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Madness in the "Mad Genre" of Science Fiction

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on common themes, conventions, tropes and other defining elements of Science Fiction in relation to their reliance on madness. Specifically, I examine the representation of madness in Science Fiction works and the role it plays in relation to thematic aspects of the genre, which render it, I argue, a "mad genre" itself. To carry this investigation out, I first examine the historical development of the genre, which demonstrates both its frequent incorporation of the theme of madness in its storytelling from its very origins, as well as reveals several distinct and fundamental characteristics of Science Fiction which provide further ties with madness. In order to draw some conclusions on the genre as a whole, an in-depth analysis follows of five Science Fiction works that deal with madness: H. P. Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928) and *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936), Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Pamela Zoline's "The Heat Death of the Universe" (1967), and J. G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970). Madness is examined both in relation to specific characters who experience psychosis, mental breakdown, or are otherwise considered mad, and in relation to other story or narrative elements employed by the authors in order to convey or explore madness.

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1. INTRODUCTION: SCIENCE FICTION AND MADNESS

Science Fiction (henceforth: SF) has a long, often overlooked, history that ties it to the theme of madness, which can be traced back to the very earliest examples of SF works. Furthermore, the genre has proven to be an excellent platform for exploring the concept of madness, whilst, conversely, madness offers itself as a useful tool for exploring SF themes. As such, there is much room for academic research that examines SF in relation to madness, both by studying SF works that deal directly with madness, focusing on the interaction of madness and SF themes, as well as by examining the very elements of SF – a genre which, I argue, has a number of "mad" characteristics of its own. In fact, in certain respects, SF can be seen as a "mad genre." The aim of this dissertation is precisely to investigate the numerous levels and dimensions on which SF and madness are linked, first by discussing the genre as a whole and then by analysing individual SF works that deal with madness for more targeted observations on their co-relation. Common themes, conventions, tropes and other defining elements of SF are, thus, discussed in relation to their reliance on madness. I approach madness as a broad and multilayered concept, discussed both in clinical terms, relating to specific characters who experience psychosis, mental breakdown, etc., as well as in metaphorical terms or even cultural terms, such as story elements that expose the strangeness of the modern (and potential future) era, governed by machines and technology.

Because SF is a very broad and surprisingly hard-to-define genre, and because the scope of this dissertation is to make some conclusions on the genre as a whole, I first focus somewhat extensively on pinpointing the most fundamental elements of SF, which I discuss in section 1.1. Furthermore, some background knowledge regarding the historical development of the genre is also important, provided in section 1.2. This historical background demonstrates the genre's frequent incorporation of the theme of madness from the earliest literary examples considered to be SF, the development of new madness-related tropes inextricably linked to SF, whilst it also reveals several distinct and fundamental characteristics of SF which provide further ties with the concept of madness, particularly relating to the genre's tendency to explore the unknown by means of

transcending reality.

The bulk of the dissertation (Chapters 2-4) is dedicated on analysing five SF works by four British and American 20th century authors that incorporate the theme of madness. These analyses aim at showcasing the various levels in which common SF themes, tropes, conventions and other SF-related aspects relate to madness or provide useful tools for exploring madness. The works analysed are H. P. Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928) and *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936), Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Pamela Zoline's "The Heat Death of the Universe" (1967), and J. G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970). The latter two are considered to be part of the "New Wave of SF"; an experimental type of SF that emerged in the 1960s and differed in some ways from traditional SF. A good portion of my discussion (primarily Chapter 3) is dedicated to the New Wave of SF, both in an attempt to provide a more holistic view on the genre's diversity and because the New Wave provided new ways of exploring madness through more abstract SF-related concepts.

As SF is such a broad genre, I have chosen to examine widely dissimilar works that encapsulate a broad spectrum of SF themes, tropes and conventions, allowing for a more comprehensive view of the genre. Consequently, some of the texts discussed are arguably located at the margins of SF. For this reason, the debate of whether or not given works belong to the genre of SF becomes another important topic I discuss somewhat extensively. By tackling these questions, it gradually becomes clearer which specific aspects and elements of SF are central to the genre, allowing for a more targeted examination of the potential links between SF and madness at the genre's very core.

1.1 The Paradox of Science Fiction

As a literary genre, SF encapsulates a very wide variety of topics, themes, conventions and tropes, to the extent that its very status *as a genre* has been brought into question. On the one hand, Farah Mendelsohn, argues that SF "is a discussion or a mode, and not a genre," as the reader cannot expect a rough outline of a SF story, simply because it is categorised as SF (2). Mendelsohn makes a good point in that most other genres tend to

be somewhat clearer in their conventions, especially when it comes to the plot. That is not to say that SF does not have a set of common conventions, plot devices and tropes which are almost exclusively associated with the genre, such as alien encounters, time travel, space exploration, alternative universes etc., but they are certainly not essential requirements and a considerable portion of SF works steers well away from such elements. On the other hand, Simon J. Evnine counters Mendelsohn's argument and insists that SF *can* reasonably be considered a genre by declaring that, from his own perspective, "a genre *is* an ongoing discussion (or at least very much like one), and not a body of texts from which one can expect certain plot elements and specific tropes" (6; emphasis in the original). The "ongoing discussion" of which Evnine speaks refers to his view that genres can be better understood as traditions with histories which develop over time, and, thus, also change over time, rather than "regions of conceptual space" (Evnine 9-10). SF, specifically, has certainly developed a lot throughout its history. It is also, perhaps, the genre that most clearly demonstrates this idea of "an ongoing discussion," as SF writers often find inspiration from contemporary scientific and theoretical developments. In addition, there is a noteworthy effort within the genre to explore new concepts and to depict new and otherworldly settings, creatures, machines etc., that are distinct in some form from those present in other SF stories. Not all SF works succeed in this, of course, but, to a great extent, SF *is* a genre that seeks to depict the previously unexplored. This is also part of the reason SF has developed into such a broad genre that includes widely dissimilar works within its literary canon, in addition to having spawned numerous popular subgenres across different media, such as space opera (e.g. George Lucas's *Star Wars*, 1977) and cyberpunk (e.g. William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, 1984). This same quest to seek out the unexplored is perhaps also one of the reasons the incorporation of the theme of madness into SF stories occurs relatively frequently. Madness, after all, forms a formidable and intriguing part of the unexplored or the unknown for those who have not experienced it.

The fact that there are disagreements within the field of SF studies regarding the very classification of SF as a genre indicates both the broad spectrum of topics and themes found within its literary output and the elusiveness of its parameters. As such, further disagreements also come in the form of an ongoing debate as to what the exact

elements and properties are that would classify a given work within the genre. As a further consequence, attempts at providing a clear definition for SF have also proven very difficult and equally polarising. Among the many attempts made by different scholars, authors, publishers and SF enthusiasts, there has been no clear consensus as to what SF actually is. The only general, unanimous, agreement is, as Adam Roberts points out, that SF "is a form of cultural discourse … that involves a world view differentiated in one way or another from the actual world in which its readers live" (*History of SF* 2016). Furthermore, as the term "Science Fiction" only came into use in the 1920s, there has been no clear consensus among scholars as to which works constitute the genre's earliest examples. Common references point at Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* (1818), Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870), H. G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), or even publisher Hugo Gernsback's launch of the first science fiction magazine, *Amazing Stories* (1926) as the birth of SF. It has even been argued that the genre originates as far back as the early 17th century, marked as a turning point in modern scientific development – especially in the fields of cosmology and astronomy (Roberts, *History of SF* 51). Regardless of where one stands in regards to the classification of SF as a genre, its definition or its earliest literary examples, the lack of a general consensus among academics and scholars clearly demonstrates that SF is not *one* thing that can be easily defined and placed within strict boundaries.

The most influential – albeit non-authoritative – definition of SF was first articulated in 1979 by Darko Suvin:

> *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.* (7-8; italicised in the original)

Although Suvin has a somewhat narrow view on what proper SF is and rejects much of the genre's literary output as being sub-literature – he excludes, for instance, H. P. Lovecraft's work due to its metaphysical undertones – his definition *has* provided an important theoretical foundation for the field of SF studies. It is not without its flaws, however, primarily due to the general vagueness surrounding the concept of "estrangement," which has lead scholars of SF to use Suvin's concept in various different

ways (Spiegel 369). Similarly, precisely what constitutes "cognition" is also vague. This has resulted in a less rigid and more flexible use of Suvin's definition that may be applied to encapsulate more works within the genre of SF than Suvin himself might have initially intended, once more leaving the genre's margins open to debate.

In general terms, by "estrangement," Suvin sets the parameter that SF is not realistic, as it does not depict the real empirical world in which we live, which he refers to as the "naturalistic world." Instead, SF stories are set in an estranged reality; distant planets, futuristic settings etc. Alternatively, as Mark Rose points out, "they describe the impact of some strange element upon our world, as in alien-invasion stories or evolutionary fables" (3). Estrangement alone, however, is not a sufficient criterion of SF, as other genres also utilise estrangement, including fantasy, myth, and the folktale. The distinguishing trait of SF is that it places its estranged elements within a cognitive framework, in the sense that any fantastical events, machines, creatures, etc., are presented as being rational and scientifically supported occurrences. Although the use of the term "cognitive" is, admittedly, somewhat confusing when applied to describe a genre that is not realistic and deals with estranged realities, Suvin does make a crucial point in that there is an attempt within the genre to create a sense of validity for the estranged SF elements, usually under the premise of advanced technology. In other words, the unrealistic depictions of SF are presented as plausible and scientifically valid within the parameters of the estranged reality they are set in. This attempt to explain *within cognitive parameters* the estranged elements depicted – often relating to science – is central to the genre and sets it apart from the other genres of speculative fiction, which make no similar attempts. Magic in fantasy, for instance, requires no explanation. Suvin, thus, uses the term "cognition" to indicate this precise attempt of SF to rationalise the impossibilities it depicts, resulting in an interaction taking place between the estranging elements and cognition. This, in turn, renders the genre, by Suvin's own admission, "a developed oxymoron, a realistic irreality, with humanized nonhumans, this-worldly Other Worlds, and so forth" (viii).

This is not the only oxymoron relating to SF, however. Contrary to what its name indicates, SF is not strictly scientific and does not necessarily follow the rules of the established science of the time it is written in. In many cases, SF stories are scientifically

inaccurate and rely on technically unfeasible plot devices explained under the premise of advanced technology. Even in these cases, however, the premise of advanced technology *does* set the estranged SF elements within a cognitive framework, albeit often not in a very convincing manner. It is important to note, however, that willing suspension of disbelief on the reader's side is essential for *all* SF stories. The reader is required to lay aside their empirical and theoretical knowledge of reality and accept the impossibilities of the given SF story as valid. Even in the case of SF authors who go to great lengths to construct their stories on the basis of real and accurate scientific principles, parts still remain speculative. If this were not the case, the stories in question would fall under the category of naturalistic fiction that tries to depict the real world in a fully accurate and realistic manner, simply with added scientific elements. This is not what SF does, however, and it is in the genre's very nature to depict the impossible or the yet unproven or unexplored. SF is, after all, speculative fiction. The speculative aspect usually centers around scientific development or its chief manifestation: technology. An example of a common speculative aspect of SF is the depiction of technology that potentially could be feasible, but has yet to be developed, such as advanced weapons using sound waves or laser beams. It is, thus, also within the genre's scope to speculate what the future might look like and what scientific and technological advancements may take place.

Suvin's other major contribution in the field of SF studies deals with this very crucial speculative parameter of SF. It is the concept of the *novum*, proposed as a necessary component of all SF works. The term "novum" is borrowed from Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch and is used to describe a fictional device that acts as "a totalizing phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author's and implied reader's norm of reality" (Suvin 64). The novum is the element introduced within a given SF story that, on the one hand sets it apart from the real world, and, on the other hand keeps the story grounded within the realm of cognition, as it is presented as plausible through scientific means. Furthermore, whether it presents itself in the form of something physical, for example a piece of technological gear that does not exist in the physical world, or in the form of something more abstract, for example the depiction of societal norms unlike any found throughout the known history of the Earth, the novum dictates the constant search of SF for something new and for something *other*, outside of the norm and outside of our

reality. As the novum introduces elements that fall outside of reality, it also forms an excellent tool for SF authors wishing to incorporate the theme of madness into their stories, as madness, too, focuses on perceptions and experiences that fall outside of reality as the non-mad know it. There are many examples of SF works that utilise the novum to that effect. A brief inspection of the origins and historical development of SF as a literary genre illustrates its close ties with madness from its very inception.

1.2 Madness and the Origins of Science Fiction

A strong case can be made that SF developed from the Gothic romance, and particularly from Gothic horror literature. This has been argued by Patrick Bratlinger, who further adds that Gothic romance and SF share the same central message, "involving an assertion of the power of the irrational over the rational" (31). Bratlinger elaborates by emphasising both genres' reliance on the pushing aside of rational reason:

> I am suggesting that the conventions of both Gothic and science fiction involve a rejection or a symbolic putting to sleep of reason; they are both forms of apocalyptic nightmare fantasy characterized by themes of demonic possession and monstrous distortion (Darko Suvin's "estrangement") (31)

Bratlinger's observations mainly relate to the earliest examples of SF works, such as *Frankenstein*, which were indeed generally dark in tone. Although not all subsequent SF is dark, Blatlinger makes an important observation by pointing out the genre's "symbolic putting to sleep of reason." In combination with the genre's characteristic of assimilating a sense of cognitive validity and (pseudo)scientific verisimilitude, it can be said that SF disguises its mad characteristics. Consequently, it becomes clear that it is not coincidental that much of early SF utilises madness in its storytelling – admittedly madness being a common theme in the Gothic genre – primarily through characters whose reason transgresses the borders of sanity. Bratlinger also points out that, in SF, reason taken to its extremities results in the creation of monsters, and that such extremities of reason often manifest themselves through the depiction of "science itself and of its chief manifestation, technology" (31). There are certainly many notable examples that support

this observation. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus* (published in 1818 and considered by many to be the first science fiction novel) features the eponymous protagonist, Victor Frankenstein, a character who would eventually come to represent the archetype of the "mad scientist," which, in turn, would become a common trope in many later SF works. In the novel, Frankenstein succeeds in bringing life to a humanoid creature (the novum of the story) compiled from human body parts. Horrified, however, by the hideousness of his creation, he neglects the Creature to be exposed to the hostility of humans who see and treat him as a monster. Greatly hurt and angered, the Creature demands Frankenstein creates a bride for him so he may live his life with a companion away from humanity. When Frankenstein refuses, the Creature turns against its creator and exacts its revenge by murdering his family members and close friends. In this case, the extremities of Dr. Frankenstein's reason very literally result in the creation of a monster, with dire consequences.

Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) is another important example of a SF work – still within the parameters of Gothic horror – that demonstrates the same concept. In the story, Dr. Jekyll creates a serum which transforms him into Mr. Hyde; a disfigured, compulsive and violent figure who is a manifestation of Jekyll's evil side. As Mr. Hyde, Jekyll can go about practicing destructive behaviour without the fear of being held accountable for his actions, thus allowing him to satisfy *all* of his desires, split between his two, now separate, personalities. At the end, of course, his plan backfires, as he is consumed by his wicked side and can no longer transform back into his normal self, thus turning permanently into Mr. Hyde. In a similar manner to *Frankenstein*, the alchemical experiments performed by Dr. Jekyll result in the creation of a monster. In this case, however, the monster is a twisted version of the mad scientist himself, consumed by the chaotic, egotistical and evil traits he normally suppressed. *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* is also "the prototype of all stories of multiple personality, transformation and possession," as reported under Stevenson's entry in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* (Clute and Nicholls). The story, therefore, has become paradigmatic in the history of SF as well as played a crucial part in the development of madness narratives. The concept of the "mad scientist" thus becomes a staple of 19th century SF, which blurs the lines between

madness and genius.

Another important development in the history of SF came in the early- to mid-19th century, with the publication of a number of SF short stories by Edgar Allan Poe, who was, of course, also a Gothic horror writer. Interestingly, although Poe is renowned for his numerous stories that deal with madness, his SF stories do not feature mad characters. Instead, Poe endeavoured to present his SF stories in a convincing manner, sometimes aiming at creating hoaxes, thus also avoiding the paranormal. His technique involves "the presentation of realistic details in a logical fashion to advance toward and ultimately arrive at a logical-seeming and credible result," backed up by established or commonly believed scientific facts of the time (Olney 418). This statement may seem strange to those familiar with Poe's SF stories, as they are not realistic or credible at all to modern readers. One must bear in mind, however, the scientific knowledge available to the average reader in the early- to mid-19th century. The publication of "The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall" in 1835, which was Poe's first attempt at SF, is a great example of this effort for credibility. It is written in the form of the titular character's reports and observations from his journey to the moon via a highly technologically advanced balloon and was published in the magazine *Southern Literary Messenger* as a hoax. Poe injects scientific lingo and technical explanations as to how the balloon functions to try to establish some scientific verisimilitude. As ludicrous as this may seem to modern readers, Poe's technique actually paid off at the time, as many readers genuinely believed the report's authenticity. This effort to provide some sort of scientific credibility for the strange and otherworldly depictions within SF has been Poe's major contribution to the genre and has become a staple in SF, although not with the purpose of creating hoaxes, but rather to help set the estranged SF elements within cognitive parameters. In turn, this effort of SF to rationalise the impossibilities it depicts and to appear at least somewhat credible, renders it a "mad genre." In this light, even though Poe avoided the creation of mad characters in his SF stories, his overall contributions to SF still provide tools that tie the genre to madness. Poe's technique has been employed and further developed by many important SF writers that followed, including Jules Verne and H. G. Wells.

SF continued to develop throughout the late 19th century with the move towards

futuristic settings, space exploration and alien encounter stories. The popularity of H. G. Wells's stories played a major role in this shift, with a series of important and very influential works, such as *The Time Machine* (1895), *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896) and *The War of the Worlds* (1897). It is notable that most of the protagonists of Wells's SF stories are scientist-adventurers venturing out into the unknown whilst "disregarding common sense and received opinion" (Suvin 210). Whilst not necessarily straightforwardly mad, Wells's protagonists do push the boundaries of conventional logic and reason. Wells has also, however, directly continued the tradition of the mad scientist within SF, most notably in *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896), of which the titular character's intellectual genius has very problematically lead him to abandon all moral values, torturing animals in the process of his biological experiments creating hybrid creatures through vivisection. Following the archetype of the mad scientist, Moreau is ultimately killed by one of his creations. Furthermore, similarly to the ethical dilemmas posed by Moreau's wicked experiments, the strange, large-headed, hyper-intelligent, but savage, alien lifeforms which set on enforcing world domination in *The War of the Worlds* (1897) further support Bratlinger's notion that reason taken to its extremities leads to the creation of monsters, or in this case, to the abandoning of morals and the committing of atrocities. Anne Stiles argues that "by juxtaposing a human mad scientist and extraterrestrials with similar mental processes, Wells likens monstrous alien life forms to the moral monstrosities of which unscrupulous geniuses are capable" (335-36). It becomes clear, thus, that much of 19th century SF writing blurs the lines between (extreme) reason and madness by presenting scientific ambition as a lack of good judgment and morals combined with naivety and shortsightedness. This message is clearly articulated in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, with Victor Frankenstein warning Walton at the end of the story: "Seek happiness in tranquillity and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries" (192).

At the turn of the century, Wells's influence on SF came to define to a great extent what was to follow. However, although his contributions to the genre have been major and the popularity of his stories has greatly helped to establish many tropes and plot devices that have become staples of SF in the 20th century, such as time travel and alien invasions, as I have argued earlier, SF is not *one* thing that can be easily defined and fit

into a clear category of roughly similar works. This has also served as the rationale behind the selection of thematically dissimilar works of the SF genre which deal with madness to discuss in Chapters 2-4. Before I proceed with their analyses, however, certain conclusions can be drawn so far.

As is evident, SF has a long history that ties it to madness, whether it be the long list of mad scientist characters, from Shelley's Victor Frankenstein to Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll, Wells's Dr. Moreau and many others, or whether it be the very genre's "mad-like" attempt to rationalise the impossibilities it depicts, maintaining, as per Suvin's definition, "cognitive estrangement." Considering the seemingly contradictory nature of SF, its depictions of estranged realities, its constant effort to explore the unexplored and, yet, its simultaneous effort to present itself as credible by cognitive means, SF can be seen as a "mad genre." In a somewhat counter-intuitive manner, it is the very attempt of SF to rationalise the irrational, to present the ludicrous in the light of the potential and to try to inject reason into the physically and scientifically unfeasible that renders it a "mad genre." Accordingly, whilst SF sets its estranged elements within cognitive parameters, it also essentially asks the reader to make sense of these elements by adopting an *alternative rationality* that is valid within the given story's setting, but would not be valid in the real world – Bratlinger's "rejection or symbolic putting to sleep of reason." The reader must submerge themselves into worlds in which time travel is possible through technological means (e.g. *The Time Machine*), elixirs can transform humans to monsters (e.g. *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*) and the animation of creatures compiled from dead body parts is feasible (e.g. *Frankenstein*), whilst at the same time the sight of such occurrences is not magical, but is supported by rational, scientific premises within these estranged worlds. The genre's effort to remain cognitive becomes, paradoxically, an element that more closely resembles the distorted perception of a psychotic mind that can not distinguish between the real and the unreal. The idea of adopting an alternative rationality, thus, once more ties the genre to madness. After all, even those individuals deemed by society to be mad have their own sense of rationality, but this sense does not overlap with what society at large considers to be rational. Furthermore, the very distinguishing feature of SF – the novum – provides more links with the concept of madness, which I discuss in Chapter 2.

2. TRANSGRESSING REALITY

Thus far we have seen that one of the features of SF stories is that they are set within an estranged reality differentiated from the author's and reader's empirical environment. Furthermore, in accordance to the crucial theoretical foundation laid down by Darko Suvin, the defining element of SF is the presence of a novum (or multiple nova), which is the specific estranging or alienating element within a given SF story, presented in the light of scientific plausibility. Moreover, as the etymology of the word "novum" indicates, SF constantly tries to invent *new* elements for the purposes of its storytelling, which can be either physical objects or abstract ideas. Considering that the scope of this dissertation is to examine madness in relation to SF and that the novum is the defining element of SF, the function of the novum is an excellent starting point for my investigation. First, however, it will be useful to briefly examine how the five chosen texts are linked to SF and to explain the rationale behind this selection.

I have mentioned that, although SF *does* have a set of conventions and tropes almost exclusively linked to the genre, their implementation is by no means a requirement for a story to be classified as SF. This becomes clear on a closer inspection. Adam Roberts narrows down the common tropes of the genre into six categories:

- Spaceships, interplanetary or interstellar travel;
- Aliens and the encounter with aliens;
- Mechanical robots, genetic engineering, biological robots ('androids');
- Computers, advanced technology, virtual reality;
- Time travel;
- Alternative history;
- Futuristic utopias and dystopias. (*New Critical Idiom* 15)

The works I will be focusing on clearly demonstrate that the implementation of common tropes is merely incidental for SF: *At the Mountains of Madness* and "The Call of Cthulhu" feature an alternative, forgotten, history and alien encounters, although the latter is not explicit in "The Call of Cthulhu." *Woman on the Edge of Time* features almost all of the tropes identified by Roberts, with the exception of aliens and alternative history,

The Atrocity Exhibition, I argue, borrows elements from dystopia but is not a conventional dystopian novel, whilst "The Heat Death of the Universe" does not utilise any of the genre's common tropes. Despite this disparity, all of the works in question *can* reasonably be considered SF – this will be discussed separately for each work when necessary – and they all appear in John Clute and Peter Nicholls's critically acclaimed *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, first published in 1979 and consistently updated ever since. This comparison also showcases how dissimilar these stories are in regards to their content. Further dissimilarities involve the overall tone, narrative form and length, ranging from Pamela Zoline's brief five-thousand-word short story, "The Heat Wave of the Universe," to Marge Piercy's lengthy novel, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, numbering over 350 pages. Then there is the time period in which each work was written and published, beginning in the late 1920s with "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928), all the way to the middle of the 1970s with *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976). I point out the many and wide dissimilarities of these SF stories because their selection has been a conscious choice precisely because they are dissimilar. Their simultaneous study and comparison provide a wider scope of an arguably very broad genre. Furthermore, in the pursuit of a more holistic view, I believe it to be beneficial to examine SF by not only focusing on the "purest" examples of the genre that make use of its most common conventions, but to also include works that are situated at the genre's margins and push it into new directions. That is certainly the case with J. G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* and Zoline's "The Heat Death of the Universe," both unusual works in their form and storytelling that have sparked debates concerning their classification as SF (Ketterer 187).

Despite their many dissimilarities there is, of course, one major theme that ties all of the stories in question together, which is their implementation of the theme of madness. Nonetheless, madness is treated differently by each author. Madness is present both in the clinical sense, through characters experiencing psychosis, mental breakdown, hallucinations etc., as well as in a metaphorical and even cultural sense, allowing for the examination of madness within SF from multiple perspectives. Furthermore, by examining the function of the novum in each story, an interesting pattern begins to appear that ties SF to the concept of madness, centered around the idea of transgressing reality. This is arguably the very purpose of the novum, since it aims at introducing estrangement

into the real world.

2.1 H. P. Lovecraft: "The Call of Cthulhu" and *At the Mountains of Madness*

Starting with H. P. Lovecraft, a brief synopsis of the two stories will prove useful. "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928) is presented in the form of Francis Wayland Thurston's written account and follows his investigation into the vicious, secret Cult of Cthulhu, which operates throughout the globe, performing strange rituals in worship of a monster-like entity called Cthulhu. Francis's investigation begins when, following his uncle's suspicious death, he acquires a strange, otherworldly, sculpture with markings of an unknown language depicting Cthulhu. He tracks down the sculptor, Wilcox, who claims to have seen the mysterious entity in delirious nightmares, and further discovers other similar instances "of panic, mania, and eccentricity" occurred around the same period (13). The investigation leads Francis to discover a strange incident that occurred in the South Pacific, involving a deadly confrontation between a group of unsuspecting sailors and pirates of the Cthulhu Cult, the appearance of a strange island with colossal, otherworldly structures of indescribable geometry and a confrontation with Cthulhu himself. The only survivor, a Norwegian sailor by the name Gustaf Johanson, was left severely traumatised, and has since died under mysterious circumstances. The story focuses greatly on the narrator's mental decline as he acquires too much knowledge regarding the existence of this terrible entity and a side note reveals his demise, presumably by the hands of Cthulhu Cult members.

At the Mountains of Madness (1936) is narrated by geologist William Dyer who leads a large-scale and lengthy expedition in the Antarctica. Following the discovery of several fossils of unknown species, the expedition splits into two teams. Professor Lake's team sets out to explore the northwestward region, where they discover massive mountain peaks taller than the Himalayas and many more fossils, extremely well preserved. The team perishes, however, during a strong snowstorm. Upon inspection of the bodies it is evident that they died "from strangulation or laceration" (26), whilst the well preserved fossils have mysteriously vanished. Dyer and another party member,

Danforth, fly over the mountain peaks, where they discover an abandoned city of a highly developed non-human civilisation. Inside it, they begin to unravel the city's history by studying pictorial friezes, statues and other decorative ornaments, discovering it was once inhabited by a species of extraterrestrials, called the Old Ones. Dyer and Danforth find tunnels underneath the mountains, where they run into a horrendous and deadly monster (a shoggoth) from which they barely escape. Much like "The Call of Cthulhu," the two men are left in a permanently shattered mental state.

In both "The Call of Cthulhu" and *At the Mountains of Madness*, the novum manifests itself in the form of a Pantheon of ancient, otherworldly, colossal beings that once ruled the Earth and now lie dormant in hidden, isolated places around the globe, waiting until the time is right for them to rise again and bring chaos to the world of humans. They are known as the Great Old Ones – Cthulhu being one of them. Almost all of Lovecraft's fictional stories are set in the same fictional universe and are tied by the same principle of a great, unknown, threat to mankind, forming what has come to be known collectively as the "Cthulhu Mythos" – a term coined after Lovecraft's death by one of his colleagues and disciples, August Derleth (Joshi, *Dreamer and Visionary* 244). Greatly inspired by the Gothic horror authors and especially by Edgar Allan Poe, Lovecraft's early works deal with the supernatural and do not have much in common with SF. This began to change, however, in the late 1920s. Robert M. Price argues that Lovecraft begins to gradually "demythologize his own mythos and to hit the reader directly between the eyes with his bleak vision of cosmic isolation" (8). This "demythologizing" of the Cthulhu Mythos is achieved by steering away from metaphysical implications and instead presenting glimpses of more science-oriented explanations for the existence of the Great Old Ones and of the other strange creatures that make their appearance in Lovecraft's stories. In Suvin's terms, Lovecraft begins to set his estranged world within a cognitive framework, creating a sense of internal scientific validity. "The Call of Cthulhu" is a crucial part of Lovecraft's early transitional stage into SF, as it is implied that, despite being worshiped as deities, the Great Old Ones are actually extraterrestrial beings that once dominated the Earth, many eons ago: "They worshiped, so they said, the Great Old Ones who lived ages before there were any men, and who came to the young world out of the sky" (19). This insinuation situates the story

somewhere between supernatural horror and SF, but later stories, including *At the Mountains of Madness*, explicitly confirm and expand upon the alien origin of the Great Old Ones, thus earning, in the eyes of many scholars, a place for the Cthulhu Mythos within the genre of SF. To further enhance the SF elements in works such as *At the Mountains of Madness*, Lovecraft uses his knowledge in a variety of sciences, including chemistry, astronomy and geology, in order to incorporate accurate scientific principles and terms into his stories (Joshi, "Time, Space and Natural Law" 177).

The most striking thing about the function of the novum in Lovecraft's work is that it is used to evoke a crushing sense of despair so powerful that it typically results in the unsuspecting Lovecraftian protagonists going mad. Lovecraft's monsters are sometimes the direct cause of madness (e.g. Cthulhu invades the dreams of susceptible individuals and causes deliriums), but more importantly, it is the realisation of a terrible and inconceivable reality that transgresses our perceived reality of the world that leads to madness. To this effect, almost all of Lovecraft's fictional stories reveal a fundamental underlying philosophical and ontological premise that he adhered to; that mankind is ultimately entirely unimportant in the vastness of the cosmos. This realisation has served as a crucial component for Lovecraftian horror, which has come to be known as "cosmic horror" precisely because the element of horror stems from understanding the nature of the universe. Both "The Call of Cthulhu" and *At the Mountains of Madness* carry a clear message and warning that some things are not meant to be comprehended by humans and that they should better be left unknown for the sake of their sanity. The opening paragraph of "The Call of Cthulhu" captures the essence of Lovecraft's philosophy:

> The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents. We live on a placid island of ignorance in the midst of black seas of infinity, and it was not meant that we should voyage far. The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality, and of our frightful position therein, that we shall either go mad from the revelation or flee from the deadly light into the peace and safety of a new dark age. (6)

Dark and dramatically pessimistic in tone, it is notable that Lovecraft emphasises the

harmful potentiality of science – a theme that will come up during the analysis of the other works, too. Interestingly, however, the focus is not on any harmful physical product manufactured through scientific means, such as weapons of mass destruction. It is "the piecing together of dissociated knowledge" that will lead to unfathomable terror and madness. Although the Gothic influence is clearly evident in Lovecraft's writing, especially in the colourful language and reliance on monsters, it is *knowledge* that holds the true potential for horror – a departure from the typical Gothic tales which tend to rely solely on the monsters created by science to achieve their horror. The reason the sciences can harm us, in this sense, is because they expose mankind's false sense of self-importance, resulting in the adoption of a complete nihilistic approach to life (at least for Lovecraft's protagonists). The narrator demonstratively proclaims in "The Call of Cthulhu": "I have looked upon all that the universe has to hold of horror, and even the skies of spring and the flowers of summer must ever afterward be poison to me" (36). By extension, the strange creatures conjured up by Lovecraft's imagination also represent this nihilistic idea. This has been argued by Dustin Geeraert, who writes that "Lovecraft's monsters are a sort of personified nihilism, and they destroy his intellectual protagonists time and again in a sort of ritualistic self-destruction" (127). These monsters come to represent the ultimate indifference, if not hostility, of the universe towards humans. Just like the dormant Cthulhu is biding his time until, one day, he may bring chaos to the world of humans, so too will the human race ultimately cease to exist once our planet develops conditions unsustainable for life. The realisation of mankind's real place in the cosmos is, in Lovecraft's stories, reason enough to lose one's mind.

There is another reason Lovecraft seems to find it natural to connect horror, madness and science. He begins his long essay, *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, by stating: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (4). The terrifying potential of science stems precisely from the fact that science seeks to explore the unknown. From Lovecraft's perspective, it is an exploration of the most primal of fears. The unknown could be anything, including concepts well beyond anyone's imagination. This is perhaps the reason Lovecraft's narrators seem to fail to describe what they have seen. The sailor, Johanson, for instance, refers to Cthulhu as "[t]he Thing [that] can not be described,"

further adding that "there is no language for such abysms of shrieking and immemorial lunacy, such eldritch contradictions of all matter, force, and cosmic order" (34). Likewise, professor Dyer's attempt at describing the pursuing shoggoth is equally elusive and non-descriptive: "It was the utter, objective embodiment of the fantastic novelist's 'thing that should not be'" (70). The two characters also fail to describe the unusual geometry of R'lyeh and the Antarctic city, respectively, as it seems not to adhere to the normal rules of physical dimensions. All they can say is that "the geometry of the place was all wrong" ("Cthulhu" 33-34) or that the geometry was non-euclidean. Language fails them, because language describes the known and can only attempt to describe the unknown by means of what it is *not*. Lovecraftian horror thrives precisely on the indescribable and the unknown, knowledge of which can only lead to madness. Ultimately, madness in Lovecraft's work is represented as punishment for mankind's arrogant sense of self-importance and manifests itself in the form of nihilistic paranoia brought upon by over-ambitious scientific exploration of the unknown. Overall, the main principle is derived from the early SF stories of the Gothic era characterised by the idea of science creating dangerous monsters, with a notable shift, however, into a more philosophical kind of horror, with Lovecraft's monsters also serving as personifications of deep cosmological fears. With the creation of cosmic horror, Lovecraft demonstrates how SF themes can be utilised creatively to explore madness, as well as how madness can be utilised to explore SF themes in a nuanced and captivating way that has resulted in a dedicated following.

2.2 Marge Piercy: *Woman on the Edge of Time*

Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), tells the story of a middle-aged Chicana woman, named Connie Ramos, who is institutionalised at New York's Bellevue mental hospital for violent behaviour. Although the violent incident that lead to her institutionalisation is fully justified – she was defending her niece, Dolly, from forced abortion by her violent pimp – Connie's past history, involving a total mental breakdown, substance abuse and child neglect in the aftermath of the death of her husband results in her actions being taken as a pattern of mental illness. What her doctors do *not* suspect,

however, is that Connie experiences visitations from an androgynous looking woman from the future called Luciente, who shows her a future vastly different from the world she lives in.

Several nova can be identified in the novel. First, there is time travel. This novum's function is to allow the character to transcend reality and view potential futures. Most interestingly, this time travel method is achieved with the direct assistance of madness. Although Piercy explains the possibility of time travel through the use of technological gadgets from the future called "kenners," it is also emphasised that Connie has a particularly receptive mind, making communication across time and space possible. In her own time, of course, she is considered mad, but this is not how Luciente phrases it: "'You're an unusual person. Your mind is unusual. You're what we call a catcher, a receptive'" (42). In Luciente's future world, unconventional thinking is not treated as an illness, episodes of madness are not cause for life-long stigmatisation and punishment and asylums are not run for the purpose of constraining patients. Instead, as Luciente explains, they "'are places where people retreat when they want to go down into themselves – to collapse, carry on, see visions, hear voices of prophecy, bang on the walls, relive infancy – getting in touch with the buried self and the inner mind'" (69). Madness is, thus, presented in the light of a hidden potential for self-reflection and insightfulness. Connie's "receptive mind" demonstrates instances of unusual insight, as she confesses that she sometimes "knew at once things about others she should not know" (44), such as her husband Eddie's infidelity or her brother's eventual decision to leave his wife before he himself had made up his mind to do so. This receptive quality, however, only ever brings sorrow to Connie, often having been beaten and called a witch by Eddie. Madness is, thus, somewhat Romanticised in the novel. On the one hand it is presented as a heightened kind of consciousness, and on the other hand it leads to pain and marginalisation (Connie's institutionalisation and constant rejection by both society and her family). To this effect, Marcia Bundy Seabury observes that "[l]ike so many protagonists of the Romantic era, Connie's heightened consciousness brings her not satisfaction but ongoing and seemingly inescapable pain" (133). On the other hand, Piercy also presents madness in a harsh and realistic light. The unacceptable treatment of psychiatric patients is emphasised throughout, which was a big concern in the 1970s,

when the novel was written. Piercy, thus, blends Romanticised madness as heightened consciousness with the harsh realities of psychiatric maltreatment.

A second novum can be identified in the form of the alternative society Connie encounters in Luciente's home village from the future, Mattapoisett. Set in the year 2137, societal norms are vastly different than those of 1970s America, or any other known society throughout the Earth's known history. Mattapoisett is a multiracial, egalitarian, eco-friendly society with no central government, in which babies are developed and born in laboratory-like environments for the purpose of gender equality, children have three mothers of any gender, twelve-year-olds spend a weak alone in the wilderness to "break dependencies" and avoid "remaining stuck in old patterns" (125), individuals choose their own names and responsibilities are appointed after councils and are rotated regularly, to name some of its peculiarities. Mattapoisett is, in many ways, a utopia, but it is not always entirely to Connie's liking, as she is used to a vastly different world with cars, tall buildings and, most importantly, relationships that rely much more heavily on attachment. In her eyes, many of the customs of Mattapoisett appear very strange and counter-intuitive, such as the preference of relying on manual labour for most jobs instead of mechanical automation (Mattapoisett prioritises sustainability). In time, she does come to appreciate Mattapoisett's society as a whole, however. This suggests that the best choices are not always easy to adjust to.

The novel's third novum appears in Connie's contemporary world in the form of an experimental mind-restraining device implanted into the cranium of psychiatric patients, including Connie's. Its purpose is to control the patients' emotions and to eliminate any outbursts. These superneurotransmitters essentially numb the brain and can also be used to induce whatever emotion the doctors choose by the click of a button. They are, in essence, a type of thought control device. Their implantation is portrayed in the novel as resulting in the ultimate death of personality: "She felt distanced from her own life, as if it had ended with the implantation of the dialytrode. … Connie was no more. Yet she lived on" (331). There is even a case of a patient, Skip, committing suicide at the first opportunity because his implantation has left him hollow. Interestingly, whereas the function of the first novum of time travel is to allow the transcending of reality, this third novum of the brain implantation has the exact opposite function; namely to force Connie

back to reality and to block its transcendence. Conflict of interests is very central to the novel and is also reflected in the use of its nova.

Woman on the Edge of Time has a final novum, which is the concept of alternative futures – the future is yet to be decided, after all. When, after many tries, a now brain-implanted Connie fails to transport herself to Mattapoisett, she instead accidentally time-travels to an alternative future of New York. This future is the polar opposite to Mattapoisett. The air is dense and yellow from pollution, people spend their entire lives in the enclosure of massive skyscrapers taking drugs as substitutes for lived experiences, the rich keep themselves alive for two hundred years through expensive medical care and organ transplantations harvested from the poor who die extremely young, the government monitors everyone through cameras and robot enforcers police the world. If Mattapoisett can be considered a utopia, this alternative futuristic New York is without a doubt a dystopia. It is notable that both futures are rooted in Connie's present society (Minico 6), with the various social and ecological problems having been handled very differently. This gives a cautionary quality to the story. Once more, Piercy juxtaposes the function of the story's nova. Whereas Mattapoisett is there to show Connie how the world can function in harmony if everyone works for the greater goal of the community and the planet, this alternative future is there to warn how messed up the world might end up being if everyone blindly conforms to power-hungry leaders and no-one strives for a better future.

Utilising the same novum of alternative futures, Connie also witnesses the death of Luciente on the battlefront. Although she initially believes she has visited the timeline of Mattapoisett she is familiar with, it is later revealed that this is yet another alternative future. There are some important things to note in regards to Piercy's use of alternative futures and her choice to show such bleak, pessimistic visions. First, Connie only begins to envision these nightmarish futures once the device has been implanted into her brain and her thoughts and emotions are tempered with. At this point, she has been "cured" of her madness, in the eyes of her doctors. The alternative futures reveal to her how horrible the world could end up becoming if everyone conforms to those who seek power and control over others; whether they be doctors, governments or some other force of power. The idea is that blind conformity comes with massive dangers. It is also notable that the

horrors of these alternative futures stem from science itself, or, more specifically, the over-reliance on science, to the extent that technology comes to both govern people's lives and to replace true lived experience. Gildina is a character who represents this fate. Locked inside her apartment, her diet is based on extremely processed, synthetic food, she spends most of her time using a virtual-reality-like device called a "Sense-all" and she relies on drugs for any type of stimulation: "Risers, soothers, sleepers, wakers, euphors, passion pills, the whole works" (320). Mattapoisett, on the other hand, represents a society that uses its technology sparingly and only where it is necessary.

The most striking observation when comparing the functions of the story's four nova is that they form two opposing pairs: the power to transcend reality and the harmonious society of Mattapoisett, on the one hand, accompanied by what Connie's contemporary society labels "madness," and subjugation and highly oppressive societies that rely too heavily on technology, on the other hand, accompanied by what Connie's contemporary society labels "sanity." The implication seems to be that a certain amount of madness – perhaps better translated to "non-conventional thinking" – is essential for societies to advance in a positive direction. This is a good example of an instance in which madness is utilised to explore a SF theme (dystopia/utopia) and to add nuanced political undertones. Much like Mattapoisett regards the process of going mad as a potentially enlightening event, so too does Connie gain insight of the potential future outcomes through her madness. Considering Connie's ability to time-travel is linked to her madness, it becomes apparent that Piercy explores madness in relation to SF in a different way compared to Lovecraft. Whereas in Lovecraft's stories knowledge of the unknown leads to madness, in *Woman on the Edge of Time* madness leads to knowledge of the unknown. This somewhat strange, admittedly, premise of insightful madness can be better understood in relation to the concept of foresight. The ability to look into the future and imagine a world radically different and improved is very important for societies in order to build towards that goal, whilst it requires, simultaneously, a non-conventional thought process not far removed from the concept of madness. Likewise, the ability to imagine the potentially horrific future outcome based on society's current trajectory is equally important in order to fight against its realisation. In this sense, *Women on the Edge of Time* also demonstrates that SF as a genre has an excellent

potential for the development and expression of radical ideas and for producing politically impactful literature in a way that would not be possible in other genres.

3. NEW WAVE AND THE INNER PSYCHE

3.1 Introduction: New Wave of Science Fiction

In the 1960s, a new literary movement emerged that began to transform SF. This "New Wave of SF," as it came to be known, found its initial grounding in the form of the British SF magazine, *New Worlds*, which began to publish more experimental and avant-garde SF works beginning in 1964, under its new editor, Michael Moorcock. Soon, the New Wave movement had spread to the U.S. and other countries too. Inspired by the social changes of the decade and its emerging counterculture, there was an overall interest in psychotropic drugs, Pop Art, the media landscape, as well as a strong "pessimism about the future … [which] often focused on the likelihood of disaster caused by overpopulation and interference with the ecology, as well as by war, and a general cynicism about the politics of the US and UK governments (Clute; Nicholls, *The Encyclopedia of SF*, "New Wave"). Furthermore, this new type of SF was generally highly metaphorical and shifted its focus towards the soft sciences, such as psychology. Science and technology still played an important part in the New Wave's literary output, but began to be used in more abstract and creative ways to explore the inner psyche of the human within the context of the rapid technological advancements of the era. A shift of focus took place, thus, from outer space to inner space, with the interiorisation of the themes of SF (Evnine 24). Many New Wave writers sought to dispense with the clichés of the SF genre and "reacted against the conventions of traditional SF to produce avant-garde, radical or fractured science fictions" (Roberts, *History of SF* 334). Experimentation, thus, especially regarding the narrative form, became common practice in an effort to reinvigorate the genre and to explore psychological disharmony and fragmentation, providing a strong new link to madness. Furthermore, as Adam Roberts points out, there was also an effort to "integrate more thoroughly the marginalised – women, ethnic minorities, alternate modes of life and sexuality – as expressive of the central SF fascination with otherness" (*History of SF* 377). In regards to the concept of madness, the New Wave's shift towards psychology and its integration of the

marginalised brought forth new ways of exploring the fractured inner psyche of psychotic experience.

Two important New Wave works that delve deep into such psychological explorations are Pamela Zoline's "The Heat Death of the Universe" (1967) and J. G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970 and republished with illustrations and annotations in 1990). Their experimentation with form and their focus on fragmentary psychopathological experience in combination with abstract scientific aspects render both works good examples of New Wave SF. Zoline's short story uses the hypothesis of the heat death of the universe, in which the universe is destined to come to an end once it reaches a temperature that renders all energy unusable through the process of entropy. This steady progression towards heat death is paralleled with a mother – Sarah Boyle – experiencing a nervous breakdown in her kitchen. J. G. Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* uses images of car crashes, war, deaths of public figures, obscene sexual fantasies and, generally, the information overload of the mass media to explore the psychosis of a man struggling to make sense of the world around him. As mentioned, both authors experiment with narrative form in their respective works, employing, for example, fragmentation. Furthermore, neither makes use of traditional SF tropes and conventions in obvious ways. There are no new planets to explore, no new speculative technological inventions that propel the plot, no encounters with aliens or time-travel in the traditional sense. Nor are the two stories set in a world clearly differentiated from our own, as one would expect considering Suvin's definition of SF. Instead of relying on otherworldly settings, Zoline sets her story in a contemporary Californian household where nothing extraordinary happens, whilst Ballard emphasises real cultural and political events that took centre stage in the American and Western public consciousness of the 1960s.

In what way, then, do these two works fit into the genre of SF? This question needs to be examined within a certain context. First, the context of their publication has played an important role in their classification as SF. "The Heat Death of the Universe" was published in 1967 in the science fiction magazine, *New Worlds*, and many of the chapters that appeared in *The Atrocity Exhibition* were initially published individually in the same magazine between 1966 and 1969, prior to their publication as part of the novel in 1970. This meant that the primary audience that read and discussed these works

initially were SF fans, with the texts being designed with the express intent of breaking their expectations. Is the context of publication, however, sufficient reason to classify a work as SF? Norman Spinrad states that "Science fiction is anything published as science fiction" (qtd. in *The Encyclopedia of SF* under "Definitions of SF"). There is some truth in Spinrad's observation, as the context of a work's publication influences the way readers perceive and interpret it. Mark Rose backs up this notion in relation to "The Heat Death of the Universe," arguing that it "clearly gains resonance and impact by having been published in a context of science-fiction expectations" (1). To demonstrate how SF expectations may influence the short story's interpretation, a SF fan may wonder if the inserts of abstract theory interspersed throughout the text are used for mere metaphorical purposes or should be read more literally. Is it, ultimately, a story about a mother's nervous breakdown or about the onset of the heat death of the universe? Perhaps it is both. Elizabeth Hewitt argues that this is intentionally left unclear, as the story "establishes, if only ambiguously, an alternative generic reading model that disrupts our conventional metaphorical machines such that even that which is most mundane can also be read as extra-worldly" (292). The context of a work's publication, thus, *does* play an important role and can even dictate, to some degree, the genre it is assigned to. Even so, Rose, follows up his statement with the question: "But is it science fiction?" (1).

Content and subject matter are, of course, also very important in genre classification. Science and technology *does* occupy an important role in both works, albeit in unusual ways. In "The Heat Death of the Universe," interspersed throughout the text are inserts of thermodynamic theory. These inserts appear in their own, separate, paragraphs and do not directly affect the story's loose plot, neither does science directly interact with the physical world. Science, thus, remains in its abstract, theoretical form, simply stated as cosmological contemplations and it is left for the reader to interpret and to draw parallels. Ballard, on the other hand, injects multiple scientific disciplines into his text, also in abstract ways. The protagonist, Travis, experiences the world differently through psychosis. Due to "the failure of his psyche to accept the fact of its own consciousness" and in an attempt to make sense of the world around him, he "revolt[s] against the present continuum of time and space" (12). Travis also develops a deep obsession with geometry, in search of a perfect symmetry that does not exist in our

asymmetrical world. Overall, Ballard uses the sciences as a tool to depict a psychotic view of the world that is not grounded in physical reality and intentionally creates ambiguity of meaning throughout the text to achieve this. Science is certainly present and central in both Zoline's and Ballard's works, but it remains more abstract and less involved, if at all, in the plot. One could argue that New Wave SF utilises science to explore new *concepts* instead of new planets and new monsters.

But, to return to the question of genre, as I have argued in the introduction of this dissertation, the implementation of scientific and technological aspects is still not enough to render a text SF. The question arises regarding cognitive estrangement and the presence of a novum. Estrangement is certainly present and a very central aspect in both texts. Their estrangement, however, does not stem from adding SF elements that set the world apart from our empirical world, but rather from the way the empirical world is presented and experienced in an estranged way. There *is* also, arguably, interaction between estrangement and cognition, but of a different kind. The vagueness of Suvin's use of the term "cognition" allows us to extend its meaning to include alternative cognitive logics that are not rooted in common rationality. This can account for the New Wave's fairly common tendency to rely on psychosis and mental breakdown. Travis's obsession with geometrical shapes, after all, stems from his constant pursuit to make sense of a world that makes no sense to him. Interestingly, Ballard has stated that "the function of the writer is no longer the addition of fictions in the world, but rather to seek its abstraction, to direct an enquiry aimed at recovering elements of reality from this debauch of fiction" (qtd. in Brigg 59). Instead of attempting to rationalise the unrealistic or outright physically impossible depictions of SF through the prospect of advanced technology, like most traditional SF stories do, New Wave authors, instead, begin from the rational, empirical world grounded in reality and proceed to irrationalise it with the help of abstract science and experimental narrative techniques. In other words, the New Wave seems to reverse the genre's tendency to rationalise the irrational, so that it now "irrationalises" the rational, instead. In so doing, it strengthens the notion of SF as a "mad genre."

As for the presence of a novum, speaking of the New Wave, Adam Roberts argues that "there was a self-conscious effort by many writers to make the mode of the novum

new again, to re-novum the novum" (*History of SF* 377). The novum, thus, is also utilised in different, abstract ways when compared to traditional SF. Because of this, it is not so easy to pinpoint a precise novum in "The Heat Death of the Universe" and *The Atrocity Exhibition*. The novum is certainly not to be found in something physical, as neither authors incorporate extraterrestrial life-forms, hyper-advanced technological gadgets or anything of the sort in their respective stories. Suvin, however, defines the novum as "*a totalizing phenomenon or relationship* deviating from the author's and implied reader's norm of reality" (Suvin 64; emphasis added). Once more, the vagueness of Suvin's definition and his use of broad terms allows us to extend its application to more abstract texts. In fact, one can argue that in the case of Zoline's short story, the very abstraction of science and the focus on the mundane in a genre that normally deals with the technological application of science and focuses on the extra-ordinary might appear to the average SF reader it was marketed to as "an estrangement-producing novum," in Simon Evnine's words (23).

There is one more technique employed by both Ballard and Zoline in order to enhance "deviati[on] from the author's and implied reader's norm of reality," as per Suvin's definition. Both authors experiment with the form of the narrative and implement fragmentation throughout their respective works. "The Heat Death of the Universe" consists of fifty-four numbered paragraphs, most of which are not narratively or thematically linked. Some paragraphs follow Sarah Boyle's day, describing the preparation for the birthday party of one of her children, the party itself and her nervous breakdown in the aftermath of the event. This is the closest narrative resembling a plot in Zoline's short story. In between these paragraphs are inserts of thermodynamic theory, passages on entropy, the heat death of the universe, light and time. Other inserts relate to art (Dadaism) and zoology (turtles), whilst some paragraphs include philosophical contemplations derived from everyday objects, such as the abstract beauty of a cereal box. The result is a fragmentary text that jumps from subject to subject – presumably changing in accordance to Sarah's mood and mental state – and an overall estranged presentation of otherwise mundane things. *The Atrocity Exhibition*, too utilises fragmentation heavily. Not only are the novel's fifteen chapters disjointed to a great extent, but even between paragraphs within the same chapters there is usually no

narrative coherence or cohesion. Instead, as Marcin Tereszewski puts it, what the reader finds is "fifteen randomly placed vignettes, a fragmented and non-linear storyline, held together by a thin thread of recurring images and themes" (77). Tereszewski also points out that "despite the disintegration of form and narrative, Ballard still employs his trademark scientific language – objective, reserved, and forensic in its precision" (77). This is also the case in Zoline's story and helps to present its content in a more objective tone, adding to the element of cognition. The fragmentary narrative form, thus, works both as a tool for achieving estrangement within typically non-estranged settings and as a tool to depict the disjointed inner psyche of characters undergoing psychosis or mental breakdown, whilst the objective scientific language helps to reinforce the interaction of estrangement and cognition SF is known for.

It may be safe to assume that Suvin's definition of SF was probably not intended to include New Wave, but the vagueness of his terminology provides some leverage to extend its boundaries. In essence, the biggest difference between traditional SF and the New Wave is that the latter shifts the focus of the genre's themes from the outer space to the inner space and from the tangible to the abstract. This inward shift produces new ties between SF and the concept of madness, which has been utilised in creative ways by many New Wave authors in conjunction to scientific concepts. Having discussed "The Heat Death of the Universe" and *The Atrocity Exhibition* in relation to the New Wave and to the broader genre of SF, their unusual incorporation of scientific elements, alternative cognitive estrangement and their experimental narrative forms, it is now time to examine their treatment of the concept of madness individually and in more detail.

3.2 Pamela Zoline: "The Heat Death of the Universe"

Since its publication, "The Heat Death of the Universe" has most often been analysed from a feminist perspective, becoming an important piece of feminist SF in the process. Ritch Calvin, for instance, finds that Zoline's story "equates the stifling confines of gender with the entropic winding down of the universe" (10), whilst Evnine points out the story's many second-wave feminist concerns, such as "the loneliness of the housewife

(her husband is conspicuously absent throughout), the drudgery of her ungratifying work in the house, the lack of scope for her obvious artistic, scientific, and philosophical talents" (22). If analysed in such a light, Sarah's mental breakdown might signal a resistance against patriarchal gender role assignments, such as the mother's duty to give birth and raise children at the expense of any life ambitions she may have otherwise had, whilst the man is free to follow his life's pursuit. There is certainly plenty of textual evidence for such a reading. Sarah's husband remains, after all, entirely absent, whilst she is stuck in the daily routine of cleaning the house, going to the supermarket and tending to the children. This results in the manifestation of an inner void which leaves Sarah feeling "that there are things to be hoped for, accomplishments to be desired beyond the mere reproductions, mirror reproduction of one's kind" (¶ 32). Although there are undeniably strong feminist undertones in Zoline's short story, there are also other factors that seem to contribute to Sarah's mental breakdown that do not stem from patriarchal oppression and restrictions of motherhood. These factors are usually overlooked by scholars. As the scope of this dissertation focuses on madness in relation to SF, I will proceed with an analysis that steers away from the story's feminist aspects to produce an alternative reading which is more closely focused on some of the themes of the genre of SF, linking them to madness.

It is interesting to note the different ways in which madness is introduced to the narrative, relating both to the story's form and to scientific concepts which are used to draw parallels with madness. The most obvious example is the use thermodynamic theory. Zoline oscillates between descriptions of Sarah's mundane life performing household chores and inserts of thermodynamic theory – focusing especially on the state function of entropy – and the hypothesis of the heat death of the universe. On a first level, madness and science are linked by parallelling mental decline with the universe's progression towards heat death, as well as mental breakdown with the state of entropy. Much like the heat death hypothesis proposes the universe is progressively moving into an irreversible state of chaos and randomness in which energy becomes unavailable for use (entropy), so too does Sarah's mental state progress to a state of chaos and burnout. The parallel completes itself when Sarah begins to throw glasses, dishes, cups, jars etc., creating chaos in her kitchen, despite her previous obsessive efforts to maintain order at

all times – an obsession I will discuss later on. Time also seems to slow down, as "[t]he eggs arch slowly through the kitchen, … go higher and higher in the stillness, hesitate at the zenith, then begin to fall away slowly, slowly, through the fine clear air" (¶ 54). This slowing down of time signals the unavailability of energy and the ultimate reaching of the heat death.

To a lesser extent, Zoline also seems to borrow the concept of oscillation from physics; first by oscillating between abstract physics and the mundane life of a housewife, which Elizabeth Hewitt argues "disrupts those epistemological categories that serve as the ideological ground for regulating familiarity and displacement" (292), thus serving as a tool to create estrangement. Zoline, however, also uses oscillation to switch between madness and sanity. This is evident from Sarah's divided inner psyche: "Sarah Boyle has at times felt a unity with her body, at other times a complete separation" (¶ 35). She, thus, oscillates between states of mind. The narrative further demonstrates this division of Sarah's inner psyche by having her at one point confusingly refer to herself in the third person when contemplating Dada principles: "'That way madness lies, says Sarah,' says Sarah" (¶ 26).

Zoline, thus, borrows concepts from physics (entropy, heat death, oscillation) and applies them to explore her protagonist's inner psyche and the manifestation of madness. It is interesting to note, however, that madness is represented in the text by the very science whose fundamental focus is to understand how the universe and everything in it works. The focus of physics is very much centered on objective reality. Madness, on the other hand, is very commonly associated with being out of touch with reality. Zoline, thus, finds a creative way to depict and represent madness by means of rational, objective and emotionally detached discourse, primarily through the various scientific inserts, but also through the frequent use of straightforward declarative statements that reveal Sarah's emotional turmoil whilst avoiding describing her emotions:

(41) She thinks of the end of the world by ice.

(42) She thinks of the end of the world by water.

(43) She thinks of the end of the world by nuclear war. (¶ 41-43)

This seems to simulate the neutral stance acquired by scientists when conducting research, with the story itself resembling a scientific report, as Mary Papke points out

(152). Sarah Boyle's mundane chores and mental decline are described almost as if they are the subject of a case study. Furthermore, Zoline maintains a neutral stance towards the condition of madness, as there is no direct expression of empathy or apathy when addressing madness in the text. Even during Sarah's climactic breakdown at the end, Zoline resists using strong emotion-evoking language, instead relying on simple repetition, straightforwardly stating that "she begins to cry," "she is crying," "Sarah Boyle begins to cry," etc. (¶ 54). Further enhancing the element of detachment in the research-like narrative, Zoline has opted to use the third person.

Despite the narrative's particularities, its focus is still to express Sarah's inner thoughts and feelings, including passages of Sarah contemplating the world around her. Considering this, it seems Sarah's mental struggles stem, in part, from her overly analytical and somewhat sterile way of viewing, experiencing, and relating to the world around her. Through her fixation with the sciences, Sarah develops a harmful hyper-rationality which results in emotional detachment and, consequently, mental breakdown. At the very least it can be said that Sarah has a very analytical way of processing concepts, feelings, objects, and situations. She contemplates, for instance, on the fortunate matter "that children are as ingratiating as we know them. Otherwise they would soon be salted off for the leeches they are, and the race would extinguish itself in a fair sweet flowering" (¶ 33). This analytical – almost purely scientific – way of looking at the world is accompanied by an obsession with the ordering of things, such as numbering "819 separate moveable [sic] objects in the living-room" (¶ 15) and writing notes – presumably also the inserts – in "a desperate/heroic attempt to index, record, bluff, invoke, order and placate" (¶ 14). Sarah's hyper-analytical mind and her fixation with order further enhances Sarah's overall emotional detachment. This becomes very clear in the way she treats love as a concept:

> (34) INSERT FIVE. LOVE.
>
> LOVE: a typical sentiment involving fondness for, or attachment to, an object, the idea of which is emotionally colored whenever it arises in the mind, and capable, as Shand has pointed out, of evoking any one of a whole gamut of primary emotions, according to the situation in which the object is placed, or represented; often, and by psychoanalysts always, used in the sense of sex-love

or even lust (q.v.) (¶ 34)

Sarah appears more preoccupied with defining the world around her and trying to order it instead of experiencing it – precisely what the natural sciences do. Even emotions become the subject of analysis; love, the target of methodical semantical dissection.

Considering Sarah's mental state is on the decline, leading up to full mental breakdown, an important question arises: Is Sarah's way of viewing and processing the world based on reality and reason? Arguably so. In fact, it is based almost exclusively on her well-informed knowledge of scientific, philosophical, zoological and even artistic principles, as indicated by the numerous inserts, discussing in detail thermodynamics, ontology, the habitats and characteristics of turtles, and Dadaism. Sarah also takes into account the possibility of scientific error before drawing parallels and conclusions. When contemplating the inevitability of the heat death of the universe, for instance, which presupposes the universe is a thermodynamically closed system, she remarks that "[i]t is by no means certain, however, that the Universe can be considered as a closed system in this sense" (¶ 19). This demonstrates Sarah's cautious outlook on the world and her strong inclination to ensure her reasoning is at all times sound. Even when addressing the emotional issues she herself is dealing with, Sarah does so in her typically detached way that seems to disregard feelings altogether as mere phenomena of no real importance: "Many young wives feel trapped. It is a contemporary sociological phenomenon which may be explained in part by a gap between changing living patterns and the accommodation of social services to these patterns" (¶ 14). Although this passage shows Sarah is very much aware of the feelings she is having, she seems to dismiss them as a simple common-found phenomenon. This stance seems to be rooted, once more, in the pure scientific outlook on all aspects of life. From a pure biological perspective, after all, emotions are nothing more than a series of chemical processes of the brain. They are also by default subjective, and, thus, of little interest to the hard sciences. So it becomes clear that Sarah's reasoning and processing of the world is well grounded, yet it leads to madness. This takes us back to Patrick Bratlinger's notion that, in SF, reason taken to extremities leads to the creation of monsters and madness (31) – a common theme from the very origins of the genre, as I have discussed in Chapter 1. There is no literal monster in "The Heat Death of the Universe," neither is it fair to characterise Sarah as such on the

basis of her nervous breakdown, but there is certainly something to be said on extreme reason, derived from strict adherence to the analytical methodology of the sciences in all aspects of life, leading to her mental breakdown.

In a paradoxical way, despite Sarah's grounded rationality, her obsession with definitions and the ordering of things, and despite the objective, analytical, and emotionally detached language Zoline has chosen for the short story, there is a remarkable failure, at times, to convey reality accurately. The repeated reassuring statements referring to Sarah as "a vivacious and intelligent young wife and mother, educated at a fine Eastern college, proud of her growing family which keeps her busy and *happy* around the house" (¶ 9; emphasis added), only serve to hint at the opposite. Her family certainly keeps her busy, but it is evident she is generally *not* happy. The second time this statement is made, it is followed by revealing she is "only occasionally given to obsessions concerning Time/Entropy/Chaos and Death" (¶ 30), revealing in an indirect way the progression of the deterioration of Sarah's mental state. In another instance, it is revealed that Sarah sometimes "labels objects with their names, or with false names, thus on her bureau the hair brush is labelled HAIR BRUSH, the cologne, COLOGNE, the hand cream, CAT" (¶ 15). This mislabelling is both an indicator of Sarah's mental decline and of the inability to solve her deeper troubles simply by enforcing order in a world that seems at times random and chaotic.

There is one more factor that seems to contribute to Sarah's mental breakdown. The short story's opening line/paragraph provides an indication that Sarah has deep ontological concerns:

> (1) ONTOLOGY
>
> That branch of metaphysics which concerns itself with the problems of the nature of existence or being. (¶ 1)

Ontological or existential concerns are a relatively common theme within SF, as is the case with Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu" and *At the Mountains of Madness*, analysed in Chapter 2. Similarly to Lovecraft's work, ontological concerns once more impact the protagonist's mental state in "The Heat Death of the Universe." The very "nature of existence or being" is itself a problem. Zoline follows up this passage on ontology by juxtaposing images of growth and decay:

> (2) Imagine a pale blue morning sky, almost green, with clouds only at the rims. The earth rolls and the sun appears to mount, mountains erode, fruits decay, the Foraminifera adds another chamber to its shell, babies' fingernails grow as does the hair of the dead in their graves, and in egg timers the sands fall and the eggs cook on. (¶ 2)

These juxtapositions serve to demonstrate through images the aforementioned "problems of the nature of existence or being." On the one hand, even though the "pale blue morning sky" with only a few clouds traditionally tends to signal a positive beginning full of hope, its light also serves to expose the erosion of mountains, decay of fruits etc. Growth, too, is set up against death; the ultimate outcome of anything that grows. In combination with the central theme of the heat death of the universe, ontological concerns function similarly to Lovecraftian cosmic horror, in that knowledge of the nature of the universe brings on a harmful nihilism that causes madness.

In summary, Zoline integrates and explores the concept of madness in multiple ways, linking it to several common SF themes. On one level, she uses scientific concepts such as thermodynamic theory, entropy, the heat death hypothesis and oscillation, placing them in parallel to her protagonist's mental breakdown. On another level, Zoline uses hyper-rationality, stemming from strict adherence to a scientific approach on all aspects of life, as a cause of madness, thus mirroring the common SF theme that reason is harmful when taken to extremities, as argued by Bratlinger. On a third level, deep ontological/existential concerns – another fairly common SF theme – are also utilised as a contributing factor leading to madness. By locating madness within scientific concepts and SF themes, without, however, relying on traditional SF tropes and story conventions, Zoline's short story showcases that many of the very themes of SF may be used to infuse madness into the genre, making SF "madness-prone." At the very least "The Heat Death of the Universe" demonstrates that several SF themes can be used effectively in conjunction with madness narratives.

4. SOCIETAL PSYCHOPATHOLOGY

4.1 J. G. Ballard: *The Atrocity Exhibition*

The Atrocity Exhibition consists of fifteen loosely tied autonomous chapters, which Ballard and others have described as "condensed novels" (Luckhurst 73). There is no clearly identifiable plot, no consistent narrative, and no real story with a beginning middle and end. In fact, prior to the novel's publication, the chapters were published individually out of order in various SF and avant-garde magazines between 1966 and 1969, meaning they were never intended to be read in any particular order. The content of the chapters ranges from fragmentary scenes of automobile crashes, war-zone atrocities, and flashes of real-life tragic events such as the deaths of J. F. Kennedy, Marilyn Monroe and other public figures, including, curiously, Elizabeth Taylor, who died in 2011, forty one years after the novel's publication. Overall, *The Atrocity Exhibition* is a work that resists easy reading and comprehension. Instead, the reader is left trying to piece fragments together in an attempt to uncover a story and to extract some sort of hidden meaning. Marcin Tereszewski points out that "extended immersion in the narrative allows the reader to eventually distill the contours of something only vaguely resembling a plot, i.e. that we, as readers, are most likely in the mind of a patient in a mental facility" (77). The protagonist, Travis, experiences the world through psychosis, developing obscene sexual fantasies linked to deadly car crashes and other atrocities, whilst also relating the world around him to geometrical shapes. Through a series of experiments, including car crash simulations, Travis's psychosis is being studied by a group of doctors and students, lead by Dr. Nathan. Considering the addition of Elizabeth Taylor's death in between deaths of other public figures that *did* take place in real life, it is not always clear where reality ends and psychosis begins. Ballard, thus, crafts a broken narrative which is characterised by a total immersion into the psychopathology of the mad protagonist. His name, tellingly, changes constantly throughout the novel, being called Travis, Talbot, Traven, Tallis, Trabert, Talbert and Travers in different chapters.[1] These name changes, in

1 I refer to him exclusively as Travis throughout the dissertation for simplicity and consistency.

combination with the text's fragmentary form, emphasise Travis's fractured and distorted perception of reality.

Similarly to the other works discussed in this dissertation, *The Atrocity Exhibition* uses specific elements, concepts, or conventions that relate to the genre of SF in order to explore madness. There are four identifiable SF-related aspects Ballard utilises in his psychopathological exploration: the harmful potentiality of technological advancement, ontological dilemmas brought on by scientific knowledge of the nature of the universe, the use of abstract science in an attempt to make sense of the world, and the dystopian treatment of media-driven society. In the following section I discuss the way Ballard utilises these four aspects in *The Atrocity Exhibition* to explore the concept of madness, as well as the ways in which his approach of these common SF elements differs when compared to their more standard variations found in most traditional SF, where necessary.

4.1.1 *Technology and the automobile crash*

Beginning with the harmful potentiality of science and technology – a theme that has been explored in many SF works in combination with madness from the very beginning of the genre's early development, as discussed in Chapter 1 – Ballard focuses on three major technological manifestations: the automobile, modern warfare weapons, and the mass media. The latter will be discussed in sub-section 4.1.3 on dystopia, which appears at the end of this chapter. The harmful potentiality of weapons is immediately evident. The novel opens with the eponymous atrocity exhibition, showcasing apocalyptic scenes of war zone atrocities, the napalm bomb and radiation burns caused by nuclear weapons. Weapons are used by Ballard as a tool to externally represent the inner disharmony or outright madness of the atrocious side of human nature, with Ballard noting in one of his annotations that "all that destructive technology concentrated on the production of nothing [is] the closest we can get to certain obsessional states of mind" (10). Travis, specifically, is an extreme case of an individual almost entirely surrendered to his atrocious side, which manifests itself through psychosis. So, on a basic level, Ballard uses the "destructive technology" of modern warfare to expose and explore madness through scientific development.

The automobile is used to a similar effect, although it is used to explore the state

of Travis's psyche in much more depth. Through a multitude of recurring sequences focused on violent car crashes taking place on the circuit of a research laboratory test track, as well as through flashes of deadly car crashes of celebrities and public figures that took place in real life, the automobile crash takes centre stage in the novel. Unlike weapons, automobiles are notably not created with the express purpose of causing harm, enabling Ballard to incorporate their harmful potentiality in the narrative in more nuanced ways. In fact, cars appear to have a potentially hazardous seductive quality, disguising the element of danger under flashy colours and the highly commercialised promise of freedom. Ballard's annotations prove very insightful once more:

> the car crash differs from other disasters in that it involves the most powerfully advertised commercial product of this century, an iconic entity that combines the elements of speed, power, dream and freedom within a highly stylised format that defuses any fears we may have of the inherent dangers of these violent and unstable machines. (97)

Drawing from the text itself, "the automobile … dominates the vectors of speed, aggression, violence and desire" on the one hand – its dangerous seductive quality – whilst, on the other hand "the automobile crash contains a crucial image of the machine as conceptualized psychopathology" (99). The automobile crash, thus, becomes a tool for Ballard to project Travis's fractured mental state onto. To elaborate, Ballard uses technology, in the form of the automobile and weapons of mass destruction, as external, physical, elements that help conceptualise madness, thus externalising the inner world of the psychotic mind by projecting it onto the physical world:

> it is clear that Freud's classic distinction between the manifest and latent content of the inner world of the psyche now has to be applied to the outer world of reality. A dominant element in this reality is technology and its instrument, the machine. (98-99)

The text, thus, suggests adopting a psychoanalytical approach towards physical external elements that constitute reality, with emphasis put on technology. Ballard invites the reader to try to interpret these elements as if they form part of a dream, deciphering their manifest and latent content. The manifest content relates to the actual images and thoughts – in this case sensationalised car crashes. The latent content relates to their

underlying psychological meaning, with Dr. Nathan providing several diagnoses, which I discuss in sub-section 4.1.2.

Madness is, thus, represented in *The Atrocity Exhibition* through a psychoanalytical perspective, projecting the subconscious psychotic mind onto physical reality. Travis's psychological world is to be understood through the environment around him, as his consciousness is reflected in a mash-up of imagery throughout the novel (Tereszewski 79), of which car crashes are the most prominent. In this process, reality blends with psychopathological hallucinations/fantasies, and the literal merges with the symbolic. In fact, the seductive quality of the automobile is experienced by Travis quite literally, as he develops strange sexual fantasies involving violent car crashes. He also has his sexual partner, Karen Novotny, positioned and photographed in strange poses, leading Dr. Nathan to remark that "it is hard to tell whether the positions are those of Miss Novotny in intercourse or as an auto-crash fatality," concluding that "to a large extent the difference is now meaningless" (27). This sexual dimension assigned to car crashes is also to be understood through psychoanalysis. In Travis's head,

> the car crash may be perceived unconsciously as a fertilizing rather than a destructive event – a liberation of sexual energy – mediating the sexuality of those who have died with an intensity impossible in any other form: James Dean and Miss Mansfield, Camus and the late President. (23)

This demonstrates how Ballard uses physical objects and events to delve deep into the psychopathology of his protagonist, showcasing Travis's strange perspective on reality and finding a fertilising quality in the most destructive of events.

4.1.2 *Attempts at making sense of the world*

Throughout the novel, several diagnoses are made by Dr. Nathan regarding the underlying factors of Travis's mental torments. Although they differ in accordance to the subject in focus each time, they all allude to the fact that Travis is struggling to make sense of the world around him, leading him to seek refuge in his psychosis. Trying to make sense of a world that seems random and chaotic leads Travis to develop a deep obsession with geometry which causes him to constantly relate the things around him to geometric shapes, always in search of a perfect symmetry that can not be found. Albena

Lutzkanova-Vassileva argues that "[u]nprepared to record and translate in meaningful experience the ceaseless flood of media-engendered images and signals, the protagonist of *The Atrocity Exhibition* inhabits a world that is impenetrable and unyielding to sensible decoding (390). It is this attempt at decoding the world that leads Travis to relate everything around him to geometrical shapes, reducing bodies and objects to their most basic conceptual elements in an attempt to simplify the world so it may make sense to him. According to Dr. Nathan's observations, "[m]uch of Travis's thought concerns what he terms 'the lost symmetry of the blastosphere' – the primitive precursor of the embryo that is the last structure to preserve perfect symmetry in all planes" (13-14). In this diagnosis, Dr. Nathan explains that

> Travis's extreme sensitivity to the volumes and geometry of the world around him, and their immediate translation into psychological terms, may reflect a belated attempt to return to a symmetrical world, one that will recapture the perfect symmetry of the blastosphere, and the acceptance of the 'Mythology of the Amniotic Return.' (14)

It is notable that Ballard, similarly to Zoline, uses a scientific discipline (geometry, as opposed to physics, in this case) to explore his protagonist's madness. This demonstrates the New Wave's experimentation with exploring the inner psyche directly through scientific concepts.

Another diagnosis provided by Dr. Nathan suggests the rejection of the very nature of existence is the cause of Travis's psychosis: "What the patient is reacting against is, simply, the phenomenology of the universe, the specific and independent existence of separate objects and events, however trivial and inoffensive these may seem" (34). This introduces ontological concerns into the picture once more, similarly to Lovecraft's and Zoline's stories. There is a different approach, however, as the focus is taken away from the human and placed on objects and events, instead: "A spoon, for example, offends [Travis] by the mere fact of its existence in time and space" (34). Furthermore, the numerous images of deaths of public figures and atrocious acts throughout the novel, which reach Travis through the media, only contribute to his psychosis. As Travis fails to accept the phenomenology of the universe, "or the fact of [his] own consciousness," he fantasises about being the perpetrator of tragic events, such

as the death of J. F. Kennedy. At first glance, these fantasies appear to be shocking glimpses into the mind of a psychopath, aimed simply to expose his inability to feel empathy. Dr. Nathan, however, observes that "he's trying to build bridges between things – this Kennedy business, for example. He wants to kill Kennedy again, but in a way that makes sense" (36). Considering this, it appears Travis's psychopathology aims at revealing the chaotic nature of the world he inhabits. On the one hand, Travis's inner psyche is explored through external means, such as the automobile crash, but conversely, the state of the world is also explored through Travis's psychosis, allowing Ballard to offer social commentary and to paint a dystopian picture of 1960s Western society.

4.1.3 *Dystopian treatment of media-driven society*

The novel's depiction of 1960s society is in many ways dystopian. As I have mentioned in Chapter 2, the dystopian future is one of the common tropes of SF identified by Adam Roberts (*New Critical Idiom* 15). It should be noted, however, that, as Ballard roots the novel's setting firmly in the 1960s with countless references to cultural and historical events, artistic movements and public figures of the decade, the novel is not dystopian in the traditional sense, as it is not placed in the future. However, Ballard treats his contemporary western society as if it were a dystopian future that has already arrived, highlighting and magnifying the absurdity of the modern media-driven age. This dystopian perspective is, thus, focused on the psychological or psychopathological effect mass media has – or could potentially have – on both the public consciousness and the individual psyche. This reading is supported by Jen Hui Bon Hoa, who focuses on the media's psychological impact in the novel:

> *The Atrocity Exhibition* … examines the visual technologies of the spectacle and the *psychological* vulnerabilities that they generate. With worry as well as with curiosity, Ballard contemplates the circulation of sensationalist imagery of the human body in the mass media. (73; emphasis in the original)

One of Ballard's annotations elaborates on the subject by posing the novel's central question in regards to the media's effect on society: "What actually happens on the level of our unconscious minds when, within minutes on the same TV screen, a prime minister is assassinated, an actress makes love, an injured child is carried from a car crash?" (89).

Expanding on Bon Hoa's observation it can be said that, in all its experimental absurdity, *The Atrocity Exhibition*'s primary focus is to explore the concept of madness through a series of external stimuli relating to the modern era, characterised by an overload of information and shocking spectacles transmitted through mass media. These external stimuli primarily take the form of technology itself through the automobile, the napalm bomb, the Apollo 1 spacecraft, etc. Furthermore, the constant changing of settings and topics throughout the novel, along with the rapid bombardment of disparate images reflects the 1960s mediascape and simulates the changing of TV channels (Tereszewski 77).

With each vignette skipping to a different setting and subject, tackling the main public concerns of the era, from extremely serious subjects such as J. F. Kennedy's assassination, the Vietnam war and the fire that killed the three Apollo 1 crew members, to ultimately trivial subjects, such as the film industry's glorification and fetishisation of Hollywood stars such as Elizabeth Taylor and Marilyn Monroe, Ballard evidently raises a deep concern that modern media-driven society may have lost track of what is important due to its obsession with creating spectacles for mass consumption. The media has created, essentially, an "atrocity exhibition." This notion also forms the core of Ballard's dystopian treatment. Fantasies relating to Hollywood film stars occupy just as big a space in the novel as the sequences relating to wartime atrocities and violent deaths in car crashes, implying they are of equal importance when viewed purely as spectacles, as the mass media's coverage would suggest. Emma Whiting argues that "all planes, whether corporeal, technological, or geometric, are brought into a radical equivalency with each other and each collapse is made reciprocal to all others (93-94). This leads to the "death of affect," caused by overexposure to such "atrocity exhibitions" by means of the media, to the point they induce total emotional numbness. Shocking events such as bombings, car crashes and assassinations no longer induce shock, whilst highly sexualised or outright pornographic imagery are no longer sexually stimulating. Instead, as Travis's case demonstrates, a new type of obscene pornography emerges that combines the two elements, sexualising atrocious images of death and destruction and exposing civilisation as an illusion in the process – Ballard, after all, was of the opinion that humans are by nature uncivilised to some degree, stating once that "If we want to successfully work

against it, we have to finally admit that human beings are not completely capable of being civilized" (qtd. in Wood 198). *The Atrocity Exhibition* certainly places this concern at the forefront.

In this section I have so far not focused much on the character of Travis, instead referring more broadly to the effects of mass-media on the public consciousness and society at large. These conclusions on society are, however, to a large degree derived from the way Travis experiences the world. The reason for this stretch is that the text offers several indications that Travis, as an individual undergoing psychosis, represents the most extreme manifestation of society's potential future based on its current trajectory. Lutzkanova-Vassileva emphasises this leap from individual psychic trauma to societal psychic trauma:

> What preoccupies the author's mind, however, are the causes for the postmodern transformation of the traumatic influences – that the modern age was able to confine to the experience of personal neurosis and alienation – into the uninhibited-in-range and mass-scale traumas of *collective* nature, resulting in the human subject's outright psychic fragmentation (391; emphasis in the original).

Further indications are to be found in the final chapters of the novel, titled "Plan for the Assassination of Jacqueline Kennedy," "Love and Napalm: Export U.S.A.," "Crash!" and "Why I Want to Fuck Ronald Reagan," which are presented as psychoanalytical case studies revealing strange and disturbing findings regarding increased sexual drive connected to automobile crashes, war atrocities etc. These chapters appear out of place in the narrative of the novel, as they do not feature any of the characters from the previous chapters, including Travis. Their purpose, however, is quite important, as they reveal a growing epidemic of a multitude of psychiatric patients experiencing similar obscene sexual obsessions with Travis. "Love and Napalm," for instance, presents the results of numerous studies "conducted to determine the effects of long-term exposure to TV newsreel films depicting the torture of Viet Cong," including the torture of male combatants, women auxiliaries, children and the wounded. These studies conclude that "[i]n all cases a marked increase in the intensity of sexual activity was reported" (93). "Crash!" takes a similar approach, presenting the findings of studies "conducted to assess the latent sexual appeal of public figures who have achieved subsequent notoriety as

auto-crash fatalities," such as James Dean, Jayne Mansfield and Albert Camus (97), reporting an increased sexual drive connected to automobile crashes. What these studies make abundantly clear is that Travis is not the only person affected in such a drastic and obscene manner by the absurdities of the modern age. Consequently, the topics tackled in the novel, such as the psychological effects caused by the equal spectacularisation of atrocities and the entertainment industry, should best *not* be read as relating to a singular case of a psychotic patient, but as part of a growing societal epidemic, giving the novel a dystopian quality, as Ballard comments on the state of his contemporary society.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

At the core of my argument lies the fact that SF is linked to the concept or theme of madness on multiple levels. These links can be broken down to into five main points: a) historical ties between SF and madness narratives, b) cognitive estrangement and the function of the novum as disguised "putting to sleep of reason," c) the frequent use of various common SF themes to explore madness and vice versa, d) science in its abstract form used to explore madness, and e) dystopia/utopia as a means of exploring madness on a societal/cultural level.

Regarding the historical ties of SF and madness narratives, the genre's early development as an offshoot of Gothic horror literature meant that the common theme of madness was directly taken over and incorporated into the first examples of SF stories. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) are two very significant and widely influential examples of early SF works dealing with madness, before SF had fully separated from its Gothic origins. Furthermore, SF developed tropes of its own which were inexplicably tied to madness, such as the archetype of the "mad scientist" introduced in *Frankenstein*, as well as the prototype of stories dealing with multiple personalities and transformation in the case of *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. From the numerous mad scientist characters, such as Victor Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll and Dr. Moreau, SF in the 19th century frequently linked the quest for scientific progress with the ultimate loss of ethical and rational judgement. SF, thus, arguably has a history that closely ties the genre to both madness narratives and madness-related tropes. Furthermore, as Patrick Bratlinger argues, SF borrows another crucial trait from Gothic literature that ties it to madness, as it involves "a rejection or a symbolic putting to sleep of reason" (31). This trait has come to be one of the genre's defining features, explained by Darko Suvin as "cognitive estrangement," thus linking SF and madness in a fundamental and integral way.

As Darko Suvin's influential attempt at defining SF centers around the idea that the estranged elements of SF stories must be placed within a cognitive framework by which speculative or outright impossible aspects are presented as scientifically valid, it

becomes clear that the element of cognition Suvin speaks of only serves to disguise the unreasonable, unrealistic or irrational nature of the genre. By extension, the novum's function is precisely to introduce such "mad" elements into the story, whether it be time travel (e.g. *Woman on the Edge of Time*), alien deities (e.g. "The Call of Cthulhu;" *At the Mountains of Madness*), or more abstract concepts in the case of New Wave SF works, such as the total alienation of narrative form combined with scientific research elements (e.g. "The Heat Death of the Universe;" *The Atrocity Exhibition*). The novum's presence signals a transgression of reality into the realm of SF. Within this realm, a wide range of SF themes have often been used to explore madness.

Within the works analysed by H. P. Lovecraft, Marge Piercy, Pamela Zoline and J. G. Ballard, but also within the early examples of SF, such as *Frankenstein*, *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, the most common theme centers around the harmful potentiality of science. This theme is explored in different ways, but always in conjunction to madness. In some cases, science poses a threat through its physical manifestation: technology. Frankenstein's Creature, Mr. Hyde and Dr, Moreau's animals are all physical manifestations of science aimed at exposing the dangerous lunacy of their respective creators, whose reason is taken to such extremities that it more closely resembles madness. Similarly – although without the presence of a physical manifestation of science – Zoline's protagonist applies a sterile scientific approach to all aspects of life which eventually results in mental breakdown. Piercy, on the other hand, implements a thought/emotion control device into her story which is intended to cure madness, but, instead, results in the ultimate death of personality – a fate much worse. In other cases, science poses a threat to mental health because it explores the unknown. Lovecraftian cosmic horror is based on the idea that science exposes mankind's ultimate and utter unimportance in the vastness of the universe; a realisation which causes the unsuspecting protagonists to adopt a nihilistic approach to life and, consequently, lose their minds. Lastly, Ballard explores the psychological damage inflicted by the mass media's obsession with creating spectacles. In summary, science is in all cases presented as a potential threat to sanity, either through its physical manifestations or through conceptual conclusions derived from scientific knowledge.

Another common theme related to the idea of scientific progression's harmful

potentiality comes in the form of deep ontological concerns that strain the mind. This is very central in Lovecraft's work, as can easily be concluded from the aforementioned central concept of cosmic horror. However, as discussed in my analyses, similar ontological concerns also make their appearance in "The Heat Death of the Universe" and *The Atrocity Exhibition*, demonstrating their effective use as a SF theme readily available to explore madness. Furthermore, science has also been used in its abstract form to create parallels with madness. Examples of such metaphorical usage includes Zoline's paralleling of mental breakdown with the heat death of the universe, as well as Ballard's reflecting of his protagonist's psychosis through geometry. Lastly, the common SF trope of utopia/dystopia becomes a most useful platform through which madness can be explored beyond the confines of the individual psyche. Piercy strikingly juxtaposes a harmonious utopian future where instances of madness are treated as opportunities for self-reflection and insight, with a bleak dystopian future where the entire world is consumed by technological advancement. This dystopian society's over-reliance on technology has reached the point where lived experience has to be simulated – arguably a mad world to live in. Ballard, on the other hand, treats the 1960s media-driven society as a dystopia that has already arrived, exposing a growing epidemic of madness caused by the "death of affect" generated through constant exposure to sensationalised violence.

It is, thus, evident that a number of common SF themes, tropes or conventions can be utilised to explore madness. Of course, it should be pointed out that the use of certain themes to explore madness does not automatically render the entire genre "mad," nor does it mean that all SF works that incorporate these themes necessarily deal with madness. However, it *can* be said that the relative frequency and wide variety of approaches by which these themes have been used to explore madness by different authors over a vast period of time showcases their inherent potential for madness-themed stories. In this sense, I argue that many of the common themes of SF are "madness-prone" and easily render themselves as useful tools for authors wishing to explore madness. Conversely, madness also offers itself for the exploration of SF themes. For example, Lovecraft uses madness to emphasise the vastly unexplored and largely unknown nature of the cosmos, focusing on the common SF theme of the existence of superior beings, whilst Piercy uses madness as a means to speculate on mankind's various

potential future outcomes. In combination with the genre's historical ties to madness narratives, as well as the genre's defining trait of cognitive estrangement disguising an unrealistic and irrational foundation, I view SF as a "mad genre" with many "mad traits" of its own.

Having established at least some important links between the genre of SF and the concept of madness, it is also important to see in what way these links can contribute to academic scholarship. What exactly is the usefulness of viewing SF as a "mad genre"? In my opinion it provides a new perspective for analysis of SF texts that deal with madness, enabling links to be drawn between the actual content and stylistic or thematic conventions linked to the genre. This could potentially provide a new nuanced approach to madness studies within the field of SF. Zoline's "The Heat Death of the Universe" is a good example of this. Academic analyses of the short story tend to focus either on its feminist aspects or on the discussion surrounding its inclusion in the genre of SF, usually neglecting the potential ties between the story's underlying theme of madness *in relation to* its unusual publication as SF. Furthermore, this new perspective may also prove useful when applied to SF texts that do *not* deal explicitly with madness, although, admittedly, the scope of this dissertation, focused exclusively on SF works that *do* deal with madness, makes it hard to speculate on the potential results of such an experiment. It could, however, potentially enable new and unexpected links to be drawn.

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Αυτή η διπλωματική εργασία εστιάζει σε κοινοτοπίες και θεματολογίες της Επιστημονικής Φαντασίας, καθώς και σε άλλα καθοριστικά χαρακτηριστικά της, εξετάζοντας την σχέση τους με την έννοια της τρέλας. Συγκεκριμένα, εξετάζω το τρόπο με τον οποίο παρουσιάζεται η τρέλα σε κείμενα Επιστημονικής Φαντασίας και τον ρόλο που παίζει σε σχέση με θεματικές πτυχές της, πράγμα που την καθιστούν, όπως υποστηρίζω, «τρελό κειμενικό είδος». Για την διεξαγωγή αυτής της έρευνας, εξετάζω πρώτα την ιστορική εξέλιξή της, η οποία καταδεικνύει τη συχνή χρήση της τρέλας σε ιστορίες Επιστημονικής Φαντασίας από τα πρώτα της δείγματα, καθώς και αποκαλύπτει διακριτά και θεμελιώδη χαρακτηριστικά της που την συνδέουν περαιτέρω με την έννοια της τρέλας. Με σκοπό την εξαγωγή συμπερασμάτων σχετικά με την Επιστημονική Φαντασία ως λογοτεχνικό είδος στο σύνολό της, ακολουθεί εις βάθος ανάλυση πέντε λογοτεχνικών κειμένων Επιστημονικής Φαντασίας που πραγματεύονται την τρέλα: «The Call of Cthulhu» (1928) και *At the Mountains of Madness* (1936) του H. P. Lovecraft, *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) της Marge Piercy, «The Heat Death of the Universe» (1967) της Pamela Zoline και *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970) του J. G. Ballard. Η τρέλα εξετάζεται μέσω συγκεκριμένων χαρακτήρων που βιώνουν ψύχωση, ψυχική κατάρρευση ή θεωρούνται αλλιώς τρελοί, καθώς και μέσω άλλων αφηγηματικών στοιχείων που χρησιμοποιούν οι συγγραφείς για να αποδώσουν ή να εξερευνήσουν την έννοια της τρέλας.