Speculative Fiction `FREE`

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Summary

The term "speculative fiction" has three historically located meanings: a subgenre of science fiction that deals with human rather than technological problems, a genre distinct from and opposite to science fiction in its exclusive focus on possible futures, and a super category for all genres that deliberately depart from imitating "consensus reality" of everyday experience. In this latter sense, speculative fiction includes fantasy, science fiction, and horror, but also their derivatives, hybrids, and cognate genres like the gothic, dystopia, weird fiction, post-apocalyptic fiction, ghost stories, superhero tales, alternate history, steampunk, slipstream, magic realism, fractured fairy tales, and more. Rather than seeking a rigorous definition, a better approach is to theorize "speculative fiction" as a term whose semantic register has continued to expand. While "speculative fiction" was initially proposed as a name of a subgenre of science fiction, the term has recently been used in reference to a meta-generic fuzzy set supercategory—one defined not by clear boundaries but by resemblance to prototypical examples—and a field of cultural production. Like other cultural fields, speculative fiction is a domain of activity that exists not merely through texts but through their production and reception in multiple contexts. The field of speculative fiction groups together extremely diverse forms of non-mimetic fiction operating across different media for the purpose of reflecting on their cultural role, especially as opposed to the work performed by mimetic, or realist narratives.

The fuzzy set field understanding of speculative fiction arose in response to the need for a blanket term for a broad range of narrative forms that subvert the post-Enlightenment mindset: one that had long excluded from "Literature" stories that departed from consensus reality or embraced a different version of reality than the empirical-materialist one. Situated against the claims of this paradigm, speculative fiction emerges as a tool to dismantle the traditional Western cultural bias in favor of literature imitating reality, and as a quest for the recovery of the sense of awe and wonder. Some of the forces that contributed to the rise of speculative fiction include accelerating genre hybridization that balkanized the field previously mapped with a few large generic categories; the expansion of the global literary landscape brought about by mainstream culture's increasing acceptance of non-mimetic genres; the proliferation of indigenous, minority, and postcolonial narrative forms that subvert dominant Western notions of the real; and the need for new conceptual categories to accommodate diverse and hybridic types of storytelling that oppose a stifling vision of reality imposed by exploitative global capitalism. An inherently plural category, speculative fiction is a mode of thought-experimenting that includes narratives addressed to young people and adults and operates in a variety of formats. The term accommodates the non-mimetic genres of Western but also non-Western and indigenous literatures—especially stories narrated

from the minority or alternative perspective. In all these ways, speculative fiction represents a global reaction of human creative imagination struggling to envision a possible future at the time of a major transition from local to global humanity.

Keywords: fantasy, science fiction, horror, genre criticism, the fantastic, indigenous literature, globalization, taxonomy, speculation

Subjects: Children's Literature, Fiction, 20th and 21st Century (1900-present)

When it comes to speculative fiction, there are more questions than answers. While somewhat frustrating, this is also advantageous, for the ongoing discussion about the what and why of speculative fiction has generated more insights than any single definition ever could. Thus, rather than looking for a conclusive statement, one may gain more from a diachronic overview of "speculative fiction" as a term whose semantic register continues to expand since it was coined as a name for a genre in the 1940s. By the late 1990s, "speculative fiction" acquired a number of historically located meanings. These are now being superseded by an emerging consensus, in which the term refers to a fuzzy set field of cultural production. First applied to genre studies by Brian Attebery, a fuzzy set is a category defined not by clear boundaries but by resemblance to prototypical examples and degrees of membership: from being *exactly like* to being *somewhat* or *marginally like*. Likewise, speculative fiction in its most recent understanding is a fuzzy set super category that houses all non-mimetic genres—genres that in one way or another depart from imitating consensus reality—from fantasy, science fiction, and horror to their derivatives, hybrids, and cognate genres, including the gothic, dystopia, zombie, vampire and post-apocalyptic fiction, ghost stories, weird fiction, superhero tales, alternate history, steampunk, slipstream, magic realism, retold or fractured fairy tales, and many more. A collection of genres and culturally situated practices, speculative fiction is effectively what Pierre Bourdieu has called a cultural field: a domain of activity defined by its own field-specific rules of functioning, agents, and institutions.

The distinction between mimetic and non-mimetic art forms—however ambiguous these terms may be—is critical for understanding speculative fiction, both as a genre cluster and as a field. In its broadest sense, *mimesis* signifies the desire to imitate reality with such verisimilitude that the audience can share the artist's experience. This has been the aspiration of much Western art since Plato and Aristotle, whose pronouncements considered literature valuable when it seeks direct correspondence to life. Of course, as Erich Auerbach demonstrated in *Mimesis* (1946), literary renditions of reality have always been subject to stylization and conventions. Nevertheless, it was the mimetic standard that became the Western norm. Reinforced by the now-untenable assumption that reality is objective and unambiguous, it deflected attention away from the non-mimetic—deliberate departures from imitating consensus reality that have persisted in Western art since its beginnings. Only in the 20th century did critical thought expose the realist fallacy: the fact that all literature constructs

models of reality rather than transcriptions of actuality. The mimetic and the non-mimetic have thus been redefined as twin responses to reality. Speculative fiction draws its creative sap from the non-mimetic impulse.

The rise of speculative fiction is a historically situated process. While there are rich traditions of non-Western speculative fiction, the current use of the term emerged within the Western literary-critical discourse, albeit from a convergence of oppositional strands including feminist, poststructuralist, and postcolonial thought. The understanding of speculative fiction as a label for a large cultural field began to take shape at the time of the first multicultural turn of the 1970s and in resistance to the specifically Western, post-Enlightenment, androcentric, and colonialist mindset that had long excluded from "Literature" stories that failed to imitate reality or embraced a different version of the real. Indeed, no other cultural formation had put such a premium on the distinction between the real and the unreal, or had so reductively defined the real as the post-Enlightenment West. This distorted perception generated a counter-reaction, one facet of which was the meteoric rise of non-mimetic genres, starting with the gothic, horror, fantasy, and science fiction in the 19th century, followed by a rapid diversification and hybridization of these and other non-mimetic forms throughout the 20th century. In hindsight, the trajectories and permutations of these genres may be traced as individual strands in the same larger process that combined to create the field of speculative fiction. In one sense, then, speculative fiction is a tool to dismantle the traditional Western cultural bias in favor of literature imitating reality. In another, it is a quest for the recovery of the sense of wonder across its semantic spectrum, from the celebration of human creative power and absolute freedom—which according to Fredric Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future* (2005) is the function of fantasy—through dramatizing our inability to imagine the future and thus contemplating our own absolute limits, which Jameson sees as the function of science fiction; and on to the "inextinguishable feeling of mixed wonder and oppression" in the face of "the vast and provocative abyss of the [horrifyingly inhuman] unknown," which according to H. P. Lovecraft is the crux of horror and the weird tale.[1]

Theorized as a field of cultural production rather than a genre, speculative fiction is not limited to any specific literary techniques. Nor can its development be traced through a linear chronology. The current understanding of speculative fiction reflects a quantum jump that connected several established and emerging traditions. Some of the forces that contributed to this cultural shift include accelerating genre hybridization that balkanized the field previously mapped with a few large generic categories; the expansion of the global literary landscape brought about by mainstream culture's increasing acceptance of fantasy, science fiction, and horror; the proliferation of indigenous, minority, and postcolonial narrative forms that subvert dominant Western notions of reality or employ non-mimetic elements in different configurations than traditional Western genres; and finally the need for new conceptual categories to accommodate diverse and hybrid types of modern storytelling that oppose a stifling vision of reality—with its correlates of "truth," "facts," "power," and others—imposed by exploitative global capitalism. An inherently plural category, speculative fiction is a mode of thought-experimenting that embraces an open-ended vision of the real.

There are at least three ways to define "speculative fiction." The original, long-contested, and not wholly abandoned formulation takes it to be a subset of science fiction. This approach can be traced to Robert A. Heinlein, who coined the term "speculative fiction" in 1941, popularized it through his 1947 essay "On the Writing of Speculative Fiction," and advocated for it in his guest-of-honor speech at the 1951 World Science Fiction Convention. Speculative fiction, Heinlein proposed, captures the highest aspiration of science fiction and includes its top quality works. Defined as narratives concerned not so much with science or technology as with human actions in response to a new situation created by science or technology, speculative fiction highlights a human rather than technological problem. This focus sets it sharply apart from the popular and formulaic science fiction. At the receiving end of Heinlein's critique was the type of science fiction, or scientifiction, popularized by the first American pulp science fiction magazine, Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* (since 1926). Since Gernsback's interest lay in amazing gadgets, the wonder of progress, and the marvels delivered by future technology—usually at the expense of scientific feasibility and human development—Heinlein sought to change the discourse around science fiction through advocating for a new term and then claiming for it the status of "Literature."

The problem with Heinlein's definition of speculative fiction was its proscriptive component, subjective and exclusivist at the same time. While successful, for some, in establishing parameters for quality science fiction, it created a counter-reaction against limiting science fiction to the kind of stories Heinlein appreciated. One of its most articulate critics, Samuel R. Delany, expressed delight in the "other" science fiction being named the enemy. In *The Jewel-Hinged Jaw* (1977), Delany argued that Heinlein's criteria helped younger authors move away from Heinlein's didactic methods and abandon the quasi-mystical search for the ultimate meaning of human life that informs not just Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961) but other science fiction classics, such as Theodore Sturgeon's *More Than Human* (1953) or Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1953). Heinlein's use of speculative fiction was also restrictive, if not elitist: it excluded not just pulp science fiction and what later came to be known as hard science fiction, but also fantasy, horror, and other non-mimetic genres. In fact, it was effectively an attempt to replace the term "science fiction" on the taxonomical map. It failed to do so. This was, in part, because the quality markers Heinlein attributed to speculative fiction can arguably be found in much science fiction and other non-mimetic genres that fell outside of Heinlein's purview. A more direct reason was that the understanding of what it means for science fiction, or literature in general, to be socially engaged had changed by the 1960s: from Heinlein's projections of idealistic, morally unambiguous models of human behavior toward social criticism and contestation of the oppressive status quo. Although Heinlein's definition fell into disuse by the late 1960s, the term itself was adopted by various protest traditions within the science fiction field. As championed by Judith Merril, for example, it helped create feminist speculative fiction of the 1970s and has remained a lasting influence on a number of female writers, including Ursula K. Le Guin, Doris Lessing, and Margaret Atwood. Also, Heinlein's core notion—that "speculative fiction" is a synonym for "science fiction"—has largely gone unchallenged until quite recently. Most publishers, at least, still use it in this sense.

The second approach has been to theorize speculative fiction as a category not synonymous with but opposite to science fiction. Deriving in part from the tumultuous diversification of science fiction that began with the New Wave movements of the 1960s, and in part from the increasing cross-breeding of fantasy, science fiction, and horror that was well under way by the late 1970s, this position articulated concern over blurring the genre's boundaries. The key proponent of this approach has been Margaret Atwood, who—expanding Merril's earlier formulations—began using "speculative fiction" in the late 1980s as a term that best describes her dystopian novels starting from *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986), through *Oryx and Crake* (2003), and *The Year of the Flood* (2009). The distinction Atwood adopts hinges on probability, although not necessarily constructed in scientific terms. Science fiction, she claims, includes stories about events that cannot possibly happen, such as the Martian invasion and similar scenarios in the tradition of H. G. Wells. Speculative fiction, instead, refers to narratives about things that can potentially take place, even though they have not yet happened at the time of the writing. As examples, Atwood evokes the tradition stretching from Verne to that part of her oeuvre that explores the not-yet- improbable futures of our planet.

The argument for speculative fiction as an ideologically different enterprise than science fiction has not been particularly convincing. James E. Gunn and Matthew Candelaria's excellent collection *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction* (2005) does not even engage this proposition. The only study that takes it seriously, Paul L. Thomas's *Science Fiction and Speculative Fiction* (2013), merely reiterates Atwood's position, assuming rather than demonstrating the validity of her distinction. The definition of "speculative fiction" to denote narratives that seek to map out a *possible* future has also been applied to late 19th- and early 20th-century utopias, most of which were concerned with social and political— rather than technological—speculation. It is not clear, though, how "speculative fiction," when used so, is a better term than "utopia." After all, the works it designates are subject to retrospective transformation into science fiction if their at-one-point possible futures do not become reality. This would be the case for classics from Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* (1887) and Una L. Silberrad's *The Affairs of John Bolsover* (1911) to other novels in the large body of utopian works that emerged in the 1870s and by 1912 had produced over three hundred titles. A glance at what is perhaps the best overview of this robust tradition—the three-volume *Political Future Fictions: Speculative and Counter-Factual Politics in Edwardian Britain* (2013), edited by Kate Macdonald—confirms that the label "speculative fiction" fails to offer any significant critical edge. While Macdonald's collection examines only six novels and does occasionally refer to them as (Edwardian) speculative fiction, she and her co-editors prefer the volume's title term "political future fictions" for this entire body of works. Either set in the future or located in an alternate reality of timeless present, these diverse narratives are protracted engagements in political speculation. The majority do not employ science fictional devices, which sets them apart, albeit not absolutely, from science fiction. Nevertheless, in their blend of didacticism, warning, and entertainment, future fictions are best described as utopias rather than speculative fictions. According to Macdonald, they are "utopian by definition of their concern with social change, and the imaginative means by which change is effected."[2] This goes some way to explain why Richard Bleiler's introduction to Volume I, despite its title "On the Naming of Nineteenth-Century Speculative Fiction," does not evoke the term "speculative fiction" even once.

The key weakness of Atwood's restrictive strategy, then, appears to be the anchoring of the definition of "speculative fiction" in the story's predictive value. By making *possible* futures the centerpiece of her approach, Atwood repeats—unknowingly perhaps—the same claims that were made about science fiction in the 1960s, when authors such as Isaac Asimov proclaimed that the American space program was a vindication of the stories published earlier in *Astounding Tales*. However, the predictive value of science fiction, or any other non-mimetic genre for that matter, has never been clearly demonstrated. Rather, the general consensus has been that the appeal of these genres lies elsewhere, most of all in their evocation of wonder: supernatural, technological, bone chilling—as in horror—or other. Nor is Atwood's assumption that science fiction must inevitably treat impossible things a tenable one. It certainly flies in the face of most definitions of science fiction, based as they are on Darko Suvin's "necessary and sufficient condition" of the narrative dominance of a novum that must be scientifically possible.[3] Finally, Atwood's distinction between stories about events that could and could not really happen reiterates the most widely applied criterion for demarcating science fiction from fantasy rather than a criterion for distinguishing genres within science fiction. For all this arbitrariness, Atwood's proposal does call attention to the important future-oriented potential of speculative fiction, which quality is central to most discussions today.

The third, more inclusive, less prescriptive, and increasingly widespread understanding of speculative fiction has been to adapt the term for the entire extremely diverse field of non-mimetic narrative fiction. Seen from this angle, speculative fiction does not denote a genre as it does for Heinlein, Merril, and Atwood. Nor is it confined to literature. It operates across the spectrum of narrative media, from print, to drama, radio, film, television, computer games, and their many hybrids. Within literature, it thrives in many formats—the novel, short story, picturebook, comic book, graphic novel, and poetry—and offers a blanket term for the supergenres of fantasy, science fiction, and other non-mimetic genres that may or may not be derivatives of these two, but either elude relational classification or have been established as distinct genre traditions. These include, but are not limited to, utopia, dystopia, eutopia, horror, the gothic, steampunk, slipstream, alternative history, cyberpunk, time slip, magic(al) realism, supernatural romance, weird fiction, the New Weird, (post)apocalyptic fiction, myth, legend, traditional, retold, and fractured fairy tale, folktale, ghost fiction, New Wave fabulation, and other interstitial genres as long as they are informed by the non-mimetic impulse—that is, by the broadly conceived departure from verisimilitude to consensus reality.

This understanding of speculative fiction has been increasingly topical since the 2000s, albeit mostly among readers, authors, and scholars who are either younger or speak from the minority perspective. It has not yet won much support among seasoned researchers. For some it feels too baggy, covering a range of texts that slip beyond fantasy and science fiction. One criticism has been that speculative fiction explodes genre boundaries of science fiction and fantasy in ways that are not productive—for example, by including counterfactual narratives with past and present settings, elements of which have often been taken to disqualify the text as science fiction, or by embracing texts without magic or the supernatural, which traditionally would place them outside the perimeters of fantasy. Other critics have observed that speculative fiction may refer to texts that are speculative socially, politically, or philosophically, but not scientifically. Or it may not employ any fantastic devices. Indeed, the ambiguous meaning of the term "speculation," which in its broadest understanding may apply to all literature and, when narrowed, is not necessarily the same as the related key term

"extrapolation," has been the subject of much debate. Yet, to discuss speculation as a type of narrative protocol—as has been expertly done by Brooks Landon in "Extrapolation and Speculation" (2014)—is not the same as exploring it as a supergenre. In that latter sense speculative fiction has not yet been defined in a rigorous way. This lack of taxonomic clarity, pointed out in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (2011), accounts for why speculative fiction has been seen as too nebulous a tool for literary analyses based on close reading, which usually involve a consideration of generic boundaries, say, between post-apocalyptic dystopia and ghost fantasy or supernatural romance. It may also explain why the term "speculative fiction" can only rarely be encountered in articles published in genre-centered journals such as *Science Fiction Studies*, *Foundation*, *Extrapolation*, *Mythlore*, *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, *Studies in the Fantastic*, and others. Likewise, no entries on speculative fiction can be found in most genre-focused encyclopedias and companions. Besides, at best a reference in passing, the term is missing from John Clute and John Grant's *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1997); Jerrold E. Hoggle's *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (2002); Gunn and Candelaria's *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction* (2005); Mark Bould, Andrew M. Butler, Adam Roberts, and Sherryl Vint's *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (2009); Gregory Claeys's *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (2010); Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint's *The Routledge Concise History of Science Fiction* (2011); and numerous others, including *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction* (2014), which features Landon's chapter on speculation.

An opposite view—expressed by one of the young voices, the editor of *Foundation*, Graham Sleight—projects "speculative fiction" as an indispensable term for contemporary works within the fantastic field, most of which blend genres to such a degree that they can no longer be adequately described with old tools and categorizations. A glance at the "Special Section" of the fiftieth-anniversary volume of *Extrapolation* (2009), in which twenty scholars were asked to contribute short pieces on the current state of scholarship and criticism in the field of speculative fiction, reveals that the debate about the usefulness of the term "speculative fiction" is generational and attitudinal. As Brian Attebery suggests in his opening contribution, it reflects an increasing gap between scholars extremely competent in fiction and criticism up to about the 1990s, and scholars more familiar with recent output but not necessarily aware of these works' antecedents.[4] The latter group, Attebery notes, tends to examine literature armed with a wider range of theoretical approaches and critical terms. Speculative fiction, it seems, is one of these new labels, complete with its own unique set of questions, assumptions, and foci.

To make sense of this most recent conceptualization of speculative fiction, it may be helpful to situate its arrival through the application of Raymond Williams's concepts of dominant and emergent cultures framed within Pierre Bourdieu's comments about the dynamics of social and cultural fields. According to Williams, any historical period is defined by its dominant patterns and informed by a specific "structure of feeling"—a notion Williams applied, in his essay "Science Fiction" (1988), to distinguish what he saw as three main types of modern science fiction: purtopia, doomsday, and space anthropology.[5] This structure of feeling is generationally specific and stems from a particular "community of experience,"[6] one instance of which would be the community of academic scholars with its ways of articulating difference and meaning. The dominant culture, however, is always challenged by the emergent culture, with its own structure of feeling based on a different set of lived experiences. As the *Extrapolation* example suggests, the dominant fantasy and science fiction culture,

institutionalized in today's academia, has shown no need for or interest in the term speculative fiction. The emerging culture, by contrast, has wholeheartedly owned the label of speculative fiction as a way to conceptualize its experience of new types of non-mimetic writing and to position them in a contiguous relation to older, ideologically loaded forms. Comprising younger readers, authors, scholars, grassroots initiatives, online resources, fanzines, and more, this emergent culture draws from a different structure of feeling. For this group, "speculative fiction" has become an accepted term to refer to the entire field in ways that challenge the dominant consensus about fault lines among various non-mimetic genres, canonical and upstart alike. While distinctions are the lifeblood of literary criticism, the appeal of the term "speculative fiction" lies in its inclusiveness and open-ended porousness.

If the growing acceptance of speculative fiction is a function of the emergent structure of feeling in the increasingly hybrid first decades of the 21st century, the very term "speculative fiction" in its broad modern use can best be thought of as a field of cultural production. In the model created by Pierre Bourdieu, field is a relatively autonomous domain of activity defined by its own field-specific rules of functioning, agents, and institutions. Like any other field, the literary field is structured externally in relation to the somewhat abstract field of power—the space of relations of force between agents and institutions that wield the economic or cultural capital that allows them to claim dominance in different fields—and internally in relation to the principles of heteronomy and autonomy. These indirectly correspond to the two poles in the field of power and may be thought of as the opposing ends on the spectrum of subordination of art to economic capital, as in the heteronomous principle, or rejecting it in favor of cultural capital, as in the autonomous principle. Despite the difference between economic and cultural capital, however, any practices within a field, even these seemingly disinterested, are effectively economic practices in that they aim to maximize material or symbolic profit.[7]

Bourdieu's framework allows positing speculative fiction as a field that implies a different mapping of the same territory. Before the advent of "speculative fiction" as a blanket term, roughly through the 1990s, the fields of fantasy, science fiction, horror, the gothic, and other non-mimetic genres had all been theorized as largely separate subfields of the literary field. They had little economic potential but growing cultural impact: in 1984, for example, Wolfe's *Glossary* listed twenty-one definitions of "fantasy" and thirty-four definitions of "science fiction." Against the relentless push from mainstream institutions in the literary field that sought to exclude these genres from "Literature," the main effort of agents operating in each subfield—readers, librarians, publishers, and especially scholars—was to demonstrate that fantasy, science fiction, horror, and related genres deserve to be studied as literature. This argument has lost much of its urgency in the 21st century but can still be found even in recent scholarship within genre fields, one example being Joan Gordon's "Literary Science Fiction" chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction* (2014). Nevertheless, it was central especially in the early period when each genre fought for its own recognition and maximizing its own power within the field. This was happening through establishing genre-specific journals, organizations, conferences, presses, awards, courses, scholarship, and other initiatives. There was little effort, however, to advocate for the collective empowerment of all non-mimetic genres within the field of literature. True, many scholars across the board used "the fantastic"[8] as a designation for this larger cluster, but their proposals were often handicapped by claims about genre seniority and the hierarchical taxonomies they entailed.

The change came in the early 2000s, when the term "speculative fiction" was adapted as a designator for the collective field of non-mimetic literature and art. This move redrew the map of the literature field and reframed the power struggle within it. First, it abandoned border wars among genres; their exclusivist definitions; and squabbles over claims to cognitive, artistic, or other primacy that have long been the feature of genre criticism. Second, it redefined the goal of the power struggle within the field from seeking to win the stamp of "literariness" for any particular genre to exploring how non-mimetic genres may be potentially more adequate than the so-called realist literature to address contemporary global challenges and reflect the diverse perspectives, traditions, and experiences of the multicultural world. Third, adopting speculative fiction as a blanket term opened up the field of literature to fruitful interaction with other fields, including drama, film, visual arts, music, computer games, even science itself. In this new "map," speculative fiction emerges as a large subfield of literature, with links to other cultural fields, rather than a narrow subfield of science fiction. It is part of modern global culture in a way that the relatively isolated and largely Anglophone genre fields were not, at least not from the start. The field of speculative fiction resists stratification that was part of individual genre field dynamics, especially rankings from masterpieces to failures and the pitting of genre fiction against literary fiction. Put otherwise, it offers a new way of allocating value by giving primacy to the system of relations within the field rather than to individual works themselves.

Early Formulations about the Field of Speculative Fiction

There is little doubt that the "emergent culture" and "field" conceptualization of speculative fiction represents a new trend. Even so, this trend is not without antecedents. It owes much to historically located traditions of critical reflection, especially the pioneering work of Judith Merril, Robert Scholes, Diana Waggoner, and Kathryn Hume.

The "field" view of speculative fiction can first be traced to New Wave radical feminist authors of the 1960s and 1970s and was a spinoff of American feminism's second wave. It was contemporaneous to the widely discussed shift from "hard" science fiction toward science fiction indebted to "soft" sciences of sociology, anthropology, linguistics, economics, and political philosophy—a narrative swerve that feminist authors theorized as indicating a rebellion against the constrains of patriarchal, androcentric structures of meaning. Feminists were perhaps the first to point out that conventional concepts of possibility and rationality used to define science fiction, fantasy, and other non-mimetic genres were limited and value laden. Moving beyond the purely formalist definitions, these authors and critics highlighted the sociopolitical contexts of these genres' creation, academic legitimization, and subversive cultural impact. To project speculative fiction as a new space for articulating feminist theory and praxis was, of course, a political move. It linked the cognitive estrangement effect of speculative fiction to priming the audience for questioning the dominant status quo and its androcentric biases. It also invested works of speculative fiction with the power, even responsibility, to voice alternative views that can move the world in the direction of gender equality.

When in "Earthsea Revisioned" (1992) Ursula K. Le Guin reflected on having written her early fantasy and science fiction works "as an artificial man"[9]—that is, by gendering her writing male—she spoke to the concerns that animated many other female authors who turned to

speculative fiction in the 1960s and 1970s: Lois Gould, Rhonda Lerman, Judith Merril, James Tiptree Jr., Angela Carter, Kate Wilhelm, Carol Emshwiller, Suzy McKee Charnas, Octavia Butler, Tanith Lee, Doris Lessing, Sally Miller Gearhart, Barbara Ehrenreich, and others. These authors used the textual power of speculative fiction to challenge the predominantly male literary establishment and patriarchal social reality—including the dominant androcentric traditions of science fiction. But speculative fiction for these feminist authors meant something more than science fiction. This broad use of the term was popularized by Judith Merril in the twelve *Year's Best SF* anthologies she edited between 1959 and 1969. While Merril's definitions were always a work in progress, by 1967 she had arrived at an understanding of speculative fiction as a new mode of literature, at once indebted to the traditional scientific methods of hypothesis and extrapolation but freer than science in their use. Speculative fiction, in her words, constitutes "a special sort of contemporary writing which makes use of fantastic and inventive elements to comment on, or speculate about, society, humanity, life, the cosmos, reality [a]nd any other topic under the general heading of philosophy."[10] Merril's ideas about speculative fiction as a cluster of non-mimetic genres striving for social change rippled through a spate of other collections and monographs, including Kate Wilhelm's *Infinity Box: A Collection of Speculative Fiction* (1975), Natalie M. Rosinsky's *Feminist Futures: Contemporary Women's Speculative Fictions* (1984), and Marleen Barr's *Alien to Femininity: Speculative Fiction and Feminist Theory* (1987). Merril's influence did not stop there: her "Spaced Out" collection donated to the Toronto Public Library in 1970 was peculiar enough to earn the description on the library website as containing "contemporary speculative literature including science fiction, certain aspects of fantasy fiction, satire, surrealist, and other speculative, future oriented, and conceptually experimental work, whether in fiction, poetry, drama, essay, or other forms as well as critical and bibliographic materials relating to science fiction and the associated areas of contemporary speculative writing."[11] It grew to become a major resource for speculative fiction known, since 1991, as the Judith Merril Collection of Science Fiction, Speculation, and Fantasy. More recently, Ritch Calvin's *The Merril Theory of Lit'ry Criticism* (2016) provided the long-overdue, single volume overview of Merril's own critical reflection.

Less than a decade after Merril's search for a comprehensive definition came perhaps the most theoretically sustained exploration of speculative fiction to date: Robert Scholes's *Structural Fabulation: An Essay on the Fiction of the Future* (1975). Writing about science fiction—which he defined in a way that applies to most non-mimetic literature: "works of fiction that insist on some radical discontinuity between the worlds they present to us and the world of our experience"[12]—Scholes envisions Western literature as an evolving system grounded in each period's time-consciousness. The most socially transformative type of literature capable of capturing the modern, post-Einsteinian time-consciousness is, in his opinion, fiction set in the future that has a license to speculate about it.[13] When he avers that the future is the only lever to nudge the present in a better direction,[14] Scholes appears to speak in the same language as Merril. When he stresses that modern literature ought to be primarily concerned with fictional explorations of human situations arising from the implications of modern science—in order to help readers "break the circle of indifference and act in accordance with a structural perception of the universe"[15]—he seems to reiterate Heinlein's position. His focus is different though. The literature Scholes advocates is first of

all a means to move modern readers away from the "intensely materialistic and propertarian"[16] heritage of the dominant forms of life and fiction in the post-Enlightenment West.

Within this framework, realism has clearly been the voice of the dominant, materialist tradition. Fantasy, horror, science fiction, and non-mimetic genres, by contrast, emerge as strands of the subversive and diverse "fictional form that is both old and new, rooted in the past but distinctly modern, oriented to the future but not bounded by it."[17] This form that addresses reality indirectly through patently fictional or non-mimetic devices Scholes calls fabulation. He then locates its development diachronically, identifying three historically staggered and ideologically distinct forms of fabulation. Dogmatic fabulation, going back to pre-modern fantastic voyages, through Dante's *The Divine Comedy* (1320) and John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), is based on a closed system of belief, usually stemming from a religious dogma. Speculative fabulation that emerged with humanism—exemplified in Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759), or Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1836)—draws on more liberal and secular reflection but lacks a firm grounding in the modern scientific understanding of life and its processes. This was provided, Scholes continues, by the arrival of the Darwinian revolution, Einstein's theory of relativity, and the discovery of the many complex structures that inform the cultural and biochemical systems in which human lives are lived. All these led to the emergence, sometime in the early 20th century, of structural fabulation. "A new mutation in the tradition of speculative fiction,"[18] as Scholes calls it, structural fabulation combines sublimation, estrangement, and cognition—the qualities that were later identified by Suvin as fundamental for science fiction. Yet, Scholes insists, it is "neither scientific in its methods nor a substitute for actual science."[19] Instead, it draws equally from the human and the physical sciences, departing from what we know through philosophical, sociological, scientific, and other extrapolations about what modern humanity has due cause to hope for or fear. As this description suggests, the mutation of speculative fiction called structural fabulation transcends any single genre. Indeed, Scholes is careful to note that not all science fiction qualifies as structural fabulation and admits that certain works of modern fantasy share a structural perception of the universe in which magic, religion, and science become indistinguishable. Although he barely mentions other non-mimetic genres and implies that most fantasy may best be thought of as speculative rather than structural fabulation, Scholes deserves the credit for being the first to sketch out a spectrum of speculative fiction that encompasses three forms of fabulation across several genres and forms of time-consciousness.

If Merril's and Scholes's works exemplify a reflection on speculative fiction that emerged in the science fiction field, claims about speculative fiction were also articulated by fantasy scholars. Two early studies, especially, merit attention: Diana Waggoner's *The Hills of Faraway: A Guide to Fantasy* (1978), and Kathryn Hume's *Fantasy and Mimesis* (1984). Both monographs were subsequently displaced from mainstream fantasy criticism by a spate of genre-focused works, but then again, the same happened to Scholes's *Structural Fabulation*. Within four years it was eclipsed by Suvin's genre-oriented *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, which almost immediately established itself as the core critical approach to science fiction and has remained so until the present. If the argument for a larger field of speculative fiction was ahead of its time, Waggoner and Hume were among the first to theorize fantasy by placing it firmly within this broader tradition.

Where Scholes's main criterion for defining an inflection of speculative fiction called structural fabulation was what we *know* about the world, Waggoner's criterion was exactly the opposite: what we *do not know* and thereby can only speculate on. Somewhat like Scholes, though not limited to fabulation or non-mimetic traditions alone, Waggoner proposes a classification of all Western literature into four broad classes of fiction depending on their treatment of the supernatural: pre-realistic literature, realism, post-realistic fabulation, and speculative fiction. Drawing on the taxonomies introduced by Northrop Frye, Waggoner uses the label of pre-realistic literature for myth, romance, and Frye's high mimetic modes—archaic and pre-modern literary forms that, other than in theological and religious senses, project no distinction between the natural and the supernatural phenomena. In these narratives the supernatural is real, as is the case in *The Divine Comedy* where the narrator experiences Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise as tangible places, not fundamentally divorced from ordinary reality. Over the course of the 16th and 17th centuries, Waggoner then argues, the worldview that informed pre-realistic literature was superseded by one based on scientific materialism and skeptical empiricism. This created conditions for the rise of literature based on the careful observation of life and a strict division of phenomena into real/natural versus unreal/supernatural. Since the supernatural was no longer accepted as part of the real world, it had no place in realistic fiction. Events that seemed supernatural were therefore explained away in realistic fiction as manipulation, coincidence, or illusion. The problem with this approach, Waggoner notes, was that the narrowly defined realism disregarded other faculties than reason, especially the irrational yet nonetheless very real phenomena of the unconscious mind. Realism thus offered a limited view of the human experience. The rise of sentimental fiction, the gothic, and other genres that began to move away from *mimesis* was a reaction to these restrictions. By the second part of the 19th century, this process led to the emergence of a class of fiction that Waggoner, employing Scholes's term from *The Fabulators* (1967), has called "post-realistic fabulation." Post-realistic fabulation broadened the scope of realism to include the irrational. Nevertheless, its treatment of the supernatural was limited to casting it as a form of madness—when resulting in outward behaviors as in Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861)—or framing it as a form of dream or hallucination, as in Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). Put otherwise, in post-realistic fabulation, the supernatural was granted qualified reality: it was acknowledged as something that is psychologically and subjectively real only for some people.

If post-realistic fabulation was thus able to handle descriptions of both everyday life and psychological phenomena in ways that realism was not, neither realism nor post-realistic fabulation considered the possibility that the supernatural might, in fact, be real. This seminal question, Waggoner asserts, "created modern speculative fiction."[20] As she defines it, speculative fiction is a broad category of modern literature "that treats supernatural and/or nonexistent phenomena (such as the future) as a special class of objectively real things or events."[21] After all, the idea that what is real must be perceptible or measurable is only an assumption. Consequently, to claim that the supernatural—including different dimensions, extrasensory perception, different forms of non-human intelligence, existence, or powers, some of these dubbed as magic—can only refer to mere projections of the human mind overlooks the possibility that at least some of these might be objectively real, though unprovable or unmeasurable phenomena. The emergence of speculative fiction, Waggoner concludes, was a development that provided a means by which otherwise realist texts can speculate on unprovable realities. And while speculative fiction comprises a number of non-

mimetic genres, fantasy stands out among them, for in it the gap between the natural and the supernatural is the widest. According to Waggoner, fantasy must establish realistic credibility for the supernatural; if it does not, it fails not just formally but entirely, regardless of the quality of its writing. As the most visionary genre of speculative fiction, fantasy is less constrained by the limitations of physical reality than other genres, especially science fiction, which is bound by the ideas of scientific plausibility.[22]

Positing fantasy as the ultimate expression of speculative fiction obviously reveals Waggoner's personal preferences. Nonetheless, her theorization of speculative fiction as a broad, multi-genre category that emerged at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in reaction to the representational limits of post-realist fabulation shares many affinities with the arguments made by Merril and Scholes. Waggoner's book was thus the first clear articulation of a trend for conceptualizing fantasy as a strand in a larger tradition of speculative fiction that involves other non-mimetic genres. This claim sets it apart from the bulk of fantasy scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s, focused as it was on defining fantasy as a genre: Tzvetan Todorov's *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to Literary Genre* (1970), C. N. Manlove's *Modern Fantasy: Five Studies* (1975), W. R. Irwin's *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* (1976), Eric S. Rabkin's *The Fantastic in Literature* (1976), Stephen Prickett's *Victorian Fantasy* (1979), Roger C. Schlobin's *The Literature of Fantasy: A Comprehensive, Annotated Bibliography of Fantasy Fiction* (1979), Eric S. Rabkin's *Fantastic Worlds* (1979), Brian Attebery's *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature: From Irving to Le Guin* (1980), and Christine Brooke-Rose's *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, especially of the Fantastic* (1981). Even though some of these authors acknowledged that fantasy cannot be absolutely separated from other non-mimetic genres—suggesting, as Schlobin does in *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art* (1982), that fantasy "can be found in all types of fiction"[23]—their focus remained on fantasy as a genre, a mode of thought, a formal element of the narrative structure, or a reader's response to the text. Often cited as foundational works of fantasy criticism, each of these studies sought to arrive at an exclusive definition of fantasy, usually through isolating its outstanding examples or operational modes rather than describing the field at large.

It is against this background that Kathryn Hume's *Fantasy and Mimesis* (1984) stands out as one of the most ambitious attempts to describe the scope of fantastic literature without limiting it to any single genre. Written at a transitional cusp, when it became apparent that genre-focused approaches fail to capture the larger contours of fantasy's entanglement with other non-mimetic genres, Hume's study challenges taxonomies, in which fantasy is treated as a genre opposed to realism. Instead, Hume postulates that fantasy and mimesis are two impulses involved in the creation of all art. They are, she posits, two responses to reality and two epistemological orientations in any human activity. This approach projects fantasy as "an element in nearly all kinds of literature,"[24] but problematizes any sharp distinctions between mimetic and non-mimetic fiction. Suggesting instead that texts on each pole of the spectrum contain both realistic and nonrealistic elements, Hume proposes a synchronic taxonomy of literature based on its specific blends of mimetic and non-mimetic components: the literature of illusion that is primarily escapist; the literature of vision that engages the reader with new interpretations of reality; the literature of revision characterized by the dominance of the didactic component; and the literature of disillusion, in which reality is declared unknowable. Being "an impulse native to literature and manifested in innumerable variations,"[25] fantasy, like mimesis, appears in all of these categories, but is put to different uses across a range of

genres and stylistic conventions. In each case, though, fantasy marks a deliberate departure from consensus reality; consequently, the works in which the fantastic impulse is dominant constitute a tradition of fiction opposed to that informed by the mimetic imperative. Although Hume prefers the term "fantasy" to "speculative fiction," she consistently speaks of the field that encompasses many genres. As for Scholes, so too for Hume, the common aspiration of the works in this field is to wean the reader away from a limited perception of reality—whether for escape, education, enrichment, or sobering embarrassment.

Recent Formulations: Advantages and Limitations

Although insightful, the pioneering work on speculative fiction by Merril, Scholes, Waggoner, and Hume has been ignored by genre criticism to the extent that the re-emergence of the term in the early 2000s can hardly be attributed to their direct influence. Nevertheless, there were larger trends operating in literary reflection on non-mimetic genres that made their merger into a field of speculative fiction almost inevitable. The most important among these has been the variously articulated yet undeniable perception of family resemblance between fantasy and science fiction. The sense of empirical convergence of these genres, especially when set against mimetic fiction, has been shared by publishers, readers, and critics. Specialized magazines, starting with *Astounding Tales* (since 1930), would publish stories across the generic range of fantasy, horror, and science fiction. Readers would intuit that their favorite genre's achievement is a facet of a larger cultural phenomenon that includes works in related non-mimetic genres. Authors would publish award-winning works in different non-mimetic genres—the fact recognized in the creation of the Nebula Award (since 1966) curated by an organization called Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America. Scholars, finally, would often address fantasy and science fiction together, even though, as Gary K. Wolfe has noted in his *Critical Terms for Science Fiction and Fantasy: A Glossary and Guide to Scholarship* (1986), fantasy and science fiction developed their own critical terminology largely apart from each other. Lloyd Arthur Eshbach's *Of Worlds Beyond* (1947) and Everett F. Bleiler's *The Checklist of Modern Fantastic Literature* (1948) were the earliest critical works in this tradition. But it was only in the 1970s—at the height of sustained definitional battles aimed at identifying genre boundaries—that a growing number of scholars would again take up the "fantastic" as a blanket term for the many forms of non-mimetic art. It was clear from its usage that the term included fantasy, science fiction, and horror. It was less clear what non-mimetic genres, if any, it excluded. Or on what grounds.

This open-ended use of the fantastic for a continuum of non-mimetic fiction was reflected in titles of such studies as Rabkin's *The Fantastic in Literature* (1976) or Christine Brooke-Rose's *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, especially of the Fantastic* (1981), but also in professional events such as the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts, an annual event since 1980. Attracting scholars, authors, publishers, and fans of science fiction, fantasy, horror, and other non-mimetic genres, the conference led to the founding, in 1982, of the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts, and the establishment of its periodical, the *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* (since 1990). The fantastic as a shared multi-genre space was also validated in several reference works, starting with the much-celebrated Gary K. Wolfe's *Glossary* that included entries on forty-five genres related to, yet distinct from science fiction and fantasy. One argument in favor of the use of the fantastic has been that it enables discussing modern and historic forms of fantastic

literature. The framework of the fantastic, for example, allows Richard Mathews in *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination* (1997) to trace the literary history of the fantastic all the way to the Egyptian "Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor" dated about 2000 BCE. Another advantage has been that the fantastic better captures the flows of fantastic motifs and themes across various media, including radio, film, drama, computer games, poetry, even fan culture—cross-pollinations that are multidirectional and circulate through rather than merely flow out of the literary fantastic. Examples of such studies are legion, from George Slusser and Eric S. Rabkin's *Flights of Fancy: Armed Conflict in Science Fiction and Fantasy* (1993) to Judith B. Kerman and John Edgar Browning's *The Fantastic in Holocaust Literature and Film* (2014).

Given all these advantages, the fantastic has been extensively used especially by fantasy scholars. Brian Attebery has drawn on it consistently. In *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth* (2014), he defines the fantastic as "creative and disruptive play with representations of the real world."[26] The term's wide currency is likewise evoked in the titles of numerous journals, including the newly established *Fantastika* (since 2016). The fantastic has also been embraced by many science fiction scholars—or embraced more widely than other supergenre labels including L. Sprague de Camp's "imaginative fiction," Suvin's "estranged fiction," the politically problematic "magical realism," or even the most recent "fantastika"—a Slavic term adopted into English by John Clute. In their co-edited 2002 issue of *Historical Materialism*, for example, Mark Bould takes the fantastic as a blanket term for a broad range of non-mimetic genres,[27] while China Miéville famously declares that science fiction "must be considered a subset of a broader fantastic mode—[in which] 'scientism' is just sf's mode of expression of the fantastic (the impossible-but-true)."[28] Despite its apparent uses and scope, however, the fantastic has been weighed down by unfortunate semantic and etymological associations. For one, it has been opposed by many science fiction scholars, from Suvin through Jameson, whose insistence on the unique cognitive value, epistemological gravity, and peculiar estrangement offered by science fiction have made them exclude fantasy, horror, and other non-mimetic genres from the science fiction field. For another, it has been resented as supposedly suggesting the primacy of fantasy over science fiction—or fantasy encompassing science fiction as one among its subgenres—which is a contestable claim at its mildest and rather hard to accept for those who, like Jameson, see fantasy as "technically reactionary"[29] and thus the opposite of science fiction.

The term speculative fiction, while essentially gesturing at the territory staked by the fantastic, is free from the legacy of genre wars and hostile taxonomies. How and when its recent rise began is hard to say, but something happened around 2000—something that surged up against genre boundaries that 20th-century criticism erected around different modes of narrative speculation based on preferences for different sets of tools. This shift resists accurate description, and its significance will be contested. But it can be intuited if one looks at two events that happened at that time and attest to an expanding perception of non-mimetic narrative forms. The earlier of these tipping points was the publication of *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (2000). Edited by Sheree R. Thomas, this landmark collection was the first to recognize an extremely rich tradition of speculative fiction by authors of color and challenged the perception of speculative genres as predominantly written by and addressed to the white audience. The collection includes twenty-nine stories accompanied by five critical essays by black scholars, including Delany's seminal 1999 "Racism and Science Fiction." In her introduction, "Looking for the Invisible," Thomas employs the metaphors of the "invisible" and the "Black Matter" to stand, at once, for

the speculative fiction of black writers, for the long tradition of their marginalization, and for these stories' generic hybridity.[30] This last aspect is represented in the volume by eleven stories that fall into science fiction; eleven in fantasy; and seven in horror, slipstream, and other designations. It is telling that despite its wide generic range, *Dark Matter* won the 2001 World Fantasy Award for Best Anthology.

The other event happened in 2001, when the World Science Fiction Society, which for over four decades chose its Hugo Awards on genre-specific criteria derived from Suvin, opened a new chapter by selecting J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000) and Ang Lee's film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) as its Hugo Award winners. These were followed in subsequent years by several other awards given to novels and films outside of science fiction proper, yet no argument was raised about these works' ineligibility for recognition by the World Science Fiction Society. Both of these events were historic in acknowledging not just the rapprochement between fantasy and science fiction, but a de facto expansion of non-mimetic genres' authorship, diverse cultural roots, and storytelling modes— all of which imply their new positioning within a larger field of the genres of alternative thought that comprise speculative fiction.

Besides circumventing the problematic semantic legacy of the fantastic, the term "speculative fiction" brought other advantages as well. It has directed attention away from interminable taxonomic debates that had so far preoccupied scholars of non-mimetic fiction. Instead of asking what works belong or should be excluded from particular genres, critics in the field of speculative fiction are apt to identify the criteria of inclusion, irrespective of whether the text represents a generic hybrid or a more unambiguous articulation of a single genre. This lens, in turn, allows for exploring the nature of the text's speculative performance with the reader. A switch to using the term "speculative fiction" may also account for the dwindling of the inherently unsolvable discussions about hierarchical relationships among various non-mimetic genres. Within this new framework, scholars may investigate, for example, whether utopia is a subgenre of science fiction or rather science fiction emerged as a node in the developmental trajectory of utopia, but all these conversations and their various outcomes can be accommodated as strands in the exploration of speculative fiction without entailing claims about these foci's central importance for the field. Most of all, speculative fiction has proven a useful term to deflect the historically-loaded emotional charge that has accrued around debates on the relationship between science fiction and fantasy. Historically, each of these supergenres has claimed a number of subgenres, some of which have been treated as border outposts that imply territorial claims. For example, *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction* (2009) features entries on twelve subgenres of science fiction—alternate history, apocalyptic science fiction, arthouse science fiction film, blockbuster science fiction film, dystopia, eutopia, feminist science fiction, future history, hard science fiction, slipstream, space opera, and weird fiction—but since many among these have also been called by alternative names, the effective range of genre labels within science fiction is much broader. Likewise, in its many theorizations, fantasy has been broken down into taxonomies ranging from as little as two—high versus low fantasy—to proposals spanning over a dozen subgenres, including, yes, science fiction, science fantasy, animal fantasy, toy fantasy, mythopoeic fantasy, heroic fantasy, epic fantasy, sword and sorcery, gritty fantasy, postcolonial fantasy, magic realism, fantastic fabulation, fabulist fiction, colonial fantasy, urban fantasy, feminist fantasy, ghost fantasy, time-slip fantasy, situated fantasy, organic fantasy, and more. One also has to contend with the historical attempts by each supercategory to colonize related genres—

fantasy claiming myth and the fairy tale, or science fiction claiming horror and utopia—as if other non-mimetic genres were unthinkable outside of the perimeter of either fantasy or science fiction. Well, they are. For example, the rise and decline of the American female gothic described by Jeffrey A. Weinstock in *Scare Tactics* (2008) occurred largely independently of the trajectories of fantasy and science fiction, and was fueled by the social usefulness of the supernatural tale "to express the specifically female anxieties and desires" experienced by women in the patriarchal culture of the 1850s through the 1930s.[31] Likewise, the history of horror, although often intersecting with fantasy and science fiction, reveals a unique trajectory of this third major genre cluster which may flout scientific speculation and the supernatural alike to produce ever new, genre-transgressive offshoots such as the New Weird. Within the larger framework of speculative fiction, each of these genres enjoys more autonomy and agency in identifying its alliances, inspirations, and predecessors.

This inherent valuing of diversity is another force that accounts for the growing popularity of the term "speculative fiction." Unlike fantasy, science fiction, horror and other genre labels, which are culturally situated designations that arose to describe European and North American developments in the Western literature field, speculative fiction opens a new discursive space for the voice of minorities and ethnic others within non-mimetic narrative forms without relegating them to the ghetto of "ethnic" literatures. Historically, fantasy was an inflection on the (Western) novel form that developed within (Western) literature as a reaction to the dominant (Western) mindset that banned the supernatural: it was a response to the limiting of reality to the palpable and explainable that never occurred in other cultures. Likewise, science fiction—if traced to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818)—emerged as a questioning of the (Western) narrative of scientific progress and has continued to interrogate (Western) technological advances, both of which were foundational to the (Western) colonial expansion that had led to the crippling of non-Western cultures and the near erasure of their science and technologies.

But if "fantasy" and "science fiction" have historically been oppositional terms, "speculative fiction," in its modern use, is even more so. A truly global phenomenon that arose in the modern multicultural world, speculative fiction rejects the "science for the West, myth for the rest" mindset informing traditional Western non-mimetic genres—especially fantasy and science fiction, with their often colonialist and imperialist visions of spiritual or technological (con)quests. Today's speculative fiction affirms not merely the existence of ethnic traditions of science and spirituality but the cognitive value of speculative visions of the world formulated from a postcolonial or minority perspective. The creation of the James Tiptree Jr. Award for speculative fiction that explores gender (since 1991) and of the Carl Brandon Society—aiming to increase racial and ethnic diversity in the production of and audience for speculative fiction (since 1999)—are just two of the many indicators about how well the term "speculative fiction" has served the much-needed minority voices. *Dark Matter* was quickly followed by other collections of diasporic speculative fictions: Nalo Hopkinson's *Whispers from the Cotton Tree Root: Caribbean Fabulist Fiction* (2000); Sheree R. Thomas's *Dark Matter: Reading the Bones* (2004); Nalo Hopkinson and Mehan Uppinder's *So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction and Fantasy* (2004); Derwin Mak and Eric Choi's *The Dragon and the Stars* (2010); Sandra Jackson and Judy Moody-Freeman's *The Black Imagination: Science Fiction, Futurism and The Speculative* (2011); Grace Dillon's *Walking the Clouds* (2012), as well as the

Kickstarter-funded grassroots anthologies by Rose Fox and Daniel José Older, *Long Hidden: Speculative Fiction from the Margins of History* (2014) and its sequel *Hidden Youth* (forthcoming).

Informing all these works is a conviction that forms of ethnic cultural expression must be recognized on their own terms, especially in how they subvert the Western dichotomy between the real and unreal, natural and supernatural, scientific and unscientific. As Hopkinson argues in *So Long Been Dreaming*, speculative fiction written from the context of blackness and Caribbeanness is substantially different from mainstream science fiction and fantasy in that it subverts these genres' Westernized tropes and codes. "In my hands," Hopkinson declares, "massa's tools don't dismantle massa's house—and in fact, I don't want to destroy it so much as I want to undertake massive renovations—they build me a house of my own."[32] That house has its own space within the field of speculative fiction. Neither excluding nor privileging traditional Western genres, speculative fiction accommodates international works written in languages other than English, bifocal cultural forms such as Ingrid Thaler's eponymous *Black Atlantic Speculative Fictions* (2014), and speculative fiction informed by Latin@, Asian American, Indigenous, and other non-Western traditions, all of which share a legacy of marginalization. In other words, speculative fiction today refers to a global phenomenon of non-mimetic traditions from around the world, whose contemporary ethnic examples often articulate multicultural reality better than the historically white and predominantly Anglophone non-mimetic genres.

That last quality implies another much appreciated advantage of speculative fiction: its inclusive open-endedness. Invariably, authors, scholars, editors, and online resources that evoke speculative fiction explain that the term encompasses science fiction, fantasy, horror and/or more genres. These, however, are always cited as examples rather than a closed list. Instead of defining "speculative fiction" through boundaries, its advocates suggest that the term's wide scope is especially welcoming to texts from the margins: generic, cultural, ethnic, or others. This has been the case at least since the establishment of the *Internet Speculative Fiction Database* (1995), which declares the project to be "a community effort to catalog works of science fiction, fantasy, and horror,"[33] but includes entries on narratives that hybridize and go beyond these three. It is likewise true of many recent initiatives, for example, the Current Research in Speculative Fiction conference (since 2011) that aims to "promote the research of speculative fictions including, but not limited to, science fiction, fantasy and horror."[34] The lens of speculative fiction, finally, ignores the distinction between literary and popular articulations of non-mimetic genres. These are noted merely as historically located markers in the evolution of speculative fiction. If Scholes considered solely the evolution of mainstream Western literature, and if Waggoner's list of speculative fiction— filtered into a timeline of fantasy—included seventy-six titles written by white authors, today's speculative fiction is a much wider and diverse category.

Contrary to what Heinlein, Merril, Scholes, or Atwood might have wished, "speculative fiction" has not replaced the term "science fiction." Instead, it has claimed a different, much larger space in the cultural imagination. Today, a search of "speculative fiction" in the Full Text box of the *Science Fiction and Fantasy Research Database* yields over thirty thousand items. The works of speculative fiction range from the gothic surreal, unicorn bedtime tales, and varieties of Shojo fan fiction, through post-apocalyptic zombie romance, Afrofuturist eco-dystopia, and posthuman urban fantasy, to steampunk animal superhero tales, alternate

history magic realism, and postmodern fractured fairy tales. With works appealing to all age groups and across a range of subculture audiences; operating in printed, electronic, and hybrid formats; and available in all visual media, contemporary speculative fiction spans anything from *Spongebob* to *Avengers*, *Thor*, the *Ice Age* movies and *The Hunger Games* to a *Southpark* spoof of *The Game of Thrones*. For those who value the term, it is the largest, the most diverse, and the most dynamic category of modern storytelling.

Despite its perplexing heterogeneity, speculative fiction across the board shares two qualities. First, it interrogates normative notions about reality and challenges the materialist complacency that nothing exists beyond the phenomenal world. This, incidentally, aligns it with science, which posits that all of the known kinds of matter and energy make up, at best, only about 4 percent of the universe, whereas the nature and properties of the remaining 96 percent remain anybody's guess. Given that dark matter and dark energy are now assumed to be a mathematical necessity, speculative fiction may well be theorized as an imaginative necessity: a mode of critical inquiry that celebrates human creative power. Second, speculative fiction offers no pretense of being factual or accurate. This denial endows it with a potential for challenging consensus reality, besides making speculative fiction politically scrappy, cognitively empowering, and affectively stimulating. With all its borderless messiness, the field of speculative fiction can thus be considered the unlimited cloud space for our multicultural world's non-mimetic traditions that help us share and reclaim forgotten or marginalized modes of engagement with reality.

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