

SOCIAL FEARS AND PARANOIA: A PRECONCEIVED ANXIETY OBSERVED IN THE 1950’S GOLDEN AGE OF SCIENCE FICTION

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ABSTRACT:

"Golden Age of science fiction" often refers to the temporal span between 1938 and the time immediately before the emergence of the New Wave in the 1960s. In the year 1938, John W. Campbell Jr. bestowed the role of editor for the science fiction publication *Astounding Stories*, which was renamed as *Astounding Science Fiction* within the same year. Subsequently, in 1960, the magazine was ultimately rebranded as *Analog*. The editorial tenure of Campbell at *Astounding Science Fiction* was of great significance, as it led to the publication of exceptional science fiction tales and the emergence of highly proficient science fiction authors. Consequently, the genre saw a surge in popularity, captivating a wide readership. The periodical gained the status as a globally recognized authority in the field of science fiction. Simultaneously, Campbell convened a group of skilled writers with the intention of producing narratives that explored the psychological and sociological impacts of scientific and technological progress on human beings. Additionally, these narratives aimed to present scientifically and technologically plausible advancements. In this article, confronting social fears and paranoia: the 1950’s with special reference to the golden age of science fiction, the aforementioned points have been highlighted.

Keywords: Social Fears, Paranoia, Science Fiction

INTRODUCTION:

The Golden Age of science fiction generally refers to the period from 1938 to the years just before the advent of the New Wave in the 1960s. In 1938, John W. Campbell Jr. became editor of the science fiction magazine *Astounding Stories*. It was renamed *Astounding Science Fiction* later in the same year. Finally, it became recognised as *Analog* in 1960. The span of Campbell's editorship at *Astounding Science Fiction* had a profound impact on the history of science fiction. In this period, the publication commenced disseminating the most exceptional science fiction narratives. For that, the most exceptional science fiction writers emerged, and in turn, they enriched the genre with their talent and popularised it among readers. The publication achieved the distinction of being the foremost publication in the world for science fiction. At the same time, Campbell constructed a team of talented writers and urged them to publish tales that were based on both the psychological and sociological influences of scientific and technological advancements on mankind. Nonetheless, those initiatives made an attempt to portray feasible scientific and technical progress.

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As mentioned earlier, science fiction has earned a name and fame among reader and scholar circle. Critics have argued that this fiction represents an especially American utopian vision, which holds that human ingenuity will guide humanity towards a utopian future. Science story and characters were prioritised under Campbell's editing. He gave writers standards for excellence, and they benefited from his collaborative editing style.

This period is very significant in human history. Several significant events that profoundly impacted humanity occurred during this period. These include the Korean War, the rise of Hitler and Nazism, the 2nd World War, the holocaust, the atomic bomb and the Cold War. During this highly volatile time, countries scrambled for the latest technological advancements to give themselves a competitive edge without any regard for the consequences and implications brought about by their mad rush. Such was the magnitude of the situation that, by its conclusion, there existed weapons of such immense strength that they had the capacity to annihilate the whole world. Moreover, the countries were dividing themselves into antagonistic blocs and there was general paranoia, distrust and fear among them. The science fiction stories of the time reflected a general fear of war, the devastation of the Great Depression, and the explosive technological development that occurred during World War II.

They also made use of a shared mythos by creating a timeline for world history known as "Future History". It went far into the future and included intergalactic conflict. During the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s, writers like Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Ray Bradbury, and Arthur C. Clarke achieved unparalleled fame and popularity. Golden Age science fiction was a phenomenon that had a lasting impact on society and many people's psyches during World War II and the Cold War that followed. After World War II, science fiction topics became more and more critical of modern society as writers tried to comment on and make fun of the time.

Under the editorial guidance of the new SF digests, American science fiction of the 1950s became more sophisticated, urbane, and satiric, with raw technophilia waning in favour of more anthropologically based speculation about societies and cultures. Many books and film adaptations from the decade were predominant with Cold War-induced fear and paranoia (Sterling).

This era produced science fiction classics such as *Foundation* by Asimov, where humanity is examined as tragically predisposed to its own downfall; *Childhoods End* by Arthur C. Clarke, which explores the limitations of technology in creating a better society; and *Puppet Masters* by Robert Heinlein, which expresses the Cold War paranoia of the time.

Asimov is regarded as one of the most popular science fiction writers of all time. Besides his impressive output of fictional works, his articles and essays on the importance of the genre and its role in informing and critiquing many misconceptions of science itself by society have made him an important intellectual of modern times. Asimov was born on 2nd January, 1920 in Petrochi, Russia. His family migrated to the United States of America in 1923 and settled in Brooklyn, New York. He studied at Columbia University and graduated from there in 1941 with a Master's degree in Chemistry. In 1942, he moved to Philadelphia to work at a naval yard during the 2nd World War, but later entered the army in 1945. He retired from the army in July 1946 and settled in West Newton, Massachusetts. After the war and much turmoil in his personal life, Asimov became an instructor at the Boston University of Medicine and was promoted to Assistant Professor in December 1951. On 1st July 1958, he gave up his teaching job to become a full-time writer. By the time of his death on 6th April 1992, he had written and published approximately five hundred books. Asimov's vivid imagination, coupled with his rich and varied life experiences, inspired him to write stories that were highly influential. He had a relentless commitment to solving humanity's problems through liberal humanism and rationality and these values always permeated throughout his works.

The Three Laws are quite problematic as they are open to considerable interpretations and complications. Asimov acknowledges this and these are examined in numerous subsequent works. In *I, Robot* also, most of the stories are detective stories that investigate strange robot behaviours. When the case is solved, it is found that these strange behaviours are caused by the complications of the Three Laws. In "Runaround", a robot simply runs around in circles on the surface of Mercury rather than carry out specific commands. Being an expensive robot, it is programmed in such a way that the Third Law is given a stronger impetus so as to protect its own existence. This measure is implemented in order to safeguard the company's investment. So, when a dangerous task is given to it, the Second Law must be obeyed but it conflicts with its strongly enforced Third Law. To reach equilibrium, it just runs around in circles. Another challenge to the Three Laws occurs in the story "Reason". Powell and Donovan, field testers for U.S. Robots and also recurring human characters in the stories, travel to a space station that supply power to earth. The station is run entirely by robots and the advanced reasoning abilities of the super robot known as QT-1 deduces that it cannot be made by humans who are far too inferior. Instead, it believes to be created by the Master Energy Convertor, the most important equipment in the station. The QT-1 and the other robots at the station develop a religious devotion to the Master but still conditioned by the Three Laws, they perform their tasks efficiently. Powell and Donovan leave the super robot in charge of the station and do no report on its dismissive attitude towards humans. Asimov was a humanist and often attacked many religious beliefs that he considers responsible for many human atrocities. The QT-1, as advanced as it is, is still far from perfect in its mental capacities. Hence the comical deduction that Master Energy Convertor is its creator and, along with the other robots at the station, treats it like a god and is dismissive of the humans. This is a reflection of Asimov's criticism of the irrationality of religion. In his essay, "The Humanism of Isaac Asimov", humanist advocate, Ross Hamilton, writes:

..many of us along with Dr. Asimov, think that the true salvation of individuals, and ultimately of our

civilization, is in turning away from the credulous beliefs and delusions offered by ancient wonder stories and myths with their inflexible absolutes and the intolerances they inevitably espouse. (n.p.)

In “Evidence”, the development of robots reaches the stage where an android becomes indistinguishable from humans. This story anticipates later developments in cyberpunk where the lines between human and machine are blurred. In this story, a politician named Stephen Byerly is accused of being an android. He refuses to take an X- ray invoking his civil rights. The only way that he could be found out was to see if he adheres to the Three Laws, specifically, the First Law which prevents a robot from harming a human being. So Byerly is intentionally placed in a situation where he would have to lash out against a human being and break the First Law. When he does lash out by punching an obnoxious heckler, he proves his humanity. The development of robots into humanlike creatures provides an interesting study and critique of human nature. Innate violence seems to be one of the distinguishing factors in being human. Byerly, having proven his humanity through violence, continues his rise in politics and becomes the first World Co-ordinator in a new World Federation. The reader never finds out if Byerly is a human or a robot. Calvin suspects him to be a robot. Still, he was able to fool everyone into imagination that he broke the First Law by planting another humanoid robot as the heckler he had labelled. Byerly reappears in the final story, “The Evitable Conflict”. By this time, robots are running the world’s social and economic systems. To put it differently, they run the world. However, this world is unlike the gloomy dystopia imagined by those who fear being ruled by machines. The machines in this world still have humanity’s best interest in mind and are still governed by the Three Laws. In accordance with the First Law, a robot is prohibited from causing harm or rendering a human being incapacitated. It, in turn, poses a risk to robots, as human beings can cause harm to them. However, robots possess the capability to disregard explicit instructions issued by humans. This implies that humans do not necessarily know or do what is best for themselves and therefore the machines have taken action to keep them from harm. This is an important commentary on man and society and, considering the historical realities of world wars, the Cold War and the impending threat of nuclear holocaust at the time, the criticism may not be farfetched at all. Also, in the story, Byerly is investigating why small but easily identifiable mistakes are being made by the supposed infallible machines. Calvin deduces that these mistakes are intentional so as to discredit anti-robot forces on earth. Calvin’s statement to Byerly is shocking and poignant as a commentary of human history. Calvin says that Humanity has never really been in control of its own fate but has always been “...at the mercy of economic and sociological forces it did not understand—at the whims of climate and fortunes of war.”

The commentary on prevailing issues and the need to reflect upon the many ills besetting mankind are common themes in all of Asimov’s works. The *Foundation* trilogy, which consists of *Foundation* (1951), *Foundation and Empire* (1952) and *Second Foundation* (1953), deals with humanity’s destructive qualities, which could bring about its own downfall, and how ultimately science and technology can create new possibilities in breaking the cycle of rise and fall in human civilization. Asimov was inspired by Gibbon’s *Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire* and his meditation on how humanity builds itself up to great heights and then tears itself down again and again. This gave birth to the writing of the *Foundation* series. Set in the distant future where mankind has achieved interstellar travel and has colonized far off worlds across the galaxy. This “Galactic Empire” is the greatest and longest lasting civilization that humanity has ever achieved. Yet, even this great empire is headed for a fall because of the same age-old maladies that besiege all empires with time. This symbolic tale of the tragic and inherent faults that humans have as a species serves as a forewarning for the present civilization. The first book of the trilogy begins when the Galactic Empire is at the height of its power. However, the main protagonist, Hari Seldon, recognises the decay within the empire and predicts that its fall is imminent. Seldon, a mathematician, has devoted his life to the development of “psychohistory”, a “profound statistical science that deals with the reaction of human conglomerates to fixed social and economic stimuli” (Touponce, 76) In short, this science predicts the future by treating humanity as one massive series of mathematical equations. It is by using psychohistory that Seldon is able to predict the downfall of the current empire. Advancement in thought and learning has become stagnant. For that reason, the centre, the capital of the empire and Trantor are weakening. Being totally dependent upon other planets for its survival, Trantor has become weak and susceptible to attack. The vastness of the Galactic Empire makes it difficult for the centre to retain

control and influence especially on the peripheries. The historical equivalent of this would be the Roman Empire just a few decades before its downfall. An observable pattern is identified, similar to the Roman Empire, where subordinate kingdoms are becoming more powerful as the centre is unable to check this trend. Though these kingdoms are overburdened by population and a lack of resources, they are collaborating to conquer the centre.

The Galactic Empire slowly weakens as the subordinate planets start to break away. The efforts made to contain the nationalistic movements spreading through its colonies drains the empire economically and politically. There are many similarities that can be drawn between the Galactic Empire and the British Empire of this time. The British Empire, at the height of its power, controlled India, large swaths of Africa and China, Australia and Canada. Unable to stop growing nationalistic feelings, and weakened by its own vastness, the empire crumbles as its colonies gain independence. In her essay, "Psychohistory as a System of Knowledge for Social Development in Isaac Asimov's *Foundation*", Arushi Mathur writes:

Asimov's depiction of an apocalyptic world could perhaps also be in response to the socio-political atmosphere of the 1950s, that is, his contemporary environment. With the Second World War bringing in a post-humanist age and a severe existential angst, and the Cold War in full swing, it is clear why Asimov foresaw a future for the Galactic Empire where "Interstellar wars will be endless; interstellar trade will decay; population will decline; worlds will lose touch with the main body of the Galaxy..." In the novel, Seldon also claims that the fall is "dictated by a rising bureaucracy, a receding initiative, a freezing of caste, a damming of curiosity..." Finally, the time period in which the novel is set, the twelfth millennium, allows us to see through Asimov's vision of the future - humans are able to commute through space and inhabit various planets across the galaxy. What is remarkable here is that Asimov is able to imagine and conjure up the idea of interstellar travel even though the first spacewalk didn't take place until 1961, and the first moon-landing until 1969. (n.p.)

Paranoia grows as the fear of telepaths such as The Mule leads the Foundationists to invent a device that can jam telepathic abilities and cause telepaths great pain. They find and kill about 50 telepaths on Terminus believing that the Second Foundation is on Terminus itself. They reach this conclusion as Terminus is on the edge of the Milky Way, a disc, and a circle has no end. So, the opposite end is Terminus itself. They declare the Second Foundation destroyed. The Second Foundation is actually on Trantor, the old capital, the opposite "social" end of Terminus. Also, the Milky Way is a spiral and not a disc, so the edge traces to the centre. The main objective of Hari Seldon and the Foundationists is humanistic. Asimov was a prominent humanist and was even the president of the American Humanist Association for eight years starting from 1985. The *Foundation* series and *Robot* series have been interpreted by many critics as Asimov's attempt at pointing out the inherent problems plaguing humanity and finding solutions to these problems. Having lived through the most turbulent times in history (World War II, the atomic bomb and the Cold War), he is acutely aware of the cruelties and destructiveness that man is capable of. His world views are made quite apparent in his autobiography, *I, Asimov: A Memoir*, where he states that the Earth should not be cut up into hundreds of different sections, each inhabited by a self-defined segment of humanity that considers its own welfare and its own "national security" to be paramount above all other consideration. I am all for cultural diversity and would be willing to see each recognizable group value its cultural heritage. I am a New York patriot, for instance, and if I lived in Los Angeles, I would love to get together with other New York expatriates and sing "Give My Regards to Broadway." This sort of thing, however, should remain cultural and benign. I'm against it if it means that each group despises others and lusts to wipe them out. I'm against arming each little self-defined group with weapons with which to enforce its own prides and prejudices. [8] The Earth faces environmental problems right now that threaten the imminent destruction of civilization and the end of the planet as a liveable world. Humanity cannot afford to waste its financial and emotional resources on endless, meaningless quarrels between each group and all others. There must be a sense of globalism in which the world unites to solve the real problems that face all groups alike.

Can that be done? The question is equivalent to: Can humanity survive?

I am not a Zionist, then, because I don't believe in nations, and because Zionism merely sets up one more nation to trouble the world. It sets up one more nation to have "rights" and "demands" and "national security" and to feel it must guard itself against its neighbors.

There are no nations! There is only humanity. And if we don't come to understand that right soon, there will be no nations, because there will be no humanity. (n.p.)

This dedication to the good of humanity is what drives Asimov and the characters in his books. Some critics have taken this further and argued that the *Foundation* series is motivated by Utilitarianism. J. Joseph Miller states that

...Asimov expresses a commitment to promoting the greatest good for all of humanity, an explicitly utilitarian goal. One of the central questions in his fiction is how best to go about in achieving that goal.

In the second part of the novel, Montag realises that his wife is a lost cause as he cannot convince her to read books with him even though he recounts recent events to prove that something is really wrong with their existence. The arrival of Mildred's friend, Mrs. Bowles, interrupts them and Montag decides to go out and find Faber, an old man, who was once an English professor before books were banned. He carries a copy of the Bible that he had stolen from the old woman's house with him and finally, when he finds Faber, Faber is scared and reluctant to help him. Montag starts ripping pages off the Bible to force Faber into conceding to help guide him. When he returns home, he finds his wife and Mrs. Bowles busy watching the "parlour walls" as they always do. He switches it off and tries to have a conversation with them. Finding them incapable of any profound or independent thought, an enraged Montag tries to read to them from a book of poems. Mildred tells her friend that this is a tradition done by firemen once a year in order to prove how silly this practice is. The next day, Montag takes a book to his office and gives it to Beatty to remove suspicion. The book is tossed into the trash and Beatty tells Montag of a dream that he had where the two of them were fighting by quoting books. A fire alarm suddenly goes off and they all rush into the fire truck heading, unknowingly, towards Montag's house.

In the last part of the book, they reach Montag's house and Beatty tells Montag that Montag's wife and her friend had reported him. He orders Montag to burn his own house. Mildred walks out of the house and never acknowledges Montag, only traumatised by the prospect of losing her precious "parlour wall". Beatty gives Montag a flamethrower to burn down his house and upon discovering the earpiece given to Montag by Faber, vows to hunt down Faber as well. At this, Montag aims the flamethrower at Beatty, who, instead of being afraid, taunts Montag into killing him. Montag burns his boss alive, knocks down a co-worker and destroys a mechanical hound. He escapes, limping from the attack by the mechanical hound, but as he leaves, realises that Beatty had always wanted to die and had goaded him to kill him, even providing him with the weapon. He manages to reach Faber's house who tells him to escape the city to the countryside and find an exiled group of book-lovers who live there. Covering all his tracks, Montag reaches the countryside and meets the exiled group and their leader, Granger. From a small portable TV that they carry, Montag learns that an innocent man has been captured and killed and reported as being him. Soon after, bombers destroy the city with nuclear weapons but Montag and the group manage to survive. The following morning, Granger teaches Montag and the group about the phoenix and the similarity between mankind and the legendary bird. Granger explains that mankind, however, can learn from its mistakes and learn not to repeat them. The group then returns to the city to rebuild it.

Donald Watt in "Burning Bright: *Fahrenheit 451* as Symbolic Dystopia", analyzes the novel's "rich body of symbols emanating from fire to shed a variety of illuminations on future and contemporary man" and that, not only does the novel famously describe the destructive burning of books, it also "describes the warming campfires of the book people; the conflagration of nuclear war", and "the affirming flame of Clarisse and altruistic individualism" (36). Speaking on the enduring appeal and importance of the book in the wake of censorship and the onslaught of modern media, Rodney A. Smolla, states that

Fahrenheit 451 still speaks to us, vibrantly and passionately, and vexes and disturbs. The novel has sold millions copies, was reset for a fiftieth anniversary printing, and continues to be assigned reading in middle school, high school, and college courses. That power to endure is well worth contemplation, both for what it says about imagination, and, more powerfully, for what it teaches past, our present, and our own imagined future. First Amendment jurisprudence has taken giant leaps since *Fahrenheit 451* was written and American society has managed to avoid the worst of the censorship described. Yet we have not been so fortunate in overcoming other demons of modernity that Bradbury revealed.

Overwhelmed by the frenetic speed and hypnotic appeal of digital and virtual genuine human relationships; we rush past the precious, physical and sensory moments that bring substance to our being; quietude for genuine reflection, peace.

Yet, even in this seemingly utopian world, there are dissidents in the form of Wainwright and the Freedom League. Regardless of how much better the Overlords have made conditions for humanity, the submission of one's sovereignty and the mysterious refusal of the aliens to show their physical selves left many humans with a sense of distrust. They kidnap Stormgren only to find out that the Overlord, Karellen, had used him as bait to flush out the members of the Freedom League. Karellen later instructs Stormgren that the Overlords will reveal themselves after fifty years. This greatly diminishes the cause of the Freedom League.

After fifty years, the Overlords have created a single government. They reveal themselves as promised and they look exactly like medieval drawings representation of the Devil, with dark black skin, giant wings, horns and a barbed tail. Though initially shocked and repulsed by their appearance as religious conditioning have taught them to fear such appearance, it soon wears off as religion on Earth becomes almost eradicated. This is achieved by a machine that allows a human to look back at any point of time in the past and is therefore able to view the true lives of people like Christ and Muhammad. Earth has become a utopia, where war and violence are a thing of the past. Resources are distributed equally and everyone is guaranteed food, water and shelter. There are no thefts and former methods of trade and commerce are abandoned. In this section of the book, Clarke commentary on the two most powerful political forces at the time is quite revealing:

Ever the pragmatic scientist, Clarke uses *Childhood's End* to push the invasion scenario beyond shock-and-awe and into a complex political event with serious sociological repercussions. The aliens (Overlords) engage in diplomacy, with occasional inflexible commands and, on the rare occasions when that fails, they exercise a metaphysical manipulation that's more paternalistic than aggressive. Rather than the frenzied running and swooning of WOTW, the humans in *Childhood's End* react warily, but their distrust eventually fades to shrugging acceptance, if not absolute faith.

They behave much like a nation under the sway of a new government. It's easy to see some mid-twentieth century commentary considering the benevolent fascism of the Overlords, and the bland utopia that results from their rule. "When the Overlords had abolished war and hunger and disease, they had also abolished adventure". The arts and sciences are sacrificed as well. But not only is Clarke commenting on the burgeoning communist governments of his era, he is also sharing his vision for a world of mixed human race and no political borders, as evidenced in the Overlords' influence over the deterioration of political borders, and the freedom of travel and interaction enjoyed by his characters. The Overlords maintain that the human race cannot advance to its undisclosed fate until they are unified as one planetary utopia.

The paranoia of the Cold War and the notion that humanity is "trapped in perpetual childhood, unable to relinquish its fears, superstitions, and us-against-them ideologies," remains as poignant today as it did when *Childhood's End* was first published.

Clarke is most well-known for his book *2001: A Space Odyssey*, published in 1968. Its fame is owed, in part, to its association with the Stanley Kubrick film of the same name. Both were developed alongside each other by the author and the director and the book was published after the film's release. The story is based on many other short stories that Clarke had published many years before including "The Sentinel of Eternity", first published in 1951. The plot of the novel revolves around the appearance of a large crystalline monolith at different times of human history. Each time it appears, it causes a leap in the evolution of mankind. The first time it appeared was around 3 million B.C. where man had not even evolved into Homo-erectus yet. Still much more ape than man, the monolith appears to a group of hominids and inspires them to develop tools for killing animals for meat. This ensured the survival and hence, the gradual evolution of the species as it was facing a food crisis. They also learn to use these tools to protect themselves from their predators, and also from their rivals.

The novel then jumps to the year 1999 A.D. where the monolith appears again on the moon. By this time, mankind has established a moon base and found the monolith in one of the moon's craters. Scientists refer to it as Tycho Magnetic Anomaly One or TMA-1, as it is found to be causing magnetic disturbances. When sunlight falls upon the TMA-1, it emits a radio transmission towards

Saturn. The scientists discover that the radio transmission is directed at Japetus, one of the moons of Saturn. Mission One, a spaceship, is then sent to Saturn with a five-member crew and an artificially intelligent computer known as Hal 9000. Only two of the crew members are conscious while the rest are in suspended animation. Hal maintains and controls most of the functions of the spaceship. Hal begins to malfunction and when threatened with disconnection, defends itself by killing the human crew members. Only Bowman is able to survive and he manages to disconnect Hal. He later learns that the true purpose of Mission One is to go to Japetus in hope of finding the source of TMA-1. Hal's malfunction is due to the conflict it felt at having to keep this secret from the crew members and having to report all observations fully. After months alone on the ship, Bowman approaches Japetus and finds another monolith, identical in shape to TMA-1 but much larger. Bowman then boards a pod to investigate the monolith further and as he draws closer, the monolith opens and pulls him in. Before he vanishes, he is heard by Mission Control proclaiming the famous line, "The thing's hollow—it goes on forever—and—oh my God!—it's *full of stars!*" . Bowman is transported through the "Star Gate" to different star systems and sees other life forms and spaceships and wreckages of ancient civilizations. He transcends his biological body and evolves into an immortal "Star Child" that can live and travel in space. He returns to Earth just when a nuclear warhead has been fired and detonates it in the air saving Earth from nuclear destruction.

As with most science fiction novels during the Golden Age, because of contemporary events, the misuse of technological advancement is also an important theme in Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. Besides this, the idea that man's current state is not the final evolutionary step is a hopeful thought for a better future for mankind. As he relinquishes his biological trappings, he also becomes free from all the evils of the flesh.

Heinlein was regarded as one of the "Big Three" of science fiction, alongside Clarke and Asimov. He was born in Butler, Missouri, in the United States on July 7, 1907, and he earned his degree from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1929. He subsequently completed five years of naval service before enrolling in graduate physics and mathematics programmes at the University of California, Los Angeles. His debut story, "Life-Line," was published in the action-adventure pulp magazine *Astounding Science Fiction* after he graduated from college and went on to become a professional writer. He kept up his writing for that magazine until 1942, when he took a brief break to reenlist in the navy and serve as an engineer during World War II. In 1947, Heinlein started writing again. His debut book, *Rocket Ship Galileo*, was published in 1947. After that, he wrote other novels and story collections, including books for kids and teenagers. Over the years, his fame increased, peaking following the release of his best-known book, *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961). For four of his novels, he received the Hugo Award, and in 1974, he was dubbed the first Science Fiction Writers Grand Master. His writings were renowned for their recurrent social topics, including themes of individual freedom and independence, one's place in society, the pervasive effect of religious organisations on humanity, and the propensity to suppress unconventional ideas. Invading aliens is a common theme in science fiction, but Heinlein's *Puppet Masters* departs from the genre's canon by having the aliens infiltrate humans' minds rather than using physical force to exert psychological control. In the book, slug-like monsters invade Earth in flying saucers, attaching themselves to people's backs to take over their nerve systems and make them into puppets. Sam, Mary, and the Old Man are the novel's three primary protagonists. The Old Man, whose real name is never made public, is the director of the covert government agency "Section." Sam and Mary are agents sent to investigate a flying saucer report and also the mysterious disappearance of the six agents sent previously. They discover that the slugs are steadily taking over Des Moines. Meanwhile, a slug manages to hitch onto one of the agents as they are returning to Washington but the team discovers the slug and are able to capture it. However, it attaches itself to Sam and uses his skills and knowledge to escape.

Completely under the control of the slug, Sam begins to help more slugs infiltrate the city, using the Constitution Club as a recruiting centre. Finally, the Old Man captures Sam, takes him to Section's new headquarters, and forces him to allow himself to be taken by the slug again. Under drug-induced hypnosis Sam reveals that the slugs come from Titan, the sixth moon of Saturn. Later, the President and Congress, realising that the United States has been infiltrated by aliens, mandate a law that requires people to go naked to demonstrate that they are not carrying slugs. As the army prepares a counterattack in the most heavily infested areas, Sam goes alone to Kansas City to get an estimate of

the number of slugs involved. There he learns that he can kill a slug by crushing it with his hand. He also discovers that the slugs reproduce through fission. Later, through Mary's episode with repressed memories of childhood, they learn that she was possessed by a slug when she was a child but that she escaped it at that time as she was suffering from a Nine-day fever and the slug on her body could not survive it. The government used biological warfare to culture the Nine-Day Fever germs and create a treatment in large enough quantities to treat the entire nation. They infect those who have been taken over by the slugs and enable them to flee into strongly afflicted areas. Thousands of medical personnel are dropped in certain regions many days later to treat the individuals whose slugs have perished. The last healthy slug in the city takes control of the Old Man, who then flees to the Yucatan to resume its attempt to subjugate humanity after knocking out Sam in the anti-car. When Sam awakens, he kicks the controls, causing the air-car to accelerate quickly and smash the Old Man into the seat, destroying the slug. Years later, Sam and Mary go on a space voyage to Saturn in order to wipe out the slugs.

However, beyond just nationalistic patriotism and opposing political and social ideologies, Heinlein had a deeper philosophical aversion to communism:

Heinlein's novel belongs to a pervasive sub-genre of films and fiction of the postwar period in which the concomitant paranoia of communist infiltration and nuclear war surface in figurations of alien invasions. Though it is easy to read most, if not all, alien invasion narratives from the period simply as allegories of the Soviet ideological and nuclear threat, to do so is somewhat reductive: as has been suggested elsewhere, the gesture equating invading aliens with Soviet forces ignores more nuanced anxieties pervading the Cold War era that had as much to do with domestic mores as with the spectre of incursion and infiltration. In other words, the fears of communist collectivism were balanced in parts by the suspicion that erosion of individualism was also at work in the culture of consensus.

Communist collectivism is seen by Heinlein as a dangerous trend towards forced conformity and the subversion of individuality. Heinlein fears that in this pursuit for creating a society that is meant to benefit all, the individual may disappear.

The Golden age was instrumental in establishing the science fiction as a separate and distinct genre of literature. The idiosyncrasies that differentiate it from other forms of speculative literature are constituted in a more defined manner thereby making it easier for readers to connect with the genre. This in turn, led to an immense growth in the genre's popularity, as well as, to the increase in the number of science fiction writers. Moreover, contemporary world events also made the genre relatable to a vast number of the reading public who saw in the stories, a reflection of their times and a warning about things to come in the years ahead.

The Golden age, however, has also been heavily criticised by later critics as propaganda literature for right wing parties, marked by immaturity and lack of depth.

CONCLUSION:

The age also produced some of the most revered writers of the genre. Asimov, Bradbury, Clarke and Heinlein are still widely read till the present day and the issues taken up by them are studied with great interest by scholars. What differentiated these writers from the rest was their acute awareness of the history of science fiction as a tool for social commentary. More than just making tales to "sell" to the public, a conscience for the betterment of humanity guided their efforts in critiquing the evils of society and in providing cautionary tales for unchecked contemporary habits. In spite of many criticisms levied against the age, the influence of these writers, and the Golden age itself, are felt till present day in both academia and popular culture.

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