

## SCIENCE FICTION BEFORE THE GENRE AND THE DOMINANCE OF FANTASY

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### **Abstract:**

*The dominance of fantasy through the ages resulted in an unfixed date of the emergence of science fiction. Science fiction (SF), with the advance age, still has some clutches of fantasy. There is much passion in fantasy since the early ages of its appearance. It travelled all the way through until there is a need to make some considerable shift with the advance of technology at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Technology has resulted in some sort qualitative leap in fantasy into science fiction, but the main features of fantasy like the myth and supernatural still remain. The purpose of this study is to analyze and focus on the difference between fantasy and science fiction in the presence of technology. The study will discuss some of the critics' statements about the presence of fantasy in science fiction even in recent literature after WW2. The study will reach to the findings that science fiction could not be totally free from the old features of fantasy. The only thing that differentiates SF from fantasy is the scientific plausibility. Thus, SF kept on developing through the passing of time until it has its full formation with the presence of the material novum. But before that it was taken as a pure fiction of fantasy.*

**Keywords:** *Science fiction, fantasy, WW2, plausibility, technology, supernatural.*

### **Introduction**

Undoubtedly, if we are going to trace back the history of SF, we will get lost to the endless quantity of the fictional works. These works, in fact, are disputed in terms of whether or not they fall under the category of SF. What is the age of SF? Did it emerge simultaneously with the industrial revolution or its roots go back as far as literature can go? According to Roberts et al. (2016, p. 25):

[...]SF can be meaningfully identified as that form of Fantastika that embodies a technical (materialist) enframing, as opposed to the religious (supernatural) approach we would today associate with genre fantasy

Obviously, in literature, all genres are traced back to their origins in history according to the seniority of their tradition. SF has its own origins before it came into this form of today. The oldest texts of the ancient stories had a reasonable quantity of speculative imaginations. These speculations were about a different kind of unfamiliar life or another estranged world of wonders. As shown in *Trexler et al. (2011 p 186)*:

Science fiction specializes in constructions of other-worlds, or what Suvin has called 'novums and such worlds are often depicted as being caused by or subjected to extreme environmental change. We can further categorize these other-worlds as extraterrestrial and/or futuristic, their strangeness a factor of planetary or temporal shift, or both."

The history of human storytelling began of telling some tales that were not real, but mainly superstitious about great warriors, mysterious voyages or flying heroes. The main element of these stories was either magic or spiritual, yet the story was plausible in the sense that this element was rational at that

time. Magic and spirituality were part of people's life and culture and these texts were found authoritative and sound. Humans' tales have almost always included elements that are not reflective of the logic of the real world: magic, ghosts, gods, wonders, miracles and the like.

### **Science Fiction in Old Times**

If looking back into the past and consider the ancient texts, we will find out that some elements of SF were shaping the system of those stories, but we cannot, as per some critics, call this part of storytelling as a pure 'genre of science fiction', because SF as a genre did not finish its corners of formation before the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. That which has previously come was only part of fantasy. Clute and Nicholls, (1995, p1067) write that:

SF is an impure genre (DEFINITIONS OF SF) which did not finally take shape until the late 19th century, although all its separate elements existed earlier. If the labeling of any earlier story as SF depended only on the presence of SF elements there would be many such

But some historians of SF like to call these old texts as part of SF and they attribute their claim to the 'extraordinary voyages' which reached the moon and space. SF, as some historians believe, is found in some of the Ancient Greek tales and most of these discourses related to the fantastic voyages of that time. Roberts, (2016, p26) states:

Another key element is the trope of odyssey, or voyage extraordinaire, which has occupied so central a place in discourses of science fiction, and which finds its origin in Ancient Greek literature. From Homer's *Odyssey* (7th Century BC), through epics, plays, histories, dialogues and later prose romances, Greek culture produced many hundreds of examples of fantastic voyages. Some of these were travellers' tales, based on actual or augmented experience, as, for example, voyages to Africa, India, or over the Atlantic. Some were purely fantastical and imaginative, as journeys to the lands of the dead, or into the heavens. Some 'liberal' critics of SF are content to classify all such voyages extraordinaire as early examples of the genre

Some critics call this type of stories "proto-science fiction" and brush aside these stories from the category of SF. In another statement "Lucian Samosata, Roberts notes, is often invoked as the first SF writer because of his work concerning moon voyage; however, earlier works offered similar characteristics" (Thomas et al, 2013p 22).

### **Old Science Fiction in the Time of Fantasy**

In fact, we cannot talk about ancient SF if not a sufficient amount of time is allotted to talk about fantasy. Because, as we go back in history, we come across countless number of old stories that tell about fairy tales, or giant people, or even some adventure stories to unknown lands, or mythological creatures. This type of literature of contacting with the other is what differentiates fantasy from different types of genres in literature as well as SF. "As a marketing category, fantasy and science fiction tend to be grouped together." (Tuttle, 2005, p. 2). In ancient stories, this creativity of fictionalization was found in profuse because this kind of imaginative fantasy did not emerge for any particular reasons as much as it was part of the creative tendency. Fantasy was an essential part of people's life and culture, even at the present day where technology prevails all over the world. The question here: Why did fantasy obtain its dominance in old texts and in modern ones as well? SF too, came from fantasy. It did not come into existence before it put its underpinnings in the basis of fantasy like the myth, the alternate world, or space voyages. Fantasy is the nutrition of imagination of authors and a mode of creation haunting writers to produce the best of their literary bestowal. This heritage of fantasy has changed over time and this transformation is now respected in the realm of literature. Roman *Saldívar*, (2011, 592, 93) shows this transformation of the fantasy: this linking (referring to Oscar Wao) of the imaginary and the real through historical fantasy is what

makes group identifications, family relationships, and even the desire for love between individual persons seem both inevitable and unachievable at one and the same time. And it is why no realism, historical, magical, modern, or postmodern alone can accurately represent the desire in the heart miming, shadowing, beating to the tune of a world of achieved justice. In this unconscious dream of identification with another across the social web, fantasy loses its illicit nature and enters the ethical world at large

Let's see something imaginative but not a type of fantasy. It is taken as an act of heresy from philosophic perspective. Hippolytus in his *Refutation of all Heresies* says:

Xenophanes thinks that ...All mankind is destroyed when the land is carried down into the sea and becomes mud. Subsequently the land starts again on its genesis. And for all worlds genesis takes place through a process of change (Sedley 2003 p42).

This pre-Socratic imagination of Xenophanes is in fact not a heresy in religion or a "proto-science" but this very text refers to some knowledge may be from previous authentic sources that he depended on. Of course, the land (the earth) could never have changed by itself, but monotheists believe that God has caused the land to change after a great destruction of entire nations. Fantasy though it is ideological, but its fascination of magic and mythology is fabulous so much so its texts survived through the passage of time and still exist in SF in the age of technology. Some authors today are not explaining the 'Novum' in their stories because of some requirements of SF, but they found this scientific plausibility as a distinguishing device for their fancy in the age of technology. Others prefer to attribute the strangeness in their stories to some supernatural dimension which is the reason for some critics to extract SF stories from the huge number of stories of fantasy. However, it is not an easy thing to cut SF off from the ribs of fantasy. In ancient texts protagonists, by their way, reached to the space long time ago only because they were dreamers. Likewise, in the age of technology, protagonists reached to the space because they are also dreamers invented the spaceship. The ancient ones had the dream and the later ones accomplished the mission by technology which was not yet available at that time. It's thus not easy to come in the present time and cut off SF from fantasy only because the scientific plausibility is not there. However, we cannot deny the fact that the foundations of SF today are still dipped in the ground of fantasy. Saying so, the point is not to detract from SF, but to lessen the gap between SF and fantasy. There is still an implicit acknowledgement by Aldiss et al, (1973, 23) that SF intermingled with fantasy could not be avoided even in the present day, although the detraction that SF is only a mode and not a genre.

We bow to the fact that much of what passes for science fiction these days is nearer fantasy. SF can, after all, be imagined to stand for science fantasy, as it can for speculative fiction (for those who are attached to that term)". "It is often impossible to separate science fiction from science fantasy, or either from fantasy, since both modes are part of fantasy in a general sense.

### **Science Fiction and the Separation from Fantasy**

Talking about SF before the genre has a specific connotation. It gives some concept that SF went through different stages to reach the form it is today. Someone has to acknowledge the fact that there has been sort of transposition of reality rather than just a mere fantasy in the essence of the story like in *Frankenstein* and *The Last Man* by Mary Shelley. There is also an overlap in the novel of *Frankenstein* whether it was only a gothic romance or it was the first work of SF, but also SF stories are usually full of horror.

The overlap of supernatural-horror fiction with sf is rather smaller than the overlap of high fantasy with sf, though still very substantial indeed; this area of overlap is discussed under the rubrics GOTHIC SF and HORROR IN SF. (Clute and Nicholls, 1995 p772)

Fantasy came first to travel to the outer space and allegorically reach to the stars, the moon or to other planets. It was the desire of the ancient people to fancy that they were shipping in the space.

Therefore, fantasy is also an imagination into the otherness to satisfy a craving desire of mankind through the ages.

As a genre and a form, fantasy is always linked to imagination and desire. Its value seems to reside “in its 'free-floating' and escapist qualities” and its propensity to inhabit the space between reality and dream (Saldívar, 2011p586).

There is a major concern of how to separate SF from the clutches of fantasy and marking the time in which SF was born as a genre. SF transcends the limitations of scientific plausibility as a result of the adventure element that is the soul of the excitement in it. However, SF as a genre is a vast kind of fiction and the element of science in it came to the appearance at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. *The Time Machine* (1985) by H. G. Wells was the first true SF and was then categorized as scientific romance. The blunder in identifying the rebirth of SF is a conspicuous mark that it is an ancient kind of fiction, but it came through stages with the elevation of science and humankind. Therefore, SF is in a state of unending development and elevation. The relation between SF and fantasy is not large, but it is so deep through the history. So, the most distinguishing factor between them is that fantasy in its imaginative dimensions, reaches the farthest scope of illusion, whereas SF reaches the farthest scope of realistic illusion. The illusion with the scientific plausibility occurs in a scientific way of justification. So, it is essential for SF writers to avoid getting criticized by naysayers in the age where technology has become the touchstone of societal culture. Therefore, this culture employed within the text of SF is still excessive and reckless; because characters are also human beings and it's difficult for them to be shown working as though they were robots.

Women as scientist fail to keep themselves devoted to their jobs and this failure is the result of a woman's biological system which takes us away from the rationality of science and technology in some novels. In a study of an article on the reality of scientific competence of woman in film images from 1929-1997, Eva Flicker concludes that:

At the professional level of science they bring in intuition, emotional elements, love affairs, and feelings. They do not represent the rational scientific system of their male colleagues. They are therefore taken less seriously as “scientists.(Flicker, 2003 p 316)

Flicker presents *The Lost World - Jurassic Park*, USA, 1997 as an example of the decline of rationality before the feminine emotions. The scientific profession proves to be fragile and imperfect as per some temptation in woman's physical appearance. The text in figure 2 of the film (quoted in Flicker ) highlights the reason behind the predominance 'between brains and breasts':

He meets her there; she is entirely independent in her decisions and actions and pursues her scientific curiosity with utter enthusiasm. She is just about thirty years old, athletic, attractive body, slightly opened erotic mouth/lips perpetually inviting a kiss. She wears practical action adventure clothing and a tight T-shirt that emphasizes her breasts. She is taking photos in the midst of gigantic dinosaurs (herbivores). They simply walk right by her. She discovers one young dinosaur who fascinates her. She pats it, lovingly. Only he, her man, and the audience know the danger she has thus entered into . . . (Flicker, 2013, p312)

## Conclusion

There is no pure genre of SF out of rationality and plausibility, all genres of horror, fantasy, romantic, or SF, are sometimes juxtaposed in one novel and disappeared in others. But the solidarity of the text progress gives the reader the fundamental criteria of categorizing in that very book. In conclusion, SF went through ages and centuries and its features had different colorations of storytelling. It is all about the elevation and development of societies across the ages. The elevation of civilization and societies could bring a different kind of literature in the future. In the coming one hundred years or so, SF could reach an advanced stage of elevation but the history of fantasy and literature will not easy go.

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