POSTHUMANISM AND ECOCRITICISM IN SHORT SPECULATIVE FICTION

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PLAGIARISM

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes the critique of anthropocentrism in twentieth-century speculative fiction. While focusing on the representation of the shortcomings of anthropocentrism in the analysis of selected works, this M.A. thesis takes recently emerging critical theories such as posthumanism and ecocriticism as its theoretical framework. The analysis I provide argue that speculative fiction is not only a harbinger of social progress but also one of many catalysts. Therefore, this study analyzes nine short stories, distributed among three separate time periods; the Pulp, Golden Age and New Wave eras of speculative fiction. The analysis in this thesis provides the political context under which these texts were written, comparing and contrasting their circumstances. While earlier texts signal the end of humanism, later ones provide this downfall with an alternative; transcendence through a posthumanist philosophy. To this end, the Pulp era stories are focused on a fear of technological and cultural progress, while Golden Age stories focus on humanity's acceptance of its evolution into more than its antiquated definition. In this regard, selected New Wave stories provide a synthesis through the merging of human and non-human agents into a relationship that is no longer detrimental to all beings involved. I argue that this synthesis is essential to provide ourselves and all other things a habitable environment, because the alternative to embracing change is total annihilation.

Key words: Anthropocentrism, Posthumanism, Ecocriticism, Speculative Fiction

ÖZET

Bu tez, 20. yüzyıl spekülatif kurgusunda varolan insanmerkezcilik eleştirisine dikkat çeker, ve analiz eder. Seçilmiş eserlerin analizinde, insanmerkezcilik sonucu oluşan zaafların temsiline odaklanılırken, son zamanlarda ortaya çıkan posthümanizm ve ekoeleştiri gibi eleştirel teoriler, spekülatif kurgunun yalnızca sosyal gelişim habercisi değil, aynı zamanda birçok gerekçesinden biri olduğu iddiasının temelini oluşturur. Bu çalışma, üç ayrı zaman dilimine dağıtılmış dokuz kısa öyküyü analiz etmektedir; spekülatif kurgunun Pulp, Golden Age ve New Wave dönemleri. Yapılan analiz, bu metinlerin yazıldığı dönemlerin politik şartlarına dikkat çeker, bu bağlamda onları kıyaslar ve karşılaştırır. İçerilen metinlerin en eski örnekleri hümanizmin sonunu işaret ederken, daha yeni metinler hümanizmin çöküşüne insanlığın posthümanist felsefe aracılığıyla sınırlarını aşması alternatifini sunar. Bu düşünceyle, Pulp dönemi hikayelerinde teknolojik ve kültürel gelişim korkusu üzerine odaklanılırken, Golden Age öykülerinin odak noktası insanlığın çağdışı humanizm tanımının ötesine geçmesini kabullenmesi olmaktadır. Seçmiş olduğum New Wave hikayeleri ise, tüm varlıkların cefasını önlemek amacıyla insan ve insan olmayanlar ilişkisinin sentezi üzerine odaklanır. İddiam, bu sentezin kendimiz ve tüm diğer varlıkların yaşanabilir bir dünya için gerekli olduğu, çünkü değişimi kabullenmemenin sonucunun topyekün yok oluş olacağıdır.

Anahtar kelimeler: İnsanmerkezcilik, Posthümanizm, Eko-eleştiri, Spekülatif Kurgu

To my mother, father and late grandmother.

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1. THE CRITICISM OF ANTHROPOCENTRISM IN SPECULATIVE FICTION

In this thesis, I will be examining speculative fiction and its representation of post-anthropocentrism and posthumanism. As an avid reader of science fiction and fantasy since I was a lot younger, my motivation behind this study is to establish that speculative fiction has not only been an indicator for social progress, but a catalyst as well. To this end, I will be looking at four short stories written in early 20th century, two short stories written in mid-20th century and three short stories written in late 20th century. The reason why I have decided to group these stories together is to make sure they are examined in their social and political contexts. The first chapter will include an introduction to speculative fiction and its subgenres, as well as an introduction to the short stories and literary theories that appear in the remainder of the thesis. In the following chapter, the highlight will be H.P. Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu". Lovecraft's iconic story will be followed by three much lesser-known short stories, to provide an argument that Lovecraft's ideas existed before, and were explored after his writings. The third chapter's highlight will be Isaac Asimov's "The Last Question". Exploring its prevalent themes of eternal life and consciousness, I will then be looking at a story with similar themes; Philip K. Dick's "Beyond Lies the Wub". The fourth, and final chapter will be centered around New Wave speculative fiction, providing context by recently emerged literary theories such as posthumanism, post-anthropocentrism and ecocriticism. In this chapter, I will be looking at Ursula K. Le Guin's "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow", Nnedi Okorafor's "Spider, the Artist" and Margaret Atwood's "Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet".

1.1. Introduction: A Difficult Definition

Speculative fiction is strangely difficult to define, and like two of its most popular subgenres, science fiction and fantasy, has always eluded clear definition. Stories of

speculative fiction are known to explore possible societal and technological changes brought about by the future, or similar changes apparent in alternative realities of either the present or the past. Some of these narratives are of a realist nature, and occasionally depict humanity's journey through space and time. Others are set in invented fantastical environments in which the author is able to tell an allegorical story that is very much of contemporary concern but set in a fantasy setting that is free of political baggage. No matter what the most accurate definition of speculative fiction is however, one thing is for certain: the genre sparks the imagination for an alternative reality. In a utopia, where it imagines a perfect political and social system, or a dystopia, where it highlights a specific worry that is already present in the real world, speculative fiction serves as a modern cautionary tale. Its newer examples' liberal interpretation of and perspective on the issues concerning gender and race allows it to become a popular medium to criticize both. Furthermore, because science fiction in particular takes most of its influence from cutting-edge real-world science, its adoption of political issues such as global warming and hyper-capitalism as its subject matter allows it to spearhead movements of social importance, such as the recent trend towards ecocritical philosophies. Therefore, I claim that speculative fiction, from its initial inception, has had the capacity to be a genre of intense optimism and been uniquely equipped to be a powerful tool for speculating a better world that allowed its readers to question the status quo and consider a potential reality in which the world is a better place.

Speculative fiction is defined by its ability to present experience, and therefore provide escapism; not in the strict purpose of making its reader escape into an alternative reality in which the world is drastically different to make them forget about their lives, but just the opposite; its purpose is to remind them that it could all be different – for the better or

for worse. R.B. Gill (2013) argues in *The Uses of Genre and the Classification of Speculative Fiction*:

> Mozart's The Magic Flute is an experience, as is the video game Gears of War, to compare great things with small. The content is different; no doubt their fulfillment of the loftiest goals of art is different. But one aspect of their essential value – the surrogate experience – is provocatively similar. TV programs, sports, popular films, Las Vegas, tales of adventure, and their forerunners, like stories around the fire and on the country store porch, may all function as equivalents of the types of speculative fiction that offer humans the psychologically healthful opportunity to occasionally escape into an alternative world. Of course, these varieties of performance, even when intended for one-time consumption, may offer conceptual depth as well as experiential pleasure, but it would be a mistake to undervalue the experience, which can itself become the value. Whatever its shortcomings, the substitution of a physical speculative experience for ordinary reality taps into the well spring of human psychological needs. It is not a matter of thoughtless or indulgent sacrifice of value to immediate pleasure, but rather an understanding that present experience is one type of value. (p. 80)

However, a highly celebrated science fiction author Robert Heinlein's definition of speculative fiction is that events and world order must be probable if not possible for the content of the fiction to be considered as speculative. This contradicts Gill's definition, of course, but it just proves the point that the genre is nigh impossible to define and that the definitive explanation for what makes up speculative fiction is up for debate, allowing the reader and the critic alike to define the genre as they like. Gill concludes her definition as:

"Clearly, speculative fiction is marked by diversity; there is no limit to possible micro-subjects and, understanding in such a mixed field, no standard definition" (2013, p. 72).

One of the leading authors of the genre, Ursula K. Le Guin defines science fiction, a very popular subgenre of speculative fiction, as descriptive, and not predictive. In the introduction to *The Left Hand of Darkness*, she criticizes the perception that science fiction is simply an extrapolation of the future, claiming that this method only manages to dismay the reader and does not conceive engaging results: "Strictly extrapolative works of science fiction generally arrive about where the Club of Rome arrives: somewhere between the gradual extinction of human liberty and the total extinction of terrestrial life" (Le Guin, 1976, p.5). She continues to claim that her novels in particular are "thought-experiments" and concludes to point out that predictions are the business of prophets and clairvoyants, not novel authors (Le Guin, 1976, p. 6). Canadian author and admirer of Le Guin, Margaret Atwood has had a public disagreement with her over how to define science fiction. In the introduction to her book, In *Other Worlds: SF and the human imagination*, Atwood (2011) says: "I found that what she means by science fiction is speculative fiction about things that really could happen, whereas things that really could not happen she classifies under fantasy" (p. 6). She then differentiates her concept of science fiction and tries to clear up where the disagreement came from: "What Le Guin means by science fiction is what I mean by speculative fiction, and what she means by fantasy would include some of what I mean by science fiction" (Atwood, 2011, p. 7). Since then, Margaret Atwood's fiction has started to be seen as science fiction, as she has been delving into some of the genre's more prevalent themes. Now, a term she coined, "speculative fiction" is seen as an umbrella term for what used to be separate genres like science fiction and fantasy. For the purposes of this thesis, I will define speculative fiction as just that, an umbrella term that encompasses both science fiction and fantasy;

therefore, including worlds that are both probable and seemingly improbable to the orthodox understanding of reality.

Although the term "speculative fiction" is rather new, its subgenres have existed for many years. In her ingenious book on science fictional theory of representation titled *Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sheep?,* Seo-Young Chu begins her introduction by citing a variety of sources in order to define the science fiction genre:

> The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines science fiction as "imaginative fiction based on postulated scientific discoveries or spectacular environmental changes, freq. set in the future or on other planets and involving space or time travel." The Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines SF as "books, films or cartoons about an imagined future, especially about space travel or other planets." A Glossary of Literary Terms defines SF as the portrayal of "an imagined reality that is radically different in its nature and functioning from the world of our ordinary experience" (Abrams, 1999, 278, as cited in Chu, 2010, p.1). American Heritage defines SF as a "literary or cinematic genre in which fantasy, typically based on speculative scientific discoveries or developments, environmental changes, space travel, or life on other planets, forms part of the plot or background." Brave New Words: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction defines SF as "a genre (of literature, film, etc.) in which the setting differs from our own world (e.g., by the invention of new technology, through contact with aliens, by having a different history, etc.), and in which the difference is based on extrapolations made from one or more changes or suppositions." (2010, p. 1)

Like many other fantastical genres of fiction, speculative fiction can comfortably be called metaphorical fiction, since it is ultimately speculative like its name and its subject matter is

almost always not literal, but metaphorical. The imagination of an alternative, although it might be purely unrealistic speculation, paves the way for the questioning of the status quo. Science fiction, by being purely speculative yet rooted in reality, gains an advantage in its ability to explore cultural, societal, and scientific issues, while remaining relevant through its use of more proven and orthodox forms. Adam Roberts (2006), in his book titled *Science Fiction*, says:

> Reading SF is about reading the marginal experience coded through the discourses of material symbolism; which is to say, it allows the symbolic expression of what it is to be a female, or black, or otherwise marginalized. SF, by focusing its representations of the world not through reproduction of that world but instead by figuratively symbolizing it, is able to foreground precisely the ideological constructions of otherness. In other words, in societies such as ours where otherness is often demonized, SF can pierce the constraints of this ideology by circumventing the conventions of traditional fiction. (p. 19)

Science fiction and fantasy are popular in many different cultures and with many different demographics. These days, readers are accustomed to seeing science fiction and fantasy novels on best-selling book charts. Most commercially, if not critically, successful movies and television shows are also science fiction or fantasy adaptations of some of these genres' classics or are influenced by them directly. Critical analysis on these genres of fiction have similarly been on the rise, as more and more academics are dedicating their careers to the analysis of science fiction and fantasy. However, it has not always been so. For years, these genres as serious fiction had to prove themselves as worthwhile and to be recognized as a legitimate study of critical humanities. In the introduction chapter titled "Coming Out of the Science Fiction Closet" to his book *Hard Reading: Learning from Science Fiction*, Tom

Shippey (2016) mentions encountering this exact problem during the 1970's in academia. He says:

> When I was an undergraduate at Cambridge, one thing I was quite sure about was that the merest whisper of an interest in science fiction was going to destroy any prospects I might have as an English professor: science fiction, it was well known, was suitable only for adolescents, and indicated a lack of the serious moral qualities thought requisite for literary criticism." (p. 3)

Although in the 1970's the departure of speculative fiction as no more than pulp fiction, into a more socially aware and philosophically sophisticated set of values had already happened decades earlier, it is still no mere coincidence that it coincided with the realization of such a shift. However, it is difficult to determine when and how this shift first began. In this thesis, I will be looking at the history of speculative fiction, how its subject matter matches the social issues of its day and whether it has anything to do with the increasing academic interest into its contents.

1.2. The History, Genres and Subgenres of Speculative Fiction

First, it might be of some value to determine how speculative fiction started. We know it is a recent label, but when did it start being written? The answer to that question, of course, changes with one's understanding of what speculative fiction means. With the traditional understanding that I have previously demonstrated, it can easily be argued that the roots of the genre go back pretty far. Although it is easier to trace the roots of fantasy – since every epic, every myth can be called a story of fantasy – it is much more difficult to determine when science fiction truly started. As outlined in Desirina Boskovich's *Lost Transmissions: The Secret History of Science Fiction and Fantasy* (2019), the German astronomer Johannes Kepler's *Somnium* is one of the earliest texts to feature a prominently science fictional

quality. Although it is perhaps a bit senseless to retro-label Kepler's manuscript as a science fiction text, it is still labeled as "proto science fiction" in Boskovich's (p. 2) compilation on lesser known texts that influenced modern science fiction. *Somnium* has a very interesting backstory on how it came to be. It apparently started out as Kepler's scholarly dissertation but was rejected by his professors at the time because of how un-scientific and speculative it was turning out to be. Ironically enough, Kepler's speculative explorations into living on alien planets not only turned out to be prime science fiction material, but they also proved to be highly scientific, since the text is made up of scientific knowledge previously inaccessible to any author of fiction. Kepler's only flaw – if it can even be called one – was to be too ahead of his time.

Many fictional texts that would later be published are similarly retro-labeled as science fiction, or more accurately as proto science fiction. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Jules Verne's many stories are perhaps the more prominent examples of this application. When Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*, medical science had progressed to a point previously thought impossible, therefore Shelley explored whether humans could possibly eliminate death, or reanimate a dead body. Equally curious about the most recent scientific discovery and its implications, Jules Verne explored fringe ideas that allowed global aerial travel or deep-sea exploration. When these stories were originally written, the term science fiction had not been coined. And the definitive science fiction trait, that is to explore a fringe scientific discovery in a fictional setting, only existed in previously stated examples that we can now think of as very early examples of speculative fiction. The question, therefore, is to contemplate whether we should consider these stories as part of the genre that they helped define.

Another author who is still lauded in praise because of her influential role is the Bengali writer and thinker Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain. In writing her feminist utopia

Sultana's Dream in 1905, she not only depicted very early on that science fiction fit the themes of a utopia, or a dystopia quite well, she also represented the genre's ability to serve as political commentary. Her story is impressive in not only how early in the 20th century it was conceived, but also in how relevant it still feels. Despite what is expected from such a narrative, Rokeya's story is not a feminist power fantasy, where genders are reversed but the roles remain fixed, as women physically overpower men in order to gain and hold power. The story, instead, takes an approach that is more fitting for a more contemporary feminist narrative: "At the core of *Sultana's Dream* is the insistence that intelligence is more powerful than brute force, and none of us should submit to oppression simply because our oppressors appear to be larger and stronger than we are" (Boskovich, 2019, p. 16). Of course, when *Sultana's Dream* was written, it was not considered to be a science fiction story. It was only recognized as such further down the line, as the pantheon of science fiction was slowly established throughout the 20th century. Alexei Panshin claims we can trace science fiction as further back as we can imagine, and the genre is as variable as it can get. He says:

> If you define science fiction in the widest sense as stories of Utopia and dystopia, of strange voyages and stranger places, it seems a remarkably reputable literary form. You might say, then, as science fiction historians have, that science fiction's ancestors were Plato, Lucian of Samosata, Sir Thomas More, Johannes Kepler, Cyrano de Bergerac, Jonathan Swift, Edgar Allan Poe, and always Verne and Wells. (Panshin, 1970, p. 884)

Panshin's claims are significant, in that he claims that the roots of the genre can be traced back identified by its themes, subject matter and motivations, instead of its established tradition in the early 20th century.

In a 1952 journal, August Derleth considered the up and coming science fiction genre to be “a cousin of the tall story and folklore.” (p. 1) He saw it as a speculation of “what could come next” in an age where technological advancements were being made faster than people could imagine them. He called this the “legendry of the atomic age”, (p. 1) the mythology of a newer time. Hugo Gernsback, the self-proclaimed inventor of the science fiction genre – the inventor of the name, if nothing else – and the publisher of the first science fiction magazine *Amazing Stories* claims: “Not only is science fiction an idea of tremendous import, but it is to be an important factor in making the world a better place to live in, through educating the public to the possibilities of science and the influence of science on life” (Gernsback, as cited in Roberts, 2006, p. 51). The coming decades proved him correct, but also, it turned out that he, despite his incessant optimism towards the genre, almost underestimated the power and influence of science fiction, which turned into a genre with a much bigger impact than he had foreseen.

Because no subject is off the table for science fiction, such as an ambisexual human society in Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness* or a post-WW2 United States of America under Japanese and Nazi control in Philip K. Dick’s *The Man in the High Castle*, the genre has had exceptional range where it could comment on and criticize anything. In countless utopias and dystopias, these stories are meant as wake-up calls to imagine how the world could easily be better, and in what ways it could be much worse. These sorts of stories are also constantly playing with the popularly simplified concepts of utopia and dystopia, and in twisting it, show their readers how one person’s utopia can be another’s dystopia – a political message disguised as a product of popular culture delivered through a popular medium. The authors of many science fiction subgenres seek answers to what now seems to be substandard questions, but they had been on the forefront of these issues from very early on. For example, the criticism of mega-corporations as replacements of contemporary world

powers brought into the zeitgeist a very reasonably critical perspective into hyper-capitalism and is probably why we look at such corporations with suspicion and mistrust. The subgenre of cyberpunk is usually attributed towards creating such a meme. Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows (1995) define cyberpunk in *Cultures of Technological Embodiment* as: "The term cyberpunk refers to the body of fiction built around the work of William Gibson and other writers, who have constructed visions of the future worlds of cyberspaces, with all their vast range of technological developments and power struggles" (p.3). In such stories, the world is generally dominated by dystopic representations of powerful corporations who control all aspects of life and their executives have immense personal and political power. What distinguishes cyberpunk from a political science fiction story is its depiction of political insurgency in the form of punk aesthetic and ideology. Also, while cyberpunk is more focused on digital spaces and therefore computer technologies, a similar subgenre called biopunk is more focused on medical technologies. Both subgenres use these technological advancements as potential exploitation measures, as the dystopically power-hungry corporations who have control over them also have ultimate control over most aspects of human life. In some of these stories, it is a common occurrence that some sort of artificial intelligence provides massive political, strategic, and military power to the individuals who control it. This motif is not exclusive to the aforementioned subgenres, since AI as a subject of fear has become widespread and can be seen as a sub-theme in a multitude of science fiction stories.

Science fiction's sociopolitical messaging started very early on, even when it was not as popular as today. However, its early messaging of political agenda was problematic, as it continually allowed some authors to spew their xenophobia under the disguise of human-alien conflict. This era of early science fiction, most commonly seen as pulp fiction, established most of the genre's noteworthy themes and ideas. These ideas would later be adapted to the changing political climate and the authors of the genre would imagine scenarios in which the

Enlightenment envisioned during the 18th century had either completely failed, or completely succeeded – not left in its in-between state as it remains today. One of the unique advantages of such a fantastical potential turned out to be its capability to give voices to objects that customarily have none. These types of narratives were matchlessly qualified to exclude from the centers of their narratives the historically destructive and spoiled child of our planet: humanity. This allowed the science fiction genre to elaborate on what Michel Foucault called the end of an 18th century understanding of humanism, inescapable from the passage of time like a "face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea" (1970/2005, p. 422). From the ashes of humanism rose the philosophical imaginings of critical posthumanism and post-anthropocentrism.

Başak Ağın, who quite recently published a book on posthumanism, claims that despite its many types and contextual definitions, first and foremost, posthumanism is about humanity's contact with its own technological creations. (2020, p. 16) What she continues on to point out is that since human culture is defined alongside its connections to its technological advancements, we have never been purely "human" as was defined by 18th century positivist humanism – and have always been posthuman, (Ağın, p. 16) since we have never been able to define ourselves separate from our relationships with non-human beings – alive or otherwise. Posthumanism, in this way, is humanity's next step, in not only through its transcendence of acknowledging the truth of human experience, but also recognizing how it surpassed its physical limitations. This physical and cultural transcendence need not be transhumanist, since as Ağın calls it in her book, transhumanism is posthumanism's "dark twin" (2020, p. 25). Transhumanism, as it is widely understood, is in somewhat of a conflict with posthuman ideals, since it does not oppose distorted humanist and anthropocentric notions that only exist to serve the rich and powerful, leaving behind countless disenfranchised and downtrodden to tend for themselves. In this way, post-anthropocentrism,

posthumanism's good twin, endeavors to raise all beings up through removing humanity from the center of universal narrative and put it on equal ground with the beings archaically mislabeled as the "unfortunate" by a similarly archaic humanist mentality. Thus, as Ağın points out, the end of humanism need not be envisioned as apocalyptic but must be celebrated – as it signals the end of an era in which humanity is defined with a barrier in between itself and the uncredited beings that helped define it (2020, p. 32).

Through the rejection of anthropocentricism as acceptable behavior by giving voice to plants, animals, mechanical beings or sometimes even completely inanimate objects, speculative fiction can imagine alternatives to traditional human experience by exposing a chillingly self-centered perspective that enabled reckless environmental attitudes throughout modern human history. In this thesis my main goal will be to point out that this anthropocentric attitude has always disturbed authors of speculative fiction, as they tried to depict fantastical alternatives whether it is a ruined planet in climate fiction and post-apocalypses, or ultimately more powerful and wise aliens, secretly in control of humanity in weird fictions. Nowadays, the deconstruction of human/non-human contact in popular fiction is more on the map than ever, therefore part of my thesis will be to acknowledge the recently emerged literary theory, ecocriticism. Ecocriticism, very simply defined, is the analysis of the natural world as depicted in literature and the deconstruction of the deficiency of the importance of human/non-human relations in such literature, which I will be further analyzing in the later chapters.

In the following sections, I will be chronicling my thesis' journey through three separate but highly connected periods and introduce the multiple short stories I will be analyzing in each chapter to demonstrate how speculative fiction, with all its wide variety of

genres and subgenres developed to imagine not only a better world, but better humans that live on it.

1.3. Early Pulp Speculative Fiction and Its Post-Anthropocentric Disposition

The early 20th century was a difficult time to be writing speculative fiction of any sort. Self-publishing was risky and potentially very costly, while traditional publishing houses did not prefer speculative fiction since they did not consider it to be lucrative. This challenge compelled authors of speculative fiction to specialize in short stories, publishing in pulp magazines most of the time. *Weird Tales* and *Amazing Stories* are two such magazines, immensely respected and valued nowadays due to their legacy, yet at the time, they were considered borderline experimental and had very limited audiences. Of course, short story as a form of fiction precedes such magazines and its heritage is subject to masters of literature such as Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville and Anton Chekhov. But the authors of these magazines used the short story form to very good effect and established a lot with what they had. While it is undeniable what this brief period brought into the genre, Jeff VanderMeer claims that speculative fiction of this early 20th century has only historical value and is only meaningful to look at in terms of a bridge between what we might consider poorly written speculative fiction that was somehow influential and the genre's classics. He says most of these stories were out of date, even when they were written: "We need escapism in our fiction because fiction is a form of play, but escapism becomes difficult to read when it renders invisible the march of history or becomes too disconnected from readers' experience of science, technology, or world events" (VanderMeer, 2011, p. 6). It was however, in this era when speculative fiction writers first dipped their toes into the common themes of science fiction and fantasy, and some of the same traditions established during this period are still being continued today. The problem VanderMeer sees – as do many readers of science fiction – is the hypocrisy of an author who for example is a racist or a misogynist in their daily life

yet highlights the glaring issue of an anthropocentric point of view. In such an author's writing, it is inescapable that one might encounter such hypocrisies. Meanwhile, when a hypocritical personality and the critique of anthropocentricism are mentioned in the same sentence, one of the primary authors that has to come to mind is H.P. Lovecraft.

Howard Philips Lovecraft single-handedly uplifted the esoteric subgenre known as weird horror, and influenced countless authors and stories, some of which most people are not even aware he influenced. Although personally a xenophobe without excuse, his contribution to speculative fiction cannot be understated. In his stories, H.P. Lovecraft repeatedly ridiculed an anthropocentric worldview. He created what came to be known as the Cthulhu mythos, in which human beings were mere puppets of much older, wiser, and powerful beings he called the "Great Old Ones". While not wholly original, his exploration into the idea that the world did not revolve around humanity and that the universe had concerns that excluded it was a radical theme to explore at the time. Following this pessimistic philosophy, Lovecraft managed to also create an obscure subgenre that is often referred to as cosmic horror, also known as Lovecraftian horror. This type of horror story did not deal with gory elements or serial murderers that one would typically expect to find in horror stories. Instead, Lovecraft liked to play with the idea that humanity was not alone in the universe and was as insignificant as a speck of dust in comparison to the powerful beings of the cosmos; hence the name, cosmic horror.

In Lovecraft's arguably most famous short story, "The Call of Cthulhu", which I will further analyze in the second chapter, the narrative is told through an exclusively and therefore limited first person account of events. This causes the plot to exist thinly at best, since the account of the narrator is limited and cannot be fully trusted. But the story is crammed full of mise-en-scène to help establish its unsettling setting. The hints of some unrevealed mystery he liked to put in every sequence to build a shadowy threat, while his

characters were unaware of the dangers that awaited them was to build the sort of suspense he would later pay off. This was Lovecraft's style, to inhibit plot development and hold back character details, to build suspense, and then reveal idiosyncrasies or aberrations just in time to make them more horrifying than had they been revealed from the outset. This points to H. P. Lovecraft being a genre writer by every sense of the word, and that he shared this style with many of his fellow genre writers. In the introduction to a newer reprint of one of Lovecraft's few novels titled *The Mountains of Madness*, China Mieville claims: "Genre writers, it is often claimed, are uninterested in characterization, theme, or nuance, and instead vulgarly subordinate everything to the exigencies of plot. This, of course, is nonsense. In fact, many genre writers don't do plot either" (Mieville, 2005, p. 16). Not all Lovecraft stories lack plot, but "The Call of Cthulhu" is indeed one of those stories that can fit into a two-sentence plot summary, because for Lovecraft, the main draw of a story such as he liked to tell was not plot. As a self-proclaimed author of weird fiction, Lovecraft did not care about narratives commonly found in science fiction (or "scientifiction" as it was known back then) or much care about writing stories of fantasy. His concern was to establish a strange universe in which the reader pondered their existence in the universe, in comparison to the unimaginable dimensions of the cosmos.

The purpose of Lovecraft's first-person narrative that he liked to use was to establish a possibly unreliable narrator to parallel the narrator's skeptical perspective with the construction of a similarly skeptical reader. When the narrator starts the story by highlighting the discrepancy between the discoveries put forward by science and people's awareness of them, it serves the purpose of a precursor to the narrator's inevitable delirium. The narrator of the story, much like Lovecraft himself, believes that not everything should be discovered, because humanity is neither responsible nor intelligent enough to handle ultimate knowledge. Lovecraft, in his bleak outlook, deferred absolute knowledge and preferred ignorance. In one

of his most famous quotes, which is from another short story titled “The Temple”, he wrote: “If I am mad, it is mercy! May the gods pity the man who in his callousness can remain sane to the hideous end!” (Lovecraft, 1925) Although in the context of the story, this line takes on a different meaning as the story progresses, this sentiment can be seen in a variety of his stories in which his characters lost their minds upon the discovery of secret, esoteric knowledge. “The Call of Cthulhu” is not the only Lovecraft story in which a character seems incoherent because of the discovery of some ancient, incomprehensible knowledge. In fact, it is a common theme for Lovecraft, and it has since become a common theme for weird fiction, as an underrecognized subgenre of speculative fiction. A lot of weird fiction is predicated upon the seemingly preposterous claims of some sort of first-person account, while the reader is left pondering whether they should believe this character. And therefore, the genre is crawling with characters whose stories are either fantastical or are a sort of fever dream.

Although Lovecraft’s fear of the unknown, the alien and the other are now generally attributed to his xenophobia – rightfully so, considering his non-fictional writings – I believe it was also a part of his struggle with insignificance in the face of death and in the scope of the cosmos. His interest in horror comes from his admiration of Poe, while “the weird” finds a place in his fiction due to his passionate respect of Kafka. However, his ultimate reason for writing speculative fiction comes from his recognition of the coming developments and dangers of the 20th century and how people were not ready to confront what awaited them. This constructed the moral core of his writings precisely because he realized that including himself, the human species tended to put themselves in the center of every narrative they constructed and were behaving as if all events in the universe occurred at their whim. Further explorations into the genre confirm this trend preceded Lovecraft’s writings and can be seen in very early science fiction stories. Analyzed in the remainder of this chapter, Karl Hans Strobl’s “The Triumph of Mechanics*”* deals with anxieties related to mechanical recreations

of living beings, which concerned Strobl in 1907. Less than a decade after that, Miguel de Unamuno's "Mechanopolis" deals with a very prolific example for his time, the compatibility of artificial life and human life – which he posits is quite impossible since humanity would require the company of other humans in order to function properly. The final short story that I will analyze in this chapter is Leslie F. Stone's "The Conquest of Gola". Stone's story centers its narrative on an alien race that sees itself superior to other beings – humans included – which parallels an anthropocentric outlook and highlights how ridiculous it looks while looked at from the periphery.

1.4. The Critique of Anthropocentrism in Golden Age Speculative Fiction

While early 20th century witnessed the rise of obscure Pulp magazines and less than popular short story collections to feature speculative fiction, the middle of the century gave rise to the popularity of science fiction and fantasy as mainstream culture. Some part of this shift was because of the changing political climate and how speculative fiction found itself in the middle of science-positive rhetoric as a result of World War II and the Cold War that followed it. As highly talented and respected authors chose to write speculative stories due to science, and scientific discoveries becoming the most recent and popular talking points, new names who would later come to be known as giants of the genre also started to emerge. American authors such as Ray Bradbury, Robert A. Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke and Philip K. Dick wrote during this "Golden Age" of science fiction.

One style of narrative that this era of science fiction adopted is known as conte philosophique, which Jeff VanderMeer describes as "philosophical story" or "fable of reason" (2016, p. 4). He explains this tradition as: "The contes philosophiques were used for centuries in the West by the likes of Voltaire, Johannes Kepler, and Francis Bacon as one legitimate way for scientists or philosophers to present their findings" (VanderMeer, p. 4). While science fiction authors of this era aimed to educate the public in all manners related to science, it is

disputable how much of this was part of political agenda, and how much of this political agenda was personal, instead of state funded. But one thing was for certain; the sorts of fiction that was written during this period, by some of the genre's true pioneers were transformative. One of the biggest giants of this era was the American author Isaac Asimov, whose novels have contributed to the science fiction genre and its continuing tradition immensely and has influenced countless works of fiction for years to come. One of his most impressive stories remains to be "The Last Question" – further analyzed in the third chapter – which is not nearly as popular as some of his other stories and certainly not as elaborative. Asimov's 13-page short story is about humanity's struggle with its own mortality and as this struggle eventually ceases to be a burden, the concerns of a post-mortality laden society's struggle with its own immortality. The thesis statement of Asimov's story is that although humanity can find a way to temporarily conquer the universality of death, and therefore the truth of the universe, it is still a slave to the universe's whims, because however invincible it may turn itself into, it cannot outlive the end of the universe.

Humanity's incredible accomplishment also brings with it an unescapable re-interpretation of the human condition and reveals how much of understood human behavior depends on its fragility and ephemerality. With death out of the equation, human life is transformed in such a way that the beings Asimov calls humans might as well be aliens. The eventuality of its ultimate elimination renders impossible the human condition to survive such a significant metamorphosis and therefore, the presupposed reality of humanity, life and consciousness is revealed to be a myth. The following story to be analyzed in this chapter; Philip K. Dick's "Beyond Lies the Wub", is also a story to be built on shattering such myths. It is a story in which a crew of human space travelers discover an alien being – originally thought to be nothing more than an animal – that turns out to be sentient and is able to engage the crew in sophisticated conversation. The true origins of this strange alien, however, lies in

its ability to transfer its consciousness into other living beings – rendering it virtually immortal. This short story, along with Asimov's tale of immortality, argue that the human body does not properly reflect the human being – prompting the age-old question of what makes a human. While these questions are discussed in the mid-20th century discussion of speculative fiction, the following chapter 4, which is centered around New Wave and contemporary speculative fiction, will be more equipped to look for the answer in a de-centralized idea of the human in posthumanist and post-anthropocentric theory.

1.5. The Posthumanist and Ecocritical Approach in New Wave and Contemporary Speculative Fiction

The late 20th century witnessed the emergence of the "New Wave". J. G. Ballard, Harlan Ellison and Ursula K. Le Guin were some of the most popular authors of this period. These authors, among many others who wrote during the 70's through the 90's were influenced by the previous generation of speculative fiction, as well as feminist, postcolonial, psychoanalytic, and posthumanist theory. It was also in this period where climate anxiety first started to show itself in scientific studies. And as is usually the case, the public was not aware of the dangers of climate change yet, and even people who knew about its risks found it difficult to internalize the problem in its entirety. Speculative fiction was at the forefront of taking important matters of social awareness as its subject matter such as a potentially world-ending catastrophe, therefore we see a trend of climate related and post-apocalyptic fiction during this moment of crisis that we are still somehow in the middle of. Fredrik Pohl argues: "The environmental movement was certainly helped along by science fiction stories that depicted a despoiled planet" (1997, p. 15). Although speculative fiction as a whole has had a role in bringing attention to a potentially planet devastating issue, a subgenre of speculative fiction called climate fiction, or cli-fi for short, has been allowed to be more focused on its insistence that the planet needs saving. As Pohl points out, the depiction of the planet as

utterly ruined has had a shocking effect on readers that stimulated their curiosities and helped them consider an alternative narrative.

Ecocriticism has recently started taking the lead on the critique of nature's representation in popular fiction. Ecocriticism, simply put, "is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xviii). Its critique is primarily of humanity's environmental recklessness and its representations in literature. This measure of criticism is grounded upon a sub-movement called material ecocriticism that considers all matter – belonging to living beings or otherwise – as agents, with their own stories to tell. As Serpil Oppermann and Serenella Iovino (2014) argue in the Introduction to *Material Ecocriticism*: "…the world's material phenomena are knots in a vast network of agencies, which can be "read" and interpreted as forming narratives, stories" (p. 1). On the other hand, ecocriticism's close sibling in its criticism of the human condition, Posthumanism, is "the philosophical critique of anthropocentrism" (Roden, 2015, p.20). While both ecocriticism and posthumanism focus on their critical messages towards the humanist movement, posthumanism encompasses more than its critique of humanism – also including a path forward for humanity as represented in literary texts. For the purposes of this chapter, I will be referring to the literary theory known as critical posthumanism to identify anthropocentric attitudes and criticisms apparent in literary works. As identified in David Roden's book titled *Posthuman Life: Philosophy at the Edge of the Human* (2015), critical posthumanism "is a broadly based attack on the supposed anthropocentrism of modern philosophy and intellectual life" (p. 21). While posthumanism as a term was first used in late 20th century, its critique also comes from and is directed towards a variety of texts from the 18th and 19th century narratives. The movement, while being unhappy with the current state of humanist thought, is also able to provide evidence of potential directions humanity may move towards in texts of 20th century speculative fiction, generally by becoming posthuman

ourselves. As to what that term refers to, "posthuman" is explained in Francesca Ferrando's article titled "Posthumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms" (2013) as an umbrella term:

> Posthuman has become an umbrella term to include (philosophical, cultural, and critical) posthumanism, transhumanism (in its variants as extropianism, liberal and democratic transhumanism, among other currents), new materialisms (a specific feminist development within the posthumanism frame), and the heterogenous landscapes of antihumanism, posthumanities, and metahumanities. (p. 26)

In the texts that I will look at in the fourth and final chapter, I will try to determine how this transformation is conceived by the authors of New Wave speculative fiction. All the short stories that I will analyze in this chapter critique an anthropocentric perspective towards the ultimate "other" – the alien, the natural or the artificial.

One potential, and recently popularized way to highlight environmental anxiety and the importance of the posthumanist philosophy is to depict the impact humanity has had over the environment – more specifically through climate change. This sort of story is called climate fiction, and in such stories the authors explore potential environmental disasters and speculate on what might come after such disasters if one were to occur on Earth, by either directly depicting a devastated Earth and setting the story in a post-apocalyptic background or illustrating a completely different planet with similar to human lifeforms and by drawing parallels. Margaret Atwood is one of the most famous authors to ever write climate fiction. Her stories are catalysts for public ecocritical awareness and highlight a very emergent matter and a potential catastrophe. Her and many others' belief that the Earth does not only belong to humans, but all life forms has become a common theme for speculative fiction as it began to explore posthumanist perspectives as well as ecocritical ones. Ursula K. Le Guin was

particularly influential in the way that she showed these perspectives in her narratives. A science fiction and fantasy author, she amazed her readers through her explorations of alien worlds and showed concern for animal and plant life through her allegories in her novels and innumerable short stories. Her short story titled "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow" – further analyzed in the fourth and final chapter – is a fitting example of how authors of this period tried to depict an alternative narrative. Her story does not feature an apocalyptic event. In fact, it takes place in a utopia, one which the reader would find ideal, yet one which the author criticizes because it is a utopia for humans exclusively. This is the sort of criticism that features lifeforms other than humans as deserving of having equal value and agency, one which ecocriticism and critical posthumanism's primary claim is based on.

Following Le Guin's story, I will look at Nnedi Okorafor's "Spider, the Artist" which is the story of a Nigerian woman's struggle with her domestic troubles, while befriending a spider shaped robot. This story features explicit narratives of colonial and imperialist exploitation, on top of the exploitation of ethnic minorities, the poor and – since this is a science fiction story – the artificially created. The ethical dilemma of the story is clear: Both the villagers and the robots are overtly oppressed, and the ultimate blame lies with the political powers that allow this sort of exploitation of people and the environment, for simply more profit. Humanity's most incredible accomplishments have become tools to be used in its ultimate subjugation. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (2012), in their pivotal work *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, claim: "What human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and human beings" (p.2). This is to claim that the prospect of the Enlightenment would have always been the decisive exploitation of nature. It was in the service of the division of labour: "The division of labour, through which power manifests itself socially, serves the self-preservation of the dominated whole." (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2012, p.16) Tackling the issues of labour, asking the posthumanist questions, while being

ecocritical of nature's exploitation during the Anthropocene, Okorafor's "Spider, the Artist" is also the story of a governmentally and domestically repressed people's seemingly insignificant conflict with increasingly powerful and influential institutions. Mirroring the questions asked in "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow", Okorafor's story also asks what consciousness means and explores the implications of a mechanical being that enjoys music. Then, the final text I will briefly look at in this chapter is Margaret Atwood's "Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet". Atwood's very short story is a letter, left behind by the sole member of a civilization that has since been annihilated. In the letter, the narrator warns the people who will supposedly find this transcript of the troubles that await them if they continue in the footsteps of the narrator's own society. This story brings home the point that the critical positions that ecocriticism and posthumanism posit is for the sole purpose of providing a better environment for humans, and all other beings that populate this beautiful planet we call Earth.

To conclude, all fictional texts in this thesis will feature an acknowledgement of how anthropocentric thinking is detrimental to the human and non-human experience. I have specifically selected these texts to highlight how preposterous it is that the human being has learned to presuppose what is alive, conscious, and valuable. To this end, I believe my analysis of nine short stories, from three different eras of speculative fiction will provide ample evidence that this genre, by its very nature, is fit to create stories in which such criticisms come second nature. Therefore, I argue that speculative fiction is not only able to predict social progress, but also able to trigger it.

2. THE CRITIQUE OF ANTHROPOCENTRISM IN EARLY 20th CENTURY SPECULATIVE FICTION: H. P. LOVECRAFT'S "THE CALL OF CTHULHU" AND OTHER STORIES

In this chapter, I will be looking at a few early 20th century speculative fiction stories, and pointing out their criticisms towards anthropocentric thought. Starting with H. P. Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu", my argument will be centered around Lovecraft's resolve in authoring characters and settings that displace humanity from the center of universal narratives. To this end, I will be pointing out the fear of insignificance he displays in his writing, while recognizing the eventuality of this insignificance. I will also examine the symbolism of his aliens in the story to point out some of his other fears – one of them being the fear of the unknown. As I acknowledge a major counter-argument against the value of Lovecraft's writing in his racist attitude, I will be presenting a reason why his fear of contact and change is not detrimental to understanding his mentality, but instrumental. Continuing with earlier examples of such stories such as Karl Hans Strobl's "The Triumph of Mechanics" and Miguel de Unamuno's "Mechanopolis", I will illustrate the similarities between these stories and Lovecraft in their display of a fear of change in the face of a rapidly changing world to argue that such a disposition started very early in the 20th century. After I point out that this fear arises from the acceptance that the humanist ideal of the previous century is no longer valid, I will be moving on to the final story, written less than a decade after "The Call of Cthulhu", Leslie F. Stone's "The Conquest of Gola". My analysis of this era's critical perspective towards humanism will come to an end as I point out that our presuppositions and

expectations from traditional narratives feed the obsession with human-centered narratives, while also failing to empower anyone but the status quo.

2.1. The Fear of Industrialization and Mechanization in H. P. Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu"

Published in the February 1928 issue of *Weird Tales* was the enormously popular "The Call of Cthulhu", written by the quintessential controversial figure of the speculative fiction community in the name of Howard Philips Lovecraft, commonly referred to as H.P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft's legacy turned out to be a gigantic one, since he influenced a slew of fiction that followed in his footsteps. Unbeknownst to him, since he died without ever realizing his stories would become at all successful, he would create the subgenre of weird fiction; one of the lesser known subgenres of speculative fiction. James Kneale (2006) claims: "Howard Phillips Lovecraft was arguably the most significant horror author of the 20th century. He links the 19th and early 20th century authors who were his own influences (Edgar Allan Poe, Ambrose Bierce, Arthur Machen and Algernon Blackwood) and writers of horror and fantastic fiction" (p. 108). John Engle (2014), on his paper on Lovecraft's influence on contemporary occult practices says: "The influence of H. P. Lovecraft on popular culture is undeniable in both the mainstream and underground. His stories served as inspiration to dozens of subsequent writers, with his idiosyncratic style and rich world building functioning as the starting point and setting for a vast expanded universe of fiction" (p. 85). "The Call of Cthulhu" as a story, and its octopus-dragon hybrid antagonist "Cthulhu" as a popular culture icon, are particularly interesting cases to study, since they were adapted to many different forms of consumer products of which all are difficult to list here. Among them are tabletop roleplaying games, video games, novels, countless short stories and poems, plush dolls and as

Engle mentions in his paper, actual contemporary cults. “The Call of Cthulhu” is also the cornerstone for Lovecraft’s Cthulhu mythos, which itself took on a life of its own.

“The Call of Cthulhu” is the first-hand account of an inheritor named Francis Wayland Thurston who, after his grandfather’s sudden and inexplicable death, is left with strange transcripts and objects. The inquisitive anthropologist Thurston finds these odd objects fascinating and potentially dangerous, yet feels like he must continue to explore further into what he unearths. Even though he soon finds out that his grandfather’s inquisitiveness led to his death, and will probably lead to his own if he continues, he is unable to stop. The story starts with the omniscient narrator’s note: “Found Among the Papers of the Late Francis Wayland Thurston, of Boston” (Lovecraft, 1926/2002, p. 139). This is the only part of the story that is not told through Thurston’s perspective, the rest of the story is told in first-person narrative, and therefore does not feature his name, but the name of the characters he meets. So, I will refer to Thurston as simply “the narrator” for the purposes of this thesis. Also, because the note at the beginning refers to the narrator as “…the Late Francis Wayland Thurston…”, we are immediately aware that he is dead as well, but the circumstances of his death are not pronounced at all.

It is appropriate at this point where the reader discovers the inevitable fate of the story’s narrator to discuss why this story is commonly labeled as weird fiction. According to Jeff VanderMeer (2007): “Weird refers to the sometimes supernatural or fantastical element of unease…” (p. 16) So, how is this genre different than fantasy or science fiction? It is generally considered to be between science fiction – where everything can be explained and often is, and fantasy – where perhaps some things can be explained but rarely is. Therefore, weird fiction sits at a place right between where some things can be explained, and some

cannot. Tzvetan Todorov's (1975) definition of the fantastic can also be appropriately applied to an attempt at what weird fiction tries to accomplish.

> The fantastic is based essentially on a hesitation of the reader – a reader who identifies with the chief character – as to the nature of an uncanny event. This hesitation may be resolved so that the event is acknowledged as reality, or so that the event is identified as the fruit of imagination or the result of an illusion; in other words, we may decide that the event is or is not. (p. 156)

Weird fiction's place between science fiction and fantasy can be observed when one thinks of them as the ancestors of today's horror stories. Yet not all weird fiction is scary, but all of them have the commonality where they put the reader at unease. They are, however, as the name of the genre suggests weird.

The opening lines of "The Call of Cthulhu" is simply a summary of Lovecraft's philosophy in trying to establish how insignificant humanity seems in the face of the universe:

> 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. (Lovecraft, 1926/2002, p. 139)

As can be gathered from this passage and many alike in his other stories, Lovecraft held a cynical perspective regarding humanity's significance in the universe. His insight reflected that the more we understood about the cosmos, the more we would reveal our insignificance.

Even though he or any of his contemporaries did not use this term at the time, his fiction later came to be known as cosmic horror, which is "an experience of the cataclysmic horror that the human subject experiences once it cognizes the finitude of its existence and realizes that, contrary to a humanist view which posits human life as intrinsically meaningful in relation not only to itself but to the cosmos, there is neither anything distinctive nor significant about being human" (Ralickas, 2008, p. 298). Therefore, it is easy to imagine how one might call Lovecraft's stories as cosmic horror, since his protagonists are so often plagued with such fears. Some call this type of story Lovecraftian horror as well, which is interchangeably used with the former.

While the opening lines of the story point to a much more pessimistic narrative, the rest of the beginning chapter is filled with skepticism in part due to the narrator's inability to correlate his findings. But as the story progresses and his skepticism dissolves, his view of his own place in the universe is shaken to its core. As T. S. Miller (2011) puts it in *From Bodily Fear to Cosmic Horror*: "The narrator's slow penetration of the arcane mysteries confronting him effects only the gradual destruction of his sane universe…" (p. 132). One thing is for certain, at some point before writing his account on the matter, the narrator realizes his insignificance in the cosmos. However, his account of what truly happens is discredited through his self-admitted mental breakdown. This is the core of another theme that Lovecraft aims to accomplish, and one which fits the tradition of the weird so well; the unreliability of not only the narrator, but the whole story and its characters. Since this is true for all characters whose accounts we later read and experience through the narrator, and since it is hinted that all of them "go mad", we are never sure if these characters are encountering monsters and magic, or if they are simply having mental episodes in response to mass hysteria. Both possibilities are equally viable at all times. And as we question the true nature of the story, we

follow the footsteps of characters who parallel our confusion, making this very fitting for a weird fiction story.

After he realizes the significance of the mysterious transcripts and regrets putting together the esoteric knowledge they contain, the narrator writes: “I hope that no one else will accomplish this piecing out; certainly, if I live, I shall never knowingly supply a link so hideous a chain” (Lovecraft, 1926/2002, p. 140). Here, the narrator has already figured out that the cosmos has a reach so incomprehensible to anyone who might accidentally cognize it that it would be merciful to let others stay ignorant on the matter. And ironically, the horror of this realization comes not from what he has already figured out, but from what else remains unknown. Just the hint of a cosmos so infinitely more complex than previously conceived, discrediting the myth of “the human” who has mastery over its environment, opens up the possibility of earth-shattering realities. And the unknowability of this potential drives the narrator to deadly fear of his own existence and significance. H. P. Lovecraft (1927/1973) very famously asserted in his essay on the horror genre titled “Supernatural Horror in Literature”: “The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown” (p. 2). “The Call of Cthulhu” reminds the reader that before humanity was disenchanted by the myths of the Enlightenment, and all the scientific and technological progress that led to both amazing and devastating consequences, it could not feel this intense fear of insignificance. This was a result of the events of the 20th century when humanity’s prideful claim that it owned the earth was strongly challenged by catastrophic global events like the First World War, a complete economic collapse that followed right after and the biggest pandemic in the history of humanity: The Spanish Flu. And this re-shifting of perspective resulted in an alternative narrative that depicted humanity as fragile, irresponsible, and naïve. The period in which “The Call of Cthulhu” was composed was still affected by post-World War ennui, and with the second World War possibly on the

horizon, especially apparent to well-read individuals like Lovecraft, this sense of melancholy must have forced the people of that time to very rightfully reconsider humanity's place in the world and how it used its technological constructs.

Humanity's relationship with technology had already been one filled with shame and fear. Shame, because it revealed to them the potential of their malevolence. And fear, because it was at this time that humanity had realized that the tools it had created to simplify their daily lives had led to their possible self-annihilation. Technophobia had already existed at this point in history, but the instances of this era led to further cases of technophobia than ever before, or possibly since. Although Heideggerian thought is not included within the theoretical framework of this thesis, I would like to incorporate a few of his ideas, because they may prove significant. Heidegger claims that human beings are shepherds of Being, recreating reality to serve their needs and to agree with their perspectives. This would mean that technological creations are consequences of human behavior and therefore are not agents of their own. The German philosopher Martin Heidegger sees this as a positive, imagining that humans stand as the only being that could recreate the world, nudging it towards perfection. And, as our reflections in the outer world, our constructs reveal our most inner, inward facing fears. Joshua Kira (2017), in his paper titled *A Thoughtful Technophobia*, to point out Heidegger's opinion on technology, puts forward a common definition: "Technology is always teleological and therefore used, like a tool, for humans to enact their Being" (p. 244). So, if the purpose in creating technology is just to use it as a tool, then the revelation of a subtle truth that comes with its use is just a consequence of its creation. If "Heidegger sees truth as the unveiledness of what is previously concealed" (Kira, 2017, p. 246), then technology is a catalyst for such revelation and therefore a threat to the human Being. Because "for Heidegger, such revelation in technology is fraught with threats, since technology, in the bringing-forth necessary for revelation, compels a particular type of human

activity that is obscuring" (p. 246). Therefore, technological advance begets revelation, which in turn leads to shame and fear. This is why I accept the higher beings called Great Ones in "The Call of Cthulhu" as parables for technology and its effect on humanity, since their revelation coincides with the ennui that can be observed in both Lovecraft's narrative and 1920's writings in parallel.

At the core of "The Call of Cthulhu's" unknowable, unnamable, unspeakable, and incomprehensible truth is the story's closest thing to an antagonist: Cthulhu. This being, which is "a sort of monster, or symbol representing a monster, of a form which only a diseased fancy could conceive" (Lovecraft, 1926/2002, p. 141) seems to be an alien of some sort. Taken at its face value, Cthulhu yields "simultaneous pictures of an octopus, a dragon and a human caricature…" and looked to its onlookers as a "pulpy, tentacled head surmounted a grotesque and scaly body with rudimentary wings…" (p. 141). The monster is chimera-like; half octopus – symbolizing its unnatural reach, and half dragon – depicting it as covetous and gluttonous, but in the shape of a man. This resembles the greatest horror of the early 20th century – machines of war; in the shape of metal monsters but controlled by man. I believe Cthulhu is a denotation of not only specific war machines, like machine guns, tanks and war planes, but also the European war-machine, that did not stop or care about all the suffering that it caused and produced an industry that the likes of which had never been seen before or since. This worried everyone at the time and in "The Call of Cthulhu", this is portrayed as consequent nightmares that are had about Cthulhu by many different individuals. One of these individuals, a sculptor, tells of his dream to the protagonist's grandfather, the account of which the narrator reads from left-behind transcripts: "Upon retiring, he had had an unprecedented dream of great Cyclopean cities of titan blocks and sky-flung monoliths, all dripping with green ooze and sinister with latent horror" (Lovecraft, 1926/2002, p. 143). This strange account of dream experience reflects Lovecraft's fear of unstoppable industry and

how it would consume cities. In the sculptor's nightmare that is a sort of prediction, the cities are depicted as containing nothing but concrete buildings without anything else in sight and blocking out sunlight. Sad to say, a part of the sculptor's and therefore Lovecraft's nightmare became true.

In "The Call of Cthulhu", the artists and poets are affected by these nightmares the most. Much like during the Great War, they are the ones who can more easily see through the veneer and make sense of the chaos. The narrator claims: "It was from the artists and poets that the pertinent answers came, and I know that panic would have broken loose had they been able to compare notes." (Lovecraft, 1926/2002, p. 145) Then, the narrative turns towards the transcripts that follow the actions of one Inspector Legrasse and his account of what he conversed with Professor Webb, and their strange and somewhat inexplicable encounters with a cult, that is simply denoted as the Cthulhu Cult. An ornate tablet that the inspector finds nonsensically reads: "Ph'nglui mglw'nafh Cthulhu R'lyeh wgah'nagl fhtagn." (Lovecraft, 1926/2002, p. 150) As this does not belong to any known language, the inspector needs the help of Professor Webb, who had an encounter with similar writings, cults, and such arcane matters. The phrase is then translated into English as: "In his house at R'lyeh dead Cthulhu waits dreaming." If we accept Cthulhu as a symbol for war, considering the first World War had just ended, it is easy to imagine how this phrase is Lovecraft's commentary on a new war that is possibly on the horizon. Although times may change and so may the tools with which humanity would inflict wounds upon itself, one thing has always stood a constant: Humanity's thirst for its own destruction.

In a following passage, a more revealing translation of a similar, yet more cryptic phrase is made, and it reads as: "That is not dead which can eternal lie. And with strange aeons even death may die." (Lovecraft, 1926/2002, p. 156) This phrase brings together the unknowable scale of the cosmos with the immediate danger that is on the observable horizon.

We already lie at the urgent precipice of obscurity from an unpredictable danger that we cannot even imagine in the face of the cosmos, yet we bring our own end from our own hands. Reading Cthulhu as a human construct – which it already is, since it is a fictional character created by Lovecraft – we can surmise that what humanity fears is itself, which is its own most unpredictable danger and the biggest threat to itself in the cosmic scale. I believe there is shame in Lovecraft's words. However, if one does not see shame mixed with fear and take his fear of an alien literally, one may very easily and rightfully assume that the blame rests solely on the other. This is apparent in deconstructing Lovecraft's habit of continual racism that appear in his stories and non-fictional writings.

2.2. The Fear of the Other and Insignificance in H. P. Lovecraft's "The Call of Cthulhu"

One of the leading arguments made against Lovecraft is and always has been, was to simply highlight his racist attitude. His racism can be noticed in a number of his stories, and many of his non-fictional writings. Even in "The Call of Cthulhu", which seems to be on the lighter side of his racist attitude and a subtler take on his fear of different races of people, he depicts characteristics of non-white people as inferior. This can be seen in observing his descriptions of many of his characters, none of which come even close to how belittling he depicts the cult members that follow the Cthulhu Cult. He shows them to be half-man, half-beast in passages such as: "There are vocal qualities peculiar to men, and vocal qualities peculiar to beasts; and it is terrible to hear the one when the source should yield the other" (Lovecraft, 1926/2002, p. 152). The othering of his monsters and antagonists are understandable unless they are obvious stand-ins for specific races of people, but his actual depictions of Blacks, Hispanics and Asians are also sometimes racist. One example would be the first time Inspector Legrasse stumbles onto the ceremony of the Cthulhu Cult. He describes it as "infinitely more diabolic than even the blackest of the African voodoo circles." (Lovecraft, 1926/2002, p. 147) And while it is difficult to claim that as a 20th century man,

Lovecraft's reference point in regard to any cult would have been an African voodoo circle, and nothing else, it is somewhat understandable why he chose such an example to highlight what he was trying to portray: The unknown is always infinitely more terrifying than what is known. He was possibly more familiar with cult activities in New England and its neighboring cities, yet to him, to show that the Cthulhu Cult was alien and unknowable, he had to choose a comparably alien practice to go with it. One other example of his obsession with the belittling of minorities would be the narrator's introduction of Castro, a very important character who introduces the reader to the Great Old Ones: "What the police did not extract, came mainly from an immensely aged mestizo named Castro…" (Lovecraft, 1926/2002, p. 154). Castro's introduction features two characteristics about who he is, he is old, and he is of mixed race, and that is all the characterization he will ever get.

While reading Lovecraft's stories, it is difficult to see past his obsession with race, yet James Kneale (2006), in his paper titled *From Beyond: H.P. Lovecraft and the place of Horror* argues instead to read the text by itself: "I am not arguing that contextual historicist readings of Lovecraft are worthless, but I am suggesting that we might read his work as *literature* – rather than as biography or history, once removed" (p. 108). By reading his work as biographical and therefore the ramblings of a racist madman, he claims that we miss his insight and his influence. Yet, it is difficult to read him any other way, "because so many of his letters survive, we actually possess *more* biographical detail than for most authors of his era" (Kneale, 2006, p. 116). He continues to say: "Despite this, once Lovecraft's racism is discovered, it is difficult not to read him *solely* in terms of these fears and hatreds. His pathology represents a critical singularity from which interpretations struggle to escape." (Kneale, 2006, pp. 116-117) Nowadays, it is difficult to claim that his racism did not affect his writings, it obviously did. But it is one thing to claim that his stories were trapped in his hatred of the other, and another to assume that his ramblings were of an individual that feared

more than other races of people and just used them as an outlet to focus his most inner anxieties. Lovecraft was certainly turned into a caricature of his own making, but he was also a person of his time and his quirks are peculiar to us only in hindsight, as Kneale puts it:

> Lovecraft's textual thresholds do not simply express his racist fears; they produce the narratives that dramatize his fears of contact and change. In arguing that Lovecraft's biography cannot entirely explain his fictions, I am not suggesting that his racism is unimportant. Far from it – it provides an important way of connecting his personal fears to wider cultural phenomena. But I am suggesting that critical work should not end there, with 'context'. (Kneale, 2006, p. 120)

The aliens of "The Call of Cthulhu" are literal aliens and are called the Great Old Ones, who "lived ages before there were any men, and who came to the young world out of the sky" (Lovecraft, 1926/2002, p. 153). The descriptions of the Great Old Ones tell us about the story's influences of science fiction, and although Lovecraft might not have enjoyed them personally, he had a certain amount of respect for its tradition. Lovecraft himself was not a religious man, and by depicting these godlike beings as nothing more than aliens, he reasons that any significantly advanced being would appear to us as gods. A pragmatist and a rationalist, Lovecraft believed in science and dismissed mystical explanations of the universal. Yet, as we can see in this story alone, he was conflicted as to what humanity was able to discover and explain thus far in human history. These Great Old Ones were used as parables for him to portray what he knew could be explained, but not by him or any other human being at the time. In the story, the Great Old Ones are dead, but we are told that they will return once the time is right. With Cthulhu's awakening by the end of the story, we are made aware that the time is right, as of now. What is meant by "when the time is right" is made clearer in this passage: "The time would be easy to know, for then mankind would have become as the Great Old Ones; free and wild and beyond good and evil, with laws and morals

thrown aside and all men shouting and killing and reveling in joy" (Lovecraft, 1926/2002, p. 155). This pessimistic view of humanity comes no doubt from the calamity of the World War. The sailor Gustaf Johansen, who encounters Cthulhu and somehow lives through the experience, relays his tale as: "The Thing cannot be described—there is no language for such abysms of shrieking and immemorial lunacy, such eldritch contradictions of all matter, force, and cosmic order" (Lovecraft, 1926/2002, p. 167). This is another similarity to the miserable experience of the World War, especially the trench battles where all surviving soldiers describe the experience similarly – indescribable misery.

Although humanity was at the precipice of constructing rockets that could go to space, and travel to the moon, space travel was still the subject of science fiction at this time, not actual science. This was also the era in which a lot of people believed that there was life on Mars and Venus. We have since learned that this is probably not the case, but the prospect of Martians was not so unfamiliar to a science fiction reader of the early 20th century that an alien invasion was itself a very familiar concept. However, by making sure that the reader understand that these aliens are incomprehensibly ancient, wise, and come from unimaginable distances away, Lovecraft subverts the Martian trope and manages to depict these aliens as truly alien. The minor antagonists of "The Call of Cthulhu" seem to be unfamiliar to us as humans; the cult members, as opposed to its protagonists whom we are familiar with. His unfamiliarity with certain human behaviors is Lovecraft's secondary conflict point and reveal his fears of heritage and racial contact. Whereas his primary and more pressing fear turns out to be his fear of insignificance and self-destruction through the rare circumstance of having unfamiliar non-humans as primary antagonists, who are presented as not only the primary concern of "The Call of Cthulhu's" narrator, but of humanity as a whole.

2.3. Earlier Science Fiction Stories About Fear of Change

Published in 1907, the Austrian author Karl Hans Strobl's science fiction story "The Triumph of Mechanics*"* deals with the issue of industrialization from a slightly different perspective than Lovecraft. A pre-WWI story, Strobl foresees a world in which humanity does not know how to deal with advanced technology and its adaptability in the face of such a complicated reality is called into question. Quite humorous in nature, the story tackles the utopian presumptions of a technologically advanced society. Ann and Jeff VanderMeer (2016) who featured this story in their science fiction collection titled *The Big Book of Science Fiction*, point out that Strobl's "dystopia is laced with humor" (p. 17). They continue on to say: "This stance is in direct opposition to the 'can-do, gee whiz' attitude about humanity's endeavors on Earth and beyond the stars that dominated some early American science fiction" (p. 17). In the story, industrialization has taken over the characters' lives and although they live in a post-mechanical society, they are unable to adapt. As the title of the story implies, so long as humanity pursues its current trend of its fascination and obsession with technology, without carefully considering its repercussions, it will be rendered obsolete and mechanical beings may take over the world. This proposition may be taken literally, however, Strobl means this metaphorically as well, implying that we, in our relentless pursuit of power, may stumble our way into our own destruction.

The author's argument is presented through an unorthodox terrorist attack in which a town is taken over by a billion mechanical rabbit toys in just under a day. The horror is described by the narrator of the story as such: "When they had appeared, the town was amused, and then enraged, but now the general sentiment was horror and disgust" (Strobl, 1907/2016, p. 22). The toy rabbits that take over the city are no more than replicas of real rabbits, yet their convincing behavior is enough for the citizens of the town to find them cute at first. But then, their uncanny behavior and appearance bother the townsfolk: They sound

like rabbits, they hop like rabbits and in every way, they behave like rabbits, but they are just replicas. And when they, by sheer numbers, turn into a nuisance, they are treated like pests. However, the townsfolk still find it difficult to destroy the little bunnies, because they uncannily resemble their real counterparts that have “souls”. It is only when the people are left with no choice that they are convinced they must eliminate the rabbits, which they are ultimately unable to. This story exposes a very self-centered human attitude towards other beings: The people in the story do not care if the rabbits are mechanical or organic, the only thing they care about is how other things make them feel, mechanical or not. As long as the thing is cute, or is not bothersome, it is allowed to exist; its inner being is not of any concern, the thing only matters when it interacts with beings that truly matter, and the quality of its interaction determine its value proposition.

On top of that, Strobl seems to point out that the advancement of mechanics would change the order of things – that is everything we understand (or understood as of 1907) about production, jobs and the division of labor would be nullified, and a new social system would be required. In which case, concern for nature would also be eliminated, since anything natural could then easily be replaced by its mechanical counterpart. In addition, while the story is uneasy about the dangers of industrialization and uncontrolled technological progress, it is strangely excited about the possibilities of such a world in which it is achieved. “The Triumph of Mechanics” is a very early example of a common theme in science fiction; the paradox of conflicting emotions towards technological progress, namely technophobia and technophilia. Although, in my opinion, both can be rationally explained as they co-exist with one another. This is through the simple recognition that science fiction authors were devoted followers of news related to scientific developments and therefore were – and still are – in touch with what developments were on the horizon, which ones to worry about and which ones to get excited by. This amount of familiarity with their subject matter, accompanied by a

new, but devoted tradition, along with the authors' exceptional enthusiasm allowed the genre to be an unrivaled medium to emphasize, recognize and enforce social change. Karl Hans Strobl's recognition was that the world was about to change forever due to mechanization, and it was up to people to determine whether it would be for the better or for worse. This can be seen in the seemingly magical mechanical recreation of an animal species, but then its misuse to organize a terrorist attack for personal gain. Strobl recognized that there would always be excited scientists and bottom feeders that would exploit them. The disparity between the intentions and the uses of such advanced technology in the real world can be exampled through the German scientist Wernher Von Braun's comment he made as his recent inventions were being used in the bombardment of London in 1944. Von Braun famously said: "My rockets worked perfectly, but they landed on the wrong planet." He had intended for them to be used in space travel.

The Spanish-Basque author Miguel de Unamuno's 1913 short story, "Mechanopolis", deals with a similar concept. In the story, a lonely and lost traveler stumbles into the city of Mechanopolis, which harbors no humans, yet the streets are immaculate, the buildings are very well maintained and the whole of the city infrastructure works perfectly around the clock. When it is made clear that artificially intelligent machines run the city, the lack of humanity in this equation disturbs the traveler immensely. He says:

> I could not resist the compassion of the mysterious invincible creatures, whether angels or demons, whom I believed to inhabit Mechanopolis. But then I was stricken by a terrible idea, the idea that the machines themselves had souls, mechanical souls, and that it was the machines themselves who felt pity for me. This idea made me

> tremble. I thought that now I was face-to-face with the race that dominated the dehumanized earth. (De Unamuno, 1913/2016, pp. 39-40)

The protagonist of the story is an allegory for the layman of the early 20th century, in the representation that one day he discovers that the world has become unrecognizable due to how technological progress far exceeded its foreseen capacity. This character thinks the human has become inferior and is on the verge of being replaced by a more functional equal, or perhaps its better. Mirroring this narrative, then, it is no surprise that the coming decades continued to depict advanced machines as gods, since mechanized processes continued to take over our daily lives. “Mechanopolis” is the story of one man’s struggle against progress. Yet, his behavior is depicted as pitiful, pointless, and retrogressive. This is because De Unamuno knew that it would not matter where he personally stood on the matter, he believed that the events he depicted in the story were an inexpugnable eventuality.

These two stories of Strobl and De Unamuno are early explorations into the idea of artificial consciousness and the emergence of the posthuman. By asking questions and exploring concepts about the things we exclusively attribute to humans, but in the story belongs to other beings, the author exposes our anthropocentric view. We do not tend to consider the reality of our space, place and time until and unless it concerns or distresses us directly. We live in a universe that has existed billions of years before we were here and will continue to exist for billions, if not trillions more after we are gone, yet we cannot imagine a universe in which we do not exist and are not concerned with what happens after we are gone. Early science fiction stories such as these expose that the obsessive self-centered thought of our species is at the root of our indifference towards each other, other beings and more alarmingly, our environment.

A third example for an early 20th century critique of anthropocentrism would be Leslie F. Stone's "The Conquest of Gola". It is an early feminist take on a science fictional exploration of humanity's obsession with war, mechanization, industrialization and commercialization set in a utopian setting. "The Conquest of Gola" is the story of an advanced alien civilization that inhabits Venus and its first encounter with humans. The interesting part of the story comes from the revelation that this utopian civilization is matriarchal in its nature and enslaves its men with a chauvinistic attitude. The subversion of the assumption that power belongs to men is not unlike Rokheya Shekhawat Hossain's seminal short story "Sultana's Dream". "The Conquest of Gola's" main difference from other early science fiction feminist stories comes from how women are depicted in the story. Batya Weinbaum (1997) says: "Stone's story shows women who consider themselves superior to men and who can fight off physical attack if need be, whereas her predecessors tended to create women's worlds in which women appeared to be like angels" (p. 471). Venus is called Gola by its natives, and its inhabitants Golans. Golan women are "aliens whose bodies have taken on super-feminine, rounded, blond, non-human dimensions, forms emphasizing the body as devouring mouth." (Weinbaum, 1997, p. 472) In the story, the exaggerated form that they take resembling the "*vagina dentata*" (p. 472) serves to put fear in Golan men and humans alike. They see themselves the apex of beauty, yet they are quite hideous to human eyes. In return, they consider the human form to be a freak of nature. The narrator describes a human man as such:

> Imagine a short, almost flat body set high upon two slender legs, the body tapering in the middle, several times as broad across as it is through the center, with two arms almost as long as the legs attached to the upper part of the torso. A small columnlike neck of only a few inches divides the head of oval shape from the body, and in this

> head only are set the organs of sight, hearing, and scent. Their bodies were like a patchwork of misguided nature. (Stone, 1931/2016, p. 100)

Beauty is subjective, yet when the narrator describes the idealized human form as offensive to look at, it is quite clearly ironic on the author's part. This is not only commentary on the subjectivity of beauty and culture, but also a critique of the fact that these sorts of ideals are determined by the ones in power, going unquestioned for no real objective reason. At the core of "The Conquest of Gola", lies the inescapable eventuality of the questioned status quo. Even though in the story, they are put right back into their place, with the help of humans, the men of Gola rise up to challenge their oppressors.

Stone's story starts with the narrator calling out to the readers, referring to them as "my daughters" (Stone, 1931/2016, p. 99), the implication being that men in Gola do not possess the ability to read. The narrator then tells her account of what happened with their first encounter with humans. According to her, the humans first came to Gola, acting as explorers and were considered to be harmless – since they were all men, and men on Gola are like children – yet then proved to be a nuisance and tried to forcefully take control of the planet. The Golans then prevented this attack and even though the humans tried to recruit the men of Gola, in their pursuit of overthrowing the powerful beings of this civilization, they were ultimately unsuccessful and were subjugated, much like their Golan gender-counterparts. The Golan civilization is familiar with astronomy much like us and it is in this passage where we first get the hint that the narrator is talking about our own solar system: "…we knew of the nine planets that encircle the great star and subject to its rule. And so are we familiar enough with the surfaces of these planets to know why Gola should appear as a haven to their inhabitants…" (Stone, 1931/2016, p. 99). The narrator's claim that people from other planets would see Gola – therefore Venus – as a paradise reveals a perspective that is very familiar; it is exactly how human beings see their own planet and no other, since Venus

is quite uninhabitable to us and is in no way in any resemblance to any paradise. Although it looks quite beautiful in the night sky, it is by far the hottest planet in the solar system and has clouds of sulfuric acid. When humans, called Detaxalans in the story arrive, the Golans assume that they are harmless and that "their mothers built the ships for them as playthings." (Stone, 1931/2016, p. 102) We know these Detaxalans are humans immediately, because the narrator calls Detaxal to be "the third planet of the sun" (p. 99). Eventually, the reason why human explorers land on Gola turns out to be a commercial one. They do not aim to take this "paradise" away from its inhabitants – although that is a fitting assumption – but to come to a businesslike understanding in which the humans are allowed to explore and exploit it, much like the business arrangement they already have with Damin, which is the fourth planet from the sun, Mars. The self-importance of the Golans is a stand-in for human self-centeredness in this context, where we always assume that the universe is always concerned with us and devise plans to trip us.

Another critique of human behavior comes in the question of why it is never enough. It is the narrator's claim that the Golans already have the capability to travel to other worlds, but choose not to do so:

> Long ago we, too, might have gone on exploring expeditions to other worlds, other universes, but for what? Are we not happy here? We who have attained the greatest of civilizations within the confines of our own silvery world. Powerfully strong with our mighty force rays, we could subjugate all the universe, but why? (Stone, 1931/2016, p. 99)

This implies the sort of wisdom that the author wishes on humanity. Perhaps humanity's insatiable appetite for more comes from its realization that it is not as advanced as it posits to be. These advanced beings claim they have superior power, yet are content and in the pursuit

of attaining more, are not willing to lose what they already have. With this civilization, militaristic thought has simply disappeared, and they have turned their civilizations into a sort of utopia, perfectly compatible with what their culture deigns appropriate. They could take over all the planets, but do not wish so: "Why spend physical energy in combative strife for something we do not wish, when our mental processes carry us further and beyond the conquest of mere terrestrial exploitation?" (Stone, 1931/2016, p. 99). This is commentary on human militaristic behavior, of course. And coupled with the fact that the Golan civilization is built on female leadership, we get a clearer picture. The narrator compares her civilization with the one on Earth, while perfectly summarizing the difference:

> On Detaxal it is different, for there the peoples, the ignoble male creatures, breed for physical prowess, leaving the development of their sciences, their philosophies, and the contemplation of the abstract to a chosen few. The greater part of the race faces forth to conquer, to lay waste, to struggle and fight as the animals do over a morsel of worthless territory. (Stone, 1931/2016, p. 99)

Although "The Conquest of Gola" is a science fiction story about spaceships and telepathic aliens, quite clearly the story is more about matters that concern humanity's expansionist and colonialist nature, led by almost exclusively male leadership. Stone is looking for an alternative; and she finds out that it is not through exclusively female leadership, because segregation of a similar sense leads down the same path – utopia for half the population and the exploitation and suffering of the other. The alternative is revealed to require a different strategy, in which humanity shifts its perspective entirely into a posthumanist view and looks at the universe and all beings that inhabit it as having equal rights to simply exist.

Based on the analysis conveyed, it can be concluded that the recently popularized posthumanist and ecocritical criticisms of anthropocentrism were already visible in early 20th

century speculative fiction. Out of four texts analyzed in this chapter, all are critical of humanist tendencies and make points to assume the species' dominance would come to an end. In Lovecraft, we see a defeatist acceptance, while Unamuno remains melancholic. However, both of them realize that human centeredness is at the root of this main issue: the inability to acknowledge that the world has other agents, and the universe has other concerns. In Lovecraft we see humanity being controlled by ancient aliens, while in Unamuno, the being in charge is mechanical and supposedly human-created. Both narratives depict human arrogance as pitiful and detrimental to itself. Strobl, on the other hand makes fun of such arrogance, to point out that there are terrifying potentials that humanity may inflict upon itself, while remaining playful about it all the while. Leslie F. Stone, the only female author in this chapter is more focused on the status quo. In her story, aliens tell the story, and humans are its villains. In direct contradiction to her male counterparts, Stone did not fear change – she hoped for it. This is noticeable in how critically feminist her story appears. Whether it was in the form of a fear of mechanization in Lovecraft, Unamuno and Strobl's fiction – a change which would render much of patriarchal humanist narratives inadequate, or the acknowledgement of this inadequacy being evident already, these authors, while being aware that anthropocentrism was a problem in a general sense, did not offer any alternatives, just acknowledgements. And although this era's speculative fiction was rife with the potential for emerging social change, the era was also mired in conflict, and such issues were not able to be debated. As will be discussed in the upcoming chapter, the coming decades would prove more appropriate for the discussion of such topics and would be accompanied by science positive rhetoric in the face of multiple world wars and a potential nuclear catastrophe. Although, rather than being cynical about humanity's future, the authors of the Golden Age – the era which the third chapter will be centered around – saw this as an opportunity to finally

acknowledge that humanity's relationship with its technological creations and all naturally occurring beings were being ignored.

3. THE CRITIQUE OF ANTHROPOCENTRISM IN GOLDEN AGE SCIENCE FICTION

Following the previous chapter, the third chapter will be centered around my observation that the following decades, commonly named as the Golden Age of science fiction, provided a more optimistic outlook towards humanity's future in re-settling into a world that was all but destroyed after two world wars. With this argument in mind, I will be looking at "The Last Question", by one of the most prolific authors of this era, Isaac Asimov. Asimov's belief in humanity's co-existence with its technological creations and his speculations of where this relationship might go will provide the foundations of my following argument – which is to read his story as a post-anthropocentric narrative to provide a future where humanity is no longer at odds with its environment due to a re-definition of what "the human" is. The following story titled "Beyond Lies the Wub", by Philip K. Dick will comment on this idea further, as I analyze its similarities to Asimov's narrative, in regard to their acknowledgement that consciousness, sentience and sapience need not define agency and the value of any being that does not fit the jigsaw puzzle that is 18th century humanism.

3.1. Golden Age Utopianism in Isaac Asimov's "The Last Question"

Following the "Pulp" era of speculative fiction of the 1910's through the 1930's, the following decades were rife with possibilities of strange new technologies for new authors to explore. Quite a lot of these technologies were featured in science fiction stories of the 1950's, a period that is called the "Golden Age". Golden Age authors were generally more interested in cutting-edge scientific discoveries and eccentric concepts than their prior counterparts, and wrote stories with significantly more optimism about them. The anxieties of WW1 had faded, and even though WW2 had only recently ended, there was an air of optimism that could be seen in the Western world. So, science fiction focused on utopias and more philosophically affirmative subject matter. Although it is unclear to what extent this was

state-propaganda, since some of this fiction was state funded and has paved the way for the nuclear race, and the space race that followed. Nevertheless, there is no question that most Golden Age authors had genuine interest in science and its possibilities.

Although Pulp era authors wrote extensive explorations of utopian settings, they were not as receptive to the social and scientific realities of the coming decades. Golden Age authors, despite feeling immense respect towards Pulp speculative fiction, felt critical of the technological utopianism established by Hugo Gernsback's pulp magazines. Andrew Milner and Robert Savage (2008) claim that: "…they were firmly ensconced in the pulp milieu, which they set out to reform from within. In addition to fighting fascism, they were bent on opposing the kind of technophilic utopianism they associated with the sleekly synthetic, dizzyingly turreted megapolises in Gernsback-era visions of the future" (p. 36). These authors realized that a utopian existence would not be a direct consequence of technological progress. Explorations into massive social change brought about by the ending of two world wars and the establishment of a technologically centered society resulted in an inevitably critical look at humanity's position in the universe. However, only the most poignant of these authors would be farsighted enough to include post-anthropocentric values in their narratives as early as the 1950's. One such author was Isaac Asimov, a Jewish-American author of Russian heritage.

Asimov is generally considered to be the most important author of not only this period, the science fiction genre as a whole. Joseph F. Patrouch (1974), in his Isaac Asimov survey asserts that: "For many people the name Isaac Asimov and the term science fiction are synonymous. Asimov is science fiction" (p. 25). Asimov was not only interested in science as a hobby and in terms of writing fiction, but he also had a PhD in chemistry. He started writing fiction in 1938, and wrote hundreds of stories. To say that he is a prolific author would be an understatement, since not many other authors are attributed to writing close to 500 books in

their lifetimes. The number of terms that he invented – or at least first started using in a fictional capacity – is only rivaled by his influence on the genre and its subsequent authors. Jeff VanderMeer (2016), in the introduction to Asimov's story in *The Big Book of Science Fiction* claims: "Isaac Asimov is a highly prolific master of hard science fiction who not only came up with the famed "Three Laws of Robotics" but is himself often mentioned along with Arthur C. Clarke and Robert Heinlein as one of the "Big Three," a term denoting the giants of early science fiction" (p. 300). As VanderMeer mentions, Isaac Asimov was known as an author of hard science fiction. "Hard" science fiction denotes its feasibility: "Hard SF is, in essence, the portrayal of what "might" happen. In this way it is a little like playing what-if games with the future excluding what we know to be impossible…" (Brin, 1986, p. 9). Taking the "impossible" away from the setting and considering everything else, however improbable they are, hard science fiction plays with conventional science and turn them into anything but. This mentality allowed Isaac Asimov to write fascinating and fantastical stories while still staying true to the science of his time.

First published in 1956, "The Last Question" is one of Isaac Asimov's most ingenious stories. Although not at direct conflict with the scientific realities of the 1950's, the themes of the story were still outlandish enough for the story to be considered quasi-soft science fiction at the time. However, as the decades passed, it became apparent that Asimov foresaw a possibility that even the most eccentric of scientists considered to be near impossible. This was the case with a lot of Asimov stories – where his predictions of the future became feasible as time elapsed. Out of all his visionary stories, "The Last Question" is said to be Asimov's favorite one. Jeff VanderMeer (2016) says: "Asimov considered this his best and favorite short story" (p. 300). In the story, humans create an artificially intelligent machine that can take care of all their needs. Even human ingenuity is replaced by this machine, since people do not even invent anything anymore – it is all handled by this being that is called

Multivac. The name of the machine changes as the story progresses – and supposedly, as the millennia pass. However, I will refer to the machine as Multivac for the purposes of this thesis, and to avoid referring to it as a machine the whole chapter – since this machine is the only character in the story that persists throughout humanity's journey through the universe for millions of years. It is a story of concentrated hopefulness as there is nary a disagreement to be found in it. The only meaningful conflict in the story appears to be humanity's struggle with its own mortality, and as it devises immortality with the help of Multivac, it being replaced with the finitude of the universe. As Patrouch (1974) puts it: "The protagonist of 'The Last Question' is no individual human being but humanity itself. The conflict is between man (and his creations) and the universe" (p. 81).

The story's core plot – as the title suggests - is about the last question, and the implication is that this last question can only be asked once humanity has transcended its current, "childish" questions. In the beginning of the story, the narrator says: "The last question was asked for the first time, half in jest, on May 21, 2061, at a time when humanity first stepped into the light" (Asimov, 1956/2016, p. 301). Stepping into the light most certainly represents transcendence. However, since we are immediately made aware that there is at least one more question left to be asked, and one more problem to be solved, the process of ultimate existence is not currently achieved. What Asimov is possibly implying here is that the Enlightenment – however incomplete its idealistic vision is – is not enough to solve every problem, because it ignores the final one, of which we will discover there is no possible solution for – at least not in the way we would like it. In Asimov's story, even in the year of 2061, where a utopia has been seemingly achieved, humanity finds new means of problematizing its existence. Because that is the primary drive of the species, to recognize

new problems in order to invent new ways to solve them. Therefore, the establishment of utopia is not enough. For Asimov, it can never be enough.

The utopia of this world is achieved through Multivac, so it is only fair that Multivac is expected to answer the last question. But it unfortunately fails to provide a meaningful answer for its creators. Humanity's primary purpose of creating such things is clear: establish a more comfortable existence by solving each of its problems, or having a more intelligent being solve said problems for them. The human condition is predicated upon its obsession with inventing, improving and reinventing, but it is not without its limits. Human legacy and history are both built and marred with its insistence on trying to innovate – whether it is for financial gains, militaristic purposes or to immortalize one's name. Immortalization is at the heart of "The Last Question", since the last question is about humanity's final problem – death. Its own death is not a great problem to be solved. And as we will see, it will be solved by the middle of the story. There is a worse problem, one which humanity is not equipped to handle – perhaps no sentient being is. That problem is the primary antagonist of the story; entropy, resulting in the heat death of the universe. Asimov's insinuation is that even if we can outlive our natural lives by factors of millions, we will never be able to outlive the universe. This may seem ridiculous to us, the reader, however when thought about through the perspective of beings so unnaturally advanced, the end of the universe starts to become a problem. The realization that true immortality is out of humanity's hands and as the universe slowly fades away, no being will ever remember humanity ever existed is the exact reason why this last question keeps being asked of Multivac. These humans – if we even can still call them humans – are unable to solve the problem, so they defer it to Multivac, seemingly continuing to live in their utopic worlds, ignoring the entropy problem. Of course, it is to be assumed that the main reason why this problem is not addressed more frequently in this world is because it is not a very urgent one – since the end of the universe is billions, if not trillions

of years away. The fact that its urgency supersedes its finality, however, by itself highlights the bigger problem with anthropocentric thinking, among other things: the difference between a utopia and a dystopia merely depends upon perspective. In this case, it is a utopia for humans, while it must be a nightmare for any other being – living or otherwise – that is endlessly exploited to serve humanity's needs.

The first step towards utopia in the story starts with the creation of the ultimate representation of human ingenuity and a perfect replication of the human mind: the artificial intelligence we know as Multivac. Multivac is created to assist humanity in fulfilling its supposed potential, the assertion being that the problems humanity faced were becoming too complex to handle because of its limitations. This shines a light on what is remarkable about the human species – to create an electronic being that requires no food, no motivation and has no off-days, therefore overcoming its own limitations by finding an alternative solution. However, it also reveals its self-centrist tendencies, because Multivac – although a sapient and sentient being – is not given a choice in this matter. It is basically enslaved to serve humanity. It is the perfect scientist; one which people may ask any question and will have an answer immediately. If the question cannot be answered, Multivac works on the problem until it finds a solution, and then is able to give a meaningful answer. It is the perfect engineer; constantly learning how to build better constructions through self-improvement and building better infrastructures each time to build upon itself to become an even better scientist and engineer. This inevitably results in incredible advancements in human society as Multivac acts as humanity's vanguard in the species' newfound innovational enterprise. As I have said however, this is explicitly done for quite anthropocentric reasons. The exploitation of this incredibly intelligent being is also established on top of the ultimate exploitation of the natural

environment. It is unclear whether there is even a natural world left or not in this setting. As the narrator says:

> The energy of the sun was stored, converted, and utilized directly on a planet-wide scale. All Earth turned off its burning coal, its fissioning uranium, and flipped the switch that connected all of it to a small station, one mile in diameter, circling the Earth at half the distance of the moon. All Earth ran by invisible beams of sunpower (Asimov, 1956/2016, p. 301).

The fact that this entire civilization is run by solar power seems like a merit to its environmentalist tendency. However, we soon discover that when the sun dies, humanity moves on to other stars, and uses their energy to advance itself further, using up suns like one would use up alkaline batteries. Humanity, like a child, abuses this power provided by Multivac to treat the universe as if it is a playground, and stars and planets its toys. The fact that throughout the narrative humanity goes through a frankly outlandish number of stars and planets underscores the callous indifference it has towards the universe that is only rivaled by its obsession with immortality.

3.2. Artificial and Transcendent Existence in Isaac Asimov's "The Last Question"

It is at this point in the chapter where I actually state what the last question is – although I have repeatedly hinted at it. It is: "How can the net amount of entropy of the universe be massively decreased?" (Asimov, 1956/2016, p. 302). This question is asked by two people who realize that solar energy will be depleted once the sun dies, which is bound to happen one day. Their assumption is that humanity would move on to other stars once that happens. However, they also realize that this cannot last forever, since there is limited energy in the universe, and there will be a day where humanity will not find itself a new star. That is why they ask the all-knowing Multivac, who responds with: "INSUFFICIENT DATA FOR

MEANINGFUL ANSWER" (Asimov, 1956/2016, p. 302). A very similar question keeps being asked of Multivac throughout the story, and the answer is always the same. The interesting thing about this question and its answer is that the people who ask this question already seem to know the answer. Ignoring the eventuality of its ultimate existential anxiety is very similar to Multivac never acknowledging the fact that it is a slave to humanity's whims. Everything we know about Multivac says that it has agency, yet it ultimately has no control over his choices. This is not indifferent to the way humans are and in the way they are wired to ignore such existential problems. Katherine Hayles (1999), in *How We Became Posthuman* says:

> "… conscious agency has never been "in control." In fact, the very illusion of control bespeaks a fundamental ignorance about the nature of the emergent processes through which consciousness, the organism, and the environment are constituted. Mastery through the exercise of autonomous will is merely the story consciousness tells itself to explain results that actually come about through dynamics and emergent structures" (p. 288).

Humanity as a whole fail to cognize a universe in which it does not exist. This is confirmation bias, of course, as it recognizes itself as special – which is itself a self-fulfilling myth – the universe must revolve around it. The universe has existed billions of years before and will possibly continue to exist billions more after humanity exists, and there is a significantly high possibility that no being that inhabit the same spaces it does in the future will know it ever existed. There is nothing more natural than the end of our lives and the end of the universe,

since the laws of this same universe demand it. So, by defying the natural and embracing the unnatural, humanity finds new ways of suppressing this anxiety.

In “The Last Question” humans can extend their natural lives to such a point that they might as well be immortal. We can only imagine why and how they would do this. Historically, the most common human behavior has been to invent new tools in order to overcome its shortcomings. The species have always been good at technological innovation. Especially since Enlightenment era humanism’s opinion is that rational thinking, resulting in science and technology is exactly what differentiates humans from other animals, therefore it is impossible to separate the human being from its technology. Although the redefinition of the “human” comes bearing the burden of separating it from the Enlightenment understanding of it, it is still impossible for us to ignore the fact that we have always been defined by our technology. This prompts the age old question: are we capable of redefining ourselves? I believe we already have, whether we realize it or not. Our close relationship with our technological tools has resulted in them becoming extensions of ourselves. They are no longer our constructs, but tools that define us. And our daily lives these days are dictated by such different dealings than they were for thousands of years, that a person from a mere 200 years ago would find it difficult to recognize us as humans at all.

In the story, Asimov depicts a similar scenario, one in which the humans of that setting are as different from us today than we are different from our ancestors of a thousand years ago. In Asimov’s setting, humans have followed the human fixation with technological advance to its natural conclusion – it has become difficult to see a difference between humanity and its technological constructs. When looked at from the perspective of today, it is easy to see what could have motivated such an action. But what could be analyzed in observing the reason for humanity’s infatuation with the idea of creating its replicas? Although not explicitly mentioned in this story, there is a distinct possibility that humanity

creates its own, but perfected facsimiles to eventually become like them, or in the process, be replaced by them. If this assumption was true, this would signal the possibility that humanity's desire for perfection and immortality is overridden by its devotion to staying human, which would affirm the likeliness that the still standing (as of the 1950's) understanding of Enlightenment era humanism is nothing more than a self-affirmation mechanism to overlook the horrific realities of human history and potential for evil. The over-mechanization of everyday life is perhaps a first step towards humanity becoming gods themselves. Or on a more pessimistic note, perhaps humans are on this planet, and in this universe to destroy it. I prefer to look at the prospect of the eventual posthuman with a more optimistic perspective, a bit like Asimov himself. At the final moments of the universe, humanity; now a single organism – a collective consciousness, accepts the reality that entropy cannot be reversed. The solution it finds is to let this universe end, and trigger a new Big Bang – to create a new universe. One in which even though humanity will never exist again, other beings someday will. The final words spoken by the collective consciousness of humanity reads: "LET THERE BE LIGHT!" (Asimov, 1956/2016, p. 308). There are multiple assumptions made by Asimov with this ending. Patrouch (1974) summarizes as:

> This story makes several assumptions and suggestions. First, it assumes that the history of the universe is cyclical, that having reverted to an energyless state it can be restarted. Second, it suggests that for the next cycle beyond ours, the motivating force behind that restart will be mankind. And third, it hints at the possibility (by analogy) that God is a combination of a sentient race and its machinery left over from a previous cycle. If one views the story as presenting not a cyclical but a circular image of the history of the universe, then man-plus-technology becomes his own creator, man is his own God -literally (p. 82).

In the final moments of "The Last Question" humanity has become a shepherd, a god. Then, as humanity becomes God, it creates a universe and preserves existence – deferring its legacy to the beings that would come later. Therefore, while it asserts ultimate supremacy over the universe, it also accomplishes its own decentering, because it retires from the scene, leaving the universe with younger, but ultimately innocent beings.

Asimov's merry temperament provides the reader with a hopeful disposition. Although anthropocentric, the humans of this setting are still idealistic. What they hope to achieve is to carry their ideals further than the natural length of the universe. However, there is more to be learned in this narrative in identifying Asimov's posthumanist and post-anthropocentric sentiments, since while being hopeful, Asimov is not uncritical of the human temperament. What he hopes is that perhaps in realizing that our selves are not tied to our physical bodies and are larger than our limited understanding, we will finally accept the fact that people are not their skin colors, not their genders and not their nationalities. Whether or not he personally believed this is irrelevant. What is clear is that his text reflects a posthumanist sentiment that needs to be finally accepted in the 21st century. I believe that even seemingly unrelated, but clever science fiction narratives such as "The Last Question" carry this sentiment to breathe life into such a hopeful outlook. What will hopefully follow these posthumanist ideals is a post-anthropocentric perspective, in which we finally understand that the goals we set for ourselves to improve our lives need not coincide with the endless exploitation of other beings – alive or otherwise – just because we are still under the illusion that we are somehow more important than they are.

3.3. Consciousness and the Ethics of Human/Non-human Relations in Philip K. Dick's "Beyond Lies the Wub"

Philip K. Dick remains as one of the most influential science fiction authors of the 20th century. Although he started writing in the 1950's, he did not receive much appreciation until

the 1970's. Even then, he never got as popular as he is today. These days, Dick gets a writing credit as the original author in so many television and movie adaptations that he has somehow become very well known – much more popular than he was back when he was alive. Philip K. Dick died in 1982, months before his most well-known novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* was adapted into *Blade Runner* by Ridley Scott. Since then, his books were adapted into movies such as *Minority Report* and *Total Recall* or television shows such as *The Man in the High Castle* and *Electric Dreams*. Also, many popular novels, movies and television series cite Philip K. Dick as their direct influence. Jeff VanderMeer (2016) – with whose short story anthology I first read Dick's first published story – comments on Dick's recent, posthumous success: "He was highly respected and influential within the sphere of science fiction before popular success found him late in his life" (p. 215). Recent texts of science fiction that delve into themes like artificial consciousness and the ethics of AI, *Westworld* for example, owe their subject matter to Dick, who explored these themes decades ago and helped establish them as appropriate for any science fiction author.

"Beyond Lies the Wub" is Philip K. Dick's first published story, in 1952. What Dick tries to accomplish with the story is, to first and foremost subvert the reader's expectation – mirroring the subverted expectations of the space crew, whose encounter with a highly intelligent being that looks like a pig is depicted throughout. The alien being is called the wub and when it is introduced, the crew wonders how it tastes. They have seemingly been having trouble finding food, and one of the crew bought this porcine-looking alien from a native for a measly 50 cents. Of course, 50 cents meant something entirely different in 1952, and probably means something even more different in whatever the year the story takes place in. However, the implication still stands that the wub was a really cheap purchase. When the crew start talking about eating the wub in front of it, the alien suddenly starts speaking. Not only is the crew surprised to see this being speak, but they are also doubly amazed that it can speak

English, which is a fair thing to be amazed by. The wub responds with: “Speak English? Am I speaking English? I’m not conscious of speaking anything in particular. I examined your mind–” (Dick, 1952/2016, p. 218). This disturbs the crew, as one can imagine, because the alien is basically invading their minds and speaking concepts to them which translates into language. This is a sort of telepathic communication, which might hint at the wub being a highly advanced being. But the crew are not quite convinced yet, so they keep talking to it, even escalating to the point of having philosophical conversations with it. What the crew slowly discovers shatters their presuppositions in the simple action of the wub being able to talk. The wub, a big porcine alien, turns from a potential food item into a person all of a sudden.

This, of course, mirrors the reader’s assumptions. Food becoming person, as soon as it starts talking in an intelligible tongue, is this story’s jab at anthropocentrism. The wub has deep thoughts, it knows of the monomyth and speaks of Odysseus. If it were not able to speak, however, it would have been eaten without a second thought. Philip K. Dick asks where the imaginary ethical line is drawn, and where it should be drawn. Since there are no other language wielding beings that we are aware of – aside from other humans – the line is drawn quite arbitrarily. It currently seems like as soon as the living being is highly intelligent, human beings will refuse to eat it, and killing it will be considered morally wrong. Standard intelligence is somehow fair game, since humans eat many animals still considered intelligent. Dick’s story also poses the question of whether humanity would feel comfortable eating aliens if we ever meet them, and where the lines would be redrawn.

Interrupting the wub’s philosophical thoughts about the Odysseus archetype, the crew suddenly decide to eat the wub. The alien seems to resist the decision, but it does not seem too agitated by the idea. It is killed, and eaten. The crew say that the taste is good, and then the captain comments: “As I was saying before I was interrupted, the role of Odysseus in the

myths –" (Dick, 1952/2016, p. 220). Shocking the crew and the reader alike, the wub becomes the captain and thus, the final twist of the story is revealed. The wub is probably not originated as the pig looking alien. The reader can imagine a scenario in which this pig ate the wub, and as a survival mechanism the wub became the pig. A similar scenario occurred with the space crew, where the wub became the captain to avoid death. Therefore, the wub is not a physical being – or at least not any longer. There are a few possibilities. One is that the wub has never been physically attached to a single organism and always switched bodies like a parasite. A second, more likely scenario is that the wub and its race has transcended their physical limits and exist on a different sort of existence. This twist in the story forces the reader to reconsider what being alive and being conscious really means. As is well known, Philip K. Dick was very spiritual, especially in his later years. He depicts the wub as a spirit that possesses beings that decide to eat it. However, his depiction is not without scientific merit – since in time, significant scientific progress in how our consciousness reacts to the things we eat has been made and it is decidedly not inconsequential.

In conclusion, the two Golden Age examples I have decided to analyze both portray speculations that defy the limits of life as we know it, and help the reader reconsider alternative forms of being. The main reason why Dick tells the story of the wub, is to portray a strange, lower looking, but immortal being to point out that the anthropocentric assumptions we make may prove catastrophic, as it does with the crew in the story. Whereas, in Asimov's "The Last Question", humanity's story is centered around its ultimate calamity, as it looks and temporarily finds a solution to death. Asimov's irony mirrors Dick's in reverse, as one surprises the reader with strange life and the other has impending death looming above it. Both authors realize that what humanity wants to achieve is eternal life – or at least eternal being, since life seems to be a mere consequence of how humanity's being is currently defined. It seems to me that it is inconsequential whether we are alive or not, as long as we

are conscious and are thinking individuals. If our future is to be defined by our transcendence of an 18th century understanding of humanism – which is based on the hypocrisy that all humans are equally valuable as long as they are white men, we might need to accept a reality in which a posthumanist and post-anthropocentric reality is accepted throughout the world. We already live with our mechanical creations all around us. A step further would be to continue living as mechanical recreations of our bodies, our metaphorical spirits – realistically composed of our memories and experience – being uploaded into these strange human-like machines with no physical limitations. Whether we find it horrific or not, it seems that we might need to accept soon that our sense of self and individualities need not coincide with our traditional understandings of life itself. The upcoming chapter, with the help of recently emerged literary theories like posthumanism and ecocriticism, will deconstruct such presumptions even further, to try and achieve an understanding between human/non-human life and reconsider the possibility of synthetic life.

4. THE CRITIQUE OF ANTHROPOCENTRISM IN NEW WAVE SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

The fourth and final chapter will focus on posthumanist and ecocritical philosophies that I have observed in New Wave speculative fiction. The chapter will begin with the analysis of Ursula K. Le Guin's "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow", as I examine how Le Guin shatters the human myth by reconsidering the meaning of consciousness, mirroring some previous discussions from the last chapter. Le Guin's unique take on "nature" as we understand it and the feasibility of its agency reminds us that the idyllic western existence of individuality is a cultural myth that has no universal basis. Her ecocritical approach to all matter will then be mirrored by Nnedi Okorafor's "Spider, the Artist", as Okorafor deconstructs human/non-human relations, while associating ecocriticism with postcolonial critique. The chapter will end with a discussion on climate fiction and its goal of preventing a post-apocalypse that it continually depicts. To this end, lastly, I will be analyzing Margaret Atwood very short story, "Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet".

4.1. Consciousness Without Intelligence: The Critique of Anthropocentric Perspective in Ursula Le Guin's "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow"

First published in 1971, Ursula K. Le Guin's "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow" is a short story that transcends its time and is more relevant to us today than ever before. Set in Le Guin's Hainish Universe, which is defined by some of Le Guin's greatest masterpieces like *The Left Hand of Darkness* and *The Dispossessed,* the story is among her finest piece of science fiction. An author of science fiction and fantasy by her own definition, Ursula K. Le Guin was more interested in world building than anything else, and her writings are therefore categorized by and serialized into the worlds she built. In the book *Understanding Ursula K. Le Guin* – an essay collection of analyses of Le Guin's worlds, the author Elizabeth Cummins (1990) claims: "Casual readers and demanding critics alike have praised Le Guin for her

ability to make worlds in words" (p. 5). She had an extraordinary ability to create characters and settings that seemed real, yet were in fantastical settings. Harold Bloom (1986), in the introduction to another essay collection on Le Guin's work titled *Modern Critical Views: Ursula K. Le Guin* says: "Better than Tolkien, far better than Doris Lessing, Le Guin is the overwhelming contemporary instance of a superbly imaginative creator and major stylist who chose (or was chosen by) fantasy and science fiction" (p. 2). Bloom's claim implies that she could have written any type of fiction, and it would have been just as successful, if not more. But her ability to jolt life into her writings came primarily from her understanding that the genres of science fiction and fantasy in particular, were tailor made for her ability as a storyteller that incorporated her active imagination and social awareness. She wanted to go on a journey along with the reader, free of political baggage, yet still able to stay relevant to the social issues of her day, and as time went on hopefully becoming more and more relevant. "During her apprenticeship years Le Guin realized that the genres best suited for depicting this journey of discovery undertaken by both author and reader were science fiction and fantasy" (Cummins, 1990, p. 6). So, she chose speculative fiction – or was chosen by it as Harold Bloom puts it, and elevated speculative fiction to the more respectable position that it is perceived at today.

"Vaster Than Empires and More Slow" is the story of a survey team's encounter with a planet that is populated exclusively by plant-like life which consists of a single consciousness, lacking intelligence as we understand it traditionally. Although the story's primary conflict arises from humanity's encounter with living beings that it does not quite understand, and is therefore a critique of colonialist habits, the major question of the story is the question of whether a conscious being that lacks intelligence is sentient, and therefore must be considered as a peer. This is of course, humanity's understanding of consciousness which illogically coincides with intelligence. And considering that up until recently, its

understanding of intelligence had coincided with the ability to invent technological tools and use them, which led to the belittlement of animal and plant-life, it also led to factions of humans to deem peoples of other ethnic backgrounds as inferior and themselves superior. Le Guin's considered approach to all life forms make her into a critic of anthropocentrism and a material ecocritic. Serpil Oppermann (2014), the leading theorist in ecocritical studies in Turkey, briefly summarizes material ecocriticism as being "mainly concerned with amending artificially naturalized systems of meaning that precipitated anthropocentric epistemologies" (p. 35). Le Guin questions what is normalized and questions what is natural. In "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow", although all perspectives are present and the story itself is a discussion of how the reader should proceed to make up their own minds, any sensible reader is expected to realize that the planet called World 4470 is alive and deserves as much respect as any other living being.

As this story takes place in Le Guin's Hainish Universe, it would be appropriate to describe what that entails. In the Hainish stories, a particular cluster of our galaxy is populated by humans, who are originally from a planet called Hain. The Hainish, throughout the years have colonized many other planets, one of which is Earth. The stories that are set in this universe are more science fiction-like than other Le Guin stories and are more about the political contact between different races of humans, raised on different planets, with different cultures and environments. "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow" is similar to other stories of Hainish origin in the fact that it features all of the different types of people from aforementioned planets, yet its subject matter is more about humanity's contact with the unknown.

The story begins on Earth, whose inhabitants are called Terrans instead of humans, since all known planets are inhabited by humans also. The Hainish are superior to Terrans and it is described that Terrans resent the Hainish for not only having founded Earth, but also

exploiting its people (Le Guin, 1971/2016, p. 1061). Although the Hainish had been understanding, this did not stop the Terrans from acting like rebellious children and therefore the Terrans had decided to explore the unknown parts of previously unexplored space, in pursuit of the discovery of exotic lifeforms. Le Guin romanticizes space-travel, but also calls out people who would sacrifice their own safety for a superfluous act: “What sane person, after all, would go out to collect information that would not be received for five or ten centuries?” (Le Guin, 1971/2016, p. 1061). We are immediately made aware that the surveyors are people living on the edge, unlike most human beings of this setting, Osden the protagonist being the most extreme example. He is an empath – someone who is much more sensitive to what other living beings are feeling and can sense their feelings from a distance. He is also the first person to have gone through an autistic therapy in this setting, and lived. However, his sensitivity towards emotions gets in the way of his relationship with the crew, since he is not fond of any of them, and they do not enjoy his company in return. His job on the crew seems – and is repeatedly deemed – to be the most nonessential. However, for the purposes of this narrative, it turns out to be the most important one. He is there to determine whether the living beings that they find have any feelings, and if so, what they are, following their encounter with the human crew.

By the end of the story, Osden and the crew come to a mutual understanding that Osden should set up camp farther away, and in the forest. When he is there, Osden is attacked, first seemingly by a beast, but then revealed to be by one of the crew. As he recovers from this attack, he remembers feeling a sense of fear, an indescribable dread. He later figures out that this was not fear that he felt towards something, being an empath, he was feeling some other being’s fear of him. He then realizes that this other being is none other than the forest, or even the entire planet itself, which is alive and fears the crew. The implication is that the planet is a single organism, with a single consciousness – therefore is an ultimately

lonely being. It has never known a different being to ever exist. The implications of this discovery are so profound to the crew that it leaves them speechless and makes them quite anxious, prompting them to leave the planet.

The second primary character of the story is therefore the planet itself. The hospitable, romanticized green planet named 4470 cannot be fully understood by trained scientists, not that anyone can actually train for this. In fact, these scientists are unintentionally manipulated by the psychic ability the planet possesses into romanticizing the green pastures that welcome them. However, when they discover that the ecosystem of the planet is of a single consciousness, it is intensely disturbing, since the planet probably did not anticipate how unorthodox this would seem to its visitors and never manipulated them into thinking this was nothing to be feared. Since the planet is the only life form it knew of, and never knew an alternative to the hive-mind it comprises, it also had no reason to think these visitors were individuals. The planet may have assumed that its visitors were the acting bodies of a single mind as well. The reason why this is so shocking to not only the space crew, but possibly the reader is the obsession with individualism that lies at the heart of Western thought. The story presents an alternative way of being, and the only crew member who readily accepts this alternative seems to be Osden, who is himself different than the rest of the crew and is actually more similar to the planet than his crew. Osden considers the organism of World 4470 as “lonely”, like himself. He sympathizes with it, and in the end is integrated into it, accepted into a collective for the first time in his life in cost of his individuality.

Osden turns out to be the only character who has the sensory capability of truly communicating with the planet. This is not only because he is different than all the others as an empath, but also because he is open-minded; he is in open defiance of the dogmatic belief that individualism is the ultimate path towards perfection. Ironically, he does this through an extreme conduct of individualistic behavior when he leaves the camp. Osden, who has been

through a tough journey in life, has figures out by the end that "being" is not skin-deep, and that to be understood and to understand requires effort. He has found out through his experiences that all perspectives are shaped exclusively by what one can see and understand, which is precipitated through a lens of one's capabilities and limitations thereof. One tends not to give much thought towards what they cannot see and understand, but when they are forced to confront such feelings that conflict with their realities, like the crew in Le Guin's story, they are shocked to their core and find it difficult to recover. The presumptions of humanity that presupposes the "true" way to "be" is in open conflict with what can be observed on Earth alone. The discovery of other planets that may harbor life on them even stranger than the ones we already know and find difficult to accept as equals must put a wrench in humanity's narcissistic and nostalgic attitude towards its supposed perfection.

4.2. Planet 4470 as Allegory: The Critique of the Anthropocentric Relationship with Nature in Ursula Le Guin's "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow"

The tale of Planet 4470 is an allegory of humanity's relationship with plant-life on Earth. Le Guin has given voice to trees and plants, whom we know are alive and have agency – although limited, but are not able to speak for themselves. Looked at in this context alone, they can be seen as the ultimate subaltern. However, the association of minority groups with plant and animal life might be quite problematic out of context, as Robert N. Watson (2006) asks in *Back to Nature: The Green and the Real in the Late Renaissance*:

> Is attempting to speak for animals, or trees for that matter, a progressive or an appropriative action? Is it in any way parallel to other efforts in cultural studies to give voice to those who have not been empowered to speak for themselves; or is the parallel I have just proposed itself an offense against social justice, since it echoes pernicious rhetoric associating a human underclass with the so-called "lower forms of

> life" and encourages a leap beyond issues of social justice that have not yet been effectively addressed? (p. 323).

The morality of Le Guin's story asks the question of whether we have any right to infringe upon lands that harbor other beings, claiming ownership upon them and defending them from other humans, as if they truly belong to us. These days, humanity's history of infringement on foreign lands of other nations are criticized and called post-colonial critique. Yet, humanity's infringement on lands that belong to nature is acceptable because the plants, trees and animals that inhabit that land have no rights upon it. There seems to be a gap in the space where humanity's obsessively infringing behavior is critiqued, and this space may be filled with the marriage of ecocriticism and post-colonialism. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (2015), in the introduction to *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* say: "…ecocriticism has tended as a whole to prioritize extra-human concerns over the interests of disadvantaged human groups, while post-colonialism has been routinely, and at times unthinkingly, anthropocentric" (p. 189). I think we would do well to remember while discussing ecocriticism that humans do not come secondary to all other living beings on the planet. And while discussing human equality in post-colonial critiques, we should also remember that this earth belongs to all living beings equally, and that we are part of Earth's natural life, however well we try to avoid acknowledging it.

Going back to Oppermann's definition of material ecocriticism, naturalized systems of meaning have little bearing in discussing the rights of plants and animals, since they did not contribute to the initial definition of such terms. Human invented words such as nature, rights and equality are themselves anthropocentric, and only exist to justify the existence of an

invasive and obstructive system that we call civilization. Huggan and Tiffin (2015) continue to argue in their introduction to *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* as:

> It thus bears reminding that, in bringing these apparently independent fields together, we are concerned not just with competing interests in terms of rights, but also with those broader categories – including the category of "rights" itself – that such interests necessarily call into question. One thing seems certain: if the wrongs of colonialism – its legacies of continuing human inequalities, for instance – are to be addressed, still less redressed, then the very category of the *human,* in relation to animals and environment, must also be brought under scrutiny (p. 190).

As will be discussed in upcoming parts, the re-definition of life itself, comes bearing the burden of a long overdue re-definition of the human. Because most of the problems discussed in this chapter are a direct consequence of the exaggeration of humanity's importance to Earth, and the universe as a whole. The term "posthuman" is one such attempt, to redefine what a "human" denotes, fully aware that it does not mean the same thing it meant in the 18th century. Although it was not until fairly recently when the Enlightenment era understanding of humanism got critiqued rigorously and can no longer stand as the default representation of being human.

In *Science Fiction, Alien Encounters, and the Ethics of Posthumanism,* Elana Gomel (2014) argues that "Humanism privileges humanity over other animals for the same ethically invalid reasons men have been privileged over women or whites over blacks" (p.20). This, however, should not mean that everything humanism represents is tainted because of its anthropocentric nature. Quite the opposite in fact, since the only reason why one would even question their contact with the world and consider its ethicality has much to do with a recently acquired ability to self-reflect, which is itself a product of Enlightenment era humanism. Although it does raise the question of whether the same humanism that defines its subject of

the human can evolve into anything beyond human; or posthuman in other words. Neil Badmington (2000) points out the difficulty of this act in the introduction to his book *Posthumanism*, giving an example from Jacques Derrida: "Precisely because Western philosophy is steeped in humanist assumptions, he (Derrida) observed, the end of Man is bound to be written in the language of Man" (p. 9). So, ignoring humanism and its effect on our contemporary understanding of ethics and morality would be to undercut decades of progress and would only serve to force posthumanism into regression. Instead, if one sees the posthuman as not the replacement of the human, but the next step in its evolution, one might accomplish this arduous task with better success. Since, "to oppose humanism by claiming to have left it behind is to overlook the very way that opposition is articulated" (Badmington, 2000, p. 9).

The next step in humanity's evolution, then, must come in the form of its recognition of the "other", and then working towards the possibility of removing that word entirely from its vocabulary. Going back to Le Guin's "Vaster Than Empires and More Slow", however alien the setting, the characters and the literal alien is, the narrative is immediately recognizable as one of a contact with the "antithesis." And through metamorphosis, the human character Osden who is already the least traditionally human one in the crew, undergoes a transformation to bring together both species, and hopefully annihilates the arbitrary divisions in between – accomplishing synthesis. What Le Guin achieves with this story is to foresee the challenge in such a difficult task and to highlight the idea that humanity, as it stands today is still stuck thinking orthodoxically. The implications of imagining the inevitability of some sort of contact in the future with a being that is both unfamiliar and alien is dire indeed, if humanity still remains ignorant towards even the inhuman beings that it is familiar with. Le Guin's assumption is that this would spell catastrophe, with how she depicts all crew members except for Osden. So, as in many other fictional narratives of hypothetical

alien contact, Le Guin's criticism is towards humanity's actual contact with peoples, cultures, animals, and other beings it is unfamiliar with. Her hope is that this unfamiliarity would perhaps be remedied a bit with the human's transformation into the posthuman. Elena Gomel (2014), in her book continues to argue for the importance of such a transformation and of narratives depicting them:

> In narratives of transformation, the alien is radically Other, ontologically different, and cognitively inaccessible. Such narratives require a profound revolution in the means of representation, as the narrative repertoire of humanism fails to come to grips with the nonhuman. The alien contact that transforms the human participant(s) not just in body but also in mind constitutes the core of the ethics of metamorphosis. It is the ethics predicated not on empathy but on its failure; not on Theory of Mind but on an inescapable mind-blindness. By opening itself up to the nonhuman, humanity undergoes a profound and irreversible change (p.31).

This transformation, Gomel argues, has profound implications in how humans would interact with their environment. Not only would they start seeing other beings that inhabit the same home as their equals, but it would also help them stop dealing in absolutes – i.e., peace or war.

> The binary dichotomy of friend/foe seems to admit of only two broad possibilities of alien contact: either it is love, peace and mutual understanding; or ray-guns blasting and planets being blown up. But there is a powerful undercurrent in both scientific and science-fictional discourses of alien encounter that suggests a third possibility: transcendence (Gomel, 2014, p. 12).

Transcendence might imply that the transcendent would bring about the attitude of supremacy that we attribute to the likes of the Nazi party of a mid-20th century, white-supremacist philosophy. However, through the depiction of transformation in direct consequence of

nonhuman contact, resulting in metamorphosis, transcendence takes on a different meaning, now amounting to the elimination of human arrogance entirely.

Speculative fiction, again, is in a unique position to begin the process of accomplishing this task of convincing the public of such a paramount change. Gomel (2014), continues to argue in favor:

> In creating fictional worlds in which ontological alterity is literal and not metaphorical, SF enables us to confront the political and ethical crisis of humanism. In representing entities that are beyond the reach of the Golden Rule and yet are moral agents in their own right (as opposed to animals or the biosphere), SF challenges us to consider that the only ethical response to the nonhuman is to become posthuman, to move beyond the emotional appeal of the face and the seductive tug of empathy and to confront the possibility of radical transformation, even if this transformation truly changes us into "something new and strange" (p.26).

From the depiction of an alien being who encounters human beings for the first time, to humans encountering a planet that is alive, speculative fiction has taken on fantastical subject matter, certainly to awe its reader, but also for the stimulation of social change. One of the most common tropes in speculative fiction is the emergence of robots as overlords of humanity, and the banal twist that it is those humans' fault that the robots revolted. In some stories, however, these robots are agents of their own and are more like people than their usual counterparts. This does not always stop their ultimate goal of total domination, but it does raise some interesting questions as to how the word "person" will need re-defining if or when these mechanical creations achieve human-like sentience and sapience.

4.3. Transcending Humanity and Robotics: A Posthumanist Reading of Nnedi Okorafor's "Spider the Artist"

Nnedi Okorafor's short story titled "Spider the Artist" is an existentialist speculative fiction story that takes place in Nigeria, the author's homeland. It is the story of a woman who is the victim of domestic abuse who and finds solitude in playing her guitar in front of a robot whose only supposed task is to repair pipelines. In the setting of the story, the Nigerian politicians, and their rich upper crust, with the help of the United States, exploit the country's workforce – both human and mechanical. Since the robots of this story appear to be sentient – which seems to be a recent development that was probably not intended in their design, but is a result of continued exposure to the world – the story asks the very topical question of what it means to be a person and whether it still requires one to be human or not. The answer it provides is that these terms either need re-definition or need to be eliminated entirely – since their connotations have long been rendered inane.

The main antagonists of the story seem to be the robotic mechanics whose primary jobs are to repair oil pipelines. They are feared and hated by the public, since they replaced the human work force of the country. After the people riot due to major unemployment, the robots are reprogrammed into guarding the pipelines – since people organize terrorist attacks and halt production. The guarding commands these robots receive turn out to be fatal for the people, and after this point, the antagonism between robots and people build to such a point that there is open hostility between them. By the beginning of Okorafor's narrative, they are considered villains by the everyone. These villains are seen as the reason for Nigeria's quickly depleting resources and now unlivable environment. Themes like the overexploitation of Earth's natural resources, and the lengths to which governments would go to in order to achieve them can be found in a multitude of varieties of genres. However, the creation of a new mechanical work force that is treated as slaves, and the conflict that arises from their

exploitation, put on top of the exploitation of the human public is a uniquely science fictional subject. It is easy to imagine how a new work force, that does not need rest, food or pay would contribute greatly to everyone's lives. However, skilled authors of speculative fiction are able to craft extra-dimensional thought experiments that take into question the horrific realities of our current society and twist them just enough to make them sound fantastical, while still being viable, as Okorafor does.

Named by the narrator of Okorafor's story, Spider, the artist, is the singular robot of the setting that has the ability to enjoy music. When the narrator has a bad day, she has a habit of sitting in her backyard and playing her father's guitar. When one day, feeling more rebellious than usual, she sits on a pipe while playing her guitar, one of the spider shaped robots appear. However, to her surprise – and possibly to the robot's as well – it does not attack her. Instead, it listens and enjoys the music. In the coming days, the robot appears at the same hour every evening and sits there while the narrator is playing her guitar. The unorthodox relationship they develop is prematurely ended when there is a massive riot in the village, and almost all the rioters, along with the narrator's abusive husband are killed by the repair robots. On a surface level, the story comes full circle when the robots that are introduced as mindless killing machines, but who recently acquired the ability to develop sentience, turn out to be murderers anyway. But the villagers and robots alike do what they must, and the bigger fault lies with the Nigerian government. However, Nigeria is not singularly at fault here, since it was very possibly tempted into the exploitation of its people, the creation of the mechanical work force and the exploitation of its natural resources by the United States. The United States, much like in many narratives – some fictional – is similarly tempted by the possibility of easy economic gains through the exploitation of the other, and its god, capitalistic thought is at ultimate fault here. That is to say, the anthropocentric obsession to attain, accumulate and hoard is the main cause of all this suffering, and

Okorafor's story, along with many fictions – speculative or not – reflect this reality in the hopes that this threat is confronted in time. Part of humanity's biggest sin in this regard, in my opinion, is to present the accumulation of wealth as a good thing, while ignoring the process with which it is achieved. Ursula K. Heise's (2006) guide to ecocriticism titled *The Hitchhiker's Guide to Ecocriticism* points out the primary purpose of this type of criticism. In her paper she asserts:

> Environmentalism and ecocriticism aim their critique of modernity at its presumption to know the natural world scientifically, to manipulate it technologically and exploit it economically, and thereby ultimately to create a human sphere apart from it in a historical process that is usually labeled "progress" (p. 507).

Critical posthumanism and ecocriticism is crucial in informing the public about the dangers of nature's exploitation and making sure that the rhetoric does not end with the assertion that nature needs our protection, but both the demonstration of the type of thinking that leads to such destructive behavior and enforcing current literature be up to date with contemporary anxieties.

Nostalgia plays a significantly important role in Okorafor's narrative. In the story, the narrator is nostalgic towards her guitar and thus – her father. She describes the object as: "The guitar was decades old and still smelled like fresh cut wood, like it wanted to tell you its story because only it could." (Okorafor, 2011, p. 78) There are hints of nostalgia towards nature in these lines as well. Her yearning for a time when she was a child and her father used to teach her how to play this guitar coincides with her yearning for a time when the country did not suffer like it does in the narrative present. She says: "The fish, shrimps and crayfish in the creeks were dying. Drinking the water shrivelled women's wombs and eventually made men urinate blood" (Okorafor, 2011, p. 77). She is unable to accept such a devastated environment

because she is fully aware that it did not have to be this way. Her frustration towards how carelessly the natural resources of her country were treated is paralleled in her frustration with how abusive her relationship with her husband is. As a result, she finds herself only able to escape this unreal situation by acting as if it is not real while playing her guitar.

The narrator's country has been objectified, it is exploited and is on the precipice of total destruction. This parallels her existence. She has been turned into an object of anger relief by her husband – a relief for his anger towards the government. So, she escapes from her supposed ally – who abuses her – and befriends her enemy – who enjoys her company. Her contradictory stand makes her into a "cyborg" as Donna Haraway calls it. In her seminal work titled *A Cyborg Manifesto*, she says: "… a cyborg world might be about lived society and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (1991, p. 15). Haraway insists on the establishment of the "cyborg" as the ultimate posthuman, as an apolitical being who is truly able to tackle issues regarding the environment, colonial behavior, exploitative practices, and identity politics. The self-proclamation of being cyborg is the ultimate political blasphemy since it actively ignores a millennium of "-isms" and otherwise destructive rhetorical baggage. It is also seen by Haraway, as the only way out of this spiral that we have found ourselves in, where the sins of the father has declared humanity guilty of major crimes against all beings that we share this world with. In Haraway's opinion, the rejection of all sides of the rhetoric provides us with a clean slate that we can start working with, and a possible roadmap that we may start working towards.

4.4. A Foregone Conclusion to the Anthropocentric Condition: An Ecocritical Overview of our Eventuality in Margaret Atwood's "Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet"

The recently emerged theoretical frameworks of ecocriticism and posthumanism serve to find a common way of saving the planet from its current heading of utter destruction. The

best scenario presented in some of these texts lead to the finality that the planet and most of its habitants will actually be fine, but humanity will meet its inevitable end. We have to deem this unacceptable – not because humanity is the most important being on this planet, but because it is in a unique position to save both the planet and itself. However, it is understandable why some authors feel pessimistic in this regard and use their literature for warning the public and shaking them into realization. Therefore, a popular theme that has been commonly depicted in 20th century speculative fiction is the ruin of global civilization, either due to technological extravagance – resulting in nuclear annihilation, or global warming, and a global climate crisis. The type of fiction that depicts a ruined civilization is generally called post-apocalyptic fiction. One example for this type of story, that also has climate anxiety that befits climate fiction, is Margaret Atwood's very short story titled "Time Capsule Found on the Dead Planet". In this story, the narrator writes a cautionary letter to anyone who might discover their devastated planet and warns the visitors about the potentially catastrophic results of nature's exploitation. The opening lines "In the first age, we created gods. We carved them out of wood; there was such a thing as wood then" (Atwood, 2015, p. 556) highlight that humanity's obsession with controlling and exploiting the environment is not new. This was also the case when humans carved wood and stone to craft godheads – and it has since evolved into such an obsessively manipulative behavior that it destroyed humanity's mutual relationship with the natural world.

Another anecdote continues the narrative with the elaboration of humanity's progress that results in the creation of money and its emergence of power over society. This is inevitably followed by the unstoppable hyper-capitalist machine that eventually destroys its relationship with itself as a whole, glorifying the successes of the individual. The fourth bulletin point comes with an unnerving revelation: "In the fourth age we created deserts" (Atwood, 2015, p. 557). In a blind fit of inquisition for ultimate knowledge, in service of a

greedy domination in pursuit of power, humans forget that knowledge only matters, and power only exists if there are people around to exercise it. The closing line to the fourth bulletin has a very insightful double meaning: “The number zero was holy” (Atwood, 2015, p. 557). This means that the zeroes that existed in figures of money held absolute power. But it also means that what was truly holy had zero ultimate power by the end of not only civilization, but also the planet.

The representation of the apocalypse, and life in the post-apocalyptic wasteland has been a tool for social messaging for many years. Some issues need to be shown to the reader as theatrically disastrous as possible in order for it to resonate with said issue. In the introduction to *Eco-dystopias: Nature and the Dystopian Imagination*, Rowland Hughes and Pat Wheeler (2013) say:

> Apocalyptic visions have the power to transfix their audience with horror, to command attention and shock people out of a position of comfortable apathy, in a way that strict adherence to the data cannot, even if the long-term implications of that data are terrifying enough in themselves. Science fiction writing and film-making has embraced the possibilities of apocalyptic soothsaying, from the Victorian era to the present day; freed from the expectations of strict fidelity to scientific fact, and yet tethered to it, it has always been a popular genre within which extravagant speculation sits cheek-by-jowl with flashes of prescience. As such, it has become the primary vehicle for artistic meditation on the progress and impact of climate change (p. 2).

Since scientific data seems not to be enough for people to realize the horrors of the situation, climate fiction has taken on the role of a social awareness campaigner. Although this genre is comparatively new and its subject matter alarmingly current, its main idea that humanity is

self-centered to both its and the planets' detriment is nothing new, as I have continually demonstrated in this thesis.

Considering all three texts analyzed in this chapter, and many others I have not had the opportunity to mention, I can easily argue that speculative fiction's ability to point out the irony in humanist hypocrisy is parallel to none other in fiction. As Timothy Morton (2015) points out in *Imagining Ecology Without Nature*, humanity is only aware of its environment as long as it becomes an obstacle to its survival:

> The environment was born at exactly the moment when it became a problem. The word *environment* still haunts us, because in a society that took care of its surroundings in a more comprehensive sense, our idea of environment would have withered away. The very word *environmentalism* is evidence of wishful thinking. Society would be so involved in taking care of "it" that it would no longer be a case of some "thing" that surrounds us, that environs us and differs from us. Humans may yet return to the idea of the "thing" to its older sense of *meeting place.* In a society that fully acknowledged that we were always already involved in our worlds, there would be no need to point it out" (p. 238).

As much as the literature – both fictional narratives and scientific research – reflect a potential for ecological disaster, the all too human habit to ignore problems until the last minute cannot be counted on this time, since the implications of a potential failure is cataclysmic. In this regard, part of the vital work falls on the shoulders of critical theory. Following Marxist and postcolonial critiques of human to human power relations in literary works, the recently popularized ecocriticism and posthumanism which deals with human to nonhuman relations, are now in a position to analyze what humanity has been doing wrong, and how fictional literature can imagine as potential alternatives.

5. CONCLUSION

Early 20th century speculative fiction known as “Pulp”, the “Golden Age” that followed and the “New Wave” that came later, follow their own trends according to their own political realities, while concurrently following a trend in unison; the post-anthropocentric critique of human arrogance. To demonstrate this notion, I have analyzed a total of nine short stories from these three separate eras with the help of recently emerging literary theories like posthumanism and ecocriticism.

As I have stated in the second chapter, out of the three eras, Pulp speculative fiction is where a post-anthropocentric philosophy is the least pronounced. Because of its contextual political period, it is somewhat masked under a technophobic sentiment, among a myriad of fears that plagued the timeframe in between two world wars. H. P. Lovecraft, one of the biggest authors of this period, is also the foremost exhibitor of such fears openly. Some of these fears are related to his racism – as acknowledged in the thesis – but not all. Since, although Lovecraft is a bigot, he is well-read and is therefore well-versed in being able to point out humanity’s anthropocentric failings. Meanwhile, Leslie F. Stone, a much lesser known author, is able to point out the irony in such a conceit while demonstrating a concern for political realities more openly; associating the anguish of the non-human with real world minorities more clearly.

Also apparent in Pulp era authors Strobl and Unamuno’s short stories, this period’s speculative fiction is more focused on the end of humanism, while the Golden Age and more specifically New Wave provide an alternative in the form of posthumanism. In this way, their dismissals of an archaic form of the human prove their readiness to accept its transcendence, rejecting the anthropocentric human condition and replacing it with the synthesis of ideas presented in posthumanist philosophies. In Dick’s story, there is a seemingly unsuspecting, but potentially immortal being that highlights human arrogance, while in Asimov, such

arrogance elicits humanity's own infinite existence – which is then contradicted by the reality of entropy and heat death of the universe. And as pointed out in the last chapter, New Wave authors are more clearly trying to provide a response to humanity's hazardous habit. Okorafor tests the age-old murderous robot cliché by having her protagonist make friends with one, and have the metallic technician fall in love with music. Breaking this familiar conflict serves to provide a beautiful alternative, while also presenting the perspective of a victimized Nigerian community and an exploited robotic work force. The ultimately artful Le Guin crafts her worlds in equal concern towards the suffering of all, trying to avoid calamity, while her close literary follower Atwood depicts an apocalyptic reality; both framing their concerns in an ecocritical light.

I have selected the nine short stories I analyzed in the thesis from a pool of about one hundred texts I have looked at in the specific pursuit of analyzing them in this context. While I kept reading Jeff and Ann VanderMeer's science fiction collection of short stories titled *The Big Book of Science Fiction*, I noticed a noticeable common theme – the theme I have decided to feature in this thesis; science fiction authors, more often than not, tended to be post-anthropocentric. Then, I realized that this trend reached further than science fiction, and encapsulated stories of fantasy, weird fiction and climate fiction (which, by its very nature tends to be such). I had found my hook, so I kept reading. What followed was surprising even to me, because I started to notice this notion in almost every science fiction and fantasy story I read. These stories, at their cores were driven by the unfair prejudice towards the "other". This "other" changed with every story, of course. While reading a robot's experience as a second-class being, whether it was an obvious metaphor for the historical exploitation of minority groups, or the non-metaphorical, literal exploitation of a robotic being, it was obvious that such abuse would not be tolerated by these authors. As pointed out by such authors, because "human" was ill defined, "non-human" embodied more than plants, animals

and inanimate objects; not all human beings were on the same horizontal playing field as the ideal "human" of 18th century humanism. This proved the arbitrariness of such a distinction and demonstrated that these terms needed redefinition. This is the reason why I have chosen to analyze these short stories from a posthumanist and ecocritical perspective; these literary theories were similarly idealistic in their pursuit to make the world a more livable place for all actors.

Speculative fiction has always been at the liberal forefront of social issues, and has spearheaded environmental concerns for decades now. Our relationship with the non-human actors of the world and the conservation of the planet's ecosystem might possibly be the most critical and pressing issues we face today; because they require the sum of all individuals if they are to be resolved. On account of their ability to incorporate such issues into a vast variety of subject matter, individual works of speculative fiction tend to stay unique, as their authors – due to their science-curious and culturally diverse nature – continuously reinvent themselves. This allows for them to stay fresh, while – as pointed out throughout the thesis – most examples of speculative fiction are still driven by the pursuit of a better experience for humans and non-humans alike. While staying fresh on subject matter, a continual reinvention and the unending emergence of new subgenres means that the followers of the genre will never be jaded by the same-old story, while they themselves are motivated by a philosophy to recurrently revise their outlook on the world. And because of its inherently contemporary nature and immediacy, it is also a tool to ask meaningful questions with, without necessarily providing definitive answers, thus creating a framework of potentially insightful contemplation and inquisitive dialectic. Therefore, I believe speculative fiction will have a prominent front row seat for the conflicts that will either annihilate or liberate us.

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