

Rob Latham

"Sextrapolation in New Wave Science Fiction"

ABSTRACT

This essay traces how the representation of sexual content within science fiction became increasingly acceptable during the 1960s. Rather than treating this development as an epochal achievement of the New Wave movement, however, it argues that a significant number of innovative treatments of sexuality—as well as a sophisticated discourse regarding the pernicious effects of censorship—had already emerged within the genre during the early 1950s. The 1960s New Wave built on this tradition in substantial ways, from Michael Moorcock's ambitious renovations of *New Worlds* to the original anthology series pioneered by Damon Knight and Harlan Ellison. The essay tracks the controversies that surrounded the explicit depiction of sexual acts and fantasies in science fiction, culminating with a three-part anatomy of New Wave approaches to "sextrapolation": feminist sf, which sought to provide an ethical counterweight to the excesses of the sexual revolution; pornographic sf, with its often lurid but sometimes arresting visions of polymorphous sexual otherness; and more straightforward extrapolative renderings of futuristic sexual mores and behaviors.

BIO

Rob Latham is Professor of English at the University of California, Riverside, where he directs the *Eaton Science Fiction Conference*. A senior editor of the journal *Science Fiction Studies* since 1997, he is the author of *Consuming Youth: Vampires, Cyborgs, and the Culture of Consumption* (2002) and coeditor of *The Wesleyan Anthology of Science Fiction* (2010). He is currently editing *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction* and completing a book on New Wave science fiction of the 1960s and 1970s.