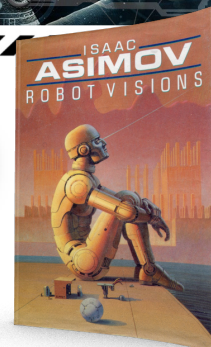


A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE

CREATING THE FUTURE

introduction by the author to the short story «robot dreams»



Science fiction has certain satisfactions peculiar to itself. It is possible, in trying to portray future technology, to hit close to home. If you live long enough after writing a particular story, you may actually have the pleasure of finding your predictions reasonably accurate and yourself hailed as a sort of minor prophet.

I began writing robot stories in 1939, when I was nineteen years old, and, from the first, I visualized them as machines, carefully built by engineers, with inherent safeguards, which I called "The Three Laws of Robotics." (In doing so, I was the very first to use the word "robotics" in print, this taking place in the March, 1942 issue of Astounding Science Fiction.)

As it happened, robots of any kind were not really practical until the mid-1970s when the microchip came into use. Only that made it possible to produce computers that were small enough and cheap enough, while possessing the potentiality for sufficient capacity and versatility, to control a robot at non-prohibitive expense.

We now have machines, called robots, that are computer-controlled and are in industrial use. They increasingly perform simple and repetitious work on the assembly lines—welding, drilling, polishing and so on—and they are of increasing importance to the economy. Robots are now a recognized field of study and the precise word that I invented is used for it—robotics.

To be sure, we are only at the very beginning of the robotic revolution. The robots now in use are little more than computerized levers and are very far from having the complexity necessary for the Three Laws to be built into them. Nor are they anything close to human in shape, so they are not yet the "mechanical men" that I have pictured in my stories, and that have appeared on the screen innumerable times.

Nevertheless, the direction of movement is clear. The primitive robots that have come into use are not the Frankenstein-monsters of equally primitive science fiction. They do not lust for human life (although accidents involving robots can result in human death, just as accidents with automobiles or electrical machinery can). They are, rather, carefully designed devices intended to relieve human beings of arduous, repetitive, dangerous, non-rewarding duties so that, in intent and in philosophy, they represent the first steps toward my story—robots.

The steps that are yet to come are expected to proceed further in the direction I have marked out. A number of different firms are working on "home robots" that will have a vaguely human appearance and will fulfill some of the duties that once devolved on servants.

As a final example, in my story "Sally," published in 1953, I described computerized cars that had almost reached the stage of having lives of their own. And, in the last few years, we do indeed have computerized cars that can actually talk to the driver—although their abilities in this direction are, as yet, very simple.

Isaac Asimov
Robot Dreams, 1986

1. Introduce the document
2. Who is the narrator?
3. What do you understand about his interest concerning robots?
4. What is his vision about robotics?
5. How can you link his vision to the Idea of Progress?
6. What role do writers have to play in Progress?
7. Can you think of other examples of writers or authors who may have guessed our future?

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