

Understanding genre

You might remember us pointing out in Chapter 15 of the first book in this series, *English: Western Australia ATAR Year 11*, that – unlike texts – genres do not have a physical existence; they do not exist in the real world. Genres are purely mental concepts.

A reminder

'Genre' is a word adopted from the French language meaning category or type. In English, 'genre' is a means of describing texts of a similar type.

There is a range of ways of talking about genre. Some generic categories are extremely broad, such as exposition or narration; while others are much narrower, such as English textbooks or detective fiction. Therefore many texts fit within a number of genres of varying degrees of breadth; for example:

- This book is both an English textbook, a non-fiction text and an example of exposition.
- J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* is an example of fantasy, a novel, fiction and narrative.

There are many different ways of categorising genres, such as by:

- function – for example, description, advertisement, letter
- audience – for example, children's literature, young adult fiction, 'chick flick'
- subject matter – for example, romance, crime, adventure.
- plot – for example, quest, *bildungsroman* (growth-to-maturity novel), tragedy.
- setting (time and place) – for example, Western, space opera (epic-style adventure set in outer space), Regency romance (set in Britain's Regency Period, 1811–20)
- relationship to reality – for example, realism, fantasy, magical realism

- politics – for example, feminist, Marxist, post-colonial
- time period – for example, Victorian novel, Renaissance drama, colonial Australian poetry
- style – for example, melodrama (sensational events featuring heightened emotions), slapstick (physical comedy), comedy of manners (comedy reliant on witty dialogue).



Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone is an example of fantasy, a novel, fiction and narrative.

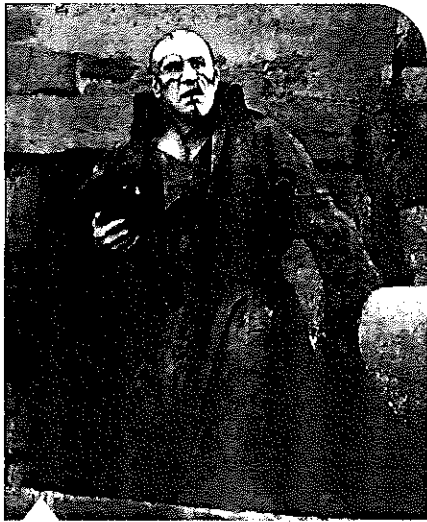
The table that follows provides some more terms you might find useful when discussing genre.

Useful terms for discussing genre					
EXAMPLES OF GENRE CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO MEDIUM AND/OR MODE		EXAMPLES OF GENRE CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO SUBJECT MATTER		EXAMPLES OF GENRE CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO SUBJECT MATTER AND MODE	
Film	Video game	Advertisement	Letter	Drama	Prose fiction:
Graphic novel	Visual image	Description	Narrative	Non-fiction	• Novel
Oral text	Webpage	Exposition	Persuasive text	Poetry	• Fable
Multimedia text	Written text				• Fairy story
Stage drama					• Short story
Television program					
EXAMPLES OF NONLITERARY GENRE		EXAMPLES OF LITERARY GENRE		EXAMPLES OF MIXED LITERARY GENRE	
Autobiography	Opinion piece	Documentary	Feature film	Biopic	Paranormal
Biography	Recipe			Black comedy	Quest
Blog	Reference book			Comedy	Road
Email	Self-help book			Conspiracy	Romance
Essay	Textbook			Courtroom drama	Romantic comedy
Feature article	Review (e.g. of a book, film or restaurant)			Crime	Science fiction
Historical narrative				Disaster	Space opera
Instruction manual	Travel guide			Docudrama	Spy
Letter	Travel narrative	Anecdote	Lecture	Fantasy	Superhero
Memoir		Conversation	Persuasive speech	Historical epic	Teen
News report		Eulogy	Riddle	Horror	Thriller
		Instructional presentation	Seminar	Martial arts	War
		Joke		Mockumentary	Western
				Musical	Zombie
				Mystery	
EXAMPLES OF MODERN OR MODERNIST GENRE		EXAMPLES OF POSTMODERN SHORT STORY GENRE		EXAMPLES OF POSTMODERN LITERARY GENRE	
Advertisement	Portrait	Adventure	Noir fiction	Epistolary (story in letters)	Realism
Family photograph	Poster	Bildungsroman (growth to maturity)	Paranormal	Magical realism (blend of fantasy and realism)	Stream of consciousness (presenting a character's thoughts as they would experience them)
Graphic novel	Selfie	Comedy	Picaresque (adventures of a roguish hero)	Metafiction (fiction that draws attention to its own construction)	
News photograph	Travel photograph	Conspiracy	Quest		
		Crime fiction	Romance		
		Cyberpunk	Science fiction		
		Dystopic fiction	Spy fiction		
		Family saga	Steam punk		
		Fantasy	Sword and sorcery		
		Gothic	Tragedy		
		Graphic novel	War		
		Historical fiction	Western		
		Horror			
		Mystery			

Some genres are defined by more than one criterion; for example:

- * Regency romance is defined by both subject matter (romance) and setting.
- * The film noir genre is defined by both its subject matter (crime) and its style (extensive use of shadows and low lighting).

In addition, generic categories may overlap. A story that fits within the quest genre might be an example of crime fiction, adventure, science fiction, fantasy, spy fiction or romance. It might also be an example of short story, novel, film, stage drama (play), graphic novel or video game.



Is *Frankenstein* an example of horror, science fiction, gothic novel and/or tragedy?

All of this has some significant results:

- ✦ First, people may use different terms to describe the same or very similar genres; for example, Ray Bradbury's short story 'The Pedestrian' (see Chapter 2) has been described as both science fiction and dystopic fiction (a story that portrays an undesirable future).
- ✦ Second, people often disagree about into which genre a text falls. Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* (see Chapter 1), for example, has been described as an example of horror, science fiction, tragedy and gothic novel. (For a list of the conventions of the gothic novel, see below.)

So, there is no single correct answer to the question: 'What genre is this text?' However, rather than seeing this as a source of confusion or frustration, you should see it as liberating. This is because if you are asked to discuss how a text conforms to, departs from or manipulates the conventions of a particular genre, unless the actual genre is specified, you are free to discuss the text in terms of any genre you choose and are familiar with.

We will provide advice on how to tackle such questions on page 57.

Generic conventions

The term 'generic conventions' refers to the features that are common to examples of a particular genre. While the name we use to refer to a genre might highlight one feature – such as subject matter or time period – that feature alone would not lead to a text being considered a part of that genre. Rather, texts within a genre share a number of features – although it is very rare that one text will contain all of the features that could be considered to be conventions of a particular genre. It is better to think of generic conventions as being similar to a list of possible ingredients, from which authors select in order to produce a text in that genre.

Below is a list of some of the conventions of the gothic novel of which Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is often considered an example:

- ✦ ancient or decrepit settings
- ✦ the use of weather to create atmosphere
- ✦ references to light and darkness
- ✦ heightened emotions
- ✦ visions in the form of dreams
- ✦ women in danger
- ✦ monsters
- ✦ supernatural events
- ✦ ghostly figures
- ✦ entrapment
- ✦ an unreliable narrator
- ✦ portrayal of the dark side of human nature, such as excessive obsession and fascination with death.



What conventions of the gothic novel does *Frankenstein* display?

Exploring Gothic conventions in *Frankenstein*

The passage below depicts the night on which Victor Frankenstein brings his creature to life. Which of the gothic conventions listed above are evident in this passage?

It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful! – Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.

The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room, continued a long time traversing my bed chamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep. At length lassitude succeeded to the tumult I had before endured; and I threw myself on the bed in my clothes, endeavouring to seek a few moments of forgetfulness. But it was in vain: I slept, indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth,¹ in the bloom of health, walking in the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her; but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel. I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed: when, by the dim and yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window shutters, I beheld the wretch – the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to detain me, but I escaped, and rushed down stairs. I took refuge in the courtyard belonging to the house which I inhabited; where I remained during the rest of the night, walking up and down in the greatest agitation, listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound as if it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which I had so miserably given life.

Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 1818, pp. 58–9

Exploring other generic conventions

Form a group with some other students. Choose two of the genres listed on page 47 and make a list of the conventions you think are typical of those genres.



Lieutenant Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) prepares to battle the monster alone in *Aliens* (1986).

Genre bending

Genre bending occurs when a text within a genre departs from one or more of the usual conventions of the genre. This is also called challenging, transgressing or subverting generic conventions.

Genre bending can be used as a source of humour or as a means of surprising an audience, but it is not always just a clever idea. Transgressing a generic convention can be a way of challenging certain ideas. This is because some generic conventions reflect particular ways of thinking about the world. For example, for many years it was a convention for a horror movie to end with the male hero defeating the monster and thus saving the female from a terrible fate. This convention constructed women as helpless victims, unable to look after themselves. So in 1979, when Ridley Scott, director of the film *Alien*, had the female Lieutenant Ellen Ripley battle and defeat the alien monster on her own, it was considered a groundbreaking departure from convention, which also challenged ways of thinking about gender.

Exploring genre bending

Form a group with some other students and brainstorm a list of texts that have transgressed the accepted conventions of a genre. The film *Shrek* (2001) might be a good place to start if at least one of the group has seen it. Make a list of how each text departs from the usual generic conventions and the effects of these departures.

If enough texts copy and reproduce a departure from previous conventions, then that departure might come to be seen as one of the accepted conventions of the genre. For example, we are now no longer surprised to women in action hero roles because many texts have followed Ridley Scott's lead.

Exploring the Brokeback Mountain poster

- 1 Discuss how the construction of this poster signals that the film conforms to the conventions of the Western genre.
- 2 Discuss how the construction of the poster signals that the film departs from the conventions of the Western genre.



Poster for the film *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), directed by Ang Lee

Genre-Bending Example 2: Guitar Highway Rose

Below is an extract from the novel *Guitar Highway Rose* by New Zealand-born writer Brigid Lowry. The novel is set in Perth, Western Australia. The main characters are Rose and Asher, two high school students. Pip is Rose's best friend, Lily and Robert are her parents and Harry is her young brother.

WHAT ASHER WORE TO SCHOOL/WEDNESDAY

Black woollen beanie with green marijuana leaf emblem on the front. Very, very old pair of greyish sneakers — which once upon a time were white — frayed canvas hole in big toe of both. Baggy dark-blue men's work trousers with ragged cuffs and two floral patches on bum. Long-sleeved Indian shirt, paisley muslin, in groovy shades of purple and olive green.

WHAT THE HOMEROOM TEACHER SAID

Dear Reader, I invite you to write this bit yourself. Invoke your imagination. Use the words disappointed, scruffy, and disgraceful.

WHAT THE HOMEROOM TEACHER DID

Gave Asher a dress pass.

WHAT ASHER FELT

Supreme satisfaction.

ROSIE AND ASHER/WEDNESDAY

There was no English class. At lunchtime Rosie saw Asher, sitting under a tree by himself eating a brown roll stuffed with cheese and salad, with hot chips on the side. Naturally she pretended she didn't see him. At exactly the same moment Asher looked up and saw Rosie and Pip walking past. Naturally he pretended not to see them.

WHAT ROSIE FELT

Embarrassed.

WHAT ASHER FELT

Embarrassed.

THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM

It is dinnertime at the Moon's house and Lily has made pesto: basil and garlic and olive oil and parmesan and pinenuts ground to a delicious green paste to stir through the pasta. There's a crispy salad in a big blue bowl, made with two sorts of lettuce, cubes of salty fetta and sweet cherry tomatoes. The fettuccine is nearly cooked and the table has been set with a white cloth and the decent plates — the blue speckled ones. There's a big bunch of cheerful sunflowers with dusty yellow faces, a round crusty loaf, a square of butter and an elegant Italian pepper grinder made of green glass.

The evening is hot and muggy, the sort of languid weather which proves that human beings are indeed descended from the three-toed sloth, but Lily is happy, despite the

oppressive weather. She is proud of the meal she has made, and pleased that Robert has come home early for once and seems to be in a cheerful mood. She can hear him whistling as he waters the petunias on the patio. He's a good man, really, she thinks, maybe things will come right. Harry seems very perky. A while ago he scooted in and got some ice-cubes and scooted back out again in a very purposeful fashion. He's probably doing some little science experiment, Lily thinks idly. It's great when he does things, she thinks. She hates it when he just sits in front of the telly or the computer for hours on end. It makes her feel guilty, incompetent, a bad mother.

Guitar Highway Rose, Brigid Lowry, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, 1997, pages 36–8.

Exploring
genre
highway rose

Discuss how the extract from *Guitar Highway Rose* transgresses the usual conventions expected of the novel genre.

Are there any ways in which the extracts conform to our usual expectations of a novel?

Genre blending

Genre blending, a form of genre bending, occurs when a text mixes together conventions from two or more genres. Such texts are sometimes called cross-genre or hybrid texts. The film *The Matrix*, for example, blends elements from the science fiction, film noir and martial arts genres.

Exploring
genre
the matrix

Form a group with some other students and brainstorm a list of texts that mix elements from different genres. Identify which elements of the text are normally associated with which genre.

Alamy Stock Photo/AF archive



A still from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1976), directed by Jim Sharman and featuring Tim Curry as Frank N. Furter. This movie was based on a stage musical that blended the conventions of the rock musical (itself a blend of genres), horror, comedy and science fiction.

Genre blending example: 'The Water Buffalo'

The following passage is from the short story 'The Water Buffalo' by Australian writer Cat Thao Nguyen, published in 2008. It depicts, in fictional form, the experience of refugees from South East Asia who came to Australia after the Vietnam War (1955–75).

He was not crowned or otherwise adorned. He did not look so different, though his horns curved a little more than the rest. His back was solid and strong. Even though many flies came to rest on him, he did not flick his tail to shoo them away like the others did. He was willing to share his body. 'A product and companion of nature,' he would say. His stance was noble. He was the king.

As they gathered around him in silent acknowledgment, he looked at each one of them. He thought of his dreams for them and he imagined the future. They all nodded in agreement.

The water buffalo grazes in herds of about fifty animals. Both wild and domesticated buffaloes have a keen sense of smell.

The sky was fading and the slight breeze in the air was momentarily trapped in the tall bamboo. The herd had dissipated and he was on his own. An occasional tinker could be heard from a bell that hung around the neck of a distant cow. But the king smelled unease. His bones told him of something impending.

The darkness came and he waited. It was an unusually black night. The stars did not emerge and the slight moon was hiding. Still, the wind innocently played hide-and-seek with the bamboo.

Then, as deafening as the thunderous roar of an immense storm, screams echoed so hideous that they carved themselves onto the field. The noises came quickly, one after another, producing a monstrous earthquake of terror. The king knew it. He smelled it coming. He cocked his head to the left and listened for the next anguish. He paused. Then with graceful swiftness he sped towards the echo. Just behind the bamboo cluster, he slowed to a halt. He lowered his head and listened to the silence. After the horrific cries, the silence emerged like a lost, curious child. Then with all his might, the king groaned to the starless sky, a sound so mournful the moon came out from its hiding and sobbed. As he walked slowly among the dead herd, he knew the time had come.

He had no reason to stay and fight. What was left of his strength was buried. He was no longer a king, but an ordinary buffalo, an animal soon to be domesticated to graze and work. Leaving his heart behind, he walked towards the South.

The Indian water buffalo is used in Asian rice fields, but has been taken to many other parts of the world, including the East Indies, the Philippines, Egypt, Hungary, Spain other countries. Its bone structure and the distribution of weight across its legs make it well suited to agricultural labour.

When the king arrived in the South, he was astonished. There was so much abundance! So much fertility in the soil! Its green was so bright and wholesome he began to weep for his herd. It was busy and exciting. There was movement everywhere. No one noticed his arrival. He took up work at a local farm and, as the days and nights passed, contentment began to seep through his skin. He worked and rested and worked and rested and was fed and worked and rested. The cries of that horrific night began to fade from his ears.

After one long day, as the sky began to fade and he began to rest, he noticed that the stars did not emerge and the moon was hiding behind a cloud. It was an unusually black night and the spirits of his herd came to visit, each one gently rolling over his

eyelids. The cries came back and haunted his ears and he groaned a mournful sigh to the starless night, wishing for the heart that he had left behind.

Then, suddenly, the ground began to move and the trees began to shake and divide. The moon split up into twenty pieces and the ground tore beneath him. He was frightened and tried to hold on to anything, but even the air was being torn and ravaged. Suddenly he felt a sense of lightness, something he had never experienced before, a lightness so beautiful he felt he was going to drift away. Then with horror and amazement, he saw the horns on his head begin to fall out as if some giant hand was plucking them from his skull. His dark blackish-blue skin began to fade and his feet were dividing into five short stalks.

Then his snout began to flatten like a mound of clay melting in the sun. His ears began retreating into his head. Afraid he would no longer be able to hear, he twitched them vigorously in a futile effort to stop them receding. He felt as if someone was stretching out his body on a canvas and he could not bear it any longer. But his eyes did not change. He squeezed them shut while rubbing them, hoping it would all disappear. Then with all his might, he yelled out a raging roar. As the rivers rippled with the sound and then became calm again, a freakish stillness overcame him. The land had stopped tearing.

Despite the buffalo's ability to adapt to its environment, physiologically it is less able to adapt to extremes of heat and cold than various breeds of cattle.

Slowly, he peeled away his hands and un-squinted his eyes. What had become of him? Who was he?

He looked around and saw concrete paths, shops, a coke machine gleaming, from a shop window and a bus pulling up to the kerb. He was confused and dazed. But these surroundings felt strangely familiar.

He slowly learned to walk. It took many weeks. After he had mastered walking on two feet, he ventured to learn to talk. This was much harder than he ever could have imagined. What was this language that these people were using and why could they not understand him? Every now and then, he would let out a groan to the sky above, but this was always quickly met with, 'Why don't you speak English?'

Buffalo hide is thick and tough and makes good leather. The water buffalo is hard working and powerfully ploughs deep into the mud, making rice farming possible in many places.

As a stranger in a new land, he began to fade into the background. He became a working man and thought, At least I am safe here, but he knew where he had left his heart. He tried hard to forget.

Cat Thao Nguyn, 'The Water Buffalo' in Alice Pung (ed), *Growing Up Asian in Australia*, Black Inc, Melbourne, 2008, pp. 32-5



Cat Thao Nguyen is an Australian author and lawyer of Vietnamese heritage. She was born in a Thai refugee camp and grew up in western Sydney. Her 2015 book *We Are Here* tells the story of her family's flight from Vietnam and journey to Australia.



The Water Buffalo': sample discussion of genre blending

Identifies the purpose of the passage so that later points about the effect of generic conventions can be related back to this.

Identifies another aspect of the passage associated with a different genre.

This paragraph follows the same pattern as the previous two.

This passage seems to blend conventions from a number of genres to depict the experience of refugees.

The first most noticeable genre is that of the fable. Using an animal as the main character to illustrate points about human behaviour and society is a common generic convention in fables. The animal characters in fables are usually seen as representative types, rather than specific individuals.

In this story, the use of this convention works to make the main character and his experiences represent the experience of many refugees, not just one individual. Portraying the main character as a water buffalo can also be read to suggest his strong ties to the soil of his homeland.

While fable-like, the passage includes elements we more commonly associate with realist fiction, such as the graphic descriptions of the effects of war. Examples of graphic description include 'the thunderous roar', the reference to screams echoing and 'the monstrous earthquake of terror'. This is the sort of description we might find in a war or disaster story. The use of realist conventions serves to bring home to us the violence and brutality many refugees have experienced.

The passage also draws on the conventions of science fiction or horror in describing the change to his body that the character experiences, unnatural transformations being a common feature of those genres. The unnatural and painful nature of the changes can be seen in the description of his horns falling out 'as if some giant hand was plucking them from his skull' and his snout 'beginning to flatten like a mound of clay melting in the sun'. The use of generic conventions associated with science fiction or horror function to portray how difficult, strange and painful refugees find having to lose their connection with their homeland and adapt to an alien environment.

Another genre the passage clearly draws on is that of the reference book or encyclopaedia. This is evident in the sentences in italics interspersed throughout the story. These can be interpreted as reinforcing the strong bond many refugees have with their home soil and also suggesting their strength and resilience.

Justifies the argument that the story is fable-like.

Suggests the effects of the use of this generic convention.

Provides examples to support this argument.

Explains the effect of the use of this generic convention.

So does this one.



istock.com/Joel Carillet

What are the effects of portraying the main character as a water buffalo?

Developments in genre

Genres are rarely static; rather, they evolve over time. But, like evolution in the natural world, the rate of change can be uneven. A genre might remain static, with very similar types of text being produced for a period of time. Then there might be periods of rapid change, where genres discard some features and take on new ones.

To stay with the evolution analogy, changes in genre are usually a response to a changing environment. There can be a number of factors at work. First, after a while, audiences can become tired of constant repetition and seek more variety in a genre. Authors will therefore seek out new ways to make a genre engaging. Or maybe an author is just driven by a personal interest in innovation.

Another, and important, factor is the occurrence of change in society. A genre will often adapt to accommodate or reflect these changes. Such changes might be material or technological, or they may be changes in ideas and values.

The evolution of science fiction

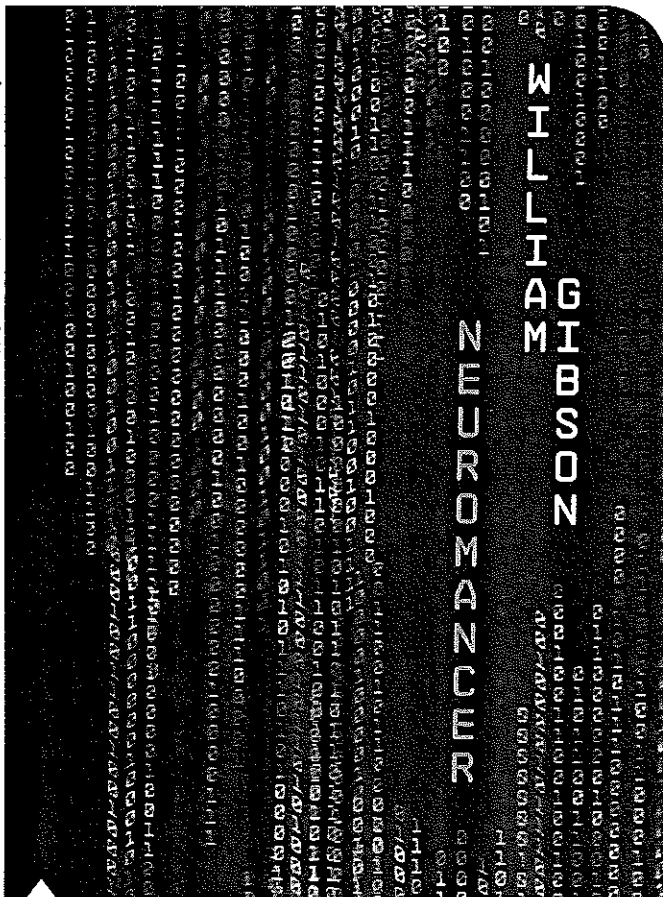
Science fiction provides a useful case study of how a genre can evolve in response to changes in society. In reading the following description of the history of science fiction, keep in mind that it is based on some broad – if valid – generalisations, which omit some important exceptions to what is described.

Leaving aside some early examples, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1897), science fiction first attained significant popularity as genre in the 1920s. From then until the 1940s, the general view of science reflected in science fiction was a positive one, reflecting Western society's optimistic view of technological progress.¹ After all, this was the time when motor cars, air travel, radio and household devices were becoming more widespread. Science and technology seemed to hold the promise of a better world.

Then in 1945, atomic bombs were dropped on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan. The possibilities of science took on a darker form in many people's minds. From this time onwards, science fiction tended to focus more on the potential dangers of science. For example, films and stories about the consequences of nuclear warfare and fallout began to appear. The development of surveillance technologies and their threat to individual freedom were other

areas of concern and exploration, most notably in George Orwell's 1948 novel *1984* and in Ray Bradbury's 1951 short story 'The Pedestrian'.

In the 1980s, as computing technology and cybernetics began to develop more rapidly, many science fiction writers and filmmakers turned their attention to the potential hazards of this



William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* (1984) is an example of cyberpunk fiction. Cyberpunk fiction focuses on social misfits living in a dystopic future dominated by virtual reality, and the modification of the human body and brain by digital technologies.

phenomenon. Cyberpunk fiction was one result. Perhaps the best-known example of science fiction based on the perils of developments in computing is the 1999 film *The Matrix*, directed by Lana and Lily Wachowski.

Another development in science fiction since the 1980s, arising from increased environmental awareness in society, has been the emergence of the eco-disaster narrative, now considered by some as a genre in its own right.

The evolution of the Western

For many years Americans, Westerns generally portrayed the US cavalry as heroic, bringing peace and Western civilisation to the west of the USA. Native Americans, on the other hand, were frequently portrayed as violent savages. However, in the 1970s, there began to appear a number of revisionist Westerns, such as *Soldier Blue* (1970) and *Little Big Man* (1970), which portrayed Native Americans in a more sympathetic manner and the US cavalry as the perpetrators of violent massacres. This was the result of greater awareness of history, a better understanding of indigenous cultures and a loss of faith in the U.S. military, partly as a consequence of the Vietnam War.

Revisionist

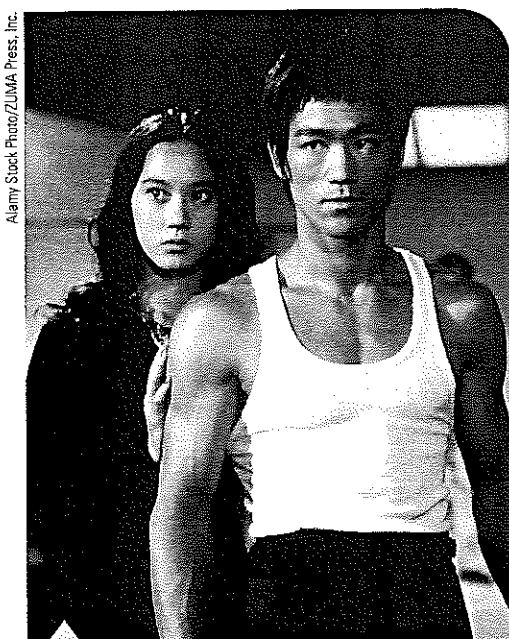
A text that offers an alternative to the established way of thinking about a topic.

Genre and gender

Changing attitudes to gender since the 1960s have resulted in changes to many genres, such as manga, martial arts, horror, crime fiction, science fiction, adventure and romance. Women are now less likely to be portrayed as helpless victims needing the protection of a strong male.

Exploring changing representations of women

Discuss the differences between the way women are represented in these images.



A still from the 1972 Hong Kong martial arts film *Return of the Dragon*



A still from the 2016 film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon: Sword of Destiny*

How to write about generic conventions

Set out below is some advice on how to write about generic conventions in a previously unseen text.

- Decide what genre or genres the text seems to belong to. Just think of this as trying to decide what sort of text it is. Setting, character and narrative voice are often useful clues to the genre of a text. Remember that a text may display features of more than one type of genre.
- Do not worry about choosing the 'right' genre. Remember that many people disagree about what text a genre belongs to. Also, do not worry too much about naming the genre 'correctly'. There are different ways of referring to the same genre.
- Decide what led you to identify a particular genre. These will be the generic elements you can write about.
- Suggest the effect of these elements on the ideas or feelings conveyed by the text.
- If all else fails, treat the text as an example of a broad genre – such as novel, short story, feature article, poster or advertisement – and discuss the conventions of this genre. For example, in the case of a novel you could write about conventions such as foreshadowing, conflict, characterisation, the use of setting and the creation of atmosphere, to name just a few. For a guide on how to discuss the conventions of the short story, you should refer to the discussion of 'The Pedestrian' in Chapter 2 and 'The Young Man Who Flew Past' in Chapter 5.