was this issue of difference, where 'alien' becomes an encoding of 'woman', that featured prominently in the work of the 1970s new wave of radical female SF writers. This was a much more populated era of women's SF in terms of the number of women writing SF. But there are three names that crop up again and again in the criticism, so I mention them here: Octavia Butler, Marge Piercy and Joanna Russ. Russ is perhaps the most often cited. Her most famous novel, *The Female Man*, presents a four-fold perspective of women's experience of the world, including a women-only utopian realm

called Whileaway. Russ is one of the most committed feminist writers and critics, and *The Female Man* has received a great deal of respectful criticism. But Gwyneth Jones is surely right when she judges this novel a relative failure compared with some others of Russ's fictions. It is set partly on the planet Whileaway where there are no men, only women, and the utopian possibilities of this world are contrasted with the trajectories of female existence on other possible worlds where women are oppressed to one degree or another. Russ has written about all-female societies elsewhere, most notably in the story 'When It Changed', but, as Jones points out, the female society in that story is 'not unreasonably idealised'. The women have the faults and strengths of 'the whole of humanity'. By the time of *The Female Man* the all-woman world 'has been got at. Its inhabitants have become female characters in a feminist science fiction, their vices and virtues bowdlerised and engineered precisely to fit the current demands of sexual politics.' Russ's novel is effectively hijacked by a feminist agenda: '*When It Changed* is feminist fiction, *The Female Man* is feminist satire'.

Of the other names mentioned, Octavia Butler, as a writer both female and black, has an especially acute perspective on issues of 'alien as other.' Her *Xenogenesis* series is examined in Chapter 4 of the present study. Marge Piercy's feminist utopia *Women on the Edge of Time* is often contrasted with *The Left Hand of Darkness* as a 'successful' version of a world without gender. Another name worth introducing at this point, although not one that seems immediately appropriate in a discussion of SF written by women, is James Tiptree Jr. Despite having the first name James, Tiptree has the distinction of having created one of the most celebrated fictional expressions of the constructions of gender, in a short story called 'The Women Men Don't See'. This tale is narrated by a man called Fenton, rather old-fashioned but basically decent, whose blindness to the actual conditions of what it means to be a woman, as opposed to his vague sense of what he *thinks* women are about, is the key point of the story. Indeed, the triumph of Tiptree's narration is the way it captures so precisely the idiom of a certain sort of male consciousness, whilst also using *only* that blinkered male point of view to delineate the women as separate characters. The story opens on a small aeroplane flying down to Mexico.

> I see her first while the Mexicana 727 is barrelling down to Cozumel Island. I came out of the can and lurch into her seat, saying 'Sorry,' at a double female blur. The second blur nods quietly. The younger one in the window seat goes on looking out. I continue down the aisle registering nothing. Zero. I would never have looked at them or thought of them again.

The plane crashes, and the narrator and the two women are forced to fend for themselves. But the story takes a striking turn when space aliens encounter them in the jungle. 'They are tall and white . . . stretching out a long white arm toward Ruth . . . the arm stretches after her. It stretches and stretches. It stretches two yards and stays hanging in the air. Small black things are wriggling from its tip. I look where their faces should be and see black hollow dishes with vertical stripes.' The narrator's response is a male one: full of terror he fires his gun at the aliens. The women are more pragmatic.

They announce they are going to leave the planet with them. 'For Christ's sake, Ruth, they're *aliens*,' yells Fenton. 'I'm used to it,' Ruth replies. Ruth's point of view is that the aliens are just as men were on Earth, and that women are used to the marginal existence: 'we survive by ones or twos in the chinks of your world machine'. The aliens themselves, with their weird technology and their satellite-dish faces, seem to embody a particular, technological metaphor for maleness; just as their spaceship, a piece of technology, is no more of a 'world machine' than the machinery of patriarchy. Women's marginal role in this machine-system manages to reverse the woman-as-alien motif. From the perspective of Ruth, a space alien is not more alien than a man.

This is a story, though, celebrated for more than literary reasons. To quote Edward James:

> Robert Silverberg commented that this ['The Women Men Don't See'] was 'a profoundly feminist story told in an entirely masculine manner,' and a few pages earlier in his introduction to the collection which included this story he remarked: 'It has been suggested that Tiptree is female, a theory I find absurd, for there is to me something ineluctably masculine about Tiptree's writing.' It was not just the writing, but the lifestyle. Silverberg noted how Tiptree in a letter had admitted to having worked in a Pentagon basement during the war and to having subsequently 'batted around the jungly parts of the globe.'

As James points out, this whole affair is especially involving to 'those interested in the difference between "masculine" and "feminine" writing (like Le Guin and Silverberg himself)', because, of course, James Tiptree Jr was a woman called Alice Sheldon, a fact which finally emerged in 1977. The embarrassment of the more chauvinist SF writers, such as Silverberg or Heinlein, at this admission was met by the delight of the more feminist critics and authors; it seemed to crystallise the ingrained sexism of assumptions governing different sorts of writing, as well as emphasising how alive this issue was. In the fiery heat of 1970s-style feminism, this was a crucial issue.

The Tiptree situation in some senses harked back to an earlier age. I have talked of the 1960s as the time when female SF really increased in popularity, yet, as Sarah Lefanu has noted, the situation was not quite as clearcut as that:

> Science fiction is popularly conceived as male territory, boys' own adventure stories with little to interest a female readership. This is true of the heyday of magazine science fiction, the 1930s and 1940s, but even then there were women writers, like C L Moore and Leigh Brackett.

The difference, she points out, is that such women more often than not 'assumed a male voice and non-gender-specific names to avoid prejudice on the part of editors and readers alike'. Women who wished to become involved, as writers or readers, had to assume a certain masculine identity, to become what we might call (after Russ's novel), Female Men. The Tiptree experiment in a sense focused exactly these prejudices, but at a more gender-aware time.

What Tiptree does, as Le Guin, Butler and Russ have also done in their various ways, is precisely to use the SF encounter with difference to focus gender concerns. An essay by Russ that was first published in the SF magazine *Vertex* in 1971 is often cited by feminist critics of SF as a classic articulation of these issues. In that essay, Russ declared that 'one would think science fiction the perfect literary mode in which to explore (and explode) our assumptions about "innate" values and "natural" social arrangements.' But whilst 'some of this has been done', Russ points out that 'speculation about the innate personality differences between men and women, about family structure, about sex, in short about gender roles, does not exist at all'. The essay is called 'The Image of Women in Science Fiction'; Russ says she chose that title rather than 'Women in Science Fiction' because 'if I had chosen the latter, there would have been very little to say. There are plenty of images of women in science fiction. There are hardly any women'. It can be argued that now, thirty years later, the situation is not quite so bleak as it was then. But there is still a sense in which the SF contact with the alien remains a powerful medium for expressing female perspectives.

Source: Adam Roberts, "Gender," in *Science Fiction*, Routledge, 2000, pp. 91-100.

Critical Essay #3

In the following essay, Parrinder examines scientific theories and metaphors used by authors of Science Fiction.

Critical Essay #4

A provisional and, I hope, uncontroversial definition of science fiction might run as follows: sf is a distinct kind of popular literature telling stories that arise from actual or, more usually, hypothetical new discoveries in science and technology. The science and technology must be convincing enough to invite a certain suspension of the reader's disbelief: this is how sf, as a creation of the later nineteenth century, differs from earlier fiction in which themes such as space travel and encounters with extraterrestrials were presented in a merely fantastic or satirical light. The present essay will propose a broad evolutionary model for the development of science fiction, comprising a prehistorical and at least three historical stages. The points of transition are those at which the genre can be seen to shift from one kind of discourse to another. In all science-fiction stories, scientific and technological innovation has consequential effects, causing changes at the level of the social structure, of individual experience, and in the perceived nature of reality itself. As sf has developed not only has its stock of imagined alternatives continued to multiply, but their status has changed from what I shall call the prophetic to the mythic and to the metaphorical. At present there are signs that the 'metaphorical' phase of science-fictional discourse may be breaking down, just as its predecessors did.

It is true that a periodisation of science fiction along these lines will strike some readers as being offensively schematic and dogmatic: my only excuse is that it may be a stimulus to further thought. Earlier critics to whom I am indebted, notably Darko Suvin and Mark Rose, have given their own versions of the 'philosophical history' of the genre□a philosophical history being a deliberately simplified model, or a hypothesis to be borne in mind when constructing a detailed empirical history. My model tries to foreground the relationship of sf to the physical sciences, while in the background there is a developing argument about scientific epistemology, and especially about the relationship of science to narrative discourse or, as we say, fictions.

Most early or 'proto' science fiction was the product of writers who stood at some distance from the science of their time and set out to mock, satirise, discredit, or at best to play with it. I am thinking here of Lucian, Godwin, Cyrano de Bergerac, Swift, Voltaire, Mary Shelley, and Poe. Poe comes the nearest to generic science fiction, though his imitations of scientific discourse can never be taken at face value. His cosmological essay 'Eureka' can claim to be a remarkable example of prophetic insight, since its alternately expanding and contracting universe is taken very seriously by some modern cosmologists. But 'Eureka' is also a vast leg-pull, an exercise in teasing absurdity comparable to the same author's 'Philosophy of Composition' with its satire on literary theory. In each case, Poe sets out to debunk Romantic irrationalism by showing that the mysteries of creation (whether human or divine) are susceptible of a blindingly simple, logical explanation; but the explanation collapses under its own weight, leaving both the mystical and the mechanical outlooks in ruins.

To move from proto-science fiction to the first stage of the genre itself is to move from sophisticated irony and satire to something which at first sounds very much cruder□the

mode of literary prophecy. Poe gave one of his most obviously parodic stories the title 'Mellonta Tauta', Greek for 'these things are in the future', but the writers of prophetic science fiction speak of future things and mean what they say. Or rather, since it is a question of literary prophecy□that is, prophecy openly making use of fictional devices□they appear to mean it. There is, as it turns out, an intricate relationship between literary prophecy and parody or irony, which perhaps accounts for Poe's crucial influence on Jules Verne and H. G. Wells. The use of future dates in fiction will illustrate what I have in mind, since every future date is a virtual not an actual date, even though some should be taken much more seriously than others. At one extreme, Poe's character Pundita in 'Mellonta Tauta' writes her long, gossipy letter from the balloon 'Skylark' on 1 April 2848; at the other, Arthur C. Clarke sets the opening chapter of *Childhood's End* in 1975, but once that date has passed he writes a new opening chapter for the revised edition of the novel. Both editions carry Clarke's well-known prefatory statement to the effect that 'The opinions expressed in this book are not those of the author.' George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was made all the more ominous by its naming of a future year which rapidly became part of the political discourse of the Cold War period, even though '1984' was arrived at by reversing the last two figures of 1948 in which the novel was written; in any case, the book begins with the clocks striking 13, a manifestly satirical touch. What are we to say, then, of a date such as Wells's 802 701 AD in *The Time Machine*? Wells's story is, as he himself said in one of his letters, 'no joke', and the narrative logic just about manages to account for a date so unthinkably far in the future (provided that we do not inquire too closely). The result is prophetic science fiction, not in the sense of an accurate forecast, but of the story's power to convince us of aspects of the future beyond or behind the ostensible fictional vehicle: it is, in effect, a kind of oracle.

From Verne and Wells to Gernsback, Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein and Pohl we have a genre shaped by writers who are almost missionaries for science, and whose fiction proclaims that it has something to divulge about the future. The writers of prophetic sf are futurologists who nevertheless recognise that, in what Frederik Pohl has offered as 'Pohl's Law', 'The more complete and reliable a prediction of the future is, the less it is worth.' Characteristically, prophetic sf writers not only claim scientific authenticity for their visions but seek to promote what Wells called the 'discovery of the future' by means of essays, journalism and popular science writing as well as fiction. They celebrate and warn their readers about things to come. Taken literally and in detail, their prophecies are undoubtedly false, but then every true terrestrial prophet is also a false one. What prophetic sf writers do know about the future is that (to adapt George Orwell's comment on Wells) it is not going to be what respectable people imagine. And this implies that prophetic science fiction will be in trouble once its predictions of scientific and technological advance have started to become respectable and commonplace.

While many of Jules Verne's best-known titles speak of travel in spatial dimensions, Wells's titles often refer to travel in time, or rather to space-time. Verne's archetypal hero is Captain Nemo of the submarine *Nautilus*; Wells's is the Time Traveller. The Wellsian model of prophetic science fiction presupposes a Positivistic space-time continuum in which natural diversity is accounted for and brought under the rule of universal laws

such as those of evolution and thermodynamics. Though living matter is extraordinarily plastic, the universe is a closed system of matter and energy without supernatural interference or any possibility of regeneration from outside. Space and time were bound together from the late nineteenth century onwards by the measurement of the speed of light and by the concept of the light-year. The future, like outer space, was waiting to be discovered, even though the future would be partly moulded by human choices. Within the 'classical' space-time universe which Wells called the 'Universe Rigid', the scope for human freedom of action faces severe constraints. According to Sir James Jeans, the sun is 'melting away like an ice-berg in the Gulf Stream', and humanity 'is probably destined to die of cold, while the greater part of the substance of the universe still remains too hot for life to obtain a footing. . . . [T]he end of the journey cannot be other than universal death'. Prophetic science fiction explores both the mysteries and the certainties of this scientific, material universe.

To do so it relies, above all, on the spaceship, an ethereal version of Jules Verne's submarine enabling the science fiction hero to travel across the space-time universe at just below (or, in many cases, far above) the speed of light. The spaceship as dream-vehicle gave way, in the mid-twentieth century, to the technological realities of NASA and Cape Canaveral (though sf writers have felt constrained to keep several jumps ahead of NASA's transport technology). At much the same time, a fundamental change in cosmology led to the general adoption of the expanding-universe theory according to which, far from inhabiting an entropic steady-state system, everything is perpetually getting farther away. Where Sir James Jeans in his best-selling account of *The Mysterious Universe* had been preoccupied with an apocalyptic future event, the 'Heat-Death of the Universe', physical speculation now came to centre upon a founding moment in the past, the Big Bang which initiated universal expansion. Science fiction has been deeply affected by this switch of attention from the end of everything to its beginning.

In the 1920s and the 1930s, the reaction against prophetic science fiction began in the work of 'space fantasists' like David Lindsay and C. S. Lewis. Lewis wrote that the best sf stories were not 'satiric or prophetic' but belonged to what he called 'fantastic or mythopoetic literature in general.' In the post-war decades, Lewis's view of sf gradually took precedence over Heinlein's much narrower conception of it as 'Realistic Future-Scene Fiction.' Soon science fiction began to repeat its 'prophetic' material and also to borrow quite consciously from modern fantasy (it had always had fantastic elements, of course), leading to a general shift from the prophetic to the mythopoetic mode. (At the same time, earlier science fiction had to be reinterpreted in accordance with the new paradigm, so that Bernard Bergonzi, for example, would describe Wells's science fictions as 'ironic myths.') I would count Ray Bradbury, Alfred Bester, James Blish and Walter M. Miller among the mythopoetic writers, but the earliest major sf novelist in this mode was probably Olaf Stapledon. Admittedly, his position is ambiguous. *Last and First Men* is in many ways a standard work of prophetic sf, with its chronological tables and its narrator addressing us from the far future. Stapledon's preface to *Last and First Men*, however, states that his 'attempt to see the human race in its cosmic setting' is an 'essay in myth creation', not a prophecy. His later book *Star Maker*, where the hero's journey through the space-time cosmos leads to a vision of creation imbued with post-

Christian mysticism, is straightforwardly mythical. From the Sixties onwards, it became commonplace to speak of science fiction as a 'contemporary mythology', a phrase which hints at the hostility to science which is (it seems to me) latent in Stapledon's writings, as well as being explicit in Lewis. The sf critic Patricia Warrick defines myth as a 'complex of stories which a culture regards as demonstrating the inner meaning of the universe and of human life'; here the body of scientific knowledge and speculation is reduced to the level of scriptures and stories, so that 'scientism' as it is now known takes its place alongside other competing belief-systems, just as some Americans want to give creationism the same weight as evolutionism in the teaching of biology.

Where Warrick claims that the scientific model of the universe itself functions like a myth, Ursula Le Guin sees mythmaking as the special province of writers and artists. Le Guin argues on Jungian grounds that storytelling connects scientific methods and values to our collective dreams and archetypes; it is science fiction, not science itself, that deserves the title of a 'modern mythology.' In practice, once science fiction became consciously mythopoetic it began to indulge in generic self-repetition and a growing carelessness towards scientific facts. The imaginary Space Age universe crossed by magical faster-than-light spaceships and full of lifelike robots and contactable intelligent aliens has remained a staple of sf (and of the popular consciousness of science) long after it ceased to resemble a plausible scientific future. From a collection of increasingly commonplace prophecies SF had become a nostalgic theme-park of futures past.

But then in the 1960s, as Brian Aldiss claimed, 'SF discovered the Present', and the future was increasingly regarded as a metaphor for the present. Aldiss and Le Guin, among others, have frequently asserted that the genre's portrayal of the future of space travel, alternative societies and alternative life-forms is at bottom metaphorical. Much of New Wave and feminist science fiction is apparently metaphorical rather than prophetic or mythopoetic in intent. By 1970 the academic study of sf had begun, so that we can track the redefinition of science fiction as metaphor through academic theory as well as through the pronouncements of practising novelists. The philosopher Ernst Cassirer had argued that myth and metaphor were radically linked, and in a writer such as Le Guin, and in an early theorist such as Robert M. Philmus, there is a kind of slippage from myth to metaphor. On the other hand, Darko Suvin rejects talk of the artist as mythmaker and offers a fully worked-out theory of sf as a metaphorical mode: its stories, he says, are not prophecies but analogies or parables. The redefinition of science fiction as metaphor coincided with the politicisation of sf and its criticism in the Sixties and Seventies, though in my view it has served a primarily contemplative rather than an activist politics. The envisioned alternatives of metaphorical sf are fantastic and utopian possibilities, parallel worlds serving what Sarah Lefanu has called 'interrogative' rather than predictive functions. An interrogative or dialogical function is precisely what has traditionally been claimed for the literary genre of utopia. Metaphorical theory views science fiction not as an alternative to utopia (which is how the prophetic writers from Wells to Heinlein had seen it), but as one of the contemporary forms of utopian writing. This understanding of science fiction as a metaphorical mode is still dominant today, but its limitations have become increasingly evident. The metaphorical theory of the genre redefines sf as 'speculative fiction' or 'speculative fantasy', but it cannot in the long run explain why these speculations should be based on science.

Critical Essay #5

Each of the three phases of science fiction I have outlined can be roughly correlated with a set of contemporary philosophical or metaphysical assumptions. Each set of contemporary assumptions constitutes an ideology or *Weltanschauung* exerting a gravitational pull on the fiction that comes under its influence. In this sense, prophetic science fiction belongs with Positivism and scientific materialism; science fiction as myth implies either neoChristianity or a pragmatic cultural relativism drawing on psychoanalytical and anthropological insights; while science fiction as metaphor tends to imply a post-structuralist 'conventionalism' or 'anti-foundationalism' denying or downgrading the referential aspects of fiction. In this view, statements no longer have a truth content, so that it would be absurd to judge imagined futures by their potential correspondence with any 'real' future. Prophetic sf is a propaganda device which is meaningful only in relation to the discursive present in which it arises.

Admittedly, it is tendentious to assert that theoretical defences of sf as a metaphorical mode imply a conventionalist view of reality. To do so they must argue not merely, in Le Guin's words, that 'all fiction is metaphor' but that all knowledge and description is so too. Darko Suvin's influential theory of science fiction is critical at this point, since Suvin in his best known work insists on a rigorous distinction between cognitive sf and supposedly non-cognitive fantasy. According to Suvin, not only is sf a mode of metaphor, but 'true' metaphor is by definition cognitive□so that sf's cognitive status is established with all the force of a syllogism. The theoretical defence of this assertion is to be found in Suvin's *Positions and Presuppositions in Science Fiction*, where he elaborates on the more programmatic and manifesto-like statements to be found in his earlier *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*.

In *Positions and Presuppositions* Suvin quotes Paul Ricoeur's aphorism that 'Metaphor is to poetic language as model is to scientific language.' The equivalence is already suspiciously neat, and if poetic language and scientific language are both regarded as cognitive, then metaphor approximates to model. This is plausible to the extent that scientific theorising involves elements of metaphorisation and analogy or model-building; but Suvin describes not only scientific models but metaphors in general as 'heuristic fictions' which have a cognitive function. His intention, undoubtedly, is to turn post-structuralist scepticism inside out by arguing for the cognitive potential of all human creativity whether poetic or scientific, rational or emotional, or conceptual or non-conceptual. But in his discussion of sf as 'Metaphor, Parable and Chronotope' it is no longer clear to what extent so-called knowledge, or cognition, relies on a truth content.

Like other theorists of metaphor, Suvin relies on an apparently commonsense distinction between the properties of the 'true' or 'full-fledged' metaphor (equivalent to Cassirer's 'genuine "radical metaphor"') and low-grade or dead metaphors. This is crucial for the cognitive theory of metaphor, since all modern linguistic theorists agree on the ubiquity of metaphor. Nietzsche's assertion that in language itself there are no literal terms, only metaphors in various states of decay, has been echoed not merely by Derrida and de Man, but by a Positivist theorist such as I. A. Richards, who has described metaphor as

the 'omnipresent principle of language.' If we say that all language also has a cognitive function we have, no doubt, stumbled upon a truth of sorts, but it is a truth that undermines any claim for a special cognitive status for scientific language, let alone for science fiction. Suvin's well-known view of science fiction as a literature of 'cognitive estrangement' implies a neat pyramid of discourse with ordinary language at the bottom and cognitive (scientific) thought at the apex; but the linguistic theory of metaphor leads us to view language as a seamless fabric with a repeated pattern in which theories, models, analogies, and 'ordinary' language are constantly changing places relative to one another. To say that sf, or any kind of fiction, is metaphorical is then to say nothing worth saying at all. Suvin, though well aware of this danger, has difficulty in extricating himself from it.

Fully-fledged metaphors or heuristic fictions, he argues, must fulfil the criteria of coherence, richness and novelty. Consciously or unconsciously, these three conditions seem to echo the scholastic triad of *integritas*, *consonantia* and *claritas*, proposed by St Thomas Aquinas and familiar to modern readers from Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. For Aquinas and for Stephen Dedalus, however, these were the requirements for beauty, not for truth or cognitive value. Suvin considers and rather perfunctorily rejects a fourth criterion, that of reference to reality, on the grounds that it is already implicit in the requirements for richness and novelty. Just so did Dedalus argue that *claritas* was the same as *quidditas*, the 'whatness' of a thing. This is an economy too far, since it amounts to saying, like Keats's Grecian Urn, that 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'. Suvin then distinguishes between metaphor as such, and narrative fictions which he regards as extended metaphors; the latter, he says, should be capable of verification or falsification, though the point is left undeveloped. Given the 'difference between brief and long writings', the criteria for distinguishing 'runof- the-mill from optimal SF' are analogous to those for low-grade versus true metaphor. It is evident from this that Suvin no longer sees sf as a special kind of narrative exhibiting cognitive estrangement; rather, all worthwhile and, as he puts it, liberating human thought and creativity is (a) cognitive and (b) estranged. The purpose of such creativity is, to quote from a more recent essay, to 'redescribe the known world and open up new possibilities of intervening into it.' Perhaps, however, a verified or validated narrative (or metaphor, or scientific model) is no longer usefully analysed simply as an instance of metaphor. We should regard it, instead, as containing an actual or potential truth statement.

Critical Essay #6

If sf's only distinguishing feature is that it serves 'interrogative functions' by means of its portrayal of analogical models or parallel worlds, then it is destined to disappear as a separate form, becoming in effect a subdivision of the novel of ideas. It is quite possible that the century of science fiction is over and that this form of expression born of late nineteenth-century scientific materialism has now run its course. (On the other hand, cultural history is littered with the premature obituaries of artistic forms.) The immediate cause of the genre's disappearance would be that science fiction understood as a metaphorical mode no longer has any necessary connection or concern with contemporary scientific developments.

If science fiction as metaphor is more or less played out, then it may be time to examine whether and under what conditions a return to science fiction as prophecy is possible. The genre's popular media image is still one of lurid anticipation and comic-book futurology, even though the sf community finds this embarrassingly naive and politically distasteful. Nothing is more guaranteed to excite the derision of the sf critic than the fact that Wells is still admired for predicting the tank and the atomic bomb, Clarke for the communications satellite, and Capek and Asimov for their robots. Some of the most plausibly prophetic recent science fiction is to be found in J. G. Ballard's scenarios of the end of the Space Age□but Ballard is famous, or deserves to be famous, as the one writer of his time who dared to contradict the commonplaces of respectable technocratic prophecy.

There is a trivial sense in which all scientific theories are predictive, since they assert that the regularities observed in the past will hold good in the future. But much of the most interesting scientific speculation focuses on unique (or apparently unique) events like the Big Bang, the Heat-Death of the Universe, or the course of evolution on Earth. For these events to appeal to the prophetic imagination they must have consequences in the future, and to appeal to the fictional imagination as we know it they must in principle be observable by human beings. The great advantage of the 'classical' space-time universe was the possibility of travelling around it and seeing things that had not yet happened, but even there what was directly observed would usually be a symbol or portent rather than the reality□like Wells's solar eclipse at the end of *The Time Machine*, or Clarke's Rama.

The modern counterpart to Wells's use of an eclipse to symbolise the heat-death of the sun would be a symbolic vision of the Big Bang, which is something that several writers have attempted. But where the end of the world naturally fits the prophetic mode, the beginning can perhaps best be represented as parody, as we see in Italo Calvino's marvellous short story 'All at one point' (from *Cosmicomics*). 'Naturally, we were all there', Calvino's narrator begins, 'Where else could we have been?'. What follows is an all-too-human nostalgia exercise, the loss of a primal utopia of primitive communism (written, as it happens, by an ex-Communist). Other aspects of contemporary cosmological speculation apart from the Big Bang pose an enormous challenge to direct fictional observation, even of the symbolic kind. According to string theory, for example,

the universe not only contains anti-matter and black holes but has ten dimensions, six of which cannot be observed. Its fundamental building-blocks are quanta which may be conceived as either matter or energy. Meanwhile, it seems that the best chance of finding traces of extraterrestrial life is not in outer space, but in tiny fragments of meteorite on the earth's surface. Although men have been to the moon and landed a camera on Mars, and although some physicists now reckon that a time machine is theoretically possible, today's universe apparently offers no more opportunity for physical exploration than the universe of 100 years ago. We can detect more of it, but we know far more about the difficulties of actually reaching it.

Scott Bukatman in his book *Terminal Identity* argues that the Space Age has given way to an Information Age in which technology has become largely invisible, and space has been interiorised. We think of the atomic nucleus as a kind of miniature solar system, while the invention of the microchip and the spread of personal computing have led to the notions of cyberspace and of microcosmic, invisible and virtual spaces. Nevertheless, we continue to model the informational universe on the physical universe. Not only was it an sf writer who invented the term cyberspace, but science fiction and computer journalism have invested very heavily in space-time metaphors, conferring on virtual space some of the sense of challenge and adventure formerly associated with outer space (just as outer space in its time was invested with the language of geographical exploration). Hence the ubiquitous ideas of the 'net' and the 'superhighway', and Bukatman's pun on the word 'terminal', as in 'terminal identity fictions'.

John Clute has written that 'We no longer feel that we penetrate the future; futures penetrate us.' Bukatman speaks of 'our presence in the future'. The presence of the future has become a central paradox of postmodernist theory, as in Baudrillard's essay entitled 'The Year 2000 has already happened.' It is not very enlightening to describe such pronouncements as metaphorical□more significant, perhaps, is that they seem to pivot unstably between the modes of prophecy and parody. The same might be said of the literary applications of chaos theory, which is described by its proponents as a new cosmology overturning the rigid assumptions of the thermodynamic and evolutionary spacetime continuum. Scientists see chaos as driving the universe towards a more complex kind of order, but at any particular time the world of nature is theorised as being like the British weather, 'predictable in its very unpredictability.' Speculative scientific developments such as chaos theory and string theory are described by John Horgan as 'ironic science'□science which does not converge on the truth but which 'resembles literary criticism or philosophy or theology in that it offers points of view, opinions, which are, at best, "interesting", which provoke further comment.' Ironic science must necessarily find its counterpart in ironic science fiction.

If sf must respond to the aspects of contemporary knowledge that I have all too superficially touched upon, it is also affected by its now entrenched status as an established, not a new, genre with a ready-made audience and an organised body of academic interpreters. If the more successful popular sf (and above all sf cinema) now inclines to irony rather than prophecy, it also apparently has no need to prophesy, being readily available as raw material for the production of a kind of criticism and theory

which itself has prophetic pretensions. If the old sf writers were also futurologists, there is little need for today's writers to double as cultural theorists, since literary critics will do the job for them. (Not only was cyberpunk instantly canonised, but if it had not existed cultural theory would surely have had to invent it, and some people have argued that cultural theory did invent it.) Popular sf no longer claims to be prophetic, but it feeds into the 'SF of theory' which does claim to speak prophetically or at least, with a parody of prophecy.

Critical Essay #7

In *The War of the Worlds*, H. G. Wells reminds us that 'No one would have believed' in the last years of the nineteenth century we were being watched by extraterrestrial intelligences: 'And early in the twentieth century came the great disillusionment.' Since then we have had a century full of fictions of galactic imperialism, of colonies in space, and of meetings with (and massacres of) intelligent and interestingly-gendered extraterrestrials; but no one (I suggest) can take these fictions seriously any more. If science fiction is conceived as metaphor or as myth it does not matter too much if the same old stuff goes on pouring out, but for the fact of *our* great disillusionment. And early in the twenty-first century . . . ? Not, I hope, a new war of the worlds, but perhaps a new science fiction, prophetic or parodic, keeping one step ahead of the cultural theorists, exploring both mysteries and certainties?

Source: Patrick Parrinder, "Science Fiction: Metaphor, Myth or Prophecy?" in *Science Fiction, Critical Frontiers*, edited by Karen Sayer and John Moore, St. Martin's Press, 2000, pp. 23-34.

Adaptations

Brave New World was released as an audio book in 1998. It was published by Audio Partners and read by Michael York.

Four of the books from Lewis's "The Chronicles of Narnia" series were made into awardwinning television shows by BBC Television. *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1988) was directed by Marilyn Fox. *Prince Caspian* (1989), *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* (1989), and *The Silver Chair* (1990) were all directed by Alex Kirby. The series is also available as a boxed set.

Director James Whale's classic, *Frankenstein*, was released as a film in 1931 by Universal Studios, and starred Colin Clive as Dr. Frankenstein and Boris Karloff as his monster. The movie is available on VHS or DVD from Universal Studios Home Video. The DVD contains many special features, including the original theatrical trailer, commentary by film historian Rudy Behlmer, production notes, a documentary (*The Frankenstein Files: How Hollywood Made a Monster*), and archival photos.

Frankenstein has seen many permutations on film, including Kenneth Branagh's *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*, released in 1994 and starring Branagh and Robert De Niro. Humorous adaptations of the Frankenstein story include Mel Brooks's *Young Frankenstein* (1974) with Gene Wilder, Peter Boyle, and Marty Feldman.

The Hobbit was released as an audio book from Recorded Books in 2001, and was read by Rob Inglis. The work was also adapted as an animated film in 1978.

The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring, the first of the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy, was made into a blockbuster hit movie and released in December 2001. It was directed by Peter Jackson and stars Elijah Wood as Frodo the hobbit. Jackson actually filmed the entire "Lord of the Rings" trilogy at once with each of the three movies scheduled to be released a year apart from each other.

The Martian Chronicles, adapted as a television miniseries in 1980, was directed by Michael Anderson, and featured Roddy McDowell as Father Stone, Darren McGavin as Sam Parkhill, and Bernie Casey as Major Jeff Spender. It is available on video from USA Video.

Slaughterhouse Five was released as a film in 1972 by Universal Pictures. Directed by George Roy Hill, it featured Michael Sacks as Billy Pilgrim. It is available on VHS or DVD from Image Entertainment.

The Time Machine, which was released as a film in 1960 by Galaxy Films and Metro-Goldwyn- Mayer (MGM), was directed by George Pal and featured Rod Taylor as the time traveler. It is available on VHS or DVD from Warner Home Video. The DVD contains a behind-the-scenes documentary, *The Time Machine: The Journey Back*, hosted by Taylor, along with co-stars Alan Young and Whit Bissell.

Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea was released as a silent film in 1916. It was directed by Stuart Paton and featured Allen Holubar as Captain Nemo. It is available on DVD from Image Entertainment. Walt Disney Pictures produced a movie version in 1954, starring Kirk Douglas as Ned Land and James Mason as Captain Nemo.

Topics for Further Study

There is no commonly accepted definition for what determines a hard science from a soft science, although many use these terms. Research some of the many sciences that Science Fiction authors have written about. Write a short report that divides your research into what you think are hard and soft sciences.

One of the common beliefs about Science Fiction authors is that they intend to predict the future, and some works have been criticized when they have not accurately done so. Find three technologies that were correctly predicted by Science Fiction authors. Compare the fictional accounts with the real technologies, and write a paper explaining how and why each technology has had either a positive or negative impact on society.

Many Fantasy authors begin their tales by creating a map of the imaginary world they are creating. Draw a map detailing an imaginary world of your own creation and label all of the major geographic features□mountains, forests, bodies of water, and towns. Write a three-page description of your world, describing its inhabitants, history, politics, and economics.

Compare and Contrast

1900s: The Wright Brothers make their historic flight at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, proving to the world that humans can fly.

1940s: German-born scientist Wernher von Braun develops the V-2 rocket for Adolph Hitler, envisioning it as a means for space travel. Hitler, however, uses the rocket as a weapon during World War II, so von Braun defects to America, where he shares his knowledge with American scientists who follow von Braun's lead and begin to apply it to space exploration.

Today: Having experienced both extraordinary success and tragic failure, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) continues to plan and send exploratory missions into space.

1900s: Einstein proves the existence of atoms.

1940s: The United States is the first to harness the power of the atom and demonstrates the awesome, destructive power of nuclear warfare when it drops atomic bombs on two Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, effectively ending World War II.

Today: After the breakup of the former Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, many of the nuclear weapons from the world's former superpower fall into the hands of independent terrorist groups. In 2001, after an attack on the World Trade Center in New York City that launched a war on terrorism, the American public's fear shifts to biological weapons and suicide bombings.

1900s: In 1901, Italian physicist and inventor Guglielmo Marconi receives the first longdistance wireless message in Morse Code, which traveled from England to Newfoundland almost instantaneously.

1940s: Bell Labs makes the first demonstration of its transistor, which amplifies electric current in an efficient and cheap manner. The first transistors are used in telephones.

Today: With the advent of modern wireless technology, digital data from telephones and computers can be transmitted instantly to and from anywhere in the world by increasingly smaller devices that rely on microprocessors computer chips that contain millions of microscopic transistors.

What Do I Read Next?

Fantastic Voyages: Learning Science through Science Fiction Films (1993), by Leroy Dubeck, Suzanne Moshier, and Judith E. Boss, uses scenes from classic and recent Science Fiction films to illustrate scientific principles of physics, astronomy, and biology, and details how the films either adhere to or violate these principles.

Dick Jude's *Fantasy Art Masters: The Best Fantasy and SF Art Worldwide* (1999) features samples from some of the world's most acclaimed Fantasy and Science Fiction artists. The book also includes interviews with the artists, who reveal how they created some of their favorite creations and relate what it is like working in the industry.

Blast Off! Rockets, Robots, Ray Guns, and More from the Golden Age of Space, by S. Mark Young, Steve Duin, and Mike Richardson, is a detailed exploration of the toys created during the 1930s through the 1950s. Published in 2001, the book examines the history of these unique collector's items, which include such memorable Science Fiction characters as Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon. It includes reprints of original advertisements, comic-strip and pulp-magazine art, and even original packaging and instructions from toys produced all over the world.

Joseph Campbell's classic *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) attempts to discover one underlying story that unifies all of the world's mythologies through examination of the hero tales from around the world. Campbell's ideas inspired many later Science Fiction and Fantasy writers, most notably George Lucas, the creator of the *Star Wars* films.

Richard Rickitt's *Special Effects* (2000) gives a thorough history of special effects, which are used mainly in Science Fiction, Fantasy, and horror films. Rickitt examines everything from trick photography to computer-generated effects, using examples from early films, such as George Méliès's *A Trip to the Moon* (1902), to more recent Science Fiction films, such as *The Matrix* (1999).

Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* studies the history, philosophy, and mechanics of comics, which have been around for more than three thousand years and which have included notable characters from Science Fiction. Written and drawn entirely in the form of a comic strip, McCloud visually demonstrates the ideas that he discusses, drawing on scientific concepts like space, time, and motion in the process.

Further Study

Alkon, Paul K., *Science Fiction before 1900: Imagination Discovers Technology*, Twayne Publishers, 1994.

This book gives information on early Science Fiction works and how they were important in the beginning stages of the movement. The works are then placed in comparison with other literary works from their time period.

Asimov, Isaac, *I. Asimov: A Memoir*, Bantam Spectra, 1995.

Asimov's final collection of autobiographical essays contains many of his personal opinions and life stories. He discusses his views on such wide-ranging topics as science, society, other Science Fiction writers, and religion.

Disch, Thomas M., *The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made Of: How Science Fiction Conquered the World*, Touchstone Books, 2000.

This work contains historical information and critiques of various works and styles of Science Fiction literature. It gives an in-depth explanation of the different types of literature and gives blunt assessments of the work of the major authors from the field.

Hartwell, David G., *Age of Wonders: Exploring the World of Science Fiction*, Tor Books, 1996.

Hartwell's book is a great primer for anyone interested in learning more about Science Fiction. The book, written by a noted editor in the Science Fiction field, includes a critical overview of the field, recommended readings, and even a section on the business of Science Fiction publishing.

Roberts, Adam, and John Drakakis, *Science Fiction*, New Critical Idiom series, Routledge, 2000.

Roberts provides a great reference for Science Fiction novices, offering a brief history of the Science Fiction field, an explanation of the critical terminology, and an overview of the key concepts in Science Fiction criticism and theory.

Toffler, Alvin, *Future Shock*, Bantam Books, 1991.

Originally published in 1970, Toffler's classic book about how people either do or do not adapt to technological changes in a fast-paced, industrial society, is still relevant in today's information age.

Tolkien, J. R. R., *The Silmarillion*, Ballantine Books, 1990.

The Silmarillion is a good book for anyone interested in examining the origins of Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and "The Lord of the Rings" series. It gives background and historical information of this Fantasy world, as well as events that take place long before the beginning of Tolkien's four-volume Middle-Earth saga.

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Orwell, George, *1984*, Signet Classic, 1950, p. 5.

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Wells, H. G., *The Time Machine*, Bantam Books, 1991, pp. 4, 21, 29.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literary Movements for Students (LMfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, LMfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on

□classic□ novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of LMfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of LMfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in LMfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by LMfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

LMfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Literary Movements for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LMfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LMfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Literary Movements for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Literary Movements for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from LMfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Literary Movements for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from LMfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Literary Movements for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of LMfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Literary Movements for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of LMfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Literary Movements for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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