

This e-content is for

M A (English) Sem-III Class

It contains material for the Paper. Unit and Text as indicated below.

Paper-X (A) : Forms of Popular Literature
Unit –I : Science Fiction

Text: *The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells

Lecture One

7.11.20

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Lecture One

7.11.20

**Paper-X(A) : Forms of Popular Literature
Unit –I : Science Fiction**

Text: *The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells

Dear Students,

I'm supposed to teach the following texts from Paper-X(A) : Forms of Popular Literature :
Unit –I : Science Fiction:

Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein*

H.G. Wells: *The Time Machine*

Arthur C. Clarke: *2001: A Space Odyssey*

Cormac McCarthy: *The Road*.

Now I'll send you regularly Lecture-cum-Notes about the above texts, taking each of them one by one.

Since the unit is about Science Fiction, you ought to know about the following also:

- **What is Science Fiction?**
- **Its kinds and characteristics.**
- **Brief history of its development.**
- **Dystopia vs Utopia.**

Today here's a brief introduction to Science Fiction.

Brief Introduction

Science fiction has proved notoriously difficult to define. It has variously been explained as a combination of romance, science, and prophecy (Hugo Gernsback), 'realistic speculation about future events' (Robert Heinlein), and a genre based on an imagined alternative to the reader's environment (Darko Suvin). It has been called a form of fantastic fiction and even historical literature.

It is more helpful to think of Science fiction as a mode or field where different genres and subgenres intersect.

In the early decades of the 20th century, a number of writers attempted to tie fiction to science and even to use it as a means of promoting scientific knowledge, a position which continues into what has become known as 'hard SF'. Applied science – technology – has been much more widely discussed in SF because every technological innovation affects the structure of our society and the nature of our behaviour. Technology has repeatedly been associated with the future by SF, but it does not follow that Science fiction is therefore about the future.

Science fiction writers exist in the present and therefore the contemporary issues and world are always mirrored in it.

The futures represented in SF embody its speculative dimension. In that sense, as Joanna Russ has explained, it is a 'What If Literature'. The writer and critic Samuel Delany has applied the term 'subjunctivity' to SF in a similar spirit to explain how these narratives position themselves between possibility and impossibility. It is helpful to think of an SF narrative as an embodied thought experiment whereby aspects of our familiar reality are transformed or suspended.

The wave of feminist science fiction from the 1970s onwards also saw the retrospective construction of a tradition which rehabilitated writers like Charlotte Perkins Gilman. It has been a recurring claim among SF writers that they are more and more occupying the position previously occupied by realist fiction and that their narratives are the most engaged, socially relevant, and responsive to the modern technological environment. In a title that plays on Ariel's famous speech in *The Tempest*, Thomas M. Disch's *The Dreams Our Stuff Is Made Of* (1998) has argued that SF permeates every level of society, especially of the entertainment industry.

Science fiction has always been an evolving mode. There is extensive debate over when SF began. Some histories have extended their reach back as far as Lucian of Samosata's *A True Story* from the 2nd century AD, which describes a voyage into space and a form of inter-planetary war. Other historians take their starting points in the Renaissance with works like Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) and Francis Godwin's *The Man in the Moone* (1638), or in the Industrial Revolution with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).

Two other starting points have been mooted: the late 19th century from around 1870, and the early 20th century when labels like 'science fiction' were first used.

H. G. Wells, however, remains as a formative English figure in the development of science fiction.

The label ‘Science fiction’ actually covers work in a number of media. There is a substantial body of drama and poetry. The Science Fiction Poetry Association was founded in 1978.

No sooner had film been invented than experiments began with science fiction subjects, such as Georges Melies’s *A Trip to the Moon* of 1902. The evolution of these two media has followed such parallel lines that since the Second World War many SF novels have received film adaptations.

What is Science Fiction?

Science fiction, often called “sci-fi,” is a genre of fiction literature whose content is imaginative, but based in science. It relies heavily on scientific facts, theories, and principles as support for its settings, characters, themes, and plot-lines, which is what makes it different from fantasy.

So, while the storylines and elements of science fiction stories are imaginary, they are usually possible according to science—or at least plausible.

Although examples of science fiction can be found as far back as the Middle Ages, its presence in literature was not particularly significant until the late 1800s. Its true popularity for both writers and audiences came with the rise of technology over the past 150 years, with developments such as electricity, space exploration, medical advances, industrial growth, and so on. As science and technology progress, so does the genre of science fiction.

Example of Science Fiction

Read the following short passage:

As the young girl opened her window, she could see the moons Europa and Callipso rising in the distance. A comet flashed by, followed by a trail of stardust, illuminating the dark, endless space that surrounded the spacecraft; the only place she had ever known as home. As she gazed at Jupiter, she dreamed of a life where she wasn’t stuck orbiting a planet, but living on one. She envisioned stepping onto land, real land, like in the stories of Earth her father had told her about. She tried to imagine the taste of fresh air, the feel of a cool, salty ocean, and the sound of wind rustling through a tree’s green leaves. But these were only fantasies, not memories. She had been born on the ship, and if they didn’t find a new inhabitable planet soon, she would surely die there too.

The example above has several prime characteristics that are common in science fiction. First, it is set in the future, when humans no longer live on Earth. Second, it takes place on a spacecraft that is orbiting Jupiter. Third, it features real scientific information—Europa and Callipso are two of Jupiter’s moons, and as Jupiter is a planet made of gas, it would not be possible for humans to live there, explaining why the ship is currently orbiting the planet rather than landing on it.

Types of Science Fiction

Science fiction is usually distinguished as either “hard” or “soft.”

Hard science fiction

Hard science fiction strictly follows scientific facts and principles. It is strongly focused on natural sciences like physics, astronomy, chemistry, astrophysics, etc. Interestingly, hard science fiction is often written by real scientists, and has been known for making both accurate and inaccurate predictions of future events. For example, the recent film *Gravity*, the [story](#) of an astronaut whose spacecraft is damaged while she repairs a satellite, was renowned for its scientific accuracy in terms of what would actually happen in space.

Soft science fiction

Soft science fiction is characterized by a focus on social sciences, like anthropology, sociology, psychology, politics—in other words, sciences involving human behavior. So, soft sci-fi stories mainly address the possible scientific consequences of human behavior. For example, the Disney animated film *Wall-E* is an apocalyptic science fiction story about the end of life on Earth as a result of man’s disregard for nature.

In truth, most works use a combination of both hard and soft science fiction. Soft sci-fi allows audiences to connect on an emotional level, and hard sci-fi adds real scientific evidence so that they can imagine the action actually happening. So, combining the two is a better storytelling technique, because it lets audiences connect with the story on two levels. Science fiction also has a seemingly endless number of subgenres, including but not limited to time travel, apocalyptic, utopian/dystopian, alternate history, space opera, and military science fiction.

Many times, science fiction turns real scientific theories into full stories about what is possible and/or imaginable. Many stories use hard facts and truths of sciences to:

- suggest what could really happen in the future
- to explore what could happen if certain events or circumstances came to be or
- suggest consequences of technological and scientific advancements and innovation.

Historically it has been a popular form for not only authors, but scientists as well. In the past 150 years, science fiction has become a huge genre, with a particularly large presence in film and television—in fact, the TV network “SciFi” is completely devoted to science fiction media. It is a particularly fascinating and mind-bending genre for audiences because of its connection to reality.

Examples of Science Fiction in Literature

Example 1

A genre-defining piece of science fiction literature is H.G. Wells' 1898 novel *The War of the Worlds*, which tells the story of an alien invasion in the United Kingdom that threatens to destroy mankind. The following is a selection from the novel's introduction:

No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man's and yet as mortal as his own; that as men busied themselves about their various concerns they were scrutinized and studied, perhaps almost as narrowly as a man with a microscope might scrutinize the transient creatures that swarm and multiply in a drop of water. With infinite complacency men went to and fro over this globe about their little affairs, serene in their assurance of their empire over matter...No one gave a thought to the older worlds of space as sources of human danger.

Conclusion

In conclusion, science fiction is a genre of possibility, imagination, and innovation whose popularity rises in relation to advances in science and technology. Its authors use real science to create fictional stories that explore the possible future of mankind and the universe in a way that is both imaginative and realistic.

In the next lecture, I'll discuss kinds and features of Science Fiction.