

What is Science Fiction?

Part 2

Modern SF – 20th Century

Issac Asimov divided this age into four periods

- I. Most of 19th Century carried into the 20th Century—“**Primitive**”**Period** —was when the “concept of SF had been born but basis for support of SF writers did not yet exist...” Most of SF produced during this period was in pulp magazines and was considered trashy and escapist because it dealt with improbable things.
- II. 1926-1938— This period was highlighted by the magazine *Amazing Stories*, edited by Hugo Gernsback, who suggested that stories should be scientifically plausible and that logic and scientific consistency were more important than style.
- III. 1938-1945—This period was the beginning of modern SF. SF magazines proliferated from 5 in 1938 and 13 in 1939, to 22 in 1941.
- IV. 1945- Present—With the dropping of the A bomb, SF and reality became closer, and, as a result, gained stature, widened its horizons and became, as Asimov states, “a literary response to scientific change which could run the entire gamut of human experience.”

New Wave Writers

The most recent movement in SF is the new wave of SF writers that originated in London and centered around the British magazine *New World*. The movement attempts to merge SF into the mainstream of literature. It also charges that SF: is no longer credible, problems will not be surmounted, and that we will not make it into the 21st century.

New Wave Writers

Many of these writers believe that since the world will soon end, sensual pleasures are important. They are therefore concerned with shock words and scenes, hallucinatory fantasies, and sex.

An Evaluation of SF - Scientific

Can prophesy the science of tomorrow. Many writers have come up with gadgets and technology that have become reality years later.

- Cyrano de Bergerac – *A Voyage to the Moon* – suggested that planets revolve around the sun and the world is made up of atoms.
- Philip Wylie – *Paradise Crater* – explored the idea of Nazis trying to conquer the U.S. with an atomic bomb....before the A bomb was even dropped.

Can recreate the worlds of tomorrow by reproducing its science realistically. Many SF writers have degrees in science.

- Isaac Asimov – taught at Boston University Medical School; did work in cancer research; wrote texts (college) in biochemistry, authored a junior series of science books, and was a master in language.
- Arthur C. Clark – investigated astronomy so thoroughly that he knew “lunar landscape better than his native Somerset”.

Can “show how much of an age determines and displays itself through what it sees as remote possibilities.”

- Neville Schute – *On The Beach* – destruction of the world through nuclear war.
- Anthony Burgess – *A Clockwork Orange* – illustrates modern society’s preoccupation with violence.

An Evaluation of SF - Literary

Up to now, SF has been deficient in lit. merit. Heinlein, a SF writer, suggests that SF should be judged by the same standards as other fiction, but done, it is often wanting. SF has been plagued by many shortcomings such as stereotyped patterns, melodramatic plots, unrealistic sex, stock heroic figures, and poor style lacking consistency and unity in many instances, **BUT**, contemporary SF has been improving. (Frank Herbert's *Dune*, for example.)

An Evaluation of SF - Intellectual

- Can spur our imaginations
- Can stretch our minds with ideas that we have never before considered

An Evaluation of SF - Sociological

frequently offers us dramatic forms of social commentary.

- **Five major concerns of modern society reflected in SF are:**
 - possibility of the destruction of the world
 - what happens to those who are not destroyed after an atomic holocaust
 - three current problems:
OVERPOPULATION, STARVATION, AND POLLUTION
 - fear of thought control
 - fear that machines will take over and man will become its servant

An Evaluation of SF - **Psychological**

- reflects the mind and mental processes, feelings, and desires of man of an era.

- desire for security or insecurity
- desire for new frontiers
- desire for progress
- tendency toward superstition
- pride in achievements
- need to rebel

An Evaluation of SF - **Philosophical**

- presents philosophical questions in dramatic form.
- ethics of science
- nature of religion
- happiness of man
- service to state
- interference into primitive societies

Awards for Science Fiction

HUGO Awards – formally known as The Science Fiction Achievement Awards

- Determined by popular vote of SF readers attending the current year's World Science Fiction Convention
- Named for Hugo Gernsback, one of the “fathers” of modern SF, a writer, editor, and publisher
- Design of award is a rocket ship poised for take-off on a block of wood
- First given in 1953

• **NEBULA Awards**

- Presented each year by the Science Fiction Writers of America through a nominating and balloting process in which all members participate.
- Design of award is a spiral nebula of metallic glitter and a rock crystal specimen embedded in a block of lucite.
- First given in 1966. Each spring NEBULA Awards Banquets are held simultaneously in New York, New Orleans, and on the West Coast.

