

Final Report  
Professional Development Grant

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## RESTATEMENT OF PROFESSIONAL ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITY AND OF PROBLEM RESEARCHED.

I was selected to attend the Science Fiction Foundation's second annual Masterclass in Science Fiction Criticism in London in June, 2008. While in England, I also began my research on Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*. I have a contract with Scarecrow Press to edit a collection of essays on that children's classic in honor of its centenary.

## BRIEF REVIEW OF PROFESSIONAL ENHANCEMENT OPPORTUNITY AND OF PROBLEM RESEARCHED.

The Masterclass in Science Fiction was held in central London for five days, with formal classes running from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., followed by evening discussions of science fiction. The three lecturers were Geoff Ryman, an award-winning science fiction author; Gary K. Wolfe, a respected scholar in the field; and Wendy Pearson, a specialist in queer theory and science fiction. The twenty students included professional editors and book reviewers, scholars, and graduate students.

At the conclusion of the Masterclass, I remained in London for several days to begin research on Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*. I also traveled to York to find additional sources on Grahame.

## SUMMARY OF OUTCOMES

The Masterclass was extremely informative—even enlightening. Gary Wolfe has an encyclopedic knowledge of science fiction and the science fiction community; I learned a great deal about the history of science fiction from him. Geoff Ryman provided a fascinating glimpse into how one science fiction writer deconstructs another's text (in this case, John Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar*). The most valuable part of the Masterclass for me, however, was Wendy Pearson's instruction on queer theory, with which I was completely unfamiliar. I was not even aware of my own biases and assumptions about queer theory, most of which turn out to be wrong. The evening discussions introduced me to professionals who will be valuable contacts for my future work. Most of all, I am now much better informed for the classes I teach in science fiction, young adult literature, and graphic novels.

My secondary goal, research on *The Wind in the Willows*, was also successful. At two university libraries in York I found biographical material that is not available in the United States. The research I did in England has already been of great benefit as I edit the first drafts of the articles for the essay collection: I am able to point contributors toward the most reliable sources and to correct their errors of fact.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

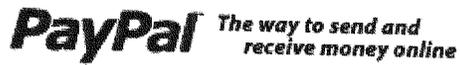
Attending the Science Fiction Masterclass was beneficial for both my scholarship and my teaching. The research I conducted in England is already proving useful in my current academic work. Neither goal would have been reached without funding from the Professional Development Grant.

As documentary proof of the Masterclass, I attach a printout of Gary Wolfe's Powerpoint presentation on science fiction criticism and a copy of a payment I sent to Farah Mendelsohn, the organizer of the Masterclass. The Science Fiction Foundation did not provide a receipt for the Masterclass, but I am sure I can get Dr. Mendelsohn to provide one if it is necessary. The only documentary proof of my research is my own notes. I will gladly produce copies of them if they are needed.

**Donna White**

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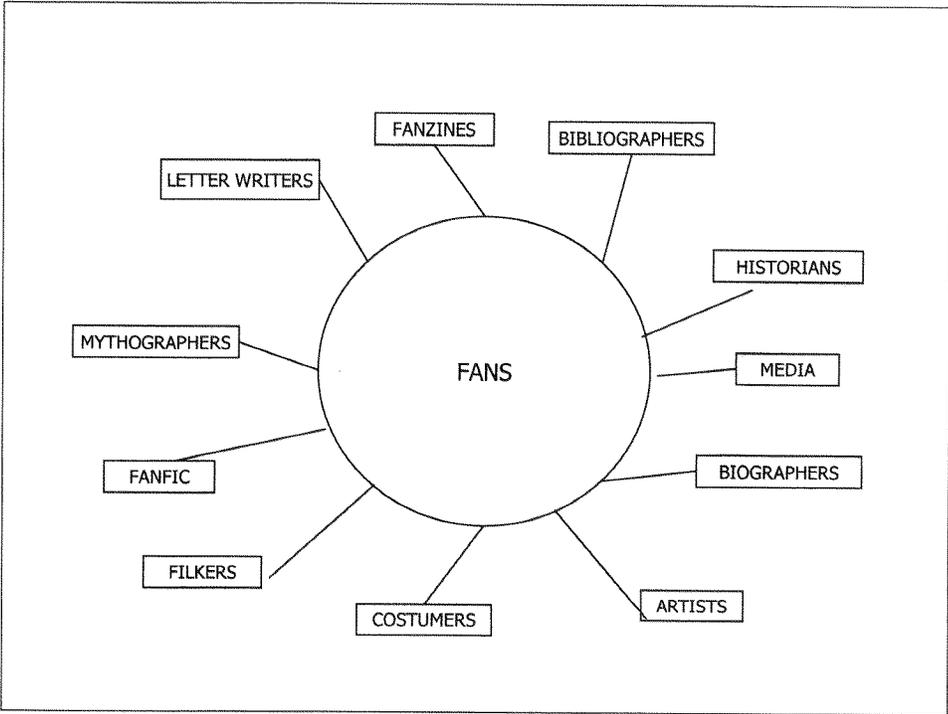
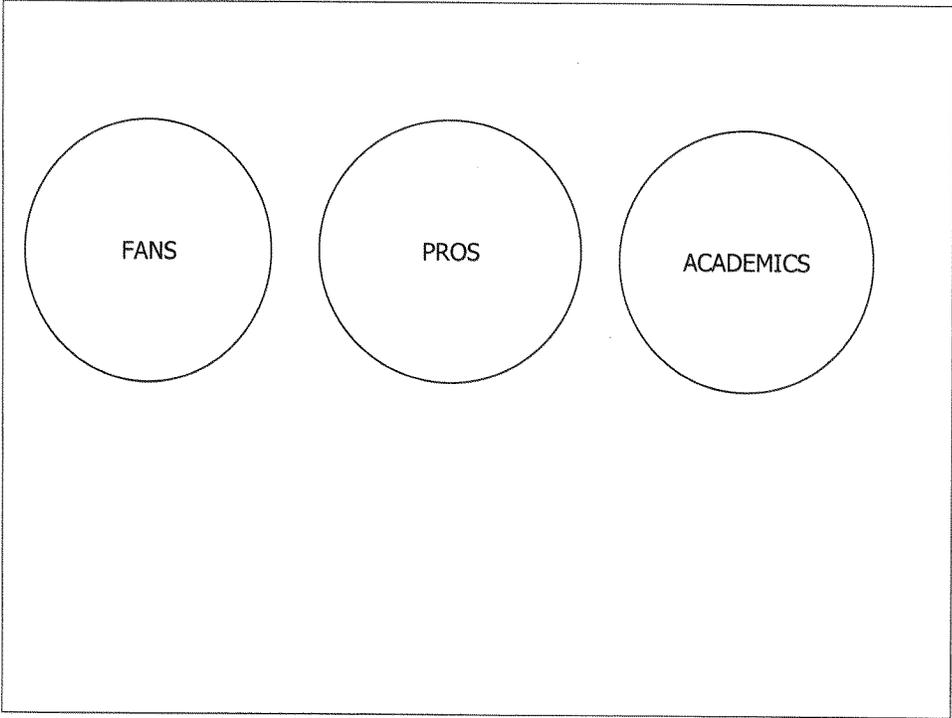
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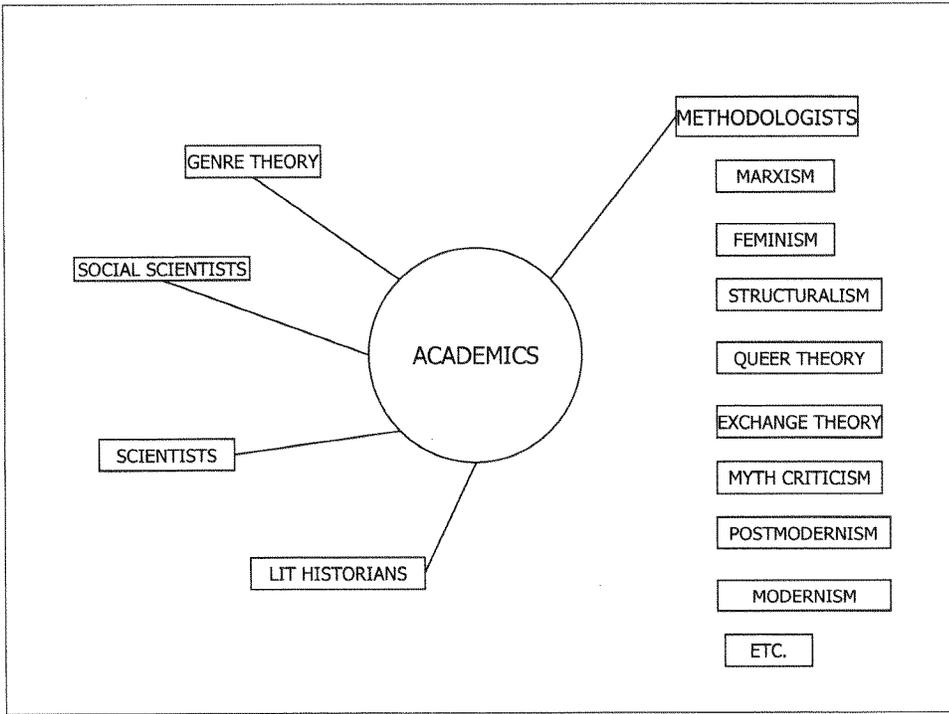
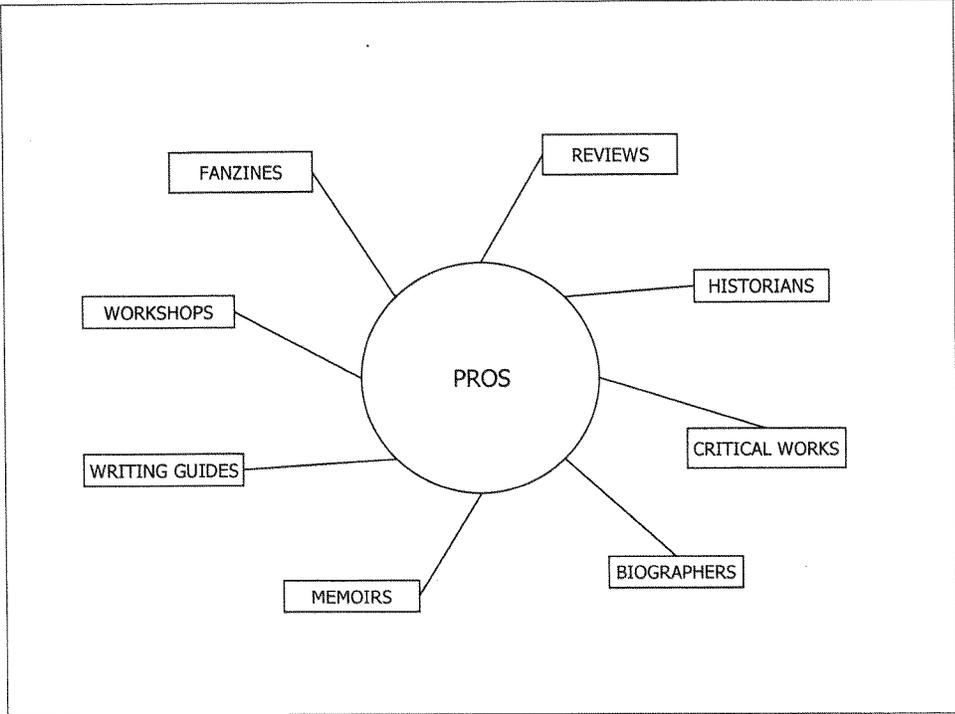
## Geographies of Discourse

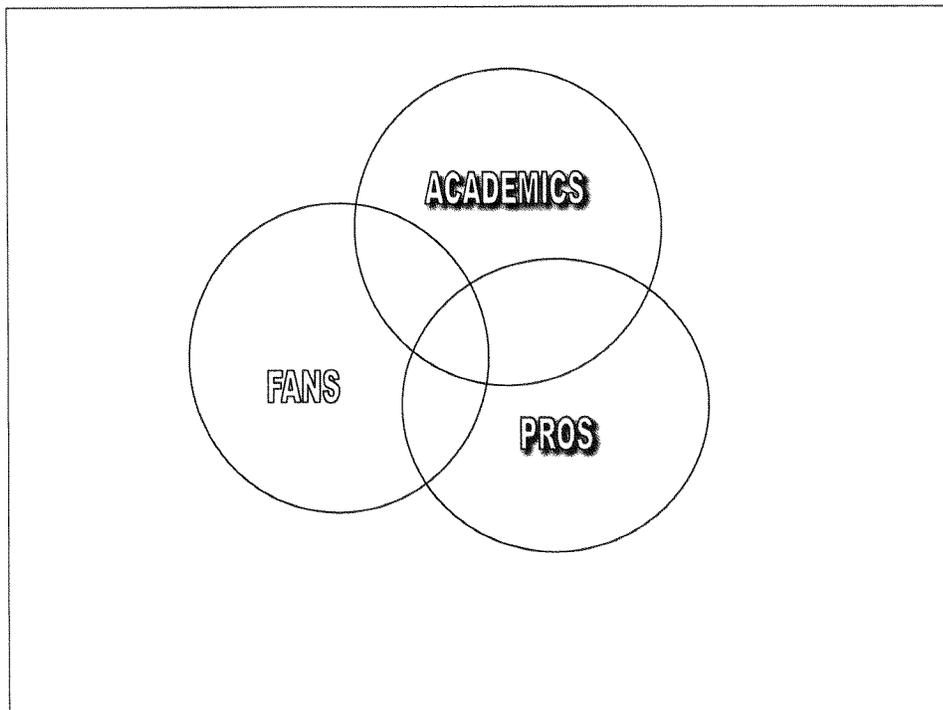
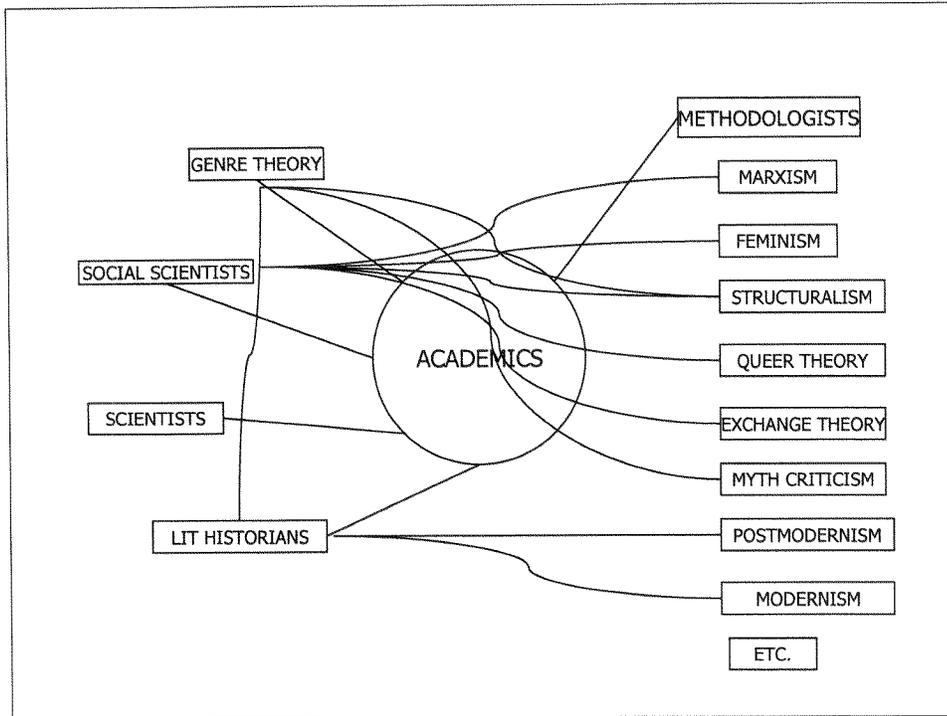
Or, How to Suppress Science  
Fiction by Trying to Defend It

"the formal scholarship of  
speculative fiction is,  
taken in the whole, worthless."

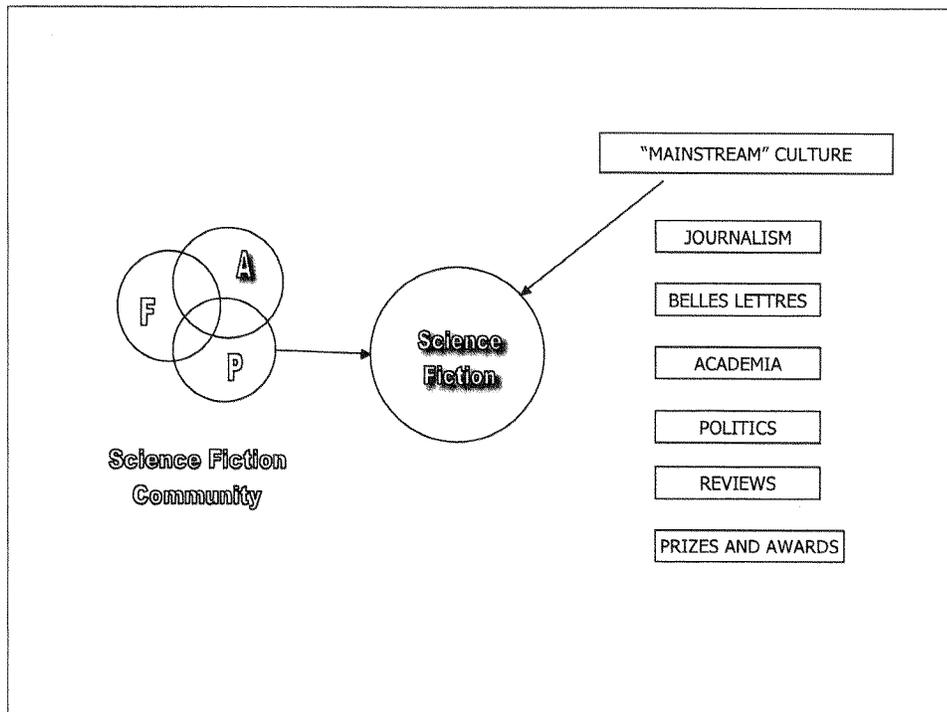
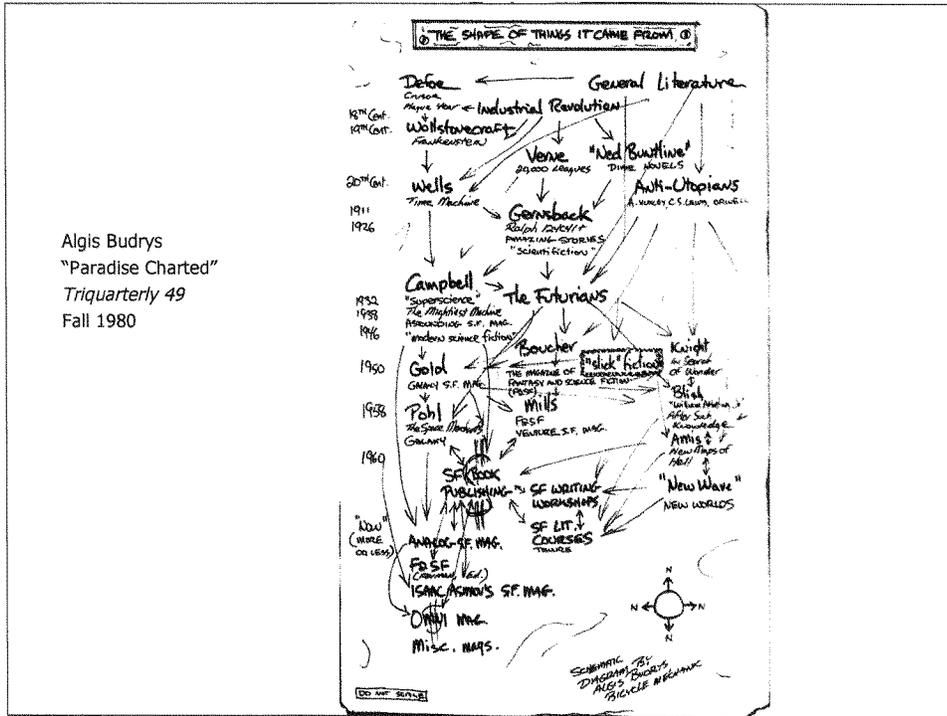
Algis Budrys, "Books,"  
*Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*  
January 1983

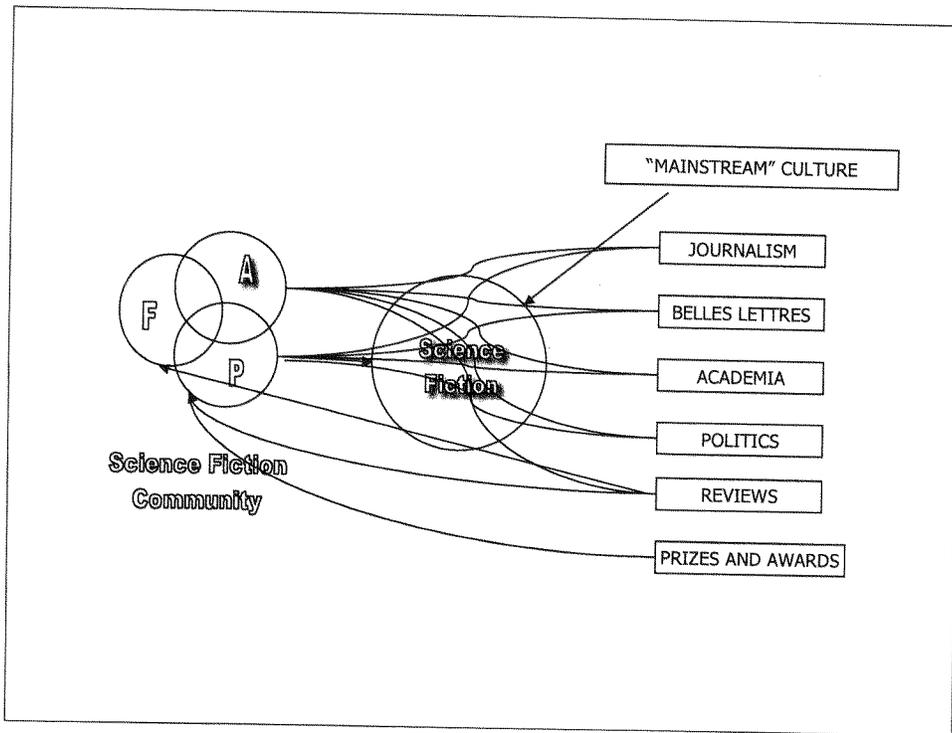






Algis Budrys  
 "Paradise Charted"  
 Triquarterly 49  
 Fall 1980





Some familiar "mainstream" takes on SF

Bernard DeVoto, "Doom Beyond Jupiter"  
*Harper's Magazine*, September 1939

- "This besotted nonsense is from the group of magazines known as the science pulps ..."
- "The science thus discussed is idiotic beyond any possibility of exaggeration, but the point is that in this kind of fiction the bending of light or Heisenberg's formula is equivalent to the sheriff of the horse opera fanning his gun, the heroine of the sex pulp taking off her dress."
- "As the sermons of back-country evangelists dilute and translate into the vernacular the ideas painfully worked out by thinkers on the age's highest plane, so what we call popular literature has, in every age, accommodated to simpler intelligences the sentiments and beliefs enregistered by artists in what we call good literature."

Bernard DeVoto, "Doom Beyond Jupiter"  
*Harper's Magazine*, September 1939

"These stories are more maturely written than those in the cowboy pulps, for example, if only in that they use longer words and more involved sentences. Their conventions and narrative formulas are also less primitive than the chase-with-sixshooters of the horse operas. Some of them are, to be sure, just that chase rephrased in terms of death rays, with heroic earthmen overcoming malign Venusians on the last page, but the majority of them forgo melodrama in favor of exegesis. They fulfill the hopeless dream of detective-story writers: they are a kind of fiction in which explanation is action."

Fowler Hill, "Superman's Anthology,"  
review of Donald Wollheim's *The Pocket Book of Science Fiction*.  
*New York Times*, July 25, 1943

**T**HREE are ten short stories in this collection edited by Mr. Wollheim. At least seven of them are above the average of their kind, and of this number three or four make good reading and therefore are a good deal more than True Comics for adults.

To one unschooled in the esoterics of "science-fiction" the remaining three seem sheer gibberish, but it may be that they deserve a place in a volume like this as signs of an age that produced Superman.

If any theme runs through all of the stories it is the familiar one—that man is an insignificant creature but that the universe is limitless as seen through the lenses of microscopes and telescopes.

Luc Sante, "The Temple of Boredom,"  
*Harper's Magazine*, 1985

"Science fiction, by relying on a tradition of mediocrity, has effectively sealed itself off from literature, and, incidentally, from real concerns. From within, science fiction exudes the humid vapor of male prepubescence. The cultlike ferocity of science fiction fandom serves only to cultivate what is most sickly and stunted about the genre."

"Present at the Re-Creation"  
(review of Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*)  
By SVEN BIRKERTS  
*New York Times Book Review* May 18, 2003

"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."

**Some familiar defenses of science fiction**

## Defense #1

SF teaches about science.

Hugo Gernsback, "The Science Fiction League," *Wonder Stories*, May 1934:

"The average parent, and the man in the street, has as yet not discovered the great and fundamental truth that Science Fiction is highly educational and gives you a scientific education, in easy doses—sugar-coated as a rule. The average man is not scientifically inclined and misses much in life because of his poor scientific education. When he is converted to Science Fiction, his scientific education quickly becomes such that, sooner or later, he understands what is going on all around him . . . This has been pointed out by many educators, time and again."

## Defense #2

A lot of scientists and engineers read it

John W. Campbell, Jr., "The Place of Science Fiction," in *Modern Science Fiction: Its Meaning and Its Future*, ed. Reginald Bretnor, 1953:

"Reader surveys [of *Astounding*] show "that the readers are largely young men between twenty and thirty-five . . . and that nearly all the readers are technically trained and employed. The nature of the interest in the stories is not economic, not love, but technical-philosophical. . . The readership . . . represents a good one third of the young technical personnel of the nation"

Gary Westfahl on Gernsback's theories  
(*Science-Fiction Studies*, 1999):

"Science fiction correspondingly had three functions: the narrative could provide "entertainment," the scientific information could furnish a scientific "education," and the accounts of new inventions could offer "inspiration" to inventors, who might proceed to actually build the proposed invention or something similar to it. Correspondingly, there were three natural audiences for science fiction: the general public, seeking to be entertained; younger readers, yearning to be educated about science; and working scientists and inventors, anxious to find some stimulating new ideas."

## Defense #3

It is a uniquely contemporary form of satire  
or social criticism

Kingsley Amis, *New Maps of Hell*, 1960:

"After the grossly inflated and often misconceived claims of the professional propagandists have been laid aside, after it has been agreed that science fiction is not going to engulf the whole of the rest of literature and that we do not need it to teach us science or respect for science or to recruit our young people into the ranks of technology or to break down our resistance to the notion of interplanetary travel, something of value remains. In the first place, one is grateful for the presence of science fiction as a medium in which our society can criticize itself, and sharply."

## Defense #4

### It's the only true literature of ideas

Clive Thompson, *Wired*, January 18, 2008:

"If you want to read books that tackle profound philosophical questions, then the best — and perhaps only — place to turn these days is sci-fi. Science fiction is the last great literature of ideas."

## Defense #5

### It's a modern mythology

- Michel Butor, "La Crise de croissance de la science-fiction,"  
*Les Cahiers du Sud*, March 1953:  
"Science Fiction represents the normal form of mythology in our time; a form which is not only capable of revealing profoundly new themes, but capable of integrating all the themes of old literature."
- Note title of first SFWA/SFRA Anthology:  
*Science Fiction: Contemporary Mythology*, ed. Patricia Warrick, Martin Greenberg, Joseph Olander (Harper, 1978)

## Defense #6

### It's an emblematic literary development of postmodernism

"The postmodernisms have in fact been fascinated precisely by this whole 'degraded' landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and Reader's Digest culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B Hollywood film, of so-called paraliterature with its airport paperback categories of the gothic and the romance, the murder mystery and science fiction or fantasy novel."

--Fredric Jameson, "Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Capitalism,"  
*New Left Review*, 1984

[Also see Jean Baudrillard, N. Katherine Hayles, Larry McCaffery, Donna Haraway, Carl Freedman, Roger Luckhurst, etc.]

## Defense #7

### It isn't really science fiction, but something much more respectable

"[Le Guin] is essentially a mythological fantasist; the true genre for her characteristic tale is *romance*, and she has a high place in the long American tradition of the romance, a dominant mode among us from Hawthorne down to Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*."

--Harold Bloom, "Introduction," *Modern Critical Views: Ursula K. Le Guin*, 1986

## Defense #8

Its most successful writers transcend the limits and formulas of the genre.

"Claiming that a work transcends its genre is almost exactly like saying, as people once were wont to do, that an accomplished African-American gentleman, someone say like John Conyers or Denzel Washington, is a credit to his race—the unstated assumption of course being that the race in question needs all the help it can get. . . . By my own ground rules, then, I have been called a credit to my race maybe half a dozen times, and about half of those times I was dumb enough to feel flattered."

--Peter Straub, "Introduction," *Poe's Children: The New Horror*, 2008

## Defense #9

It's a significant market segment

Donald Wollheim, "The Science-Fiction Novel," NY Times August 28, 1949:

**Many book stores, among which are counted Scribner's and Brentano's, have pushed clear corners of their detective novel counters to make way for a host of strangely titled and fantastically jacketed volumes.**

Wollheim, cont.

It took the actual invasion of the book publishing field by fantastic writers and aficionados themselves to prove its existence. The production of novels by such authors as Edward E. Smith, Jack Williamson, John Taine, Stanley C. Weinbaum, David H. Keller, and Robert Heinlein, to name a few, and the successful marketing of novels by such "unknowns" by small firms without previous access to stores and with little or no advertising proved the potency of this undiscovered section of the American reading public. Now that the old-line publishers have finally noticed what they were missing, it is safe to predict that science-fiction is to become as firmly established a part of standard publishing as the detective, Western and light romance novels have been for years.

Villiers Gerson, "Take a Rocket to the Moon,"  
NY Times, Sept. 24, 1950

The future of science fiction seems assured. New readers are being lured daily to the new medium, and once attracted they become devotees. In this, history repeats itself, for the same experience was true of the detective mystery. Many unbiased observers believe the detective story has reached a point of stasis. Psychologically, the science fiction story offers a sublimation as potent as that of the detective mystery. Where the latter captured and transformed the aggression characteristic of our times, the former offers the reader a painless method of capturing science—of making it familiar, less fearful, a part of his life experience.

Illustration for Gerson article, 1950

**TOP GROSSING FILMS**

Titanic  
The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King  
Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest  
Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone  
Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End  
Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix  
The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers  
Star Wars: Episode I - The Phantom Menace  
Shrek 2  
Jurassic Park  
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire  
Spider-Man 3  
Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets  
The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring  
Finding Nemo  
Star Wars: Episode III - Revenge of the Sith  
Spider-Man  
Independence Day  
Shrek the Third  
Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban  
E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial  
The Lion King  
Spider-Man 2  
Star Wars  
The Da Vinci Code

## Defense #10

It's been recognized with Nobel Prizes:

Rudyard Kipling  
William Golding  
Jose Saramago  
Doris Lessing

## Defense #11

It has attracted the attention of respected  
mainstream writers.

Margaret Atwood  
P.D. James  
Doris Lessing  
Michael Chabon

John Updike  
Jeanette Winterson  
William Golding  
Philip Roth

Kazuo Ishiguro  
Sinclair Lewis  
Walter Mosley  
etc., etc.

## Defense #12

It's not really fiction at all.

- Heinlein, *The Science Fiction Novel*, p.22: "A handy short definition of almost all science fiction might read: realistic speculation about possible future events, based solidly on adequate knowledge of the real world, past and present, and on a thorough understanding of the nature and significance of the scientific method."
- LeGuin, *Language of the Night*, 151: "This book is not extrapolative. If you like, you can read it, and a lot of other science fiction, as a thought-experiment."