

## Science Fiction Book Club

### Interview with Michael Page (Dec 2022)

*Michael Page is the author of a number of books which examine the history and cultural importance of science fiction. He has published analyses on the life and works of Frederik Pohl, James E. Gunn, edited two books of Gunn's critical writings, and edited a collection of stories by Miles J. Breuer a "forgotten" science fiction writer from the Pulp Era. He is an Assistant Professor of Practice at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, and regularly teaches courses on science fiction, science fiction film, Alfred Hitchcock, and Film Genre. Page is currently doing research for a two-book critical study of Astounding during the Golden Age.*

#### **John Grayshaw: What is the Golden Age of Science Fiction?**

This becomes a more complex question as we move further along in time! After all, many of the science fiction stories written in the "Golden Age" and after were presumably set in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century or in the early decades of the 21<sup>st</sup>! Similarly, terms like the "Golden Age" and the "New Wave" were formulated to describe periods in science fiction that, in truth, were only separated by a decade or so (if even that), which are both now in the (somewhat) distant past. Arguably, the New Wave itself is, perhaps, simply the late phase of the Golden Age. In any case, we usually think of the Golden Age as the decade of the 1940s that was dominated by the magazine *Astounding* and its editor John W. Campbell, wherein most of the major writers that would dominate the field for the next fifty years started their careers – Asimov, Heinlein, Van Vogt, Sturgeon, Simak, Clarke, Merril, Blish, etc.

**Bill Rogers: Michael, I'm a bit hazy on this period of literary SF, so forgive me if my questions aren't really germane.**

**Did leftist/progressive writers like those in the Futurians submit many stories to 'Astounding'? If so, did Campbell publish much that work and how did he relate to the writers themselves, him having a reputation for being staunchly conservative?**

The Futurians submitted regularly to *Astounding* but most of them were still very young. With the exception of Asimov, there's not very many stories by Futurians in *Astounding* until the late 1940s. By then, Blish, Kornbluth, Merril, Knight all appear several times in the magazine. I don't think Campbell rejected any of their work because it was overtly leftist. Like Asimov, Pohl would visit Campbell regularly and talk over story ideas and other interests. Campbell became more conservative in later years.

**Damo Mac Choiligh: When I first came across discussions of this period of SF history, I learnt that Campbell and other editors wanted to make SF a respectable literary form, a genre that could boast writers who can convey their ideas with competent, grown-up writing. They**

wanted it to 'come of age'. Therefore Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein and the others published in *Astounding/Analog*, *F&SF* and so on were good quality writers, in terms of their bread-and-butter prose, replacing the previous juvenile versions of SF. Were they really that much better than what had gone before? Could they really compare in quality with other writers of that time? I ask this question as once I passed the age of 20, I found the answer was no. Only Bradbury really stands up from this time as a genuinely good writer, whereas much of what was published during the New Wave is still at least readable.

Generally, yes, it's better than most of what appeared in the magazines in the twenties and thirties. Some of this, I think, has to do with shifts in cultural styles and literary tastes, broadly speaking, that happened in the mid-1930s. For instance, the cultural "style" of a 1932 film is quite different than, say, a 1939 film – and not just because of the technical limitations of early sound in the former. And, of course, those styles and tastes have shifted several more times since then.

It's worth noting that most mainstream/literary writers of the period would be judged not that great either to a modern reader. I once had one of my classes review stories from "Best American Short Stories" volumes from the twenties and thirties, and most of the stories weren't very interesting and most of the writers have been long forgotten. Also, I'd say there are plenty of New Wave stories that are now unreadable – take a look at some of the stories in Judith Merril's *England Swings SF*, for example.

**Catherine Berkenfield: What do women authors of the Golden Age have to tell us about the technologization of the home and family and are there exceptions that anticipated women's changing relationships to work after WWII?**

That's an interesting question and one I'm going to think about more deeply when I start on a chapter on C. L. Moore and Henry Kuttner. I think the Kuttner and Moore stories that appeared in *Astounding* (under Moore's own name and the pseudonyms Lewis Padgett and Laurence O'Donnell) particularly engage with how new technologies have the potential to complicate society, home, and family. I call this "technological befuddlement," and the Kuttners were the best writers on this topic in *Astounding* in the stories involving Professor Gallegher ("The Twonky", for example), "Private Eye," and others. Judith Merril's classic "That Only a Mother," published in *Astounding* in 1948, is another great example. This kind of story became central to *Galaxy* magazine in the 1950s, and some of the women writers that frequently appeared there were Evelyn E. Smith, Kit Reed, Rosel George Brown, and Miriam Allen DeFord.

**Damo Mac Choiligh: Here is an alternate history question about science fiction itself; how crucial was the Golden age period of science fiction, in particular the US magazines at the heart of that movement, to the development of SF? If we had not had Campbell, Groff**

**Conklin Horace Gold et al and the writers they developed, do you think we would still have a vibrant SF as we see it now?**

Interesting question! Probably not, because the discourse and culture (fandom being a large part of that) may not have coalesced the way it did. SF is the only genre that has developed a substantial critical discourse around itself; and that's not just from academics. SF's critical discourse started with the fan letters and fanzines and was already internally very sophisticated (Damon Knight, James Blish, James Gunn) long before academics got involved. One of the most important early academicians was Thomas Clareson, and he came out of fandom, published some critical writing in the pulps while in graduate school, and then founded the first SF academic journal, *Extrapolation*, in 1959.

It's interesting that you mention Conklin. In his book *Evaporating Genres*, Gary Wolfe has a chapter discussing the importance of the post-war hardcover anthologies by Conklin and others that mostly featured stories from *Astounding*, and how those anthologies placed SF into public and university libraries, establishing an early canon and legitimacy for the genre. It's through those anthologies that most readers encountered the Golden Age. (One of the first SF books I read was a paperback selection from the seminal 1946 anthology *Adventures in Time and Space*).

Campbell and Gold were both distinct personalities and both put their own distinct vision on their magazines. I'm not sure if that is true within other genre category magazines or if it's true of many other SF magazines from the period.

**Stevie Book: The July 1939 issue of Astounding Science Fiction is often cited as the beginning of the Golden Age. Why that issue in particular?**

That issue introduced A. E. Van Vogt, with his essential story, "Black Destroyer," and it also marked the first appearance in *Astounding* of Asimov, with the story "Trends" (though Asimov had already published a couple of stories in *Amazing* that Campbell had rejected; and he was also a regular voice in the Letters column since his early teens). The following August issue had Heinlein's first story, "Life-Line," and the September had the first Theodore Sturgeon story, "Ether Breather." So those three issues introduced the four core writers of Golden Age SF. It's also worth noting that the July 1939 would have been the issue on the newsstands when the First World Science Fiction Convention was held in New York City on July 2-4. BTW, the August 1939 issue also had a story called "Heavy Planet" by Lee Gregor; it was written by a young fan named Milton Rothman, but rewritten by Frederik Pohl (like Asimov, then 19), to make it publishable, and is now credited as a collaboration between Rothman and Pohl. So arguably Pohl's career was launched in that issue as well.

**Stevie Book: When did the Golden Age come to a close? What heralded the end?**

Again, dates can shift as the timeline expands. A case could be made that the 1950s are part of the Golden Age and that the Golden Age doesn't close until the advent of the New Wave circa 1960, and that's probably now a more accurate approach to take. However, a case can also be made that it ends with the December issue of *Astounding* in 1949, which features Asimov's final "Foundation" story and Heinlein's "Gulf," his first story in the magazine since he left it in 1942. The May 1950 issue of *Astounding* is, perhaps, another possibility, as that was the issue where Campbell first introduced Hubbard's Dianetics, which seems to have move Campbell and *Astounding* into another direction. To be less specific than a particular magazine issue, 1950 saw the end of Campbell's dominance when *Galaxy* was launched in October and *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* became established. Another factor was increasing book publication and a broader embrace of SF in American culture.

**Stevie Book: How did the established writers of Gernsbackian sciencefiction react to this new Golden Age of Science Fiction ushered in by John Campbell?**

A lot of them stopped getting published or moved into other areas of pulp fiction. Others, like Jack Williamson and Clifford Simak, developed along with the change in style and continued as major writers for the next 50 years. One writer who was pretty prolific in early SF, Captain S.P. Meek, wrote a series of juvenile novels about dogs (I found one in an antique shop called *Pat, the Seeing Eye Dog* several years ago), which was probably more lucrative than SF! Nat Schachner, who continued to appear in *Astounding* in the early 1940s, went on to write biographies of American presidents; again, probably much more lucrative than SF. Stanton Coblenz focused on poetry and literary criticism. In other words, some of the writers simply went into other fields, which perhaps quashes the idea that they were "bad" writers.

**Damo Mac Choiligh: What place does science hold in the story of the Golden age science fiction? The cliché is that there were several important writers who were established scientists, there most noteworthy example being Asimov, but how true is this? Were there many genuine scientists in the genre at this time? Conversely, how was the genre at this time viewed by scientists; were there many working scientists and engineers among the genre fans?**

There's the story that the FBI investigated Campbell because stories were appearing in *Astounding* that described atomic reactions and imagined atomic weapons. Campbell had been a grad student in atomic physics at Duke and M.I.T. Campbell said he knew something must be going on at Los Alamos because *Astounding* had an inordinately high number of subscriptions there; the same was true at Oak Ridge. There were a number of scientists that wrote SF and every issue had at least one scientific article, sometimes two. Willy Ley was a frequent contributor. The letters column, called "Brass Tacks," was often filled with long debates about scientific questions raised by the stories, and often the letter writers were highlighted by their

scientific credentials. Some of the most important public discussion of atomic physics and its implications was happening in the pages of *Astounding* in the late 1940s, as well as important discussion of the prospects of space travel. Campbell wrote a book called *The Atomic Story* published in 1947 by Henry Holt, a major publisher; the copy in my university library is well worn. By the 1950s, much of this valuable discussion in *Astounding* was replaced by Campbell's obsession with psi-phenomena and other hobby horses.

**Damo Mac Choiligh: How important was the experience of a generation of men in the Second World War to the Golden Age of Science Fiction? Is it possible that the optimism of the older writers who saw the United States assume superpower status fueled the golden age optimistic view of science and technology until the mid-40s, but the experience of those who were younger men during the war, often combatants, eventually undercut that optimism and brought that age to an end? How would this compare with the experience of British SF writers, for whom the war was a clear end-of-empire moment?**

The comparison to the British writers is very interesting, especially as I think about Brian Aldiss, who served in the Pacific Theater. Clarke, of course, also served and helped develop radar. Aldiss would certainly be classed as a melancholy, romantic pessimist; whereas we think of Clarke as fundamentally optimistic.

We, of course, see more apocalyptic SF following the war, though even pre-war SF has a lot of apocalypses or American decline in it – Heinlein's *If This Goes On...* and *Sixth Column*, for example. For that matter, Heinlein's "Universe" is essentially an apocalyptic story set inside a generations starship. Fritz Leiber's *Gather, Darkness!* appeared in *Astounding* in 1944. SF, starting with Wells, always seems to balance between utopia and apocalypse, sometimes in the same work!

I'm reminded of a remark Frederik Pohl made at the Heinlein Centennial in 2007, that he was a short-term pessimist, but a long-term optimist. My dear late friend James Gunn had much the same view. Both served overseas in the war. Jim had a very optimistic view of humanity's future, yet most of Jim's novels are dystopian and/or apocalyptic. I highly recommend Jim's novel *The Joy Makers*, which still very much resonates.

**Bill Rogers: As a sort of follow-up to Damo's last question, how did the advent of the Cold War and its domestic repercussions influence/affect the GA and its writers?**

I would say that from the late 1940s to the early 1990s, that SF is the literature of the Cold War. It's through SF that the Cold War and its implications for the present and the future is most fully engaged. Notably, in stories such as Sturgeon's "Thunder and Roses" (1947), Merril's "That Only

a Mother" (1948), Chan Davis's "The Nightmare" (1946), and others, the implications of the Cold War were being mapped out before the Cold War even began. L. Ron Hubbard had an interesting political novel in *Astounding* in 1947 called *The End is Not Yet*, which, oddly, has never been reprinted by his organization or anyone else. It struck me as an interesting take on near-future global politics when I read it.

**Dave Hook: How did SF and its writers, editors, etc., differ from before and after the GA?**

A couple of things come to mind: the field expanded greatly in the 1950s so that writers had more opportunities to make a living at writing. Also, writers "matured" (that is, grew older, as we all do), and the field did along with them. In the 1970s, as academic criticism of SF came in, there were a number of reflective anthologies and memoirs by various Golden Age writers – Asimov's two-volume autobiography and the anthology *Before the Golden Age*, Damon Knight's book on the Futurians, Pohl's memoir *The Way the Future Was*, among several others. I read a lot of those in the 80s when I was a teenager and college student. Asimov was younger than I am now when he published *Before the Golden Age*. In other words, the Golden Age writers were only in their 50s in the 1970s. The field itself was a wholly contemporary literature until around the mid-1980s because almost all of the formative Golden Age writers were still living and still writing. Once that generation began dying off, the genre becomes increasingly historical. And now, with the passing of my friend Jim Gunn in 2020, perhaps the last of the Golden Agers, that divide between historical SF and contemporary SF is clearly demarcated.

**Richard Whyte: Would you say that 'Astounding's 1944 publication of the atomic bomb short story 'Deadline', by Cleve Cartmill and its subsequent passage into legend was overall a good thing for Science Fiction?**

Yes. Though the story itself doesn't stand out all that much. But it does illustrate that SF was engaging with future technologies and their implications in meaningful ways, and, of course, these kind of technological issues are central to our complex culture today. Think also of Murray Leinster's 1946 story "A Logic Named Joe," which imagines the implications of what we now take for granted as a wired, internet society.

**Damo Mac Choiligh: What is the legacy of the Golden Age and how long do you think this legacy will persist? Do you think younger people now will be reading the classics from this era in ten or twenty years time? Has Sf moved on from it?**

The classics will endure. Asimov's *Foundation* series and *I, Robot* are still standard reading and have entered the general readership beyond SF. Heinlein continues to be read and I think Moore and Kuttner have had a bit of a revival. Campbell's own "Who Goes There?" will endure just as the movies based on it will. A lot of my students, surprisingly, prefer the older SF over

newer works. Of course, SF has moved on, too, and many readers now start with Octavia Butler or the cyberpunks, the “old classics,” for them.

**John Grayshaw: Has the function of the editor changed much from The Golden Age’s day to today? Is an editor more or less directive of the content, for example?**

I don’t think so. Nor was it all that typical then, Campbell and Gold being the exceptions. I’m not sure that level of editorial input was happening in other fields either. The type of story conferences that Campbell had with his writers has shifted from the editorial office to the writers’ workshop. Many writers fine tune their stories in workshops before they submit them to the editors.

**John Grayshaw: Who are some of your favorite Sci-fi authors from this period?**

I’m in the process of re-reading Heinlein’s *Astounding* stories in the order they appeared, and I will do the same with Asimov, Moore and Kuttner, and Van Vogt as I prepare this new book. Heinlein and Asimov are writers I return to frequently. Now, often on audiobook, as most of their work is available in that format. Heinlein’s “Universe” blew my mind when I first read it at age fourteen, and I recaptured some of that “sense of wonder” when I re-read it between Christmas and New Year’s. I’ve reached the age where I don’t have much left to read by the major authors (though there are so many books I probably won’t get to them all), so it’s fun to stumble upon a paperback by one of them I haven’t read yet or don’t have in my library yet. I love Fred Pohl, of course, but since I read everything he wrote when I did the book on him, I haven’t reached the point of re-reading, with the exception of *The Space Merchants* and “Day Million,” which I use in my classes. I may be getting enough distance from Pohl (8 years) that I’ll start re-reading some of his novels.

**John Grayshaw: What are some of your favorite novels and stories from this era?**

The aforementioned “Universe” by Heinlein; his stories “The Green Hills of Earth” and “Requiem,” and most of the rest of his stuff. Van Vogt’s “Black Destroyer” and *Slan* are fun. Asimov’s *I, Robot* sequence. C. L. Moore’s “No Woman Born.” Sturgeon’s “Thunder and Roses.” Leinster’s “First Contact” and “A Logic Named Joe.” Clarke’s *Against the Fall of Night*. Bradbury’s *The Martian Chronicles*. Not exactly genre SF, but I return to Orwell’s *Animal Farm* and *1984* every four or five years.

**John Grayshaw: Why do you think that this is such a popular period in science fiction?**

It is the foundation (pun intended) of the genre and its central discourse. And I think it still speaks to the concerns (and hopes) we have in the modern world.

**John Grayshaw: What (if any) are some of the themes that unify the science fiction works of this period?**

Future technology (some of which we now take for granted), space exploration, energy (atomic and other forms), politics and sociology, hope for the future coupled with despair for it (in other words, that balance between optimism and pessimism), scientific discovery, the future of the human species.

**John Grayshaw: At this time were science fiction magazines read more than novels? And which did authors make more money from?**

If we confine ourselves to the 1940s, there was no book market for SF until the end of the decade when some of the specialty presses began publishing SF books. So the magazines were read more simply because there really were no novels, except those SF books that weren't part of genre SF (e.g. Olaf Stapledon, Wells, etc.). However, those specialty presses didn't pay very well, if at all, so the magazines were the best route for making any income from SF. That's why Heinlein started publishing his stories in "slick" mainstream magazines after the war – there was interest in those publications for SF, but also it paid a lot better – and, of course, his juvenile novels in hardcover by Scribner's paid well. By the mid-fifties, books became a bigger part of the SF marketplace and by the early 60s were starting to overtake the magazines in importance.

**John Grayshaw: What can you tell us about the experiences of female science fiction authors of this period?**

C. (Catherine) L. Moore was prominent in *Astounding*, writing mostly in collaboration with her husband, Henry Kuttner, and under the pseudonyms Lewis Padgett and Laurence O'Donnell. But a number of stories were published under her own name, most notably "No Woman Born." Leigh Brackett published some early stories in *Astounding*, but much of her work appeared in other magazines like *Planet Stories* and *Thrilling Wonder Stories*. She also wrote in the much more lucrative field of movie screenplays, scripting Howard Hawk's *The Big Sleep* as well as westerns, among others. Brackett is credited for the script of *The Empire Strikes Back*, her last before her death in 1978. Judith Merril published her early stories in *Astounding*. Van Vogt's wife E. Mayne Hull published a number of stories in *Astounding* during the war, though some of those stories were later credited to Van Vogt alone in book publication, making their authorship somewhat uncertain. There's a claim that Campbell rejected stories by Leslie F. Stone because she was a woman, but the fact that Stone didn't have any stories published after 1940 anywhere else makes that somewhat suspect. By the way, later on in the 1960s, Anne McCaffrey was a major contributor to *Analog* (*Astounding*'s title after 1960). Her *Ship who Sang* series and the first Pern stories appeared in the magazine.



**John Grayshaw: At the time, who were the most successful/well known science fiction writers of this period? Are they the same ones that are still associated with the period today?**

Heinlein had enormous impact on the other writers as his stories came out. His reputation as the top writer in the field was almost instantaneous. It's interesting to look back at Asimov's trajectory – it was a slow build up. The *Foundation* and Robot stories were published over a period of years. The first *Foundation* story appeared in 1942 and the last in 1949, then they were collected in the three volumes *Foundation*, *Foundation and Earth*, and *Second Foundation* in the early 1950s. The Robot stories appeared from 1941 to 1950. Asimov didn't really become a big name until the book collections appeared. Van Vogt was hugely popular, prolific, and influential at the time. I'm not sure how often Van Vogt is still read today or which of his books are still in print. Campbell himself would have had the reputation as a major writer who mostly stopped writing when he became *Astounding's* editor. L. Ron Hubbard was prolific and popular. And then there was E. E. "Doc" Smith, whose influence was enormous through the *Lensman* novels that appeared throughout the 1940s, but his work is hard to read today. Nonetheless, the very first video game created at M.I.T. in the early 1960s, "Space War," was inspired by the *Lensman* saga, and its influence can be felt still in any galaxy-spanning space adventure, like *Star Wars* or *Guardians of the Galaxy*.

**John Grayshaw: Who are some of the authors in this period who are particularly intriguing but may be largely forgotten today?**

I don't know if it's forgotten now or not, but Clifford Simak's *City* should be more widely read. Robots and uplifted dogs with an environmental message.

**John Grayshaw: How did you become interested in researching the Golden Age of Science Fiction?**

I became a devoted reader of science fiction in 1981, age 14, when I read *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame Volume IIA*, which contained such Golden Age novellas as Heinlein's "Universe," Jack Williamson's "With Folded Hands," Moore and Kuttner's "Vintage Season," and Sturgeon's "Baby is Three." The first paperbacks I found at the local thrift store shortly thereafter introduced me to Asimov, Van Vogt, Bradbury, and others. Soon after that, I discovered *Analog* magazine (the name of *Astounding* since 1960) at a grocery store magazine rack and Pohl's novel *The Cool War*. And after that, various anthologies in the library and at used book stores. My first introduction to James Gunn, my late friend, was the first volume of his *The Road to Science Fiction* anthologies; a copy was in the paperback rack in my small town high school English classroom. So it's been an interest for 40 years. As time went on, becoming connected with Fred Pohl and James Gunn, brought a more intense interest in the period. I was invited to write the chapter on the Golden Age for *The Cambridge History of Science Fiction* several years

back and now that I'm moving into the later part of my academic career, I think it's time to write a more comprehensive study of the period, as it has become, as previously mentioned, a historical era of literary history; no longer a "contemporary" moment.

**John Grayshaw: What are some fun anecdotes about your research? Like quirky, unexpected, or amusing discoveries?**

Years ago, when I was researching the Miles J. Breuer volume at the Jack Williamson Library at Eastern New Mexico University, I came across a Christmas postcard that Heinlein sent to Williamson in 1945. On the postcard, Heinlein had drawn a mushroom cloud and another drawing of the Earth with an atomic rocket missile plunging toward it. The card reads: "NEVERTHELESS / The Heinleins / (Bob and Leslyn) / Wish You / One Last Merry Christmas.

Another anecdote that's stuck with me in the near sixteen years since I made that trip to the Williamson Library involves a series of letters Edmond Hamilton sent Williamson circa 1931 or '32. Hamilton wrote Williamson that he had bought a car and was learning to drive. A few weeks later, Hamilton wrote that he had bought this new device called a portable radio for the car. Shortly after that, Hamilton wrote that he sold the car because he almost had several accidents while fiddling with the radio. That story has always struck me as illustrating the complications with regard to new technologies that many SF stories illustrate.

**John Grayshaw: What information did you find that really surprised you?**

Although the ideas behind Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics are explored and articulated throughout the Robot stories that appeared in *Astounding*, they are not fully encoded into "Laws" until "The Evidable Conflict," which appeared in the June 1950 issue and is the final story in the *I, Robot* collection. In fact, the first story in which the Three Laws were sketched out was the March 1942 story "Runaround," and in the original printing of that story they are called "Rules," not laws.

In the original version of "The Evidable Conflict," the Three Laws are embedded in a discussion between Susan Calvin and Stephen Byerly. In *I, Robot*, the Three Laws have been taken out of that discussion and instead appear at the front of the book. However, there is a very interesting revision of the language of the Second Law between that found in the original "The Evidable Conflict" and what appears in *I, Robot*. The now familiar Second Law reads: "A Robot must obey orders given it by human beings except when such orders would conflict with the First Law." In the original "The Evidable Conflict," Dr. Calvin recites the Second Law as this: "All robots must obey the orders of all qualified human beings as long as those orders don't conflict with the First Law." The important word here is qualified. That's quite an interesting change and I suppose it could have been Campbell that inserted it in the magazine version.

**John Grayshaw: What was Fandom like during this period? What were conventions like during this period?**

As I mentioned, the First World Con happened in New York as the July 1939 issue of *Astounding* was on the newsstands. Jack Williamson was there and met many of the young fans (Pohl, Kornbluth, Blish, Asimov, etc.). Forry Ackerman and Ray Bradbury came by train from Los Angeles. Like the Futurians, Bradbury was still a teenager and hadn't yet published any stories outside of fanzines. There's a famous photo of Ackerman dressed up as Flash Gordon standing on a hotel balcony overlooking the city. That's the beginning of cosplay.

There's a great story about how the Futurians were banned from attending the proceedings (except for Asimov) by the rival NYC fan group led by Sam Moskowitz. In *The Immortal Storm*, Moskowitz's book about early fandom, he writes about this conflict and says something to the effect of, "little did the Futurians know that the convention organizer (Moskowitz) was trained in pugilism." If I recall Blish was still part of Moskowitz's group at this point; later switching allegiances to the Futurians.

**John Grayshaw: Got any fun stories about when multiply authors got together? Or stories about friendships between authors?**

James Gunn told me some stories about when he would travel to New York to talk with the editors during the 1950s. On one occasion, he rode with Asimov, Martin Harry Greenberg, and Evelyn Gold (H.L. Gold's wife) to the World Con in Cleveland. Greenberg was an editor and publisher (not to be confused with the later Martin H. Greenberg who was a prolific editor and academic) Evelyn Gold would often attend conventions as her husband's representative because he suffered from acute agoraphobia due to trauma in World War II; we'd now call it PTSD. At that Cleveland convention, Jim Gunn met Fred Pohl (who was his agent at the time) for the first time. Afterward, Asimov wrote Gunn a letter (the first of their long correspondence) saying how much he enjoyed their trip together and that we was sending a signed copy of his new *Lucky Starr* novel to Jim's son, Christopher. That signed *Lucky Starr* novel was on the shelf in Jim's basement next to the guest bed I would sleep in when I stayed at his house in Lawrence, Kansas.

**John Grayshaw: What novels were the biggest hits at the time?**

Smith's *Lensman* novels were enormously popular, though they already seemed dated. When those novels were first published in book form, in a six-volume set, they were published as *The History of Civilization*. A set of those is worth thousands of dollars now. Since there weren't that many genre SF books available yet in the 1940s, Olaf Stapledon's novels, such as *Star Maker*, *Last and First Men*, *Odd John*, and *Sirius*, were well-thought of. And, of course, the works of H. G. Wells were still making an impact.

**John Grayshaw: Which Golden Age novels only turned out to be significant after the era was over?**

I think I've mentioned most of them in the questions above. Although they didn't come out of genre SF, I might mention a couple of novels from the late-1940s that were published in book form: Ward Moore's *Greener Than You Think* (1947) and George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1949).

**John Grayshaw: What makes Golden Age of Science Fiction different than other eras of Sci-fi? And what makes it similar?**

The dominance of one venue (*Astounding*) and the development of the first generation of writers who were raised on science fiction. In other words, writers like Asimov, Pohl, Knight, Blish, Del Rey, etc. started reading SF around the age of 10, in the early magazines. Same for the next generation: Ellison, Silverberg, Disch, McCaffrey, etc., who were raised on the Golden Age magazines. I imagine that's true of subsequent generations as well.

One difference, I suppose, is that those writers could read just about all available science fiction. By the 1950s, that was no longer possible. And today, an avid reader of science fiction cannot possibly keep up with all contemporary science fiction published in a year, let alone the historical past. I've been reading this stuff heavily for 40 years, and with the exception of Heinlein, Pohl, Gunn, Philip K. Dick, and maybe a few others, I still haven't read everything by most of the authors. Even in Dick's case, I still have a few of his mainstream realist novels that I haven't read yet.

**John Grayshaw: What is the legacy of The Golden Age of Science Fiction? Why is it still relevant?**

It's relevant because it is the central hub for the "discourse" we call science fiction. Just like poets like Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, and Shelley and Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* define the Romantic Period in English Literature, writers like Asimov, Clarke, Heinlein, Pohl, Van Vogt, Leiber, Merril, Moore, Sturgeon, et al, define science fiction and continue to speak to readers today about questions of technological change, the challenges of the future, the fate of humanity, and the nature of the universe. In a historical sense, they also have much to tell us about the political, scientific, social, cultural, and intellectual history of the mid-twentieth century, perhaps more than literary writers of the period, like Saul Bellow, Jack Kerouac, and Herman Wouk.