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1. What is Science Fiction?

1.1 A "Brief" History of Speculative Fiction

Science fiction, sometimes referred to with the broader term of speculative fiction, finds its roots in the mists of antiquity, claiming the Epic of Gilgamesh, the rapture of Elijah, and Greek and Egyptian mythology as its predecessors. Though these works of literature contain themes often associated with the genre, they cannot be considered genuine science fiction, or even speculative fiction, because they fail to fall under any of science fiction's commonly accepted definitions, lacking, above all, earnest speculation. None of these stories attempt to create scenarios, to speculate about possible situations, that really might take place, and it is not until shortly before the Industrial Revolution that the beginnings of true science fiction can be found in works like Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Louis-Sébastian Mercier's *The Year 2440* (1770), and Mary Wollstonecraft Shelly's *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (1818). Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* arrives as one of the first examples of futuristic, fictional situations used to comment on social conditions of the day. Through the example of an ideal society on the island Utopia, this book, whose title plays on the Greek words *eutopia*, meaning "the good place," and *outopia*, "no place," demonstrates positive societal changes caused by altered economic circumstances. More comments thereby indirectly on the negative effect of the cloth industry's growing demand for English wool on the English peasantry during his time.[1] [2] His work illustrates that science fiction arises when the rate of technological progress accelerates to the degree that consciousness of the changes within one's lifetime develops, and flourishes only when industrialisation brings the knowledge that the future will not be like the present to the common awareness.[3] Through science fiction, people reconcile themselves with the rapid change in society, it allows them to experiment with worlds and situations simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar.

In keeping with these auspicious beginnings, science fiction provides a forum to discuss the present and future implications of scientific trends, making social commentary integral in speculative fiction. Mary Shelly, noting thrilling, yet often disquieting scientific advances, uses her novel, *Frankenstein*, to express the fear of scientific development unrestrained by moral and ethical limits. Her story about a

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[1] Feige, Marcel: *Science Fiction*. Hamburg 2001, 6.
[2] ibid.
[3] Franklin, H. Bruce: *Science Fiction: The Early History*.
<http://newark.rutgers.edu/~hbf/sfhist.html>(11.3.2002)

being created by the driven scientist Victor Frankenstein calls his good intentions of curing disease and death into question. Dr Frankenstein, who seeks to produce life at all costs, ends up constructing a creature that plagues him to the ends of the earth because of his creator's refusal to take responsibility for his creation. In 1895, H. G. Wells' *The Time Machine: an Invention* describes the possibility of inequality and conflict produced by continued evolution of the human race, while his famous *The War of the Worlds* (1898) speculates on the subject of aliens, their designs on the human race, and humans' reactions to them. Jules Verne, author of *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865) and *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864), also greatly influences the development of this new and yet unnamed genre.[4]

For a short time, when speculative fiction appears on the literary scene as a cohesive genre in the early 1920s, this tendency towards social analysis disappears. In the magazine *Amazing Stories*, first published in 1926, editor, journalist, and publisher Hugo Gernsback calls this budding form of literature "scientification, " setting the focus on the technological aspects rather than the critical. At the beginning of 1930s, Gernsback renames the genre to "science fiction" in *Science Wonder Stories*, one of the several successors to *Amazing Stories* that he edits. At this time, science fiction receives very little (and perhaps does not deserve) attention as a serious genre because of inferior writing quality and poor appearance of the magazines. This superficial phase in science fiction does not continue for long, as the genre improves in quality and in popularity when editor John W. Campbell, Jr., begins to demand better quality for the stories he publishes in his magazine, *Astounding Stories of Super-Science* (he renames it to *Astounding Science Fiction* in 1938).[5] [6] With the driving force of Campbell behind it, science fiction eventually makes its debut as "serious fiction" through the work of authors like Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, and Robert A. Heinlein. The move away from "pulp" and Space Opera and the growing use of science fiction as a venue for social criticism also contribute to this increasing legitimacy, before, but especially after World War II.

In the 1940s and early 1950s, science fiction moves somewhat into mainstream literature, developing an appeal for the general public. This popularisation ushers in

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[4] Åsman, Calle: *Science Fiction, the end of the 19th, beginning of the 20th century.* (3.12.2001) <http://hem.fyristorg.com/gumby/sf/eng/september/sf2.html>(3.3.2002)

[5] Åsman, Calle: *Science Fiction, magazines in the beginning of the 20th century.* (3.12.2001)<http://hem.fyristorg.com/gumby/sf/eng/september/sf3.html>(3.3.2002)

[6] Åsman, Calle: *Science Fiction, magazines continued.* (3.12.2001)<http://hem.fyristorg.com/gumby/sf/eng/september/sf4.html>(3.3.2002)

the Golden Age (or Classic Age) of science fiction. Authors like Brian W. Aldiss, A.E. Van Vogt, and Theodore Sturgeon as well as Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, and Robert A. Heinlein, who grew up reading the early science fiction magazines, publish books and stories during this era of science fiction "classics."[7] These authors write grandiose stories of space adventures and explorations, colonisation of faraway planets, and galaxy-spanning empires. At this time, science fiction films like *Frankenstein*, *The Invisible Man*, and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* are produced as well.[8]

The latter half of the 1950s conventionally receives the eponym, "the Silver Age." The "flying saucer craze" finds its beginnings in this time period, and the interest in alien life forms as well.[9] However, the trend in the Golden Age towards extravagant, adventurous, space stories loses its impetus, clearing the field for stories and novels with "softer" themes, more centred on human actions and consequences, for example, post–holocaust and –apocalypse themes. This tendency toward psychological and social themes gives birth to the New Wave movement, first named by Judith Merril in 1966. New Wave changes the focus of science fiction from the "hard" to "soft" science, dealing with social and interpersonal issues like gender, human relationships, and community.[10] The New Wave movement produces cyberpunk, ribofunk, and steampunk, and indirectly instigates the entrance of women as science fiction writers during the 1970s.

Modern (late 20th century and early 21st century) science fiction partakes of all the different movements of the past, not limiting itself to any single form or theme. The ideas developed during the earlier movements of science fiction all find a place in current novels, ranging from apocalypse to utopia, from time travel to cyberspace, though a propensity towards examining society and science in a critical light remains.

1.2 A Suitable Definition

Speculative fiction is quite difficult to categorise, and not simply because the genre has evolved over the centuries. To achieve their ever-changing aims, science fiction authors have, particularly in the last hundred years, created disparate works of literature, making the process of classification even more confusing. Because of the

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[7] *woytex sci-fi wiki: Science Fiction.*(10.12.2001)
<http://www.pobratyn.com/phpwiki/index.php3?Science%20Fiction>(11.3.2002)
[8] Futures Institute of Rio Salado College: *Science Fiction.* (16.7.1999)
<http://futures.rio.maricopa.edu/sciencefictionthemes.html> (16.3.2002)
[9] ibid.
[10] Dillon, Grace: *:-:science fiction:-: Introduction.* (15.3.2002)
<http://web.pdx.edu/~dillong/scifi/intro.html> (16.3.2002)

complexity involved in defining the genre, several different approaches exist, each describing science fiction through a different characteristic.

The aspect of time plays a deciding role in science fiction, making it possible to define it in terms of certain temporal aspects. Keeping in mind that not all science fiction is futuristic, Kim Stanley Robinson opines, "In every [science fiction] narrative, there is an explicit or implicit fiction history that connects the period depicted to our present moment, or to some moment of our past."[11] This basic tenet often goes unnoticed, but speculative fiction always attempts to connect to some timepoint in reality.

Other definitions try to describe science fiction through its relationship to the reader. Unrealistic, surrealistic, and semi-realistic fiction demand a "willing suspension of disbelief" from the reader to make the story enjoyable/acceptable, thus separating it from normal fiction, which is inherently believable. According to some critics, science fiction and fantasy coexist as subcategories of speculative fiction (see Speculative Fiction Genre Chart), some use the terms speculative fiction and science fiction interchangeably (as in this paper), while others portray science fiction as a subset of fantasy, arriving at this definition from Sam Moskowitz:

> "Science fiction is a branch of fantasy identifiable by the fact that it eases the 'willing suspension of disbelief' on the part of its readers by utilizing an atmosphere of scientific credibility for its imaginative speculations in physical science, space, time, social science, and philosophy."[12]

Most difficult, however, seems the task of characterising speculative fiction through a unique subject matter. The genre has no sharply-defined borders, it sets no ironclad thematic requirements. Despite these inherent problems, Judith Merril tries to quantify the essence of science fiction:

> "So-called 'science fiction' is speculative or extrapolative literature (or sometimes visual art or music) dealing in some way with the idea of *change*--most often changing human responses to the altered, or shifting, environment of some alternative reality."[13]

Isaac Asimov also classifies science fiction through its use of change, though he offers a more specific definition: "Modern science fiction is the only form of literature that consistently considers the nature of the changes that face us, the

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[11] Robinson, Kim Stanley: *Notes for an Essay on Cecelia Holland. Foundation (UK)*, Summer 1987. *SG SF Defs.* (8.12.1999) <http://www.muohio.edu/~erlichrd/def2.htm> (10.2.2002)

[12] Runte, Robert, ed.: *The NCF Guide to Canadian Science Fiction and Fandom. NCF Guide: Defintion of Science Fiction.* (6.7.2000) <http://www.edu.uleth.ca/~runte/NCFGuide/sfdef.htm> (10.2.2002)

[13] ibid.

possible consequences, and the possible solutions."[14]

Through these three approaches to science fiction, loosely defining what characteristics the genre ought to have becomes possible. Science fiction should relate in some way temporally to reality, it should demand a "suspension of disbelief," yet simultaneously attempt to mitigate the degree to which the reader must believe, and finally, science fiction should deal with change, not only the possibilities of a different reality and the ensuing consequences, but the accompanying changes in human behaviour as well.

These three prerequisites for science fiction also apply, to some extent, to its non literary forms. The book and short story are arguably no longer the most popular and familiar forms of science fiction. Science fiction films reach a different and more diverse audience. In films, the defining characteristics have less weight than the audiences' judgement on whether the film is science fiction. Recent science fiction films like *The Matrix*, *AI*, and *Planet of the Apes* exemplify the success of science fiction in mainstream media. Likewise, the rapidly expanding field of science fiction on television only pay lip service to the these basic characteristics. Sensationalism and the need to hook viewers drive television programmes with science fiction-related themes to produce a great deal of Space Opera, that is, Westerns with hand lasers instead of shotguns, spaceships instead of horses, and aliens instead of Indians. *Star Trek* generally manages to avoid sinking to this primitive level, but series like *Stargate*, *Power Rangers*, *Gene Roddenderry's Andromeda*, and *Battlefield Earth* use enough technological gimmicks mixed with romanticism to hold viewers' attention, but fail to comment on the social effects of this increased technology, a central characteristic of true science fiction.

2. Subthemes in Science Fiction

The thematic possibilities of science fiction range across the provinces of many fields of literature, partaking in the variety of romance, gothic, historical, and mystery fiction, among others. Science fiction authors have the ideas available to all fiction writers at their disposal, as well as the scientific, futuristic, and alternative possibilities, limited only by their imaginations. For example, some themes relatively

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[14] Gökçe, Neyir Cenk: *Definitions of Science Fiction.* (25.5.1996)
<http://www.panix.com/~gokce/sf_defn.html> (10.2.2002)

unique to science fiction include alien life forms, galactic empire, mental powers, faster than light space travel, nuclear holocaust, post-holocaust, colonisation of new planets, time travel, robots, utopia, dystopia, and bioengineering (gene manipulation).

2.1 Analysing Our World

Though far from unique to science fiction, social criticism may well be the most important and influential of all subthemes. Science fiction comes into existence mainly to give authors an arena in which they can express their concerns about a changing present and an uncertain future. Science fiction's usefulness lies, as Alexei Panshin puts it, "in the unique opportunity it offers for placing familiar things in unfamiliar contexts, and unfamiliar things in familiar contexts, thereby yielding fresh insights and perspective," and making it an ideal medium through which to question elements of our society.[15] Novels of utopia and dystopia, the most blatant form of social criticism, provide subtle or blatant critiques of social and political systems. George Orwell's *1984* (1949), one of the most famous dystopias, criticises overprotective and controlling government, popularising the phrase "big brother is watching." On the other hand, the stories of the New Wave employ subtler methods, challenging assumptions and attitudes in the context of a story.

2.2 Faster Than a Speeding Train

Another ever-present premise, space travel often plays a central role in science fiction's imaginary realities. According to modern physics, travel faster than the speed of light cannot exist. Authors speculate that space travel can and will develop beyond this point. Therefore, faster than light space travel has become a common premise in speculative fiction, making it possible to use the universe as the setting of the story. Many writers call faster than light travel the "hyperspace" technique, which entails sending a spaceship into another dimension, where travel between all points in the universe becomes instantaneous, or where the laws of relativity prohibiting faster than light travel can be circumvented.

2.3 Robots, Robots Everywhere

Robots also have an important place in the realm of speculative fiction. The advancement of robots from the simple factory constructions of today to androids almost indistinguishable from human beings provides an intriguing topic about

[15] ibid.

which speculative fiction writers often postulate. One idea, which has significantly influenced the evolution of robot stories, comes from the science fiction author Isaac Asimov. The Three Laws of Robotics, which govern the behaviour of robots, overriding whatever programming they may have, state,

> "1) A robot may not harm a human being, or through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm; 2) A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law; 3) A robot must protect its own existence, as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law."[16]

These laws have become the central tenets around which many robot stories revolve, helping to make robots an interesting and beloved theme in speculative fiction today.

3. The Author: Isaac Asimov

3.1 His Life

On January 2, 1920, Isaac Asimov is born in the town of Petrovichi, Russia, near Smolensk. When he is three years old, his parents decide to immigrate to Brooklyn, where they raise Asimov and his sister while running a small confectionary and newsagent, which Isaac Asimov remembers "affectionately as 'the candy store.'"[17] He teaches himself to read at the age of five, then teaches his sister two years later. Gifted with an excellent memory, Asimov finishes high school at fifteen and goes on to study chemistry at Columbia University. *Amazing Stories* publishes his first science fiction, *Marooned Off Vesta*, in 1938, and Asimov continues to contribute to magazines like *Astounding*, *Astonishing Stories*, *Super Science Stories*, and *Galaxy*. Over thirty-three years he contributes more than "400 columns and articles" to *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* alone.[18]

In 1958 Asimov stops teaching at Boston University to devote his full attention to writing. His writing career begins in earnest now. He also publishes under the pseudonyms Paul French and George E. Dale. In the course of his career, Asimov receives many prestigious awards and much recognition. Among these are seven Hugos and three Nebula Awards, induction to the Science Fiction Hall of Fame, and the Skylark Award. Even after his death on April 6, 1992, Isaac Asimov maintains

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[16] Asimov, Isaac: *Foundation's Edge*. New York ²1991, p 381.

[17] Ashley, Mike: *Book and Magazine Collector: Isaac Asimov*. (12.1986). <http://www.kruse.co.uk/asimov.htm> (9.2.2002).

[18] Rothstein, Mervyn: *Isaac Asimov, Whose Thoughts and Books Traveled the Universe, Is Dead at 72*. The New York Times on the Web. (7.4.1992) <http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/03/23/lifetimes/asi-v-obit.html> (9.2.2002)

his status as one of history's pre-eminent science fiction writers. His rich, prolific career and his tendency to write about many divergent subjects makes it easy for his books to appeal to people from all walks of life.

3.2 His Work

During his lifetime, Isaac Asimov writes 477 works of literature and several hundred articles and columns. Though known best for his science fiction, Asimov has also penned "highly successful detective mystery stories, a two-volume *Guide to the Bible*, a biographical dictionary, encyclopaedias, [and] textbooks."[19] Many books deal with "subjects in areas that Asimov decided the population at large required astute and correct enlightenment. And about half of these [are] young adult and children's books that [do] not talk down to the younger audience."[20] Asimov does not write simply of the entertainment of his readers, rather, his books are intended to educate and broaden horizons. This consciousness of his responsibility to the public colours his writing, showing not only through his criticism of reality in his fiction, but also through his production of works such as *Asimov's New Guide to Science*, "considered one of the best books about science for the layman."[21]

A sampling of Asimov's world-renown science fiction should include the *Foundation* saga, *I, Robot* (1950), *Pebble in the Sky* (1950), *The Caves of Steel* (1954), *The End of Eternity* (1955), *The Naked Sun* (1957), *The Gods Themselves* (1972), *The Robots of Dawn* (1983), *Robots and Empire* (1985), and *Nemesis* (1989).

3.3 Quotations

Blessed with an inquiring mind, Asimov left few area of intellectual inquiry untouched. Quotations about an incredible variety of topics are attributed to him, from the development of evolutionary theory to how many protons would fit in the volume of the known universe. In an interview, Asimov once claimed, "I don't have to worry about [death and the end of conscious thought], because there isn't an idea I've ever had that I haven't put down on paper."[22] Most significantly, however, Asimov expresses his views in a humorous, captivating way, making his non-fiction easy or easier to read than his science fiction. For example, in *The Collapsing Universe*,

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[19] Asimov, Isaac: *Foundation and Earth.* HarperCollins*Publishers.* London [3]1996, inside cover.
[20] Willick, George. *ASIMOV, Isaac – personal data.*
<http://members.tripod.com/~gwillick/asimov.html> (9.2.2002)
[21] Rothstein, Mervyn, op. cit.
[22] ibid.

Asimov writes, "A hole is nothing, and if it is black, we can't even see it. Ought we to get excited over an invisible nothing?" Asimov's style tends to invite and make readers feel at ease, in keeping with his desire to write books for the illumination of the masses. The following quotes from Isaac Asimov seek to clarify his uniquely penetrating writing and conversational style.

In *The Tragedy of the Moon*: "The ancient Egyptians ignored leap years, letting their year fall a quarter day behind the Sun each year, so the seasonal landmarks made a complete cycle of the year every 1,460 years. They refused to change this even though they knew it was happening and knew how to keep it from happening. Tradition, you know."[23]

"The most exciting phrase to hear in science, the one that heralds new discoveries, is not 'Eureka!' but 'That's funny...'"[24]

4. The Novel: *Foundation*

4.1 What Happens?

The Foundation trilogy consists of *Foundation*, *Foundation and Empire*, and *Second Foundation*. These three books, on which several of Asimov's later novels are based, as well as novels by other authors, tell the story of a group of scientists and scholars set up by the psychohistorian Hari Seldon during the decline of the Galactic Empire. He establishes the Foundation to prevent thirty thousand years of suffering and misery, the repetition of the Dark Ages on a galactic scale. The unconscious instrument of the Seldon Plan, the Foundation will shorten the time of turmoil to one thousand years, culminating in a stable and enlightened Second Galactic Empire.

> "…When the First Galactic Empire was decaying into the paralysis that preceded final death, one man—the great Hari Seldon—foresaw the approaching end. Through the science of psychohistory, the intrissacies[sic] of whose mathematics has long since been forgotten, … he and the men who worked with him are able to foretell the course of the great social and economic currents sweeping the galaxy at the time. It was possible for them to realize that, left to itself, the Empire would break up, and that thereafter there would be at least thirty thousand years of anarchic chaos prior to the establishment of a new Empire.
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> "It was too late to prevent the great Fall, but it was still possible, at least, to cut short the intermediate period of chaos. The Plan was, therefore, evolved whereby only a single millennium would separate the Second Empire from the First…
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> "Hari Seldon established two Foundations at the opposite ends of the Galaxy, in a manner and under such circumstances as would yield the best mathematical solution for his psychohistorical problem. In one of these… established… on Terminus, there was

[23] Nellis, Michael: *Isaac Asimov Quotations File Part I.* <http://www.angelfire.com/scifi/dreamweaver/quotes/qtwriters1.html> (20.3.2002)

[24] ibid.

> concentrated the physical science of the Empire… no man has ever discovered the exact location of [the Second] Foundation, nor knows its exact function…"[25]

Foundation originally appeared as several short stories published in science fiction magazines. It covers the first one hundred fifty years of the First Foundation's history, beginning before the establishment of the Foundation and proceeding through the first three "Seldon Crises," crises during which "[the Foundation's] freedom of action would become circumscribed to the point where only one course of action was possible."[26] After these crises, the influence and power of the Foundation greatly increases, and its development takes a new direction. The book contains five distinct novellas/short stories: *The Psychohistorians*, *The Encyclopedist*, *The Mayors*, *The Traders*, and *The Merchant Princes*.

In the first section, *The Psychohistorians*, Asimov relates the events which lead to the establishment of the Foundation on the planet Terminus, with the blessing of a Galactic Empire glad to be rid of the troublemaking Hari Seldon and his followers. The second novella, *The Encyclopedists*, describes the rise to power of Salvor Hardin, mayor of Terminus City and first hero of the Foundation. He achieves fame through his handling of the first Seldon crisis, which occurs fifty years after the settlement of Terminus. The deterioration of the Galactic Empire has reached the point where the provinces of the Periphery—the edges of the galaxy—begin to break away from the control of the Empire and to set up "kingdoms." The first crisis predicted by Hari Seldon involves these newly formed independent kingdoms. The Four Kingdoms of Anacreon, Smyrno, Konom, and Daribow surround Terminus and want to gain control of the strategically located planet. The Anacreons seek to place a military base on Terminus, but Salvor Hardin preserves Terminus' independence by playing each of the Four Kingdoms against one other. Each of the kingdoms fears to take control of Terminus because the other three would never allow one kingdom to gain control of the Foundation's technological expertise.

In the third part, *The Mayors*, the second Seldon Crisis appears on the horizon. Thirty years have passed since the first Seldon crisis, and the Foundation seems about to lose the balance it cultivated among the Four Kingdoms. Anacreon declares war on the Foundation, yet loses despite its military superiority. Because the Foundation has created a religion in which priests educated on Terminus control nuclear power plants, hospitals, and other important technological functions, the solution to this

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[25] Asimov, Isaac: *Second Foundation*. New York ²1991, pp 103-106.
[26] Asimov, Isaac: *Foundation*. New York 1951, p 119.

problem requires only to exert this religious power over Anacreon to prevent the war.

The fourth story, *The Traders*, provides a single example of how the traders act as the pioneers of the Foundation's expanding sphere of influence. The Trader Limmar Ponyets travels to Askone, a planet not under the religious control of the Foundation, to rescue Eskel Gorov, supposedly a trader, but actually an agent of the Foundation. Gorov, imprisoned by the Askones for trying to sell forbidden Foundation goods, insists on remaining to achieve his goal. At this point, the Foundation believes it needs to extend its religious control, through dependence on its nuclear trade goods, to stay safe. However, in the end, it is Ponyets who plants the seeds of free trade. Through his trader instincts and adherence to Salvor Hardin's alleged advice, "Never let your sense of morals prevent you from doing what is right!," he manages to succeed where Gorov failed.

The final chronicle, *The Merchant Princes*, examines Hober Mallow, the third of the Foundation's legendary figures, and his role in the third Seldon crisis. The religious control through which the Foundation dominates its neighbours has begun to lose its efficacy. The Korellian Republic confronts Foundation ships with nuclear-powered ships of its own. Mallow investigates and discovers that the Korellians have weapons and ships from the Galactic Empire. He solves this Seldon crisis by exerting economic influence on the Korellian Republic, rather than relying on the old method of religious control, thereby bringing the Foundation into a new era of economic domination.

4.2 Where Have We Seen This Before?

Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* offers a wonderful example of the typical science fiction that appeared in the Golden Age. However, Asimov does not limit himself to the questions of "hard" science, an inclination which characterises many of his contemporaries. Of the familiar subthemes prevalent through science fiction, two play an especially large role in *Foundation*: galactic empire and adventures on other planets. This book begins and ends with the threat of the Galactic Empire and its Imperial forces looming over the Foundationers. Though the Empire has a relatively passive role in this first book of the Foundation saga, it plays a much greater and influential role in *Foundation and Empire* (1952), *Prelude to Foundation* (1988), and *Forward the Foundation* (1993). Nonetheless, Asimov's Galactic Empire is one of the

first well-developed of science fiction. In fact, this Empire has many similarities with the Roman Empire, which also achieves incredible greatness, but then starts to decay from within. Both empires grow weaker, not overnight, but through a gradually increasing decadence. The conquered peoples on the frontiers begin to break away first, despite the strong system of government set up by the central power (Rome and Trantor). In Asimov's galaxy, the Periphery dissolves into individual kingdoms, while the uncertain holdings of the Roman Empire, like Germany, break away as soon as possible.

The second theme, a subset of space adventures, appears in every novella in *Foundation*. Each of the protagonists journeys to another planet to solve his conundrum. Science fiction authors employ this thematic device quite often, since it gives them the opportunity to introduce interesting, colourful, and exciting new worlds. For example, in order to stave off war, Salvor Hardin travels to the planet Anacreon in *The Mayors*, whereas nearly the entire plot of *The Traders* takes place on Askone. Other works of speculative fiction in which the location on another planet plays a significant role include *Solaris* by Stanislaw Lew, *Dune* by Frank Herbert, and *Imago* by Octavia E. Butler.

4.3 And Now, a Word from Our Readers…

As one of the first major works of modern science fiction, *Foundation* is an interesting book to read in order to gain a sense of the ideas which spawned the massive amounts of both good and bad speculative fiction in the last fifty years. For the well-read science fiction (or speculative fiction) fan, *Foundation* contains very little that has not been repeated to death in the years following Asimov's publication of the book and series. The narrative perspective contains no surprises, as Asimov employs the style of third person limited omniscient. In fact, he shies away from simply announcing the thoughts of his protagonists so much that the narrative style borders on third person objective, where the protagonist is observed, but not clearly by any other character. The only variation *Foundation* consists of the changing protagonist; in each novella, a new point of view and new protagonist takes over.

From a scientific or technical angle, although the ideas presented in the book may have been cutting edge or newly imagined technologies as Asimov wrote, the average reader is already far too familiar with the hyperdrive, "nucleics," and computers to feel impressed by starjumping ships and personal force fields, or the absence of

computer technology. One concept, however, which other authors have not overused, is the "science" of psychohistory, the basis of the entire Foundation series. Perhaps because Asimov has developed this idea to a great extent, the idea of analysing the past and present in order to predict the future appears only, in this reader's limited experience, and even then as a very minor detail in a few books by author Spider Robinson.

5. Speculative Fiction Today

Of all socially important literary genres, speculative fiction continues to have a relatively undervalued function and frivolous appearance. Many people regard science fiction and fantasy readers as an eccentric and slightly oddball group, though many writers in the genre are highly regarded by their colleagues. Despite this contempt from "literary" circles of society, speculative fiction served and continues to serve an important, real purpose. It gives us, as a society, the opportunity to test out new ideas and to guess what consequences might result in. Science fiction allows us to comment on disturbing developments and trends in our world, such as cloning or genetic engineering, through a medium that reaches many more than dry essays or speeches would. Speculative fiction also has a cathartic function, tackling real problems and situations in our society and giving both authors and readers release to see them in print.

An important example of this phenomenon lies in the cyberpunk movement of science fiction. Our society grows continually more dependent on the flow of information. In the rather dark, oppressed worlds of cyberpunk, human beings are reduced to bits of information, giving up their humanity and becoming more machine than human in order to manoeuvre in the vast ocean of cyberspace. Cyberpunk emphasises the importance of the individual personality and the individual battle, crying out for the people in our society—which has slowly become information-centred—to fight for individuality and to fight against assimilation into the unthinking whole.

Speculative fiction is important for its message, because regardless of whether the actual story takes place in the past, present, or future, it demands that we open our eyes and acknowledge the possibilities that lay before us. What we should do about these possibilities may not always be clear, but speculative fiction points out what our world could become and calls us to action.

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Appendices

Einverständniserklärung zur Veröffentlichung

Schriftliche Versicherung der selbständigen Anfertigung

Speculative Fiction Genre Chart

Internet Sites on Diskette

Einverständniserklärung zur Veröffentlichung

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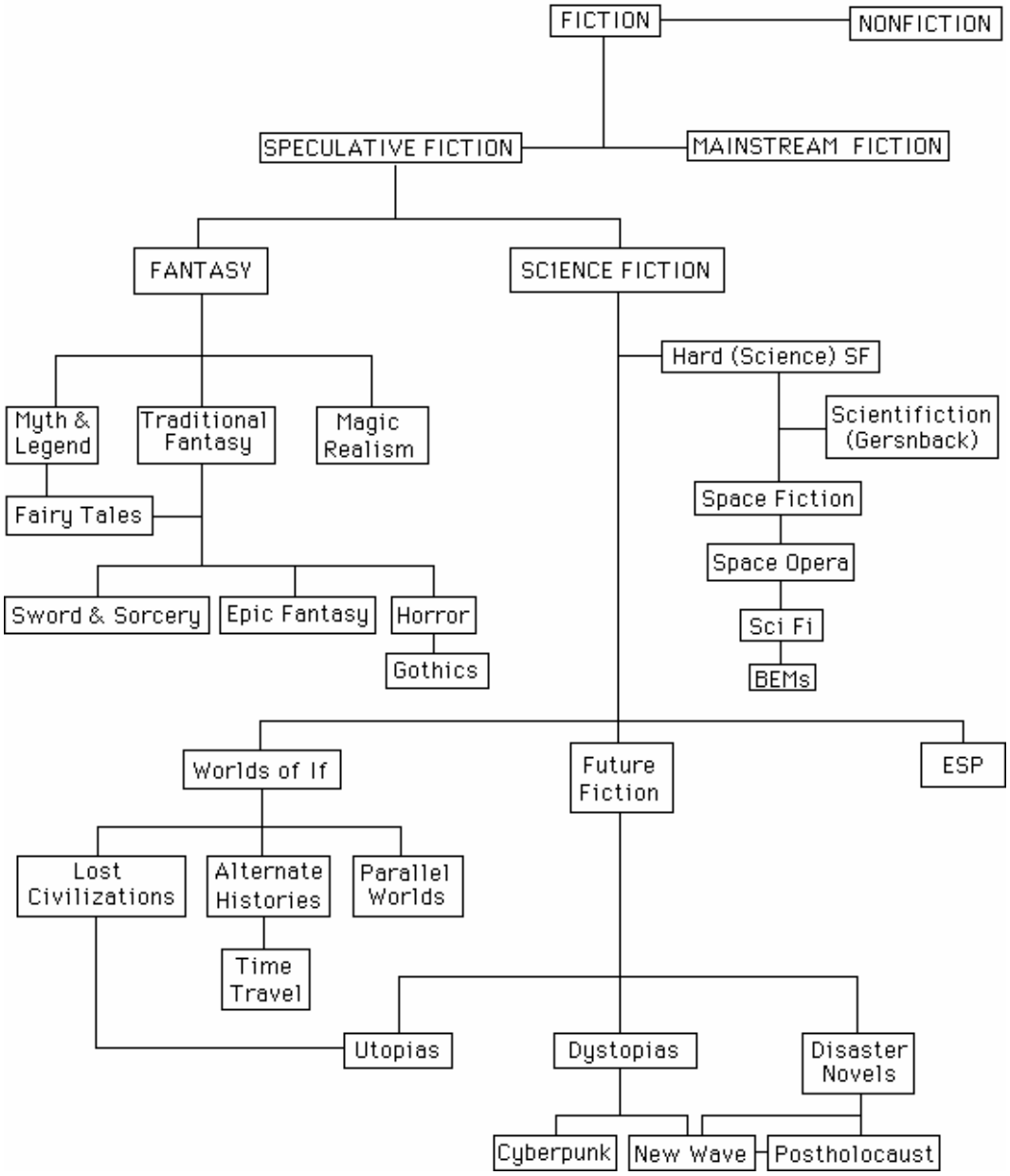
SPECULATIVE FICTION GENRE CHART



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