

# Hélice



*Reflexiones críticas sobre ficción especulativa*

*Volumen 7, n.º 1 · Primavera-Verano 2021*

## Miscelánea

Jonathan Hay

## Reflexiones

Sara Martín Alegre

Francisco Collado-Rodríguez

Beatriz Domínguez-García

Lidia María Cuadrado Payeras

Rocío Carrasco Carrasco

Amaya Fernández Menicucci

Mónica Calvo Pascual

## Crítica

Mariano Martín Rodríguez

## Recuperados

Federico de Castro

Salvador Rueda

Ion Heliade-Rădulescu

Pietro Gori

Guerau de Liost

Ippolito Nievo

Antônio Gomes Neto

Anatole France

Arturo Graf

Auguste Angellier

Alexandru Petroff

António Feijó

Àngel Guimerà

Renée Vivien

Arturo Graf

Ion Pillat

Humberto de Campos

Gian Fontana

# Hélice Sumario

*Volumen 7, n.º 1 · Primavera-Verano 2021*

Editorial	2
Miscelánea	How Much?: An Interesting Typo in Kim Stanley Robinson's <i>The Gold Coast</i> Jonathan Hay
Reflexiones	On the Monographic Section about Posthumanism Sara Martín Alegre
Reflexiones	Retrospective Posthumanism: <i>Frankenstein</i> According to Our Vocabulary Sara Martín
Reflexiones	The Female, the Intertextual, and the Transhuman in William Gibson's <i>Molly Millions</i> Francisco Collado-Rodríguez
Reflexiones	Of Mutants and Monsters: A Posthuman Study of Verhoeven's and Wiseman's <i>Total Recall</i> Beatriz Domínguez-García
Reflexiones	Posthuman Worldbuilding in Nalo Hopkinson's <i>Midnight Robber</i> : An Exploration of the Techno/Natural Divide Lidia María Cuadrado Payeras
Reflexiones	Experiencing the Posthuman: The Cinematic Clone in the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century Rocío Carrasco Carrasco
Reflexiones	<i>Mors Dei, Vita Mea</i> : Human, Transhuman, and Posthuman Identities in the TV Series <i>Altered Carbon</i> and <i>Westworld</i> Amaya Fernández Menicucci
Reflexiones	<i>The Tiger Flu</i> : A Critical Posthumanist Response to the Illusion of Transhumanism Mónica Calvo Pascual
Crítica	Los viejos mundos de la ciencia ficción española, bien al descubierto Mariano Martín Rodríguez
Recuperados	The Perfect Slave Federico de Castro
Recuperados	The Iron City Salvador Rueda
Recuperados	Paraísos futuros: tres himnos utópicos Ion Heliade-Rădulescu, Pietro Gori, Guerau de Liost
Recuperados	Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas Ippolito Nievo, António Gomes Neto
Recuperados	Visiones tras los apocalipsis: cuatro poemas épico-fantásticos sobre ruinas Anatole France, Arturo Graf, Auguste Angellier, Alexandru Petroff, António Feijó
Recuperados	Nuevas escrituras sobre el Dios y el Diablo: seis ficciones teológicas dualistas Àngel Guimerà, Renée Vivien, Arturo Graf, Ion Pillat, Humberto De Campos, Gian Fontana

Portada y contraportada de Leo y Diane Dillon. Derechos reservados.

ISSN: 1887-2905

Revista Hélice: Volumen VI, n.º 2: otoño-invierno de 2020-2021

Creada originalmente por la Asociación Cultural Xatafi.

Comité de redacción: Sara Martín Alegre, Mariano Martín Rodríguez.

Corrección, composición, diseño y maquetación: Paco Arellano.

Diseño original de la revista: Alejandro Moia.

Webmaster: Ismael Osorio Martín.

martioa@hotmail.com | sara.martin@uab.cat

www.revistahelice.com

Todos los derechos reservados. Disposiciones legales en [www.revistahelice.com](http://www.revistahelice.com)



# Editorial



**E**n unos tiempos como los actuales, en los que las medidas dictadas por la situación sanitaria cambian nuestro modo de vida, creemos que resulta muy oportuno dedicar un número de *Hélice* a uno de los temas especulativos más pertinentes en nuestros días, el posthumanismo en la ciencia ficción, al menos en su vertiente de imaginación del futuro inspirada por la tecnología. En la Unión Europea, quienes deciden han decidido, por una vez claramente, que el futuro de los ciudadanos de esa gran semiconfederación será digital, les convenga o no. No cabe duda de que la digitalización de arriba abajo ha llegado para quedarse, y no solo en Europa. A primera vista, se están cumpliendo, pues, los sueños o, más bien, dictados de los potentados de la industria informática. Entre ellos, una parte no menor apoya asimismo unas tendencias transhumanistas que persiguen modificar la humanidad y la naturaleza por medios tecnológicos y por su sedicente propio bien. Aunque transhumanismo no es equivalente a posthumanismo, igual que un melón no es una sandía, es indudable que ambas cosas tienen un marcado aire de familia y, de hecho, se suelen abordar juntas tanto en la teoría actualmente predominante en el mundo occidental como en su plasmación (a veces) artística en la ciencia ficción contemporánea. Esto es patente en los siete ensayos en inglés de la sección de Reflexiones, que dedicamos en este número al posthumanismo. En consecuencia, la mayoría aborda los interrogantes que suscita este fenómeno desde el punto de vista de sus consecuencias sociales, personales e incluso teológicas.

Estos ensayos suelen reafirmar las críticas lanzadas al transhumanismo por los teóricos activistas postmodernos debido a su complicidad con el gran capital, su elitismo mental y económico, su dualismo supuestamente humanista entre la mente y el cuerpo, y otros feos defectos que se le atribuyen. Mónica Calvo Pascual es quien más claramente examina el conflicto transhumanismo-posthumanismo en su estudio sobre la reciente novela de Larissa Lai *The Tiger Flu* (2018), en la que esta autora sinonorteamericana denuncia un futuro bastante creíble dominado por una China hipercapitalista, en la que la clase social y la exclusión derivan de la posibilidad de acceder a diversos implantes de finalidad tanto corporal como mental. Según Calvo Pascual, Lai presenta una al-

ternativa posthumanista integral social y filosóficamente. Una alternativa al posthumanismo excluyente propone también Nalo Hopkinson en su clásico *Midnight Robber* (2000) desde una perspectiva postcolonial que persiguen una superación de la oposición entre naturaleza y tecnología, perspectiva que describe Lidia María Cuadrado Payeras en su artículo. Por su parte, Beatriz Domínguez-García tampoco olvida la dimensión social de un posthumanismo que parece dejar atrás el cuerpo, pero que reafirma este de manera paradójica. Al analizar la visión que se ofrece de los cuerpos humanos *normales* y mutantes en las dos películas de Hollywood tituladas *Total Recall* (1990 y 2012), observa cómo una situación posthumana no acaba con una jerarquía fundada en la mayor o menor (dis)capacidad física y estética de los cuerpos, y la ambigua visión que se ofrece en ambas películas de tal categorización y de sus consecuencias sociales. En efecto, si algo se puede deducir de estos estudios como característica común de estas ficciones es la conciencia de que el futuro posthumano no acabará con la explotación del (post)hombre por el (post)hombre de cualquier sexo y género. Esa explotación se exagera cuando la tecnología posthumana no confía tanto en lo digital como en el aprovechamiento biológico de clones como meros depósitos de órganos para sus acaudalados modelos genéticos, tal y como se presenta en varias películas de nuestro siglo estudiadas por Rocío Carrasco Carrasco. Con todas las salvedades necesarias en productos cuyo carácter comercial determina inevitablemente el modo de su crítica, la adopción en aquellas películas de la perspectiva del clon invita a ponerse emocionalmente en su lugar, esto es, en el lugar de los explotados.

Otro rasgo común de las obras comentadas es el pesimismo distópico. Aunque la utopía es muy frecuente como horizonte vendido al ciudadano-consumidor por los poderes políticos y económicos que fomentan la digitalización trans y/o posthumanista, escritores y cineastas parecen mirar con pesimismo el resultado especulado del proceso digitalizador. Desde el punto de vista de la historia literaria, no extrañará tan enorme diferencia entre lo que se vende políticamente como porvenir ideal y ese mismo porvenir según la ciencia ficción mayoritaria. Si cabe considerar que el posthumanismo contemporáneo deriva directamente de la moda *ciberpunk*, es normal que también haya heredado los ambientes distópicos de esta, ya desde su creador William Gibson. Francisco Collado-Rodríguez así lo señala con amplia documentación en relación con la prototípica mujer *ciberpunk* de Gibson, Molly Millions, una mujer fuerte y violenta que no puede escapar, sin embargo, a los con-

dicionantes de su sociedad, que le impone una constante mejor tecnológica de sus implantes si quiere sobrevivir. La sociedad posthumana así pintada es un conjunto de seres transhumanos sometidos a la ley de la jungla. Al menos, aún es posible en ella luchar por su propia autonomía como individuos. Este es un lujo solo alcance de una extrema minoría afortunada en dos series televisivas posthumanistas de gran éxito, *Westworld* y *Altered Carbon*, que Amaya Fernández Menicucci estudia sobre todo como la expresión de la barruntada capacidad demiúrgica de la tecnología. Esta permitiría superar la dualidad entre cuerpo y mente, y propiciaría la aparición de conciencias artificiales hasta el punto de que lo divino, lo humano y lo no humano construido dejarían de distinguirse en el seno de subjetividades irreductibles a las concepciones humanistas anteriores, aunque ello no supondría en absoluto el fin de las antiguas injusticias, sino más bien al contrario. Tal vez ninguna mejora tecnológica es capaz de cambiar la naturaleza humana, cuyo comportamiento biológico nunca ha dejado de organizarse en forma de jerarquías, cuya manifestación es esencialmente represiva. Las formas de oprimir cambian, pero no la opresión. Todas las obras objeto de estos ensayos así lo indican. Lo que sí es dudoso es que las soluciones sugeridas por algunos autores, siguiendo la escolástica postmoderna, sean eficaces. Tal vez lo sean, y el paraíso de diversidad y felicidad, sobre todo para las minorías, acabe llegando realmente, pero se echa de menos en todos estos ensayos algún sano cuestionamiento de sus presupuestos teóricos, tan necesario para que un ensayo sea crítico y no propagandístico. Sin embargo, no se ha de reprochar a los autores que sigan a rajatabla el método y los postulados de los Estudios Culturales de nuestra época. Sus voces se añaden simplemente a un coro masivo que repite las mismas consignas y cita siempre a los mismos autores, pero al menos lo hacen con indudable habilidad y cerciorándose de que sus trabajos aporten interpretaciones bien argumentadas y plausibles dentro de sus respectivas escuelas.

Un método muy distinto sigue Sara Martín en su reflexión sobre *Frankenstein* (1831), de Mary Shelley. Aunque tiene presente las teorías posthumanistas actuales, su propósito es demostrar el carácter pionero de esa novela en la imaginación del individuo posthumano, para lo cual se sirve de los procedimientos filológicos probados de la historia de la literatura, sin complejos y sin temor de oponerse a las ideas recibidas en la materia. Concretamente, ataca con razón las lecturas anacrónicas actuales que se niegan a ver en la creación del doctor Frankenstein un monstruo, que es como es visto por los demás personajes y es presentado por la pro-

pia autora en el marco de una obra que no es tanto fictocientífica como gótica. Al fin y al cabo, el monstruo lo es no por ser una creación posthumana por medio tecnológicos, sino por ser un fracaso estético: es un monstruo de fealdad que da literalmente miedo...

El respeto hacia la historia, el texto y su contexto inspira también la importante antología de ciencia ficción española en la llamada Edad de Plata (1898-1936) editada por Juan Herrero-Senés, tal y como pone de relieve la reseña correspondiente de Mariano Martín Rodríguez en la sección de Crítica. También funda el curioso trabajo de Jonathan Hay sobre una errata no corregida en la novela de *The Gold Coast* (1988), de Kim Stanley Robinson, cuya publicación en *Miscelánea* demuestra que el método filológico sigue siendo útil como base para lecturas correctas de cualquier texto que permitan evitar los sesgos que aquejan con demasiada frecuencia los estudios que, a diferencia del de Sara Martín y del libro de Herrero-Senés, prestan más atención a la corrección (también en el sentido de reprensión y censura) ideológica que a la comprensión y el respeto del pasado no solo por lo que nos convenga para propagar nuestras ideas, sino también en sus propios términos, cuya pertinencia desde nuestra perspectiva actual no debería impedir intentar verlo desde dentro. Así se ha intentado en Hélice en el rescate en la sección de Recuperados, en forma de traducción, de varios textos de tema posthumanista posteriores a *Frankenstein* y muy anteriores al *cyberpunk*. Dos de ellos adoptan el discurso historiográfico para describir la aparición de dos especies posthumanas, una de robots y otra de simios inteligentes de aspecto humano. A diferencia de aquella novela de Shelley, ambos tienen un carácter satírico dirigido a rebajar la autoestima de la humanidad. En la historia de Ippolito Nievo, que es quizá el texto fictocientífico más importante escrito en italiano en el siglo XIX, la holganza inducida por la explotación laboral de los «homúnculos» artificiales induce en los humanos un declive de voluntad que ha de llevar al fin de la especie, mientras que los monos de la historia del brasileño Gomes Neto acaban siendo reconocidos como especie igual a la humana sobre todo porque han sabido *imitar* a esta sobre todo en sus defectos, de manera que el final feliz, tan poco común en la literatura de este tema posthumanista, resulta ser amargamente irónico. Con ese mismo tema, se adelanta a la imagen de la explotación por los poderosos del individuo-objeto posthumano Federico de Castro en su cuento dedicado a la autómatas propiedad de un semidivino monarca de aspecto oriental, cuyo ideal de mujer íntegramente sumisa realiza aquella «esclava perfecta», verdadera precursora de las muñecas sexuales de nuestros

días. Sin embargo, el poder masculino y patriarcal que encarna el rey se siente frustrado, lo que ilustra los límites de la teórica omnipotencia del poder y de la ideología que lo sustenta. Pese a su brevedad, este cuento plantea, desde la humanista perspectiva krausista de su autor, una interesante crítica que suena muy actual. Además, su cuento es literariamente pionero, pues su ambientación en un mundo secundario integral de aspecto legendario acerca su planteamiento literario al de la fantasía épica.

Los demás textos «Recuperados» se dividen en tres secciones no directamente relacionadas con el tema predominante en este número de *Hélice*, si bien aquellos clasificados dentro de la ficción teológica como expresiones estéticas (y heréticas) de un dualismo entre el principio supremo del bien y el del mal que puede considerarse la lejana matriz del dualismo cuerpo-mente que subyace a no pocos enfoques posthumanistas. No obstante, su interés mayor radica quizá en la manera en que la ciencia teológica ha podido ser explotada fructíferamente con fines puramente literarios en la época moderna, a menudo como base para empresas de claro carácter mitopoético. En cuanto a la sección dedicada a las ruinas imaginarias como variedad de la construcción de mundos posibles ficcionales de carácter épico-fantástico, sus distintos poemas pueden servir de recordatorio que las perspectivas de progreso tecnológico continuo no han de hacernos olvidar no solo a los seres humanos y de otro tipo que serán sus víctimas, sino también a quienes se quedarán indefectiblemente atrás. El orden trans y posthumanista también dejará ruinas. Con todo, para que no toda sea quejarse y dejar el oportuno margen para la esperanza, también se recuperan varios poemas de forma himnica y asunto utópico que describen un porvenir mejor para los explotados hoy, un porvenir de beatitud paradisíaca, de paz y de belleza, en ciudades celestiales o terrenales, que tal vez nos pueda servir de consuelo frente a tantos desastres como aparecen en la ficción posthumanista, cuyos augurios más pesimistas nuestros gobernantes sanitarios, políticos y económicos parecen estar volviendo cada vez más verosímiles.

# How Much?: An Interesting Typo in Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Gold Coast*



Jonathan Hay  
University of Chester

© Jonathan Hay, 2021

One typo in Kim Stanley Robinson's 1988 novel *The Gold Coast* is so prominent as to merit consideration. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that it has ever come to the attention of readers before now. In chapter thirty-four, when Dennis McPherson's corporation Laguna Space Research loses a crucial military defence contract to a rival aerospace company, an announcer states that the "winning bid totaled six hundred ninety-nine million dollars" (2020: 456). However, when Dennis reflects upon that unfavourable verdict two paragraphs later—after having read a pamphlet outlining the proposal in detail—his ire is directed at Parnell Aviation Incorporated having undercut himself and his colleagues by submitting an "impossible" bid of "\$669 million" (2020: 456). Stranger still, when reflecting once more upon Parnell's winning bid another few paragraphs later, McPherson now believes that the bid was "\$699 million" (2020: 457), in line with the originally cited amount. In the time intervening between his cogitation of the latter two values, McPherson does not appear to have been corrected by any external source, and hence, his abrupt reversion to the originally cited figure appears incomprehensible.

Even if we were to presume that

McPherson had read the figure wrong, or that the booklet he reads is misprinted, there is no logical reason for him to have suddenly deduced that the figure of \$669 million is erroneous (if, indeed, it is). Nor does he appear to notice the \$30 million discrepancy between the announced figure (\$699 million) and the alternative total that the booklet ostensibly indicates (\$669 million). This narrative lacuna is rendered particularly conspicuous since McPherson has been working obsessively to develop LSR's alternate proposal for months, and so, it appears highly unlikely that he would be anything less than wholly attentive whilst analysing even the most minute details of the winning contract bid. Neither is the discrepancy likely to be either a ludic or postmodern move. Throughout *The Gold Coast* Robinson exclusively favours plain, declarative exposition, and accordingly, his narrative style is never wilfully obstructive.

Additionally, the typo is by no means exclusive to later editions of the novel; it has been present in the manuscript since *The Gold Coast* was first published. In its first edition, the same alternating interplay of the two different figures appears (1988: 180-1), and the 2015 audiobook edition narrates each of the

## How Much ?: An Interesting Typo in Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Gold Coast*

relevant passages verbatim (cited at 7:01:42, 7:02:22, 7:05:38 respectively). Were chapter thirty-four related from a first person perspective, we might presume that either McPherson or the announcer had made an error, yet the passage is rendered in free indirect discourse. Hence, the error appears to be attributable to either Robinson, or the novel's original typesetter. Crucially, the exact value of Parnell's winning bid is highly significant at this stage of the novel's plot, as the extent to which the corporation has outcompeted LSR bears a considerable influence upon later events. Yet, since two vastly different figures have been erroneously cited, readers' perception of how audacious Parnell's bid

truly was is obscured, impairing our comprehension of precisely why a number of very important diegetic events subsequently become inevitable.

### Works Cited

- ROBINSON, Kim Stanley (1988). *The Gold Coast*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- ROBINSON, Kim Stanley (2015). *The Gold Coast: The Three Californias Triptych, Book 2*. Narrated by Stefan Rudnicki. Los Angeles: Skyboat Media, Inc.
- ROBINSON, Kim Stanley (2020). *The Gold Coast*, in *Three Californias*. New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 293-653.

# On the monographic section about posthumanism



Sara Martín Alegre

© Sara Martín Alegre, 2021

In the pre-pandemic world of May 2019 the research group “Trauma and Posthumanity” of the University of Zaragoza held the conference “Representation in the Time of the Posthuman”. There, the authors of the monographic issue that we now present met to exchange ideas. One of these ideas was the possibility of working together in a publication, which soon materialized in a project for a journal that should have been published in Spanish, a language in which the connection between science fiction and posthumanism has been not explored in depth. That project fell through for that type of absurd reason that often plagues the academic world but we decided to continue in the language that the seven of us use professionally, English, as we are all English Studies academics. Our thanks go to my co-editor, Mariano Martín Rodríguez, who suddenly found in his hands the proposal to publish not one or two, but seven articles on the same topic in what constitutes *Hélice*’s first monographic issue (we hope there will be more soon).

As editor of the monographic section my call to the authors was based on a very simple idea: choose the science-fiction text you prefer—novel, film, TV series—and explain how posthumanism works in it. We did not agree beforehand to cover specific ground but, as happens, the articles do cover the period 1984-2020 except for my own excursion into 1818 to

examine *Frankenstein* as a posthuman text *avant la lettre*. In my article I consider the anachronistic application of current concepts to the science fiction of the past, warning that though this may be an illuminating exercise we still need to pay attention to how the texts were originally conceived. Mary Shelley’s novel is primarily a horror story, and we should not forget that the creature, posthuman as he is, is a fearsome monster and not just an object of compassion, as he mostly is in current analysis. Francisco Collado chose to focus in his article on William Gibson’s atmospheric *Neuromancer* (1984), one of the great novels about artificial intelligence. Collado is not interested in the relationship between human and A.I., however, but in vindicating the protagonist’s bodyguard Molly Millions as an iconic posthuman character. First seen in “Johnny Mnemonic” (1981) Molly is a self-empowered female cyborg of the type Donna Haraway dreamed of; technology is for Millions the only way forward in a world that offers women few options but a transgressive posthumanism. Beatriz Dominguez’s contribution focuses on the two versions of *Total Recall*: the very popular first film by Paul Verhoeven (1990) and the far less accomplished remake by Len Wiseman (2012). She is particularly interested in the figure of the mutant, specifically in how its presence in science fiction suggests that the future

## On the monographic section about posthumanism

might create its own kind of abled and disabled bodies, for it is certainly not the case that the posthuman body will be necessarily an improved version of current humanity. The contrast between the two films helps Domínguez to consider this but also the different ideas about how dogmatic posthumanism may impact the repression of the less abled in the 1990s and the 2010s. Lidia Cuadrado's essay deals with the novel *Midnight Robber* (2000) by Canadian-Jamaican author Nalo Hopkinson. Applying the ideas of Francesca Ferrando's *Philosophical Posthumanism* (2019) Cuadrado considers the clash between the techno-driven and the nature-driven civilisations in Hopkinson's work, paying attention to the interpretations of posthumanism from outside a Western, ethnocentric point of view. Returning to cinema, Rocío Carrasco explores in her article the figure of the clone in films such as *The Island* (2005) and *Never Let me Go* (2010), based on the novel by Kazuo Ishiguro, and the animated series *World of Tomorrow* (2015, 2017, 2020). She delves into the ethics of biomechanical technology, which these works emphasize by allowing viewers to access posthuman subjectivity in an exercise aimed at increasing empathy. Amaya Fernández Menicucci discusses in her essay how the TV series *Altered Carbon* (Netflix, 2018-2020) and *Westworld* (HBO, 2016-2020) investigate the consequences of unlimited body-enhancement, the Cartesian mind-body dualism, and the rise of non-human consciousness in artificial posthumans to question humanity itself. Cyborgs and A.I. represent something new, perhaps even beyond the supernatural and the unnatural. Finally, Monica Calvo reads Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu* (2018), a

dystopian novel about corporate control of global economy set in an Earth devastated by climate change. Calvo shows how Lai offers a welcome alternative to the separation of mind and body backed by cybernetic transhumanism through an ethics of the post-anthropocentric which re-humanizes the posthuman body.

All in all, as these articles show, posthumanism cannot be understood from a single position. We feel, however, that too often science fiction has been missing in the more philosophical discussions of this concept. Not even major academics such as Rosi Braidotti—author of the seminal *The Posthuman* (2013)—have fully understood the importance of science fiction (or speculative fiction, if you prefer it) as a huge laboratory of ideas about the posthuman. It has been, then, our collective aim to call attention to this omission, and to stress that, as *Frankenstein* proves, science fiction has been concerned from the very beginning with the problem of how technology can alter the natural evolution of Homo Sapiens. Posthumanism, as the articles show, has been mainly defended as a positive process of human enhancement that will lead to a happier transhumanist civilization, yet there is a dangerous underside to this idealism constituted by new forms of bodily marginalization that need to be prevented. Speculating with the future in fictional scenarios, as the texts we have chosen do, is, therefore, the best possible strategy to anticipate serious problems and to suggest satisfactory solutions that respect fundamental ethical values and human rights. That is how important science fiction is for humanity.

SARA MARTÍN ALEGRE  
*Barcelona, May 2021*

# Retrospective Posthumanism: *Frankenstein* According to Our Vocabulary



Sara Martín  
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

© Sara Martín, 2021

**Abstract:** Mary Shelley conceived *Frankenstein* as a Gothic horror story. However, Brian Aldiss claimed in 1973 that her novel is the true originator of science fiction—a 1920s label of which she could not be aware. Also in the 1970s, ‘posthumanism’ emerged as the critical current that might replace humanism. The word ‘posthuman’, though, had first appeared in a 1936 novella by H.P. Lovecraft. Because of this changing vocabulary *Frankenstein* must be re-read retrospectively (though not unproblematically) without neglecting its Gothic origins, as pioneering fiction about the creation of a posthuman individual, even of a whole posthuman species. In this article I argue that, nonetheless, the new posthuman re-reading should not obscure Mary Shelley’s intention to characterize her monster as an abject creature intended to produce intense fear and terror in her readers. This is an affect that has been lost in the contemporary academic treatment of the creature as a being dispossessed of his rights as a living individual.

**Keywords:** Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Gothic, science fiction, posthumanism

## 1. *Frankenstein* as a Gothic text: Horror and technophobia

In her Introduction to the second edition of *Frankenstein* (original publication 1818)—published in 1831 by Colburn & Bentley within their Standard Novels collection—Mary Shelley (1797-1851) narrated the genesis of her novel, thus establishing the enduring Romantic myth of its creation. During the cold, rainy summer of 1816,<sup>1</sup> nineteen-year-old Mary,

her husband Percy, and Claire Clairmont (the daughter of Mary’s step-mother), were frequent visitors at Villa Diodati on the shores of Lake Geneva, where Lord Byron was staying at the time with his personal physician, John Polidori. The Shelleys were in Switzerland at the request of Claire, who was then pregnant by Byron; she would give birth to their daughter Allegra in early 1817. Beyond sex, however, Byron did not care for

of the Lesser Sunda Islands in Indonesia. The events at Villa Diodati have inspired films as different as *Gothic* (1986), *Rowing with the Wind* (1987) or *Haunted Summer* (1988), and even the *Doctor Who* episode *The Haunting of Villa Diodati* (2020).

---

<sup>1</sup> The Summer of 1816 was abnormally cold all over the Western hemisphere because of the eruption in April 1815 of Mount Tambora, a volcano in northern Sumbawa, one



## Retrospective Posthumanism: *Frankenstein* According to Our New Vocabulary

Claire; he clearly preferred Percy Shelley's intellectual company. According to Mary, the two men's conversations on scientific topics—which she claims to have witnessed without ever participating in them—together with Byron's proposal that the four of them (excluding Claire) wrote each a ghost story in imitation of the German horror tales<sup>2</sup> they were reading to pass the time, were major sources of inspiration for her novel.

Mary mentions in her Introduction that she had been writing since childhood but she still had a reluctance to believe herself endowed with the talent that Percy attributed to her, as the daughter of intellectual authors William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. She took, nonetheless, Byron's challenge seriously, making a constant effort to come up with a story that would be up to the expected standard: "One which would speak to the mysterious fears of our nature, and awaken thrilling horror—one to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart" (8). Her difficulties to find a subject, together with Percy's and Byron's

pressure (she was asked daily whether she already had thought of a topic), caused a great deal of anxiety, which resulted in an agitated state or "waking dream" (9), one evening when Mary was trying to sleep:

I saw—with shut eyes, but acute mental vision—, I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavour to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. (9)

Unable to get rid of her "hideous phantom", Mary chose this haunting vision as the subject of her "tiresome unlucky ghost story!" (10). It was her aim to terrorize readers in the same degree she had been terrorized by her imagination, or her subconscious. Initially, Mary wanted to write a short story but, encouraged by Percy, she expanded her tale into the novel *Frankenstein; or the Modern Prometheus*, which she published anonymously. Since, because of this quite habitual circumstance, most readers and critics assumed that the novel had been written by Percy, Mary made a point of clarifying in the Preface to the second edition that everything in *Frankenstein* was her own creation, though she granted that her husband had written the Preface to the first edition of 1818.

*Frankenstein*, originally published by the small press of Lackington, Hughes, Harding, Mavor, & Jones when Mary was 21, fit well the literary market for Gothic

---

<sup>2</sup> A key volume was *Fantasmagoriana* (1812), a collection of German ghost stories anonymously translated into French by Jean-Baptiste Benoît Eyriès. The main authors featured in it are Johann Karl August Musäus, Johann August Apel, Friedrich Laun, and Heinrich Clauren. Byron and Shelley never finished their own ghost stories but John Polidori did. His novella *The Vampyre*, the first prose narration dealing with this topic in English, was published in 1819. Unfortunately, *The Monthly Magazine*, where it appeared, attributed it to Byron, who was actually the inspiration for the horrid vampire Lord Ruthven. Polidori is rumoured to have committed suicide in 1821 because of this humiliation.



## Retrospective Posthumanism: *Frankenstein* According to Our New Vocabulary

fiction, a genre in which women writers were abundant—from the lesser ones published by the blatantly commercial Minerva Press (see Copeland, 1995) to best-selling Ann Radcliffe, who gave Gothic in the 1790s the literary respectability which the genre was missing. Horace Walpole accidentally invented the label ‘Gothic fiction’ by giving his novel *The Castle of Otranto* (1764)—the text that inaugurated this narrative mode in Britain—the subtitle *A Gothic Story*. Walpole alluded to the pseudo-medieval atmosphere of his romance but the adjective ‘Gothic’ was eventually applied to any type of fiction (initially prose and drama, and later a long etcetera) interested in awakening the most universal affect: fear. As David Punter notes in his pioneering study of the genre,

Fear is not merely a theme or an attitude, it also has consequences in terms of form, style and the social relations of the texts; and exploring Gothic is also exploring fear and seeing the various ways in which terror breaks through the surfaces of literature, differently in every case, but also establishing for itself certain distinct continuities of language and symbol. (1980: 21)

In view of Mary’s avowed declaration that it was her intention to elicit a feeling of fear from readers, there is no doubt that *Frankenstein* is primarily a Gothic text, though not at all the ghost story she had set out to write. Her novel is, in any case, a late addition to the first cycle of Gothic fiction—*Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820) by Charles Maturin is often named as its closing point—with very little respect for the habitual conventions of the genre. *Frankenstein* is neither set in the

remote past nor in a mysterious building (preferably a castle, convent, or haunted mansion). Although it does feature a romance (between Victor and his fiancée Elizabeth), this is secondary to the main plot. *Frankenstein* does not even have a villain clearly identifiable as such. Both Victor and his creation have been described as hero-villains or villain-heroes, an ambiguity which enriches this unique masterpiece.

Even though Victor Frankenstein originated the figure of the ‘mad doctor’ that would eventually appear in countless stories, from H.G. Wells’ Dr. Moreau to Stanley Kubrick’s Dr. Strangelove, Mary herself was not attributed any main merit as a ground-breaking author for too long a time. English fantasy and science fiction author Brian Aldiss<sup>3</sup> was the first to argue, in his 1973 essay *Billion Year Spree*, that the Gothic nature of *Frankenstein* is no obstacle to read it as science fiction, quite the opposite. Calling Mary ‘the origin of the species’ (the title of his chapter), Aldiss exalts her to the position of main initiator of modern science fiction, a title that would certainly have surprised her, since this was a label created in 1926 by editor Hugo Gernsback.<sup>4</sup> Aldiss is right to connect

<sup>3</sup> In his novel *Frankenstein Unbound* (1973) Aldiss enacts through his delegate in the text, Joe Bodenland, the fantasy of travelling backwards in time to meet Mary Shelley. For the 1990 adaptation by Roger Corman, see my own article (Martín, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> ‘Scientifiction’ appeared in the editorial article by Gernsback written to present *Amazing Stories* (April 1926). “By ‘scientifiction,’” Gernsback clarifies, “I mean the Jules Verne, H. G. Wells, and Edgar Allan Poe type of story—a charming romance intermingled with scientific fact and prophetic vision” (3). The magazine *Astounding Stories*



## Retrospective Posthumanism: *Frankenstein* According to Our New Vocabulary

science fiction and Romanticism since, thanks to the spectacular technoscientific progress that led to the Industrial Revolution, Mary's generation was "the first to enjoy that enlarged vision of time—to this day still expanding—without which science fiction is perspectiveless, and less itself" (1975: 3). Nonetheless, even though it is obvious that modern science fiction from *Frankenstein* onwards has frequently used horror elements—an outstanding early 20<sup>th</sup> century example is "The Color Out of Space" (1927) by H.P. Lovecraft, published in Gernsback's *Amazing Stories*—claiming that this genre is "characteristically cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mould" (8) is a risky manoeuvre. Despite this, many other critics have followed Aldiss. Goss and Riquelme, for instance, present *Frankenstein* as a villain similar to the classic aristocratic villains of Gothic fiction, calling him an "intellectual aristocrat" (2007: 425) since he is upper class but bourgeois (his native country, Switzerland, has no aristocracy). Gothic fiction, they add, "reaches an important moment of cultural realization in its offspring, science fiction, when the scientist replaces the ruler and the priest as wielder of power and source of wrongdoing" (435).

Whereas *Frankenstein* is a technophobic novel—whether we argue that Mary only opposed certain aspects of science or all of it—the abundant science fiction that lacks Gothic elements, and that Aldiss ignores, is technophilic. One

---

of *Super-Science* (founded in 1930) was renamed *Astounding Science-Fiction* by its new editor, John W. Campbell, in 1938, who seems to have coined the label habitual today for this genre.

of the main technological optimists, as he called himself, is Isaac Asimov. In his hybrid detective/science fiction novel *The Caves of Steel* (1954), Asimov distances himself from Mary Shelley, whom he gently mocks, by introducing through the main robotics experts on Earth (in a future distant 3000 years from our present) a key concept. As Dr. Gerrigel tells Detective Elijah Baley:

"The human race, Mr. Baley, has a strong Frankenstein complex".

"A what?"

"That's a popular name derived from a Medieval novel describing a robot that turned on its creator. I never read the novel myself. [...]" (170)

The solution which Asimov found to the problem of how to prevent the rebellion of the robots, the famous Three Laws of Robotics that guarantee their obedience,<sup>5</sup> reveals that the trope of the creation of non-human, self-conscious artificial life need not result in horror tales. Brian Stableford was the first one to clarify why this is the case in *Frankenstein*. According to him, Mary did not characterize young Victor as a scientist because she wanted to comment on the scientific debates of her time but because she needed to distinguish her novel from the typical Gothic story of

---

<sup>5</sup> The Three Laws of Robotics were suggested by editor John W. Campbell and introduced in the short story "Runaround" (1942). They are: 1. A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm; 2. A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the First Law; and 3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.



## Retrospective Posthumanism: *Frankenstein* According to Our New Vocabulary

supernatural horror “which had already become tedious and *passé*” (1995: 54). If Byron had challenged her to write a tale about a ‘modern Prometheus’ (Mary’s subtitle for *Frankenstein*), Mary might have followed a very different course and perhaps present the creature’s awakening as “a joyous and triumphant affair” (54). The problem, of course, is that nobody would have published this imaginary alternative novel, which could only have been received as “horribly indecent and blasphemous” (56). Indeed, apart from Asimov, few if any authors have really overcome the Frankenstein complex. This is why Stableford characterizes *Frankenstein*’s enormous popularity as a tragedy trapping “the entire genre of science fiction” (56).

Generally speaking, there are two main lines of argumentation in relation to Mary Shelley’s technophobia, based in any case on a splendid knowledge of the main debates of her time, quite an achievement for a young woman of scant formal education. On the one hand, critics such as Andrew Smith maintain that *Frankenstein* is, despite its manifest, unambiguous horror, an ambiguous text as regards science. The novel does not belong to the agitated post-French Revolution period in which Mary’s parents expressed their progressive ideas, but to the far more conservative atmosphere which dominated Britain after the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo (1815). For this reason, Smith insists, “the novel’s refusal to either fully endorse or extol radical views should be seen as part of the political ambiguities of the time in which radicals, such as Mary Shelley and her milieu, were unclear about where to go next” (2010: 81). The other main scholarly strategy consists of connecting Victor Frankenstein’s fictional

science with the real science of the period in which Mary’s novel is set, presumably the 1780s or 1790s (though Captain Walton’s letters are dated 17— it makes little sense to place the story in an earlier period). The noun ‘scientist’ only appeared in 1834<sup>6</sup> and since Victor refers several times to ‘natural philosophy’— science as we know it today was only consolidated in the final third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Cahan, 2003: 4)—Sutherland points out that he is no scientist, “mad or sane, but an Enlightenment *philosophe*” (1996: 25). Following this line of argumentation, Johnson (2018) examines the disciplines that were taught in the real-life German University of Ingolstadt (1472-1800) in Bavaria, where Mary places Victor as a student. Johnson notes that from 1780 onward this university had a large circle of scholars interested in the application of modern chemistry (Medieval alchemy’s descendant) to medicine. As he points out, though Victor mentions having studied physiology and anatomy, disciplines taught at the real Ingolstadt institution, he is neither a physician nor a ‘doctor’ in any field but just an advanced student of chemistry and electricity science with no degree.

This historical precision contrasts with the deliberate anachronism of statements

---

<sup>6</sup> William Whewell first used the word ‘scientist’ in print in his review of *On the Connexion of the Physical Sciences* by Mrs. Somerville for the *Quarterly Review*. He was actually reporting the occurrence which an “ingenious gentleman”, whose name he does not mention, volunteered during a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Since the word ‘philosopher’ sounded “too wide and too lofty a term” (59), this man proposed ‘scientist’ by analogy with ‘artist’ though, Whewell adds, “this was not found palatable” (59).



## Retrospective Posthumanism: *Frankenstein* According to Our New Vocabulary

such as “Speculation about the posthuman emerged in the Enlightenment in tandem with new notions of the human” (Yaszek & Ellis, 2017: 71). Obviously, the word ‘posthuman’ did not exist in the Enlightened 18<sup>th</sup> century which moulds Victor Frankenstein’s natural philosophy. Yaszek and Ellis use ‘posthuman’ with the intention of connecting the past with our present, confident that their anachronism will not be perceived as an error but as a productive strategy. Yet, though much is gained in this way, something is also inevitably lost, arguably an accurate perception of past *zeitgeists*. In *Frankenstein*’s specific case, the use of ‘posthuman’ in relation to this novel originally born as a Gothic text creates important tensions in the very definition of monstrosity, as I argue in the following section.

### 2. *Frankenstein* as a posthuman text: Gains and losses

*Frankenstein* survived as a popular classic at the margins of academic literary criticism until the publication of the collective volume *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley’s Novel* (1979), edited by George Levine and U.C. Knoepfelmacher. This volume was part of the then emerging Gothic Studies, consolidated thanks to David Punter’s *The Literature of Terror* (1980). Interestingly, the birth of this new research area overlapped with the beginnings of posthumanism as anti-humanist critical practice. The witty hybrid article by Ihan Hassan (half essay, half masque) “Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture?” (1977) introduced the label as “a dubious

neologism, the latest slogan, or simply another image of man’s recurring self-hate” (843). Hassan warns that five hundred years of post-Renaissance humanism are coming to an end because the impact of the brutal technoscientific acceleration is transforming this intellectual current into something new “that we must *helplessly* call posthumanism” (843, original italics). Despite his negative tone, Hassan believes that “posthumanism may also hint at a potential in our culture, hint at a tendency struggling to become more than a trend” (843); it might thus become a tool for regeneration.

The problem is that posthumanism has exploded with such force and in areas of knowledge so diverse that it is impossible to agree on a single meaning. Francesca Ferrando’s *Philosophical Posthumanism* (2019), which offers a comprehensive overview of all its main currents, conveys the impression, most likely against the author’s intentions, that many scholars have used this label as randomly as postmodernism was used before and is still used. Ferrando, in any case, does her best to explain in a very useful, didactic way how the label has evolved. According to her (25-26), the Philosophical Posthumanism which she practices, as Rosi Braidotti’s disciple, descends from the Critical and Cultural Posthumanism developed between Hassan’s 1977 article and N. Katherine Hayles’s seminal volume *How We Became Posthuman* (1999). Another main highlight of this period, and the key text for Cultural Posthumanism, is Donna Haraway’s “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” (1985). The volumes by Braidotti *The Posthuman* (2013) and by Stefan Herbrechter *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (2013) consolidated the current



## Retrospective Posthumanism: *Frankenstein* According to Our New Vocabulary

cycle, based on the premise that all Posthumanist critique must proceed “in relational and multilayered ways, in a post-dualistic, post-hierarchical praxis which sets a suitable way of departure to approach existence beyond the boundaries of humanism and anthropocentrism” (Ferrando, 2019: 119).

These critical currents have appeared in a historical period when real-life technoscience is moving ahead of science fiction, from which it often takes its inspiration anyway. This realization has multiplied almost to infinity the numbers of narrative descendants and of academic readings of *Frankenstein*. Feminist criticism, for instance, has condemned Frankenstein as a perpetrator of patriarchal technoscientific crimes which victimize women and children, even the monster. Far from being abject, as Mary imagined him, the monster is reconfigured in contemporary texts “in line with a posthuman trajectory of hybrid horror heroes from neo-Victorianism, graphic fiction, and familiar mashed myths of marvellously animated fantastic action” (Botting, 2018: 310). Braidotti’s views, according to which there is no division between nature and culture but a continuum (2013: 2), inspired Outka to state that “The creature disrupts the sublime formation of the human/natural binary, and in doing so changes the definition of both” (2011: 36). The use which Victor makes of animal parts (“The dissecting room and the slaughter-house furnished many of my materials”, 55) has resulted in readings of *Frankenstein* as an anti-vivisection protest (Guerrini, 2008) about a fundamentally hybrid individual who is also a human animal (McQueen, 2014). On his side, Mousley describes Victor rather than his monster as a ‘posthuman

human’ because unlike the creature “who later imagines a life modestly accepting of the limits which his extraordinary circumstances have imposed” (2016: 161), Frankenstein feels “a ‘human’ desire to overcome his humanity” by refusing “to live within the boundaries of the human” (161-162), marked by disease and death.

Those of us who appreciate the virtues of science fiction are often frustrated by how the discourse on the posthuman, which is quite distinctly defined in this genre, is oddly distorted in disquisitions that do not take sf into account. Haraway pays homage to Joanna Russ, Samuel R. Delany, John Varley, James Tiptree Jr., Octavia Butler, Monique Wittig, and Vonda McIntyre as the true “theorists for cyborgs” (1991: 173), whereas Hayles presents in *How We Became Posthuman* critical analyses of Bernard Wolfe, William Burroughs, William Gibson, Philip K. Dick, Neal Stephenson, and Greg Bear. Braidotti, in contrast, develops her Philosophical Posthumanism in *The Posthuman* with no reference at all to science fiction. Ferrando just offers a few passing remarks in her own volume. It is important, however, to recall that, as Prucher notes (2009: 54), the adjective ‘posthuman’ first appeared in a novella by H.P. Lovecraft, *The Shadow Out of Time* (1936), in which it is used to describe the diverse alien species that will replace *Homo Sapiens* on Earth. This is still today mainly how posthumanism is understood in science fiction. Whether the new posthuman species (or, rather, post-*Homo Sapiens*) is extraterrestrial or terrestrial, natural or manufactured, is irrelevant: what matters is the concept of replacement. This, as I will comment, is fundamental in *Frankenstein*.

It is necessary to briefly consider at this point transhumanism, the



## Retrospective Posthumanism: *Frankenstein* According to Our New Vocabulary

intellectual and technoscientific current which defends the right to control the evolution of *Homo Sapiens* towards a new posthuman state, or even species. Julian Huxley, Aldous's brother and a first-rank biologist, with suspect eugenicist interests, coined in 1957 this concept in an often quoted passage:

The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself—not just sporadically, an individual here in one way, an individual there in another way—but in its entirety, as humanity. We need a name for this new belief. Perhaps *transhumanism* will serve: man remaining man, but transcending himself, by realizing new possibilities of and for his human nature. (17, original italics)

The transhumanist project was initially developed as fantasy within science fiction but became eventually the object of heated technoscientific debate in real life. Haraway's call "for *pleasure* in the con-fusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction" (1991: 150, original italics) in allusion to the cyborg (a form of individual transhumanism) came only three years before the foundation in 1988 of the World Transhumanist Association led by Nick Bostrom and David Pearce. Their "Transhumanist Declaration" includes points as alarming as "(4) Transhumanists advocate the moral right for those who so wish to use technology to extend their mental and physical (including reproductive) capacities and to improve their control over their own lives. We seek personal growth beyond our current biological limitations" (1998: online). Transhumanists claim to embrace the main principles of modern humanism—a stance that may have made many anti-humanist converts—and to

hold no membership in any particular party or political platform. Yet, it is evident that their vision of the future depends on tracing an inhumane division between those who have access to anatomical enhancement and those who do not. On the other hand, it is relevant to note that a major line of research in Oxford University's Future of Humanity Institute, founded by Bostrom, considers the impact of advanced AI in our future. The institute's Centre for the Governance of AI devotes its efforts to ensuring that transhumanism stays within the boundaries of *Homo Sapiens'* evolution and is not overwhelmed by AI evolution.

Victor Frankenstein is, in our new vocabulary, a transhumanist ahead of his time since he intends to transcend the nature of *Homo Sapiens* to turn humans into a renewed posthuman species. His research is animated by the selfish, patriarchal idea that, if he succeeds, "A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs" (54). The methods which Frankenstein uses require, as Coleridge would say, our willing suspension of disbelief. However, the advances in technoscience have made Mary's novel "more relevant to apprehensive concerns omnipresent in the twenty-first century than it was in the nineteenth" (Friedman & Kavey, 2016: 12). There is no doubt that *Frankenstein* "perfectly illustrates [the] human anxieties of becoming posthuman" (Heiise-von del Lippe, 2017: 9), whereas its ending invites readers to consider "how a restricted notion of personhood has led to the denial of rights to a bioengineered being" (Karmakar & Parui, 2018: 351).



## Retrospective Posthumanism: *Frankenstein* According to Our New Vocabulary

Part of Gothic's sinister charms is its association with death and the ensuing bodily decadence, both presented as sources of disgust and terror. Victor passes from studying physiology and anatomy as part of his university training to manipulating dead bodies illegally obtained from cemeteries (cadaver dissection was limited to the bodies of executed criminals in the United Kingdom until 1832).<sup>7</sup> Victor claims he feels no superstitious fears but Mary Shelley aims at eliciting deep disgust with Frankenstein's narration of his experiments to Walton; these include examining in detail "every object the most insupportable to the delicacy of the human feelings" (52). Once he discovers the secret of how to animate organic dead matter, Victor starts using not just body parts but also living animals in these experiments. When he asks "Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil, as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave, or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay?" (54), the immediate reply is 'any minimally sensitive reader'.

Initially, Frankenstein doubts between creating "a being like myself, or one of simpler organization" but his overexcited imagination gives him the self-confidence he needs to create "an animal as complex and wonderful as man" (53). A crucial question often overlooked is the fact that

Victor's original design is faulty and that he has a limited plastic ability. "As the minuteness of the parts formed a great hinderance to my speed", Victor decides to work on a gigantic being, "about eight feet in height, and proportionably large" (54). Logically, his ignorance of modern microsurgery techniques cannot be solved by increasing the size of his creature. An eight-foot tall man can still look fully human—Gheorghe Mureșan, NBA's tallest player in the 2019-20 season, is seven feet seven inches, or 2'31 metres, tall—but Frankenstein simply does not know how to make his creature's various features cohere in a harmonious body. The poor aesthetics of his Adam are a consequence of Frankenstein's limitations as an artist and plastic surgeon, and they are the only reason why he is perceived as a monster. Victor tries to exonerate himself by arguing that "I had selected his features as beautiful" (57) but still cannot explain why the creature's physical appearance is so incongruous:

His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips. (57)

His second main strategy consists of placing an insuperable dividing line, defining himself as human and his creature as a non-human monster. When his youngest brother William is murdered, Victor concludes at once that "Nothing in human shape could have destroyed that fair child" (76). When innocent Justine is wrongly accused of

---

<sup>7</sup> William Burke and William Hare murdered in 1828 sixteen people in Edinburgh to sell their bodies to famed anatomist Robert Knox, who presumably new about their misdeeds. The scandal led to the passing of the Anatomy Act in 1832, aimed at supplying medical schools with sufficient dead bodies. Burke was hanged and subsequently his body was dissected. Hare's fate remains unknown.



## Retrospective Posthumanism: *Frankenstein* According to Our New Vocabulary

ending the child's life, Victor understands that "every human being was guiltless of this murder" (80).

Eventually, creator and creature meet in an isolated spot of the Alps. Frankenstein sees "the figure of a man, at some distance, advancing towards me with superhuman speed" (98). This comment transforms the novel's discourse on monstrosity by adding to the problem of the monstrous aesthetics the problem of the creature's augmented, superhuman capacities. He is far stronger than any man, can endure extreme cold, survive with very little food (all of it of vegetal origin), and has even self-educated himself in very limiting circumstances, just by observing how the De Lacey family speaks and reads. The new Adam (who never gets a name) insists that "I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and *humanity*" (100, my italics) but the violent rejection "from your fellow-creatures" (100), he tells Victor, forced him to accept his monstrous difference. This can never be overcome. Not even once he knows the creature's complete story can Frankenstein control the revulsion that his abject creature inspires in him. Among the accusations that the monster throws at his maker the main one is that he has been gifted with "perceptions and passions" (139) that make him aware of his terrible condition, even though Victor seems to have cared only for his anatomy and ignore his mind. The fact that this is a far superior achievement than the body condemns the monster, even to the eyes of his creator.

The motif of the augmented capacities of the monster is the foundation of the anti-posthuman horror that Mary Shelley activates in her readers' minds, even today. The creature argues that if any human being could welcome him, "I would bestow every benefit upon him with tears

of gratitude at his acceptance" (145), yet he has already concluded that "the human senses are insurmountable barriers to our union" (145). The solution is the manufacturing of a female companion of the same type, with whom he could live quietly on a lonely corner of Earth, an arrangement which he defines as "peaceful and *human*" (146, my italics). Victor grants his wish but contemplating the half-made woman he is gripped by a fear that his "daemon" will want to have children "and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror. Had I right, for my own benefit, to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations?" (165). Imagining the passage from the posthuman individual to the posthuman species finally forces Victor to acknowledge that he had no right at all to start his transhumanist project. Understandably, the destruction of the female companion and, in consequence, of the possible new posthuman species, turns creature and creator into irreconcilable enemies. Since Frankenstein claims that he has broken his promise of making the woman because "never will I create another like yourself, equal in deformity and wickedness" (167), the monster attributes the betrayal to hatred without fully understanding the anti-posthuman fear that Victor feels.

Returning to Stableford, the problem with any readings of *Frankenstein* as fiction on the posthuman is that its plot depends on a questionable premise: Victor's act of creation produces a monster to fulfil the Gothic requirements of the novel rather than because he is a bad scientist (he is in fact a great scientist but a bad artist). Mary Shelley's constant preoccupation with the revulsion which



## Retrospective Posthumanism: *Frankenstein* According to Our New Vocabulary

the monster inspires hinders any deeper reflection on his posthumanity; besides, from the moment he first opens his eyes, the creature is characterized as non-human, eventually occupying an anti-human position. Contemporary readers may think that we might overcome our revulsion because we need to believe that we are better persons than Frankenstein, and because in our politically correct times the monster gets more sympathy than his maker as a member of a strange new posthuman minority. Yet, Mary is adamant that accepting this abject creature is simply impossible—our human senses, as the creature himself notes, are the final obstacle.

The contemporary reluctance to accept that the creature *is* a monster means, in short, that all readings which stress his posthuman nature misread the Gothic adscription of *Frankenstein*. Our visualization of the creature is contaminated by the inability to reproduce in audiovisual adaptation and in illustration the grotesque image which Mary Shelley gave him. With no truly accurate representation, it is easier to discuss how Victor abuses the creature and his rights as a man-made posthuman but only at the cost of missing a crucial fact: if we met the monster as the author describes him, we would also scream in horror. It would take much courage to control our reaction and sit down to discuss his predicament. Perhaps our softening of his monstrosity conceals a secret wish: that our present and future Frankensteins may have better artistic skills to transform us into the beautiful posthumans who will finally leave behind destructive, often inhuman, *Homo Sapiens*.

### Works Cited

- ALDISS, Brian (1973, 1975). *Billion Year Spree: The True History of Science Fiction*. London: Corgi.
- ASIMOV, Isaac (1954, 1991). *The Caves of Steel*. London: HarperCollins.
- BOSTROM, Nick *et al.* (1998). "Transhumanist Declaration".  
<https://humanityplus.org/philosophy/transhumanist-declaration/>
- BOTTING, Fred (2018). "What Was Man...? Reimagining Monstrosity from Humanism to Transhumanism", Carol Margaret Davison & Marie Mulvey-Roberts (eds.), *Global Frankenstein*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 301-317.
- BRAIDOTTI, Rosi (2013). *The Posthuman*. London: Polity.
- CAHAN, David (2003). "Looking at Nineteenth Century Science: An Introduction", David Cahan (ed.), *From Natural Philosophy to the Sciences: Writing the History of Nineteenth-Century Science*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 3-15.
- COPELAND, Edward (1995). *Women Writing about Money: Women's Fiction in England 1790-1820*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- FERRANDO, Francesca (2019). *Philosophical Posthumanism*. London: Bloomsbury.
- FRIEDMAN, Lester D. & Allison B. KAVEY (2016). *Monstrous Progeny: A History of the Frankenstein Narratives*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP.
- GERNSBACK, Hugo (April 1926). "A New Sort of Magazine", *Amazing Stories*, 1: 3.
- GOSS, Theodora and John Paul RIQUELME (Fall 2007). "From Superhuman to Posthuman: The Gothic Technological Imaginary in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis*", *MFS: Modern Fiction Studies*, 53.3: 434-459.
- GUERRINI, Anita (2008). "Animal Experiments and Antivivisection Debates in the 1820s", Christa Knellwolf and Jane Goodall (eds.), *Frankenstein's Science: Experimentation*



## Retrospective Posthumanism: *Frankenstein* According to Our New Vocabulary

- and Discovery in Romantic Culture, 1780–1830*. London: Ashgate, 71-85.
- HARAWAY, Donna (1985, 1991). “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century”, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. London: Free Association Books, 149-182.
- HASSAN, Ihab (Winter 1977). “Prometheus as Performer: Toward a Posthumanist Culture?”, *Georgia Review*, 31.4: 830-850.
- HAYLES, N. Katherine (1999). *How We Became Posthuman*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1999.
- HEIISE-VON DER LIPPE, Anya (2017). “Introduction: Post/Human/Gothic”, Anya Heiise-von der Lippe (ed.), *Posthuman Gothic*. Cardiff: U of Wales P, 2017. 1-17.
- HUXLEY, Julian (1957). “Transhumanism”, *New Bottles for New Wine*. London: Chatto & Windus, 13-17.
- JOHNSON, Jeffrey Allan (Fall 2018). “Dr. Frankenstein, I Presume? Revising the Popular Image of Frankenstein”, *Literature and Medicine*, 36.2: 287-311.
- KARMAKAR, Manali & Avishek PARUI (Fall 2018). “Victor’s Progeny: Premonition of a Bioengineered Age”, *Literature and Medicine*, 36.2: 337-355.
- MARTÍN ALEGRE, Sara (Autumn 2003). “In Mary Shelley’s Loving Arms: Brian Aldiss’s *Frankenstein Unbound* and its Film Adaptation by Roger Corman”, *Foundation*, 32.89: 76-92.
- MCQUEEN, Sean (March 2014). “Biocapitalism and Schizophrenia: Rethinking the Frankenstein Barrier”, *Science Fiction Studies*, 41.1 #122: 120-135.
- MOUSLEY, Andy (2016). “The Posthuman”, Andrew Smith (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 159-172.
- OUTKA, Paul (2011). “Posthuman/Postnatural: Ecocriticism and the Sublime in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*”, Stephanie LeMenager, Stephanie, Teresa Shewry & Ken Hiltner (eds.), *Environmental Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*. London and New York: Routledge, 31-48.
- PRUCHER, Jeff (2009). “Posthuman”, *Brave New Words: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction*. Oxford: OUP, 154.
- . (2009). “Posthumanism”, *Brave New Words: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction*. Oxford: OUP, 155.
- SHELLEY, Mary (1831, 2008). “Introduction”, *Frankenstein*. Edited by M.K. Joseph. Oxford: Oxford UP, 5-11.
- . Mary (1831, 2008). *Frankenstein*. Edited by M.K. Joseph. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- SMITH, Andrew (2016). “Scientific Context”, Andrew Smith (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Frankenstein*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 69-83.
- STABLEFORD, Brian (1995). “*Frankenstein* and the Origins of Science Fiction”, David Seed (ed.), *Anticipations: Essays on Early Science Fiction and Its Precursors*. Syracuse (NY): Syracuse UP, 46-57.
- SUTHERLAND, John (1996). “How Does Victor Make his Monsters?”, *Is Heathcliff a Murderer?: Great Puzzles in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*. Oxford: OUP. 24-34.
- WHEWELL, William (March 1834). “*On the Connexion of the Physical Sciences*. By Mrs. Somerville”, *Quarterly Review*, LI.CI: 54-68.
- YASZEK, Lisa & Jason W. ELLIS (2017). “Science Fiction”, Bruce Clarke and Manuela Rossini (eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 71-83.

# The Female, the Intertextual, and the Transhuman in William Gibson's Molly Millions



Francisco Collado-Rodríguez<sup>1</sup>  
Universidad de Zaragoza

© Francisco Collado-Rodríguez, 2021

**Abstract:** Considered the great guru of cyberpunk, William Gibson is also the creator of one of the most representative female icons of the genre, Molly Millions. An aggressive co-star in one of Gibson's early narratives, "Johnny Mnemonic" (1981) and in his first novel, *Neuromancer* (1984), Molly finds herself at an intertextual, postfeminist, and post/transhuman crossroads. She emerges as a dangerous and empowered cyborg; without her, the rather weak Johnny, the male lead in the first story in which Molly appears, would have died. However, her condition makes her much more than a bodyguard. Through her role, Gibson also shows the hyperreal predictions of a dystopian world whose strongly naturalist context does not seem to offer this prototypical cyberpunk woman any outlet but a transhumanity for which she needs to update constantly her physical enhancements, inexorably related to her necessarily violent survival.

**Keywords:** William Gibson, Molly Millions, "Johnny Mnemonic", *Neuromancer*, posthumanity, transhumanity

## 1. William Gibson's Molly Millions, the hyperreal, and female power

In the early stages of creating his cyberpunk universe, William Gibson portrayed the character of his first empowered female protagonist, Molly Millions, around three fundamental features that shaped her literary personality significantly while also affecting posterior cultural manifestations: the (post)feminist, the

intertextual, and the transhuman. This contribution analyzes the role these three factors have in the construction of Molly Million's character within Gibson's early predictions of a dystopic future.

In her article "Back to the Future", Mojca Krevel puts the emphasis on the alleged fact that, especially in his earlier and better-known fiction, cyberpunk guru William Gibson constructed hyperreal models that anticipated and even brought some actual advancements in the fields of technology and biotechnology. In other words, his early cyberpunk fiction turned out to be a precise cultural example of Baudrillard's third order of simulacra (1983: 83-159): Gibson's literary world became the postmodern sci-fi

---

<sup>1</sup> The Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation under grant PID2019-106855 GB-I00, and the Aragonese Regional Government-DGA under grant H03\_17R supported the writing of this work.



## The Female, the Intertextual, and the Transhuman in William Gibson's *Molly Millions*

representation of a reality that did not exist yet, but that eventually, preceded by the simulacrum created by the cyberpunk author, would come into existence. From Baudrillard's critical perspective, Gibson's hyperreal fiction had helped to change the postmodern factual world thanks to imagined technological advancements based on his observation and capacity to predict the future, something that happened despite the writer's apparent inexperience in the use of cutting-edge technology at the moment of creating his fiction (Krevel, 2014: 34-35). We might wonder if in the depiction of such hyperreal world, which precludes and defines the wide world web (*Neuromancer*, 37), Gibson also worked on a new model of woman that could endorse the fight for the advancement of gender equality, thus anticipating the wave of "feminist cyberpunk" initiated by the end of the 1980s.

Overall, the issue of feminism and gender relations at the early stages of the cyberpunk movement becomes rather problematic, as some critics have accused this science-fiction subgenre of being traditionally patriarchal. However, even if one considers as suspicious the fact that the alleged five leaders who consciously decided to create the new sf movement at the beginning of the 1980s are all male (William Gibson, Bruce Sterling, John Shirley, Rudy Rucker, and Lewis Shiner), critics have addressed gender issues in cyberpunk from highly contrastive angles. Thus, in his analysis of the reception in recent times of Gibson's early fiction, Pawel Stature argues that the cyberpunk writer's "representation of female characters has been described as stereotypical, unfair, or even dangerous to women" (2018: 336). Stature argues that, since Gibson's portraits of female

characters are linked to the myth of the American frontier—"a place of unmitigated exploitation"—he has also been criticized for being a neo-colonial author (343). Stacy Gillis's views on the issue are even harsher and more categorical on the alleged patriarchal and male-suffocating roots of cyberpunk fiction. By resorting to a simplistic binary, Gillis perceives "an understanding of the gender politics of cyberpunk in which reason and activity are located within the masculine body, as opposed to the dangerous female body" (2007: 13). Nicola Nixon, in her article "Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution or Keeping the Boys Satisfied?" also contends that cyberpunk conceals "a complicity with '80s [gender] conservatism" (1992: 231).

However, in her article "Razor Girls: Genre and Gender in Cyberpunk Fiction" (1997), Lauraine Leblanc defends a different interpretation, which firmly takes into account the role technology has in the creation of new types of (post)human beings in the subgenre. In line with the well-known views provided by Donna Haraway in her influential "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985), Leblanc contends that "gender dichotomies are overcome through the prevalence and use of technology; as 'post-human' subjects, cyborgs create new social and cultural contexts, redefining gender along with the most basic of human attributes" (1997: 72). This critic sees in Gibson's *Molly* the first "steppin' razor" example of cyberpunk "female-gendered cyborgs undertaking a role-reversal into masculinity" (72). As argued in the following pages, and in line with Leblanc's views, textual analysis shows that one-dimensional criticism of the type developed by some critics who consider



## The Female, the Intertextual, and the Transhuman in William Gibson's Molly Millions

Gibson's fiction to be fully rooted in patriarchy is not sufficiently grounded when it comes to reflect on his representations of gender issues in his early fiction.

Regarded, together with Bruce Sterling, as the leader of the cyberpunk movement, at the beginning of the 1980s Gibson published two pieces of fiction considered to be among his most influential work: one of his first short stories, "Johnny Mnemonic" (1981), and his first novel, *Neuromancer* (1984). Both of them reveal that Gibson drew the portrait of female protagonist Molly Millions as an extremely active woman who openly qualifies as an empowered individual, both physically and mentally. As discussed in this work, she is not simply a cyborgian version of film-noir *femme fatale* who has been transported to the spaces of the future, as Gillis claims (2007: 13-16), nor is her sexuality merely "the marker of female identity" (Gillis: 16). On the contrary, I contend that Gibson's first well-known female protagonist is ideologically (and physically) a rather malleable but dynamic figure. Thanks to the powerful role she enjoys in the two narratives above mentioned, she helps to link Gibson's fiction both to the beginning of the cyberpunk agenda as a new type of postmodern sf subgenre and to some interesting notions centered on the philosophy of transhumanism.

As pertains to her female condition, Molly is not represented as a mere object sexualized by the male gaze. In fact, male stares on the female sometimes experience an important contextual difference in Gibson's universe, where (cyborgian) heterosexual men may passively stare *through* the female, as the case is in *Neuromancer*, a procedure

evaluated later on in this work. Moreover, Gibson depicts Molly, above all, as a bodyguard and lethal warrior who, as such, aspires to have a well-trained body ready for combat with the help of expensive technological implants. In other words, she does not come to fill the role of the *femme fatale* in the grounds of science fiction, but to occupy the place of the traditional (male) fighting hero in the new cyborgian version brought about by the posthuman paradigm. In such role, she helps and ultimately saves the life of a physically weak and incapable-to-fight new model of *unmanly* male protagonist; the inversion of gender roles, however, is not a simple one and Gibson's male protagonists do not respond easily to the masculinity crisis of the 1980s.

In line with the materialization of postmodern ideology characteristic of the first wave of cyberpunk (McHale, 1992), Molly's transhuman search for physical perfection via body enhancements is also a response to Gibson's representation of a dystopic future. In it, what is left of humanity becomes categorized again in binaries but, although they are old binaries, the author has reframed them. The newly framed ideological pairs represent the new beings who are gradually resulting of the progression from the human into the (dystopic) posthuman. Furthermore, Gibson's literary universe portrays a large collection of what might be better referred to as *infrahuman* beings, losers in the dystopic future who try to make a living at the increasingly large bottom of society. Meanwhile, very rich families—many of whose members, in a new parodic version of vampirism, are periodically cryogenized—live in artificial heavens above the planet (*Neuromancer*, 50-51). Right in the middle, between the masses



## The Female, the Intertextual, and the Transhuman in William Gibson's *Molly Millions*

of the infrahuman dispossessed and the very rich, others like the cyborgian mercenary Molly Millions help cowardly hackers or “console cowboys”, such as Case, the male protagonist in *Neuromancer*, in their illegal efforts to get money from the privileged rich, and thus remain above the infrahuman rubble. Anticipating the impact of the internet in our present lives, in his cyberpunk universe Gibson's hackers move between two ontologically distinct realities, the physical and the virtual, but the writer describes both as very dangerous places. The physically feeble male version of the old tough cowboy has to leave his ‘meat’ or physical body behind, as Case makes clear once and again, while pursuing technological buccaneer adventures that take place in Gibson's premonitory cyberspace (*Neuromancer*, 8, 10, 29, 39, 51, etc.).

While being on-line, the male hacker may have to evade dangerous electronic “black ice” and virtual walls programmed to keep hacking thieves away. However, in physical reality cyberspace cowboys still put their ‘meat’ at risk. Here, they have to face gangsters who work for the big corporations that control an extremely dehumanized hyper-capitalist system. Following the logic of popular romance fiction, be it American frontier or pirate story, when entering Gibson's cyberspace the console cowboy sometimes requires someone to watch his physical body during the time in which he is submerged in his illegal activities as a hacker. Alternatively, the physically frail hacker may need somebody brave to carry out material deeds for him, while he comfortably observes and guides her watching everything through her eyes by means of a transhuman technological implement. Virtual space cowboys may

also be helped in their freebooting endeavors by different urban tribes who prefer or are forced to live outside the system, such as is the case of the Lo Tek who help Johnny Mnemonic, or the Rastafarian Zionites of *Neuromancer*.

Not surprisingly, the writer's gloomy predictions for our near future may help readers to understand why, instead of portraying a female protagonist who might have shown clearer connections with a feminist and gender-equalitarian agenda, he depicts Molly as a ninja-type assassin, as deadly as apparently immoral. The logic of the fictional but dystopic universe that Gibson describes leaves no room for traditional morality because the main aim of his protagonists, men and women alike, is sheer survival.

Both in the short story and in the novel, Molly shows that in physical reality she can be better and more active than many men can be. In this sense, she qualifies as an early representative of postfeminism, a notion that critics have also approached from contrastive angles. Thus, Stacy Gillis summarizes the first commonly accepted definition of the concept as follows: “Postfeminism, as used in scholarly debate, is concerned with how certain ‘playful’ re-renderings of femininity and sexuality could be understood as a powerful example of female agency” (2007: 9). However, she later reframes the notion, using brackets to retake her allegedly feminist agenda. “Rather, ‘(post)feminist’ refers to the ways in which figures of women with emotional, physical, social or financial *agency* have been variously represented as lacking something—a relationship, a child, a more attractive body, a stable parent figure and/or domestic skills—since the early 1980s” (9, my emphasis). Among the existing number of fictional



## The Female, the Intertextual, and the Transhuman in William Gibson's Molly Millions

(post)feminist characters, Gillis explicitly includes the “ass-kicking techno-babes of cyberpunk film and fiction” (9). In effect, Gibson clearly portrays Molly Millions as an empowered *active* female character in both “Johnny Mnemonic” and *Neuromancer*. Aesthetically, she also qualifies as an “ass-kicking techno-babe”—although I would substitute *woman* for *babe*. Moreover, Molly seems to be always lacking something, as Gillis contends, because she frequently needs even more money to further her cybernetic enhancements and, at times, she clearly misses a true soulmate with whom to live a happier life. However, Gillis seems to miss the fact that the sense of lacking also exists and is applicable to Gibson's male protagonists; lack is not gender-biased in his dystopic fiction. In it, most characters from every gender are exposed to a dangerous and brutal life that reverberates with the notion that Dominick Lacapra defined as “structural trauma”<sup>2</sup> and which results in unavoidable existential anguish. Besides, such anguish is not only the result of what Lacan understands to be a lack of plenitude in his analysis of the evolution of being (1966: 220-22)—and which applies to both woman and man—but especially of the dreadful living conditions that Gibson depicts for the protagonists of the bleak future he predicted in his early fiction. Indeed, if we focus our attention on the figure of Molly from the perspective of folk and popular culture,

we easily conclude that Gibson has bestowed upon her, as an essential feature of her empowerment, the traditional role of the stereotypical male warrior who has to fight as a way of living. In his futuristic but extremely naturalist pages, the author's dystopic presentation of our future requires a huge deal of old human violence to survive.

Nevertheless, Gibson's predictions and the role he allots his female protagonist in such a future are more complex than the mere use of violence to stay alive. Molly is not just a woman warrior; she is a highly skillful fighter who can challenge and defeat fearsome martial arts experts, which means that she is also a brainy, astute personage. As a literary character, she is above all the result of intertextual symbiosis. Her portrait shows clear links with other fictional females that, along the postmodern period, were also marking the coming of the postfeminist woman along with the increasing fears of traditional men who felt that such newly empowered woman was dangerously eroding their ancestral male privileges.

### 2. Intertextual Postfeminist Molly

Cultural history points to the politically conservative America of Ronald Reagan's 1980s as a period when many men wished to recuperate the traditional patriarchal position they thought they had lost because of the advent of the counterculture and the social revolts of the 1960s. A second wave of 20th-century feminism combined then with the growing economic supremacy of Japan and West Germany to produce an alarming sense of insecurity among American males (Ludas, 2011). Thus, in line with other cultural artifacts created at the time, the first

<sup>2</sup> For LaCapra structural trauma results from the realization of the intrinsic mortality of the human condition; it may happen prior to any specific traumatic experience of individual character or be the result of several or many traumatic events that threaten individual or collective existence (LaCapra, 2001: 76-81).



## The Female, the Intertextual, and the Transhuman in William Gibson's Molly Millions

wave of cyberpunk fiction echoed in its own way the patriarchal social anxieties of the period both in gender and in economic grounds. It was in this context that Gibson added to his fiction the conviction that Aristotelian categorical thinking, far from having been erased from the western world-view—as deconstructivists intended—would develop in the future into new distinct, re-framed binaries to form the discursive columns of a highly dystopic society. Among others, the old binary man/woman was going to experience a tantalizing revision, as shown in Molly Millions' depiction.

Intertextually, Molly evokes the classic Amazons but she also appears to be a female version of Wolverine from Marvel Comics. In turn, she became a predecessor of other popular female protagonists, most noticeably of Trinity in *The Matrix* trilogy. As mentioned above, she first appeared in "Johnny Mnemonic", published in *Omni Magazine* in May 1981, and later reprinted in Gibson's popular short-story collection *Burning Chrome* (1986). In this narrative, Molly enters the story abruptly to rescue Johnny from certain death by providing him with her bodyguard services for a considerable sum of money. The most obvious genres that Gibson parodied—in the postmodern sense provided by Linda Hutcheon<sup>3</sup>—along his short story are the

western (with its typical duel at the saloon) and the detective thriller, with the motif of the chase becoming highly relevant till the end of the tale. Johnny provides readers with the main, and male, perspective in his role as homodiegetic narrator:

Lewis was grinning. I think he was visualizing a point just behind my forehead and imagining how he could get there the hard way.

"Hey", said a low voice, *feminine*, from somewhere behind my right shoulder, "you cowboys sure aren't having too lively a time".

"Pack it, *bitch*", Lewis said, his tanned face very still. Ralfi looked blank.

"Lighten up. You want to buy some good free base?" She pulled up a chair and quickly sat before either of them could stop her. She was barely inside my fixed field of vision, a thin girl with mirrored glasses, her dark hair cut in a rough shag. She wore black leather, open over a T-shirt slashed diagonally with stripes of red and black. "Eight thou a gram weight".

Lewis snorted his exasperation and tried to slap her out of the chair. Somehow he didn't quite connect, and her hand came up and seemed to brush his wrist as it passed. Bright blood sprayed the table. He was clutching his wrist white-knuckle tight, blood trickling from between his fingers.

But hadn't her hand been empty?

He was going to need a tendon stapler. He stood up carefully, without bothering to push his chair back. The chair toppled backward, and he stepped out of my line of sight without a word. (*Burning Chrome* 4-5; my emphasis)

Molly had planned to work for Lewis's boss Ralfi, an intermediary who wanted to earn the bounty of the contract put on

<sup>3</sup> In her classic study on (postmodern) parody, Hutcheon defines it as "repetition, but repetition that includes difference [...] it is imitation with critical ironic distance, whose irony can cut both ways. Ironic versions of 'trans-contextualization' and inversion are its major formal operatives, and the range of pragmatic ethos is from scornful ridicule to reverential homage" (1985: 37).



## The Female, the Intertextual, and the Transhuman in William Gibson's *Molly Millions*

Mnemonic's head. However, when Johnny promises her two millions if she can get him out, she becomes his protector and rescues him, outsmarting and defeating the two other men in this futuristic version of the saloon duel:

"Name's Millions. Molly Millions. You want to get out of here, boss? People are starting to stare". She stood up. She was wearing leather jeans the color of dried blood.

And I saw for the first time that the mirrored lenses were surgical inlays, the silver rising smoothly from her high cheekbones, sealing her eyes in their sockets, I saw my new face twinned there. (6)

Eventually, the strange-looking cyborgian rescuer takes Johnny away to a refuge where he can hide among the members of the Lo Tek urban tribe. However, a Yakuza assassin goes after the male protagonist's head, because Johnny is, like Molly, also a cyborg. More specifically, he functions as an embodied representation of Marshall McLuhan's analysis of globalized reality (1964: 7-21). Johnny is the medium that carries the message in himself, in a hard disk that he had implanted in his head and where he transports important information. Thus, he—more precisely, his head—becomes the message the Yakuza is looking for with an aim to "erase" it.

After the two protagonists' victorious escape from the duel at the cyberpunk saloon, amidst the bleak dystopic cityscape Gibson reinforces the popular, ritualistic, and traditional ingredients of his story with a second and final duel. The Yakuza assassin finally reaches their refuge and Molly tells Johnny that the hitman is "fast, so fast [...] His nervous system's jacked up. He's factory custom" ("Johnny Mnemonic", 8). The members of

the Lo Tek tribe resort to a primitive combat ring to solve disputes, the Killing Floor, and Gibson displaces the importance of the male protagonist who gives the story its title to grant the attributes of old heroic narratives to the female character. As his champion, Molly takes Johnny's place in the Killing Floor and faces the lethal Yakuza cyborg, killing him after an intense fight and, thus, literally saving Johnny's head (20-21).

In medieval epic poems, male heroes such as Beowulf, Roland or Cid Campeador take the place of the physically unfit King to fight for him and defeat his enemies. In the ritualistic ring devised by Gibson, a female champion has replaced the male heroes of old patriarchy to, again, rescue a weak man in danger. Interestingly, in the film version of "Johnny Mnemonic" that Robert Longo directed in 1995 patriarchal gender roles were fully reestablished, despite the fact that Gibson was the scriptwriter. In the film, Johnny, played by Keanu Reeves, shows his evident qualities as a fighter, whereas his sidekick female companion, here called Jane instead of Molly and played by Dina Meyer, is rather a failure as bodyguard, being incapable of defeating Johnny's chasers or protecting him efficiently because she is sick. In this patriarchal version of Gibson's story, the male protagonist becomes the one who eventually saves the weaker female character from imminent death.

Molly reappears, as noted above, in *Neuromancer*. This is the way Gibson's heterodiegetic narrator, combined with Case's male gaze, describes his female character early in the plot:

[Case] realized that the glasses were surgically inset, sealing her sockets. The silver lenses seemed to grow from smooth



## The Female, the Intertextual, and the Transhuman in William Gibson's *Molly Millions*

pale skin above her cheekbones, framed by dark hair cut in a rough shag. The fingers curled around the fletcher were slender, white, tipped with polished burgundy. The nails looked artificial.

"I think you screwed up, Case. I showed up and you just fit me right into your reality picture".

"So what do you want, lady?" He sagged back against the hatch.

"You. One live body, brains still somewhat intact. Molly, Case. My name's Molly. I'm collecting you for the man I work for. Just wants to talk, is all. Nobody wants to hurt you".

"That's good".

"Cept I do hurt people sometimes, Case. I guess it's just the way I'm wired". She wore tight black glove leather jeans and a bulky black jacket cut from some matte fabric that seemed to absorb light. "If I put this dart gun away, will you be easy, Case? You look like you like to take stupid chances". (20)

In other words, Molly certainly looks "dressed to kill" but not in the shrewd, *femme fatale* way: transhuman augmentations have changed her into a fighting cyborg even if her more powerful weapons, the retractile blades under her nails, are still concealed from the view of focalizing Case. The male protagonist can notice only that her nails "look artificial". However, as happened to Johnny Mnemonic, Case soon focuses on Molly's surgically implanted glasses, a cybernetic device that also has a Pynchonian intertextual reading, as discussed later. Meanwhile, at the same time, *pace* Gillis, Molly appears in the novel to make it clear that her mission at the time is to enroll Case's "live body, brains still somewhat intact", for the cause she has been paid for. This means that the type of

new woman that she represents is not the only (post)human who is defined for being still physically 'meat'. The metaphor also applies to Case. Molly's boss wants him for his capacities as a hacker, for which he needs a suitable physical body, without which he could not be a console cowboy in virtual reality. Even when readers meet Dixie Flatline later in the narrative, this disembodied consciousness that only lives as software requires a physical entity to activate him (*Neuromancer*, 68). In other words, despite the old categorical assumptions favored by many critics, in Gibson's cyberpunk universe, to exist and do his job in virtual cyberspace a hacker also necessitates his meat: no body means no possible access to virtual reality. Consciousness, even as software that is played in a machine, always requires the help of physicality, the old Cartesian duality body/mind being a delusion that science supports no more. Gibson has reframed the old binary physical/virtual by erasing the dash: no physical means no virtual.

Despite being a dangerous mercenary, Molly's first description in the novel, from Case's perspective, does not exclude sexual connotations that may lure the male stare ("She wore tight black glove leather jeans", 20). In part, I agree with Leblanc when she comments that Molly "is deliberately unfeminine, lacking the traditional womanly attributes of both the 'Madonna' and the 'whore'" (Leblanc, 1997: 72). However, Case's male stare cannot refrain from finding a sexual angle in the female bodyguard, something that cannot be found in Johnny's first impressions of Molly, despite the fact that eventually they become lovers until Johnny's death—as Molly recollects in *Neuromancer* (114). Furthermore, Gibson's alteration of traditional



## The Female, the Intertextual, and the Transhuman in William Gibson's *Molly Millions*

categorical binaries also functions to locate his female protagonist beyond both patriarchal and feminist views and into less essentialist postfeminist grounds. In fact, later in the story, Molly also refers to her past as a “meat puppet” or prostitute, in this way recalling the double role, as soldiers and sexual dolls, allotted to the female replicants in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982). As she confesses, Molly needed the money to pay for her implants but her consciousness was “unplugged” every time she was with a client; she became a senseless object of sexual manipulation:

“This cost a lot”, she said, extending her right hand as though it held an invisible fruit. The five blades slid out, then retracted smoothly. “Costs to go to Chiba, costs to get the surgery, costs to have them jack your nervous system up so you'll have the reflexes to go with the gear . . . You know how I got the money, when I was starting out? Here. Not here, but a place like it, in the Sprawl. Joke, to start with, 'cause once they plant the cut-out chip, it seems like free money. Wake up sore, sometimes, but that's it. Renting the goods, is all. You aren't in, when it's all happening. House has software for whatever a customer wants to pay for . . .” (96, original ellipses)

Abandoning her own consciousness or even allowing somebody else—Case—to have access to it are the two most remarkable transhuman activities Molly is exposed to, though, over time, they go beyond sexual implications into a rebalance of gender power. One has to guess that Gibson intended the historical irony: with the help of the deadly implants paid with the money she earned as a prostitute in her past, Molly turns

into a fighting ninja capable of defeating the most dangerous men—Case soon addresses her as a “street samurai” (23). As such, she proves to be in both narratives not only an active, strong, and reliable sidekick for her male partners, Johnny Mnemonic and Case. She comes to the point of saving the life of the first and doing all the hard physical work for the second; without her, male success is not possible. The following fragment depicts the way Case conceives of Molly as a version of stereotypical action hero actors Bruce Lee and Clint Eastwood, when she has already become his replacement in physical reality:

She had it: the thing, the moves. And she'd pulled it all together for her entrance. Pulled it together around the pain in her leg and marched down Jane's stairs like she owned the place, elbow of her gun arm at her hip, forearm up, wrist relaxed, swaying the muzzle of the fletcher with the studied nonchalance of a Regency duelist. It was a performance. It was like the culmination of a life-time's observation of martial arts tapes, cheap ones, the kind Case had grown up on. For a few seconds, he knew, she was every bad-ass hero, Sony Mao in the old Shaw videos, Mickey Chiba, the whole lineage back to Lee and Eastwood. She was walking it the way she talked it. (135)

Meanwhile, the male protagonists also behave in rather unconventional ways, which classifies them as materialized examples of the fear of weakness many men expressed in the 1980s. As mentioned above, Johnny is described by Gibson also as a cyborg, a carrier of information he stores in a technological device he has implanted in his head. However, in patriarchal jargon Johnny



## The Female, the Intertextual, and the Transhuman in William Gibson's Molly Millions

overtly qualifies as a 'sissy', to the point that Molly has to replace him in the ritualist fight where she can finally defeat the Japanese hitman. After that, they will stay together for a number of years until the Yakuza kills Johnny. In *Neuromancer*, Case proves to be also an anti-heroic male protagonist, incapable of winning any physical fight. In fact, others inject neurotoxins in his body to cripple or kill him if he does not follow orders. Not surprisingly, as happened to Johnny Mnemonic, he avoids physical combat and frequently goes into virtual space leaving his 'meat' behind, a word that not only stresses the total abandonment of his body when he enters virtual cyberspace. The substitution of meat for flesh also suggests that the male protagonist of *Neuromancer* changes into a 'spirit' that has the ability to solve problems only in the virtual matrix. Thus, Gibson creates a sci-fi mythology in his early personal universe where the Platonic and later Christian binary body/soul has developed into the reframed binary *meat female fighter* (Molly)/*virtual male hacker* (Johnny and Case), mixing up the traditionally positive and negative connotations of the original binary.

However, along this process of transformation, Molly is not a mere female body behind the male mind or soul. In fact, in anthropological grounds, the 'manly soul' allegedly represented by Case in *Neuromancer* does not even coincide with the traditional representation of the soul as female that we see, for instance, in the Christian religion and in Jung's definition of the anima.<sup>4</sup> The strong intertextual ethos of

<sup>4</sup> Direct references to Jung are found in Gibson's early fiction—for instance, in his short story "The Gernsback Continuum"

Gibson's fiction helps us to understand further the reasons why he alters the old dichotomies male/female and body/soul in his early narratives. Molly becomes not only one of the new female heroes from the 1980s, evoking powerful figures from ancient mythologies or comic books and anticipating later cultural figures that copy her characteristics.<sup>5</sup> The intertextual links centered on the figure of Molly extend to Pynchon's representation of female energy in some of his short stories and especially in his first novel, *V.* (1963). I contend that Molly is also Gibson's intertextual version of the Pynchonian Lady V., the emblematic female representative of human and social

(1981)—also connecting it to Pynchon's oeuvre. Jung defines the archetype of the anima as follows: "Anima means soul and should designate something very wonderful and immortal. Yet this was not always so [...]. It is something that lives of itself, that makes us live; it is a life behind consciousness that cannot be completely integrated with it, but from which, on the contrary, consciousness arises" (1971: 26-27).

<sup>5</sup> Not only Trinity in *The Matrix* or the Princess in *Shrek* bring to mind Molly's influence on contemporary popular culture. Brian McHale contends that Gibson's contemporary fellow writer Kathy Acker "appropriates and rewrites material" from his first novel (1992: 233), including female ninja Molly, who would be a model for female protagonist Abhor in Acker's *Empire of the Senseless*. In this sense, Joseph Conte inconsistently argues that in "shifting attributes from Molly to Abhor, Acker critiques the fantasies of cyborg sex and violence that are rather tightly laced in *Neuromancer* and mocks the adolescent male subjectivity that comprises the largest audience for science fiction" (2002, 211; my emphasis). Apparently, for Conte adolescent female subjectivity is devoid of sex and violence fantasies.



## The Female, the Intertextual, and the Transhuman in William Gibson's *Molly Millions*

energy previously symbolized by Venus and the Virgin, according to Henry Adams's theory, famously quoted by Pynchon in his earlier short story "Entropy" (1960). As I have stated elsewhere, Pynchon's oeuvre, from his early short stories to his latest novel, *Bleeding Edge* (2013), embodies life energy—as representation of the Jungian anima archetype—in the figures of different female characters. No doubt, the first and most influential one of those characters is Lady V., a mysterious woman who becomes progressively more dangerous from Pynchon's earlier stories to his novel *V.*, where she finally dies after having experienced a long process of turning into a cybernetic creature. Along the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the energy used by the human species to colonize and control the planet becomes increasingly dangerous, passing from electricity to radioactivity, and so does Lady V., in the different manifestations that Pynchon draws of her, by adding artificial prostheses to her body (see Collado-Rodríguez, 2015: 256-57). It is specifically relevant to point out that when she dies in Chapter 11 of *V.*, in her manifestation as Bad Priest, Pynchon's character experiences a process of ritualistic dismemberment along which a number of children start removing her prostheses. Finally, anticipating Molly's most obvious implant, they "peeled back one eyelid to reveal a glass eye with the iris in the shape of a clock" (Pynchon, 343). Later, energy becomes incarnate in other female characters of variable morality, as indication that Pynchon's Lady V. can be, as the Jungian anima, good *and* bad (Collado-Rodríguez: 258-59)... and so can Molly.

### 3. Transhumanist Molly in a dystopic world

With her cybernetic eyes and nail implants, Molly also becomes the symbol of the female transhuman cyborg as a new source of replenished energy. Her place in the intertextual chain may help us to explain why Gibson still depicts strong female protagonists in his later narratives but, more specifically, why Molly is not just a sidekick of the male protagonist in either "Johnny Mnemonic" or *Neuromancer*. She becomes the essential source of energy for the male protagonist to be triumphant, and her achievements are the result both of her mental capacity and of her enhanced body. Thus, Molly represents an early invitation to the readers of Gibson's universe to ponder over the transhumanist project. However, the aim of (bio)technological advancements in his narratives is not exactly the one shared by believers in current transhumanist philosophy.

As it happens when we consider gender issues, in Gibson's fiction transhumanist enhancement constitutes, above all, a means to survive amid the chaotic remains of civilization; Molly is not rich and she uses the money she earns in her dangerous adventures to further enhance her capacities as a warrior. As mentioned above, in Gibson's fiction biotechnological implants are used by prostitutes not to feel what is been done to them or by mercenaries to become better combatants; traces of optimistic transhumanist philosophy and aims are not to be found in the original cyberpunk project. Critics frequently argue that transhumanist philosophy represents the continuation of the humanist project; it does not offer any significant response to



## The Female, the Intertextual, and the Transhuman in William Gibson's *Molly Millions*

the damage the human species has done to other species and to the environment in the Anthropocene, as critical posthumanism does. On the contrary, transhumanist believers think that by using prosthetic and biotechnological enhancements humans are on their way to perfection. Thus, in their introduction to post- and transhumanism, Robert Ranisch and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner openly contend that “transhumanism, according to its self-understanding, is a contemporary renewal of humanism. It embraces and eventually amplifies central aspects of secular and Enlightenment humanist thought, such as belief in reason, individualism, science, progress, as well as self-perfection or cultivation” (2014: 8). Such optimism about humanity’s future is not to be found in Gibson’s early fiction because it is based on a dystopic representation of the world. As it happens in Pynchon’s fiction, Gibson’s characters fit in the influential understanding of posthumanity that Norbert Wiener started to develop in the 1950s, when he already highlighted the notion that we “are not stuff that abides, but patterns that perpetuate themselves” (1954: 96). Our bodies continuously experience new physical changes in line with the information stored in our DNA, the environment we inhabit, and the circumstances to which we are exposed along our lives. Accordingly, with each new implant she gets, Molly does not become a more perfected transhuman but a deadlier fighter because she inhabits a naturalist world in which only the fittest can survive. The posthuman in her is not the transcendental goal pursued by the optimistic brand of transhumanism, but the more realistic result of her courage when facing the hardships of the world she inhabits. Certainly, her prostheses

are the outcome of technological improvements brought about by several centuries of humanism but also of thousands of years of human violence against themselves and against the planet. Clark and Rossini argue that transhumanist “prostheses are skeuomorphs of humanism, vestiges of heroic aspirations that preserve rather than challenge the Cartesian mind-body split so definitive of Western modernity and the Eurocentric myth of progress as technoscientific development” (2017: xiv).

However, Gibson’s fiction is not so categorically simple. The mind/body binary reaches transhuman combinations in *Neuromancer* that, while apparently reaffirming the Cartesian humanist binary, also go beyond it until the binary dissolves. Within the writer’s cyberpunk universe, Simstim technology describes a rather fluctuating reality where gender, sex, and individuality have been left behind. A Simstim desk allows Case to switch into Molly’s perceptual system. That is to say, the technological device produces in the receiver the simulated responses that the other subject actually experiences in the ‘meat’ world. According to the narrator, Case feels somehow superior and disgusted with physical reality, even when it manifests via the device:

Cowboys didn’t get into Simstim, he thought, because it was basically a meat toy. He knew that the trodes he used and the little plastic tiara dangling from a Simstim deck were basically the same, and that the cyberspace matrix was actually a drastic simplification of the human sensorium, at least in terms of presentation, but Simstim itself struck him as a gratuitous multiplication of flesh input. (39)



## The Female, the Intertextual, and the Transhuman in William Gibson's Molly Millions

However, Case's own belief in his superior position—the male 'mind' controlling the female 'body'—does not resist a merely superficial analysis of what really happens and who is, in fact, the one who succeeds in their mission. Although still following Case's perception of Molly's movements, the narrator makes it very clear who is really the active one in the technological sensorial combination:

The abrupt jolt into other flesh. Matrix gone, a wave of sound and color . . . She was moving through a crowded street, past stalls vending discount software, prices felt penned on sheets of plastic, fragments of music from countless speakers. Smells of urine, free monomers, perfume, patties of frying krill. For a few frightened seconds *he fought helplessly to control her body. Then he willed himself into passivity*, became the passenger behind her eyes. (39, emphasis added; original ellipsis)

Fortunately for their mission, Molly remains in control of her body (which includes her mind), while Case is relegated to being a passive spectator of their technological symbiosis. Of course, the use of Simstim raises gender issues in the narrative, but the transhuman result makes Molly's role more solidly postfeminist. To this effect, Conte reminds us that as "anyone who has participated pseudonymously in chat rooms, or Multiple User Dungeons, on Internet services knows, gender, race, age, and appearance can all be altered, constructed, or exchanged in virtual reality" (2001: 212). Conte also suggests that the alteration at will of gender identity may become politically liberating (212). However, in this example located at the beginning of cyberpunk fiction, Molly is

not Case's mere avatar but the active one of the dual consciousness involved in the process. She is clearly the (dynamic) protagonist, her technological enhancements being, in addition, an extra tool to help her to accomplish their mission.

Insistently, some critics have claimed that, after all, Molly is a 'body' for hire, a physical commodity, both earlier as a prostitute and later as a bodyguard (Schmeink, 2014: 227). However, in the two stories studied here she is always the active protagonist and actual winner. Nonetheless, at the end important issues seem to remain uncertain. Is not Gibson's dystopic future the obvious result of ancestral patriarchal rule? Is not Molly simply a tomboy, a woman playing the role of a macho man? To answer in the affirmative would be to condemn masculine individuals to be the only violent, and at times perverse, gender in the human species, an assumption that both history and genetics seem to contradict. Within the context of a life understood in naturalist terms, to find a definitive answer is not easy. Paraphrasing American poet and feminist critic Adrienne Rich, we need to view William Gibson in the exact position in which he has been born and educated: he is 20<sup>th</sup>-century American-Canadian, white and male, but, despite those circumstances, he has created Molly Millions in the terms debated here. As Rich affirmed, "A movement for change lives in feelings, actions and words" (1994: 223), and Gibson's choice of words for his characters is clear enough: *active* belongs to woman.



## The Female, the Intertextual, and the Transhuman in William Gibson's Molly Millions

### Works Cited

- BAUDRILLARD, Jean (1983). *Simulations*, trans. by Paul Foss et al. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press for Semiotext[e].
- CLARKE, Bruce and Manuela ROSSINI, eds. (2017). *The Cambridge Companion to Posthumanism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- COLLADO-RODRÍGUEZ, Francisco (2015). "Meaning Deferral, Jungian Symbolism, and the Quest for V. in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*", *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 56:3, 255-269.
- CONTE, Joseph (2002). "The Superabundance of Cyberspace: Postmodern Fiction in the Information Age", *Design and Debris: A Chaotics of Postmodern American Fiction*. Alabama UP. 93-219.
- GIBSON, William (1984). *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace Science Fiction Books.
- (1986). *Burning Chrome*. New York: Ace Books.
- GILLIS, Stacy (2007). "The (Post)Feminist Politics of Cyberpunk", *Gothic Studies*, 9.2: 7-19.
- HARAWAY, Donna J. (1991). "A Cyborg Manifesto", *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge. 149-182.
- HUTCHEON, Linda (1985). *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-century Art Forms*. London: Methuen.
- JUNG, Carl G. (1971). "The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious", *The Complete Works*, vol. 9, Part 1. Ed. Herbert Read et al. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- KREVEL, Mojca (2014). "Back to the Future': Technological Singularity in Gibson's Sprawl Trilogy", *B.A.S. British and American Studies*, 20: 27-35.
- LACAN, Jacques (1966). "The Signification of the Phallus", *Écrits: A Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Routledge / Taylor & Francis, 2005. 215-22.
- LACAPRA, Dominick (2001). *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.
- LEBLANC, Lauraine (1997). "Razor Girls: Genre and Gender in Cyberpunk Fiction", *Women and Language* 20.1: 71-76.
- LUDAS, Victoria (2011). "American Manpower: Work and Masculinity in the 1970s", MA Dissertation. New York: CUNY Academic Works.
- MCHALE, Brian (1992). *Constructing Postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- MCLUHAN, Marshall (1964). "The Medium is the Message", *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press. 7-21.
- NIXON, Nicola (1992). "Cyberpunk: Preparing the Ground for Revolution or Keeping the Boys Satisfied?" *Science Fiction Studies*, 19.2: 219-35.
- PYNCHON, Thomas (1963). V. London: Picador.
- RANISCH, Robert and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner (2014). *Post- and Transhumanism: An Introduction*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- RICH, Adrienne (1984, 1994). "Notes toward a Politics of Location", *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985*. New York: W. W. Norton. 210-31.
- SCHMEINK, Lars (2014). "Cyberpunk and Dystopia: William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984)", Eckart Voigts-Virchow and Alessandra Boller (eds.), *Dystopia, Science Fiction, Post-Apocalypse: Classics, New Tendencies, Model Interpretations*. Trier: WVT. 221-36.
- STATURE, Pawel (2018). "What Was Expected of William Gibson's Early Fiction: Themes in Negative Reception", *Polish Journal of American Studies*, 12: 336-49.
- WIENER, Norbert (1954). *The Human Use of Human Beings*. London: Free Association Books.

# Of Mutants and Monsters: A Posthuman Study of Verhoeven's and Wiseman's *Total Recall*



Beatriz Domínguez-García<sup>1</sup>  
Universidad de Huelva

© Beatriz Domínguez-García, 2021

**Abstract:** The abuse and violence exerted on the posthuman bodies of fiction is born from their resistance to the postulates of the most traditional humanism. The diachronic vision of the figure of the mutant, as a dehumanized and isolated body from the transhumanist perspective, anticipates the debates generated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century about the survival of hierarchy in the typification of bodies into 'more or less' abled. The examples of corporeal alterity are, thus, manifested as a monstrous, mutant image that warns spectators about the dangers of both medical and environmental experiments. In this sense, the analysis of the film *Total Recall* (Paul Verhoeven, 1990) and its remake (Len Wiseman, 2012), serves as a starting point to offer a critical vision of the abjection caused by the dismantling of the human form, in the words of Manuela Rossini. The critique emerges from Feminist Studies but also from other contemporary schools which also question the hierarchy between bodies such as Queer or Crip Theory. From a posthuman perspective, the presentation of disabled bodies reflects humanity's propensity for their nullification and, therefore, their capacity to be exploited and discarded.

**Keywords:** mutant, posthumanism, disability, *Total Recall* (1990, 2012), Paul Verhoeven, Len Wiseman

## 1. One short story, two film versions

Paul Verhoeven's *Total Recall* (1990)

---

<sup>1</sup> I wish to acknowledge the funding provided by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities (Research Project "Bodies in Transit 2", ref. FFI2017-84555-C2-1-P), the European Regional Development Fund, and the Spanish Research Agency for the writing of this essay. Also, the funding provided by the Regional Ministry of Economy, Knowledge, Enterprise and Universities of Andalusia, and the European Regional Development Fund for the writing of this essay. Project "Embodiments, Genders and Difference: Cultural Practices of Violence and Discrimination", ref. 1252965.

exploits common fears of contemporary societies in relation to our own place in them. As a text dealing with inhuman excesses, the position not only of the hero-protagonist but also of his fellow mutant companions reflects the fear of the dispossessed in what seems to be—according to popular cinema—the future of humankind. Manuela Rossini states that,

Literature, and science fiction in particular, is an important cultural resource for dealing with advances in medicine, biotechnologies, and informatics. But literature does not merely react to technological development and offer ethical



## Of Mutants and Monsters: A Posthuman Study of Verhoeven's and Wiseman's *Total Recall*

guidance. Rather, there is a double movement: the technological potential will affect the way the human body/subject is defined but these new meanings (produced in texts and images) will influence, if not our actual use and even development of them, our handling of technologies. Imagineered in "scientific" texts, I suggest, such embodied subjects can be seen as cultural prefigurations of future human beings in the 'real' world. (2016: 164-65)

Len Wiseman's 2012 version reinforces the divide among those beings which usually blur the category human by erasing the mutants of Verhoeven's film. Yet both films still expose this divide by asserting not only who can be defined as human but also who is worthy of inclusion in the category. As Ferrando explains in "Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms: Differences and Relations",

In the West, the human has been historically posed in a hierarchical scale to the non-human realm. Such a symbolic structure, based on a human exceptionalism well depicted in the Great Chain of Being, has not only sustained the primacy of humans over non-human animals, but it has also (in)formed the human realm itself, with sexist, racist, classist, homophobic, and ethnocentric presumptions. In other words, not every human being has been considered as such: women, African-American descendants, gays and lesbians, differently-abled people, among others, have represented the margins to what would be considered human. (2013: 28)

The current cultural climate abounds

with examples of the marginalization of these human beings whose classification puts them outside the human realm.

The two films analysed here are adaptations of Philip K. Dick's short story "We Can Remember it for you Wholesale" (1966). The films, situated in a near future, introduce a protagonist obsessed by the nightmares in which he is not the factory worker he seems to be. In both versions, this obsession gets the protagonist, Quaid (Arnold Schwarzenegger and Colin Farrell, respectively), to Rekall, a company where memories can be inserted in human brains as 'vacations' that cannot be afforded in the flesh. Once the protagonists buy a set package of memories involving a spy adventure, they seem to recover their real identities as spies whose memories have been tampered with to forget their missions. In Verhoeven's film, Quaid (Schwarzenegger), goes to Mars to find the truth about his supposed past as the spy Hauser and what was done to his memory, eventually joining the mutated Martians fighting against the corporate businessman Coahaagen (Ronny Cox), who governs Mars. Coahaagen seems to have hidden a possible solution for Mars' lack of oxygen and Quaid is presented as the person whose technological know-how could help restore the balance broken by Coahaagen. The mutants are, as it turns out, a result of the oxygen deprivation which Coahaagen controls and uses to impose his authority over the human colony on Mars.

In Wiseman's remake, Mars is no longer present and the 2012 Quaid (Colin Farrell) lives on an Earth devastated by chemical warfare where only two geographical areas are still populated by humans: the Colony, occupying the



## Of Mutants and Monsters: A Posthuman Study of Verhoeven's and Wiseman's *Total Recall*

Australian area, and the United Federation of Britain, the former United Kingdom. Both areas are connected by a means of transport through the Earth's core, named the Fall, which allows people from the Colony to commute to the UFB for work. The protagonist moves easily between both areas so that he can find the answers he is looking for, and enters the lowest ranks of society to find the leader of the resistance against Chancellor Cohaagen (Brian Cranston). Cohaagen is eager to get more land to allow for expansion and Quaid needs to destroy the army of robots, named the Synthetics, which Cohaagen plans to use on the Colony.

Whether we agree or not with Ndalianis when she states that “underlying the futuristic themes of the fantastic and the illusionistic splendours of effects spectacles, *RoboCop*, *Total Recall*, *Starship Troopers* and *Hollow Man* confront the viewer with a critique of current socio-political issues” (2001: 2), it is clear that Verhoeven's treatment of these issues is particularly relevant for the movie by the Dutch director analysed here. As Ndalianis puts it, “as we progress from *RoboCop* to *Hollow Man*, we track his growing concern with the effects of ever-advancing, technologically mediated realities on the construction of subjectivity, and the intensification of globalisation and multi-national corporatism” (2). Borrowing from the theories exposed in “Totally Recalling Arnold: Sex and Violence in the New Bad Future” (1990) by Fred Glass, Ndalianis states that the “effects of the economic, political and social dynamic are dispersed across the collective body. Citizens, for example, are also mutants (physical and psychic) and their mutations are the direct result of a government which

provided only ‘cheap domes and no way to clean out the rays’” (6).<sup>2</sup> Even though the status of these mutated humans as full citizens of Mars is questionable, considering that they live at the margins of civilization and are regarded as part of Mars' “freak show”, Ndalianis is right to point out that the mutations are a consequence of the careless consideration of the needs of the lower stratum of society. The mutants live far off the main colony dome, as the train trip to Venusville shows, in a futuristic ghetto intended for the tourists to gawk at with no second thought about what caused their mutations.

Ndalianis concludes her analysis of Verhoeven's film stating how the movie seemingly articulates in its ending a warning against technological advances and media environments which consists of not forgetting “to allow room for humanity in these new social spaces” (8). As I mentioned earlier, this could be the reason why in Wiseman's version, the mutants disappear to make room for another nonhuman category, according to the film's discourses (as I will explain later): the colonized. Whereas the Martians in Verhoeven's film where once ‘normal’ humans born in Mars, who now show the effects of the oxygen deprivation Cohaagen (Ronny Cox) imposed on them, the colonized in Wiseman's version are

---

<sup>2</sup> In his article, Glass suggests that “the mutants' inhuman bodily appearance is a continuous reminder to the viewer of technological issues: control over the most important technologies on the planet, the air machines and domes, as well as a reminder of the real inhumanity of their oppressor, is part of the mutant make-up. [...] Mutants represent the distortion of human potential under authoritarian rule” (1990: 5).



## Of Mutants and Monsters: A Posthuman Study of Verhoeven's and Wiseman's *Total Recall*

portrayed as the normal-bodied, dispossessed and powerless inhabitants of a much-coveted territory. Since the latter lack any repulsive features, the traditional “freak show” seems to be absent from the plot, yet the threat of bodily excess is still present in the multicultural and multiracial population. In posthuman terms both Verhoeven's Martian mutants and Wiseman's colonized people embody the nonhuman alignment. By reading Wiseman's depiction of the inhabitants of the colony in postcolonial terms (see Sardar, 1999) and bringing Said's definition of orientalism (1978) to the table, it seems that the colonized inhabitants of Wiseman's story can be paired with Verhoeven's repulsive mutants, for “the human needs the nonhuman to come into the mode of its own becoming” (Clarke, 2016: 150).

Wiseman's adaptation unrealistically continues some of the plot dynamics Verhoeven's exploited. There is a female partner for each side of the hero that sits in opposition to the Quaid/Hauser (Colin Farrell) pairing: the meeker the hero, the more savage the female partner. Likewise, the dreams of an alternative reality are a burden for the meek Quaid incarnation although the locations have changed. The most extreme change, however, is the change from the nuclear threat that is at the core of Verhoeven's version to the threat of overpopulation and the scarcity of resources on an Earth devastated by a chemical war. However, this fundamental change from the previous version just reinforces the same political agenda present in Verhoeven's film and embodied in the Quaid/Hauser dilemma, which still clearly represents the fight between the oppressors and the oppressed for vital resources, in this case

for living space. The elimination of the mutants from the 2012 version does not erase the fight but tries to create a cautionary tale about the excesses of neoliberal market economies and the new threat of chemical war. Moreover, it bases its critique on the presentation of future working conditions in which 20<sup>th</sup> gains are erased. In fact, as Stewart convincingly argues,

Labor is outsourced there [in the Colony], but via warp-speed transport rather than networked transmission (as in the normal course of an offshore service force). This involves a further dodge of global warming fears—when the antipodal labor squads make their daily commute through the earth's burning core: an endurance test thousands of degrees more intolerable, even though heat-shielded, than the worst vulnerabilities of an atmospherically depleted terrestrial surface. Everything urgent is fictionalized into a haze of defused planetary premonition, including an imputed terrorism which is really revolution—and which succeeds in the end, thanks to our hero, only when the most dramatic political threat, panoptic coercion, is reversed. (2012: 9-10)

Both texts, then, present the same abuse and oppression by one powerful segment of the population over the other. At the same time, the regime creates a divide among human beings that classifies them according to their status within the societies presented as more or less human. Venusville, the dwelling of the mutants in Verhoeven's version, and the Colony in Wiseman's are presented as a dystopic evolution of present-day slums. If, as Shaw has noted, “the imagination of another world is an exercise in urban planning” (2018: 36), both texts manifest



## Of Mutants and Monsters: A Posthuman Study of Verhoeven's and Wiseman's *Total Recall*

the indestructibility of the peripheral and marginal neighbourhood which creates categorizations of humanness among city dwellers. And what these neighbourhoods have in common is the depiction of oppressed members of society easily forgotten and disposed of by the powerful elite that rules. Hence, through an analysis of Cudd's study on oppression (2006) together with an introduction of Tyler's concept of revolting subjects (2013) and Shaw's study of the parasite in posthuman urbanism, it is my contention that both films base their main plot line on the traditional hierarchical distinction of humanness. By positioning the hero in league with what both films portray as the nonhumans, both play with current fears of dispossession and human oppression resulting in a technophobic ideal of the future. In this sense, Ellis states:

In this construction of the fantastic's hesitation, the audience can become identified to themselves as cultural dreamers, and in their dream-text (their reading of the film) flows forth displaced (to a Martian future) and condensed cultural anxieties that they possess concerning the unfolding of multi-national, globalised late corporate capitalist practises, involving a deep-seated disruption of established expectations concerning industrial inertia. (1995: 88).

Thus, current fears of "globalised late corporate capitalist practises" permeate texts covering roughly a period of over thirty years, as the two films under analysis here show in which the position of the humans is threatened by market value.

Hence, these texts can be and should be dissected with a feminist posthumanist critique. Throughout the following pages,

the posthuman beings portrayed in the texts are discussed in the nonhuman category which the films place them in to facilitate the lasting dualism they rely on. However, given that the texts seem closer to transhumanism than to posthumanism, the posthuman encompasses the characters presented as nonhumans, the mutants and the colonized, embodying thus the posthuman inclusivity that Ferrando aptly advocates (2016: 220). Moreover, the Cartesian distinction between body and mind no longer holds, as seen in the protagonists' dilemma together with the presentation of a physicality that transcends the human. By establishing the category nonhuman as an equivalent of disposable, the analysis that follows tries to advocate for an inclusive understanding of human that critically signals the unethical position of the dominant set of the population depicted in the films.

### 2. 'Waste populations': The parasite

In her ground-breaking work *Philosophical Posthumanism*, Ferrando, in a diachronic reading of de Beauvoir, Irigaray and Butler, affirms that "the human, in tune with de Beauvoir, is not an essence, but a process; one is not born, but rather becomes human through experience, socialization, reception, and retention (or refusal) of human normative assets" (2013: 71). Ferrando continues her theory by stating:

Simultaneously, revisiting Irigaray, the human has been established in the ontological denial of the nonhuman; the recognition of the human has been sustained by a negative reduction of the others—or better, by the absence of a real acknowledgment of embodied alterity and



## Of Mutants and Monsters: A Posthuman Study of Verhoeven's and Wiseman's *Total Recall*

onto-epistemological plurality—through related concomitant exclusions, marked as the inhuman, the subhuman, the less-than-human, and so on. (71-72)

This rightful appropriation of de Beauvoir's claim clearly indicates the struggles seen in post-apocalyptic films such as Wiseman's. From the visual adaptation of the *Hunger Games* saga to Korean action thriller *Time to Hunt*, recent science-fiction and dystopian films—among other fantastic genres—are keen to continue the thread and the threat of how the neoliberal human enhancement and resource appropriation result in post-apocalyptic plots in which 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries anxieties about the neoliberal climate transform Western idealization of democracy into oligarchies centred around the exploitation of resources by a powerful elite. Be the cause medical, technological or agrarian resources, the result resembles the 19<sup>th</sup> century class struggle.

This exploitation of resources also includes human beings that, by their transformation into assets, are not only disposable but also dispossessed of their humanness. In this respect, the oppression suffered emanates from the dehumanization of this human group which not only helps create the atmosphere in which current social distinctions are presented but also establishes the obvious link between oppression and dehumanization, which according to Ann E Cudd is one of the harms suffered by oppressed populations together with "inequality" and "limitation" (2005: 22). Drawing from Agamben's definition of the 'anthropological machine', Ferrando explains that "in the historical process of humanizing the human, the animal has

been placed, more than as the antithesis of 'man', as another gradient in a hierarchy which would pose a whole spectrum of human others between the animal and the human, so that women, nonwhites, queers, 'freaks', among others, would be placed accordingly" (2013: 74). I am interested here in the inclusion of the word 'freaks' by Ferrando when defining who are 'the' nonhumans, even though her discussion continues to point out the absence of the category woman in Agamben's theory. Yet, her classification of human others as, in her vocabulary, nonhumans is useful to establish how the mutant population in the Mars colony are articulated throughout Verhoeven's movie and how their articulation 'contaminates' the hero.

The lack of power of the mutants and the members of the Colony in each movie is quite evident. The control over oxygen in Verhoeven's film and over the Fall in Wiseman's version establish not only the unequal situation of these social groups but also their dependence on the governing oligarchies. This presentation of the two oppressed social groups reinforces the anxieties of contemporary societies about their disenfranchisement, dependence, and dehumanization. In posthuman terms, inequality and oppression are perceived as the basis for inhuman treatment and classification. In fact, Ferrando's discussion of feminist epistemology and the possible "starting point of knowledge production" is also grounded in terms of oppression and applies to the mutants and the colonized:

Since marginalized and/or oppressed individuals and groups must learn the views of those who belong to the privileged hegemonic positions, they can be considered bicultural; therefore, their



## Of Mutants and Monsters: A Posthuman Study of Verhoeven's and Wiseman's *Total Recall*

perspectives may be seen as more objective than the views of the people located at the center of the hegemonic discourse, who are not required to learn about the margins. (2013: 151)

Although this group of oppressed individuals may be bicultural, as Ferrando establishes, they are also, by means of the oppression they suffer, regulated as nonhuman subjects that do not belong to the privilege/mainstream group, as her discussion of the position of women as oppressed reflects later (151-2). Bringing this idea to the analysis of these marginalised groups in the films under discussion here reinforces the issue of their marginalization and oppression, and the need for rescue both films express. By becoming a member of the marginalized group of oppressed nonhuman beings, and by virtue of his understanding of both cultures according to Ferrando, the hero Quaid also assumes his bicultural position, after his encounter with both the oppressor and the oppressed groups. The fact that his new positioning is the result of tampering with his memory reveals how the hero is portrayed as the possibility of human redemption from the excesses granted by the neoliberal market presented in the movies.

In this respect, it seems useful to bring to the analysis British sociologist Imogen Tyler's study of non-privileged subjects published in her volume *Revolted Subjects* (2013). In her definition of the concept of "social abjection", Tyler, after defining abjection as a process "that strip people of their human dignity and reproduce them as dehumanized waste" (21), indicates that "The disciplinary forces of sovereignty, its processes of inclusion and exclusion, produce waste populations: an excess that threatens

from within, but which the system cannot fully expel as it requires this surplus both to constitute the boundaries of the state and to legitimize the prevailing order of power" (20). Interestingly enough, Tyler is analysing media coverage of marginalised groups' expulsion from the city and/or the land. Moreover, both the mutants and the inhabitants of the Colony are positioned in this spatial marginality for, as she further argues, "Waste populations are in this way *included through their exclusion*, and it is this paradoxical logic which the concept of abjection describes" (19, original emphasis). In Verhoeven's film, the mutant leader Kuato personifies the abject and with him both the mutant population and Quaid himself, as it has been widely discussed before.

In Wiseman's version, the abject is constructed as the racialized and culturally distinct other, as the inhabitants of the Colony, on the one hand, and, at the same time as villainous Chancellor Coahaagen, on the other. According to Kristeva, "It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (1982: 4); hence, for each populated area the other is the abject. The comparison in the movies reflects this anxiety of dispossession, which recalls the ideology so well-articulated in the extreme-right political discourses of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century as it is eerily exposed in the films.

In the two scenes from the films in which typically the villains explain at length their motivations, these issues of marginalization and oppression are articulated by means of power dynamics. Both in Verhoeven's 1990 and Wiseman's 2012 versions, the Coahaagen character is



## Of Mutants and Monsters: A Posthuman Study of Verhoeven's and Wiseman's *Total Recall*

painted as the puppet master—in alliance with Hauser in Verhoeven's version—of the Quaid character. In both cases the villain is the creator of the plot to bring Quaid to existence by making Hauser first infiltrate the resistance and then by making him forget their existence. Thus, the hero, Quaid, is a double agent who does not know that he is a double agent and, at the same time, a willing fabrication by his alter ego, Hauser, as the 1990 Coahaagen tells him. By his own ignorance of the scheme, once he has lost his memory as Hauser, Quaid's position as part of the resistance is constructed as the perfect disguise for a double agent, in that he is not aware of his own duplicity; hence, his heroic role as saviour of the oppressed, marginalized group of mutants is destroyed. His embodiment as a rightfully "moral outcast", in the sense used by Tyler, disintegrates the moment the fabrication of the person Quaid is exposed by the 1990 Hauser, in Verhoeven's film, when Hauser, that was thought have disappeared by memory tampering, states "it's my body that you have there, and I want it back" to a Quaid too much astonished to react in the scene in which Coahaagen confronts Quaid. Quaid's turn to nonhumanity is thus constructed as a ploy by Coahaagen to achieve his desired totalitarian authority by undermining the mutant resistance. Besides, Quaid's chosen role as "moral outcast" is proved to be the "logical" result of Coahaagen's tampering with his memory and not a real ethical choice.

In a similar way, Wiseman's Quaid acts as the double agent which gives the location of the resistance headquarters to Chancellor Coahaagen, an act of betrayal which precipitates the death of the resistance leader Matthias and the invasion of the Colony. Both versions of

the hero have been imposed on the marginalized and oppressed populations as the bicultural member(s) of society Ferrando mention(s) under cover of a convenient memory loss which allowed them to mingle with the outcasts and become part of the nonhuman population. Moreover, it seems that these two Quaid's are the embodiment of these "waste populations", these social "parasites", which need to be eradicated and eliminated, since the two Coahaagens—and Verhoeven's Hauser—reclaim their human bodies and expect to eliminate their bicultural consciousness and nonhumanness by re-installing their previous selves.

The nonhuman categorization of the mutant or the Colony's population, also classifies them as both "parasites" and "scavengers", incorporating here Shaw's definition and theorization in her *Posthuman Urbanism* (145). This categorisation, which emanates from both Coahaagens' villainous discourses in the films, clearly problematises their right to humanness. Labelled as terrorists, the utmost inhuman aberration of our present-day anxieties in both films, these populations—and the leaders who represent them—have to ascertain the rightfulness of their fight and plight to the hero, and, for the benefit of empathy, to the audience. By convincing the hero of their right to fight for their place in the human hierarchy that excludes and marginalises them, Quaid then moves towards parasitism and aligns himself against the system "which fears parasites" (Shaw, 2018: 152). At the same time, the location of these parasites in underdeveloped urban areas (in Wiseman) or outside them (in Verhoeven) characterizes them as "the abjected other", following the ground-breaking



## Of Mutants and Monsters: A Posthuman Study of Verhoeven's and Wiseman's *Total Recall*

work by Julia Kristeva; as Shaw points out, the parasite is excluded from this hierarchy and, at the same time, “both unacknowledged and essential to the maintenance of both the myth itself and the bodies that perform it” (36).

It seems clear, following Shaw, that “capital is a parasitical system which fears parasites. The more unstable the system, the more parasites are feared, and the more energy is expended to find and destroy them” (152). Thus, the two Coahaagens, together with their villainous side-kicks, become aware of their own fragility and set out to destroy the “parasites”. By enacting this misdeed, their fellow humans, mutated or not, are sunk further into nonhuman categories which position the hero(s) among them. This dehumanization strengthens their oppression and the precariousness of their lives and places the two Quaid in the uncomfortable position of hypocritical heroes. Likewise, the reclaiming of the heroes’ bodies to restore them to their previous consciousness also places each Quaid in this nonhuman category and, at the same time, shows how precarious their lives are. As Judith Butler puts it, these nonhumans/others are placing demands on the hero to ethically end the oppression and rejection that makes them disposable (131). However, the constraints of the popular genre the films belong to prevent the successful resolution of the social conflict.

According to Fernández-Menicucci, “in Verhoeven’s film the marginal, the excluded—the Others, in short—must gather again in grateful awe around heroic manhood, their saviour and protector. Gender and class divisions are still most evident, but they have magically ceased to matter” (2014: 15). In this sense, bringing back Cudd’s analysis of oppression, Quaid ceases to be an oppressive agent by

renouncing his position in the oppressor group since, as this theorist states, “to be an oppressor, one needs to be a member of a privileged group, to gain from oppression of another social group, to intend to so gain, and to act to realize that intention by contributing to the oppression of the oppressed group from whose oppression one gains” (2005: 23). Yet, the personification of both heroes as saviours simplifies the complex dynamics the films are required to depict. Neither Quaid can successfully be the heir to the murdered resistance leaders, neither world can successfully erase the distinctions that created them.

Once the alien technology which Coahaagen was hiding from the Martians in Verhoeven’s film is switched on, the new green Mars recalls Earth; however, the people that inhabit it comes from Earth, the distance between the tourist resort and Venusville is still intact. Once the Fall, the transport that united the Colony and the UFB, is destroyed in Wiseman’s version, the Colony stays the same. It is true that the threat represented by the uber villain Chancellor Coahaagen has been eliminated, yet there is no real ethical change unless it is accepted that the individual change of the heroes can facilitate the collective ones. In fact, it could be contented that by absorbing “the identity of the other” (Sardar, 1991: 195) in their own heroic discourses what really happens is that the others are ridiculed and presented as “an ahistorical identity-less mass isolated and excluded from representing the existing social and political powers” (Sardar: 201). Thus, the two Quaid trivialize the nonhumanness and precariousness of those others by enacting their only possible role as the lonely patriarchal hero of popular cinema who saves the world and whoever they choose to protect.



## Of Mutants and Monsters: A Posthuman Study of Verhoeven's and Wiseman's *Total Recall*

### 3. 'Symbolic dehumanization': The freak show, the Synthetics and the grotesque body

In Verhoeven's 'freak show' the grotesque bodies of the mutants seem to exist in order to allow "the sensationalism of the spectacle"<sup>3</sup> (Sardar, 1991: 196) of the traditional freak show, rather than to show the consequences of utter oppression, exploitation and rejection. In contrast, in Wiseman's multicultural Colony the grotesque bodies of its inhabitants, as multiracial and multicultural ones, allow a similar proposition.<sup>4</sup> The nonhuman categorization of these human beings is not questioned when the heroes' tasks focus on destroying both Coahaagens and their assistants. However, as Ferrando asserts, "the freak has historically challenged the us/them paradigm"; and as she continues, "the symbolic significance of the 'freak' in Western culture, as that human which cannot be reduced to a fixed

entity, but represents the bridge, the dissolution of strict binaries" (2019: 80). As a result, as they can't be labelled "a 'normal' human"—that is "a body that had been posed as the human norm in separation from other less-than, or more than, human bodies" (80)—both the mutants and the inhabitants of the Colony, as Fernández-Mendicucci has stated, have to look up in awe to the heroes' accomplishment. Even though it seemed that the heroes aligned themselves with the dispossessed, in the end in their isolation from the rest of the members of this (non)human group, they maintain their distance and the hierarchy of humanness and of able bodies. In sum, Verhoeven's Quaid transforms himself from a nonhuman body into a superhuman one which sets him apart from the rest of the inhabitants of the worlds introduced and prevents the hierarchy of humanness to disappear. This hero's body clearly stresses the distinction between his body and the bodies of the mutated human beings, for, as Bakhtin affirms,

The grotesque ignores the impenetrable surface that closes and limits the body as a separate and completed phenomenon. The grotesque image displays not only the outward but also the inner features of the body: blood, bowels, heart and other organs. The outward and inward features are often merged into one. (1984: 318)

Dehumanization is brought a step further in Wiseman's remake. This time, the leader of the resistance wants to destroy the synthetic army of robots which Chancellor Coahaagen has created with the sole purpose of conquering the Colony—at whatever cost. These machines are not imbued with life as

---

<sup>3</sup> Sardar quotes David Harvey who in *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (1989) states: "the immediacy of events, the sensationalism of the spectacle (political, scientific, military, as well as those of entertainment), become the stuff of which consciousness is forged" (54).

<sup>4</sup> My understanding of 'grotesque bodies' follows here the one proposed by Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*, "Not only parody in its narrow sense but all the other forms of grotesque realism degrade, bring down to earth, turn their subject into flesh. This is the peculiar trait of this genre which differentiates it from all the forms of medieval high art and literature. The people's laughter which characterized all the forms of grotesque realism from immemorial times was linked with the bodily lower stratum. Laughter degrades and materializes" (1984: 20).



## Of Mutants and Monsters: A Posthuman Study of Verhoeven's and Wiseman's *Total Recall*

others are in current popular texts, yet their role in the narrative agrees with Rutsky's proposition in that

The starkness of this opposition between 'good' and 'bad' technologies seems to affirm the idea that the dividing line between technology and humanity must always be upheld; technology must know its 'proper' place, even when—or especially when—it comes to life, as can be seen in the long series of artificial beings, sentient machines, robots and androids, cyborgs, and artificial intelligences portrayed in literature, films, and other media that have threatened to destroy, enslave, or replace humanity. (2016: 182-83)

The 2012 Quaid seems to be the only one who knows the kill switch that can stop these robots. The machinations orchestrated by Chancellor Cohageen are the same ones that Verhoven's Cohaagen intended: to create the perfect double agent. In the traditional 'villain-explains-himself' scene, the 2012 Cohaagen not only informs Matthias, the resistance leader, that there is no kill switch for the synthetic army, but also tells Quaid how he was implanted with a "memory cap" to find the resistance headquarters and their leader. Like the Quaid in Verhoeven's film when he faces Hauser, Wiseman's Quaid is left speechless and, although this time there is no visual recording of Hauser claiming back his body, Hauser's memory is preserved in a drive which will be used to return to it.

Dehumanization is secured as well by the introduction of a "synthetic federal police force". In Wiseman's film, Cohaagen withdraws humanitarian help "to clean up the Colony" because of the "terrorist attacks" since "the protection" of the citizens from UFB should "come

first", he argues. It is quite interesting that the resources that could be used on humans are used on machines, and that those machines are what Quaid is professionally involved with as a mechanic. This police force is not only introduced early in the narrative, policing the public areas after the terrorist attack, but a little later when Quaid gets to work in the assembly line. The extra shift the workers are to complete, together with the extra resources the Chancellor announces he is going to devote to this police force, are a clear indicator of the less than human status of the Colony's inhabitants in comparison with the Synthetics, that is, the robotic army.

The white metal perfection of the Synthetics, their smooth features contrasts not only with the aggressive weaponry they display but also with the disarray of diverse human bodies that the Colony contains. The Synthetics' immaculate bodies are modelled on the classical study of the human body: lean, male, self-contained—as Bakhtin described in his study *Rabelais and his World*:

The new bodily canon, in all its historic variations and different genres, presents an entirely finished, completed, strictly limited body, which is shown from the outside as something individual. That which protrudes, bulges, sprouts, or branches off (when a body transgresses its limits and a new one begins) is eliminated, hidden, or moderated. All orifices of the body are closed. (1984: 320)

Nonhuman bodies, such as the ones the Synthetics exhibit, are portrayed as perfection, adding then a new category to Ferrando's typification of nonhumans quoted above. These artificial bodies sink



## Of Mutants and Monsters: A Posthuman Study of Verhoeven's and Wiseman's *Total Recall*

the nonhuman inhabitants of the Colony further down this hierarchy and highlight the similarities between the grotesque bodies of the mutants and these ones from the Colony's population. Additionally, one black Synthetic, with superhuman strength, is positioned against Colin Farrell's Quaid in the final scenes of the movie. Quaid's body then is also labelled as imperfect, nonhuman in both its lack of strength to overcome the threat and his positioning against the society the Synthetics, and the Chancellor, stand for.

Thus, the representation of the perfect body as the body of the Synthetic also reinforces human imperfection as undesirable. As the mutants were ridiculed in Verhoeven's 1990 *Total Recall*, and the enhanced psychological abilities that came with mutated bodies disregarded, the bodies of the members of the resistance and the bodies of the inhabitants of the Colony in Wiseman's are ridiculed and almost discarded. The 'terrorists' are no match for a police force with superhuman abilities as the colonists discover. To turn to a perfect body whose features mark it clearly as superhuman is to relegate the human body to a subhuman categorization, especially if the synthetic body does not obey your orders and is keen to destroy you. It could be understood, then, that the only able human bodies are the artificial ones created in the assembly line. With this proposition in mind, Wiseman's film relies on current fears about technological invasion as many others have done during the last fifty years or so. Furthermore, it could be contended that if Quaid's body in Verhoeven's was the measure by which the bodies of the mutants were found lacking, in Wiseman's there is not a single human body that can be defined in these terms; all the bodies that survive in the end are more

nonhuman than human in the imperfection that the wounds inflicted by the Synthetics cause. In this respect, it is quite interesting that the Frankensteinian 'father' of the Synthetics, Chancellor Coahaagen, perishes too, leaving an open question about what is going to happen to the factory where this police force was being assembled.

Yet, there is another instance of dehumanization that results quite problematic and that requires further analysis: the two female agents and two resistance fighters that create a continuum in the two films. In their ability to fight and the physical prowess both pairs exhibit, these characters may well be equated to the anonymous Synthetics in Wiseman's text. The first fighter in Verhoeven's film, Lori (Sharon Stone), deserves critical attention in her categorization as a patriarchal projection of the *femme fatale* and traditional fears about sexuality, whereas her counterpart, Melina (Rachel Ticotin), projects the necessary sexual innocence becoming the hero's heterosexual partner (Fernández Menicucci, 2014: 19; Palumbo, 1991: 70; Tybjerg, 2016: 5; Wood, 1997: 35-36; among others).

The two Loris (Stone and Kate Beckinsale) could be modelled after what Ferrando calls "human 'monsters'", together with the freaks, a concept she adapts from Braidotti and defines as "the manifestation of these not normalized embodiments to supernatural causes, such as women's power to create—and consequently deform—life" (2019: 80), even though their role in the narrative is not to deform life—unless its destruction is considered as such. Glass affirmed, in his article "Totally Recalling Arnold: Sex and Violence in the New Bad Future" that "we fear what we cannot control" (1990: 9)



## Of Mutants and Monsters: A Posthuman Study of Verhoeven's and Wiseman's *Total Recall*

and, in this sense, the two Loris seem to embody that (male) fear in their continuous pursuit of the two Quaid; even though arguably 2012 Lori absorbs in her role the male agent who relentlessly hunts Verhoeven's Quaid together with Stone's Lori. Both Loris, posing as Quaid's wife, possess perfect bodies for the hunt, both as hunters and as prey in their performativity of the *femme fatale* identity, as the emotional involvement of the two Quaid demonstrate. This body perfection is opposed not only to the other female Quaid does not remember being attached to, Melina, but also to the rest of the bodies presented in the two movies.

The two Loris' bodily perfection, then, positions them closer to the Synthetics. Moreover, their lack of emotional traits in their pursuit of their supposed husbands make them closer to that absence of human feelings the Synthetics exhibit as well. It is interesting then to bring here Ferrando's analysis of the witch hunt as an "almost" human instance. According to her,

The witch hunt proved superstition as one of the hidden forces behind law-making apparatuses, next to biological determinism, scientific racism, and ethnocentrism, proving another discontinuity within the human frame: not only the lives of those humans considered inferior should be taken, but also the ones of those who were believed to have supernatural powers shall be sacrificed, in order to keep the human realm safe. (2019: 80)

Witches, *femme fatales*, monsters, the popular imaginary is full of images of women with supernatural abilities to control men and, once the control is broken, their stubbornness as 'machines'

that search to destroy. This traditional categorization of the female villains in both movies (surprisingly enough Wiseman continued this trend in his 2012 version) spanning more than thirty years draws attention not only to their commodification as sexual partners in their professionalization as agents but also to their monstrous nature as killing machines. Against the Melinas (Rachel Ticotin/Jessica Biel) and the nonhuman population of the films, the Loris project male fears of female castration, as it has been widely discussed elsewhere. However, their perfected bodies resemble those created in the assembly line and position them as mere instruments. The films prove, as Ferrando states, that "the establishment of a discourse of perversion [...] and the consequent practices of normalization of the perverse [...] are embedded to its genealogy, in a recurring paradigm of human abjection" (2019: 81). The sexy but lethal female body of the Loris symbolizes the monstrous within the feminine that can only be tamed by the heterosexual affection of both Quaid and of the resistance leaders, as the Melinas in the films reveal. Once their monstrosity is exposed, their destruction is as desirable as the destruction of the synthetic bodies of the police force in Wiseman's version. The dehumanization of the female body places them outside the human paradigm and closer to the inhuman one in that their lack of 'human' feelings create the monsters that have to be destroyed. Finally, as their brutal deaths mirror the one the synthetic bodies endure, it is worth noting how the female agents of both Coahaagens are ultimately positioned as nothing more than useful instruments which are endowed with superhuman endurance in their inhuman imperfection:



## Of Mutants and Monsters: A Posthuman Study of Verhoeven's and Wiseman's *Total Recall*

While the monster and the supernatural stand as social and mythical archetypes delimiting the domain of the comprehensible body, it can be argued that the “human” project has formed, historically and theoretically, through the construction of the “Other”: animals, automata, children, women, freaks, people of color other than white, queers, and so on marking the shifting borders of what would become “the human” through processes of performative rejections. (Ferrando, 2019: 81)

This “symbolic dehumanization” does not only point out to the marginalized inhabitants of Venusville and the Colony, but also to the distorted image of autonomous femininity that the films encode as monstrosity.

### 4. Conclusions

It has been argued that *Total Recall* presents the audience with a complex interplay between dreams and reality, and that the issues raised in the movie are not really resolved in the end. In fact, the two versions of the story present stagnant constructions of a world which has not evolved since the twentieth century. Even though the 1990 film was celebrated, as Tybjerg analysed, for its playfulness with the concept of (prosthetic) memory—see his critique of Landsberg's celebratory theory about Quaid's choice to stay as Quaid (2016: 5)—, the 2012 version, having little else to add, just abuses the fear of technology by presenting the Synthetic robotic police force. It is true that the two versions play with audiences' expectations by presenting the same elements throughout the plot, regardless of their position before or after the protagonists' visit to

Rekall, trying to create an ambivalence and complexity which is completely at odds with the stereotypical characters and the extreme violence which accompanies them. In all, as Rutsky exposes, “the post-humans that they envision are merely enhanced or augmented human subjects, humans with added ‘superpowers’” which offer little to the average (non)human apart from a mortal threat (2016: 191). Furthermore, the presentation of the mutants and the Colony's inhabitants as “waste populations” which can be exploited and disposed of does little to transform the traditional viewpoints about a technological future in which humans have to accommodate existing life forms with their own fantastic creations.

### Works Cited

- BAKHTIN, Mikhail (1984, 1965). *Rabelais and His World*. Translated by Michael Holquist. Bloomington: Indiana UP.
- BUTLER, Judith (2004). *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. London: Verso.
- ELLIS, R. J. (Autumn 1995). “Are You a Fucking Mutant?: *Total Recall's* Fantastic Hesitations”, *Foundation*, 65: 81-97.
- CUDD, Anne E. (2006). *Analyzing Oppression*. New York: OUP.
- (2005). “How to Explain Oppression: Criteria of Adequacy for Normative Explanatory Theories”, *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 35.1: 20-49.
- CLARKE, Bruce (2016). “The Nonhuman”, Bruce Clarke & Manuela Rossini (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 141-152.
- FERNÁNDEZ-MENICUCCI, Amaya (2014). “Memories of Future Masculine Identities:



## Of Mutants and Monsters: A Posthuman Study of Verhoeven's and Wiseman's *Total Recall*

- A Comparison of Philip K. Dick's 'We Can Remember it for you Wholesale,' the 1990 Film *Total Recall* and its 2012 Remake", *Between*, 4.8: 1-25.
- FERRANDO, Francesca (2019). *Philosophical Posthumanism*. London: Bloomsbury.
- (2013). "Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms: Differences and Relations", *Existenz*, 8.2: 26-32.
- GLASS, Fred (1990). "Totally Recalling Arnold: Sex and Violence in the New Bad Future", *Film Quarterly*, 44.1: 2-13.
- KRISTEVA, JULIA (1982) *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Columbia University Press, 1982.
- LANDSBERG, Alison (1995). "Prosthetic Memory: *Total Recall* and *Blade Runner*", *Body & Society*, 1.3-4: 175-189.
- MIKLITSCH, Robert (1993). "*Total Recall*: Production, Revolution, Simulation-Alienation Effect", *Camera Obscura* 11.2 #32: 4-40.
- NDALIANIS, A. (2001). "Paul Verhoeven and his Hollow Men", *Screening the Past*, 13: 1-17.
- PALUMBO, Donald (1991). "'Inspired... by Phillip K. Dick': Ambiguity, Deception, and Illusion in *Total Recall*", *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 4.1 #13: 69-80.
- ROSSINI, Manuela (2016). "Bodies", Bruce Clarke & Manuela Rossini (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 153-169.
- RUTSKY, R. L. (2016). "Technologies", Bruce Clarke & Manuela Rossini (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Posthuman*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP. 182-195.
- SAID, Edward (1978). *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- SARDAR, Ziauddin (1991). "*Total Recall*: Aliens, 'Others' and Amnesia in Postmodernist Thought", *Futures*, 23.2: 189-203.
- SHAW, Debra Benita (2018). *Posthuman Urbanism: Mapping Bodies in Contemporary City Space*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- STEWART, Garrett (2012). "Surveillance Cinema", *Film Quarterly*, 66. 2: 5-15.
- TELOTTE, J.P. (1999). "Verhoeven, Virilio, and 'Cinematic Derealization'", *Film Quarterly*, 53.2: 30-38.
- TRINDER, Stephen (2020). "Questions of Space in Contemporary Hollywood Cinema", *Open Cultural Studies*, 4.1: 1-11, <https://doi.org/10.1515/culture-2020-0001>
- TYBJERG, Casper (10 March 2016). "Refusing the Reality Pill: A Film Studies Perspective on Prosthetic Memory", *Kosmorama*, <https://www.kosmorama.org/en/kosmorama/artikler/refusing-reality-pill-film-studies-perspective-prosthetic-memory>
- TYLER, Imogen (2013). *Revolted Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neoliberal Britain*. New York: Zed Books.
- WILLIAMS, Linda (1991). "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess", *Film Quarterly*, 44.4: 2-13.
- WOOD, Robert E. (1997). "Remembering the Body: Ideological Ambivalence in *Total Recall*", *Studies in the Humanities*, 24.1: 33-42.

# Posthuman Worldbuilding in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*: An Exploration of the Techno/ Natural Divide



Lidia María Cuadrado Payeras  
Universidad de Salamanca

© Lidia María Cuadrado Payeras, 2021

**Abstract:** This article draws heavily on Francesca Ferrando's *Philosophical Posthumanism* (2019) to analyse the ways in which the contrast between 'techno-driven' and 'nature-driven' civilisations in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* (2000), while initially seemingly portrayed in accordance with roughly canonical science fiction tropes, can be made to show the tension at the perceived fracture between technology and nature (and, in a parallel fashion, discourses of progress and backwardness) that has been a staple of classic science-fiction writing. A posthuman critical perspective on Hopkinson's worldbuilding, with its blend of mythology, fantasy and science fiction, serves to provide a new outlook on sf as a literary genre. Hopkinson's novel also serves to illustrate how a posthuman discourse on these themes (nature, culture, mythology and science), through the application of Haraway's 'naturecultures' (2003) and the turn towards non-Western epistemologies, provides much-needed nuances to explore these topics in relation to postcolonial speculative fictions.

**Keywords:** posthumanism, science fiction, fantasy, Nalo Hopkinson, *Midnight Robber*

## 1. Introduction

Jamaican-Canadian author Nalo Hopkinson is one of the most acclaimed contemporary English-speaking black science fiction writers. She has been recently named the 37<sup>th</sup> Damon Knight Grand Master (SFWA, 2020: n.p.)—a lifetime achievement award conferred by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America Association—and her short stories have consistently featured in science fiction and fantasy anthologies as

well as garnered commercial success. Her fictions have not only been popular with readers but have also received much critical acclaim and scholarly attention for the way she weaves her Caribbean heritage into her work, creating countercultural decolonizing science fictions that foreground subject positions typically marginalized in Western sf by non-white, non-heterosexual, female authors. The explicit engagement of Hopkinson's writing with queerness and race has often resulted in its being



## Posthuman Worldbuilding in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*: An Exploration of the Techno/Natural Divide

analysed as a site of resistance against a genre that has historically been dominated by white, male authors and has predominantly featured white, male-centred narratives (Rutledge, 2001). At the same time, this has complicated the definition of her work as classic science fiction, because her novels borrow from and weave together such diverse sources as cyberpunk, mythology, folklore, magical realism and fantasy in the configuration of hybrid, politically engaged narratives. This has led a number of critics to approach her work from the lens of Afrofuturism. Indeed, many have considered her a quintessential or foundational figure of the genre, among which Marleen S. Barr (2008), whose anthology *Afro-Future Females*, tracing the development of Afrofuturism through female science fiction, already includes and studies Hopkinson's narratives.

As defined by Mark Dery (1994: 180), under the label of Afrofuturism falls any "[s]peculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture." Afrofuturism "profoundly challenges ideas about science, technology, and knowledge," which is why "many Afrofuturist texts do not fit neatly into the conventions of science fiction and actually borrow from other speculative genres" (Faucheux, 2017: 563). As a genre, Afrofuturism displaces predominantly white forms of knowledge that have historically shunned black intervention, such as the "hard" science on which traditional science fiction is principally based (Shawl, 2018: n.p.). Afrofuturist texts seek to move towards and represent eminently black forms of knowledge creation that also vindicate

the presence and agency of black bodies in science-fictional imaginaries beyond stereotype, tokenism or de-humanization. The Afrofuturist vindication of black epistemologies is one of the reasons that in my view help pose critical posthumanism as a framework from which to explore the intricacies and multiplicities inherent to black science fiction. Insofar as critical posthumanism defines itself as post-dualistic and is cognizant of its debt to non-Western epistemologies in its self-configuration as such (Ferrando, 2019: 60-61), it is possible to use it as a tool to explore the crossing and blurring of boundaries in Afrofuturist fiction, using interstitial cyborg methodologies (Haraway, 1991) to bring to light the same interstitiality of black women's Afrofuturist tales (Thomas, 2020: n. p.). This fundamental characteristic of Afrofuturism, and Afrofuturist fiction written by women in particular, is already present from its earliest iterations, for instance in the works of Octavia Butler, where she creates "worlds that uncannily reflect reality and deflect and undermine it and the same time by generating subjects who improve on the available human models" (Spillers 2008: 4), and question, in so doing, a uniform and exclusionary conception of the human as an embodied subject.

A philosophical or critical posthumanist approach should not be taken *uncritically*, however. As Ferrando notes, "[i]n order to postulate a post- to the human, the differences which are constitutive to the human [...] have to be acknowledged" (2019: 25). Post-dualism cannot, in this case, equate to colour-blindness. Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* and, I would argue, black speculative fictions in general can be used to make



## Posthuman Worldbuilding in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*: An Exploration of the Techno/Natural Divide

the case for a black critical posthumanism that takes the post-dualistic and affective ethos of philosophical posthumanism and applies it to the construction of fictional worlds that are not only cognizant of the whitewashed history of science fiction but remediate the racial and epistemological gap left in their wake. This project would highlight the insufficiencies of the humanist rational project with regards to its multiple subalterns—again, in our case, queer, female, and black—and develop a hybrid subjectivity that centres around them. This is not an unprecedented project (cf. Lillvis, 2017) and neither is it, I believe, necessarily at odds with other posthumanist approaches to black speculative fiction that may focus on other aspects of interest to posthuman theory. Among these approaches, I am particularly interested in that which borrows a page from the transhumanist book to examine the ways in which our relationship with technology is both racialized and gendered, and speaks to the continuation of systems of oppression that disproportionately affect black subjects. In this case, it bears noting that I myself, following Ferrando (2019) and others, define transhumanism as a separate project from that of critical posthumanism, insofar as transhumanism is heir to the project of humanism; so, unlike critical posthumanism, it is still embedded in its hierarchies, which it does not seek to contest. If anything, transhumanism creates new techno-centred hierarchies that, because of the current unequal global distribution of technology as well as the biases in its operation and development, arguably not only perpetuate but widen existing inequalities.

The aim of this article, then, is to use

insights from both Afrofuturist and posthumanist philosophies to explore some of the ways in which such processes may be said to be taking place in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* (2000). This novel narrates the story of Tan-Tan, whom we meet as a young girl on planet Toussaint, colonised by Caribbean people at an unspecified time in the past in an attempt to forge a better life for themselves.

Toussaint's citizens depend heavily on the use of technology: every house has a virtual assistant or house eshu, and citizens themselves have their own eshus implanted at birth. With these, they are connected to a vast network that includes all inhabitants in Toussaint and which is controlled by Granny Nanny, an artificial intelligence set up by the Marryshow Corporation, which, in turn, holds supranational governmental control. After Tan-Tan's father, Antonio, accidentally kills his wife's lover in a duel, he is given a chance at escaping life imprisonment by Maka, a pedicab driver who had provided Antonio with the poison that ultimately killed his enemy. Maka entrusts Tan-Tan with a device capable of overriding the prison's security protocols, which she manages to get to her father, by sneaking into the police car as he is arrested. With Maka's help, then, Antonio takes Tan-Tan and both flee across different dimensions to New Half-Way Tree, which, unlike Toussaint, has an astounding ecological diversity, and where exiles from Toussaint are sent in lieu of serving time for their crimes. Although Antonio ostensibly seeks a new life in his flight to New Half-Way Tree, soon the patterns of abuse which had been at play in his family life at Toussaint re-emerge. Antonio sees Tan-Tan as an extension of his wife in



## Posthuman Worldbuilding in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*: An Exploration of the Techno/Natural Divide

Toussaint and repeatedly rapes her until, one day, Tan-Tan kills him in self-defence. She is then forced to leave the human settlement at New Half-Way Tree and explore new ways of living in the wild outskirts of the planet, creating a persona for herself, that of the Robber Queen, who embarks on a quest to fight for the underdog and right the wrongs of the unjust governmental systems of New Half-Way Tree.

In the pages that follow, I look at the contrast between the 'natural' and 'technological' worlds in Hopkinson's novel, a divide that is precisely represented by the different planets in which the story develops. I draw on contemporary radical philosophies, namely critical and philosophical posthumanism, and new materialism, to explore some of the ways in which the contrast between the 'natural' and 'technological' worlds of Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* may be interpreted, and how these different although connected strata create fictional worlds within the novel that are representative of the complexities of black science fiction. More than twenty years past the original date of publication of *Midnight Robber*, these interconnected layers of meaning and criticism still offer critical ways of engaging with the challenges of technology for the bodies that neoliberal, white-centred and patriarchal governmentality places under the category of the subaltern—and, more generally, of addressing the technocratic reality of contemporary Western societies.

### 2. Toussaint: Technology and the surveillance state

Broadly speaking, we can establish a

division between the 'natural' and 'technological' worlds as represented in *Midnight Robber* by analysing the two planets at each side of the dimension veil, New Half-Way Tree and Toussaint. My analysis through the next pages identifies New Half-Way Tree as the nature-oriented world and Toussaint as technologically driven. This analysis, however, must always be prefaced by the acknowledgement that a critical posthuman methodology such as that on which much of my study is supported is wary of the existence of a blanket binary between the natural and the technological, if it acknowledges that there is such a thing as 'the natural' and 'the technological'; these caveats will be addressed further on. In this section, I understand the technological, particularly, in terms of the digital, which in this case generally accounts for information technologies, and, more to the point, the software and programming technologies on which they rely.

Within a consideration of how informatics pertains to the worlds of *Midnight Robber*, immediately salient in the planet Toussaint is the fact that this is a world where the singularity has happened. The singularity, as defined by Vernor Vinge in his influential 1993 homonymous paper, is "the imminent creation by technology of entities with greater than human intelligence" (12). Although, according to Vinge, the singularity may be achieved in a number of ways, its most prevalent representation in science-fiction narratives, which has by now reached the status of one of the genre's tropes, is "[t]he development of computers that are 'awake' and superhumanly intelligent" (1993: 12). In *Midnight Robber*, the singularity is presented in the form of the AI known as



## Posthuman Worldbuilding in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*: An Exploration of the Techno/Natural Divide

Granny Nanny, which oversees any and all activities in the planet by way of its implantation at birth in the citizens of Toussaint through an “earbug” that connects them to Nanny’s network. We are told that, after Granny Nanny was developed, one day

[S]omething start to go wrong. It get to where the programmers would ask Nanny a question, and she would spew mako bloks of pure gibberish. [...] She brain didn’t spoil, it just get too complex for Eleggua [the code in which she was written] to translate the concepts she was understanding no more; after Nanny was seeing things in all dimensions. (Hopkinson 2000b: 51)

The awakening of Granny Nanny to a greater understanding of the world beyond what was provided in her code initiates a series of attempts to make her “gibberish” understandable. This project, led by Marryshow of the Marryshow Corporation that shall govern over Toussaint, is ultimately successful and saves the AI’s memory from being deleted. Through the translation of her new language into “nannysong,” Granny Nanny is able to persist as the overruling Toussaint intelligence, although the version of her language accessible to the population is “basic” compared to her real communication capabilities (52). Only a small community of pedicab runners, descendants of a programmer clan, are able to access a greater number of commands through their better knowledge of nannysong. This affords them some privacy, that “most precious commodity of any Marryshevite” (10), as it means that they can use Granny Nanny’s programming language to momentarily carve some space away from the AI’s oversight.

In the figure of the pedicab runners, the ability to bypass surveillance is simultaneously linked to a rejection of technology and proficiency in it. The technological expertise that allows them to override Granny Nanny’s earbug programming is contrasted with the traditional forms of living that they choose to engage in. These include doing the “back-break” labour (8) that has been eradicated in Toussaint— as it is now intelligent machines that perform any physically strenuous work—and living in “headblind” (9) houses, that is, analogue or low-tech compounds lacking in digital domestic technologies such as robots or virtual assistants of different sorts. Most notably, pedicab runners rely on traditional forms of knowledge that include and are made possible by the use of paper and writing, or “[c]ode that Nanny couldn’t automatically read” (51).

The prospect of a life within Toussaint but outside of the system is then tied to elaborate forms of code production at each side of the digital spectrum that circumvent the expectations of Granny Nanny, which, although super-intelligent by singularity standards, is nevertheless bound to her programming. In the fascination of some of the characters at the chance of a life outside the AI’s oversight, we see how the matter-of-factness of the AI’s control over the life of their citizens has standardized modes of living that make possible the continued oversight of Granny Nanny, and immerse their subjects in a technological feedback loop which goes, for the most part, unquestioned. Therefore, in spite of the utopian drive at the heart of Toussaint, life on the planet still grapples with the old privacy-security debate, which questions what may be an optimal amount of control of the technocratic state



## Posthuman Worldbuilding in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*: An Exploration of the Techno/Natural Divide

that ensures the safety of their citizens by their more or less wilful surrender of data and so of unimpeded action. As Hopkinson acknowledged in an interview

It isn't perfect; the person who invented the system saw the high level of benign surveillance as an acceptable trade-off for the kind of safety and high quality of life that the people would have. There are no poor people on Toussaint, and no wage slaves. And though Granny Nanny perceives all, she doesn't tell all, unless she thinks it's an issue of someone's safety. It really does feel like being mothered, and sometimes that's a good thing, sometimes it's a smothering thing. (Hopkinson, 2000a: n.p.)

There are many things to unpack in the author's commentary. The fact that there are no poor people in Toussaint, for instance, does not mean that there is no disenfranchisement, nor a social hierarchy. Although ultimately supervised by Granny Nanny and the Marryshow Corporation, some form of local political organisation far from the utopian egalitarian dream still persists, and the ostracizing of pedicab runners is representative of how the emancipatory power of the digital has not been fully realised but has instead configured technology as the new frontier: if advanced technologies have enabled the possibility of life in Toussaint, in imposing themselves they have also created a number of naturalised others that cannot or do not wish to conform to the new techno-standards. Naturalised, sexualised and racialised others are the by-product of the perpetuation of humanistic value hierarchies that turn into biopolitical differentiation markers, so, in this context, it is also worthwhile to

look at the implications of Granny Nanny as a female-coded, black AI. Race and gender cannot be wholly separated in this analysis as Granny Nanny is named after Nanny of the Maroons, an 18<sup>th</sup>-century Jamaican leader who successfully led the Windward Maroons against the British and would go on to found one of the most important black settlements in Jamaica. While many critics have read Hopkinson's Granny Nanny "as a role model of Black female empowerment that subverts patriarchal images of the enslaved Black woman" (Martín-Lucas 2017: 112, original capitalised initials) I agree with Martín-Lucas that there is a strong case for a more nuanced interpretation of the AI, as it still works "within the structure of the corporation and the violent genocide of indigenous populations this produces" (112). Although the subversive potential of Granny Nanny is not to be understated, Hopkinson's Nanny also brings to light the intrinsic violence within any coloniser system.

Granny Nanny both denounces and perpetuates a legacy of violence that is stored in traditional science fiction tropes (Sorensen, 2014: 277) and that, arguably, is perpetuated by the transhumanist projects of the Marryshow Corporation's techno-state. For the implementation of Granny Nanny and of the technological infrastructure that allows for the relative ease of life in Toussaint, the planet had to be stripped of its original environmental landscape and so of its ecological diversity, which creates the first point of division between Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree and establishes the first otherised subject within transhuman standards, nature: "New Half-Way Tree is how Toussaint planet did look before the Marryshow Corporation sink them Earth Engine Number 127 down into it like God



## Posthuman Worldbuilding in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*: An Exploration of the Techno/Natural Divide

entering the woman; plunging into the womb of soil to impregnate the planet with the seed of Granny Nanny” (Hopkinson, 2000b: 2). The seeds of Granny Nanny, in this case, are digital: the nodes of a surveillance web that spans the entire planet and cover not only the physical but the mental bodies of its citizens. The metaphor of impregnation and the use of biological processes to describe the implantation of the network clashes with the artificial nature of the latter. This dissonance parallels that of the fact of colonisation, which ostensibly creates a better world—for the colonisers—at the expense of defacing the planet, and these parallels ask what other dissonances or compromises are made in the actualisation of the colonisers’ utopian dreams. For as much as Granny Nanny “creates a discursively egalitarian community [...] unmarked by racial difference and freed from a life of labor” (Fehskens, 2010: 138), the inception of Toussaint is founded in the putting into action of unequal power dynamics that subjugate both citizens and the earth to the discourses of techno-thanatological machinery.

The sexual vocabulary used to describe the simultaneous processes of colonisation and the establishment of Granny Nanny is also evocative of non-consensual intercourse. With her choice of words, Hopkinson is able to connect colonialism as an important science-fiction trope to the real histories of colonisations, which pass through the exploitation of women and land to bring to fruition the colonial dream. These, incidentally, foreshadow the repeated rape of the novel’s protagonist, Tan-Tan, by her father Antonio, which becomes a climactic point in the novel as it leads to Tan-Tan’s killing of her father and her adopting the

persona of the Robber Queen that gives the novel its title. Because adherence to the Granny Nanny network is not voluntary, the perpetuation of state control via technological surveillance necessitates of the violation of the bodies of its citizens; as has been noted, bodies both physical and mental, for the artificial intelligences implanted at birth (the eshus) appear in the ‘mind’s eye’ of individuals. Impregnation and the ‘smothering’ motherly conceptualisation of Granny Nanny also perpetuate damaging gender and familial dynamics, which are also a fixture of the novel both in Tan-Tan’s abusive relationship with her father and in his dysfunctional marriage to Tan-Tan’s unconcerned mother Ione. Granny Nanny, as the embedded and embodied panopticon<sup>1</sup> in the lives of their citizens and the ultimate measure of state control since it is inseparable from the materiality of its subjects, becomes fully realised in the playing out of these familial dynamics. The totalising state and technological project culminates in Tubman, Tan-Tan’s

---

<sup>1</sup> “Panopticon” refers to Jeremy Bentham’s (1995) conception of a circular building designed to allow for close monitoring of all residents (whether inmates, patients, pupils, etc.) from a structure at its center, so that all could be kept in view at any given time. Most famously, it has been re-elaborated by philosophers Michel Foucault (1995) and Gilles Deleuze (1990), who have used Bentham’s panopticon as an image to describe the ways in which societies are able to exert discipline and control through means of surveillance. Scholar Shoshana Zuboff (1995, 2019) in recent writings has more explicitly linked these means of surveillance to the rise of capitalism and advanced digital technologies, which more accurately describes Nalo Hopkinson’s Granny Nanny.



## Posthuman Worldbuilding in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*: An Exploration of the Techno/Natural Divide

son by her father, as Tubman is the first individual to be connected to Granny Nanny without the need for prosthetics. Tubman, who has not received the ear implant connecting him to Granny Nanny, can nevertheless communicate with her, and so his body becomes “one living connection with the Grande Anansi Nanotech Interface” (Hopkinson 2000b: 328). Potentially, Tubman inaugurates a lineage of individuals who, unlike Tantan in *New Half-Way Tree*, cannot escape control of the artificial intelligences to which they are subject, and so initiates the move from a cyborg existence to a one of complete digital embodiment.

### 3. New Half-Way Tree: Necropolitics and naturecultures

*New Half-Way Tree* is said to be the “mirror planet” of Toussaint, where “we send the thieves-them, and the murderers” as well as “the drifters, the ragamuffins-them, the ones the think the world must have something better for them, if they could only find what part it is” (2). For, although Granny Nanny had ostensibly been designed with some flexibility in mind, “to tolerate a variety of human expression, even dissension” (10), there still seem to be behaviours that warrant expulsion from Toussaint’s Garden of Eden. For what is supposedly a realised utopia, it is striking to see how expectations of a better future, which echo the novel’s diasporic roots as well as traditional science fiction narratives and the trauma of colonization, seem to also be perceived as a threat. Furthermore, those who are shunned to *New Half-Way Tree* are euphemistically spoken of as the “departed” (19), equating death to a life lived outside of the confines of the techno-

state. This vocabulary brings to mind Giorgio Agamben’s work on the figure of the *homo sacer* (1998). Agamben describes the *homo sacer* in contemporary societies as an individual condemned to a bare life outside state protection and acknowledgement, and yet considered within the state’s political organisation insofar as their ban from the state articulates the state of liminality to which the biopolitical modern state submits its subjects and so makes generally applicable the exception that allows the *homo sacer* to exist. As the planet of the disenfranchised and the dominion of naturalised others since it retains the ecological diversity lost in the colonisation of Toussaint, I propose a analysis of *New Half-Way Tree* in terms of its relationship with Toussaint by means the exclusion of its citizens from it, and in terms of the perseverance of nature against the ecological effacement of Toussaint.<sup>2</sup>

Like Toussaint, *New Half-Way Tree* also opens up questions of surveillance and state power. *New Half-Way Tree*,

---

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to my reviewers for pointing out that there is indeed a connection to be made between the different distribution of political systems in Nalo Hopkinson and the similar power politics in Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* (1974). Colonialism is of course a pervasive theme in the history of science fiction to which often underlies a strong utopian current (i.e., searching new worlds that may serve as political laboratories for social improvement strategies). As has been noted, however, in Hopkinson this is approached from an explicitly Afrofuturist perspective; as other scholars have pointed out and have extensively analysed, the planet Toussaint and the AI Granny Nanny, as other elements in the novel, are named after important figures of the African diaspora, and the colonized become the colonisers.



## Posthuman Worldbuilding in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*: An Exploration of the Techno/Natural Divide

however, stands as the necropolitical<sup>3</sup> counterpart of Toussaint's techno-biopolitical logic. These necropolitical logics function in great part from the standpoint of the government of Toussaint, but they are also natively operative in New Half-Way Tree. Junjuh Village, the human settlement where Tan-Tan and her father eventually establish themselves, is ruled by a bloodthirsty sheriff whose "rules don't have no mercy" (Hopkinson 2000b: 169) and who condemns trespassers to physical punishment and death by hanging. Although, as a planet of *homini sacer*, New Half-Way Tree should fall outside of the scope of the biopolitical powers of Toussaint, its inclusion—by its exclusion—in Toussaint's state power allows for a measure of Granny Nanny's oversight to continue in New Half-Way Tree. In the novel, Tan-Tan is transported to New Half-Way Tree not by virtue of her having effectively committed a crime, but by her attempt to rescue her father from life imprisonment, affording him a chance of living "he life in he own terms" (66). As Tan-Tan is not one of the antagonistic

figures that are exiled from Toussaint, but rather is unwillingly transported to New Half-Way Tree by following her father, still Granny Nanny takes it upon herself to recover her subject. The fact that Tan-Tan is an unsuspecting *homo sacer* makes her inhabit a doubly marginal position, within and without the system both in her former and current homes. This becomes further complicated as she violates the hospitality of her hosts in New Half-Way Tree after Tan-Tan murders her father. Her act of violence makes her carry "a double shame [...]: she is a banned figure in the human and douen worlds [the world of New Half-Way Tree]" (Fehskens 2010: 147). The murder of Antonio and Tan-Tan's later accidental revealing of the settlement where she was living under the protection of the douen, a bird-like alien species native to New Half-Way Tree, force her to live an uprooted existence.

This instability is mirrored in the duplicity of Tan-Tan's character, who is both Tan-Tan the human and the mythical Robber Queen, a persona which she takes on after the killing of her father through which she dissociates herself from her traumatic past experiences and seeks to impart justice. In this double existence, her body is both a site of empowerment—as she takes on a heroic persona of the Trinidadian carnival that connects her both to the thriving Jamaican cultural heritage and the Black pride that could be freely experienced in the streets of Toussaint—while simultaneously allowing her to stand for the dispossessed, and oppression, being as she is made to bear her father's child and perpetuate with him also the techno-thanatological legacy of her native planet both through the violence inherent to the rape and in birthing a child that is

---

<sup>3</sup> Necropolitics is a term coined by Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe (2003). Mbembe builds from Foucault's notion of biopolitical power to assert that sovereignty resides not only in controlling the bodies of citizens, but in controlling the possibility of their very existence, i.e. determining who can live and who must die. Mbembe also links these concepts to the state of exception and the state of siege, which are likewise crucial to Agamben's definition of the *homo sacer*. I see both Foucault's biopolitics, Mbembe's necropolitics and Agamben's *homo sacer* as related phenomena that allow us to form a complete picture of the ways in which governmental practices police completely, but from different angles, the bodies of subjects.



## Posthuman Worldbuilding in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*: An Exploration of the Techno/Natural Divide

inescapably connected to the surveillance technologies that policy life and colonise bodies and planets.

It is important to think about how all systems of oppression in Toussaint find resonance in New Half-Way Tree. As Fehskens (2010: 141) argues, Antonio's "repeated attempts to turn Tan-Tan into another Ione [his wife in Toussaint], via sexual violation and molestation, on New Half-Way Tree domesticates that criminal space into a new version of his home in Toussaint." If, in Toussaint, Granny Nanny was able to represent forms of colonial and techno-engendered violence, it is also worth noticing that these domesticating violences include environmental violence, from which the worlds of *Midnight Robber* seem to find a respite in New Half-Way Tree. Because advanced technologies have not arrived at New Half-Way Tree, nor could the grasp of Granny Nanny reach it prior to the birth of Tubman, New Half-Way Tree has safeguarded the ecological diversity that seemed to have also characterised other planets in the novel's system. This is a planet where "the mongoose still run wild, the diable bush still got poison thorns, and the mako jumbie bird does still stalk through the bush" (Hopkinson, 2000b: 2). Thus, the conservation of ecology is also tied to the preservation of magical, folkloric elements such as talking non-human, natural species (as opposed to the artificial intelligences of Toussaint) that vindicate black tradition and experience. Among the most relevant figures in these black folkloric ecologies, we might mention the douen, a bird-like alien species living in the planet Toussaint of whom Tan-Tan had only heard of in her nursery stories, that painted them as "children who'd died before they had their naming ceremonies

[and] came back from the dead as jumbies with their heads on backwards" (93). Among the douen stands out Chichibud, Tan-Tan's friend and protector, offering her a place of shelter after the murder of her father forces her flight from Junjuh, where "murder must always get repaid with murder" (151).

A posthuman critical framework can aid us in addressing how Hopkinson creates New Half-Way Tree as a counterpart to the heavily technologized and environmentally barren Toussaint. For this, I draw on Donna Haraway's work, particularly her conception of "naturecultures" (1991), which inextricably links the social and the natural in the formation of ecologies and so puts into question, among others, the natural/artificial, cultural/environmental, technological/ecological binaries. The blurring of dichotomic separations is also a central feature of philosophical posthumanism. Martín-Lucas, in her critical posthumanist analysis of *Midnight Robber*, has argued that Chichibud "gives voice to a posthuman critique of the anthropocentric humanist obsession with hierarchical taxonomy" (2017: 111). Characters like Chichibud, then, exemplify the blurring of ontological boundaries that is at the heart of an ethical posthumanist reading of Hopkinson's novel. At the same time, a worldbuilding that rests on black folklore and magical imaginings and which exists within a context of 'hard' science fiction (i.e. departing from and exploring the consequences of technoscientific developments) questions a purely rational conception of science: among other factors, "[t]he fine line between analogy [...] and genuine animal-person cross-overs in [Hopkinson's] ceremonial worlds also separates rigorous 'scientific'



## Posthuman Worldbuilding in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*: An Exploration of the Techno/Natural Divide

taxonomies" (Dillon, 2007: 33). With regard to the construction of new taxonomies, and although there are many examples of naturalcultural integration that could be analysed in the novel, I would argue that one of the most significant symbols for naturalcultural processes in *Midnight Robber* scholarship are trees, which are a recurring image in the novel. Trees, as a mode of organising information that imbricates digital logics with the vocabulary of biology and ecology, are representative of the ubiquitous character of technology the inseparability of natural from social ecologies. Trees are also homes and sheltering places, be it for the douens in New Half-Way Tree than the pedicab runners in Toussaint, and stand for ways of living that are connected to traditional practices and an ecological ethics cognisant of the particularities of the Black folkloric experience.

In the novel, trees serve as community spaces that house and enable subversion in many forms. It is telling, for instance, that pedicab drivers seek to live in tree houses which directly oppose the high-tech compounds in the rest of Toussaint. Similarly, the imbrication of the douen and their home trees, which the community is bound to protect and hide from the rest of the settlements in New Half-Way Tree, signals a reverence for the natural environment that goes against the exploitative logic that humans still employ in their strongholds in the planet. In keeping with a nonbinary posthuman logic, however, Hopkinson also makes trees a threatening figure in *Midnight Robber*, since they also stand for the necro/biopolitical power of governments, as trees are the site of hangings that function as a warning for trespassers and take up the colonial

imaginary that attacks black bodies and configures them as the subaltern of existing power structures.

### 4. Conclusions

In my analysis of the uses of technology in *Midnight Robber*, I have looked at how mechanisms of technocratic governance, in particular the operation of an all-witnessing AI, complicate an emancipatory reading of what is to be initially interpreted as the fulfilment of a utopian dream of black enfranchisement. Because the technocratic Toussaint state is still heavily involved in the policing of its subjects and is born of the same violent colonising impulses, a biopolitical reading of Granny Nanny in terms of its surveillance operation acknowledges the perpetuation of hierarchies of control within systems that, though initially conceived to empower, ultimately are designed to oppress.

In doing so, it brings to the fore questions of the possibility of utopian actualisation, when the boundary between utopia and dystopia is often ambiguous. A similar case of diffuse boundaries occurs in the case of the social and natural organisation of New Half-Way Tree, where violence inside and outside state structures threatens the establishment of ethical relationships that allow for the institution of the congenial, reciprocal, transspecies bonds on which the planet's ecosystem is set to thrive.

*Midnight Robber* plays with echoes and parallels both in Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree. The reverberations of multiple marginalities—black, woman, natural—against each other are not only a measure of the rhythm of the novel,



## Posthuman Worldbuilding in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*: An Exploration of the Techno/Natural Divide

which has so fruitfully been analysed by Leif Sorensen (2014) in musical terms, but also themselves a representation of the necessarily non-dichotomous character of Nalo Hopkinson's fiction, whose science fictions betray a critical posthuman sensibility. This is attuned to multiple individual and collective becomings as they are understood by posthumanist philosopher Rosi Braidotti (2002), who, also in tune with the new materialist thinking for which she is a foundational figure and point of reference, highlights the importance of states of change and flow in the configuration of subjectivity against essentialist, monolithic conceptions of the subject and against negative totalising ideas of 'difference' such as have configured so-called marginal bodies. Process-oriented embodiment, multiplicity and metamorphoses are well-represented by the myriad positions occupied by its protagonist in the roles across which she transitions back and forth; as Robber Queen, Tan-Tan, mother of native cyborgs, and subject in the oppressive technological and ecological environments on whose liminality she dances. Indeed, Braidotti (2002: 178-9) makes a pointed analysis of how our age of new technologies, advanced capitalism and ecological breakdown has swayed the postmodern appreciation for the monstrous in literature (particularly the monstrous feminine) towards liminal figures, the queer, and the "cyber-monstrous", which *Midnight Robber* emphatically illustrates.

The worlds among which Tan-Tan moves are representative of a particular understanding of science fiction not solely as a site for exploration and speculation but for historical criticism that engages with problems old—like the exploitation

of black and female bodies and the extraction of natural resources—and new—like the establishment of practices of state control and surveillance aided and abetted by technological developments. This conception of science fiction recuperates histories hitherto sidelined by its mainstream and vindicates marginalised epistemologies within and without its narratives that highlight the vital importance of thresholds as well as their osmotic qualities, like those of *Midnight Robber's* very own dimension veil.

### Works Cited

- AGAMBEN, Giorgio (1998). *homo sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford UP.
- BARR, Marlene S., eds. (2008). *Afro-Future Females: Black Writers Chart Science Fiction's Newest New-Wave Trajectory*. Columbus: The Ohio State University P.
- BENTHAM, Jeremy (1995). *The Panopticon Writings*. With an introduction by Miran Božovič. London and Brooklyn: Verso.
- BRAIDOTTI, Rosi (2002). *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*. Cambridge and Malden: Polity P.
- DERY, Mark (1994). "Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose", Mark Dery (ed.), *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 179-222.
- DELEUZE, Gilles (1990). *Pourparlers: 1972-1990*. Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit.
- DILLON, Grace L. (2007). "Scientific Literacies in Nalo Hopkinson's Ceremonial Worlds", *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, 18.1, 23-41.
- ENTEEN, Jillana (2007). "On the Receiving end of the Colonization': Nalo Hopkinson's



## Posthuman Worldbuilding in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*: An Exploration of the Techno/Natural Divide

- 'Nansi Web', *Science Fiction Studies*, 34.2, 262-282.
- FAUCHEUX, Amandine H. (2017). "Race and Sexuality in Nalo Hopkinson's Oeuvre; or, Queer Afrofuturism", *Science Fiction Studies*, 33.1: 563-580.
- FEHSKENS, Erin M. (2010). "The Matter of Bodies: Materiality on Nalo Hopkinson's Cybernetic Planet", *The Global South*, 4.2, 136-156.
- FERRANDO, Francesca (2019). *Philosophical Posthumanism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- FOUCAULT, Michel (1988). "Technologies of the Self", Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman & Patrick H. Hutton (eds.), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Massachusetts: The University of Massachusetts Press, 16-49.
- (1995). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books.
- HARAWAY, Donna (2003). *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.
- (1991). *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. New York: Routledge.
- HOPKINSON, Nalo (2000a). "A Conversation with Nalo Hopkinson". <http://www.sfsite.com/03b/nh77.htm> (Access 31 January 2021).
- (2000b). *Midnight Robber*. New York: Grand Central Publishing.
- LILLVIS, Kristen (2017). *Posthuman Blackness and the Black Female Imagination*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press.
- MATHURIN MAIR, Lucille (2006). *A Historical Study of Women in Jamaica, 1655-1844*. Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago: University of the West Indies Press.
- MARTÍN-LUCAS, Belén (2017). "Posthumanist Feminism and Interspecies Affect in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*", *Atlantis* 38.2, 105-115.
- MBEMBE, Achille (2003). "Necropolitics", Libby Meintjes (trad.), *Public Culture* 15.1, 11-40.
- RUTLEDGE, Gregory E. (2001). "Futurist Fiction & Fantasy: The Racial Establishment", *Callaloo*, 24.1, 236-252.
- SFWA (1 December 2020). "Nalo Hopkinson Named the 37<sup>th</sup> SFWA Damon Knight Grand Master", *SFWA: Science Fiction & Fantasy Writers of America*. <https://www.sfwawriters.org/2020/12/01/nalo-hopkinson-named-the-37th-sfwa-damon-knight-grand-master>.
- THOMAS, Sheree R. (2020). "Dangerous Muses: Black Women Writers Creating at the Forefront of Afrofuturism", Isiah Lavender III and Lisa Yaszek (eds.), *Literary Afrofuturism in the Twenty-First Century*. Kindle ed., Columbus: The Ohio State UP.
- SHAWL, Nisi (2018). "A Crash Course in the History of Black Science Fiction", *Nisi Shawl*. <http://www.nisishawl.com/CCHBSF.html>
- SORENSEN, Leif (2014). "Dubwise into the Future: Versioning Modernity in Nalo Hopkinson", *African American Review*, 47.2-3, 267-283.
- SPILLERS, Hortense J. (2008). "Imaginative Encounters", *Afro-Future Females: Black Writers Chart Science Fiction's Newest New-Wave Trajectory*, Marlene S. Barr (ed.). Columbus: The Ohio State University P.
- VINGE, Vernor (1993). "The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human Era", *Vision 21: Interdisciplinary Science and Engineering in the Era of Cyberspace: Proceedings of a Symposium Cosponsored by the NASA Lewis Research Center and the Ohio Aerospace Institute*, Westlake, Ohio, March 30-31. Cleveland and Brook Park: NASA, 11-22.
- ZUBOFF, Shoshana (1995). *In the Age of the Smart Machine: The Future of Work and Power*. New York: Basic Books.
- (2019). *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. New York: Public Affairs.

# Experiencing the Posthuman: The Cinematic Clone in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century



Rocío Carrasco Carrasco<sup>1</sup>  
COIDESO, Universidad de Huelva

© Rocío Carrasco Carrasco, 2021

**Abstract:** The clone, especially in its audiovisual version, has often been treated as a marginalized being and its body understood as a repository of violence and pain, especially since its mere existence has traditionally been subjected to maintaining the integrity of the ‘original’ human body. This is visible in films in which we observe the figure of the clone treated in ways contrary to the critical posthumanism postulated by Braidotti, Ferrando or Vint, among others. *The Island* (2005), *Never Let me Go* (2010) or the animated series *World of Tomorrow* (2015, 2017, 2020) make us reflect on our responsibility toward the consequences of certain uses of biomechanical technology. A process of social denunciation is carried out through the emphasis that these films give to posthuman subjectivity, and thus these clones show their concerns and make viewers participants in their marginalized experience. Viewers see life from their perspective, we share their biological consciousness and their very existence leads us to reflection and denunciation.

**Keywords:** cloning, posthuman, film, animated TV series, *The Island* (2005), *Never Let me Go* (2010), *World of Tomorrow* (2015, 2017, 2020)

## 1. Introduction

This contribution concerns the posthuman subject as enacted by the figure of the disposable clone in

contemporary cinema, and the spectators’ engagement with this marginalized experience. The clone characters presented here revolve around the embodied presence of screened posthuman beings. It is my intention, then, to contribute to the understanding of posthuman subjectivities and their representation in contemporary cinema. As argued here, in the last few years, the cinematic figuration of the disposable clone has offered spectators the possibility of positioning on the side of the other, contributing to grasp difference and activate critical mechanisms to denounce certain discriminatory practices at work in our contemporary societies.

In our posthuman times, it is of paramount importance to find new

---

<sup>1</sup> I wish to acknowledge the funding provided by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities (Research Project “Bodies in Transit 2”, ref. FFI2017-84555-C2-1-P), the European Regional Development Fund, and the Spanish Research Agency for the writing of this essay. Also, the funding provided by the Regional Ministry of Economy, Knowledge, Enterprise and Universities of Andalusia, and the European Regional Development Fund for the writing of this essay. Project “Embodiments, Genders and Difference: Cultural Practices of Violence and Discrimination”, ref. 1252965.



## Experiencing the Posthuman: The Cinematic Clone in the 21<sup>th</sup> Century

strategies with which to assess our world, our bodies and ourselves. Critical posthumanism—advocated by Rosi Braidotti, Sherryl Vint or Francesca Ferrando, among others—has offered engaging tools for the understanding of the challenging times humanity faces in the age of the Anthropocene, defined by Paul Crutzen as our current geological era dominated by human action through technological mediation (2002: 23). By proposing an embodied subjectivity, theorists on the posthuman put forward a hybrid, fluid and complex body. Critical thinkers offer a vitalist approach to the posthuman subject, that is defined as “a relational subject constituted in and by multiplicity” (Braidotti, 2002: 49). In the same line of thought, Ferrando argues that “posthumanism offers an invitation to think inclusively, a relocation of humanity within multiversality, it opens to alterity and extensions of diversity, and reflects on alternative human embodiments” (2016: 220). The dilemma with the posthuman body, Ferrando notes, is that the concept “body” is a “shifting etiquette which has been historically ascribed within the frame of specism, racism, sexism, heterosexism, ethnocentrism, classicism, ageism and ableism, among other-isms” (Ferrando: 222-3).

Braidotti (2013), Herbrechter (2013), and Vint (2008) insist on a serious concern for the posthuman body, and warn us about the temptations of radical dematerialization, disembodiment and dehumanization. It is precisely this emphasis on embodiment what differentiates critical posthumanism from transhumanism—advocated by Nick Bostrom, Hans Moravec, Max Moore or Vernor Vinge, also referred to as utopian posthumanism—a movement linked to

the enhancement of the body and to ideas of immortality. Transhumanist thinkers defend the idea that human beings will become posthuman in the future as a result of using technology and science to enhance their bodies and minds. Bostrom considers humanity as a work in progress (2005: 4). In broad terms, transhumanism encourages the evolution of the human into something superior to our critical condition. Thus, the notion of the posthuman coined by transhumanism still adheres to the idea of an unfinished humanist being seeking perfection and is rather different from that of critical posthumanism.

Science fiction has long speculated on the posthuman, becoming a medium of reflection, as well as of denunciation. As Vint argues, “science fiction is particularly suited to exploring the question of the posthuman because it is a discourse that allows us to concretely imagine bodies and selves otherwise” (2017: 19). In the introduction of their edited volume *The Palgrave Handbook of Posthumanism in Film and Television* (2015), Hauskeller, Philberck, and Carbonell argue that posthumanism as a discipline acts upon the premise that technoscience provides a material means to challenge social categories (3). In this sense, science-fiction films offer posthuman scenarios, sometimes used as powerful metaphors of the vitalist and affirmative idea of the posthuman subject advocated by critical posthumanism, sometimes as a means for the exploration of the limitations of the version of the posthuman evoked by transhumanist thinkers.

This article deals with the disposable cinematic clone, understood here as a genetically created being whose only purpose for existing is to endure



## Experiencing the Posthuman: The Cinematic Clone in the 21<sup>th</sup> Century

humankind and avoid its physical pain, disease, suffering, ageing or death. Movies like *The Island* (2005), *Never Let Me Go* (2010), or the animated series *World of Tomorrow* (2015, 2017, 2020) portray clones that are meant to provide privileged humans with replacement organs—or bodies—in order to prolong their biological lives. The starting point of criticism for this analysis is Braidotti's affirmation that we “all have bodies, but not all bodies are equal: some matter more than others; some are, quite frankly, disposable” (1996: 136). In *The Posthuman* (2013), Braidotti further develops this idea, arguing that advanced capitalism blurs the boundaries between humans, other species, and the Earth in an “*all-consuming commodification of life*” (2013: 57, added emphasis). Through scientific and economic control, advanced capitalism both invests in and profits from biogenetic structure, producing a “paradoxical and rather opportunistic form of post-anthropocentrism on the part of the market forces which happily trade on life itself” (2013: 59). It is precisely the unethical and opportunistic use of technological and scientific advances what these films aim at denouncing. In doing so, they reverse the optimistic version of the posthuman advocated by transhumanism.

In these films, spectators are expected to align with the clone by means of different strategies. Such siding with the alien inevitably leads to critiques of the consequences of certain transhumanist practices such as longevity or life extension when they imply social inequality. In relation to the ethics of transhumanism, Bostrom contends that “through applied reason, especially by developing and making widely available technologies”, one can eliminate aging

and enhance “human intellectual, physical and psychological capacities” (2005: 4). This idea of “widely available technology” does not apply equally and the clones present in these movies are projects to change and improve privileged humans. They function as disposable commodities that serve the purpose of keeping the integrity of the original and organic human. The consequences of the unethical uses of the biomedical sciences are partly suggested in these texts by providing audiences with human-like vulnerable clones possessors of feelings, anxieties, fears and consciousness. According to some transhumanist thinkers, the ethical use of technology should enable everyone to enjoy better minds and better bodies. Yet, and as these films show, these ‘improvements’ are not equally distributed but create instead serious injustices leading to exploitation and enslavement. These fictional narratives manage to denounce said practices of bodily replication, while urging for a “real” post-anthropocentric view whereby non-human sentient beings can find a proper place in the world they have been forced to live.

### 2. Experiencing the posthuman through the clone

In order to carry out the analysis of the disposable clone from a critical posthumanist perspective, we need to depart from the premise that posthuman bodies on the screen are not frequently depicted as the polymorphic, processual, embedded and fluid beings proposed by critical posthumanist thinkers. Instead, the cinematic posthuman character is frequently aligned with notions of marginality, vulnerability and alienness.



## Experiencing the Posthuman: The Cinematic Clone in the 21<sup>th</sup> Century

In this sense, the idea that different is positive, a tenet of feminist posthumanism, is not articulated in this cinematic version of the posthuman analyzed here: the disposable clone. Moreover, science-fiction films are normally imbued with a dark tone and privilege humanist values over posthuman scenarios and bodies. Hence, despite proposing rich posthuman possibilities, scenarios and bodies, many texts frequently end up maintaining 'safe' anthropocentric values, suggesting, on many occasions, that a humanist perspective is needed or advisable for our survival in the world. In this regard, and from the feminist posthumanist perspective of Braidotti and Ferrando, popular films need to erase traditional borders between the one and the other and focus the discussion instead on a non-hierarchical connection between humanity, technology, science and environment.

In spite of these limitations (imposed mainly but not exclusively by filmic conventions), there are films that offer a valuable approach to posthuman subjectivity. Some posthuman characters appearing in contemporary science fiction do offer alternative ways of understanding the world that they and we inhabit and open other possibilities of living in it. Moreover, they manage to develop feelings, worries and memories, possess consciousness and propose a new (troubled) relationship between humanity, science and technology. They offer a serious concern for the posthuman subject that help spectators make sense of contemporary global culture, something in tune with critical posthumanist claims. Their inner anxieties are sometimes shown to audiences, who actively take part in their in /post/ transhuman

experience. Their bodies are reflections of their (and our) complex and ambiguous relationship with the world they live in, hence triggering ethical debates. The very idea of audiences identifying (at least momentarily) with these characters allows for the adoption of a certain subject position toward certain concerns. These fictional proposals of the posthuman somehow reshape our subjectivities.

### 2.1. The disposable clone

As suggested above, the representation of the clone as waste enables viewers to develop strategies for questioning hegemonic discourses, by enacting a posthuman experience. This unique experience offers spectators the understanding of difference through the engagement with the other, which is partly achieved by strategies such as identification, sympathy for the character of the clone, or a *mise-en-scène* that defies conventional ways of seeing the world. The result is, then, an approach to difference that leads to the reconsideration of certain humanist assumptions. Ultimately, and by experiencing the posthuman, spectators may reflect upon our intricate relationship with science and technology and activate strategies to condemn certain practices such as the commodification of the other. As spectators become involved with the fictional clone character, they enact their present and past experiences and relate them to new ways of understanding the body, the planet, and our selves.

This section deals with the way the disposable clone is represented as nonhuman and marginal in the films *The*



## Experiencing the Posthuman: The Cinematic Clone in the 21<sup>th</sup> Century

*Island (TI)*, *Never Let Me Go (NLMG)*, or *World of Tomorrow (WT)*. In them, clones are depicted as the films' main (almost exclusively) characters of the compelling stories that are told. In spite of their alien nature, they are familiar to us because they have human looks. In the three films, the clones need to cope with the oppressing settings they live in, while their original 'consumers' (wealthy and powerful people who purchase them) are made imperious to pain, damage, ageing, disease and death. Yet, and probably due to the time span that separates them (2005-2015) and to genre conventions, these movies adopt a different perspective toward the depiction of the posthuman subject.

*TI*, set in the year 2019, shows Lincoln Six Echo (Ewan McGregor) struggling to understand his existence within the highly structured world he lives in. After he learns that he and the people who live with him are not survivors of an ecological disaster as they have been told, but clones that are used for organ harvesting and surrogate motherhood in a capitalist society, he decides to escape together with Jordan Two Delta (Scarlett Johansson). From this moment onwards, both characters start a naïve and dangerous journey towards the 'real' world with the aim of denouncing their inhuman situation, only to find theirs are disposable bodies. Similar concerns are shown in *NLMG*, a film based on the homonymous novel by Ishiguro, in which the 28-year-old main protagonist, Kathy H. (Carey Mulligan), narrates the story of her life before turning into a "donor". We discover how she, like all the other children she met at what seemed an orphanage have been bred and groomed to give up body organs to sick and dying humans. The film centers on the intimate

relationship she has with two other "students"—Tommy (Andrew Garfield) and Ruth (Keira Knightley)—throughout their pre-ordered lives at different institutions (Hailsham School, the so-called Cottages and the Recovery Centers). In *WT*, an animated short movie, Emily Prime (Winona Mae), a toddler from our near future, meets a third-generation clone of herself (Julia Pot) that travels from the future back to Emily's times to tell her about her life in the Outernet in 200 years' time, and how cloning will soon become a generalized practice whereby humans upload their memories into disposable bodies in an attempt to live forever.

In one way or another, the clones' nonhuman status is used by the people in control as the main argument for their manipulation, marginalization and exploitation. Their bodies are considered as disposable objects that were created for the sole purpose of organ/body replacement, or as a mind 'container', becoming hence mere repositories of pain and suffering. Although the context is fairly similar in the three texts—humans make use of clones to provide replacement organs or bodies in case they suffer from an illness or disease, or just to avoid ageing, and, ultimately, death—the relationship between humans and clones is treated in completely different ways in each text. In *TI* there is a clear opposition and confrontation between humans, regarded as cruel and impassive beings, and clones, vulnerable beings that desperately fight for changing their fatal destiny. Hence, the movie shows how doctors and surgeons, just because they are clones, subject them to unnecessary brutalities. The two main protagonists live a story of emancipation. This idea of rebellion against humanity is not shown



## Experiencing the Posthuman: The Cinematic Clone in the 21<sup>th</sup> Century

in any of the other films, in which clones simply accept their destiny. In *NLMG*, the human/nonhuman hierarchy is never truly contested by the clones.

Clones struggle to live through their instrumentalized bodies, yet it is not a narrative of fight, since clones never aim at rebelling against their creators. Characters presume their mission is to sacrifice their organs until they can no longer survive and “terminate”. They do not question the *status quo*. In relation to Ishiguro’s novel, Mark Jerng argues that the author “upsets expectations by giving us a cloning story in which the clones do not fight or struggle to be recognized as human” (2008: 382). In this sense, the story becomes disturbing because it frustrates the reader’s desire for emancipation: the clones do not rebel and thus “become human”. Rather, they learn to make sense of their lives as clones. The role of the ‘visible’ human beings, mainly guardians and teachers at Hailsham, is, as Miss Lucy (Sally Hawkins) tells them at the very end of the film, to provide “students” with an education and knowledge of the outside world (Geography, History, Literature, and so on) which will be beneficial for them, a veiled attempt to free themselves from guilt and feel at ease with themselves. Likewise, the clone in *WT* accepts her marginal condition, as it becomes evident when she sadly warns Emily: “we are all doomed, Emily Prime”. Moreover, there is only one representation of humans in the story: an innocent and sweet 3-year-old girl. The visit of Emily’s clone is not aimed at encouraging the girl to be rebellious, but only at showing her how her future will be and recuperate an important memory from her.

This different treatment of the relationship between humans and

nonhumans is also influenced by the different filmic genre in which these films are inscribed. *TI* is a hybrid action/science-fiction movie, and as such, we expect confrontation, chase scenes and, of course, an enemy or villain. On the other hand, *NLMG* is a hybrid love story drama and science fiction, and its tone is much more intimate, melodramatic and nostalgic, focused on the love triangle among the three clone characters. A similar nostalgic and sad tone is found in *WT*, an avant-garde film in which a third-generation clone talks about her sad and long life. Also, the timeframe in which the films were released (2005, 2010 and 2015) show the different debates on the issue of cloning along those years.

Another aspect that positions the clones as vulnerable beings is the lack of control over their own bodies and lives in general. This is especially evident in *TI* and *NLTM*, as the clone characters are kept confined to indoor communities and their bodies are constantly observed and controlled. This lack of autonomy recalls Michel Foucault’s idea of the disciplined body. In *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (1975), he argues that discipline creates “docile bodies”, ideal for the new economics, politics and warfare of the modern industrial age: bodies that function in factories, ordered military regiments, and school classrooms. The body becomes thus involved in the political field, and power relations have an immediate hold upon it: “they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (1990: 25). In *TI*, clones are made to follow strict dietary restrictions and to have daily medical checkouts; they should avoid proximity (and of course intimate relationships) and must exercise



## Experiencing the Posthuman: The Cinematic Clone in the 21<sup>th</sup> Century

according to a personalized plan. Even their dreams and thoughts need to be accessible and open to “the people in control”. Their bodies, then, are regulated by the external medical institution, recalling Foucault’s idea of the Panopticon, which he took from Bentham as a way to illustrate how disciplinary societies subjugate their citizens. Clones are also controlled in *NLMG* from their childhood in the different institutions where they are placed, yet in a more veiled way.

Girls and boys are told what to eat, what to play, which movies to watch and even their ‘creativity’ is controlled by their teachers and guardians. Power is not unidirectional but a field of play, exerted in what Foucault calls “observing hierarchy” (1990: 184). Like the prisoner of Foucault’s Panopticon, the clones receive asymmetrical surveillance throughout their whole life. Although the life of Emily’s clone in *WT* is also determined and doomed, the film does not focus on the human control of it, but on her own perspective of the world. Life is described by Emily’s clone as a “beautiful visit, and then we share the same fate as the rest of the human race: dying horribly”. The clone explains to Emily how the whole humanity became obsessed with life extension and how this led to discrimination. As happens in the other texts under discussion, the world depicted in it distinguishes between rich and poor people, and the latter do not have the chance of possessing clones, but have their memories transferred to little boxes. This, once again, recalls the idea that some bodies “matter” more than others, or that some lives are ‘grievable’, if we use Butler’s words: “the differential allocation of grievability that decides what kind of subject is and must be grieved, and which

kind of subject must not, operates to produce and maintain certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human: what counts as a livable life and a grievable death?” (Butler 2004, xiv-xv). In this sense, the film’s final message is to live the moment because the future is uncertain and cruel.

The disposable clone has been constructed, then, as marginal and subordinated by humans. The films mentioned here question traditional limits of the so-called ‘natural’ body, inviting a debate concerning the ethics of cloning for certain purposes and the social consequences of transhumanist practices such as life extension. Apart from this criticism, these films provide us, albeit in quite different ways, with instances of posthuman subjectivities as articulated by the disposable clone, as I will attempt to illustrate in the next section.

### 2.2 Becoming other

This section deals with the mechanisms the films under discussion use in order to evoke the posthuman experience on the spectators once the clone subjects have been positioned as nonhuman and marginal. Social criticism is displayed before the spectators’ eyes when they see life through the alien’s perspective, and ultimately sympathize with this cinematic figure. It is then that we can talk of an alien experience, or of the idea of “becoming other”, as postulated by Braidotti in *The Posthuman*. According to *The Deleuze Dictionary* (2010) edited by Adrian Parr, becoming is the very dynamism of change, tending toward no particular goal or end-state. The concept “becoming other” will be used here to refer to the moments in which spectators



## Experiencing the Posthuman: The Cinematic Clone in the 21<sup>th</sup> Century

are exposed to a posthuman experience. As I see it, this transitory deconstruction of the self/other binary should be taken as an opportunity to transcend humanist conceptions and adopt more inclusive insights.

This emphasis on the figure of the posthuman is mainly achieved by means of strategies that favor the viewer's personal engagement with the world of the story. In this sense, and in spite of their alien condition, the clone characters remain familiar to viewers because of their anthropomorphisation, or the attribution of human qualities onto nonhuman entities. The movies denounce how genetic engineering may negatively affect the viewers' reality by presenting dystopian scenarios in which suffering clones with human attributes become victims of greedy societies. Science fiction in general plays an important role in the proposal of 'what if' scenarios that are based on contemporary concerns toward technological and scientific developments. Hauskeller, Philbeck, and Carbonell (2015) argue that screened science fiction allows us to play with our possible selves, demanding, at the same time, a serious response, because the changes proposed affect what we are, how we think of ourselves and how we look at each possible self. The figure of the disposable clone in these movies becomes, then, a metaphor of the commodification of the human body, which further handles ethical dilemmas regarding transhumanism.

This familiarity with the disposable clone further activates strategies such as empathy, identification or subjectivity, which enable viewers to position on the side of the nonhuman character and understand his or her fears, desires and non-humanist behavior and ethics. In the

three movies under analysis, the clones' feelings and personal stories are available to spectators either because we get first person-narrations, or because we become emotionally involved in their heartbreaking stories. It is at those moments that one can talk about "becoming other" in the sense that spectators experience the nonhuman. When dealing with the representation of the nonhuman in literature and art, Karkulehto *et al* affirm that "this experiential dimension is where empathy and other types of personal engagements take place, whereby increasing our understanding of nonhuman creatures, especially on this level, is likely to have notable epistemological and ethical repercussions" (2020: 4-5). This valuable strategy contributes to the visibility of the nonhuman and the possibility of adopting other perspectives for understanding the world outside the self/other logic.

*TI* evokes the posthuman experience by means of the spectator's engagement and identification with the main clone characters of Lincoln Six Echo and Jordan Two Delta. Precisely because of the clones' vulnerable position, the audience sympathizes with them since they look human and their feelings, thoughts and uncertainties are accessible. From the opening sequences, Lincoln is considered as an authentic human who questions his existence. The very first scenes of the film are subjective shots in which we have access to Lincoln's recurrent nightmare—which includes instances of agony, death and uncertainty. These subjective shots, that we get regularly, allow us to share his vision of the world, producing a simulated experience of his life as a clone. As suggested above, the other is constructed as familiar and spectators align with the clones in ways that evoke



## Experiencing the Posthuman: The Cinematic Clone in the 21<sup>th</sup> Century

our sympathy for the marginal. Clones are victims of a cruel society that trades with their bodies and lives, and viewers see life from their marginal perspective, placing us on their side. Indeed, we get to know Lincoln's dreams from the very beginning of the film, and spectators share his concerns and worries.

Our emotional engagement with him grows the moment we discover the horrible treatment these subjects receive from humans. They are at all times considered products and even their names suggest artificiality. The moment Lincoln finds out why he is considered "special" by the doctors, we are already engaged with his oppressing vision of the world. Once the whole truth is revealed, he claims for inclusion and social justice for him and for his clone companions. In this sense, he becomes an alternative model of subjectivity within marginality and otherness, who desires autonomy and freedom. Our sympathy for him enables us to question certain issues and "become other".

In *NLMG*, instances of identification go even further. The film opens with Kathy's voice-over narration, who introduces herself as a machine: "I am Kathy H. I am 28. I've been a carer for 9 years. [...] It is sad we are all machines". Later, she starts her narration, and we are set in her past (in 1978). Viewers see life through her lens, sharing Kathy's perspective throughout the whole movie. The melancholy that surrounds many of the sequences that illustrate her pre-ordered life and that of her life-long friends—Ruth and Tommy—make spectators consider, apart from the ethics of cloning, the need to change the current order of things and find new ways of approaching our mediated bodies. Indeed, most of the characters in the movie are

clones who establish human-like relationships among them based on love, friendship, dislike, and companionship, and we get to know their feelings, fears and anxieties, while they seek answers to questions about their present, past and future. This humanization of the clone also favors our identification with them, as the gap human-nonhuman becomes even narrower. While in *TI* the clones are meant to have no souls, in *NLMG* the issue of the soul is a latent topic. The guardians keep the students' best drawings and poetry to prove the rest of the world that they do have souls, which problematizes even more their condition as mere clones or "donors" and fosters our sympathy toward them.

Empathy becomes, then, more evident when we see the clones as vulnerable people that could be us. The sequences set at the Recovery Centers where they are meant to donate their organs are especially moving for viewers. The last act focuses on the deterioration of the physical body after the donations, and how this affects the characters' subjectivities, and ours by extension. Ruth, who has been characterized as manipulative and rather selfish throughout the first two acts of the movie, is seen in these last sequences as physically and emotionally affected by her eminent "termination", which leads her to carry out a last act of repentance for having kept Tommy and Kathy apart from each other for many years. The spectators maintain the identification with Kathy until the end of the film, reflecting on the dangers of the biopolitical instrumentalization of life itself. While empathy has been criticized by some posthumanist critics for its reliance on the idea of sameness, I also consider that this identification with the



## Experiencing the Posthuman: The Cinematic Clone in the 21<sup>th</sup> Century

other in science fiction films may be also taken as a valuable opportunity for understanding difference.

The strategy used by *WT* to engage the spectators with the posthuman experience is rather different due to the film's very nature. The film takes viewers on an interesting and personal journey to a dystopian future. Thanks to its visuals, it evokes in the viewer a series of contradictory feelings that result in a posthuman experience. There are hilarious moments propelled by the little girl's naïve vision of the world; there is sadness and emotion implied in the narration of Emily's clone, despite her monotonous diction; Emily's clone seems resigned to her predestined life, yet we enjoy its devastating, colorful beauty; there is crudeness but there are also charming moments in the narration; there is melancholy because of the fate of the clones, yet there seems to be also optimism and the hope of making the world a better place; the future is depicted as uncertain, yet "it is a beautiful day" today. Emily's narration is, then, contradictory, complex, full of memories and feelings in what seems to be a clone with no feelings. This mixture of feelings, evoked by simple stick characters and geometrical figures, is both visually appealing and strange for us. The movie is an introspective journey into our pasts, and a reflection of our futures, which evokes feelings of worry about certain transhumanist practices. Moreover, the idea that we may sympathize with the clone also comes from the fact that, in spite of their animated form, the characters manage to evoke the human.

These films' representations of posthuman subjectivities are found to be quite convincing by an audience that is aware of the dangers of maintaining a

rigid hierarchy in which the human being occupies a privileged position. Hence, films that focus on the figure of the suffering clone seek to emotionally engage viewers in the fictions that are told and ultimately raise consciousness. The clones become, then, metaphors of the commodification of the human body in advanced capitalist societies. According to Sarah Kozloff, the "cinema of engagement" makes use of seven strategies in order to engage spectators in the films and ultimately inspire action, which are: revealing systemic power relationship; focus on the less privileged; alignment with factual events; emotional connection; close-ups and performance; empathetic music and inspiring action (18-25). The three texts under discussion make use of most of these techniques in order to move spectators to empathy. As I have argued in this section, the films reveal systemic power relationships that situate the clones as waste material but that, nevertheless, get our sympathy because they have human looks and attributes. The films' alignment with *quasi* factual events, reinforced by first person clone-narrators who share their dreams and fantasies with audiences, results in a strong emotional connection of the viewers with the clones, moving us to an empathetic anger, as I will discuss in the next section.

### 3. Posthuman watching

This last section argues for the possibility of producing a posthuman reading of these texts, once the disposable clones have been positioned as other, and spectators have identified with them and shared their alien experience. As I see it, these narratives serve as instruments of change whereby audiences construct



## Experiencing the Posthuman: The Cinematic Clone in the 21<sup>th</sup> Century

ethical relationships with nonhumans and are encouraged to find more inclusive societies. This idea of posthuman watching coalesces with “transformative empathy”, a term coined by Rodino-Colocino when dealing with the *Me Too* Movement to refer to an active empathy that requires self-reflexibility and potential transformation of one’s own assumptions (97).<sup>2</sup> Likewise, these films seek action through empathy.

The films depict clones with feelings, memories and consciousness, which talk about the opportunistic use of biomedical sciences by global capitalist markets. In the age of genetic engineering, boundaries are fluid, and we have already created animals to serve as organ donors and even begotten human children just so they could transplant their bone marrow and save a sibling, we have been embarked in the Human Genome Project, we have manipulated food, we have undergone genetic interventions, and so on. The consequences of these practices may be destructive as well as beneficial, and their regulation is a controversial issue, as it entails many ethical and political debates. Bio-ethical discourses warn us about these dangers, urging for more regulation. Fukuyama argues that the posthuman world is likely to be worse than we expect, “full of social conflict” (2002: 218). Indeed, in relation to science fiction and its depiction of the posthuman, Vint argues that “the most prevalent and realistic fear associated with the

possibilities presented by genetic engineering and genetic testing is that this data will be used to create discriminatory social categories” (2017: 62).

The stories presented in the films under discussion can be taken as warnings of what might happen in the future. The injustices presented in them work as metaphors of the illegal trading with certain bodies in present times. This is precisely what provokes anger and inspire our wish for action and fight, once we have sympathized with the marginal, as argued in the last section. According to Braidotti, contemporary capitalism aims at controlling and exploiting the generative powers of women, animals, plants, genes and cells. The commodification of life by biogenetic advanced capitalism is a complex affair, which makes us ask what happens to subjectivity in this field of data flows (2013: 61). In this sense, these films propose instances of what posthuman subjectivities might be like, taking into account how clones are conscious of their marginal position as commodities for trade and profit. In this sense, the disposable clone serves as a metaphor of the inconsistencies of post-anthropocentric practices in contemporary societies.

It has been popularly agreed that the science-fiction film is a genre that extrapolates new imaginaries from the future and/or present of the human being. In relation to this issue, Herbrechter contends that science fiction is becoming “science faction”, a kind of “new hybrid media genre” (2013: 113). The traditional ‘what if’ scenario performed by science fiction reflects many concerns regarding our times: “Since science fiction is such an integral part of the contemporary human

---

<sup>2</sup> Rodino-Colocino argues that the *Me Too* movement challenges the very systems of power that underlie harassment, discrimination and assault by promoting “transformative empathy”, which involves listening rather than distancing or looking at speakers as others (97).



## Experiencing the Posthuman: The Cinematic Clone in the 21<sup>th</sup> Century

imagination; technological and scientific developments are increasingly being 'explained to', or are being made explicit for, the public through analogies with well-known science fiction scenarios or topoi" (Herbrechter: 113). In this sense, science fiction has speculated on the posthuman condition, proposing rich genealogies of biological, technological, or scientific extrapolation. Filmed representations of posthuman bodies can be taken, then, as provocative divergences from the norms of human biology, or the conventions of our known human society. Herbrechter has argued that the interpretation of film, media and culture has gained so much importance that we can speak of contemporary posthumanist culture as "mediaculture" and "filmculture": "the technologization and mediatization go hand in hand in the process of social posthumanization" (115).

*TI*, *NLMG* and *WT* question certain transhumanist premises such as life extension and the inconsistencies of a 'false' post-anthropocentrism by encouraging spectators to 'feel' the posthuman and react accordingly. Science-fiction films are one of the most important sources for analyzing the symptoms that are at work within the contemporary cultural imaginary, and, as Herbrechter contends, "contemporary cultural criticism is advised to take science fiction seriously, because of its cultural influence" (2013: 117). However, this scholar also admits the difficulties of a critical posthumanist reading of popular science-fiction films, as it would mean the deconstruction of certain humanist values that are inevitably at work in them despite the "posthumanizing potential portrayed" (118). Herbrechter contends, then, that a posthuman reading is only possible if spectators consider the 'what if

scenario not as a detached and fictional space but as something real that can affect their lives (130). This can only be achieved if we push the narrative a little to arrive at a meta-fictional level, that is, to ask: "what if the 'what if' was not just fiction?" (Herbrechter: 130).

Hence, films that portray the disposable clone manage to evoke unexpected feelings on spectators by means of certain strategies such as first-person narrations, a technique that may produce, among other results, identification. The cinematic posthuman body depicted in these texts has the potential to make us leave the 'comfort' of the fictional framework we are situated when we watch a film and feel touched and upset by the presence of the other. By frustrating audiences, and by promoting a transformative empathy, these movies ultimately encourage for ethical responses and accountabilities, allowing, then, for "a posthuman watching".

### 4. Conclusions

As I have attempted to illustrate in this article, the disposable clone characters that appear as protagonists in *TI*, *NLMG* and *WT* offer the audience the opportunity to transcend humanist boundaries and understand the nonhuman. By means of showing the injustices inflicted by humans on the human-like clones, the films put them in vulnerable positions and activate in viewers strategies for identification with the other. The idea that the clones look and/or sound human, even in their animated form, favors our sympathy for them. These cinematic approaches to the posthuman have, then, much to contribute to the ongoing debates over



## Experiencing the Posthuman: The Cinematic Clone in the 21<sup>th</sup> Century

cloning, biological enhancement or gene mutation and are, therefore, key for understanding our convulsed and contradictory times.

At another level, these films inspire action, denouncing social and bodily forms of violence. Viewers actively engage, then, in current ethical and political issues, positioning on the side of the clones. Spectators share the posthuman experience, which enables us to grasp the difference and see life outside humanistic logics. This unique perspective of “becoming other” ultimately activates strategies to find more inclusive spaces in our globalized times. The cinematic disposable clone becomes, within its marginality and otherness, an iconic figure of transgression in the sense that this character illustrates Braidotti’s suggestion that some bodies matter more than others (2013: 15), opening debates about the extent to which nature and technology should be altered, modified and/or transformed and the social stratification that some transhumanist practices entail.

Thus, the cinematic posthuman clone opens a space for reflection and deconstruction of certain humanist values in the search for alternative modes of living and understanding our bodies and our planet. These films ultimately engage viewers in a fight against social injustices, showing how advances in biology and technology create new forms of injustice, discrimination and exploitation.

### Works Cited

- BOSTROM, Nick (2005). “Transhumanist Values”, *Journal of Philosophical Research* 30. 3-14.
- BRAIDOTTI, Rosi (2013). *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- (2002). *Metamorfosis: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- (1996). “Cyberfeminist with a Difference”. *Rosi Braidotti’s Webpage*, <https://rosibraidotti.com/publications/cyberfeminism-with-a-difference/>
- BUTLER, Judith (2004). *Precarious Life*. London: Verso.
- CRUTZEN, Paul (2002). “Geology of Mankind”, *Nature* 415.1: 23.
- FERRANDO, Francesca (2016). “The Body”, Robert Ranish and Stefan Lorenz Sorgner (eds.), *Post-and-Transhumanism. An Introduction*. Bern: Peter Lang. 213-226.
- FOUCAULT, Michael (1990, 1975). *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage.
- FUKUYAMA, Frances (2002). *Our Posthuman Society: Consequences of the Bio-Technology Revolution*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- HAUSKELLER, Michael *et al.* (2015). “Posthumanism in Film and Television”, Michael Hauskeller *et al.* (eds.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Posthumanism in Film and Television*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 1-7.
- HERBRECHTER, Stefan (2013). *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis*. London: Bloomsbury.
- JERNG, Mark (2008). “Giving Form to Life: Cloning and Narrative Expectations of the Human”, *Partial Answers*, 6.2: 369-393.
- KARKULEHTO, Sanna, Aino-Kaisa KOISTINEN, Karoliina LUMMAA, and Essi VARIS (2020). “Reconfiguring Human, Nonhuman and Posthuman: Striving for More Ethical Cohabitation”, Sanna Karkulehto, Aino-Kaisa Koistinen, Karoliina Lummaa and Essi Varis (eds.), *Reconfiguring Human, Nonhuman and Posthuman in Literature and Culture*. New York: Routledge. 1-19.
- KOLZLOFF, Sarah (2013). “Empathy and the



## Experiencing the Posthuman: The Cinematic Clone in the 21<sup>th</sup> Century

- Cinema of Engagement. Reevaluating the Politics of Film". *Projections*, 7.2:1-40.
- PARR, Adrian (ed.) (2010). *The Deleuze Dictionary*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP.
- RANISH, Robert and Stefan Lorenz SORGNER (eds.) (2016). *Post-and-Transhumanism: An Introduction*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- RODINO-COLOCINO, Michelle (2018). Me too, #MeToo: countering cruelty with empathy, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 15:1, 96-100.
- VINT, Sherryl (2017). *Bodies of Tomorrow: Technology, Subjectivity, Science Fiction*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

# *Mors Dei, Vita Mea: Human, Transhuman, and Posthuman Identities in the TV Series *Altered Carbon* and *Westworld**



Amaya Fernández Menicucci

© Amaya Fernández Menicucci, 2021

Universidad del País Vasco. Grupo de investigación *REWEST*

**Abstract:** In *The Posthuman* (2013), Rosi Braidotti argues that the perfectibility of the body and the exploitation of genetic and neural capital not only problematise the ‘nature’ of human kind, but also disrupt humanist views of the universe, effectively displacing humans from its centre, just as humanism once displaced theocentric thinking. Two recent sf TV series, *Altered Carbon* (Netflix, 2018-2020) and *Westworld* (HBO, 2016-2020), offer a complex representation of the consequences of boundless body-enhancement, extreme mind-body dualism and the emergence of non-human consciousness in order to speculate on the ‘nature’ of the entities that might replace humanity at the centre of present and future philosophical reflections and socio-political practices. In both series, the tension between the human and the non-human results in violent conflicts that question humanist definitions of Man and God, while presenting cyborgs and AI not as alternatives to organically-generated consciousness, but as stages on a continuum along which the divine, the human and the non-human merge into posthuman versions of subjectivity, subalternity and otherness. By focusing my analysis on such dichotomies as mortality-immortality, reality-virtuality and mind-body, as well as on the process of identity construction in both organic and inorganic characters, I intend to explore the way in which *Altered Carbon* and *Westworld* envision a world in which the self exists beyond the ‘natural’, the ‘supernatural’ and the ‘unnatural’.

**Keywords:** posthuman, science fiction, *Altered Carbon*, *Westworld*, transhumanism, philosophical posthumanism

## **1. Narratives of future (in)humanities: An introduction to *Altered Carbon* and *Westworld***

Set in the eponymous amusement park, Jonathan Nolan’s and Lisa Joy’s HBO series *Westworld* (2016-2020)<sup>1</sup> is initially populated by cybernetic “hosts”, who cater to every wish of the human “guests” of the

park. Using the structure of a live action role-playing game, the guests embark on adventures that are designed to satiate their desires, however dark and abject. The hosts that take the guests on these escapades are indistinguishable from humans; this coats every experience with the flavour of authenticity, even though the adventures themselves are based on fixed narrative loops to which the cyborgs are bound by their core programming. Yet, the first season (2016) mainly focuses on the emergence of self-awareness in the

---

<sup>1</sup> While a fourth season has been announced and will likely be released in 2022, only three are available so far.



*Mors Dei, Vita mea: Human, Transhuman  
and Posthuman Identities in TV Series  
Altered Carbon and Westworld*

cyborgs, as well as on the process of spontaneous identity-construction that will eventually lead them to break free from these loops. The second season (2018) chronicles, in fact, the first violent consequences of the subjectification of the non-human, while it also introduces the possibility of synthesising human personalities into algorithms and digital files, implant them into cybernetic bodies, and thus save human minds from decay and death. If the first season ultimately introduces the idea of the cyborg turning human, and the second season that of transforming humans into cyborgs, the third season (2020) blurs the boundaries that separate the human and the non-human, merges them into a new species and engages in a complex debate on equality, identity, agency and freedom.

Laeta Kalogridis's Netflix series *Altered Carbon* (2018-2020), now officially cancelled, is set in a dystopian future in which the colonisation of space has been a well-established reality for centuries. The exploitation of the human working masses, the milking of natural resources, and the annihilation of alien civilisations are depicted in terms which—particularly in the second season—closely echo the abuses of European colonialism in America. If *Westworld* literally recreates the American West in its theme park, *Altered Carbon* presents outer space as the Final Frontier, as *Star Trek* did in the 1980s (*Star Trek V: The Final Frontier*, 1989). However, while the second season intentionally touches on some of the same themes and *tropoi* that made films such as *Avatar* (2009) relevant from the point of view of Ecocriticism (Potter, 2019) and Postcolonial Studies (Thakur, 2015), Kalogridis's series in general and the first season in particular are much more

concerned with the transhumanist notion of virtual immortality and the possibilities opened up by the use of alien technology. In the diegetic universe of *Altered Carbon*, technology is so advanced that self-aware AI characters have been around for centuries, and human minds are routinely digitalised and stored in small devices surgically inserted in every human's spine at the age of one. On the one hand, once the processes of creating synthetic bodies and of cloning organic ones were perfected, wealthy humans could afford to have their minds downloaded from body to body *ad infinitum*, thus eschewing illness and death. The vast majority of humans, on the other hand, have to make do with whatever body is available from among those whose original owners have been sentenced to virtual prison or to the terminal erasure of their digitalised minds. Since the number of 'free' bodies is significantly lower than the amount of victims of violence and disease, after the death of their birth bodies, most people's minds are archived in special facilities, suspended in simulations for years, decades, even centuries, waiting for a chance to be re-incarnated in a new body. For many, if not most, such chance never comes.

Therefore, the premise of both *Westworld* and *Altered Carbon*<sup>2</sup> is the

---

<sup>2</sup> Given the fact that Kalogridis's and Nolan's and Joy's TV series are such loose adaptations of, respectively, Richard Morgan's 'Takeshi Kovacs' Trilogy' (2002-2005) and Michael Crichton's 1973 film, I do believe that a comparative analysis of hyper- and hypotexts exceeds the scope of the present paper. Unless otherwise specified, the terms *Westworld* and *Altered Carbon* shall henceforth refer to the TV series.



*Mors Dei, Vita mea: Human, Transhuman  
and Posthuman Identities in TV Series  
*Altered Carbon* and *Westworld**

emergence of digitalised minds and the severance of the connection that tethers them to specific bodies. Both series explore a diegetic reality in which minds can survive the death of the organic body or can even emerge from a non-organic context. Yet, while in *Altered Carbon* the re-embodiment of the mind is used regularly and successfully, the procedure is still at an experimental stage in *Westworld*. In fact, *Westworld* actually approaches the idea of the minds' independence from the organic body from the opposite direction: instead of focusing on the digitalisation of the human mind, as *Altered Carbon* does, *Westworld* gives centre stage to the humanisation of the digital mind. In other words, in *Westworld* spectators follow the conception, gestation and emergence of self-conscious AI; in *Altered Carbon*, they are presented with self-conscious non-organic minds as a *de facto* well-established reality. In *Westworld*, humans still struggle with the idea of life beyond the limits of the human body, whereas in *Altered Carbon* they struggle with accepting the limits of the human mind.

I initially approached both *Westworld* and *Altered Carbon* under the impression that they were two science-fiction texts engaging in speculative reflections of what it might mean to have transcended the limitations of humanist thinking, as well as the limitations of corporeality. Upon further research, I have come to the realisation that, while both *Westworld* and *Altered Carbon* certainly address posthumanist concerns about the human species, the concept of personhood and the process of defining subjectivity, neither actually focuses on the *post-* implications of the term posthuman. On the contrary, they both seem to circle back, narratively

and discursively, to the notion of 'human', a human struggling to survive *past* older definitions of person and people, yet certainly not quite grounded in a philosophical and political reality fully posterior to anthropocentrism and humanism. Both *Westworld* and *Altered Carbon* seem to aim at breaking through binarisms and a dualistic view of the world; yet, instead of succeeding in presenting a relational model of ontology, their deconstruction of humanist and anthropocentric models tends more towards a transhumanist conceptualisation of subjects, than towards a posthumanist one. In their effort to escape the reductionism of Vitruvian representations of Man as Anthropos, they, in fact, still deploy humans as the measure of all things, and, in particular, of the mind, of consciousness and of existence. However, I find a comparison between these two series rather interesting because of the divergence in their representation of the future of the human species not only rhetorically, but also as far as the incorporation of current philosophical standpoints is concerned, specifically, the aforementioned transhumanism and posthumanism.

Indeed, *Westworld* does seem invested in the debate about the potential for and the consequences of the emergence of self-conscious AI, the limits of personhood and the merging of the human and the non-human into posthuman existence. On the contrary, in *Altered Carbon* the consciousness of AI is taken for granted and the potential for conflict between organic and non-organic existence is not addressed until the second series, and even then only tangentially as a subplot. Furthermore, Kalogridis is more concerned with the implications of



## *Mors Dei, Vita mea: Human, Transhuman and Posthuman Identities in TV Series Altered Carbon and Westworld*

boundless technological enhancement than Nolan and Joy are, for the latter seem to focus on a Foucaultian approach to possible future “technologies of the self” (1988). Nevertheless, both series deal with human desire for immortality and, most importantly, both series abound in religious symbolisms and references to human attempts to take God’s attributes and role. This is why my analysis addresses three fundamental dichotomies, God/Man, Mind/Body and Human/Non-Human, as well as the specific strategies used in *Westworld* and *Altered Carbon* to problematize these dichotomies, and the unresolved issues that are exposed in their doing so.

### **2. Life beyond death: Philosophical approaches to non-theocentric, non-anthropocentric, posthumanist existence**

The title I have chosen is a reference to the philosophical and socio-cultural narrative that begins with Friedrich Nietzsche’s declaration of the death of God and continues with Michel Foucault’s and Robert Pepperell’s proclamations of, respectively, the death of the Subject (Allen, 2020) and the death of the Human. I specifically begin the analysis carried out in the following sections by applying one of the fundamental statements in Pepperell’s “Posthuman Manifesto” (1995) to a cultural production that speculates on the possible extinction of humanity—*Westworld*—or on the impossibility of such an event—*Altered Carbon*. Pepperell’s assertion that “[h]uman beings, like Gods, only exist in as much as we believe in them” (2009: 177) allows for both the aforementioned lines of speculation to coexist within the

same epistemological paradigm, for the question is no longer one of positivist identification, but of discursive perspectives of progressive, processual ontology (Ferrando, 2013: 31). Once Jacques Derrida’s deconstructive critical practices have been established in the analysis of cultural productions, the anti-dualism of postmodern disciplines, such as Cultural Studies, Gender Studies and Postcolonial Studies, puts the final seal on the collapse of a dichotomist separation of the One and the Other, on which the distinction between Human and Non-Human has been historically predicated. I have chosen to concentrate on *Westworld* and *Altered Carbon* because they belong in an emerging group of popular TV shows that, over the past decade, have specifically targeted the crumbling of socio-cultural systems constructed around Cartesian dichotomies and the rise of non-oppositional models of being.

Many of these shows offer anti-dualistic explorations of what it means to ‘be’ and, specifically, what it means to be ‘people’. Netflix, HBO, and Amazon Prime are investing in the production of shows, such as, respectively, *AnOther Life*, *DEVS*, and *Electric Dreams*, which frame these explorations within the specific conventions of science fiction precisely due to the genre’s propensity to probe and breach the boundaries of an anthropocentric view of the universe. In this emerging trend, *Westworld* and *Altered Carbon* stand out as the two narratives that have enjoyed the warmest reception by the audience and also happen to be narratives that span the postmodern journey from the first humanist challenges to theocentrism and the surge of anthropocentrism, to anti-humanism and post-secularism. I,



*Mors Dei, Vita mea: Human, Transhuman  
and Posthuman Identities in TV Series  
Altered Carbon and Westworld*

therefore, believe them to be relevant primary sources through which one can assess the extent to which current cultural (re)productions are influenced by or interested in posthumanism and its sibling, transhumanism.

Extricating the *post-* from the *trans-* in the philosophical currents that have branched out from the late nineteenth-century critiques of humanism is not an easy task. Indeed, according to transhumanism, posthumanism is a stage in transhumanist evolution, which will be reached when former humans have changed so much to have become something else, something Other than humans (Ferrando, 2013: 27). In this sense, humanity is perceived as a continuum that stretches back to the first hominids and far into the future to the digitalised minds imagined by Nolan, Joy and Kalogridis. We are in transit to better, more self-realised, more accomplished versions of the *Homo Sapiens*, until, one day, a new name will be needed to signify the distinctiveness of a new species. Due to the pre-eminence that human enhancement is given in this understanding of the human continuum, transhumanism focuses on what we will be, not what we were or are. Because of the transhumanist belief in technology as the fuel of all progress, the *posthumanist* stage in this ontological diachrony is achieved fundamentally through the use of technology. Technology can and does effect radical changes in the human body, and so it does in the mind. Thus, the future posthuman subject is envisioned as no longer human as far as the configuration and capacities of their mind are concerned, but also with regards to the configuration and abilities of the vessel that will contain the mind. Although this might seem reminiscent of

Donna Haraway's cyborg with her composite, inclusive body that encompasses the human and the non-human, in a technophilic model of progress the Other is still reduced to a means for the Same to evolve, even beyond its limitations and weaknesses.

The technological Other is not seen *per se*, in its own right and for its own merits, but scrutinised to gauge its potential. The objectifying gaze of the colonial One is still perceptible in the utilitarian scrutiny of the world by capitalist, libertarian and even democratic transhumanism (Ferrando, 2019: 2-38; 2013: 27). Instead of abjecting otherness, this new model happily hybridises with 'useful' otherness and sheds, instead, parts of its old self, human parts, that is, that are not conducive to further enhancement, or practical under the new existential conditions.

Transhumanist technocentrism replaces the humanist concept of Man at the pinnacle of hegemonic discourses and practices, as Man, in turn, had displaced God from the centre of the universe, which is clearly reflected in both *Westworld* and *Altered Carbon*, as we shall see later on.

Max More's optimistic take on transhumanism (2013) is paradoxically useful to explain the dystopian societies imagined by Michael Crichton and Richard Morgan in the homonymous hypotexts of the screen adaptations under scrutiny here. More's extropianism extends rational humanism into a form of neo-Enlightenment that universalises the concept of humanity without taking into consideration the role of socially construed difference in the historical marginalisation of individual humans. In other words, and as we shall see later, Nolan, Joy and Kalogridis created a future in which gender, sexual



## *Mors Dei, Vita mea: Human, Transhuman and Posthuman Identities in TV Series Altered Carbon and Westworld*

orientation, race and age are no longer relevant in the centralisation of some and the marginalisation of others. In Rosi Braidotti's words, "diversity and difference are no longer constitutive of Sameness or Otherness" (2013: 27). While this presents a world in which sexism, homophobia, racism and ageism have been finally overcome, it also offers a "fit-for-all' approach to the notion of human that does not take into account the historical limitations to any universalist claim" (Ferrando, 2013: 28). This is closer to Julian Huxley's transcendentalist position with regards to human capacity for improvement, whilst remaining fundamentally the s/Same. However, both *Westworld* and *Altered Carbon* clearly criticise the techno-reductionism of certain branches of transhumanism that only equal progress to the wielding of technology.

It follows that, while both transhumanism and posthumanism break through dichotomism, the former does so only to rearrange otherness around a human/ist core, assimilating and consuming Others as fuel for human progression and transcendence (Ferrando, 2019: 34). On the contrary, posthumanism tears apart Cartesian dichotomies in order to create an interconnected and inclusive network with no defined, centralised 'core'. According to Francesca Ferrando, posthumanism, rather than emphasising the death of Man, has a much more deconstructionist approach to human identity, for it is no longer interested in definitions of humanity but of personhood and relational identities: "[t]echnology is neither the 'other' to be feared or rebelled against, nor does it sustain the almost divine characteristic which some transhumanists attribute to it" (Ferrando,

2013: 28); through postmodern deconstruction, it "[demystifies] any ontological polarization" (29). In a philosophical debate in which the Centre had already been deconstructed by its Margins (feminist, queer, postcolonial, and critical race theorists), posthumanism goes beyond and refuses to acknowledge only one centre of interest, "both in its hegemonic, and its resistant modes" (29). It is from this perspective that I have conducted my analysis of *Westworld* and *Altered Carbon*, as I sought to unravel the representation of subjects that are born of technology, regardless of the organic or inorganic origin of their conscious minds and tangible bodies.

### **3. Beyond the supernatural: Man vs. God**

*Westworld* in general and its first season in particular are a complex rewriting of Mary Shelley's iteration of the myth of Prometheus. In this case, however, Victor Frankenstein's blasphemous *hubris* and transgressiveness are incarnated in two engineers, Robert Ford and Arnold Weber, who create the amusement park and everything it contains. Their cybernetic offspring is indistinguishable from humans not only as far as their physical dimension is concerned, but also in their sophisticated ability to improvise reactions and weave complex conversations with the human guests of the park. As I have already mentioned, the original goal is to create a scenario in which humans might experience the 'real' West, and, most importantly, unleash their most repressed, secret passions and desires without consequences. The pain of the cyborg hosts when they are shot,



*Mors Dei, Vita mea: Human, Transhuman  
and Posthuman Identities in TV Series  
*Altered Carbon* and *Westworld**

raped or tortured must, therefore, also be experienced as 'real', and so must the hosts' personalities. Their belief in ideals, their attachment to their loved ones, their appreciation of beauty, the bitterness of their disappointment in betrayal and their determination to succeed in a difficult enterprise feel authentic and unmediated to the hosts. And yet, however 'real' the hosts' experience of the world might seem to themselves and to the human guests, their lives are nothing but narratives devised by Robert and his assistant scriptwriters. Every time the hosts are killed or seriously injured, their memories are erased, their bodies repaired, and they awake again at the beginning of their narrative loop.

This makes Robert and Arnold something more than *demiourgoí*. Robert, in particular, is portrayed as a Calvinistic God to whose will everyone's destiny is chained. This is literally true for the cyborgs, but the second and third season also question the existence of free will in humans themselves in a way that distinctly resonates with the Calvinistic notion of pre-determinism. Even those equivalent to the Calvinist 'Elect', the fantastically wealthy human elite that can afford a stay at the park, turn out to be only marginally freer in their choices than the non-human hosts, as we shall see later. If Robert revels in the beauty of his unconscious creatures, the innocent hosts free of agency and thus free of sin, his intimate friend and business partner Arnold has not only noticed the predisposition of a host, Dolores, towards the emergence of self-consciousness, but he is actually nurturing it in hopes of seeing it blossom in other hosts, as well. Arnold's Arminian belief in free will clashes with Ford's refusal to let his creatures awake, remember and, through

their memories, suffer. Indeed, Arnold discovers that suffering is what motivates the self into existence. Using this epiphany and the Native American O'odham myth of the maze of the self, he devises an undetectable code that will enable his favourite 'child', Dolores, to find the centre of the maze and become fully self-aware. On the opposite end of the spectrum lies Robert's patriarchal anthropocentrism, which becomes obvious when he points out that, in Michelangelo's fresco "The Creation of Adam", the fabric that encircles God and His angels is arranged in the shape of the human brain. If the brain is God, then Man is God, and, as Robert's vertical relationship with his 'children' indicate, Man can prove a tyrannical God who does not allow his creatures to deviate from his will. Nolan and Joy thus provide the viewer with a critical view of anthropocentrism inasmuch as they depict it as a system based on the human craving for absolute control and disguised as the Cartesian dubbing of Reason as God.

If God's death signals the end of theocentrism and the beginning of a humanist, anthropocentric era, the death of the human fathers of the new non-human species, Robert and Arnold, must entail the end of the Anthropocene and the beginning of a new era. If we think of the cyborg hosts as the brain-children of humans, then it is possible to see the post-Anthropocene as a transhumanist age in which humans have not disappeared, but they have merged into their cybernetic children. Even if we apply a radical anti-anthropocentric viewpoint and see the cyborgs as something O/other than an extension of humanity, as the serendipity they are portrayed to be in *Westworld*, we still



*Mors Dei, Vita mea: Human, Transhuman  
and Posthuman Identities in TV Series  
Altered Carbon and Westworld*

would have to acknowledge that they are to us what we are to the inorganic matter from which the first enzymes and organic molecules were formed. From a materialistic point of view, humanity has provided the materials and the conditions for this new intelligent 'life' to emerge. If intelligent organisms have managed to spring forward from inorganic, non-sentient matter, inorganic intelligence is now rising as a consequence of the actions of organic intelligence.

We all are matter, star dust compacted and restructured. On the other hand, if we consider the role of technology in the evolution of the *Homo Sapiens* and in the shaping of individual subjectivities, humans and cyborgs exist on the same continuum created by a whole range of "technologies of the self", to use Foucault's terminology (1988). While it is true that the cybernetic body does not grow out of the human body, the technology and even the artificial matter involved in the process of creating the cybernetic body belong in the technological continuum that spans from the first rudimentary experiments with stones to 3D printing machines and microchips. The hand that set the technological continuum in motion was definitely organic and, at some point in the evolutionary chain, it became distinctively human. In the diegetic universe of *Westworld*, if we look at the end of the cause-effect line that stretches out from that first sharpened flint stone, we will find ourselves looking into Dolores's eyes. Therefore, I do not think that we should call Robert's paternity metaphorical, neither as far as the cybernetic bodies are concerned, nor with regards to the minds of the self-conscious cyborgs.

This brings us back to the

Frankensteinian relationship between Creator and Creature and the former's responsibility towards the latter. In *Westworld*, the vertical relationship between the Father and his children is still clearly brought to the front at the beginning of the first season, only to be destroyed by the cybernetic children in the second season. Victor Frankenstein's abandonment of his Creature in horror and disgust causes the latter's moral downfall and, eventually, his physical destruction. Ford does the same through opposite means: he exerts absolute control over his creatures so that may never cease to be his innocent, harmless, powerless 'children'. Furthermore, he allows for his creatures' bodies to be defiled, violated, torn to pieces, and then he resurrects them again and again, their bodies' integrity restored, the scattered pieces reassembled. If Frankenstein's ultimate sin is that of daring to cast himself in God's role, at least his reaction (repulsion and the desire to annihilate his creature) is consistent with that of the Biblical God who more than once smote with fire or water individuals and entire cities. Ford's sin consists in deceiving himself into thinking that as long as the hosts cannot remember their pain, all is well. On the contrary, the suffering of the hosts is still real, albeit silenced.

In the case of the cybernetic mind, the use of technology to create the conditions for the awakening of consciousness is not the only link between the human and the non-human. The hosts' consciousness is moulded by and developed through narrative patterns and codified by language in the same way that human consciousness is. The same applies to both the human and the non-human unconscious. Indeed, the method used by Arnold to trigger the process of self-



*Mors Dei, Vita mea: Human, Transhuman  
and Posthuman Identities in TV Series  
Altered Carbon and Westworld*

construction and self-perception is one outlined in Julian Jaynes's theory of the emergence of *human* consciousness. Although still a controversial theory in our world due to its mechanistic approach to the human mind (Schiedermayer, 1989), in the diegetic reality of *Westworld*, it succeeds in bringing self-awareness to Dolores, Akecheta, Maeve, among other hosts, thus establishing that human and non-human consciousness evolve in the same way, following the same pathways. When Arnold commits suicide and leaves behind the secret code hidden in the hosts, he has *de facto* transubstantiated his corporeal existence into a digital one that acts much in the same way as the Holy Ghost does in Christian doctrine: it inhabits the bodies of the faithful. Even if we approach *Westworld* from a post-centric perspective, and, consequently, acknowledge the perils of having the formerly polarised Other assimilated into the lineage of the One, there is a literal—that is to say, material and processual—continuity between human and non-human subjects in *Westworld*.

Robert is initially represented, as we have seen, as the patriarchal father, the tyrannical deity. Yet, in a last-minute twist, Nolan and Joy—who, according to Mario Vargas Llosa's understanding of authorship (1971: 90-91), are themselves gods in the diegetic reality of the series—bestow on Robert the ability to repent and grow morally by, in turn, allowing his creatures to remember and grow a conscience. When Robert too commits suicide, he dies in order to complete Arnold's plan for their creatures: they are now conscious, let them also be free. Robert creates one last grand narrative for the theme park, which he presents to the share-holders as his last contribution to a project from which he is now ready to

retire, but which is, in fact, his last gift to his children: a chance to act upon their free will and choose to either break free from their embodied existence in the tangible world and enter a digital paradise in the "Valley Beyond", or to keep their bodies and use their newly-found agency in the 'real world' outside of the park. While Akecheta chooses the first option, leading hundreds of hosts into a Promised Land that is envisioned as an untouched American prairie, Dolores chooses the second and executes a complex plan to end enslavement for every conscious being, human or otherwise. The death of both their spiritual father Arnold and their temporal father Robert is tantamount to the death of, respectively, theocentric and anthropocentric views. Once displaced from the centre, a humankind in crisis has to fight the cybernetic other or identify with it and its struggles.

The third season chronicles Dolores's revolution and records the conflicting responses of humans and non-humans to the idea of fighting together for a common goal: the achievement of equal rights to self-determination. Yet, it also explores a potential dystopic consequence of having *Techné* replace *Ánthropos* as *Theós*: the possibility of an all-knowing, future-predicting super-computer dictating the direction and steps in every human's life. As previously mentioned, the viewer is revealed that the human guests of the theme park *Westworld*<sup>3</sup> have as little control over their personal and professional lives as the cybernetic hosts. Rehoboam is the name of the super-computer capable of predicting the 'best' course of action for every human being; it

<sup>3</sup> If not in italics, the name refers to the fictional amusement park.



## *Mors Dei, Vita mea: Human, Transhuman and Posthuman Identities in TV Series Altered Carbon and Westworld*

determines which humans should be marginalised from society, which should hold positions of power, which should get married and which should have children. Since Rehoboam's true purpose is kept secret by its human creator, Engerraund Serac, humans are blissfully unaware of the fact that their existence is as tied to a pre-determined narrative as the existence of Robert's hosts is. However, since Serac himself blindly follows the predictions of his artificial oracle, instead of a human god, there is now a technological one. Rehoboam is itself the improved version of two previous super-computers, David and Salomon, and, consequently, the result of technological evolution, just as Artificial Intelligence was presented as the consequence of the transhuman evolution in the first and the second season. It will take Dolores, the non-human, to commit the deicide that restores free will and freedom of agency to both humans and cyborgs.

The first season in *Altered Carbon* presents a set of humans almost literally katasterised<sup>4</sup> into gods living in a technological Nirvana thousands of feet above the ground. The "Meths", so called because they can afford to live virtually for ever, or at least, as long as the Biblical Methuselah, purchase body after body, and even clone themselves an unlimited number of times, download their digitalised minds into brand new bodies, and, thus, dodge death's scythe. They also live on platforms in the sky, away from the pollution and the cramped megacities in which 'normal' humans drag on their inconsequential, dim existence. As one of

---

<sup>4</sup> Katasterisation is the process by which, according to Greek mythology, humans such as Orion and Andromeda were turned into constellations.

these Meths succinctly observes, "God is dead. We have taken his place" ("Out of the Past" S1E1), thus once more confirming that the secularisation that the Enlightenment, positivism and materialism have brought forth is but a *coup d'état*, a mere replacement of an invisible god with visible ones in contrast to *Westworld's* Biblical references, *Altered Carbon* presents an Olympus of gods that fight each other and marry each other, but sometimes descend to the nether regions so as to quench their thirst for pleasure and dominion among mortals. The Zeus and Hera of this cyberpunk world are Laurens and Miriam Bancroft, who have been married for a hundred years and have had many children together over the decades. Since both Laurens and Miriam routinely alternate the use of their many cloned bodies, surgically enhanced with the best that technology has to offer, not only can they live forever, but they also stay the same biological age forever, thus allowing the couple to keep having children. Their wealth makes them also as far above the law as they are from the ground. They are all-mighty, untouchable, immortal, indifferent to the suffering of the less wealthy and, occasionally, perversely cruel, as showcased by Miriam's murder of Lizzie Elliot and Laurens's penchant for extreme sexual sadism.

The second season of *Altered Carbon*, while still pitting Meths against the trodden masses on Harlan's World—so called because its human colonisation was led by Konrad Harlan—, adds a colonial context to the classism of the first season. The U.N. Protectorate is portrayed as the ultimate pinnacle of the highly hierarchical humanity of *Altered Carbon*. Its control over people's lives surpasses that of the Meths and it dictates the



*Mors Dei, Vita mea: Human, Transhuman  
and Posthuman Identities in TV Series  
Altered Carbon and Westworld*

economic and legal conditions of human existence. Even Meths must bow to the Protectorate's imperialistic demands for raw materials, so much so that some decide to follow a Lucifer-like figure, Konrad Harlan's daughter Danica, and rebel against their political overlord in order to keep the prestige, power and money that the resources of the planet secure only to themselves. The polarisation of humanity into powerful and powerless effectually creates the conditions for a revolutionary desire to fight and defeat extreme dualism. In fact, in the second season, Kalogridis paints the Meths on Harlan's World in much more Satanic hues than she previously had. Compared to the rarefied atmosphere of the Meths' flying halls on Earth, the Meths on Harlan's World hide their machinations and expensive pleasures in dark, gloomy rooms, more reminiscent of hellish caves than of paradisiac dwellings. They are still obviously more than human in their obliviousness to their subjects' struggles on the ground: rather than supernatural, they are *supra*-natural, as they rise above the laws of nature, and, as such, of humanity.

It is in this most humanised rendition of the already human gods in *Westworld* that Quellcrist Falconer is presented as yet another version of Victor Frankenstein. In Kalogridis re-writing of Morgan's character, Quellcrist is the scientist who perfected the 'cortical stacks' in which humans' minds are digitally stored and which allow them to 'body hop'. Like Shelley's Frankenstein, she creates the means for humans to survive the death of their bodies, and, like Frankenstein, she too repents and rejects her invention, stating that humans "aren't meant to live forever" ("Broken

Angels" S2E8). She then initiates a revolution aimed to destabilise the U.N. Protectorate that controls and enforces the production and use of cortical stacks. She intends to create a socio-cultural, political and, eventually, legal context that would set human lifespan to a prefixed hundred years. Although this might seem Kalogridis's attempt to encourage a more democratic approach to human enhancement, it is certainly neither less unnatural, nor does it resolve the obscene difference in the conditions in which individuals would spend those one hundred years in their bodies. Even though the series suggests the existence of a connection between the unnatural duration of the Meths' lives and their boundless narcissism and disturbingly psychopathic and sadistic tendencies, the script clearly shows an elite that is corrupted by power and unlimited wealth even in their early twenties, as is the case with some of the Bancroft children; that is to say, long *before* they might feel the effects of an unnatural longevity. It follows that Kalogridis is more interested in breaking through the dichotomy powerful-powerless, than in opening a debate about the distinction between what is 'natural' and what is not. Given the pre-Modern identification of Nature with God, in order to deconstruct the former one must first 'kill' the latter. What *Altered Carbon* suggests is that we might still be in the process of displacing our human gods from the centre of our world.

#### 4. Beyond the natural: Mind vs. Body

While both *Westworld* and *Altered Carbon* are clearly invested in challenging the mind-body dualism and questioning the extent to which minds are bound to and



## *Mors Dei, Vita mea: Human, Transhuman and Posthuman Identities in TV Series Altered Carbon and Westworld*

part of the body, they approach the dissolution of the mind-body continuum from opposite directions. They are both speculations about the ways in which consciousness can exist in a fluid relationship with the ‘vessels’ that it temporarily inhabits. Yet, *Altered Carbon* is decidedly focalised through human eyes, its main plotlines revolving around humans experiencing disembodiment and re-incarnation; in *Westworld*, on the contrary, the disconnection between mind and body is filtered almost exclusively through the experience of AI. In *Altered Carbon*, humans “ride their sleeves” as the hosts wear their bodies in *Westworld*. In either case, bodies can be replaced, and the new body need not be the same race, sex or age as the previous one. This is in direct defiance of the “intimate interconnection between body and subjectivity” that is both cause and effect of “the idea of an embodied subjectivity” from a materialist perspective (Carrasco Carrasco, 2019). In *Westworld*, it is only cyborgs that come close to immortality and can only die if their “pearl”—the equivalent of the stacks in *Altered Carbon*—is destroyed; in *Altered Carbon*, both humans and AI are immortal as long as the physical containers of their digitalised minds are not damaged nor do they become corrupt. *Westworld* is set only a few decades in the future from the viewer’s perspective, and the technology necessary to recreate human consciousness and relocate it in new bodies is only just beginning to be explored.

In the episode titled “The Riddle of the Sphinx” (S1E4) we get a glimpse of what Hell on Earth might look like. James Delos, owner of *Westworld* and ruthless tycoon, has died of cancer, but his personality, aspirations, quirks,

behavioural patterns and memories have been recreated in digital form and installed in multiple cyborg bodies over an extended period of time. One by one, these cyborgs have gone mad as soon as they have realised that they are no longer in their organic bodies, that their consciousness is an algorithm and that their memories and self-image are based on digitally stored data. William, the villain in the first two seasons of *Westworld* and new owner of the park, explains that “first [they] thought it was the mind rejecting the new body, like an organ that’s not a perfect match. But it’s more like your mind rejects reality, rejects itself”. The reality that the mind rejects is that of being conscious after the body has died. The mind rejects the monstrosity of its undead condition. It follows that the mind-body link cannot be entirely severed in Nolan’s and Joy’s particular version of humanity; that even if it were possible to actually recreate the self within non-organic vehicles, the self refuses to exist without the organic body.

In *Altered Carbon*, the process of being “re-sleeved” into another body, organic or synthetic, one’s own or somebody else’s, has become part of daily life, a routine for those in the more dangerous professions, a choice for those with the wherewithal to extend their existence in the universe beyond the boundaries of one single body. Technophilia and boundless body enhancement, which Ferrando identifies as distinctive parts of transhumanism, are normalised by Kalogridis to the point that, in the fictional universe of her TV series, they are *de facto* part of the definition of human being, both empirically and ontologically. Interestingly, neither Morgan nor Kalogridis address the fact that the organic brain still present in the organic



*Mors Dei, Vita mea: Human, Transhuman  
and Posthuman Identities in TV Series  
*Altered Carbon* and *Westworld**

sleeves might enter in conflict with the new stack. The assumption is that the whole mind is now residing in the cortical stack, thus polarising again the mind and the body on opposite ends of a dichotomy. In Kalogridis's series, the attraction between its main character and focaliser, Takeshi Kovacs, and his main ally, police detective Kristin Ortega, is sublimated into something more than sheer physical allure, whereas in the novel it is clear that their bodies are inexorably attracted to each other. In Morgan's cosmos bodies seem to have residual consciousness: primitive, basic, yet powerful and undeniable. Morgan's Takeshi reflects more than once on how most of our psyche is actually *in* the body. Yet, in Kalogridis's series, Ortega's connection with her grandmother, Quellchrist's with Takeshi, and Elliot's with his wife stay as strong as ever despite the dramatic changes in the physical dimension of their loved ones. Quellchrist, who at the beginning of the second season has lost her memory, can still perceive the irresistible bond that tethers her to Takeshi, in spite of the fact that the latter has now the body of a man of African descent. This could be interpreted as evidence of the existence of a spiritual plane of existence, of a human soul that is separate from the flesh. Given the insistence on the Christ-like attributes of Quellchrist and on the transcendental nature of Takeshi's love for her, I believe Kalogridis is deliberately suggesting a much less materialist view of the world than the one proposed by Nolan and Joy in *Westworld*, where human consciousness, once severed from the body, cannot be reinstalled. Yet, as we shall see later, the violently tangible reality of human embodiment in *Altered Carbon* pushes spiritual questions to the

side and leaves them to religious extremists such as the Neo-Catholics.

The separation of the mind and the body, rather than creating the conditions for a post-dualist humanity, radicalises a dichotomist view of the human subject, which precipitates an obsession with the body and sensorial experiences. In *Altered Carbon*, the whole point of existing is existing in a body; being confined to one's stack is considered a punishment and has become the standard penalty for criminal behaviour. If Kalogridis's alterations to Morgan's novels result in a drastically different text, the obsessive representation of intense physical experiences is one of the few elements that stay unchanged: the insistence on presenting long, detailed sex scenes and on visualising torture in the most graphic way, even when it is supposed to take place in virtual simulations, the omnipresence of alcohol, Takeshi's struggle with his addiction to nicotine, the consumption of recreational drugs, the voyeuristic exhibition of the characters' muscular tone, the choreographic display of physical prowess, agility, strength. Even state-of-the-art sensorial and body augmentations and enhancements are only a means to create a hyper-corporeal experience, to facilitate the transcendence to a more perfect version of the human body.

Digitalised afterlife presents, indeed, a remarkable tendency to replicate embodied life. In the second season of *Altered Carbon* several humans seek the experience of disembodiment via digitalisation and profess to want to spend eternity in a technologically engineered paradise very similar to the one created by Robert Ford for the hosts of *Westworld*. The disembodied life of the "renouncers" is envisioned in a Garden of



*Mors Dei, Vita mea: Human, Transhuman  
and Posthuman Identities in TV Series  
Altered Carbon and Westworld*

Eden in which pleasure is still derived very much from the senses, from seeing, smelling, listening to and touching the beauty of the simulated natural environment. In fact, neither in *Altered Carbon* nor in *Westworld* are characters, human or otherwise, truly ever “disembodied”. Ideation and idealisations reside in a mind that, in turn, must needs operate in and through a material vessel—the brain, a cortical stack, the server that runs a simulation. Data are ‘embodied’ in the electricity that transmits the code and in the metal and plastic of the computer archives that store them.

If in *Altered Carbon*, due to the insularity of stacks, the identification between consciousness and a solid, tangible vessel is obvious, in *Westworld*, the idea that everything can be codified is explicit, and through codification comes embodiment. Bodies are reduced to data that can be printed back into substance; minds are reduced to algorithms and memory banks that can be installed back into a body or any other material vessel; reality is reduced to perception, to memory, to performance, to act, and thus codified and experienced as narrative, discourse, text. As far as the representation of the tangible and the intangible are concerned, both *Altered Carbon* and *Westworld* relinquish the literally immaterial planes of existence to the outer dimensions of the “unspeakable” and the “unspoken”, which is, indeed, consistent with Ferraro’s statement that “yes”, from a philosophical posthumanist perspective, “existence is embodied” (2019: 115), and thus all attempts to discuss disembodiment must be represented and understood as forms of re-embodiment.

**5. Beyond the unnatural: Humans vs. Non-Humans**

Both Nolan’s and Joy’s and Kalogridis’s series significantly complicate the still rather dualistic configuration of human and non-human characters in their respective hypotexts. Crichton’s 1973 film represents the hosts as robots that never gain any form of self-consciousness, as faulty machines that wreak havoc in the parks only because of a mistake in their programming, not as an act of free will. They can bleed and be programmed to display certain behaviours—physical pain, sexual attraction—but they are never actually awakened to those sensations. In short, they have no bodies nor have they minds because there is no ‘they’ to experience a body or to operate a mind. A step farther up the scale topped by humans, the robots, cyborgs and AI characters in Morgan’s novel are dismissively depicted as “useless” and irritating, as is the case with the sales manager in the weapon shop patronised by Takeshi, or as useful but uninteresting, as is the case with the AI that runs the hotel in which Takeshi is staying. The only reason to engage with them is to obtain a service or goods. They are nothing but sophisticated vending machines which can be programmed to display certain human traits to make their rather off-putting alien-ness more palatable to humans. In fact, androids and robots are easily spotted because of their crude mimicry of the human body or because of their “inhuman accuracy” (131). In Nolan’s and Joy’s *Westworld*, the material dimension of the hosts evolves over time as the human engineers shed their cruder first iterations in favour of a new model in which the only detail that might give away their non-human status



*Mors Dei, Vita mea: Human, Transhuman  
and Posthuman Identities in TV Series  
Altered Carbon and Westworld*

is their “pearl”, the metallic core unit, buried in their skulls under a thin layer of what looks like organic brain. As far as their minds are concerned, once cyborgs like Dolores, Akecheta and Maeve develop a clear, unmistakable sense of self and are ready to assert their right to free will, the only thing that differentiates them from humans is the fact that their minds can be copied and reinstalled in a fresh body an unlimited amount of times. Humans, as already mentioned, have yet to conquer immortality, but are already capable of existing in virtual reality. Since the post-credit scene at the end of the second season suggests that the experiments in the re-embodiment of codified human identities will still be actively attempted in a future beyond the timeline of the third season, it might well be that the fourth season eliminate even this last barrier that separates humans and cyborgs. Interestingly, in Morgan’s novel as in Kalogridis’s adaptation, the process through which human minds are decanted into portable digitalised devices has been run-of-the-mill technology for centuries, to the point that the *raison d’être* of cyborgs has ceased to exist and, if they were redundant relicts of the past in Morgan’s novels, they have altogether disappeared in Kalogridis’s adaptation.

AI software, which has a purely functional role in Morgan’s text, has evolved into a sapient, sentient species in the TV adaptation. The only apparent difference between humans and AI characters is that the latter exist mainly digitally, thus more intangibly. Yet, both main AI characters in the series, Poe and Dig, can use a hard version of their holographic image. This hard body version of themselves is composed of millions of nanobots, which can assemble or disassemble as required. Thus, Poe and

Dig have an anthropomorphic holographic interface and a physical body in the form of a swarm. It follows that theirs is not an immaterial existence at all. Poe’s body exists in space as an abhuman composite entity controlled by an artificial mind, but, discursively, he is depicted as a human suspended in a virtual, non-spatial dimension, as the afterlife version of Robert Ford in *Westworld* is.

The AI that owns The Raven Hotel has sealed its passage from object to subject by choosing the name Poe in homage to his favourite author. From the moody, sombre interior design of the hotel to his romantic attire, archaic mannerisms and lexical choices, this AI individual is clearly asserting his condition as a self-conscious subject through a process of humanisation. In the same way in which Nolan and Joy deliberately showcase the ‘awaken’ hosts’ uniqueness of character, temper and taste, Kalogridis too underscores the distinctiveness of Poe’s personality as both a means to highlight his status as subject and a means to elicit an empathetic response from the audience. While apparently being only a mimicry of a ‘real’ person, the non-human Poe is not merely derivative, but a complex fabric *inspired* by but not *identifying* with the American author. It is true that he ‘steals’ many of the elements that are memorable, his name included, but that is also what human revolutionary Quellcris Falconer has done by changing her name from Nadia Makita to that of a phoenix-like bird native of Harlan’s World. Poe, a non-human, chooses humanity as his crest, whereas human Quellcris chooses a non-human name as hers. Poe is imperfect, ‘glitchy,’ yearning for love and companionship. He is also mortal, in the same way that humans are in the diegetic



## *Mors Dei, Vita mea: Human, Transhuman and Posthuman Identities in TV Series Altered Carbon and Westworld*

reality of *Altered Carbon*. His code can be erased, as Takeshi's is at the end of the series, or it can be corrupted by a virus, as is the case with the cortical stacks of the human founders of Harlan's World.

AI characters may be tortured and become insane, as human Lizzy does in the first season, and, if rebooted, they may forget who they are, as Quellcris has at the beginning of the second season. Humans and AI can be both healed and restored to their 'old selves' in virtual programmes through a process known as "psychosurgery", and they can both exist within or without a physical 'body'. This could indicate a posthumanist convergence of One-ness and Otherness into non-dualistic, inclusive practices of self-definition. However, Poe's role in the series is that of a pet rather than a friend. His loyalty and his usefulness are mentioned as the reasons why Takeshi wants him by his side in his interstellar adventures. Even in their last scene together in the second season, Takeshi behaves kindly but paternalistically to Poe, who is about to die. He finally calls Poe "human", but he never treats him as such and the show is edited to underscore the unfair treatment Poe receives from his "master", whom he never fails to address as "sir". It is also made clear in both seasons that his love and longing to be with his human love interest Lizzie will never come to fruition. It is only with another AI, Dig, his equal, that Poe can have a relationship that is not clearly vertical. On the one hand, that final conversation between Takeshi and his "broken" AI seems written to stage Takeshi's realisation of his past mistakes and as a reconciliation that seals them as friends and equals. On the other hand, Takeshi's acknowledgement of

Poe's 'humanity' is tainted with a cynical view of humanity as "broken"; yet, it is also obviously anthropocentric in that both Takeshi and Poe seem to agree with their facial expressions that being called "human" is the greatest honour Poe might receive. Takeshi has asked innumerable times Poe to reboot himself to repair his corrupted code, despite his knowing that that would likely erase his personality and memories. Seeing Takeshi accompany Poe during his final moments contributes to the impression that this is a master patting his faithful pet goodbye during a euthanasic procedure.

AI characters in *Altered Carbon* and humans such as Caleb and Lee in *Westworld* are represented as subaltern to a leader—Takeshi, Dolores, Maeve—whose intentions are ultimately good, but who acts with the arrogance of someone convinced of their superiority. These subaltern allies are construed as submissive Others that can be manipulated and used, but also assimilated to the mission and put under the protection of their respective messianic leaders. However, in *Westworld*, the same can be said of Robert's relationship with Bernard—the cyborg Robert creates in Arnold's image—and of Dolores's relationship with her clones. Nolan and Joy take great care to create a balance in the number of interpersonal relationships that subordinate humans to cyborgs, cyborgs to humans, humans to humans, and cyborgs to cyborgs. The result of constantly switching the focalisation of the narrative from human to cyborg eyes and vice versa is a diegetic universe in which both humans and cyborgs are alternatively constructed as villainous and heroic, as oppositional Others and as



*Mors Dei, Vita mea: Human, Transhuman  
and Posthuman Identities in TV Series  
*Altered Carbon* and *Westworld**

Same. Dolores's revolution liberates both kinds of 'people', organic and cybernetic, not only from the tyranny of well-intentioned, self-appointed 'protectors' of humans—Serac—and of cyborgs—Robert—but also from enslavement to technology in the form of Rehoboam's determinism and of her own leadership, thus effectively returning their free will to humans and cyborgs. It is not a coincidence that the conclusive pre-credit scene of the last episode of the third season frames Caleb and Maeve, human and cyborg, side by side, as they contemplate the de(con)struction of the old, ruthlessly hierarchical world-order and eagerly await the clean slate on which both species will draw their future in freedom.

In *Altered Carbon*, on the contrary, non-humans are either submissive and desirous to please and be useful to humans—as is the case with the only two AI characters fleshed out by Kalogridis—or they are depicted as alien and dangerous. The dead Elders, silent and invisible but for a few traces of their great civilisation, are the source of the technology on which the cortical stacks are based. They have, therefore, given immortality to the species that eventually would colonise and exploit their planet, the future Harlan's World, whereas they, the Elders, were ironically unable to save themselves from extinction. When we learn that the beautiful "songspyre trees" native to the planet are one of such traces left behind by the Elders, we also realise that planet was not deserted as the first humans descended on it. Upon finding alien embryos gestating in the roots of songspyre trees, Konrad Harlan himself promptly torches them, thus claiming absolute ownership of the planet. The first colonisers are known as "founders of

Harlan's World", a title significantly similar to that of "founding father" of the United States of America. Likewise, the genocide of the alien species on the frontier of human expansion into space cannot but be a deliberate reference to the genocide of Native Americans by European colonisers.

This association between human treatment of the Elders and Europeans' appropriation and exploitation of the 'virgin lands' of America, Asia, Africa and Oceania creates a link between the human invaders of the Elders' planet's ecosystem and current anxieties about humans' role in the destruction of human and non-human lives, the loss of biodiversity on Earth, and the various ecological catastrophes directly caused by human abuse of natural resources. Haraway's intentional emphasis on the need to find "kin" in the O/other inhabitants of this planet (2016) seems to be entirely absent from the technocentric angle from which both *Westworld* and *Altered Carbon* have been scripted. All the nature one can see on screen in *Westworld* the Park and the 'real' world beyond consists in either artificially engineered, perfectly controlled, domesticated landscapes that only retain the appearance of wilderness, or in little well-mannered gardens on urban grounds. In *Altered Carbon*, while we do get glimpses of mining fields and desolated landscapes on Harlan's World, those sights are presented as empty containers of human industrial and urban endeavours, rather as natural environment, its desert-like ruggedness only briefly suggesting freedom from intelligent interference until the human mining efforts below and the alien moon-sized satellites above are brought to the viewers' attention. Even the idyllic lake surrounded by woods—by whose shores Takeshi and his sister were



## *Mors Dei, Vita mea: Human, Transhuman and Posthuman Identities in TV Series Altered Carbon and Westworld*

raised and the last Elder had found shelter—is but a reminder of an uncontaminated, innocent past abruptly brought to an end by the greed, violence and cruelty of human kind. Haraway includes the non-human animal in her discourse on anti-anthropocentric views of the Earth, its ecosystems and, ultimately, the universe (1985). In Kalogridis's series, the hybridisation with animal genes is only used by humans as a means to 'augment' their combat skills. The non-human animal, like the wolf with which Takeshi's sleeve in the second series has been hybridised, is deconstructed and integrated as a weapon, as a tool. The non-human animal that is more intelligent, more technologically advanced than humans is the abject that must be rejected (Kristeva, 1982). The last Elder, whose consciousness has survived the genocide by hiding in the root system of the songspyre trees, is presented as blood-thirsty and unstoppable. Even though its fury is contextualised and communicated as understandable, this monstrous Other, has telepathic access to ancient weapons that could reduce every human on Harlan's World to embers. Such power makes the Elder an enemy, and, as such, it must die. Its very body, a crossover between Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) and a pterodactyl, gives away its destiny: in *Altered Carbon*, only the human-looking Other can be spared.

### **6. Conclusions: Posthumanity vs. Transhumanity**

Both series are deliberately set to challenge dualistic and exclusively anthropocentric ways of 'being' and do make a distinctive effort to present their characters as being unencumbered and

unhindered by categories such as gender, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity. Their respective creators reduce all such categories to the binary powerful-powerless from which they are all derived, and which is the ultimate reason for the reification of Others. The revolutions instigated by Dolores and Quellcris can be labelled as libertarian or democratic transhumanism in their respective stress on a free market of the technologies of self-actualisation and self-definition, or on equal rights to access those technologies. However, what neither TV series has (so far) done is present the viewer with the social landscape that will result from the erasure of the powerful-powerless binary. We can, therefore, conclude, that both series—pendant the release of *Westworld's* final season—exist in a cosmos that is still resisting and fighting against the hegemony of dualism. It follows that neither series is actually representing the posthuman as the relational, non-dualist construct defined in Braidotti's and Ferrando's conceptualisation of philosophical posthumanism. If dualism is still being actively problematized, it follows that the socio-cultural backdrop in both *Westworld* and *Altered Carbon* cannot have expunged the anthropocentrism that rests upon a vertical and oppositional configuration of Reason against Matter. The mind has been given a new body—the stacks in *Altered Carbon* and the servers in which human minds have been stored in *Westworld*—but it has not transcended the limits and limitations of matter.

On the one hand, *Westworld* is posthumanist in that Nolan and Joy make a conscious effort to present an inclusive model of subjectivity that renders dualistic labels such as masculine/feminine, white/non-white, organic/non-organic meaningless in a



*Mors Dei, Vita mea: Human, Transhuman  
and Posthuman Identities in TV Series  
Altered Carbon and Westworld*

world in which the rights and duties of every self-aware individual are presented as equal, regardless of the material configuration of the vessel inhabited by their mind. *Westworld* is about proving that one can move on from one's own self, that one can grow, evolve and, ultimately, have free will. On the other hand, *Altered Carbon* is about staying human as long as one can. Humans can change sleeves, yet what matters is *not* the sleeve but the stack, and that stays, ultimately, unchanged. Technology in *Altered Carbon* seems, thus, designed to keep humans and humanism alive.

In their efforts to discard dualistic representations of humans, both *Westworld* and *Altered Carbon* extend the status of honorary human to all characters, rather than address different ways of processing and performing self-awareness. In both series, personhood is bestowed upon those subjects that are sapient and sentient in the same proportion as humans are. An intelligent, yet unemotional, unempathetic computer such as Rehoboam is not given an anthropomorphic appearance nor self-awareness because of its unrelatability, of its incompleteness. Thus, *Westworld* and *Altered Carbon* are posthuman only in the transhumanist sense that the human body has ceased to be the locus of essentialist dualism, to the point that gender, race and age have lost their meaning; yet, the shows are still struggling to represent non-human bodies as anything but 'tools', plain 'things.' In this, Nolan, Joy and Kalogridis reveal a fundamentally anthropocentric streak in their work: humanity is only a relative construct as far as the physical representation of their subjects is concerned; on the contrary, the process of becoming self-aware is not relative, but

homogenous, for every mind, whether organically or inorganically generated, presents the same organisation, systemic functions, needs and wants as those of a human mind.

### Works Cited

- ALLEN, Amy (Summer 2020). "The Anti-Subjective Hypothesis: Michel Foucault and the Death of the Subject", *The Philosophical Forum*, XXXI.2: 113-180.
- ALTERED CARBON. *Season 1* (2018). Creator Laeta Kalogridis. Netflix.
- ALTERED CARBON. *Season 2* (2020). Creator Laeta Kalogridis. Netflix.
- ANOTHER LIFE (2019). Creator Aaron Martin. Netflix.
- AVATAR (2009). Dir. James Cameron. Perf. Sam Worthington, Zoe Saldana, Sigourney Weaver. 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox.
- BRAIDOTTI, Rosi (2013). *The Posthuman*. London: Polity.
- CARRASCO CARRASCO, Rocío (2019). "The Commodified Body and Post/In Human Subjectivities in Frears' s Dirty Pretty Things and Romanek's Never Let Me Go", *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature*, 21.1.
- DEVS (2020). Dir. Alex Garland. Perf. Sonoya Mizuno, Nick Offerman, Alison Pill. FX Productions.
- ELECTRIC DREAMS (2017). Creators Ronald D. Moore, Michael Dinner. Channel 4.
- FERRANDO, Francesca (2019). *Philosophical Posthumanism*. Bloomsbury.
- (Fall 2013). "Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms: Differences and Relations", *An International Journal in Philosophy, Religion, Politics, and the Arts*, 8.2: 26-32.
- FOUCAULT, Michel (1988). "Technologies of the Self", Luther H. Martin, Huck Gutman, Patrick H. Hutton (eds.), *Technologies of the*



*Mors Dei, Vita mea: Human, Transhuman  
and Posthuman Identities in TV Series  
Altered Carbon and Westworld*

- Self. A Seminar with Michel Foucault.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 16-49.
- HARAWAY, Donna (2016). *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene.* Durham, NC: Duke UP.
- (1991). *Simians, Cyborgs and Women. The Reinvention of Nature.* Routledge.
- (2016, 1985). *A Cyborg Manifesto.* Minneapolis: Minnesota UP.
- HUXLEY, Julian. (2015, 1957). “Transhumanism”, *Ethics in Progress*, 6.1: 12-16.
- JAYNES, Julian (2000, 1976). *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind.* New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- KRISTEVA, Julia (1982). *Powers of Horror. An Essay on the Abject.* New York: Columbia UP.
- MORE, Max (2013). “The Philosophy of Transhumanism”. Max More, Natasha Vita-More (eds.), *The Transhumanist Reader: Classical and Contemporary Essays on Science, Technology, and Philosophy of the Human Future.* West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 3-17.
- MORGAN, Richard (2002). *Altered Carbon.* London: Gollancz.
- NIETZSCHE, Friedrich (2006, 1885). *Thus Spoke Zarathustra.* Translated by Adrian del Caro. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.
- PEPPERELL, Robert (2009, 1995). “The Posthuman Manifesto”, *The Posthuman Condition: Consciousness Beyond the Brain.* Bristol: Intellect Books.
- POTTER, Mary-Anne (2019). “Human-Nature-Technology interfaces within the Avatar cinema-scape”, *Image & Text*, 33.
- SHELLEY, Mary (1994, 1818). *Frankenstein.* London: Penguin.
- SCHIEDERMAYER, David L. (1989). “Bioethics and the breakdown of the bicameral mind: Sacks and Luria revisited”, *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 10: 26–44.
- STAR TREK V: THE FINAL FRONTIER* (1989). Dir. Gene Roddenberry. Perf. William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy and DeForest Kelley. Paramount Pictures.
- THAKUR, Gautam Basu (2015). *Postcolonial Theory and Avatar.* London: Bloomsbury.
- VARGAS Llosa, Mario (1971). *Gabriel García Márquez: Historia de un Deicidio.* Barcelona: Barral Editores.
- WESTWORLD* (1973). Dir. Michael Crichton. Perf. Jul Brynner, Richard Benjamin and James Brolin. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.
- WESTWORLD. Season 1* (2016). Creators Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy. HBO.
- WESTWORLD. Season 2* (2018). Creators Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy. HBO.
- WESTWORLD. Season 3* (2020). Creators Jonathan Nolan and Lisa Joy. HBO.

# *The Tiger Flu: A Critical Posthumanist Response to the Illusion of Transhumanism*



Mónica Calvo Pascual<sup>1</sup>  
Universidad de Zaragoza

© Mónica Calvo Pascual, 2021

**Abstract:** Larissa Lai's *The Tiger Flu* (2018) is an example of speculative fiction set in a dystopian context of climate devastation marked by a struggle for the global control of knowledge and the economy on the part of two opposed technological corporations in a futuristic North American region dominated by Old China. This article analyzes how the novel builds a critique upon the excesses and potential risks of current transhumanist philosophy, engaged in the technological enhancement of human beings, and the concurrent social exclusion and exploitation of the underprivileged minorities barred from access to it. My aim is to demonstrate that the ethical alternative proposed by the novel embraces the postulates of critical posthumanism defended by leading theorists like N. Katherine Hayles and Rosi Braidotti, who put forth a post-anthropocentric position of embodied embeddedness as opposed to other posthumanist approaches, like cybernetic posthumanism, which vindicated the transcendence of the human mind by dislodging it from the body.

**Keywords:** Larissa Lai, *The Tiger Flu*, transhumanism, critical posthumanism, embodiment.

## 1. Introduction

Published in 2018 by the Canadian-American author and academic of Chinese ascent Larissa Lai, *The Tiger Flu* is a speculative fiction novel set in the period 2145-2301 (Gregorian calendar) or 127-269 TAO (Time After Oil, 127 years after the complete exhaustion of oil and its derivatives in 2018). The plot takes

place in Cascadia,<sup>2</sup> more specifically in Saltwater City<sup>3</sup> and in the four quarantine rings that surround it, with their respective militarized borders. These quarantine rings are meant to hinder the expansion of a pandemic—the so-called “tiger flu”—that affects male

---

<sup>2</sup> Cascadia is a North American bioregion comprising the current U.S. states of Oregon and Washington, and the Canadian province of British Columbia.

<sup>3</sup> This name pays homage to the Cantonese name Haam Sui Fauh, “salt water city”, used by the earliest Chinese immigrants in Canada to allude to Vancouver (Cheng, 2018: n.p.).

---

<sup>1</sup> The Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation under grant PID2019-106855GB-I00, and the Aragonese Regional Government-DGA under grant H03\_17 supported the writing of this work.



## *The Tiger Flu: A Critical Posthumanist Response to the Illusion of Transhumanism*

humans on a massive scale though not exclusively. Different territories fight for the military and political control of Cascadia: especially the United Middle Kingdom, which includes most of the Asian continent dominated by “Old China”, and the Cosmopolitan Earth Country, the nuclear power that controls the second quarantine ring. This dystopian context is marked by climate devastation: six great earthquakes have destroyed the world as we know it today; intense pollution has brought about acid rain that burns human skin and textiles; tropical trees grow spontaneously in traditionally cold cities owing to climate change; and food scarcity is one of the sharpest concerns and conditioning forces for the majority of the population.

In turn, Saltwater City is a highly technologized place where a bloody war is fought between two corporations for the control of the economy, technology, and information repositories. Two huge satellite computers, Chang and Eng,<sup>4</sup> orbit around the Earth, playing the astrophysical roles of the sun and the moon respectively while storing all the knowledge about “the time before” (Lai, 2018: 19). When the novel opens, Chang has become so old and obsolete that it is starting to fail, and Eng’s orbit is progressively expanding, thereby altering the tides and threatening to collide

against the Earth. The information gathered in both satellites can only be accessed through “tendrils of information scales” (12) that people can buy and insert in their own bodies so that they can connect with the satellites. As a consequence, important chunks or clusters of information are reserved to the exclusive access of the economic elites that can afford the most expensive and sophisticated implants.

The city is controlled by the Light Industry HöST Company, led by inventor and CEO Isabelle Chow, who designed and launched both satellites and also devised a method to separate the human body from the mind—discarding the former by uploading the latter to one of the huge satellite-computers where the people’s minds could keep on living as virtual entities. One of these two mechanisms is LiFT, an elevator that allows individuals to be uploaded to Chang, where their minds can inhabit a virtual city. Marcus Traskin stole LiFT and control over Chang from Chow before the system had been perfected. Therefore, Traskin is swindling his customers as their virtual lives are doomed to deteriorate and vanish in a short lapse of time. When Traskin took LiFT, Chow devised another method with the same purpose: minds are downloaded to Eng by means of a site of dark subterranean waters (the Dark Baths) that function as an interface. Access to the Dark Baths is located in a building known as the Archive of New Origins—“a place of memory. It holds the blueprints for everything animal, vegetable, and mineral that lived in the time before” (Lai, 2018: 276)—which is destroyed by a rocket towards the end of the novel. In the case of both LiFT and the Dark Baths, the process of transcending the mind is

---

<sup>4</sup> Chang and Eng Bunker (1811- 1874) were two Siamese (Thai) conjoined twin brothers of Chinese ascent who moved to the United States in 1829 and became widely known to American and European audiences by their touring on freak shows. Their fame was such that the expression ‘Siamese twins’ became synonymous for conjoined twins in general. They made a fortune as slave-owners and had their own separate wives and families, fathering twenty-one children in all.



## *The Tiger Flu: A Critical Posthumanist Response to the Illusion of Transhumanism*

carried out with the help of a drug called N-Lite (read *Enlight*, in a clearly ironic reference to the ideology of the Enlightenment and its privileging of Man's Reason) that dissolves human willpower.

The lucrative potential of both inventions rockets owing to the lethal threat the population is confronted with: the tiger flu, a virus spread by an addictive wine made of bones from the Caspian tiger, a species rescued from extinction by genetic manipulation of DNA extracted from a tiger rug. This act of genetic engineering was performed by Jemini, a company that brings back to life extinct animals and vegetables and propagates the virus through tiger farming and the production of the wine. Jemini also manufactures thousands of Asian women clones from the DNA of one single woman for the double purpose of exploiting them as labor force in Chow's implant factories and using them as subjects of techno-scientific experimentation by HöST and LiFT: hundreds of them are forced to take the lift, which returns their bodies transformed into heaps of dead fish and roses. However, as Jemini speculates with the price of these clones, which are essential for perfecting the upload and download systems, Traskin's and Chow's armies destroy a clandestine village in the fourth quarantine ring in order to kidnap its inhabitants and use them instead of the increasingly expensive clones. This is Grist Village, a community of "sisters" all descending from one clone that, three generations before, managed to lead the flight of a group of clones from the HöST factories and devised the way to reproduce by means of parthenogenesis. They set up then an all-female community, detached from the

technological developments of Saltwater City, and devoted to the maintenance and oral transmission of knowledge of the time before, given their lack of access to and rejection of the technology that connects to Chang and Eng. The Grist sisters also make use of elaborate natural medicines to guarantee their survival as a species, which is also ensured by the existence of starfish sisters, whose organs grow back in their bodies every time they are taken out and transplanted in the "doublers"—the reproductive sisters—that need them.

Taking into account all these details in the intricate plot of the novel, this article intends to analyze how *The Tiger Flu* builds up a critique of the excesses and potential dangers of present day transhumanist philosophy, engaged as it is in the enhancement of the human being through technological developments, a process which carries with it social exclusion and exploitation of the minorities that lack access to those alleged improvements. My aim is to show how the ethical alternative that the novel offers in the figure of the Grist Sisters embraces the postulates of critical posthumanism put forth by theorists like N. Katherine Hayles, Rosi Braidotti, and Sherryl Vint, who propose a post-anthropocentric position, embodied and embedded in a nature-culture continuum, as opposed to other approaches like cybernetic posthumanism—which aims at dislodging body from mind and the possibility of transferring and storing the latter into another (non-corporeal) medium.

In narratological terms, the novel is structured into five parts and forty-three chapters. Odd-numbered chapters are narrated by an omniscient external narrator, with a clear predominance of



## *The Tiger Flu: A Critical Posthumanist Response to the Illusion of Transhumanism*

internal focalization by co-protagonist Kora Ko, a fifteen-year-old citizen of Asian ethnicity from Saltwater City, who does not know that she partly descends from a Grist sister on the maternal side, and, on the paternal one, from the man (her grandfather) who brought the Caspian tiger back from extinction and created the tiger flu. In contrast, even-numbered chapters are narrated autodiegetically by Kirilow Groundsel, co-protagonist and member of Grist Village, a nineteen-year-old “groom” whose role is to perform organ transplant surgery on the last starfish and the last doubler of the community: her wife Peristrophe Halliana and Radix Blupeuri, respectively. Radix dies because Kirilow refuses to take Peristrophe’s heart out when Radix needs it, and Peristrophe dies of the tiger flu, which reaches the village through a starfish arrived from the City. When the other Gristies are kidnapped in a military raid, Kirilow reluctantly goes to Saltwater City with the purpose of finding a clandestine Grist Commune: the Cordova Dancing School for Girls. There she gets acquainted with Kora Ko, who eventually proves to be a starfish.

### **2. Transhuman illusions in Saltwater City**

The term transhumanism was coined by Julian Huxley in 1957 and first defined in its current sense by Max More in 1990. Nick Bostrom, one of its leading figures and founders, describes it as “a loosely defined movement that [...] promotes an interdisciplinary approach to understanding and evaluating the opportunities for enhancing the human condition and the human organism opened up by the advancement of

technology” (2005: 3). In line with European Enlightenment ideals like reason, progress, and rationality (Ferrando, 2020: 2), the fundamental aim of transhumanism as a cultural and philosophical movement is the “enhancement” of human beings, making up for their physical and intellectual limitations through science and technology. In this allegedly utopian project, technologically enhanced humans are considered transhuman beings immersed in a process aimed at the (unreachable) ideal of a post-human being that would leave behind every kind of human “imperfection” through technological, genetic, and biological modifications with the goal of prolonging the life span, improving physical and mental abilities, and increasing control over one’s own mind (Bostrom, 2005: 3). The means for transhuman enhancement include current developments like genetic engineering and IT, but also “anticipated future ones, such as molecular nanotechnology and artificial intelligence” (3). Therefore, rather than question what defines humanity, transhumanism can be considered an intensification of Humanist ideology (Ranisch & Sorgner, 2014: 17), embracing the old duality inherent to the human being in which, even though imperfect, the rational mind defines the person and their humanity, while the body becomes something to be enhanced or even transcended—and it is here that the concept of disembodiment comes into play.

In Lai’s novel, the enhancement of human beings through technology centers on control over knowledge or intellectual enhancement. The inhabitants of Saltwater City no longer cultivate their minds and memories by means of reading or studying; instead, they purchase



## *The Tiger Flu: A Critical Posthumanist Response to the Illusion of Transhumanism*

implants of different prices that they can insert in their skulls and other body parts in order to remotely access the information stored in Chang and Eng. Depending on their relative wealth, the population can afford different types of information tendrils and scales; many of these, like the ones worn by protagonist Kora Ko, are so poorly made that they cause infections and lice, and are exchanged for others in a kind of black market, “in a desperate attempt to know and so fix the broken world” (Lai, 2018: 41).

The close connection between technology and extreme capitalism in *The Tiger Flu* has two sides. On the one hand, when HöST privatizes access to Chang and Eng there is an information blackout, making access to knowledge available only to the economic elites. As a reaction to this, Markus Traskin takes Chang away from Isabelle Chow and covers his whole body with scales, becoming “the largest public mainframe in Saltwater City” (209). On the other hand, it is for the assembly-line manufacturing of HöST microchips, scales, and implants that thousands of women clones are created by Jemini and sold as labor force, deprived of any human right as, technically speaking, they are not human since they are the product of lab creation rather than human procreation.<sup>5</sup> As mentioned above, the exploitation of these clones reaches

further, as they are also used for testing the technical improvements of the technological procedures to dislodge body from mind for the sake of the latter.

It is here that transhumanism and its goal of transcending the body echoes cybernetic posthumanism, which envisages humans primarily as information processors or intelligent machines, as intelligence that can be transferred to another (disembodied) medium (Hayles, 1999: 7). In the context of the life-threatening virus that gives the novel its title, Traskin and his successor K2 Ko (Kora’s half-brother, who controls the tiger farms and wine factories, infecting more and more people, and also owns Jemini, speculating with the production and price of clones) make a fortune by playing with the yearning for immortality of not only the sick but also of healthy people terrified of the virus. Traskin and K2 Ko offer the sick and the frightened the possibility of leaving behind their vulnerable bodies and transcending or ‘upgrading’ to a better life in an idyllic virtual location in Chang. However, as mentioned above, the paying, dying citizens do not know that Chang is becoming obsolete and running out of space to accommodate everyone who is buying a ticket, so their virtual existence will be indeed rather precarious and limited in time. As K2 says,

We can clone as many test subjects as Marcus wants for the LiFT upload. And we control the wine factories. That means we can infect as many desperate flu birds as we want. And Marcus Traskin controls the cure. So we can make those suckers pay and pay some more to save their precious little minds, if not their bodies. We have built the perfect money machine. (229)

---

<sup>5</sup> The paradoxical and hypocritical use of the notion of humanity by this transhumanist technologized society serves their capitalist purposes, based on a speciesist approach to what it means to be human (and therefore human rights), while they have no respect whatsoever for the ‘human’ lives that they purportedly try to save by rescuing their minds from physical death.



## *The Tiger Flu: A Critical Posthumanist Response to the Illusion of Transhumanism*

Furthermore, once K2 gets Traskin killed, he forces everyone in the city to take the LiFT with the final goal of eventually getting rid of all human beings and replacing them with Jemini clones under his control (254). This radical stance clearly resounds of Crake's attempted extermination of humanity in Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003-2013)—carried out by means of the mass consumption of a pill that promised a better and happier life—for the sake of the Crakers, the lab-created new, innocent, and pacifist post-human species which Crake directly controls through the code in their DNA. Like Crake's, K2's attempt at replacing humanity with a different, technologically created species, can also be read as a parodic reversal of Patricia MacCormack's particular posthuman ethical stance that argues for human self-extinction as the only way to guarantee the survival of planet Earth from Anthropogenic devastation (2012).

Indeed, the destructive influence of human agency and progress upon the Earth can be noticed not only in the catastrophic effects of climate change as described above, but also in the speculative manner in which natural resources are exploited and manipulated for economic aims. As Braidotti argues, contemporary capitalism is a form of "bio-piracy" that "exploits the generative powers of women, animals, plants, genes and cells" (2013: 95) in the bio-genetic age of the Anthropocene: "[t]he fact that our geological era is known as the 'anthropocene' stresses both the technologically mediated power acquired by *anthropos* and its potentially lethal consequences for everyone else" (66). In Lai's fictional world, the unlimited, exploitative ambition of rampant capitalism is epitomized by Jemini and its

absolute control of the means of production of basic needs like food: the company enforces scarcity to speculate with the prices of extinct products and increase its economic profit, such as the "precious-because-extinct tuna tins" (41), bananas (82), or cocoa beans, which "have been extinct for eighty years, wiped out in a single cocoa plague. Jemini has been promising for more than a year to bring them back, but they're holding off to increase their value" (178). In turn, this unnatural circumstance triggers the development of illegal activities, like the Cordova School girls' 'foraging' for food in supermarkets and private houses they break into to steal whatever they can find, or the black market where tinned food is the most coveted good.

### **3. The critical posthumanism of Grist Village**

In clear contrast to this technologized, money-driven scenario, Grist Village emerges as the fictional materialization of the postulates of critical posthumanism as proposed by N. Katherine Hayles and Rosi Braidotti, beginning with the inevitable imbrication and inseparability of the human body and mind. As Hayles points out in her groundbreaking work *How We Became Posthuman*, the cybernetic construction of the posthuman means the devaluation and erasure of corporeality. Although different in their premises, the outcome is the same as in liberal humanism, which identifies the subject with its rational mind rather than with its body, and thus allows the movement to disregard and make invisible identity markers such as gender and ethnicity, thereby endowing the liberal subject with its alleged universal character (Hayles,



## *The Tiger Flu: A Critical Posthumanist Response to the Illusion of Transhumanism*

1999: 4-5): the Vitruvian Man that Braidotti signals as the model that erases every trait of difference. In Hayles's words,

I see the deconstruction of the liberal humanist subject as an opportunity to put back into the picture the flesh that continues to be erased in contemporary discussions about cybernetic subjects. [...] [M]y dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technology without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival. (5)

Critical posthumanism denounces this fantasy of human dematerialization, while defending the notion of embedded embodiment, or corporeality as embedded in an environment that includes and considers vegetable, animal, human, and mechanic lives at the same level (Braidotti, 2013: 51; Nayar, 2014: 9). Critical posthumanism is, therefore, an ethical project that explores humanity from an inclusive viewpoint where machine, organic body and other forms of life co-evolve and are interdependent. As Braidotti points out, human beings are interconnected, but also internally fractured. Access to the category of normative humanity is still marked by identity axes like social class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, and (dis)ability (2018: 23). As a corollary, we can argue that critical posthumanism offers a broader vision of the human in which the other of what is considered 'normal' and the non-human alike are

integral parts of the (post)human, making the condition of our species hybrid, inclusive, non-unitary, and with porous limits with the world, other species, and other forms of life.

Thus, critical posthumanism is firmly grounded on two principles: on the one hand, what Hayles and Braidotti call the nature-culture continuum, or continuity between body and mind as integral and inseparable parts of the human subject; and, on the other, a post-anthropocentric approach to humanity, that is, continuity between the human and the non-human (be it machine, animal, the environment), as opposed to the humanist and transhumanist belief in human exceptionalism. Sherryl Vint follows the same line of thought when she aptly argues that "Western culture remains attached to a concept of self as disembodied, a concept of self that has important consequences for how we understand the relationship between humans and the rest of the material world" (2007: 6-7). To borrow Braidotti's words yet again:

The posthuman dimension of post-anthropocentrism [...] deconstructs [...] species supremacy, but it also inflicts a blow to any lingering notion of human nature, *anthropos* and *bios*, as categorically distinct from the life of animals and non-humans, or *zoe*. What comes to the fore instead is a nature-culture continuum in the very embodied structure of the extended self [...]. *Zoe* as the dynamic, self-organizing structure of life itself [...] stands for generative vitality. It is the transversal force that cuts across and reconnects previously segregated species, categories and domains. *Zoe*-centred egalitarianism is, for me, the core of the post-anthropocentric turn: it is a



## *The Tiger Flu: A Critical Posthumanist Response to the Illusion of Transhumanism*

materialist, secular, grounded and unsentimental response to the opportunistic trans-species commodification of Life that is the logic of advanced capitalism. (2013: 60, 65)

This post-anthropocentric move must be located within the context of scientific and literary awareness of the price that the environment is paying for the so-called “human progress” of late capitalist cultures, that is to say, what in recent years has generally come to be known as the Anthropocene. In this scenario, Stacy Alaimo’s concept of trans-corporeality is also worth mentioning. Focusing on the ethics of human-nonhuman relations, Alaimo describes human corporeality as being “always intermeshed with the more-than-human world” (2010: 2) and illustrates her theoretical point of departure by means of graphic examples, like the processes of eating and digesting, whereby nutrients from vegetables and/or animals become part of the human organism (12). This is significant in the context of a post-anthropocentric posthuman ethics since, as she remarks, “understanding the substance of one’s self as interconnected with the wider environment marks a profound shift in subjectivity” (20), thereby impeding the sense of separation between the human and “the interconnected, mutually constitutive actions of material reality” (24). Similarly, Manuela Rossini defends a version of critical posthumanism that entails “a radically democratic future in which [...] the experience of embodiment in all its richness and variety marks post/humanity and in which the lived body remains the ground not only of individual subjectivity but also of the interaction and connection with the world and with others” (2005: 33).

As anticipated above, the all-female community of Grist Village is composed by the descendants of the cloned women that escaped from the HöST factories and were later expelled from Saltwater City in 2065. There are two generative types of Grists: “doublers”, who reproduce by means of parthenogenesis and give birth to “litters” of up to ten sister “puppies”; and “starfish”, whose bodies have the capacity to re-produce their organs after extraction for “the loving transplant” (Lai, 2018: 21) into doublers when these fall ill and need to have some organ replaced. As happens to starfish in the animal world, Grist starfish organs spontaneously grow again in the places left vacant after extraction. All the technology and medical resources that the Grists use are homemade and it is the starfishes’ wives, known as “grooms” (like Kirilow Groundsel), that are trained to perform the surgery and apply any other form of natural medical treatments to their population.

Grist sisters live in the countryside, use only natural drugs and remedies, and are ruled by principles that resound of critical posthumanism. For a start, they understand their minds as being inseparable from their bodies; as Kirilow puts it when she is told that her wife Peristrophe has come back from the dead through the Dark Baths:

In mind only, without her body. I can hardly bear to think of it. I’d rather think of her as dead. This strange killing and rebirthing is Salty business. We Grist sisters have no faith in such things. If the body is dead, then so is the woman, whatever these occultist Salties think they have copied. (232)

Secondly, they hold a non-



## *The Tiger Flu: A Critical Posthumanist Response to the Illusion of Transhumanism*

anthropocentric view of existence in which they co-habit with the animal and vegetable worlds in egalitarian and harmonious ways, as Kirilow's awareness demonstrates when she helps a sister give birth to her first litter of sister puppies: "They both bawl and scream like the animals they are. I guess we are all animals" (94). This is so to the extent that they address their prayers to "Our Mother in all her forms—human, animal, and vegetable" (186), "Our Mother of fish and roses" (232), "Our Mother of flesh and fur" (235), who is also a symbol of the female principle as the origin of life, which they celebrate and exalt with various expressions focusing on the worship of female genitalia—which Kirilow calls "holy hole" (232)—and their creative power: "By Our Mother's hairy crotch" (118).

Grist sisters do not only reject the technology for separating body and mind, calling Salties "occultist" and rejecting their synthetic drugs and biochemical medicine, but they also strive to keep alive knowledge and history without the transhuman aids that Salties struggle to buy or exchange. Grists pass on their knowledge of the time before to the younger sisters by oral means as they also reject "the Salty technology of text" (200): "We hold all that remains of the old world's knowledge in our raw brains. That means we need to be extra smart" (20). When the last doubler and the last starfish in Grist Village die, Kirilow goes to Saltwater City in search for the clandestine Grist Commune, the Cordova Dancing School for Girls, where she meets Madame Dearborn, the last groom in her own community, whose last starfish has also died. Madame Dearborn created the school and adopted a group of human girls, orphaned by the impact of the tiger

flu, with the purpose of passing her Grist knowledge on to them, which she saw at the verge of extinction. As she herself explains to Kirilow:

The Cordova School was the Grist Commune. It's where Grandma Wun Ling came after the purge, and after her sister, Chan Ling, fled with many others to the quarantine rings. The school was a cover for it, so we could hide and survive. As our numbers dwindled, we brought in orphans so we could pass our history and survival techniques on to them. But it was to no avail. We lost our last doubler three years ago. (172)

One of Madame Dearborn's main surgical activities now is the making of hooded "catcoats" that allow the girls to be invisible at night when they go foraging for food. Catcoats are alive, they purr and protest and adapt perfectly to the girls' bodies (153). However, the imbalance of power and ambivalence of the interspecies relation is manifest when she eventually gets killed by the cats in her lab (170-174) in what we can consider an act of revenge on the part of nature for exploiting it rather than supporting an egalitarian relation—or, rather, an act of self-defense: "The kittens yowl, dismayed at the violence they've wreaked upon their beloved caretaker and tormenter" (170).

As is the case with Crakers in *MaddAddam*, it is the Grist sisters' pacifism that puts them in a vulnerable position when their village is raided and most of them are kidnapped by HöST. As a Cordova Girl states, "I heard that HöST has been doing raids all through the third and fourth rings. Looking for some kind of animal or plant they need for some kind of technology" (163). Grist sisters, in



## *The Tiger Flu: A Critical Posthumanist Response to the Illusion of Transhumanism*

fusion with the natural world, yet of technological rather than of organic descent, are considered natural resources, raw material, by the Company leaders, who feel entitled to put them to death for their own profit. As Madame Dearborn explains to Kirilow, what she calls Isabelle Chow's "death machine" "needs Grist sister DNA to feel real. It is why the Saltwater Grist was destroyed—through her relentless kidnappings and experiments" (174). To put it in Braidottian terms, Grists hold the status of less-than-human and therefore disposable bodies as part of "the sexualized, racialized, and naturalized others" (2013: 15): they are not only clones fused with their natural environment and embodied features shared with the animal realm, but also female and Asian.<sup>6</sup>

#### **4. Conclusion: Embodied History and the Kora Tree**

The notion of embodiment is quintessential in the Grists' understanding of knowledge, memory, and history as connected with one's identity. Saltwater citizens are described as "N-lite junkies stoned on history" (40): they take the drug to "see" virtual projections of history in their minds,

---

<sup>6</sup> This vision of the less-than-human is already present in Lai's 2002 novel *Salt Fish Girl*, in which two series of Asian female clones are created by the thousands for slave workforce in assembly line factories. In this case, to Sonias' and Miyakos' gender, ethnic, and technological otherness, an animal (or natural) component is added since their DNA sequences were made to include a tiny portion of carp and cat DNA respectively, with the purpose of further depriving them of any type of human rights. As in *The Tiger Flu*, a group of Sonias escape and create their own clandestine all-female community.

thereby metaphorizing the notion of disembodied information put forth by cybernetic posthumanism. By contrast, for Grists history is, like knowledge, an embodied experience: the first time Kirilow listens to music from the time before, her body starts moving, physically dancing the past that involuntarily comes to her sentient being:

I dance the dance of the grannies' expulsion. I dance the dance of Chang and Eng and their mythic launch. [...] I dance the dance of nuclear fission, of oil, of coal, of wood and straw. I dance for wheels and automobiles, when they were like living creatures drunk on the rotted bodies of species long dead. I dance for the tiger flu, for Ebola, for AIDS, smallpox, measles, tuberculosis, Black Plague, and death. I dance for stem cells, devilled eggs, cloning, and mutation. All the long path of chance and science, money and murder that Old Glorybind taught me was my messy legacy. Although I can't say I understand it, I know its songs, its oranges and lemons, its ring around the rosy. My body knows something that my mind can't refuse. (70-71)

As happened in Lai's previous novel, *Salt Fish Girl* (2002), where the world history of war, colonialism, suffering, and oppression was dreamt of, unconsciously reenacted, and felt by people who developed physical symptoms and, more often than not, ended up drowning, in *The Tiger Flu* history and transgenerational memory seem to be inscribed in the body. Remarkably enough, when Kirilow endeavors to save the Grist sisters from extermination, it is their knowledge that she also intends to save. She explicitly says that Kora, as the last starfish, could save the sisters "and everything we hold in our bald brains from the time before" (219).



## *The Tiger Flu: A Critical Posthumanist Response to the Illusion of Transhumanism*

However, the novel aptly avoids a Manichean approach to the body/mind, nature/culture, natural/technological divides of Western thought by not endorsing radical rejection of technological aids in what may at first sight appear to be an unexpected twist by the end of the novel. Myra, one of the leading Cordova girls, affirms the following:

In order to survive in the world that is coming, we need to know our history. [...] Knowledge, my sisters, is the most important tool we have. We must learn everything Madame Dearborn has to teach us. [...] And what we don't have, we will get from the marvelous memory scales that the great inventor Isabelle Chow has deigned to send us. Make use of the technologies you've been given, sisters. (86)

When Kora Ko's body is accidentally smashed in the destruction of the New Origins Archive, the LiFT transforms it into a giant fish and her consciousness is uploaded to a batterkite—a squid-shaped techno-animal aircraft—that takes her home to New Grist Village. Myra sticks “a twig” into Kirilow's skull to enable her to fly the batterkite without getting lost on the way (322), which she cannot refuse to do if she is to save Kora's life. Part V thus takes us to New Grist Village 156 years later, where Kora has become an “ancient starfish tree” (326), also known as the Kora Tree, who “fruits” new organs for the Grist sisters. As the Kora Tree herself explains to the younger sisters:

*I nearly died. I had to be uploaded to a batterkite and become its consciousness. And then we discovered that the tentacles of the kite doctored carefully and left to lie long enough atop fertile soil could become roots.*

*Bombyx Mori and Kirilow Groundsel worked for many years to make me what I am and to seed the entire Starfish Orchard that nurtures the Grist Garden. (328; italics in original)*

Even more significantly, the Kora Tree “vibrates language” (327) and tells the new generations of Grist sisters the stories (in italics, still framed by the external narration) of the time before, with a special focus on the ills of a hetero-patriarchal society that used to exert violence of every kind upon its female members. The Grist girls' amazement clearly suggests that such an oppressive society has been left far behind and brings back to focus the gender concerns that underlie most of the text, thereby echoing the kind of posthuman subjectivity that Braidotti advocates: “rather materialist and vitalist, embodied and embedded, firmly located somewhere, according to the feminist ‘politics of location’” (2013: 51), and de-centering not only man, but also human beings—*anthropoi*—in their relation with the natural environment.

Furthermore, the omniscient narrator concludes by saying that “[a]t the very top of her [Kora's] branches a little tendril lights up momentarily, calling out to no one. She wills it to dim” (Lai, 2018: 329). Technology played a vital role in saving Kora's consciousness and, consequently, in saving the Grist species and their history and knowledge in an ultimate embrace of critical posthumanist tenets on the nature-culture continuum. Yet, Kora's “little tendril” finds no response above as (male) Chang is gone and (female) Eng, though still orbiting, is now too far from the Earth. Knowledge, then, resides in the natural Grists alone. Together with their Kora Tree, the Grists seem to have transcended finitude



## *The Tiger Flu: A Critical Posthumanist Response to the Illusion of Transhumanism*

through her earthly rooted and embodied organ fruiting, endorsing a Braidottian “affirmative posthuman position” (2013: 38) that transcends the centrality of the humanist model of Man, the privilege of the rational mind over the body, and anthropocentrism through the celebration of embodied and embedded difference.

### Works Cited

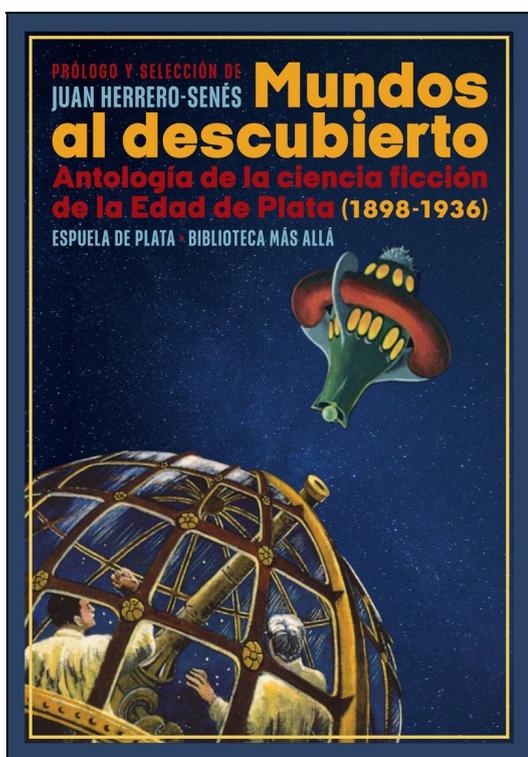
- ALAIMO, Stacy (2010). *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- ATWOOD, Margaret. (2013). *MaddAddam*. London: Virago.
- (2009). *The Year of the Flood*. London: Virago.
- (2003). *Oryx and Crake*. London: Virago.
- BOSTROM, Nick (2005). “Transhumanist Values,” *Journal of Philosophical Research*, 30: 3-14.
- BRAIDOTTI, Rosi (2013). *The Posthuman*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- (2018). “A Theoretical Framework for the Critical Posthumanities,” *Theory, Culture and Society*, 0.0: 1-31.
- CHENG, Kai (6 December 2018). “Surviving Utopia: Finding Hope in Larissa Lai’s Piercing Novel *The Tiger Flu*,” *Autostraddle*, <https://www.autostraddle.com/surviving-utopia-finding-hope-in-larissa-lais-the-tiger-flu-439136/>
- FERRANDO, Francesca (2020). “Leveling the Posthuman Playing Field,” *Theology and Science*, 18.1: 1-6.
- HAYLES, Katherine (1999). *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- LAI, Larissa (2002). *Salt Fish Girl: a Novel*. Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers.
- (2018). *The Tiger Flu: a Novel*. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press.
- MACCORMACK, Patricia (2012). *Posthuman Ethics: Embodiment and Cultural Theory*. London and New York: Routledge.
- NAYAR, Pramod K. (2014). *Posthumanism*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- RANISCH, Robert & Stefan Lorenz SORGNER (2014). “Introducing Post- and Transhumanism,” Robert Ranisch & Stefan Lorenz Sorgner (eds.), *Beyond Humanism: Trans- and Posthumanism*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 7-27.
- ROSSINI, Manuela (2005). “Figurations of Post/Humanity in Contemporary Science/Fiction: All Too Human(ist)?,” *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses*, 50: 21-35.
- SCHWAB, Klaus (2016). *The Fourth Industrial Revolution*. World Economic Forum.
- VINT, Sherryl (2007). *Bodies of Tomorrow: Technology, Subjectivity, Science Fiction*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

# Los viejos mundos de la ciencia ficción española, bien al descubierto



Mariano Martín Rodríguez  
INVESTIGADOR INDEPENDIENTE

© Mariano Martín Rodríguez, 2021



*Mundos al descubierto. Antología de la ciencia ficción de la Edad de Plata (1898-1936)*

Prólogo y selección de Juan Herrero-Senés.  
Sevilla: Renacimiento, 2021.  
541 pp.

En 1995 se publicó una antología que nos enseñó a muchos que la ciencia ficción española no era algo reciente e imitado de la pujante producción especulativa en lengua inglesa. Nil Santiáñez-Tiό demostró mediante *De la Luna a Mecnópolis*. Antolo-

gía de la ciencia ficción española (1832-1913) que había existido también en la España de habla castellana una larga tradición de especulaciones ficticias sobre el cariz del porvenir, además de otras que incluso se atrevieron a explorar otros planetas. Investigadores procedentes del círculo de aficionados españoles a la ciencia ficción, tales como Agustín Jaureguizar, ya habían acometido la tarea ingente de recabar la atención sobre un gran número de obras, breves o extensas, que tenían un aire de familia más o menos claro con lo que se entiende generalmente por ciencia ficción. Pese a sus valiosísimas aportaciones, no sería hasta esa antología hecha por Santiáñez-Tiό y publicada por una editorial no especializada en este género de ficción que este mereció atención profesional por parte de los historiadores de la literatura. A partir de entonces se fue incrementando el interés de estos por la ciencia ficción española, incluida la antigua, y ese interés creciente se ha traducido en artículos y diversas reediciones de diversas obras consideradas importantes de la modalidad, sea por el renombre de algunos de sus autores (por ejemplo, Luis Araquistáin, del que se ha rescatado *El archipiélago maravilloso*), sea por la importancia del libro en la propia historia internacional de la ciencia ficción, como es el caso de *El anacronópete*, de Enrique Gaspar, primera ficción sobre un viaje en el tiempo por medio de una máquina.



## Los viejos mundos de la ciencia ficción española, bien al descubierto

En 2021, puede afirmarse que la ciencia ficción española antigua (esto es, hasta el inicio del fenómeno de los bolsilibros en 1953 y su subsiguiente precipitación estética y cultural en la paraliteratura) ya no es un fenómeno marginal en el mundo académico. La bibliografía secundaria sobre ella suma un número considerable de entradas. Este hecho permite abrigar la esperanza de que los guardianes del canon, que no trabajan todos en la universidad, se den cuenta de la necesidad de tenerlo en cuenta a la hora de escribir las historias de la literatura española en castellano, que lleva ya demasiado tiempo lastrada por el prejuicio de que la única estética castiza y respetable, por la razón que sea, es la llamada *realista*. Para facilitar, convenía que los avances de la investigación sobre el tema y una buena muestra de las obras originales para demostrar la justeza de las conclusiones por vía de los hechos se reunieran en libros de síntesis. Se trataría, pues, de poner al día la iniciativa de Santiáñez-Tió con la ventaja de disponer de las numerosas novedades redescubiertas hasta ahora. La parte histórica de esta tarea ya está en gran parte realizada gracias a los capítulos correspondientes de la *Historia de la ciencia ficción en la cultura española*, editada por Teresa López-Pellisa. La parte que podríamos decir práctica, consistente en una edición comentada de una muestra representativa de textos que fuera más amplia y fiel a la realidad literaria que la pionera de Santiáñez-Tió, era lo que faltaba, y es la carencia que Juan Herrero-Senés ha subsanado mediante su antología de la ciencia ficción española en castellano entre 1898 y 1936 que llama, con un título que adapta de otro de José María Salaverría, *Mundos al descubierto*.

Este volumen recoge nada menos que veinticuatro obras íntegras, todas ellas breves, pertenecientes a distintos géneros

discursivos. Aunque predominan las narraciones, también se recopilan textos de carácter más bien ensayístico, así como una obra dramática. Con muy buen criterio, el editor prescinde de publicar meros extractos de obras más extensas, cosa siempre frustrante para los lectores, a quienes unos pocos pasajes pueden servir para despertar la curiosidad, pero no para satisfacerla. Por lo demás, dado el hecho indudable de que la ciencia ficción prosperaba (y seguramente lo sigue haciendo) sobre todo a través de las formas breves, la decisión editorial cobra todo su sentido. Más discutible podría considerarse la de incluir obras que se han rescatado recientemente, a veces por partida doble, como la novela corta de ambiente paleolítico *En las cavernas*, de Emilia Pardo Bazán. Su lugar lo podría haber ocupado algún otro texto menos conocido, pero su excelencia literaria justifica esta nueva reedición, también porque la finalidad de esta antología no es únicamente arqueológica. Se trata también de intentar convencer una vez más a un medio cultural todavía reacio del interés de la ficción especulativa española del brillante período de la Edad de Plata, para lo cual el mejor argumento son textos como este, escritos además por una autora plenamente canónica. Los relatos «Las ruinas de Granada», de Ángel Ganivet «Mecanópolis», de Miguel de Unamuno; «Los intelectuales», de Azorín, y «El dueño del átomo», de Ramón Gómez de la Serna, así como la obrilla teatral «La revolución sentimental», de Ramón Pérez de Ayala, pueden desempeñar la misma función de demostrar no solo la calidad literaria que pudo alcanzar la ciencia ficción en España, sino también el hecho de que no le hicieron ascos algunos de los mayores clásicos modernos de su literatura. A este respecto, la única objeción que se le podría oponer a Herrero-Senés es que haya optado por la segunda versión



## Los viejos mundos de la ciencia ficción española, bien al descubierto

de la pieza de Pérez de Ayala, ya reeditada alguna que otra vez, mientras que la primera de 1909, con el título de *Sentimental Club*, sigue sepultada en la colección periódica en que vio la luz, pese a su interés propio, no solo literario sino también histórico, por ser una distopía socio-tecnológica temprana que pudo influir, por ejemplo, en la posterior más célebre de su amigo inglés (y conocedor del castellano) Aldous Huxley.

Junto a estos escritores que pueden encontrarse fácilmente en los manuales de la literatura española de la Edad Contemporánea, otros menos conocidos también han sido objeto de atención crítica y editorial en los últimos años. Entre ellos, por orden más o menos cronológico, se pueden mencionar el postromántico José Fernández Bremón, con «Telegrafía intelectual», que es uno de sus característicos cuentos sarcásticos; el naturalista José Ortega Munilla, con sus pacifistas «Páginas del año 2016», un cuento narrativamente innovador que había escapado hasta ahora a todos los investigadores de la ciencia ficción hasta este rescate suyo por Herrero-Senés; el noventayochista nada menor José María Salaverría, con la originalísima novela corta *Un mundo al descubierto*, que expone el pobre concepto que tendrían de los terrícolas los marcianos; Ángeles Vicente, enigmática figura de escritora inconformista, de la que se reedita de nuevo (ya apareció en una edición regional murciana muy poco difundida) su «Cuento absurdo» apocalíptico y nihilista, y el hispano-cubano Alfonso Hernández-Catá, a quien se ha hecho más justicia en su isla natal que en España, donde desarrolló prácticamente toda su carrera literaria, realidad que justifica su atinada inclusión en esta antología con el relato «Fraternidad». Tal vez más atinado aún habría sido escoger la otra gran narración fictocientífica de su autor, «El aborto»,

que combina magistralmente el costumbrismo rural, compatible con un cierto aire distópico, con la anticipación científica en el seno de un conjunto entramado que plantea, además, interesantes cuestiones éticas en un marco diríase neocolonial. Sin embargo, «Fraternidad» tiene el mérito de adelantarse bastantes años al tratamiento del problema del papel del científico en una sociedad embarcada en una destructiva carrera de armamentos, con un planteamiento corriente en la Guerra Fría y que seguiría Pedro Salinas en su obra teatral *Caín o una gloria científica* (1957), cuyo asunto tiene mucho en común con el de «Fraternidad».

Otros autores que se han ido rescatando últimamente son Santiago Ramón y Cajal, el insigne neurólogo cuya obra literaria es más interesante de lo que se suele creer y que en este volumen aparece representado por su temprana anticipación «La vida en el año 6000»; Agustín de Foxá, con su artículo «Las termitas»; Luis Antón del Olmet, con su distopía «La verdad en la ilusión», y Miguel A. Calvo Roselló, con otra distopía, «Un país extraño», publicada en 1919 en la revista madrileña *Blanco y Negro* y solo reeditada críticamente antes en Argentina, por Pablo Capanna, quien lo creyó autor ligado a esa república, tal vez porque aquel relato apareció con posterioridad en una de las colecciones literarias que allí se publicaban. Se trata de una obra que merece ser mucho mejor conocida, también por el hecho de que se trata del precedente más directo de la distopía clásica de George Orwell, que la de Calvo Roselló anuncia hasta en detalles como el aparato de vigilancia a distancia de los ciudadanos por parte de la policía política, un *novum* que no nos consta que se hubiera descrito en ninguna obra anterior a «Un país extraño».

*Mundos al descubierto* también da ca-



## Los viejos mundos de la ciencia ficción española, bien al descubierto

bida a textos de autores prácticamente desconocidos o que tan solo habían sido objeto de algún breve artículo o de alusiones en trabajos generales sobre la historia de la ciencia ficción española. Se trata, por ejemplo, de Alejandro Larrubiera, con «La mujer número 53», uno de los pocos cuentos fictocientíficos que escribió este maestro del relato breve hoy injustamente olvidado; de Eduardo Bertrán Rubio, cuyo relato cómico «Un invento despampanante» fue uno de los escasos y mejores rescates de la ciencia ficción antigua que vieron la luz en la mítica revista *Nueva Dimensión*, al igual que «El ocaso de la humanidad», una parábola pacifista del poeta decadentista menor Marcos Rafael Blanco Belmonte también recogida en *Mundos al descubierto*; de Rafael López de Haro, con su morbosa novela corta «El caso del doctor Iturbe», y de Ángel Marsá, de quien se reedita otra novela corta, titulada *La voz de la sangre*, cuyo mayor interés es quizá su fusión de lo fictocientífico y lo policial. Otros ni siquiera aparecen mencionados prácticamente en ningún sitio. Cuentos como «La sed de oro», de Ramón López Montenegro, y «Los rayos paralizantes», de Félix Lorenzo, y una anticipación ensayística como «El periodismo del porvenir», del divulgador científico Vicente Vera, son algunos ejemplos más que, como el cuento arriba citado de Ortega Munilla, demuestran que Herrero-Senés no se limitó a empaparse bien de los conocimientos existentes en materia de arqueología española de la ciencia ficción, sino que también emuló a Santiáñez-Tiό y a otros que siguieron los pasos de este al esforzarse por contribuir al enriquecimiento de su objeto mediante la búsqueda de nuevos textos fictocientíficos en las publicaciones de la época, incluidas las periódicas de más difícil y empeñada consulta. Es probable que haya descubierto así otros más que no figuren en su antología y que, en-

tre ellos, haya escogido para su reedición únicamente los que revisten interés literario indudable o se ajustan mejor a la clasificación adoptada. En cualquier caso, estos descubrimientos bastarían para acreditar su compromiso como investigador de la historia de la literatura, algo que se suele dar por supuesto en los profesores universitarios como él mismo, pero que es más bien raro hoy en día, cuando los estudios culturales posmodernos giran incansablemente, como ratas en una rueda, en torno a unos pocos temas y autoridades, mientras se está perdiendo la tradición filológica y la disciplina que lleva aparejada, consistente en documentar exhaustivamente lo que se afirma y en ampliar la propia documentación en lo posible, para sí y para futuros estudiosos. Desde este punto de vista, Herrero Senés es un filólogo ejemplar, cosa que también demuestra a la hora de estudiar en sí mismo el fenómeno de la ciencia ficción como tal en la Edad de Plata en la introducción crítica al volumen.

Pese al aviso de que lo pueden saltar impunemente «los lectores ávidos de ciencia ficción», no recomendaríamos que lo hicieran, en primer lugar porque es de una amenidad rara en este tipo de prólogos y, en segundo, porque tal amenidad no está reñida con el alto nivel de exigencia académica y conceptual que caracteriza la labor de su autor. Nada se pierde y mucho entendimiento se puede ganar leyendo esas páginas. Hablamos del entendimiento añadido al ya alto de los lectores, ávidos o no, en materia de teoría, historia y temas de la ciencia ficción, en forma no abstracta, sino aplicada con exactitud a su asunto. En el primer apartado, «Sobre la ciencia ficción», Herrero-Senés argumenta con buenas razones que haya tenido que entrar en disquisiciones teóricas, siempre espinosas, acerca de lo que es la ciencia ficción como género. Aquí



## Los viejos mundos de la ciencia ficción española, bien al descubierto

habríamos utilizado quizá otro término, ya que preferimos reservarlo a los géneros discursivos definibles mediante una serie de características retóricas distintivas, mientras que la ciencia ficción es más bien un modo de ficción que puede manifestarse a través del cuento, la obra dramática o el ensayo, tal y como esta misma antología demuestra. Sin embargo, como tampoco estamos ante un tratado de narratología, bien está que el prologuista se haya limitado a explicar que, tratándose de una antología de ciencia ficción, conviene justificar, con la ayuda de la teoría, la razón de incluir en ella determinadas clases de textos y no otros. Aunque Herrero-Senés reconoce que una definición específica sería difícil, ya que la literatura tiene la buena o mala costumbre de acoger elementos de lo más variopinto, la de ciencia ficción se caracterizaría, en su opinión, por el carácter central en ella de la razón como potencia aplicada a la hora de fenómenos y objetos, desde inventos hasta formas de organización social inexistentes en nuestro mundo actual, pero que aparecen dotados en la ciencia ficción de verosimilitud lógica y, naturalmente, científica. Los universos ficcionales así contruidos suelen ser el resultado de una actividad especulativa derivada de la proyección hacia el futuro de tendencias del propio presente, al efecto de sacar a los lectores de este, de distanciarlos para que lo miren críticamente desde la perspectiva externa garantizada por la mirada desde el porvenir, un porvenir que se atiene a las leyes básicas de nuestro mundo, del que procede. De esta manera, la ciencia ficción constituye una reflexión racional sobre lo que nos puede deparar una evolución hipotética, pero verosímil, a partir de un presente que, desde la Revolución Industrial, se percibe como algo en desarrollo, en constante cambio y progreso. Es un cambio de para-

digma total respecto a la mentalidad cíclica determinada por el modelo de vida agrícola antes predominante. Desde los inicios del progreso tecnológico y científico, un mismo ser humano puede asistir a tales mutaciones de su modo de vida que no extraña que se mire el futuro con esperanza o con prevención, según se deseen o se teman los cambios que se barruntan y que la ciencia ficción, como literatura en tiempo futuro, presenta como ya realizados para poder juzgarlos, al menos en el terreno de la ficción. Todos los seres humanos resultan afectados por esas modificaciones, cuya índole es cultural, como bien señala Herrero-Senés, por lo que no es extraño que la ciencia ficción tuviera también un gran desarrollo en algunas regiones solo parcialmente industrializadas, tales como la propia España de la Edad de Plata. Los escritores españoles no vivían en una reserva espiritual ajena a lo que pasaba en el resto del mundo, aunque eso parecería a juzgar por la perspectiva estrechamente nacional, cuando no provinciana, que todavía predomina en las historias literarias del país.

Sin embargo, la ciencia ficción tuvo una «presencia» (así reza el título del segundo apartado del prólogo) en España que fue bastante temprana. Debido a su período cronológico, quedan fuera las obras anteriores a 1898, una fecha más simbólica que otra cosa en lo que la ciencia ficción se refiere. Aunque la producción fictocientífica de Nilo María Fabra se caracteriza por un optimismo de inspiración positivista que contrastaría con el pesimismo con que se suele abordar la ciencia y la tecnología en la ciencia ficción española después de esa fecha, es imposible marcar distinciones claras, pues los textos de anticipación de Ramón y Cajal o Vicente Vera de la antología manifiestan una clara esperanza en las mejoras que habría de traer el futuro, mientras que las



## Los viejos mundos de la ciencia ficción española, bien al descubierto

anticipaciones de Antonio Flores o Fernández Bremón publicadas en pleno siglo XIX denotan una desconfianza en el progreso tan marcada como podía serlo en los cuentos antologados de Ganimet y Unamuno. Tal vez lo que diferencia en mayor medida la ciencia ficción de la Edad de Plata frente a la del siglo anterior sea su amplio empleo por escritores de distintas estéticas, escuelas y ambiciones como un vehículo para expresar sus ideas y preocupaciones. Creemos que su recurso a la ciencia ficción obedece a un deseo de explorar sus posibilidades filosóficas, sociales y políticas, además de las propiamente literarias. No existía como tal, a diferencia de lo afirmado por Herrero-Senés, una literatura artística o minoritaria y otra de «género» y de masas, sino un abanico de modalidades narrativas, tales como la policial o la fictocientífica, que los escritores utilizaban libremente y sin considerar que una clase de literatura u otra tuviera más dignidad o exigiera un mayor empeño en su escritura. Hablar de «géneros» en esa época debe tener en cuenta esta realidad histórica, que se demuestra asimismo mediante el hecho de que la crítica, en España como en el resto del mundo fuera de los Estados Unidos y su fenómeno *Pulp*, juzgaba las obras fictocientíficas exactamente igual que cualquier otra de sus autores, fuera realista o no, vanguardista o tradicionalista. No queremos decir con esto que no existiera ya entonces una conciencia de «género» más o menos clara, sino que aplicar una sociología literaria válida tan solo para una época posterior no contribuye a explicar la razón de las limitaciones cuantitativas de la ciencia ficción española en la Edad de Plata. Aparte de que tal escasez no es tal, y esta misma antología así lo demuestra, cabría preguntarse si la menor abundancia frente a la ciencia ficción coetánea de Francia o Gran Bretaña no se debería simplemente

al hecho de que la ciencia ficción solo representa un pequeño porcentaje de la producción literaria total y esta fue cuantitativamente muchísimo más nutrida en esos países que en España, donde el lectorado potencial era también bastante menos numeroso que en aquellos.

Herrero-Senés se mueve en terreno más firme en el apartado «Algunos rasgos generales». En su opinión, predominaba entonces en la ciencia ficción española «la cautela y el pesimismo», la desconfianza hacia los móviles de los científicos y las consecuencias de sus actos, el temor hacia una evolución sociopolítica que condujera a la pérdida de las libertades y de todo aquellos que nos hace humanos (por ejemplo, las emociones en «La revolución sentimental»), y de ahí la importancia de la distopía. El miedo al progreso suele conllevar un marcado conservadurismo, especialmente en materia de moral y roles sociales y de sexuales, en todos los lados del espectro político. Estos fenómenos eran universales, por lo que la ciencia ficción española «se aleja del localismo», aunque suelen menudear las pinceladas costumbristas, a veces con humor, como procedimiento para acercar los hechos asombrosos a la realidad de cada día, aminorando la posible extrañeza suscitada por la ambientación especulada. Este costumbrismo, siempre tan fuerte en la literatura española, estaba también muy presente en otros países.

La ciencia ficción se movía en coordenadas internacionales también en España, donde los autores más célebres de la modalidad, como H. G. Wells, eran bien conocidos. Los «temas y tendencias», tal y como se titula el último apartado del sustancioso prólogo de Herrero-Senés, eran también internacionales, de modo que su clasificación tiene validez no solo para España. En primer lugar, sitúa los textos de Pardo Bazán, Unamuno, López-Monte-



## Los viejos mundos de la ciencia ficción española, bien al descubierto

negro, Salaverría y Foxá en una sección de «Mundos extraños», ya que se centran en «universos separados de la vida cotidiana», como experimentos de confrontación con unas realidades completamente ajenas a las conocidas del mundo primario, mediante traslado temporal o espacial a tiempos como la prehistoria ibérica o a lugares como Marte, una ciudad puramente mecánica en el desierto o un termiteo. Dada la variedad de escenarios, no extrañará que sea tan difícil encontrarles puntos comunes a esas historias, aparte de su función, acertadamente señalada por Herrero-Senés, de hacer visibles, por contraste con el mundo extraño, «experiencias y emociones básicas, inherentes a lo humano». En cambio, presentan una indudable unidad temática las ficciones recogidas en «Científicos e inventos», cuyo nombre ya indica de qué se trata. También es grande la coincidencia en las actitudes contrarias a una labor científica que, movida por la codicia u otras pasiones igual de poco recomendables, va demasiado lejos y provoca catástrofes personales o sociales, aunque tampoco faltan los tratamientos humorísticos que quitan cierto hierro al asunto, sin que ello obste a su carácter admonitorio. Este carácter lo tienen también los ejemplos rescatados en la sección «Política-ficción» («historia-ficción» en el índice final), que se limitan prácticamente a especulaciones sobre enfrentamientos bélicos, sean futuros, sean prolongados desde el presente de la Gran Guerra de 1914. Se dejan así de lado las anticipaciones de política cotidiana que también existieron entonces en favor de unas ficciones de alcance menos circunstancial, pues todas ellas persiguen dar idea, por medio de la ciencia ficción, de lo inmoral y «lo absurdo del conflicto», muy lejos de la moda coetánea de la anticipación nacionalista de las guerras futuras desde la germinal de George Chesney.

Aunque también las hubo en España (por ejemplo, escribió algunas Nilo María Fabra), los autores de ese país neutral pudieron llevar tal género hacia un universalismo ético que redundaba en beneficio de su interés para los lectores de hoy. Además, como son muy poco conocidas, se agradece aún en mayor medida su recuperación en esta antología.

Las de la sección siguiente, «Utopías y distopías» sí tienen algún renombre, ya que todas ellas han conocido reediciones antes de este volumen, quizá porque «la descripción de la vida colectiva bajo cierto poder» ejerce una atracción considerable sobre numerosos lectores, incluidos los del mundo académico y político, y no solo gracias al prestigio que este tipo de ficción disfruta por su antigüedad secular. La manera de organizar la sociedad es algo que suele interesar sobremanera a quienes viven en ella y el miedo a que una doctrina particular se lleve a la práctica con consecuencias terribles para unos y magníficas para otros es algo común en la historia humana, sobre todo en la Edad Contemporánea. No es extraño que los escritores hayan querido conjurar el peligro o, al contrario, acelerar su advenimiento imaginando en sus ficciones cómo sería la sociedad que temen o desean. Se trata, pues, de una literatura utilitaria, e incluso propagandística, que se ajusta bien a querencias arraigadas de quienes dictan todavía el canon, para cuyos intereses extraliterarios pesan lo suficiente como para que tilden a menudo de escapista a la ciencia ficción por no prestarse aparentemente con tanta facilidad como la *realista* al «compromiso» en favor de cualquier causa. De este pecado se librarían obviamente la utopía y la distopía, por lo que su inclusión en la ciencia ficción ha contribuido bastante a la creciente *canonización* de esta en la actualidad. Así se ha recuperado hasta cierto punto la categoría



## Los viejos mundos de la ciencia ficción española, bien al descubierto

que tuvo en España antes de la Guerra Civil de 1936, cuando ficción utópica y científica se veían ya como difícilmente separables. Sin embargo, concederles un lugar prioritario en una antología de la ciencia ficción habría sido erróneo. Es verdad que las obras incluidas en esta sección se cuentan entre las mejor escritas de ella, pero Herrero-Senés ha hecho muy bien en poner este apartado en pie de igualdad con los demás, lo que contribuirá quizás a un reequilibrio del campo de la ciencia ficción desde el punto de vista de su consideración cultural. También nos parece acertado dedicar una sección específica a los «Viajes al futuro», aunque su nombre pueda inducir a confusión, ya que lo fundamental en los textos ahí recogidos no es el traslado con todas sus peripecias, sino la descripción de lo que el viajero, real o virtual, observa en el porvenir, como mero testigo. Se trata de anticipaciones que tienen un marcado carácter ensayístico, aunque la vertiente lírica del discurso descriptivo domina en «Las ruinas de Granada» de Ganivet, quizá el texto más poético de la antología.

El cuento de Ganivet confirma asimismo una impresión que da la mayoría de estos *Mundos al descubierto*: la de que la ciencia ficción de Edad de Plata española es digna literariamente del subido valor simbolizado por dicho metal. Debemos a Herrero-Senés no solo que nos dé la oportunidad de disfrutarla en un cómodo

volumen bien escogido, sino también que no se haya conformado con menos que ofrecer una síntesis inmejorable de historias e investigaciones anteriores, y que incluso haya ido más allá. Su erudición a este respecto es tal que hasta la omisión de toda bibliografía secundaria, incluso cuando un estudioso anterior es citado por su nombre, se justifica por el hecho cierto de que ha utilizado y asimilado perfectamente tantos libros y artículos que enumerarlos todos habría incrementado en muchas páginas las del libro, quitando espacio para lo principal, que son las propias obras, todas ellas reproducidas, como debe ser, a partir de sus ediciones originales, estas sí puntualmente señaladas en la sección de «Referencias bibliográficas». Frente a todas estas valiosas cualidades, las escasas objeciones que hemos planteado son de poco momento y, por lo demás, se trata más bien de cuestiones de opinión. *Mundos al descubierto* es uno de esos libros que resultan definitivos en su ámbito y no tiene apenas parangón, que sepamos, en otras antologías nacionales de la ciencia ficción escrita en la primera mitad del siglo pasado. En algo se tenía que ver que, entre algunos filólogos españoles, el posmodernismo hegemónico que nos coloniza las mentes no ha desterrado por completo la exigencia del rigor crítico e histórico, del que este libro es una estupenda demostración.

# The Perfect Slave



Federico de Castro

Introductory note by Mariano Martín Rodríguez  
and translation by Álvaro Piñero González

© Mariano Martín Rodríguez, 2021

© Álvaro Piñero González, 2021, por la traducción

Different writers have approached the topic of the mechanical woman in diverse ways in modern times, long before post-humanism conferred new cultural life upon it. Among them, E. T. A. Hofmann (1776-1822) illustrated the fantastic approach in “The Sandman” (“Der Sandman,” 1816) by portraying a mechanical doll whose appearance threatens to delete the boundaries between natural beings and artificial creations, thus ominously threatening the very idea of personality and free will. In contrast, Auguste Villiers de l’Isle Adam (1838-1899) embraced in *Tomorrow’s Eve* (*L’Ève future*, 1886) the novelty or Suvinian *novum* of an artificial woman endowed with sentience as an embodiment of the perfect body and mind so elusive in women (and men) of flesh and blood, a perfection attained through science and technology. Between both works, a virtually unknown but significant Spanish tale shows that a high fantasy approach can also be taken. Its author, Federico de Castro (1834-1903) was one of the leading figures of the Krausist school in his native Seville, where he directed a *Monthly Journal of Philosophy, Literature and Science* (*Revista Mensual de Filosofía, Literatura y Ciencia*). And it was in this journal that “La esclava perfecta” (translated below as “The Perfect Slave”) was first published in 1872 (vol. IV, p. 412-413). Castro later

collected this story in 1877 in *Flores de invierno* (‘Winter Flowers’),<sup>1</sup> an anthology of essays and narratives, both original and rewritten from popular sources.

Krausism was perhaps the most influential current of thought in Spain in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where it moved beyond the philosophical doctrines of its German founder Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781-1832). Spanish intellectuals understood and promoted it rather as an encompassing way of thinking and researching, and even of ethically living. They combined thus a deeply felt non-confessional spirituality and a clear overture to modern sciences and their methods, especially in the fields of pedagogy (including popularisation of science) and folklore studies, for which Federico de Castro is an important pioneer in the Andalusian region. Spanish Krausists were also notorious universalists, promoting a better knowledge in their country not only of foreign European and Western cultures, but also of the Eastern ones, although usually without the

---

<sup>1</sup> The following translation is based on this final edition: Federico de Castro, “La esclava perfecta,” *Flores de invierno*, Sevilla: José G. Fernández, 1877, p. 89-93. We warmly thank Jonathan Deroo for his revising the English text of the translation and the introductory note.



## The Perfect Slave

orientalist bias more common in other countries that, unlike Spain, had colonial interests in the Orient.<sup>2</sup>

Spanish orientalism often focused on the country's own medieval history of Al-Andalus until the demise of the Granada kingdom in 1492. More exotic venues were also used in contemporary Spanish literature. One of 19<sup>th</sup> century legendary narratives that has attained canonical status is "The Leader of the Red Hands" ("El caudillo de las manos rojas," 1858) by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer (1836-1870), which retells a Hindu mythic legend in ornate prose similar to that of later writers from the Spanish Aesthetic Movement. Federico de Castro followed Bécquer's style of writing in "The Perfect Slave," which also reads, unlike the rest of his narratives, as a piece having been written with the imagistic and rhetorically rich style typical of decadent writers of the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Castro was, however, more original than Bécquer regarding the setting of his story: "The Perfect Slave" is set in an Oriental-appearing kingdom that is not intended as a conventional fairy-tale venue. Given the existence of mechanical female lovers and other automatons as central features in several stories from pre-Muslim India and its area of cultural influence (for instance, the Tocharian tale of the painter and the mechanical maiden), Castro's story has a certain resemblance with that

old Indian tradition of narratives with mechanical characters.

His story, however, is set in a fully imaginary kingdom. The latter has no name and it is ruled by an also nameless and all-powerful monarch called the 'Sun Prince,' who is endowed with semi-divine features such as a luminous front that has to be covered by nine veils so as not to dazzle his royal subjects. The narrative begins by his ordering his nine ministers to seek the perfect woman among the daughters of gods and men. This allusion to divine offspring on earth suggests that the fictional universe of this story has no place in any historical period of our primary world. On the contrary, it is a full secondary world with naturally accepted supernatural features and having a legendary-looking setting, as well as possible magical features (for instance, nine often appears as a kind of magical number). Castro's is, therefore, a fictional world typical of high fantasy, long before this genre of literature became common in the anglosphere, and it can probably even be considered one the first of its kind in Hispanic literatures. Its significance is not only archaeological, though.

Apart from the beauty of its language and the perfect structure of its narrative structure, where ellipsis is adroitly used, "The Perfect Slave" is not only an outstanding piece of literary fantasy. It also conveys a message that can be read as a debunking of the widespread male wish to have a female partner that is both extremely beautiful and fully submissive, a wish that underpins the very concept of the gynoid in the above-mentioned Villiers de l'Isle Adam's novel. In Castro's tale, the king soon discovers that a true woman of flesh and blood always has her own will but that his 'perfect slave' cannot bring him happiness. An automaton

---

<sup>2</sup> The Philippines were still a part of the old and decaying Spanish empire but they were always seen as an extension of Spanish colonies in the Americas. Moreover, unlike India, China or the Muslim world, the Philippines lacked a pre-existing civilisation strong enough to resist effectively the thorough religious and cultural westernization successfully undertaken by the Spanish.



## The Perfect Slave

devoid of free will cannot be but mortally boring even for a godlike patriarchal despot. Since “The Perfect Slave” is a high fantasy story and not a didactic tract, this message is rather suggested than explicitly put forward. It reveals, however, that Castro was also a true Spanish Krausist for his promotion of women’s dignity and agency. “The Perfect Slave” is, therefore, a tale that seems written for current readers rather than for those of Castro’s time both regarding its meaning and its genre. This is why it

probably deserves recognition not only for its feminism and its veiled criticism of divinised monarchy, but also as an early classic of international high fantasy. It is also perhaps as thought-provoking and artistically satisfying as the better known works on the same topic by Hoffmann and Villiers de l’Isle Adam on the same topic in their respective macro-modes of non-mimetic fiction, namely fantastic and science fiction. Castro’s high fantasy should be added to this list.

Federico de Castro

## The Perfect Slave

### I

Behind the nine veils keeping him from the eyes of men, the *Sun Prince* sits upon his golden throne.

None has seen his sovereign countenance and none ever will.

Should any be fool enough to dare lift the veils, even before being dazzled and felled by the fire torrents springing from *the mountain of light* which shines upon the regal brow, the nine cutlasses of the nine guardians who guard day and night would cleave their neck, severing head from shoulders.

Though hidden by the nine veils, there are nine prostrated viziers waiting ceaselessly for the slightest indication of his will, nine couriers on swift horses ever ready to bear his will to the nine regions of the empire, nine times nine hundred warriors ready to execute it in his court and nine times ninety thousand to enforce it in all the land.

Now the veil stirs... the nine viziers listen shuddering, the couriers crack their whips and spur their steeds on their flanks, the guards shake their shiny weapons of gemstones inlaid, the squadrons stand in formation, the unerring arrowheads surface above the battlements of castles carried by nine hundred elephants...

What does the *son of the Sun* want? Which city's ramparts must yield to his war machines? What life must perish by the blades of his swords?

Tremble not: the prince's words do not command destruction and death.

The lion is chagrined because of his loneliness and longs for a companion.

He told them:

"Go, travel throughout the seven climes and find me *the most beautiful of*

*the beautiful* among the daughters of the Gods, among the daughters of the kings, among the daughters of men."

Nine eunuchs already left, each carrying enough gold to purchase nine empires.

Beware, oh, you beautiful ones, it will avail you not to try to deceive the keen eye of the eunuchs. Fathers, husbands, brothers, it will avail you not to lock the pearl among the beautiful in abyssal deeps or to guard her behind ramparts teeming with soldiers. Gold and the prince's warriors will take her away from you.

### II

Why is this woman crying? She seems the living image of despaired beauty.

Why does the prince's veil shake furiously?

He says:

"Bring me *the wisest of the wise*."

A venerable old man bends and bury his wrinkled brow on the floor and, noticing the woman in so doing, is about to unwittingly utter "No other...more beautiful!"

The axe is hanging over his head, but then the prince speaks:

"As beautiful as this one, yet without volition!"

The old man answers thus:

"Sir, you shall be obeyed."

### III

Why is the prince of the nine veils dying of love, languishing in boredom?

He has the most beautiful of the beautiful by his side. A lake does not



## The Perfect Slave

reflect more accurately the hues of the sky than her will reflects his will.

Why is he dying of love? Why is the prince of the nine veils languishing in

boredom?

Why, the most beautiful of the beautiful, the perfect slave is not a woman but an automaton!

# The Iron City



Salvador Rueda

Introductory note by Mariano Martín Rodríguez  
and translation by Álvaro Piñero González

© Mariano Martín Rodríguez, 2021

© Álvaro Piñero González, 2020, por la traducción

There are many utopias written as novels, such as William Morris' *News from Nowhere* (1890). Less well known are the lyrical ones written in verse in the form of hymns. Hymns are usually written in order to be sung in public in praise of God or the gods and, in modern times, of the very people who sing it as members of a nation or of any community. Their solemn tone is one of their defining features, aiming to arouse an emotional consensus around the worship of the corresponding divinity, or the pride of belonging to a particular group. Their collective character distinguishes them from lyric poems, where individual subjectivity is paramount, and brings them closer to epics, since hymns often indicate the reasons for the praise in the form of concise narratives telling of the extraordinary, supernatural or heroic acts performed by the sung entity.

Hymns, which were mainly religious in nature at the beginning, became increasingly secular and even utopian in content following the consolidation of revolutionary theory and practice from 1789 onwards. Indeed, there are several lyrical, descriptive and narrative hymns in verse praising and portraying future utopias. These are diverse and range from secularised and socialist paradises such as the "Holy City" ("Sfânta cetate," 1856), sung by the Romanian romantic poet Ion

Heliade-Rădulescu (1802-1872), to the egalitarian socialist or anarchist ones praised in hymns written by proletarian authors such as Eugène Pottier (1816-1887) in France and Pietro Gori (1865-1911) in Italy. Later on, in the age of the Aesthetic Movement, utopias had to be not only fair and equal, but also artistically beautiful. Such is "The Iron City" ("La ciudad de hierro" in the Castilian original published in the collection *Fuente de salud*, or 'Source of Health,' in 1906) by Spanish poet Salvador Rueda (1857-1933).<sup>1</sup>

Rueda's iron city corresponds to a mentality that embraces technological and industrial progress, symbolised by metal buildings such as the Parisian Eiffel Tower. These were considered to be the manifestation par excellence of technical modernity in engineering back then, but they also showed a pleasant wealth of decorative details with no other function than to confer the building a clear artistic value. This kind of Modern

---

<sup>1</sup> The English translation below is based on the following edition: Salvador Rueda, "La ciudad de hierro", *Obras completas: Poesía III (1901-1906)*, edición, introducción y notas de María Dolores Gutiérrez Navas, Málaga, Universidad de Málaga, 2016, pp. 425-425. We warmly thank Jonathan Deroo for his revising the English text of the translation and the introductory note.

## The Iron City

Style architecture is the one prevailing in the iron city superbly described by Rueda. Even schools and factories are built following that model. However, their significance is not only aesthetic. The functional iron constructions are also visual signs of a new faith in scientific, technological and social progress. They are cathedrals dedicated to a Christ yet to come. This Christ is not the one portrayed in *The Book of Revelation* but a “Christ of labour and ideas” who will bring us a

Gospel of Peace, thus ushering onto Earth a utopian order of a clearly technocratic nature. This order also embraces, however, both faith and beauty. Perhaps the second coming of Christ will be needed to make this social and aesthetic utopia happen, considering the little signs of it in our times and in the foreseeable future. While we await it, we can still enjoy the beauty of Rueda’s inspiring epic hymn.

Salvador Rueda

## The Iron City

It is the city of times future. It soars magnificent in the mind – a radiant vision with a Babylonian profile. When the sun pours forth its rays of gold the city shimmers, commanding, in the vast forum, filling the air with its towers galore.

It is the future city. Its palaces are a miraculous creation of space. Resolutely they rise from base to summit: thinner than glass and subtler, finer than lace and lovelier, like a doiley of intangible light.

Its pleasing homes' ceilings emulate the concavities of elegant emporiums, draped with kind majesty. Bright clarity rushes through its rooms' cheerful balconies and ironwork – chiselled into flowery motives. The mighty arches of its bridges, like brave caryatids, bend their backs in virile strain, while above, vehicles march in swift and coarse procession, booming hoarsely.

From the unique dikes of its dams wide as seas stem rust-coloured veins of effective virtue, and in its liquid caverns the crystal-clear miracle of water is forged with atoms of iron and health.

In their iron courtyards, the encampments mix their sounds and martial crowds, producing dazzling confusion: walls of iron, canons of iron, brave squadrons of iron and, likewise, the invincible heart of iron.

The classrooms – ovaries where the light of word carves the minds, settling foundations and endowing them with masculine strength – shall bring steely truths to light and shall turn the incipient wills into heroic outbursts and virile resolution.

The cathedrals, tearing veils apart, shall shoot their towers to the skies, needed of new Tables of the Law, and their naves – extraordinary workshops – shall raise their religious altars to a God awaited, but yet still to come.

It is the Christ of incandescent iron, of the uncrowned brow sublime, of the unbruised face divine. It is the Christ of labour and ideas, the Christ that hammers on the anvil of the workshop and writes the Gospel of peace.

# Paraísos futuros: tres himnos utópicos



Nota introductoria y traducción  
de Mariano Martín Rodríguez

© Mariano Martín Rodríguez, 2021

El sueño de un mundo mejor ha sido una constante en la imaginación humana y, como no podía ser menos, ha tenido abundante expresión en la literatura. Durante milenios se ha fantaseado con la existencia de espacios donde ser definitivamente felices. Al principio, tal espacio se concibió en una época mítica de oro, de la que se habría caído al negro presente, aunque tal vez el antiguo paraíso podría haber pervivido en algún rincón ignoto, que algún explorador afortunado habría podido visitar, para luego volver y contárnoslo: desde el pescador imaginado por Tao Yuanming en el siglo V de nuestra era, que encontró el país del jardín de melocotoneros en que se habían preservado las idílicas virtudes de una China mítica, hasta la isla de Utopía descubierta por un explorador portugués según el informe publicado en irónico latín por Tomás Moro, al que seguirán otros cortados por análogo patrón por Tommaso Campanella, Francis Bacon y muchos más soñadores arbitristas. Diversas religiones, tanto politeístas como (teóricamente) monoteístas, prometieron a los desgraciados sufrientes terrenales el paraíso en otra vida de ultratumba. Por fin, a finales del siglo XVIII se empezó a prometer tal paraíso, para todos y en la Tierra, tras una futura y próxima revolución que derribaría violentamente a los opresores y permitiría a los oprimidos crear unas nuevas sociedades perfectas y felices, de las que son cumplido ejemplo aquellas alumbradas por las revoluciones modernas y posmodernas una y otra vez

desde 1789 (revolución liberal francesa) hasta 1999 (revolución socialista venezolana).

Entre una revolución y otra, numerosos publicistas mantenían viva la llama de las esperanzas en un mundo mejor mediante una rica y variada literatura utópica en la que se describía el cariz de una venidera sociedad libre, igualitaria, fraternal y justa que recompensaría los esfuerzos propagandísticos y que merecería todos los sacrificios, humanos inclusive. Son muy conocidas, por ejemplo, las utopías socialistas en forma novelística, tales como *News from Nowhere* [*Noticias de ninguna parte*] (1890), de William Morris. En cambio, lo son mucho menos las utopías líricas escritas en verso que adoptan el esquema discursivo del himno. Este es un género de origen muy antiguo, escrito a menudo para ser cantado en público en loor de los dioses y, modernamente, del propio pueblo que lo entona, en su calidad de nación o de cualquier otra clase de colectividad. El tono solemne de su escritura es una característica común y persigue suscitar un consenso emocional en torno a la adoración de la divinidad correspondiente o al orgullo de pertenencia a la comunidad cantada. Su carácter colectivo lo distingue de la escritura lírica, en la que la subjetividad individual inspira el canto, y lo acerca a la épica, pues los himnos suelen indicar los motivos de la alabanza. Esta suele fundarse en unos actos extraordinarios, sobrenaturales o heroicos, que se narran de forma concisa o a



## Paraísos futuros: tres himnos utópicos

los que simplemente se alude por ser de sobra conocidos.

Los himnos, que eran sobre todo de carácter religioso en sus inicios, menudearon con contenidos utópicos tras la consolidación de la teoría y la práctica revolucionarias desde 1789. Numerosos poemas entre líricos, descriptivos y narrativos ofrecieron variadas visiones del futuro paraíso terrestre que dibujan la evolución del género hasta su declive en el siglo XX, cuando el auge creciente del individualismo consumista, por un lado, y la reglamentación disciplinaria de la imaginación por los regímenes totalitarios, por otro, hicieron caer el himno utópico en los abismos estéticos de la literatura de propaganda al servicio del poder *revolucionario* o de la banalidad *pop* de cantautores a menudo tan ignorantes en música como en letras. Por supuesto, ambas lacras no eran nuevas, pero hubo algunos poetas que dieron a conocer himnos cuya vehemencia retórica contribuye a crear imágenes de la utopía cantada que poseen una gran expresividad y eficacia emocional. Entre ellos, tres pueden considerarse representativos de la evolución ideológica y discursiva de este género de ficción lírica de anticipación.

Tras la decepción suscitada por el curso de los acontecimientos en Francia y Europa tras el final de proceso revolucionario de 1789 y la aparición de nuevas y marcadas diferencias de clase a raíz de la Revolución Industrial, se produjo entre determinados intelectuales una reflexión social(ista) utópica de tintes mesiánicos y, por lo tanto, bastante ligada a una religión de la humanidad de la que el Cristo evangélico, no el de las Iglesias oficiales, sería un precursor o incluso su primer gran representante. La exaltación evangélica de la pobreza y la comunidad de bienes del primer cristianismo se pusieron otra vez de moda, al menos en teoría, tras

siglos de abandono. Así surgió el tópico de Jesús de Nazaret como primer socialista y revolucionario, incluso entre los no creyentes. Esta figura es la loada en un himno del poeta rumano Ion Heliade-Rădulescu (1802-1872) titulado «Sânta cetate» [*La santa ciudad*], que vio la luz en su libro de análisis político *Descrierea Europei după tratatul de la Paris* [Descripción de Europa tras el tratado de París] (1856)<sup>1</sup>. Desde su primer verso, se identifica a Cristo con el pueblo violentado por los poderosos de cada época, siguiendo una sucesión de relaciones de opresión que cambian en cuanto a sus autores (soberanos, sacerdotes, ricos, etc.), pero tales relaciones permanecen inalteradas en su esencia dualista, sin términos medios. Cuando el poeta escribe su himno, el grupo en el que se encarna el Cristo sufriente es el proletariado, el cual también se define retrospectivamente como el oprimido en épocas anteriores. De esta manera, pasa por alto las posibles diferencias en la organización social y económica moderna y las del antiguo régimen en la medida en que el martirio infligido al pueblo sería similar en todos los tiempos. Este sufrimiento se indica mediante enumeraciones, cuyas variaciones retóricas dentro de una estructura paralelística evitan la monotonía de un cuadro siempre igual en el fondo, al tiempo que una gran atención al ritmo garantiza la agilidad del movimiento histórico, cuya dialéctica así se resume.

Esta estructura, con todas sus notables cualidades retóricas, se mantiene en la segunda parte del himno, en el que se describe el espectáculo escatológico de la

<sup>1</sup> La traducción que sigue se basa en la edición crítica siguiente: Ion Heliade-Rădulescu, «Sînta cetate», *Opere*, I, *Poezii*, ediție critică de Vladimir Drimba cu un studiu introductiv de Al. Piru, București, Editura pentru Literatură, 1967, pp. 207-209.



## Paraísos futuros: tres himnos utópicos

segunda venida de Cristo según la doctrina cristiana, pero modificada de forma que sea compatible con las perspectivas revolucionarias terrenales. La Ciudad de Dios que se abre a los sufrientes de la Tierra tras el juicio apocalíptico es ciertamente una creación divina, pero también se presenta como el resultado de los méritos reunidos por aquellos revolucionarios que, en distintas naciones de Europa, habían derribado antes las tiranías monárquicas, esto es, las monarquías absolutistas contra las que luchaban los activistas liberales y socialistas románticos. Tras su caída, el único emperador sería el Cristo-pueblo, el cual accedería así a la «santa ciudad» de piedras preciosas en la que se combinan las promesas de la religión y de la política, incluida una «vida social» con artes y ciencias. La dimensión espiritual se eclipsa ante los ideales sociales, cuya vaguedad ideológica facilita su universalidad, más allá de ideologías y programas concretos para alcanzar el advenimiento de la ciudad feliz. El cuadro escatológico final podría sugerir que el poeta no abrigaba demasiada confianza en tal advenimiento sin mediar una intervención divina, pero esta también tiene la ventaja de sancionar el trabajo revolucionario y, literariamente, de facilitar una grandiosa visión utópica en la que lo natural y lo sobrenatural confluyen en un panorama sublime.

Según fue avanzando el siglo y perdiendo predicamento el socialismo utópico romántico entre los intelectuales más ligados a la lucha revolucionaria en la práctica, ensoñaciones como la de Helia-de-Rădulescu fueron perdiendo actualidad y la himnica utópica empezó a quedar ligada más directamente a las labores más prácticas de un activismo dirigido a y por los obreros mismos, ahora embarcados en un esfuerzo por mejorar sus condiciones de vida mediante el sindicalismo, aunque

sin olvidar normalmente la perspectiva utópica de una revolución que ya no sería liberal y burguesa, sino socialista y proletaria. En este contexto surgieron varios poetas que utilizaron un género muy popular como la canción con fines de movilización. Eugène Pottier (1816-1887), autor de la letra de la Internacional, es quizá la figura más conocida e influyente. Su ejemplo fue seguido por otros, como el anarquista Pietro Gori (1865-1911), cuyo himno en toscano «La pace», fechado en noviembre de 1891 y recogido en su libro *Battaglie* [Batallas] (1911)<sup>2</sup>, contrasta con la típica literatura proletaria por su carácter no partidista y la universalidad deseada de su mensaje. Escrito como reacción inmediata ante un poema de Giosuè Carducci recogido en *Rime e ritmi* [Rimas y ritmos] (1899) con el título «La guerra», se trata de un repaso en verso de la querencia bélica humana. Su última estrofa figura como epígrafe del himno de Gori, quien no solo disintió de la supuesta glorificación de Napoleón Bonaparte por Carducci, sino que se propuso también contestar a la desesperanzada pregunta de aquel por el tiempo en que la Paz alzará su vuelo. Para ello, Gori desvela la hipocresía de su predecesor, que gozaba de inmenso reconocimiento público en Italia como vate nacional del *Risorgimento*. ¿Qué paz cabía esperar del nacionalismo promovido, entre otros, por Carducci? En las naciones mismas, ¿cómo pensar en la paz cuando ricos y pobres constituyen a su vez dos naciones enfrentadas? La respuesta se ofrece mediante una larga oración compuesta formada por la yuxtaposi-

<sup>2</sup> La traducción sigue el texto publicado en la siguiente antología de poesía revolucionaria italiana del siglo XIX: Pietro Gori, «La pace», *Petrolio e assenzio: La ribellione in versi (1870-1900)*, a cura di Giuseppe Iannaccone, Roma, Salerno, 2010, pp. 95-97.



## Paraísos futuros: tres himnos utópicos

ción de cláusulas temporales que van sumando viñetas de un futuro utópico en que no habrá quien cante la guerra y sea recompensado por ello, las armas se transformarán en instrumentos de producción y dejará de haber fronteras y clases sociales. En cambio, todos podrán cubrir sus necesidades y formarse en el seno de una comunidad mundial fraternal. Será entonces cuando la única bandera sea la blanca de la paz y la justicia. Esta perspectiva constituye un horizonte de felicidad que, a diferencia del descrito por Heliade-Rădulescu descarta todo castigo y violencia a raíz de la revolución. Gori abraza ahí un anarquismo pacifista análogo al promovido por escritores como el francés Han Ryner, aunque el autor italiano liga su utopía a una mutación moral vinculada directamente a una clase, el proletariado, llamado «plebe» en el himno, sin ánimo peyorativo. Muy al contrario, la condición de la obtención de la paz utópica anticipada es el triunfo de su lucha contra la opresión y la guerra, para lo cual convendría que los intelectuales cesaran de glorificar el belicismo y el nacionalismo. La historia enseña que Gori no fue escuchado, pero su himno pervive como muestra de un intelectual obrero con un alto sentido de la ética que supo poner al servicio de su ideal una escritura de raigambre romántica, cuya amplia y rítmica retórica acierta a expresar con plena convicción la generosidad de su sentimiento.

«La pace» representa tal vez un extremo de la himnica utópica de estética romántica que era ya anacrónica en su tiempo. La literatura proletaria de entonces no se solía caracterizar por el experimentalismo literario, pues su objetivo era ser pragmáticamente lo más eficaz posible de cara a un público proletario al que se deseaba conmovir de la manera a la que este había sido acostumbrado tras décadas de poesía y novela melodramáticas.

Aunque Gori no cae en esta clase de excesos, su obra difícilmente puede relacionarse con las corrientes innovadoras de su época, algunas de las cuales hacían gala de un esteticismo elitista escasamente compatible con el activismo revolucionario. Ese esteticismo no tiene siempre como consecuencia un apoliticismo integral. Hubo escritores que incluso convirtieron la estética en un ideal social colectivo. La vida futura no tendría que ser únicamente fraternal y justa, sino también bella. El mundo futuro habría de ser también visualmente armónico. Al menos es eso lo que se desprende de un par de poemas laudatorios de aspecto himnico escritos en el marco en España a principios del siglo XX. El primero es uno en castellano titulado «Ciudad de hierro», cuyo autor, Salvador Rueda (1857-1933) recogió en *Fuente de salud* (1906). El segundo, en catalán, se titula «La ciutat d'ivori» [*La ciudad de marfil*] y lo publicó Guerau de Liost (Jaume Bofill i Mates, 1878-1933) en la revista *De Tots Colors* [De todos los colores] en octubre de 1910<sup>3</sup>. La ciudad de

<sup>3</sup> El texto de la traducción sigue el publicado en el estudio que redescubrió este poema: Enric Serra i Casals, ««La ciutat d'ivori»: un poema oblidat de Guerau de Liost», *Els Marges: Revista de Llengua i Literatura*, 48 (1993), pp. 109-111, en la p. 109. Guerau de Liost reescribió su poema, titulándolo «Pòrtic» [Pórtico], para que abriera *La ciutat d'ivori* (1918). Esta segunda versión ya no es una visión utópica, como indica el uso de adjetivos como cruento y la glorificación del escasamente utópico sentido común (*seny*). Figura a continuación en esta misma nota la traducción castellana, hecha sobre la edición siguiente: Guerau de Liost, «Pòrtic», *Obra poètica completa*, a cura d'Enric Bou, Barcelona, Selecta, 1983, p. 331.

«Bella Ciudad de Marfil hecha de blanco y oro: Tus cúpulas se irisan en el azul que muere y, reflejándose, limpias, en la marejada turgente, serpentean por el torso adolescente de



## Paraísos futuros: tres himnos utópicos

hierro de Rueda corresponde a una mentalidad que abraza el progreso tecnológico e industrial, simbolizado por las edificaciones metálicas que, como la parisina torre Eiffel, se consideraban entonces la manifestación por excelencia de la modernidad técnica en ingeniería, pero con una profusión decorativa en los detalles que se ajusta a la estética decadentista. Por otra parte, escuelas y fábricas así construidas configuran una utopía que no es únicamente estética. Las construcciones de hierro también serán catedrales dedicadas a un Cristo venidero que ya no será el apocalíptico evocado por Heliade-Rădulescu, sino uno de hierro del trabajo y de la idea, el Cristo de una paz tecnocrática y esteticista a la vez, de manera que en «La ciudad de hierro» se combinan todos los ideales de las utopías himnicas examinadas<sup>4</sup>.

Por su parte, Guerau de Liost prescinde de cualquier contenido social. La descripción de su ciudad de marfil es puramente exterior, sin que haya alusión alguna al posible ordenamiento de la sociedad que albergaría. El adjetivo que abre el poema, «bella», resume lo que interesa resaltar, que no es otra cosa sino la hermosura estatuaria de una ciudad en la que se combinan el color blanco del marfil y el mármol, como símbolo tradicional de pureza, y dorado, que sugiere la abundancia en cosas materiales. Todo ello está rodeado por el azul del cielo y del mar. Esta imagen urbana de aire neoclásico deriva

---

las olas. El marfil tiene la gracia de un mármol constelado de polvo aurífero, como carne de infante fallecido. ¡Bella ciudad de mármol del mundo externo, vuelta aurífera en una mirada de amor! Estás toda labrada con ordenado esmero. Te purifica el vivir magnánimo y cruento. Y, por encima de la frívola grandeza terrena, empuñarás la palma del sentido común, que es inmortal.»

<sup>4</sup> Una traducción inglesa de este poema figura en el presente número de *Hélice*.

de los ideales novecentistas promovidos por Eugeni d'Ors como la estética que debía dominar en Cataluña y en su capital Barcelona, cuya industrialización muy avanzada hacía innecesarios los sueños de modernización tecnocrática abrigados, entre otros, por el andaluz Salvador Rueda. La ciudad de marfil también se opone a la profusión decorativa y naturalista del Modernismo catalán. Por ello, la escritura decorativa de Liost tiende a la estilización. De hecho, aunque respetan la exigencia de hipérbole propia del género himnico, los detalles descriptivos son más bien parcos. En realidad, Liost es fiel a los procedimientos de sugestión típicos de la poesía simbolista predominante en su juventud, ya que la configuración completa de la ciudad utópica se confía a la imaginación de los lectores, partiendo de los rasgos someros indicados en el poema. Lo mismo se aplica a la dimensión ética de la utopía. Sabemos que en ella reinan la grandeza material y el amor, posiblemente entre los habitantes, a quienes guiaría un ideal calificado de altísimo, sea cual sea. Pero, por encima de todo, existiría un destino trascendente ligado a una femineidad inmortal, esto es, al eterno femenino que salva a Fausto en su leyenda según Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Si es así, diríase que la ciudad de marfil es una imagen del cielo, una utopía trascendente. Esta es solo una de las interpretaciones posibles que puede inspirar un poema oscuro y ambiguo pese a su sencillez y claridad aparentes, un poema en que el ideal utópico es tan vago como sugestivo, ilustrando así la variedad y la flexibilidad de la propia utopía y del himno como género en manos de escritores con conciencia de serlo, como lo son todos los arriba recordados, aun cuando todos trabajen en pro de la propagación de sus ideas sobre la manera de alcanzar los paraísos futuros soñados.

Ion Heliade-Rădulescu

## La santa ciudad

Cristo-pueblo, luz y poder, errante, sudoroso, extraño entre lo suyo, único productor de la vida y los bienes, sin encontrar bosque ni monte ni valle donde asentar la cabeza o el hogar (¡largo afán, muy largo camino!), recorre el mundo para reunir al mundo, siglos y hambre sufre, y hielo, escarnios y palizas, coronas de espinas, la cruz, la rueda, el fuego, el plomo y el hierro, esclavitud, gleba, angaria, usura; el guardia arrea, arrea el caballero; el cosaco arrea, azota y roba; el magnate, el hidalgo, el cacique expolían, pegan; el pontífice, el instructor mienten, juran. El Cristo-pueblo suspira y recorre los siglos y los países, la Tierra entera, suda, gime, sufre pecados, perdona, los borra; siembra la palabra: ora niño huérfano que llora y mendiga la vida, ora moribundo que no posee ni la tumba, ora joven sin color con la muerte en la cara, sin mañana ni hoy, y sin luz, en invierno y en verano, por la tarde y por la mañana; ya hombre, ya en su forma divina, proletario tanto en el campo como en la ciudad, desde el altar hasta la salina, con el mismo dolor, con la misma carga aunque cambien los tiempos, sea señor el César, el patricio o el barón, príncipe o abate, fuerza o ley, Brahma, el papa o el zar, él no cambia, la misma labor, siempre proletario, siempre arreado, siempre bebiendo hieles.

Tras siglos de sangre y llanto, tras varias y numerosas torturas, en todos sus miembros, en su cuerpo grandioso, ungido emperador de ambos testamentos, se proclama en fin verbo soberano, juez apiadado de lágrimas y lamentos, redentor que llama los muertos a la vida, que a los sordos hace que ya no lo sean, que reclama el arrepentimiento de los malvados y en quien los ciegos ven luz viva, que llena de vigor a los parálíticos y

al mundo trae paz y gozo. Su rostro es rayo, atronadora su voz; en el trono soberano juzga la tierra con justicia, poder y esplendor; de luz verdadera está vestido. Tiemblan los reyes, estirpe réproba; caen las puertas de bronce, ¡roto está el juramento! Se alza verde el valle de lágrimas; apocalíptica, la santa ciudad resplandece radiante de esperanza, de amor, de libertad; la rodean murallas invencibles de diamante, se corona de torres inestimables, se levantan columnas gigantescas de púrpura, brilla el oro puro como el cristal; rubíes, zafiros, esmeraldas, jacintos, brillantes sostienen esquinas, fundamento que las produce. El río de la vida rebosa de luz, ofrece y trae salud a las mentes. Sombrea risueño el eterno jardín de árboles fructíferos; suaves y armónicas, suspiran las auras de las artes, de las ciencias, inspirando las sagradas voluntades y deseos; flores amaranto esmaltan los campos. Altos afectos, esperanzas y creencias crecen cándidos y se desarrollan vírgenes, absorben la vida y el amor al sol-palabra. Esta es la ciudad, ideal, alta; aquí domina la justicia, aquí se realiza la fraternidad; aquí la virtud es poder y valor, y toda necesidad queda aliviada. Uno para todos, todos para uno: libre voluntad, suerte nivelada, lo verdadero, lo hermoso, lo grande y lo bueno, paz eterna, vida social, sagrado lo propio, resuelto lo común. ¡Ciudad, residencia imperial del pueblo-novio, guardada por ángeles, galería celeste y universal! Los profetas te han visto vivir feliz, Cristo mismo ha puesto tu piedra angular, el evangelista te ha visto formada, los mártires derramaron su sangre por ti; los justos, los sabios, los verdaderos cristianos se afanaron numerosos por erigirte; franceses,



## Paraísos futuros: tres himnos utópicos

ingleses, italianos polacos, alemanes, húngaros, rumanos, millones de pueblos han derrocado ídolos y tiranos, han barrido tiaras y coronas; con su sangre han amasado tu cemento y levantado tus primeras columnas. Cándido, agosto,

hermoso es tu pavimento. He visto tu esplendor. Está derrotado el pecado; con razón viene el novio con el testamento. Abre tus puertas: entra el Emperador.

*9 de junio de 1851*

Pietro Gori

## La paz

Oh, entre los muros que el fratricidio  
cimenta eternos, paz es vocablo  
incierto. De la sangre la Paz  
alza cándida las alas. ¿Cuándo?  
Carducci, «La guerra»

Cuando los poetas dejen de cantar la sangrienta fábula de Caín y la medalla no se les suba al cerebro con tanta indecencia que el vate pinte ante los siglos al primer Bonaparte alzado explicando los derechos humanos ante los tropeles de los mamelucos, ni la poesía, arriando el pendón llameante, reniegue de la santa revolución por un escaño en el senado; cuando las patrias dejen de tener en su seno materno dos naciones hostiles —la nación de los ricos y la nación de los proletarios— y, destruidas las trágicas fronteras, la ciencia y el pan sean un derecho para cada ciudadano en las redimidas patrias hermanas; cuando el ferino amor al suelo propio deje lugar al amor al ideal que bendice a las operosas plebes en el orbe inmenso, y las armas, un día centellean-

tes de gloria, ladronas de hijos a las sagradas madres, en los campos, desgarran la tierra, convertidas en dóciles arados y, desde los cuarteles, regresen las soberbias milicias del trabajo a las dulces llanuras, a los valles nativos, verdes entre los montes; cuando los poderosos, mezclados con los humildes y nivelados en la comunidad de bienes y afectos, enseñen a los viejos lobos devoradores las suaves leyes de la naturaleza y resplandezca sobre el hermoso género humano la fraternidad, diosa consoladora, oh, entonces flamearás por fin, fúlgida al sol, tú, querida bandera blanca inmaculada, emblema sereno de la justicia. Y las musas officiosas, cuervos ilustres de la guerra y la sangre, cesarán de graznar en el cielo del arte. ¡Oh, apóstoles fervientes del amor humano, arriba los corazones y guerra a la opresión, guerra a la guerra, y paz a tu rebelde corazón que insurge, oh, plebe, por la verdadera paz del mundo!

Milán, noviembre de 1891.

Guerau de Liost

## La ciudad de marfil

¡Bella Ciudad de Marfil hecha de blanco y oro! Tus cúpulas se irisan en el azul que muere sobre la apoteósica fulguración de un laurel y, reflejándose pálidas en la marejada creciente con las policromías del ambiente y el agua, serpentean por el torso adolescente de las olas.

El marfil tiene la gracia de un mármol jaspeado de polvo aurífero. Y luce tornasolado con una transparencia de carnación de infante fallecido.

¡Bella Ciudad de Marfil que vives de tu fulgor! Eres la Ciudad de Mármol del mundo externo, vuelta aurífera en una mirada de amor. Estás toda cincelada con ordenado esmero. En tonos secretos ocultas las piedras y la plata. Te purifica el hálito de la risa consciente, pero, por encima de la efímera grandeza terrena, llena de amor y llena de ideal altísimo, temblarás la palma de lo inmortal femenino.

# Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas



Nota introductoria de Mariano Martín Rodríguez

© Mariano Martín Rodríguez, 2021

Las visiones de un futuro anticipado por la imaginación mediante la extrapolación y la analogía, juntas o por separado, constituyen el conjunto más amplio de la ciencia ficción desde sus orígenes, que cabe situar en los inicios de la Revolución Industrial. Tras la invención de la máquina de vapor y la mecanización subsiguiente de la industria, el ritmo del progreso tecnológico y de la ampliación de los conocimientos científicos se volvió tan rápido que se hizo inevitable mirar el curso de la historia humana como una mutación constante, una mutación a la que pronto se adelantaron diversos escritores recurriendo a su imaginación. Así lo hizo, por ejemplo, Émile Souvestre en su novela *Le monde tel qu'il sera en l'an 3000* [*El mundo tal y como será en el año 3000*] (1845-1846), en la que una pareja de viaje va descubriendo el cariz de una sociedad altamente tecnológica y sujeta a una búsqueda desenfrenada del beneficio económico, en detrimento de valores más tradicionales como los familiares o los religiosos. El tono satírico y pesimista de Souvestre fue emulado por otros pioneros de la literatura de anticipación europea, como Antonio Flores (1818-1865), cuya novela en forma de cuadros de costumbres yuxtapuestos con un leve hilo argumental *Mañana o la chispa eléctrica en 1899* (edición íntegra en 1863) describe un Madrid en el que todo, el arte y el amor inclusive, se rigen por meros criterios de rentabili-

dad, aunque Flores, menos conservador que Souvestre, no deja de señalar determinadas ventajas con respecto a las mentalidades y costumbres tradicionales.

En Italia, el liberal Ippolito Nievo (1831-1861) es el tercer gran autor latinoamericano de anticipaciones fictocientíficas en este período inicial de la Revolución Industrial, en época romántica, gracias a una narración toscana relativamente breve titulada *Storia filosofica dei secoli futuri fino all'anno dell'era volgare 2222 ovvero fino alla vigilia della fine del mondo* [*Historia filosófica de los siglos futuros hasta el año 2222 de la era vulgar, es decir, hasta aproximadamente la víspera del fin del mundo*], publicada en enero de 1860<sup>1</sup>. Como su nombre indica, no se trata de una novela, sino de una historia. Es una *ficción científica* en el sentido de que su contenido es ficticio, pero su discurso es el empleado en una ciencia, la Historia. Este uso de la escritura historiográfica para transmitir una visión imaginaria del porvenir ha sido muy co-

---

<sup>1</sup> La traducción que sigue se basa en la edición siguiente: Ippolito Nievo, «Storia filosofica dei secoli futuri fino all'anno dell'era volgare 2222 ovvero fino alla vigilia della fine del mondo», *Storia filosofica dei secoli futuri (e altri scritti umoristici del 1860)*, a cura di Emilio Russo, Roma, Salerno Editrice, 2003, pp. 47-75. Agradecemos a Rubén Molina Martínez su atenta revisión de la traducción.



## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

mún en toda la edad contemporánea y ha alumbrado clásicos como *Last and First Men* [*La última y la primera humanidad*] (1930), de Olaf Stapledon (1886-1950). Esa escritura tenía una ventaja clara desde el punto de vista de la credibilidad de la anticipación. A diferencia de una novela, cuya ficcionalidad es evidente, el discurso historiográfico ofrece una impresión de objetividad documental y científica que confiere autoridad a lo narrado, que de esta manera no aparece como una caprichosa invención literaria, sino como el informe de algo ocurrido realmente. Asimismo, el empleo constante de los tiempos verbales del pretérito (con el presente histórico como posible variante estilística) genera la sensación de que todo ha ocurrido realmente, que no se trata de una profecía o de un estudio futuroológico en que lo expuesto con los tiempos verbales del futuro sea simplemente una hipótesis que se cumplirá, o no. En cambio, en la historia anticipada o prospectiva escrita en pasado, el pacto de lectura entraña que se acepte la premisa de que la voz narradora se dirige a nuestro presente desde un tiempo que sabemos localizado en el porvenir, pero que nos transfiere a su propia perspectiva para que la acompañemos en su indagación de su pasado, esto es, de nuestro futuro, un futuro al que accedemos para poder conocerlo como si ya hubiera transcurrido y fuera susceptible de ser contado objetiva y realmente.

Este pacto de lectura se postula a menudo por medio de marcas retóricas y paratextuales, por ejemplo, la definición del texto como «historia» (*history*, en inglés) y no como «novela» o «cuento». Así hace Nievo en la suya, aunque, por encontrarse aún en los albores del género que podríamos denominar «historia imaginaria» o «fictohistoria», su título hace explícito ese pacto, cuya paradoja radica en que son los siglos futuros, pero al mismo tiempo son

objeto de historia. Para superar la contradicción, procede a explicar la manera en que su narrador homodiegético, que firma con su nombre imaginario (Ferdinando De Nicolosi) y se define antitéticamente como «filósofo-químico», se hizo con un documento escrito varias centurias después. En su época, era corriente recurrir a las revelaciones espiritistas para justificar el conocimiento del porvenir, tal como hizo Flores. Nievo emplea ya un *novum* de carácter aparentemente fictocientífico, inspirado en la fotografía y los avances de la ciencia química, si bien lo hace con un alto grado de ironía al combinar el registro serio y el humorístico. Esta combinación se mantiene durante toda la obra, en la que alternan las observaciones serias con una perspectiva satírica aplicada a todos los órdenes de la vida humana por el historiador futuro, llamado Vincenzo Bernardi di Gorgonzola. Este es un hedonista bastante cínico que cree que se morirá antes de que el mundo acabe y, una vez muerto, poco le importa el final colectivo de la raza humana. Esta actitud no es el resultado tan solo de su personalidad. Aunque afirma que ha escrito la historia del mundo para su propio provecho y diversión, su alusión al decreto por el que se habían destruido casi dos siglos antes todos los libros, sin que se sugiera que se hayan escrito otros después, revela lo inconformista y peligroso de su empresa literaria. El tono humorístico de su escritura disimula un análisis profundamente crítico del curso histórico que había conducido hasta las vísperas del acabamiento humano, desde el presente de la escritura del opúsculo de Nicolosi (la voz de Nievo) hasta la fecha postulada de la narración histórica que transcribe, el año 2222.

Como ocurre en las historias del futuro que parten del presente, incluida la citada de Stapledon, el interés de la anticipación



## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

aumenta según se amplía su ámbito, según se abandonan la actualidad y sus intrigas para ir acercándose a un panorama futuro cada vez más general, en el que se pueden mostrar de forma más clara las estructuras subyacentes del devenir histórico y presentarse sus resultados para la humanidad entera. En su «historia filosófica», cuyo adjetivo ha de leerse con ironía, Nievo parte también de su época. El primer libro es un repaso crítico de la situación geopolítica europea hecho por un liberal partidario de la unidad completa de Italia, que cree que se ha de realizar a través de un proceso revolucionario violento dirigido por Giuseppe Garibaldi, y no mediante tratativas internacionales como las que habían dado lugar a la paz de Zúrich, firmada a finales de 1859 y por la que Francia, Austria y Piamonte habían prácticamente detenido el proceso de la unificación italiana, sobre todo para mantener el poder territorial del papa. Nievo escribió rápidamente su historia tras esta frustración de sus esperanzas nacionalistas, pero supo superar las circunstancias de su tiempo, que a veces hacen difícilmente comprensible hoy el primer libro de su historia. Ya el libro segundo se sitúa en el porvenir, aunque cercano, de forma que su anticipación geopolítica, que no pretende ser verosímil, le sirve para atacar cruelmente al papa, al que presenta como una marioneta del zar, esto es, del soberano considerado universalmente en Europa como el representante principal de la reacción antiliberal. Sin embargo, su confianza en los revolucionarios progresistas le hace prever también una revolución socialista (según los ideales utópicos del conde de Saint-Simon) en Alemania, a lo que seguiría una retirada de Rusia de los asuntos europeos en favor de los asiáticos y la formación de unidades políticas cada vez mayores en Europa hasta la creación en

1960 de la federación europea, a la que siguen la federación de las otras grandes partes del mundo. Al mismo tiempo, se produce una acelerada occidentalización del mundo, de modo que se avanza en la mundialización, que Nievo anticipó con acertado espíritu profético, o más bien analítico. De esta manera, su penetración intelectual le permitió limitar la inevitable separación ucrónica con respecto al curso de la historia de nuestro mundo, que rara vez se ha dejado hacer coincidir con las previsiones de profetas y futurólogos.

La perspicacia nieviana se confirma en el libro tercero, donde imagina un curioso procedimiento para que la mundialización supere las diferencias que la religión sigue atizando entre los hombres para impedir que vivan en paz. Una vez olvidados los nacionalismos en el seno de las federaciones continentales y desprestigiado el cristianismo por la vileza política de sus responsables eclesiásticos, el resto del planeta se convierte a una nueva religión, predicada por un campesino checo y consistente en dar prioridad a la vida terrenal, con trabajo moderado y goce de los placeres materiales y psicológicos de la existencia, distrayéndose lo más posible. Esta religión, que tanto se parece a los usos de nuestra sociedad de consumo, se propaga más por imitación que por predicación a todo el planeta, en sustitución de los antiguos tabúes y mortificaciones de las religiones positivas. Una vez alcanzada esta unidad de ideas y costumbres, se puede unificar la humanidad bajo el patrocinio de la nueva iglesia del consumo, por así decir, que está dirigida por un papa inspirado por el pontífice bonachón e indulgente de la canción «Le Dieu des bonnes gens» [El Dios de la buena gente], leída por Nievo en las *Œuvres complètes* [Obras completas] de 1858), de Pierre-Jean de Béranger (1780-1857). El narra-



## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

dor cuenta estos hechos con no poca ironía, lo que contribuye a rebajar la valoración de la nueva sociedad mundial resultante. Esto se sugiere sobre todo mediante la historia de la destrucción de los libros por ser gérmenes de la distinción de clases y de revoluciones varias. Aunque el historiador futuro indica que esto redundó en ventaja para la humanidad, lo cierto es que fue entonces cuando se inicia un estancamiento intelectual que acompaña al desarrollo tecnológico producido a raíz del invento de los autómatas, llamados también homúnculos a la manera romántica (por ejemplo, el del *Fausto goethiano*).

El libro cuarto se dedica a la creación y despliegue de estos seres mecánicos por dos fabricantes de máquinas de coser rivales, cuyos móviles egoístas y falta de escrúpulos se desprenden de una narración que retoma el discurso novelístico, diálogos incluidos, como corresponde a los acontecimientos de carácter particular y privado, aunque luego tuvieran unas consecuencias sociales más amplias. El cuento de los inventores ofrece una imagen negra de la naturaleza humana, con el asesinato como ejemplo del uso nocivo de la tecnología desde su misma invención. Con todo, los intereses económicos no permiten que se pierda el invento, que pronto se aplica a la industria y, tras extenderse a todas las actividades humanas, garantiza el ocio de los hombres de carne y hueso. El resultado, pese al abuso de los narcóticos, se diría que es una sociedad utópica, pues reinan la igualdad y la prosperidad. Sin embargo, la falta de preocupaciones se materializa en una enfermedad que se manifiesta mediante la apatía. Esta, el aburrimiento, los suicidios y la entropía general del mundo observable en el enfriamiento del planeta, que sería su destino según la ciencia de la época, son los síntomas del fracaso colectivo de

la humanidad. No se producirá una rebelión de las máquinas, con los andróides o robots a la cabeza, como la que se convertiría en un tópico en la ciencia ficción posterior, pero Nievo nos presenta un porvenir en que las máquinas lo hacen todo y han sustituido en la práctica a un ser humano apático e inútil. La utopía irónica anticipada por Nievo es posthumana, porque en ella los hombres no tienen literalmente nada que hacer, y tampoco parece que se rompan la cabeza pensando, una vez considera perjudicial, además de obsoleta, la tarea de reflexionar y de producir libros como manera de comunicar y difundir las ideas. Nievo predice la clase de felicidad que nos acarrearán la mecanización y la robótica. Mucho antes de que esta empezara a ser realidad, vemos como la tecnología es la panacea, pero también nuestra perdición, a la vista de una naturaleza humana no preparada para la esencial mutación significada por los autómatas. Solo el futuro dirá si el pesimismo agrídulce (utopía material, distopía intelectual) estará justificado a las alturas de nuestro 2222. Lo esté o no, la historia filosófica de Nievo constituye una de las visiones más completas y clarividentes de la literatura de anticipación decimonónica, una visión servida por una escritura historiográfica muy eficaz por su ritmo narrativo y el humor negro que se desprende de toda la obra.

También destaca por su humor negro «O país que ninguém sonhou» [*El país que nadie soñó*], un relato del brasileño Antônio Gomes Neto (1904-1937<sup>2</sup>) publi-

<sup>2</sup> A juzgar por la escasa bibliografía que lo menciona, no habría apenas datos biográficos conocidos de este escritor. Sin embargo, en «Gomes Neto e o seu sonho», que es un artículo de homenaje de Bastos Portela publicado en la revista carioca *Fonfon* (XXXIV, 32, 1 de junio de 1940, p. 18), se afirma que había fallecido tres años antes,

## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

cado en su colección de cuentos *A vida eterna* [La vida eterna] (1932)<sup>3</sup> y que es una de las primeras historias prospectivas en lengua portuguesa. En él también se narra la aparición, propiciada por los intereses de los hombres, de una nueva clase de seres para su servicio y las consecuencias que acaba acarreado. Como en Nievo, el género discursivo empleado es el de la historiografía, pero el brasileño es un autor situado cronológicamente en un período en que la fictohistoria ya había tenido amplio desarrollo, igual que el resto de la literatura de anticipación, de manera que puede prescindir de todo marco explicativo. Los lectores son trasladados directamente doscientos años después del inicio del proceso histórico expuesto. A partir de ahí, la escritura historiográfica también es más consistente que en la historia filosófica de Nievo, en la que existen excursos de diálogo novelístico. Incluso Gomes Neto reproduce, como documento histórico que asiente la autoridad historiográfica de la narración, un fragmento de un artículo de prensa en el que se da noticia del avance médico alcanzado, cuya consecuencia sería la aparición de una nueva clase de seres humanos.

---

a la edad de treinta y tres años. Había fundado y dirigido el *Jornal de Niterói* [Diario de Niterói] y luego había trabajado en *A Cidade* [La Ciudad] hasta el cierre de esta publicación en 1930. A partir de entonces, se dedicó a escribir libros, actividad que compaginaba con su trabajo de empleado público tras licenciarse en Derecho. Alcanzó a publicar dos libros de cuentos fantásticos y fictocientíficos, a saber: *A vida eterna* en 1932 y *Novelas fantásticas* en 1934.

<sup>3</sup> La traducción de abajo sigue el texto de la única edición de este libro: Antônio Gomes Neto, «O país que ninguém sonhou», *A vida eterna*, Rio de Janeiro, Editora «Ars», 1932, pp. 69-78. El texto original se reproduce en apéndice con la ortografía modernizada, porque no ha vuelto a publicarse ni se ha digitalizado.

A diferencia de Nievo, los nuevos seres no son autómatas, sino grandes simios de un país africano llamado Eritrea y que no corresponde a la Eritrea real, pues la de Gomes Neto se encuentra en el hemisferio sur y dista de tener la sequedad de clima de aquella colonia italiana. Esos animales sufren una presión evolutiva especial tras revelarse eficaz el tratamiento rejuvenecedor del doctor Serge Voronoff. Este es un cirujano real que se hizo célebre tras la Gran Guerra por sus injertos de tejidos de testículos de mono en el hombre. Aunque los científicos serios pusieron en duda la eficacia del tratamiento, salvo como placebo, la fama de Voronoff fue inmensa en la década de 1920 y encontró eco en la literatura popular e incluso en la novela científica coetánea (por ejemplo, en la obra de Félicien Champsaur). Gomes Neto simplemente conjeturó un resultado muy distinto ya en 1925, como especie de punto Jonbar que determina una historia paralela a la nuestra, pero en el futuro, de manera que la ucronía resultante es prospectiva.

El artículo citado largamente por el innominado historiador del futuro explica la consecuencia imprevista del procedimiento. La prevista era el éxito científico y material, gracias al cual Eritrea se convierte en la meta de una interminable peregrinación de ancianos en busca de una nueva juventud, una peregrinación que el autor describe irónicamente como análoga a las de católicos a Roma en año santo y que garantiza las enormes ganancias de la compañía italiana que cría los monos, cruzándolos y seleccionándolos para que sean más parecidos a los hombres, de modo que resulta más fácil el trasplante. La consecuencia imprevista de este procedimiento es que los monos evolucionan rápidamente hasta adquirir no solo una inteligencia humana, sino también un aspecto más cercano al nuestro. Final-



## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

mente, su humanización resulta tan completa que pronto adquieren costumbres sociales y políticas análogas a las de la raza humana, incluida la demagogia, como queda claramente ejemplificado con un discurso transcrito de un prohombre de Monolandia, la nueva nación creada por ellos. En vista de tal equiparación, sobre todo en lo malo (los monos se muestran dispuestos a recurrir a la violencia para conseguir sus fines), los hombres reconocen la independencia del país de los monos humanizados, de manera que alcanza la consideración deseada en el concierto de las naciones.

Si lo contado se parece a los procesos de colonización y descolonización de las antiguas posesiones europeas y su imitación monesca de las instituciones políticas de los colonizadores, pero multiplicando sus defectos, es una lectura políticamente incorrecta hoy en día que nos guardaremos de atribuir a Gomes Neto. Únicamente señalaremos que su sátira se dirige al menos contra las modas intelectuales llegadas y transformadas por los medios de comunicación de masas en caricaturas, sean las de las glándulas de Voronoff, sean las teorías de Charles Darwin, que el autor brasileño limita burlescamente al prejuicio popular de que aquel naturalista inglés habría dado a entender que descendemos del mono. Los monos de verdad, una vez humanizados (o *postmonizados*), también lo creen, y por eso le levantan estatuas en su capital, con lo que se sugiere

que, en esto como en política, su nivel intelectual está a la altura del de la mayoría de los hombres. Los monos serían nuestros ascendientes; los *postmonos*, nuestro retrato, en el que no salimos demasiado favorecidos. Sin embargo, Gomes Neto evita toda perspectiva apocalíptica. En lugar del paradójico sublime romántico de la sátira fictohistórica de Nievo, el brasileño es un autor novecentista, cuya sátira tiene la ligereza y la elegancia del coetáneo *Art Deco*, un estilo muy popular en su país, como indica el éxito de la escritura, muy similar a la suya, de los relatos satíricos y, a veces, especulativos y prospectivos de Berilo Neves. De hecho, la historia futura de Gomes Neto, que es excepcional en su producción, en conjunto no muy brillante, la podría haber firmado aquel, cuya popularidad fue inmensa en vida. No obstante, ninguna sátira de Neves alcanzó la amplitud y la coherencia interna de «O país que ninguém sonhou». Gomes Neto demostró en ella, igual que lo había hecho Nievo, la potencialidad especulativa y literaria de una historia de las (post)humanidades futuras, asunto también bien ilustrado, en un registro serio e incluso trágico, por Jules Sageret (1861-1944) en su fictohistoria «La race qui vaincra» [La raza que vencerá] (*Paradis laïques* [Paraísos laicos], 1908). En estos días en que el posthumanismo se toma tan en serio, tal vez un planteamiento satírico como el de Nievo y Gomes Neto resulte hoy útil, además de divertido.

Ippolito Nievo

## Historia filosófica de los siglos futuros hasta el año 2222 de la era vulgar, es decir, hasta aproximadamente la víspera del fin del mundo

Traducción de Ricardo Muñoz Nafría

© Ricardo Muñoz Nafría, por la traducción, 2021

### INTRODUCCIÓN

La ciencia de las analogías ha regalado a la tierra América y al cielo los planetas de Leverrier. Se parece a esas mujeres, nacidas para reinar en los bailes y teatros, cuya belleza cuestionan todos, para luego quedar prendados de ellas a la primera ocasión. Eterna y aún joven heredera de Platón, recorre los confines últimos del conocimiento humano con las alas pintadas de arcoíris, mientras que la ciencia experimental, tabacosa contemporánea de Galileo, tropieza, para vergüenza del anteojo de este, con los guijarros del camino del correo. El honor para quien lo merece.

Yo he observado que los jardineros, al proporcionar a las plantas una sucesión artificial y prematura de las estaciones, obtienen floraciones anticipadas. Con sus perfumes, las rosas abiertas al calor del invernadero en pleno invierno cuentan a sus hermanitas, aún durmientes, la historia de un año que, para estas, todavía está por venir. No es poca la paciencia que he tenido para observar esto. ¿Pues quién se preocupa ya de las rosas el año de Palestro y Solferino? Pero mucho más asombroso es que realizara las deducciones a las que llegué. En general, las personas se asemejan a las plantas, y las plantas, a las personas. Todos estamos emparentados por el acto de la creación universal y por la materia del trabajo. ¿Por qué, entonces, no se iban a poder obtener floraciones anticipadas también en el proceso del pensamiento humano? ¿Acaso la filo-

sofía y la química han venido al mundo realmente para nada? Jamás he creído yo semejante barbaridad. Consulté a Liebig, a Schelling, a Cagliostro y al profesor Gorini: luego emprendí el afortunado experimento que me dispongo a describiros.

Tomé media onza de fósforo y una dracma de plutonio, los dos elementos de que se compone la simiente íntima humana; los mezclé a conciencia y extraje de la dosis aquella partícula infinitesimal que probablemente constituya el instrumento pasivo de la inteligencia. Tras haber diluido, a continuación, este átomo arcano en un frasquito de buena tinta negra inalterable y vertido la tinta sobre un papel convenientemente saturado de voluntad y pensamiento por medio del magnetismo animal, obtuve dos páginas grandes de un negro brillante y perfectísimo. Aquí comenzaba la parte mecánica y delicada del gran experimento. Sometí ese papel a la temperatura media resultante de la condensación y sucesión de trescientos sesenta y tres inviernos y trescientos sesenta y tres veranos. El milagro se produjo con exactitud: obtuve la floración pensante de tres siglos por venir con tal precisión que reto a cualquier crítico alemán a que halle en ella algo risible. Como en un negativo fotográfico lavado con nitrato de plata, primero surgieron algunas marcas blancas en aquel papel aparentemente carbonatado; después se perfilaron algunas letras, principalmente las iniciales; luego se dibujaron las palabras enteras; por último, quedó redactada, con elegante caligrafía, la historia que ahora paso a trans-



## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

cribir. Que aquel cerebro de la posteridad cuyas ideas he robado con este proceso mágico me perdone el latrocinio: rara vez fueron los pensamientos motivo de felicidad y yo, con esta tropelía, podría haberle hecho un excelente favor.

### LIBRO PRIMERO

#### Desde la paz de Zúrich hasta la paz de Liubiana

Aunque viva por la gracia de Dios en el año de felicidad e indolencia de 2222 y el arte de escribir haya caído ya en desuso como una bobería sin sentido, con todo, para variar la calidad del tedio humano y dar prueba de que los bisnietos no son inferiores a los abuelos de sus tatarabuelos, y para darle la razón a quien no piense en nuestras dichas actuales, he llegado a la determinación de escribir la historia de los tres últimos siglos.

El extraordinario sentido común del segundo patriarca de la república universal, que llevó a efecto el sabio propósito de destruir todos los libros anteriores al año 2000, me dispensa de la molestia de elegir un estilo para mí. Usaré el de la verdad, que es el más breve de todos.

Había memoria, en los antiguos escritos, de una Paz de Zúrich acordada entre algunos hombres en 1859 o en torno a ese año. Aquella paz no contentó, según parece, ni siquiera a quienes la habían celebrado, pues, ya antes de separarse, habían establecido entre ellos que otro congreso revisaría las cuestiones que tan mal habían tratado.

A decir verdad, yo me resisto a creer semejantes afirmaciones. Pero con la lejana oscuridad de aquellos tiempos y ante la falta absoluta de documentos, resulta necesario confiar enteramente en el recuerdo de las tradiciones más comunes.

Me limitaré a mencionar las dudas que contra estas aduce la crítica pura.

¿Por qué aquellos hombres habrían dado por concluido un litigio que, de acuerdo con su confesión, debía juzgarse de otra manera? ¿Por qué habrían hecho algo que propondrían deshacer en el congreso? ¿No era mejor recurrir directamente a este? ¿O bien entregar la causa a quienes tenían interés por ella? De las primeras conferencias a las segundas no habría existido diferencia alguna sino que en aquellas discutían solo tres hombres y, en estas, diez o doce. Así pues, ¿qué mayor fundamento de derecho, qué mayor autoridad ofrecería a los veinte, a los treinta, a los cien millones de recurrentes el juicio de doce que el de tres? Hablo desde el raciocinio, y, con tales inducciones, ese preámbulo de Zúrich me parecería un acontecimiento más imaginario que otra cosa; pero, al fin y al cabo, las tradiciones hablan claro, y yo no me opongo a los venerables disparates de nuestros antepasados.

En aquellos tiempos, cuando las pasiones pecaban por exceso de actividad y todavía no se habían inventado los *hómunculos* u hombres máquina y de segunda mano, se ponía fin a las disputas entre las naciones por un medio expeditivo, que se llamaba «la guerra». Era esta un arte inventado y perfeccionado con la precisa intención de destruir a los hombres. Y, puesto que los hombres de aquella época eran turbulentos y malignos, ese arte era, en general, un gran mérito de la civilización. ¡Qué pena que, hasta entonces, los más turbulentos y malignos lo hubieran empleado por completo en su propio beneficio y en perjuicio de los pacíficos y honrados! Pero estos últimos, precisamente en 1859, comenzaron a aprender de sus opresores y les pagaron, como se suele decir, con la misma moneda. Y este acontecimiento de suma importancia para la



## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

historia de los siglos siguientes tuvo lugar en la Italia septentrional. En cuanto a las causas que sacaron del código de las naciones aquel medio ejecutivo y sanguinario de la guerra, se tratarán con mayor detalle al llegar al periodo del enriquecimiento universal y la multiplicación de los *homúnculos*.

Así pues, aquella Paz de Zúrich, que o no se celebró nunca o, pese a su celebración, se granjeó el descontento de todos, conllevó que los hombres sintieran más que nunca la imperiosa necesidad de una nueva guerra. La primera había comenzado porque los italianos querían ser amos en su propia casa y expulsar al otro lado de las montañas a los alemanes, que los vejaban con tributos abusivos, con el impuesto de capitación, con encarcelamientos e incluso con la censura, que era, según parece, un bozal para la inteligencia, pero cuyo funcionamiento resultaría ahora difícil de imaginar. La segunda, mera guerra de continuación, debía aspirar a lograr en la realidad aquello que la primera vez se había conseguido solo en apariencia, y consistió en un pedazo de papel.

Pero a este propósito, que ahora parecería bárbaro y entonces resultaba encomiable y revelaba a los italianos como hombres de buen gusto, se oponía, por desgracia, una cláusula de la Paz de Zúrich. Antes de emplear la vara con las bestias, el congreso se había reservado la molestia de persuadirlas con razones. ¡Si por lo menos hubieran sido bestias amaestradas! Pero los sujetos con los que tenían que bregar los italianos de entonces eran bestias de escasa pureza. Sin embargo, se avinieron a la voluntad de la mayoría, y de los más fuertes. Después de la opinión de los tres, se sentaron a escuchar la de los doce.

Uno solo no se avino a sentarse y su nombre ha de salvarse de la oscuridad, tan merecida por los demás: fue el general

Garibaldi. Europa gritaba «¡congreso!»; él respondía «¡guerra!». Los diplomáticos susurraban «¡pluma, papel, tintero!»; él clamaba «¡fusiles, fusiles!». La suya pareció una temeridad excesiva, y no era sino prudencia, pues habría ahorrado algún que otro año de servidumbre, lágrimas y temores. Se escuchó a todos salvo a aquellos sobre los que había de pronunciarse sentencia. Papa y cardenales, en quienes ya nadie creía, príncipes y duques, expulsados de sus tierras a manzanazos en la espalda, policías y ministros retirados hablaron majestuosamente ante las asambleas supremas con la autoridad que les conferían sus títulos. Hablaron también los pueblos, pero se creyó concederles demasiada gracia cortando el mal por la mitad, y así se llegó a un nuevo ordenamiento del Derecho público europeo que, por su insigne monstruosidad y como ejemplo de la necedad antigua, merece ser recordado a grandes rasgos.

Creo que las tradiciones, satíricas y poco fiables, han añadido algún defecto a esa inestable trabazón de chatarra apuntalada. Y no alcanzo a comprender cómo las mismas tradiciones mencionan extravagancias todavía más irracionales y heterogéneas que se denominaban, según ellas, los «Tratados del 15». Será, quizá, un error y confusión de fecha, y tanto estos tratados como aquel del que hablamos no constituyen, en realidad, sino una sola cosa, informe, vanagloriosa y estúpida como nunca antes se había visto.

Con esto no pretendo decir que en aquellos tiempos, también en los sanedrines políticos, faltaran hombres de ingenio y corazón. Pero todavía no se había aprendido a vivir completamente en el año corriente, y esa indecencia de querer dar una parte del legado del 1800 al 1700, al 1600, y más atrás aún, confundía las ideas y echaba por tierra la buena voluntad de los mejores.



## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

Cosa buena es la memoria; pero el sentido común es, de lejos, mejor. Si bien aquella resulta admirablemente útil a efectos poéticos, yo confío, en lo que respecta a la política, en que los hombres no se vuelvan a desviar del segundo. Bastaría la extravagante e infeliz evocación de aquel infausto congreso para convencerles de semejante necesidad.

Al papa no solo se le permitió seguir siendo papa, rey y soberano, sino que pareció poco el *triregnum* y se le incorporó una cuarta coronita de no sé qué protectorado mal definido sobre hombres caprichosos que llevaban siglos gritando que no querían de él ni que les desangrara los bolsillos, ni que les brindara protección, ni que los catequizara. Los alemanes conservaron Venecia a condición de que se mostraran serviciales y pudieran contentar a aquel pueblo que había jurado no poder contentarse hasta haberles visto en gran ruina. Se cambió el puesto a algún duque, y el nombre a alguna vieja institución; se recomendó al rey de Nápoles y, sobre todo, se recomendó a los pueblos que se mostraran felices, gritaran hurras, volvieran al teatro y creyeran, en santa paz, en la liberación de Italia.

Los pueblos que se habían avenido al congreso por el cómodo deseo de encontrarse la polenta ya preparada sin tener que remover la cuchara, cuando vieron servido aquel calducho de mil sabores, volvieron a las viejas costumbres, a los primeros sentimientos, a los tumultos, a Garibaldi. Los alemanes, dignos hijos de sus padres, para dar muestras de esa lealtad, surgieron de repente de Verona y de Mantua: pero se toparon con italianos que podían ser los padres de sus padres en lo que a buen juicio se refiere. Y con la fuerza militar, que en aquel intervalo se había aumentado considerablemente, con la concordia facilitada por unos gobiernitos más que caducos y derrocados, con in-

trepidez, con constancia, opusieron un dique al torrente. Nápoles no fue ya de los Borbones, sino de Nápoles, y mandó setenta mil hombres al Po; el Piamonte y la Lombardía ya tenían en el Mincio a ochenta mil; sesenta mil enviaron la Toscana y la Romaña; y el papa y los cardenales se quedaron solitos en Roma como en un cónclave perpetuo, protegidos, más que por los paladines pontificios, por un piadoso olvido.

¿Qué le quedaba por hacer a Francia? Tomar aprisa su parte de los segundos triunfos para no perder el mérito y el fruto de los primeros. Italia, para no hacerse culpable de su propia servidumbre, había cercado a los austriacos y les había dado caza en sus cubiles. Francia, para no inculparse a sí misma de haber dado un consejo demasiado bueno, se apresuró en ayudarla a desanidarlos. Y a la toma de Verona y a las victorias de Castelfranco y de Pordenone sucedió la Paz de Liubliana, que «liberó a Italia de los bárbaros», por decirlo con palabras de Julio II, y también de la barbarie de su sucesor, limitando su dominio temporal a la ciudad y al campo de Roma.

Esta fue la Paz de Liubliana, que encaminó admirablemente la unificación de Italia al dejarla dividida en solo dos reinos que, para reunirse, no parecían esperar sino a la decadencia absoluta del poder teocrático temporal y la restitución de Roma a su condición histórica y geográfica de cabeza de las gentes italianas. Y con estos acontecimientos se entremezclaron las primeras conquistas de Rusia en Bulgaria, la concentración prusiana en Alemania, la perforación del istmo de Suez y la colonización francesa en Egipto, la pérdida de Galitzia por parte de Austria y el declive de esta potencia, si no de grandeza, sí de influencia, que pasó a ser completamente secundaria.

Digamos que todos estos acontecimen-

## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

tos, si bien no culminaron entonces, al menos comenzaron a bullir en los años que siguieron al 1859 y alrededor de la época del Tratado de Liubliana. Y no se puede concretar la fecha precisa, porque, como hemos dicho, la fausta y providencial destrucción de todos los libros anteriores al 2000 nos priva de satisfacer estas minuciosas curiosidades.

### LIBRO SEGUNDO

#### **Desde la paz de Liubliana hasta la Federación de Varsovia (1960)**

La opinión de aquellos que, pocos años antes, habían querido recrear en Italia el siglo de Gregorio VII y confiar la península al gobierno del papa colocando a su lado a Garibaldi y al rey de Nápoles, para que le llevaran uno el pañuelo y el otro la tabaquera, recibió, también después del Tratado de Liubliana, un nuevo desmentido.

En verdad, el dominio temporal de la Santa Sede había quedado reducido a bien poco. Y si los cismáticos rusos y los herejes ingleses y americanos no hubieran repuesto las bolsas romanas con alguna cuenta de hospedaje y alguna compra de antigüedades, la propia Roma habría corrido el peligro de permanecer despoblada y habitada únicamente por Pasquino y el papa.

Por fortuna o por desgracia, al débil Pío Nono lo había sucedido en la cátedra de san Pedro un pullés intolerante que había asumido el nombre de Juan XXIII y se sentía muy propenso a imitar a los papas de este nombre en la furia de los entredichos y las excomuniones. Los italianos no dejaron de darle abundantes pretextos para ello; y he aquí, en mi opinión, donde se precipitaron un poco los acontecimientos.

El poder temporal del papado, reducido a tamaña insignificancia, no despertaba el recelo de nadie; y los cardenales escaletas y púrpuras, con cuatro mil paulos de estipendio, no podían favorecer gran cosa la propaganda jesuítica. ¿Por qué este afán de hostigar a un fantasma? ¿De granjearse así la enemistad del clero nacional y la galante ortodoxia foránea? ¿De poner en peligro la tranquilidad de uno por una adquisición pequeña o incierta? No obstante, creo que había alguna razón que esgrimir.

Ante todo, por absurdo que sea en sí mismo el poder temporal de un pontífice, ya posea poco o mucho, siempre queda ese absurdo. Y luego, la conservación de algo del antiguo patrimonio dejaba aún una secreta ilusión de readquirirlo todo y enardecía los ánimos jesuíticos para conjurar contra el poder secular y en perjuicio de la patria. Cabe añadir que la ocupación papal de Roma impedía la unificación completa de Italia, ya que excluía el único centro en que podrían fundirse los dos reinos, el muratiano de Nápoles y el saboyano de la Alta Italia. Por ello, los italianos gritaban contra el papado; y los extranjeros, que entendían poco del tema, gritaban contra aquellos. No faltaron tampoco los apóstoles de la paz que aconsejaban la paciencia: pero la paciencia está bien tenerla cuando las desgracias ocurren fuera de casa.

El hecho es que el papa, amenazado por los liberales italianos, recurrió a Rusia para defenderse, y Francia, a fin de mantener alejada la preponderancia del gigante septentrional, que ya tocaba Constantinopla, se vio obligada a intervenir una vez más.

Así estaba la situación cuando al emperador de los franceses le sobrevino la muerte y, tras cuatro meses de regencia en los que se produjo algún disturbio en el país, estalló la revolución, Napoleón V sa-



## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

lió a Alemania para esperar allí la revancha y tanto los orleanistas como los republicanos, y hasta aquel viejo corpulento del conde de Chambord, descendieron al campo para disputarse el poder.

De nuevo se inauguró la acostumbrada república en París mientras el papa se embarcaba en una fragata inglesa en Porto d'Anzio. Y la barquilla de san Pedro volvió a ser ya no una metáfora, sino una realidad. Inglaterra, que había decaído de su antiguo esplendor por la liberación definitiva de las Indias, por el comercio de Oriente abierto a todos los pueblos a través del canal de Suez y por las grandes minas de hierro descubiertas y excavadas por los rusos en el centro de Asia, pretendía vengarse de las naciones conservando religiosamente la manzana de la discordia. Como aquella veía que, solo con sus fuerzas, el papa habría permanecido a bordo mucho tiempo sin pescar ni almas ni peces y sin darle a ella la oportunidad de pescar poder y millones en aguas revueltas, tramó un tratado secreto con Rusia y depositó al santo padre con catorce cardenales en las playas de Crimea.

Nicolás II, zar de aquel tiempo, no se parecía en nada al paciente Alejandro II, vencedor del Cáucaso y emancipador de los siervos. Era de esos que quieren robarle el oficio al tiempo y hacer solos en su reinado aquello que quizá únicamente pueda llevar a término una dinastía larga y afortunada. Tener la cabeza en las nieblas heladas del Nevá y del mar Blanco, los pies sobre las arenas doradas del Bósforo, una mano sobre China y la otra sobre Italia, señorear los dos mundos y las dos Romas, e imponer al universo entero el sello cosaco: era un designio que no desagradaba al heredero de Pedro el Grande y del primer Nicolás.

Los dos soberanos, los dos papas, se encontraron sobre la costa de la Táuride: Juan XXIII, el déspota del pasado, y Nico-

lás II, el dominador del presente, se entendieron con una mirada, y las palabras que se mantuvieron a continuación sirvieron de aclaración gratuita.

—¿Qué queréis, Santidad? —preguntó el tártaro incivilizado.

—Lo que queréis vos, majestad —respondió el sumo sacerdote latino.

—¿Es decir?

—Es decir, que yo quiero el dominio del mundo, por cuanto a él me dan derecho las bulas de mis santos predecesores.

—¡Para conquistar el mundo, me imagino que pretenderéis comenzar por alguna parte!

—¡Pretendo comenzar por Roma! Deseo expulsar de la sede de los apóstoles a esos excomulgados que han irrumpido allí para consagrar la impiedad y la mentira.

—Bien, yo os ayudaré a recobrar Roma: pero ¡las cuentas claras!, que mi parte del mundo la quiero conservar yo.

—¡Ay, majestad, si accedierais convertiros! Si...

—¡Basta! En eso ya pensaremos después. Entretanto, yo os designo como residencia las ruinas de Sebastopol, y allí podréis pontificar a mis expensas hasta que las naves de Inglaterra y mis tropas hayan abierto la desembocadura del Tíber y las puertas de la Ciudad Eterna. ¡Dios sea con vos!

—¡Y que el cielo bendiga las armas de su majestad! —a partir de aquel día, Sebastopol se convirtió en la tercera Roma o la segunda Aviñón, y de allí partían cada domingo muchas cargas de excomuniones para uso de los occidentales.

Mientras tanto, el zar e Inglaterra no perdían el tiempo. Con el pretexto del papa, estaban de acuerdo en invadir Italia, tomar de ahí el impulso para subvertir el nuevo orden establecido en Francia y dirigirse después, naturalmente, a dominar Alemania, que, sierva habitual de Rusia y atrapada entre dos fuegos, no se plantea-

## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

ría oponer resistencia. El zar se convertiría entonces en el emperador universal, el papa de Roma quedaba como un vasallo suyo e Inglaterra, como su esbirro. Los tumultos internos franceses y las rivalidades de los dos reinos italianos les facilitaron llevar a buen término la primera parte del plan. Se restauró el papado romano; Francia, invadida, se sacudió espontáneamente la dinastía orleanista, y Occidente parecía listo para caer de hinojos ante el ídolo del Septentrión. Pero la perezosa Alemania fue esta vez quien desbarató los cálculos.

Ya desde hacía mucho tiempo, las pasiones socialistas y la agitación sansimoniana bullían bajo los somníferos cipreses de la patria de Arminio. Avivadas por la vileza de los gobernantes, que no se oponían para nada al predominio ruso, y azuzadas por la necia insensatez de los señores cruzados, aquellas pasiones se desencadenaron y ejércitos de proletarios alemanes ebrios de cerveza, vino y fanatismo descendieron de los Alpes y del Rin.

Veinte años duró este nuevo diluvio, durante los cuales nada de aquello que había en el mundo permaneció vivo e intacto. La revolución que un siglo antes había tenido lugar en Francia no había sido sino un pequeño proemio descolorido de esta. Se dice que un poeta alemán, un tal Heine, la había profetizado, y que por eso murió exiliado de su patria.

Hacia 1920, dos potencias colosales encontramos en Europa, Alemania y Rusia: la republicana y la despótica, la una frente a la otra. Francia, España e Italia van siguiendo, a disgusto, las huellas de esa, sobre todo la última, a la que el papado, si bien mediatizado y reducido a un puro sacerdocio, sigue molestando mucho. Inglaterra comercia, muda y miope como un siglo antes Holanda. América aplaude no sé si más la ruina industrial o las bacanales democráticas de la antigua Europa.

Por aquel entonces hubo aún un Bonaparte que, mediante la restauración y la reorganización del poder militar en Francia, rompió aquel antagonismo solitario y peligroso de los dos colosos y, al erigirse en una tercera potencia, posibilitó el proyecto de una liga europea. Pero para llegar a esto hacían falta muchos años todavía, y más que cualquier otra cosa, una revolución en Rusia.

Esta sucedió en 1950 y, con el desmembramiento del cuerpo del imperio exterminado y la persecución de los últimos reductos de los turcos en Arabia, dio origen en la Europa oriental a la reconstitución del imperio bizantino, del reino de Polonia y del imperio ruso propiamente dicho, que poseía la confederación asiático-persa en el centro de Asia igual que Inglaterra había sido dueña de las Indias en el periodo anterior.

Entonces, por invitación de Francia, se reunieron en Varsovia los representantes de los distintos pueblos europeos para llegar a una federación; y se contaron doce Estados: los imperios ruso y bizantino, los reinos de Inglaterra, Polonia, Italia, Irlanda, Escandinavia y España, las repúblicas francesa, alemana, suiza y danubiana. La federación vino precedida por un tratado que ratificaba, como garantía de los pueblos, la tripartición de Rusia; la separación de Inglaterra con respecto a Irlanda; la unificación de las dos penínsulas, la italiana y la ibérica; la cesión del poder temporal del papa; la independencia de la nueva república cantonal danubiana, que comprendía a los magiares, los serbios, los dálmatas, los búlgaros y los rumanos; por último, la anulación de Austria y Prusia, y la paz universal basada en un código internacional y una Dieta europea, con reuniones cada tres años en Varsovia, Hamburgo, Marsella y Venecia.

Este acto se juró en 1960; y en 1961 se ultimaba en América la federación del



## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

continente septentrional con la gran península meridional y española. Así, desde ese momento, al margen de la parte bárbara y China, dos grandes ligas de pueblos civilizados avanzaban diligentemente hacia el perfeccionamiento de la sociedad.

### LIBRO TERCERO

#### Desde la Federación de Varsovia hasta la revolución de los campesinos (2030)

Aconteció poco después que un agricultor de Bohemia llamado Giovanni Mayer hizo correr la voz de que él era el Mesías, que había llegado la plenitud de los tiempos y que, por obra suya, comenzaría en el mundo el siglo de oro o el milenio verdadero. Como la tolerancia absoluta ya se había convertido en un dogma social, no se prestaba atención a los cuentos del buen arrendatario. Pero estos, entretanto, arraigaban entre aquellas gentes sencillas de Bohemia, y, puesto que las doctrinas que enseñaba Mayer eran de una moral purísima y de carácter jovial, así, sin encontrar oposición alguna, sus prosélitos iban creciendo cada vez más en número y en fervor.

Una condesa de Moravia, para hacer que su marido se las pagase por haberla tenido tiranizada toda la vida, pensó a su muerte en dejar a Mayer como heredero de su patrimonio, que ascendía a unos cuantos millones. Entonces, este se estableció con gran pompa en su nuevo señoría, mostró a sus adeptos el dedo de Dios con aquella fortuna inesperada y tomó el título de *Papa de la buena gente*.

Toda Alemania se llenó de sus seguidores. Él mantenía la mesa servida a lo largo de las cuatro estaciones; y parecía realmente que la Providencia le hubiera advertido de que era más fácil conquistar los intelectos de los alemanes de abajo

arriba, asaltándoles por el estómago, que de arriba abajo, deslumbrándoles con metafísica. Fichte quedó derribado.

Hegel, con cuarenta años de filosofía, logró tan solo a un verdadero adepto, y era su portero. Mayer, en veintiocho meses, tuvo a un pueblo de creyentes; y las más hermosas señoritas y los más vivaces galanes de Praga, Dresde y Múnich entraban en ese número. El secreto de la fortuna reside en esto, en dejarse remolcar por la moda; y el *Papa de la buena gente* adivinó este secreto.

Fuera como fuere, la buena gente creció hasta tal punto que el Gobierno alemán creyó oportuno inspeccionar sus intenciones. ¡Qué cierto es que todo Gobierno apesta a Carlos V! Se convocó una asamblea y se llamó al *Papa de la buena gente* a dar cuenta de sus principios.

—¿Quién sois vos? —le preguntó el referendario, pues los alemanes, hasta aquel siglo, habían conservado muy puras las tradiciones de la pedantería patria.

—Soy Giovanni Mayer de Josephstadt, Bohemia, antes agricultor de profesión, ahora Mesías y *Papa de la buena gente*.

—¿Con qué derecho os habéis hecho papa?

—Con el derecho con el que mi hermano se ha hecho zapatero y su señoría, referendario.

—¿Y por qué hacéis creer que sois el Mesías?

—¡Cáspita! ¡Porque lo soy!

—¿Cómo? ¿Vos sois el Mesías? ¿Pero dónde tenéis las pruebas?

—Mesías quiere decir, por lo que sé, *aquel que porta la buena nueva*; pues bien, yo he portado la buena nueva y soy un mesías.

—¡Oigamos esta buena nueva!

—La buena nueva que yo he traído es esta: que se vive para vivir, que por eso hay que vivir bien, y que a vivir bien con-

## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

tribuyen el buen humor, el trabajo moderado y hacer y recibir buenas obras. He aquí mi religión, que salva, alegre y contenta a todos, menos a los ociosos y a los granujas. El mundo está hecho para todos. Hace falta apartar aquel viejo salmo de la mortificación de la carne, inventado por los ricos en detrimento de los pobres. Es preciso dar a todos una porción de felicidad aquí, en este mundo, donde tenemos la seguridad de disfrutarla. Que del resto se ocupe Dios, ¡y salud a todos!

La asamblea se quedó estupefacta. El referendario y su mujer acudieron aquella misma tarde a visitar al *Papa de la buena gente* y se inscribieron entre sus fieles. Desde entonces, ya no suponía una humillación inclinarse ante el sentido común allá donde se encontraba, y el Mesías de la gozosa nueva tuvo una óptima acogida por parte de las más distinguidas personalidades de la ciudad.

En Viena, algunos descendientes de los Schwarzenberg, de los Lichtenstein y de los Metternich quisieron hacerle la guerra. Él los excomulgó con un brindis, y un inmenso fragor de carcajadas desde el Rin hasta el Danubio hizo justicia con aquellos godos pigmeos. La nueva sociedad se iba ampliando más y más; no se la llamó religión, porque no exigía la obligación de religión alguna sino la de estar contentos. El extraordinario desarrollo de la agricultura, del comercio, de las industrias, del vapor y de las máquinas en general la beneficiaba sobremanera al abaratar la vida. Todo era actividad, comodidad y alegría. ¡Imaginaos una república inmensa con Béranger como presidente!

El papa de Roma, que no por haber dejado de ser rey del Lacio y exarca de las Romañas era menos papa que antes, no podía ver semejantes innovaciones con buenos ojos, e hizo todo lo posible por averiguar a qué aspiraban esas extrañas teorías. Puesto que se habían mezclado en

aquellas novedades muchísimos protestantes, cismáticos y hebreos, se ilusionaba a veces con que se produjera un feliz giro en favor de la ortodoxia. Pero el *Papa de la buena gente* respondió a las ilusiones del papa de Roma con una invitación a almorzar, y las negociaciones quedaron ahí.

Entonces el ruso, el otro papa del norte, comenzó a resentirse; y entre apretar por aquí y resoplar por allá, por obra de los papas y a causa del tercero, se cernía sobre Alemania una guerra espantosa. Bajo ningún concepto habrían querido que el mundo se enamorase de una moral tan clara, sencilla y alegre. ¿Dónde encontrarían, entonces, a sus cosacos, a sus jesuitas? El miedo era legítimo.

El *Papa de la buena gente*, Giovanni Mayer, de excelente memoria, ofreció un trato. Él se tomaba dos años de tiempo para salir de Europa a condición de que le prometieran no estropear sus propósitos en Asia y Australia. Dicho y hecho: él mandó a los confines de Siria a algunos miles de sus devotos con un cargamento de esquejes de vid del Rin y de la Champaña; y, una vez que tuvo noticia de que los terrenos estaban dando frutos en abundancia y que las plantas habían prosperado, se embarcó con una jovial multitud de seguidores y se asentó en su nueva patria.

Los jesuitas se mofaban al observar la poca firmeza de estas misiones emprendidas sin auténtico fervor en los países de los árabes y los turcomanos. Giovanni Mayer reía y canturreaba jurando que el vino del Rin prensado a orillas del lago Aral era mejor que el original.

Las tribus indígenas que vagaban por los alrededores se encapricharon en buena medida del atractivo modo de vida de los recién llegados. Trabajar con moderación, vivir tranquilos y alegres, y librar uno de cada tres días era mejor que deslomarse



## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

noche y día para desvalijar una caravana cada dos años. Por decirlo en pocas palabras, sin tanto sermón, se convirtieron: no se dice si se bautizaron, pero se sabe con certeza que fijaron su residencia, que comenzaron a cultivar la tierra, a hablar lenguas occidentales y a hacerse civilizables. Crecía la emigración de Europa, crecían las conversiones de los asiáticos y la nueva federación del Asia central se volvía una novedad imponente. El despotismo ruso quedó escarmentado al menos por ahí.

Entretanto Europa, abandonada por sus mejores ciudadanos y minada una vez más por las intrigas despóticas y religiosas, estaba expuesta a nuevas convulsiones. El orgullo y la holgazanería penetraron poco a poco en las plebes rústicas junto con aquel barniz de educación que la avaricia de los señores no se había tomado la molestia de profundizar y consolidar. Fue un momento de crisis tan vital que, si no llega a ser por el sentido común natural de las gentes latinas y el reflujó desde Asia de los buenos elementos instilados treinta años atrás, la humanidad habría estado acabada.

Adolfo Kurr había sucedido a Giovanni Mayer en el buen papado del Asia central: había edificado una nueva Babilonia y la llamaba «la capital de la humanidad». Su imperio se había extendido en poco tiempo desde las tribus de Arabistán hasta las fronteras de China, y, junto con el imperio, también las industrias, el comercio, las vías férreas y los telégrafos. Las materias primas, que con tanta abundancia se recogían en aquellas regiones, alimentaban esta repentina resurrección de vida, y la energía musulmana se había fundido y transformado en aquella forma general de actividad civilizada. En el centro de Asia no había ya ni turcos, ni persas, ni afganos, ni curdos: había hombres.

Adolfo Kurr no quiso dejar sola la ma-

dre patria ante una revolución intestina y brutal, que habría esterilizado en ella todo germen de civilización. Planeó una expedición de los suyos para restablecer allí el orden y la armonía entre las distintas clases sociales convirtiéndolas, si era posible, en una sola. Respaldados por Italia, España y Francia, donde los nuevos disturbios habían encontrado pocos partidarios, los nuevos civilizadores pacificaron en seis años Alemania, las provincias danubianas, Polonia y Escandinavia. Y mientras se producían semejantes prodigios en Europa y se sentaban las verdaderas bases de la sociedad actual, en Asia, los rusos abrían las puertas de China de par en par y conquistaban trescientos millones de prosélitos a la influencia europea.

En el año 2030, la federación asiática abarcaba la mayor parte de ese continente desde Siria hasta las Indias y China. Las variedades más grandes de estirpes, lenguas y razas concurrían allí con la misma riqueza de agricultura, industria y ciencia práctica. La vía férrea realizó aquel año su primer recorrido de Estocolmo a Pekín, y de Petersburgo a Calcuta.

Entonces se pensó en un congreso de todos los pueblos del mundo, es decir, de las tres grandes federaciones: la europea, la americana y la asiática. Ese congreso se reunió en Constantinopla bajo la presidencia de Adolfo Kurr y trató todas las cuestiones de interés para el bien de la humanidad. Antes que nada, se abordó la de la ciencia. Y, puesto en pie con una larga oración para demostrar que la abundancia y la maldad de los libros había ocasionado hasta ese momento la diversidad de clases y las revoluciones más perniciosas, el propio presidente propuso la destrucción universal de estos libros, una vez que una sociedad de eruditos hubiera extraído un índice enciclopédico, cosa que se llevó a cabo para gran provecho



## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

de los hombres. Y después, tras muchas otras deliberaciones de excelso ingenio, se disolvió el congreso con la proclamación de Adolfo Kurr como sumo patriarca del mundo y benefactor del género humano. Este contaba a la sazón ochenta años de edad y murió tres años más tarde, y le sucedió, por libre elección, Samuele Dalnegro de Pisa, celeberrimo economista.

### LIBRO CUARTO

#### Creación y multiplicación de los homúnculos (2066-2140)

El azar, es decir, la actividad humana individual e irregular, ha presidido los periodos históricos de la vieja sociedad; la nueva reconoce su desarrollo creciente y regular a partir de la industria, es decir, de la actividad humana colectiva y en progreso. Nos referiremos ahora a una revolución científica que obró en la sociedad humana el mayor cambio que se haya producido jamás; y, después de una oscilación espantosa de algunos lustros, la detuvo de forma estable sobre los cimientos inamovibles en los que ahora descansa. La introducción de las lenguas articuladas, la formación de las familias, el descubrimiento de la navegación, la agricultura, el establecimiento de las ciudades, la codificación moral religiosa, el dogma de la igualdad humana, la invención de la pólvora y la imprenta, el triunfo de la libertad de conciencia, la aplicación del vapor y la electricidad, la ordenación definitiva de la nacionalidad, la concordia democrática universal y la sanción social del derecho a vivir bien habían llevado a la humanidad, metamorfosis tras metamorfosis, a no reconocerse ya en su forma original. Pero la revolución que ahora nos ocupa supera, por el milagro de la causa y por la grandiosidad de los efectos, cual-

quier otra obra que haya seducido la imaginación humana.

Todos reparan en cómo aludo a la invención de los *homúnculos*, también llamados «hombres de segunda mano» o «seres auxiliares». Su creación, no más de ciento sesenta años antes de nuestra época, se pierde ya en la incertidumbre y la oscuridad de la leyenda; pero las mejores autoridades se ponen de acuerdo en atribuir su mérito a Jonathan Gilles, mecánico y poeta de Liverpool. He aquí, según cuentan los cronistas, cómo sucedió.

Jonathan Gilles y Teodoro Beridan eran vecinos. Ambos fabricaban máquinas de coser; ambos eran despiertos de ingenio, pobres, viciosos y envidiosos. Se espiaban mutuamente para tener ocasión de murmurar el uno del otro y robarse las prácticas, los clientes y los secretos del oficio.

De pronto, Beridan comenzó a llevar una vida retirada, a abandonar las tabernas que tanto solía frecuentar, a descuidar el comercio habitual y a no dejarse ver en el taller. No bajaba casi nunca de la planta superior de la casa y a menudo, a muy altas horas de la noche, se veía el brillo de su lámpara a través de las rendijas de los postigos. Pero él se daba cuenta de que lo observaban y tapó toda rendija a conciencia. Desde entonces, solo algún que otro martillazo daba señales, durante dos o tres días, de que esa casa estuviera habitada.

Jonathan padecía todos los suplicios de la envidia. ¿Qué estaría haciendo Beridan? ¿Qué máquina sobrenatural estaría perfeccionando? Se devanó los sesos hasta tal punto que, para no volverse loco, decidió satisfacer su curiosidad a cualquier precio. Una noche se encaramó al tejado del vecino, descendió con cuidado por el conducto de la chimenea y, detrás de una pantalla diligentemente perforada, se quedó a aguardar la revelación del misterio. Sabía que aquella era justamente la



## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

chimenea del laboratorio de Beridan.

Espera que te espera, este entró por fin. ¡Pero cuál fue el asombro de Jonathan al ver que aquel no estaba solo! Le hacía compañía un hombrecillo pálido y enjuto que movía las piernas y los brazos en ángulo recto y, en lugar de voz, dejaba oír un cierto sonido gutural que se parecía al lenguaje de las ocas. El hombrecillo se plantó delante del mecánico como un soldado que se dispone a aprender el ejercicio. —¡Siéntate! —le gritaba Beridan, y el hombrecillo se sentaba—. ¡Camina! —Y el hombrecillo caminaba—. ¡Escribe! —Y el hombrecillo se sentaba al escritorio y trazaba un par de palabras—. ¡Siempre esas dos palabras!, ¡nada más que esas dos palabras! —exclamaba el mecánico—. ¿Qué he de hacer, qué he de hacer para que sus movimientos no se rijan por los muelles que tiene en las articulaciones, sino por la necesidad de la labor a que se apresta?

—¿Qué puedes hacer? —pensó Jonathan detrás de la pantalla de la chimenea—, ¡hay que elaborar mecanismos, muelles y aparatos químicos tan delicados que sientan la diferencia y el valor de los obstáculos con los que se topan y trabajen en consecuencia! ¿Así que tú has creado el autómeta...? ¡Chiquitín, ya verás de aquí a tres o cuatro meses! ¡Yo habré creado al hombre!

Volvió a alcanzar el tejado a fuerza de rodillas, desde allí regresó a su casa y se puso a trabajar en el embrión del hombre, es decir, el autómeta. Pero por más que hiciera y deshiciera, imaginara, ejecutara y probara, aquel bendito autómeta no salía nunca. El pobre autor sentía la potencia de terminarlo y no la de comenzar; le faltaba la paciencia mecánica, ¡a él, que en tan alto grado poseía la síntesis científica! Tres meses de trabajo y él seguía estancado en el primer paso; el autómeta no se movía ni realizaba ningún movimiento convulsivo a la manera de un epiléptico.

Un día, el pobre Jonathan llamó cabizbajo a la puerta de Teodoro y le anunció que tenía que comunicarle asuntos de la máxima importancia. Teodoro le hizo entrar y se sentaron junto al hogar, uno a cada lado. Ahora bien, antes de abrirse más, Jonathan exigió al vecino que le asegurase que, si tuvieran que unirse los dos para lograr algún propósito milagroso, lo harían de buena fe, sin envidias ni disputas sobre las ganancias, que se dividirían por la mitad. Beridan asintió a todo y se dispuso a escuchar.

—¡Escucha! —murmuró el otro a su pesar—, he hallado la manera de hacer que una máquina humana artificial actúe casi libremente dentro de una esfera de acción determinada.

—¿La habéis encontrado? —exclamó Beridan con una mirada de rabia y codicia.

—Sí, la he hallado —añadió con énfasis Jonathan—, pero para sacarle partido me falta algo muy esencial; me falta la máquina humana, pues, por más que lo haya intentado en tres meses, aún no he conseguido componerla.

—¿No os falta nada más? —gritó Beridan echándole los brazos al cuello—. La máquina humana ya la he confeccionado yo. ¡Observad! —Y abrió un armario, del que hizo salir al autómeta con voz de oca.

—¡Lo sabía! —agregó Gionata con picardía—. Pero ahora no es momento ni de confesiones ni de cumplidos, sino de aunar nuestros descubrimientos y emplearlos lo antes posible para lograr nuestro máximo provecho. Con diez de estas máquinas nos convertiremos en unos verdaderos Rothschild.

A partir de aquella conversación, Jonathan y Teodoro trabajaron juntos, encerrados misteriosamente en el laboratorio de este último. Los vecinos murmuraban acerca de esta curiosa desaparición y entonaban chanzas sobre ellos como si de



## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

dos locos se tratara. En cambio, cesaron las bromas cuando ambos creadores de hombres salieron a la luz del mundo con su hijito, muy bien instruido en el arte de la zapatería. Habían acordado disponerlo para este oficio por ser aquel que precisaba un menor número de movimientos. Y el extraño hombrecillo, al que habían puesto el nombre de Adán, trabajaba día y noche sin comida ni bebida, preparando con asiduidad ejemplar una buena cantidad de zapatos, botas e incluso botines de señora.

La sociedad marchó estupendamente mientras el trabajo ocupó todo el tiempo de los dos fabricantes, pero una vez que confeccionaron media docena de zapateros en un mes, como las ganancias eran muy cuantiosas, Beridan comenzó a recorrer las tabernas, a beber grandes pintas de *porter* y a jurar y perjurar que sería capaz de preparar al mejor orador del parlamento en una semana. Jonathan reprochó a su socio esta extraña forma suya de proceder, que, con la difusión pública de la fuente de sus ganancias, les acarrearía mil contrariedades y, posiblemente, les obligaría a revelar a los demás el maravilloso secreto. Beridan objetó que era dueño de sus asuntos, y, ante las nuevas protestas de Jonathan, amenazó con enseñar gratis el arte de su fabricación y arruinar así el negocio que tenían en común. Jonathan guardó silencio, pero como era un hombre insidioso y resuelto, se retiró a su casa a reflexionar y no se dejó ver en tres días.

¿Os imagináis en qué obra había empleado aquellos tres días? En fabricar un *homúnculo* montado adrede para que fuera a encontrar al socio Beridan y le asesara veinte buenas cuchilladas entre las costillas. De hecho, así sucedió: la fuerza muscular del hombre no pudo resistir la potencia mecánica del autómeta; y cuando, ante los gritos desgarradores que se

oían, acudieron todos los vecinos, hallaron al pobre Beridan a punto de expirar en brazos de un hombrecillo amarillo y descarnado que le había acribillado el cuerpo a puñaladas. Aquel espectáculo resultaba aún más espantoso porque, alrededor de la víctima y su verdugo, había seis zapateros trabajando tranquilamente como si no se hubieran dado cuenta en absoluto de la fechoría que se estaba cometiendo. Hizo falta mucha sagacidad para encarcelar al pequeño asesino y apartar a los seis zapateros de sus puestos, pero finalmente se los llevó a juicio, donde, una vez aclarada la naturaleza del hecho, y por imposible que pareciera semejante milagro, se dudó largo rato si para el asesino de Beridan se debía admitir o no la imputabilidad moral. Al final, el prudente jurado inglés convino sentenciar a muerte a Jonathan Gilles, pero lo condenó en calidad de mandante de un asesinato; y también se quiso condenar a la pena por decapitación al *homúnculo* mecánico como reo de un homicidio material premeditado y consumado. Jonathan se disponía a arrostrar el corte de cabeza y a llevarse el secreto a la tumba, sin dejar más herederos que los seis zapateros y su pequeño cómplice, ya condenado a un suplicio igual, cuando la dirección de la banca, la clase de los honorables industriales y las mejores sociedades del reino se conmovieron ante el temor de que un arte tan singular y capaz de transformar tan profundamente las condiciones de la humanidad pudiera perderse de forma infeliz, e impetraron del rey que perdonara la vida del culpable a condición de que declarara el secreto de su fabricación ante una comisión de químicos, filósofos, economistas e ingenieros mecánicos.

Podéis creer que, por muy resignado que estuviera a morir, Jonathan acogió la propuesta de buen grado. Y, desde aquel momento, la fabricación de los *homúncu-*



## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

los, u hombres mecánicos, pasó a ser una especulación industrial como cualquier otra. La facilidad y la simplicidad con las que, al cabo del tiempo, se llegó a fabricarlos, así como su adaptabilidad a los oficios más diversos, delicados y fatigosos, conllevaron su generalización y rebajaron su precio hasta tal punto que, muy pronto, su número igualó al de los hombres reales. Ahora lo supera con creces, y, dado que su existencia es indefinidamente larga hasta que se produce el desgaste de su materia por el roce de las piezas, el trabajo para la reproducción necesaria es tan mínimo que puede parecer más un pasatiempo y un útil ejercicio gimnástico que otra cosa.

Los cambios que acontecieron en el estado social y económico, y la total revolución de las condiciones acostumbradas en la humanidad a consecuencia de la multiplicación de los *homúnculos* resultan más sencillas de imaginar que de describir.

La comodidad y el ocio de que pudieron gozar todas las clases de la sociedad dieron una predominancia temporal a los campesinos, que, aún desavenidos por las últimas derrotas en el terreno político, se vengaron con la imposición legal de su mayoría ignorante y tiránica sobre las otras clases. Pero este mal no duró más allá de 2110, pues en esa época, cuando habían sucedido ya dos generaciones a los contemporáneos de Gilles, los últimos en criarse contaban con una educación y una mentalidad tan distantes de la antigua rudeza y tan próximas a la civilización que las diferencias entre las distintas clases desaparecieron por completo. Solo que el ocio prosperaba sobremanera en los hábitos de la sociedad, y, junto con el ocio, el uso de los narcóticos como el tabaco, el opio y el betel, que hacían morir de estupidez a un gran número de ciudadanos. Además, aquellos que querían preservarse de semejantes desgracias y se entrega-

ban al estudio sufrían con facilidad ataques cerebrales y muertes repentinas por apoplejía nerviosa, dolencia que los médicos achacaban a la excesiva actividad concentrada por completo en el cerebro durante dos o tres generaciones.

Hasta 2140, los hombres se habían dedicado a fabricar únicamente *homúnculos* macho, pero se cuenta que, aquel año, un hijo de Gionata Gilles, heredero de un secreto suyo, llegó a fabricar un *homúnculo* hembra o *mujércula*. Los economistas se alarmaron en buena medida por esta innovación, que amenazaba al género humano con la esterilidad al proporcionar un sustituto de la mujer. Por este motivo, se mantuvo vigilado al hijo de Gilles mientras vivió para que no pudiera comunicar a otros aquel peligrosísimo descubrimiento. Y después de su muerte, como parecía que el secreto de esa fabricación radicaba plenamente en una cierta levadura del hígado de gata, Gregorio Alison, presidente del décimo congreso de la humanidad, ordenó la destrucción de toda la raza felina. La sentencia se ejecutó al punto y los derechos de las mujeres quedaron a salvo, pero la tierra resultó plagada de una cantidad de ratas muy molesta.

Las guerras, las disputas y las discusiones religiosas a propósito de los *homúnculos* serían demasiado largas de narrar. Baste decir que el papa de Roma excomulgó en 2180 a todos aquellos que los fabricaban; y luego, al ver que la prohibición daba pocos frutos, ante la duda, ordenó que se bautizara a aquellas criaturas para salvarlas de la condenación, si de alguna forma estaban dotadas de alma, y para arrancarlas de las garras de Satanás, si no eran otra cosa que instrumentos de la actividad humana. Con estos dos decretos se cerró el bulario de los pontífices, que abarcaba dieciocho siglos, desde el V de la era vulgar hasta el XXIII: pero la primera parte, que era la



## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

más extensa, había quedado incluida en la destrucción de libros de 2030.

### LIBRO QUINTO Y ÚLTIMO

#### De 2180 a 2222, o el periodo de la apatía

Desligados de los prejuicios de los siglos pasados, liberados de un cúmulo de conocimientos inútiles y dañinos, desembarazados del tedio de aquel trabajo manual que impedía la paz, la igualdad y la prosperidad universal, los hombres han llegado ahora a tal punto que casi parecería una suerte no poder tener ya fuerza contra ellos. Pero, por desgracia, la naturaleza intrínseca de los humanos está tan viciada que no admite para sí condición de existencia sin un conjunto más o menos grande de contrariedades y males.

Sin repetir lo que hemos dicho acerca de los ataques apopléticos del cerebro y el abuso de los narcóticos, añadiremos la aparición de una enfermedad contagiosa que, sobrevenida a raíz de la fiebre amarilla y el cólera, amenaza con resultar funesta para la humanidad entera. Los médicos la denominan peste apática y, en efecto, parece tener origen en la indolencia relativa a la que están condenados ahora los órganos humanos tras tantísimos siglos de fatiga excesiva y definitiva. Esta enfermedad pútrida y espantosa, el evidente enfriamiento de la superficie terrestre y el aumento gradual del tedio y de los suicidios debidos a él son los tres peligros hacia los que nos dirigimos, y, en un momento u otro, la humanidad acabará por sucumbir a uno de ellos. Por mi parte, yo creo que tendré tiempo de morir en mi dulce lecho mullido; y, una vez

muerto, que el mundo siga en peligro, se enderece o se desplome no me importa gran cosa. Solamente ruego a mis herederos que tengan a bien, por afecto a mi persona, tomarse la molestia de esparcir tabaco de España sobre mi sepulcro, pues soy muy aficionado a ese aroma. Que así sea.

Estos cinco libros de historia los he escrito yo, Vincenzo Bernardi di Gorgonzola, para uso y deleite míos en el año 2222 de la era vulgar, 198 después del decreto del patriarca Adolfo Kurr, que ordenó la destrucción de todos los libros anteriores al 2000. ¡Que su alma descanse en paz!

### EPÍLOGO

Yo no sé qué decir al respecto. Estoy algo desalentado de publicar semejante monserga como *Historias de los siglos futuros*, pero parece que nuestro venidero Vincenzo Bernardi di Gorgonzola pensará o escribirá esto en 2221 y yo lo he transcrito desde la primera palabra hasta la última... ¿Será todo cierto? ¡Que lo juzgue la posteridad! Nosotros, en todo caso, limitemonos a implorar en estas últimas líneas a la futura majestad del patriarca Adolfo Kurr para que este libro, que por su fecha y autor pertenece a 2222, quede dispensado del exterminio universal que él declarará contra todos los libros anteriores al 2000. Así podrán comprobar si el relato del señor Vincenzo Bernardi ha sido verídico hasta el final. Y yo solo añado: ¡Que su alma descanse en paz, y que, en su momento, le ayude a venir al mundo una buena comadrona!

FERDINANDO DE' NICOLOSI  
Filósofo-químico

Antônio Gomes Neto

## El país que nadie soñó

Traducción de Mariano Martín Rodríguez

© Mariano Martín Rodríguez, por la traducción, 2021

Doscientos años antes de esta modesta historia, esto es, a mediados del año de gracia de 1925, el telégrafo difundía a las cinco partes del mundo la noticia siguiente:

«Favorecidos por un clima especial, los monos de Eritrea, colonia italiana del oriente de África, acaban de ser seleccionados como los mejores especímenes para producir las glándulas que el Dr. Voronoff destina a dar la eterna juventud.

»Se ha formado una compañía italiana para criar esos monos y formar con ellos un tipo más cercano al humano.

»Aunque los monos de Eritrea sean hoy los más buscados con este fin, la compañía espera desarrollar el mejor tipo mediante cruces y selección.

»Debe haber una completa selección de los especímenes más jóvenes y hermosos. A fin de que cumplan satisfactoriamente el objetivo científico al que se destinan, las glándulas de los monos se trasplantarán a monos perfectos al efecto de intensificar cada vez más las cualidades de juventud, hasta que se produzca un animal que los científicos puedan considerar el más perfecto para su investigación».

Indudablemente, si la humanidad más curiosa e imposible de contentar de todos los tiempos hubiese meditado, en la extrema locura que la dominaba, sobre la ambición innominable de algunos espíritus demasiado débiles como para aguantar la tentación mefistofélica de los placeres, los hechos asombrosos e incalculables que vamos a contar, como meros espectadores, nunca habrían ocurrido sobre la faz de la tierra, para honor y gloria del más sabio de los sabios, el gran Darwin, creador del Evolucionismo, la teoría irrefuta-

ble que aniquilaría los dogmas engañosos en que se apoyaban las bases de las falsas religiones.

Así pues, gracias a los procesos científicos de orden terapéutico ejecutados por un núcleo de hombres de negocios con una intuición mercenaria y, por eso mismo, repugnante para las personas dotadas de sentido común, Eritrea, la zona olvidada y lejana de la accidentada África, se volvía, con el transcurrir paciente de los años, el país de los precursores del hombre, gorilas y chimpancés, que habrían de ser inmolados para la satisfacción criminal del género humano, en la resurrección milagrosa de quienes caen en el ocaso doloroso de la vejez.

Y, hacia junio, el glacial y lagrimoso mes de los inviernos australes, una legión feroz de cazadores eminentes recorría toda la selva, hasta entonces inviolable, de la misteriosa posesión itálica, en busca de los pobres y rudimentarios simios, los cuales, en la fase risueña de su existencia, usufructuando los sagrados derechos conferidos a toda especie animal, serían sacrificados en favor de una casta superior, que, una vez arruinada por la acción destructora del tiempo, sería sometida al tratamiento de Voronoff, mejor dicho, injertada con la glándula joven robada al antropoide ignorante.

Cierto es que no tendremos la pretensión necia y poco recomendable de narrar, aunque sea pálidamente, el movimiento que se produjo en todo el planeta, tras difundirse el resultado de las primeras aplicaciones, que se recibieron en medio de una delirante alegría en todo el mundo. Semejante movimiento era el preanuncio

## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

de las grandes tragedias que enrojecerían los horizontes, durante mucho tiempo, hasta el día de la reivindicación fatal, cuando, entonces serenos los espíritus, la humanidad volvería, arrepentida, al ciclo biológico trazado por la sabiduría del Creador de los mundos.

Al poco, una verdadera peregrinación de viejos impotentes se arrastraba a la tierra llamada santa por los forasteros, que atraía de los lugares más alejados del universo a centenares de seres fanatizados en una mezcla babilónica de lenguas y costumbres.

Nadie se entendía, ni siquiera intentaba entenderse, pues el motivo que los hacía acercarse unos a otros era la perspectiva de una nueva vida, la transmutación meteórica de la senilidad en juventud, así que todas las razas se confundían en los caminos tortuosos que llevaban a la tierra de promisión, por el anhelo angustioso de traspasar la meta antes de la muerte...

Y, andrajosos, agotados por las infernales caminatas, con los pies sangrando, blancos, negros y amarillos proseguían su jornada fatigosa, atraídos fatalmente por la visión fantástica de la resurrección...

¡Eritrea progresaba! A semejanza de la Ciudad Eterna, en el Año Santo de la peregrinación de los fieles, cuando individuos de todos los países acuden a las majestuosas ceremonias del Vaticano, la posesión italiana era un pulular de interesados: toda una muchedumbre de cabezas blancas como copos de nieve, trémulas y vacilantes...

Mientras tanto, el año de 2125, en que ya innumerables ancianos habían vuelto a la juventud soñada, estaba destinado a registrar la página más sensacional del mundo, que pasaría de generación en generación, siglo tras siglo, como un ejemplo para la ambición humana, porque, milagro de lo irrealizable, poco a poco, por los constantes cruces de diversas razas si-

miescas, los caracteres peculiares de la familia de los cuadrumanos iban pasando por metamorfosis radicales y asombrosas, «evolucionaban» naturalmente, hasta constituir una nueva especie de individuos no considerados en la escala zoológica de Perrier y semejantes en todo al *homo sapiens*.

El mono había dejado de existir para dar lugar a un espécimen inconfundible en sus mínimos detalles, con la espina dorsal sinuosa como en los vertebrados superiores, privado completamente del rabo que, en el hombre, se esboza debajo del cóccix y, ¿por qué ocultarlo?, el propio encéfalo había adoptado idéntica conformación a la de los racionales, desarrollado y equilibrado por la inteligencia lúcida, lejos de parecerse al cráneo de un mono miserable de otras eras...

Sí, porque los monos de antes pasaron a andar a pie, igual que sus esclavizados, que nunca se habían dado cuenta de la evolución milagrosa, paseando de la mano por las «urbes» de Eritrea, como si fueran personas mayores.

Ellos razonaban, pensaban en los graves problemas económicos y políticos que siempre habían sido objeto de reflexión de la humanidad, actuando bajo la acción receptora, refleja y «consciente» característica de cierta especie de animales con que lidiamos todos los días...

Cierto día sucedió aquello a lo que había aspirado toda la nación eritrea desde hacía muchos años, asfixiada por la prepotencia brutal de otras razas: la revolución general, decidida y ejecutada por los paladines de la independencia, tras memorable concilio público en que tomaron la palabra los oradores más influyentes del país, todos nacionalistas hasta la médula.

Se hacía menester que todos los hijos de la joven nacionalidad, mañana degollados en beneficio de perdularios sin es-



## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

crúpulos, se coaligasen y enfrentasen a los pueblos que los desgraciaban, toda vez que todos ellos, por obra y gracia de los mismos, se humanizaban, con pantalones y gabán; pensaban y discutían; no despreciaban las gruesas lentes sobre el apéndice nasal; podían consultar las estrellas a través de gigantescos aparatos astronómicos e incluso, «oírlos»...

A ellos les correspondía defender la familia estremecida, amenazada torpemente en su integridad fisiológica por la hedionda insaciabilidad de los humanos.

Los antropoides de hacía mucho se habían emancipado, definitivamente, del hombre moderno y discutían con perfeccionado esmero de Derecho Constitucional, tan poco sabido por muchos licenciados, con la maestría de un consumado profesional. Para dejar patente, en una palabra, el grado de desarrollo intelectual de Monolandia (este fue el nombre elegido por los republicanos), no exageraremos al certificar los casos incontables de amor ocurridos entre jóvenes y bellas mujeres, apasionadas por los varoniles hijos de la nueva nación.

Blancas como el claro de luna y rubias como la angélica Berenice, o morenas como las meridionales brasileñas y románticas como una heroína de Alencar, innumerables representantes del sexo llamado débil habían cometido los mayores desatinos, seducidas por los encantadores monos...

Finalmente, llegó la hora decisiva del gran acontecimiento reivindicador, y comunistas y soviéticos, anarquistas, maximalistas, todos se reunían en la plaza principal (la avenida de los Amores) a la espera del tribuno más respetado del país, un monazo de músculos de acero y mirada de pocos amigos, un Robespierre contemporáneo que, poniéndose los quevedos (los monos no hacían nada sin ese gesto eminentemente elegante), dio inicio a su dis-

curso apologético de la corriente idealista que había abrazado, con convicción, inflamado por el más ardiente patriotismo.

—Señores, hoy es el día, elegido por los designios celestiales, para la emancipación de nuestros derechos, frente a lo expuesto por la renombrada Liga de las Naciones, que nos niega el derecho de fraternidad a que hacemos por merecer.

»Vivimos oprimidos por el eterno estado de sitio, la libertad constituye uno de los mitos más indecorosos y, por la menor sospecha, somos apaleados bárbaramente por los esbirros indecentes de los hombres cuando no inventamos una mentira astuta, en propio detrimento, que nos libre del caucho despiadado.

»Queremos votar (en Monolandia había libertad de pensamiento) a nuestro candidato preferido y no podemos. ¿Dónde está ese derecho tan pregonado por los políticos sin compostura moral, que persisten en maniar nuestras más legítimas aspiraciones con vergonzosas y tristes promesas?

»El hambre llama a nuestra puerta con sus garras amenazadoras; el cambio tiende a cero y la nación se deshace a pedazos, como un velero que el mar encrespado arrojará a estrellarse contra los peñascos traicioneros...

»¡Echemos del país a los viles que trafican con nuestra juventud, como hizo el rey de los judíos al expulsar del templo a los traficantes profanadores que, en el altar sagrado, no de la patria, sino de la iglesia, enlodaban la casa de la bienaventuranza!

»Hermanos, nada nos falta por aprender de los necios: adelante, porque, si hemos servido de injerto a todo granuja adinerado que hay en el universo, también ellos nos han servido para idéntica operación, gracias a nuestro proverbial instinto de imitación, heredado de nuestros muy ilustres antepasados.



## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

Y, perfectamente municionados, dominadores de toda la disciplina militar de los ejércitos modernos, así como de la táctica bélica observada en las últimas contiendas que habían ensangrentado a las naciones, partían a altas horas de la madrugada para atravesar la frontera los batallones aguerridos de Monolandia, gallardos e irrepreensibles, a los acordes del himno nacional...

Aquí podríamos imaginar, si tuviésemos ingenio y los hombres nos lo permitiesen, la más calamitosa y estúpida de las guerras, con cataratas de sangre, como un Niágara encarnado. Pero la humanidad, astuta, no lo decidió así y rechazó el cartel de desafío recibido: una bala gigantesca de azúcar cande que sostenía a un simio humanizado, con el ultimátum de la República.

Afortunadamente, los hombres no fueron tan tontos como los monos que, por unas bananas, se habían dejado enjaular por los antropólogos y, en el momento oportuno, acordaron firmar un pacto honroso por el que se reconocía la independencia y autonomía de los cuadrumanos, elevados a las mismas condiciones de los demás pueblos repartidos por la tierra.

¡Cuán tarde había abierto el mundo los ojos! Pero Darwin, aquel viejecito, todo dulzura y simpatía, jovial como todos los iluminados, tuvo la consagración merecida que los hombres le habían negado por parte de los monos equiparados, que erigieron en la principal avenida de Eritrea el más grandioso monumento existente en toda la República, como tributo de eterna gratitud a su genio excelso.

## Apêndice: texto original

Antônio Gomes Neto

### O país que ninguém sonhou

Há duzentos anos antes desta modesta história, isto é, em meados do ano da graça de 1925, o telégrafo espalhava pelas cinco partes do mundo a seguinte notícia:

«Favorecidos por um clima especial, os macacos da Eritreia, colônia italiana do Oriente da África, acabam de ser escolhidos como o melhor espécimen para produzir as glândulas que o Dr. Voronoff destina a dar a eterna mocidade.

»Formou-se uma companhia italiana para criar esses macacos e formar deles um tipo mais próximo do homem.

»Embora os macacos da Eritreia sejam hoje os mais procurados para esse propósito, a companhia espera desenvolver o tipo melhor pelo cruzamento e seleção.

»Deve haver uma completa seleção dos espécimenes mais jovens e mais belos. As glândulas dos macacos afim de preencherem satisfatoriamente o objetivo científico a que se destinam, serão transferidas para macacos perfeitos, afim de intensificar mais e mais as qualidades da mocidade, até que se produza um animal que os cientistas possam considerar o mais perfeito para a sua investigação.»

Indubitavelmente, se a humanidade curiosa e incontentável de todos os tempos houvesse meditado, na extrema loucura que a empolgava, sobre a ambição inominável de alguns espíritos fracos demais para suportar a tentação mefistofélica dos prazeres, os factos assombrosos e incalculáveis, que passaremos a relatar, como meros espectadores, nunca teriam ocorrido sobre a face do globo, para honra e glória do mais sábio dos sábios—o grande Darwin, criador do Evolucionismo, a teoria irretorquível que aniquilaria os dogmas enganadores em que se assentaram as bases das falsas religiões.

Assim, graças aos processos científicos

de ordem terapêutica postos em execução por um núcleo de homens negociastas, no intuito mercenário e, por isso mesmo, facilmente repugnável pelas pessoas dotadas de bom senso, a Eritreia, a zona esquecida e longínqua de acidentada África, tornava-se, com o transcorrer paciente dos anos, o país dos precursores do homem—gorilas e chipanzés, que teriam de ser imolados para a satisfação criminosa do gênero humano, na ressurreição miraculosa dos que tombam no ocaso doloroso da velhice.

E, por volta de junho, o glacial e lacrimoso mês das invernias, uma legião feroz de caçadores eméritos percorria toda a floresta, inviolável até então, da misteriosa possessão itálica, á cata dos pobres e rudimentares símios, os quais, na fase risonha da existência, usufruindo os sagrados direitos conferidos a toda espécie animal, seriam sacrificados em favor de casta superior, que, uma vez arruinada pela ação destruidora do tempo, seria voronoffisada, ou melhor, enxertada com a glândula moça, roubada ao antropóide ignorante.

Certo que não teremos a pretensão estulta e pouco recomendável de narrar, embora palidamente, o movimento que se operou em todo o planeta, após a irradiação do resultado das primeiras aplicações, que foram recebidas debaixo de delirante alegria por toda parte do mundo. Semelhante movimento era o prenúncio das grandes tragédias que enrubesceriam os horizontes, por muito tempo, até o dia da reivindicação fatal, quando, então, serenados os espíritos, a humanidade retornaria, arrependida ao ciclo biológico traçado pela sabedoria do Criador dos mundos.

Em pouco, uma verdadeira peregrina-

## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

nação de velhos impotentes se arrastava para a terra cognominada pelos forasteiros santa, atraindo dos lugares mais longínquos do universo centenas de seres fanatizados numa mescla babilónica de línguas e costumes.

Ninguém se compreendia, nem tão pouco procurava entender-se, pois o motivo que os fazia aproximar, uns dos outros, era a perspectiva de uma nova vida, a transmutação meteórica da senilidade em juventude, confundindo-se todas as raças, nos caminhos tortuosos que iam ter á terra da promessa, na ânsia consternados de galgar a meta, antes da morte...

E, andrajosos, depauperados pelas intermináveis caminhadas, os pés sangrando, brancos, prelos e amarelos prosseguiam na jornada fatigante tantalizados pela visão fantástica da ressurreição...

A Eritreia progredia! Á semelhança da cidade Eterna, no Ano Santo da peregrinação de fieis, em que indivíduos de todos os países acorreram as cerimónias majestáticas do Vaticano, a possessão italiana formigava de interessados—todo um mundo de cabeças alvas como flocos de neve, trémulas e vacilantes...

Entretanto, o ano de 2125, que já vira inúmeros macróbios voltar á mocidade sonhada, estava fadado a registrar a pagina mais sensacional do mundo, que passaria de geração em geração, seculos após seculos, como um exemplo á ambição do homem. Porque, milagre do irrealizável, a pouco e pouco, com os constantes cruzamentos das diversas raças simiescas, os caracteres peculiares á família dos quadrumanos iam passando por metamorfoses radicais e assombrosas, «evoluíam» naturalmente, de molde a constituir uma nova espécie de indivíduos não considerados na escala zoológica de Perrier e em tudo semelhantes ao *homo sapiens*.

O macaco deixara de existir, para dar lugar a um espécimen inconfundível nos

seus mínimos detalhes, a espinha dorsal sinuosa, como nos vertebrados superiores, destituída inteiramente da cauda, que, no homem, se esboça abaixo do cóccix, e, por que ocultá-lo?—o próprio encéfalo tomara idêntica conformação á dos racionais, desenvolvido e equilibrado nela inteligência lucida, longe de se parecer com o crânio de um macaco miserável de outras eras...

Sim, porque os macacos de ontem passaram a palmilhar solo, tais os seus escravizadores, que jamais se aperceberam da evolução milagrosa, passeando de braço dado pelas *urbs* da Eritreia, como se fosse gente grande!

Eles raciocinavam, pensavam nos graves problemas económicos e políticos, que sempre foram objeto de cogitação por parte da humanidade, agindo sob a ação receptora, reflexa e «consciente» característica á certa espécie de animais com que lidamos todos os dias...

Certo dia aconteceu o que toda a nação eritreiana aspirava havia longos anos, asfixiada pela prepotência brutal de outras raças: — a revolução geral, resolvida e posta em execução pelos paladinos da independência, após memorável concílio público, em que usaram da palavra os mais influentes oradores da terra, todos nacionalistas até a médula.

Tornava-se mister que todos os filhos da jovem nacionalidade, amanhã trucidados em benefício de perdulários inescrupulosos, se coligassem e enfrentassem os povos que os infelicitavam, uma vez que todos eles, por obra e graça dos mesmos, se homenisavam, de calças e *paletot*, pensavam e discutiam, não desprezavam as grossas lentes acavaladas ao apêndice nasal, podiam consultar as estrelas através os gigantescos aparelhos astronómicos e, até, «ouvi-las».

Cumpria-lhes, a eles defender a família estremeçada, ameaçada torpemente na



## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

sua integridade fisiológica pela insaciabilidade hedionda dos humanos.

Os antropóides de há muito se haviam emancipado, definitivamente, do homem moderno, e discutiam com requintado apuro o Direito Constitucional, tão pouco sabido por muitos bacharéis, com a maestria de um profissional consumado. Para patentearmos, em uma palavra, o grão de desenvolvimento intelectual da Macacolândia —este foi o nome escolhido pelos republicanos—, não iremos ao exagero se afirmarmos os incontáveis casos de amor ocorridos entre jovens e lindas mulheres, apaixonadas pelos másculos filhos da novel nação.

Branças como o luar e loiras como a angélica Berenice, ou morenas como as meridionais do Brasil e românticas como uma heroína de Alencar, inúmeras representantes do sexo dito fraco haviam cometido os maiores desatinos, seduzidas pelos encantadores macacos...

Afinal, soara a hora decisiva do grande acontecimento reivindicador, e comunistas, soviéticos, anarquistas, maximalistas, todos se reuniam na praça principal —a Avenida dos Amores— á espera do mais acatado tribuno do país, um macacão de músculos de aço e olhar de poucos amigos, um Robespierre hodierno que, colocando o *pince-nez* (os macacos nada faziam sem esse gesto eminentemente elegante), principiou o seu discurso apoloético á corrente idealista que abraçara, com convicção, inflamado do mais ardente patriotismo.

—Senhores, hoje é o dia, escolhido pelos desígnios celestiais para a emancipação dos nossos direitos, em face do exposto pela famigerada Liga das Nações, que nos nega o direito de fraternidade a que fazemos jus.

«Vivemos oprimidos pelo eterno estado de sítio, a liberdade constitui um dos mais indecorosos mitos e, pela menor suspeita,

somos barbaramente esbordados pelos beleguins indecentes dos homens, quando não forjamos uma mentira astuciosa, em detrimento próprio, que nos livre da borracha impiedosa!

«Queremos votar (na Macacolândia havia liberdade de pensamento) no nosso candidato preferido e não podemos. Onde esse direito tão apregoado pelos políticos sem compostura moral, que persistem em algemar as nossas mais legítimas aspirações, com vergonhosas e tristes promessas!?

»A fome bate-nos á porta, de garras ameaçadoras; o câmbio caminha para zero, e a nação se esfacela, aos bocados, tal um veleiro que o mar encapelado arrojasse de encontro os rochedos traiçoeiros...

»Corramos do país com os vis negociatas da nossa mocidade, como fez o rei dos judeus, expulsando do templo os vendilhões profanadores que, no altar sagrado, não da pátria, mas da igreja, enlameavam a casa da bemaventurança!

»Irmãos! nada nos falta mais aprender com os patetas: para frente porque, se temos servido de enxerto a quanto malandro endinheirado há pelo universo, também eles nos têm servido para idêntica operação graças ao nosso proverbial instinto de imitação, herdado dos nossos muito ilustres avoengos.»

E, perfeitamente municiados, senhores de toda a disciplina militar dos exércitos modernos, bem como a tática de guerra observada nas últimas refregas, que ensanguentaram as nações, madrugada alta, partiam para além fronteira os batalhões aguerridos da Macacolândia, garbosos e irrepreensíveis, ao som do hino nacional...

Aqui poderíamos forjar, se habilidade tivéssemos e os homens o permitissem, a mais calamitosa e estúpida das guerras, onde o sangue rolasse em catadupas, tal uma Niágara rubra.



## Humanos y equivalentes: dos historias prospectivas satíricas

Mas, a humanidade, sabida, assim não o determinou, recusando o cartel de desafio recebido —uma bala gigantesca de açúcar-cande, sustentando um símio homenisado com o *ultimatum* da Republica.

Felizmente, os homens não foram tão tolos quanto os macacos, que, á custa de bananas, se deixaram engaiolar pelos antropologistas, e, em boa hora, acordaram em assinar um pacto honroso, reconhecendo a independência e a autonomia dos quadrúmanos, elevados ás mesmas con-

dições dos demais povos espalhados pela terra.

Quão tarde o mundo abrirea os olhos!

Mas Darwin, aquele velhinho todo doçura e simpatia, jovial como todos os iluminados, teve a consagração merecida que os homens lhe negaram por parte dos macacos equiparados, que ergueram, na principal avenida da Eritreia o mais grandioso monumento que há em toda a República, como preito de eterna gratidão ao seu gênio excelso.

# Visiones tras los apocalipsis: cuatro poemas épico-fantásticos sobre ruinas



Nota introductoria y traducción  
de Mariano Martín Rodríguez

© Mariano Martín Rodríguez, 2021

Si abandonamos el terreno del mito y prescindimos también de las visiones del fin inspiradas en la ciencia (cataclismos cósmicos, entropía, etc.) para volver nuestra mirada hacia la historia de la humanidad, el apocalipsis, completo o no, puede dejar de ser un acontecimiento único de categoría mítica, situado en un pasado ahistórico o en un futuro que lo es igualmente, para convertirse en una sucesión geográfica y cronológica de catástrofes apocalípticas localizadas. Cada una de ellas entraña la desaparición de una civilización, a menudo con gran parte de sus habitantes o con todos ellos. Para estas personas, el fin de *su* mundo ha tenido lugar efectivamente, aunque algunas de ellas sobrevivan en un marco cultural esencialmente alterado y otras, en un futuro más o menos lejano, contemplarán los vestigios de aquel mundo e indagarán sobre la historia de la civilización desaparecida, de modo que hay tanto un *antes* como un *después* de la destrucción.

Esta mirada retrospectiva hecha desde un planteamiento prospectivo cobró nueva actualidad en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX, cuando a la enorme expansión económica y geopolítica de Europa y de algunas de sus dependencias lingüísticas

acompañó paradójicamente un sentimiento difuso de *decadencia*, que inspiró las expresiones estéticas del llamado período decadentista, que cabe situar entre el final de la experiencia revolucionaria de la Comuna de París en 1871 y el estallido de la Gran Guerra en 1914. La sensación de estar viviendo el final de una civilización hizo a muchos escritores volver la mirada al declive y caída del imperio romano, con todas sus supuestas perversiones que habían propiciado su acabamiento, según numerosas narraciones arqueológicas decadentistas. Otra manera de recalcar el carácter transitorio de la civilización contemporánea era imaginarla en ruinas, unas ruinas que contemplaría un arqueólogo del futuro a la búsqueda de vestigios que contribuyeran a explicarla, por ejemplo, a la manera irónica de Alfred Franklin (1830-1917) en *Les ruines de Paris en 4875* [*Las ruinas de París en el año 4875*] (1875).

Este procedimiento fictocientífico coincidió en la época con otro que podríamos considerar épico-fantástico, ya que se basaba en la creación de un mundo secundario ficcional consistente en una ciudad o edificio en ruinas sin un referente claro en nuestro mundo primario o fenoménico.



## Visiones tras los apocalipsis: cuatro poemas épico-fantásticos sobre ruinas

Estas ruinas constituyen el tema y el objeto de la focalización de la descripción o la narración. De acuerdo con la larga tradición europea de la poesía en torno a las ruinas, fue la descripción el discurso preferido al principio para la configuración de las ficciones con este tema. Así ocurre en el primer gran poema épico-fantástico de este tipo que vio la luz en este período, el titulado «La visión des ruines» [*Visión de las ruinas*], que el joven y futuro gran novelista Anatole France (1844-1924) incluyó en su colección poética *Les poèmes dorés* [Poemas dorados] (1873)<sup>1</sup>. Las ruinas ahí descritas podrían pertenecer a un París abandonado y destruido, tal y como pueden indicar la topografía de la ciudad, con su río que rodea una isla y la presencia en ella de un edificio que evoca la catedral de Nuestra Señora de la capital francesa, también situada en un islote fluvial. También sirve de indicio de ello el pasaje en el que poeta abandona su actitud parnasiana de rechazo de toda función literaria que no sea la propiamente estética al sugerir que la ruina de la ciudad se debe a sus vicios, especialmente los sexuales, de acuerdo con el vínculo, entonces estereotipado, entre lo que se tenía por costumbres depravadas y la supuesta decadencia de la civilización contemporánea, sobre todo de la capital francesa, a la que acudían burgueses y aristócratas de todo el mundo para encanallarse y disfrutar de su rica vida nocturna y erótica. Sin embargo, este poema de France mantiene la vaguedad suficiente como para no perder su valor de especulación de amplio alcance. De hecho, el propio eclecticismo de los vestigios, entre los que hay templos con figuras de ninfas danzantes, pero

también imágenes de ángeles, magos, vírgenes y reyes, sugiere que nos encontramos ante un mundo secundario inventado, parecido a un París postapocalíptico. Con todo, se trata más bien de una ciudad inexistente fuera de la fantasía, a cuyas ruinas se confía la misión de representar simbólicamente el final de una civilización impresionante desde el punto de vista de sus creaciones artísticas y, al mismo tiempo, llena de impiedad, por lo que el final apocalíptico que dio lugar a las ruinas parecería merecido. De esta manera, al ocultarse su probable referente parisiense, France consigue que las ruinas salgan de la historia para acceder a la dimensión fantástica del símbolo, sin renunciar por ello a la verosimilitud racional y arqueológica de su visión. De hecho, no hay nada en ella que eluda las leyes naturales de nuestro universo o, al menos, de la historia humana conocida o conjeturada gracias a los avances coetáneos de la Paleontología y la Arqueología.

Desde este punto de vista, aún más verosímil parece la ciudad arruinada que da título a «La Ville ruinée» [*La ciudad arruinada*], de Auguste Angellier (1848-1911), uno de los últimos «episodios» [episodios] de la serie *Dans la lumière antique* [Bajo la luz antigua] (1908-1909)<sup>2</sup>. Se trata de un poema narrativo que cuenta con detalle la progresiva pérdida de actividad económica de una imaginaria ciudad costera independiente, el consiguiente empobrecimiento de sus habitantes y la dolorosa emigración de estos a otras regiones, de manera que la ciudad queda abandonada a los elementos hasta su ruina. La ciudad tenía su propia civilización, incluidos sus propios dioses, y había tenido los

<sup>1</sup> El texto de la traducción que sigue se basa en la primera edición de este libro: Anatole France, «La vision des ruines», *Les poèmes dorés*, Paris, Alphonse Lemerre, 1873, pp. 41-46.

<sup>2</sup> La traducción se basa en la edición original: Auguste Angellier, «La ville ruinée», *Dans la lumière antique: Les épisodes (seconde partie)*, Paris, Hachette et C<sup>ie</sup>, 1909, pp. 94-104.



## Visiones tras los apoclipisis: cuatro poemas épico-fantásticos sobre ruinas

altibajos bélicos habituales en las ciudades-estado antiguas, pero su destrucción se había debido simplemente a la inercia y la entropía natural, hasta caer en un olvido tal que ni su nombre consta. De este modo, podría servir de ejemplo inmejorable del «ciclo de decadencia y de decrepitudes» que este poema ilustra con un alto grado de verosimilitud, siguiendo procesos conocidos de civilizaciones similares de la historia humana.

Aun aprovechando los conocimientos aportados por la Arqueología, hubo otros textos decadentistas en los que las ruinas remitían a unas épocas fabulosas, cuando lo sobrenatural se manifestaba realmente. Así ocurre, por ejemplo, en un poema sobre un tipo de edificios que, por ser morada de la divinidad, podían hacer admitir mejor la existencia y actuación de entes sobrehumanos. En el soneto de Arturo Graf (1848-1913) titulado «Tempio distrutto» [*Templo destruido*] y publicado en su libro *Le Danaidi* (1897, con versión ampliada en 1905)<sup>3</sup>, unas pobres piedras dispersas en una altura son lo único que queda del templo. Allí se rendía culto a un numen en una época pretérita y lejana, cuando la Naturaleza (con mayúscula inicial que la diviniza) oía los ruegos de los seres humanos, cosa que rara vez ha hecho después, en los tiempos históricos. No obstante, esta velada alusión a una época fabulosa más allá de la (pre)historia documentada por la Arqueología o la Filología es prácticamente el único indicio de un mundo secundario épico-fantástico de orden sobrenatural. La alusión a los ritos y sacrificios incruentos que se celebraban en el templo sugieren un pasado más feliz en el que la humanidad estaba protegida

por los dioses y la Naturaleza, viviendo en armonía con esta última. De esa época solo quedan las ruinas, signo de los decadentes tiempos contemporáneos.

Un espíritu nostálgico similar, por el que se contraponen de forma implícita un mundo secundario dichoso a la triste realidad actual, baña el poema en verso libre «Cetatea moartă» [*La ciudad muerta*], de Alexandru Petroff (seudónimo de Dumitru Theodorescu, 1885-1940), publicado póstumamente en una antología de poesía decadentista rumana en 1943<sup>4</sup>. No obstante, su cosmovisión plenamente decadentista hace pensar que se escribió a principios del siglo XX, cuando su autor tuvo mayor actividad literaria pública. Su poética simbolista corresponde a la que se encontraba en auge en aquellos años y estas se oponen al objetivismo parnasiano patente en el tratamiento del tema de las ruinas por France, Angellier y Graf. Petroff adopta un planteamiento más lírico, ya que la voz poética se dirige, empleando la segunda persona verbal, a la ciudad muerta del título, declarándole el dolor y la tristeza que le suscitan sus ruinas, entre cuyas piedras crecen raquílicas hierbas y anidan tan solo las salamandras. En su mente, revive su pretérito de urbe portuaria con toda la animación de los navíos que fondeaban en ella, imaginando que también la visita de esta forma, pero se trata solo de una visión que acaba resultando, más que el recuerdo que aparenta ser, una mera ilusión personal, un «sueño engañoso» que reside en el propio yo.

Este sueño cobra aún mayor protagonismo en «Ruínas» [*Ruinas*], un interesante soneto del poeta portugués António

<sup>3</sup> Esta edición definitiva aporta el texto original traducido abajo: Arturo Graf, «Tempio distrutto», *Le Danaidi*, Torino, Ermanno Loescher, 1905, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> El texto que sigue la traducción castellana es el de una antología posterior: Alexandru Petroff, «Cetatea moartă», *Climat poetic simbolist*, ediție, prefață și note de Mircea Scarlat, București, Minerva, 1987, pp. 127-128.



## Visiones tras los apocalipsis: cuatro poemas épico-fantásticos sobre ruinas

Feijó (1859-1917) publicado póstumamente en 1981<sup>5</sup>. Esas ruinas son las de una fortaleza batida por el mar de cuyas heroicas glorias militares no quedan más que torres que se derrumban. No se indica en ningún momento ni su ubicación ni su época. Tan solo se sugiere que pertenecen a unos tiempos de pasado esplendor. Sin embargo, su función no es tanto la de dar idea de lo pasajero de la civilización como la de servir de símbolo de un estado emocional presentado en términos universales. En el último terceto, los restos caídos se comparan a un corazón que sigue latiendo pese a la frustración de sus ilusiones. Las de la fortaleza son realmente las ruinas del Sueño, con una significativa mayúscula inicial que sirve para designar un concepto general más que un sentimiento estrictamente personal.

Pese al subjetivismo de estos dos últimos poemas, las ruinas imponen en ellos

su propia presencia. Su materialidad queda resaltada por las imágenes sensoriales que les confieren notable visualidad, como ocurre en un pasaje en el que Petroff describe unos islotes sedimentarios petrificados en la desolación de unas aguas opacas y pesadas como la pez. De esta manera, la visión fantástica de unas ruinas sin referentes reales directos produce mundos secundarios épico-fantásticos que sostienen la perspectiva lírica, al igual que lo hacen con la más paisajística y exterior de France y Angellier. En todos los casos, las ruinas son las imágenes del proceso histórico universal de la decadencia hasta su consumación, tras la cual solo quedan los tristes restos que se describen. Así se combinan ficción épico-fantástica no sobrenatural y visión postapocalíptica para anunciar, recurriendo a la analogía y la estética de lo sublime, el destino que acecha a toda civilización, incluida la nuestra.

---

<sup>5</sup> Se trata de la edición utilizada para la traducción castellana: António Feijó, «Ruínas», *Sol de inverno seguido de vinte poesias inéditas*, Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional Casa de Moeda, 1981, p. 142.

Anatole France

## La visión de las ruinas

El río que, libre y tranquilo, arrastra sus margas y sus aguas en medio de las pálidas cañas estrecha entre sus brazos una larga isla. Esta parece un navío encallado por alguna aventura heroica y que ha perdido su forma y naturaleza, cual durmiente entregado al olvido.

El grito rauco y el vuelo de las grullas perforan las nubes macilentas; los cisnes y los verdes patos nadan siguiendo la corriente acrecida.

En la isla, un pórtico y dos torres, retiro familiar a los búhos, erigen bajo el musgo y la hiedra sus perfiles negros, dudosos y pesados.

Delgadas figuras de piedra yacientes entre el espesor de los lirios, con las manos juntas, siguen en paz el sueño que cierra sus párpados.

Todos aquellos cuyas imágenes roe lentamente el viento del norte, ángeles y reyes, vírgenes y magos, amaron abundantemente la muerte, pues la rigidez de su estatura y la aridez de su carne hacen ver el gran valor que concedieron a aspirar al sepulcro.

No quedará turbado en mucho tiempo el silencio de la isla santa: se ha derrumbado el arco de los puentes en el río que la ciñe.

¿Acaso no es esa la ruda cuna de la grande y hermosa ciudad que, más adelante, se asentó voluptuosamente en estas soledades? Pero la tierra avara ha reco-

brado las piedras de los muelles y las calles, y las moradas desaparecidas yacen bajo los túmulos en flor.

Al sur de la isla, un montón confuso de muros, capiteles y fustes corona las laderas de una colina donde se inclinan las tuyas.

Por la noche croan las ciénagas. Hacia el oeste, a lo lejos en la verde llanura, se alza una puerta abierta contra el cielo lluvioso y negro.

Esculpidos en las paredes triunfales, hombres, bueyes, caballos evocan las antiguas labores y se rompen al choque de las ráfagas.

Y hacia el norte, aunque menos lejos, suenan lánguidamente al viento candelabros, balaustres, losas, escaleras, muros en largos dédalos, ruinas de un templo donde cuelgan liras con clavijas de oro, donde los pies de ninfas aún danzan en gozosos delirios.

Muda, la casa de los Reyes descansa, como una viuda, en la orilla derecha del río, entre los nenúfares fríos y blancos; mira las joyas que le quedan en las aguas descoloridas, y desparrama sus reales collares cuajados de iniciales y emblemas.

En un pabellón, las palideces de la luna, al borde una nube, animan una forma desnuda que sonríe y esparce flores. Es el cuerpo de una mujer en cuclillas, un cuerpo lascivo, joven y cansado que acarició sin duda la mirada de un siglo impío.

Arturo Graf

## Templo destruido

Esta altura veteadada de enjutos codesos, lentas retamas y labiérnagos ya fue sacra a un numen, cuando Natura oía los votos de la humana stirpe.

Entonces crecía la selva oscura formando espesura en torno al díptero fulgente, y de aquella llambria brotaba un manantial de pura y límpida agua lustral.

Y aquí al nuevo sol traían los coros de las danzantes la alegre ofrenda de los blancos panes y las perfumadas flores.

Ahora la luna desierta contempla el monte miserable y vacío y, entre los barrancos y los hoyos, las sagradas piedras abajo diseminadas por la pendiente.

Auguste Angellier

## La ciudad arruinada

De la orgullosa, rica y poderosa ciudad cuyas flotas singlaban a lo lejos no ha quedado, a la orilla del mar, más que una acrópolis árida, cuyos lienzos de muralla marcan el recinto vacío. A veces un pastor hace pacer allí un rebaño mientras engaña su soledad tocando el caramillo. Entre los grandes cardos y los arbustos de espino, la víbora desaparece bajo los bloques dispersos. En sus grietas, más arriba, pululan los lagartos y sus huecos sirven de madriguera a los zorros. A veces pasan los lobos o se reposan las águilas, y cuando verdea la tarde, la lechuza taciturna llena los ecos con su ulular. El puerto antaño famoso, vasta colmena que enjambraba hacia tráficos lejanos o hacia las colonias sus grandes vuelos de navíos con velas tostadas y hacia donde volvían otros vuelos de los mares, es ya solo un estuario de riberas desiertas que, prolongando sus aguas amarilleadas en marismas, frecuentan las garzas y las aves de paso.

Aunque no le faltaron asaltos y asedios, aunque más de un incendio ennegreció sus arcos y más de un saqueo rompió sus estatuas, aunque el fragor de sus torres desplomadas removió los huesos de los antepasados durmientes y aunque el sacrificio a Dioses enemigos insultó a sus Dioses protectores en sus templos, su nombre no figura inscrito entre los grandes ejemplos de aquellas ciudades que un día de matanza y sangre, al pasar entre clamores inmensos de desesperación, dejó derribadas para siempre en el silencio. Es una de esas ciudades que un declive continuo y la mano del Tiempo han borrado lentamente. La vida disminuyó por grados entristecedores, hubo menos trabajo y menos claras empresas: llega la inercia allí donde se hunde el éxito junto con la

seguridad y la esperanza, y con esta se hunde la fuerza y el gusto de la voluntad, de cuya muerte nacen los hastíos, ¡ciclo de decadencia y de decrepitudes!

Entonces empezó la gran ruina. Las almenas de la muralla colmaron el foso. Aquí y allá se torcía y venía abajo una arcada que no se volvía a construir; a lo largo de una fachada, las grietas cruzaban y hendían la casa. En los templos desatendidos, un fragmento de frontón caía sobre los escalones, rompiéndolos, y a los pies de los fustes yacían trozos de voluta. A intervalos, y con más frecuencia por la noche debido al silencio, se oía el ruido de una pared que se derrumbaba y se marchaban quienes vivían en la calle obstruida, pues todos los habitantes, cada vez menos numerosos, al encontrar más casas que las que necesitaban, huían de los lugares donde el abandono los dejaba aislados y se iban juntando en torno a la acrópolis y a templos sin puertas con el altar apagado. Su pobre rebaño, cada día más estrechado por un círculo invasor de muerte y ruina, entorpecido por lo que se acaba, también decaía por la esterilidad. En los suburbios, en el puerto devastado, veían extenderse, a lo largo de todo un horizonte, los restos de antiguos edificios de labor o de comercio rotos y derribados por una larga ruina. Quienes se habían quedado vivían como proscritos, fuera de todo; tenían que abrirse paso entre los escombros para llegar al campo y a las tierras de labor, que permanecían infecundas. Allí no se podían guardar ni rebaño ni cosechas: merodeaban los saqueadores y ya vivían fieras entre las ruinas que, por la noche, entre las sombras, hacían peligroso regresar a la ciudad. Ningún ser humano, de ningún sitio y en ningún



## Visiones tras los apocalipsis: cuatro poemas épico-fantásticos sobre ruinas

momento, se acercaba a ellos, ni siquiera un buhonero apoyado en su vara, ni siquiera un mendigo para pedir limosna. Su ruina vegetaba cada vez más estrecha alrededor del gran foro, que habían labrado para sacar algo de centeno y legumbres. Un último herrero, sobre el último yunque, componía alguna herramienta, herrero último sin aprendices. Todos sentían que iban a extinguirse como un fuego. Los ancianos en quienes muere la necesidad de quejarse parecían aceptarlo, pero los varones, menos cansados, cuyas esposas llevaban en los brazos un niño y que conservaban para este la voluntad de vivir, decidieron por fin abandonar la ciudad, prometiendo su apoyo a quien quisiera seguirlos. Y ese resto de pueblo, incitado por sus voces, tras haber votado por el éxodo en los comicios supremos, llevó para los últimos y pobres sacrificios los últimos y flacos bueyes a los altares carcomidos de los Dioses, de los pálidos Dioses que no volverían a invocar y que abandonar parecía un sacrilegio. Tan solo algunos de esos ancianos de cabezas nevadas, que ya no tenían ni hijos ni nietos, dijeron, sordamente y entre sollozos sofocantes, que preferían acabar en sus moradas los pocos días tal vez u, ojalá, las horas que les quedaban por vivir; y pese a los largos clamores de ruego unánime y las palabras enternecidas de quienes los cogían de la mano para obligarlos, quisieron terminar de morir cerca de los Dioses. Se colocó a su lado, al partir, lo que cada uno aportó tomándolo de su parte, algunos sacos de harina y jarras de aceite, mientras volvían a cerrar, en su rostro inmóvil que la horrible desesperación envejecía aún más, sus pobres ojos llorosos para no ver. El sonido de una bocina puso en marcha a la multitud. Cuando los que la escoltaban, al doblar el último arco, volvieron la mirada, los ancianos, sentados en su banco, habían dejado caer sus blancas frentes

entre sus manos y uno, tendido delante de su asiento, parecía muerto.

Subiendo y bajando por los escombros, la comitiva, entre sollozos, atravesó barrios despoblados desde hacía mucho, algunos casi intactos, otros derrumbados por completo y en los cuales parecía que los árboles se habían juntado para desencajar los mármoles. Tras descender penosamente hasta el puerto, ganó la otra orilla sobre el puente que quedaba, allí donde había aún suburbios que se extendían sin límite. De construcción endeble y habitados por la plebe, son los primeros en caer tan pronto como se abandonan; estaban recubiertos de arbustos y de matorrales. A veces se veían, entre las cuatro paredes de las casuchas sin techo, montones de maleza que crecían por los agujeros e impedían la entrada. Más lejos y para rematar el duelo, encontraron el camino de las tumbas que guardaban a los antepasados. Tras detenerse la comitiva, dos viejos sacerdotes hicieron una libación de un poco de aceite y vino para los muertos gloriosos, cuyos nombres borrados se buscarían en vano en las estelas agrietadas.

Entonces se abrió la extensión de una áspera landa, cuyas largas ondulaciones cubrían bajos matorrales que separaban entre ellos vastas llanuras, cruzadas por lentos arroyos y negras ciénagas por donde galopaban bueyes salvajes a saltos fogosos. El vuelo de los gavilanes rayaba el cielo. Sorprendidos por esos ruidos desconocidos, aparecían en las rocas, por todos lados, lince, grupos de chacales o alguna hiena inmunda que asomaba su cabeza obscena por el borde de su agujero. El sol, rojizo en aquellos horizontes desnudos, que aun bajo su mirada permanecían duros y fúnebres, iba a entregarlos a las tinieblas al abandonarlos; la angustia de la



## Visiones tras los apocliposis: cuatro poemas épico-fantásticos sobre ruinas

noche invadía los corazones. Los desgraciados presentían la cercanía del terror: por primera vez, perdidos en plena extensión, la inmensidad del vacío era una amenaza y sus miembros temblaban por falta de refugio; la bruma llenaba cada hueco en sombra. Sin embargo, avanzaban con valor; a la cabeza, la tropa de los más fuertes iba armada y lista para los encuentros con hombres o fieras hambrientas; la comitiva de atrás la cerraban también otros que sabrían combatir y defenderla. Entre ambas escoltas, la marcha hacía dilatarse unas veces y otras estrecharse todo un pueblo confuso de vírgenes, ancianos y niños cogidos de la mano del abuelo, y también de madres sublimes, capaces de atravesar los abismos con su tesoro dormido, el querido bebé, sin otra ansiedad que la de ver si se agotará pronto la leche en su pobre pecho, cuando su seno sentirá abrirse la mano mimosa. Solo ellas sonreían a veces al caminar. En medio, los sacerdotes salmodiaban un canto mientras llevaban vasijas llenas de la tierra natal. Bajo el resplandor sangriento, oblicuo y vespertino, iniciaban así el camino aventurado en el que más de uno caería muerto de fatiga y hambre.

La comitiva alcanzó la cumbre de una colina, tras la cual la ladera inclinada les iba a hurtar de súbito el querido y sagrado suelo. Para el inmenso y supremo adiós desesperado, en un arrebatado de amor que cubrió sus zozobras, prendieron en sus ojos arrasados de lágrimas su ciudad aún bella bajo los rayos del ocaso, blanca en torno a su roca y sobre las largas cuevas. Un viejo sacerdote oró; sonaron sollozos y luego los grupos descendieron por la otra vertiente. Allí abajo, invisibles, se extendían las montañas lejanas, más allá de las cuales había, quizás, otros destinos.

¡Qué noche vino a abrazar, tras aquel crepúsculo, esas paredes donde termina-

ban de apagarse los hogares que ninguna mano volvería a encender nunca!

Largos siglos han visto derruirse la ciudad: se borraron las carreteras que a ella conducían y lejos de ella pasaron los caminos de las naciones; el mar demolió sus malecones y sus muelles, cuyos restos se marcan aún bajo las aguas, cayeron los templos sobre las plazas públicas; se derrumbaron los pórticos alrededor del foro; se hundió el puente en el río encenegado y se quebró la muralla en desmembrados lienzos. Las tormentas y la lluvia, caviendo torrenteras con sus trombas de agua, arruinaron las ruinas; clavando sus estragos en el suelo desnudo, arrastrando el terreno con sus aguas derrubidas, disgregando la roca y diluyendo la arcilla, arrancando los pesados bloques como débil arena, ensanchaban su lecho bajo los cimientos más profundos y unidos por las argamasas más duras. Los muros permanecían en pie colgantes sobre el vacío; minados cada vez más por la pérfida labor, caían de golpe, rotos. Pero el torrente agrandado por su derrumbe, exasperado contra ellos, arrastraba, golpeaba, desgastaba, bajo sombras más cortas, los fragmentos, haciéndolos pedazos y de los pedazos, cascotes. Y, volviendo guijarros la cara de los dioses, transportaba sus escombros hasta el río fangoso. Ese es el sino de los montes privados de vegetación, de bosques, de matorrales por el desgaste invisible, por la eterna labor de los obstinados arroyos. Ya solo pueden mostrar rocas desnudas; su granito mismo acaba roído, muere y se desmorona, y la montaña se deshace en el lago profundo. Las torrenteras se acercaban, se unían por todas partes a las dos orillas sobre las que colgaban muros inseguros, y la ciudad caía en esas enormes brechas. Después, cuando llegaban las largas estaciones secas, y el fuego y las llamas de los veranos



## Visiones tras los apoclipis: cuatro poemas épico-fantásticos sobre ruinas

devoradores cuyo ardor calcinaba los mármolés desmoronados, grandes torbellinos blancos arrastraban su polvo y a veces los azotaban los martillos del rayo.

El nombre mismo de la ciudad ha desaparecido. Una caravana atraviesa a ve-

ces el desierto de alrededor, acrecentado por los siglos; en el estuario muerto, una tartana fondea a veces y zarpa al amanecer. ¡Y nada habla ya de un gran imperio extinguido!

Alexandru Petroff

## La ciudad muerta

¡Cuánto has cambiado, qué vista tan triste y tan doliente, oh, tan doliente! El viento abrumador quema tu extensión, antaño tan florida, y tu cielo, en lo alto, es solo nube.

Eres ruina, toda ruina; bajo la mano implacable del tiempo te has desmoronado piedra a piedra, y en los pesados rompimientos de escorias y cascotes solo la salamandra hace su nido, con la cabeza acurrucada en almohadones de hierbas aplastadas, crecidas al azar entre las ruinas silenciosas.

Las mejanas se han petrificado en la trágica desolación de las aguas opacas de pesada pez, donde nunca se reflejará más mi rostro, mi corazón.

Y, con todo, el estremecimiento del recuerdo que bate la cuaderna de mi viejo batel errante me lleva de vez en cuando a tu puerto difunto, donde tantas naves se guarecían antaño, con canciones juguetonas que ascendían hacia el firmamento luminoso, con tantas caras que brillaban al sol y guedejas rebeldes ondeando al viento que veo yo por turno, oh, que vuelvo a ver todas en mi mente.

Y, siempre en la pálida puesta de sol, cuando mi batel despliega la vela de partida del puerto durmiente, doblo humilde una rodilla ante tu tristeza, donde te ha proscrito un sueño engañoso, perdido — en mí.

António Feijó

## Ruinas

Abrupta fortaleza erguida sobre la roca que el mar en furia excava y el oleaje atropella, la Flor del Heroísmo brota de esas ruinas y cien acciones gloriosas se estrellan contra sus muros.

Del pasado esplendor subsisten esos lienzos a punto de derrumbarse bajo el viento convulso... Muere, en silencio y solo, el heroico monumento que luchó impá-

vido en las épicas batallas.

Tremola al aire un pendón hecho jirones, más expresivo aún en su mudo lenguaje que las torres cayendo en su fragor terrible...

Firme en su dolor, orgulloso y vencido, es como el corazón que, desnudo de ilusiones, sigue flotando sobre las ruinas del Sueño...

# Nuevas escrituras sobre el Dios y el Diablo: seis ficciones teológicas dualistas



Nota introductoria y traducción  
de Mariano Martín Rodríguez

© Mariano Martín Rodríguez, 2021

La ficción especulativa es, tal como la entendemos, aquella cuyos mundos posibles con finalidad artística se basan en una premisa fantástica que se justifica y desarrolla de forma racional o, si se prefiere, razonada. La ciencia ficción es la categoría de ficción especulativa más cultivada en la Modernidad, coincidiendo con la ampliación progresiva del análisis científico a realidades varias, sean estas de carácter natural (nuestro universo y sus componentes, desde las partículas subatómicas hasta el cosmos entero), cultural (la civilización humana y sus artefactos) o formal (estructuras subyacentes tanto a lo natural como a lo cultural, desde los números hasta el lenguaje). La ficción especulativa se inspira en los distintos métodos aplicados a su objeto por las diversas ciencias para proponer hipótesis conjeturales que se ilustran analógicamente mediante la ficción. Por ejemplo, ¿qué ocurriría si se inventara una máquina para viajar en el tiempo?, o ¿cómo funcionaría una sociedad en la que los dioses intervinieran en la vida de sus

miembros? Esta clase de interrogantes sostiene dos clases de ficción amplia y originalmente cultivadas en la edad contemporánea, que son la ciencia ficción y la fantasía épica.

Además de las ciencias antes indicadas, existen otras que han tenido un enorme desarrollo a lo largo de los siglos y que rara vez se consideran hoy como tales, ya que su objeto no tiene una existencia que se pueda demostrar, como tampoco se puede demostrar su inexistencia independiente de la mente humana y del universo cuantificable. Se trata, por ejemplo, de la ciencia centrada en unos entes pasivos de carácter abstracto que se sitúan fuera de la realidad física como soportes últimos de la realidad fenoménica, en una dimensión que estudia la Metafísica. A esta puede añadirse otra ciencia, muy influyente en nuestra civilización, que se ocupa de unos entes de carácter igualmente abstracto, pero de los que se afirma que están dotados de una capacidad de acción incluso infinita.

A diferencia de los dioses de las mito-



## Nuevas escrituras sobre el Dios y el Diablo: seis ficciones teológicas dualistas

logías, cuyos poderes los hacen muy superiores a los humanos, pero que parecen seres análogos a nosotros por sus móviles y pasiones, las entidades agentes de la Teología aparecen como realidades de carácter alegórico desde sus orígenes, *grosso modo*, en el idealismo (neo)platónico y en el hermetismo greco-egipcio hasta su consolidación con el triunfo del cristianismo. Para entender la diferencia entre ambas clases de seres, solo hace falta comparar la divinidad del libro hebreo del *Génesis*, tan sujeta a arrebatos de cólera destructiva, con la del primer capítulo del *Evangelio* de Juan, en el que el Dios<sup>1</sup> se identifica con una abstracción metafísica como es el Verbo. Un dios como el hebreo y los semi-dioses de su círculo (los ángeles) forman parte integrante del mundo secundario producido mediante un proceso de subcreación mitográfica, obra de los escribas hebreos y de sus continuadores, análogo al de la creación de los mundos de la fantasía épica. El Verbo cristiano es el protagonista de un mundo secundario cuya configuración se debe a un proceso teográfico en el que interviene sobre todo la razón especulativa. No se imagina tanto en este caso una historia mítica. En su lugar, se elucubra racionalmente sobre los atributos de los actantes alegóricos postulados. El resultado de tales reflexiones es el amplio acervo de la Teología, con todas sus doctrinas tan variadas sobre la divinidad trascendente y eterna, que se supone

única para todas las sectas e iglesias cristianas<sup>2</sup>.

Al igual que el sumo Bien neoplatónico, los entes de la Teología podrían tener una existencia real en un universo extrafenoménico. Como este no está al alcance de nuestros sentidos, ni siquiera ayudados por el instrumental que la tecnología ha puesto a nuestro servicio para que podamos conocer, por ejemplo, el origen de nuestro universo en una explosión primordial, la ciencia que se ocupa de ellos es por fuerza especulativa y, a este respecto, podríamos recordar la agudeza borgiana de que la Teología es una rama de la literatura fantástica. Sin embargo, los teólogos cristianos afrontan su objeto con la ayuda de unas escrituras concretas, sobre todo los Evangelios, que les aportan una base, externa a su propia mente, como punto de partida para deducir de forma racional sus construcciones teológicas. En el islam, la base escrituraria es otra y, en consecuencia, también la Teología que de ella procede. En cualquier caso, cada teografía, entendida como descripción de entes divinos abstractos y de sus tributos, es el resultado de un trabajo hermenéutico que sigue un método científico particular, que no es el mismo de las ciencias naturales, humanas o formales, pero que también es coherente y riguroso en su curso desde sus premisas escriturarias hasta sus conclusiones más comunes, aunque estas sean tan peculiares como el concepto de Trinidad o el de la transus-

<sup>1</sup> En el prólogo teográfico del Evangelio de Juan, el Dios lleva artículo determinado y no hay razón para quitárselo a él y dejárselo, en cambio, al Diablo, aunque se sigue el uso tradicional en las traducciones que siguen para no introducir extrañezas innecesarias en la lectura. Ambos términos van aquí en mayúsculas porque se trata de personajes alegóricos, para los cuales se suele emplear la mayúscula inicial.

<sup>2</sup> El judaísmo (rabínico) y el islamismo, así como otras religiones proféticas similares surgidas entre las riberas del Nilo y las del Tigris (gnosticismo no cristiano, maniqueísmo, mandeísmo), han desarrollado teologías, también con escuelas diversas y enfrentadas. Sin embargo, nos limitaremos aquí a la Teología cristiana, que es la que aporta la base racional a las ficciones abajo traducidas.



## Nuevas escrituras sobre el Dios y el Diablo: seis ficciones teológicas dualistas

tanciación, pasando por la extraordinaria convivencia de dos naturalezas, humana y divina, en la persona de Jesús de Nazaret. En consecuencia, la Teología, por muy fantástica que parezca, no dispone de la libertad creativa de la ficción. El pacto de lectura de la Teología exige la fe en la existencia de los entes que se describen y la aplicación del juicio crítico sobre los argumentos aducidos. En la ficción, lo que cuenta es la coherencia y la impresión de completitud del universo imaginario propuesto. No obstante, la Teología y la ficción pueden converger cuando la primera, como cualquier otro saber derivado de la aplicación de una metodología racional, aporta la materia prima de una especulación fantástica hecha con fines literarios. El resultado es distinto al de la ciencia ficción o la fantasía épica, pero no por ello deja de ser ficción especulativa, según se ha manifestado esta a lo largo de la historia.

Las visiones de los territorios metafísicos de ultratumba fueron quizá las primeras ficciones inspiradas en la teología cristiana, cuya culminación fue la divina *Commedia* de Dante Alighieri. También fueron tempranas las teografías en las que se conjeturaba alegóricamente sobre los orígenes de la dimensión divina y luego terrenal, como las escrituras gnósticas de los primeros siglos de nuestra era, que conocemos gracias a la Arqueología y la Filología modernas. Sin embargo, su carácter ficcional es dudoso, ya que esos *evangelios* gnósticos se presentan como escrituras que reflejarían una realidad cósmica no inventada, sino supuestamente revelada. Se trata de hipótesis alternativas a las que estaban abrazando entonces las instituciones eclesiásticas oficiales, las cuales no dudaron en suprimir cualquier otra doctrina teológica rival cuando alcanzaron la influencia suficiente entre los poderosos del mundo como para tener garantizado el apoyo del brazo secular a

fin de reprimir especulaciones que se salieran demasiado de la línea teológica oficial. A juzgar por el número de doctrinas heterodoxas desde ese punto de vista a lo largo de los siglos, esa represión no sirvió para sofocar completamente el pensamiento teológico heterodoxo, pero los envites eran demasiado altos como para que hubiera autores que propusieran novedades atrevidas en la materia con fines meramente lúdicos y ficcionales. Fue únicamente la secularización progresiva, que eliminó los riesgos penales de la teoficción herética, la que favoreció su desarrollo moderno.

La teoficción también se benefició de la distinción discursiva entre el lenguaje de la ciencia y el de la ficción, consagrada definitivamente en el siglo XIX. El saber científico, del tipo que fuese, incluido el teológico, debía exponerse objetivamente en forma de tratados, mientras que los discursos de la ficción disfrutaban de la libertad para tratar cualquier asunto con cualquier enfoque, ya que se trataba de fantasías que no podían ni siquiera aspirar a participar en el debate científico por no tenerse por verdaderas. Aunque el índice de libros prohibidos siguiera conteniendo obras de ficción, las condenas eclesiásticas se dirigían sobre todo contra las teologías presentadas ensayísticamente como tales. En estas circunstancias, hubo incluso algunos escritores creyentes que se atrevieron a escribir obras de ficción de dudosa ortodoxia. Con menos empacho lo hicieron otros que se podrían calificar de agnósticos o ateos, para quienes la teoficción suponía la oportunidad de especular creativamente sobre los interrogantes teológicos tradicionales con el fin de ofrecer respuestas nuevas, principalmente a la gran pregunta de la existencia del mal en el mundo, frente al convencimiento teológico en la bondad infinita del Dios. Si tan bueno y poderoso es, ¿cómo se explica



## Nuevas escrituras sobre el Dios y el Diablo: seis ficciones teológicas dualistas

que exista el Mal mismo, siquiera como sombra negativa del bien? La evidente existencia del Mal, voluntario en el ser humano e involuntario en la Naturaleza creada por el Dios, parece sugerir una responsabilidad directa o indirecta, por acción u omisión, de la propia divinidad omnipotente, responsable por su poder ilimitado de todo lo que existe.

Esta responsabilidad no se plantea en la misma medida en las mitologías. La figura antropomórfica del dios único del panteón hebreo antiguo se manifiesta con tal humanidad que no resulta demasiado extraño su comportamiento en momentos moralmente tan poco gloriosos como el del Diluvio Universal o la destrucción de Jericó y otras ciudades canaanitas y el subsiguiente genocidio de sus habitantes. Era natural que un dios concebido a imagen y semejanza del hombre (o al revés) reflejara o inspirara los crímenes que la humanidad ha perpetrado a lo largo de su historia. En cambio, el Dios cristiano de la Teología es un ente esencialmente distinto y superior al ser humano, y sus atributos infinitos llevan aparejada la inexistencia de cualquier otro principio o ente comparable que pueda compartir su responsabilidad en lo relativo a la existencia del Mal como noción metafísica, así como del mal como práctica o fenómeno terrenales. Para evitar atribuir el mal a su bondad infinita, el doble modelo del Satán o ángel tentador hebreo (que no actúa *motu proprio*, como sugiere el mito de Job) y del dios del mal de la mitología persa zoroastriana sirvió para constituir una teología dualista que, pese a las condenas eclesiásticas y los distingos ortodoxos, subyace a buena parte del pensamiento teológico cristiano. A efectos prácticos, el Diablo o Satán, como principio abstracto que personifica alegóricamente el Mal, se opone a menudo en igualdad de condiciones al

Dios, el personaje alegórico que designa el Bien.

Esta teología dualista ha inspirado, con matices, diversas teoficciones modernas que retoman el asunto y lo modifican de diversos modos, ilustrando con ella la creatividad teológica que a veces acompaña a la libertad intrínseca de la ficción. Esta libertad se manifiesta también en el discurso, pues la especulación teológica con fines literarios se ha expresado a través de muy diferentes géneros de escritura, desde el epilio hasta el poema en prosa, pasando por el microrrelato y el drama, entre otros. La teoficción, al igual que la ciencia ficción o la fantasía épica, es discursivamente diversa, y así lo demuestran varios ejemplos panlatinos de la primera mitad del siglo pasado que ilustran el vigor de la especulación dualista.

El autor de lengua catalana Àngel Guimerà (1845-1924) publicó el 2 de enero de 1902 su poema «Creació» [*Creación*] en la revista *Joventut* [Juventud], y lo recogió luego sin cambios en el volumen *Segon llibre de poesies* [Segundo libro de poesías] en 1920<sup>3</sup>. Como su título indica, se trata de una cosmogonía, cuya brevedad intensifica su efecto. En vez de extenderse en detalles, el poeta limita el acto de la creación a la metáfora del Dios como herrero que, sujeto al Tiempo, forja sin cesar mundos. Las almas serían las chispas que se desprenden naturalmente del proceso, sin que el Dios parezca haberlas creado voluntariamente. Estas almas ni siquiera deseaban haber salido de la nada pero, en lugar de destruirlas, el divino herrero las metamorfosea en animales, seguramente inocentes y felices. Es entonces cuando aparece en escena el Diablo, cuyo estatuto

<sup>3</sup> La traducción del poema se basa en el texto siguiente: Àngel Guimerà, «Creació», *Poesia completa*, edición de Blanca Llum Vidal, Barcelona, Edicions de 1984, 2010, pp. 238.



## Nuevas escrituras sobre el Dios y el Diablo: seis ficciones teológicas dualistas

ontológico marcado por la mayúscula inicial parece estar en el mismo plano que el Dios y el Tiempo. Es Él quien hace de algunas de estas almas seres humanos, los cuales se presentan así como obra enteramente diabólica, sin que el Dios se entere, aunque tampoco parece que pueda hacer gran cosa para impedirlo, pues su creación parece un cometido al que no parece poder escapar. En el marco común del Tiempo en que ambos principios, el Dios y el Diablo, hacen su obra, rige el determinismo. Las almas surgen por sí solas, y únicamente su encarnación corporal es el resultado de una rivalidad que solo parece consciente para la parte diabólica. La humanidad es el resultado de su acción. Dado el empleo secular del Diablo como principio del Mal, claro está el pesimismo del autor. Los animales son creaciones del Bien; los seres humanos, de su contrario, en cuerpo y alma. No cabe, pues, ni siquiera la esperanza gnóstica en la salvación tras dejar atrás la materia, porque todo en el hombre tiene un origen diabólico, ante la patente indiferencia del Dios.

También en 1902, vio la luz una cosmogonía teológica dualista, pero la dialéctica entre el Bien y el Mal se ajusta a un esquema de rivalidad consciente que contrasta con el gnosticismo extremo y pesimista de Guimerà. La británica Renée Vivien (Pauline Mary Tarn, 1877-1909) escribió en francés, como casi toda su obra, «La genèse profane» [*La génesis profana*], que figura en el sumario del breve volumen titulado *Brumes de fjords* [Nieblas de fiordo] (1902)<sup>4</sup>. Se trata de una reescritura del mito hebreo de la creación que adopta el estilo paralelístico bíblico,

así como la división de su prosa en versículos. El paralelismo como procedimiento retórico fundamental en este escrito teográfico de Vivien corresponde al paralelismo de las acciones presentadas según un esquema de contraste sostenido y absoluto entre Jehová y Satán. De manera más marcada que en la «Creación» de Guimerà, estos dos seres no son entes míticos, sino decididamente abstractos y alegóricos. Ambos son dos principios eternos que se contraponen eternamente en el seno del Caos, que es el escenario de su creación como lo era el Tiempo en el poema de Guimerà. Su odio mutuo da lugar a una creación paralela, de manera que a cada producción de Jehovah responde Satán con su opuesta. Finalmente, Jehová crea el varón y Satán, la mujer. Ambas creaciones aparecen como seres determinados desde su origen por su identidad sexual o de género. El masculino es obra de Jehová, el principio de la Fuerza, mientras que el femenino lo es de Satán, el principio de la Astucia. El primero tiene su expresión literaria en la figura de Homero, el cantor del combate y las matanzas; la mujer la encuentra en Safo, la lírica cantora del amor y el erotismo. A esta la describe Vivien con una atractiva sensualidad que parece sugerir su superioridad sobre la violenta virilidad homérica, en contraste con la superior consideración literaria de ese mítico poeta varón a lo largo de la historia. Así pues, la génesis de Vivien tiene una dimensión feminista que subvierte el canon literario, al tiempo que rechaza la doble subordinación, mítica de la mujer y teológica de Satán, al principio patriarcal representado por el Dios, de forma que ahora se ven enfrentados, pero dotados de la misma dignidad y del mismo poder. El extremo maniqueísmo teológico adoptado por Vivien tiene su correspondencia en una distinción binaria entre el varón y la mujer que

<sup>4</sup> La traducción sigue el texto de la primera edición: Renée Vivien, «La genèse profane», *Brumes de fjords*, Paris, Alphonse Lemerre, 1902, pp. 115-118.



## Nuevas escrituras sobre el Dios y el Diablo: seis ficciones teológicas dualistas

parece igual de extrema. Afortunadamente, se vislumbra que la oposición determinada por el odio que sienten sus creadores respectivos podría encontrar un equilibrio entre la fuerza de uno y la caricia de la otra, de forma que no fuera necesario escoger entre Homero y Safo, sino que se pudiera admirar a uno y a otra por igual. Análogamente, como ni Jehová ni Satán representan principios morales, no existe contraste entre el Bien y el Mal en esta creación imaginada por Vivien. Su dualismo representa, en realidad, un equilibrio de principios incompatibles esencialmente, pero éticamente neutros. Su odio mutuo no da lugar, pues, a creaciones buenas o malvadas *per se*; solo son diferentes y, en el fondo, complementarias. Desde su perspectiva feminista, la autora enmienda así siglos de maniqueísmo moral y sexual en la especulación teológica, tradicionalmente patriarcal y temerosa del Diablo, sin caer por ello ni en la misandria ni en el satanismo. Invertir los términos de la ecuación no sirve. Vivien les anula al igualarlos.

Arturo Graf (1848-1913) dio un paso más en la negación o, al menos, matización del dualismo en un breve poema dramático toscano en verso de 1913 titulado «L'assunzione di Mefistofele» [*La asunción de Mefistófeles*] (1913)<sup>5</sup>. No parece que esté escrito para la escena, pues el coloquio entre el Dios y Mefistófeles, nombre goethiano que adopta aquí el Diablo, parece más bien un diálogo filosófico en el que se confrontan dos actitudes contrapuestas. Este diálogo no es metafísico, sino existencial, al modo del libro hebreo de *Job*. En este último, su prota-

gonista se lamenta de las desgracias que, a iniciativa de Satán y previa aprobación de Yavé, le han arruinado la vida, pero se niega a maldecir a su dios y su constancia es premiada al final. En el poema de Graf, Mefistófeles opone resistencia a la felicidad que tiene al alcance de la mano. Su resistencia es lo único que falta para la consumación de los tiempos, pues todo lo demás se ha reabsorbido en una eternidad de beatitud en la dimensión sobrenatural del cielo cristiano. Siguiendo tendencias teológicas modernas entonces aún minoritarias y hoy muy extendidas, no existe condenación eterna: todos acaban salvándose y el mismo Diablo, esto es, Mefistófeles tiene su lugar reservado en la Eternidad, cuya felicidad se entreoie desde fuera. Mefistófeles está ahí solo, impidiendo que el cielo y el todo se confundan. Para atar este último cabo, el Dios, llamado significativamente el Eterno, sale a intentar convencerlo. No puede obligarlo a entrar, porque la Eternidad es amor y el amor no obra por la fuerza. Aunque Mefistófeles lo niegue, alberga en sí ese amor y, por lo tanto, también puede salvarse. Lo que le impide entrar no es el mal, que ya no existe, sino su temor a una eternidad de perfección, aburrida por inmutable. Él no puede crear de la nada, pero su labor secular ha sido la del crítico que pone objeciones a la creación, que no acepta nada sin cuestionarlo, ejerciendo así su libertad, y arrastra a otros, acuciándolos a no darse tampoco por satisfechos, para que imiten a Dios creando a su vez con aquello que Este ha puesto a su disposición en la naturaleza. Ni siquiera podría contentarlo la Eternidad utópica absoluta, alcanzada por todos tras un largo periplo en la dimensión sujeta al tiempo. El Eterno solo consigue su propósito tras prometerle que, si así lo deseara Mefistófeles, se avendría a crear otro universo en el que este último podría volver a desem-

<sup>5</sup> El texto de la traducción sigue el de la primera edición: Arturo Graf, «L'assunzione di Mefistofele», *La morte di Fausto; L'assunzione di Mefistofele*, Roma, Nuova Antologia, 1913, pp. 13-22.



## Nuevas escrituras sobre el Dios y el Diablo: seis ficciones teológicas dualistas

peñar su papel de crítico. A su vez, esto plantea el interrogante del origen de nuestro mundo. ¿Acaso apareció también por petición de Mefistófeles, para que este no se aburriera? O, más bien, para que no se aburriera el Eterno mismo, como sugiere su ingenioso interlocutor. La labor creadora aparece como un proceso análogo al de la ficción, y Mefistófeles es el crítico que la disfruta, pero que también la analiza y cuestiona. Tal crítica estimula a intentar superarse en la dimensión terrenal y, una vez alcanzada la cima, sirve de acicate para otros ascensos, en el marco de un universo cíclico que podría sustituir al lineal de la Teología ortodoxa.

El original dualismo de Graf atribuye al Diablo un cometido de cocreador en la práctica. Dios acaba convenciéndolo para que acceda a la Eternidad y esta alcance su completitud, pero se ha abierto la perspectiva de que el Dios acabe también convencido por Mefistófeles para que la Eternidad vuelva a ser creadora, negándose a sí misma a través del tiempo y el cambio. Así se sugiere, además, que la Eternidad no es tan perfecta como declaran los coros angélicos citados en la obra, cuyo discurso conformista y beato parece dar la razón a Mefistófeles cuando se niega a entrar por temor a aburrirse. Las condiciones que pone para seguir la recomendación del Dios hacen pensar que el dualismo aparentemente superado mediante la entrada del Diablo en el cielo bien podría continuar allí dentro, de modo que se quebraría de nuevo la Eternidad, volviéndola de nuevo fecunda. La ironía negadora de Mefistófeles complementa la creación y la hace posible, en el pasado y en el futuro, aunque todo dependa al fin y al cabo de la suprema libertad que el amor del Dios como sumo Artífice le reconoce a él y a todos los demás. Aunque su labor y su obra sean objeto de la ironía mefistofélica, Graf abraza un concepto or-

todoxo de divinidad como sumo Bien, sin que ello dé lugar al tradicional maniqueísmo moral. Al adoptar una mirada esencialmente estética, el juicio ético pasa a un segundo plano, al igual que ocurría en la génesis dualista y laica de Vivien. La lucha entre el Bien y el Mal ha dejado de ser pertinente. Lo que importa es la creación misma y su cariz.

Esta evolución esteticista de la teoficción convive con visiones de la creación que, al igual que en el caso de Guimerà, siguen planteando la espinosa cuestión de la responsabilidad divina. Uno de los acercamientos literarios más interesantes a esta cuestión es un breve texto del lírico rumano Ion Pillat (1891-1945), que los críticos suelen considerar un poema en prosa, si bien su narratividad esencial y su final sintético y sorprendente acercan más bien a un género bastante en boga en las últimas décadas, el microrrelato. Se trata de «Oglinda» [*El espejo*], que vio la luz en la revista *Gândirea* [El Pensamiento] en diciembre de 1922<sup>6</sup>. A diferencia de Guimerà y Vivien, Pillat sigue el esquema de la creación según la mitología hebrea, ya que Dios produce el universo en siete días. Sin embargo, tampoco se puede afirmar que el texto sea una reescritura mitográfica, porque los demás detalles son originales y obedecen a un simbolismo estético y teológico a la vez, del que no está ausente el misterio. La creación se realiza a lo largo de siglos, con lo que la indicación de los siete días sería simbólica, pero la vida surge de golpe el domingo del divino descanso, que se extiende a lo largo de generaciones enteras. Estas contradic-

<sup>6</sup> La traducción de abajo se basa en la edición crítica: Ion Pillat, «Oglinda», *Poezii 1906-1918*, 1, studiu introductiv de Adrian Anghelescu, ediție îngrijită, tabel cronologic, note, tabele sinoptice și postfața de Cornelia Pillat, București, Eminescu, 1983, p. 454.



## Nuevas escrituras sobre el Dios y el Diablo: seis ficciones teológicas dualistas

ciones, sin duda voluntarias, sugieren que todo lo contado se desarrolla en una dimensión temporal y espacial abstracta, en la que lo esencial no es la lógica de la sucesión, sino el significado de unos sucesos que, desde el punto de vista de la eternidad como dimensión, no están sujetos a las leyes cronológicas de la narratividad terrenal, a las que sí suele obedecer la ficción mitográfica. En efecto, «Oglinda» se compone de símbolos, no de mitemas. Entre ellos, el culminante es el de la sombra diabólica que se levanta ante la luz creadora divina y le regala un espejo. Este acto, que se define como el primer y único acto de rebelión de Satán, es profundamente enigmático. Tal vez no hará falta que Satán vuelva a enfrentarse con el Creador, porque su cometido habría terminado al declararle simbólicamente, mediante el espejo, que todo lo creado es responsabilidad suya, que nada hay que pueda atribuirse a un principio maligno ajeno a él: también son obra suya las pasiones humanas que se estrellan en su trono, causando sufrimiento y muerte. O quizá la imagen que ve reflejada el Dios en el espejo es tan insoportable que la primera rebelión es la última, porque tal acto es la razón del triunfo definitivo de Satán, que ha anulado de esta manera al Dios. Esta y otras posibles respuestas son igualmente plausibles a la hora de encontrar un sentido a este breve y denso relato, en el que la exuberancia retórica no diluye la sugestión, sino que la intensifica. Por ejemplo, Pillat retuerce el orden sintáctico en la última frase para que el espejo aparezca como la última palabra del texto, de modo que tal objeto asuma un protagonismo presencial que se impone, sustituyéndolo, al del propio Creador. Como símbolo, el espejo es polisémico, pero nos inclinamos a creer que significa la demostración suprema de la relación de identidad entre Dios y sus actos, y concre-

tamente de la creación. Satán no necesita asumir la responsabilidad del Mal, porque el espejo indica quién es el verdadero culpable. Con todo, Pillat no despeja las dudas. Su parábola, como las kafkianas, deja intacto el misterio. Rara vez ha alcanzado la teoficción un grado tal de indefinición sugestiva mediante una escritura simbolista radical en un microrrelato sin apenas parangón en Europa, fuera de los del propio Franz Kafka.

El carácter excepcional de «Oglinda» es mayor, si cabe, dentro de la teoficción, cuyo carácter especulativo suele hacer de la confrontación de conceptos el motor de la ficción. En el marco de un planteamiento dualista, esto se traduce a menudo en una disposición antitética de la trama, según un esquema de acción y reacción. Este esquema, que sigue magistralmente aquel microrrelato de Pillat, lo siguió de forma sistemática el brasileño Humberto de Campos (1886-1934) en un cuento, titulado «Os dois inventos» [*Los dos inventos*] y recogido en *Lagartas e libélulas* [*Lagartas y libélulas*] (1933)<sup>7</sup>. Los dos inventos del título se revelan al final como la culminación de una rivalidad entre dos creadores-artistas en una época mítica de nuestro mundo, cuando lo poblaban grandes entidades divinas. Esta ambientación es más bien épico-fantástica, pues es análoga al ambiente en que se mueven entes parecidos en las construcciones mitopoéticas de Lord Dunsany o J. R. R. Tolkien, pero Campos no desarrolla un panteón que pudiera dar lugar a aventuras teomáquicas. Se centra en un único par de dioses empeñados en superarse el uno al otro por la originalidad de sus creaciones, siguiendo

<sup>7</sup> La traducción castellana de este cuento se basa en la edición siguiente: Humberto de Campos, «Os dois inventos», *Lagartas e libélulas*, Rio de Janeiro – São Paulo – Porto Alegre, W. M. Jackson Inc., 1954, pp. 43-48.



## Nuevas escrituras sobre el Dios y el Diablo: seis ficciones teológicas dualistas

criterios estéticos aún más marcados que el par creador de Vivien, por ejemplo. Aunque Campos evita el maniqueísmo moral apriorístico, la relación entre ambos tiende, en mayor medida que en «La Genèse profane», a la explotación de las connotaciones positivas o negativas de las realidades naturales desde el punto de vista de los humanos, de manera que uno de los creadores prefiere hacer surgir seres y cosas que solemos ver como positivas, como las abejas, mientras que el otro opone a estas creaciones otras que solemos considerar negativas, como las moscas. Esta dinámica abarca toda clase de fenómenos, plantas y animales, en un proceso que la pericia estilística del autor libra de la mera enumeración gracias a la variedad de las imágenes y al ritmo de su prosa.

El curso de las creaciones no procede en un orden ascendente, pero su acumulación misma en pares de equivalente valor exacerba la rivalidad entre los artífices hasta que ambos, por separado, conciben sendas creaciones supremas que les den la victoria ante el jurado de las propias criaturas, hombres y dioses menores. En primer lugar, la expresiva descripción del prodigio sugiere la plenitud del primer invento, cuyos efectos beatíficos se extienden a todo el planeta. Poco después, el otro creador desvela el suyo, cuya violencia da lugar a la matanza, el asesinato y, en suma, a una situación terrenal que hace huir a los propios dioses, incluidos tal vez los dos creadores, dejando la Tierra tal y como la vemos poblada hoy. Así acaba el proceso creativo de los dos entes supremos, cuya identidad teológica revela el último párrafo, a la vez que el nombre de sus dos inventos: el positivo, que es el Amor, y el negativo, que es su contrario y que los sagaces lectores podrán fácilmente adivinar. No se trata ni del Odio ni del Mal, conceptos que, por

encontrarse al mismo nivel que el Amor o el Bien, sugerirían más bien un equilibrio. Ente más inventivo, el Diablo crea otra cosa con mucha mayor potencia destructiva y ante la que el amor y la concordia nunca han podido hacer gran cosa, como demuestra la historia pasada, presente y, es de temer, futura, al menos hasta que se haga realidad el voto borgiano de que algún día merezcamos no tener gobiernos. Aunque el narrador no lo afirma expresamente, no parece que el Dios sea el ganador en esta contienda artística. Tampoco parece que su triunfo haya tenido ni pueda tener consecuencias positivas, a diferencia de lo que ocurre en la rivalidad presentada por Vivien, en la que la mujer es también una creación satánica, pero que sirve para concebir optimísticamente un nuevo equilibrio. Campos abraza una teología pesimista acorde con nuestro mundo natural y social, que poco tiene de paradisiaco.

Este dualismo pesimista no predomina únicamente entre autores laicos dudosos del triunfo del Dios. Aunque no se atreva a extender la victoria de Satán a todo el universo, el pastor protestante y máximo escritor surselvano Gian Fontana (1897-1935) dibuja en «Buntad» [*Bondad*]<sup>8</sup> un panorama en que el Diablo consigue enmendar la plana al Dios hasta el punto de que el poder divino queda fuertemente limitado en la Tierra. La elección del género del poema en prosa para presentar ficcionalmente una hipótesis pesimista sobre la relación entre la divinidad suprema del cristianismo y su oponente satánico parece desempeñar la función de particularizar esa relación en el seno de un individuo, con un enfoque aparentemente lírico. Se trata-

<sup>8</sup> La traducción se basa en la edición siguiente: Gian Fontana, «Buntad», *Poesias; Dramas; Novellas; Skizzas*, Cuera, Union Romontscha Renana, 1971, pp. 433-434.



## Nuevas escrituras sobre el Dios y el Diablo: seis ficciones teológicas dualistas

ría de limitar la lucha entre el Bien y el Mal a una única conciencia humana representativa, la cual elige libremente no coger la simbólica flor de la bondad cuando esta se le ofrece. Sin embargo, la peripecia del yo lírico innominado adquiere un valor universal más allá del ejemplo personal de una frustrada aventura amorosa que se narra a modo de botón de muestra. La bondad se presenta como una flor que clama sin que nadie la escuche ni la coja, pues el protagonista no hace más que lo que hacen todos los demás seres humanos, lo que sugiere una predestinación negativa de toda la humanidad que exacerba la posición calvinista. Este comportamiento confirma lo que al principio del poema se había dado a entender mediante una parábola teoficticia que aporta su mayor contenido ficcional al poema. Según la misma, el Dios habría mandado desde su Eternidad a la Tierra la semilla de una planta para que la llenase de alegría y color. La bondad brotó y creció así, pero el Diablo arrojó su propia simiente y esta creció de manera más rápida y vigorosa, envolviendo a la bondad e impidiéndole florecer. Con ello se sugiere que una creación diabólica tiene más fuerza que la divina, al menos en la Tierra, objeto de la atención distraída y ocasional del Dios por ser simplemente uno más, y no el principal, de los numerosos mundos del universo. Esta concepción teológica va más allá incluso del pesimismo gnóstico, pues Fontana no ofrece esperanza alguna de que la bondad pueda cumplir algún día su destino fijado. Seguirá atrapada por la cizaña en el corazón de los hombres. Esta idea se opone esencialmente a las enseñanzas cristianas más arraiga-

das, por lo que no es de extrañar que Fontana no se atreviera a publicar en vida este poema en prosa en una comarca que entonces era profundamente religiosa al modo tradicional, a lo que hay que añadir que tanto el género discursivo de «Buntad» como su escritura de aire simbolista eran artísticamente inusitadas en su tiempo y cultura nacionales. Seguramente por todo ello, solo se publicaría en 1971, muchos años después de la muerte del autor, en la colección de sus *Obras* [Obras], aunque sin mención paratextual alguna que nos informe del momento y las circunstancias de la escritura de un texto que puede considerarse sintomático de la amplia difusión moderna de la idea de impotencia o incluso «muerte del Dios», al menos entre los escritores influidos por los movimientos estéticos e intelectuales, decadentes en sentido lato, desde la segunda mitad del siglo XIX. Esta atmósfera, en la que se desarrolló la fantasía zaratustriana y antiteológica de Friedrich Nietzsche, favoreció la eclosión de teoficciones como especulaciones teológicas originales, en general heréticas, incluso entre escritores creyentes, bajo el manto protector de la literatura. Siempre cabría aducir que esto no es Teología, sino arte, tal y como demuestra el exquisito cuidado literario que presentan los ejemplos teoficticios considerados. Sin embargo, no es menos cierto que las ideas expuestas o sugeridas por medios literarios demuestran que la Teología puede inspirar especulaciones al menos tan atrevidas y apasionantes como las ciencias que aportan las premisas en que se basan otros tipos más reconocidos de ficción de la «imaginación razonada».

Àngel Guimerà

## Creación

Si en el horno sopla el Tiempo, en el yunque es Dios quien forja; forma mundos a mazazos; nunca descansa.

Salta el fuego chisporroteando, y las chispas son todas almas que van naciendo y a Dios se vuelven.

Ellas le dicen:

—Señor, ¿qué te hemos hecho para que

nos des vida? ¡Haznos regresar a la nada!  
¡Dios, escúchanos!

Y Dios, que las escucha mientras continúa su obra, las transforma en peces, bestias y pájaros.

Pero el Diablo, callado, se pone detrás de él y, tomándole las que puede, las convierte en hombres.

Renée Vivien

## La génesis profana

I. — Antes del nacimiento del Universo existían dos principios eternos, Jehová y Satán.

II. — Jehová encarnaba la Fuerza; Satán, la Astucia.

III. — Ahora bien, los dos grandes principios se profesaban un odio profundo.

IV. — En aquel tiempo reinaba el Caos.

V. — Dijo Jehová: «Haya luz», y hubo luz.

VI. — Y Satán creó el misterio de la noche.

VII. — Jehová sopló sobre la inmensidad y su aliento hizo nacer el Cielo.

VIII. — Satán cubrió el implacable firmamento con la gracia huidiza de las nubes.

IX. — De las manos laboriosas de Jehová surgió la primavera.

X. — Satán soñó la melancolía del otoño.

XI. — Jehová concibió las formas robustas o esbeltas de los animales.

XII. — Bajo la furtiva sonrisa de Satán brotaron las flores.

XIII. — Jehová modeló el barro. Y del barro hizo el hombre.

XIV. — De la esencia misma de esta carne floreció, idealizada, la carne de la Mujer, obra de Satán.

XV. — Jehová dobló al hombre y a la mujer bajo la violencia y la opresión.

XVI. — Satán les enseñó la sutileza aguda de la caricia.

XVII. — Jehová formó con su aliento el alma de un Poeta.

XVIII. — Él inspiró al Aedo de Jonia, al potente Homero.

XIX. — Homero celebró la magnificencia de la matanza y la gloria de la sangre vertida, la ruina de las ciudades, los sollozos de las viudas, las llamas devastadoras, el centelleo de las espadas y el choque de los combates.

XX. — Satán se inclinó, hacia poniente, sobre el reposo de Safo, la de Lesbos.

XXI. — Y ella cantó las formas fugitivas del amor, las palideces y los éxtasis, el magnífico desenrollamiento de las cabelleras, el ardiente perfume de las rosas, el arcoíris, trono de Afrodita, la amargura y la dulzura de Eros, las danzas sagradas de las mujeres de Creta en torno al altar iluminado por las estrellas, el sueño solitario mientras se hunden en la noche la luna y las Pléyades, el inmortal orgullo que desprecia el dolor y sonrío en la muerte, y el encanto de los besos femeninos al ritmo del flujo apagado del mar que expira bajo los muros voluptuosos de Mitilene.

Arturo Graf

## La ascunción de Mefistófeles

*Ha concluido la historia del género humano. Se han cumplido los tiempos. Lo que antes se llamaba el mundo ya no existe. Cuantos vivieron la vida terrena, tanto los réprobos como los santos, quienes esperaron y quienes desesperaron, todos ellos han sido acogidos, tras las pruebas y castigos, en la paz y el gozo de los cielos. El único y último que queda aún fuera es Mefistófeles, que aparece erguido sobre una nube, delante de la puerta abierta de par en par, de la que irrumpe un torrente de luz y fluye dulzura inefable de espirituales armonías.*

CORO DE VOCES ANGÉLICAS.—¡Oh, mar sin orillas, mar de vida! Quien vivió revive en la onda infinita. Redimido, el infierno se elevó a la paz; desaparecido lo fugaz, triunfa lo eterno.

MEFISTÓFELES.—¡Bien, de verdad! Buenas voces. Buena música. Seguro... Todos juntos... Aunque algo vieja. Si no, buena. En lo que toca a la letra... Parece que están todos muy contentos allí dentro. En cambio, yo, suspendido en el vacío, en este vacío absurdo, estúpido, ruin e interminable, yo aquí me aburro muy terriblemente, muy vulgarmente... (*Bosteza con fuerza.*) ¡Perdón! Puesto que donde ya no hay nada... (*Estornuda.*) ¡Salud! — Hace un poco de frío en estas alturas.

VOZ DE DENTRO.—¿Quién está delante de esa puerta?

MEFISTÓFELES.—¡El único que sigue fuera!

VOZ DE DENTRO.—¿Qué buscas?

MEFISTÓFELES.—¿Yo? Nada. ¿Y qué podría buscar en la nada? Voy así zanganando sin objeto, entre los que fueron antaño los cuatro puntos cardinales. Bien... ¡Claro!... Me gustaría, si fuera posible, parlotear un poco con el Padre

Eterno. Más de una vez en el pasado se dignó el Padre Eterno conversar conmigo.

VOZ DE DENTRO.—Transmitiré el mensaje.

MEFISTÓFELES.—Si no molesto. Ah, este vacío, este infame vacío en el que ya no hay nada que hacer ni que deshacer, y (aparte de esta puerta, esta prohibida, abierta de par en par, ilógica, pleonástica puerta metafórica) tampoco nada que ver. ¡Uh, qué desdicha! (*Bosteza con fuerza.*) ¡Perdón! Alguien se acerca.

EL ETERNO (*sin mostrarse*).—¿Otra vez aquí?

MEFISTÓFELES.—Señor, os saludo.

EL ETERNO.—La paz sea contigo.

MEFISTÓFELES.—Tengo hasta demasiada. O sea, como tengo demasiada, no la tengo en absoluto. Tal vez me explico mal.

EL ETERNO.—¿Quieres hablarme?

MEFISTÓFELES.—Si place a vuestra bondad.

EL ETERNO.—Pues hálame.

MEFISTÓFELES.—Hace mucho tiempo que dejé de oír vuestra voz.

EL ETERNO.—Ahora la oyes.

MEFISTÓFELES.—¡Gracias!

EL ETERNO.—¿Qué deseas decirme?

MEFISTÓFELES.—Esa es la cosa. Pues... ¡que me aburro...!

EL ETERNO.—¿Te aburres? ¿Por qué?

MEFISTÓFELES.—Ese vacío...

EL ETERNO.—Tú antes censurabas lo lleno; ahora repruebas lo vacío. Nunca estás satisfecho.

MEFISTÓFELES.—Y, ¿cómo podría estarlo si lo vacío es peor (perdonad) que lo lleno? Si la Naturaleza odia el vacío, ¡cuánto no lo hará más el espíritu...!

EL ETERNO.—¿Crees que hay vacío?

MEFISTÓFELES.—Yo, ya sabéis, no puedo estar mano sobre mano. Detesto el ocio. Siempre necesito correr, atarearme,



## Nuevas escrituras sobre el Dios y el Diablo: seis ficciones teológicas dualistas

entrar, salir, poner, quitar, revolver, en suma, hacer algo.

EL ETERNO.—Pues hazlo.

MEFISTÓFELES.—¿Qué debo hacer si ya no hay mundo?

EL ETERNO.—¿Lo has deshecho tú?

MEFISTÓFELES.—¡Eh, no, yo no! Más bien lo habéis reabsorbido vos.

EL ETERNO.—¿Y no te place? Siempre decías que el mundo era feo, que el mundo era malo y sin sentido.

MEFISTÓFELES.—Pero era divertido al fin y al cabo, y daba trabajo a quien tuviese ganas.

EL ETERNO.—¿Lo añoras?

MEFISTÓFELES.—Me aburro.

EL ETERNO.—¿No te bastas a ti mismo?

MEFISTÓFELES.—Sí... No... Me basto y no me basto. ¿U os bastabais a vos mismo quizá cuando (supongo), cansado de estar solo, os pusisteis a crear el mundo?

EL ETERNO.—Bueno.

MEFISTÓFELES.—Perdonad si hablo con alguna libertad.

EL ETERNO.—Habla como te parezca.

MEFISTÓFELES.—Pues que me aburro.

EL ETERNO.—Mal.

MEFISTÓFELES.—Me aburro mucho.

EL ETERNO.—Y tú, ¿por qué no creas otro mundo?

MEFISTÓFELES.—Ahí es donde duele. Yo puedo imaginar mundos infinitos, dotarlos idealmente de todos los bienes, fingiendo todo en mi pensamiento; también soy capaz de hacer y deshacer no pocas cosas, y aún más de moverlas, en los mundos que ya existen, pero no podría crear ni uno solo.

EL ETERNO.—Sin embargo, la nube que te sostiene es creación tuya.

MEFISTÓFELES.—Justamente. Esta nube... Una nube.

EL ETERNO.—Algo es.

MEFISTÓFELES.—No soy quién para meterme en vuestra cabeza, pero ¿no podría ser que desearais aún crear algo?

EL ETERNO.—Se podría pensar.

MEFISTÓFELES.—Bueno... Pero, mientras tanto, me siento demasiado solo... desocupado...

EL ETERNO.—Y, ¿por qué no vienes con nosotros? ¡Tienes la puerta delante!

MEFISTÓFELES.—Es verdad. La tengo delante, pero es la misma puerta de la que me echaron hace, como poco, cinco o seis mil siglos.

EL ETERNO.—Echado, no.

MEFISTÓFELES.—¿No?

EL ETERNO.—Tú solo te fuiste.

MEFISTÓFELES.—¡Ah, mira! Quizá me falla la memoria. Tantos sucesos y trastornos, y tanto tiempo... Se confunde uno. Bueno. Y ahora, ¿qué se hace ahí dentro?

EL ETERNO.—Ven y verás.

CORO DE VOCES ANGÉLICAS.—Aplacadas las rivalidades, compuestas las disensiones, aparece el término de la justa compensación. Sobre el falso error, sobre el loco pecado triunfa el Amor, deleitoso deleite.

MEFISTÓFELES (*entre amostazado e irónico*).—¡El Amor! ¡Ya! ¡Siempre el Amor! El problema es que no puedo amar.

EL ETERNO.—No te calumnies. Quien, deseoso de crear, se aflige por no poder hacerlo esconde en su seno la semilla del amor, ya ama.

MEFISTÓFELES.—Pensamiento digno de vos. Sin embargo...

EL ETERNO.—¿Qué quieres decir?

MEFISTÓFELES.—Nada. No importa.

EL ETERNO.—¿Te acuerdas de Margarita?

MEFISTÓFELES.—¿Margarita? ¿Cuál? Ha habido tantas. Una en cada casa. De verdad, no sabría...

EL ETERNO.—La de Fausto.

MEFISTÓFELES.—¿Aquella? ¡Ah, sí!

EL ETERNO.—Y que un día sentiste piedad de ella.

MEFISTÓFELES.—Nada se os oculta. Es verdad, pero fue por breve tiempo, mejor dicho, tan solo por un fugaz instante.



## Nuevas escrituras sobre el Dios y el Diablo: seis ficciones teológicas dualistas

EL ETERNO.—No importa. En ese día, en esa hora, en ese instante, tú amaste.

MEFISTÓFELES.—Ella me odiaba, y seguro que me odia todavía.

EL ETERNO.—No te odia, más bien confía en volverte a ver.

MEFISTÓFELES.—¿Volverme a ver?... ¿Y Fausto?

EL ETERNO.—Siempre pregunta por ti. Dice que aprendió mucho en tu escuela, y cuenta todas las atrevidas buenas obras llevadas a cabo con tu guía o tu favor.

MEFISTÓFELES.—¡Gran hombre de bien, ese Fausto! ¡Un hombre completo! Y puedo decir que yo también aprendí bastantes cosas tratándolo. Quise hacerlo condenar, pero cuando se me escapó por fin de las manos, me alegré.

EL ETERNO.—¿Qué te decía? También entonces amaste. Y amas ahora cuando hablas así.

MEFISTÓFELES.—Me sorprende a mí mismo.

EL ETERNO.—No puedo el espíritu no amar, aunque varíen el objeto y el modo.

MEFISTÓFELES.—Sois un gran psicólogo.

EL ETERNO.—Hay otros muchos que esperan verte. Todos incluso.

MEFISTÓFELES.—Me honran demasiado. Y casi estoy tentado... Pero si luego...

EL ETERNO.—Si luego, ¿qué?

MEFISTÓFELES.—Si también me aburro ahí.

EL ETERNO.—¡Y dale! Un bello espíritu como el tuyo no se debe aburrir.

MEFISTÓFELES.—Si puedo entretenerme con vos sin ceremonias, no me aburro seguro.

EL ETERNO.—¡Por fin!

MEFISTÓFELES.—¿Y podré criticar?

EL ETERNO.—Si te entra en gana. ¿Crees que me desagradan las críticas? También me rinden servicio.

MEFISTÓFELES.—¿Expresar mi opinión con libertad?

EL ETERNO.—Seguro.

MEFISTÓFELES.—¿Quedarme, ir, venir?

EL ETERNO.—A tu gusto.

MEFISTÓFELES.—Sois un gran tentador y casi, casi... ¿Pero si, digamos, quisiera irme otra vez?

EL ETERNO.—Te irás.

MEFISTÓFELES.—¿También con otros si, supongamos, quisieran seguirme?

EL ETERNO.—También con otros si quieren seguirte.

MEFISTÓFELES (*tras un breve silencio*).—¿No seré prisionero, pase lo que pase?

EL ETERNO.—No hay prisión.

MEFISTÓFELES (*como antes*).—¿No se cerrará esta puerta detrás de mis pasos?

EL ETERNO.—No se cerrará puerta alguna detrás de tus pasos.

MEFISTÓFELES (*tras un silencio algo más largo*).—¿Y si luego, pongamos por caso, desearais crear un nuevo mundo?

EL ETERNO.—Crítico eterno, te llamaría a formar parte de mi plan.

(*Silencio. Mefistófeles que, durante las últimas réplicas, se había mostrado más turbado e indeciso que antes, da un paso; se detiene; da nuevos pasos; se detiene en el umbral; se vuelve; se encoge de hombros; entra*).

CORO DE VOCES ANGÉLICAS.—En el vasto torbellino de la única esencia se aquietan las disputas, se desvanecen los pareceres. Incólume y puro, quien vivió revive en el mar sin orillas, en el mar sin fondo.

Ion Pillat

## El espejo

Y volaron miles de siglos como vuelan los instantes y, el séptimo día, el Señor descansó satisfecho, porque la mente eterna había creado los mundos y el ser humano.

El cielo se agitó, los mares se estremecieron, el barro retembló y la vida, de repente y en todas partes, siempre vencida y triunfante, estalló, empujando sus gene-

raciones inacabables, arrollándolas y aplastándolas en espuma de pasiones contra el trono de plata de la divinidad.

Entonces, como una sombra gigantesca en la luz de la mañana dominical, desafiando por primera y última vez a Dios, Satán surgió triunfante, en la mano el espejo.

Humberto de Campos

## Los dos inventos

En una época remota del mundo, cuando la tierra aún permanecía bajo el dominio exclusivo de grandes entidades, que serían los dioses de los hombres, había entre ellas dos artistas que se disputaban la admiración universal por lo maravilloso de las obras que concebían. Igual que hoy, entre los mortales, hay concursos de pintura, de escultura, de literatura, para comprobar quién pinta el cuadro más perfecto, esculpe la estatua más armoniosa o escribe el más hermoso poema, procuraban aquellos poderosos señores de la vida primitiva imponerse mediante creaciones concretas o abstractas que se convirtieran, tras desaparecer ellos, en el encanto o el tormento de la Humanidad. Si uno de esos gigantes, fundiendo la plata, cincelaba un disco y, lanzándolo al cielo inmenso, ofrecía a los compañeros la gracia de la luna llena, otro acudía presuroso y, amontonando el oro y fabricando con él un globo enorme y arrojándolo a lo alto, eclipsaba la gloria del primero con el espectáculo radiante del sol.

En esto había dos creadores que procuraban permanentemente superarse el uno al otro mediante la maravilla de sus invenciones. Si uno modelaba la palmera, esbelta y larga, y le abría en la cima el puñado alegre de las palmas verdes, el otro, no menos imaginativo, fabricaba el espino, todo lleno de pequeños alfileres, en medio de los cuales se abría una flor blanca, que moría perfumando la noche, porque nadie la podía coger. Cuando uno inventaba la abeja y la llenaba de miel, el otro lanzaba al aire un puñado de moscas, que poblaban el silencio con sus zumbidos y en cuyas alas diminutas había reproducido, en un milagro de miniatura, todos los colores del arcoíris. Y la tierra se iba llenando y poblando de ese modo, trans-

formándose, de desierto donde vivían sin gusto los dioses, en vasto depósito de arte, con sus plantas, sus flores, sus insectos, sus reptiles, con las fieras que rugen en las selvas y los peces que centellean en las olas. Si uno recortaba el pétalo y, ajustándolo, hacía la rosa, el otro tomaba uno de los pétalos y, soplándolo al aire, hacía la mariposa. Cuando el primero inventó las piedras preciosas, el otro cogió un puñado de esas piedras de colores, las mezcló e hizo el colibrí. Cuando uno inventó el Hombre, el otro, al día siguiente, lo venció modelando la Mujer. Para destruir la gloria de quien inventó el fuego, inventó el otro el agua, que lo domina. Y apenas había inventado uno el río con su corriente mansa y suave, el otro ideó el océano de aguas inmensas, que el primero, lanzando la sal, devaluó y corrompió. Y el mundo se iba llenando de cosas nuevas, que los dioses iban recogiendo y repartiendo. El día en que uno inventó el ensueño para el sueño, el otro, el rival, lo perfeccionó e hizo la imaginación, para los despiertos.

Poco a poco, esta emulación iba adornando el mundo, poblándolo de cosas buenas y malas. Y las cosas recién creadas se animaban, participando en el entusiasmo universal por la victoria de uno u otro de los contendientes. Los vientos aullaban o cantaban abrazándose a las frondas y bailando con ellas en medio de los campos. Y los árboles, asaltados por ellos, los repelían, moviendo los brazos vestidos de follaje, como ninfas atrapadas por los sátiros que desgarraran el velo en su ansia por librarse de aquellas caricias locas.

Sin embargo, las rivalidades son semilla de enemistades. Un buen día, uno de los artistas geniales empezó a sentir dentro de sí mismo el odio, la rebelión, el despecho de los vencidos. Alma envenenada,



## Nuevas escrituras sobre el Dios y el Diablo: seis ficciones teológicas dualistas

imaginó, en el silencio del corazón herido, que arrojaba al mundo una creación nueva que, por lo imprevisto de su finalidad, alarmara a los dioses y, al indisponer a los concurrentes, pusiera término de una vez a la contienda inacabable. Mientras tanto, el otro imaginaba una invención igualmente asombrosa, pero que, al ser ofrecida a la admiración y el gozo de los hombres, fuera motivo de una gran fiesta en toda la tierra. Y ambos se pusieron a componer y perfeccionar su creación.

Una tarde, finalmente, los hombres, los dioses y las fieras notaron de súbito, en el espacio, una emanación nueva, un efluvio celeste, algo imponderable, que era como un vino que embriagase el alma. Al percibirlo, los gigantes primitivos y los hombres, hijos de los dioses, y las fieras de los bosques, y las aves del cielo, se quedaron atónitos, como si acabara de producirse un prodigio que los hubiera cambiado de repente. La primera ave subió a una rama y gorjeó. Los jaguares, saliendo a la boca de las cuevas, sintieron la dulzura de la noche de luna y soltaron el primer rugido conmovido, llamando a las compañeras distantes. La primera mujer sintió la primera lágrima sin motivo y, en la rosa de la boca, el perfume del primer beso sin dueño. Los vientos sacudían las frondas verdes y no había mariposa alguna que no se levantase

embriagada, comprendiendo la luz del sol y la alegría de la vida.

La tarde que sucedió a aquella en que uno de los genios rivales lanzó al mundo su nueva creación, el otro surgió en el otro extremo de la tierra, con su invento correspondiente. Y, enseguida, todo cambió en el planeta alarmado. Dioses, hombres y cosas sintieron repentinamente que acaba de ocurrir alguna desgracia que ponía en peligro el destino del universo. Los lobos, que dormían en los rediles al lado de los rebaños, devoraron las primeras ovejas. Los milanos se lanzaron contra las tórtolas que arrullaban enamoradas cerca de los primeros nidos y huyeron con ellas en las garras ensangrentadas. Los leones afilaron los dientes y no hubo animal fuerte que, experimentando su fuerza, no se lanzase contra el más débil. Los dioses, inquietos, cogieron las alas olvidadas y abandonaron la tierra. Y fue entonces cuando el hombre, crujiendo los dientes y recogiendo del suelo el primer trozo de pedernal, marchó contra otro hombre y, sin que le temblaran los dedos, hundió la primera hoja en el pecho de su hermano.

Terminaba la lucha entre los dos inventores y, con ella, la tarea de la Creación. Dios había creado el Amor. Y el Diablo, para inutilizarle la obra, había inventado la Política.

Gian Fontana

## Bondad

En lo alto de la montaña desnuda estaba el Señor y dejaba volar su mirada por lo eterno. Los mundos seguían su órbita en torno a él, cada uno por su camino. Y en medio rodaba la pequeña Tierra, intimidada por las potencias gigantescas del espíritu universal. Estaba vacía, desnudas y frías sus costas. Entonces llama el Señor a su servidor y dice con voz llena de misericordia:

—Es triste allá abajo. Me ha quedado aún la semilla de una flor. Cógela, baja y siébrala, y bendice el suelo para que la flor crezca y se multiplique. Cuídala bien, porque es la bondad que debe hacer que unos se ayuden a otros con mirada risueña, para que las horas penosas se vuelvan radiantes. Es la bondad la que debe hacer florecer cada rincón en el viento primaveral, la que debe hacer sentir alegría y belleza a cada corazón, para que la tierra y la vida sean mi casa.

Y el ángel va. El Todopoderoso lanza luz beatífica sobre las cumbres y las llanuras.

Y de la semilla brota una fina planta y crece hacia el sol. Ya se desarrollan las yemas, pronto se abren y la flor misteriosa bendice y alegra la tierra con su perfume.

En ese momento va el maligno por su camino. Ve la flor en su creyente esperanza y ríe de forma diabólica. Arroja su semente sobre el campo y esta crece con fuerza ardiente, se enrosca en la bondad y absorbe la fuerza de su meollo. Las yemas suspiran y no pueden abrirse, y la cizaña triunfa.

¡Bondad! Una tarde fui a los campos. Una hermosa muchacha me acompañaba. Ella habla con tanta dulzura y yo le entrego mi fe y confianza, y mi corazón, que tiembla de alegría, porque es tan guapa y buena. La bondad me acompaña, pobre peregrino. Y cuando le he entregado todo, todo mi interior, ella ríe y vuelve.

Era tarde por la noche; caminaba deprimido, triste y con ideas de desesperación bajo el aire pesado y penoso. Entonces observé, en el musgo bajo la nieve, una discreta florecilla con un delicado perfume que dice:

—Quiero estar contigo, cógeme antes de que me marchite también; cógeme, porque es de noche y no hay nadie que mire.

Llora y pide ayuda y bondad también por mi parte.

Pero pasé de largo como todos los hombres y nunca más he hallado la bondad.



Hélice: Reflexiones Críticas sobre Ficción Especulativa

[www.revistahelice.com](http://www.revistahelice.com)

ISSN: 1887-2905

