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Expanding the Definition of Liminality: Speculative Fiction as an Exploration of New Boundaries

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Expanding the Definition of Liminality: Speculative Fiction as an Exploration of New
Boundaries

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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by

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Abstract

Speculative fiction allows an expanded view of literature and so allows scholars to explore new boundaries in the way words and ideas work. In the titular character of *The Last Unicorn* by Peter S. Beagle, the reader sees an expansion of self through liminality while *A Scanner Darkly* by Philip K. Dick explores its collapse. In order to portray each of these the character examined must move though one seems to move upward and the other downward. This idea of movement is only part of what expands the idea of liminality past the traditional idea of a doorway to create a hallway that the character might traverse on the way from place to place. This is not a redefinition of the term but a revision, a change in the way that we look at the concept as we accept and explore newer genres.

Keywords: liminality, threshold, time, memory, Speculative Fiction, Science Fiction, Fantasy, *The Last Unicorn*, *A Scanner Darkly*, Philip K. Dick, Peter S. Beagle

Expanding the Definition of Liminality: Speculative Fiction as an Exploration of New Boundaries

The concept of liminality is pervasive in literature, most noticeable when characters grow, change, and learn about themselves or the world around them. The eighth edition of *A Handbook to Literature* describes liminality as “The state of being on a threshold in space or time” (291), citing the anthropological studies of Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner. The definition goes further, describing Thomas Hardy’s poem “The Darkling Thrush” as “a poem of many thresholds...’multiliminal’... set at the end of a day, a month, a year, and a century” (291). This definition discusses liminality as a fixed point, as though it is a space between the spaces and, indeed, liminality is easiest to define this way. But if it is simply a fixed point in space how does liminality differ from transition? Traditionally we tend to think of liminality using the analogy of the threshold. Think of a house: in order to move from room to room you must traverse a doorway. If you consider each room a separate experience then the doorway, the pathway between the two experiences, becomes a liminal space. The threshold itself is the transitory space. The *Handbook* also offers the idea of the seaside as an illustration of liminality: an idea that projects a deeper facet if one envisions the sea. The sea does not simply wash against the shore in a single line, calm and one dimensional. Instead, it stretches into the distance, forming a barrier between land and sky. To venture out to sea is to eventually disappear beyond the horizon, a place that ancient mariners marked with the legend “Here Be Dragons.” Liminality denotes an exploration of the self. It is the pathway to becoming. A liminal space is the space through which the character journeys while on the way to something new. The transition is the point at which the character moves from being to becoming then back to being again. It is generally well-defined but is the point where solid expectations cease to exist. Liminality is the

place where new expectations are formed or existing expectations change. It is a place of uncertainty, hence the monsters.

Authors of speculative fiction tend to explore human limitations and psyche by expanding liminality to become like an ancient mariner on his sea of uncertainty. In their hands, liminality becomes a hallway that the character must travel, a simple blue expanse of water becomes the mystic wine-dark expanse into which a reader plunges and is held, captivated, until the story reaches the next transition. Within the realm of realism, liminality is fairly easy to define because the human mind can separate that which is real from that which is fantasy. Speculative fiction requires a far greater willing suspension of disbelief: it asks readers to step into worlds that are other. Sometimes these worlds contain familiar elements so the temptation arises to equate them with realism and to take for granted that their liminalities remain within the bounds that we describe as normal (thresholds, cross-roads, places that are neither here nor there). The author of speculative fiction can extend these liminalities for she creates the world. The speculative aspect of fiction allows us to explore greater concepts within our “real” world and liminality itself allows speculation. If something is not real then the reader might hold it at arm’s length, try it on without buying the concept completely. One might see parallels between story and life without acknowledging the completeness of the parallels. Many people use the term “fiction” synonymously with the term “lie” thus granting themselves permission to ignore that which might be revealed, and so speculative fiction and its consequent exploration of liminal spaces is often written off as inconsequential or unimportant (just imaginary, escapist fluff) rather than a forum by which to examine current societal foibles. In the same way, liminal spaces are often seen in a negative light. Since they are spaces in-between, always shifting and impermanent, we often people them with the “monstrous other” instead of the simply “other.”

One might be pushed into a liminal space, perhaps tricked or forced, but a character in a novel rarely ventures there purposefully. Yet liminal spaces play an essential role in character growth as a space where decisions must be made. The anthropologist Bjorn Thomassen analyzed Victor Turner's concepts and concluded that "Turner realized that 'liminality' served not only to identify the importance of in-between periods, but also to understand the human reactions to liminal experiences: the way in which personality was shaped by liminality, the sudden foregrounding of agency, and the sometimes dramatic tying together of thought and experience" (14). This tying together of thought and experience shifts the concept of liminality from threshold to hallway, from simple transition to multilayered concept.

Recent scholars have pointed out that the globalization of our world has given rise to feelings of liminality within a populace that might not know the name of such a phenomenon. Robert Daly traces this feeling all the way back to American founders writing: "Stranded on the shoreline, no longer British, not yet American, our Pilgrim forebears were clearly liminal....," later noting "the recurrence of liminality in American history and literature" (72). Writing of current events in Great Britain, Nick Bentley mentions "shifting understanding of regional and national identity" calling the United Kingdom a politically unified state though "culturally it is an amalgam of social, ethnic, and national identities" (161). The same might be said about the United States; it often seems that while its denizens share a common physical space they are often mentally, emotionally, and politically separate. Bentley calls this a "cultural diversity" (161) pointing to colonialism and diaspora as generators of liminality. Though he is writing of the United Kingdom this is again a phenomenon that we see in the United States. Into this space speculative fiction reaches, to speak to those who feel the strengthening effects of such a diversity and work to understand it. Readers can venture into wine-dark outer space or the wine-

dark psyches of fictional characters and discover new monstrously other creatures with which to people their dreams even as authors reach deep into the past to draw upon the fantastic lingering there. Literature often presents a metaphor for the world and if the metaphor is used often enough it becomes embedded in reality, growing and changing as it is passed from person to person, often back through new writing. The recent rise of speculative fiction within popular culture is difficult to deny – Neil Gaiman is one wildly popular modern author, movies have recently been made from the books of J.R.R. Tolkein, and George R. R. Martin’s series *A Song of Ice and Fire* is now wildly popular as a television series – as our world becomes more fraught with liminal spaces, we turn to a representative of such in order to make sense of the world around us. Because speculative fiction deals so heavily with liminality, it is time to revisit the definition and reintegrate the concept of time with it.

The most-used definition presented at the beginning of this paper treats time as a fixed point or another place, as in the example of the turn of the century. In an article titled *Liminal to Liminoid In Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology*, Turner states “it is more than just a matter of entering a temple – there must be in addition a rite which changes the quality of time also, or constructs a cultural realm which is defined as ‘out of time,’ that is, beyond or outside the time which measures secular processes and routines” (57). Here Turner is thinking of time as more than a fixed point, or series of fixed points. It is the human experience of time, the fluctuating immeasurable thing that is beyond the physical bound of minutes and seconds that tick on the clock to which he refers. We experience this fluctuation daily – when a class is going badly and time seems to drag on, when a paper is due and suddenly the day before the due-date has arrived and we are still scrambling to correct minor mistakes... The changing nature of time that we can name with so many examples also includes memory as a kind of time.

We often remember events in relation to other events, creating a personal timeline. The memory of these events may be triggered by small incidents; Proust famously writes of the connections between smell and memory. In the case of memory, liminality does not create a threshold between external, physical states, but is an interior state of being, connecting moments in a personal timeline. The memory exists both outside and inside the timeline, and when presented in literature the memory often becomes the story. An excellent example of this is Margaret Atwood's novel *The Blind Assassin* in which the narrator is writing a journal meant for no one but herself and her grand-daughter. Atwood skillfully adds another layer of memory by admitting that she has written a famous semi-autobiographical piece of quasi-speculative fiction and attributed it to her younger sister after that sister's death. While the concept is difficult to describe, it makes perfect sense to the reader as the plot unfolds. A reader can hold all of these concepts in her mind: the idea that a fictional character is remembering something that is not happening to them currently while the timeline of the story progresses. The moment is not a part of the character's *now* but it has worked to shape that *now*. Entering this liminality allows us to understand current motivations in the character's timeline. Sociologically, liminality is a "period and area of ambiguity" (Turner, 57) and the function of memory within the text allows an area of ambiguity within a stable character. As the butterfly in *The Last Unicorn* says "No, no, listen, don't listen to me, listen" (276): the information is there, we just need to put it together in a new way. Listen to the memory, not the words that define it. The memory has shape without the words but we use the words to define it: words are the symbols that bring it to consciousness and so when consciousness changes the words should too. Memory makes time liminal and liminality turns time into memory. (Listen. Don't listen to *me*, listen.) The theory becomes even more slippery as one considers that, because liminality is an anthropological phenomenon as well as a

literary one, the author and readers also step into a liminal space, communicating with one another through layers of personal experience.

Liminality is not a new concept; an archetypal character who deals with it is the Greek goddess Persephone. Able to live in both the Underworld and above ground, Persephone is symbolic of the hybridization of dualities that often denotes characters who have walked the liminal hallway. Her journey is a literal manifestation of the psychological phenomenon that occurs when moving from state to state, a journey honored through time by specified rituals called the Eleusenian Mysteries. It is true that the mythos surrounding Demeter and Persephone is generally taught as an explanation for the seasons, but this is a very basic definition of the myth. As a scholar delves deeper into the mythology and the surrounding stories, rituals, and beliefs, she begins to understand that this story is much more than a simple transition between states. In the “Preface and Acknowledgements” section of her influential work on *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Helene P. Foley suggests: “In reading Western literature critically, as anthropologists of the tradition, we must ask questions of the texts that the original authors might not have dreamed of asking” (xiii). This statement points to the way that story influences itself, the way that memory is transmitted through the stories that we tell ourselves and one another. These stories shape memory, giving humans a general backdrop of understanding against which to discuss larger theories and concepts. Persephone becomes an archetype for the travel through liminal spaces because the simplicity of her story allows it to be echoed in newer tales. One does not need to know the nuances of her tale in order to trace its influences, but for my purposes it is important to understand her naming. In her edition of *The Homeric “Hymn to Demeter,”* Foley points out that when Persephone is above ground she is called Kôre, which simply means “the Maiden”. She does not become Persephone until after Hades takes her to the underworld. She

has both “before” and “after” names, denoting her participation in the ritual of liminality (39). It is important to note that, since the myth is so embedded in common Western knowledge, many authors do not purposefully allude to it. I prefer to call minor references to the goddess persephonic *implications* because of their implied, almost subconscious nature. Even if the name of the goddess is rarely invoked, the implications of Persephone’s transformation hover just out of sight, casting the shade of liminality over characters that carry echoes of her ancient voice.

To illustrate this expansion of definition, I have chosen two speculative texts. *The Last Unicorn* by Peter S. Beagle is a modern fairy tale that traces the quest of the titular character to find out if she is truly the last. With this story the author explores the experience of time and memory by turning an immortal creature human, plunging her into chaos and confusion that we commonly identify with liminality. The unicorn is not the only character to struggle with liminality: many of her companions also display the marks of its small teeth. Philip K. Dick is a master of such work in his imagined futures and so I have chosen *A Scanner Darkly* to help explore the more “scientific” approach to time and memory as liminal space. The main character in *Scanner* is not redeemed; he never comes out of the liminal state that he enters unlike the unicorn who defeats her demons and returns from liminality. By the end of *Scanner* the reader may not be sure that any conclusion she draws is correct due to the chilling afterword in which Dick reveals that his story is based upon people he knew (himself included). This author folds time and memory around himself and his reader, blanketing everything in the uncertainty of liminal space. In these works, we see two examples of multidimensional liminality created by the confluence of time and memory. Close analysis of them gives further insight to the new twists of this theory.

I have already alluded to the liminal quality of *The Last Unicorn* by quoting the butterfly from that work in the opening of this piece. He is not a recurring character within the text but a gatekeeper: his words help spur the unicorn to her ultimate fate. Though she first hears of the disappearance of her brethren from human lips, the butterfly lives closer to her world – he is both a wild creature and a repository of scraps of human lore and knowledge, a bridge between the two worlds. In other words, the butterfly is the first liminal character introduced in the text. On the surface, the butterfly is lighthearted, a little piece of fluff. The unicorn thinks “All they know are songs and poetry, and anything else they hear. They mean well, but they can’t keep things straight. And why should they? They die so soon” (274). Yet his words are the repository of a deeper knowledge. Yes, he spouts poetry but as the unicorn listens, the reader begins to understand that his poetry represents the memory of humankind, that those specific words shape human memory about unicorns. It is not the language that is important but the memory that the language preserves. This preserved memory can be shared with others only through language and so is both protected and shaped by it. It also holds the key to the fate of her kind, the key that unlocks the door to her eventual liminalization. The butterfly holds the words in his mind which in turn hold the memory through time and space, transmitting it to the proper point and catalyzing the unicorn into action. His mind is the liminal space through which the knowledge reaches the unicorn. She is happy in her forest, she tries to avoid going into the wide world, yet this idea weighs in the back of her mind until she can no longer remain within her safe space. She must venture into the uncertainty of liminality in order to discover the meaning of these transmitted memories. It is here that time and memory create an atmosphere of liminality that is ripe for change, inviting adventure rather than stagnation.

Beagle enters into such a liminal meta-space multiple times within the narrative, emphasizing the ways in which knowledge is transmitted through the hallway of time and memory. After escaping Mommy Fortuna and the harpy, Scmendrick tells the tale of his mentor, Nikos, who once turned a unicorn into a young man. Later, we see this story become fact as Scmendrick's uncontrolled magic turns the unicorn into the Lady Amalthea. On the surface life imitates art, but one is left to wonder if the magic ran such a course because the story was told. It seems that the physical words of the story create that hallway-like connection between past and present, the memory and the now. The magic is able to rush through this liminal space to do what it has done before. Scmendrick does not wield the power but is a conduit for it; when magic happens it is usually because he has intoned "Do as you will" (323). He becomes a liminal space in the moment he allows magic into the world, making him a character that not only exists within liminality but also holds it within himself in turn.

The unicorn's transformation is not the first instance of magic taking the form of story, either. The Mayor of a small town tells Scmendrick "...We always welcome strangers with tales to tell and songs to sing. They broaden our outlook...set us to looking inward..." (310). This statement points out the duality of stories, which allow people to examine both the world around them but also themselves and their places within that world, a duality that is echoed within the liminality of both Scmendrick and the unicorn. When Captain Cully and his men ask to see magic, it shows them Robin Hood and his merry band. This illusion is out of Scmendrick's control; the simple tricks that he can control leave the men "without wonder" (322). It is when Scmendrick becomes suddenly angry that true magic takes over: "he dropped seven spinning balls that had been growing brighter and brighter as he juggled them (on a good evening he could make them catch fire), let go all his hated skills, and closed his eyes" (323). The magic "sighed

through him, beginning somewhere secret... something moved more surely in his body than he ever had. It spoke with his voice, commanding” (323). He becomes a mere vessel for the power that makes him weak and once it has worked he must “[wait] to be Scmendrick again” while he wonders what happened. (323) Though he is described as a conduit, or hallway, for magic, Scmendrick’s inner voice speaks as though he can control it, saying “I wonder what I did. I did something” (323). He denies his liminality, longing to take control of his fate, but because he has called the magic he has become the catalyst for the thing it has wrought. Seen from the outside he seems to be in control, as shown by the reactions of those around him. This duality of character further proves his liminality – he is not what he seems to be because of the curse levied upon him by his mentor. We see the echo of this liminality later, in Amalthea’s duality of form caused by the magic’s participation in her story. Her liminality is imposed from without; the magic works upon her form instead of working through her. Robin Hood appears to a band of men who can openly admit that they masquerade as such a hero. It is their dream to be remembered in the same way that he is but they are unwilling to follow completely in his footsteps. The unicorn becomes human, mimicking the story of Nikos because it has already been told. Like water, magic seems to follow the easiest path, a path cut through the world by the words that form the tribal memories embedded in tales and stories. Such tidy dualities are not always a hallmark of liminality but in these instances they underline its presence.

While meta-story casts a definite shade of liminality over the work, Beagle extends the emphasis on liminality even further. Within his text one sees both the hallway and the seashore. The sea is presented baldly as itself; one need not struggle to find the metaphor. The hallway is also straightforward, though not so much as the sea; it is a mystical pathway through an old clock that reaches to the underworld of the Red Bull’s lair. These are the concrete examples of

liminality embedded within the text and meta-story. The butterfly acts as a repository of memory, acts as the catalyst to set the unicorn in her journey. The story of Nikos's unicorn forms the shape of Scmendrick's magic. These examples show that it takes memory to grow and, according to Victor Turner and anthropological theory, liminality is a space of growth.

Images of the sea first appear right before the Red Bull makes his entrance. As she prepares to battle the Red Bull the unicorn is "Mad, dancing, sea-white" (352). This passage, occurring just before the unicorn's transformation to Amalthea, foreshadows her transition to liminality. But there is another reference to the sea in the next paragraph, one that adds to the confusion of the moment. Molly says aloud "But it has to be the sea, it's supposed to be" in response to the vision of Haggard's castle on fire (352). The castle sits on a rock overlooking the sea into which the Red Bull has chased the rest of the unicorns so it stands to reason that Molly might think that the sea would appear to swallow the group in the same way that they have been swallowed by liminality. Every time they meet the Red Bull they are plunged into a liminal space like the unicorns have been plunged into the sea, and they must somehow make a change in order to escape. This change is especially strong in the two characters most affected by liminality. The unicorn's change is physical: her shape shifts. Scmendrick's change is more subtle; he begins to understand the nature of magic while in these moments of stacked liminality. The Red Bull is about to appear, bringing a light like the sunrise behind the horizon, illuminating the world like a forest fire so that it appears to burn. This juxtaposition between fire and water signals the liminality into which the unicorn will descend, a liminality that the bull shares. Dawn and dusk are traditionally liminal space, after all, and the bull's coming is like the dawn (351). Scmendrick also realizes that "[the bull] doesn't care for daylight" (358) and realizes that that is worth knowing although the thought exists in a vague confusion, it is not fully reasoned.

This confusion leads to the turning point of the story, the point in which Schmendrick allows magic into the world to transform the unicorn. He again becomes the conduit for magic: “What words the magic spoke this second time, he never knew surely. They left him like eagles, and he let them go; and when the last one was away, the emptiness rushed back with a thunderclap that threw him on his face” (359). Here he acknowledges his complete inability to shape the magic, it forms its own words, words that he cannot remember, and leaves him empty after it has done its work. Much later in the story, after the characters have undergone a growth period, he will remember how to use the words though he does not remember them exactly. At that point he begins to emerge from liminality. His acknowledgement here is the signal that he has accepted the need for growth. Moving through the liminal hallway provides such a growth. Molly Grue is a character that highlights this growth. Molly is the caregiver, the character who realizes what has occurred though she blames Schmendrick. He has, after all, opened the door to the magic and allowed it to come in to the world. Though he has not immediately shaped the story in his mind, the history that has come before shapes the experience. Even though he realizes that he acts as a conduit he can also take credit for the action. “A magician is a porter, a donkey carrying his master where he must. The magician calls, but the magic chooses... I am a bearer... I am a dwelling, I am a messenger,” after which Molly snaps “You are an idiot” (231).

These two approach magic, and therefore liminality, in different ways. Schmendrick sees what it can be; embroiled in the liminality he looks down the pathway from the midpoint and tries to project the future. Molly is not a liminal character. She stands outside of her liminality; she has already become herself. Her personal journey allows her to see events as they are instead of how they can be, setting her up as a guardian. Through the experience Schmendrick insists that he can change the Lady Amalthea back even though the story of Nikos and his unicorn does

not end with the reversion of that mortal. Molly is the character that shows skepticism. Their diverse past experiences have shaped the ways that they approach their current liminal hallway. In the distant past Scmendrick's mentor realized that his "ineptitude is so vast, [his] incompetence so profound" that he was certain that he was "inhabited by greater power than [Nikos had] ever known" (364). In anthropological terms, Scmendrick needs to participate in a coming of age ceremony in order to achieve actualization. Once he moves through the uncertainty of the liminal space and understands his full potential he will become a whole magician, able to exert control over the magic. Until then he is only a conduit, a hallway through which the magic passes on its way into the world. His only control over magic seems to be through memory, the liminal space that connects all human beings, making it stronger than a single person. Nikos realized that Scmendrick could not control such powerful magic and decided to freeze him in perpetual youth so that he might have time to develop the needed skills. "I told you that I was older than I look," he tells Molly after relating this story. "I was born mortal, and I have been immortal for a long, foolish time, and one day I will be mortal again; so I know something that a unicorn cannot know. Whatever can die is beautiful – more beautiful than a unicorn, who lives forever, and who is the most beautiful creature in the world" (364). He does not forget parts of his extended life but uses those memories to grow and to learn. The liminality of memory engenders a change within the perpetually young magician that allows him to eventually gain control of the liminal spaces within himself through which the magic will travel.

The path of Scmendrick's life foreshadows the path that the unicorn will take. In the end, the unicorn takes something from her mortality like Scmendrick has taken this lesson from his immortality. They both have the persephonic ability to bestride a liminal space – the space between mortality and immortality. A major indication of persephonic implication of liminality

is the name shift. Like the young goddess above ground, the unicorn is referred to as merely “the unicorn” before her transformation. Only after her violent magical transformation does she become the Lady Amalthea. Amalthea later physically descends underground through an actual liminal space created by magic, much like Persephone is dragged underground.

This point of liminality is marked by a skeleton, symbol of the dead, and even the skeleton is not completely dead. He can speak, he can remember, and he seems to feel. He is another gatekeeper, another repository of memory, harkening back to the butterfly and his specific liminalities. The skeleton tells the travelers “The way is through the clock... You simply walk through the clock and there you are” (418). He means this literally though Scmendrick fails to understand. The skeleton explains:

When I was alive, I believed – as you do – that time was at least as real and solid as myself, and probably more so. I said ‘one o’ clock’ as though I could see it and ‘Monday’ as though I could find it on the map; and let myself be hurried along from minute to minute, day to day, year to year, as though I were actually moving from one place to another. Like everyone else, I lived in a house bricked up with seconds and minutes, weekends and New Year’s Days, and I never went outside until I died, because there was no other door. Now I know that I could have walked through the walls (419).

In other words, time itself is a liminal space. It is a human construct, built for clarification, that traps us until death releases us. Time works with memory to create the liminal hallway; without memory the human mind would have no concept of time. Indeed, memory allows time to become unfixed, to telescope around the rememberer depending upon human perception, to bring events suddenly to the surface in a fit of Proustian reminiscence.

The skeleton is an immortal being and so is no longer governed by time, though having been human he understands the human point of view. Scmendrick, for all his temporary immortality, is still governed by human rules and so cannot at first grasp the concept. Amalthea is quickly approaching human, her eyes have become the mirrors that Haggard expected to first see and she has cried (though Molly hopes the tears to be sea-spray). Molly has never dealt with immortality; the ritual of her liminality brought her into womanhood, and so is bewildered by such talk. These characters are all in different stages of liminality, forced to commune in order to travel through the liminal hallway together. The multi-staged nature of the group causes confusion and hesitation among the members. “You can strike your own time, and start the count anywhere” (419) the skeleton urges the group. At this point in the story, the liminal hallway becomes concrete as time shifts around characters. The narrative point of view hovers close to Molly, the most human character, as she sees Scmendrick’s face “smudged from within, like the inside of a lantern glass, with fear and confusion” (420). She hears footsteps and breathing but is disoriented. “I still think it’s a real clock,” she thinks. “That’s all right though. I can walk through a real clock,” (420). Molly can understand and explain because she is the one who can hold both the concreteness and abstraction within her mind without the need to reconcile them. She has moved through the abstraction of liminality and into the concreteness of becoming. It is Amalthea that leads the way though, Amalthea who is not yet embedded completely within her liminality (like Scmendrick) nor yet completely through her journey (like Molly). She is neither a whole person (like Molly) nor a part of the monstrous other (like the Red Bull). She finds the path into the bull’s lair, a cavernous, literal underworld in which her final battle must take place. Again, Beagle alludes to the myth of Persephone, placing his characters in an arena similar to her space of growth. They, too, must travel underground in order to become something greater than

they have been in the past. It is here that Scmendrick begins to find his way out of liminality. He can finally take charge of the magic. At the point which he is needed most he:

stepped into the open and said a few words. They were short words, undistinguished either by melody or harshness and Scmendrick himself could not hear them...But he knew what they meant, and he knew exactly how to say them, and he knew that he could say them again when he wanted to, in the same way or in a different way. Now he spoke them gently and with joy, and as he did so he felt his immortality fall from him like armor, or like a shroud (434).

In removing the unicorn's mortality Scmendrick escapes his immortality. It is not this that defeats the Red Bull, however. The unicorn finds the power to defeat the bull in the lesson that she learned as a human – the lesson of love. Her hero, Prince Lir, lies dead at the bull's feet and though her immortality has been restored her mortality is close enough that she can remember love and remember grief. She has walked the liminal hallway and chosen the room in which she will reside.

Again the sea plays a part – it is the cage that holds the unicorns and then it is the unicorns themselves: “the whiteness, flowering in the tattered water, their bodies arching with the streaked marble hollows of the waves, their manes and tails and the fragile beards of the males burning in the sunlight, their eyes as dark and jeweled as the deep sea – and the shining of their horns, the seashell shining of the horns! The horns came riding in like the rainbow masts of silver ships. But they would not come to land while the Bull was there” (438). These unicorns are transitional rather than liminal. They are trapped, immovable and unchanging even though the sea is a liminal space. They refuse to leave their sanctuary until everything is certain, until Haggard's castle has fallen and the bull has swum out to sea. Only then can they emerge and

truly be within the world again. They did not go through the trials of their sister and so do not carry the memory of that liminal time. When they do emerge, they run past the small group huddled in the sand – the only thoughts in their minds are to get back to their forests, to become the same as they once were. The titular unicorn is different. She has grown through liminality by walking the hallway, by interacting with the human constructs of time and memory. The sea stretches from shore to horizon for her as well as along the sand – it has become more than a simple trap. In the end, the unicorn states “I have been mortal, and some part of me is mortal yet. I am full of tears and hunger and the fear of death, though I cannot weep, and I want nothing, and I cannot die” (453). Her journey through the liminal hallway has changed her even though she returns to her original form and has released her brethren from their liminalities.

Not only has her experience released the other unicorns but it has helped Scmendrick move through his own. She recognizes her journey with the words: “My people are in the world again. No sorrow will live in me as long as that joy – save one, and I thank you for that too... I will try to go home” (453). She understands the change in herself and also understands that this will affect the way that she sees her home. The other unicorns, having never been mortal, can return without thought because they have never faced the liminal hallway, have never walked through it. Scmendrick has always been a wandering magician so he has nowhere to return. His journey has led him to a different stage in his life as well but he will have less work to fit into the world. These concrete examples of liminality work to emphasize the way that time and memory work as liminal spaces, adding to the lessons that the characters take from the journey.

While Peter S. Beagle gives examples of the liminal hallway and seashore as a “real” passageway and a “real” sea, Philip K. Dick asks his reader to stretch her imagination. The reader meets his main character mid-journey, arguably at the climax of his character arc as he

slides into drug addled confusion. This main character is unnamable because of the way that his personalities are splintered and interlaced. He is Arctor when he is acting as one splinter, Fred as another splinter, Bruce as still another splinter, but there is no real name for him as a whole. To avoid confusion I will simply refer to him as X unless writing about a specific, splintered phase. Instead of following a clear-cut pathway like the unicorn's quest, Dick's reader must untangle the knotted skein of the character's mind. If we accept the unicorn as a persephonic figure then might we accept X as one and allow him a positive ending to his story? We were able to meet the unicorn in her Kôre phase and follow her to her underworld (as Amalthea) and back because her story begins at the beginning. X's story begins in the middle, where he is already caught in his underworld of deepening paranoia. Dick lets his reader know that X had a life before he became involved with the drug enforcement authorities. If we accept this memory as "real" in a world of shifting reality then it is obvious that we have met X during his descent, like Persephone on the way to Hades. Heightening this comparison, X emerges in a final incarnation, Bruce, upon a field of flowers. True, these flowers are that mysterious substance D, but substance D is also the catalyst to X's transformation. The reader meets him after he has become entangled in its web, Dick never shows his life without reference to the substance. Even X's memories of a life before are vague and insubstantial. To further the allusion, the small blue flowers are interspersed with corn. This field connects X to Persephone through the flowers of her Kôre stage. Not only does Hades kidnap her from a flowery field but the *Hymn* extols her as "the flower faced maiden" (Foley 1.8).

Adding to the liminal perspective of this new world, she claims that "Aristotle emphasized that the initiate does not learn something but is made to experience the Mysteries and change his or her state of mind. A rhetorician offers the following description of the

experience at Eleusis: ‘I came out of the mystery hall feeling like a stranger to myself’” (69). This experience of liminality parallels X’s loss of self to substance D, tying him to the ancient rituals celebrating liminal goddesses. Dick points explicitly to worship at this point as well. Bruce has gotten to his knees to see the tiny blue flowers better and the Executive Director, Donald, can only view him as a burnt-out shell. “So get up and stop worshipping – this isn’t you god any more, your idol, although it was once” (721), Donald says.

At first Bruce can only comprehend in flashes and the reader is drawn into his misfiring brain but then the main character realizes “I saw death rising from the earth, from the ground itself, in one blue field, in stubbled color” (722). Dick mirrors Persephone’s descent to Hades here; if she was life taken into the earth then these flowers are death rising from it. There is a resurrection, or the beginning of one, as Bruce looks “forward inside his mind, where no one could see, to Thanksgiving” (722). This moment could mark a cyclical point, a place where X has the chance to begin his journey along the liminal hallway, to swim up from the depths of the liminal sea. This is the note upon which Dick chooses to end his story, a rare glimpse of possibility, vague though it may be. The reader stands within her own liminality, peering into the veiled workings of the character, drawing upon her own experience in order to guess what may happen next. Bruce has the ability to remember his friends though he shows little sign of remembering much else, and the reader can hope that a reunion will help him become more than he is. If it does not, at least he has remembered to take the flower to give to Donna. He may have been used cruelly by his handlers but perhaps there is hope for those junkies who have followed him down such a path. Dick, being the author that he is, must crush this hope with his Author’s note. He tells the reader directly:

In Greek drama they were beginning, as a society, to discover science, which means causal law. Here in this novel there is Nemesis: not fate, because any one of us could have chosen to stop playing in the street, but, as I narrate from the deepest part of my life and heart, a dreadful Nemesis for those who kept on playing. I, myself, am not a character in this novel; I am the novel (724).

Current scholarship understands Nemesis to be the Greek goddess of divine retribution – she takes revenge upon mortals who suffer the sin of arrogance or excessive pride (hubris). The characters in this novel show nothing if not excessive pride through the delusion that they understand something about the world that others are missing. This reference to Nemesis also points to Dick’s understanding and use of Greek mythology and it is not a giant leap to one of the most popular goddesses in that body of mythology, one who has traveled the liminal hallway from time immemorial.

Not only is the field a liminal space because of its ties to Persephone or the fact that Foley states baldly that “meadows in Greek myth are liminal sites” (33), but it also acts as a metaphorical sea. The flowers are blue, “such lovely little blue flowers” (720), and are interspersed with corn that might wave in the wind and sigh like sea upon sand. It could be the beginning of a new cycle for Dick’s main character if one chooses to cast a hopeful light upon Bruce. Perhaps he is beginning to emerge from liminality into being a new and whole person. If, however, the reader takes Dick at his word and considers Bruce to be forever-Bruce, a brain-dead automaton, then he is trapped in a psychological liminality and the field/sea is exactly the place for him. In this case, the ritual has misfired and the wanderer cannot find the door out of the hallway. He is trapped inside of his own decaying mind.

Even before Bruce is sent to the farm he is shown to be a cyclical character, traveling through liminality. He tells another supervisor, Mike, “‘I want to be with something living.’ Mike explain[s] ‘The ground is living... Do you have any agricultural background?’” (714), and here agriculture could point again to liminal Persephone’s mother, Demeter. Mike thinks of Bruce as a dead thing that somehow keeps moving yet extends the hope that he might one day recover – extends the hope through a connection with agriculture.

But maybe, if he is placed in the right spot, in the right stance, he can still see down, and see the ground. And recognize that it is there. And place something which is alive, something different from himself, in it. To grow (715), Mike feels that even though Bruce’s brain retains only rudimentary function he can still connect with the land. Agriculture’s cyclical quality transfers to Bruce through Mike’s hopes for that connection, and the only way to work through the cycle is to travel the liminal hallway of human growth. If he is to travel the hallway Bruce cannot remain in a vegetative state, he must move mentally. Bruce must partake in the ritual of growth that feeds a Turnerian notion of liminality. On the heels of this thought Mike refers to Bruce as “Arctor-Fred-Bruce” (715); this is the only point in the novel where all three names are linked. Mike knows all of X’s identities, unlike even the man himself. Mike’s thoughts bring X full-circle: “I wonder... if it was New Path that did this to him. Sent a substance out to get him like this, to make him this way *so they would ultimately receive him back?*” (715). This paranoia highlights the cyclicity of the work and of X’s journey. There is also a reference to the beginning of the tale in Mike’s thoughts about X: “now you have become a bug. Spray a bug with toxin and it dies; spray a man, spray his brain, and he becomes an insect that clacks and vibrates about in a closed circle forever” (714). The cycle is closed in this case, it leads nowhere and prevents growth. It is X, the whole man, who

has become a metaphorical bug in Mike's eyes. *A Scanner Darkly* begins: "Once a guy stood all day shaking bugs from his hair..." (513). The reader does not know this character in the beginning, though he is later referenced as a friend of Bob Arctor's who cracked up and was sent away. The bugs were never there, like X is not really a bug. They are a side effect, a manifestation of the paranoia that Substance D causes in its victims. This is an example of what happens when memory decays, when the inability to hold the events of one's life in a way that allows understanding breaks down and washes the rememberer outside of himself. This is not an example of liminality because X is static, completely still without goal or guidepost. Perhaps he has taken a wrong turn in the liminal hallway and come to a dead end, a room without windows whose door seemed to disappear once it was shut. If he fails to find a way out then this is his new world, much simpler than the one he left behind, where he can be just Bruce instead of a complex, multilayered being. Seeing him this way puts him in the same place the unicorns are within the sea – trapped within liminality but unable to participate in the growth it engenders. What, then, might represent the hallway of liminality within this work? Beagle gives us the image of the clock and the descent to a tangible underworld represented by the cave of the Red Bull. Dick's hallway requires a deeper understanding of metaphor; the technology in his novel combines to cause a psychological journey with a distinctive downward cant.

The first chapter of *A Scanner Darkly* is seemingly anecdotal: the reader does not meet X until the second chapter. This chapter opens with a Lions Club meeting full of normal people. It is important to note the people here, the "normal" people, because they so rarely appear in the book. "He beamed, this man wearing his pink waffle-fiber suit and wide plastic yellow tie and blue shirt and fake leather shoes; he was an overweight man, overaged as well, over-happy even when there was little or nothing to be happy about" (526). Dick describes the host in clothing

that was considered futuristic at the time of this writing. The clothes that his other characters wear, the junkies, are not described in great detail. The people in the first chapter might have been contemporary to the reader but in order to describe the technology the author must project some kind of difference in worlds. The audience, the reader is told, “mirrored the host in every possible way” (527). This is a sea of faceless futuristic people as opposed to the named, familiar junkies in the first chapter. This theme of facelessness normality versus identity is something with which X will struggle throughout the novel; it is part of what causes his schism of self and deepening liminality.

At this point, X is introduced as Fred “because that is the code name under which he reports” (527). The host proudly presents this information to his audience, along with the fact that once X is safely ensconced in his scramble suit as Fred he “cannot be identified by voice, or even by technological voiceprint, or by appearance” (527). Fred is “a vague blur and nothing more” (527). He fades into even more anonymity than those around him, encased in a visual representation of liminality. This visual representation of him is able to stand at both ends of the hall, the opposite of his quickly dividing self. Dick follows these juxtaposed descriptions – the interchangeable man in his garish clothing and the vague blur – with a scientific explanation of the development of the scramble suit. It is long and complex, and the reader may take it as scientific fact. A scientist enters a drug-induced dream-state, sees visions of modernist paintings, and develops the idea of the scramble suit:

Basically, his design consisted of a multifaceted quartz lens hooked to a miniaturized computer whose memory banks held up to a million and a half physiognomic fraction-representations of various people: men and women, children, with every variant encoded then projected outward in all directions

equally onto a superthin shroudlike membrane large enough to fit around an average human. As the computer looped through its banks, it projected every conceivable eye color, hair color, shape and type of nose, formation of teeth, configuration of facial bone structure – the entire shroudlike membrane took on whatever physical characteristics were projected at any nanosecond, and then switched to the next...the wearer of the scramble suit was Everyman and in every combination... during the course of an hour (528).

The suit is a visual representation of liminal space, encasing the wearer in complete anonymity because of the ever-changing façade of faces.

But why does Dick choose to encase his protagonist in the features of every human being, including women and children? Why not go for a simpler cloak of futuristic silver with a simple voice changer? The scramble suit is an erasure of identity through the representation of the masses. Dick blithely points out that the scientist fed his own features into the program so that his own features appear on every suit every fifty years. “It was his closest claim to immortality” (529). This is the key to the answer. The scramble suit is at the same time an erasure of identity and a memorial to a certain identity. Fred first appears to the reader as a vague blur in a sea of anonymous, interchangeable faces. “In his scramble suit, Fred, who was also Robert Arctor, groaned and thought: This is terrible” (529), Dick tells his reader. This simple sentence sets the stage for X’s eventual loss of self. He is already a duality, fluctuating between two personalities when the reader meets him, but he is able to hold that duality in his mind as he stands within a shifting outer layer.

Even as he gives his rote law enforcement speech as Fred, his primary personality (Bob Arctor) comments from the sidelines. Fred talks about “animals” who dress like hippies and push

drugs on the innocent of America one moment and the next “Robert Arctor halted. Stared at them, at the straights in their fat suits, their fat ties, their fat shoes, and he thought Substance D can’t destroy their brains; they have none” (530). Yet his audience assumes that he is like them, that both the scramble suit and the hippie clothing are just disguises, that underneath it all he is another blank face encased in the latest fashion. The realization that he does not have the third personality sits with the reader; it is the first hint of X’s downward spiral. He can still separate the halves of his life but he seems to stop caring for a moment. This is not merely a side effect of existing within the liminality of the suit – Arctor is Fred’s cover and Arctor is a junkie, hooked on Substance D. Fred’s supervisors watch him carefully for signs of burnout because of this.

But the suits are only a narrative device used to describe a state of being. “At first he believed it to be the scramble suits that both of them wore,” the narrator states, describing Fred and his supervisor, Hank, “they could not physically sense each other. Later on he conjectured that the suits made no actual difference; it was the situation itself... He had to neutralize himself; they both did, him more so than Hank. They became neutral; they spoke in a neutral fashion; they looked neutral” (554). Here the technology is a vehicle for neutrality; it creates an in-betweenness that allows complete anonymity to the wearer. When a person is safely inside he can be anything or anyone. It is an illustration of the potential of liminality even as it reaches through the liminal hallway between fiction and reality to the reader’s mind. Fred’s scramble suit, coupled with Arctor’s personality, pushes X into psychological liminality. Fred and Arctor are opposites: one pursues and persecutes the other but both are the same. X struggles to keep the two reconciled in his mind as he slips deeper into the grip of Substance D and eventually slides over the edge into insanity. In this case, liminality works against the character within it. One

often sees liminality presented as a space in which to reconcile such duality of personality but Substance D represses that ability and leads X into a closed loop.

The second piece of technology is the eponymous scanner. Eventually, Fred must bug Arctor's house and the tenuous reconciliation within his mind begins to break down through over-examination. As he spins absurdities with his friends, Arctor thinks:

How many Bob Arctors are there? A weird and fucked-up thought. Two, I can think of, he thought. The one called Fred, who will be watching the other one, called Bob. The same person. Or is it? Is Fred actually the same as Bob? Does anybody know? I would know, if anyone did, because I'm the only person in the world that knows that Fred is Bob Arctor. But, he thought, who am I? Which is me? (585).

He is beginning to question his own sense of self because of the task he must perform. The scramble suit causes X to feel disconnected from humanity, this effect is amplified by the copious amounts of Substance D that he consumes. It is the threshold to the liminal hallway of these thoughts that are triggered by knowing that he will be viewing himself, as a suspect, through a scanner.

In an article titled "Telling Stories: Memory and Narrative," Mark Freeman points out that memory itself is non-chronological. "Far from being the mere video-tape like replica of the personal past it was often assumed [memory] to be, [memory] has emerged instead as a richly textured, multivocal text, as potentially relevant to the literary critic or the cultural historian as to the psychologist" (263). Freeman is writing specifically about memoir, but since the "Author's Note" of *Scanner* reveals it to be the bitter truth gleaned from personal experience this Freeman quote is applicable. Within this story, Dick's memories work to create a fictional world into

which his reader sinks. The reader, in turn, brings her own memories to the text, interacting with the characters in a liminal space outside of the book, in her own mind. Peter Middleton and Tim Woods present the same vein of thought in their “introduction” to *Literatures of Memory: History, time, and space in postwar writing*:

With the technology of writing, a vastly extended social memory becomes possible, enabling a society to extend its control over large areas of space and time and to ensure its posterity by transmitting records of its achievements to descendants on whom its future integrity depends. Paul Connerton summarizes this view well: ‘what has been fixed in writing enters into a sphere of publicly accessible meanings in which everyone who can subsequently read that writing has potentially a share in its meanings’ (5).

Writing allows the transmission of memory by allowing future readers access to the thoughts and feelings of an author during a certain time period. The reader does not need to have been alive during that time but may understand what was going on through associative occurrences. Peter S. Beagle offers the butterfly as a symbol of this community memory. Philip K. Dick offers a scanner – literally the videotape to which Freeman refers. It is X’s memory that illustrates the liminal qualities of videotape, sending him reeling in a drug-fueled stupor from moment to moment, fluctuating wildly across an ever-widening gulf between reality and paranoia. “Every junkie,” thinks Fred, “is a recording” (633), even as his world begins to schism and the liminal hallway spirals out of his grasp.

Authors ground texts through liminal spaces of memory because time is often so difficult to pin down. Time is a liminal hallway within human reality, especially when it intersects with

memory to create spaces within which the reader might connect with a different era. In other words, *A Scanner Darkly* connects the reader with the drug culture of the nineteen sixties and seventies even as it reaches forward to an imagined future. This hallway branches to include the reality in which the reader exists. She understands that this is fiction yet also that it is a form of memory. The layers of this specific liminality add to X's multilayered reality at the point he is watching himself through the scanner.

In Chapter Ten X moves from Bob Arctor to Fred, the reader has followed Arctor's adventures then suddenly experiences Fred's perceptions upon seeing himself through his own eyes. Toward the end of the chapter Fred contemplates his duality of self and "his mind [goes] into spins and double trips and then split[s] in half, directly down the middle" (640). He is momentarily unable to reconcile the pieces of his splintered self, his reality twists, and for a moment he is left clinging to only the liminal hallway, sorting through his thoughts. He knows he is Fred but also struggles to reconcile the Arctor personality "When you get down to it, I'm Arctor" (640) he thinks, and the Fred part recoils at this idea. X is experiencing a duality in himself because the liminal hallway between scanner and watcher (that same hallway that connects reader to text) connects two opposing splinters of his personality. He is both the junkie and the narcotics officer pursuing that junkie and he must find a way to reconcile the two. In X's case, his substance D abuse closes the door on his liminality and effectively traps him, suspending him in the middle of his journey to selfhood. "I'm slushed;" he thinks, "My brain is slushed. I'm not believing this, watching what is me, is Fred – that was Fred down there without his scramble suit; that's how Fred appears without the suit!" (640). Here he is truly X, neither Fred nor Arctor, completely disassociated from the two. He is not yet Bruce, though: this personality observes and puzzles but has no shape, no answers.

In this moment, Dick shows his reader the liminality of personality – the piece of Turner’s rituals of becoming in which a person is neither one nor the other and so is moving through the liminal hallway. By describing the effects of substance D, Dick creates a space in the hallway to freeze his character, as if he is frozen on the film that Fred is watching, even as he allows the reader a space to dissect X’s thoughts. To complicate things further, the reader can understand X’s confusion and can partake in the confusion of layered reality through the experience of layered liminality. All of this happens in a flash: it takes much longer to explain than to experience. The reader has read and suspended belief so far up to this point and is embroiled in a world based on the reality of the past, a future that Dick imagined a current reader’s present might be. In this instance, the liminal hallways run parallel – Dick had no way to see exactly what the future held and so had to project himself there. The future that he has written about is most likely contemporary to now or the very recent past and so the reader understands the fiction more deeply than Dick’s contemporaries may have. This creates a mild disconnect that deepens the liminal experience of reading the piece; the reader holds the two hallways in her mind at the same time, connected by the author’s words. Memory allows readers to explore human limitations and psyche by expanding that threshold. In the hands of skilled authors, liminality becomes a hallway that the character must travel and the reader travels with them. Authors connect readers with their characters through the liminal space of memory, creating a place both outside and inside the narrative in which the reader must dwell simultaneously.

Offering another layer of complexity, *A Scanner, Darkly*’s title points directly to the liminality of the scanner due to its ties to 1 Corinthians 13:12: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (KJV).

This verse compares the earthly plane to a heavenly plane, claiming that people on Earth only see part of the truth while those who have passed through the liminal veil of death have a greater understanding of the way things really work. Extending this metaphor to the novel, one might consider the normal people to be on the earthly plane while the junkies are beginning to pierce the veil (like X in the Lions Club at his first introduction). The allusion is intensified in Chapter Eleven as X's brain enters an ever-deepening schism and contemplates the way a scanner sees him: "What does a scanner see? he asked himself. I mean, really see? Into the head? Down into the heart?... clearly or darkly?" (653). X, himself, is moving into the knowledge of "how things really are" at the point he looks into the scanner. He has entered the liminal hallway completely and, unlike the unicorn who has *something* to move toward, he is headed for a complete break with what he knows as reality. The move through liminality is often seen as a positive one which is why the reader might choose to see his redemption arc in a positive light. Instead, at the end of his tale, X is lost, he stands in a metaphorical sea, surrounded by the flowers of his undoing. If it were a more traditional work, the use of liminality in *Scanner* might allow the re-integration of X's personality. Since Dick is writing in a post-modernist world, liminality tends to engender confusion rather than signal movement away from it. There are moments of confusion in *Unicorn* that might be considered "most" liminal, specifically those surrounding the Red Bull, but the confusion is resolved as the characters move through liminal space. *Unicorn* is part of the High Fantasy genre and Beagle weaves a more traditional story than Dick's Science Fiction and so his character arcs move more smoothly. Beagle is still able to experiment with liminality, stranding Scmendrick within it for an unknown amount of time, but because the genre follows long-established norms the reader expects a beginning, middle, and end. This does not hold true for all works in the subgenre of Fantasy, there are far less conservative writers who wade deeper

into experimentation, but the conservativeness of Beagle's story is one reason that I chose it. Juxtaposed with *Scanner*, *The Last Unicorn* helps to illustrate the way that liminality should be expanded. Though the two works are vastly different, the liminal hallway can be traced through both, shaping the characters and their worlds as well as the reader's perceptions.

One of the interesting things about the speculative fiction genre is the vast difference in the literature that it covers. Both *The Last Unicorn* and *A Scanner Darkly* fall under its umbrella yet at first glance they are extremely different types of work; however, they both speculate upon some aspect of humanity by putting it into a different frame of reference. Neither can be classified as realism and though the characters have much in common with those we sit next to every day they must deal with situations that we may never experience. In our world unicorns do not guard shaded woods (no matter how much we would like them to) and narcotics officers do not wear special suits that both disguise them and mark them as other. Speculative fiction allows an expanded view of literature and so allows scholars to explore new boundaries in the way words and ideas work.

In the titular character of *Unicorn*, the reader sees an expansion of self through liminality while *Scanner* explores its collapse. In order to portray each of these the character examined must move though one seems to move upward and the other downward. Even the unicorn, in the end, is unsure of whether or not she will be able to return to her wood – she realizes that change, even growth, does not always allow one to return to the status quo. She understands that her change has been wrought through the memory of her time within the liminal confines of human form and also through the memory of her interaction with the humans who acted as her companions and guides through that liminality. X, on the other hand, cannot analyze his journey down the liminal hallway because of his degenerated psyche. This degeneration does not appear

to be brought on completely by the vehicles of liminality for others also work in scramble suits, presumably watching themselves through scanners. He, instead, is unable to reconcile the splinters of his personality because of the drug that he has consumed; the reader meets him mid-journey and he is arrested before he can come out of the liminal hallway. Both authors ask their readers to enter into liminal spaces of their own – Beagle introduces the idea of the meta-story, drawing the reader in through association and asking her to consider the functions of memory. Dick explores the liminality between reader and text from the opposite direction; instead of looking at the way memory ties humanity together he explores the degradation of memory and the way that drives a wedge between a single human and others, trapping the single human within a lonely, liminal hell. Both of these works are considered Speculative Fiction, both deal heavily with a “what-if” situation, both ask for a large amount of suspension of disbelief, yet both explore the human condition and the liminal spaces that one must move through in order to determine what it means to be human. The often fantastic nature of the genre allows an author to take a closer look at the rituals of becoming that may be otherwise difficult to explore by asking “what if” and answering in a way that escapes the boundaries of the “real.”

It is important to revisit the terminology that we use to define literary concepts in order to keep them fresh in an ever-changing world. The recent acceptance of speculative fiction works into the literary teaching cannon will require a revision of well-worn terminology. It is not that we are having completely new conversations but that we are discussing new forms of writing. In many cases the time-honored terms apply but the new material gives us a chance to see them in a different light. Liminality is such a term. In its case, speculative fiction sheds a new light upon the concept and allows us to look at even established canonical works in that new light. Expanding the definition of liminality offers a new view on the literary world as a whole, it gives

readers more rooms to explore along the liminal hallway and new depths to plumb within the sea of liminality.

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Vida

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