CHAPTER ONE

What is science fiction?

In the not-too-distant future, workers of the mechanical guild who maintain the complex conveyer-belt system of "roads" that serves millions of pedestrian commuters plan a strike, but a wily supervisor realizes this is the work of one easily removed agitator. The true core of workers is dedicated to public service and a quasi-military ethos of service to the country's (economic) needs. The strike is averted and transportation rolls on.

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, a battle wages between the evil Galactic Empire and the freedom fighters of the rebel alliance. A young man from an isolated rural community discovers that he is a secret prince of this empire, the long-hidden son of the evil ruler's lieutenant; he joins the resistance, redeems his father, and overthrows the empire to restore the republic.

A young woman finds herself confronted with three alternative versions of herself, doppelgangers that prove to be genetically identical but radically different in personality and physical stature, due to their different experiences. One comes from a world of only women, another from a world where men and women are in open war, and yet another from a world still shaped by 1930s gender roles. Our protagonist is a professional woman negotiating 1970s feminist desires and cultural backlash.

Are all of these stories science fiction (sf)? Readers familiar with the genre will recognize the first narrative as Robert Heinlein's "The Roads Must Roll" (1940), the second as the basic narrative structure of episodes IV–VI of the *Star Wars* franchise (1977–83), and the last as Joanna Russ's novel *The Female Man* (1975). Although radically different, each of these texts might be considered the "centre" of some understanding of science fiction. Heinlein's story details the technological feat of the roads and the social innovation they produce, all the while celebrating technocratic values of rational management and a social hierarchy based on the "meritocracy" of genius. Heinlein is considered by some one of the genre's greatest writers, recipient of the first Grand Master Award from the Science Fiction Writers Association (SFWA), and this particular story was nominated by the same group as one of "the greatest science fiction stories of all time"[1] by its inclusion in the first *Science Fiction Hall of Fame* (1970) volume. Lucas's epic saga shares many features with space opera published in the earliest sf pulps—thrilling space battles, heroic masculinity, stunning technology, and imperiled women—but also relies on the trope of destiny and a mysterious force, features associated more with fantasy than with sf. Nonetheless, at least in terms of sf film, it is difficult to overstate *Star Wars*'s influence in reshaping and re-energizing the genre. Finally, Joanna

Russ is perhaps the most important feminist writer of sf, her work as author, critic, innovator, and activist key to challenging (and changing) gender stereotypes in the genre. *The Female Man* is considered by many to be the most important feminist sf novel, and it is also crucial to the aesthetic reshaping of the genre in the 1960s and 1970s in ways similar to contemporary innovations in postmodern fiction.

Although the term "science fiction" might seem self-evidently to offer up a group of images, icons, themes, and narrative formulas easily equated with the name, the genre is notoriously difficult to define. The name *science fiction* and the long-established tradition of regarding certain writers who dominated American sf in the 1940s—Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Ray Bradbury, Frederick Pohl, Theodore Sturgeon—as representing the Golden Age of the genre privileges sf's relationship to scientific extrapolation and rationalist logic. From this point of view, media adventure spectacles such as *Star Wars* have the props of sf, but lack the underlying engagement with ideas that this fan community has considered to be the genre's core.[2] Yet even before *Star Wars* launched a lucrative cycle of Hollywood blockbuster sf films that continues to this day, the genre always had a media presence in *Buck Rogers* and *Flash Gordon* serials, comic strips, and associated merchandise, alongside its main commercial form in 1920s and 1930s pulp magazines. Similarly, Joanna Russ's philosophical, polemical, and intertextual story of women's struggles under patriarchy further challenges the boundaries of the genre, using sf techniques to reconfigure social rather than technological regimes. Which is the "real" sf, or, if they are all equally but differently sf, what is this genre?

Origins

The name *science fiction* was popularized[3] by Hugo Gernsback to describe the pioneering new fiction he wished to cultivate in the magazines he founded, *Amazing Stories* (first published in 1926) and *Science Wonder Stories* (first published in 1929, and where Gernsback shifted his terminology from "scientifiction" to "science fiction"). Some date the emergence of the genre to these specialty pulps and Gernsback's efforts to create a literary form suited to the technological age. Others note that Gernsback merely codified—some would argue commercialized and compromised—an already existing literary form that included fantastic voyages, utopias, disaster fictions, tales of invention, and scientific romances. Thus, part of the difficulty of defining sf is that there is no consensus on when, precisely, it began. Some critics strive to apply the label, once coined, back in time as far as possible, seeking to posit this kind of speculative imagining as a long-standing part of Western cultures. Johannes Kepler's *Somnium* (c. 1600; pub. 1632), about a lunar voyage, was written in part to experiment with the idea of how the earth's motion would look from the moon; it is sometimes nominated as the first sf, but occult rather than scientific forces propel Kepler's traveler. Other critics note the similarities between sf and the utopian tradition launched by Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), or draw connections to satires of imaginary voyages such as *Gulliver's Travels* (1726). One of the most influential nominees for first sf is Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), a novel that not only gave us many of genre's staple preoccupations, such as the limits of scientific

understanding and humanity's relationship to created beings, but also firmly placed its innovations in the realm of science rather than the supernatural.

Noting the importance of this shift in Shelley's work, Paul Alkon argues that sf "might indeed be defined as the narrative use of science to create myths allowing novel points of view to the imagination" (7). This conceptualization helps negotiate one of the difficulties in describing sf: the genre's name implies some special relationship to science, but when one looks closely at most of what passes as sf, much of it has only a tentative relationship to scientific fact. Instead, sf is a cultural mode that struggles with the implications of discoveries in science and technology for human social lives and philosophical conceptions. The genre is interested in real science, to be sure, but it is equally concerned with mythologies of science, as Alkon notes, with the dialectic between "our perceptions of science" (85) and the way its innovations have been changing material and social worlds since the Enlightenment and the industrial revolution. Some fans describe their love of the genre in terms of the "sense of wonder" it provokes in them, an affective response that some critics have linked to the aesthetic experience of the sublime. Yet whereas gothic literature, which also counts *Frankenstein* as an ancestor, participates in the natural sublime as theorized by Burke and Kant, much sf might better be understood in terms of what David Nye has called the technological sublime. Nye argues that the Romantic concept of the sublime—that feeling of awe and terror as one is overcome by the spectacle of the infinite visible in nature—shifted in the early twentieth century and developed a new and specific form in the United States. No longer associated with the wonders of God's creation or man's insignificance in the face of a powerful Nature, it focused instead on objects of technology, such as railroads, bridges, skyscrapers, and factories. Rather than inspiring a feeling of mixed fear and awe in the face of human limitations, the technological sublime instead divides "those who understand and control machines [from] those who do not": it is a "sublime made possible by the superior imagination of an engineer or a technician, who creates an object that overwhelms the imagination of ordinary men" (60).

Science fiction participates in both promoting this myth of technological mastery and transcendence, and deflating it. It provides the language, images, and concepts that celebrate our cultural preoccupation with science and technology, and that express our anxieties and fears regarding how they are changing our world and our selves. We might think of the myths of sf as ways of providing imaginary solutions to the real contradictions and tensions of a world in which science has displaced religion as the hegemonic explanatory discourse, a world in which the products of technoscience are ubiquitous in everyday life. Gary Wolfe argues that the icons of sf perform this kind of cultural work when they become detached from "particular fictional contexts and gai[n] currency in the popular culture at large" (88). These icons of sf—motifs such as alien encounters, robots and other created beings, travel through time or outer space, apocalyptic or perfected futures, posthuman descendants, and Artificial Intelligences—mark a work as science fictional. Yet it is clear that no simple tally of their presence will help us get closer to defining the genre: no single work will contain all of these icons, and it is impossible to create an exhaustive list of all the icons the genre might generate. Instead, it is more productive to think of the cultural work performed by such icons, their role in imagining a world that is in some way different from the one we take for granted and their power to create

mythologies that help us grasp the experience of human life in a world dominated by scientific thinking.

Genre definitions

Sf is often described as a genre that has the power to literalize metaphor, to build worlds that capture something true yet unrepresentable in the literary mode of realism. It is thus unsurprising that the genre was formulated and named in the twentieth century, a period marked by rapid and substantial technological change: increased urbanization, aided by new transportation networks such as the system of highways, widespread motor vehicle ownership, and commercial air travel; the electrification of cities and homes, transforming domestic space through innovations such as artificial refrigeration and other home appliances; the discovery of antibiotics, vaccines for diseases such as rubella and polio, and immunosuppressant drugs that transformed medical practice and individual health; the increased mechanization of war from the poison gases of World War I to the remotely guided missiles of contemporary warfare; the space program, which put Americans on the moon and transformed our imaginative relationship to our planet through an image of the world from space; and the IT revolution in personal computing, which changed not only the nature of work but also leisure through personal electronic devices and social media. Science and technology shape our lives in ways both extensive and intimate, from the public cultures of big science and global economies to the private lives of family structures and personalized media environments. Although sf does not predict the future as is sometimes claimed, it is the mythological language of technoculture and thus it plays a central role in producing the future through the dreams and nightmares it offers for our contemplation. In 1970, Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock* suggested that contemporary Western cultures were experiencing trauma related to the rapidity of technological and social change, and we might see sf as a cultural site where we work through this shock of the new. The genre is thus a way of thinking about and experiencing a reality that is itself slightly askew and not merely a particular configuration of settings, plots, and images.

In the fuzziness[4] of its borders and the heterogeneity of its participants, sf is not that different from other genre categories. Recent genre theory, particularly that drawn from film and television, has emphasized that genre is produced by a process of evaluation and description, and is not a fixed object that can then be found in the world and studied by critics. In *Film/Genre*, for example, Rick Altman argues that genres are objects that come into being after the fact, as observers seeking pattern privilege some textual features over others. The marketing desire to reproduce characteristics that have sold well to the public, Altman suggests, is key to this process, and Gernsback's proselytizing efforts on behalf of what he calls "A New Sort of Magazine"[5] certainly fit into this model. Similarly, in *Genre and Television*, Jason Mittel argues that genres are cultural categories used by programmers, audiences, academics, marketers, and others; genre, then, is best understood not as a set of qualities intrinsic to specific texts, but rather as "a process of categorization that . . . operates across the cultural realms of media industries, audiences, policy, critics and historical

contexts" (ix). These processes actively shape our experience of texts so categorized. Similarly, this book will explore sf as a genre that is always in process, something actively made (and often in competing ways) by a variety of stakeholders that include creative forces (authors, directors, artists), marketing imperatives (producers, network branding, editors), and audiences (fan-based and beyond). Thus we will explore this perplexing genre from a variety of points of view, seeking to arrive not at some totalized answer to the question of "what is science fiction," but rather with a prismatic view that allows us to see multiple visions of sf simultaneously, each a partial and fragmented explanation of the genre, with the vision of the whole providing not a simple or singular image but rather multiple, and at times contradictory, possibilities, held in productive tension.

In "On Defining SF, or Not," John Rieder explores what is at stake in these many struggles to define the genre. Rieder notes that what is important in seeing genre as a historical and mutable category—that is, seeing that what we call "science fiction" in 1940 looks rather different from what we call "science fiction" in 2014—is that this mode of framing sf asks us to attend to "how and why the field is being stretched to include these texts or defended against their inclusion" (194). This framing compels us to see genre as a social and political category as much as a formal and aesthetic one. Yet, as Rieder points out, this definition can tend toward tautology. Damon Knight once famously quipped, "science fiction is what we point to when we say it" (qtd in Rieder 192), but this convenient definition rather begs the question: who are "we," and what is being sought in the pointing? Refusing models that privilege a single origin point, even if they then allow a wide range of offshoots to grow from this first seed, Rieder contends that histories of sf should be less interested in defending specific origins for the genre, and should instead embrace a strategy of "observing an accretion of repetitions, echoes, imitations, allusions, identifications, and distinctions" whose interpenetration demonstrates "the way that sf gradually comes into visibility" (196). Part of this work of making sf visible concerns its relations with neighboring genres, other unstable formations from which sf at times seeks to distinguish itself (such as the purging of science fantasy from "proper" science fiction under John W. Campbell's editorial vision in the 1940s), or with which sf at other times seeks alliance (such as the affinities between New Wave sf and postmodern literature in their common interest in experimental form and metatextuality in the 1960s).

By labeling certain texts sf, Rieder explains, authors, critics, advertisers, or editors rhetorically intervene in the genre's distribution and reception. They advocate its use by a particular community of readers, trained to read in a particular way. The result is that the act of labeling certain texts "science fiction," and hence shaping the genre to particular forms and ends, is also an act that produces the genre's communities of practice. Unique among popular genres, sf is characterized by a highly interactive relationship among its authors, readers, and fans, particularly in the early days of the pulp magazines when fiction labeled sf was largely read by only a small group of enthusiasts. The pulp magazines almost immediately began to publish letters columns, and Gernsback actively sought feedback from his readers about future publications (it is impossible to determine how much this was an expression of shared enthusiasm for the genre, and how much a marketing ploy designed to create a steady readership). Clubs to discuss sf followed and shortly thereafter began to produce their own publications, fanzines, which form the earliest sites of critical response to the genre and are the

source of terminology that remains in use today (the most famous being "space opera," coined by Bob Tucker in the January 1941 issue of *Le Zombie*). This close relationship between an enthusiastic group of fans and sf's emergence in the magazines, however, can tend to obscure the fact that they are not the only people "practising" sf. Focusing on this version of the genre's history to the exclusion of other possibilities, such as its instantiation in nonprint media, or the use of sf techniques in fiction published in other venues, such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), produces a unified and yet only partial account of the genre. Rieder thus calls for sf critics to begin to pay attention not merely to "the choices writers make when composing texts or that readers make, or ought to make, in interpreting them" but further to "the practice of generic attribution" (204), from sites of both high and low culture, as part of the genre's history and meaning. We will need to understand multiple communities of practice to grasp sf's perplexities.

Gernsback's new sort of magazine

We begin, however, with Gernsback and the community of practice that emerged from, yet also exceeded, his creation of the genre label as a marketing category. Gernsback announced that his magazine launched a new kind of fiction, but even as his description promotes sf's uniqueness, he draws on existing publications to define the kind of story he means to categorize and cultivate: "the Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and Edgar Allan Poe type of story—a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision" (3). As Rieder has suggested, we can understand Gernsback's statement here to go beyond a mere *description* of the genre he wants to promote/invent and instead as an *intervention* into the reception of these quite distinct authors, encouraging his readers to see relations among them that constitute sf. His further descriptors, "charming romance," "scientific fact," and "prophetic vision" all emphasize qualities that Gernsback wants others to repeat and imitate: the story itself, as entertainment, is privileged, but sf will draw upon science (and here we might recall Alkon's qualification that empirically this has been *perceptions* of science more than the scientific *fact* Gernsback evokes). Finally, and this is Gernsback's particular contribution and preoccupation, the genre is celebrated for its ability to envision the (presumed wondrous) world soon to come through the marvels of science and technology. The masthead marking editorial columns in these early issues of *Amazing Stories* proudly proclaims, "Extravagant Fiction Today . . . Cold Fact Tomorrow!" For Gernsback, sf was to be more than a new genre: it was to "blaz[e] a new trail, not only in literature and fiction, but progress as well" (3).

Even in this seemingly obvious moment of genre definition, however, multiplicity, contradiction, and competing yet overlapping communities of practice abound. Although our retroactive labeling of both Verne and Wells as common fathers of the genre encourages us to see them as engaged in similar projects, from the point of view of the literary marketplace of the late nineteenth century they had little in common. Verne drew extensively on the tradition of colonial adventure fiction, organizing many of his tales around voyages of discovery, and displayed a concern for precise details of measurement and careful explanations of his novel

technologies. As Alkon notes, "Verne makes futuristic devices such as the *Nautilus* part of his contemporary world rather than taking readers forward imaginatively to a different future where such things are commonplace" (58). Publication of his work in Hetzel's *Magasin illustré d'éducation et de récréation* reverses the order of priority between scientific education and entertainment as framed by Gernsback, and in general Verne's work seeks to mingle accurate scientific details with his adventures, even if scientific facts are at times strained, such as with the interior sea in *Voyage au centre de la Terre* (1893). Indeed, Verne dismissed any similarity between his work and Wells's, complaining "I make use of physics. He invents. I go to the moon in a cannonball, discharged from a cannon. . . . He goes to Mars in an airship, which he constructs of a metal which does away with the law of gravitation," which is all very entertaining, he concludes, but "show me this metal" (qtd in Alkon 7).

Verne is right to point to this distinction. Although both he and Wells write about worlds different than the worlds of realist fiction or contemporary Europe, and although both are concerned with the impact of science and technology on contemporary life, they are writing in different venues, and for different communities of practice. Verne's *Voyages Extraordinaires*[6] wrestle with the extraordinary pace of change as new communication and transportation technologies radically reshape European colonial economies and urban lives. He eagerly seeks out what is new in biology, geography, astronomy, and oceanography, and constructs adventure stories in which he, his protagonists, and his readers may revel in the wonders of modern science and discovery. Wells, in contrast, writes scientific romances that tend to de-emphasize the role of the individual hero and focus on long-term, evolutionary perspectives. His most famous contributions to the genre grapple with the implications of new discoveries in geology, paleontology, and especially biology in the form of Darwinian evolutionary theory. Human agency and action are decentered on this timescale, and although the immediate future in *The Time Machine* (1895) might promise more of the marvels of technological innovation later celebrated in the pulps, the more distant future portends a bleak polarization of human beings into two different species, while the far future eclipses humanity entirely and offers a vision only of an entirely alien and alienating planet.

More overtly than Verne, Wells uses sf in the mode of literalized metaphor, mobilized for social critique. For example, his future humans, bifurcated into Morlocks and Eloi, are not simply a thought experiment about differentiation and evolutionary change, but more importantly a comment on antithetical and isolated class identities in contemporary England. The isolation of working class from aristocratic class, he suggests, has grown so pronounced as to parallel the process of speciation by which separated populations of an organism each select for environmentally favorable traits until they are no longer recognizable as the same species. Further, the Time Traveller's experiences teach him to question the timelessness (and wisdom) of his own social values when he learns that those descended from aristocratic stock are not dominant in this future. In this and other work, Wells challenges human hubris and effectively uses the techniques of sf to enable his readers to see the world in a new way. Both Wells and Verne are writing under the broad umbrella of mythologies of science, but whereas Verne privileges minute examination of the changes wrought by technoscience on daily life, Wells focuses instead on the philosophical and social implications of scientific discoveries: our understandings of our ethical choices and perceptions of our material world cannot remain

static as the scientific worldview permeates Victorian society and rewrites common knowledge.

Poe is the most neglected of Gernsback's initial exemplars of sf, his reputation linked more to the contemporary rise of American gothic fiction and pulp detective fiction. Science is central to many of Poe's works as well, although his focus on technique tends toward the forensic tradition of detective fiction, whereas his interest in social critique emerges in exposing the violent horror that underlies much quotidian life. The work of gothic writers is frequently associated with the sublime, but here we find it expressed in all its horrifying glory, overwhelming human cognition and reminding us of forces greater than our manipulation of nature through science.

Poe thus brings to this early configuration of sf a version of the sublime that resists its transmutation into the more comforting sense of wonder associated with the technological sublime. Looking at a number of Poe's stories, we find evidence of a much broader range of engagements with the sublime than in the sf that immediately follows, although this sensibility returns in more recent sf. In "M.S. Found in a Bottle" (1833), for example, what begins as an adventure tale of exploration quickly becomes uncanny. As the explorers' ship is driven further and further south by a storm, daylight disappears and "thick gloom, and a black sweltering desert of ebony" (4) surrounds them. In the abyss of a huge wave, our narrator encounters a mysterious ship that sails with ease through the hurricane. Jumping aboard, he discovers that he need not hide from the sailors because these "incomprehensible men! . . . *will not see*" (7) him, yet his unease grows as he notes the decrepit condition of ship and crew. Growing bolder, he explores more of the ship and confronts the crew, at first attempting to rationalize his observations and master the situation. But cognition fails and the story ends with the collapse of language: the narrator describes their wild plunge into "the grasp of the whirlpool . . . amid a roaring, and bellowing, and thundering of ocean and of tempest" (11) and the ship goes down. The manuscript itself is all that returns from this otherworldly realm to attest to the experience, its rational explanation terminated by this sublime encounter.

Although Verne and Wells are more frequently cited than Poe as progenitors of sf, the evocation of the sublime as fundamentally incomprehensible and potentially frightening is also part of the genre, as in Arthur C. Clarke's haunting story "The Sentinel" (1951), and perhaps even more strongly Stanley Kubrick's film version of the expanded narrative, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Clarke's original story conveys its narrator's wonder at finding the artifact on the moon, the "great lifting of [his] heart, and a strange, inexpressible joy" (246) when he realizes that he is confronting a manufactured rather than natural object. At the same time, however, his excitement is mixed with terror as he contemplates the evolutionary timescale of its origin, a technology that far exceeds anything accomplished by humans and placed on the moon before we had become *homo sapiens*. Although the narrator strives to transmute this feeling of awe into its positive form of wonder, he remains haunted by human helplessness before such a superior species: "Perhaps they wish to help our infant civilization. But they must be very, very old, and the old are often insanely jealous of the young" (249). In Kubrick's film adaptation, we are left with even fewer explanatory hints, confronted only by the mysterious hotel room in which, it seems, Dave (Keir Dullea) is transformed into the starchild. Whether this is the apotheosis or extinction of humankind is unclear. Modes of sf that draw

upon the paradigms established by Verne and Wells abound as well, such as the careful engineering detail used to establish Larry Niven's *Ringworld* series (1970–), or the transformation of space opera conventions into a critique of colonialism in New Space Opera writers such as Ian McDonald and Gwyneth Jones.

Science fictions

My point in stressing the diversity of Verne, Wells, and Poe is not to suggest that Gernsback was "wrong" in identifying them with his new genre label, nor is it to privilege one particular inheritance over another. Rather, my point is that our understanding of sf must necessarily be multiple, and further that this heterogeneity describes not merely the genre as it exists in the twenty-first century, but also the range of texts that have been retroactively incorporated into histories of the genre *and* the ways in which Gernsback's call to write new fiction for modernity was taken up. Just as Rieder argues that instead of searching for *the* origin of sf, histories of the genre should explore how multiple possibilities cohered into specific formal features and thematic tendencies that change over time, this book will not seek to explain and defend *the* genre of science fiction. Rather, it will explore a number of influential conceptualizations of the genre that have been offered by different critics, striving to gain a total but not totalized picture of the genre by shifting among these various strategies for describing it. This book is organized conceptually rather than chronologically. My treatment of sf texts as examples to illustrate various meanings will function as case studies, not as a comprehensive treatment of all of the genre's major writers and movements;[7] I have provided a timelime as an appendix to help readers see how the various examples discussed fit within a larger history of the genre's major texts, movements, and writers.

Since one of the factors shaping the definition of sf is historical context, some of the frameworks discussed will lend themselves more readily to certain historical periods than to others, and the examples discussed will inevitably reflect this tendency. It is important to keep in mind, however, that the interaction between concept and chronology is fluid rather than fixed: although each description emerges as a specific intervention at a particular time, part of the intellectual work of labeling is the backward propagation of the concept to incorporate previous work, precisely as we see Gernsback drafting Verne, Wells, and Poe as sf writers. The purpose of this book is not to provide a history of sf, then, but instead to convey the scope of various communities practicing sf. To readers new to the genre, some of these communities and examples may seem surprising, introducing them to a genre that exceeds the garish pulp aliens and big space battles they have come to associate with sf; for readers more familiar with the genre, this approach may prove frustrating in its refusal to privilege one paradigm over others, although I too inevitably have my own favorites. My larger purpose, however, is to convey a wide-ranging sense of sf as a site of ongoing cultural struggle over the meanings and relevance of science, literary capital, and cultural politics. I take it as axiomatic that each way of conceptualizing the genre obscures certain texts and perspectives, and illuminates others, so readers are encouraged to assess and challenge these frameworks and boundaries rather than

merely accept them. I offer this range of perspectives in the belief that one cannot understand sf without simultaneously understanding these debates.

Science fiction is not a "thing" but is always actively being made from heterogeneous materials, and larger questions of market, cultural politics, and aesthetics inform these struggles over definition. To call a text "science fiction" is to change the way we look at that text, as well as to attempt to change the overall understanding of the boundaries of this genre and its relation to other genres. We need to think about sf as a network of linked texts, motifs, themes, and images, a network in which it is always possible to make new and novel connections among existing nodes, and to which it is always possible to link previously unconnected material. Each paradigm examined in the following chapters enables certain kinds of conversations and precludes others, and each should be taken as an invitation to enter into a collective "we" of science fiction practice.

Before I turn to my first framework for understanding sf, there is one final point to be made about the scope and limits of this text. In order to facilitate classroom use, I have chosen examples mainly from short stories that are frequently anthologized or from novels regularly in print.[8] Although it is my conviction that nonprint forms of sf are as important to the genre as is print sf, my examples are largely from print sources for two reasons: first, this book provides an overview of the critical response to sf as much as to the genre itself, and most of its history as an object of academic study has focused on print forms; second, it remains the case that most university courses devoted to sf concern sf literature. Finally, although sf flourishes in a variety of countries and languages, this book addresses the Anglo tradition of sf and sf scholarship, a tradition that includes a number of writers (Verne, Stanislaw Lem, Karel Čapek) whose work has been translated into English and had a significant impact on the sf written in English.

Discussion questions

1. What comes to mind when you think of the genre designation science fiction? What do you think are essential qualities for a text to be considered sf? Is sf a genre you regularly consume? Why or why not? Return to these answers once you have completed the course, and consider whether you would still answer in the same way.
2. In the beginning of his review of China Miéville's novel *Embassytown*, sf scholar Neil Easterbrook discusses a problem he sees when scholars not familiar with sf review works that use science fictional ideas and motifs. Such reviewers, he argues, frequently have a pre-established prejudice against sf and thus if they like a work, they insist the work *uses* sf but somehow *isn't* sf. "This is an old critical conceit," Easterbrook writes. "If it has aliens or warp-drive, then it's sf; if it has emotion or metaphors of the human condition, then it isn't. Derangment by estrangement, we might call the persistence of this formula, if we wanted to be charitable. Ignorance and superficiality if we didn't" (see full review at http://lareviewofbooks.org/article.php?id=107). Is there a difference between *using* sf and *being* sf? Can serious works of literature never be sf? Why or why not?