

Introduction to Science Fiction

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Office hours: Wednesdays, 12–1 p.m. or by appointment

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review

Suddenly an idea came, one we'd been toying with for years, that of telling a story from a multiple point of view. Here it would be the omniscient, the master's and the slave's. That was the **ignition point**. **The fever set in**, and I ran like hell for the typewriter.

Bester, "Comment on 'Fondly Fahrenheit,'" in *Starlight: The Great Short Fiction of Alfred Bester* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 68.

Rieder: don't define SF

The assertion that SF is “whatever we are looking for when we are looking for science fiction” does not mean anything much unless “we” know who “we” are and why “we” are looking for science fiction. (15)

SF has no essence, no single unifying characteristic, and no point of origin. (16)

SF is not a set of texts, but rather a way of using texts and of drawing relationships among them. (16)

Rieder's historical approach

It is this gradual articulation of generic recognition, not the appearance of a formal type, that constitutes the history of early SF. (21)

Even during the so-called golden age of Campbell's editorial influence, SF resided within a larger economy of genres whose shifting values and fluid boundaries no group, much less a single editor or publication, could control. (28)

Pigeonholing a text as a member of this or that genre is much less useful than understanding the way it positions itself within a field of generic possibilities. (22)

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- 1950 Bradbury, "There Will Come Soft Rains"
- 1951 Asimov, *Foundation*
Knight, "To Serve Man"
- 1954 Bester, "Fondly Fahrenheit"
- 1962 SDS, [Port Huron Statement](#)
- 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (August)
John F. Kennedy assassinated (November)
- 1964 Civil Rights Act passed (July)
US troops deployed in Vietnam (August)
- 1965 Voting Rights Act passed
Ellison, "'Repent, Harlequin!,'" in *Galaxy* (December);
wins Hugo and Nebula awards
- 1966 Dick, "We Can Remember It For You," in *F&SF* (April)
Timothy Leary: ["Turn on, tune in, drop out"](#)
- 1967 Ellison, ed., *Dangerous Visions* (New York: Doubleday)
- 1968 Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinated
- 1969 Richard Nixon elected
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Harlan Ellison's Hugo award trophy for "“Repent, Harlequin!,”" 1966,
www.thehugoawards.org.

What you hold in your hands is more than a book. If we are lucky, it is a revolution....

These are stories so purely entertaining that it seems inconceivable the impetus for their being written was an appeal for ideas. But such was the case, and as you wonderingly witness these ducks of entertainment change into swans of ideas, you will be treated to a thirty-three-story demonstration of “the new thing”—the *nouvelle vague*, if you will, of speculative writing.

Ellison, “Introduction: Thirty-Two Soothsayers,” in *Dangerous Visions*, xix–xx.

Yet speculative fiction (notice how I cleverly avoid using the misnomer “science fiction”? getting the message, friends? you’ve bought one of those s—e f—n anthologies and didn’t even know it! ...) is the most fertile ground for the growth of a writing talent without boundaries, with horizons that seem never get to any closer. (xxiii)

discussion

- ▶ How does Ellison's “Repent, Harlequin!” represent the breaking of boundaries?

stick it to the Man

He had become a *personality*, something they had filtered out of the system many decades before. But there it was, and there *he* was, a very definitely imposing personality....But down below, ah, down below, where the people always needed their saints and sinners, their bread and circues, their heroes and villains, he was considered a Bolivar; a Napoleon; a Robin Hood; a **Dick Bong** (Ace of Aces); a Jesus; a **Jomo Kenyatta**. (369)

Jelly for God's sake beans! This is madness! (372)

“You’re full of it. You’re a tyrant. You have no right to order people around and kill them if they show up late.” (377)

a matter of style

- ▶ Does Ellison's technique relate to his theme of rebellion?

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There are always though who ask, what is it all about? For those who need to ask, for those who need points sharply made, who need to know "where it's at," this: (368)

The middle you know. Here is the beginning. How it starts: (372)

mrree, mrree, mrree, mrree. (378)

blame the system

- ▶ Who is in charge in Ellison's story?

blame the system

- ▶ Who is in charge in Ellison's story?
- ▶ Who is in charge in Dick's story?

surely some revelation is at hand

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1. “What do you want now?” Quail said harshly. “You’ve broken my cover.” (391)
2. The false memory of “his trip” to Mars hadn’t taken—at least not entirely, not as he had been assured. (394)
3. Opening the box he saw, to his disbelief, six dead maw-worms and several varieties of the unicellular life on which the Martian worms fed. (396)
4. *But they may have altered your memory-track also*, he realized. (396)
5. “Now put up your hands, Quail.” (396)
6. “We have a tele-transmitter wired within your skull.” (397)
7. “Because,” the Interplan harness bull said, “what you did is not in accord with our great white all-protecting father public image.” (398)
8. “Your fantasy is this: you are nine years old...” (401)
9. “We started interrogating him,” Lowe said, white-faced...“And strangely enough—” (404)

nested prisons

everyday life *A miserable little salaried employee* (387)

unaccountable government organizations his gun appeared to be UN
issue (397)

your own head *Can you hear me thinking?* he wondered. (400)

reality “They also gave me a magic invisible destroying rod,”
Quail mumbled. (404)

remind you of anything?

“Is an extra-factual memory that convincing?” Quail asked.

“More than the real thing, sir....The packet which is fed to you while you’re comatose is a creation of trained experts.” (389)

Ironically, he had gotten exactly what he had asked Rekal, Incorporated for. Adventure, peril, Interplan police at work, a secret and dangerous trip to Mars in which his life was at stake—everything he had wanted as a false memory.

The advantages of it being a memory—and nothing more—could now be appreciated. (399–400)

Crisis is the key to [short] story-writing, a sort of brinkmanship in which the author mires his characters in happenings so sticky as to seem impossible of solution. And then he gets them out...usually. He *can* get them out; that's what matters.

Philip K. Dick, "(Unpublished) Foreword to *The Preserving Machine*," *Science Fiction Studies* 2, no. 1 (March 1975): 22, [JSTOR](#).

- ▶ Could Dick have gotten Quail out? Did he?

next

- ▶ Ballard, “The Cage of Sand” (*Wesleyan*)
- ▶ Ballard, very short essays (*Canvas*)
- ▶ ...something about Friday