

# Science Fiction

October 17. Ballard.

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# last time

critique: devices (or: world-building as *dominant*)

natural/unnatural

estrangement

exaggeration

embedded explicit judgment

critique: targets

use of natural resources

Pohl: “I didn't invent anything. It was all there.” (1976)

media society or “society of the spectacle”

consumerism

The Organization Man, conformity, and managerialism

# last time

critique: the capitalist System

Individual ills to be addressed by reform?  
or aspects of a thoroughly corrupt society?

(corporate elite, economic imperialism, ...)

→ what is to be done? a *genre* question

space opera: the flight to Venus, the new world

(latently managerial: who will rule in Utopia?)

satire: impasse

(should the Yahoos be exterminated?)

reform and even revolution appear ridiculous

Is a call to action thinkable within an SF genre?

# what was to be done?

Any reasonable assessment of English language SF during this period [the 1950s] must challenge both its view of itself and its view of the rest of the country. The US Supreme Court desegregation decision, the first mass marches on Washington, the racial protests in Alabama—all were phenomena of the '50s that belie the SF community's picture of a totally apathetic country.

Samuel R. Delany, "Reflections on Historical Models," 1980

# J. G. Ballard

1930 b. Shanghai (foreign concession)  
1941 family interned by Japanese occupation  
1945 moves to England; studies medicine  
1950s in RAF, in Canada; reads SF mags  
1956– Stories in *New Worlds* ('60s: New Wave)  
1960s avant-garde interests, prolific writing  
1970 “Crashed Cars,” New Arts Laboratory  
1984 *Empire of the Sun* first mainstream success  
2003 declines CBE (“a Ruritanian charade”)  
2009 d.



photograph by Fay Godwin, 1970s, [npg.org.uk](http://npg.org.uk)

# discussion

The only truly alien planet is Earth.

“Which Way to Inner Space?”

Redstone rocket, used for Shepard's 1951 flight.  
Smithsonian website, <http://airandspace.si.edu/webimages/highres/NASM-9A08102h.jpg>



**NASA**  
National Aeronautics and  
Space Administration

S-61-1927

Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center  
Houston, Texas 77058



**Yuri Gagarin (left) and Alan Shepard**

<http://airandspace.si.edu/exhibitions/fifty-years/online/dream.cfm>

# space race thinking

This...breathtaking...pace cannot help but create new ills as it dispels old, new ignorance, new problems, new dangers. Surely the opening vistas of space promise high costs and hardships, as well as high reward.

So it is not surprising that some would have us stay where we are a little longer to rest, to wait. But this city of Houston, this state of Texas, this country of the United States was not built by those who waited and rested and wished to look behind them. This country was conquered by those who moved forward—and so will space.

JFK in 1962

[http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/We\\_choose\\_to\\_go\\_to\\_the\\_moon](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/We_choose_to_go_to_the_moon)

Those who came before us made certain that this country rode the first waves of the industrial revolution, the first waves of modern invention, and the first wave of nuclear power, and this generation does not intend to founder in the backwash of the coming age of space. We mean to be a part of it—we mean to lead it... We have vowed that we shall not see it governed by a hostile flag of conquest, but by a banner of freedom and peace. We have vowed that we shall not see space filled with weapons of mass destruction, but with instruments of knowledge and understanding.

Ibid.

# space and the state

“On the instructions of the Anti-Viral Subcommittee of the UN General Assembly we are now building a continuous fence around the beach area.”

(350)

discussion: and what's wrong with that?

# the form

I firmly believe that science fiction is the true literature of the twentieth century, and probably the last literary form to exist before the death of the written word and the domination of the visual image.

Ballard, "Hobbits in Space?" (1977)

"A corner of Earth that is forever Mars." (349)

# Ballardesque

The tireless shoulder of the Gulf Stream drummed against the soft Martian dust and piled the dunes into grotesque rococo reefs which the wind carried away into the sand sea. (340)

Find another (contrasting, or similar) example.

# blogging prompt

**group 1** (N.B. change from syllabus)

Juxtapose two passages, one from Ballard and one from either Dick or Ellison. To what extent do they share a program for SF writing? Draw a specific comparison.

**group 2** Anything you like, but you are strongly encouraged to comment (using comments or a post) on what group 1 is posting.

**essays forbidden**

# next time

Dick and Ellison (*Wesleyan* selections)

For November, now required:

*Star Trek*, “Where No Man Has Gone Before”  
watch at Douglass (or: not hard to get online)