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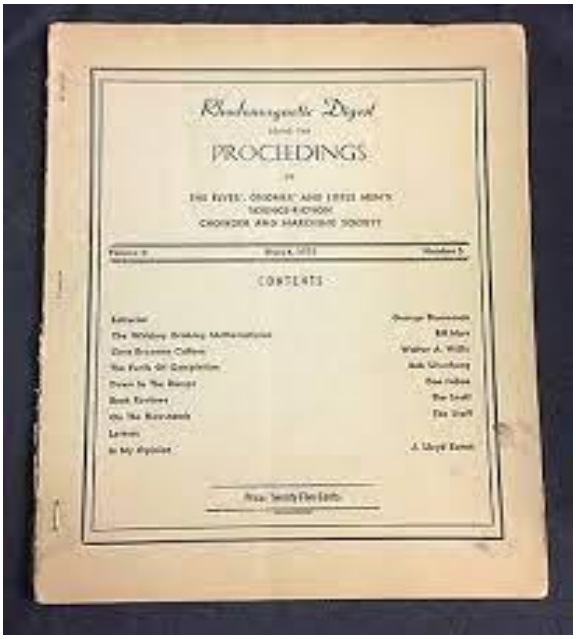
Join us as we go about the production of our issue. You are always welcome here. There is space available for your letters of comment, which can contain advice and new ideas or impressions of what we are doing, anything you may choose to write us about. Contacts are of great value to us.

FANZINE RETROSPECTIVE 3

by Jon D. Swartz, N3F Historian

In previous Fanzine Retrospectives, fanzines published in 1937 and 1949 were examined. This time we look at an issue of a more recent fanzine, although it too appeared more than fifty years ago.


Rhodomagnetic Digest

PROCEEDINGS

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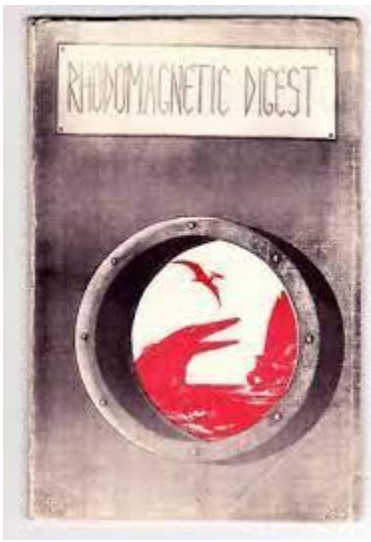
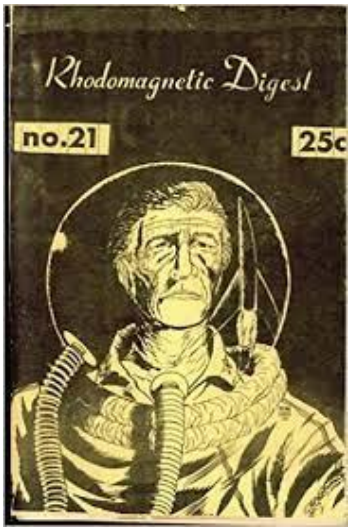
RHODOMAGNETIC DIGEST for March, 1951
(Volume II, Number 5)

This issue of the Digest was edited by Don Fabun. The fanzine's full title was RHODOMAGNETIC DIGEST, Being the PROCEEDINGS of The Elves', Gnomes' and Little Men's Science Fiction, Chowder and Marching Society._ The Society was described as being composed of people "interested in reading, writing, or collecting science fiction and fantasy, in any of its forms" and Anthony Boucher was one of the founders. Deriving its name from the comic strip "Barnaby", the Society was located in the San Francisco Bay Area and gained mundane fame in 1952 when it filed formal notice with the United Nations that it was claiming certain territories on the moon. At the time this issue was published, officers were J. Lloyd Eaton (Chairman), Gladys Fabun (Vice-Chairman), George Finigan (Secretary), and Emma W. Johnson (Treasurer).

Format/Policies: The Digest was published ten times a year. Single copies sold for thirty cents if mailed and twenty-five cents if purchased at a newsstand(!). Subscriptions were available for $2.50 per year. Format varied over time, but this particular issue was eight and a half by eleven inches, forty pages (+covers), and multilithed on the "Garden Library Press" in Berkeley, California. Some illustrations were in color. The following policy statement said it all: "No fiction or poetry even read, much less accepted." Instead, serious articles on science fiction and science fiction fandom were featured.





Contributors/Contributions: George Blumenson (a former editor who provided this issue's editorial), Bill Murr ("The Perplexing Problem of the Whiskey Drinking Mathematician", a reply to a problem posed in a 1950 **Scientific American** article), Walter A. Willis ("Corn Becomes Callous", in which Willis laments both American SF and movies), Bob Silverberg ("The Perils of Completism", a still amusing article on collecting SF), and editor Don Fabun ("Down in the Dumps: Our Record Writ in Rubbish", a thoughtful article on the different kinds of containers currently in use). In addition, this issue included the following features: "Book Reviews" (by the Staff), "On the Newsstands" (prozine reviews by the Staff), and "Letters" (from Northern Ireland fan Walt Willis, Donald E. Ford, H.J. Campbell, Mrs. Mary Eleanor Forbes, British fan A. Vincent Clarke, and a copy of a letter to John W. Campbell, Jr., from the Science Fantasy Society). The letter to Campbell was issued by Clarke and Ken Bulmer, who were soliciting signatures to protest the rise in foreign subscription rates for **Astounding Science Fiction**. "The Inner Orbit" provided brief information on the issue's contributors, and a continuing feature of the Digest by J. Lloyd Eaton, "In My Opinion", took up four

pages and completed the issue. In his column Eaton listed several books from his extensive personal collection and gave his rather idiosyncratic ratings for each book (and for the individual stories in book collections). For example, four stories in Ray Bradbury's first collection, DARK CARNIVAL (Arkham House, 1947), were rated "not fantastic" and/or "treatises thinly disguised as fantasy with little story value"! Bob Beetem and Ron Goulart, both at the time students at the University of California, Berkeley, contributed cartoons and other artwork. Goulart was identified as Ronald Goulart.

Books reviewed were Bradbury's THE ILLUSTRATED MAN (reviewed by Reg Bretnor: "Readers will find some bad science, some good science fiction, much good writing, and lots of entertainment"); Theodore DuBois's SOLUTION T-25 (reviewed by Fabun: "Mrs. Dubois ordinarily writes mysteries, and the mystery here is why she didn't stick with mysteries and let 'science fiction' go hang"); Campbell's THE MOON IS HELL (reviewed by Karl Boyer: "Full of bad physics and worse biochemistry"); and James S. Wallerstein's THE DEMON'S MIRROR (also reviewed by editor Fabun: "A curious flavor about it that makes it hard to put down").

Prozines/fanzines reviewed were the March 1951 issue of **Planet Stories**; Walt Willis' **Slant** No. 5 (reviewed by William Gaffey), **Galaxy Novel** No. 4, S. Fowler Wright's THE AMPHIBIANS (*aka* THE WORLD BELOW); the Spring 1951 **Ten Story Fantasy** (reviewed by Robert Keppel); the April 1951 **The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction** (reviewed by Joseph Barron); the May 1951 **Marvel Science Stories** (reviewed by Gary Nelson); the April 1951 **Galaxy** (reviewed by Bill Murr); the April 1951 **Astounding Science Fiction** (reviewed by L.E. Lipetz): and the April 1951 **Imagination** (reviewed by Joseph Barron). In general, the reviewers found something to like in all these publications, especially Galaxy: "Mr. Gold announces a price raise to thirty-five cents effective May. It will still leave Galaxy the most for the money at present."

Conclusions

Everyone reading this column probably is familiar with the work of Willis, Silverberg (a current First Fandom member), Clarke, Bulmer, Goulart, and at least one of the Campbells. With more than half the contributors going on to make significant contributions to SF prodom and/or fandom, this was an impressive issue of a 1950s sercon fanzine. Its serious orientation was so strong that an apology once was issued when space was used for an attack on Dianetics. Warner further reports that the fanzine

has been credited with keeping together the Society, plagued by dissention from its start. According to Warner, the Digest ceased publication after the Little Men failed to win the 1953 Worldcon for San Francisco, but was revived briefly in 1962.

Previous editors of the Digest were George Blumenson (the first seven issues) and Donald B. Moore (the next four issues), although to a large extent production was a cooperative club effort. In fact, in some issues the names of all club members who contributed were listed. This issue, for example, listed Gladys Fabun, Joseph R. Ryus, Ben Stark, Robert Keppel, and Phil Bean as providing assistance.

Sources

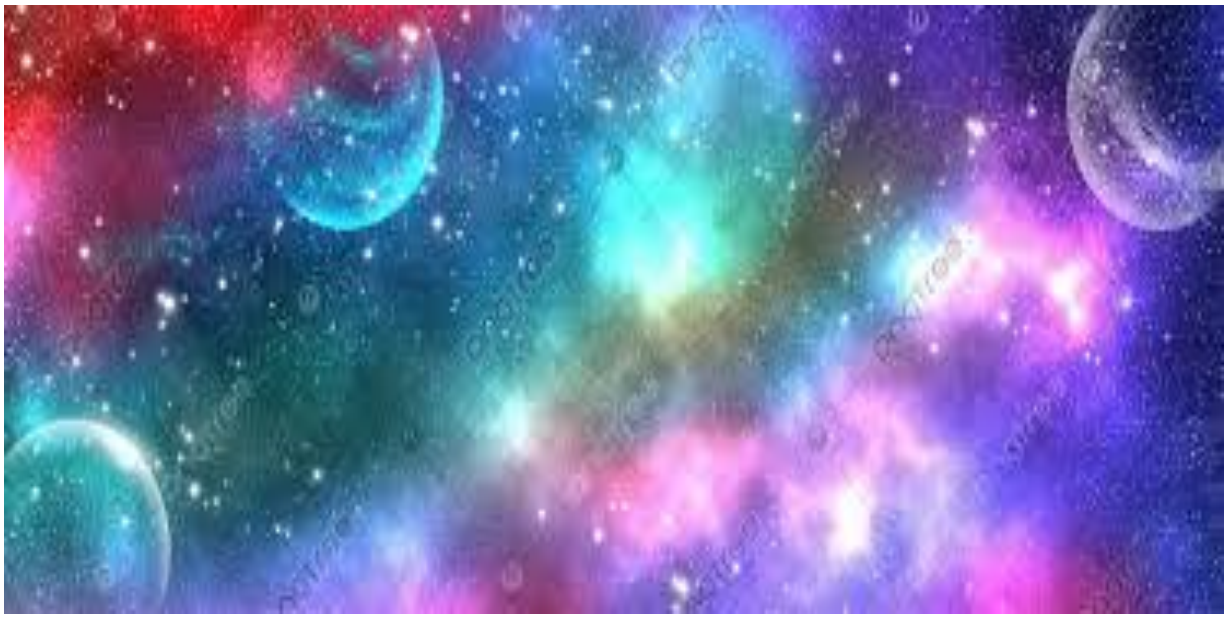
Pavlat, Bob & Bill Evans. FANZINE INDEX. Hyattsville, MD: Authors, 1952-1959.

Sanders, Joe (ed.). SCIENCE FICTION FANDOM. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994.

Warner, Harry, Jr. ALL OUR YESTERDAYS. Chicago, IL: Advent, 1969.

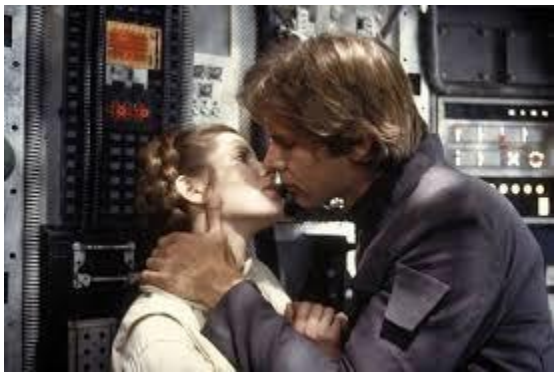
Warner, Harry, Jr. A WEALTH OF FABLE. Van Nuys, CA: SCIFI Press, 1992.

Note. This article on an early fanzine was published in First Fandom's **Scientifiction** many years ago. It has been revised somewhat for reprinting in Origin.



Romance and Romanticism in Science and Science Fiction

by JEFFREY REDMOND



When the science is not so hard

Scientific Romance is an archaic, mainly British term for the genre of fiction now commonly known as Science Fiction. The term originated in the 1850s to describe both fiction and elements of scientific writing, but it has since come to refer to the science fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, primarily that of Jules Verne, H.G. Wells and Arthur Conan Doyle. In recent years the term has come to be applied to science fiction written in a deliberately anachronistic style as a homage to or pastiche of the original scientific romances.

Early Usages

The earliest use of the term "scientific romance" is thought to have been in 1845, when critics applied it to Robert Chambers' VESTIGES OF THE NATURAL HISTORY OF CREATION, a speculative natural history published in 1844. It was used again in 1851 by the **Edinburgh Ecclesiastical Journal and Literary Review** in reference to Thomas Hunt's PANTHEA, OR THE SPIRIT OF NATURE.

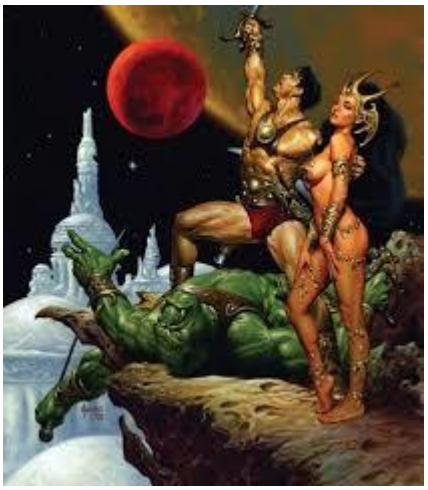
In 1859 the **Southern Literary Messenger** referred to Balzac's URSULE MIROUET as "a scientific romance of mesmerism". In addition, the term was sometimes used to dismiss a scientific principle considered by the writer to be fanciful, as in THE PRINCIPLES OF METAPHYSICAL AND ETHICAL SCIENCE (1855), which stated that "Milton's conception of inorganic matter left to itself, without an indwelling soul, is not merely more poetical, but more philosophical and just, than the scientific romance, now generally repudiated by all rational inquirers, which represents it as necessarily imbued with the seminal principles of organization and life, and waking up by its own force from

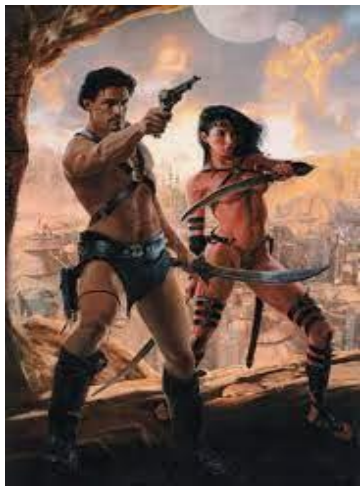
eternal quietude to eternal motion." Then, in 1884, Charles Howard Hinton published a series of scientific and philosophical essays under the title SCIENTIFIC ROMANCES.

20th Century

"Scientific Romance" is now commonly used to refer to science fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as in the anthologies UNDER THE MOONS OF MARS: A HISTORY AND ANTHOLOGY OF THE SCIENTIFIC ROMANCE in the Munsey Magazines, 1912-1920 and SCIENTIFIC ROMANCE IN BRITAIN: 1890-1950. One of the earliest writers to be described in this way was the French astronomer and writer Camille Flammarion, whose RECITS DE L'INFINI and LA FIN DU MONDE have both been described as scientific romances. The term is most widely applied to Jules Verne, as in the 1879 edition of the AMERICAN CYCLOPAEDIA, and H.G. Wells, whose historical society continues to refer to his work as "scientific romances" today.

Edgar Rice Burroughs' A PRINCESS OF MARS (1912) is also sometimes seen as a major work of scientific romance, and Sam Moskowitz referred to him in 1958 as "the acknowledged master of the scientific romance", though the scholar E.F. Bleiler views Burroughs as a writer involved in the "new development" of pulp science fiction that arose in the early 20th Century. The same year as A Princess of Mars, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle published THE LOST WORLD, which is also commonly referred to as a scientific romance.





1902 saw the cinematic release of George Melies' film LE VOYAGE DANS LA LUNE (A Trip to the Moon). The time period and the fact that it is based partially on works by Verne and Wells has led to its being labelled as a scientific romance as well.

Modern Revival

In recent years the term "scientific romance" has seen a revival, being self-applied in works of science fiction that deliberately ape previous styles. Examples include Christopher Priest's THE SPACE MACHINE: A SCIENTIFIC ROMANCE, published in 1976, Ronald Wright's Wells pastiche A SCIENTIFIC ROMANCE: A NOVEL, published in 1998, and the 1993 roleplaying game FORGOTTEN FUTURES. Though it uses the term, Dennis Overbye's novel EINSTEIN IN LOVE: A SCIENTIFIC ROMANCE does not imitate science fiction of the past in the manner of the other novels mentioned.

Definitions

Brian Stableford has argued, in SCIENTIFIC ROMANCE IN BRITAIN: 1890-1950, that early British science fiction writers who used the term "scientific romance" differed in several significant ways from American science fiction writers of the time. Most notably, the British writers tended to minimize the role of individual "heroes", took an "evolutionary perspective", held a bleak view of the future, and had little interest in space as a new frontier. Regarding "heroes", several novels by H.G. Wells have the protagonist as nameless, and often powerless, in the face of natural forces. The evolutionary perspective can be seen in tales involving long time periods, such as WAR OF THE WORLDS and THE TIME MACINE by Wells, or STAR MAKER by Olaf Stapledon.

Even in scientific romances that did not involve vast stretches of time, the issue of whether mankind was just another species subject to evolutionary pressures often arose, as can be seen in parts of THE HAMPDENSHIRE WONDER by J. D. Beresford and several works by S. Fowler Wright. Regarding space, C.S. Lewis's Space Trilogy took the position that "as long as humanity remains flawed and sinful, our exploration of other planets will tend to do them more harm than good."

And most scientific romance authors had not even that much interest in the topic. As for bleakness, it can be seen in many of the works by all the authors already cited, who deemed humanity flawed—either by original sin or, much more often, by biological factors inherited from our ape ancestors. Stableford also notes that some of the British scientific romances were saved from "being entirely gloomy" by their philosophical speculation, calling them works of "modest armchair philosophizing". He cites E.V. Odle's THE CLOCKWORK MAN, John Gloag's TOMORROW'S YESTERDAY and Murray Constantine's PROUD MAN as examples of this type of scientific romance.

Nonetheless, not all British science fiction from that period comports with

Stableford's thesis. Some, for example, reveled in adventures in space and took an optimistic view of the future. By the 1930s there were British authors such as Eric Frank Russell who were intentionally writing "science fiction" for American publication. At that point British writers who used the term "scientific romance" did so either because they were unaware of science fiction or because they chose not to be associated with it.

After the Second World War the influence of American science fiction caused the term "scientific romance" to lose favor, a process accelerated by the fact that few writers of scientific romance considered themselves "scientific romance" writers, instead viewing themselves as just writers who occasionally happened to write scientific romances. Even so, the influence of the scientific romance era persisted in British science fiction. John Wyndham's work has been cited as providing "a bridge between traditional British scientific romance and the more varied science fiction which has replaced it." Some commentators believe scientific romance had some impact on the American variety.

Romanticism in Science

19th Century science was greatly influenced by Romanticism, or the Age of Reflection (c. 1800-40), an intellectual movement that originated in Western Europe as a counter movement to the late 18th Century Enlightenment. Romanticism incorporated many fields of study, including politics, the arts, and the humanities.

In contrast to the Enlightenment's mechanistic natural philosophy, European scientists of the Romantic period held that observing nature implied understanding the self and that knowledge of nature "should not be obtained by force". They felt that the Enlightenment had encouraged the abuse of the sciences, and they sought to advance a new way to increase scientific knowledge, one that they felt would be more beneficial not only to mankind but to nature as well.

Romanticism advanced a number of themes: it promoted anti-reductionism, that the whole is more valuable than the parts alone, and epistemological optimism, man was connected to nature, and encouraged creativity, experience, and genius. It also emphasized the scientist's role in scientific discovery, holding that acquiring knowledge of nature meant understanding man as well. Therefore, these scientists placed a high importance on respect for nature.

Romanticism declined beginning around 1840 as a new movement, positivism, took hold of intellectuals, and lasted until about 1880. As with the intellectuals who earlier had become disenchanted with the enlightenment and had sought a new approach to

science, people now lost interest in Romanticism and sought to study science using a stricter process.

Romantic Science *vs.* Enlightenment Science

As the Enlightenment had a firm hold in France during the last decades of the 19th Century, the Romantic view on science was a movement that flourished in Great Britain and especially Germany in the first half of the 19th Century. Both sought to increase individual and cultural self-understanding by recognizing the limits in human knowledge through the study of nature and the intellectual capacities of man. The Romantic movement, however, resulted in an increasing dislike by many intellectuals for the tenets promoted by the Enlightenment. It was felt by some that Enlightened thinkers' emphasis on rational thought through deductive reasoning and the mathematicization of natural philosophy had created an approach to science that was too cold and that attempted to control nature, rather than to peacefully co-exist with nature.

According to the philosophies of the Enlightenment, the path to complete knowledge required dissection of information on any given subject and a division of knowledge into subcategories of subcategories, known as reductionism. This was considered necessary in order to build upon the knowledge of the ancients, such as Ptolemy, and Renaissance thinkers, such as Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo. It was widely believed that man's sheer intellectual power alone was sufficient to understanding every aspect of nature. Examples of prominent Enlightenment scholars include Sir Isaac Newton's physics and mathematics, Gottfried Leibniz's philosophy and mathematics, and Carl Linnaeus as a botanist and physician.

Principles of Romanticism

Romanticism had four basic principles:

(1) The original unity of man and nature in a Golden Age.
(2) The subsequent separation of man from nature, and the fragmentation of human faculties.
(3) The interpretability of the history of the universe in human, spiritual terms.
(4) The possibility of salvation through the contemplation of nature.

The above-mentioned Golden Age is a reference from Greek mythology and legend to the Ages of Man. Romantic thinkers sought to reunite man with nature and therefore

his natural state.

To Romantics, science must not bring about any split between nature and man. Romantics believed in the intrinsic ability of mankind to understand nature and its phenomena, much like the Enlightened philosophers, but they preferred not to dissect information as some insatiable thirst for knowledge and did not advocate what they viewed as the manipulation of nature. They saw the Enlightenment as the cold-hearted attempt to extort knowledge from nature that placed man above nature rather than as a harmonious part of it. Conversely, they wanted to improvise on nature as a great instrument. The philosophy of nature was devoted to the observation of facts and careful experimentation, which was much more of a "hands off" approach to understanding science than the Enlightenment view, as it was considered too controlling.

Natural science, according to the Romantics, involved rejecting mechanical metaphors in favor of organic ones; in other words, they chose to view the world as composed of living beings with sentiments, rather than objects that merely function. Sir Humphrey Davy, a prominent Romantic thinker, said that understanding nature required "an attitude of admiration, love and worship…a personal response [sic]". He believed that knowledge was only attainable by those who truly appreciated and respected nature. Self-understanding was an important aspect of Romanticism. It had less to do with proving that man was capable of understanding nature, through his budding intellect, and therefore controlling it…and more to do with the emotional appeal of connecting himself with nature and understanding it through a harmonious co-existence.

Important Works in Romantic Science

When categorizing the many disciplines of science that developed during this period, Romantics believed that explanations of various phenomena should be based upon *vera causa*, which meant that already known causes would produce similar effects elsewhere. It was also in this way that Romanticism was very anti-reductionist: they did not believe that inorganic sciences were at the top of the hierarchy but at the bottom, with life sciences next and psychology placed even higher. This hierarchy reflected Romanic ideals of science because the whole organism takes more precedence over inorganic matter, and the intricacies of the human mind take even more precedence since the human intellect was sacred and necessary to understanding nature around it and re-

uniting with it.

Various disciplines on the study of nature that were cultivated by Romanticism included: Schelling's Naturphilosophie; cosmology and cosmogony; developmental history of the earth, and its creatures; the new science of biology; investigations of mental states, conscious and unconscious, normal and abnormal; experimental disciplines to uncover the hidden forces of nature—electricity, magnetism, galvanism and other life forces. Also physiognomy, phrenology, meteorology, "philosophical" anatomy, among others.

Naturphilosophie

In Friedrich Schelling's Naturphilosophie, he explained his thesis regarding the necessity of reuniting man with nature; it was this German work that first defined the Romantic conception of science and vision of natural philosophy. He called nature "a history of the path to freedom" and encouraged a reunion of man's spirit with nature.

Biology

The New Science of Biology was first termed biologie by Jean-Baptiste Lamarck in 1801, and was "an independent scientific discipline born at the end of a long process of erosion of 'mechanical philosophy', consisting in a spreading awareness that the phenomena of living nature cannot be understood in the light of the laws of physics but require an *ad hoc* explanation". The mechanical philosophy of the 17th Century sought to explain life as a system of parts that operate or interact like those of a machine. Lamarck stated that the life sciences must detach from the physical sciences, and strove to create a field of research that was different from the concepts, laws, and principles of physics. In rejecting mechanism without entirely abandoning the research of material phenomena that does occur in nature, he was able to point out that "living beings have specific characteristics which cannot be reduced to those possessed by physical bodies", and that living nature was *un ensemble d'objets metaphisiques* (an assemblage of metaphysical objects). He did not 'discover' biology. He drew previous works together and organized them into a new science.

Goethe

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's experiments with optics were the direct result of his application of Romantic ideals of observation and disregard for Newton's own work with

optics. He believed that color was not an outward physical phenomenon but internal to the human. Newton concluded that white light was a mixture of the other colors, but Goethe believed he had disproved this claim by his observational experiments. He thus placed emphasis on the human ability to see the color, the human ability to gain knowledge through "flashes of insight", and not a mathematical equation that could analytically describe it.

Humboldt

Alexander von Humboldt was a staunch advocate of empirical data collection and the necessity of the natural scientist in using experience and quantification to understand nature. He sought to find the unity of nature, and his books ASPECTS OF NATURE and KOSMOS lauded the aesthetic qualities of the natural world by describing natural science in religious tones. He believed science and beauty could complement one another.

Natural History

Romanticism also played a large role in Natural History, particularly in biological evolutionary theory. Nichols (2005) examines the connections between science and poetry in the English-speaking world during the 18th and 19th centuries, focusing on the works of American natural historian William Bartram and British naturalist Charles Darwin. Bartram's Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida (1791) described the flora, fauna, and landscapes of the American South with a cadence and energy that lent itself to mimicry and became a source of inspiration to such Romantic poets of the era as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Blake. Darwin's work, including ON THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES BY MEANS OF NATURAL SELECTION (1859), marked an end to the Romantic era, when using nature as a source of creative inspiration was commonplace, and led to the rise of realism and the use of analogy in the arts.

Mathematics

Alexander (2006) argues that the failure of mathematics changed in the 19th Century from an intuitive, hierarchical, and narrative practice used to solve real-world problems to a theoretical one in which logic, rigor, and internal consistency rather than application were important. Unexpected new fields emerged, such as non-Euclidean geometry and

statistics, as well as group theory, set theory and symbolic logic. As the discipline changed, so did the nature of the men involved, and the image of the tragic Romantic genius often found in art, literature, and music may also be applied to such mathematicians as Evariste Galois (1811-32), Niels Henrik Abel (1802-29), and Janos Bolyai (1802-60). The greatest of the Romantic mathematicians was Carl Friedrich Gauss (1777-1855), who made major contributions in many branches of mathematics.

Physics

Christensen (2005) shows that the work of Hans Christian Orsted (1777-1851) was based in Romanticism. Orsted's discovery of electromagnetism in 1820 was directed against the mathematically based Newtonian physics of the Enlightenment; Orsted considered technology and practical applications of science to be unconnected with scientific research. Strongly influenced by Kant's critique of corpuscular theory and by his friendship and collaboration with Johann Wilhelm Ritter (1776-1809), Orsted subscribed to a Romantic natural philosophy that rejected the idea of the universal extension of mechanical principles understandable through mathematics. For him the aim of natural philosophy was to detach itself from utility and become an autonomous enterprise, and he shared the Romantic belief that man himself and his interaction with nature was at the focal point of natural philosophy.

Astronomy

Astronomer William Herschel (1738-1822) and his sister Caroline Herschel (1750-1848), were dedicated to the study of the stars. They changed the public conception of the solar system, the Milky Way, and the meaning of the universe.

Chemistry

Sir Humphrey Davy was "the most important man of science in Britain who can be described as a Romantic". His new take on what he called "chemical philosophy" was an example of Romantic principles in use that influenced the field of chemistry. He stressed a discovery of "the primitive, simple and limited in number causes of the phenomena and changes observed" in the physical world and the chemical elements already known, those having been discovered by Antoine-Laurent Lavoisier, an Enlightenment philosopher. True to Romantic anti-reductionism, Davy claimed that it was not the individual components, but "the powers associated with them, which gave character to

substances". In other words, not what the elements were individually, but how they combined to create chemical reactions and therefore complete the science of chemistry.

Organic Chemistry

The development of organic chemistry in the 19th Century necessitated the acceptance by chemists of ideas deriving from Naturphilosophie, modifying the Enlightenment concepts of organic composition put forward by Lavoisier. Of central importance was the work on the constitution and synthesis of organic substances by contemporary chemists.

Popular Image of Science

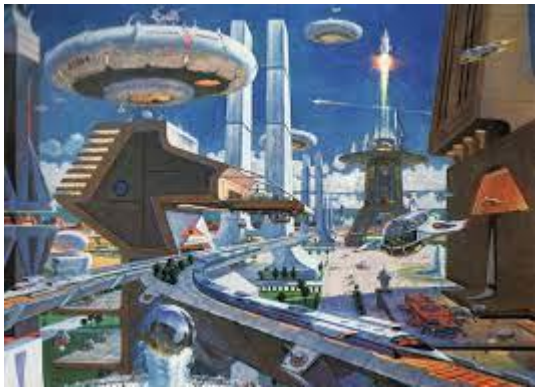
Another Romantic thinker, who was not a scientist but a writer, was Mary Shelley. Her famous book FRANKENSTEIN (1818) also conveyed important aspects of Romanticism in science as she included elements of anti-reductionism and manipulation of nature, both key themes that concerned Romantics, as well as the scientific fields of chemistry, anatomy, and natural philosophy. She stressed the role and responsibility of society regarding science, and through the moral of her story supported the Romantic stance that science could easily go wrong unless man took more care to appreciate nature rather than control it.

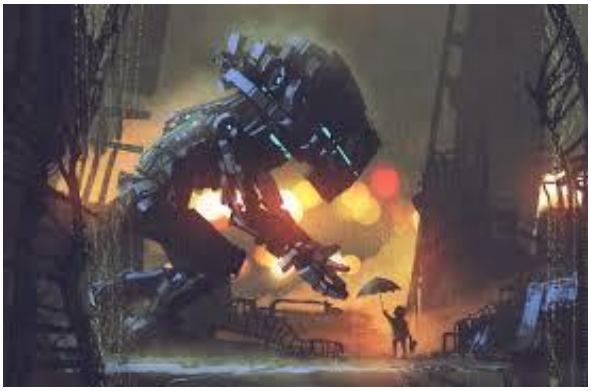
John Keats' portrayal of "cold philosophy" in the poem "Lamia" influenced Edgar Allan Poe's 1829 sonnet "To Science", and Richard Dawkins' 1998 book UNWEAVING THE RAINBOW.

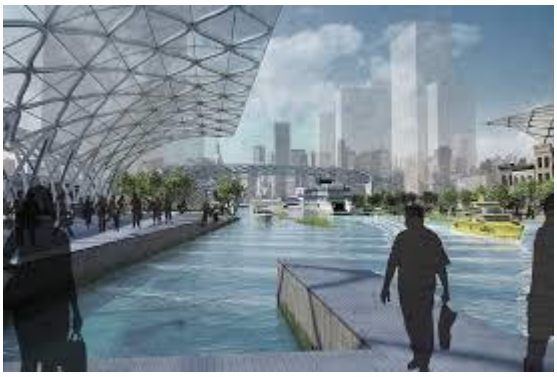
Decline of Romanticism

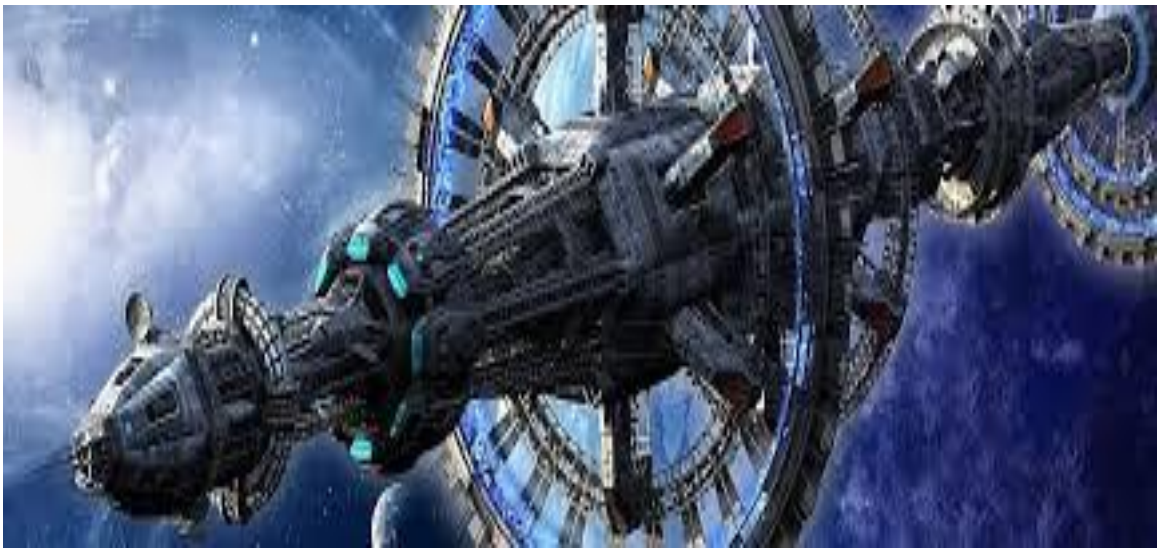
The rise of Auguste Comte's positivism in 1840 contributed to the decline of the Romantic approach to science. Today there is science fiction presented in modern technological formats. Movies and television shows predominate, with action heroes throughout. Special effects are a constant, and much of the deeper meanings are lost. But hopefully not forever.

HARD AND SOFT SCIENCE FICTION by Judy Carroll

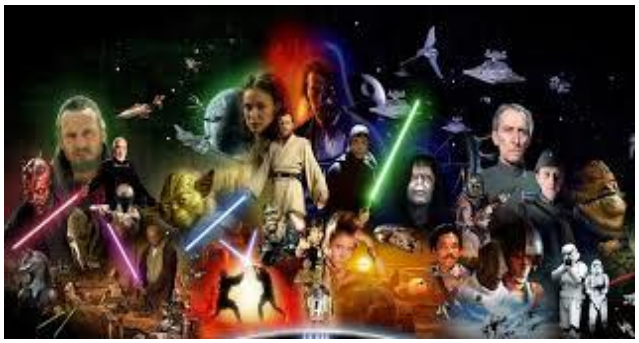


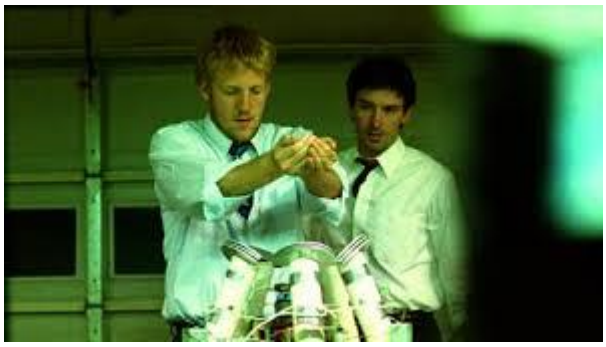






HARD SCIENCE FICTION




SOFT SCIENCE FICTION

I imagine there have been several "debates" over which approach to science fiction is more favorable, hard or soft. I don't even remember when I first heard those terms. To me, anything with aliens, spaceships, unknown planets and "powers" not known to

humankind, was science fiction. Just so we are all on the same page, following are the definitions of hard and soft science fiction.

"Hard science fiction strictly follows scientific facts and principles. It is strongly focused on natural sciences like physics, astronomy, chemistry, astrophysics, etc."

"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."

(Taken from—Literaryterms.net/science fiction/)

I have read many books and seen many movies without knowing whether they were hard or soft science fiction when I began each adventure into the Unknown. But, over the years, I have learned what my preferences are and are not.

I have discovered that I find battle scenes boring. In the movies, these scenes, many times, are stretched out way too long, seeming to enjoy repeating many attacks over and over again to show off special effects. When in a book, I may skim battle scenes hoping to move the story along. The problem with this tactic? I may miss an important element in the story and have to backtrack.

I am not a science person. Science and I have never gotten along. I want simple answers to my questions. How does a TV work? You plug it into the wall. Push the red button to turn it on and off. These are volume buttons, and these change the channels. How does a spaceship work? You hit the red button on the bridge and adjust a few funny-shaped things and you're off.

When I was a child I developed a curiosity in people's reasons for doing things.

Who was that man letting his little boys run around in the bus?

What was behind the forced smile and the dull eyes of the lady across the room?

Why did that girl lower her head whenever anyone looked at her?

It's obvious by now, that I favor soft science fiction. I prefer people over things. I want to see the differences in the way the aliens live, their customs and beliefs. How each group on that distant planet are the same and are different. And, of course, how those aliens are the same and different from Humankind.

Before I become too repetitive I would like to tell you about a science fiction book I read many years ago. I do not remember the name of the author, the name of the book, nor what happened in the story. The book was connected to a TV series I liked, and I only remember parts of the first chapter.

I opened the book with excitement and curiosity, finding it hard to suppress my feelings. I expected to find myself on the bridge of the spaceship surrounded by crew members I had grown to love. Instead, I was overlooking a planet. There was no spaceship. No crew members. Just space, me and the planet. The author's words sent me to the surface of that planet. I found myself, an invisible being, alone in a strange dwelling. There were several aliens moving around and quite busy. They were preparing for a feast of some importance. I had the impression it was similar to the many Thanksgivings I had been a part of.

I felt betrayed. As if the author was playing a joke on me, the reader. Sending me off to an unknown planet without even a glimpse of the starship crew. I resigned myself to whatever would be. I went back to the planet and spent all but a few sentences, learning about the family, their holiday and who they were. There were several communications between the father and his young son. It was the boy's first time to carve the main food item, and his father was teaching him how this was to be done, while he told him the traditions behind this coming-of-age event. I sat in on these conversations and began to feel very attached to this boy, his father, their family and traditions. I was so involved in their lives that I was as startled as they were when their home started to collapse and the screaming started. And the fires spread. The author pulled me off the planet away from the strangers I had learned to care about.

I was on a ship watching from space when the planet exploded. My heart cried and my mind screamed, "WHY?"

Why did I share this memory with you? Because that one chapter taught me that by taking an active part in someone's life you can learn to care about them no matter what the differences are between you.

I also learned how to start a story and draw the reader in—even when they were disappointed and angry at the beginning. Make them care.

A Fantasy Poem

EMILY IN THE GRAVEYARD by Will Mayo

I was walking through the graveyard long ago
when I spied a lovely young woman
dressed all in white.
It seemed strange to see her.
Stranger still
was her choice of dress.
"What an unusual color for a graveyard!"
I thought to myself.
I thought to converse with her,
perhaps to get to know her better
as she laid flowers in the moonlight.
But no sooner had I gathered my thoughts
than she disappeared
in the fog of a November evening.
Only the flowers remained
by the grave of some soldier and editor.
"From Emily"
the card simply said.
And with that I ended my autumn sojourn
and returned to these rooms
in which I wrote these words.
It's been days now,
it's been years,
since I cast my eyes on Emily
and the fog of one November evening.
But this I clearly recall
as I begin another mortal day
haunted by more than a few ghosts.

End page