PARASPHRES

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Category: Fiction

DESCRIPTION

Extending Beyond the Spheres of Literary and Genre Fiction | Fabulist and New Wave Fabulist Stories

With Fabulist and New Wave Fabulist stories by 44 Literary and Genre authors, this anthology follows in the footsteps of Conjunctions 39 (from Bard College, New York), the Fall 2002 issue, which focused on New Wave Fabulist writers.

(If you write fiction and you are interested in guidelines for submitting New Wave Fabulist fiction to Omnidawn, click here.)

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The editors ponder calling some of these selections 'Non-realistic artistic fiction.' More seasoned readers will recognize 'quality fantasy and science fiction.'

ParaSpheres...offers something for everyone, even those inclined toward 'literary' fiction...yet these stories go beyond the classification of fantasy, magical realism, and speculative fiction. The editors...have sought out some fine examples of literary fiction with fantastic elements...the stories...are compelling, moving, amusing, and often profound. Some...are simply such great tales that readers will find it easy to cry or laugh...There is plenty more to challenge the imagination—and the status quo—in this excellent anthology of fabulist tales.

Omnidawn Publishing’s massive new anthology, ParaSpheres...is a feast of fine writing and striking applications of the fantastic to the everyday...Indeed the particular value of ParaSpheres lies in its exhibition of a large group of established mainstream writers cutting their teeth on the fantastic or (more to the point) revealing that the fantastic has always been fundamental to their technique, implying that the envelope of speculative fiction should be cast a lot wider than we often suppose it can be. After reading ParaSpheres, I found myself...
eagerly searching for more work by a lot of the ‘literary’ authors sampled here: Ira Sher, Paul Pekin, William Luvaas, Randall Silvis. But to open in more familiar territory: ParaSpheres does include some strong reprints by major genre names, Ursula K. Le Guin, Kim Stanley Robinson, Rudy Rucker, Jeffrey Ford, Michael Moorcock. Of its best original entries, two are by genre contributors. Jeff VanderMeer’s “The Secret Paths of Rajan Khanna”…[and] L. Timmel Duchamp’s novelette “The Tears of Niobe”…Michael Moorcock’s: The Third Jungle Book: A Mowgli Story” is good, a look at contemporary British realities through the prism of Kipling and Edgar Rice Burroughs; Michael Andre-Druissi sardonically entraps an unwary lover in an alternate reality in “Old Flames in New Bottles”; Terry Gates-Grimwood gleefully savages the UK’s body politic in “Nobody Walks in London.” …An SF audience should appreciate all the items just mentioned…And yet there’s equal enjoyment to be had either side; and in pointing this fact out, ParaSpheres performs and inestimable service.

NICK GEVERS, LOCUS

The editors have cast an impressively wide net…As a collection of stories, and an introduction to a number of interesting new writers, ParaSpheres is fine, and well worth your attention.

STEPHEN JEFFREY, INTERZONE

While it would be possible to make a number of minor criticisms about a handful of the stories in this anthology, the overwhelming majority are very strong. ParaSpheres has succeeded in addressing a significant question in the world of literature by presenting an excellent selection of unique writing and providing an alternative framework through which it may be understood. Because that framework is divergent rather than convergent, the pieces
become a platform of potential, not a string of stories written to a rigorous formula. It is a work that has great relevance to the evolution of literature and, functioning as both an anthology of fiction and a reference volume, should be of interest to the reader and academic alike.

MIRANDA SIEMIENOWICZ, HORRORSCOPE

The editors of ParaSpheres have cast their nets widely and brought back a marvelous anthology full of marvelous tales. The sum of an anthology can sometimes be greater than its parts, and these parts—these stories—are bold, haunting, and remarkable.

KELLY LINK

So, the more things change, the more they stay the same, only differently. I hope Omnidawn succeeds in publishing quality fiction of a certain broadly defined, yet ultimately, niche audience. The appeal, I suspect, is, as it has always been, going to be less for people who gravitate towards genre or literary labels than those who seek interesting fiction that takes chances, regardless of its standing in the mainstream. And who really wants to be there, anyway?

DAVID SOYKA, SF SITE

Perhaps more than anything, the book makes an argument regarding how perceptions about fiction are cultivated, how we seek to categorize literature before we even start reading it. ParaSpheres is full of superb stories, but the results in regards to its argument are not clear-cut—even though the anthology is probably stronger because of that. Just as the individual stories risk a great deal in their linguistic and structural play, the overarching conceits of the collection provide a reading experience that is not easy to categorize.
**ALAN DENIRO, RAIN TAXI**

Considered simply in terms of its fiction, it is a gem of a collection. Not only is there a lot of material—more than fifty stories in this 600-page volume—but much of it is rich and strange, a phantasmagoria fashioned into print. The stories run the gamut from earnestly numinous to raucous and playful. And many are quite memorable. L. Timmel Duchamp’s “The Tears of Niobe,” for instance, portrays a girl who has visions of lost worlds and must grapple with the masters who try to harness her ability. As the tale progresses, the narrator slowly learns the truth of what has happened to the lost worlds she sees, and their relationship to her own past. It is a contemplative examination of the nature of belief and cultural intolerance, conveyed in luminous prose.

**DARJA MALCOM-CLARKE, STRANGE HORIZONS**

At over 600 pages, this meaty collection of stories may seem overwhelming at first blush, but for the short story reader it’s a blessing between two paperback covers. ParaSpheres, published by Omnidawn, gives readers such as myself such an escape from the normal, the humdrum, the darkening skies of November that make me grit my teeth until the porcelain begins to shatter, that I’ve been only too happy to bury my nose in nothing but this for the timebeing.

**DIANE KIDMAN, CARP(E) LIBRIS REVIEWS**

ParaSpheres demonstrates that its editors, Rusty Morrison and Ken Keegan, truly took Conjunctions 39: The New Wave Fabulists, a project dear to me, to heart, for it inspired them to assemble this marvelous, marvelously generous collection of stories that dart
back and forth over the boundary supposedly separating the genre of the fantastic from mainstream literature. By means of the excellence of their taste and the breadth of their vision, Morrison and Keegan prove not only that this so-called boundary has become remarkable for its porosity, but that many of the stories coming from the down-low side of the wire make up some of the most innovative and exciting fiction being written today.

PETER STRAUB

WHY FABULIST AND NEW WAVE FABULIST STORIES IN AN ANTHOLOGY NAMED PARASHERES?

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(The Article Summary below appears in the front matter of ParaSpheres, and the Detailed Answer portion appears in the back of ParaSpheres.)

Article Summary

Unless otherwise stated, this essay deals with the commercial publishing industry within the United States and does not necessarily apply in other countries.

When Omnidawn started publishing books in 2001 we planned to publish an anthology within a few years with the type of fiction included here, but we did not have clear boundaries for its definition or a name for it. Historically in the U.S. we have had two broad categories, literary and genre, into which the major publishers attempt to toss virtually all fiction. If it doesn’t fit into one of these categories, the large publishers usually see no point in publishing it. And yet, what we wanted to publish seemed to fit neither of these classifications. The term literary fiction, which implied quality, had long ago been defined by most critics as narrative realism and admitted nothing that was non-realistic, with the relatively recent
exception of magic realism. All other non-realistic fiction was relegated by most publishers to the various “formula” genres, where the non-realistic elements were assumed to further the primary purpose of escape into worlds ranging from unlikely to fantastic, where readers were entertained but not enlightened.

Of course, there has always been another form, non-realistic fiction, that attempted more than entertainment and often gave us new insights and perspectives. No one would be taken seriously if they denied that Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*, Huxley’s *Brave New World*, and Orwell’s *Animal Farm* and *1984* have this quality, as well as lasting cultural meaning and value, more than half a century after the last of these was written. Some have given these works a sort of honorary status as Literary Fiction, even though they do not meet the otherwise required standards of Narrative Realism. Still others relegate them to the genres, but admit that even some genre stories can have valuable cultural meanings beyond mere escape and entertainment.

But the genre categories do not hold these works well. No matter what genre category is chosen for them, they tend to be unlike most of the others with which they are grouped. Readers who expect genre escape and entertainment can be disappointed and dislike stories like these, sales can falter, and they can go largely unnoticed. The genre classifications no longer seem to make sense for such stories, and haven’t for some time.

These are the stories that we knew we wanted to publish in this anthology, but again, how were we going to define them? A number of terms have been used over the past several decades to try to create a special niche for such stories. Robert A. Heinlein coined the term “speculative fiction” in 1947, and for a time this was used to define such stories, but in recent years that term has been used to include all forms of the genres of fantasy and science fiction, as well as much horror. Therefore, the term no longer defines fiction that goes beyond genre fiction. These stories are far too strange for the term magic realism, which requires that the story be basically realistic, with some magical elements.
with some magical elements thrown in, and magic realism implies Latin American in origin. The terms non-realism and trans-realism are descriptive, but define these stories only in relation to what they are not: the more accepted narrative realism form.

Then in the fall of 2002, *Conjunctions*, the literary journal from Bard College edited by Bradford Morrow, came out with their issue number 39, guest-edited by Peter Straub. They used the term “new wave fabulists,” described thus: “For two decades, a small group of innovative writers rooted in the genres of science fiction, fantasy, and horror have been simultaneously exploring and erasing the boundaries of those genres by creating fiction of remarkable depth and power.” The term came with a number of disadvantages. For one thing, it’s a mouthful. Why not a simple one-word name? And the term new wave has been used before and has its own meanings. But the term did have the advantage of being an extension of the term fabulist, a word which has gained some acceptance as a form of literary fiction and which generally means magic realism without necessarily being Latin American.

Since we really could not establish a clearly definable boundary between fabulist and new wave fabulist, we decided to include both in the anthology, which we called *ParaSpheres* because these stories seem to extend “beyond the spheres” of either literary or genre fiction. In the process we hope to exist partly in both forms as well as extending beyond them, and to build a bridge between the two, where writers and readers from both can easily meet. Ultimately, another name may be used to describe this form of fiction, but for now we have chosen to describe the form of fiction as fabulist and new wave fabulist.

This is the short answer to “Why Fabulist and New Wave Fabulist Stories in an Anthology Named *ParaSpheres*.” Read on for a more detailed answer.

**Detailed Answer**

As a publisher plans to publish a new book of fiction, as we did with this anthology, one decision that must be made is how to classify it.
This is critical because it will determine not only the likely audience, but more importantly, if there will be an audience at all. A book published with the wrong classification or completely outside the commonly approved classifications will have a difficult time finding reviewers and an audience. There are some valid reasons for this. Readers usually know what forms of fiction they prefer, and they try to find fiction that is similar to fiction they have enjoyed in the past. Publishers and reviewers know this, and they produce or review books to fit the type in which they specialize. Ultimately, good fiction that does not fit accepted classifications may surface, but the process can be a difficult one, and the writers of such fiction may give up along the way or switch to a more acceptable style. As many writers have put it, “I write what my publisher will buy.”

But before the vast majority of publishers in the United States will accept a work of fiction they almost invariably decide whether to publish it as one of two broad, though in fact neither exclusive nor comprehensive categories, “genre fiction” or “literary fiction.” Fiction that cannot be allocated to one of these two categories often has difficulty finding a publisher.

**Genre Fiction**

The vast majority of fiction published in the United States falls into the various categories of genre fiction, which include fantasy, science fiction, horror, romance, western, mystery, spy, and adventure, not to mention sub-genres that can be defined within these categories. Most genre fiction, otherwise known as pulp, formula, escapist, and when particularly successful, blockbuster fiction, is commonly perceived as having been written to provide escape, to take readers away from their supposedly boring, overstressed, and/or unrewarding lives to exciting, unusual or improbable settings, events, and/or characters. Much genre fiction is based on proven formulas for selling a book within its particular genre, and sub-genres have still more specific formulas, and these formulas define the core examples of each form of fiction (although they do not necessarily define fiction on the fringes of each genre, nor the fiction that extends over
One can often find these formulas in books on how to write blockbuster fiction or various other specific forms of genre fiction. It should be about the rich, famous, powerful, heroic, or even the superhuman. It should incorporate melodrama and/or pathos. It is usually about fantastic things and events and places that are highly improbable or even impossible. The characters are usually less developed than in literary fiction and are usually caught up in the external milieu, ideas or events and are more driven by external circumstances than driving the story themselves. Or if they do drive the story, they tend to have one simple objective, rather than a full spectrum of various motivations. These characters are often stereotypes of good and evil that promote unrealistic expectations of human behavior. (Imagine, for example, all the men in the ‘60s and ‘70s who relished the fantasy that James Bond was a realistic ideal and attempted to emulate his exploits.) These rules are all part of the formulas that are primarily intended to sell books.

Breaking fiction into genre and sub-genre categories seems to go hand in hand with creating formulas. When Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy came out, it started the genre of fantasy fiction, and also spawned the formulas for thousands of imitators. Formula is simply a way to duplicate success, and genres are often started by one or more very successful books that attract imitators. Although many genre writers successfully bend, break, or even ignore these formulas, many genre writers often follow these formulas to a significant degree, sometimes developing their own personal formulas for the books they write. After all, it is much faster to write to formula than to write more creatively. It is these writers who use formulas that give genre fiction its formula reputation. The escapist formula novels dominate the world of genre fiction publishing, accounting for over ninety percent of all fiction sales. Corporate publishers routinely expect sales in the hundreds of thousands, if not millions of copies from their blockbuster authors, and they usually attempt to improve their profits by pressuring these authors to write at least two books a year.
Some of the most famous writers, when faced with such deadlines, have typically secluded themselves and written novels totaling several hundred pages in a month or less. Some would argue that the primary motivation for writing and publishing genre fiction is to make money.

**Literary Fiction**

The remaining ten percent or less of sales that comprise literary fiction is divided up among tens of thousands of writers who typically spend years writing each book. Literary fiction is generally not divided into subgroups or genres. (Although in a broader sense of the word genre, literary fiction is sometimes referred to as a genre unto itself, as poetry and narrative fiction are sometimes referred to as genres.) In the broadest sense of the term, literary fiction is that which has recognized cultural and artistic value.

Although it is usually considered inappropriate in articles such as this to reference commonly accepted dictionary definitions, in this case it is virtually impossible to proceed without revisiting these sources. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (2001) gives the primary meaning of the word “literary” (and the meaning most relevant for this discussion) as: “Of, relating to, or dealing with literature.” *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2001) defines “literature” (with my bold italic emphasis) as:

A body of written works related by subject-matter (e.g. the literature of computing), by language or place of origin (e.g. Russian literature), or **prevailing cultural standards of merit**. In this last sense, “literature” is taken to include oral, dramatic, or broadcast compositions that may not have been published in written form, but which have been (or deserve to be) preserved. Since the 19th century, the broader sense of literature as a totality of written or printed works has given way to more exclusive definitions based on criteria of imaginative
Criteria of imaginative, creative, or artistic value, usually related to a work’s absence of factual or practical reference (see autotelic). Even more restrictive has been the academic concentration upon poetry, drama, and fiction. Until the mid-20th century, many kinds of non-fictional writing—in philosophy, history, biography, criticism, topography, science, and politics—were counted as literature; implicit in this broader usage is a definition of literature as that body of works which—for whatever reason—deserved to be preserved as part of the current reproduction of meanings within a given culture (unlike yesterday’s newspaper, which belongs in the disposable category of ephemera).

In other words, according to this definition, literary fiction has lasting meaning and value, whereas non-literary fiction does not. This is the “primary” meaning of the term “literary fiction.” Academic institutions in the United States usually use this primary definition of the term.

However, among reviewers and within the commercial publishing industry, the term literary fiction has taken on a far more specific and exclusive secondary meaning that has been used for over a century. This secondary meaning does not allow many highly regarded works that are included in the primary meaning of the term literary fiction. This narrower definition requires that literary fiction be narrative realism, which is defined by its own more exclusive rules. One of the most important rules for this definition of literary fiction is that characterization be well developed; in fact the characters should drive the story, and not be driven by the events, ideas, or milieu around them. Protagonists have flaws and antagonists, when present, tend to have virtues, and there is no simple right or wrong. As a result readers often finish a literary novel with the feeling that they have a more compassionate understanding of other human beings than when they started. This deeper characterization tends to work best
Characterization tends to work best when the narrative is set in recognized realistic cultures that exist or have existed in the past, particularly where the environment is familiar to the reader. Because the settings are familiar and can be suggested with minimal description, the text can be devoted to character development. Therefore, another important rule for creating literary fiction is that it be primarily realistic.

Rejection of Non-Realistic Fiction as Literary Fiction

The literary critics can serve as defenders of the intellectual and artistic values that are relatively free of the profit motivations that dominate the world of formula escapist fiction. There is definite merit in this cause. Left unchecked, this formula escapist fiction could ultimately obliterate the much less profitable literary fiction. But the standards of literary fiction that are applied to eliminate escapist fiction also eliminate much serious thought-provoking fiction that does have artistic value. In her introduction to the novel Under the Glacier by Halldór Laxness, Susan Sontag wrote the following (finished days before her death in December 2004):

The long prose fiction called the novel, for want of a better name, has yet to shake off the mandate of its own normality as promulgated in the nineteenth century: to tell a story peopled by characters whose options and destinies are those of ordinary, so-called real life. Narratives that deviate from this artificial norm and tell other kinds of stories, or appear to not tell much of a story at all, draw on traditions that are more venerable than those of the 19th century, but still, to this day, seem innovative, or ultra-literary, or bizarre. […] It seems odd to describe “Gulliver’s Travels” or “Candide” or “Tristram Shandy” or “Jacques the Fatalist and His Master” or “Alice in Wonderland” or Gershenzon and Ivanov’s “Correspondence from Two Corners” or Kafka’s “The Castle” or Hesse’s
"Steppenwolf" or Woolf's "The Waves" or Olaf Stapledon's "Odd John" or Gombrowicz's "Ferdydurke" or Calvino's "Invisible Cities" or, for that matter, porno narratives, simply as novels. To make the point that these occupy the outlying precincts of the novel's main tradition, special labels are invoked. Science Fiction. Tale, Fable, Allegory. Philosophical novel…

Outside the United States, non-realistic work has generally received more recognition. Many non-realistic authors first achieved success outside the U.S. and were later published here. All the authors mentioned in the above quote are European, as are Huxley and Orwell. Gabriel García Márquez (Columbia) won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1982 and Jorge Luis Borges (Argentina) won the French Legion of Honor in 1983, and this contributed to the acceptance of magic realism as literary fiction within the United States. And more recently Life of Pi by Yann Martel, the story of a man who survives shipwreck for months in a life raft with a tiger, won England's Man Booker Prize. And this is just to mention European and Latin American sources. Non-western countries, particularly Japan, have a long tradition of honoring non-realistic stories.

Such non-realistic works are also valued by U.S. university English departments and academic presses. Indeed, in the academic world, literary fiction has the much simpler primary meaning, that of having artistic value, and can easily include non-realistic fiction. In the academic world the term narrative realism is used to mean what the commercial publishers and reviewers call literary fiction. And the genres are being studied at the university level, although this has been a relatively recent change. As Noel Perrin wrote in the New York Times Magazine, April 9, 1989:

Fourteen years ago [1974] I began to teach a course in science fiction at Dartmouth College. [...] Not all my colleagues in the English department were embarrassed by the new course, just most. Say, 25 out of 30. In general, they knew just
enough about science fiction—without, perhaps, having read any except those two special cases, *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*—to know that it was a formula genre, like the murder mystery, and not worthy of attention in the classroom. But they were powerless to stop the new course, or at least it would have taken a concerted effort. I was chairman of the department at the time, and my last year in office I spent such credit as I had left on getting the science fiction course approved.

As Noel Perrin notes later in the article, the course was still in the course catalog in 1989, but it was bracketed, meaning that it was not currently being taught. The acceptance of such courses at the university level has improved, and it is now possible, for instance, to obtain a Ph.D. in some universities with a specialization in speculative fiction (a term defined later in this article). However, as David Soyka pointed out in the March 2003 issue of Locus Magazine:

Though there is an established branch of academia devoted to science fiction, the notion continues to linger that the genre is somehow an alien life form to “real” literature. Not so long ago I overheard a university advisor trying to steer away a student from taking a seminar in SF because prospective doctoral programs wouldn’t consider it “serious study.” Why the academy gives Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* respect as a Gothic novel, but not SF, is something I’ve never understood.

Outside academia, a number of small presses and journals have published such fiction for decades, including City Lights, Coffee House, FC2, Dalkey Archive, New Directions, and Sun and Moon (now Green Integer). And within the larger commercial publishing world in the United States, established literary authors like Philip Roth can always get their non-realistic works (e.g. *The Plot Against America*) published successfully. (It has always
successfully. (It has always seemed strange to me that alternative histories such as this one are considered science fiction. Aren't all literary fictions alternate histories?) There are also a few other exceptions where genres such as fantasy and science fiction have achieved honorary or token acceptance in the category of literary fiction when they cannot be ignored, even if they are not realistic, at least by some critics. As John Hodgman wrote in *The New York Times Magazine* of August 1, 2004:

"Fantasy has not, of course, been absent from literary fiction, but it has been admitted to the mainstream only when pedigreed (Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*), political (Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*) or exotic (which is to say, Latin American). Fantasy and science fiction as a capital G genre, meanwhile, has largely been shelled separately from the rest of the culture, in part because of the genre's mania for self-classification into ever narrower niches (high fantasy versus alternate history, hard science fiction versus space opera, cyberpunk versus steampunk) and in part because of pure snobbery. More exacting critics would not admit anything from some of these genres. For example, Sven Birkerts, editor of the highly respected literary journal *Agni*, published out of Boston University, wrote in the Sunday *New York Times Book Review* of 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.

I would agree that science fiction
rarely achieves excellent character
development, and it may never
have achieved the level of
character development present in
the best literary novels, although I
believe it could. (One way would be
to push premise into the
background.) However, science
fiction (as well as other forms
normally assigned to the genres) is
capable of possessing another
form of meaning that literary novels
do not. For example, science fiction
can visit the future, and fantasy
fiction and fables can visit our
dreams and the mythological
underpinnings of our most
cherished values. Especially in this
day and age, isn’t it important to
examine these seriously? There is
definite merit in determining one
standard of value from the
character-based test and to hold
this fiction apart, but should it be
the only form to have recognized
cultural and artistic value?

Fiction that introduces and
examines non-existent milieus can
have substantial artistic value and
can teach us about our own
culture. For example, Aldous
Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932)
gave us a glimpse of mass
production, behavior modification,
and pharmaceutically induced
happiness as it might be applied to
human beings in the future to
create a more stable, though
emotionally sterile society, thus
depicting a civilization in many
ways like our own. It makes its
point as well as it does because
modern trends are taken to the
extreme, rather than being
described in more subtle realistic
terms.

Another example is George
Orwell’s *1984* (1949), which
depicts a futuristic (although now
all too contemporary) western
civilization in which truth is what
the spin doctors create and history
is rewritten to suit the
establishment. Again, the story is
an effective critique of the
propaganda machines of modern
governments precisely because it
depicts such practices to the
extreme.

Similarly, Marion Zimmer Bradley’s
*The Mists of Avalon* (1982) is a
The Mists of Avalon (1982) is a retelling of the Arthurian legend from a feminist perspective. As such, it critically re-examines one of the idealized myths that has tremendous influence on our views of heroism, chivalry, and warfare. Instead of the usual interpretation of Arthur conquering the island of Britain in order to achieve peace, The Mists of Avalon is about a highly stratified Christian world that comes to dominate and destroy a relatively peaceful egalitarian non-Christian world that is demonized as pagan. This work is also particularly relevant to our current political world, and I mention it here primarily because of this significance. It also has a level of character development that would admit it to the classification of literary fiction if it were not for the unrealistic elements of a mythical kingdom, magicians, and fairies. Because of these elements, this is a novel that is generally defined as non-literary fantasy fiction.

None of these novels generally fits the standards set by reviewers for literary fiction, yet they have far more cultural value and impact than much accepted literary fiction. But such novels have a great deal of difficulty in gaining attention if they are initially published as genre fiction, or even if the authors are primarily defined as genre writers. Huxley and Orwell were respected as literary writers in England when they published their works, and they did not have to run the genre gauntlet. Bradley is the only American so far mentioned in this essay and also the only author who started as a writer of genre fiction. The Mists of Avalon succeeded beyond the fantasy genre audience largely because it was popularized by the feminist movement that was prevalent at the time of its publication.

In the United States, writers almost always stay in the classification in which their work first succeeds. It is simply easier for book buyers to find all the books by a particular author in one section of the bookstore, and for bookstore clerks to know where a particular author’s work can be found, and work that is an attempt to break out will almost always stay in the section with the author’s original books. Because this creates genre “ghettos,” writers who want to be taken seriously generally avoid starting out in genre fiction, and successful literary writers who write genre...
literary writers who write genre fiction are often described as “slumming it.” So writers who want to write artistic work are discouraged from starting out with and later experimenting with a style that will be classified as genre fiction.

At Least One Other Type of Fiction

What is in fact true is that there are really at least three different kinds of fiction: genre, literary (in its realistic, character-based sense), and a third type of fiction that really has no commonly accepted name, which does have cultural meaning and artistic value and therefore does not fit well in the escapist formula genres, but which has non-realistic elements and settings that exclude it from the category of literary fiction. This third type of fiction may or may not be character-based. It is this form of fiction that we knew we wanted to publish—but what would we call it?

One could argue that this third form of fiction does have a name, “fantasy fiction.” In the broadest sense of the term this is true. The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms (2001) defines fantasy as:

…a general term for any kind of fictional work that is not primarily devoted to realistic representation of the known world. The category includes several literary [in a broader sense of the word “literary”] genres (e.g. dream vision, fable, fairy tale, romance, science fiction) describing imagined worlds in which magical powers and other possibilities are accepted.

However, in commercial publishing the term “fantasy” has come to mean a much more specific escapist genre form of fiction that includes magic, magicians, and mythical creatures like elves and dragons, usually set in a feudal society with medieval technology. The foremost example of this form is Tolkien’s Lord of the Rings trilogy, which essentially created and defined the genre. Such a definition excludes science fiction, so that the terms “fantasy and science fiction” are usually used when describing both forms. If it were not for this very prevalent meaning of the term “fantasy
fiction" in commercial publishing, this might be an ideal name for this third type of fiction.

The term “speculative fiction” has also been used by some to define such fiction. This term was coined by Robert A. Heinlein in 1947 when he wrote: “In the speculative science fiction story accepted science and established facts are extrapolated to produce a new situation, a new framework for human action. As a result of this new situation, new human problems are created—and our story is about how human beings cope with those new problems.” Others later defined the term as “literary forms of science fiction.” However, Orson Scott Card, in his 1990 book *How to Write Science Fiction and Fantasy*, presented what is probably the term’s most common current definition: “Speculative fiction includes all stories that take place in a setting contrary to known reality.” This definition includes all forms of the genres of science fiction and fantasy, and much, if not most, horror, without regard to artistic quality, and an increasing number of writers of these escapist genres use the term to describe their work. On several occasions I initially described the work we would be publishing as “speculative fiction,” only to receive a response like, “Oh, you mean science (or fantasy, or genre) fiction. I don’t read science (or fantasy, or genre) fiction. I only read literary fiction.”

One might also argue that the term “magic realism,” which has now been included in the “literary fiction” form, can be used for this third type of non-realistic fiction, and in part this is true. The term “magic realism” (or “magical realism”) was first used in the 1920s to describe graphic art that is realistic in some aspects and magical or surrealistic in others. It was later used to describe a style of writing. The *American Heritage Dictionary* (2004) defines “magical realism” as: “A chiefly literary style or genre originating in Latin America that combines realistic and fantastic elements.” The *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* (2004) defines “magic realism” as (with my bold italic emphasis):

…a kind of modern fiction in which fabulous and fantastical events are included in a narrative.
The term was once applied to a trend in German fiction of the early 1950s, but is now associated chiefly with certain leading novelists of Central and South America, notably Miguel ángel Asturias, Alejo Carpentier, Gabriel García Márquez. The latter’s Cien años de soledad (One Hundred Years of Solitude, 1967) is often cited as a leading example, celebrated for the moment at which one character unexpectedly ascends to heaven while hanging her washing on a line. The term has also been extended to works from very different cultures [although if not Latin American, this is not the generally accepted meaning], designating a tendency of the modern novel to reach beyond the confines of realism and drawn upon the energies of fable, folktale, and myth while retaining a strong contemporary social relevance. Thus Günter Grass’s Die Blechtrommel (The Tin Drum, 1959), Milan Kundera’s The Book of Laughter and Forgetting (1979), and Salman Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children (1981) have been described as magic realist novels along with Angela Carter’s Nights at the Circus (1984) and Rushdie’s Satanic Verses (1988). The fantastic attributes given to characters in such novels—levitation, flight, telepathy, telekinesis—are among the means that magic realism adopts in order to encompass the often phantasmagoric political realities of the 20th century.

However, the term magic realism is currently associated chiefly with Latin American novelists, while the non-Latin American versions of magic realism tend to be included in the category of literary fiction on a case-by-case basis and often by some critics and not others.
More recently another term, fabulist fiction, has been used to include both the Latin American and non-Latin American versions of magic realist fiction. The term fabulist has still not found its way into the current editions of various dictionaries of literary terms. But because its Latin American form has generally achieved status as literary fiction, the term fabulist is generally associated with quality. However, as fabulist fiction becomes more fantastic it becomes fantasy fiction, or if more metaphysical it becomes horror or new-age fiction, or if futuristic it becomes science fiction. So the term fabulist, by itself, cannot describe the entire scope of the fiction which we wanted to publish.

Then in the fall of 2002 the literary journal *Conjunctions* (from Bard College; edited by Brad Morrow) devoted their issue number 39 in the fall of 2002 (guest-edited by Peter Straub) to what were described as “new wave fabulist writers,” thus extending the term “fabulist” to include other artistic fiction that goes well beyond realism. Such an extension of the word “fabulist” has the advantage of drawing on a term that is associated with quality literature (though only a portion of it is considered literary) and that is generally placed in the general fiction area of bookstores. This new definition was perhaps most succinctly defined in the preceding issue of *Conjunctions*, which announced the upcoming *Conjunctions:39* with the description:

For two decades, a small group of innovative writers rooted in the genres of science fiction, fantasy, and horror have been simultaneously exploring and erasing the boundaries of those genres by creating fiction of remarkable depth and power.

Of course, if we are “erasing the boundaries of those genres” we should not hesitate to include closely-related fiction otherwise classified as genres beyond “science fiction, fantasy, and horror,” thus including fables, folktales, myths, fairy tales, tall tales, new-age, and all alternative forms of prose narrative that go beyond “objective realistic report.” (Worthy of particular note are experimental forms that do not...
Experimental forms that do not meet the realistic test because their formal construction, use of language, and/or other methods of experiment offer variations on the patterns of thinking—of narrating reality—that are most commonly mass-produced in current media. It is often difficult to determine whether certain forms of experimental fiction are describing reality or not, and if reality cannot be verified, these will also not meet the standards of literary fiction. (Also, as long as alternate histories are considered science fiction, then we will include these in our scope as well.) Such a definition allows for seamless crossing of the above genres; indeed it erases genre classifications entirely, making it difficult for others to define such fiction in terms of genre. And finally, by eliminating genres and their subdivisions it becomes more difficult to apply formulas to create or select such fiction. One could object that this definition is too great, that it encompasses far too much literary territory, and that there is the potential for many different styles within this grouping. That is precisely the point. We want to present a wide diversity of styles and subject matter rather than break this non-realistic fiction into subdivisions, which ultimately invite formula.

If we can use this definition we can now give a name to the two components of “non-realistic artistic fiction,” namely “magic realism” (in its non-specifically Latin American sense, also known as “fabulist fiction”) and “new wave fabulist fiction.” Since these two types are closely related, and indeed the boundaries between what “maintains the ‘reliable’ tone of objective realistic report” and what does not can easily become blurred, we could still use a name for the combination of the two types. Perhaps at some future time these two types will become known simply as “fabulist fiction,” or perhaps another name will be applied. (We are committed to this type of fiction, but we will use whatever name is commonly used to define it.) However, for the moment, it is far beyond our power to give a simpler name to the totality of “non-realistic artistic fiction,” so in the meantime we can simply refer to this as its combined components of “magic realism (meaning the broader non-specifically Latin American
definition) and new wave fabulist fiction." Or perhaps we can simply call it "fabulist and new wave fabulist fiction," and in fact, it is these latter terms that we have chosen to use. The name of this anthology, ParaSpheres, refers to the idea that the stories published herein extend "beyond the spheres" of the two widely accepted forms.

Although we do consider this fiction to meet the broad definition of the term literary, we recognize that it does not meet the established narrative realist definition of literary fiction. By presenting this fiction as neither literary nor genre, but rather as something else, we are avoiding the pitfalls of claiming literary status for these works. In presenting this anthology we hope to exist partly in both forms as well as extending beyond them, and to build a bridge between the two, where writers and readers from both can easily meet and explore fiction outside the boundaries imposed by the two accepted forms.

Ken Keegan

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