while his "dystopian satire" she would classify as "speculative fiction."

Atwood's and Rabkin's labels distinguish between more realistic and less realistic categories of science fiction (if one wishes to make science fiction the inclusive label) or between more realistic and less realistic categories of speculative fiction (if one prefers to make speculative fiction the inclusive label). Because, for at least a couple of centuries, the novel and fiction generally have been accorded "literary" value on the basis of realistic verisimilitude, the kind of science fiction (I am using the term inclusively) that is most highly valued by the literary and academic establishments is that of the more realistic variety. Kingsley Amis, in *New Maps of Hell: A Survey of Science Fiction* (1960; derived from his 1959 Christian Gauss Seminars in Criticism lectures at Princeton University), inaugurated the ruling academic justification for the value of science fiction as a form of improving satire. Much science fiction is indeed best read, like much satire, as an estranged or distorted version of the world we know. Many of the aliens of science fiction *are* best read as disguised representations of women or of oppressed races and classes. In this way stories about extraterrestrials can be mundanely recuperated for Atwood's sense of speculative fiction. But that reading, it should be emphasized, directly counters what our experience of a real extraterrestrial would or should be.

Science fiction (in the inclusive sense) combines satire with the kind of visionary (or prophetic) imagination exemplified by Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Olaf Stapledon's *Star Maker*, and the best of Arthur C. Clarke's fiction. The frequent claim that we now live in a science fiction world testifies to the genre's prophetic and visionary success. It is the sublime visionary aspect of science fiction—its "sense of wonder"—that, I suspect, a majority of science fiction readers respond to. And it is with a sense of wonder (intermixed perhaps with terror or horror or both) that we would all respond in the event of real contact with a real extraterrestrial intelligence. The sense of wonder traditionally associated with science fiction has much to do with the vastness of the universe and the persistent faith that somewhere it harbors alien life-forms (with the conceptual breakthrough that entails). That is why science fiction readers like stories with exotic aliens in them and why the editors of science fiction magazines publish so many such stories.

Thus far, the academic approach to science fiction has paid insufficient attention to its visionary dimension and the dream of first contact with an extraterrestrial intelligence. Whatever verisimilitude science fiction writers can give to that event requires a high degree of imagination. In denigrating the visionary aspect of science fiction, academic criticism is reading the genre against the grain. Thus Raffaella Baccolini, in her Correspondents Abroad contribution ("The Persistence of Hope in Dystopian Science Fiction," 119 [2004]: 518–21), writes of science fiction (in the inclusive sense) that "[i]n its extrapolation of the present, it has the potential to envision different worlds that can work as a purely imaginative (at worst) or a critical (at best) exploration of our society" (519). Baccolini wants science fiction of the satiric dystopian or utopian kind. The kind of science fiction that depends on the power of imagination (fantasy, if you will)—in my view often the best kind—is for her the worst.

David Ketterer
University of Liverpool

Reply:

David Ketterer writes about the finding of the Genre Evolution Project (GEP) that among American science fiction short stories of the twentieth century, alien–alien contact stories are those most likely to be published at all while dystopian satires are those most likely to be reprinted (www.umich.edu/~genreevo/). He says this is "pretty much what the informed reader of science fiction would expect, and, as such a reader, I feel able to offer a plausible explanation without the benefit of further systemic statistics." His explanation is that alien–alien contact stories are the more fantastic and engage a sense of wonder that motivates science fiction readers while dystopian satire stories are more realistic and appeal to those of educated literary taste.

While one may at least provisionally accept the distinction that Ketterer makes, I find it hard

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to believe that the statistical fact he adduces it to explain is self-evident. With sixteen genre contents (such as alien) and fourteen genre forms (such as alien contact), our codings allow for 224 combinations. Would most informed readers have known which one of those was historically most likely to be printed and which one most likely to be reprinted? It is one thing to explain a fact once it is known, another to come to know it. One is reminded of the legend of Columbus and the egg.

Let us assume that the hypothetical informed reader did understand that alien–alien contact stories are those most likely to have been printed. Wouldn't it then have been reasonable to suspect that, as a favored type, they would also be most likely to be reprinted? After all, most science fiction story reprintings occur in science fiction magazines or science fiction anthologies edited by the same individuals who choose first printings to begin with.

Assuming for the sake of discussion that Ketterer's explanation is correct, it leads to an important point: that the editors of anthologies believe themselves to be serving a market of readers more educated in science fiction than the readers of magazines. As an anthology editor, I would want to ask myself if I had really intended that, and if I had, I would want to combine this with the knowledge that science fiction anthologies can readily outsell any given issue of a science fiction magazine. (Having published a science fiction anthology, I know this firsthand.) If the aim in creating the anthology is to appeal to those better-educated readers, so be it. But if the aim is to attract more readers to science fiction, perhaps the literary preferences of the anthology editor should be restrained in favor of indulging the sense of wonder. In other words, the explanation for the differences in printing and reprinting success leads us to ask if the contents of science fiction anthologies are chosen as effectively as possible. And, whatever one concludes, one wants to know how those more educated readers got that way. Was it from reading magazines or from reading other books?

I notice that in his examples Ketterer discusses long works although the GEP observations he repeats are based on studying short stories. Perhaps long works are more literary in the sense he means and those who read novels therefore prefer the more literary short stories. Or perhaps not.

In "Science Fiction and the Future of Criticism" I wrote that "we clearly need to know much more about the times, about what different modes of distribution and consumption mean, and in general about the cultural system of science fiction" (472). In fact, based in part—but only in part—on GEP data, I and others have begun to address that (e.g., Eric S. Rabkin, James B. Mitchell, and Carl P. Simon, "Who Really Shaped American Science Fiction?" forthcoming in *Prospects*). The distinction between story first publication in magazines and story reprint publication in books is part of that systemic knowledge, even if one doesn't count the number of books and magazines. Although statistics is one way to gain systemic knowledge, I do not equate systemic knowledge with "systemic statistics." That is Ketterer's formulation, created when he wishes to dismiss the argument for systemic knowledge.

If one were to ask an informed spectator for observations about a phenomenon and were then to study it, sometimes the observations would be confirmed and sometimes disconfirmed. That is an abiding fact of scholarly inquiry. Ketterer calls the GEP findings he seeks to explain my "most important findings" so that, I suppose, more is gained for him by trivializing them. They are the most important GEP findings for that article, but saying that is not saying the same thing.

As an observer of American culture and as a human being subject to common misfortune, I would have thought that of the eighteen possible dominant sciences for which the GEP codes science fiction short stories, medicine would be substantially overrepresented. After all, fiction is so much about human drama, and so much drama is inscribed so vividly on our bodies. In fact, though, as GEP data make clear, medicine is extraordinarily underrepresented in science fiction publication. In an effort to discover why this might be so, I focused on those few such stories that had won reprinting, some of which, indeed, are among the most reprinted of all science fiction stories. The conclusions from that study are available (Eric S. Rabkin, "The Medical Lessons of Science Fiction," *Literature and Medicine* 20

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[2001]: 13–25). Perhaps they, too, are apparent to the informed reader. I believe otherwise.

Eric S. Rabkin
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Reply:

I am a bit surprised by David Ketterer's letter, as it was far from my intention to prescribe what kind of science fiction should be written or read. When I talk of purely imaginative explorations of our societies, I do not mean that imaginative writing is bad in itself. The problem is that this kind of writing thinks—along with some critics—that it is "pure" and that it does not reflect or is not conditioned by the daily experience of the author. Hence, its reading and interpretation supposedly need not be tainted by a social, political dimension. I do not see myself as an arbiter of taste, nor do I believe it is the work of the critic to be one. I merely find myself most interested in literature that moves readers to think and engage with what goes on in the world. That was the point I was trying to get across: I think we are what we write and we write what we are. Ketterer also seems to have missed the point of the Correspondents Abroad section: we were invited to write on what ways our cultural, biographical circumstances and geographies informed our reading of and our approach to science fiction. The point was, for once, to listen to how "aliens"—a condition I experienced for a long time, when I lived in the United States—approach a literary genre that is profoundly Anglo-American and that for years has been traditionally thought of as (bad) literature for boys. It seems to me that it is scholars like Ketterer who risk prescribing the right way to look at science fiction by trying to shut down a different approach. The universe is vast enough to contain us both. After all, isn't Ketterer among those who prefer an alien contact–alien story? Don't we all benefit from finding out, listening to, and understanding what the "other"—aliens, enemies, men, women, and "oppressed races and classes"—says? What puzzles me is that Ketterer seems to already know "what our experience of a real extraterrestrial would or *should* be" (emphasis mine).

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