

The true weird tale has something more than secret murder, bloody bones, or a sheeted form clanking chains according to rule. A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint, expressed with a seriousness and portentousness becoming its subject, of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space.

Lovecraft, "Supernatural Horror in Literature," *The Recluse* 1 (1927): 24, Princeton University Library.

Up to the day the first issue of WEIRD TALES was placed on the stands, stories of the sort you read between these covers each month were taboo in the publishing world. Each magazine had its fixed policy. Some catered to mixed classes of readers, most specialized on certain types of stories, but all agreed in excluding the genuinely weird stories. The greatest weird story and one of the greatest short stories ever written, "The Murders of the Rue Morgue," would not have stood the ghost of a show in any modern editorial office previous to the launching of *Weird Tales*. Had Edgar Allan Poe produced that masterpiece in this generation he would have searched in vain for a publisher before the advent of this magazine.

[Otis Adelbert Kline], "Why *Weird Tales*?" *Weird Tales* 4, no. 2 (May 1924): 1, Internet Archive.

There is the usual fiction magazine, the love story and the sex-appeal type of magazine, the adventure type, and so on, but a magazine of "Scientifiction" is a pioneer in its field in America.

By "scientifiction" I mean the Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and Edgar Allan Poe type of story—a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision.

Hugo Gernsback, "A New Sort of Magazine," *Amazing Stories* 1, no. 1 (April 1926): 3, pulpmags.org.

SF is, then[,] a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment....

Even less congenial to SF is the *fantasy* (ghost, horror, Gothic, weird) tale, a genre committed to the interposition of anti-cognitive laws into the empirical environment...

If the Nose [in Gogol's story] were in a completely fantastic world—say H.P. Lovecraft's—it would be just another ghoulish thrill. When fantasy does not make for such a tension between its norms and the author's empirical environment, its reduction of all possible horizons to Death makes of it just a sub-literature of mystification. Commercial lumping of it into the same category as SF is thus a grave disservice.

Darko Suvin, "On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre," *College English* 34, no. 3 (December, 1972): 375–76.

The United [Amateur Press Association, of which HPL was then vice-president] aims to assist those whom other forms of literary influence cannot reach. The non-university man, the dwellers in different places, the recluse, the invalid, the very young, the elderly; all these are included within our scope. And beside our novices stand persons of mature cultivation and experience, ready to assist for the sheer joy of assisting.... It is an university, stripped of every artificiality and conventionality and thrown open to all without distinction.

Lovecraft, "For What Does the United Stand?" *United Amateur*, May 1920, in *Writings in the United Amateur, 1915-1922*, Project Gutenberg, 2009.

Perhaps the most important tactic in the genre world consists in naturalizing one's own discursive claims. Most typically, this is done by attributing to the text itself goals and functions proper to producer, exhibitor, spectator or critic. Each of the basic meanings of the term genre—blueprint, structure, label, contract—has its own spokesperson, save one: textual structure. Into this vacuum rapidly rush all those who speak for the other meanings, thus hiding their own purposes behind the apparently neutral text.

The history of genre theory may thus conveniently be retold as the history of user attempts to conceal their own activity and purpose. Aristotle dissimulates the distance between structure and reception by equating cathartic reception with tragic structure.

Rick Altman, *Film/Genre* (London: BFI, 1999), 101.

Genre, we might say, is a set of conventional and highly organised constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning. In using the word "constraint" I don't mean to say that genre is simply a restriction. Rather, its structuring effects are productive of meaning....No speaking or writing or any other symbolically organised action takes place other than through the shaping of generic codes, where "shaping" means both "shaping by" and "shaping of": acts and structures work upon and modify each other.

John Frow, *Genre*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2015), 10.

When I finally spoke with author Charles R. Saunders, who had virtually “disappeared” (as far as the U.S. sf community was concerned) into the far reaches of Canada, *Dark Matter* began to take on a new shape in my mind. Later, while I was attending the six-week science fiction writing workshop at Clarion West in Seattle, a manila envelope arrived from him. He had forwarded me a photocopy of “The Comet,” the W. E. B. Du Bois short story published in the 1920 collection *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*. *Dark Matter* had acquired critical mass.

With W.E.B. Du Bois now in view, my original vision for the collection broadened. My new goal in compiling this collection was to offer readers an enjoyable entrée to the diverse range of speculative fiction from the African diaspora and to encourage more talented writers and scholars to explore the genre. By uniting the works of the early pioneers in the field with that of established and emerging new writers, perhaps the necessary groundwork for the discussion and examination of the “unobserved” literary tradition has been laid.

Sheree R. Thomas, “Introduction: Looking for the Invisible,” *Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora* (New York: Warner, 2000), xi–xii.

H. P. Lovecraft, the dean of weird fiction writers, sums up the opinions of the readers in his own comment on *Shamblau*, in a letter to the editor. “*Shamblau* is great stuff,” he writes. “It begins magnificently, on just the right note of terror, and with black intimations of the unknown. The subtle evil of the Entity, as suggested by the unexplained horror of the people, is extremely powerful—and the description of the Thing itself when unmasked is no letdown. It has real atmosphere and tension—rare things amidst the pulp traditions of brisk, cheerful, staccato prose and lifeless stock characters and images. The one major fault is the conventional interplanetary setting.”

[Farnsworth Wright], “The Eyrie,” *Weird Tales* 23, no. 1 (January 1934): 132, Internet Archive.

My name was Catherine Moore and I lived in a large midwestern city and the depression of the 1930s was rampant over the land. So I was snatched from my sophomore year at the state university and crammed into a business school to learn the rudiments of shorthand and typing. By incredible good fortune, before I’d finished the course, a job opening in a large bank loomed up and I leaped at it, unprepared but eager....

Typing was something I practiced in every spare moment. And this is where “*Shamblau*” began, halfway down a sheet of yellow paper...

Midway down that yellow page I began fragments remembered from sophomore English at the university. All the choices were made at random.

C. L. Moore, “Afterword: Footnote to ‘*Shamblau*’...and Others,” in *The Best of C. L. Moore* (New York: Taplinger, 1975), 306.



Royal 10 Typewriter (introduced 1914), in “Our History,” royal.com/our-history/, accessed May 7, 2026.