Cyberpunk Fiction

Science fiction that depicts the relationship between human beings and the rapid advancement and omnipresence of technology, which leads to a radical change in the social order.

A sub-genre that explores the interactions between humans and technology. Cyberpunk features the combination of man and machine, either literally or metaphorically. The lines between the physical world and the cyberworld are often blurred, sometimes with multiple forms of virtual reality. For traditional cyberpunk, the setting is typically the Earth, but a dystopian one that is immersed in a dark and bleak cyberworld where corporations control society and standards of living have broken down. Author William Gibson described cyberpunk as "a combination of low life and high tech." Protagonists are typically hackers who interact, physically and digitally, with other people equally immersed in the cyberworld. Authors writing in cyberpunk may use the style to criticize corporate power and the invasive rise of technology.

Stories concerning bio-robotics discuss the addition of mechanical prosthesis or enhancements to human physiology. Similar works involving cyborgs feature "bionics"—the integration of humans and machines. Novels on artificial intelligence (AI) depict one or more artificial minds becoming fully sentient. They may be mainframe computers, mobile androids, or, more recently, software on the internet. This portion of the sub-genre is generally focused on one of three mentalities: pro-machine, anti-machine, or ambivalence. In a pro-machine plot, robots or artificial intelligence entities are benevolent. In an anti-machine plot, there is generally confrontation with robots, androids, or AI; sometimes as mechanical servants malfunction, assert rights, or launch a coldly logical and diabolical plan. In an ambivalent plot, robots perform their functions but there remains some anxiety about them. William Grove's *The Wreck of the World* (1889), Karel Čapek's *R.U.R.* (1921), Eando Binder's "I, Robot" (1939), Jack Williamson's *With Folded Hands* (1947), Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot* (1950), Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination* (1956), D. F. Jones's *Colossus* (1966), Robert A. Heinlein's *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* (1966), and Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968) are founding works in this sub-genre.

Common Elements

Exploration of the relationship between humans and computers	Omni-present surveillance
	Cybernetic implants
Human concerns of sentient technology	Prosthetics
"Frankenstein complex"	Cyborgs
Malicious compliance	Cyberspace
Consequences of technological interference in human lives	Virtual reality
	The internet
Alienation from society	Robotics
Social revolution	Artificial intelligence
Computer hacking and hackers	Corporate domination

Class divides		Freedom from need to work
Ecological collapse		Personal gratification
Megacities		Power to rule
Transhumanism		

Benefits of Reading

Offers readers cautionary tales of human nature and out-of-control technology	Inspires readers to ponder the corrupting influence of money and power
Encourages readers to consider corporate exploitation in society	Warns readers of disconnecting from the real world in favor of the virtual

Modern Literary Examples

Accelerando (2005) by Charles Stross	*Neuromancer* (1984) by William Gibson
All Systems Red (2017) by Martha Wells	*Pirate Utopia* (2016) by Bruce Sterling
Ariel (1984) by Jack M. Bickham	*Repo Virtual* (2020) by Corey J. White
Cinder (2012) by Marissa Meyer	*River of Gods* (2004) by Ian McDonald
A Closed and Common Orbit (2016) by Becky Chambers	*Robopocalypse* (2011) by Daniel H. Wilson
Cyborg (1972) by Martin Caidin	*Sea of Rust* (2017) by C. Robert Cargill
Glow (2021) by Tim Jordan	*Snow Crash* (1992) by Neal Stephenson
The Golden Age (2002) by John C. Wright	*Software* (1982) by Rudy Rucker
He, She and It (1991) by Marge Percy	*Speak* (2015) by Louisa Hall
The Infinity Courts (2021) by Akemi Dawn Brown	*Synners* (1991) by Pat Cadigan
	Tik-Tok (1983) by John Sladek
The Lifecycle of Software Objects (2010) by Ted Chiang	*Trouble and Her Friends* (1994) by Melissa Scott
The Mall (2022) by Brandon Cornett	*Wake* (2009) by Robert J. Sawyer