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SCIENCE FICTION: GENRE AND/OR MODE?

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Abstract

This article aims to present the discussion about the definition of Science Fiction as a genre, including older studies that enable a deeper understanding of the current theory. In addition, I revisit Patrick Parrinder's (1980) initial assertion that Science Fiction should not only be understood as a genre, but also as a mode, which can facilitate the discussion about various works that flirt with science-fictional aspects without really delving into them. Finally, a discussion about the British New Wave as a crisis of the genre is made, to support the theory that Science Fiction should be regarded both as a genre and a mode.
Keywords: Science fiction; Genre; Mode; British New Wave.

Science Fiction as a genre

When the subject is Science Fiction, the difficulties of defining the genre can probably come as a surprise to those unfamiliar with its theory. Even those who have never held a book of the genre in their hands have had some contact with films or television series and can easily recognize themes that are considered typical, such as futuristic content or the depiction of aliens. It is no wonder that the authors of the genre themselves use tautological definitions to dispense controversy, such as Damon Knight when he states that "science fiction is what

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we point to when we say it" (qtd. in Roberts 2005, *History* 2). As literary lexicons tend to offer cautious definitions, we may start with two such examples. The German *Reallexikon* describes the genre as follows:

> (1) Fictional prose that (2) creates the image of a world that differs fundamentally from the author's real present in at least one respect, whereby (3) such deviations can be of a technical, scientific, medical, or social nature and (4) the text is set either in a future world or in a 'estranged' present. (Lorenz 2007, 412, my translation)[1]

And the *Handbuch der literarischen Gattungen* (Handbook of Literary Genres) defines it as follows: "Science fiction is a multimedia genre of fantastic literature whose fictions contain a *novum* that is incompatible with reality and is (pseudo-) scientifically based. The action usually takes place in the future" (Friedrich 2009, 672, my translation).[2] With the exception of the trait that concerns the genre's multimediality, it is possible to say that both lexicons basically have the same definition, with a few variations that complement each other: it is a fictional narrative that presents a reality that differs from ours in at least one element (the so-called *novum*) that has a science-fictional explanation – which can be based on both natural and human sciences – and whose plot tends to be developed in the future.

Both lexicons make indirect reference to Darko Suvin's theory through the terminology employed. Both the concept of "estrangement" ("'estranged' present") and the definition of the scientifically justified non-realistic element as *novum* are derived from Suvin's theory developed in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979). Suvin (2005, "Estrangement" 27) states that "SF is, then, a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition, and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment." Science fiction is once again defined by its non-realistic character, but its dialectical relationship with cognition is the main characteristic. The concept of "estrangement," adapted from the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky's concept of "estrangement" (*ostranenie*), serves here as a definition for non-realistic texts.

Science fiction differs from other genres such as fairy tales, fantastic or fantasy stories by the so called "cognitive vision," that is, the non-realistic element of the narrative (i.e., the estrangement), which must have the function of causing reflection on different societal problems, such as making the reader question their environment, while the non-realistic elements of fairy tales, for example, would not bring about any kind of deeper thoughts (Suvin, "Estrangement" 26). Suvin goes on to affirm that it is possible to use the concept of estrangement to mean fiction and cognition to mean science, thus concluding that Science Fiction is "cognitive estrangement" ("Estrangement" 32). Since the effect of estrangement,

as described by Suvin, occurs in all types of non-realistic literature, he simplifies the terminology that refers to the specific innovation of Science Fiction, using the concept of *novum*: "A *novum* or cognitive innovation is a totalizing phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author's and implied reader's norm of reality" (*Metamorphoses* 64).

The concept of "cognition" presented by Suvin is broad: it refers to the fact that the non-realistic element has a scientific justification, and also provokes readers to think. This definition stems from the desire to elevate the genre of Science Fiction to high literature. As a consequence of considering non-realistic elements that bring the reader to reflect on reality one main aspect of Science Fiction, Suvin classifies all utopian literature since Thomas More as a sub-genre of Science Fiction. This interpretation goes to even greater extremes when we consider Carl Freedman (2000), who in *Critical Theory of Science Fiction* concludes that:

> As we argue that the qualities that govern texts universally agreed to be science fiction can be found to govern other texts as well, it may be difficult to see just where the argument will stop. It may even begin to appear that ultimately nearly *all* fiction – perhaps even including realism itself – will be found to be science fiction. […] In fact, I do believe that all fiction is, in a sense, science fiction. (16)

Freedman comes to this conclusion since all fiction, whether realistic or not, presents data that is not in accordance with our reality, and that all these narratives bring the reader to some sort of contemplation. Needless to argue that such a definition is pointless. Furthermore, in an attempt to ennoble the genre, Suvin consciously excludes a great chunk of the texts that are understood as Science Fiction, such as the origins of pulp production or low quality writing, which does not provoke any cognition, in other words, narrations that aim solely to entertain, and leaves a very limited set: "Such a sociological discussion would enable us to point out the important differences between the highest reaches of the genre, glanced at here in order to define functions and standards of SF, and its debilitating average" ("Estrangement" 33).

This understanding of Science Fiction is shared by several scholars, including Fredric Jameson (2005), who repeatedly quotes Suvin in his *Archaeologies of the Future*. Jameson embraces the concept of "cognition" and admits that, by emphasizing that the differences between Science Fiction and fantasy lie in the cognitive aspect, that is, in the question of whether these narratives induce the reader to deeper reflections or not, he reproduces the discourse on the criteria of "high" and "low" literature in modernity (68).[3] These criteria are the same ones responsible for downgrading Science Fiction on a scale of literary values.[4] Others, such as Adam Roberts (2000, *Science Fiction* 36), are critical of this definition because they admit that even canonical works of Science Fiction often do not

question, but rather reproduce prevailing standards in the society of their time. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. (2011) makes a clear critique to the Marxist Science Fiction theory, represented by Suvin, Jameson, Freedman and others – and most recently by China Mieville, not cited in Csicsery-Ronay's book. The scholar indicates that Marxist theorists "treat SF as a vehicle for consciousness-raising about the ideological distortions of the dominant high-capitalist world-picture" (140). He goes further, arguing that

> If a tale asserts that the earth is hollow, that there is a passage through the earth's core from Iceland to Italy, or that Grey Aliens live down there, it has merely contradicted scientific understanding. The appearance of gigantic ants, reptiles, spiders, rabbits, women, or tomatoes does not constitute a scientific critique. (141)[5]

Suvin would promptly assert that those are no examples of Science Fiction, as there is no cognition to be found here, which may be confusing for readers, and leads Roger Luckhurst (1994, n.p.) to affirm that the "cordon sanitaire" installed by Suvin is so rigid that it could kill the genre.[6]

Another point of contention is the definition of Science Fiction's time frame: Suvin affirms that Science Fiction dates back to More's *Utopia*, or even earlier. Roberts was among those who considered that it began with Johannes Kepler's *Somnium*, published in 1634,[7] as it was written according to the scientific standards of the time and from which it is possible to trace a continuity of similar works dedicated to journeys to the Moon (*Science Fiction* 38-41). Brian Aldiss (2005) sees Science Fiction as a development of Gothic literature, which also dealt with alternative universes, and points out Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, published in 1818, as the initial milestone. Postmodern Science Fiction author Samuel R. Delany (2005), on the other hand, reacts strongly against the attempt to praise the genre by associating it with titles from the 16th or 17th century, or even with *Frankenstein*. Delany (99-101) believes that to avoid mentioning that the genre was born in the pulp magazines of the 1920s would be a disservice to the great authors of today and would mean obscuring important names such as Isaac Asimov. Despite being convinced of Science Fiction's quality, the scholar Damien Broderick (1995, 157) states that the genre is marked by characteristics that go against the established literary values, namely the neglect of "fine writing." One of the most common interpretations is that Science Fiction would have developed from the second half of the 19th century due to the impulses of the Industrial Revolution, represented mainly, but not only, by names such as Jules Verne and H.G. Wells (Rose; Broderick; Lorenz; Friedrich). We shall return to this topic later.

As can be seen above, the issue of literary quality is a major point of contention in the search for a definition of Science Fiction. While some try to stretch the boundaries of the genre in order to comprehend canonical and recognized works

such as *Utopia* or even *Gilgamesh*, others make a point of limiting it, leaving the selection as "pure" and niched as possible. A clear case in point is George Orwell's *1984*. Erik S. Rabkin (2009, 20) claims that among the different ways of classifying Science Fiction, there is what he calls a "social" classification. According to Rabkin, this would mean defining works as Science Fiction based on a judgment of literary quality, i.e., "social" should be understood in this context as a judgment of value. According to this definition, *1984* would not be Science Fiction "because it's good" – a classification of quality that would come from those who have no connection to the genre, and considered erroneous by Rabkin (20). On the other hand, decades earlier, Robert Conquest (1976, 41) accused "the literate" of ignoring the scientific aspect and used his article "Science Fiction and Literature" to downgrade books that he believes are not good enough to be classified as "true Science Fiction." The quality of the work is judged according to the level of inventiveness or new information presented. About Orwell's book, he wrote: "*1984* need[s] all [its] power to carry quite a small load of dead wood" (41).

The choice to limit the definition of Science Fiction to entertainment literature can easily lead to error. It is true that most texts focus on questions of the effect of the *novum* on the society described, often relegating the development of characters or aesthetic aspects, but the limitation to these characteristics results in the exclusion of works such as *1984*. Even though authors such as Aldous Huxley and George Orwell can hardly be disconnected from the current debate about Science Fiction, *Brave New World* and *1984* did not engage with the contemporary production of Science Fiction, but were rather works that criticized the aspirations of utopia[8] and its unsuccessful political achievements. Science Fiction as it is known today was still in the process of formation, but it must be recognized that, even if these works were published outside the pulp scene, they are an important chapter in Science Fiction's history. Furthermore, writers such as Stanislaw Lem and Ursula K. Le Guin are part of the group of authors specializing in Science Fiction and are known for their concern for quality writing and the depth of their characters. In other words, there are works of Science Fiction of unquestionable quality both inside and outside the specialized group of writers.

Science Fiction as a mode

Another proposition is the one made by Patrick Parrinder (1980): to understand Science Fiction as a mode. In *Modern Genre Theory*, David Duff (2000) makes the following distinction between genre and mode:

> MODE A term which, confusingly, is used in two almost opposite senses in modern genre theory: to denote the manner of representation or enunciation in a literary work (the three basic modes, in this sense,

> being the narrative, the dramatic and the lyrical – though the validity of this triad has been questioned); and to denote more strictly literary categories such as the tragic, the comic, or the pastoral, which are thematically specific but non-specific as to literary form or mode of representation. In this second sense, a mode is often distinguished from a genre, the latter term being reserved for types of literature which are both thematically and formally specific: tragedy as distinct from the tragic, comedy as distinct from the comic, etc. (n.p.)

In this paper, we are referring to the second conception of mode, in other words, mode as an aspect of the work that is not decisive to its definition of genre, even if mode and genre may overlap. For example, most comedies (genre) are comic (mode), but there are also tragic (mode) comedies (genre). Klaus Hempfer (1973, 27) defines mode as an ahistorical constant that can be found in different genres and eras; whereas genre is a formal and historical structure in which modes are concretely realized, and which may or may not be predominant.

Parrinder starts and ends *Science Fiction: Its Criticism and Teaching* explaining the Science Fiction mode. His first chapter opens with "The Scientific Romance," where he describes novels such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and R. L. Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* as works that are based on a single scientific event that should not be regarded as Science Fiction as those events are mere allegories to something else (6, 9). His usage of words reflects Duff`s quotaed passage: Science Fiction as distinct from the scientific. Parrinder is one of the theorists who does not advocate for a definition that elevates the genre: "Science fiction is not a part of 'high literature', nor is it undifferentiated mass entertainment" (136). The scholar is in favor of the understanding of Science Fiction as a mode as well, in his words: "To get to know it as a literary mode is to begin to read the great writers of the past differently" (136). That is, Parrinder does not consider works written before the Industrial Revolution as Science Fiction as a genre but recognizes their scientific aspect. If, on the one hand, it is not appropriate to go as far back as Antiquity, when "science" was not even a concept, on the other hand scientific diligence is evident in a work like *Somnium*, rich in footnotes, where Kepler justifies all his hypotheses about the Moon.

The classification of Science Fiction as a mode brings us to the debate about a similar literary type: fantastic literature. According to Tzvetan Todorov (2010), whose theory serves as a basis for the debate that has been developed to this day, the fantastic is defined by the representation of a world like our own in which there are strange elements or events that provoke a certain hesitation in both the protagonist and the reader due to the uncertainty about the cause of what happened. If the hypothesis that the event is supernatural is confirmed, it is classified as "marvelous," while an event that can be justified on realistic

grounds is defined as "uncanny" (Todorov, 38). In his study, Todorov treats the fantastic as a genre, which is one of the points of disagreement between theorists. Remo Cesarini (2006, 56) states that the characteristics listed by Todorov are not enough to speak of a genre, since the uncanny has as its only quality "an exclusively contrastive semantics" and the marvelous, in turn, is a characteristic shared by several different genres. David Roas (2014, 45) also opposes the definition of the fantastic as a genre, since the effect of the fantastic depends on the "active participation of the reader," who hesitates before what is described. The understanding that the fantastic is present in different literary periods and genres results in its classification as a mode, i.e., one of many characteristics that serve to define genres.

Todorov in fact mentions Science Fiction in his considerations on the fantastic and defines it as "scientific marvel" (63). In this classification, the degree of distance from what we understand as the real world is the aspect in which the fantastic and Science Fiction resemble, because their narratives must be committed to "reality" at least to some degree – unlike fantasy, where everything can be magical and wonderful, with no commitment to the principle of reality. The fantastic needs a sense of "reality" so that the effect of hesitation in the face of the "uncanny" or "marvelous" is possible, while Science Fiction must evoke a "scientific" discourse that presents the marvelous as something justified from the perspective of our real experience. Thus, what Science Fiction aims for is not the effect of hesitation described in Todorov's theory of the fantastic. The attitude of its characters towards the new varies: they can react naturally to what seems marvelous to the reader, since they are themselves part of a futuristic universe, but they can also marvel at technological discoveries that are described as recent in the world they inhabit. The reader, however, is never skeptical of what is being told. Reading Science Fiction involves the search for novelty and the desire to understand how these variations impact the universe being described.

Before advancing, it should be noted that the boundaries between non-realistic modes/genres are fluid. Although it is possible to define the differences between Science Fiction and the fantasy genre, this does not prevent one of Science Fiction's best-known subgenres, space opera – for example, Frank Herbert's *Dune* –, from being precisely what is defined as "Science Fiction-Fantasy." This subgenre is more akin to fantasy than Science Fiction, as its stories describe a marvelous universe with fantastic beings, where the only "scientific" justification for the wonders presented is the fact that the story takes place in a galaxy far, far away – so that the perspective of planet Earth often is not even considered.

Science Fiction as a genre and a mode

As Hempfer points out, there are certain genres that can also present themselves as a mode (satire, for example) when these characteristics are not predominant in the structure of the narrative or appear outside the historical

context (27). A clear example is Petronius's *Satyricon*, which is clearly of the satire genre; on the other hand, Shakespeare uses satire in many plays that cannot be defined as satire. Here I argue that Science Fiction can also be presented both as a mode and as a genre, as long as a distinction is made between both.

The first difference to be highlighted is the historical focus. Since genre is a historical definition, it is important to avoid definitions that treat it as ahistorical – a mode characteristic. Here we will consider the time frame proposed by Friedrich, who argues that Science Fiction emerged from the Industrial Revolution onwards, concurrently, in different countries where there was rapid technological progress (675). At that time, many science-fiction works were published in different countries with no clear exchange between them. Even though American Science Fiction dictates the genre today, a definition that starts only with the pulp magazines of the mid-1920s would be mistaken because it ignores both the initial ebullition in different countries and the works of H.G. Wells and Jules Verne, who later had their texts published in pulp magazines as a way of inspiring new authors to a certain type of writing. Besides England and France, it is possible to mention, in this initial phase, a rich production of science-fiction works in Germany, initially with Kurd Laßwitz' *Two Planets*, published in 1897, and then with a whole tradition of what was called *Zukunftsromane* (novels of the future) in German pulp magazines, which lasted until the end of the Second World War (Pereira 2023). Even dystopia was also born as a distinctly scientific genre in 1920, in the U.S.S.R., with Yevgeny Zamyatin's novel *We*.

Although *Frankenstein* has characteristics to be considered Science Fiction as a genre, there is no clear continuity that can be traced to the novel as far as Science Fiction is concerned. It was no inspiration to Science Fiction writing as Verne's and Wells' works. However, when we consider that mode is an ahistorical constant that occurs in different genres, it is possible to say that *Frankenstein* is a Gothic narrative that makes use of the Science Fiction mode – or a scientific Gothic novel using Parrinder's concepts. The tendency to write fictional stories using scientific concepts is an old one, so it is also possible to talk about the Science Fiction mode when approaching a book like *Somnium*. The historical focus, however, is only the first of a series of characteristics that should differentiate Science Fiction as a mode and a genre.

As seen above, it is usual to consider the mere presence of the *novum* as enough to define a work as Science Fiction as a genre. However, this classification is inadequate, especially in cases where the scientific mode is not dominant. Consider Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*: the book depicts a love triangle between young clones, who are treated as disposable bodies as they were born and raised in order to donate their organs. This is clearly a description of a Science Fiction novel, but it disappoints some readers of Science Fiction or even scholars: "The appearance of these devices in the mainstream may be because literary writers turn innocently to themes and ideas thinking that they are new, not realizing that they have been used in the science-fiction field for decades" (Sawyer 2011, 238). Andy Sawer critiques mainly the usage of scientific themes by

"outsiders" as the title of his article clearly shows, "Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go and 'Outsider Science Fiction'", a critique that is empty. The main "problem" is not that Ishiguro is no professional science-fiction writer, but that there is no development to the scientific plot. *Never Let Me Go* is a love story, and the fact that they are clones only points to the brevity of their lives and the difficulties of being raised as second-class human beings. There are no discussions about how this new technology, the *novum*, changes the world as we know it. There are not even considerations of the functioning of this *novum*. It is stated, for example, that the clones can make about three donations before they die. The possibility of donating a vital organ is not even mentioned. If we consider that the Science Fiction as a genre can be regarded as an art of mental experiment and that the *novum* must be, as Suvin (*Metamorphoses* 64) puts it, "a totalizing phenomenon," Ishiguro's novel is lacking exactly this feature.

To be clear, this distinction does not serve the discussions about the literary field, to use Bourdieu's term. While Ishiguro's novel cannot be classified as Science Fiction as a genre, the same cannot be asserted about all authors who enjoy recognition on the literary field. Margaret Atwood's dispute about *Oryx and Crake* being Science Fiction or not became one of the most well-known recent discussions about the genre definition after Ursula K. LeGuin's response (Atwood 2011, 5). Atwood still rejects the term Science Fiction, referring to her work as speculative fiction or even slipstream in a clear effort not to distance herself from the field of "high arts" (7). However, different from *Never Let Me Go*, her apocalyptical novel *Oryx and Crake* not only has a scientific premise but it develops this premise fully, presenting all possible effects it would have in our world, leading the human race to extinction. Not only is her novel a perfect scientific mental experiment, but it has the clear objective of bringing readers to deepen their thoughts about the possible consequences of climate crises and unregulated scientific progress, in other words, her *novum* serves the cognition as described by Suvin.

The distinction between Science Fiction as a genre and scientific mode can be positive even to the description of other genres. Once Science Fiction is accepted as a mode, it should also be possible to assert that there are genres, other than Science Fiction, that often make use of Science Fiction as a mode, being the frequent feature of this mode one of the defining characteristics those genres.

Take the genre of spy thriller as an example. It is very common for spy films to make use of a wide variety of technological devices. With a franchise that spans half a century, James Bond offers several examples of the presence of the *novum* in its films: the rocketbelt in Terence Young's *Thunderball*, a car that camouflages itself to become practically invisible in Lee Tamahori's *Die Another Day*, x-ray glasses in Michael Apted's *The World Is Not Enough*, satellites capable of targeting and killing people on Earth in Guy Hamilton's *Diamonds Are Forever*, among many others. The technological inventions portrayed can serve both as an initial impulse, when the villain seizes something that could subjugate all humanity, and as tools that allow the protagonist achieving spectacular results in his mission. It

is true that James Bond has films that could be considered Science Fiction, such as Marvin Hamlisch's *The Spy Who Loved Me*, which deals with the attempt to annihilate civilization and replace it with an aquatic community, New Atlantis, or Lewis Gilbert's *Moonraker*, which takes place in space, but the mere presence of technological devices should not be considered sufficient to identify the genre, because they often only serve to support the plot, whose main focus is not the development of a scenario that explores the possibilities of the *novum*.

The superhero-genre also makes frequent use of the Science Fiction mode, as both good and bad guys usually have abilities caused by a *novum*: superpowers are acquired by radiation, genetic mutation, coming from another planet, high technology, etc. The genre, however, is not limited to Science Fiction and occasionally stretches into fantasy territory, as in the case of the magic superhero Dr. Strange, or the adventures of mythological gods in Thor comics.[9]

It should be noted that both the spy thriller and the superhero story genre are not defined by the presence of the *novum*. The espionage thriller is defined by international intrigue and the actions of a secret agent with special skills who, at the end of the story, will prevent a catastrophe. It is characteristic of these stories that they are filled with gallant spies, fleeting romances, fights and futuristic technology, but none of these elements is decisive: they may be present in some stories and absent in others (just as not all spy thrillers end with the secret agent's victory, although this is rarer). Superhero stories are defined by the existence of one or more people who have superhuman abilities and outstanding moral value, so that they dedicate their lives to fighting evil and protecting the weak and oppressed. Their narratives tend to be built on a single structure: the powers come from a *novum*, the heroes use a secret identity to ensure the safety of their loved ones, the hero's moral values are so high that they prevent him from killing even the most ruthless villain who, if not killed in an accident, will come to be his opponent again in the future. Again, none of these characteristics are compulsory, and there may be variations. In addition to the fact that there are many spy and superhero stories that make no use whatsoever of a science-fictional discourse, the dominant characteristics of these genres often lead to a maximum reduction of the *novum*.

Based on the considerations about the presence of the Science Fiction mode in spy or superhero narratives, it is possible to identify another characteristic of Science Fiction as a genre: the Science Fiction mode must be dominant. This has already been pointed out by Suvin: "The presence of the *novum* as the determining factor of an SF narration novelty means that an SF narration is not only a tale that includes this or that SF element or aspect" (2010, *Defined* 74). The Science Fiction author Robert Heinlein (2017, 19), in his essay "On the Writing of Speculative Fiction,"[10] indicates the same when he states as one of the main characteristics of the genre: "The new conditions must be an essential part of the story." Heinlein also states that "the story is not about the new situation; it is about coping with problems arising out of the new situation" (19). In other words, the aspect of the

novum must be reflected throughout the narrative, causing a shift in the society that is portrayed and reflected in the attitudes of its protagonists.

In one of the first attempts to explain the genre of Science Fiction, John W. Campbell, editor of the magazine *Astounding Science Fiction*, compared the "scientific method" – that is, the proposition of a mental experiment in order to explain and even predict a phenomenon – with Science Fiction, whose function would be to present possible results of a particular theory when applied to society (qtd. in Broderick 7-8). As Colin Greenland (1983) put it:

> John W. Campbell and his team set up the enduring principle that sf is different from all other fictional modes. It is 'a Literature of Ideas'. What they meant by this was that each sf story should be erected to support an abstract proposition of a scientific kind, clearly discernible from the story, which was to be the mainspring of the plot and the reason for the story's existence. (165)

There is no shortage of classic works that can be cited as an illustration: H.G. Wells' *Time Machine*, rather than addressing issues relating to time travel, works on the Darwinian theory and has as its main hypothesis a macabre development of humanity due to the Industrial Revolution; Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* (1961), deals with the human incapacity to understand extraterrestrial intelligence; Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), develops a scenario where the members of an alien society alternate male and female characteristics when they enter the fertile period; William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) addresses a spectrum of virtual reality and artificial intelligence issues; the list could go on.

British New Wave

The suggestion to distinguish the mode from the genre, where the latter is characterized by the predominance of the former, i.e., the fact that the entire narrative revolves around the conception of a scenario that aims to present possible consequences of hypothetical alterations to our reality, serves a definition of genre that is in accordance with the expectations of a trained readership and is not limited to questions of editorial marketing (whether or not the work has been released as Science Fiction), nor to questions of literary value. What is more, according to these parameters, the means of promotion and editorial marketing are not enough to guarantee the definition as Science Fiction as a genre. See the case of the British New Wave movement, considered one of the crucial stages in the development of Science Fiction.

To understand the importance of the New Wave movement, it is necessary to revisit the history of the genre. After a diffuse birth in the 19th century, driven by rapid scientific progress, the production of Science Fiction in the United States was concentrated especially in cheap, low-quality magazines sold at newspaper stands, causing the genre to be stigmatized as mass literature. This initial phase is identified as the Pulp Era. From the late 1930s onwards, there was a significant rise in the quality of the stories published in the United States, partly due to John W. Campbell's zealous work as editor of *Astounding* magazine (Roberts, *History* 195). It was the beginning of the Golden Age.

The Golden Age lasted until the 1950s and brought forth many of the genre's iconic names, such as Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, and Arthur C. Clarke. Science Fiction writing, however, remained stuck in old patterns, with flat narration styles and stories mostly focused on expansionist adventures led by men. As Greenland points out, Science Fiction at this time was still a genre written by men for boys (26). Not only did many of these stories not feature any women, but, contrary to what the half-naked beauties who commonly appeared on the covers of magazines of the genre might lead one to believe, sex and sexuality were also completely absent. Characteristics such as these were the reason for much internal criticism, such as Peter Graham's well-known pun "The Golden Age of Science Fiction is twelve", referring to the average age of the readers. The 1960s and 1970s witnessed profound changes in this regard, many of them driven by a group of British authors who took a stand against the clichés of the genre and acted to break down the boundaries between Science Fiction and literature in general, in a movement that became known as New Wave.

In 1964, Michael Moorcock became editor of the Science Fiction magazine *New Worlds*. From the beginning, the young writer made it clear that he intended to change the direction of the publication, stating in his first editorial that the content of the magazine would become "a kind of SF which is unconventional in every sense" (qtd. in Greenland, 17). The changes brought about by the movement generated by the *New Worlds* may have been unconventional for Science Fiction, but they were nothing new for the literary scene. In addition to the maturing of the plot, which now included explicit sexual content, the stories published by the magazine and by the main authors involved in the movement finally explored, within the Science Fiction publishing circuit, aspects of writing that had been developed by modern literature more than half a century ago, such as non-chronological narrative, stream of consciousness and unreliable narrator (Greenland 23). New Wave writers, such as J.G. Ballard, also argued that it was time to abandon the space theme: instead of outerspace to dedicate themselves to journeys to innerspace (Moorcock qtd. in Greenland 44). In other words, dealing with psychological and psychiatric issues and, inspired by William Burroughs, also psychedelia and self-discovery through drugs (Greenland 52).

Contrary to what had been preached until then, the New Wave saw the quality of writing and the depth of characters as a vital characteristic that should not be neglected. And it is because of this characteristic that the movement is often

remembered. It is seen as a milestone in the history of Science Fiction because of what was perceived as "a deliberate attempt to elevate the literary and stylistic quality of SF" (Roberts, *History* 231). If, on the one hand, the movement was responsible for invigorating the genre and for reminding writers that they needed to take care of their writing style, on the other hand, it failed in breaking down the rigid boundaries of the genre. Delany, for example, despite being recognized as one of the most important authors of what was conceived as the American New Wave, and cultivating a complex, post-modern style of writing, remained, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, in defense of the ghetto and its lack of interest in aesthetics.

It is no wonder that many Science Fiction fans perceived this movement as a betrayal (Roberts, *History* 231). But it would be unfair to credit this feeling solely to a supposed lack of literary maturity on the part of readers, who were not prepared for more complex writing. The truth is that several texts from the British New Wave movement cannot be defined as Science Fiction as a genre and, in some cases, even their definition as Science Fiction mode is questionable.

A clear example is the short story "The Heat Death of the Universe," by Pamela Zoline, published in the *New Worlds* magazine in 1967, and mentioned by Mark Rose (1981) in his introductory chapter to *Alien Encounters*. In the story, Zoline draws a parallel between the busy and stressful day of a housewife preparing for one of her children's birthday parties and the scientific hypothesis of the heat death of the universe, which predicts that, due to the constant increase in entropy, there will come a time when all the energy in the universe will be uniformly distributed, extinguishing any movement and thus any kind of life. "The Heat Death of the Universe" does not present any hypothesis of scientific innovation, even the theory of the heat death of the universe is not applied to the reality presented in the story; it is just a metaphor for the process of extreme exhaustion reached by the mother. The story was published in *New Worlds*, i.e., within the context of Science Fiction, but, as Rose points out, the narrative does not even fulfill the one requirement that is included in all definitions of Science Fiction: to portray a world that is different from ours in some way (3). Despite recognizing this, Rose considers that the discussion about the genre classification of "The Heat Death of the Universe" is not fruitful:

> Zoline's story, if only by virtue of its place of publication, asks to be read in the context of science-fiction expectations. Whether or not it "is" science fiction is finally as much beside the point as whether Marcel Duchamp's signed shovel is art. Sterile arguments over classification are the sort of activity that has given genre criticism a bad name. (4)

It is worth noting that Marcel Duchamp's artworks do not fulfill their function without sparking a debate about the limits of art. The tacit acceptance that the

short story written by Zoline is Science Fiction serves, above all, Moorcock's initial intention: to break the boundaries of the genre – and consequently the genre itself.

This is clear from Rose's division of Science Fiction into three phases. In the first phase, the genre was still being shaped. Then, what is currently understood as megatext[11] is already formed, i.e., there is a series of icons and recurring topics in the genre, known and recognized by the reading public, so that the public does not need to be repeatedly introduced to the theme, already known through the intertextuality within the genre, which allows a deepening of these recurring issues (14). Finally, in the third phase, Rose recognizes a "radical reinterpretation of the genre" (16). The time frame of this third phase coincides with the New Wave movement, but it is also the moment in which strong changes are brought about by other authors, such as Philip K. Dick and Ursula Le Guin. Rose exemplifies this "reinterpretation of the genre" with Aldiss's *Cryptzoic* and Dick's *Ubik*, both books dealing with mental processes and virtual perceptions. While it is true that this was, at the time, a completely new perspective within Science Fiction, the development of a scenario brought about by the possibility of psychic travel fully satisfies the prerequisites of the genre. However, when Rose accepts that even what he calls a "radically problematic text" would be Science Fiction, he is also forced to admit that "Science Fiction's history as a distinct genre may be approaching its end" (23).

As Karl Heinz Göller (1977, 142) rightly points out, the New Wave did not produce works in the Science Fiction as a genre, but rather a crisis of the genre. While he was still very close to the developments – as was Rose –, Göller was critical even of the traits that later crystallized as part of the genre, for example, the presence of anthropological or psychological discussions, as well as criticizing authors such as Harlam Ellison for writing "obscenities" (142). There was, in fact, a desire for Science Fiction never to develop beyond the point it had reached in the Golden Age and for it not to be "tainted" by dull subjects that only concern literary circles, and not fans of a genre who just want to "have fun," – it must be acknowledged that, to a certain extent, this "discomfort" was justified (141). There are texts that were published under the Science Fiction label in England at this time that cannot be understood as Science Fiction as a genre. Accepting this limitation is not the same as ignoring or rejecting the importance that authors and works from the New Wave movement had for the history of Science Fiction. The discomfort that these short stories and novels brought should be used not only to reinvigorate the genre, but also to discuss what defines it as such. The fact that the New Wave brought higher values to the Science Fiction debate does not alter the reality that, by pushing the boundaries the way that some of its participants did, many of them did not break the boundaries of the genre but wrote outside them instead.

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The history of the Science Fiction as a genre is far from over. It continues to develop and reinvent itself causing a renewal of the readership, which includes now a much more diverse public. Understanding Science Fiction both as a genre and as a mode is intended to facilitate the discussion of related works and broaden dialogues within literary studies and other narrative media.

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Notas finais

1. "(1) Fiktionale Erzählprosa, die (2) das Bild einer sich von der realen Gegenwart des Autors in zumindest einem Punkt fundamental unterscheidenden Welt entwirft, wobei (3) solche Abweichungen u.a. technischer, naturwissenschaftlicher, medizinischer, sozialer Natur sein können u. (4) die Text entweder in einer Zukunftswelt oder aber in einer 'verfremdeten' Gegenwart spielen."
2. "Science-Fiction ist ein multimediales Genre der fantastischen Literatur, dessen Fiktionen ein realitätsinkompatibles Novum enthalten, das (pseudo-) wissenschaftlich begründet ist. Üblicherweise findet die Handlung in der Zukunft statt."
3. As quoted by China Mieville, Suvin has revised his complete rejection of the genre fantasy, but the effects on the critique remain. Mieville, China. "Cognition as Ideology." Red Planets: Marxism and Science Fiction, edited by Mark Bould and China Mieville, Wesleyan University Press, 2009, pp. 231-248.
4. Even though Suvin's and Jameson's theory strive to elevate the genre to the academic level, they do so by excluding a great part of the Science Fiction production, which leads to a sort of agreement that the main production of the genre has a lower value.
5. Csicsery-Ronay criticizes the qualitative aspect of the cognition, but the definition of a whole genre as Marxist is also questionable. Robert Heinlein is, for instance, one of the main writers of the Golden Age. The cognitive aspect of his works, such as Starship Troopers (1959), is far from being Marxist, but rather conservative and pro-war.
6. Although neither Csicsery-Ronay's book Seven Beauties of Science Fiction nor Luckhurst's article "The Many Deaths of Science Fiction" (1995) discuss the exact definition of the Science Fiction as a genre, they are highly recommended for anyone that would like to have a deeper understanding of its characteristics and crisis, respectively.
7. In 2005, Adam Roberts published The History of Science Fiction, in which he expressed that he had changed his mind about the starting point, and that he now considers it to be Antiquity.
8. This commentary is only meaningful within the historical context proposed by authors such as Samuel Delany, who emphasizes the pulp production, rather than within the theoretical framework that classifies utopian literature as a subgenre of Science Fiction since its origin.
9. Marvel movie franchises have sought to frame these stories in scientific discourse as well so that it makes more sense for all Marvel characters to be part of a single universe, but this does not reflect the original comics.
10. Speculative fiction is a term created by Heinlein which has evolved to an umbrella term nowadays that covers a broader range of non-realistic fiction. He was, however, a Science Fiction writer and is addressing this genre.

11. Megatext is a term coined by Broderick (1995) to refer to the imaginary world created by the intertextuality of decades of Science Fiction writing.

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