

Lecture #5 Thurs Feb 11 2010: History of Science Fiction

Proto-SF: *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus*, Mary Shelley (1818).

Jules Verne (1828-1905), *voyages extraordinaires*. First universally acknowledged science fiction author. Set up genre expectations of technical accuracy + long didactic explanations

Major works: *Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864)
From the Earth to the Moon (1865)
Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea (1869)
Around the World in Eighty Days (1872)
Mysterious Island (1874)

H. G. (Herbert George) Wells (1866-1946). Unlike Verne, tightly plotted novels + significant social commentaries, particularly on class structure.

Major works:

The Time Machine (1895). Time travel and evolution.
The Island of Dr. Moreau (1896). “Genetic engineering.”
The Invisible Man (1897). Social structures repress hidden insanity.
The War of the Worlds (1898). Imperialism and colonialism.
First Men in the Moon (1901). Space travel; alien social structures.

The Pulp Age (1920s-1930s):

Hugo Gernsback founds *Amazing Stories* (“scientifiction”) in 1926. Sloppy science, sloppy stories, glorious adventures, often space operas.

The Golden Age (1940s)

John Campbell, editor *Astounding Science Fiction* (became *Analog* in 1960) 1937-1971
Conscious emphasis on *consequences* of science and technology, not just adventures.

The Golden Age Giants

Robert Heinlein (1907-1988). Signature works: *Starship Troopers* (1959); *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961); *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* (1966); *Time Enough for Love* (1973)

Isaac Asimov (1920-1992). Signature works:

Foundation series (1951-1953); *I, Robot* (1950); *Caves of Steel* (1954).

Arthur C. Clarke (b. 1917). Signature works: *Childhood's End* (1954); *The Nine Billion Names of God* (1967); *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968); *Rendezvous with Rama* (1973)

1950's. Introspection

New emphasis on character and social commentary, on style and mood in writing.

Beginning of modernist themes. Subversion of Golden Age.

Damon Knight, Theodore Sturgeon, Frederick Pohl, C.M. Kornbluth, Algis Budrys,

1960s-'70s: The New Wave

More sophisticated modernism. De-emphasis of science, emphasis on character, writing, social effects. Michael Moorecock, J.G. Ballard, Harlan Ellison, Robert Silverberg, Ursula LeGuin, Joanna Russ, James Tiptree Jr., Samuel R. Delaney, Phillip K. Dick.

1980s: Cyberpunk

Computers and information age. Asian culture. Postmodern themes: fragmentation, tribalism, doubt of meaning.

Neuromancer, *Bladerunner*. William Gibson, Bruce Sterling.

Late 1990s – early 2000

Resurgence of hard SF, especially in Britain, Australia
Stephen Baxter, Greg Egan, Paul J. McAuley

SF subgenres

Hard SF : Narratives in which detailed or “rigorous” arguments about science and/or technology are central to plot and/or theme. *Arthur C. Clarke*, *Hal Clement*, *Larry Niven*, *Steve Baxter*

Space opera : Fast-paced galactic adventure stories. Derivative of hard SF, but science and technology often gobbledygook. *E. E. Smith*, *A. E. van Vogt*; *Star Wars*, *Star Trek*.

(Soft SF): Narratives which downplay arguments about science and / or technology.

Emphasis on psychology, sociology, and character. *Ray Bradbury*, *Ursula LeGuin*, *Joanna Russ*, *James Tiptree, Jr.*, *Cordwainer Smith*.

New Wave : Downplayed science, frequently subverted standard tropes. Strong influence of “modernism” in literature. Experimental techniques. Sexual themes and disturbing images. *Harlan Ellison*, *Samuel R. Delaney*, *Roger Zelazny*, *Phillip K. Dick*, *J. G. Ballard*, *Brian Aldiss*.

Feminist SF: *Joanna Russ*, *Ursula K. LeGuin*, *James Tiptree, Jr.*, *Sherri Tepper*, *Octavia Butler*, *Suzi McKee Charnas*, *Karen Joy Fowler* (+ *Connie Willis*)

Cyberpunk : computers + influence of Asian culture. Postmodern paradigms: fragmentation/tribalization, incognuities, sense of play. *William Gibson*, *Bruce Sterling*.

Utopia/dystopia : Utopia (“good place”) = desirable social order; dystopia (“bad place”) = undesirable social order. Utopias difficult to make interesting; LeGuin’s *The Dispossessed* is called “an ambiguous utopia.” Dystopias: Zamyatin’s *We*, Orwell’s *1984*, Huxley’s *Brave New World*, Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

Alternate history : Narrative set in present day or in past, but with changes to “our” history.

Major SF awards:

Hugos. Named after Hugo Gernsback. Begun 1953. Awarded at Worldcon.. Fan vote.

Nebulas. Begun 1965. Awarded by SFWA (Science Fiction Writers of America). Voted by fellow writers; more “literary.”