

Introduction to Science Fiction

What is Science Fiction?

SCIENCE FICTION is a form that deals primarily with the impact of actual or imagined science upon society or individuals. If science concerns itself with discovery, then science fiction concerns itself with the consequences of discovery. It is a testament to the visionary nature of the form that science fiction writers predicted the advent of atomic weapons and sentient machines. Its enduring value though is in its capacity to ask probing questions of each new scientific advance, to conduct a dialogue with progress that decodes its real meaning and reveals it to us.

[SCIENCE FICTION is] “...*that branch of literature which is concerned with the impact of scientific advance upon human beings.*” (1952)

SCIENCE FICTION consists of a careful and informed extrapolation of scientific facts and principles. It has to be plausibly based on science. Science fiction writers have included predictions of future societies on Earth, analyses of the consequences of interstellar travel and imaginative explorations of other forms of intelligent life and their societies in other worlds.

The Development of Science Fiction

SCIENCE FICTION was made possible by the rise of modern science itself, notably the revolutions in astronomy and physics. Early science fiction writers were Voltaire’s *Micromegas* (1752) and his imaginary voyages to the moon or other planets and space travel, Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels* (1726) and his alien cultures, and science fiction elements in the nineteenth century stories of Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Fitz-James O’Brien. Science fiction properly began toward the end of the nineteenth century with the scientific romances of Jules Verne whose science consisted primarily of invention, as well as the science-oriented novels of social criticism by H.G. Wells. A great boom in the popularity of science fiction followed World War II. The fame of science fiction was international, from the Soviet Union to other eastern European nations, and was frequently used as a vehicle for political commentary that could not be safely published in other forms. It is now common to study science fiction in colleges and universities as literature.

The Elements of Science Fiction

IN ORDER for a story to be classified as science fiction it needs to have at least *three* of the following elements:

- * *deals with an element of science*
- * *technology and inventions*
- * *the future and the remote past, including all time travel stories*
- * *extrapolation (the inference of an unknown from something that is known; a conjecture)*
- * *scientific method*
- * *other places—planets, dimensions, etc... including all visitors from above, or*
- * *catastrophes—natural, or manmade*

“Science fiction is really sociological studies of the future, things that the writer believes are going to happen by putting two and two together.”

RAY BRADBURY