The Ugly Little Boy Short Guide

The Ugly Little Boy by Isaac Asimov

Contents

Overview

The Ugly Little Boy has a very simple plot premise: a boy is snatched from the distant past by a time machine and taken to a future in which he does not easily fit. The handling of the storyline based on this idea is a complex attempt to see into the heart of what makes us human and how we define ourselves. Timmie, a Neanderthal, challenges definitions of humanity, and his story is an inquiry into how people's perceptions of sometimes trivial personal traits shape their view of who is worthy or unworthy of respect, love, and sacrifice. Asimov invites his readers to travel with Edith Fellowes; to see through her eyes how even deeply held perceptions can be wrong and how there may be more to being human than having human physiology.

About the Author

Isaac Asimov was born between October 4, 1919 and January 2, 1920, in a region of the world (Petrovichi in the former U.S.S.R) where two calendars were in use concurrently, neither of which matches the calendar commonly used in the West; not knowing his "true" birthday, he chose to celebrate it on January 2. His parents were Judah Asimov, then head of a food co-operative, and Anna Rachel Asimov. The Asimovs moved to Brooklyn in 1923, and Judah Asimov opened his first candy store three years later. Isaac Asimov would avidly read the magazines for sale in the store, making sure that they still looked new enough to sell after he finished with them. Asimov already possessed the omnivorous interest in knowledge of every kind that was to be such a prominent feature of all his adult writings. Asimov became a naturalized United States citizen in 1928.

He went to Seth Low Junior College in 1935. He attended Columbia University from 1936 to 1939, earning a Bachelor of Science degree; then from 1939 to 1941, he was a graduate student there, receiving a Master's degree in Chemistry. His studies were interrupted by World War II, and he became a chemist in 1942 at the U.S.

Navy shipyard in Philadelphia. That same year he married Gertrude Blugerman. He served in the army from 1945 to 1946, then in 1946 returned to his graduate studies at Columbia, earning a Chemistry Ph.D. in 1948. The following year he became a teacher of biochemistry at Boston University School of Medicine. Although he loved teaching and his engaging lecturing style endeared him to students, he had problems with other faculty who were jealous of his publications. His department chair seemed to believe that Asimov was wasting his time writing, and by the mid-1950s he was essentially relieved of his duties as a teacher.

Asimov had published his first story a decade before he began his teaching career. This was "Marooned Off Vesta" in Amazing Stories back in 1939.

"Nightfall" appeared in 1941 and is still regarded by many, if not most, writers in the field as the greatest science fiction short story ever published. During the 1940s, he wrote the novellas that would form the Foundation Trilogy. John W. Campbell, editor of Astounding, frequently pressed Asimov for new novellas in the Foundation series, and Asimov responded admirably to this test of his inventiveness, creating what some critics call one of the "cornerstones" of the genre of science fiction. Pebble in the Sky, his first novel, was published in 1950 and was followed by several others. Asimov was the Guest of Honor at the 1955 World Science Fiction convention. He became a full-time writer in 1958.

Hugo Awards are given annually at World Science Fiction Conventions, and these awards are determined largely by the voting of science fiction fans. Asimov received one in 1963 for his monthly science articles in The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, a series he continued to write until his death. He received another Hugo in 1966 for his Foundation stories. He received Hugos for two of his novels, The Gods

Themselves in 1973 and Foundation's Edge in 1983. He also received a Hugo for the short story "The Bicentennial Man" in 1977. The Science Fiction Writers of America give out annual awards for best novel, best novella, best novelette, and best short story. These are called Nebula Awards. Asimov received Nebulas in 1973 for The Gods Themselves and in 1977 for the "The Bicentennial Man."

The Science Fiction Writers of America also gave him their Grand Master award in 1987.

Asimov wrote a great deal of nonfiction, especially during the 1960s when science books dominated his output.

The American Chemical Society gave him the 1964 James T. Grady medal for science writing about chemistry, and he received the 1967 Westinghouse American Association for the Advancement of Science award for science writing.

The last twenty or so years of his life were staggeringly busy ones. Asimov became legendary for his enormous production of books, numbering over four hundred by the time of his death, and the topics he wrote about included the Bible, literature, astronomy, cosmology, mathematics, and biology. He wrote mystery fiction, as well as even incorporating mystery elements in some of his science fiction.

His jovial wit managed to make even the dullest of subjects come alive, and he helped to educate at least two generations of readers about the marvelous intricacies of science. He had a thyroidectomy in 1972, and ill health plagued him off and on for the rest of his life. The next year Asimov divorced his first wife, then married Janet Jeppson on November 30, 1973.

Perhaps sensing how much his health had deteriorated, he began, in the late 1970s, to write his autobiography.

Asimov had a triple bypass heart operation in 1983, the success of which seemed to reinvigorate him. He appeared as a public speaker at many events, even though he had a severe phobia against traveling. In 1988, he became president of the American Humanist Association, and from this point on he became an outspoken advocate of atheism. He argued that it was enough for a person to be all that his talents will allow him to be in one life; no supernatural forces were needed to urge human beings toward achievement. This made him a controversial figure in his last years. He died of heart failure on April 6, 1992. He was among the most beloved of science fiction writers and is still known, as he was for decades, as the "Good Doctor" among writers and readers.

Setting

Most of the action takes place in and around the "doll house," the stasis bubble—a place to store objects from the past—where Timmie lives. Dr.

Hoskins explains that "In Stasis, time as we know it doesn't exist. Those rooms are inside an invisible bubble that is not exactly part of our Universe." No object retrieved from the past may be taken from a stasis bubble without a huge cost in energy; the bigger the object, the greater the cost.

Timmie, a large object, must remain within his bubble.

For the four years covered by The Ugly Little Boy, Timmie's movements are limited to a bedroom, a playroom, and Edith Fellowes's bedroom, as well as a washroom. Edith Fellowes, a nurse at a hospital, has an outside life at the start of the novella, but as the story progresses her world becomes totally focused on Timmie's stasis bubble.

The Stasis, Inc. facilities seem to be large. When Dr. Hoskins takes Edith Fellowes on a tour she sees many stasis bubbles that are temporary homes for rocks, water, and animals from prehistory. She and Dr. Hoskins also have an unexpected encounter with a scientist who tried to break the rules by taking a rock out of its stasis bubble. Dr. Hoskins immediately sends the rock back to its past and bans the scientist from the Stasis, Inc. facilities.

It is during this incident that Edith Fellowes learns that anyone in the stasis bubble when an ancient object is sent back to its own time will be dragged along back into the past by that object.

Social Sensitivity

The Ugly Little Boy presents us with one of the most profound questions of our age: what is human? This can never be an idle question in a world in which people sometimes kill other people because of fervently held beliefs that since our genes make us human a fertilized human egg is human. When The Ugly Little Boy was published in 1958, World War II was still a memory so indelibly vivid for many adults that it constituted the central experience of their lives. At the black heart of that experience of man's inhumanity to other men were the death camps of the Germans, where people who did not meet the Nazi definition of human were systematically brutalized and murdered, and the killing by Japanese forces of millions of Chinese, who were deemed a race inferior to the Japanese. It can be seen then that the question of where humanity begins was a sensitive, emotionally charged one at the time The Ugly Little Boy was written, and Asimov—as humanist and biochemist—may have been aware that the issue of what is human would not quickly disappear but only become more contentious and complex.

The Ugly Little Boy is a complex examination of the what-makes-a-human question that offers no entirely reassuring answers. That the novella's loving protagonist Edith Fellowes thinks Timmie is a human being probably moves many readers towards her view, but Dr. Hoskins authoritatively declares that Timmie belongs to a human subspecies different from our own, and he implies in so doing that other scientists may think the Neanderthals were a completely different species. How Timmie should be treated seems to depend on which view one chooses for one's own: human, almost human, or not at all human. This alone would make The Ugly Little Boy somewhat unsettling to read, but Asimov deepens his presentation of the issue even further. He shows that Timmie is capable of human behavior whatever his evolutionary background. He talks in good English, he can read, he likes watching television as well as reading books, he needs companionship, and he yearns to explore, all typical of contemporary human children. Does human behavior make a person human, regardless of his or her genes? Then what about those genetically human who are missing important aspects of typical human behavior, such as an ability to socialize with other people? Are they not human? Asimov does not make life easy for readers of The Ugly Little Boy, offering no simplistic answers in the working out of the plot or under the surface of the story, although he seems in sympathy with Edith Fellowes as she learns of the soul beneath the monstrous face and comes to see Timmie as fully human. Perhaps the solution is that if someone possesses the traits that most distinguish humans from other creatures, especially if his soul is—like Timmie's—essentially human, then he or she should be treated with the same respect and ethics as a human being would be, regardless of physiology.

Literary Qualities

The Ugly Little Boy has at least one significant flaw in its construction— the "ape-boy" epithet is not entirely credible. The term comes from journalists who sound like stereotypes from 1930s gangster movies: "Sure, sure," said the gentleman from the Times Herald, "But is that really a Neanderthal or is this some kind of gag?"

Who ever actually talked like that?

Probably no one. Even modern tabloid journalists who might well invent a term "ape-boy" would not talk like that. This is the only off note in an otherwise virtuoso performance, and it may reflect Asimov's ignorance of journalism even while the story displays his profound understanding of science and scientists.

The novella is tightly structured and wastes no space. Each event is carefully foreshadowed by earlier passages; even the melodramatic conclusion is so well presaged that it seems an entirely natural outcome of events.

Edith Fellowes is a nurse, and "the nursing profession is accustomed to placing its duties ahead of self-preservation." This helps to account for her sacrifice, but people are seldom clearly motivated—usually many motives, some not understood, lead to a person's actions. In Edith Fellowes's case, Asimov creates a complex figure who has multiple and sometimes contradictory motivations for what she does.

The novella reveals her to be lonely; she wants to be married and she would like to have children—we learn this from her brief fantasies about Dr.

Hoskins. She is also motivated by the guilt of prejudgment because Timmie, whom she deemed hideous at first, has turned out to be a fine little boy.

Would she have done the same thing to a deformed child in the maternity ward? This guilt makes her feel especially responsible for Timmie's well being.

Themes and Characters

Edith Fellowes is our point-of-view character, and the story is much more about her than it is about Timmie. Asimov seems to be interested in exploring how an outsider would react to the facts of a great scientific advance; Edith Fellowes is smart, knowledgeable, and well versed in the scientific method, making her well equipped to understand the implications of the events of the story and the hazards of her own actions. This all makes the ending of the story particularly effective because she is not a romantic fool, but a person with an analytical mind who understands the risks she takes.

That she has an analytical mind is evident early on as she makes careful, pointed observations of those around her, most notably Dr. Hoskins, whose looks she quickly assesses. She can tell that he puts on a show of friendliness but is really tired underneath. She also can tell that while she sizes him up, he is sizing her up. We also learn that she is prone to judge people by their looks, a bad but common trait among people, and an essential one for the plot of this novella. She is sensitive about her own looks; she thinks of herself as unattractive, with a misplaced nose. She notes defensively that Dr. Hoskins is unattractive. This element of judging people by their looks is emphasized by Dr. Hoskins, who asks "do you just love pretty children? Nice chubby children with cute little button-noses and gurgly ways?"

Edith Fellowes, a nurse who worked in a maternity ward, asserts that she likes children, regardless of looks, thus formally introducing the key theme of people's appearances.

When Edith Fellowes hears "a terrified scream from the dollhouse rooms," she rushes to the aid of the child, but "It was the ugliest little boy she had ever seen." The boy has a flattened and receding forehead, the back of his head bulges, and he has no chin.

Edith Fellowes is repulsed by the boy's looks, and her first thoughts are to flee the premises, but she fears Dr.

Hoskins's question, "Only pretty children, Miss Fellowes?" She watches "regular" children at play later after having grown used to Timmie, and she momentarily sees them as ugly, with bulbous foreheads. This disturbs her, but Edith Fellowes has been wrong before; for instance, Dr. Hoskins, whose looks she had not liked, turns out to be a nice man—someone she would like to marry if he were not already married. This "do not judge a book by its cover" admonishment is a common theme in literature, but it is seldom as artfully presented and carefully integrated into a story as it is in The Ugly Little Boy.

Timmie's role is primarily that of a little kid. He first appears naked, filthy, foul smelling, and ugly, though with loving care he changes from a savage to a fairly ordinary youngster.

We learn early in the novella that he is a fast learner when he uses the bathroom correctly on the first try, quickly understanding what he is supposed to do. He adjusts to

civilized comforts rather well, despite at first displaying the behavior of someone who lives in the wild, such as hiding under the bed to sleep and constantly looking over his shoulder while eating. As any child might be, he seems easily bored.

Edith Fellowes must bring him toys, sing to him, read to him, bring him video and music tapes, and eventually provide him with a playmate. From resolving to stay with Timmie only as long as it took to settle the child comfortably in his bubble and then quit, Edith Fellowes becomes first a nurturer and then Timmie's mother by the story's end.

It is important that Dr. Hoskins not be seen as a villain or a figure of malice. He is, instead, a theoretical physicist who has found his theories made into reality, and who must devote most of his life to managing a large scientific complex so that other scientists may do their work. It does not seem to be a task that suits him since he is weary and overburdened most of the time. He seems, on the evidence of his first appearance, to be destined to be a stereotypical amoral bureaucrat, an enemy to anyone with humane feelings, but if he were The Ugly Little Boy would be much inferior to what it is. Instead of being a bureaucrat concerned only with the financial bottom line, Dr. Hoskins is a fully rounded character—a man trying to satisfy economic and scientific needs while also satisfying his better nature. Proof of his deeply human side comes when Edith Fellowes demands that Timmie be given a playmate, and Dr. Hoskins provides his own son Jimmy. Edith Fellowes discovers, in this and other actions, that he is a kind and sensitive man. When she asks what is to be done about Timmie, he tries—unsuccessfully but with sincere and humane intent—to ease her into an understanding of what must be done. Dr. Hoskins gives Edith Fellowes a tour of the Stasis, Inc. facilities not just to give a woman he likes a good time but to show her what must happen to Timmie in a somewhat less painful way than if he had bluntly told her. By making Dr. Hoskins a complex man with a basically decent nature who must constantly make compromises among his many duties, Asimov enriches the novella's moral quandaries; the problems do not have easy "this is right, that is wrong" solutions. Science is often the same because it requires complex cogitation, as well as complicated experimentation, before conclusions can be reached and answers explicated, and good scientists can arrive at markedly different conclusions from one another.

Topics for Discussion

1. How important to people are people's looks? How do you think Asimov views this matter? Support your opinion by appropriate references to the novella.

2. What choice would you make if you were in Dr. Hoskins place: would you take Timmie out of stasis; shut down the power to Washington, D.C.; cost Stasis, Inc. millions of dollars as well as possibly their future funding; and set Stasis, Inc.'s work back by years; or would you send Timmie back to a place he left four years ago—someplace wild, without civilization? Or is there another choice? If so, what would it be?

3. Is Dr. Hoskins a bad man? 4. Is Edith Fellowes a fool? 5. Is Timmie really human? What human traits does he display?

6. What should be the ethics for conducting experiments on Timmie or anyone like him? Remember that scientists in the story test synthetic foods on him and conduct other similar experiments because, according to Hoskins, they could not conduct such experiments on human children.

7. The novella begs an important ethical issue inherent in its premise.

Do we have the right, even for the sake of scientific knowledge, to grab any person from his time, take him to ours, and then study him? Was it moral to snatch Timmie? Was it moral to snatch the elderly fourteenth-century peasant? Is this merely glorified kidnapping?

8. How far should science be allowed to go in disrupting people's lives for the sake of acquiring knowledge? How much of your life are you willing to give to strangers so that they can experiment with you?

9. Asimov seems to have a dim view of people's reactions to the unusual.

Would people in general really refer to Timmie as "ape-boy"?

10. How will Jerry react when he learns that on the very day he picked a fight with Timmie, Timmie was sent away forever?

11. Why would Asimov have Timmie bite Jimmy rather than punch, shove, or kick him?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. What are mesons? Why does Asimov use them in a story about time travel? Have other writers used mesons in a similar way?

2. What were Neanderthals? Were they human? What were their physical characteristics? When did they live?

Where did they live? Is Asimov's portrayal of a Neanderthal boy scientifically accurate?

3. Write part two to the Ugly Little Boy. Tell the story of what happens next in either of two scenarios—where Timmie and Edith Fellowes go or what happens back at Stasis, Inc. where Dr.

Hoskins is. How would Timmie and Edith Fellowes cope with their new environment? How would Dr. Hoskins's dreams survive the catastrophe?

4. How do scientific enterprises find funding? How would a scientific enterprise lose funding? Is the portrait of Dr. Hoskins's worries about funding accurate?

5. There are scientists who specialize in the field of medical ethics. Find out what the field is and what its practitioners do. What are their views on experimenting on humans? Have they established any guidelines for such experimentation?

6. What does modern science do for children who have looks that society deems deformed? What are the ethics involved in how such children are treated?

7. Asimov's The Gods Themselves (1972) covers much of the same ethical territory as The Ugly Little Boy. Compare and contrast the characters in each. How are scientific bureaucrats portrayed in The Gods Themselves? Is there a figure like Edith Fellowes in the novel? Does anyone make special sacrifices for the sake of others in The Gods Themselves? What about scientific ethics seems to most concern Asimov?

For Further Reference

Asimov, Isaac. In Memory Yet Green: The Autobiography of Isaac Asimov, 1920-1954. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979. Presents an exhaustively detailed account of his youth and early manhood. His avowed intention is to provide as many unvarnished facts of his life as possible, avoid interpretation of these facts and events as much as he can, and leave the glossing and parsing of them up to his readers.

Given Asimov's irrepressible wit, he does not quite succeed in presenting nothing but facts; his portrait of himself as a teenager includes his self-absorption, his love of whistling, and fondness for cemeteries—he presents himself as a comic figure whose bizarre habits cause his parents endless concern. He felt his eccentricities were his personal property, and he treated them as special parts of himself rather than as embarrassing traits. He noted, more than thirty years later, that his eccentricities are now thought of as colorful.

——. In Joy Still Felt: The Autobiography of Isaac Asimov, 1954-1978. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980. It is as imposingly large as the first volume and focuses mostly on his literary career, an activity that, according to him, defined who and what he was; he lived to write. Again, his sense of humor livens up the narrative, making potentially dry accounts of how certain writings were inspired, written, and published entertaining and often enlightening.

Fans of Asimov's work would likely find everything in this book inter esting, explaining as it does how his best-loved writings developed.

Scholars would find the wealth of detail to be helpful in their research.

——. "Science Fiction and I." In Asimov on Science Fiction. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981, pp. 295-318.

This book is a gathering of Asimov's essays on science fiction; the section "Science Fiction and I" is composed of five of his essays. These cover his thoughts about his own work in science fiction.

Chambers, Bette. "Isaac Asimov: A One-Man Renaissance." The Humanist 53 (March-April 1993): 6-8. Discusses Asimov's role as advocate for secular humanism.

Ferrell, Keith. "Requiem: Isaac Asimov 1920-1992." Omni 14 (June 1992): 22.

Notes Asimov's influence on the real world of society and science, as well as his contributions to fiction and nonfiction.

Fiedler, Jean, and Jim Mele. "Asimov's Robots." In Critical Encounters: Writers and Themes in Science Fiction.

Edited by Dick Riley. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1978, pp. 1-22.

Fiedler and Mele trace Asimov's development as a writer through his robot stories.

——. Isaac Asimov. New York: Frederick Ungar, 1982. (Recognitions series.) Fiedler and Mele offer a chronological study of Asimov's science fiction. They assert that one of the qualities that has made Asimov's science fiction special has been that he "was a scientist, and even in his earliest attempts at fiction, his interest in science dictated his method." This is a good introduction to Asimov's science fiction that should be especially helpful to students.

Gunn, James. Isaac Asimov: The Foundations of Science Fiction. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982. This is the most scholarly of the booklength studies of Asimov and is written with high intelligence.

Gunn begins with a summary of Asimov's life and career, and then devotes himself to a study of Asimov's science fiction which emphasizes the robot stories. Gunn concludes that "Asimov's continuing presence in the field of science fiction has importance as a reminder not only of the past but of the way in which the past is a foundation for the present, and of the way in which the past can renew itself."

Hassler, Donald M. "Asimov's Ordering of an Art." In Comic Tones in Science Fiction: The Art of Compromise with Nature. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982, pp. 87-96. (Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy, Number 2.)

Hassler compares Asimov to writers of the eighteenth century, and argues that for Asimov the eighteenth century is a Golden Age. He further asserts that Asimov is conscious of literary history and of his antecedents and wishes to have the time of his own prime regarded as a Golden Age for science fiction. Thus he treats his own life as history: "Asimov understands his history and uses his history, but he is changed as a writer by his history."

4940 The Ugly Little Boy ——. "Some Asimov Resonances from the Enlightenment." ScienceFiction Studies 15 (March 1988): 3647. Hassler discusses Asimov as a kind of eighteenth-century thinker, suggesting that he writes in the tradition of John Locke, "affirming the Lockean methodology of gradual accumulation," meaning that Asimov emphasizes the rationality of gradually accumulated facts and rejects the "absolute insights of intuitive or 'inspired' art." These ideas seem particularly applicable to the characterization of Hari Seldon.

Hutcheon, Pat Duffy. "The Legacy of Isaac Asimov." The Humanist 53 (March-April 1993): 3-5. Discusses Asimov's belief that scientific research makes the future brighter for humanity.

"Isaac Asimov." Variety 346 (April 13, 1992): 78. Obituary article noting Asimov's popularity.

Lenz, Joseph M. "Manifest Destiny: Science Fiction and Classical Form."

In Coordinates: Placing Science Fiction and Fantasy. Edited by George E. Slusser, Eric S. Rabkin, and Robert Scholes. Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983, pp. 42-48. Lenz examines how Asimov used Classical sources to create a galactic empire and compares Asimov's empire to that created by Frank Herbert in Dune.

Moore, Maxine. "Asimov, Calvin, and Moses." In Voices for the Future: Essays on Major Science Fiction Writers.

Edited by Thomas D. Clareson.

Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1976, pp.

88-103. Moore argues that "beneath the glib surface of Asimov's considerable output . . . lies an elaborate metaphorical structure that combines New England Calvinism with the Old Testament Hebraic tradition of the 'Peculiar People' to set forth a highly developed philosophy of mechanistic determinism with a positive ethic to justify it." She argues that in his science fiction Asimov has developed a "massive philosophy based on fixed fate."

Moskowitz, Sam. "Isaac Asimov." In Seekers of Tomorrow: Masters of Modern Science Fiction. Cleveland: World, 1966, pp. 249-265.This book is treated by many scholars as a landmark in the development of studies of science fiction. In it, Moskowitz summarizes the lives of twenty-two science fiction writers; in several cases these summaries were the first accounts of the lives of important writers. In "Isaac Asimov," Moskowitz emphasizes the role the environment of Asimov's life played in Asimov's development as a writer. For instance, he notes that while growing up in New York, "Isaac grew to love the masses of concrete and steel vibrant with the eternal hum of traffic." The images of concrete and steel are found throughout Asimov's work.

"Nightfall." The Economist 323 (April 11, 1992): 87. Obituary article focusing on Asimov's writings.

Olander, Joseph D., and Martin Harry Greenberg, editors. Isaac Asimov.

New York: Taplinger, 1977. This book contains nine essays that dis cuss Asimov's use of metaphors, his characterizations, his science fiction mysteries, his Foundation books, and his robot stories. Taken as a whole, this book provides a good scholarly introduction to the major aspects of Asimov's science fiction.

Panshin, Alexei and Cory Panshin.

"Shifting Relationships," "An Empire of the Mind," and "Man Transcending." In The World Beyond the Hill: Science Fiction and the Quest for Transcendence. Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1989, pp. 302-344, 520566, and 567-647. The Panshins here offer an intellectual history of science fiction. So massive is this book, that its sections on Asimov alone provide a book-length introduction to his work. According to the Panshins,

Asimov was the creator of important ideas that have become essential to modern science fiction.

In "Shifting Relationships," they discuss how Asimov worked with John W. Campbell, editor of Astounding, developing the short story "Nightfall" and other literary works.

In "An Empire of the Mind," the Panshins put Asimov's Foundation stories into the context of their time, suggesting sources for the stories, discussing what Asimov hoped to achieve in the stories, and analyzing their literary merits. Most of "Man Transcending" is devoted to how John Campbell coped with the effects of World War II, but the chapter also includes details about how Asimov's career fared during the war.

Patrouch, Joseph F., Jr. The Science Fiction of Isaac Asimov. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974. This book is a critical survey of Asimov's achievements in science fiction. Patrouch emphasizes how Asimov depicts the supremacy of reason over emotionalism. He sees this supremacy as an important general characteristic of science fiction, and finds it in the problem- solving characters of Asimov's fiction. About science fiction in general, he says, "Each of us is a conscious packet of sensations imprisoned in a specific body, place, and time not of his own choosing.

Science fiction frees us from that prison." Patrouch explores how Asimov frees his readers from the prison.

Platt, Charles. "Isaac Asimov." In Dream Makers: The Uncommon People Who Write Science Fiction: Interviews.

New York: Berkley Books, 1980, pp.

1-7. Platt provides a portrait of Asimov at home.

Sagan, Carl. "Isaac Asimov." Nature 357 (May 14, 1992): 113. A summary of Asimov's life, noting Asimov's ability to explain science to laypeople.

Toupence, William F. Isaac Asimov.

Boston: Twayne (G. K. Hall), 1991.

(Twayne's United States Authors Series, 578.) Although this book is part of the Twayne's Authors Series, it does not offer the broad overview of the author's achievements typical of other books in the series. Instead, it focuses on Asimov's science fiction only, providing little commentary on his many writings in other fields. Toupence analyzes individual works as contributions to a vast imaginative universe created by Asimov. He concludes, "Asimov's universe is therefore a superior one in terms of the qualities characteristic of science fiction as a literature of ideas." Toupence considers Asimov a tolerant man who usually respects the beliefs of others even though he sometimes becomes a caustic antagonist when he thinks science is being attacked with irrational views.

Warrick, Patricia. "Isaac Asimov Develops the Genre." In The Cybernetic Imagination in Science Fiction. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1980, pp. 5374. "Isaac Asimov is deservedly regarded as the father of robot stories in SF," declares Warrick. "He has produced more robot and computer stories that any other writer, and the quality of his fiction is consistently high." Warrick examines the basic ideas that underlie Asimov's robot stories, noting the importance of Asimov's optimism about future developments in technology.

Wilcox, Clyde. "The Greening of Isaac Asimov: Cultural Change and Political Futures." Extrapolation 31 (Spring 1990): 54-62. Wilcox examines how the social themes of Asimov's novels changed as America and the world changed from the 1950s to the 1980s.

Related Titles

Asimov always had an interest in writing specifically for young adults, even though many of his books for adults were favorites for young readers. He wrote several books for young adults during the 1950's, most of them part of the David Starr series (1952; see separate entry for David Starr, Space Ranger, Vol. 4). The Ugly Little Boy is probably the richest, most emotionally vibrant of his writings for young people during this period.

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