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Teaching Speculative Fiction in College: A Pedagogy for Making English Studies Relevant

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TEACHING SPECULATIVE FICTION IN COLLEGE:
A PEDAGOGY FOR MAKING ENGLISH STUDIES RELEVANT

by

JAMES HAMMOND SHIMKUS

Under the Direction of Dr. Elizabeth Burmester

ABSTRACT

Speculative fiction (science fiction, fantasy, and horror) has steadily gained popularity both in culture and as a subject for study in college. While many helpful resources on teaching a particular genre or teaching particular texts within a genre exist, college teachers who have not previously taught science fiction, fantasy, or horror will benefit from a broader pedagogical overview of speculative fiction, and that is what this resource provides. Teachers who have previously taught speculative fiction may also benefit from the selection of alternative texts presented here. This resource includes an argument for the consideration of more speculative fiction in college English classes, whether in composition, literature, or creative writing, as well as overviews of the main theoretical discussions and definitions of each genre. In addition, this work includes a short history of speculative fiction, bibliographies of suggested sample themes for each genre, sample course syllabi and assignment/activity suggestions, and strategies for obtaining and using hard-to-find texts for prospective teachers.

INDEX WORDS: Pedagogy, Literature, Rhetoric, Popular culture, Speculative fiction, History of literature

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JAMES HAMMOND SHIMKUS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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A PEDAGOGY FOR MAKING ENGLISH STUDIES RELEVANT

by

JAMES HAMMOND SHIMKUS

Committee Chair: Dr. Elizabeth Burmester

Committee: Dr. Mary Hocks

Dr. Scott Lightsey

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College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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DEDICATION

For my Dad

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION: SOME WEIRD TALES

At the 2009 Joint Conference of the National Popular Culture and American Popular Culture Associations in New Orleans, I wandered into a roundtable session titled “Pedagogy of Horror—Using Horror to Teach Across the Disciplines.” Wait. Allow me to backtrack for a moment to the true start of the seed that grew into a dissertation. My good friend and co-worker Leverett Butts was presenting a paper at the conference, and we had planned to drive down to New Orleans together. I was the designated driver. This is because, if I let Leverett drive, we'll never get there, or we'll get there, but someone will be called to identify our bodies. I had contracted H1N1 two days prior to our departure, and it turned into pneumonia, making my drive much more interesting than usual. I slept through Leverett's presentation, but he gave me a synopsis of the panel later. It seems that, after he had presented his paper, someone in the audience asked Leverett, “So, how would I use this in my class?” I think no one on the panel expected that question, but Leverett responded skillfully, and we discussed later what a brilliant, simple question that had been: *How would I use this in my class?*

The question was still on my mind then when I attended the horror pedagogy roundtable, and the speakers (Kristopher Woofert, Michael Nelson, Beth Kattelman, Robin Gray Nicks, and Carl Sederholm) answered it thoughtfully, given the time limitation. No one seemed to want to leave, and in fact, several people in the audience waited around to get suggestions for texts, films, and authors to use for the horror classes they wanted to teach. People were interested in horror, and they wanted to teach it, but they wanted some resources. In short, *how do I use this in my class?*

So I did some research, and I found that indeed there are some resources out there for

people who want to teach horror, or science fiction, or fantasy—also known as genre literature or speculative fiction. Mostly science fiction, though, because for some reason, writers and teachers of science fiction like to share their thoughts in print. However, those resources I found were problematic in two ways: they left large gaps and at the same time were very narrowly focused; they tended to be collections of essays by different teachers who related their experiences teaching specific texts. Also, the resources themselves seemed to be segmented into one of the three genres of speculative fiction: science fiction, or horror, or fantasy. As I shall discuss later, these three types of fiction are related, sharing distinct characteristics that bind them together and set them slightly apart from “realistic” fiction. Rather than merely critique the existing scholarship, I decided to fill the gap that I had encountered, with original scholarship providing new contexts, theories, applications, genealogies and glossaries for each genre, and discussion linking them together. Motivated by the question of how to teach these genres in college literature, composition, and popular culture courses, and also by my own interest as both an avid reader, and sometime writer, of speculative fiction, I have drawn on my own teaching experiences at a variety of post-secondary institutions, my bibliographic and anthologizing skills, and original research to instruct other teachers.

In this dissertation, I will strive to maintain a casual, conversational tone. Whether at conferences or conventions (or tutoring sessions in writing centers or conferences with students), I have found that many productive conversations occur when people are sitting around talking. In fact, many of the ideas that helped form this dissertation came from phone conversations or late night sessions around someone's kitchen table. In striking a conversational tone, I am acknowledging that writing is a conversation, and I am responsible for upholding my end of the dialogue by holding the attention and interest of my audience.

I have designed this dissertation to be a resource for those who aspire to teaching science fiction, fantasy, and/or horror in the college classroom, as well as those who never considered it before but want to integrate popular culture and genres into their writing and literature courses to engage students and to create greater relevance in their curriculums and courses that will connect with college students. My intended audience encompasses all teachers who would like a broad overview of the issues and texts in each of these genres; this resource is not necessarily for those who have been teaching speculative fiction for years, but even those teachers may find something new here to use in future teaching.

I will begin, in Chapter 2, with a cliché of sorts: a defense of speculative fiction. Specifically, I will attempt to make an argument for teaching speculative fiction in college before I move on to recommending texts and techniques. Although others have defended and continue to defend genre fiction in general, I believe it is necessary to review and add to the argument for two reasons. The first has to do with critics and the canon. Although genre fiction of many stripes is working its way into the classroom, some stigma still attaches itself to this type of literature even in the 21st century, and even with impressive growth in sales figures and new readers. Many scholars and teachers still consider speculative fiction to be repetitive and/or poorly written, and thus not worthy of study—or even reading. I believe this view is simplistic and misinformed, and I will counter it with evidence that reveals its roots in classical and canonical story conventions, its full and complicated definitions, and its relevance to critiques of social, political, and cultural conventions of everyday life. I will also present suggestions for new ways to engage students in these evaluative debates and to become more critical participants.

Which leads directly into my second reason for teaching speculative fiction, which has to do with college students and their attitudes about reading. A few years ago, I taught an Honors

Composition class. Nearly all of the students in the class loved literature, particularly fantasy, so we would often get derailed from discussing composition to discussing, say, the merits of the *Lord of The Rings* movies versus the books, and just how one pronounces *mithril*. During one of these digressions, one of my brightest students told me, “Literature is useless.” I was taken aback, not only by the comment (and the disconcerting germ of truth in it), but because this student *was always reading fantasy novels*. Is entertainment useless? He seemed to enjoy them...isn't enjoyment useful? This student was also an avid athlete (so am I, when I have the time); couldn't I make the case that lifting weights or practicing Pilates or playing basketball is useless? After all, this is the 21st century—all we need to do to be productive and useful is learn how to use technology, right? Or perhaps we need to reevaluate why and how we evaluate the things we enjoy in our day to day lives.

Over the years, as a teacher at a large state research university, and at a private community college, I have found that college students crave a reason to read literature. They often tell me they want to read texts that have some relevance to their lives, that they can relate to and that help them make meaning out of the substance of their experiences. I have known quite a few good teachers who strive to draw connections between the literature we assign in our classes and our students' lives, but I argue here that we need to do more to establish those connections. I will, in arguing for the validity of speculative fiction, discuss some of the ways this fiction is very relevant to our lives, both in and out of academia, and how, in some sense, it can be “useful.”

In Chapter 3, I provide a brief history of speculative fiction, examining its starting points and growth with gothic and realistic novels in the 18th century, moving to the early science fiction works of H.G. Wells and Jules Verne, and the transition away from gothic toward modern

horror, inspired by new technologies, in the 19th century. I also trace the growth of speculative fiction in the early 20th century with pulp magazines and books, the role and legacy of Lovecraft, the golden age of science fiction, and the rise of post-war and cold-war “monster movies” in the 1950s. From there, I discuss the second half of the 20th century, the creation of sub-genres of speculative fiction, solidification of marketing, the rise of small presses and self-publishing, and the creation of horror and science fiction “film franchises.” I put this entire history in a cultural context to explain its evolution and appeal. Moreover, I put this tracing of roots and origins and backgrounds specifically into a teaching context, explaining how this history can inform course design and how it can be used for pedagogy with students.

Following Chapter 3, the next three chapters each focus on a single (sub)genre, defining and theorizing it, and presenting identical frameworks for teachers, so they may either use them consistently for parallel inclusion and study, or so each can be a stand-alone unit for those who want to focus exclusively on one of these subgenres of speculative fiction. Chapter 4 focuses on Horror, Chapter 5 on Science Fiction, and Chapter 6 on Fantasy. Each of those chapters includes its own Glossary of Key Terms and Genealogies and Themes, which are designed to help teachers design courses and choose appropriate and desirable texts, authors, and themes from the very large range of choices out there.

For each of these practical chapters, I will reflect on and discuss my process of selection, and share the criteria I used in choosing the entries, with the goal of not only revealing how and why I consider these texts, authors, themes, trends, and concepts important and even essential as starting points, but also to construct a model and method that readers can adapt and apply on their own to their classrooms, using their own interests and parameters, but informed by the theory and definitions and perspectives I have drawn on and been influenced by.

In my Conclusion, I will take stock of where this pedagogy brings us, its benefits to student learning in specific courses, and next steps, where I will consider what still needs to be done with scholarship and pedagogy for the future, and to advance English Studies as both relevant to readers' lives, and also relevant to preparing readers for the real world outside the classroom and campus. In this chapter I will also discuss sample courses and syllabi for implementing my methods.

1.1 A Word About Terminology

I really would prefer to use the terms “weird tales” and/or “weird fiction,” and not just because H.P. Lovecraft scholar S.T. Joshi seems to like them (*The Modern Weird Tale* 1). If we were to pick up an original issue of the pulp magazine *Weird Tales*, we would find a potpourri of genres within: science fantasy, heroic fantasy, horror, historical fiction, and just plain *weird* stories. However, I have opted for the more specific and technical term “speculative fiction” here to encompass the genres/sub-genres (more about the idea of genre later) of science fiction, fantasy, and horror.

I realize that, strictly speaking, *all* fiction is speculative. As Ursula K. LeGuin says in “On Not Reading Science Fiction,” the foreword to her collection *A Fisherman of the Inland Sea*, all fiction presents to us “a world we can't otherwise reach” (3). However, my use of the term “speculative” serves to differentiate fiction that is *consciously* written to posit some reality for the reader that *explicitly differs* from our everyday, empirical reality from fiction that does not offer an explicit break with reality or is not consciously intended to. This is the key difference between *speculative fiction*, as I am defining it, and *fiction*, which in some way re-creates or simulates everyday reality. Speculative fiction would cover such elements as zombies (we have none in the real world), dragons (ditto), and faster-than-light travel (this may even be as

impossible/improbable as dragons), to name just a few examples.

Speculative fiction would then be a sort of over-genre itself, with science fiction, fantasy, and horror being sub-genres, each containing variations. I will often use the terms *genre* and *sub-genre* interchangeably, unless I find a better term for the speculative fiction umbrella: meta-genre? uber-genre? The idea of genre itself presents problems (as it always has); the temptation is strong to view genres as categories (mostly because categories are useful for marketing books; but this is good for publishers, rather than for readers or authors). While categories may be useful for distinguishing cookbooks from poetry collections, when we are dealing with speculative fiction, the lines get blurry. I fully agree with Carl Freedman: we should consider genre *not as*

a classification but an element or, better still, a *tendency* that, in combination with other relatively autonomous generic elements or tendencies, is active to a greater or lesser degree within a literary text that is itself understood as a complexly structured totality. In other words: a text is not filed under a generic category; instead, a generic tendency is something that happens within a text. (20)

This idea of elements or tendencies illustrates the fact that genres tend to be fluid and dynamic, rather than static categories. While certain elements remain constant and identifiable (e.g., horror fiction generally aims to evoke horror, fantasy tends to use elements of a mythic past), I find Freedman's suggestion very useful, thus I will use *genre* to mean the predominant tendencies that are active within a text, rather than denoting a strict category.

1.2 A Word About Methods and Methodology

Research methods are the tools and techniques used to craft an argument, interpret evidence, and propose new models. Methodology is why you are using a particular approach. In

their “Introduction” to *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research*, editors Gesa Kirsch and Patricia A. Sullivan quote Sandra Harding’s definitions. To wit, method is “a technique or way of proceeding in gathering evidence,” while methodology is “the underlying theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed” (2). Kirsch and Sullivan go on to associate methods with “pragmatics,” and methodology with “problematics,” but both “are intertwined” and connected to “knowledge making” (2).

In my study, the “pragmatics” are the suggestion and organization of texts for classroom study using anthologizing and bibliographic methods. By organizing suggested texts according to themes and genealogies, I provide readers with a modular reference system which can be assembled and reassembled in different configurations for the classroom. In addition, many bibliographies of genre fiction simply suggest key texts without additional guidance; where a particular text is out of print or otherwise inaccessible, my system provides similar or related texts as substitutes. My approach is pedagogical, and every method I employ is designed to keep that focus and provide readers with a variety of resources for their classrooms.

The “problematics” I uncover include the vestiges of prejudice against speculative fiction in college (resulting in a relative dearth of pedagogical resources), the difficulty of employing theory to account for all of the characteristics of speculative fiction, the increasing difficulty of obtaining important texts for inclusion in classroom study, and the narrow focus adopted by many of the texts on teaching speculative fiction in college. My argument for including speculative fiction in the classroom is based in both pedagogy and critical examinations of the underlying reasons for bias against speculative fiction. My discussions of theories related to science fiction, fantasy, and horror avoid tidy conclusions, but rather point out strengths and weaknesses in the major theoretical lenses most often used to study those genres; this approach

allows readers to easily import the ideas in the ongoing conversations about the genres into classroom discussions and augment those discussions with whatever additional theoretical concepts they find useful. My approach also recognizes the expertise students who are genre fiction fans bring with them, and shows the ways that these debates about the value, place, and conventions of speculative fiction can become central to the pedagogy for teaching genre texts.

I also draw on *Movies and Methods*, edited by Bill Nichols. Nichols observes that neither film nor film studies has an “intrinsic method,” so any interpretation is “extrinsic,” or imported and applied from another field or theoretic framing. So film studies—and literary studies—may invoke analytic methods belonging to “Semiotics, poststructuralism, linguistics, psychoanalysis, phenomenology, Marxism, feminism, formal analysis, cognitive and perceptual psychology, anthropology, literary and rhetorical criticism, and cultural history” (2). However, Nichols also points out that these methods “have not gained universal acceptance” and these methods “stand largely in opposition to a staunchly defended humanistic tradition” (2).

The humanistic tradition derives from the history of rhetorical education, which connected poetics and persuasion, recitation and composition, reading and writing. My approach is humanistic because I support interdisciplinary and multi-genre connections to broaden literature pedagogy (for example, focusing on texts that cross or blur genre conventions, and those that cross or blur or combine with other subjects—English with history, art, communications, and others that provide multiple perspectives and methods for examining themes and topics larger than—or enlarging—a single work or author.

I am arguing in my research that both film and printed texts constitute intertwined (sub)genres of speculative fiction, that both should be studied and taught, and that the methods to analyze and interpret them should be multidisciplinary, informed by more than a single frame or

lens or school of thought. There is a reciprocity among films and fiction, in that a work of fiction (for example, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker) often inspires multiple film adaptations, and those films have spawned new fiction subgenres, and possibly imitations, in print, which then generate yet more films, which may become film franchises, and all are related in theme, character, or plot devices.

This intertwining of plots, characters, settings, and major themes is the meaning of genealogy that I enact, uncovering the network of origins and legacies of particular authors and works over periods of time, and identifying their “family trees,” or constellations of works that have common and shared roots and resemble each other in meaningful ways, like offspring. My use of *genealogy* is shaped by Nietzsche’s definition: “origins understood as the complex intersection of a number of different and competing forces” (ix). Focusing on intersections means reading with multiple possible interpretations. For example, Poppy Z. Brite’s “His Mouth Will Taste of Wormwood” seems to be a nod to H.P. Lovecraft’s “The Hound,” but with a pronounced queer element. Does this change our reading of Lovecraft’s story? Can we find queer elements in “The Hound?” Both Robert W. Chambers’ “The Yellow Sign” and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wall-Paper” deal with mental illness through the lens of the 1890s (the “Yellow Nineties”), but one story is from a man’s point of view, and one is from a woman’s point of view; this tension encourages us to explore not only the subject of perceived insanity but also how gender issues shaped the conversation on that subject.

My decision to include glossaries to accompany the genealogies is driven by classical rhetoric, Cultural Studies, and Composition Studies. Plato and Aristotle both advocated, as part of an ideal rhetorical education, that students and teachers must be precise and specific in their use of words (diction), the arrangement of those words (taxis), but especially in defining their

terms to avoid misunderstandings, or worse, manipulation of language and meaning. Under Greek rhetorical theories, definition was part of invention and contributed to generating knowledge and ideas with which to construct a persuasive text. Before the argument could be presented or explored, it was crucial to agree on its definition. I therefore emphasize definitions throughout this study. More recent applications of definition and cataloging key terms can be found. The first comes from Raymond Williams, whose *Key Words* book drew vocabulary from everyday life in Great Britain in 1976, but especially vocabulary with social and cultural significance and ambiguity. Adapting this specifically for a disciplinary study of contested yet central terms, Peter Vandenberg and Paul Hielker published *Key Words in Composition Studies* in 1996, using bibliographical essays to trace and discover definitions and their lineages. In each of these ground-breaking works, there were no neat conclusions or consensus, so the door for critical thinking invited students into the public and professional conversations.

My discussion of works will be less focused on their analysis, and more on their value and significance. My approach is also humanistic because it is focused not on textual features, but on human reactions, emotions, and experiences to the texts. I emphasize the relationship of my chosen texts to specific themes and legacies of literary conventions and genres. Therefore, my method and methodology embrace an awareness of culture and history, with some attention to reception theories. My discussions of the texts will usually include some summary and my own observations on the importance or usefulness of the texts for classroom study, as well as mentioning ancillary texts that may be relevant. Because the 20th and 21st centuries have seen a rise in adaptations and franchises (sequels, prequels, sidequels, and other multimedia expansions based on primary texts, in print and film and other media), in many cases, I will note instances where adaptations or franchise texts are superfluous, or substantially inferior to the original text,

and thus may not be valuable for teaching, although I leave those decisions in the hands of my readers.

My methods are primarily textual. I am using bibliography and anthologizing as tools. In this way, I am positioning myself as critic and as editor—in selecting and commenting on particular texts, themes, and definitions. Anthologies, as a genre of publishing and as a form for studying literature, can be traced back to *The Greek Anthology*, a collection of Greek and Roman poems and epigrams dating from 90 BC to the Augustan Age in Rome, where “anthology” translates as “a garland” or “gathering of flowers,” where the flowers are individual texts by various authors (Harmon/Holman 33; Paton v). As Paton observes in his “Preface,” the current edition of the *Anthology* (translated and published in 1916), was actually based on three earlier versions, one Greek and two Roman, each unique, and that subsequently, in the Middle Ages, “a scholar of astounding industry, Maximus Planudes, to whom history owes a heavy debt, rearranged and revised the work,” thus creating the text that has been handed down (vi). I accept this scholar’s industry as my own, in collecting and presenting selected texts by various authors for the purpose of reaching fresh readers and categorizing speculative fiction for future generations.

Robert Atwan, in his Foreword to his 26th edition of the *Best American Essays* series, notes how he has been designated by others as “one of America’s noted anthologizers,” and then muses on what it means to be an anthologist, and the importance of anthologies. According to Atwan, “the anthology has remained a popular publishing product for over two millennia. So we anthologists possess a long literary tradition, though I know of no history that charts our endeavors or the progress of Meleager’s *Garland* into *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*” (xiii).

My bookshelves are filled to overflowing with anthologies of many varieties. I see the

best ones as charts of culture; good anthologies give us a sense of a culture's preoccupations either at a certain point in time or over the course of time. Consider Harlan Ellison's 1967 *Dangerous Visions* or Skipp and Spector's 1989 *Book of the Dead*. These anthologies in some sense could only have been produced in their respective historical and cultural contexts; the texts they contain can now be combined with others to give a broader picture of the changes in culture. In presenting texts for your teaching consideration, I am giving you a glimpse into a sort of literary *Twilight Zone*, a parallel, often ignored, tradition that sometimes intersects with the canon and sometimes serves as its insightful reflection. One of my main sources for inspiration is the anthology *The Hastur Cycle*, edited by Robert M. Price. In exploring the roots and the lasting influence of Robert W. Chambers' collection of weird stories, *The King in Yellow* (1895), Price not only collects important texts, but also connects the stories into a historical, cultural, and even theoretical framework that helps us explore how issues such as insanity and “dangerous books” have been dealt with in fiction and real life throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. Price's approach has greatly influenced the way in which I present texts here.

On one level, as a bibliographer, I am compiling “a list of works dealing with a given subject” and this list is “annotated” with “brief descriptions” and “critical comment” (Holman/Harmon 64-65). This is especially what graduate students in English Studies are trained to do, often in required literary bibliographic research courses. But on a different level, reclaiming an older and wider practice, I define bibliography as “a knowledge of particular books, the peculiarities of editions, their value, and what may be termed an intimate acquaintance with the history and character of a work” (Lowndes v). This art, as William Thomas Lowndes asserts, in 1834, “has been singularly neglected” and is “confessedly deficient” (v), in terms of models. The task and purpose of the bibliographer, like the anthologist, is not

merely collecting nor compiling, but sorting. My goal in sorting the works in these pages is to present an anthology of teaching ideas and resources within the realm of speculative fiction, and to introduce the idea of anthologizing as a research method and an interpretive tool for student readers.

Almost a hundred years after Lowndes, in 1932, scholar W.W. Greg published an article in *The Library*, where he discussed bibliography as “the grammar of literary investigation” (113). He finds the key in using bibliography as a research method to be in “the establishment and history of the text” (113). Citing Greg, scholar Edwin Wolf picks up two terms in the “science of bibliography”: analytical and critical (831), but both of these techniques are more concerned with transmission of texts, the book as object, and authenticity. In defending the usefulness of bibliographies, and why more are needed, Lowndes had previously argued:

The accumulated wisdom of ages is deposited in Books; can there then be more useful information than that by which these repositories of knowledge are rendered available to the world by proper classification, separating the valuable from the worthless, and presenting the student [and teacher] with a convenient and trustworthy guide to the respective sources? Bibliography is in truth the mariner’s compass of learning; for without it the student would be floating on an immense ocean of literature, with no other means than what chance afforded of attaining the object of his voyage. (vi)

Following this logic, I am presenting a bibliographic anthology, one that leads new readers into speculative fiction along a deliberate and meaningful path, so that they can experience the subgenres with a knowledgeable guide and a clear map. Furthermore, in *Composition Studies* as in *Literary Studies*, published annual bibliographies of scholarship are common, as are subject-

specific, genre-specific, and author-specific bibliographies used as references and research essays. Those however, are aimed at scholars, while my work is designed for instructors and students.

In making the case for including speculative fiction in college courses, I argue that much negative, aesthetic-based criticism of genre fiction from the outside is in general ill-informed and reactionary. The negative criticism of genre fiction often depends upon the idea that recurring tropes or techniques somehow diminish the literary value of genre works. This view is most often offered by critics and theorists who have not written in the genres they evaluate. I am not making the case that one must write a science fiction novel in order to comment on science fiction, but speculative fiction is a collaborative effort by writers and readers (dare I say *fans*), who often take on both roles. Readers will notice that much of the scholarship I include in this work was written by people who also are professional fiction writers in the genres they study. Speculative fiction has a strong democratic element to it; that is, readers, writers, and critics/theorists tend to all be fans as well. This de-centers the critic from a position of unique privilege without eliminating the need for critics. In this dynamic, students can be empowered to read, write, and develop analyses of speculative fiction as well as anyone, as long as they engage with the genres. Furthermore, this democratic element also meshes well with civic rhetorics and engaged pedagogies from Composition Studies, which argue for student writers as both authors and citizens, or as producers of texts as well as consumers. This ideological framework can be used to incorporate speculative fiction texts into reading and writing assignments for composition courses.

As to the recurring tropes and techniques of genre fiction, an element which is also intertwined with their status as popular works, what appears to be a weakness is, I argue, a

strength. Because so many people (more and more every day, based on book sales and newspaper stories) are familiar with the tropes and iconography of science fiction, fantasy, and horror, works in these genres present a common language with which many students will be familiar. For example, I would have had to explain what a “zombie apocalypse” is to a non-horror fan in 1985; today, I do not. The democratic and familiar nature of speculative fiction allows students to easily enter into discourse about it. The teacher's task is to then deepen that discourse. Many students may be unaware of the cultural issues that gave rise to speculative fiction, or the large body of theory and criticism concerning science fiction, fantasy, and horror. Teachers can use the additional contexts and conversations to encourage students to see these familiar genres in a new way, leading to a deeper understanding of the problems and issues they present and confront.

My methodology is influenced by my position as a reader and writer of science fiction, fantasy, and horror, and as a college instructor of writing, literature, and popular culture. I have read, and viewed, and re-read and re-viewed, the printed texts and films I discuss here multiple times. I have taught many of them and paid attention to students' observations, reactions, and questions. Overall, my dissertation is pedagogical—it is meant to relate to and add to scholarship on the teaching of speculative fiction, the rationale and argument for the importance of teaching speculative fiction (whether in its own course or as part of other courses on literature, writing, and/or popular culture), and to contribute new teaching approaches and content within English Studies, including Literary Studies, Creative Writing, and Rhetoric and Composition. The bibliographies and genealogies I have created may also be instructive for graduate students and instructors who want to become specialists in speculative fiction, and anyone wishing to read deeply in the genres of horror, science-fiction, and fantasy.

1.3 A Word About What This Resource Is, Is Not, and How to Use It

The chapters following my defense of speculative fiction provide three pedagogical tools for instructors: 1) an overview of the critical/theoretical conversations surrounding each genre, 2) a glossary of terms useful for discussing each genre, and 3) multiple themes and their genealogies, listing suggested texts for use in classes dealing with a given genre and/or issues associated with that genre. The themes and genealogies are useful for several reasons. On a practical level, instructors may want to use a text from my selections, but that text may be out of print or prohibitively expensive. In that case, instructors will find other texts in my selection that will address many of the same issues as the preferred text. When teaching speculative fiction, we need to incorporate a certain amount of flexibility because we will often be using texts that, while useful for our classes, may be very difficult to find in the quantities needed. More important, the genealogies offer a handy map of a conversation between texts; this idea is a pillar of Composition Studies, and contemporary Literature courses adopt this approach more and more. One of the benefits of studying a genre over time is that, not only does one see how cultural values and concerns change, but one also can analyze how tropes and techniques change within the larger conversation that is the genre in question. Questioning the reasons for these changes engages student's analytical skills and encourages them to see popular culture as a dynamic enterprise.

I have carefully chosen the glossary terms and genealogies to introduce new readers to key texts and themes, key authors, and to provide context for diving into each subgenre, and then to relate the subgenres together. My purpose throughout has been to bring to light works that otherwise may be overlooked or dismissed, and to prove their necessary role and influence. I strove throughout as well to create a scope that would be achievable by other instructors, and not

overwhelm or confuse with too much variety or depth. I am a fan, teacher, and writer of horror, and I sometimes am overwhelmed by the sheer magnitude of a critical work on horror. The broad scope of this work is intended, not to help you become a better critic or theorist of a particular genre, but to assist you in teaching. As you become more enthusiastic about teaching speculative fiction, I predict that you will widen your study, and that is where other primary and specific secondary texts will play a role. This work is the foyer and perhaps the art gallery of the mansion; I leave it to you to explore the other rooms.

For the themes and genealogies, my selection was based on my status as a fan, writer, editor of anthologies, and scholar of speculative fiction. My reading, re-reading, and reflection over the years has enabled me to discern the historical arcs and conversational evolution in these genres, and as a consequence, the texts that are considered important in those genres. I applied two initial criteria/questions of my own: “What parts of the conversation are important for teachers and students to engage?,” and “What texts and concepts best illustrate that part of the conversation?” The themes and genealogies I have chosen reflect a combination of literary history and relevant contemporary cultural topics. However, you may notice that the texts within each theme or genealogy could also be used with other themes or historical overviews. For example, the film *Escape From New York*, while it deals with dystopian themes, had significant influence on William Gibson's *Neuromancer* and thus could be included in a class or unit on cyberpunk fiction. For the themes and genealogies, I opted for a “mixed” approach, selecting a combination of popular and obscure (to beginning readers in the respective genres) texts with the aim of suggesting familiar, readily available texts as well as texts that are often neglected, but influenced the more popular works, and are thus necessary for context. Last, I selected texts that are teachable; that is, most are not overly lengthy, and can be easily integrated into your courses

without requiring entire courses of their own. Instructors may want to integrate only a few of my suggested texts into their courses, or even use an abbreviated theme as one unit in a course.

These themes and genealogies are a starting point, and are meant to be inspirational. Instructors will no doubt add to, modify, and delete elements as they see fit, developing new courses of their own. In each entry in a theme or genealogy, you will find very basic bibliographic information, because I cannot suggest one edition in most cases. Most of the texts I mention (even films) appear in different publications and editions; some of them may be hard to find, so I am only suggesting the text itself. In the bibliographic information, I will note the primary generic tendency for that text. For example, **Science Fiction**. However, if the text has other strong generic tendencies, I note those in parentheses. For example, *Alien* would be **Science Fiction (Horror)**. Because in space (science fiction), no one can hear you scream (horror).

For my glossaries, I chose terms that often come up in conversations between writers and readers of science fiction, fantasy, and horror. In addition to my own reading and reflection, I took note of the discussions I have had with other people, and recorded terms we use which may not be familiar to those new to the conversation. The glossaries will be useful on a basic level for teachers who are unfamiliar with some of the specialized vocabulary of speculative fiction. Some students may already be quite familiar with the terminology. In that case, the glossaries will help teachers to become more equal participants in the conversation that defines a given genre. I have one additional suggestion. The key is, if not to become an outright fan (which might happen if you are not careful), then to read like one, at least initially. The more one reads in these genres, the better able one is to make judgments about texts to include in one's courses. One way to do this is to choose one of the themes or genealogies and make it a Summer reading and viewing list for yourself. You may not like everything you read or watch, but that comes with the

anthologist's territory. My intent and hope is that you will find something new, take what you want, and leave the rest as it suits you.

Thus none of these components are meant to be viewed as comprehensive in any way. They are appetizers, if you will. As I noted above, these components are inspirational examples intended to get you interested; a comprehensive approach would be better for a work discussing a single genre in depth. Part of my purpose here is to introduce you to three interconnected genres so that you may choose which one(s) appeal to you and your teaching goals. The critical/theoretical discussions are designed to provide a broad overview and starting point, with the intent that prospective (and current) teachers of speculative fiction will themselves individually delve deeper into the criticism and theory as they see a need and customize my work, as well as create new research and applications for their own themes and explorations. Articles and books of criticism/theory about the genres of speculative fiction and specific texts within those genres are being published at a steady clip, and there is no way that a work of this size and scope could collect and evaluate them all. This work is broad, serving as an introduction, a gateway to more specific genre-related resources. Part of the reason I began this project was to fill a gap I perceived between no resources and specific single-genre explorations or advanced theoretical and critical resources.

New genre-related primary texts (many of them excellent) appear nearly every day, it seems. Small presses, independent film-making, self-publishing, and e-texts (print and visual) posted on the internet have made a great volume and variety of genre texts available for readers, for enjoyment and comparison. Beginning with my suggestions for selected texts and criticism, readers can launch into this new material with purpose and direction. No doubt some readers will notice omissions (“Where is *Gormenghast*?”). Be that as it may, the texts I have thoughtfully

selected reveal the high points, historical links, and intertextual connections within a genre in order to give my audience a taste of the most familiar, the rarer, and those titles and authors which I have discovered to be essential to understanding, and expanding, the appreciation, invention, and significance of speculative fiction generally, and each subgenre specifically. My deep reading, bibliographic research, and anthologizing creates the framework for teaching, and for further research in popular cultural studies and pedagogy.

In each case, I have tried to stay away from recommending a particular edition of a text. With some exceptions, I will generally only provide the date of first publication. I am not withholding information, but rather allowing teachers to choose whichever edition of the text suits them, or more likely, whichever edition they can their hands on (see below), since some are no longer in print but available in used copies, and some appear in multiple anthologies or multiple versions put out by different publishers.

1.4 A Word About Finding and Using Texts for the Classroom

Perhaps the greatest challenge for those of us who would like to teach speculative fiction is the availability of texts. The various literature anthologies cannot be counted on to have every text you will want to teach. Except for a few canonical anomalies, science fiction, fantasy, and horror are largely absent from the standard anthologies. Therefore, you will probably need to go outside the typical anthologies for some of the texts you wish to teach. This presents several problems. For more information, please see, “Appendix 1: Accessibility and Fair Use--A Word About Applications.”

In “Appendix 2: Sample Course Syllabi,” I will provide a variety of options and plans for teaching speculative fiction, based on my teaching experience and enacting theories from the previous chapters in this dissertation. These are also meant to provide a starting place for others,

and to serve as inspiration for crafting new courses and applications. The syllabi will represent how texts can work together, how texts and films can be used together, and provide course descriptions, rationales, and assignment ideas that can be put into practice by teachers, or serve as templates for teaching speculative fiction as part of a writing course, an American Literature course, a Popular Culture course, and a special topics course.

CHAPTER 2: WHY TEACH SPECULATIVE FICTION?

In “Some Thoughts on the Passing of English A at Harvard,” Stephen H. Horton discusses the current climate where “English as a required subject is on the defensive in American colleges and secondary schools” (163) and asserts that “A scholar is of little use to his classes if his scholarly efforts separate him irretrievably from their way of living” (164). He goes on to call for a consideration of popular culture in the classroom: “In our snobbish search for artistic works we have scorned the new media of the communications art—radio (now fast becoming antiquated), television, movies, and comic books. These media are part of the intellectual life of educated men; even college graduates have television sets or radios, go to the movies, and directly or indirectly buy comic books for their children” (165). If Horton's phrasing sounds a little outdated, we may forgive him; his *College English* article was published in 1951.

It seems to have taken a while, but popular culture is making its way into the classroom, whether in composition, literature, or actual studies in popular culture. As a part of popular culture, speculative fiction has become more acceptable as worthy of study than it may have been in say, 1951. However, some prejudice against genre fiction in general, and by extension, speculative fiction in particular, remains. This prejudice, I argue, is largely unfounded, and it prevents us as teachers from teaching material that is timely and relevant to our students' lives.

2.1 Defining Key Terms

But before launching into my argument, it is relevant to define key terms. Generally (and with bias), “genre fiction” is the label applied to works of fiction where plot drives a “formulaic” and common story, making it highly recognizable and familiar, rather than arty, innovative, or original. These genres usually include: detective stories, westerns, mysteries, romance, science-

fiction, fantasy, and horror. As James Harold observes in his 2011 analysis of genre fiction:

The distinction is made visible in the physical layout of bookstores: “Mystery,” “Romance,” and “Science Fiction” each have their sections, while “Literature” occupies its own distinct (and more esteemed) space. While *some* genre fiction is thought of as respectable and serious, it is not seen in this way unless it is seen as *transcending* its status as mere genre to become something more important.

(emphasis in original)

A quick look at the amazon.com website confirms that even in cyberspace these “aisles” of book divisions pertain, although their list for “genre fiction” is more expansive, including: “Action and Adventure; Fairy Tales; Family Sagas; Gay and Lesbian; Historical; Horror; Medical; Men’s Adventure; Metaphysical; Movie Tie-Ins; Political; Sports; War; Westerns.” A few others, such as “Thrillers,” “Suspense,” “Chick-lit,” and “Christian Fiction” have also been collected under “genre fiction” by publishers and booksellers--and bloggers (see also McHale; Grossman).

Additionally, genre fiction “is also of great relevance to media theorists because of its affiliation with the dominant genres of movie, television, comics, and video game narrative” (McHale 199). So genre fiction has an inherent relationship with communications and public reading that encourages students and teachers to explore “text” in multiple delivery models (book, digital file, visual, moving and static), which meshes well with the drive toward multi-modality in Composition Studies, and toward Literature and Film offerings in English departments. (In Chapters 3, 4, and 5, in my selections for teaching Horror, Science Fiction and Fantasy, I consider movies, television, periodicals, anthologies, and paperbacks all as “texts” and all as falling within “speculative fiction.”)

Another favored term to replace, or at least expand, “genre fiction” is “Popular Fiction,”

as described by Brian Jones and Geoff Hamilton in the *Encyclopedia of American Popular Fiction*, published in 2010. First, “popular fiction speaks to the people directly” (v), and it is “first-rate story-telling,” instead of “second-rate fiction” (vi). Furthermore, popular fiction is better than genre fiction as a descriptive term because much of recent popular fiction in fact combines genres or “can be placed under the rubric of more than one genre” (v), actually introducing hybrid genres, or because it takes up conventions equally from different subgenres and so could be considered excellent as an example from either.

Brian McHale agrees that we need a new term, arguing “genre fiction is actually a misnomer insofar as it implies that some varieties of fiction are bound by genre formulas but not others” (199). He elaborates, with a view that is shared by contemporary critics, and that emphasizes not form but function: “In a sense, all fiction is genre fiction; nevertheless, some varieties do depend more heavily than others on shared conventions, and cater more openly to the expectations of readers familiar with these conventions” (199).

On the other hand, “speculative fiction” is a newer term, more positive, and more specific in its application. Speculative fiction is usually used to indicate science fiction, fantasy, and the supernatural (including horror). According to The Speculative Literature Foundation, established in 2004, “speculative literature” is defined as:

a catch-all term meant to inclusively span the breadth of fantastic literature, encompassing literature ranging from hard science fiction to epic fantasy to ghost stories to horror to folk and fairy tales to slipstream to magical realism to modern myth-making -- and more. Any piece of literature containing a fabulist or speculative element would fall under our aegis, and would potentially be work that we would be interested in supporting.

The breadth of this definition is indeed admirable, opening up space for teachers and students to talk about categories and criteria, and it certainly shows speculative fiction is not narrowly confined, but it doesn't actually provide the best way for those new to it to grasp its outlines and feel comfortable that they know what they are talking about. Gerald Lucas, writing within *The Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century Fiction*, Volume 2, offers some more details and parameters, and a point of origin. "Speculative fiction" as a term was "coined in 1948 by Robert Heinlein," and "it represents the concerns of the increasingly fragmented world of high technology evident after World War II" (840).

Speculative fiction, or literature, has also been called "imaginative literature." This is sometimes contrasted to the domesticity or everyday reality accorded to literary texts and novels (which I will explore further in Chapter Two). Though, as I stated in my Introduction, I find all literature to be speculative and imaginative, speculative fiction as a category opens new ways to expose college students to new reading experiences, and to reinvigorate the English major, so that both students and instructors can see the study of literature as relevant to their lives, and as commenting upon social reality and culture.

Furthermore, speculative fiction, "as part of its more inclusive purview...also breaks with the traditional concerns of a white, male-dominated readership and authorship to include marginalized voices and concerns, like those of differing class, race, gender, and sexuality" (Lucas 840), and offers ways to reach students who may not relate to canonical literature (see Donawerth). The variety it espouses is in terms of characters and not only setting, plot, or conventions. In fact, "speculative fiction often poses a 'What if?' question that challenges assumptions of empirical experience or reality," as well as challenging the status quo (Lucas 840). This "challenge" can be directed inward or outward. For example, "Speculative fiction

provides a reflection *of* reality, but this critical distance also allows for reflection *on* reality” (843; emphasis in original). More specifically, reading speculative fiction “consciously explores and questions reality by situating itself at the intersections of the mundane and the *not quite right*” (Lucas 843; emphasis in the original). Readers get a sense of uneasiness or epiphany between perceptions, assumptions, and possibilities that otherwise wouldn’t rise to the surface. Lucas provides one more observation about the benefits of reading speculative fiction that is particularly attached to the reasons why I think it should be taught, and what students can gain when speculative fiction is included in any course. This basis involves definition, and directing challenges, or dissonance, *internally*:

Speculative fiction challenges basic assumptions readers hold about themselves and their worlds, especially how they define ‘human.’ ...Speculative fiction seems to ask ‘How would human communities changes as a result of _____?’
Finishing this sentence is what science fiction does at its core. (843)

Like rhetorical analysis and critical thinking, like text explication, Lucas suggests that when looked at through its definition, speculative fiction provides more humanistic approaches to intellectual inquiry and to citizenship: our students will be better humans and better thinkers when they are exposed to literature, because it will change the way they respond to their current and future world.

2.2 Defining Key Lines of Argument

How we evaluate literary texts forms a crucial point of investigation in teaching popular culture and speculative fiction because evaluation is tied to the history of rhetoric as well as to the politics of canonization and standards for what readers—especially students—are offered or required to read. First let’s consider the history of rhetoric, and then move into the history and

politics of evaluation and critical response. Aristotle's *Poetics* and *On Rhetoric* both offer some intriguing origins for considering the cultural place of speculative fiction, and the idea of "genre fiction" as a category.

2.2.1 *Classical Rhetoric and Speculative Fiction*

Aristotle's works are taxonomies for specific subjects. As James Harold points out, *Poetics* may be identified as "the first work of literary criticism" but more significantly "also the central model for genre-based criticism," because "Aristotle "recognized several genres of poetry: tragedy, epic, comedy, and the satyr play" ("Literature"). So our impulse to classify and identity forms traces back to Classical Greece. Furthermore, Aristotle divides poetics from rhetoric, and then classifies rhetoric into three branches: forensic (legal), deliberative (political), and epideictic (ceremonial, civic, and public) (see Kennedy). Each branch of rhetoric has a specific time frame associated with it, and I would argue that so does each subgenre within speculative fiction. These time-tense requirements connect speculative fiction to the goals of persuasion and classical rhetoric, as well as establish criteria for form.

Deliberative rhetoric is used for creating legislation and public policy that creates future benefits for a population, so the time-tense is future, and this corresponds to Science Fiction, which deals with future consequences and concerns, often projecting current social conditions into a hypothetical future moment—and to an imagined society. Fantasy, on the other hand, looks backward. It is concerned with the past, often trying to recapture a better time and place, but also preserving a tradition that otherwise will be erased or lost in time. Forensic rhetoric, the rhetoric of trials and law courts deals with the past, often trying to recreate what may have happened at a time in the near or distant past, and often having to reconstruct possible events and timelines, based on artifacts, evidence, and conflicting narratives about what actually transpired. Epideictic

or ceremonial rhetoric concerns the present and so is timely and reflective of culture and society at the time it is delivered. Horror concerns itself with the present time and the present tense. In fact, what makes horror so frightening is the immediacy of the events and the everyday, familiar settings. Like rhetoric, speculative fiction is highly concerned with society, and with public issues and how to address them.

2.2.2 *The Appeals of Genre Fiction*

So, considering the heavy bias against genre fiction, why are these books so popular with readers? Genre fiction is undeniably popular at this moment, even eclipsing its heights from past historical periods. On May 23, 2012, *TIME* magazine published an article with the subtitle: “How science fiction, fantasy, romance, mysteries and all the rest will take over the world” (Grossman). It was responding to an article by Arthur Krystal in the May 28, 2012, issue of *The New Yorker*, in the section “A Critic at Large,” which explored the “guilty pleasures without guilt” of reading genre fiction. *The New Yorker* issue following this one a week later, is a special issue devoted to Science Fiction.

New Yorker writer and critic Arthur Krystal asserts that “people read genre fiction to escape not from life but from literature,” and that what they desire is “a good story” (81). And in spite of urban legends that students are reading less and less these days, a 2008 study done by David Jolliffe, Brown Chair in English Literacy, and Professor of English and of Curriculum and Instruction, at the University of Arkansas, found the opposite: students are reading more than anyone suspected. They are just not reading what we assign in class (Jolliffe and Harl 600). Instead, they are choosing their own reading materials and motives, and these primarily include “values clarification, personal enrichment, and career preparation” (600). If we want students to read our assigned texts, we need to know more about why they read and what drives their

choices.

Joyce Saricks offer a perspective from that of a librarian, focusing on the role of appeals and how appeals, rather than categories or conventions, offer a way to divide genre fiction. She argues, “As I continue to read genre fiction and teach genres and readers’ advisory techniques, I have realized that appeal lies at the root of our understanding of genre fiction. No matter how genres change [over time], an understanding of appeals is invaluable [for] studying individual genres,” and equally, “at the macro-level as well, as we connect genres to each other and study groups of genres” (3). The key, “thinking about books in terms of their appeal, rather than their subject or plot,” happens only if “we change the way we talk about them” (3). Following from the way we talk is the way we act, especially how we make decisions, and “genre borders blur and readers follow authors and appeal elements that please them” (3), rather than following strict conventions or predictability.

Saricks divides genre fiction into four groups, based on the major appeals that readers seek out with their preferred titles. Classical rhetoric also draws on rhetorical appeals that apply to all branches of rhetoric. As Aristotle defined them, the three rhetorical appeals—all necessary for persuasion to be successful—are ethos, logos, and pathos. Pathos appeals to both the audience, relating to them and addressing them, and to emotions. Ethos appeals to the character, disposition, credibility, and authority of the speaker or author. Logos appeals to the content, subject, facts, and knowledge of the speech or text (See Kennedy; Bizzell/Herzberg). These rhetorical appeals can be paired with Saricks four reading appeals:

- 1) Adrenaline, where pacing is of highest priority, along with plot twists (rhetorical appeal to pathos);
- 2) Intellect, where a puzzle is presented that engages the mind, often calling on delving

- deeply into social and ethical issues (rhetorical appeal to logos and pathos);
- 3) Landscape, where one encounters intricately described backgrounds, real or imaginary, and the goal for an author is to create a world and set readers in it (rhetorical appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos); and
 - 4) Emotions, where a particular mood is evoked with an emotional pull (Saricks 4) (rhetorical appeal to pathos).

Within this framework of Saricks' appeals, Science Fiction falls into Intellect (logos); Fantasy is part of Landscape (ethos), and Horror corresponds to Emotions (pathos) (4). It would be fruitful to raise these terms and examples with students to discuss the way rhetoric and speculative fiction blend, and to draw them into discussing evaluation, classification, and categorization as readers, and how these then are extrapolated by reviewers, scholars and critics to make judgments.

Even shifting to appeals can still lead us back to evaluation, as James Harold describes:

The pleasures of genre fiction are thought to be the pleasures of relaxing, of familiarity, of *not* having to engage oneself fully, of allowing the novel to do the work of entertaining you. By contrast, the pleasures of serious art require effort of thought and feeling on the part of the audience, engaging the mind and the imagination actively as the reader thinks through the literary work. The distinction between these two kinds of pleasure quickly takes on an evaluative aspect... The fact that the pleasures of literature are greater than the pleasures of genre fiction is supposed to be evidence of their aesthetic and moral superiority.

Yet this "evidence" doesn't have to go unquestioned, and the usefulness of literature generally, focusing on what it *does to readers* and how it *makes readers feel*, which can be more vivid to

students of speculative fiction, can also become more central to the college curriculum, as teachers draw students into talking about why they read (and don't read), and why pleasure should not be excluded from criteria for determining the merit and usefulness of texts.

2.2.3 *Identifying the Lines of Attack and Defense: What is Literature?*

Reading as guilty pleasure is reserved for books that are not “good” for readers, or just not good. Grossman puts it more bluntly: “Maybe it’s just that we’re self-loathing capitalists, and anything associated with commerce, as genre fiction is, is automatically tainted and disqualified from having any aesthetic value.” Krystal reminds us, “The guilty-pleasure label peels off more easily if we recall that the novel itself was once something of a guilty pleasure. In the mid-18th century, there was a hovering suspicion that novels were for people not really serious about literature” (83).

But researching how speculative literature really operates, and what draws readers into it, shows that readers who seek out popular fiction are very serious. Grossman provides insight into what is gained, and why it is attractive beyond merely appeals, especially for the subgenre of dystopic fiction:

There’s more than escapism going on here. Why do we seek out these hard places for our fantasy vacations? Because on some level, we recognize and claim those disasters as our own. We seek out hard places precisely because our lives are hard. When you read genre fiction, you leave behind the problems of reality—but only to re-encounter those problems in transfigured form, in an unfamiliar guise—one that helps you understand them more completely, and feel them more deeply. Genre fiction isn’t generic pap. You don’t read it to escape your problems, you read it to find a new way to come to terms with them.

Grossman's justification matches with the self-sponsored reasons students read on their own, outside of classes: they want to understand the world around them and their place in it. They value genre fiction for its seriousness and its ability to make them problem-solvers, not complacent spectators. Jolliffe and Harl give an example from a student journal in their study that supports Grossman's position and gives strong validation for teaching speculative fiction. Corey, a first-year Honors Composition student is, outside of class, "a young man devoted to reading fantasy fiction and learning French ...to fulfill his goal of getting a job working in the American Embassy in France" (610). In his reading journal, he wrote a detailed entry about *Eldest* by Christopher Paolini, the second book in a best-selling fantasy trilogy, also made into a blockbuster film. But rather than describing or summarizing the book, Corey analyzes it: "This really relates to the real world because this symbolizes bigotry that still exists around the planet. ...This text basically reaffirmed my passion against the ignorance of bigotry, whether it be in fiction novels, or real life and history" (610). Two things are interesting in this student writing. First, that he is applying a critical lens just as Grossman and Krystal and Jolliffe all suggest drive the popularity of popular fiction. He is not using this reading for entertainment or leisure, but because he wants to engage his intellect. He is a real example of their theories having actual applications and impact. And second, because he considers the text to be "a novel," not a subgenre or an inferior work to other kinds of literature. He is using different criteria to select his own texts, and it has to do with better understanding the world.

When it comes to understanding speculative literature and why it is popular in the face of its critics—who refuse to change course—both what readers gain from their reading and how they come into contact with texts must be considered. Making texts accessible and giving them contexts so they can be fully explored and appreciated is of critical importance. The process of

text selection and privileging is so prevalent and accepted that it is usually invisible. It may even occur before the teacher enters a classroom, if texts are standardized across sections, or there are committees that pick texts instead of leaving these decisions to individual instructors. For students, they almost never have choice in the required readings of a course, and simply accept the list given to them on the syllabus. I am recommending we change that and make the idea of selecting and evaluating texts open to study and discussion. In order to understand speculative fiction, and its relationship to popular culture, the academy, the marketplace, and high art, teachers and students need to be familiar with the received criticism and to continue to question its foundations and ultimate utility in our changing world. By knowing what the substance of the debates have been, and continue to be, teachers and students can propose new ones, and can experiment with new ways of reading and critical thinking.

Bestselling novelist Lev Grossman (*The Magicians*), who also holds the post as book critic and senior writing for TIME magazine, puts a new spin on the state of the debate over evaluating, and for that matter defining, literature. The fault lies with our “critical vocabulary” which “is geared to dealing with dense, difficult texts like the ones the modernists wrote. It’s designed for close reading, for translating thick, worked prose into critical insights...not for the long view that plot requires.” On the other hand, plot has far more rewards on its own terms. As Grossman points out, “plot is an extraordinarily powerful tool for creating emotion in readers.” Especially because “fiction is never real, but feelings always are” (Grossman).

Despite the overall social paradigm in current culture that concentrates on social interactions and multimedia, and feelings, a fascination with the text, and its value, remains firmly fixed in professional debates. Maureen Barr refers to this as “textism,” and she defines it as “a discriminatory evaluation system in which all literature relegated to a so-called subliterate

genre, regardless of its individual merits, is automatically defined as inferior, separate, and unequal” (430). Giving so much status to textism has multiple limitations for readers and critics, and consequently for teachers and librarians as well. James Harold expresses how this could change, especially with new reviewers and critics studying and writing genre fiction. New attention to genre fiction or speculative literature, and interest from a new generation of readers, is far less interested in “the question of what makes particular works good or bad, but on what such works can show us about the societies in which they are created and consumed.” Creating a new teaching space in English classrooms to connect history, social practices, reader reception and popular culture studies so that literature, and writing about literature, become part of a social fabric and awareness of culture as historical, social, and political. Despite the attraction of that approach, textism continues to trump it.

Lest we think that no one practices textism in the 21st century, consider Yale Professor and leading literature critic Harold Bloom's evaluation of Stephen King's work (and by extension, J.K. Rowling, Poe, and Lovecraft):

...King's books...are not literary at all, in my critical judgment...Reading *Harry Potter* is not reading, and neither is perusing Stephen King...King, whatever his qualities, emerges from an American tradition one could regard as sub-literary: Poe and H.P. Lovecraft...I will avoid King's obvious inadequacies: cliché-writing, flat characters who are names upon the page, and in general a remarkable absence of invention for someone edging over into the occult, the preternatural, the imaginary...His fans find exactly what they want in King, and these are fans he shares with Anne Rice (a sickly imagination) and with Dean Koontz and Peter Straub, who are less homespun than King (*Stephen King* 1-2).

Bloom is notorious for his condescension towards genre writing, but it is difficult to count up the insults in the passage I have quoted, and remarkably, this was from the introduction to a collection of critical essays about Stephen King's work. Bloom's stance is yet another salvo in what Neil Easterbrook calls the "Genre Wars" (511). Note Bloom's use of the term "sub-literary"; this implies some binary opposition between literary works and, well, everything else (which we apparently peruse rather than read), or at least a hierarchy of literature. There's the library, and then there's the sub-basement of the library. It's clear what would be found in the basement.

According to Nick Mamatas, part of this conflict stems from class distinctions:

The divide between literary and genre fiction can in part be laid at the feet of popular magazine marketing at the turn of the 20th century. The "slicks," with their large middle-class audiences, were dedicated to realism, thanks to the influence of William Dean Howells and his followers. The "pulp," printed on cheap paper and sold to the newly literate urban working classes, concentrated on fiction that its audience could relate to. Working-class lives were transformed far more profoundly by industrial and social technology, the core elements of science fiction. Urban areas seemed awash in crime, thus the mystery/detective story. Fantasies, Westerns, and romances all harkened back to various mythic Golden Ages long since lost to urbanization and rationalization. (78)

Contrary to what many critics charge, namely that genre fiction is inferior because it is escapist, the scenario Mamatas describes may not be very escapist at all, but suggests instead that genre fiction is intimately connected with the realities of its readers' lives. As Lev Grossman explains,

There's more than escapism going on here. Why do we seek out these hard

places for our fantasy vacations? Because on some level, we recognize and claim those disasters as our own. We seek out hard places precisely because our lives are hard. When you read genre fiction, you leave behind the problems of reality — but only to re-encounter those problems in transfigured form, in an unfamiliar guise, one that helps you understand them more completely, and feel them more deeply. Genre fiction isn't just generic pap. You don't read it to escape your problems, you read it to find a new way to come to terms with them.

This is the battlefield on which the genre wars have been fought--the distinction between "literature" and "non-literature." I will discuss this history further in Chapter 2, but for now, this battlefield is one that students can witness and engage with. How fair are these debates and battles over status or merit? How meaningful do they remain in a vastly changed publishing and educational context? Even distinctions between literature and non-literature are fading with the rise in popularity and use of new "genres" in everyday life, like twitter, texting, and headline news. Genre distinctions are basically unstable.

One problem with making the distinction between literature and non-literature is that those definitions can change as culture changes. And they were never terribly firm to begin with. Ursula K. Le Guin wrote in 2011 about the distinction between literature and genre fiction that "tho cherished by many critics and teachers, was never very useful and is by now worse than useless" (Krystal 83). There is no Library of America collection of Danielle Steele's work, but there is one of Lovecraft's. *Tarzan of the Apes*, by Edgar Rice Burroughs, arguably the first pulp novel, is also being celebrated on the occasion of its centennial this year by the Library of America (Krystal 82). Stephen King won the 2003 National Book Foundation Medal for "distinguished contribution to American letter," much to the chagrin of critics like Bloom

(Krystal 84). Moreover, the teaching of literature (or more properly, the use of literature in teaching) in colleges has changed dramatically over the decades, and is still in flux as we exit the first decade of the new millennium, with universities embracing global literacy, digital humanities, and international programs, and English departments being redrawn not by time periods, but by genres and themes, and an increased interest in the contemporary over the classics. In “Composition, Literary Studies, and the End(s) of Civic Education,” Dominic DelliCarpini argues that

Literary studies, of course, has changed drastically in the last four decades...Teaching universals or aesthetics has been usefully tempered by attempts to resituate texts historically, socially, and culturally; literary texts no longer need to be treated as a form of discourse different in kind, or in value, from other types of texts. In many ways, the study of literature has become, like rhetoric, more of a social science. (27)

We have come a long way from the New Critics and their insistence on teaching texts as disconnected aesthetic objects. In many ways, Rhetoric and Composition as a field deals with the study of intellectual conversations and where our students may place themselves within those conversations. In this way, it is a social science that allows us to see the connections between the use of rhetoric and how it has affected and continues to affect us. There is a narrative written within the study of rhetoric. Similarly, the rise of theory and the recent emphasis in college on critical thinking skills has resulted in a shift from teaching literature as a canon of works that may or may not be presented as interconnected, towards an approach that views literature as a narrative larger than a handful of texts, a narrative that tells us who we are and where we have been.

One of the primary objections to genre fiction has, from the beginning, been that it is mindlessly repetitive and predictable (and therefore not literary), but if we accept DelliCarpini's account above, even mindlessly repetitive and predictable texts will have their uses, especially as a way to study and critique human communication, attitudes, and behaviors. Also, because genre texts are popular (another supposed fault), teaching them helps connect the field of English with what people actually read outside academia, mitigating “the liberal arts' perceived detachment from actual concerns of day-to-day life” (DelliCarpini 31). Science fiction in particular is useful in the critically/rhetorically oriented system DelliCarpini describes, because its central concern is our relationship to technology, which is becoming an almost invisible but crucial facet of human existence in the 21st century. Science fiction texts will often foreground important questions about our use of technology and force us to re-examine our assumptions about it. You will find more discussion of the benefits and by-products of reading science fiction, fantasy, and horror in following chapters. However, I would now like to turn to the (false) idea that genre texts are repetitive and subsequently of little literary value.

The idea that genre texts are not literature seems to stem from the fact that they employ tropes (which help to indicate the genre(s) a particular text leans toward), one of which is plot or story. Noël Carroll, in describing “junk fictions” (an unfortunate term, by which he means genre fiction), notes that “their story dimension is the most important thing about them” (*Beyond Aesthetics* 335). Apparently, this is a problem. Consider Sven Birkerts' quote about science fiction, which Maureen Barr calls “fighting words” (429):

I am going to stick my neck out and just say it: science fiction will never be Literature with a capital "L," and this is because it inevitably proceeds from premise rather than character. It sacrifices moral and psychological nuance in

favor of more conceptual matters, and elevates scenario over sensibility. Some will ask, of course, whether there still is such a thing as Literature with a capital “L.” I proceed on the faith that there is. Are there exceptions to my categorical pronouncement? Probably, but I don't think enough of them to overturn it. (12)

Birkerts' implication here is that because “SF privileges cognition over character it produces bad writing” (Easterbrook 510). Apparently, plot and premise are inferior to character (“moral and psychological nuance”), *but why must we necessarily accept this?* I would argue that story, as a component of fiction among many from which one could choose, is equally as important as character, and that “literary” character-based texts *also* rely on tropes that may become repetitive as well. Raise your hand if you have ever spotted or been asked to spot the “Christ imagery” in a 20th century canonical Modernist text. I thought so. Now consider *Hamlet*. Which is more important, Hamlet's psychology, or the story? How would we have one without the other? Imagine explaining the play to someone unfamiliar with it. I suspect we would all recount some of the plot, rather than saying, “It is about a deeply troubled young man” and leaving it at that.

Fredric Jameson, despite having written a book on science fiction, decries the repetitiveness of genre: “The atomized or serial 'public' of mass culture wants to see the same thing over and over again, hence the urgency of the generic structure and the generic signal” (123). Jameson's assessment is typical of the objections to genre fiction. However, repetition may not be a bad thing altogether. As Noel Carroll points out, “Baseball games are repetitive, but we play them again and again because they afford the opportunity to activate and sometimes even to expand our powers” (*Beyond Aesthetics* 344). Grossman uses chess to describe the rules governing conventions for genres: “a small set of constraints that produce near-infinite complexity. They're not restrictive, they're generative.”

Thomas J. Roberts argues that the non-formulaic qualities of “literary” fiction are largely illusory and that genre fiction is often misread by its detractors:

Probably what its critics mean when they say that all the stories in a particular genre are the same is that none of the stories piques their interest. That is true of a genre's stories when we do not know how to read them, when we are unconsciously looking for the wrong things...The masterworks of the past were anomalies within their genres when they first appeared, and the genres that did inspire them have now vanished. Their indebtedness to those genres is no longer visible. (171-172)

Roberts' argument debunks the notion that canonical texts are worth reading simply because they were written outside any genre; they were not. Every text has some characteristics or tendencies that, either in the past or currently, signal some genre influence. Therefore, we are doing our students no disservice if we encourage them to read fiction that tends towards one or more of our contemporary genre taxonomies.

2.3 Engaging Students as Reviewers and Critics of Bestselling and Classic Texts

Genre reading can be useful for teachers of literature, composition, or creative writing. For literature classes, genre reading can help make students aware of socio-cultural frameworks or give them a way into cultural awareness and critique because reading in a genre can help us to construct

effective generalizations about large groups of literary works for the purpose of tracing historical trends or relating literary production to other cultural patterns. In such cases we are not primarily interested in the artistic qualities of individual works but in the degree to which particular works share common characteristics

that may be indicative of important cultural tendencies (Cawelti 7).

We are almost compelled to view texts this way if we use them in a class with a topical focus, such as gender, race, or technology. The aim of a topical class is usually not to focus on the merits of a few texts devoid of context; in such a class, the point is to explore the *context itself*. Genre fiction, then, is not out of place in a 21st century classroom, and can be useful not only in achieving the contemporary goals of literary studies, but in constructing new ones to advance what our field is and does. (For more on arguments to include science fiction as “serious reading, critical reading” in the high school classroom, see Zigo and Moore, 2004).

Roberts argues that “[g]enre reading is system reading” (151). By this he means that

In reading any single story, then, we are reading the system that lies behind it, that realizes itself through the mind of that story's writer...as we are reading the stories, we are exploring the system that created them. (151)

Key to modern composition studies is the idea expressed by John C. Bean, Virginia A. Chappell, and Alice M. Gillam in *Reading Rhetorically* that “texts themselves are in a conversation with previously published texts. Each text acts in relationship to other texts. It asserts a claim on a reader's attention by invoking certain interests and understandings, reminding readers of what has been written about the subject before” (Bean, Chappell, and Gillam 7). As Bean, Chappell, and Gillam point out, this idea is illustrated in Kenneth Burke's influential, and oft-cited metaphor of reading and writing as a “parlor”:

Imagine you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one

present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you Decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. (qtd. in Bean, Chappell, and Gillam 8)

Burke's metaphor parallels Roberts' idea of system reading. Because genre texts are popular and employ recognizable tropes with which many students will be familiar, genre reading is a good illustration of the complex relationship between authors, texts, and audience expectations in a particular conversation. Reading in a genre can help composition students understand the importance of conventions, audience analysis, and research, whether a course involves actual genre readings or includes the idea of genre reading as a helpful example alongside Burke's metaphor. For example, I have taught a composition class with a dystopian theme. Dystopian fiction (which seems to become less fictional every day) is a conversation about the horrors we may inflict on ourselves, and it speaks to the current events of its time. My students were encouraged to position themselves in the conversation and write their own nonfiction arguments against a variety of cultural and technological trends they saw as potentially dangerous.

Nick Mamatas argues for inclusion of genre writing in creative writing programs, noting that “genre fiction hasn't been embraced by most writing programs, despite the demand for such training” (77) and the fact that book sales suggest that “the nonrealistic may have a place in graduate writing programs” (78). However, some creative writing programs have begun to

include “genre-themed tracks...[which] are much more focused on getting their students published commercially than are many traditional programs” (78). Genre fiction is finding a place in creative writing programs, and like “science fiction itself, genre-themed MFAs just may be a glimpse into the future” (78).

Though the politics of aesthetics and class influences have often lined up against genre fiction, it has a variety of uses in college English classes. Roberts and others make the case that the perceived weaknesses of genre fiction (popularity, formula, etc.) are actually strengths, and indeed literary fiction has its share of tropes. Despite the persistence of textism, genre fiction is on its way to becoming an accepted part of the curriculum, and we may soon see a time when, as Maureen Barr humorously puts it, we can acknowledge that, “like all people, all literary genres are created equal” (436).

Teachers can learn much from librarians’ evolving perceptions and ongoing training about finding the right books for patrons, whether they are ordering titles on a limited budget, and weighing too many choices, or when an individual approaches them in person and asks for a recommendation. As Joyce Saricks explains, “Our goals as librarians has always been at least two-fold: to help readers discover titles they are currently in the mood to read, and to expand their reading beyond strict genre boundaries to other books that have the same elements they appreciate” (3). These goals are incredibly close to those of teachers, or maybe they describe a way teachers could expand their perspective and step away from trying to “convert” students to canonical literature. Joyce Saricks is an excellent model for how to recast our teaching attitudes when it comes to reading, and specifically to student reading. She examines the tension between what happens, and the motives at stake, when we use one term rather than another, specifically our use of the terms “recommend” and “suggest.” Many schools, and programs, have

“recommended reading lists” they publish for students, and these mirror those that other readers look for too, like “Best of” lists compiled by organizations or prestigious publications. But Saricks nudges those of us in positions of authority to stop recommending. Rather, librarians, and teachers, should reflect on how they present text selections to other readers:

Learning to suggest, rather than recommend, was another major breakthrough.

Recommend is a word fraught with unintended meaning and emotion.

Recommending places us in the role of expert saying, ‘Take this book; it is good for you.’ Suggesting, on the other hand, makes us partners with readers in exploring the various directions they might want to pursue. (2)

If we, as instructors, are able to enact this kind of pedagogy, which I advocate, we make teaching more a collaborative endeavor with students, and involve them in the choices that affect them most. We also show them a model of community participation they can use outside the classroom. They may even be part of a literary revolution or help reshape the future of English Studies. Lev Grossman hypothesizes that one reason the prejudice against genre fiction runs so deep is that the old guard, and the force of tradition, do not want change. But change is inevitable. Grossman posits “We expect literary revolution to come from above, from the literary end of the spectrum. . . . Instead, we’re getting a revolution from below, coming up from the supermarket aisles. Genre fiction is the technology that will disrupt the literary novel as we know it.” So now we have to ask ourselves (and our students): what happens when literature is defined as technology? What does the world look like when literature is one technology among others? Who and what is disrupting literary and popular tradition and culture and where is this disruption leading? Who does it benefit or harm? What is gained and what is lost? And, in keeping with the topic of this chapter, how do these events and attitudes change how we view definitions,

distinctions, conventions, and the purpose of the texts we choose to read? One conclusion we can reach, is that there is no definitive “answer” or definition, nothing that binds everything to a commonality, yet the uncertainty this study churns up is productive and creates opportunities for teachers and students to actually add to and to keep generating new texts and ways to read them. As the next chapter shows, the genres I am working with here did not spring forth fully formed; the borders are blurry, and always in dispute.

**CHAPTER 3: A SHORT HISTORY OF SPECULATIVE FICTION: BACKGROUNDS,
ORIGINS, AND CONTEXT FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS**

Michael Rennie was ill

The Day the Earth Stood Still

But he told us where we stand

And Flash Gordon was there

In silver underwear

*Claude Rains was *The Invisible Man**

Then something went wrong

For Fay Wray and King Kong

They got caught in a celluloid jam

Then at a deadly pace

It Came From Outer Space

And this is how the message ran...

Science fiction double feature

Doctor X will build a creature

See androids fighting Brad and Janet

*Anne Francis stars in *Forbidden Planet**

At the late night, double feature, picture show

-- "*Science Fiction/Double Feature*", **THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW**

A history of speculative fiction will be helpful for teaching science fiction, fantasy, and horror. Some of the texts and historical information here will be familiar to readers; some may

not. My aim in providing this history is not only to give teachers some context for in-class discussions and a base of knowledge from which to proceed, but also to suggest themes and time periods which they may wish to explore further. Darwin's influence on 19th century Science Fiction and Horror, for example, or the Cold War's influence on Popular Culture. But where is the starting point? Like *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), the history of speculative fiction is a messy, complicated mass of cultural fears, transgression, technological advances, and struggles between vice and virtue.

I will begin with the influence of the Gothic novel, then trace the shift of Gothic concerns in to 19th century speculative fiction. From there, the genres begin to solidify into what we know them as today, mostly due to the proliferation of pulp magazines. The 20th century brings its own aesthetic and economic factors to the perception and definition of speculative fiction; I will discuss these trends and the current state and possible future of science fiction, fantasy, and horror.

3.1 Where did it Begin? An Ontology for Genre Fiction

When approached to write a book on horror, Stephen King considered beginning with “Grendel and Grendel's mum” (*Danse Macabre* 10), so perhaps *Beowulf* (circa 700-1000 A.D.) is a good place to start. It is already required reading in many literature surveys, and it has the honor of being the oldest existing English-language story. Or maybe, as Wheeler Winston Dixon muses, we could look to the “*Epic of Gilgamesh* (circa 2000 B.C.) and Homer's *Odyssey* (circa 800 B.C.), both of which involve a variety of contests between mortals and monsters with a strong otherworldly flavor, in which man is but a tool, or pawn, of the gods” (1). Carl Freedman argues that we could plausibly consider the work of Dante and Milton to be science fiction:

...many of the major literary values for which science fiction is generally read are very much at work in Dante's and Milton's efforts to take the reader far beyond the boundaries of his or her own mundane environment, into strange, awe-inspiring realms thought to be in fact unknown, or at least largely unknown, but not in principle unknowable. It is in this sense of creating rich, complex, but not ultimately fantastic alternative worlds that Dante and Milton can be said to write science fiction. (15-16)

However eloquent Freedman's point may be, he seems to be stretching things a bit. The problem with nailing down one text as the progenitor of science fiction or fantasy or horror is that it ignores the fact that speculative fiction (for good or ill) stands *in contrast* to fiction that purports to be realistic. While ancient or medieval texts may serve as inspiration for modern speculative fiction, they were not, at the time they were written, *in contrast* with realistic fiction. For medieval Christians, Grendel is no more implausible than Cain or any of a number of frightening beings from Christian cosmology, all of whom were considered in some sense to be “real.”

For Brian Aldiss, the key text for the genesis of science fiction is *Frankenstein* (1818). To a certain extent, I agree, but the issue is more complicated. In “On the Origins of Genre,” Paul Kincaid notes that

There is no starting point for science fiction. There is no one novel that marks the beginning of the genre...Brian Aldiss famously named *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley, and his suggestion has been taken up by a number of later commentators. Other strong contenders include H.G. Wells, or Edgar Allen [sic] Poe, or Jules Verne. Gary Westfahl has nominated Hugo Gernsback as the true father of science fiction. Still others (including myself) have gone back to Thomas More's *Utopia*.

(41)

Kincaid concludes that “We are all wrong...because there is no ancestral text that could possibly contain, even in nascent form, all that we have come to identify as science fiction (41). Kincaid argues that “we cannot extract a unique, common thread that we could trace back to a unique, common origin. Science fiction, in particular, and probably all genres in general, does not work that way” (46), then he offers what may be one of the best explanations of how genres function:

A genre does not emerge, entire and fully armed, from the body of literature. A better analogy might be evolution by means of natural selection. There is an inchoate mass of story, each individual writer struggling with each individual story to produce something that will succeed, that will sell, or will please an editor, or please a reader, or will make a particular point, or will work in a formal experimental sense, or, more likely, that will do several or all of these and perhaps more besides. In order to do this they might use ideas or themes or settings picked up from other writers, or that are a reaction against those of other writers; they might distort something old and familiar or invent something entirely new; they might take bits and pieces from a dozen different sources and recombine them in a novel way or regard them from a novel perspective. The exact details of this evolutionary process need not concern us, but eventually enough writers will be producing work that is sufficiently similar for us to start recognizing patterns. (46)

Kincaid's description reinforces the idea of genres developing organically, with writers taking inspiration from other writers and trying to adapt ideas and techniques to their own purposes to create something new, but his explanation also acknowledges that pressures from readers and editors will nudge certain markets in one direction or another. The motives behind an author's

choice to participate in a particular genre are not always merely to make money, as some critics will charge; Kincaid's statement gives insight into the driving forces behind the evolution of genre writing that many prospective teachers of genre fiction may not have previously considered. Reflecting on the dynamic Kincaid describes, we can see that the student writer is in much the same position as the genre writer, who is presented with a mass of previous information and, if encouraged, will develop the desire to add something new to it.

Fully aware that I cannot pinpoint any *precise* moments when speculative fiction “begins,” I have chosen to begin with the Gothic novel. This is because the tension between the Gothic novel and the ostensibly realistic novel illustrates a cultural break between non-realistic and realistic forms of narrative; this, combined with the rapid advance of science and industrialism, sets the stage for the exploration of non-realistic narrative. The Gothic novel is the place where we can, in Kincaid's words, start recognizing the patterns that will eventually become what we now call science fiction, fantasy, and horror.

My historical overview is not meant to be even remotely comprehensive. I intend here to illustrate major currents and high points in the development of what we now regard as science fiction, fantasy, and horror. In doing this, I hope to illustrate what I see as important points in the evolution of these genres, while avoiding turning this work into a massive, complete history. The history I present here suggests certain historical periods and topics upon which teachers may wish to focus. For those wishing to research more deeply into one of the genres or particular historical periods, I recommend Fred Botting's *Gothic* and Wheeler Winston Dixon's *A History of Horror*; for horror. For fantasy, I would suggest Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James' *A Short History of Fantasy*. For science fiction, I would suggest James Gunn and Matthew Candelaria's excellent *Speculations on Speculation: Theories of Science Fiction*, which, being an anthology,

has the advantage of presenting multiple points of view on a variety of issues in science fiction. The above titles would be ideal for background reading for teachers, but can also be parsed and used for assigned readings for students and classroom discussion.

3.2 The Gothic: Morality and Monstrosity

Early 18th century England, according to Botting, had two aesthetic problems on its collective mind: “[m]orality and monstrosity” (21). Some of this had to do with, strangely enough, architecture. The classical influence of Greece and Rome upon the Enlightenment was crucial; this influence

privileged forms of cultural or artistic production that attended to the classical rules. Buildings, works of art, gardens, landscapes and written texts had to conform to precepts of uniformity, proportion and order. Aesthetic objects were praised for their harmony and texts were designed to foster appreciation on these terms, to instruct rather than to entertain, to inculcate a sense of morality and rational understanding and thus educate readers in the discrimination of virtue and vice...The dominance of classical values produced a national past that was distinct from the cultivation, rationality and maturity of an enlightened age. This past was called 'Gothic', a general and derogatory term for the Middle Ages which conjured up ideas of barbarous customs and practices, of superstition, ignorance, extravagant fancies and natural wildness. Manifestations of the Gothic past-buildings, ruins, songs and romances-were treated as products of uncultivated if not childish minds. (Botting 22)

Botting's quote illustrates the tension between the classical influence and emphasis on reason championed by Enlightenment thinkers and an emerging breed of writers who, first and

foremost, wanted to titillate and entertain their readers, not necessarily make them better people.

The Gothic novel reveled in the imagery of the dark, superstitious past. It portrayed excess, fear, and mysterious and powerful supernatural forces at work in a supposedly rational, orderly world. Gothic tales employed portents and omens, exotic locales (often Muslim or Catholic countries), and stark, wild imagery (castles, forests, moors). Worse yet, Gothic novels often refused to promote specific moral education, instead engendering ambiguity:

Encouraging superstitious beliefs Gothic narratives subverted rational codes of understanding and, in their presentation of diabolical deeds and supernatural incidents, ventured into the unhallowed ground of necromancy and arcane ritual. The centrality of usurpation, intrigue, betrayal and murder to Gothic plots appeared to celebrate criminal behaviour, violent executions of selfish ambition and voracious passion and licentious enactments of carnal desire. Such terrors, emerging from the gloom of a castle or lurking in the dark features of the villain, were also the source of pleasure, stimulating excitements which blurred definitions of reason and morality and, critics feared, encouraging readers' decline into depravity and corruption. (Botting 6)

It is no surprise then, that Gothic novels such as Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* (1764) with its scheming, betrayal, and gigantic ghostly pieces of armor falling from the sky, and Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), with its rape, murder, and necromancy, could be seen as an affront to order and rationality.

The Gothic novel had its roots in medieval romances, with their “wildly extravagant and fanciful tales of knights, giants, fabulous entities and marvellous incidents. Novels were privileged as instructive observations on the living world” (Botting 27.) However, several

important changes in English culture would validate the Gothic novel. By the middle of the 18th century, English culture's reaction to rationality and order had undergone a bit of a

shift in cultural values...what happened was that the 'medieval', the primitive, the wild, became invested with positive value in and for itself and came to be seen as representing virtues and qualities that the 'modern' world needed...the old-fashioned as opposed to the modern; the barbaric as opposed to the civilized; crudity as opposed to elegance; old English barons as opposed to the cosmopolitan gentry...various writers...began to make out a case for the importance of these Gothic qualities and to claim, specifically, that the fruits of primitivism and barbarism possessed a vigour, a sense of grandeur that was sorely needed in English culture. (Punter and Byron 8).

The qualities of the Gothic gained some acceptance during this period of English nostalgia, but by the late 18th century, another event paved the way for the rise of tales of excess and horror: the French Revolution.

The English were horrified by the French Revolution and what it implied. While the English regularly rioted for various reasons, "English rioters were sometimes killed, but were themselves seldom killers" (Davenport-Hines 153). Part of the problem was that the excesses of the French Revolution seemed to demonstrate an Enlightenment experiment gone horribly awry. This is where the Gothic novel, with its emphasis on non-rational scenarios, came in:

New vocabulary and images were needed to represent the destructive horrors of an angry, vengeful mob. Gothic is particularly suited to moments when human experience reaches the limits of intelligibility, and the French disorders after 1789 were just such an occasion. The excesses of the mob were exemplified by the

excesses of Gothic: both involve the uncontrol of unruly passions. (Davenport-Hines 154)

It will come as no surprise that the Gothic sets the groundwork for modern horror writing, but the nostalgic medievalism of Gothic also survives in modern fantasy, as we shall see. What may be surprising, however, is the argument that Gothic leads to early science fiction. Which leads us to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).

3.3 The Birth of Science Fiction

3.3.1 Species Competing for Survival: Frankenstein

As I mentioned, Brian Aldiss sees Gothic writing as the precursor to science fiction:

In the gothic mode, emphasis was placed on the distant and unearthly...Gothic's brooding landscapes, isolated castles, dismal old towns, and mysterious figures can still carry us into an entranced world from which horrid revelations start...The methods of the gothic writers are those of many science-fiction and horror writers today...Other planets make ideal settings for brooding landscapes, isolated castles, dismal old towns, and mysterious alien figures...with science-fiction novels distance lends enchantment. They may locate themselves in distant futures on Earth, on one of the planets of the solar system, or anywhere in our galaxy, even a distant galaxy...The Gothic novel was part of the great Romantic Movement. Its vogue declined early in the nineteenth century. But terror, mystery, and that delightful horror which Burke connected with the sublime—all of them have remained popular with a great body of readers, and may be discovered, sound of wind and limb, in science fiction to this day. (“On the Origin of Species:

Mary Shelley” 176-8)

For Aldiss, *Frankenstein's* science fiction credentials begin with the core concept of the book:

“...the creation of the nameless monster...an experiment that goes wrong—a prescription to be repeated later, more sensationally, in *Amazing Stories* and elsewhere” (182). *Frankenstein's* lack of supernatural forces and reliance on science (however improbable) make it a contender for a science fiction ur-text, as Aldiss argues, but other, more existential concerns also tie the book to modern science fiction and horror. Although plausible arguments can be made for considering other texts as “missing links” for science fiction, *Frankenstein's* continuing influence does make it a strong contender for a precursor to modern horror and science fiction, both of which will often share the same concerns and explore the same issues, albeit in different settings.

Aldiss notes that “Frankenstein agrees to make a female companion for the monster, subject to certain conditions. When his work is almost finished, Frankenstein pauses, thinking of the 'race of devils' that might be raised up by the union between his two creatures...” (184). This part of the book is influential because it posits the human race not against itself, not against hosts of Heaven and Hell, and not against isolated, solitary supernatural antagonists (such as ghosts), but against *another species*. This idea will continue to resonate in such diverse works as *Alien*, *Starship Troopers*, “The Call of Cthulhu”, and even entire sub-genres such as zombie apocalypse fiction and fiction of the singularity.

The importance of this idea cannot be overstated; apocalypse has always been an option in myth and fiction, but *Frankenstein* takes the idea of apocalypse away from God or gods and places it in the control of the natural world, where species compete, flourish, and sometimes become extinct. The extinction of the human race figures prominently in another of Mary Shelley's works, *The Last Man* (1826), the narrative of the lone survivor of a worldwide plague

in the late 21st century. Again, apocalypse in Shelley's work moves from myth to science, while retaining a sense of horror. Although Shelley was writing before Charles Darwin's work, Darwin's grandfather, Erasmus, was producing work that would foreshadow the theory of evolution, and “[s]peculations on evolution and natural selection were current at the end of the eighteenth century” (“On the Origin of Species: Mary Shelley” 169); evolutionary concepts were part of Mary Shelley's intellectual environment. When Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) was published, it would have even greater influence on speculative fiction of the 19th century.

We can see Darwin's influence (and *Frankenstein's*) in such category-blurring Victorian-era novels and novellas such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), H.G. Wells' *The Invisible Man* (1897), *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896), and *The Time Machine* (1895). Wells' novels and stories in particular tend to include a strong element of horror in their science fiction, echoing the “experiment gone awry” theme of *Frankenstein*. Jules Verne's works, such as *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870), *A Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1864), and *Around the World in Eighty Days* (1873), while retaining elements of suspense, demonstrate a more optimistic attitude towards scientific advances. The texts by Wells, Verne, and Stevenson have exerted a tremendous influence on subsequent speculative fiction. Wells and Verne in particular shaped the way science fiction was to be written and approached in the 20th and 21st centuries, and Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898), with its battles against Martians with the fate of the human species at stake, set a precedent for all of the alien invasion fiction to come. However, another novel of science and technology would, like *Frankenstein*, act as a bridge between the intellectual and cultural concerns of two centuries: Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula*.

3.4 19th Century, Part Two: Dracula, Technology, and the Transition from Gothic to Horror

Dracula is, in an important sense, about cutting-edge technology; this aspect of the book tends to be ignored in the many film adaptations (Clemens 205). The novel pits human technology against the implications of Darwinism. Dracula is personally, physically powerful and has supernatural powers that are yet linked to the natural world: he can turn into a wolf, climb sheer walls, and control weather. He

hails from the prehistoric beginnings of animal life on earth. His incursions into the modern world signify the eruption of the most elemental instinctual drives related to the struggle for species survival---for food, for safety, and for sexual reproduction---at a time when a rapidly transforming environment was making increasing demands on the human power of adaptation. (Clemens 205)

The Darwinian threat posed by Dracula is the extermination, or at least subjugation, of the human species. This fear is articulated in the novel by Jonathan Harker:

Then I stopped and looked at the Count. There was a mocking smile on the bloated face which seemed to drive me mad. This was the being I was helping to transfer to London, where, perhaps, for centuries to come he might, amongst its teeming millions, satiate his lust for blood, and create a new and ever-widening circle of semi-devils to batten on the helpless. (Stoker 57)

This passage echoes the “race of devils” in *Frankenstein* and further shifts the locus of horror from personal or even societal threats to threats against the species. The novel foregrounds recent scientific advances such as the portable typewriter, trains, the phonograph, and advanced medical techniques; these are the tools with which the protagonists ultimately defeat Dracula. Technology

triumphs over extinction for now, but *Dracula* and other late 19th century horror texts bring horror squarely into a modern, everyday environment; threats are no longer confined to ruined castles or desolate forests as in Gothic novels. Jonathan Harker realizes this after he has escaped the Count's castle and returned to London; it is almost as if he realizes he is no longer in a Gothic novel, but some other kind of story. Horror follows him home.

3.5 Fantasy and Fairytales

Fantasy in the 19th century continued the strain of nostalgic medievalism, but this often expressed itself in an interest in myth and fairy tales. These revivals of folklore, were, like the Gothic impulse, often motivated by nationalistic concerns and the longing for a mythical simple, noble past. The 1800s saw both the Brothers Grimm collecting and publishing fairy tales from folklore and Hans Christian Andersen writing and publishing his own influential fairy tales. American writers including Nathaniel Hawthorne and Washington Irving were including elements of fairy tales and even horror in their stories. However, the late 19th century would see the expansion of interest in science and industry that in turn prompted a boom in speculative fiction.

3.6 Early 20th Century: Pulp Periodicals Launch Weird Stories

The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the rise of several influential fantasy writers, among them Lord Dunsany, Algernon Blackwood, and Arthur Machen. While Dunsany's work tended to have a mythic, cosmic feel, Blackwood and Machen included quite a bit of horror in their work. Machen's "The Great God Pan" (1890) and "The White People" (1904) are considered horror classics. Around this period a new phenomenon occurred which would allow speculative fiction and other genres to flourish: pulp magazines.

Cheap to produce, pulps gave beginning writers a paying outlet for their work. Some of the most well-known were *Argosy*, *Amazing Stories*, *Black Mask*, and *Weird Tales*. These magazines and other pulps helped to create the careers of H.P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard, Clark Ashton Smith, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and a host of other writers of science fiction, fantasy, and horror.

The 1920s and 1930s are an important transition phase in the history of speculative fiction. Although genres were solidifying to some degree, and new ones were becoming popular (Howards's "boxing stories" for example), writers and editors seemed to have no trouble switching back and forth between them. Robert E. Howard, while famous for creating Conan, the mythical Hyborian Age, and the sword-and-sorcery sub-genre, also wrote historical adventure, westerns, detective stories, and science fiction. Editors at this time gain a great deal of power in shaping the careers of writers and thus the trajectory of genre fiction. Hugo Gernsback, who founded *Amazing Stories* in 1926, is given credit for not only developing the genre of science fiction, but also coining the name of the genre itself (Roberts 67-8).

3.7 Mid 20th Century: Monster Movies, the Cold War, and the Golden Age of Sci-Fi

By the 1930s and 1940s, science fiction had become a distinct genre in literature. This period is often referred to as the Golden Age of science fiction, and it spawned the careers of such writers as "Isaac Asimov, Clifford Simak, Jack Williamson, L. Sprague De Camp, Theodore Sturgeon, Robert Heinlein, and A E Van Vogt, to name only the shortest list that might be drawn up" (Roberts 75).

The solidification of science fiction as a genre also solidifies the genres of fantasy and horror, to some degree. Although fantasy and horror live on, horror mostly moves to film,

leading to such classics as *Dracula* (1931), *Frankenstein* (1931), *The Wolf Man* (1941), and *The Mummy* (1935). Fantasy would begin a revival with the publication of Tolkien's *The Hobbit* in 1937 and *The Lord of the Rings* in 1954. Tolkien's books legitimized fantasy, and his influence, along with that of Robert E. Howard, becoming be the defining factors of modern heroic fantasy.

By the 1950s, the Cold War had begun, and this provided fodder for a new tide of science fiction and horror texts. If not originally intended as allegories for the struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union, when these texts were adapted from print to film, their meanings took on new implications. Putative science fiction films such as *The Thing from Another World* (1951) and *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) contained a strong horror element, and it is difficult not to view them as expressions of Cold War fears.

Stephen King argues that the launch of the Soviet satellite *Sputnik* in October 1957 is a turning point for science fiction and horror:

We were fertile ground for the seeds of terror, we war babies; we had been raised in a strange circus of paranoia, patriotism, and national *hubris*...science fiction itself had never been in better shape. Space would be more than conquered...why, it would be PIONEERED!...This was the cradle of elementary political theory and technological dreamwork in which i and a great many other war babies were rocked until that day in October, when the cradle was rudely upended and all of us fell out. For me it was the end of the sweet dream...and the beginning of the nightmare...The big bombers that had smashed Berlin and Hamburg in World War II were even then, in 1957, becoming obsolete. A new and ominous abbreviation had come into the working vocabulary of terror: ICBM...the Russians were looking pretty good in the old ICBM department...ICBMs were only big rockets,

and the commies certainly hadn't lofted Sputnik I into orbit with a potato masher.

(*Danse Macabre* 23-5)

King's reaction to *Sputnik* may be hard to understand today, but it was shared by many Americans:

Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson was panicked; rocket wunderkind Werhner von Braun was furious; President Eisenhower was satisfied, even pleased; and Russian and American scientists were ecstatic...the public, greatly assisted by the media, went with Johnson. (Bracey 31).

Sputnik and the subsequent technological race engendered both fear of nuclear annihilation and interest in science. These concerns were on the minds of writers even slightly before *Sputnik*, and can be seen in such films as *The Incredible Shrinking Man* (1957) in which radiation causes the hero to, not surprisingly, shrink; *Them!* (1954), which deals with ants made gigantic by radiation; and *Tarantula* (1955), which features similar mishaps, with, you guessed it, tarantulas. Aliens, radiation-enhanced insects, and other monsters dominated film during the 1950s, perhaps the most famous is 1958's *The Blob*.

Horror in the 1950s and 1960s retains a science fiction element, just as science fiction retains a strong horror element. Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*, published in 1954, posits a future where a plague has transformed nearly all humans into one of two types of vampire-like creatures. Some are intelligent, in the mold of Dracula; some are mindless and shambling. The latter would inspire the depiction of zombies in George Romero's 1968 film *Night of the Living Dead*, the first in a long line of zombie apocalypse movies.

3.7.1 *New Wave Science Fiction*

Science fiction in the 1960s undergoes some important changes which expand the possibilities of the genre beyond the legacy of the Golden Age and its silver rocketships. Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965) took science fiction 20,000 years into the future to a strangely primitive civilization. Stanley Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Arthur C. Clarke's novel was published shortly after the movie was released) set a new cinematic standard for science fiction dealing with space travel, artificial intelligence, and the origins of humankind. Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961) achieved cult status among the “hippy counterculture of its time” (Roberts 82). The popularity of such novels as these inspired the New Wave of science fiction, which, while not a monolithic movement, is considered to include such writers as Harlan Ellison, Michael Moorcock, Samuel Delany, and Ursula K. Le Guin. New Wave was an experimental, often character-driven response to the perceived techno-fetishism of the Golden Age.

3.7.2 *Satanic Horror and Beach Reading*

By the 1970s, a new innovation in publishing would, like the pulps, enable a proliferation of speculative fiction: the mass market paperback. While cheap paperbacks had been around for some time, the increase in supermarkets, airports, and other venues where these books were bought and sold, made them very popular in the 1970s. Perhaps the most famous writer to benefit from this situation was Stephen King, who, after the success of his first novel *Carrie* in 1974, was encouraged to write more and longer novels, which could be more easily carried and read, say, at the beach, than a larger, more expensive hardcover. King's success in the 1970s and 1980s was nothing short of colossal, and he, like Lovecraft before him, inspired many other horror writers. Some other writers of horror did manage to get acclaim as well.

Ira Levin's 1967 novel *Rosemary's Baby* dealt with a Satanic cult menacing a young couple; the 1968 film adaptation, directed by Roman Polanski, was quite successful and brought Satan back from the forgotten realm of Gothic novels for a 20th century audience. William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist* (1971) and the 1973 film adaptation of the same name were highly successful, and its graphic violence, sexual scenes, and pacing would, like King's similar penchant for gore, influence a new generation of writers and filmmakers. Satan continued to be successful after the success of *The Exorcist*; the 1976 film *The Omen* would begin the narrative of a child destined to become the Antichrist.

Meanwhile, back in the lands of science fiction and fantasy, one film would overwhelmingly influence the way science fiction appeared in subsequent films and television shows: *Star Wars* (1977). A genealogically controversial blend of science fiction and fantasy, *Star Wars* harkened back to the pulpy, space opera stories of the 1930s. The franchise, which has been expanded to include more movies, television shows, novels, and comics, continues to be popular today. Not to be outdone, the fantasy side of the equation was rising in print. In the 1970s and 1980s, the lasting popularity of Howard's Conan stories (reprinted in various forms during this time), Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, and Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea novels inspire what seems to be a cascade of fantasy trilogies too numerous to begin to document here. For an insightful look into the publishing atmosphere for speculative fiction writers of the 1970s and 1980s, I recommend reading Karl Edward Wagner's only slightly fictionalized story "Neither Brute Nor Human" (1983).

3.7.3 *Cyberpunk and Splatterpunk*

By the 1980s, science fiction, which had been moving towards a gritty shift in tone, found inspiration in the 1970s punk rock movement. Cyberpunk, the foundations of which had been

festering for some time in comics and films, emerged with William Gibson's game-changing novel *Neuromancer* (1984). In the novel, Gibson explores artificial intelligence, pop culture, drugs, alternate realities, and corporate dystopia, while drawing on the pacing and plots of John le Carré and the hard-boiled atmosphere and language of writers such as Raymond Chandler. Along with John Shirley, Bruce Sterling, Pat Cadigan, and many others, Gibson introduced a new relevance to science fiction. The futures depicted in cyberpunk fiction were often eerily similar to our own present, with some modifications and advancements in drugs, cybernetics, and pop music. Cyberpunk tropes appeared in film as well. Ridley Scott's 1979 *Alien*, while firmly rooted in a tradition of horror, presents us with dirty, patched-together starships and weary protagonists who are far removed from the square-jawed space heroes of the Golden Age. Scott's 1982 film *Blade Runner* would exert tremendous influence on the hard-boiled, gritty cyberpunk aesthetic.

Not to be outdone, horror writers had their own punk movement as well. Termed splatterpunk, the movement took horror in new directions, much as the cyberpunks did with science fiction. Splatterpunk aimed to pull out all the stops when it came to gore and violence, even outdoing Stephen King. This had mixed results; some splatterpunk of the 1980s and 1990s feels gratuitous. However, this movement, interested as it was in anything gooey, propelled zombies into the collective consciousness. John Skipp and Craig Spector's anthology *Book of the Dead* (1989) still stands as a key example of zombie fiction.

3.7.4 *Goths and Vampires*

Many readers will be familiar with the current proliferation (some would say glut) of vampire fiction. While vampires have enjoyed perennial popularity in cinema (thanks to nearly innumerable film and print adaptations and permutations featuring Dracula, his daughters, his

sons, etc.), our current vampire mania stems from a slowly rising tide of vampire fiction that began to gain momentum in the early 1990s. Anne Rice's 1976 novel *Interview With the Vampire* and its sequels had enjoyed some success through the 1980s and into the 1990s, and the novel was adapted for film in 1994. Like Rice's books, Anno Dracula, Kim Newman's alternate-history take on *Dracula*, featured both vampire villains and vampire protagonists. White Wolf's role-playing game, *Vampire: The Masquerade*, first published in 1991, became something of a pop culture phenomenon, and Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 film *Bram Stoker's Dracula* helped even more to bring the Count back into the public consciousness. Goth subculture (not the 18th century version), had been developing since at least the early 1980s, but during the 1990s, it reached something of an apotheosis. Writers associated with the Goth movement, riding the tide of events, began publishing dark fiction, often portraying vampires as protagonists. This phenomenon continues today with the success of the *Twilight* series and its film adaptations, as well as many other novels featuring vampires, werewolves, demons, and sorcerers as sympathetic characters.

3.8 Changes in Publishing and Marketing: Readers and Authors Combined

From the 1990s on, speculative fiction of many stripes has risen in popularity. This has led to a frenzy of marketing, which gives us the many sub-genres (teen urban vampire romance fantasy for example) we can encounter today, thanks to corporate book publishers and book stores. However, the punk element has not gone away; low-budget independent films such as *The Blair Witch Project* (1999) gained popularity and even helped to develop the sub-genre of docu-horror, the “found footage” style of film with which many contemporary film-goers will be familiar. Small presses and self-publishing outfits have done what the pulps used to do: provide would-be genre writers with outlets for their work. This aesthetic is of particular interest to

teachers, because it demonstrates a real-world demand for writing that does not need to come from famous dead people or those with book contracts from large corporate publishers. This dynamic de-mystifies writing, and shows students that they do not necessarily need to be famous or well-connected to produce good writing.

3.9 The New Millennium, in Fiction and on Film: Franchises, Docu-Horror, and Zombies Everywhere

Monsters are of course still with us, and they still express our cultural fears; it is almost impossible to watch the “found footage” of the destruction of Manhattan in *Cloverfield* (2008) and not think of the 9/11 attacks. Docu-horror as a technique has reached such popularity in horror that it may soon rival spooky music or the cat jumping out of nowhere as a classic horror trope. Because vampires have become a bit too friendly and sympathetic, zombies are everywhere now: on television, in film, in comics, and, if the rumors are to be believed, real life. Some influential texts (usually films, such as *Alien* and *Star Wars*) have spawned entire industries that include novels, toys, television shows, and a host of fan-related material. It is difficult to find anyone who does not have some sort of *Star Wars*-related paraphernalia in his or her home. I urge readers to take this brief historical overview as a starting point and delve more deeply into the history of speculative fiction, because that complicated story is as important as any other historical perspective; it contains our hopes, dreams, and fears. The genres I have traced here have mutated, and they will continue to mutate. Modern audiences often expect to see a bit of horror in their science fiction, or some fantasy in their horror. Or even some hard-boiled mystery in their science fiction and teen drama in their horror. These genres are tendencies, and writers and filmmakers will continue to combine those tendencies in new ways. However, I would next like to discuss what H.P. Lovecraft would consider the oldest tendency: fear.

CHAPTER 4: TEACHING HORROR

"Horror is not a genre, like the mystery or science fiction or the western. It is not a kind of fiction, meant to be confined to the ghetto of a special shelf in libraries or bookstores.

Horror is an emotion." ---Douglas Winter, Prime Evil

4.1 Defining and Theorizing Horror as a SubGenre

It is difficult to argue with Douglas Winter's pronouncement that horror is an emotion; however, horror is also undeniably "a kind of fiction." The fact that Winter sits on the Board of Trustees of an organization called the Horror Writers Association undercuts his assertion. If there is such a thing as a "horror writer," there must indeed be such a thing as "horror writing." Defining what horror is, in an artistic context, is difficult and may (as is the case with defining science fiction, comedy, or pornography) not lead to satisfactory, conclusive results, but adds to important conversations about aesthetics, cognition, emotions, and how audiences respond to texts. Conversations about horror fiction in the classroom can and should go far beyond a simple "is it scary/is it not all that scary" analysis. Fears are *about* something, and this is what studying horror can explore. For example, in a previous chapter, I outlined Stephen King's argument that much science fiction and horror after *Sputnik's* launch metaphorically expresses Cold War anxieties, or the fear of nuclear destruction. For students, the challenge of reading and analyzing horror goes beyond the aesthetic and into articulations of what fears a text or set of texts may be expressing metaphorically. However, theorists of horror focus on the mechanics of fear, and this is necessarily where the discussion for you and your students should begin.

Like comedy, horror is fiction that ostensibly aims to provoke a specific emotional response in an audience. The problem with a text that aims for a specific emotional response is

that the text may not provoke the desired effect in all audiences; what is funny or frightening to me may leave you emotionally unmoved. In his influential essay “The Uncanny,” Sigmund Freud attempts to pinpoint those things that evoke “fear and dread” (124). However, Freud admits that “people differ greatly in their sensitivity to this kind of feeling” and that he himself very rarely encounters the “impression of the uncanny” (124). H.P. Lovecraft echoes this observation in *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, noting that what he calls the “fear of the unknown” is an “elementary principle whose appeal, if not always universal, must necessarily be poignant and permanent to minds of the requisite sensitiveness” (21).

As with attempts to define science fiction and fantasy, attempts to identify what frightens us and why will probably not give us conclusive answers or lead to a discovery of some fictional element that will engage all audiences in the same way, but the ongoing conversation is important because it engages professors and students in critical thinking, and helps us to understand better how literature works and how readers respond to it. For example, teaching the competing theories of horror, like teaching other theoretical models (Marxism, feminism, and others) allows students to exercise their critical thinking and writing skills by summarizing, dismantling, and analyzing them. Theorists of horror make definite philosophical assertions which, in themselves are open to debate and analysis by students engaging this material.

In the case of horror fiction, the conversation is particularly interesting because some people consume and enjoy horror fiction and do not experience a state of fear. People who do not like science fiction or fantasy or westerns generally simply avoid those genres, but horror fiction often engages an audience's attention and appreciation without evoking fear and dread in that audience. In a sense, the horror story can utterly fail to evoke the emotion it is ostensibly designed to evoke, yet still succeed as a work of art; the same can rarely be said of a comedy,

because a comedy (in the contemporary, and not Shakespearean sense) tends to have one element upon which it is judged: is it funny or not? Horror, however, usually has one of several other sub-elements, such as an unfolding mystery, graphic violence, or action. In film, horror also has the advantage of presenting special effects to grab its audience's attention. Horror's versatility thus allows a horror text to succeed on other levels than its ability to frighten an audience. I have many friends who can watch a B-grade horror movie, enjoy the gore and action, but not come away from it shaken or disturbed. On the other hand, I have never encountered anyone who came away from David Fincher's 1995 film *Seven* undisturbed, but I am sure someone out there was not moved by it. This is an important point to keep in mind, particularly when teaching horror fiction; many readers and viewers will simply not be frightened by classic horror texts, although they may still enjoy them for the suspense, action, or special effects, which are not the same as horror. Despite this phenomenon, analyzing horror texts can still be productive, because horror often explores cultural anxieties and confronts difficult issues that other fiction may not touch. I once taught *Candide* (which I think may be one of the funniest things I have ever read) in a World Literature class. None, I repeat, *not one* of my students thought it was funny. I abandoned the discussion I had in mind for that day (based on the funny aspects of *Candide*) in favor of a discussion based on Voltaire's critique of a certain brand of philosophical optimism. Crisis averted, I suppose. This situation can still be productive; students can still analyze a text without being emotionally moved by it. However, because theories of horror tend to focus on horror's possible potential to frighten us, I will discuss the merits of those theories, beginning with Freud and his theories of the uncanny, which will lead to attempts at identifying first what fictional horror is *not*.

4.1.1 Freud and the Uncanny

Early in “The Uncanny,” Freud mentions Ernst Jentsch's 1906 essay “On the Psychology of the Uncanny,” but finds Jentsch's emphasis on uncertainty unsatisfying; I will return to Jentsch later. In exploring what evokes fear in us, Freud first provides an exhaustive (and exhausting) dissection of the German words *heimlich* (homely) and *unheimlich* (unhomely) in order to establish the shades of meaning in the term “uncanny,” then moves on to cite works from the German weird fiction writer E.T.A. Hoffmann as examples of “disturbances of the ego” (143). For Freud, these disturbances stem from “something that was once familiar and then repressed” (154) such as fears of castration. Many critical works viewing horror through a psychoanalytic lens exist; however, Freud concludes “The Uncanny” by observing that his theories do not necessarily apply to works of fiction. He claims “we should distinguish between the uncanny one knows from experience and the uncanny one only fancies or reads about” (154) and goes on to set some groundwork for an aesthetic study of horror fiction. Freud suggests that the uncanny as encountered in fiction “deserves to be considered separately” (155) because a writer may choose to present a world that in few ways conforms to our reality (a fairy tale, for example), or a writer may present a world that appears to conform to “common reality” (156) but then introduces uncanny elements to produce fear. The writer “tricks us by promising us everyday reality and then going beyond it” (157). Ultimately, Freud concludes that “fiction affords possibilities for a sense of the uncanny that would not be available in real life” (157), and his theories of the uncanny therefore do not truly apply to fiction.

In *The Philosophy of Horror*, Noel Carroll echoes Freud's observations on the use of psychoanalytic criticism of horror fiction, ultimately concluding that psychoanalysis is not satisfying as a comprehensive theory of horror, because it is highly arguable that “every monster

in horror fiction will be traceable to repressed subject matter” (172). A variety of monsters “that tax psychoanalytic analysis...are rampant in horror fictions...[and] *need not* figure as emblems of psychic conflict” (173). Carroll's analysis matches Freud's observation that writers have power to create effects an audience has not previously encountered and which therefore could not have been repressed. A productive exercise for students may be an attempt to argue that Freud is *wrong*, and that we *can* effectively apply his theories to fiction; I leave this option up to you.

4.1.2 *Noel Carroll and Psychoanalytic Criticism*

Carroll's work dissects horror from an aesthetic view, laying out his theories as to how horror fiction functions on an audience. Before discussing the functions of horror, Carroll makes a point to distinguish what he calls “natural horror” (12) and “art-horror(12). Natural horror, according to Carroll, is the horror we feel at genocide or reports of serial killings. Art-horror is necessarily fictional, and it attempts to raise “the affect of horror in audiences” (15). For Carroll, this affect of horror is achieved with the use of a fictional monster. However, the simple introduction of a monster will not suffice. As Freud observes,

The world of the fairy tale, for example, abandons the basis of reality right from the start...many things that would be bound to seem uncanny if they happened in real life are not so in the realm of fiction...The imaginative writer may have invented a world that, while less fantastic than that of the fairy tale, differs from the real world in that it involves supernatural entities such as demons or spirits of the dead. Within the limits of the presuppositions of this literary reality, such figures forfeit any uncanny quality that might otherwise attach to them. The souls in Dante's *Inferno* or the ghostly apparitions in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* or *Julius Caesar* may be dark and terrifying, but at bottom they are no more uncanny

than, say, the serene world of Homer's gods. We adapt our judgement to the conditions of the writer's fictional reality and treat souls, spirits and ghosts as if they were fully entitled to exist, just as we are in our material reality. (156)

Freud's statements here are insightful and important and parallel Carl Freedman's concept of identifying science fiction texts (and presumably other genre texts) not by “any epistemological judgment external to the text itself” (18) but rather *how the text treats itself*. Consider the *Underworld* franchise of films versus the novel *Dracula*. Both deal with vampires, which are monsters, and would thus be considered horror, correct? However, from the beginning of the first film, *Underworld* (2003), we as an audience know from the beginning that vampires and werewolves exist, we see them in action-packed fights, and in fact we learn a great deal about them. They are not horrifying; they are superheroes and supervillains. Contrast this with *Dracula*, which begins with a real estate transaction. From this mundane premise, Stoker develops a sense of mystery and malevolence which gradually builds to horror. *Dracula* is not treated as a stylish, super-powered human; he is treated rather as something terrible and mysterious which should not even exist in the rational, businesslike Victorian world. Carroll reiterates this idea:

The monsters of horror, however, breach the norms of ontological propriety presumed by the positive human characters in the story. That is, in examples of horror, it would appear that the monster is an extraordinary character in our ordinary world, whereas in fairy tales and the like the monster is an ordinary creature in an extraordinary world. (16)

For Carroll, a monster is necessary to a work of horror fiction, and the monster must be presented as something abnormal to the fictional world. But what defines a “monster?” Carroll

presents a definition based on two characteristics. First, “monsters are threatening...They must be dangerous. This can be satisfied simply by making the monster lethal. That it kills and maims is enough. The monster may also be threatening psychologically, morally, or socially” (43). Second, according to Carroll, monsters must be “impure...Impurity involves a contradiction between two or more standing cultural categories” (43). Carroll then describes the types of structures for creating monsters. One is *fusion*, the

construction of creatures that transgress categorical distinctions such as inside/outside, living/dead, insect/human, flesh/machine, and so on...A fusion figure is a composite that unites attributes held to be categorically distinct and/or at odds in the cultural scheme of things in *unambiguously* one, spatio-temporally discrete entity” (43).

Lovecraft’s description of the alien god Cthulhu in “The Call of Cthulhu” illustrates Carroll's idea of fusion:

If I say that my somewhat extravagant imagination yielded simultaneous pictures of an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature, I shall not be unfaithful to the spirit of the thing. A pulpy, tentacled head surmounted a grotesque and scaly body with rudimentary wings; but it was the *general outline* of the whole which made it most shockingly frightful. (169)

Lovecraft's monster, reptilian/octopoid/humanoid/winged (and also gigantic and gelatinous, as we find out later in the story), violates common notions of what should and should not be biologically possible. Under Carroll's definition, zombies, vampires, insect/human hybrids, Godzilla, and a host of other entities count as monsters because they blur the line between two or more categories we normally hold to be distinct: living and dead, human and animal, etc..

Another monster structure Carroll offers is *fission*, a structure in which “categorically contradictory elements are fused or condensed or superimposed in one unified spatio-temporal being whose identity is homogeneous” (46). This structure produces monsters such as werewolves, doppelgangers, and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. In werewolves, for example, the wolf and human occupy the same body at different times.

Magnification and *massification*, for Carroll, also produce monsters. If something is presented as far too large for its cultural category, it becomes a monster by *magnification* (49). An elephant is not a monster; an elephant-sized cockroach *is*. If we take cockroaches and multiply their numbers, give them a purpose, and set them against humans, we also have a monster. Carroll calls this structure *massification* (50). Finally, Carroll describes *metonymy*, by which a monster is created by the loathsome or disturbing things which surround it; Dracula's association with vermin illustrates horrific metonymy (52). Not only is Carroll's view open to debate, as I will show below, but his system suggest some activities for the classroom, which could include students creating their own monsters with his system. This exercise in monster creation could even lay the groundwork for class projects leading to individual or collaborative fiction employing said monsters.

Brian Laetz calls Carroll's account “the leading, most sophisticated view of horror fiction” (Still 1), which is why I have chosen to foreground it here in my overview of horror theories. However, as Laetz points out, there are some problems with Carroll's account. After summarizing Laetz's very specific objections, I would like to propose some more general questions that Carroll's account may raise.

4.1.3 Implications: Questioning the Theory

In “Two Problematic Theses in Carroll's Account of Horror,” Brian Laetz addresses the problems in Carroll's ideas that 1) audiences mirror/are meant to mirror the responses of fictional characters to the monster and 2) audiences are disgusted by the impurity of a monster. First, Laetz observes that there may be different responses from the characters in a text that seem to be undesirable responses for the audience. For example, vampires often entrance their victims, who are then not horrified by the monster (68). Often, “villainous human characters *admire* the monster” (68). Clearly, audiences are not meant to parallel *all* the possible responses fictional characters display towards a monster.

Laetz also points out that Carroll's concept of the monster's disgust factor (Laetz calls this the impurity-disgust complex) has a few gaps. Laetz uses the film *Scanners* as an example to show how one character may be considered monstrous, yet another character with the same monstrous trait (in this case potentially lethal psychic powers) may be considered sympathetic and therefore not horrifying (71). Laetz also mentions *Interview With the Vampire* as an example; Louis, although a vampire, is not presented as horrifying, but Lestat, also a vampire, *is* presented as monstrous (71). In Carroll's explanation, the second important moving part in the horror machine, as it were, is the audience's reaction to the monster, which is based upon the reactions of characters in the fiction to the monster. We the audience are meant to experience emotions that “ideally, run parallel to the emotions of characters. Indeed, in works of horror the response of characters often seem to cue the emotional responses of the audiences” (17). It is here that we get into complications.

On Carroll's view, might we not have horrific, monstrous beings that shock/disgust the audience that then turn out not to actually be monsters? Is the text then no longer a horror text

from that moment on? Consider the example of 1980's *Friday the 13th* (the first film in the franchise). The film is essentially an inversion of *Psycho*. In *Psycho*, we as viewers are led to believe that Norman Bates' mother is behind the killings. As it turns out, she is dead, and we learn that it was Norman all along. In *Friday The 13th*, we as viewers are misled as to the identity of the (seemingly preternatural) killer; we might even suspect that an undead Jason Voorhees, back from the grave for revenge against naughty teenagers, is responsible for killing the campers, but we eventually find out that Jason's mother is the killer. Because Jason's mother is in no way a loathsome, impure category mistake (to use Carroll's terminology), she cannot be a monster in Carroll's scheme (she is a spree killer, something acknowledged by modern science). Yet some of the characters and ostensibly the audience could reasonably *believe* her to be a monster. The film further complicates matters by introducing an undead Jason in a dream sequence (or is it?) at the end of the film. So, is *Friday the 13th* a horror movie or not? These and similar questions raised by Carroll's theory and the objections to it beg to be included in classroom discussions dealing with aesthetics and reception theory.

The docu-horror film *The Blair Witch Project* serves as another example of the limits of Carroll's theories. In the film, three college students set out to make a documentary about the disturbing historical events in a small town in Maryland. The town is reputed to have been the home of an 18th century witch named Elly Kedward, who was driven from the town and, as the legend goes, possessed a local man in the 1950s, causing him to murder a number of children. The three filmmakers are menaced by strange sounds in the woods, malevolent-looking stick figures hanging in trees, and finally some unseen entity that (it is presumed) kills them. What the audience sees is “found footage” from the filmmakers' cameras. At no point in the film is the audience shown a monster. However, most critics generally call *The Blair Witch Project* a horror

film and agree that it is quite scary, despite the fact that the audience is given nothing impure to which it may react.

Carroll's notion of disgust/impurity seems to strain or perhaps constrain the genre of horror. The fact that something "does not exist according to the lights of contemporary science" (41) does not necessarily make it disgusting. For example, Ambrose Bierce's classic story "The Damned Thing" features a dangerous creature that happens to be invisible to the human eye. As with *The Blair Witch Project*, the characters in the story have no clear visual conception of the monster, so neither does the audience. Carroll does acknowledge that monsters do not have to be ugly, citing examples of attractive vampires and other humanoid threats (41), but presumably an audience would be disgusted by the metonymic aspects of these entities under Carroll's view; e.g., Dracula's associations with vermin. In "The Damned Thing," all we know is that the monster is ferocious and invisible, not that it disgusts the characters. It would be more reasonable to infer that the characters in *The Blair Witch Project* and "The Damned Thing" are frightened because they lack knowledge of their situation and feel helpless in the face of something that is beyond their comprehension. Is that a form of disgust? Again, these questions may augment your discussions in a horror course.

If Carroll's account, while compelling, does not quite satisfy on all counts, we might look back to Lovecraft and Jentsch to gain a sense of what constitutes horror. In *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, H.P. Lovecraft begins with the assertion that the "oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (12). Lovecraft is trying to establish a certain literary legitimacy here for what he calls "weirdly horrible tales" (12), but his observation may be helpful in analyzing horror fiction when taken in conjunction with Jentsch's theorizing on the uncanny.

Carroll dismisses the emotion of dread, making an unsupported but clear distinction between it and horror (42). If dread precedes horror, this may be a crucial oversight. It appears that horror requires a context, which Lovecraft would call the build-up (177). The context/build-up may occur swiftly or slowly, and it may even happen in reverse, that is, after the monster or horrific event reveals itself, but there must be some context in which the characters and the audience may place the horror, as it were. Without the context, the fright becomes as meaninglessly startling as the unexpected honk of a car horn. It may make one jump, but is that horror?

A hypothetical example may be helpful here. Imagine a film or short story in which the reader is given a short glimpse or description of a normal workday in a large office building. The building collapses, and many people inside are killed or injured. The end. Now imagine that the reason the building collapsed is the presence of earthworms the size of subway trains burrowing beneath it, but the reader or viewer *is never told that*. One might feel bad that the building collapsed, but absent any context, can we consider that feeling horror? The key here is that the audience knows virtually nothing, and it will be difficult to horrify them with this scenario. Horror depends on the audience knowing *something*, but not *enough*. There is a context, but there are gaps in that context. This is Jentsch's "dark feeling of uncertainty" (11) and Lovecraft's "fear of the unknown" (21): the idea that we think we know how the world works, but we are then confronted with an event that is outside our knowledge.

Jentsch asserts that we are afraid when we encounter some phenomenon that we cannot place in a familiar context (3-4). Lovecraft notes that an uncanny or fearsome marvel cannot be presented with "an account of impossible, improbable, or inconceivable phenomena as a commonplace narrative of objective acts and conventional emotions" (*Collected Essays* 177). As

in Jentsch's concept, there must be normal, familiar phenomena to compare to the new, unfamiliar phenomena. Optimally, we find some category in which to put the new phenomena, but this cognitive categorization, if unsuccessful, leads to “psychical uncertainty” (7). In Jentsch's, and probably Lovecraft's view, we are afraid of things such as the dark, not because the dark is inherently bad, but because our vision is decreased, and we cannot make appropriate judgments of the data we take in (Jentsch 6). It appears that what we are discussing here is similar to Carroll's “category mistake,” but the difference lies in the process of cognitive confusion in Jentsch's view, something we might call dread or doubt. Jentsch asserts that “the mood lasts until these doubts are resolved and then usually makes way for another kind of feeling” (8), presumably horror/alarm or relief/resolution. As interesting as these ideas are, they have not been welded into a comprehensive theory of horror; perhaps someone will refine the definitions and theories I have discussed here.

While it seems that a comprehensive definition or theory of horror has not been achieved, this overview should nevertheless give you some insight into the conversation and allow you to take that conversation into your classroom. As Freud and Lovecraft note, we do not all fear the same things, and horror fiction will not affect everyone the same way. However, we all fear something, and encountering, studying, and analyzing our fears, both cultural and personal, may help us understand them better.

4.2 Pedagogy for Teaching Horror

Although, as I have argued, horror and Gothic have slightly different concerns, I admit they are interconnected. However, the term “Gothic” is often applied by academics to works of horror in order to link, for instance, Stephen King or Anne Rice to the older, more academically legitimate tradition. Given that, there are reasons to teach Gothic or horror, or whatever we wish to call it.

The most important reason to teach horror is that it is relevant. Fear drives more of our decisions that we would like to admit. Studying literature of fear helps us to understand ourselves both as individuals and as groups. Horror often gives us a vocabulary to address cultural concerns that that may not always be available in mainstream contemporary fiction or the canon. Stephen King argues that

the horror genre has often been able to find national phobic pressure points, and those books and films which have been the most successful almost always seem to play upon and express fears which exist across a wide spectrum of people. Such fears, which are often political, economic, and psychological rather than supernatural, give the best work of horror a pleasing allegorical feel. (*Danse Macabre* 18)

If we accept King's argument, then teaching horror is teaching students to encounter and analyze political, economic, and psychological issues, whether historical or contemporary.

In *The Rise and Fall of English*, Robert Scholes asserts that, as teachers, we should confront two questions: “One question is how we can put students in touch with a usable cultural past. The other is how we can help students attain an active relationship with their cultural present” (104). Horror fiction, because it documents King's “phobic pressure points,” can help us confront the past and present in the way Scholes suggests. Having the potential to fill both of the roles Scholes outlines, horror can be useful in providing both topics for students in composition classes and as the focus of literature courses. Scholes goes on to note that

When disconnected texts are collected in surveys of Great Books, one of the first things lost is history itself. When texts that speak to one another—that address the same problems, that work in the same medium or genre—are studied,

then such courses can make sense. (119).

Scholes is arguing here for a more holistic approach to teaching literature, an approach that avoids presenting texts as discrete, unconnected objects of study, but rather presents them as elements in a larger historical conversation that, when given context, makes sense to students and allows them to connect to that conversation.

The strength of horror fiction is that, as I hope I show in my themes, genealogies, and historical overview, horror texts do indeed speak to one another, addressing the same problems—fear, transgression, survival, extinction—through different historical periods and narrative styles. Also, horror and its vocabulary are still with us, and are a part of our “cultural present.” Recently, the Centers for Disease Control published a graphic novel online designed to prepare people for a zombie pandemic. The comic was intended to be a whimsical, topical way to encourage people to prepare for *real* pandemics; even more recently, the CDC felt that it had to clarify that there are no actual zombies for us to worry about. But one wonders.

4.3 Glossary: Key Terms for Teachers

The terms I have selected here come from three sources: conversations with writers, editors, and fans of horror fiction; critical works on horror; and horror fiction itself. In my experience, these are the topics that often come up in conversations about horror or in critical works on horror. They are primarily intended for teachers, in order to introduce them to unfamiliar terms that they may encounter during background reading of primary or secondary texts. Also, students may be familiar with some of these terms, and instructors will want to be able to talk intelligently about them if students bring them up in classroom discussions.

These terms can also be used as search words for research, or a useful way to identify the

focus of a critical source that may be otherwise unfamiliar. For example, if you happen across a paper on kaiju films, you will know that it deals with monsters, and not some sort of martial art.

Finally, you may want to distribute an edited version of this glossary to your students to fit the needs of your course. In fact, because speculative fiction has a dynamic and ever-changing vocabulary, you may ask your students to research and add to the glossary you provide. A search for “horror” on the MLA database alone will yield around 3000 results, many of which will use the specialized terms I list here. You may also want to explore *Horror.net*, which links to fan-generated resources that discuss many of these terms and new ones as they develop as well.

DARK FANTASY

Dark fantasy was an alternate category to horror, which, by the 1990s, had become synonymous with gratuitous gore and serial killers (Westfahl 177). It has several nuanced meanings. It can refer to “sword and sorcery” texts that feature anti-heroic protagonists, such as Karl Edward Wagner's *Kane* or Michael Moorcock's *Elric*. It also can refer to supernatural horror stories told from the point of view of a monster; many modern vampire texts fit into this category. It has also been used to describe texts which use fantasy tropes (fairies, dragons, quests, etc.) but in a horrific context. A notable recent example of dark fantasy is Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* series.

DOCU-HORROR

Also called “found-footage” films, docu-horror usually refers to films that present a videotaped narrative of horrific events. 1980's *Cannibal Holocaust* (a gory but non-supernatural story) is credited with starting the trend (Meslow), but 1999's *The Blair Witch Project* is probably the

most successful and well-known example. Docu-horror films run the gamut from derivative to unbelievable to truly disturbing and effective. Some of the best recent examples are 2008's *Quarantine* (based on the 2007 Spanish zombie apocalypse film *REC*), the American kaiju film *Cloverfield* (2008), and *Paranormal Activity* (2010), and its sequels.

EROTIC HORROR

Erotic horror in many ways assimilated and replaced the splatterpunk movement (see **Splatterpunk** below). From the early to mid 1990s, erotic horror dominated the marketing of horror fiction. Erotic horror writers attempted to take the splatterpunk “extreme” aesthetic into the realm of erotically charged texts, with mixed results. Erotic horror often tended to be neither erotic nor horrifying. Jeff Gelb's *Hot Blood* (1989) anthology led to many more volumes (and imitators), providing a reliable market for authors wishing to break into the field. The television series *The Hunger* (1997-2000) capitalized on the movement, including episodes written by David J. Schow, Poppy Z. Brite, Graham Masterton, Harlan Ellison, Gemma Files, and other working horror writers. Other writers associated with erotic horror include Lucy Taylor, Karl Edward Wagner, and Edward Lee. Although erotic horror anthologies are still published, the movement, much like splatterpunk, has largely died out. Easily dismissed for its lurid preoccupations, this movement in horror nevertheless has value for study in the classroom for those interested in exploring transgression, queer issues, and gender roles.

KAIJU

Kaiju is a sub-genre of horror (and arguably science fiction) dealing with huge creatures menacing human populations. The English translation is “mysterious beast” (Dauphin 80). Often

simply called “monster movies,” kaiju sprang from Japanese films and television series; Godzilla is probably the most famous of these monsters. However, the term could retroactively encompass films such as *King Kong* (1933). Although these films have often been low-budget, amateurish affairs, there have been some recent notable examples, such as the South Korean film *The Host* (2006), *Cloverfield* (2008), and *Monsters* (2010). Kaiju is not limited to Japanese films, in much the same way that we do not find it strange when American or British actors portray martial artists. Many Western films such as the ones I have mentioned take inspiration from kaiju films.

LOVECRAFTIAN HORROR

H.P. Lovecraft (1890-1937) is considered to be the most influential horror writer of the 20th century. His stories, collectively known as the *Cthulhu Mythos*, present a universe populated by alien gods and creatures of vast power that are not so much malevolent as they are inimical to humans and human comprehension. His cosmology was inspired by scientific developments at the time (relativity, for example), which Lovecraft saw as evidence of a mechanistic universe too large for humans to comprehend and stay sane. The term “Lovecraftian” (in many sense interchangeable with the term “cosmic horror”) is used to describe horror texts that deal with deep space/deep time, grotesque alien entities, and sanity-damaging forbidden knowledge. Not all texts inspired by Lovecraft echo his pessimism, however. August Derleth, who coined the term “Cthulhu Mythos, gives the cosmology a feeling of heroic adventure and a struggle of good versus evil in his work, although he retains the monstrous alien gods and other creatures. Some of the best recent examples of texts called “Lovecraftian” are detailed in the **Lovecraftiana** theme later in this chapter.

SPLATTERPUNK

Splatterpunk was a movement in horror from roughly the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. David J. Schow is given credit for coining the term at a World Fantasy Convention (D. Carroll).

Splatterpunks aimed to revitalize the horror genre by pushing the blood, gore, and general level of disgusting imagery in their texts to the furthest limits they could envision. Zombies figure prominently in splatterpunk, and John Skipp and Craig Spector's zombie anthologies *Book of the Dead* (1990) and *Book of the Dead 2: Still Dead* (1992) are emblematic of the splatterpunk movement, along with Skipp's *The Scream* (1987). Like cyberpunk's *Mirrorshades* anthology, Paul Sammon's *Splatterpunks: Extreme Horror* (1990) and *Splatterpunks II: Over the Edge* (1995) attempted to showcase the authors of the movement. In addition to Schow, Skipp, and Spector, other authors such as Clive Barker, Edward Lee, Poppy Z. Brite, Rex Miller, and Nancy Collins are often considered part of the splatterpunk movement.

ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE

In voodoo lore, the zombie is a reanimated corpse; the reanimation can be for the purpose of creating a slave, taking revenge on an enemy, or sometimes both. Some scientific basis for the zombie may exist; in his book *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1985), ethnobotanist Wade Davis claims that zombies are victims of powerful neurotoxins and hallucinogens. Early texts dealing with zombies include William Seabrook's *The Magic Island* (1929) and H.P. Lovecraft's *Herbert West---Reanimator* (1921), as well as the films *White Zombie* (1932) and *I Walked With a Zombie* (1943). However, the modern genre of the zombie apocalypse begins with Richard Matheson's seminal *I Am Legend* (1954), which posits a future in which a plague has transformed virtually all humans into bloodsucking undead creatures. The book was adapted for film as *The Last Man*

on Earth (1964) and *The Omega Man* (1971) and again as *I Am Legend* (2007), but perhaps the definitive text inspired by the novel is George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), the film by which all other zombie apocalypse texts are measured. Romero's film introduced the important tropes that still shape today's concept of the zombie apocalypse: some sort of worldwide infectious plague, hordes of the infected hunting the living, and a grim battle for survival in store for the uninfected. Subsequent texts (usually films, although zombie novels, comics, and short stories have risen in popularity) have introduced many inventive variations on the zombie apocalypse. Recent film examples include *Quarantine* (2008) and *The Horde* (2009).

4.4 Horror Genealogies: Themes and Annotated Bibliographies for Teachers

The following groupings of suggested texts each outline a theme. My selection of themes is based on a combination of my identification of topical issues that can be explored through a set of texts and my aim to introduce new teachers and readers of horror to some lesser-known yet influential texts. Lovecraft's popularity has risen dramatically since his death, so his work may be familiar to some teachers and students, but my goal here is to provide textual suggestions that go beyond Lovecraft but are firmly planted in a Lovecraftian tradition. James's short story and Tourneur's film are perhaps lesser known, but both are horror classics and have exerted a subtle yet persistent influence on writers in the genre. Both themes chart literary history to a certain degree, but the individual texts can be rearranged into non-chronological configurations as well.

These themes are not prescriptive. Teachers are encouraged to use them in any way they wish. Both of the themes in this chapter contain text suggestions that would be appropriate for any literature or composition class with a focus on horror. You will note that each theme proceeds in roughly chronological order, so that there is a substantial representation of recent

texts in addition to older ones, so that you may fit them into multiple time periods if you choose to structure your course that way. Also, I have endeavored to draw connections between the texts in order to make it easier for teachers to obtain texts for the purposes of their courses; if you cannot obtain a particular story, for example, there will be a possible substitute within my selections.

You could build a course around either of the themes I outline here. In the case of *Curse of the Demon*, you will want to use nearly all of the texts I discuss if you wish to make it into an entire course; I suggest that it may be more useful as a unit in a horror-themed course. For the *Lovecraftiana*, you may want to use some components as a unit in a larger course plan based on horror fiction, but its larger scope makes it appropriate for a chronological, survey course of its own.

I encourage you to take the themes I present here as starting points and as models. After some reading in horror, you will want to develop your own themes. These could include Vampires, Zombies, Madness, and many others. Horror confronts many subjects, and thus provides many possibilities for use in your courses.

4.4.1 *Theme I: Curse of the Demon*

“It's in the trees! It's coming!”

---**NIGHT OF THE DEMON** (1957)

This genealogy is designed to show how one text, in this case M. R. James' “Casting the Runes” can spawn a host of homages, some of which are obvious, some of which are not. The

various permutations of the story bring it into contact with the cultural contexts of the times in which it appears, but the basic elements remain: a curse, a victim, and the victim's efforts to pass the curse to someone else. I could have just as easily picked another influential (but not very well-known) text, such as Robert W. Chambers' "The Yellow Sign" and demonstrated the same ripple effect in horror literature, but Robert M. Price and S.T. Joshi have already done that. The texts I present here in a sense selected themselves; the family tree of "Casting the Runes" is, in most cases, grown by the design of the many texts it has influenced. I encountered James' story through the 1957 film; I saw it when I was seven years old, and I later tracked down the story. Unless your course centers on horror film, I suggest having your students read at least the print version of James' story. Any of the films mentioned here will be appropriate as companion pieces to show how James' idea has been adapted for new audiences.

James, M.R. "Casting the Runes." 1911. Short story. Horror.

James' story of a man who offends a sorcerer and is subsequently put under a time-sensitive curse has a twist to it: the curse can be transferred to another person. Often somewhat inaccurately called a ghost story (James' reputation was as a writer of ghost stories), "Casting the Runes" is a very modern horror story for its time. James' work represented a break with Gothic conventions; he set his stories in thoroughly contemporary settings, albeit usually removed from urban areas. His scholarly, reserved Protagonists and penchant for implied horror prefigure H.P. Lovecraft's work in many ways. The story was adapted for radio in 1947 (for CBS' *Escape*), again in 1974 for *CBS Radio Mystery Theater*, and again in 1981 for BBC Radio 4. The 2007 audiobook *Tales of the Supernatural: Volume 1* includes a reading of "Casting the Runes" by Gareth David-Lloyd. Other radio/spoken adaptations of the story may exist; James' work

undergoes perennial periods of popularity, especially with British audiences. In 1979 *ITV Playhouse* produced a television adaptation of “Casting the Runes” directed by Lawrence Gordon Clark; this may be difficult/impossible to find in the U.S. At the time of this writing, many online versions of the original print story exist.

Tourneur, Jacques (director). *Night of the Demon* (released in the U.S. as *Curse of the Demon*). 1957. Film. Horror.

Widely regarded as a classic horror film, Tourneur's film (with a script by Charles Bennet and Hal E. Chester) departs slightly from “Casting the Runes,” but effectively captures the suspense and dread of James' story as Dr. John Holden (played by Dana Andrews) is stalked by supernatural forces. Many critics and directors place the film on their lists of the best/scariest horror movies of all time. I highly recommend this film for a horror literature /horror film course, or any course that includes “Casting the Runes.”

King, Stephen (Richard Bachman). *Thinner*. 1984. Novel. Horror.

King's novel (published under his Richard Bachman pseudonym) updates James' concept (much like James himself used contemporary settings instead of a Gothic past), but the plot remains similar: the protagonist offends a character with supernatural powers, and he becomes the victim of a slow curse, which can be transferred to another victim, saving the original recipient from the curse. In this case, it is overweight attorney Billy Halleck who accidentally kills an elderly gypsy woman and is cursed to waste away slowly. The novel ends in a much less upbeat manner than “Casting the Runes.” The 1996 film of the same name, directed by Tom Holland and starring Robert Burke, suffers from the curse of many film adaptations of King'

work; it seems to somehow miss the punch and suspense of the novel. However, the film may serve as a contrast to *Night of the Demon* for discussion purposes in a horror film class.

Hynes, James. *Publish and Perish: Three Tales of Tenure and Terror*. 1998. Collection of Novellas. Horror (Humor, Academia?).

Hynes' book will strike a chord with academics; the novellas all center on academic environments with horrific plots. The novella "Casting the Runes" is of course a direct homage to James' story, with the conflict shifted to a feud between an ambitious assistant professor and her malevolent senior professor. I recommend Hynes' "Casting the Runes" as a companion/contrast piece in a course including James' story. It would also work well to teach compare/contrast in a composition course, or in a creative writing class to teach parody and imitation. Furthermore, since the story also reveals the politics of academic work, it could be part of a discussion on the politics of English Studies, debates about the value of the tenure system, or even discussions about gender equity and sexual harassment.

Raimi, Sam (director). *Drag Me to Hell*. 2009. Film. Horror (Humor).

In many ways, *Drag Me to Hell* is a synthesis of *Night of the Demon* and *Thinner*. The offense against a person with supernatural powers, the time-limited curse, and the looming demonic presence from *Night of the Demon* remain, along with the gypsies from *Thinner*. In this case, a young loan officer denies an elderly (Eastern European, implicitly gypsy) woman an extension on her house payment, and is subsequently cursed. As in *Thinner*, things do not turn out as well for the protagonist as in James' story. Raimi uses his signature over-the-top combination of horror and humor to produce a film that is much more of a modern, fast-paced

work than *Night of the Demon* or *Thinner*, but *Drag Me to Hell* is a very appropriate discussion piece for a class involving “Casting The Runes” or any of the works based on it.

4.4.2 Theme II: Lovecraftiana

“The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age.” --“**THE CALL OF CTHULHU**” (1928)

The above quote from H. P. Lovecraft's best-known story sums up the cosmology his works, taken as a whole, present. In fact, the term “Cthulhu Mythos” has come to represent not only Lovecraft's pantheon of alien gods and entities, but the myriad monsters other writers have added to his fictional universe over that past several decades. This genealogy is designed to provide not only an introduction to his work, but also an illustration of his continuing influence on horror writing throughout the 20th century and into the 21st. I have chosen to include selected works not only from Lovecraft, his contemporaries, and his successors, but also a few of the works that Lovecraft admired and which influenced his aesthetic. Anyone interested in teaching horror or including horror texts in a class will encounter Lovecraft's influence again and again, so I strongly suggest including some of his work in such a class to give not only a context for the general evolution of cosmic horror, but also (because the specific entities and ideas in his mythos

have propagated throughout horror fiction as an inspiration to other writers) to illustrate the collaborative nature of genre reading and writing. Lovecraft's work is often familiar to students; his influence pervades popular and internet culture. In fact, I have had students ask me to include Lovecraft in my American Literature courses. I often comply. Students enjoy reading his stories, and Lovecraft's work is versatile: it can be used in American Literature courses, horror courses, fantasy courses, and science fiction courses.

Poe, Edgar Allan. "Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." Short story. Horror.

Poe was a great influence on Lovecraft, and this gruesome story is a good example of that influence. The story concerns a man who is dying of tuberculosis and agrees to be hypnotized at the point of death. The results are less than pleasant. The story was adapted in Roger Corman's *Tales of Terror* (1962) and George Romero's *Two Evil Eyes* (1990). Companion texts for this story might include Lovecraft's "Cool Air" (1928), Fritz Leiber's story "The Dead Man" (1950), and/or the *Night Gallery* television adaptations (1970, 1971) of either one.

Bierce, Ambrose. "The Damned Thing." Short story. Horror.

While many literature teachers are familiar with the oft-anthologized "Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" (1890), Bierce wrote many weird tales, and this story of frontiersmen menaced by an invisible monster is one of his best. Lovecraft specifically mentions "The Damned Thing" in *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (51); his own invisible abomination in "The Dunwich Horror" may have been inspired by Bierce's unseen predator.

Chambers, Robert W. *The King in Yellow*. 1895. Short story collection. Horror (Fantasy).

Chambers was best known for his romances during his time, but his collection *The King in Yellow* is probably his best-known work today. Although some of the stories are straightforward bohemian slices of late 19th century life, “The Yellow Sign,” “The Repairer of Reputations,” “The Mask,” and “In the Court of the Dragon” are stories of madness, fantasy, and horror. Chambers uses a fictional madness-inducing play, *The King in Yellow*, to link the first four stories. The play, with its references to alien worlds and sanity-blasting knowledge, is a precursor to Lovecraft's own fictional tome of forbidden knowledge, *The Necronomicon*. Companion texts for *The King in Yellow* could include Karl Edward Wagner's story “The River of Night's Dreaming” (1981), James Blish's “More Light” (1970).

Lovecraft, H. P. Various. Horror.

Lovecraft's work has been anthologized, reprinted, and collected in many places. The stories I recommend here should not be difficult to find in one form or another. Probably the best primer for Lovecraft study is The Library of America's *H.P. Lovecraft: Tales* (2005), edited by Peter Straub. For a horror course or a course including horror fiction, I would recommend Lovecraft's “classic” stories, beginning with “The Call of Cthulhu” (1928), which has been adapted as an excellent silent film, *The Call of Cthulhu* (2005). Lovecraft's other classic works, the novella *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (1936) and “The Dunwich Horror” (1929) have been adapted for film as well; *The Dunwich Horror* (1970) bears little resemblance to the story, but an updated film adaptation appeared in 2009. *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* has undergone a few loose film adaptations, notably *Dagon* (2001) and *Cthulhu* (2007). “The Whisperer in Darkness” (1931), another of Lovecraft's more famous stories, has been adapted as a 1930s style film, *The*

Whisperer in Darkness (2011). Finally, Lovecraft's longest work, *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936), which deals with an Antarctic expedition that discovers aliens, has not yet been directly adapted, but it might pair up well with John W. Campbell's novella *Who Goes There?* (1938) and/or John Carpenter's film *The Thing* (1982).

Long, Frank Belknap. “The Hounds of Tindalos.” 1931. Short story. Horror (Science Fiction).

Long was a protégé of Lovecraft, as well as part of the “Lovecraft Circle,” a loose association of writers working in weird fiction in the 1920s and 30s (which included Robert E. Howard, Robert Bloch, and Clark Ashton Smith, among others). The Lovecraft Circle traded ideas back and forth, and Long's “The Hounds of Tindalos” was greatly influenced by Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos. The story posits the existence of malevolent extra-dimensional beings only able to enter our reality through angles of space/time. Although Long wrote many other excellent stories and novels, “The Hounds of Tindalos” is his best-known work, and it is considered a classic of Lovecraftian horror.

Borges, Jorge Luis. “There are More Things.” 1975. Short story. Horror.

Borges' work is commonly considered to be magic realism, but he wrote this story as an homage to Lovecraft and Lovecraftian horror. Employing the standard tropes of a mysterious house and a mysterious monster, the story displays Borges' labyrinthine narrative style. It would make a good companion text for Lovecraft's “The Shunned House” (1937), which also deals with an ominous house inhabited by a monster.

Shea, Michael. *The Color Out of Time*. 1984. Horror (Science Fiction).

Shea has written in various genres, and his work often blends genres, such as horror and heroic fantasy. Although heavily influenced by the science fiction and fantasy writer Jack Vance, Shea has written Lovecraftian horror, most notably his 1984 novel *The Color Out of Time*, is a loose sequel/homage to Lovecraft's "The Colour Out of Space" (1927), which involves a horrible wasting blight visited on a rural community by a meteorite. "The Colour Out of Space" was adapted into the 1965 film *Die, Monster, Die!*, the 1987 film *The Curse*, and the 2010 film *Die Farbe (The Colour)*. Also, one might consider Stephen King's short story, "Weeds" (1976) and its film adaptation, "The Lonesome Death of Jordy Verrill," which was the second segment in George Romero's *Creepshow* (1982), as companion texts for Shea's novel and/or Lovecraft's story.

Klein, T.E.D. *Dark Gods*. 1985. Novella collection. Horror.

Klein's collection of four novellas may be some of the best Lovecraftian fiction available. In *The Modern Weird Tale*, S.T. Joshi calls *Dark Gods* "one of the premier weird collections since the heyday of Lovecraft and Blackwood" (96). Although Klein has written other works of horror, this collection exemplifies the "cosmic horror" that so many writers in the Lovecraftian idiom strive to convey. Any of the four novellas would be appropriate examples of modern Lovecraft-inspired horror. However, the last, "Black Man with a Horn," is a direct extension of Lovecraftian ideas, featuring a narrator based on Frank Belknap Long, who, in addition to struggling with old age and the shadow of his mentor's posthumous fame, gradually realizes that he is living out the plot of one of Lovecraft's (or his own) tales.

Brite, Poppy Z. “His Mouth Will Taste of Wormwood.” 1990. Short story. Horror.

Brite's short stories and novels garnered her acclaim during the 1990s, mainly for her contemporary subject matter and accomplished prose style. I recommend “His Mouth Will Taste of Wormwood” because it is a modern update of Lovecraft's “The Hound” (1924), but Brite's story is set in Louisiana. “The Hound” is about two jaded necrophiliacs (Lovecraft gives no overtly sexual cues, but that is the only appropriate term) who rob graves and take souvenirs, organic and otherwise, from the corpses. They steal an amulet from a purported “ghoul” and are then stalked by something dreadful. “His Mouth Will Taste of Wormwood” and “The Hound” are excellent companion texts that illustrate the influence of Lovecraft over the decades as well as the ways modern authors use his ideas to explore entirely different cultural issues.

Ligotti, Thomas. Various. Horror.

Ligotti's work takes cues from Lovecraft and throws in possibly even more pessimism and paranoia. His stories are notoriously hard to describe; S.T. Joshi perhaps puts it best: “...his actual work is almost entirely original and unclassifiable...a systematic assault on the real world and the replacement of it with the unreal, the dreamlike, and the hallucinatory” (*The Modern Weird Tale* 244-5). I recommend his stories “The Sect of the Idiot” (1988), “The Last Feast of Harlequin” (1990), and “The Dreaming in Nortown” (1991) as representative examples of his work and the most obviously Lovecraft-inspired (Ligotti even dedicates “The Last Feast of Harlequin” to Lovecraft's memory).

Kiernan, Caitlín R. Various. Horror (Dark Fantasy).

Another writer who uses Lovecraft as a starting point and takes those ideas into new directions, Kiernan possesses a distinct prose style and unique vision. Nearly all of her work could fit into a horror class, although it often crosses/blurs genres. I recommend as a starting point two stories, "In the Water Works (Birmingham, Alabama 1888)" (1998) and "Postcards from the King of Tides" (2000). Both touch upon Kiernan's interest in "deep time," an idea Lovecraft often used. Anyone interested in studying/teaching Kiernan's work should explore her many short story collections and novels, particularly *Tales of Pain and Wonder* (2000), *Threshold* (2001), *From Weird and Distant Shores* (2002), *Low Red Moon* (2003), and *Daughter of Hounds* (2007).

Dikkers, Scott, ed. "Nation Escapes Depression Through Fanciful Works of H.P.

Lovecraft." *Our Dumb Century*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999: 52. Humor.

And finally, a little humor. This fake news story in a collection from *The Onion* makes a good addition to any study of Lovecraft. With lines such as, "Lovecraft's gay yarns lift the spirit and take readers' minds off the difficulty of daily life," this small satirical article, like all good humor, contains a grain of truth worth discussing in conjunction with Lovecraft's work or any of the popular pulp fiction of his time.

CHAPTER 5: TEACHING SCIENCE FICTION

“It's been said that science fiction and fantasy are two different things. Science fiction-the improbable made possible...”

---Rod Serling, “THE FUGITIVE” (1962)

As we saw with the attempts to define horror, attempts to define science fiction generally leave us unsatisfied, but not necessarily to a dead end. Perhaps because science fiction has produced so many writers within the genre who also try to articulate definitions of the genre, the answer to the question, “How do we know what is science fiction and what is not?” has been hotly debated. Damon Knight famously said of science fiction that “it will do us no particular harm if we remember that, like *The Saturday Evening Post*, it mean what we point to when we say it” (qtd. in Kincaid 44). While Knight's comment may seem unhelpful and glib, I will return to it later. It may not be as offhandedly trite as it seems.

5.1 Defining and Theorizing Science Fiction as a Subgenre

5.1.1 Divisive Definitions

In “Toward a Definition of Science Fiction,” James Gunn asserts that definition is the “most important, and most divisive, issue in science fiction” (5). As Carl Freedman notes in *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*,

No definitional consensus exists. There are narrow and broad definitions, eulogistic and dyslogistic definitions, definitions that position science fiction in a variety of ways with regard to its customary Others (notably fantasy on the one hand, and “mainstream” or realistic fiction on the other) and, finally,

antidefinitions that proclaim the problem of definition to be insoluble. (13)

The problem with most genre definitions is that they tend to be brief and pithy (note the Rod Serling quote above), and “brevity means lack of precision” (“Toward a Definition of Science Fiction” 5). However, more working parts to a definition mean more chances for it to break down. Although it may be insoluble, I will discuss this problem and present the major definitions with the aim of providing a context and fodder for your classroom discussions of science fiction.

In 1926, Hugo Gernsback described the the model story (which he then called “scientifiction”) he wanted in his magazine *Amazing Stories* as “a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision” (qtd. In Claerson 15). Let us discount the “charming” element (this would certainly rule out *Alien*, *The Thing*, etc.) and focus on prophecy as the benchmark. John W. Campbell, the editor of *Astounding*, also stated that he wanted stories that made “an honest effort at prophetic extrapolation” (Eshbach 91). The idea that science fiction somehow predicts the future sounds intuitively correct, but it is rarely realized, or at least not in the way authors and readers may think. Two problems exist when we look at the prophetic standard, and these problems are interconnected.

First, many, many science fiction texts get the future wrong, or at least partially wrong. Part of the reason for this is the oft-used trope of the somewhat recognizable near-future, which, in much science fiction from the 1920s to the 1990s, was somewhere around the year 2000. We are in the second decade of the 21st century, and Arthur C. Clarke's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) is now alternate history. If the “future” was traditionally around the turn of the 21st century, it has reached its expiration date. In *Science Fiction*, Adam Roberts further explores the idea of science fiction as (failed) prophecy, citing the 1996 film *Apollo 13*:

It is a film about the adventures of the crew of a spaceship, off on a perilous mission, who have to battle with near-fatal malfunction...But this is a text that looks *backwards*, not forwards...watching it...creates an acute awareness that 'going to the Moon' was something our ancestors did...Apollo 13 does...epitomise an important argument about SF made by several critics: although many people think of SF as something that looks to the future, the truth is that most SF texts are more interested in the way things have been. (26)

Roberts cites instances of science fiction texts that got some things right and others dead wrong. I would like to offer some examples of my own. The United States never had a war, nuclear or otherwise, with the Soviet Union, and indeed, the Soviet Union no longer exists, yet many science fiction texts have used this as a premise. Some texts predicted the widespread use of computers, but not the prevalence of Facebook and other social media. Even William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and other works from the 1980s predicted something like the internet, but only sophisticated computer experts could use it. What do we make of these texts now? Did they "fail" in some sense? Are they no longer science fiction? William Gibson himself debunks the idea that science fiction is somehow visionary, and in doing so, makes an important observation about what science fiction really explores:

I don't actually think of science fiction as primarily a predictive form. That's its cultural reputation and that's what lots of people believe it is, but my approach has always been that it's invariably about the day it was written in. Regardless of what the author tells us, it can't really be anything else. There's no way it can be about the future, except it pretends to be the future. It's like reading *1984*. What it's actually about is 1948, the year it was written. (avclub.com)

The second problem with the “prophecy standard” is that science fiction texts often get it *right*. However, these correct prophecies are often not foregrounded in the texts. For example, *Neuromancer* is set against a backdrop of immense corporate power, poverty, and urban decay, which we see today, but most critics focus on the implications of cybernetics and cyberspace in the book. Charles Stross' *Accelerando* (2005), which is primarily about a technological singularity, posits Rick Santorum (probably) as President of the United States, a minor and clearly satirical detail in the book, as then-Senator Santorum was wildly unpopular at the time and suffered a crushing defeat in his 2006 Senate re-election bid. As I write this, Rick Santorum is a serious contender for the Republican nominee for President. So much for satire. It is difficult to tell what may be extrapolation and what may be surreal/satirical/incidental detail in a science fiction text, so the accuracy of prophecy may not be our best standard for judging science fiction.

Norman Spinrad has commented that “science fiction is anything published as science fiction” (qtd. in Roberts 2), which is cynical and mostly unhelpful, but does point to the influence editors and publishers, relying on their personal preferences, have had on the field. Slightly more helpful is Theodore Sturgeon's statement that “a good science fiction story is one whose events would not have occurred without its scientific content” (Malzberg 38). This brief definition sounds good, but it would cover a story set in 1998 about a love affair conducted entirely by e-mail. Would that count as science fiction? Also, a great deal of contemporary fiction depends on scientific content. Many forensic crime dramas (*CSI*, *NCIS*, etc.) rely heavily on science for their plots, but I doubt we could agree to call them science fiction. For that matter, the movie *Smokey and the Bandit* (1977) could not exist without the internal combustion engine, and it would be an almost absurd stretch to call that film science fiction.

5.1.2 *Discontinuity*

James Gunn offers an extended definition of science fiction that focuses on change and discontinuity (“Toward a Definition of Science Fiction” 7-8). For Gunn, the difference between fantastic literature and realistic literature is that “the situations of traditional fiction are those of the everyday world, including the everyday world of history. The broad area of fantastic literature is characterized by situations in which a significant element is different from the everyday” (7). One objection to Gunn's first point is that even realistic literature often differs from the everyday, mainly because it is fiction. As Ursula K. Le Guin points out in the introduction to her collection *A Fisherman of the Inland Sea*, “All fiction offers us a world we can't otherwise reach, whether because it's in the past, or in far or imaginary places, or describes experiences we haven't had, or leads us into minds different from our own” (3). Samuel Delany further explains this idea with an anecdote about a historian he met:

A historian specializing in the beginnings of the 19th century, he had been a great reader of literature, but had found...that he was reading more and more science fiction until, for the last two years, other than his journals and nonfiction he read nothing else. “I was really afraid to go back and read a 'serious' novel,” he told me.” I didn't know what would happen. Finally...I picked up Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*...I thoroughly enjoyed it, more than I ever had before. But I realized something. Before, I used to read novels to tell me how the world really was at the time they were written. This time, I read the book asking myself what kind of world would have had to exist for Austen's story to have taken place--which, incidentally, is completely different from the world as it actually was back then. I know. It's my period.” (Delany 116)

Setting aside for now the objection that *all* fiction differs from the everyday, I will explore Gunn's definition further. He goes on to explain how discontinuity works in fantastic fiction:

Traditional fiction...is the literature of continuity. Whatever the situation, it is continuous with everyday experience, and the decisions that must be made by the characters are decisions based upon prior experience, upon tradition. The moment characters in any kind of fiction encounter new situations or attempt new solutions, the story begins to feel like science fiction...we...must...further differentiate science fiction and fantasy, which is also the literature of discontinuity...If the difference between fantastic literature and the literature of everyday experience lies in the changed situation, the difference between fantasy and science fiction lies in the fact that fantasy takes place in a world in which the rules of everyday experience do not apply, and science fiction in the world of everyday experience extended. That is, fantasy creates its own world and its own laws; science fiction accepts the real world and its laws...we can believe in the existence of aliens somewhere else in the universe, or that time machines or faster-than-light spaceships eventually may be developed, and still function without real-life problems; but if we behave in our everyday life as if werewolves, vampires, and doorways into other worlds exist, our lives will be difficult, even if we remain outside institutional walls.

(“Toward a Definition of Science Fiction” 9)

Gunn's definition sounds quite comprehensive and intuitively sound, but it raises a few objections. I will deal here with the most important one. According to a 2010 Pew Research poll, roughly one in five Americans believe in ghosts. Roughly one in four believe in astrology.

According to a 2007 Gallup poll, seven in ten Americans believe in the Devil. If the historical accounts are accurate, the Puritans really did believe witches, demons, and the like were real and lurking everywhere, and those beliefs have not gone away entirely. My point here is that, when it comes down to it, there is no consensus as to what constitutes “the real world.” One might counter that, at least, there is some consensus in the scientific community about what is possible or impossible. There is not. Some researchers believe faster-than-light travel is possible, as well as time travel. However, Chinese researchers claim to have proof that photons cannot travel faster than the speed of light, and therefore time travel is impossible, and probably faster-than-light travel with it. Some cosmologists theorize that our universe may in fact be a multiverse, with many (perhaps infinite) different realities. Others vigorously criticize multiverse theories.

5.1.3 *Cognitive Estrangement*

Darko Suvin proposes a definition that is somewhat similar to Gunn's with some differences. Suvin describes science fiction as literature of “cognitive estrangement” (“SF and the Genological Jungle” 24). Cognition, for Suvin, is the “aspect of SF that prompts us to try and understand, to comprehend, the alien landscape of a given SF book, film or story” (Roberts 8). Estrangement is the presence of one or more “novum,” elements that distinguish the fictional world from our own empirical reality; a galaxy-traveling starship would be an example. For Suvin, “realistic” literature, such as *Tom Jones*, *Madame Bovary*, and *Intruder in the Dust*, satisfies the cognitive aspect, but is not estranged; myth, folk tales, and fantasy are estranged, but lack a cognitive element (“SF and the Genological Jungle” 61-3). Suvin's definition, while providing a handy taxonomy for different types of literature, raises a few of the same objections that Gunn's does. First, as Le Guin and Delany note, realistic fiction is not always that “realistic.” Second, as with Gunn's concept, there is not really a consensus as to what reality is, so, to many

readers, estrangement based on the presence of dragons or hobbits may often be the equivalent of estrangement based on teleportation or time travel; the cognitive element may not always be apparent.

Third, what if some elements in a text are scientifically, rationally plausible, and some are not? Take Frank Herbert's 1965 novel *Dune*, for instance. Much of *Dune* seems sociologically and ecologically possible, but what of the precognition and other psychic abilities exhibited by characters in the novel? Also, doesn't it seem highly "unrealistic" that a boy 20,000 years in the future is living a life that, at times, suspiciously parallels those of Hamlet and Henry V? Need we repossess Herbert's Hugo and Nebula Awards? Also, Gunn and Suvin (and others who have defined science fiction) place great emphasis on cognition/science/plausibility, but this in turn places a great burden on the reader, not to mention the author. Gunn himself notes that the reader is important and must "ask the right questions" ("Toward a Definition of Science Fiction" 9) of a given genre text: "When we read science fiction, we realize that it applies to the real world, and we ask it real questions. The first one is: How did we get there from here? If the question is irrelevant or whimsical, then the fiction is fantasy. On the other hand, if we insist that the fantasy answer our real-world questions, we cannot read it" (9). The problem here is, what is a "real-world question?"

As readers, we would have to know enough to ask the "right" questions. For example, I know a little about Alcubierre's theoretical warp drive model, so I suppose I could ask the correct questions of a text that featured something like it, but I am deficient when it comes to the theoretical physics of dimensional travel. Logically, I would have to consider those texts using warp drives to be science fiction, and those featuring hyperspace drives to be fantasy, which seems absurd. Suvin, in a rant containing a backhanded compliment to Isaac Asimov's

Foundation novels, makes a statement which actually undercuts the cognition/plausibility/real-world standard:

Unfortunately a majority of what is published as SF is still in that pre-natal, or, better, regression-to-womb stage...the science is treated as a metaphysical and not physical, supernatural and not natural activity, as gobbledygook instead of rational procedure. From Ralph, Buck Rogers, and the post-Stapledonian supermen to Asimov's psychohistory (which has at least the advantage of identifying the proper field of modern destiny, social relations).

(“SF and the Genological Jungle” 66)

If the “proper field of modern destiny” is social relations (and not physics or biology), why couldn't fairy tales or fantasy fiction explore the issue as well as science fiction? Or Gothic fiction? What Suvin acknowledges (and seems to be disgusted by) is the fact that much science fiction appears to use science as a metaphorical way to explore how humans interact with each other and their world, which, arguably, is the *point* of literature.

A story centered only on its plausible technology might be pure science fiction, but it will probably fail as plain old fiction if it minimizes human experience. Lastly, as Adam Roberts notes,

It might be argued perhaps that 'cognitive' is almost a synonym for 'scientific' that his phrase 'cognitive estrangement' is just another way of restating the phrase to be defined, 'science fiction.' One of the strengths of Suvin's definition is that it seems to embody a certain common-sense tautology, that science fiction is scientific fictionalising. But, as we have seen, science is just as frequently represented in the SF novel by pseudo-science, by some device outside the

boundaries of science that is none the less rationalised in the *style* of scientific discourse...several of the frequently deployed 'nova' of SF are things that 'science' has specifically ruled out of court as literally impossible. The most obvious example of this is faster-than-light travel, a staple of a great many SF tales but something that scientists assure us can never happen. (8)

5.1.4 *Structural Fabulation*

Robert Scholes offers “structural fabulation” as a definition of science fiction; like Suvin's “cognitive estrangement,” this concept rests on an element of rationality and an element of fiction. As Scholes puts it, people

require a fiction that satisfies our cognitive and sublimative needs together...The most satisfying fictional response to those needs takes the form of what may be called structural fabulation. In works of structural fabulation the tradition of speculative fiction is modified by an awareness of the nature of the universe as a system of systems, a structure of structures, and the insights of the past century of science are accepted as fictional points of departure.

(“The Roots of Science Fiction” 214)

Scholes goes on to explain that “structural fabulation is neither scientific in its methods nor a substitute for actual science. It is a fictional exploration of human situations made perceptible by the implications of recent science” (214). Roberts observes that, similar to Suvin's cognitive estrangement, “there's a certain re-duplication here. 'Fabulation' seems synonymous with 'fiction' in pretty much the same way that 'structural' is with science; we could abbreviate both 'science fiction' and 'structural fabulation' to SF if we wanted to” (10).

What are we to do with all the cognition, fabulation, etc.? Is there a definition available

for science fiction among all these terms? As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, Carl Freedman puts forth the idea that

it is possible to conceptualize genre in a radically different and thoroughly dialectical way. In this understanding, a genre is not a classification but an element or, better still, a *tendency* that, in combination with other relatively autonomous generic elements or tendencies, is active to a greater or lesser degree within a literary text that is itself understood as a complexly structured totality. (20)

Freedman argues that we must consider “the attitude of the text itself to the kind of estrangements being performed” (18). In a sense, the text will tell the reader what genre or genres might be operating in that text. Perhaps the most interesting thing about the contentious discourse and metadiscourse about science fiction is that it actually generates ideas about other genres, particularly fantasy (which is often scorned), and even the broad category of literature itself. This is how we can make some use of Damon Knight's infamous comment: the key is that we keep pointing to these texts and discussing their implications. This is part of the reason I have chosen to discuss the study and teaching of science fiction, fantasy, and horror together under the term speculative fiction; the dialectic involved, which includes ideas about technology, literature, emotions, cognition, and ultimately the nature of humanity, is the important byproduct of encountering and analyzing these genres.

5.2 Pedagogy for Teaching Science Fiction

As you have probably noticed, science fiction addresses many “big questions.” Ursula K. Le Guin observes that “American SF has been full of stories tackling totalitarianism, nationalism, overpopulation, pollution, prejudice, racism, sexism, militarism, and so on” (“On Teaching Science Fiction” 24). Le Guin's list reminds me of topics I have often seen my students

write about in composition classes. If we as teachers want to provide subjects for our students to write and think critically about, we could possibly do no better than to have them read science fiction. Arguing for the inclusion of literary texts in composition classes, Dominic DelliCarpini suggests asking students “to see connections, rather than hierarchies, among literary and other texts” (28). Science fiction can aid in this.

Science fiction, like horror and fantasy, presents a set of connections that are already in place. Because the tropes of science fiction are well-known in popular culture and indeed, in everyday experience (the internet and smart phones are examples that come to mind; anyone my age will remember when things like this appeared mostly in comic books), students have a base of knowledge which allows them to enter the conversations inherent in science fiction. At the risk of being overly dramatic, I would suggest that studying the conversations in science fiction is more important today than ever, because we are facing ever-accelerating technological changes. As a friend of mine pointed out to me, we seem to adapt to these changes rather well; there is no “future shock.” I am not sure he is totally correct, but even if we do *adapt* well to our technological advances, we may not be *thinking* about them enough.

5.3 Glossary: Key Terms for Teachers

The terms I have selected here come from three sources: conversations with writers, editors, and fans of science fiction; critical works on science fiction; and science fiction itself. In my experience, these are the topics that often come up in conversations about science fiction or in critical works on science fiction. They are primarily intended for teachers, in order to introduce them to unfamiliar terms that they may encounter during background reading of primary or secondary texts. Also, students may be familiar with some of these terms, and

instructors will want to be able to talk intelligently about them if students bring them up in classroom discussions.

These terms can also be used as search words for research, or a useful way to identify the focus of a critical source that may be otherwise unfamiliar. For example, if you happen across a paper on FTL in fiction, you will know that it deals with space travel.

Finally, you may want to distribute an edited version of this glossary to your students to fit the needs of your course. In fact, because speculative fiction has a dynamic and ever-changing vocabulary, you may ask your students to research and add to the glossary you provide. A recent search for “science fiction” on the MLA database alone yielded over 9000 results, many of which will use the specialized terms I list here. You may also want to explore the *Center for the Study of Science Fiction* page at www.sfcenter.ku.edu, which links to essays and other resources which will use many of these terms and new ones as they develop as well.

ALTERNATE HISTORY

Alternate history is arguably a sub-genre of science fiction dealing with speculation about historical events occurring differently from how they actually happened. For example, a popular theme in alternate history is the “what if the Nazis had won?” idea. Competing with the Nazis is the “what if the South had won?” theme. Philip K. Dicks' *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) explores the former, while Harry Turtledove's *Southern Victory* series of novels (1997-2007) explore the latter. Often, but not always, the trope of time travel appears in these texts to explain the deviation from history. An interesting sub-sub-genre, which could be called alternate fictional history, has been refined by Kim Newman, whose *Anno Dracula* series (1992-1998) uses historical figures and fictional characters from other authors' works to construct an alternate

history of the late 19th and 20th centuries.

CYBERPUNK

Cyberpunk is a movement within science fiction that began in the early 1980s; the leading authors/proponents of the movement at the time were William Gibson, John Shirley, and Bruce Sterling. The term “cyberpunk was coined by Bruce Bethke in his 1983 short story “Cyberpunk”; the name evokes recent technology (cybernetics) and the rebellious music and attitude of punk rock. Influenced by comics (*Heavy Metal*, for instance), B movies, hard-boiled detective fiction, and author such as William S. Burroughs and Philip K. Dick, cyberpunk writers explored themes such as the rise of mega-corporations, virtual reality/drug use/altered consciousness, media/fame/pop culture, and the invasion of the body by technology. Some authors associated with cyberpunk include Pat Cadigan, K.W. Jeter, r.u. Sirius, Paul Di Filippo, and of course Gibson, Shirley, and Sterling. Key cyberpunk texts include Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) and Sterling's 1986 *Mirrorshades* anthology.

FTL (FASTER THAN LIGHT TRAVEL)

Put simply, faster-than-light travel. A staple of science fiction texts and a contested concept within the scientific community. According to Einstein, the speed of light is the upper limit for the universe; some theorists posit that there may be ways to get around this. The theories are too complicated to approach here, but fictional explorations of the ramifications of FTL include Dan Simmons' *Hyperion* (1989) and *The Fall of Hyperion* (1990) and Ursula K. Le Guin's short stories “The Shobies' Story” (1990) and “Dancing to Ganam” (1993), which may be found in her

collection *A Fisherman of the Inland Sea*.

GOLDEN AGE OF SCIENCE FICTION

The Golden Age of science fiction is dated from roughly the late 1930s to the 1960s. John W. Campbell's assumption of editorship at *Astounding* is generally considered to be the starting point for the Golden Age. Previously, the field had been dominated by Hugo Gernsback and the magazine *Amazing Stories*, but when Campbell became editor of *Astounding* in 1938, he almost singlehandedly eliminated purple prose from the field of science fiction. He wanted written by writers who understood both people and science. Campbell's influence was such that he could make or break the careers of aspiring science fiction writers. The work of this period is characterized by attention to scientific plausibility, especially in the “hard” sciences of physics and biology. Space travel figures prominently in science fiction of this period. The Golden Age ushered in the careers of many authors we consider classic today, including Isaac Asimov, Robert A. Heinlein, Theodore Sturgeon, and many others.

HARD SCIENCE FICTION

Often associated with the Golden Age and its authors, hard science fiction places emphasis on the accuracy of its scientific content and foregrounds “hard sciences” such as physics, engineering, etc. in its plots. The works of Larry Niven, Robert Heinlein, Arthur C. Clarke, and Kim Stanley Robinson often fall into the category of hard science fiction.

NEW WAVE

The term “New Wave” comes from *nouvelle vague*, which was originally used to describe the work of French avant-garde filmmakers of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Long before the term was applied to 1970s and 1980s pop music, Judith Merril used New Wave in a 1966 essay in *F&SF* to describe a new group of writers, most of whom were regular contributors to the British magazine *New Worlds*. Michael Moorcock had become editor of the magazine in 1964, and he ushered in a counter-revolution against traditional SF. New Wave SF usually emphasized inner rather than outer space; its authors employed stylistic techniques that had previously been reserved for more mainstream literature, and those authors were not afraid to include sexual content. In the U.S., Harlan Ellison's *Dangerous Visions* (1967) introduced new authors and new styles of SF to readers and was credited for inspiring the American arm of New Wave. Merril's New Wave anthology *England Swings* appeared the next year. Some authors associated with New Wave (many of whom have disavowed it at some point on their careers) include Robert Silverberg, Thomas Disch, Brian Aldiss, J.G. Ballard, Joanna Russ, and Samuel Delaney.

SINGULARITY

As described by futurists, the singularity (a term coined by science fiction author Vernor Vinge) refers to a point in technological progress when artificial intelligence (AI) exceeds the capacity of human comprehension. It is believed that, because true AI would be so alien to human consciousness, humans would no longer be able to predict or even comprehend future events. The hypothesis is that AI would create more AI, and the successive generations would become more intellectually powerful and alien to humans. This in turn might lead to the intelligences eradicating the human species, accidentally, incidentally, or on purpose. Nonfiction sources for information on the singularity include Ray Kurzweil's 2005 book *The Singularity is Near* and

Bill Joy's article "Why the future doesn't need us" in the April 2004 issue of *Wired*. The singularity has been fodder for many fictional texts; I collect some of these in the **Singularity** theme/genealogy included in this chapter.

SOFT SCIENCE FICTION

A counterpart of hard science fiction, soft science is sometimes called sociological science fiction. It usually deals more with character, philosophy, or social issues than hard science fiction, but the terms are not necessarily opposites; they merely refer to the emphasis on hard or soft science issues found within a given text. Ursula K. Le Guin's character-driven science fiction is a good example of soft science fiction.

STEAMPUNK

Steampunk can be considered a sub-genre of alternate history. The term describes fiction usually set in the 19th century, but with advanced technology along the lines of that found in the works of H.G. Wells or Jules Verne. The technology is usually Victorian-era and steam-driven, hence the name, which was coined by cyberpunk writer K.W. Jeter. The first popular novel in the steampunk genre was William Gibson and Bruce Sterling's *The Difference Engine* (1990), which featured steam-powered computers. Other steampunk works include China Mieville's *Perdido Street Station* (2000), Joe Lansdale's *Zeppelins West* (2001), and Cherie Priest's *Dreadnought* (2010).

5.4 Genealogies for Science Fiction: Themes and Annotated Bibliographies for Teachers

The following groupings of suggested texts each outline a theme. My selection of themes is based on a combination of my identification of topical issues that can be explored through a set of texts and my aim to introduce new teachers and readers of science fiction to new ways to look at classic texts, as well as highlight some lesser-known yet influential texts. The two themes I have chosen here illustrate some of the “big problems” science fiction tends to address. Dystopian fiction covers a range of conversations about what can go wrong (or is going wrong) in society. Many readers have some familiarity with dystopian works, but the issue of the singularity may be something unfamiliar to teachers and students. However, quite a few theorists believe some dramatic technological development will transform humanity into something else, for good or bad. Both themes chart literary history to a certain degree, but the individual texts can be rearranged into non-chronological configurations as well.

I would like to emphasize that these themes are not prescriptive. Teachers are encouraged to use them in any way they wish. Both of the themes in this chapter contain text suggestions that would be appropriate for any literature or composition class with a focus on science fiction or technology, or possibly even politics. You will note that each theme proceeds in roughly chronological order, so that there is a substantial representation of recent texts in addition to older ones, so that you may fit them into multiple time periods if you choose to structure your course that way. Also, I have endeavored to draw connections between the texts in order to make it easier for teachers to obtain texts for the purposes of their courses; if you cannot obtain a particular story, for example, there will be a possible analog or substitute within my selections.

You could build a course around either of the themes I outline here. Both dystopia and the

singularity are excellent topics to help students develop thinking, writing, and research skills, and both topics have real connections to our lives.

I encourage you to take the themes I present here as starting points and as models. After some reading in science fiction, you will want to develop your own themes, or “big questions.” These could include Space Travel, Aliens/the Other, Virtual Reality, and many others. “Big questions” are excellent material for composition or literature classes, and science fiction is full of explorations of those questions.

5.4.1 Theme I: Dystopia

Here comes another winter

Of long shadows and high hopes

Here comes another winter

Waiting for utopia

Waiting for hell to freeze over

The The, “HEARTLAND” (1986)

Utopian/dystopian themes have been as much a staple of science fiction as space travel. Utopian fiction is difficult to pull off; if nothing goes wrong or there is no conflict, it tends to be uninteresting. However, dystopia is a subject that has been examined with great success in science fiction. I have chosen to concentrate on social, near-future dystopias in this genealogy. As William Gibson points out, science fiction tends to be about the present, not the future, and dystopian texts offer excellent opportunities to examine current cultural topics and issues.

Perhaps no one is ever completely happy with the time and society in which he or she lives, but many of the concerns of dystopian fiction are eerily resonant with today's state of affairs. Dystopian fiction, as arguably the most pointedly political of all speculative fiction, gives teachers an opportunity to encourage students to critically examine and analyze the assumptions of a variety of political philosophies, including their own and that of today's culture. The issues of control, surveillance, eugenics, poverty, and endless war are relevant today, and dystopian fiction prompts students to examine these issues and how they are affected by them.

London, Jack. *The Iron Heel*. 1908. Novel. Science Fiction (Dystopia).

London's cautionary tale of robber barons instituting a repressive oligarchy in the United States is a classic example of what appears to be predictive science fiction, but actually articulates fears about the time in which it was written. Although it is difficult to imagine authors vociferously arguing for socialism in the United States today, the novel depicts the competing ideologies of its historical context.

Huxley, Aldous. *Brave New World*. Novel. 1932. Science Fiction (Dystopia).

Huxley's novel has influenced many texts since its publication. The dystopian tropes he explores have been reworked and re-envisioned by quite a few authors. Surreal and somewhat pedantic by today's standards, it nevertheless remains relevant. Although some of its themes seem to be reversed in today's world (in the United States, contraception is under attack, and religion has undergone an upsurge rather than eradication), it stands as a classic of dystopian literature.

Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Novel. 1949. Science Fiction (Dystopia).

Part of my purpose in these themes/genealogies is to introduce prospective teachers of speculative fiction to works and writers they may not have encountered, but I also have to include classics such as Orwell's novel. I cannot say anything about the book that has not already been said; it may be in the running with *Brave New World* as the ultimate dystopian novel. Orwell's vision manages to persist as a warning of the dangers of surveillance, perpetual war, and the manipulation of language for political gain and control. The list of works inspired by Orwell's book is long, and includes albums by David Bowie (*Diamond Dogs*, 1974) and Nine Inch Nails (*Year Zero*, 2007), an homage by Anthony Burgess (*1985*, 1978), Haruki Murakami's *1Q84* (2009-2010), ...the list goes on and is too extensive to cover here. Of particular note is the excellent film adaptation starring John Hurt (*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 1984).

Harrison, Harry. *Make Room! Make Room!*. Novel. 1966. Science Fiction (Dystopia).

Harrison's novel, set in 1999, posits overpopulation as the chief problem facing humanity. As a byproduct, water, energy, and food are in short supply, and social unrest is rampant. The film adaptation, *Soylent Green* (1973) departs sharply from the book in several places (the use of people as food, for instance), but is nevertheless compelling and an exploration of the anxieties of the 1960s and 1970s.

Carpenter, John. *Escape from New York*. 1981. Film. Science Fiction (Cyberpunk, Dystopia).

Carpenter's film depicts a post-World War III 1997 plagued by crime, poverty, and mental illness. Carpenter's anti-heroic Snake Plissken is sent to retrieve the President, who is being held

hostage by inmates in New York City, which has been turned into a prison. The 1981 novelization by Mike McQuay provides a more detailed picture of the dystopia the United States has become, as well as a history of Snake Plissken. Both the novel and the film influenced William Gibson's *Neuromancer*; these texts make a great introduction to Gibson's novel and cyberpunk in general.

King, Stephen (writing as Richard Bachman). *The Running Man*. Novel. 1982. Science Fiction (Dystopia).

King's grim, eerily prescient book was mangled in the 1987 film adaptation of the same name. However, the book itself stands as an underrated example of dystopian fiction. Although both the book and the film both revolve around a deadly game show, the similarities end there. Unlike other situations in which a film adaptation updates a dated concept in a novel, the film seems dated and cartoonish, while the book remains gritty and relevant. Set in 2025, the novel anticipates reality television shows, *America's Most Wanted*, the widening gap between rich and poor, and the 9/11 attacks. I highly recommend *The Running Man* for inclusion in any class with a focus on dystopian fiction.

James, P.D. *Children of Men*. Novel. 1992. Science Fiction (Dystopia).

James' novel posits an authoritarian regime in England in the year 2021. In the book, male sperm counts mysteriously drop to zero worldwide, causing social despair. Although the book received acclaim, I am strongly recommending the 2006 film adaptation, *Children of Men*. In the movie, female fertility has dropped to zero, and a similar authoritarian regime exists in England, but the movie departs sharply from the book in several important ways in order to

explore the ramifications of contemporary social issues such as immigration, indefinite detention, terrorism, war, and poverty. In much the same way, Alan Moore's graphic novel *V for Vendetta* (1982-1989), which critiqued Thatcher-era England through the use of a near-future English dystopia, was updated to critique more contemporary issues in its film adaptation, *V for Vendetta* (2005). Although the sources for both films stand on their own, the films offer critiques of current social issues with which contemporary viewers can connect, and these texts could work well together in a science fiction course or any course exploring dystopian themes.

Wilson, Mehitobel. "The Mannerly Man." Short story. 2002. Science Fiction (Dystopia).

Wilson's tale of paranoia envisions a world in which everyone is given a license to kill another person who threatens or offends them, but only once. This grim, deceptively simple story, while written at the turn of the 21st century, resonates with the current controversy over "stand your ground" laws, and it is therefore an excellent choice in a class that explores such timely subjects.

Wimmer, Kurt. *Equilibrium*. Film. 2002. Science Fiction (Dystopia).

Equilibrium includes so many allusions to other classic dystopian films and novels that it is difficult to spot them all. However, the film, rather than seeming overly derivative, comes off as a synthesis, homage, and update of those texts (with a great deal of gunplay and martial arts thrown in). The film is set in a post-World War III society (Libria) which is predicated on the idea that emotions are to blame for humankind's problems; instead of *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* "thoughtcrime," Libria punishes "sense offenses." The story follows a policeman/assassin of

sorts (shades of *Logan's Run*) who accidentally is exposed to emotions; conflict and rebellion ensue.

Shteyngart, Gary. *Super Sad True Love Story*. 2010. Science Fiction (Dystopia).

Shteyngart's novel is set in a near-future, dysfunctional version of the United States. As with the film *Children of Men*, *Super Sad True Love Story* is almost not speculative; it takes contemporary culture and exaggerates it just enough. Poverty, militarization, underemployment, and the pervasiveness of social media provide the backdrop for the story. This is one of the best examples of recent dystopian fiction, and it connects with modern readers' everyday experiences.

5.4.2 *Theme II: Singularity*

“Defense network computers. New.. powerful... hooked into everything, trusted to run it all. They say it got smart, a new order of intelligence. Then it saw all people as a threat, not just the ones on the other side. Decided our fate in a microsecond: extermination.”

Kyle Reese, THE TERMINATOR (1984)

I have focused in this genealogy on technological singularities, that is, unintended effects of the creation of artificially intelligent computers. Although Ray Kurzweil's *The Singularity is Near* and other theoretical texts about the singularity paint a positive, utopian picture of a hypothetical intelligence explosion which will release humanity from physical limitations, fiction writers have not always seen the singularity as an event that will turn out well for us.

Fiction of the singularity has been labeled as Luddite, and that may be fair in some

instances. However, this type of fiction presents opportunities in the classroom for questioning technology and our relationship to it. Frank Herbert, author of the *Dune* novels, did the very same thing with his college students. His philosophy was that too often “people don't examine or question their basic assumptions...most people today live in a 'light switch' society where they have no actual connection to the tools they use. If the light goes off, they have to call the building superintendent to come repair it. Knowledge has become institutionalized into specialties, and individuals have continually less and less power over their lives” (Stone 11-12). As technology becomes less and less visible but more and more complex, we will better serve our students by encouraging them to question technology's ramifications and consequences; fiction of the singularity, while it sometimes proposes extreme scenarios, is nevertheless suited to stimulate those questions and conversations.

Ellison, Harlan. “I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream.” Short Story. 1967. Science Fiction (Singularity).

Ellison's story is set in a post-apocalyptic world populated by five people and a sentient computer, which is responsible for the world war. The computer, named AM, keeps the humans around to torture them in a sort of private Hell. Notable for Ellison's characteristic style and often brutal fictional situations, this story is an early pessimistic vision of a computer-based singularity.

Cameron, James. *The Terminator*. Film. (1984). Science Fiction (Singularity, Time Travel).

The film spawned an entire franchise, including a television series, but I recommend the first movie in the cosmology simply because it depicts a worst-case scenario of a technological

singularity in Cameron's characteristic broad strokes. We give up power to computers, and they try to exterminate us. Although the subsequent movies *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* (2003), and *Terminator: Salvation* (2009) add to the fictional world and sometimes explore the ramifications of time travel, the first film makes the point well enough.

Wachowski, Larry and Andy Wachowski. *The Matrix*. Film. 1999. Science Fiction (Cyberpunk, Singularity).

This is of course a very popular movie, and as with other texts I have discussed, spawned a franchise too large to document here. However, as with *The Terminator*, I recommend the first film in the franchise; the sequels continue the story, but the first film makes its point quite nicely. There are quite a few references to religion, mysticism, and modern theory in *The Matrix*; these can lead to productive analyses, but I recommend the film mostly for its vision of a technological singularity in which humans are not so much eradicated but held unaware in imprisonment.

Moore, Ronald D. (creator). *Battlestar Galactica*. Television Series. (2003 and 2004-2009). Science Fiction (Singularity, Military).

I would not normally recommend a television series for inclusion in a college course; time constraints often prohibit the depth of study needed to analyze a series in its entire context. However, the 2003 miniseries and subsequent series (2004-2009), which rebooted/revised the original *Battlestar Galactica* series created by Glenn Larson (1978-1979), is, to put it bluntly, too good to pass up. Where the original series posits the Cylons as created by a warlike reptilian

alien species, the Cylons in the newer series are humanity's creation, and they want to exterminate humanity. The conflict from the outset is a technological singularity. In addition to exploring a cybernetic intelligence explosion/evolution, the show deals with many themes recognizable to viewers living in the age of the 9/11 attacks and the War on Terror.

Stross, Charles. *Accelerando*. Novel. 2005. Science Fiction (Singularity).

Stross' novel is one of the most detailed depictions of a technological singularity. The book is about big concepts, such as dismantling the planets of the solar system for materials to be used in the construction of titanic computing systems. The singularity in *Accelerando* produces sentient, godlike corporations, hedge funds, and other financial instruments, which end up instituting a new system of economics that eventually forces humans to flee the solar system. Nothing so blunt as a nuclear attack here. Although some elements of the book will seem a little dated (is *Slashdot* cutting edge these days?) I highly recommend this book for any study of technological singularities.

CHAPTER 6: TEACHING FANTASY

“...*fantasy-the impossible made probable.*”

---Rod Serling, “**THE FUGITIVE**” (1962)

I did not plan it this way, but discussing fantasy last makes sense. By looking at horror and science fiction first, we have some idea of what fantasy is not. You have probably noticed by now that critics who study one type of speculative fiction (often, but not always) tend to dismiss or downplay the significance of other types. Writers often do not make the same distinctions; George R.R. Martin, probably best known for his *Game of Thrones* fantasy series, has also written science fiction and horror. Stephen King's *Dark Tower* series cheerfully raids the tropes of science fiction, fantasy, horror, and westerns. However, you have probably also noticed that the discussion of one strand of speculative fiction necessitates discussion of one or more others for purposes of comparison, contrast, and value judgments.

6.1 Defining and Theorizing Fantasy as a Subgenre

Fantasy, in a very broad sense, encompasses all fiction---things that did not, might have, or could not ever happen. In a narrower sense, it means (to many people) dragons, elves, magic swords, etc.---*The Lord of the Rings* and the *Harry Potter* series and other works often considered children's books. A better definition may be somewhere in between these two extremes. As I discussed earlier, science fiction is often considered to have its feet firmly planted in the “real” world, while fantasy “elicits wonder through elements of the supernatural or impossible” (Mathews 2) or “the impossible and unexplainable” (Mendlesohn and James 3). It is

here that my earlier objections to the cognitive/extrapolative model of science fiction fall on the side of the fantasy proponents who would like to include most speculative fiction under the fantasy rubric: we seem to have trouble, even in the scientific community, figuring out just what is possible and impossible in the real world.

According to many researchers, circumventing the speed of light is an interesting but impossible endeavor---in short, a fantasy. Proponents of fantasy often even place horror as a sub-genre within it (Mendlesohn and James 3), although I would suggest that horror has a different set of goals and preoccupations. However, as I have noted elsewhere, the term “dark fantasy” gained some marketing traction in the late 20th and earlier 21st centuries as an alternative to horror, which had, in public perception, become rather chainsaw-heavy and lowbrow.

Undeniably, fantasy as a marketing concept has succeeded; where it once was “the neglected cousin to both sf and horror” (Mendlesohn and James 3), fantasy now dominates the bookshelves in the genre sections, and it does fairly well at the box office. But how do we know fantasy when we see it, and what are the goals of fantasy? First, I will discuss the ideas of J.R.R. Tolkien, the most widely acclaimed fantasist so far.

6.1.1 Tolkien

In his essay “On Fairy-stories,” Tolkien explains his criterion for classifying a text as a fairy-story, which may or may not correspond to what we commonly think of as a fantasy story, as I shall show. Tolkien identifies four elements that must be present in a fairy-story: fantasy, recovery, escape, and consolation. Fantasy, for Tolkien, is “the derived notions of 'unreality' (that is, of unlikeness to the Primary World), of freedom from the dominations of observed 'fact,' in short of the fantastic” (47). This idea of course, is in line with (and precedes) much criticism of speculative fiction that makes the obvious but important point that it is consciously “estranged”

(to use Suvin's term) from our everyday reality. Tolkien vigorously defends the idea of fantasy, almost anticipating the arguments of Suvin and others who imply that fantasy is at best non-cognitive and at worst anti-cognitive:

Fantasy is a natural human activity. It certainly does not destroy or even insult Reason; and it does not either blunt the appetite for, nor obscure the perception of, scientific verity. On the contrary. The keener and the clearer is the reason, the better fantasy will it make...creative fantasy is founded upon the hard recognition that things are so in the world as it appears under the sun; on a recognition of fact, but not a slavery to it. So upon logic was founded the nonsense that displays itself in the tales and rhymes of Lewis Carroll. If men really could not distinguish between frogs and men, fairy-stories about frog-kings would not have arisen.

(54-55)

By “recovery” Tolkien means a “re-gaining---regaining of a clear view” (57), in which we encounter familiar things (colors, for example) and see them with a fresh perspective.

So far, these ideas square with modern fantasy, in which we have estrangement and a re-visioning of familiar or ancient concepts. Tolkien then explains “escape,” which he notes has acquired a bad reputation: “...I do not accept the tone of scorn or pity with which 'Escape' is now so often used” (60). For Tolkien, escape is an escape from what, from his perspective, is a world estranged from important, enduring things:

Fairy-stories...have many permanent and fundamental things to talk about...it is after all possible for a rational man, after reflection (quite unconnected with fairy-story or romance) to arrive at the condemnation, implicit at least in the mere silence of “escapist” literature, of progressive things like factories, or the

machine-guns and bombs that appear to be their most natural and inevitable, dare we say “inexorable,” products. (61-63)

Tolkien goes on to discuss the final element of a fairy-story: consolation. Beyond what Tolkien calls the fairy-story's “imaginative satisfaction of ancient desires” (68), such as communication with animals or eternal life, is the “Consolation of the Happy Ending” (68). This is a bit more than what it seems at first. Tolkien introduces the idea of

Eucatastrophe...the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous 'turn'...this joy, which is one of the things which fairy-stories can produce supremely well...is a sudden and miraculous grace...it denies...universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief. (68)

From here Tolkien moves to discussing Christianity as the highest fairy-story: “The Birth of Christ is the eucatastrophe of Man's history...There is no tale ever told that men would rather find was true...But this story is supreme, and it is true” (72).

Several problems mar Tolkien's analysis, not the least of which is his proselytizing at the end of his essay. First, it is presumably possible that fantasy stories can be written, read, and enjoyed by people who are not Christians, and it is entirely possible (given the world's large populations of, say, Muslims or Buddhists) that people might rather find another tale to be true. Also, in claiming that Christianity subsumes or is in some sense a higher-evolved form of fairy-stories, Tolkien may be going in the wrong direction. As Neil Gaiman, another successful fantasist, points out, “... things start off as religion, as the holiest of holies. And then after a while it's just myth, and then after a while it's just fairy stories” (contemporarylit.about.com).

Finally, many fantasy stories have decidedly unhappy or ambivalently happy endings, or

at least function without the grace of eucatastrophe; Robert E. Howard's Conan, for example, often triumphs by sheer determination and superior physical skills. Karl Edward Wagner's stories about his anti-hero Kane maintain a fairly grim, existential mood; in fact, Kane claims to have killed God. Not much *evangelium* there.

6.1.2 Todorov

Because modern fantasy after Tolkien has a diverse set of goals, influences, and preoccupations, we may wish to look at some post-Tolkien definitions. Tzvetan Todorov's famous 1973 work *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* offers a definition of fantasy based upon “hesitation”:

In a world which is indeed our world, the one we know, a world without devils, sylphides, or vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The person who experiences the event must opt for one of two possible solutions: either he is the victim of an illusion of the senses, of a product of the imagination---and laws of the world then remain what they are; or else the event has indeed taken place, it is an integral part of reality---but then this reality is controlled by laws unknown to us...The fantastic occupies the duration of this uncertainty. Once we choose one answer or the other, we leave the fantastic for a neighboring genre, the uncanny or the marvelous. The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event. (25)

Todorov elaborates upon the “hesitation” provoked by the fantastic and to whom it occurs:

First, the text must oblige the reader to consider the world of the characters as a world of living persons and to hesitate between a natural and a supernatural

explanation of the events described. Second, this hesitation may also be experienced by a character; thus the reader's role is so to speak entrusted to a character, and at the same time the hesitation is represented, it becomes one of the themes of the work---in the case of naive reading, the actual reader identifies himself with the character. Third, the reader must adopt a certain attitude with regard to the text: he will reject allegorical as well as “poetic” interpretations. (33)

Todorov's first point seems to be the most problematic when we apply it to modern fantasy, although it may apply to horror or magical realism. If we are immediately immersed in an “estranged” fantasy world full of hobbits, elves, wizards, and dragons, when do we hesitate? Do we hesitate at all, vainly trying to find some natural explanation for the existence of orcs?

Todorov might counter my objection by pointing out that, at a story's end, the reader makes a decision even if the character does not; he opts for one solution or the other, and thereby emerges from the fantastic. If he decides that the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described, we say that the work belongs to another genre: the uncanny. If, on the contrary, he decides that new laws of nature must be entertained to account for the phenomena, we enter the genre of the marvelous. (41)

Let us set aside for a moment that the semantics of Todorov's two new genres, the uncanny and the marvelous, could be disputed. The problem here is that he seems to be describing a technique rather than an actual genre, and many readers make decisions at the *beginning* of a story based on their expectations of the genre in which they are reading. Even if there is some “reveal” to clue the reader in to the presence or absence of the supernatural (as in many Gothic novels), not every text will provide that. Allow me to return to *The Blair Witch*

Project. The events of the film, with some creative stretches of imagination, could be explained away rationally. Personally, I believe something supernatural is operating in the film's story, but others could make a case against my position. The film resists a definitive interpretation. The “fantastic” as Todorov describes it seems to exist in some quantum state that is neither realistic nor non-realistic: “The fantastic...may evaporate at any moment...there is no reason not to think of it as an evanescent genre” (41-42). Todorov discusses Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw* as a text which maintains ambiguity throughout, much like *The Blair Witch Project* does, but his initial explanation of the fantastic seems to imply that readers will always somehow reach a decision as to whether a text is uncanny or marvelous.

Todorov points to Poe's work, “The Fall of the House of Usher” in particular, as examples of the uncanny. That is, there is nothing in “The Fall of the House of Usher” that cannot be explained rationally (47-48). As for the marvelous, Todorov offers only *The Arabian Nights* and fairy tales as examples, with some science fiction texts thrown in to muddy the waters even more. Todorov makes no mention of the works of Robert E. Howard, Tolkien, Lord Dunsany, Clark Ashton Smith, or many of the other fantasists to whose work he had access at the time. As Ursula K. Le Guin notes, “Todorov said many interesting things in his book on fantasy, but few of them have anything to do with fantasy. Anyone familiar with the literature he should have read can only admire his perverse ingenuity in getting off the subject” (“The Critics, the Monsters, and the Fantasists” 359). It seems that Todorov's “hesitation” only really applies to texts with a certain amount of ambiguity or possibly the types of stories we would call slipstream, magical realism, low fantasy, or even horror today. Even if we use his limited examples of the “marvelous” (which would roughly correspond to what we call fantasy today), Todorov does not explain how the reader's hesitation, which he names as a definitive part of the fantastic, could

possibly operate in a tale that begins with, say, sentient, talking pigs.

6.1.3 Rabkin

Eric S. Rabkin, in *The Fantastic in Literature*, asserts that fantasy “may be generally distinguished from other narratives by this: the very nature of ground rules, of how we know things, on what basis we make assumptions, in short, the problem of knowing infects Fantasies at all levels, in their settings, in their methods, in their characters, in their plots” (38). Rabkin's comments seem to echo those of the scholars I have mentioned in discussing horror and science fiction (fabulation and estrangement come to mind), in that, as in those genres, a text presents a world that consciously deviates from our observable reality. Rabkin elaborates upon his definition, however:

The fantastic is a quality of astonishment that we feel when the ground rules of a narrative world are suddenly made to turn about 180°. We recognize this reversal in the reactions of characters, the statements of narrators, and the implications of structure, all playing on and against our whole experience as people and readers...In more or less degree, a whole range of narratives uses the fantastic. And at the far end of this range, we find Fantasy, the genre whose center and concern, whose primary enterprise, is to present and consider the fantastic. (41)

In other words, a text will signal that it is a fantasy text through the use of magic, quests, impossible creatures, and other fantastic elements. As we have seen, science fiction, although the science may be improbable at times, will usually only deviate from the “ground rules” of everyday reality to a minor degree; fantasy allows for any number of violations of those “ground rules” in its fictional worlds. Rabkin's definition is helpful in that it acknowledges fantasy *as a*

genre, which, strangely enough, Todorov's book does not. Despite using the terminology of genres, Todorov appears to treat texts as discrete things encountered by readers who then have to engage in a cognitive process to decide whether they are reading fantasy or not. This ignores the post-Tolkien phenomenon of the fantasy trilogy (quadrilogy, pentology, or in the case of Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series, a tetradecalogy), for which readers need no hesitation, because the world is established, as well as the phenomenon (mostly pre-Tolkien) of a recurring character in a series of short stories (Howard's Conan), which would also preclude hesitation for those who have been following the character's exploits. Beyond these objections, the nature of a genre, as Rabkin points out, is the interplay between writers and readers of a particular type of text. Genres tend to evolve and mutate, guided by the goals of writers, the expectations of readers, and (often regrettably) the influence of publishers and booksellers. Ursula K. Le Guin argues that

Nobody can rightly judge a novel without some knowledge of the standards, expectations, devices, tropes, and history of its genre (or genres, for increasingly they mix and interbreed). The knowledge and craft a writer brings to writing fantasy, the expectations and skills a new reader brings to reading it, differ significantly from those they bring to realistic fiction---or to science fiction, or the thriller, or the mystery, or the western, or the romance, or the picture book, or the chapter-book for kids, or the novel for young adults. ("The Critics, the Monsters, and the Fantasists"³⁵⁶)

Likewise, Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James maintain that fantasy is a "conversation that is happening, as we write, between the authors of the texts and the readers" (4). These points seem obvious, perhaps as obvious as stating that fantasy stories do not take place in our everyday world, but they are important to any discussion of what fantasy (or science fiction, or horror) is

and how we identify it. Genres are large-scale conversations, and as teachers of speculative fiction, our mission, should we decide to accept it, is to keep those conversations going by adding to them and encouraging our students to do the same.

6.2 Pedagogy for Teaching Fantasy

People tend to get dramatic when they write about the merits of fantasy literature. Consider Richard Mathews' endorsement: "Fantasy enables us to enter worlds of infinite possibility. The maps and contours of fantasy are circumscribed only by imagination itself" (1). Or Professor Tolkien's defense of fantasy's escapist nature, as reinforced by Ursula K. Le Guin:

the best answer was given by Tolkien, author, critic, and scholar. Yes, he said, fantasy is escapist, and that is its glory. If a soldier is imprisoned by the enemy, don't we consider it his duty to escape? The moneylenders, the knownothings, the authoritarians have us all in prison; if we value the freedom of the mind and soul, if we're partisans of liberty, then it's our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with us as possible. ("On Teaching Science Fiction" 23)

Yikes. Are we supposed to be teaching stuff about escape and glory and souls? This seems a bit too un-academic. And yet, maybe there is something to the whole glory and heroism thing; *The Avengers* movie came out recently and it made a billion dollars or something. However, you may feel that teaching about glory or freedom of the soul is not intellectually rigorous enough. It is difficult (and somewhat futile) to teach aesthetics, to teach someone how they should *feel* when they read something. So, if you are interested in teaching fantasy, and you are uncomfortable trying to teach emotions, I suggest you try something different.

James Gunn, in describing science fiction classes he has taught, says that his classes "have addressed the question of genre, that is, what science fiction is and how it got to be that

way. The entire semester, I told my classes, was a search for definition” (*Inside Science Fiction* 84). Although Gunn is speaking of science fiction, he has a good idea that could be used for a fantasy class: make it one big question. Or many smaller questions. What is fantasy? Why does fantasy remain popular? What can we get from studying fantasy? How do we distinguish fantasy from other genres? Can we? Also, we may question the reasons people continue to desire fantasy of one sort or another. Can we make an argument for escapism? Fantasy is often the result of nationalistic nostalgia, so there may be political issues to explore as well. It is not all fairies and barbarians.

You see my point, I hope. Whether in a composition class or a literature class, teaching fantasy opens up opportunities for critical thinking and writing precisely because it is so hard to pin down. We often like to give our students difficult texts to work through because it strengthens their intellectual capacities. Why not offer an entire genre?

6.3 Glossary: Key Terms for Teachers

The terms I have selected here come from three sources: conversations with writers, editors, and fans of fantasy; critical works on fantasy; and fantasy fiction itself. In my experience, these are the topics that often come up in conversations about fantasy or in critical works on fantasy. They are primarily intended for teachers, in order to introduce them to unfamiliar terms that they may encounter during background reading of primary or secondary texts. Also, students may be familiar with some of these terms, and instructors will want to be able to talk intelligently about them if students bring them up in classroom discussions.

These terms can also be used as search words for research, or a useful way to identify the focus of a critical source that may be otherwise unfamiliar. Finally, you may want to distribute an

edited version of this glossary to your students to fit the needs of your course. In fact, because speculative fiction has a dynamic and ever-changing vocabulary, you may ask your students to research and add to the glossary you provide. A search for “fantasy” on the MLA database alone yielded me over 7000 results, many of which will use the specialized terms I list here.

HIGH FANTASY

High fantasy is what most people think of when they hear the term “fantasy.” High fantasy takes place in invented worlds (Middle-Earth, although Tolkien claimed it was our planet's distant past) or parallel worlds (Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, Stephen King's “levels” of the Dark Tower). It also generally follows the portentous, charmed life of an heroic protagonist. The protagonist is often meant for great things, such as saving the world from a powerful evil. This is in contrast to the survival-oriented antiheroes of sword and sorcery; Conan would take the One Ring to Mount Doom, but he would demand a great deal of gold and an open bar tab in return. Major works of high fantasy include Tolkien's work, Stephen King's *Dark Tower* series, Robert Jordan's *Wheel of Time* series, and The *Harry Potter* franchise.

MAGICAL REALISM

Arguably a sub-genre of fantasy, or possibly a parallel genre. Magical realism generally proceeds from a detailed, realistic everyday world and then introduces (usually) one fantastic, unexplained element. Unlike fantasy, it often does not draw on the heroic quest tropes popularized by Tolkien and others. Its genesis is often attributed to Latin American writers; Gene Wolfe somewhat dismissively calls magic realism “fantasy written by people who speak Spanish” (Wright 132). Notable authors of magical realism include Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Jorge Luis Borges, and

Isabel Allende, although some American and British writers, such as Stephen King and Clive Barker, have tried their hands at magical realism.

RPG (ROLE-PLAYING GAME)

Acronym for role-playing game. I have chosen to include this reference because the first RPG was Dungeons & Dragons, a fantasy game developed by Gary Gygax in the early 1970s from a tactical miniatures historical warfare game. D&D inspired a plethora of other RPGs set in many other genres (Western, horror, science fiction, etc.), but the tropes of D&D were inspired by fantasy literature and run parallel to and through much subsequent modern fantasy literature. RPGs have been adapted for computer and online play; MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online role-playing games) are widespread and popular.

SLIPSTREAM

A problematic term, much like magical realism, a classification with which slipstream is often conflated. The term is credited to Bruce Sterling, who used it in a 1989 essay. Somewhere between mainstream literary fiction and fantasy/science fiction, slipstream usually lacks an overt fantastic element, but develops sense of unease through strange events and atmosphere. Nicholas Royle's novels and short stories are good examples of slipstream, as are Kelly Link's short stories.

SWORD AND SORCERY

A style of fantasy inspired by history/historical fiction and mythology. It differs from high fantasy in that it usually focuses on one or two characters who are often anti-heroes trying to survive in a dangerous world, rather than dedicated heroes who are trying to save it. Sword and

sorcery developed in the early 20th century in pulp magazines such as *Weird Tales*. Robert E. Howard's Conan the Barbarian, King Kull, and Cormac Mac Art, Karl Edward Wagner's Kane, Michael Moorcock's Elric, and Fritz Leiber's Fafhrd and The Gray Mouser are all examples of sword and sorcery characters.

6.4 Genealogies for Fantasy: Themes and Annotated Bibliographies for Teachers

The following selections of suggested texts each outline a theme. My selection of themes is based on a combination of my identification of topical issues that can be explored through a set of texts and my aim to introduce new teachers and readers of fantasy to some lesser-known yet influential texts. In both cases, the themes I have chosen illustrate that “fantasy” has many meanings beyond knights fighting dragons. Both themes chart literary history to a certain degree, but the individual texts can be rearranged into non-chronological configurations as well.

These themes are not prescriptive. Teachers are encouraged to use them in any way they wish. Both of the themes in this chapter contain text suggestions that would be appropriate for any literature or composition class with a focus on fantasy. Each theme proceeds in roughly chronological order, but you may fit the texts within them into multiple time periods if you choose to structure your course that way, or use abbreviated versions of the themes as units in a fantasy-oriented course. These themes are samplers, so I have endeavored to draw connections between the texts in order to make it easier for teachers to obtain texts for the purposes of their courses; if you cannot obtain a particular story, for example, there will be a possible substitute within my selections.

You could build a course around either of the themes I outline here (or in some cases, a series of novels, as I indicate) although you may want to narrow your focus on each one. I

encourage you to take the themes I present here as starting points. After some reading in fantasy, you will want to develop your own themes. You may want to look to the Glossary in this chapter for ideas for units or even entire courses; these could include Dark Fantasy, Sword and Sorcery, or Magical Realism. As I hope these themes illustrate, “fantasy” has many meanings and possibilities, and I am sure you will find some that suit you and your teaching goals.

6.4.1 *Theme I: Modern Fantasy*

“Would you believe that all the gods that people have ever imagined are with us today?”

---Neil Gaiman, American Gods (2001)

Modern Fantasy, in the sense I am using it here, does not mean fantasy written by contemporary authors. Rather, I am using the term here to mean fiction with a modern, non-fantasy setting injected with elements of fantasy, mythology, or fairy tales or a modern setting juxtaposed with a secondary fantasy world. Stories of this sort have much in common with modern horror (which often uses contemporary, realistic settings), and you will note quite a bit of overlap.

The impulse in fantasy has been a nostalgic, often nationalistic, sometimes racist one. Modern fantasy often dramatizes the conflict between that impulse and the embrace of modern life; this is one reason that modern fantasy may be appropriate for inclusion in your classroom. Modern fantasy, because it includes elements of the everyday, throws its nostalgic elements into sharp relief. This allows students to better analyze the conflicts and issues that are often inherent in fantasy literature.

Barker, Clive. Various. (Dark Fantasy, Modern Fantasy, Horror).

Barker, long known for his erotic and gory horror work, has also written more fantasy-oriented works. Barker's fantasy work, like much modern fantasy, creates detailed secondary worlds that coexist with our own. *Imajica* (1991) depicts a fantasy multiverse of which Earth is but one “dominion”. The novel's protagonists attempt to reunite Earth and the other dominions in a “reconciliation” that can only be attempted once every 200 years. *Weaveworld* (1987) follows the adventures of Calvin Mooney, a British man who works at an insurance company. Mooney discovers a rug that contains a parallel fantasy world, and undertakes a quest to save it and its inhabitants.

Feist, Raymond. *Faerie Tale*. 1988. Novel. Fantasy (Modern Fantasy).

Feist's novel about a normal, 20th century American family encountering a breach between the everyday world and the world of Faeries is something of a minor classic. Feist's characters are believable and well-drawn, and the novel is notable for its development of a parallel fantasy world to our quotidian existence. The influence of this theme can be seen in later works such as the *Harry Potter* franchise.

Gaiman, Neil. Various. Fantasy (Modern Fantasy, Dark Fantasy).

Almost all of Gaiman's work could be considered modern fantasy, but of particular note are his DC comic *The Sandman* (1988-1996) and his novels *Neverwhere* (1996), *American Gods* (2001), and *Anansi Boys* (2005). In some sense, all of these works deal with gods and figures of myth and religion living in and dealing with the modern world. *Neverwhere* deals with a hapless protagonist drawn into a parallel, magical London. *American Gods* and *Anansi Boys* explore the

ramifications of being a mythological god in the 21st century. The novels are paragons of modern fantasy, and would work well in a class with a focus towards such works. *The Sandman*, which catapulted Gaiman to fame, could be a course unto itself. It is the story of Dream, one of seven anthropomorphic representations of abstract concepts, and his search for meaning and redemption. Elsewhere I have cautioned about the difficulties and issues involved in teaching graphic novels in the classroom, but if you should take on the task, be aware that the collected issues may be difficult to find or prohibitively expensive.

Kiernan, Caitlín R. Various. Fantasy (Modern Fantasy, Dark Fantasy, Horror).

Kiernan's work tends to combine/defy genres, but several of her short stories are prime examples of the elements of modern fantasy. "Anamorphosis" (1996) is a crime story with malevolently protective fairies and a reluctant psychic named Deacon Silvey (the character also appears in Kiernan's more horror-tending novels *Threshold* (2001) and *Low Red Moon* (2003)). Also appearing in *Threshold* is Dancy Flammarion, whose Beowulf-inspired monster-hunting adventures are chronicled in *Alabaster* (2002), a collection of short stories. Also recommended are Kiernan's linked stories "Estate" (1997) and "The Last Child of Lir" (1997) which bring the mythology of the Celtic god Lir and his cursed daughters to 19th and 20th century New York. Kiernan's 1997-2001 run on the DC/Vertigo comic *The Dreaming*, which was a sort of sequel to Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* series, is also recommended as an example of modern fantasy.

King, Stephen. Various. Horror (Modern Fantasy, Science Fiction, Western).

Stephen King's *Dark Tower* series contains eight primary novels: *The Gunslinger* (1982), *The Drawing of the Three* (1987), *The Waste Lands* (1991), *Wizard and Glass* (1997), *Wolves of*

the Calla (2003), *Song of Susannah* (2004), *The Dark Tower* (2004), and *The Wind Through the Keyhole* (2012). However, many of King's other novels and short stories intersect with and add to the *Dark Tower* cosmology. Inspired by the poem "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" by Browning, Arthurian story-cycles, *The Lord of the Rings*, and spaghetti westerns, the series focuses on Roland, a gunfighter from a quasi-medieval parallel world, and his quest to find a tower that serves as the hub for all realities. King's series is the classic fantasy quest taken to its ultimate extent, as it not only alludes to many other works by other authors but also arguably necessitates reading most of his other work as background. As with *The Lord of the Rings*, Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* comic, or any number of television shows, graphic novels, or movie franchises, using the *Dark Tower* series in a class would be quite an undertaking, and might require an entire course of its own.

***Trollhunter*. Dir. André Øvredal. 2010. Film. Fantasy (Modern Fantasy, Docu-horror).**

Despite *Trollhunter's* use of the almost-cliché hand-held camera/mockumentary approach, the film manages to do something new for the genre. Three Norwegian students filming a documentary about strange bear killings (shades of *The Blair Witch Project*) find that a suspected poacher is actually an overworked government employee who contains and regulates Norway's secret troll population. Mayhem ensues. The film's melding of pseudo-scientific explanations of troll ecology and physiology and folklore is particularly well-done and compelling.

6.4.2 *Theme II: Beyond Tolkien*

Most people have some passing familiarity with *The Lord of the Rings*, if only through Peter Jackson's films. While I maintain that Tolkien's work is important, influential, and still

relevant, much heroic (and anti-heroic) fantasy preceded and followed *The Lord of the Rings*. As I have noted several times, if you wish to teach something as colossal as *The Lord of the Rings* in your class, I wish you luck in your quest. It can be done. However, time constraints may preclude teaching Tolkien's epic in a single course, or you may simply want to explore the scope and variety of epic fantasy in your class. In that case, you may want to consider some of the works I list here.

Although fantasy often expresses a longing for a mythic past, there are many versions of that longing, and your class may benefit from inclusion of these perspectives. Some of these texts may also work well in a more conventional literature course when placed alongside canonical texts. For example, Robert E. Howard's writing communicates a disdain for "civilization" and an admiration of a more straightforward, primitive way of life. Writing in the 1930s, Howard is a contemporary of canonical Modernist writers and artists who, in many cases, advocate much the same view. It may be productive to teach Howard alongside Hemingway or Faulkner to illustrate the idea that, while the modes of expression may differ, the philosophies underpinning the work of these writers was not so dissimilar. On the other hand, Ursula K. Le Guin's revision of her world of Earthsea (which was a radical one from the beginning, as it decentered the typical white, European fantasy character) into a more feminist alternate world would be worth examining in any class with a feminist emphasis.

Wagner, Karl Edward. Various. Fantasy (Dark Fantasy).

Although known for his Lovecraft-inspired horror fiction, Wagner also wrote fantasy. His character Kane, who initially resides in what appears to be an alternate, fantasy world (he later travels to our modern Earth), is in many ways the antithesis of what we expect from fantasy

heroes or even anti-heroes. Kane is presented as the destructive creation of a primordial, insane god (whom Kane claims to have slain). His adventures are not so much quests for glory or struggles for survival as they are attempts to cope with his immortality and boredom, often at the expense of others. In other contexts, Kane would be the villain we hope our protagonist overcomes. Particularly recommended are the stories “Cold Light” (1973), “Undertow” (1977), “Raven's Eyrie” (1977), “Misericorde” (1983), and the novel *Bloodstone* (1975).

Thieves' World. Various short stories and novels. Various authors.

Originally a series of anthologies conceived over drinks at a science fiction conference in 1978, *Thieves' World* is an exercise in collaborative world-building. The idea was to have fantasy writers contribute stories of sword and sorcery about the shared world of Sanctuary; the project was so popular that it spawned fourteen anthologies: *Thieves' World* (1979), *Tales from the Vulgar Unicorn* (1980), *Shadows of Sanctuary* (1981), *Storm Season* (1982), *The Face of Chaos* (1983), *Wings of Omen* (1984), *The Dead of Winter* (1985), *Soul of the City* (1986), *Blood Ties* (1986), *Aftermath* (1987), *Uneasy Alliances* (1988), *Stealers' Sky* (1989), *Turning Points* (2002), and *Enemies of Fortune* (2004) and seven novels: Janet Morris' *Beyond Sanctuary* (1985), *Beyond the Veil* (1985), and *Beyond Wizardwall* (1986); Andrew J. Offutt's *Shadowspawn* (1987) and *The Shadow of Sorcery* (1993); David Drake's *Dagger* (1988); and Lynn Abbey's *Sanctuary* (2002). The stories are excellent examples of the gritty, anti-heroic sword and sorcery developed by Robert E. Howard, Fritz Leiber, and Karl Edward Wagner. Of particular interest is the authors' use of each others' characters in their stories---the one rule was that an author could not kill off another's main character; other than that, anything was fair. I recommend the first three anthologies as an introduction: *Thieves' World* (1979), *Tales from the Vulgar Unicorn* (1980), and

Shadows of Sanctuary (1981). Authors involved in the project include Robert Lynn Asprin, Lynn Abbey, Poul Anderson, Philip Jose Farmer, Marion Zimmer Bradley, Andrew J. Offutt, David Drake, A.E. Van Vogt, Chris Morris, Janet Morris, Joe Haldeman, John Brunner, and Christine DeWees.

Howard, Robert E. Various. Fantasy (Sword-and-sorcery).

Howard's Conan is the template for most sword-and-sorcery heroes of the 20th century. An amalgam of the rough customers Howard met while growing up in Texas (with a bit of Howard himself thrown in), Conan is an adventuring anti-hero bent on survival and fun, “the damnedest bastard there ever was” (*The Whole Wide World*). While some have criticized Howard's writing, he was rather successful during the Depression, and Lovecraft considered him the best writer in the Lovecraft Circle---all before Howard took his life at the age of 30. Although Howard had a large body of work at his death, including stories about other barbaric characters such as Cormac Mac Art and King Kull of Atlantis, the Conan stories assured Howard's fame, and subsequent writers have added to the story-cycle. Howard's stories are notable in that they express a philosophy that civilization is unnatural, and that barbarism is humanity's natural state. The films *Conan the Barbarian* (1982), *Conan the Destroyer* (1984) and *Conan the Barbarian* (2011) somehow have never managed to quite get Howard's lost Hyborian Age or the main character right. Although, including later writers' additional material, there is a huge amount of Conan-related fiction, I recommend Howard's original stories as an introduction to the character and the Hyborian world, in particular “The Frost Giant's Daughter” (1934), “Red Nails” (1936), “Beyond the Black River” (1935), “The Phoenix on the Sword” (1932), and the novel *The People of the Black Circle* (1934).

Le Guin, Ursula K. Various. Fantasy.

Le Guin's Earthsea novels and stories are among the most highly regarded fantasy series. Two short stories, "The Word of Unbinding" (1964) and "The Rule of Names" (1975) laid the groundwork for her fantasy world, in which magic is based in language. The *Earthsea Trilogy*, which includes the novels *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968), *The Tombs of Atuan* (1971), and *The Farthest Shore* (1973), narrate the adventures of a wizard named Ged as he grows from boyhood into the most powerful mage of his generation. Le Guin followed the trilogy with *Tehanu: The Last Book of Earthsea* (1990), which, as it turns out, did not live up to its title. The short story collection *Tales of Earthsea* (2001) and the novel *The Other Wind* (2001) re-visioned Earthsea's fantasy "ground rules" and took the stories in a more feminist direction; as the men (sometimes literally) lose their power, women become more and more important in the predominant narrative.

McNaughton, Brian. *The Throne of Bones*. Short story collection. 1997. Fantasy (Dark Fantasy, Horror).

McNaughton's collection of interconnected short stories is difficult to categorize. It contains nods to Robert E. Howard, Lovecraft, and Clark Ashton Smith, among others, but manages to maintain its own identity. McNaughton creates a dark world full of ghouls, necromancers, and even the occasional aging heroic swordsman. As Alan Rodgers states in the book's introduction, "Imagine what Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* would have been if Tolkien had tried to tell that story sympathetically from the point of view of the human denizens of Mordor" (introduction). Highly recommended for McNaughton's lively prose style and dark humor.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

"The future is a kind of history that hasn't happened yet. The future is here, it just isn't well distributed."

---Bruce Sterling, Visionary in Residence

If you have not taught speculative fiction in your classes before, but you have considered it, I hope that I have provided you with a resource to get you started. If you have been using speculative fiction in your classes, I hope that you have found something new here.

Of course, my sample themes and courses do not require wholesale use. All of the components I include in this dissertation can be taken apart and reconfigured. One strategy I suggest for instructors is to try working some of the speculative fiction texts I discuss into existing courses. Many of the science fiction, fantasy, and horror works I have discussed in this dissertation can easily be integrated into literature courses for a mix of canonical and non-canonical texts. This approach can bring some new energy to such courses by offering students unexpected texts (many have read canonical texts over and over in high school and college), as well as a more complex view of historical periods and literary movements. This integration does not need to be limited to literature courses; for example, if you teach a composition course with a focus on technology, you may wish to include some science fiction in order to provide artistic vision and perspective on technology.

Beyond mixing canonical and genre texts, I also suggest going deeper and using what I call "mashups." This involves combining one or more genre texts with one or more canonical texts that share common thematic elements. For example, Jack London's "To Build a Fire"

and/or Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat" could be paired with one of Stephen King's survival stories, such as "Survivor Type." An advantage to this technique is that the canonical text receives a fresh context, while, as I have noted, students are introduced to texts that may be new to them. Students can analyze the ways the texts interact with each other, as well as how the tropes and messages in the canonical text are reconfigured for a modern audience. In addition to teaching strategies, I would also like to point to some possibilities that exist for further pedagogical and scholarly research.

For example, a special topics course often benefits from deep immersion in the cultural background of that topic beyond literature or film. A horror course might include music from horror films or classical music with horror themes. Such a course might also include art by macabre artists such as Goya or Edward Gorey or H.R. Giger for further context. A resource listing music and artworks for teachers of science fiction, fantasy, or horror would be useful for immersive courses.

Horror in particular presents some opportunities for research. As its primary objective, horror ostensibly aims to horrify audiences, but many consumers of horror fiction seem to enjoy it, but not come away from it frightened. I have speculated on this and offered some anecdotal evidence in Chapter Four, but this phenomenon merits more study, I believe. Noël Carroll provides thought experiments to test his theories in *The Philosophy of Horror*, but more studies of the attitudes of consumers of horror grounded in reception/reader response theory could help to test some of his ideas and suggest some answers as to why some people are frightened by a particular text and some are not, yet both groups may enjoy it.

Despite critics who may persist in categorizing speculative fiction as "sub-literary," the popularity of science fiction, fantasy, and horror has been steadily rising, and the use of these

genres in the classroom has increased as well. I recently met a fellow teacher who regularly uses vampires as a topic in her freshman composition classes. Speculative fiction is versatile; not only can we bring to bear all of the theoretical lenses (Marxism, feminism, etc.) we use as English teachers and students to bear on them, but each of the three genres comes with a rich, built-in theoretical conversation about itself. More important, speculative fiction is relevant to our students. If the successes of the *Twilight*, *Harry Potter*, and *Paranormal Activity* series are any indication, our students are likely to be consumers of horror and fantasy, and, for people like me who grew up in the 1960s, they are living in what used to be *my* “future.” They are living in science fiction. When our students are my age, instead of railing at the vagaries of Word 2010, as I often do, they will be trying to get the teleporter to work correctly.

. I began the first chapter of this dissertation with some help from Stephen Horton. Although he was writing at the beginning of the Cold War, I believe his insights still provide some direction for English teachers. So I will let him clarify my position on teaching speculative fiction: “Don’t misconstrue me. I am not advocating the teaching of easy books. But the teaching of challenging books within the range and need of the student” (164). Like Horton, I am not saying that we as teachers should simply assign what is popular today without evaluating its usefulness in helping our students reach their learning objectives. We should be critical in our reading and use what we deem to be most appropriate for our literature and composition classes. Familiarity is a strength of popular culture, but familiarity is a starting point, and we should go beyond that, encouraging our students to both evaluate the texts we present them in order to sharpen their writing and critical thinking skills and examine the relevance of speculative fiction to their lives.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Accessibility and Fair Use of Texts

As I have mentioned previously, prospective teachers of speculative fiction should be prepared for two frustrating problems: procuring texts and staying within the restrictions of fair use. I will discuss options for dealing with these obstacles, beginning with suggestions for getting the texts you want without forcing your students to pay a fortune for them. However, with regard to fair use, I must provide a disclaimer: I am not a lawyer, nor am I in any way qualified to give legal advice. I will only provide information from other sources regarding fair use, and I will try to unpack the concepts in a helpful way. Because the rules governing fair use mostly leave us on our own as teachers, you will ultimately be responsible for any actions you take to provide texts for your classroom; I cannot be held responsible for any unfortunate legal entanglements. Now that we have gotten that out of the way, I would like to suggest some ways you can get the texts you want.

Many speculative fiction texts you will want to use will appear in anthologies, but you will probably not want to use the entire anthology. Of course, the easiest way to get around that is to simply copy the pieces you want to use and distribute them to your students. That is illegal. Usually. More on that below. I am assuming you will not require your students to buy several different anthologies, thus forcing them to forgo things like food. You may also find that texts you would like to use are out of print. This is an even bigger problem, because you do not even have the option of illegally copying them.

Some of the texts you will want to use may be online for free, especially those in the public domain. In this case, you need not even copy the texts; you may simply point your students to them and let them read them online or print them out on their own if they wish. For

example, I have found free copies of many of H.P. Lovecraft's stories (most of which are technically in the public domain) online. However, this can be fraught with danger and frustration also; some writers (Harlan Ellison comes to mind) and their copyright holders diligently police the internet for stories of theirs that have been illegally copied and posted online. This means that you may indeed find a story online one semester, and it may be gone the next. Amazon.com is your friend in this case.

Because used (often out-of-print) texts are widely available on Amazon, you will at least have access to them in most cases, often for a very reasonable price, unless you are looking for something very rare, in which case I advise you to pick another text. There are two options for using Amazon. First, you can direct your students (well ahead of the beginning of the course, if possible) to order the available used texts from Amazon (or another online bookseller). This will require you scouting ahead to make sure there are many copies available. Second, and this may be a better long-term solution, you could buy a sufficient number of used (and affordable, we hope) copies of the text in question and re-use them from class to class. You would simply distribute the texts to your students, then gather them back up when the course is over.

Perhaps the safest and most difficult option is to obtain permission (which would be better than asking forgiveness). Many contemporary authors have blogs, fan web sites, and other public online spaces which may permit you to contact them directly. However, sometimes an author does not have the copyright for a particular version of a work; in this case, you will want to contact the copyright holder directly. It may take some time to get a response, so this may be prohibitive. The best way around the problem, though, is for you and your students to obtain and/or use the texts you want in a legal manner.

Fair use is a somewhat confusing concept. The idea is connected to copyright, which was originally codified in the Constitution to give

copyright owners the exclusive right to reproduce their work, prepare derivative works based on it, distribute copies of it, and perform it or display it publicly...the purpose of copyright law is to advance knowledge for the *public* welfare by keeping creative works in circulation as freely as possible...copyright creates a so-called *intellectual commons*, a public domain...where creative works...circulate as the common property of everyone and can be reproduced at will. At the same time, however, the law recognizes that writers, artists, and publishers need an incentive to produce and publish original creative works. The law therefore grants limited monopolies---copyrights. (Butler 14)

In 1790, copyright was surprisingly short by today's standards: 14 years (Butler 15). However, subsequent changes have extended that period. Thanks mostly to the lobbying efforts of Disney, Congress passed the 1998 Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act, which

extended the term of protection by 20 years for works copyrighted after January 1, 1923. Works copyrighted by individuals since 1978 got "life plus 70" rather than the existing "life plus 50". Works made by or for corporations (referred to as "works made for hire") got 95 years. Works copyrighted before 1978 were shielded for 95 years, regardless of how they were produced. (Sprigman par. 6)

The upshot of this is that many works previously scheduled to pass into public domain will not, at least not any time soon. In addition, the 1998 law foreshadowed the aggressive efforts that copyright holders now make to protect their works. The fair use doctrine from the Copyright Act

of 1976 describes four factors courts take into account when determining whether a given use is fair or not. They are

- (1) the purpose and character of the use, including whether such use is of a commercial nature or is for nonprofit educational purposes;
- (2) the nature of the copyrighted work;
- (3) the amount and substantiality of the portion used in relation to the copyrighted work as a whole; and
- (4) the effect of the use upon the potential market for or value of the copyrighted work.

(“Reproduction of Copyrighted Works by Educators and Librarians” 4)

If you are reading this, you are probably using texts for nonprofit educational purposes, which would put your use on the side of fair. As to the second factor, courts usually consider “whether the work is *published or not*. It is less likely to be fair to use elements of an unpublished work” (“Understanding Fair Use”). Also, courts consider “whether the work is *more 'factual' or more 'creative'*: borrowing from a factual work is more likely to be fair than borrowing from a creative work” (“Understanding Fair Use”). The third factor is the one that will most often give teachers trouble. For teachers,

A single copy may be made of any of the following by or for a teacher at his or her individual request for his or her scholarly research or use in teaching or preparation to teach a class:

- A A chapter from a book
- B An article from a periodical or newspaper

- C A short story, short essay or short poem, whether or not from a collective work
- D A chart, graph, diagram, drawing, cartoon or picture from a book, periodical, or newspaper

(“Reproduction of Copyrighted Works by Educators and Librarians” 6)

The above guidelines sound reasonable; however, there are additional stipulations which teachers may find impractical. These have to do with tests of brevity, spontaneity, and cumulative effect:

Brevity

- i Poetry: (a) A complete poem if less than 250 words and if printed on not more than two pages or, (b) from a longer poem, an excerpt of not more than 250 words.
- ii Prose: (a) Either a complete article, story or essay of less than 2,500 words, or (b) an excerpt from any prose work of not more than 1,000 words or 10% of the work, whichever is less, but in any event a minimum of 500 words.

[Each of the numerical limits stated in “i” and “ii” above may be expanded to permit the completion of an unfinished line of a poem or of an unfinished prose paragraph.]
- iii Illustration: One chart, graph, diagram, drawing, cartoon or picture per book or per periodical issue.
- iv “Special” works: Certain works in poetry, prose or in “poetic prose” which often combine language with illustrations and which are intended sometimes for children and at other times for a more general audience fall short of 2,500

words in their entirety. Paragraph “ii” above notwithstanding such “special works” may not be reproduced in their entirety; however, an excerpt comprising not more than two of the published pages of such special work and containing not more than ten percent of the words found in the text thereof, may be reproduced.

(“Reproduction of Copyrighted Works by Educators and Librarians” 6)

The guidelines, as you can see, are more restrictive than they seem at first glance. From the perspective of someone copying book chapters, short stories, and essays for educational use, they are somewhat dismaying. What exactly would the point be of giving your students only the first 1,000 words of Lovecraft's “The Shadow Over Innsmouth”? The good news is that at least everyone can get a copy:

II. Multiple Copies for Classroom Use

Multiple copies (not to exceed in any event more than one copy per pupil in a course) may be made by or for the teacher giving the course for classroom use or discussion; provided that:

- A The copying meets the tests of brevity and spontaneity as defined below and,
- B Meets the cumulative effect test as defined below and,
- C Each copy includes a notice of copyright

(“Reproduction of Copyrighted Works by Educators and Librarians” 6)

Therefore, always include a notice of copyright with any copied texts you distribute to students.

There are further restrictions concerning what the law calls “spontaneity.” This means

- i The copying is at the instance and inspiration of the individual teacher,
and
- ii The inspiration and decision to use the work and the moment of its use for maximum teaching effectiveness are so close in time that it would be unreasonable to expect a timely reply to a request for permission.

(“Reproduction of Copyrighted Works by Educators and Librarians” 6)

The spontaneity element is not too daunting. You may be able to effectively argue that you needed to copy a text for your class rather than wait months to hear from the copyright holder.

However, “cumulative effect” may cause some confusion and trouble:

Cumulative Effect

- i The copying of the material is for only one course in the school in which the copies are made.
- ii Not more than one short poem, article, story, essay or two excerpts may be copied from the same author, nor more than three from the same collective work or periodical volume during one class term.
- iii There shall not be more than nine instances of such multiple copying for one course during one class term.

(“Reproduction of Copyrighted Works by Educators and Librarians” 7)

This section seems particularly arcane. As to the first point, I suppose you would have to check that no one else in your department or another department in your school is planning on copying

and distributing to their students any text you plan on copying and distributing to your students. At a large institution with a large number of multidisciplinary humanities courses, this might be impractical, to say the least. The second point may be fairly easy to get around, but could cause trouble if your course is heavily focused on, say, Harlan Ellison or Karl Edward Wagner. The third point means you need to keep the number of texts you copy and distribute to nine. This should not be a problem if your students can get their primary texts from Amazon or another bookseller. You could then use your nine free instances of multiple copying for critical/theoretical essays that may be harder for your students to find on their own.

As if this all were not enough, there are a few additional prohibitions:

III. *Prohibitions as to I and II Above*

Notwithstanding any of the above, the following shall be prohibited:

- A Copying shall not be used to create or to replace or substitute for anthologies, compilations or collective works. Such replacement or substitution may occur whether copies of various works or excerpts therefrom are accumulated or reproduced and used separately.
- B There shall be no copying of or from works intended to be “consumable” in the course of study or of teaching. These include workbooks, exercises, standardized tests and test booklets and answer sheets and like consumable material.
- C Copying shall not:
 - a substitute for the purchase of books, publishers’ reprints or periodicals;

b be directed by higher authority;

c be repeated with respect to the same item by the same teacher from term to term.

d No charge shall be made to the student beyond the actual cost of the photocopying.

(“Reproduction of Copyrighted Works by Educators and Librarians” 7)

Here is where a few more problems arise. Sections A and C are of particular interest. The key would be to make sure you do not *intend* to make your own anthology as a substitute for one that already exists, although a good selection of texts in a topical course may look like one.

Subsection c, if followed, is sure to cause headaches. One presumes that, if your class is successful and worthwhile, you might use the same texts the next time you teach it. The way the subsection is worded is somewhat vague, though; perhaps one can use copied texts one term, wait a few terms, then teach the class again. I would not advise testing it, though.

The key to following fair use guidelines is somewhat simple: the burden is on the individual teacher. Also, as my summary shows, the rules are fluid and vague. This means that you should review the guidelines and be very careful to document your choices. Your school's library may have a fair use checklist for you to use. If not, other institutions may have them available online for you to download and print; a search for “fair use checklist” will produce a number of them. These checklists usually include a number of factors that you can mark as “fair use” or “not fair use” in order to determine whether your choices and situation will be defensible if copyright issues should arise. As I have noted, fair use issues are a special concern for

prospective teachers of speculative fiction. It is my hope that this summary and my suggestions will help to mitigate some of the problems you might encounter.

Appendix 2: Sample Course Syllabi

Sample Syllabus 1: An Introduction to American Literature

This class is designed as a themed American Literature survey class. Each unit is very roughly historical, but some include texts by contemporary authors that are inspired by or thematically similar to the historical texts; often, a canonical American text is paired with a more obscure genre one. I have used these “mash-ups” with some success, particularly pairing Robert W. Chambers' “The Yellow Sign” and “The Repairer of Reputations” with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's “The Yellow Wall-Paper.” This gives a better picture of the cultural issues the with which the works are concerned. Each unit should take a week, and the units will roughly correspond to a 15-16 week semester. Optionally, more theoretical/critical texts, such as the ones I discuss in “Chapter 3: Teaching Horror,” can be included or substituted for some of the primary texts here. Substituting more theoretical/critical texts may be an option where some of the primary texts I list here are of limited availability.

Course Description:

An introduction to American authors from the Colonial period to the present. Horror is the focus. We will learn about and explore various cultural and historical contexts in American literature by examining our collective fears and how they have changed and continue to change.

Learning Outcomes:

- ✧ define key literary terms/concepts and implement these in oral/written discussion as well as in literary interpretation
- ✧ analyze literature and explain how various components of literature work together to create meaning.

- △ apply writing and revision as tools for understanding literature and its interpretation
- △ recognize and describe American literary history as chronological, developmental (moving through time periods), and generic/thematic
- △ recognize and interpret relationships between American literature and its literary history and culture

Unit 1: Get Out While You Can

Excerpts from H.P. Lovecraft's *Supernatural Horror in Literature* and Stephen King's *Danse Macabre*

Unit 2: "Those Philistines of Hell are upon You": Early American Horror, or: There's Something Weird About New England

Cotton Mather, *Memorable Providences*; Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Young Goodman Brown"; Stephen King, "Jerusalem's Lot"; Washington Irving, "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow"

Unit 3: Death, Insanity or Some Combination Thereof

Edgar Allan Poe, "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar"; H.P. Lovecraft, "Cool Air"

Videos: "CoolAir" and "The Dead Man" from *Night Gallery*

Robert W. Chambers, "The Yellow Sign" and "The Repairer of Reputations"; Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wall-Paper"

Unit 4: Nameless Horrors, and Why We Should Maybe Just Stay Away From New: England

Ambrose Bierce, "The Damned Thing" and "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge"

John Shirley, "Occurrence at Owl Street Ridge"

Peter Straub's intro to *H.P. Lovecraft: Tales*; "The Hound"; "The Shadow Over Innsmouth"; "The Call of Cthulhu"; "The Colour out of Space"

Unit 5: Murder. More Insanity.

Richard Connell, "The Most Dangerous Game"; Joe Lansdale, "Incident On and Off a Mountain Road"; William Faulkner, "A Rose for Emily"; Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man is Hard to Find"

Unit 6: The Dead Walk, and They're Coming to Get You, Barbara

Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend*; Richard Greene, "The Badness of Undeath"

Video: George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*

- Unit 7: Blood Loss is Bad, or: More Reasons to Avoid New England**
Stephen King, 'Salem's Lot and "One For the Road"
- Unit 8: Look, More Vampires!, or: There's Something Weird About New Orleans**
Anne Rice, *Interview with the Vampire*
- Unit 9: The Night He Came Home**
Video: *Friday the 13th*
Video: *Halloween*
- Unit 10: Lovecraft and Chambers Redux**
Karl Edward Wagner, "The River of Night's Dreaming"; James Blish, "More Light"
T.E.D. Klein, "Black Man with a Horn"; "Nadelman's God"
- Unit 11: Splatterpunks, Goths, Yet More Vampires, again with the New Orleans**
Poppy Z. Brite, "His Mouth Will Taste of Wormwood"; David J. Schow, "Dusting the Flowers"; Pat Cadigan, "The Power and the Passion";
Excerpt from Bret Easton Ellis, *Less Than Zero*, Douglas Winter, "Less Than Zombie"; Selections from Ellis, *The Informers*
- Unit 12: Lovecraft Redux Redux**
Thomas Ligotti, "The Last Feast of Harlequin"; "Gas Station Carnivals";
Caitlín R. Kiernan, "Postcards From The King of Tides"; "Rats Live On No Evil Star"; "In The Water Works (Birmingham, Alabama 1888)"; "So Runs the World Away"
- Unit 13: And You Thought We Were Finished with Vampires? Wrong!**
Video: *The Hamiltons*
Video: *30 Days of Night*
- Unit 14: Docu-horror, or Maybe They Should Put Down the Cameras and Run**
Video: *The Blair Witch Project*
Video: *Cloverfield*
- Unit 15: They're Coming to Get You Again, Barbara**
Video: Clips from *The Walking Dead*
Video: *Quarantine*

Suggested background reading for instructors:

Cooper, Andrew L. *Gothic Realities: The Impact of Horror Fiction on Modern Culture.*

Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2010. Print.

Frost, Laura. "Black Screens, Lost Bodies: The Cinematic Apparatus of 9/11 Horror." *Horror after 9/11: World of Fear, Cinema of Terror*. Eds. Aviva Briefel and Sam J. Miller. Austin: U of Texas P, 2011. 13-39. Print.

Morgan, Jack. *The Biology of Horror*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2002. Print.

Suggested assignment ideas:

- ⤴ Research Paper: Why do monsters appear so often in literature? What purposes do they serve? Are they always metaphors, and if so, how do they change over time?
- ⤴ Class Discussion: Caitlín Kiernan has said that one good mystery is worth a thousand solutions. Many of the texts in this class resist one interpretation. Share personal experiences that have no rational explanation. Everyone has one!
- ⤴ Writing Exercise: Often, the end of a horror story has an unbelievable ("The creature is chewing my face off even as I write this!") or unsatisfying (Okay, what just happened?) ending. Choose one of the texts from this class and write your own ending.
- ⤴ Essay: Analyze one or more of the theories of horror from the readings, or find others through research and analyze them. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these theories? Can you add your own theories of fear?

Sample Syllabus 2: Special Topics--Beowulf's Legacy

Beowulf has inspired a surprising number of speculative fiction texts; a course charting this influence could be a good special topics literature class. Alternatively, the units here could be parsed and imported into other classes on fantasy, science fiction, or horror. This class is divided into seven units, each of which should span about two weeks of class time, leaving some leeway in the schedule for a typical 15-16 week course.

Course Description:

Rather than focus on *Beowulf* exclusively, this course will explore the often indirect influence of the poem in popular culture, as well as its numerous direct adaptations.

Learning Outcomes:

- ♣ Analyze the messages in popular culture texts, both in print and film.
- ♣ Explain the significance/impact of popular culture texts and their connections to canonical texts.
- ♣ Exercise written, oral, and critical thinking skills.
- ♣ Develop research skills and the ability to evaluate and synthesize sources.

Unit 1: Foundations

Beowulf

J.R.R. Tolkien, "*Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*" and *The Hobbit*

Unit 2: Real or not?

Michael Crichton, *Eaters of the Dead*

"Hunters Told of Swamp Attack" from *The Augusta Chronicle*, June 17, 2012

- Unit 3: Different Perspectives**
 John Gardner, *Grendel*
 Richard Matheson, *I Am Legend*
- Unit 4: Cinematic References**
 Videos: *Alien*, *Aliens*
- Unit 5: Cinematic References Continued**
 Videos: *Alien3*, *Predator*
- Unit 6: More Adaptations**
 Frank Schaefer, *Whose Song is Sung*
 Neil Gaiman, *Bay Wolf* and *The Monarch of the Glen*
- Unit 7: Blending Genres and Changing the Story**
 Videos: *Beowulf* (1999), *Beowulf* (2007), and *Outlander* (2008)

Suggested background reading for instructors:

Chen, Kuo-jung. "The Untold Stories of Beowulf: Cinematic Renditions and Textual

Interpretations." *Tamkang Review* (2010): 111-31. Print.

Emanuelson, Karen. "Monster or Warrior? Beowulf as Problematic Hero." *The Image of the*

Hero II. Eds. Will Wright and Steven Kaplan. Pueblo, CO: Society for the

Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery, Colorado State U-Pueblo, 2010. Print.

Hodapp, William F. "'No Hie Faeder Cunnon'; But Twenty-First Century Film Makers Do."

Essays in Medieval Studies 26 (2010): 101-8. Print.

Suggested assignment ideas:

- ♣ Essay: Film adaptations of print texts are often disappointing, but can, in some instances, be more successful than the original text. Review one or more of the film adaptations of *Beowulf*, answering the question, "Is this a good adaptation or not?"
- ♣ Essay: Compare and contrast the values represented in the poem with those in one of the

later texts inspired by it. Are there differences? Are there similarities? If there are differences, speculate as to why the contemporary writer chose to make those changes.

- ✦ Essay: With all of the modern re-visionings of *Beowulf*, do we still need to study it? Do the modern texts in any way supersede or replace *Beowulf*?