

# Hélice 33

Volumen 8, n.º 2

Este número está dedicado a Francisco Arellano (1953-2022), insigne editor, traductor, crítico y animador de la ficción especulativa en España, además de amigo inolvidable, *in memoriam* 



**ISSN:** 1887-2905

Revista Hélice: Volumen 8, n.º 2 (otoño-invierno 2022-2023)

Creada originalmente por la Asociación Cultural Xatafi.

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

Corrección, composición, diseño y maquetación: Andrés Massa Holroyd-Doveton.

Diseño original de la revista: Alejandro Moia.

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Webmaster: Ismael Osorio Martín.

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

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## Han colaborado en el presente número

#### Autores

Dominik BAUMGARTNER

Carleton BULKIN

Sofiya FILONENKO

Guillermo GUADARRAMA MENDOZA

Jonathan HAY

Kirsten HUNT

Julia E. KIERNAN

Mariano MARTÍN RODRÍGUEZ

Chris PAK

### **Traductores**

Mariano MARTÍN RODRÍGUEZ

Tony MILEMAN

Álvaro PIÑERO GONZÁLEZ



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## **EDITORIAL**

El gran tema de nuestro tiempo es el cambio climático antropogénico. Gobiernos y múltiples ONG invierten miles de millones de dólares/ euros en convencer a la población de la catástrofe apocalíptica que espera a la humanidad si esta no cambia sus hábitos consumistas. Aunque no todo el mundo cree en tan negras perspectivas, al menos a la vista de lo poco dispuestos que están algunos grandes países de nuestro planeta a subordinar su desarrollo económico a la lucha contra el calentamiento, lo cierto es que la convicción de la llegada inminente de la catástrofe climática mundial tiene todo tipo de repercusiones culturales, al menos en Occidente. Dos miembros de una ONG contra los combustibles fósiles llamada «Just Stop Oil» atacaron hace poco con sopa de tomate un cuadro de Vincent van Gogh, queriendo con ello criticar que se dé más importancia al arte que a la vida, como si ambas cosas fueran contradictorias o incompatibles. Fenómenos como este ilustran la enorme penetración y el éxito de los discursos alarmistas en materia de cambio climático, asunto que inspira hoy sesudas reflexiones y mueve ingentes cantidades de dinero. En este contexto, aquel ataque a un cuadro representando inocentes girasoles no parece ser una performance marginal en el mundo de la cultura. La preocupación climática, que en algunos alcanza la categoría de obsesión, parece estar muy extendida entre quienes reflexionan sobre el futuro. Así es entre quienes lo hacen profesionalmente, esto es, quienes presentan

sus previsiones en forma científica, tales como aquellos que llevan décadas pronosticando la pronta desaparición de las Maldivas bajo las aguas oceánicas, como si de la mítica Atlántida se tratase. Asimismo, las especulaciones ficticias de carácter distópico-apocalíptico, sobre todo en la ciencia ficción constituyen ahora una de las ramas principales de tal clase de literatura y, en consecuencia, también de la exégesis en la materia.

Así se puede observar en este mismo número, cuya sección de Reflexiones es el resultado de una convocatoria sobre un tema teóricamente muy amplio, centrado en los paisajes en la ciencia ficción y la fantasía. Sin embargo, de entre los interesantísimos estudios recibidos (algunos de los cuales esperamos ir publicando en números siguientes), solo uno de los escogidos ahora trata del paisaje en sí mismo en el marco de la ficción. Es el titulado «Delineating Mars: The Geopoetics of the Red Planet in Edgar Rice Burroughs' A Princess of Mars». Su autora, Sofya Filonenko, lo ha escrito en las difíciles circunstancias que está viviendo su país, Ucrania. Como el clima no constituía un motivo de preocupación hegemónico en 1912, cuando se publicó esa novela de Burroughs, naturalmente la estudiosa no lo tiene en cuenta, prefiriendo ligar los paisajes imaginarios de Marte a los intereses de su época, que eran más bien de tipo geopolítico. En consecuencia, es fácil observar rasgos colonialistas y orientalistas en aquel libro, rasgos que Filonenko no juzga

con criterios actuales, sino que contextualiza en la clase de ficción a la que pertenece la obra (planetary romance), al tiempo que acierta a poner de relieve la propia belleza de las fantásticas descripciones hechas por Burroughs.

En otro de los estudios de esta sección temática de Reflexiones, titulado «Visiones of the Future, Farming and Land Use in Welsh Science Fiction», Chris Pak contextualiza ampliamente las narraciones galesas que aborda como ejemplos de anticipaciones ficcionales sobre el porvenir del uso humano de la tierra con fines alimentarios. Los paisajes considerados son en gran parte obra humana. En consecuencia, están sujetos a los condicionamientos sociales de cada época, así como a los intereses de quienes aprovechan en última instancia sus frutos, que no siempre son ni quienes cultivan la tierra, ni los habitantes de la región. De hecho, buena parte de las narraciones descritas y analizadas tanto amplia como profundamente por Pak demuestran, con medios especulativos y una estrecha relación con los métodos de presentación utópicos y, sobre todo, distópicos, que los poderosos de los centros económicos y políticos imperiales suelen imponer su voluntad tanto a las clases subalternas, tales como lo serían los pequeños agricultores propietarios, como a las naciones sometidas, en este caso la galesa, en cuya lengua autóctona están escritas varias de las obras tratadas. Aunque hayan sido traducidas al inglés, la aportación de Pak a una internacionalización real de los estudios de ficción especulativa es, pues, muy de agradecer, lo mismo que la propia originalidad de haber elegido como tema de su estudio de poética del paisaje la agricultura, un sector fundamental, pero normalmente descuidado en las visiones fictocientíficas del porvenir.

Las obras estudiadas en los demás trabajos de la sección de Reflexiones son recientes y todas ellas reflejan, de una manera u otra, la candente actualidad del cambio climático. Por ejemplo, según el artículo de Julia E. Kiernan titulado «Situating Solastalgia within Climate Fiction: Anthropogenic Expansions of Dystopian fiction», un relato publicado en 2019 de Joyce Carol Oates que combina ficción psicológica, observación social y visión pesimista del mundo, en el marco de una ficción que es a la vez distópica y climática, ilustra hermosamente una afección psíquica muy actual, designada con el neologismo *solastalgia*, la cual procede de la angustia vital que produce la percepción de las catástrofes climáticas actuales y futuras.

Otros ejemplos tienen un carácter literariamente más especulativo, tales como las dos novelas analizadas por la escritora neozelandesa Octavia Cade en el artículo «The Impoverished Landscape: titulado Navigating Absence and Ecological Resilience in Speculative fiction», a saber: Locust Girl (2015), de Merlinda Bobis, y Sweet Fruit, Sour Land (2018) de Rebecca Ley. Ambas narraciones son distópicas, ya que su visión es la de un futuro tiránico en el que la reproducción humana es obligatoria y está reglamentada, pese al estado calamitoso de la naturaleza y la consecuente pobreza alimentaria. Sin embargo, no es tanto la polémica sociopolítica la que prima en ellas, sino más bien una imagen de resistencia, a veces rayando en lo fantástico y lo mágico-realista, ligada a una valoración verdaderamente universalista del mundo, que engloba a todos sus habitantes de cualquier especie. La muerte y la opresión, tanto como el potencial de soluciones que se entrevé, son comunes a todos los seres, humanos o no, sujetos a la explotación de los poderosos.

La protagonista de *Locust Girl* es una persona posthumana, fruto de una simbiosis ser humano-animal, pero no deja de ser una excepción. En cambio, es plenamente posthumano el mundo en el que se desarrollan

las tramas de las novelas gráficas estudiadas por Kirsten Hunt en «Posthuman Fiction: The Speculative Landscape of Shaun Tan's Tales from the Inner City & Nnedi Okorafor's LaGuardia». Ambas obras se dirigen a un público adolescente y, aunque su tonalidad es distópica, se observa en ellas que esta moda está poco a poco dando lugar a visiones del futuro algo más esperanzadas, tal vez para no traumatizar aún más a los adolescentes asustados por la perspectiva de la catástrofe climática. Aparte de la propia conveniencia del análisis de aquellas novelas gráficas, este artículo ofrece también una caracterización específica de la ficción de asunto posthumano de acuerdo con ocho útiles criterios de definición. De esta manera, la autora no desdeña un planteamiento teórico relacionado con el estudio de la ficción como tal, de acuerdo con el método narratológico y, en general, filológico.

Este método es el adoptado con rigor por Guillermo Guadarrama Mendoza en «Making Kin in January: An Ecocritical Analysis of Landscapes and Environment in The City in the Middle of the Night». La dimensión ecocrítica de este trabajo radica en la perfecta articulación entre el análisis, por una parte, de los paisajes planetarios de los mundos de aquella novela, cuya relación con las condiciones medioambientales y, como es de esperar, climáticas se explican con rigor, y por otra, de las técnicas narratológicas que el escritor ha utilizado para crear su rico universo ficticio. A este último respecto, Guadarrama Mendoza realiza un detallado y bien fundado análisis estructural de la obra, sostenido por una lectura muy atenta del texto, con numerosas citas. Su base teórica son dos estudios mexicanos poco conocidos en Europa o en la angloesfera, por lo que su uso añade interés al artículo, si bien este destaca ya por sí solo por su extraordinaria solidez filológica, gracias a lo cual no cae tanto en el defecto tan

actual de la ideologización a ultranza aplicada a un ámbito que no le es propio, tratándose aquí de literatura (y de ficción en general) y no de activismo político.

Por supuesto, muchas obras literarias tienen un mensaje e incluso un propósito instrumental. La ficción sobre el cambio climático es buen un ejemplo de ello. Por esta razón, Jonathan Hay, el editor invitado de las Reflexiones de este número, explica bien en su introducción, que puede considerarse un artículo por su contenido, las bases extraliterarias del tema y, al hacerlo, argumenta la validez de las afirmaciones científicas y oficiales sobre el cambio climático. Pero su trabajo no se queda en eso. Su análisis de varias obras importantes de la tradición fabulosa y especulativa, cuyos autores van desde Homero a N. K. Jemisin, arroja luz sobre la importancia del paisaje, tal y como este resulta del clima, a lo largo de la historia de la ciencia ficción y géneros afines, en forma de una breve crónica histórico-filológica de alto interés. No cabe mejor introducción a una sección de Reflexiones tan bien nutrida como la que honra el presente número.

En la sección de Miscelánea, también honra a Hélice, creemos, el amplio y casi exhaustivo panorama histórico de la fantasía épica (high fantasy) literaria europea escrita en lenguas románicas en un período (1838-1938) del que apenas se conoce nada a ese respecto, y menos aún en las lenguas y literaturas objeto de su estudio, entre las que incluso se cuenta una tan minoritaria como el romanche. En esa historia, Mariano Martín Rodríguez aplica su concepto de fantasía épica, cuya teoría propia resume. Esta es tal vez algo estrecha, pero eso no le impide ofrecer un número impresionante e insospechado de títulos de fantasía épica, algunos de los cuales describe con algún grado mayor de detalle. Tampoco se olvida de la fantasía épica propiamente dicha, esto es, la posterior a la obra definitoria de J. R. R. Tolkien, y ofrece un ensayo indirecto de canon, siguiendo criterios literarios más que comerciales. Estos últimos son, por supuesto, también muy respetables y pueden dar lugar a estudios académicos muy rigurosos, tales como el titulado «"Aren't you gonna close her up? and cover all that beautiful machinery?": Critical Transhumanism in *The Book of Boba Fett*», en el que Dominik Baumgartner dilucida ese aspecto de la saga audiovisual de *Star Wars*. El hecho de que no se ajustara a la temática de las Reflexiones es la única razón de que no figure en ellas y lo haga en la de Miscelánea.

En la de Crítica, Mariano Martín Rodríguez saca su lado más fiero para reivindicar la ficción fantástica y sus cultivadores jóvenes en España, completamente marginados por las instituciones culturales del país, al hilo de un libro modélico de Ana Abello Verano sobre la obra de uno de ellos, Juan Jacinto Muñoz Rengel. La reivindicación que ahí realiza del valor intelectual de la ficción especulativa, siguiendo el propio ejemplo de la autora del libro de crítica reseñado, la prosigue en su doble aportación a la sección de Recuperados. La primera es una serie de traducciones de sonetos en lenguas románicas que persiguen demostrar que lirismo y especulación, apocalíptica en este caso, no están reñidas. La segunda es la tercera serie de pares de ficción especulativa panlatina. Como en el número anterior, en esta sección Martín Rodríguez realiza una importante aportación textual a la historia de la literatura. Si en el anterior reveló un interesante texto

rumano de ficción cósmica desconocido en la propia Rumanía, en este ofrece en primicia la traducción y transcripción del manuscrito original, inédito hasta ahora, de una descripción de los habitantes de la Luna hecha con mucha gracia en la segunda mitad del siglo XIX por Maurice Sand, cuya propia obra especulativa no le cede en valor al de la escrita por su famosa madre George.

La publicación de este inédito mundial es una razón más, junto con lo ya descrito arriba, para considerar memorable este número de Hélice. A todo ello se añaden tres traducciones al inglés de otras tantas narraciones breves de mujeres europeas, pertenecientes cada una a uno de los grandes géneros de ficción especulativa. Un cuento en castellano de Emilia Pardo Bazán es un ejemplo de fantasía épica, el de Ángeles Vicente en la misma lengua es fictocientífico y de asunto radicalmente apocalíptico (aunque no intervenga el clima) y, por último, otro checo de Sofie Podlipská ofrece un mundo secundario de índole simbólica en el marco de una ficción influida por algo literariamente tan fantástico como el espiritismo. Todos estos cuentos, y los demás textos traducidos, tienen por objeto ampliar en variedad la conciencia de la verdadera historia de nuestra literaria europea, sin los sesgos de los cánones oficiales. Otro de sus grandes objetivos es merecer los sufragios de nuestros lectores, entreteniéndolos con todo el alto respeto que su intelecto y buen gusto merecen. A ellos confiamos también el aprecio, o no, de este número por entero.





## A Century of High Fantasy in Latin Europe (1838-1938), and Beyond: A Historical Overview<sup>1</sup>

## MARIANO MARTÍN RODRÍGUEZ Independent scholar

Bibliographies, encyclopaedias and literary research by both fans and scholars are increasingly bringing to light the international wealth of science fiction's past and present. The other great branch of speculative fiction, (high) fantasy, has still a long way to go in this regard. In particular, a number of important works published after J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of* 

the Rings (1954-1955) by high fantasists from Europe, and specifically Latin Europe, from Portugal to Romania and from French Belgium to Italy,<sup>2</sup> are virtually ignored abroad, except for a couple of exceptions, namely Vladimir Colin's Romanian *Legendele Țării lui Vam (Legends from Vamland*,<sup>3</sup> 1961), which is an outstanding collection of linked myths and epics from an

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This essay, which I presented at Eurocon in Dudelange (Luxembourg) on April 10th 2022, has been written with a wider readership in mind. It builds on an earlier paper of mine (2020), some parts of which have been recycled here. A wider theoretical discussion on the specific features of high fantasy proper can be found in another paper of mine in Spanish (2022). I warmly thank Sara Martín and Jonathan Hay for having corrected my draft. All remaining errors are my own.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> I consider here works written by Latin European authors published in Latin Europe, not those by Latin Americans published in Latin Europe or by Latin Europeans published only in Latin America or elsewhere. If a particular work has been published earlier out of Europe, the date given here is that of its first European edition.

Titles in italics are of works already published translations into English (in full or in part), according to the bibliographical information that I have found on the Internet. Those in Roman types are of works still to be translated into that language as far as I know. The given date is always that of the earliest publication of the original text that I am aware of, or the (approximate) date of the manuscript if this was posthumously published. Its spelling of which (and of the author's name) is adapted to current rules of its language. I will only mention here titles of works that I have had the opportunity to read and that I broadly consider artistically satisfying. Some could think that too many titles are mentioned. I hope that readers will understand that my point is precisely to demonstrate the outstanding wealth, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, of high fantasy in Latin Europe. Further research could very well bring to light even more, especially in Italian. Moreover, quite a few more titles could be mentioned as well, especially those written in Romance *Kulturdialekte*, most of which I am unable to read, although I am aware of some fine high fantasy stories written by contemporary authors in Galician, such as "O templo" (The Temple, 1958) and "O dique de area" (The Sand Dyke, 1958) by Xosé Luis Méndez Ferrín, as well as in Provençal, such as "Archieu secret dóu Tèmple di tèmple" (Secret Archives of the Temple of Temples, 1970) by Louis Bayle,

imaginary ancient nation, and of Silvana De Mari's fine Italian genre novel L'ultimo elfo (The Last Elf, 2004). Lacking translations into English, other inventive high fantasy novels by mainstream writers such as Mário Braga's O Reino Circular (The Circular Kingdom, 1969), Charles Duits' Ptah-Hotep (Ptah-Hotep, 1971), Miguel Espinosa's Escuela de mandarines (School for Mandarins, 1974), Pau Faner's Potser només la fosca (Maybe Just Darkness, 1979), Jacques Abeille's Les jardin statuaires (The Statuary Gardens, 1982), Rafael Sánchez Ferlosio's El testimonio de Yarfoz (Yarfoz's Testimony, 1986), João Aguiar's O homem sem nome (The Man Without a Name, 1986), Isabelle Hausser's *Célubée* (Celubea, 1986) and Bernardo Cicchetti's Lo specchio di Atlante (Atlas' Mirror, 1991)<sup>4</sup> are not even mentioned in international, or even national surveys of high

fantasy. The same has happened with significant high fantasies published in collections of youth literature such as Jean-François Ménard's L'île du dieu maussade (The Isle of the Sullen God, 1980), Joan Manuel Gisbert's Leyendas del planeta Thámyris (Legends from Planet Thamyris, 1982)5, Nadèjda Garrel's Les princes de l'exil (The Princes of Exile, 1984), Vicent Pascual's L'últim guerrer (The Last Warrior, 1986) and Silvana De Mari's La nuova dinastia (The New Dinasty, 2015).6 It could be argued, however, that contemporary Latin European genre high fantasy has mostly been rather derivative from Anglophone models, especially the Howardian Sword and Sorcery and the Tolkienian mythopoetic kinds of fiction, although there are certainly in Latin Europe some genre novels also written by contemporary older authors<sup>7</sup> that are enjoyable as original

and in Asturian, such as "Pol sendeiru la nueite" (On the Path at Night, 1981) and "L'aniciu de los dioses ya de las cousas" (The Beginning of Gods and Things, 2014) by Roberto González Quevedo.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The languages of these works are, respectively, Portuguese, French, Spanish, Catalan, French, Spanish, Portuguese, French and Italian.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> This book by Gisbert is a collection of short stories. They show that high fantasy short narratives have existed in the last decades despite the overwhelming prevalence of the long novel in that genre. Further significant Latin European examples published after 1954 are "La longueur de temps" (The Length of Time, 1968), "Le ghoum" (The Ghoom, 1968) and "La terrasse du feu roi" (The Terrace of the Late King, 1968) by Albert Dasnoy, "La visite au tombeau de mes ancêtres" (The Visit to My Ancestors' Tomb, 1995), "Les dunes grises" (Grey Dunes, 1995) and "Le Roi" (The King, 1995) by Sylvain Jouty and "Akr Simoul, le très puissant" (Akrum Simul the Very Powerful, 1999) by Robert Duterme in French, "A cidade" (The City, 1968) by José Saramago and "Do Deus memória e notícia" (Report and Information on the God, 1981) by Mário de Carvalho in Portuguese, "Sigue Poeta" (Poet Still, 1969) by Manuel Derqui, "La mujer y el dios" (The Woman and the God, 1971) by José Ángel Valente, "Lem" (Lem, 1979), "Origen de la dinastía reinante" (Origin of the Ruling Dynasty, 1979) and "Nari" (Nari, 2006) by José Elgarresta and "El retorno de Sheherezade" (Scheherazade's Return, 1991) by José Ferrater Mora in Spanish, "Il poeta" (The Poet, 1972) by Juan Rodolfo Wilcock, "Drakar l'eterno" (Drakar the Eternal, 1985) by Luigi Menghini and "La torre" (The Tower, 1990) by Giorgio Prodi in Italian, "La sabata de l'emperador Orfran" (Emperor Orfran's Shoe, 1974) by Xesc Barceló in Catalan, "Felonia" (Felonia, 1981) by Mihail Grămescu, "Căutători de comori din Eldo" (Treasure Hunters from Eldo, 1982) by Mihai Măniuțiu and "Anul în care nu vor veni zangorii" (The Year When the Zangors Will Not Come, 2005) by Liviu Radu in Romanian, and "Ils uors tabuisai" (Tabooed Bears, 2009) by Lothar Deplazes in Romansh. There are also short fictions written as historic and geographic accounts of imaginary ancient cities, such as "La Ciudad Rosa y Roja" (The Pink and Red City, 1980) and "La ciudad incontenible" (The Unstoppable City, 1999) by Carlo Frabetti in Spanish, as well as several of the cities described in the collections of 'urbogonies' Le città invisibili (Invisible Cities, 1972) by Italo Calvino in Italian and Cuadratura cercului (Squaring the Circle, 1975) by Gheorghe Săsărman in Romanian.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> These books are written, respectively, in French, Spanish, French, Catalan and Italian.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> I understand here by 'contemporary older authors' those born in or before the landmark year 1954.

literature as well, such as Christia Sylf's *Kobor Tigan't* (Kobor Tigan't, 1969), Gianluigi Zuddas' *Amazon* (Amazon, 1978), Francis Berthelot's *Khanaor* (Khanaor, 1983), Rosanna Masoero's *Aragorn e la maga verde* (Aragorn

and the Green Wizardess, 1996), Liviu Radu's *Armata moliilor* (Army of Moths, 2012) and Toti Martínez de Lezea's *Enda* (Enda, 2014),<sup>8</sup> as well as a number of series.<sup>9</sup> At any case, even admitting the current overwhelming influence

The languages of these books are, respectively, French, Italian, French, Italian, Romanian and Spanish. To all these Latin European high fantasy works one could add several heroic fantasies with marginal elements of Christianity and/or other historic religions, sometimes verging on chivalric romance, such as Jaume Fuster's Catalan series of Món Conegut (Known World, 1983-1993), Hugues Douriaux's French novel in three volumes La biche de la forêt d'Arcande (The Hind of the Forest of Arcande, 1988) and Ana María Matute's narrative masterpiece in Spanish Olvidado rey Gudú (Forgotten King Gudu, 1996). Other genres related to high fantasy can also boast of fine Latin European books written by older authors and published after 1954. For example, constructed cultures from the origins of sedentism to the Bronze Age are described in similar terms to those common in high fantasy in novels such as În valea Marelui Fluviu (In the Valley of the Great River, 1955) by Felix Aderca in Romanian, Culan da Crestaulta (Culan from Crestaulta, 1955) by Toni Halter in Romansh, La déesse mère (The Mother Goddess, 1997) by François Cavanna in French, Aetara (Aetara, 2004) by Pau Faner in Catalan and El último cazador (The Last Hunter, 2008) by Antonio Pérez Henares in Spanish. Among works set in lost Atlantis, the novels Luntrea sublimă (The Sublime Boat, 1961) by Victor Kernbach in Romanian, Les Atlantes (The Atlanteans, 1965), later retitled Les survivants de l'Atlantide (Survivors from Atlantis, 1965), by Georges Bordonove in French, La signora di Atlantide (The Lady of Atlantis, 1988) by Bruno Tacconi in Italian and Atlantida (Atlantis, 1995) by Margarida Aritzeta in Catalan deserve to be mentioned, as well as the French series of Enfants de l'Atlantide (Atlantis' Children, 1994-2003) by Bernard Simonay. Most of these novels portray Atlantis as a civilisation contemporary to others having really existed in ancient history. The same can be said of further narratives where imaginary and real ancient civilisations also coexist, such as the French novels La ville de sable (The City of Sand, 1959) by Marcel Brion and Le pays noyé (The Drowned Land, 1990) by Paul Willems, and the Spanish one Menesteos, marinero de abril (Menesteos, April Sailor, 1965) by María Teresa León, as well as the French masterpiece of imaginary history La gloire de l'empire (The Glory of the Empire, 1971) by Jean d'Ormesson. Other invented civilisations also appear to be similar to those portrayed in high fantasy in several works written as lost race tales in which the secondary world cannot be accessed to by modern characters, such as the Spanish novel Teluria, un país de tinieblas (Teluria, a Land of Darkness, 1972) by Pedro Sánchez Paredes, or as imaginary voyages set in a past or indefinite period, such the French stories collected in Voyages aux pays évanouis (Travels to Vanished Countries, 2000) by Sylvain Jouty. Moreover, some books introduce the future perspective typical of science fiction into high fantasy narratives, such as the novels Nocturne sur fond d'épées (Nocturne on a Background of Swords, 1984) by Daniel Walther in French and Temblor (Tremor, 1990) by Rosa Montero in Spanish, the French series of Phénix (Phoenix, 1886-1990) by Bernard Simonay and the Italian collection of linked stories Il libro dell'impero (The Book of the Empire, 2000) by Adalberto Cersosimo. Conversely, a technologically advanced civilisation in the remote past of the Earth is described in René Barjavel's French novel La nuit des temps (The Ice People, 1968).

Some of the above-mentioned novels are, in fact, the first ones in their series. These are, respectively, De Mari's Ultimi (Last Ones, 2004-2020), Sylf's Géants (Giants, 1969-1971), Zuddas' Amazzoni (Amazons, 1978-1984), Radu's Taravik (2012-2014) and Martínez de Lezea's Enda (2014-2017). Further Latin European genre high fantasy series by other contemporary older authors are, to name but a few, Jean Tur's Arkonn Tecla (1973-1976), Alain Paris's Antarcie (1985-1987) and Pangée (Pangea, 1989), Hugues Douriaux' Vonia (1989-1990), and Alain Le Bussy's Chatinika (1995-1999) in French, as well as Domingo Santos & Luis Vigil's Nomanor (1971-1974) in Spanish, and Mariangela Cerrino's Lisidranda (2008) and Donato Altomare's Artiglio (Claw, 2010-2013) in Italian. Indeed, genre high fantasy is often composed of series of novels set in the same fictional universe, but mainstream authors have occasionally adopted a similar literary approach as well. For example, in French, Duits wrote a further novel titled Nefer (Nefer, 1978) set in the secondary world of Ptah-Hotep, while Abeille set in his secondary world of Contrées (Lands) several novels and a fine collection of short stories and fictional non-fiction texts titled Les carnets de l'explorateur perdu (The Lost Explorer's Notebooks, 1993). In Spanish, Sánchez Ferlosio produced a couple of short stories titled "Los lectores del ayer" (The Readers of Yesterday, 1980) and "Los príncipes concordes" (The Princes in Agreement, 2005), which belong with El testamento de Yarfoz to a series named Historia de las guerras barcialeas (History of the Barcialean Wars), yet to be published in full.

of high fantasy written in English, there is no reason to believe that this peculiar situation of cultural dependence has always been the same.

Before The Lord of the Rings redefined the genre, there was already high fantasy of outstanding quality in Latin Europe. This fact has been overlooked, however, despite the unarguable influence of French Symbolist fantasy on the work of some of the best English and American fantasists. Many of those French<sup>10</sup> fantasists wrote in the so-called purple prose typical of artistic literature in the Decadent and Aesthetic Movement at the turn of the 19th century. This particular style of writing was creatively emulated, among others, by Lord Dunsany, Kenneth Morris and Clark Ashton Smith, who should particularly be counted among the creators of high fantasy in the modern sense. There is likewise no need to position H. P. Lovecraft's typical purple prose as a further derivative of earlier continental models, especially his first high fantasy stories, before he moved into the weird fantastic. Therefore, it is at least historically relevant to recall the development of high fantasy not only in France, the leading literary country in the 19th and early 20th centuries, but also in other parts of Latin Europe<sup>11</sup> which also produced early high fantasy, almost always without even knowing contemporary British classics of this literary mode such as William Morris. Hence, high fantasy was born in parallel in different parts of Europe. Better recognising this fact would allow us to fully appreciate high fantasy works rooted in European traditions rather than in the Anglophone ones, regarding both their themes and their style. This move is not meant to belittle any particular literature or language. Rather, it is about promoting a meaningful universalism, as well as a fairer literary globalisation both culturally and linguistically. My field of study is unfortunately limited to Romance languages and I am not, therefore, into a position to discuss early high fantasy works in other European languages. I hope, nevertheless, that this limited historical survey will show how helplessly parochial the usual overviews are which only focus on works written in English, as if this were the only language and literature worth studying, at least in the realms of high fantasy.

Before attempting to draft a history of high fantasy, it might be worth trying to describe first what exactly we aim to discuss. This is not an idle task even from the historical perspective here adopted. A prior specific theoretical description of high fantasy seems necessary to escape the vagueness that all too often affects both academic and fan approaches to this kind of narratives. Whereas science fiction is, despite

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Some of them are, in fact, from Belgium. In this overview, every ethnonym solely refers to the language used by the discussed Latin European authors in their mentioned works, not to their ethnicity, nationality or citizenship.

There are some high fantasy works worth mentioning in Latin America in the period prior to World War II, too. For example, Brazilian Nestor Vítor's tale "Hiranyo e Garbha" (Hiranyo and Garbha, 1895) is a rare example of pure dystopian high fantasy; Argentinian Leopoldo Lugones' flash fiction "El mal, el bien, la justicia y la ley" (*Evil, Good, Justice and Law*, 1909) is a masterful parable on morality and politics; Uruguayan Álvaro Armando Vasseur's piece of historical fictional non-fiction titled "La isla donde no se dormía" (The Island Where No One Slept, 1919) shows an original alternative past humanity, while his fellow countryman Pedro Figari used a similar literary procedure in *Historia kiria* (Kirian History, 1930); the prose poems with ancient imaginary settings included by Venezuelan José Antonio Ramos Sucre in his books from the 1920s have become canonical in Latin American literature, and the volume *O'Yarkandal* (O'Yarkandal, 1929) by Salvadorian Salarrué is a significant collection of allegedly translated myths and legends from an invented ancient civilization. To those works we could add a few fine high fantasy short narrative poems, such as Luís Delfino's "Origem das nuvens" (Origin of Clouds, 1855) in Brazil and Duraciné Vaval's "La légende du chasseur" (The Hunter's Legend, 1912) in Haiti.

its range of definitions, a clear literary entity, the English word 'fantasy' is so all-encompassing that it has virtually lost any taxonomic value. Putting Edgar Allan Poe and J. R. R. Tolkien under the same heading because both use the supernatural amounts to a complete disregard of the specific nature of fantasy, and namely of high fantasy. This is a particular literary species with distinctive fictional features that can be inferred from even a superficial reading of its classics. High fantasy is about the realistically consistent building of a fictional secondary world fully independent from the mundane one (past, present, or rationally anticipated). Whether it is specifically named or not, high fantasy hardly stands intrusions from our world without losing its ontologically autonomous status, if we are to follow the definition of 'secondary world,' as it appears in this genre, proposed by Waggoner: "A fantasy world is a secondary reality whose metaphysical premises are different from those of the real world" (1978: 4). Using a more precise narratological language, Trebicki contends that fantasy follows "a strategy aimed at the creation of a secondary world model with its own precisely described spatial and temporal parameters, its own social and ontological order,12 and its own causality, unusual from the point of view of mimetic reality but perfectly coherent and logical within

the fictional universe" (2014: 488). Therefore, one should exclude from high fantasy those works in which modern characters directly and knowingly intervene in the secondary world, thus depriving it of the illusion of completeness in its own setting in a venue removed from the primary world or parallel to it, even when this venue is not explicitly named (if it is, onomastics usually indicate its imaginary status). C. S. Lewis' Narnia is a wide and sophisticated secondary world but the children's access into it and return from it through a wardrobe during World War II implies that their modern primary world and the secondary world of Narnia are intertwined, instead of the latter remaining independent from mundane modernity as it would be the case in true exercises of subcreation in the Tolkienian sense. Portal fantasies such as Lewis' or Massimo Bontempelli's Italian short novel La scacchiera davanti allo specchio (The Chessboard in Front of the Mirror, 1922) are certainly enjoyable as great literature in their own right, but they cannot be considered, in my view, genuine high fantasy.13

High fantasy eschews implausible direct contacts between ontologically different kinds of fictional worlds (the mundane and the fantastic) in order to offer the complete result of a speculative process of world building akin to that of science fiction (since it is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Trębicki slightly modified this contention in a later study on the same subject, where he stated that the fictional secondary worlds of both science fiction and (high) fantasy have "their own social and, sometimes, ontological orders" (2015: 66), thus tacitly recognising that fantasy can abide by the natural laws of our material universe. A specific social order would be, on the contrary, necessary.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> In order to offer a wider picture of Latin European endeavours in fictional 'sub-creation,' I mention in passing (mostly in footnotes) some significant fictions that are not high fantasies, but that create similar secondary worlds based on the mythopoetic/pagan view within an imagined ancient civilisation underpinning high fantasy proper: fictions set in a pagan non-technological future, fictions set in nations already invented in ancient times (e.g., Atlantis), imaginary voyages into ancient fantasy lands, archaeological fictions on imagined first civilisations, heroic archaeological fantasies with marginal historical content and invented mythographic texts and ethnographic accounts, etc. I do not mention in this study any kind of portal fantasies featuring characters clearly living in the modern age who can have access to the secondary world, not even if their intrusion into it is fully ignored as it happens with the arrival of Lessingham on Zimiamvia in E. R. Eddison's novel *The Worm Ouroboros* (1922).

rationally created on the basis of a particular set of premises). These appear to be scientific in science fiction, as its name implies. They are rather mythical in high fantasy, thus warranting the common presence<sup>14</sup> of supernatural beings, magical powers and extraordinary occurrences in the framework of a plausible pagan society, as they all were before the advent of Christianity and Islam, as well as before the evolution of Buddhism into a clerical religion focused on its divinised founder. These religions have transformed our worldview up to the point that their presence in a fictional world implies that this is not fully removed from our current culture and cannot be independent from it. Therefore, it cannot be a pure high fantasy world according to the approach here adopted,15 especially if we also consider that both Christianity and Islam tend to exclude supernatural forces that do not fit into their received beliefs, thus preventing the free use of imagination to invent them or to show them acting in a non-traditional way. Confessional theology is hardly favourable to mythopoesis, at least to any myth-making free from dogmatic interference.

By contrast, in high fantasy societies, godlike forces can freely intervene, or are believed to intervene, in human affairs in the same way as they do in the true mythological lore that modern archaeological, philological, mythological and ethnological research have revealed to us using rational methods from the Enlightenment Age onwards. However, unlike mythological and legendary fiction mainly

based on existing matter (for instance, any kind of existing mythic beliefs in the past or the present and, therefore, any form of historical paganism), as well as fairy tales, where narratives follow traditional and stereotyped settings and motives usually borrowed from folklore, high fantasy is 'created,' or if we prefer to use a Tolkienian term, 'sub-created.' Its worlds are essentially personal artistic inventions by a particular author, although fantasy writers often find inspiration in existing mythologies as well as in ancient history for their creations, which are nevertheless invented. High fantasy writers treat features borrowed from the ancient lore yet revealed by the modern human sciences as mere elements in their free world building, the consistency of which is internal, and which need not to be externally consistent with previous mythological, ethnographical or historical knowledge. For example, while Robert H. Howard uses names and peoples from the true ancient history of our planet in his Conan stories, these do not constitute archaeological fiction, because the history of their secondary world is freely imagined, as his fictional historiographical account of the Hyborian age shows. Lord Dunsany was probably inspired by Japanese mythology, but his mythology of Pegāna was his own.

These features are common to all high fantasy worlds now considered canonical, such as William Morris' Glittering Plain, Lord Dunsany's Pegāna, Robert H. Howard's Hyboria, Clark Ashton Smith's Hyperborea,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Although many high fantasy fictions feature supernatural occurrences, some of them do not and they still 'sub-create' a full-fledged secondary world of the high fantasy type here described. A good example of this is William Morris' romance *The Roots of the Mountains* (1890). Its venue, the Dale, and its inhabitants are probably inspired in early Germanic tribes, but there is not a single mention to any historical nation, name or culture from the past of our primary world. The Dale is, as such, a wholly invented place, a secondary fictional world where imaginary pagan nations have imaginary religions, history and manners, and from which any supernatural agency is fully absent.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> This is the main reason for our excluding from this survey chivalric romances, including those related to the Arthurian legend, which are deeply related to Christianity (cf. the Holy Grail), as well as those orientalist fantasies related to Islamic cultures (e.g. Latin European works based on the lore of the *Arabian Nights*) and to Asian civilisations shaped by Buddhism.

Tolkien's Middle-earth, Fritz Leiber's Nehwon, L. Sprague de Camp's Novaria, Ursula K. Le Guin's Earthsea, Samuel Delany's Nevèrÿon, and George R. R. Martin's Westeros. A similar mythopoetic imagination already appears active in the largely invented Ossianic epic narratives by James Macpherson and, especially, in William Blake's narrative poems where his personal mythology is, rather confusedly, presented to the world as an alternative to Christianity.<sup>16</sup> Regarding prose fiction, John Sterling's short story "The Sons of Iron" (included as an independent narrative in the novel Arthur Coningsby, 1833) explores the customs and history of an ancient imaginary race of men made of iron. This tale could be considered the first true high fantasy narrative, but it remained obscure in Britain, and it does not seem to have influenced the later course of Englishlanguage fantasy from George Macdonald's Phantastes (1858) onwards, with the caveat that Macdonald's significant narrative could be better understood as a portal fantasy or even as a symbolic Märchen novel, and not as high fantasy proper. This ambiguity also occurs in a minor degree in the first significant work in this

mode published in Latin Europe, 17 Alphonse de Lamartine's La chute d'un ange (The Fall of an Angel), a long epic poem first published in 1838. There is, however, a significant difference. Whereas Anodos, the protagonist and homodiegetic narrator of Phantastes, returns to his known and contemporary primary world, once the angel of Lamartine's poem renounces his heavenly status for the love of an earthly woman, he loses all memories of his former being, and he never recovers it, even in the face of death. Moreover, although Lamartine's story is firmly set in an existing mythological time and place, specifically in the antediluvian times described in the Hebrew Book of Genesis, the former angel's earthly adventures with his lover owe nothing to Hebrew myth. Their world is purely invented, and has the appeal of encompassing two fully constructed imaginary civilisations. The first one is a technologically primitive society from which the couple has to flee due to the fact that their love does not fit into the unwritten collective laws of the tribe, thus showing how social pressure from peers can act as a sort of horizontal totalitarianism tending to repress any signs of unbridled

Blake's poems remained largely ignored for many years and they were not directly imitated, whereas poets throughout Europe wrote epic poems on the matter of Ossian. Among those written in Romance languages, I will just mention "Óscar y Malvina" (Oscar and Malvina, 1837) by José de Espronceda in Spanish, "Óscar" (Oscar, 1845) by Almeida Garrett in Portuguese and "Orla" (Orla, 1892) by Nicolae I. Basilescu in Romanian. Moreover, Ossian's example might have given rise to further attempts at creating national epics using allegedly ancient, pre-Classical and pre-Christian materials from several areas of Europe. Among them, only the Catalan narrative poem "La deixa del geni grec" (The Legacy of Greek Genius, 1902) by Miquel Costa i Llobera and the Romanian dramatic poem Zamolxe (Zalmoxis, 1921) by Lucian Blaga seem to have acquired canonical status. However, all these works can hardly be regarded as belonging to high fantasy, whereas other modern legends also set in ancient times in barbarian Europe read now as sword and sorcery fiction, such as the Basque novella written in Spanish by Vicente de Arana titled "La leyenda de Lelo" (Lelo's Legend, 1882), or even as a sort of Tolkienian legendarium, such as the linked short stories set in pre-Roman Germanic Campine (now in Belgium) that Roland de Marès published in his French book En Barbarie (In Barbarian Lands, 1894).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> The short description in verse of a magnificent imaginary city endowed with supernatural high fantasy features made by Philothée O'Neddy in his French "Fragment indien" (Indian Fragment) could have been written earlier, since it is included in a series of poetic fragments written between 1835 and 1842 according to the publishers of their posthumous edition in 1877. From our perspective, it might be worth clarifying that, despite its title, there is no indication in the poem that the city is located anywhere in historical or mythical India. Moreover, we cannot be sure if that title was already present in the manuscript written down by O'Neddy.

individual agency. The second civilisation is, in contrast, a vertically totalitarian one, since it is a tyrannical monarchy where prisoners are enslaved and public dissidence is also actively repressed, whereas the powerful have a lavish lifestyle in a palace as luxuriant and ornate as any aesthete from the Decadent movement could desire. How the lovers succeed in fleeing only to die is also an early example of the way Latin European high fantasy usually avoids the consolations of eucastastrophe. Unhappy endings seem to be, indeed, specific to many of Latin European masterpieces of high fantasy after Lamartine.

Not many years passed until his example was, indeed, followed. A further French canonical author, George Sand, revisited humankind's beginning in the poematic and philosophical prose narrative Évenor et Leucippe (Evenor and Leucippe, 1856), later retitled Les amours de l'âge d'or: Évenor et Leucippe (The Loves of the Golden Age: Evenor and Leucippe, 1861). This is arguably the very first high fantasy novel.<sup>18</sup> Although she called it a "Légende antédiluvienne" ('antediluvian legend'), its world is fully mythopoetic in the Tolkienian sense. Sand invented her own myth about the origins of humanity, love and civilization. Both the Hebrew single god and the panoply of Greek deities are absent from the narrative, which tells the life as well as the emotional

and philosophical growth of Évenor, a human child living in a balanced primitive society. The seeds of selfishness and evil already exist among humans, however, and the young protagonist is happy to find, after getting lost in the forest, a secluded, paradisiacal valley where he decides to stay. He meets there another child, Leucippe, a girl who is being raised by Téleïa, the last of the 'dives,' a species of beings half humane and half divine, and Sand's own invention. The 'dive' teaches them morality and true love as the main inheritance from her race to this couple of children, then teenagers and married couple, so that they can deliver it to the successor sentient race, the humans. They fail, however, in their mission. Evil has already grown deep roots in human society. Évenor, Leucippe and their followers are forced to escape from their tribe. Only the dive's supernatural intervention finally saves them from their pursuers, allowing them to return to their paradise in the valley, called Éden. This parts them from their fellow humans and therefore from the course of human history. Their fate is lost in the mist of myth and legend. Despite the echoes of their names and place in later traditions, namely Biblical and Platonic, their internally consistent world is a closed one, having nothing to do either with sacred or secular history. Évenor et Leucippe is not a fictional reconstruction of prehistory as it could have been but rather a symbolic narrative

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> There is at least an earlier high fantasy short story, namely the Spanish one "El rey Eserdis" (King Eserdis, 1842) by Manuel Milá y Fontanals. It is a parable set in an Orient-like imaginary kingdom and conveying a moral lesson combined with tacit political criticism of despotism. A similar approach to high fantasy was also adopted by later Spanish writers of parables such as "La esclava perfecta" (*The Perfect Slave*, 1872) by Federico de Castro, "Las piedades del sultan" (The Sultan's Mercies, 1897) by José de Echegaray, "El cuerno del rey Zamur" (King Zamur's Horn, 1898) by Alejandro Larrubiera, "La sombra" (*The Shadow*, 1900) by Emilia Pardo Bazán, "La corte triste" (The Sad Court, 1902) by Mauricio López Roberts, "La duda del rey Omar" (King Omar's Doubt, 1918) by Álvaro Alcalá Galiano, "Benagissal el profeta" (*Benagissal, the Prophet*, 1924) by Alfonso Maseras, "La clave" (The Key, 1926) by Huberto López de la Ossa and "Ilustir el triunfador" (Ilustir the Victor, 1928) by Sinesio Darnell. Among these tales, Castros's "La esclava perfecta" stands out due to its combining of supernatural features and the presence of ancient technology since that 'perfect slave' is a perfect female automaton. Castro might have known a former French example of that combination of fantasy and a very early form of retro-futurism, namely a short story by Aurélien Scholl related to the Frankenstein topic titled "Prométhidès" (Promethides, 1854).

intended to convey, for a grown-up readership, an ethical and philosophical meaning through mythopoesis<sup>19</sup>. Therefore, the fictional world created there by George Sand fulfils for the first time all the requirements of high fantasy in a novel.

Despite Sand's status as a renowned and also popular writer in her time and afterwards, no other French high fantasy full-fledged novels were produced for decades, although her son Maurice published in book form in 1867 a long romance set in Plato's Atlantis titled *Le coq aux cheveux d'or* (The Golden-Haired Rooster), which reads as one of the first heroic fantasy or even sword and sorcery works ever written in modern times. The rooster of the title looks and acts in a similar way to Howard's Conan. Its fictional world is also fully Howardian both for its themes and its style. The same can be said of a 19th century Spanish novel set in two ancient kingdoms of Amazons and developing, as an

extended narrative, ancient legends on that matter summarized by Diodorus Siculus. Pedro Mata's Las amazonas (The Amazons, 1852) tells the many adventures and political intrigues of an Amazon queen fighting with monsters, human or not, and it does it with a lively pace which can also be considered as offering a foretaste of Howardian writing. Unfortunately, neither the youngest Sand nor Mata's footsteps were immediately followed. Latin European novels of heroic fantasy adventures entirely set in ancient Atlantis began to appear in the 20th century,<sup>20</sup> such as Les Atlantes (The Last Days of Atlantis, 1905) by Charles Lomon & Pierre-Barthélémy Gheusi and La fin d'Atlantis (The End of Atlantis, 1926) by Jean Carrère in French, to which one could add a number of more innovative short stories on the same subject written in the style of the Decadent/Aesthetic movement around 1900, such as Paul Valery's "L'île Xiphos" (The Island of Xiphos, written in 1896), also in

<sup>19</sup> George Sand had already written a further mythopoetic piece, namely a short epic poem in prose titled "Le poème de Myrza" (Myrza's Poem, 1835). Although it is mostly based in ancient Hebrew creation myths, it is to be considered, along with William Blake's mythic poems, one of the first modern examples of literary mythopoiesis. Sand's footsteps were later followed by further Latin European authors who proposed their own creation myths, usually in the form of allegoric narratives often based on dualistic Theology and written as mythographic accounts in verse, such as "Fiat lux!" (Fiat Lux!, 1863) by Antero de Quental and "O firmamento" (The Firmament, 1895) by Teófilo Braga in Portuguese, "El Bien y el Mal" (Good and Evil, 1868) by José Fernández Bremón in Spanish, Les destins (Destinies, 1872) by Sully Prudhomme and "La légende de la Terre" (The Legend of the Earth, 1886) by Jean Rameau in French, "Creațiunea" (The Creation, 1874) by Alexandru Macedonski in Romanian and "Creació" (Creation, 1902) by Àngel Guimerà in Catalan, or in prose, such as "Vie de Morphiel, demiurge" (Life of Morphiel the Demiurge, 1895) by Marcel Schwob, "Sacrifices" (Sacrifices, 1902) by Han Ryner, "La genèse profane" (Secular Genesis, 1902) by Renée Vivien and L'épopée de Lucifer (The Epic of Lucifer, 1937) by Henri Mazel in French, "A Dor" (Sorrow, 1902) by Raul Brandão in Portuguese, "Il fuoco" (Fire, 1919) by Vincenzo Cardarelli in Italian, "Buntad" (Goodness, written before 1935) by Gian Fontana in Romansh, and "Oglinda" (The Mirror, 1922) by Ion Pillat and "Geneza și apocalipsa" (Genesis and Apocalypse, 1937) by Tudor Arghezi in Romanian. In "Le poème de Myrza" a civilisation of imaginary pre-human intelligent beings with supernatural features is described as well. Similar beings also appear in later mythographic allegories such as "Les Funèbres" (The Mournful Ones, 1898) by Gabriel de Lautrec in French and "Bătrânii Insulei de Aur" (The Old men from the Golden Island, 1925), later retitled "Bătrânii din insulă" (The Old Men from the Island, 1931), by Tudor Arghezi in Romanian.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Earlier significant narratives on Atlantis showing features of contemporary Positivism, such as the Catalan long narrative poem *LAtlantida* (Atlantis, 1877) by Jacint Verdaguer and the Portuguese short one "A submersão da Atlântida" (The Sinking of Atlantis, 1894) by Teófilo Braga, are rather related to Greek myths (Heracles, Prometheus, etc.) and bear much less resemblance to high fantasy than the later narratives mentioned or than other epic poems, generally short, on the same matter of Atlantis, such as "La découverte d'Atlantide" (The Discovery of Atlantis, 1883) by Pimodan and "Les géants" (The Giants, 1890) by Auguste Génin, as well as two further short epics also in French, both titled "L'Atlantide" (Atlantis), one published in 1885 by Stanislas de Guaita and the other written in 1932 by François Brousse.

French, and Luis Valera's "La diosa velada" (*The Veiled Goddess*, 1905) in Spanish. Amazonian fiction was less popular back then, although several French works, all titled "Les Amazones" (The Amazons), warrant to be mentioned, namely a Parnassian poem from 1902 by Renée Vivien, a drama from 1905 by Henri Mazel and a cruel Lesbian tale from 1928 by Renée Dunan, as well as an Italian short narrative poem titled "Laòmache" (Laomache, 1906-1916) by modern classic Luigi Pirandello. However, both

strands of fiction are not high fantasy proper, because their worlds are not wholly invented.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, stories of this kind are better seen as belonging to a corpus composed of modern and original versions of ancient legends on imaginary kingdoms,<sup>22</sup> rather than to high fantasy proper. Nevertheless, their similarities and mutual influence cannot be denied.

High fantasy in Latin Europe only gained momentum when the Decadent/Aesthetic worldview promoted the invention of exotic

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> The same can be argued regarding secondary worlds created in later times. Among them, the stark Christian character of legends such as the Arthurian ones and those of the drowned city of Ys excludes them from high fantasy proper, being rather forms of chivalric romance and hagiography, respectively. There is, however, a legendary matter implying a full-fledged secondary world that has inspired fantasies in our period of study, such as the poems "La coupe du roi de Thulé" (The King of Thule's Cup, 1863) by Louise Ackermann and "Le roi de Thulé" (The King of Thule, 1877) by Arsène Houssaye in French, and "Nova balada do rei de Tule" (New Ballad of the King of Thule, 1875) by António Gomes Leal in Portuguese, as well as the tales in prose "A taça do rei de Thule" (The King of Thule's Cup, 1893) by Fialho de Almeida in Portuguese and "La copa del rei de Tule" (The King of Thule's Cup, 1899) by Eugeni D'Ors in Catalan. This secondary world is that of Thule in the German ballad by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe titled "Der König in Thule" (*The King in Thule*, 1774).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> There are some fantasies written in this period and also set in classic mythical or historical times but in other classic imaginary regions different from Atlantis and the kingdoms of Amazons, such as those described in the poems "La ville disparue" (The Vanished City, 1877) by Victor Hugo in French, "La città dei titani" (The City of Titans, 1897) by Arturo Graf in Italian and "La destrucció d'Idàlia" (The Destruction of Idalia, 1912) by Jeroni Zanné in Catalan, as well as in the French drama Avant l'âge d'or (Before the Golden Age, 1927) by Henri Mazel. Moreover, there are some modern imaginary voyages featuring invented ancient travellers who come from a real place in history and visit imaginary regions populated by fantasy beings, human or otherwise. The masterpiece of this sort of imaginary voyages is arguably the Spanish novella "Los inmortales" (The Immortals, 1947), later retitled "El inmortal" (The Immortal, 1949) by Argentinian Jorge Luis Borges, but we should not forget some Latin European works that preceded it, such as the short fictions "Les embaumeuses" (The Embalming-women, 1891) and "Origines du journal: l'Île des Diurnales" (Origins of the Newspaper: the Island of the Diurnals, 1903) by Marcel Schwob, the novella "Les aventures de Setnê" (The Adeventures of Setne, 1902) by J.-H. Rosny aîné and the novels Les voyages de Psychodore, philosophe cynique (The Travels of Psychodorus, Cynic Philosopher, 1903) by Han Ryner and Le bouclier d'Alexandre (Alexander's Shield, 1922) by Marcelle Tinayre, all of them in French, as well as the playlet "La fuente del mal" (The Source of Evil, 1907) by José Francés in Spanish and the Italian tale "Un'avventura di Alessandro Magno e dei suoi" (An Adventure of Alexander the Great and His Men, 1908) by Arturo Graf. To these we can add other fantasy voyages of a more symbolic nature, such as those where an imaginary traveller, either unnamed or with a fully invented name (a typical linguistic mark for high fantasy), visits in an unspecified past time period cities and places unlike any one having existed. The extraordinary features of those venues are usually endowed with a particular philosophical meaning, as it is the case, for example, in the French short stories "La vie sans effroi" (Life Without Fear, 1891) by Bernard Lazare, "Le temple d'Effroi" (The Temple of Dread, 1891) by Pierre-M. Olin, "La ville aux aveugles" (The City of the Blind, 1897) by Édouard Ducoté, "Voyage à la Cité des Morts" (Voyage to the City of the Dead, 1898) by Frédéric Boutet, "L'île de la joie" (*The Isle of Joy*, 1900) by Victor-Émile Michelet and "Le long de l'abîme" (*Along the Abyss*, 1905) by Renée Vivien, and in the Spanish one "Las peregrinaciones de Turismundo" (The Travels of Turismundo, 1921) by Miguel de Unamuno, as well as in some lyrical visits to fantasy and sacred places such as the ones portrayed in the French poem in prose "Offrande distraite" (Distracted Offering, 1892) by Arnold Goffin, in the Italian playlet "La statua velata" (The Veiled Statue, 1905) by Arturo Graf, in the Catalan tale "Oracle" (Oracle, 1905) by Alfons Maseras and in the Romanian poem in verse "Per aspera" (Per aspera, 1912) by Ovid Densuşianu. Imaginary journeys of this kind are probably to be counted among the rare instances of portal fantasies that could be considered high fantasies as well.

worlds, often primitive or Oriental-looking. In the last decades of the 19th century, pagan myths and legends different from the Greco-Latin or Hebrew ones were already widely known among educated writers thanks to translations from works written, among others, in Old Egyptian, Akkadian, Sanskrit, Old Irish, Old Norse and Persian (especially Ferdowsi's Book of Kings), as well as from modern pagan lore from Europe, especially Finland (*The Kalevala*), and from other regions of the world, such as Native America, Sub-Saharan Africa and the Pacific islands, which began to be revealed by ethnologists back then.23 Leconte de Lisle and later Parnassian poets enthusiastically embraced this exotic matter and produced poetic versions of the now revealed myths, epics and histories. Some of his followers went a step further by inventing their own fictional worlds, with their history, art and myths. This Parnassian high fantasy can be illustrated by short poems in French, such as Léon Dierx's "La ruine" (The Ruin, 1879), Éphraïm Mikhaël's "L'hiérodule" (The Hierodule, 1886) and "Le mage" (The Mage, 1890), and Auguste Angellier's "La ville ruinée" (The City in Ruins, 1909); in Catalan, such as Àngel Guimerà's "L'honor real" (Royal Honour, 1887) and Gabriel Alomar's "La doma dels déus" (The Domestication of the Gods, 1911), and in Italian, such as Luigi Gualdo's "Atarah" (Atarah, 1883) and, especially, an early

work by modern classic Gabriele D'Annunzio. His short narrative poem "Il fuoco della pace" (The Fire of Peace) was first published in 1883 and, in its definite version titled "Il sangue delle vergini" (Virgins' Blood), in 1894. Although D'Annunzio paraphrased in part of his poem one of the episodes of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's The Song of Hiawatha (1855), the plot of "Il sangue delle vergini" is not exactly located in any venue of the real ancient world. Also invented, including their names, are the two tribes who fight each other until their members are all killed following the attempted rape and death of the virgins of the other tribe, despite the attempt of their national god, also invented, to appease them. D'Annunzio pessimistically shows how human, and especially male violence, transgresses even materially uttered divine injunctions. D'Annunzio's superb command of poetic language allows him to endow great rhetorical and literary beauty to such a horrible view of our species, a view unfortunately all too often underpinned by real history, both in the legendary past and in recorded history until our own times.

This anthropological pessimism endures in Latin European fantasy after 1900, as if it were a dire premonition of the horrors to be seen during the two great wars of the 20th century. Two narratives set in secondary worlds populated by sentient non-human beings coming from

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Fakelore or true folklore, such ethnologic narratives were creatively imitated in the form of original myths written as if they were taken from an imaginary oral literary tradition, namely by Henri Michaux in his avantgardistic Fables des origines (Fables of the Origin, 1923). These French fables by Michaux are often etiologic tales that read as poetic versions in prose of oral pagan lore from Sub-Saharan Africa, although they are fully invented and can be read as mild parodies as well. This parodic is far clearer, for example, in the fake critical translation by Pompeu Gener into Catalan of an imaginary Indian sacred book which allegedly explains the origins of all titled first "Una teogonia índia" (An Indian Theogony, 1901) and later "Antic poem del Indostan" (Ancient Poem from Hindustan, 1911). Despite its alleged origin in India, this piece of mythography is populated by fully invented gods and divine forces that own nothing to Hindu lore, being are rather the result of a process of myth-making intended to deconstruct the myths themselves from a Positivist perspective. Positivism also underpins "A dor" (The Sorrow, 1881) by Fialho de Almeida, which is a serious etiologic tale in Portuguese set in the beginnings of hominization according to contemporary scientific theories, although it is an unnamed forest god who forces intelligence and, consequently, sorrow upon the unsuspecting pre-human.

Classic mythology and European folklore are good expressions of a common negative concept of humankind extending to the whole human race, not just to some specific (imaginary) nations as it was the case in D'Annunzio's poem. In André Lichtenberger's French novel Les centaures (The Centaurs, 1904), a faraway forest is the last refuge of centaurs and other such creatures from encroaching humans. Centaurs are the guardians of a technologically primitive and peaceful community where all its members, including animals, live in harmony with nature and themselves. The arrival of humans into the forest means the destruction of that utopian order following a battle of annihilation. The story happens in a legendary time, after which the very existence of centaurs and similar beings, now killed to the last one, becomes the matter of myth. In the Catalan long poem Liliana (Liliana, 1907) by Apel·les Mestres a forest is also the place where different elemental beings, in particular gnomes and sylphs, spend their lives in a natural way according to the lore described by Paracelsus and others. The frustrated love of several gnomes for a visiting female sylph<sup>24</sup> is depicted in delicate and melancholic terms, but this turns into expressionistic tragedy after their world is dramatically disturbed by the irruption in the forest of armed hunters. Following this, this fantasy world, which had existed independently along with our human one, is threatened. Although the elementals succeed in expelling human invaders from their forest refuge, Mestres shows that the cohabitation of both worlds is impossible. Given human ways, fantasies where men and elementals live alongside each other are tacitly shown as illusory and false.25

The negative concept of mankind implied in many narratives of this kind<sup>26</sup> often acquires a metaphysical dimension in Symbolist high fantasy. Symbolism is about suggesting through intuition hidden messages coming from a universe that is spiritual as much as it is material.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Mestres had presented a similar plot in an earlier and much shorter narrative poem, also in Catalan, titled "El gnomo" (The Gnome, 1906). The frustrated love of gnomes for a female of another species, this time human, is also the subject of the Spanish playlet "Tragedia de gnomos" (Gnomes' Tragedy, 1912) by Eugenio López Aydillo. A further example of a Spanish narrative where gnomes are the main characters is Vicente Risco's fine tale "El tesoro de Kolirán" (Koliran's Treasure, 1910).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> A similar message can be easily deducted from an interesting example of the fantastic ethnographic report in French on the life and manners of elves by Camille Mauclair titled "Vie des elfes" (Life of Elves, 1903), whose elves are shown to exist in a different plane alongside bothersome humans until today. Other communities, although allegedly human, are described as being unlike any other to such a degree that they seem the stuff of high fantasy, namely those described in Spanish by Tomás Borras in "El agua de la ciudad seca" (The Water of the Dry Town, 1924) and, especially, in French by Henri Michaux in *Voyage en Grande Garabagne* (Travels to Great Garabagne, 1936). This kind of ethnographic fantasy had been cultivated very early, but with no literary consequences whatsoever by Pavel Vasici-Ungureanu in his short fiction in Romanian "Geografia Țintirimului" (Geography of the Cemetery Kingdom, 1840).

In addition to these two significant long works, short fantasies featuring communities of elementals and similar beings in conflict with humans within secondary worlds were quite numerous in Latin Europe between 1838 and 1938. Among them, I will mention but a few in prose, such as Guerra Junqueiro's "Os gigantes da montanha e os anões da planície" (Mountain Giants and Plain Dwarves, 1877) in Portuguese, Renée Vivien's "La légende du saule" (*The Legend of the Willow*, 1902) in French, Alfons Maseras' "El conte d'una bruixa" (The Tale of a Witch, 1905) in Catalan, Arturo Graf's "Lo gnomo" (The Gnome, 1908) in Italian, Nicolae Davidescu's "Zâna din fundul lacului" (The Fairy at the Bottom of the Lake, 1912) in Romanian and "La sirena" (The Siren, 1918) by Álvaro Alcalá Galiano in Spanish, and in verse, such as Nicolae Iorga's "Sirenele" (Sirens, 1893) in Romanian, Salvador Rueda's "Las xanas" (*The Xanas*, 1893) in Spanish, Albert Samain's "Les sirènes" (Sirens, 1894) in French, Alberto Osório de Castro's "Fata Morgana" (Fata Morgana, 1906) in Portuguese, Alexandre de Riquer's "Fada Doralissa" (Doralissa the Fairy, 1910) in Catalan and Gian Fontana's "La diala" (The Diala, 1925) in Romansh.

Metaphor is the main trope used to convey meanings than cannot be accessed by reason alone. This is mostly the case in symbolist poetry, but also in symbolist narratives, especially in short ones. In this context, the tale is usually conceived as a sort of extended metaphor and, therefore, it often appears as a parable. Although this genre has very ancient roots, older even than the Christian gospels, Symbolist parable sometimes introduces new significant features. Some examples endeavour to convey their philosophical message through innovative processes of literary world-building. In order to move away from contemporary realities, as well as from documented history, several Latin European Symbolists tried to exploit the connotations of exoticism, legend and myth by presenting invented ancient and pagan kingdoms in imaginary or vague temporal and geographical venues. Thus, they could fully create mythopoetical worlds of fiction where they could express their seeking of hidden meanings both in the universe and in the human mind, without any pollution by positivistic materiality. The ensemble of these parables written in the service of a poetic investigation of the essence of things, both natural and social, constitutes one of the main strands of early modern high fantasy, from Pre-Raphaelite forerunners such as George Macdonald to writers of the Aesthetic

Movement such as Lord Dunsany and Kenneth Morris. However, French Symbolism was the cultural movement that ushered in the first golden age of high fantasy. The short stories that can be said to belong to this species are often impressive both for their number and for the consistent high quality of their style, which was often influenced by the rhetoric of the so-called écriture artiste (artistic writing). Despite this fact, it is to be admitted that French Symbolist high fantasy has not acquired yet the canonical status that it certainly deserves, although recent reissues and translations suggest that their rediscovery is underway. Here I will just mention but a few short stories translated into English that can be considered representative of that sort of literature in French, namely Éphraïm Mikhaël's "L'évocateur" (The Evocator, 1890) and "Le solitaire" (Solitude, 1890), Pierre Quillard's "Les frères d'armes" (The Brothersat-Arms, 1890), Bernard Lazare's "Les fleurs" (The Flowers, 1891), Jean Lorrain's "Hylas" (Hylas, 1892), Marcel Schwob's "Le roi au masque d'or" (The King in the Golden Mask, 1893), Gabriel de Lautrec's "Le mur" (The Wall, 1898), Remy de Gourmont's "La ville des sphinx" (The City of Sphinxes, 1898), Victor-Émile Michelet's "Holwennioul" (Holwennioul, 1899) and, especially, Camille Mauclair's Le poison des pierreries (The Poison of Precious Stones, 1903).27 This is a novella luxuriantly

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> There are, of course, a number of high fantasy tales and short narrative poems in French following the Decadent/ Aesthetic style which seem not to have been translated into English. Here I will mention just some beautifully written examples, such as the short stories "La recherche" (The Search, 1879) by Ernest Hello, "L'arbre sacré" (The Sacred Tree, 1885) by Catulle Mendès, "Soléal" (Soleal, 1893) by Hubert Stiernet, "Le roi" (The King, 1895) and "Le Triomphateur" (The Victor, 1895) by Jehan Maillart (Jules Noël), "Hors la lumière" (Out of the Light, 1897) by Édouard Ducoté, "Fax-Agélia, prince de Belsédène" (Fax-Agelia, Prince of Belsedene, 1898) by Frédéric Boutet, "Le bouclier d'or" (The Golden Shield, 1903) and "La révolte des bijoux" (The Jewellery Revolt, 1906) by Camille Mauclair, and "Hécatombes" (Slaughters, 1906) and "Les noyées" (The Drowned Women, 1906) by Stuart Merrill, as well as the poems in verse "L'étrangère" (The Stranger, 1888) by Éphraïm Mikhaël, "L'aventurier" (The Adventurer, 1890), "Le bois sacré" (The Sacred Wood, 1890) and "La voix impérissable" (The Imperishable Voice, 1890) by Pierre Quillard, "L'idole" (The Idol, 1891) by Stuart Merrill, "La reine Margiane" (Queen Margiane, 1895) by Gustave Kahn, "La Cité de Lumière" (The City of Light, 1896) by Claude Couturier, "Les éléphants bourreaux" (Executioner Elephants, 1911) by Sébastien-Charles Leconte and "Le château des masques" (The Castle of Masks, 1918) by Maurice Magre. Among works of a similar kind written in other Latin European

portraying an imaginary and Oriental-looking ancient kingdom, where a sorceress queen unsuccessfully tries, having recourse to the black magic residing in her precious necklace, to confront her husband, a very masculine warrior king, with his beloved younger brother, an androgynously delicate and artistically-minded, but nevertheless iron-willed prince.

Mauclair's novella is a successful high fantasy narrative following Gustave Flaubert's style of writing in Salammbô (Salammbô, 1862), the historical novel that inaugurated the kind of prose almost universally embraced by the above-mentioned authors in France, although it was also widely practiced by high fantasy writers in other Latin European countries.<sup>28</sup> In this respect, Portuguese literature can boast of one of the masterpieces of Symbolist high fantasy in artistic (rather than purple) prose thanks to two opposite main versions of the same tale written by the same author. Raul Brandão first depicted in "A voluptuosidade e o amor" (Voluptuousness and Love, 1896)29 an oppressive ancient society subjected to sanguinary rites focusing on the human sacrifice of young couples, as requested

once a year by an idol endowed with divine powers. The subsequent terror surrounding nascent love and relationships is, however, brought to an end by the triumph of spring, which is symbolised by bees making their honey on the former stone god. Some years after, impressed by the suffering caused by the Russian civil war on the wake of the 1917 revolution, Brandão altered that ending. The latest version of his story, now retitled "Primavera abortada" (*Aborted Spring*, 1926), describes the failure of Nature in front of the forces of darkness and death embodied by the idol. Human suffering will then continue.

This tragic story was hardly exceptional in its time. Melancholy and pessimism are prevalent in Symbolist high fantasy, but there were alternatives within that kind of fiction as well. There was, indeed, a parallel strand of optimistic high fantasy showing how heroism could prevail against difficult odds. J.-H. Rosny aîné's novella in French "Les Xipéhuz" (*The Shapes*, 1887) is a significant pioneering work of adventure high fantasy, although it has also been considered one of the first masterpieces

languages and also lacking English translations, there are several that warrant mentioning here, such as the Italian brief descriptions of symbolic secondary worlds titled "La montagna fatale" (The Fatal Mountain, 1892) by Mario Rapisardi and "La porta di bronzo" (The Bronze Door, 1901) by Arturo Graf, both in verse, and "Era il paradiso terrestre" (It Was the Terrestrial Paradise, written in 1908) by Carlo Michelstaedter, in prose. To these can be added the Romanian tale "Apocalips profan" (Secular Apocalipse, 1913) by Nicolae Davidescu and the Spanish novellas "El Jardín Encantado" (The Enchanted Garden, 1918) by Álvaro Alcalá Galiano and "La estrella cautiva" (The Captive Star, 1922) by Tomás Borrás.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Salammbô was influential on high fantasy not only due to its style. Although its plot was based on historical facts, Carthaginian civilisation itself was only vaguely known. This allowed Flaubert to give a free rein to his imagination when portraying it, perhaps following the steps of his friend Maxime du Camp in his French novella set in a fantasy India titled "Tagahor" (Tagahor, 1851). Other 19th Latin European writers also used exotic and little known mythic or historic legends set in largely imaginary Oriental kingdoms, or created them, in order to produce narratives that often read, like those on Atlantis and the Amazons, as if they were high fantasies, such as Juan Valera's Spanish unfinished novel "Lulú, princesa de Zabulistán" (Lulu, Princess of Zabulistan, 1870), Villiers de l'Isle Adam's French novella "Akëdysséril" (Akedysseril, 1885), Marià Vayreda's Catalan "Conte àrab" (Arabian Tale, 1893) and Giovanni Pascoli's Italian poem "Gog e Magog" (Gog and Magog, 1895). "Akëdysséril" was later emulated, among others, by Félicien Champsaur in his supernatural fantasy La princesse Émeraude (The Emerald Princess, 1928), which is set in an invented kingdom where Hindu gods are worshipped.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> There is an earlier, less developed version of this tale titled "Deus" (God) published in 1895.

of science fiction.<sup>30</sup> The reason for the latter classification is that a group of ancient humans are confronted with a form of intelligent life apparently alien to earthly biology. However, Rosny aîné states nowhere that the portrayed beings are anything but terrestrial. They seem to be rather a modern variant of the usual fantasy monster that kills people, with the difference that those 'shapes' are fully 'subcreated, since they are not based on previous myths or legends. Moreover, the novella is firmly set in an entirely imagined civilisation somehow similar to Neolithic ones, albeit it is fully imaginary. Although the narrative focuses on the war between humans and the fantastic mineral-like 'shapes,' as well as on the gallant deeds of men led by the main hero, who is both brave and intelligent, there is an adequate depiction of the mores, beliefs and culture of the invented populations depicted. This stimulates a deliberate search for historical plausibility and completeness by the imagined civilization fighting for its survival, which also means the survival of humankind. Men succeed at great cost in conquering and eliminating the rival race after an epic clash as impressive and existentially meaningful as those described in Tolkien's masterpieces, despite the relative brevity of Rosny aîné's story. This work is also literarily sophisticated since the alleged memories of the main hero follow a heterodiegetic narrative in order to tell his discovery of the shapes' vulnerabilities and how he took advantage

of them to win the day. These memories are presented as a document, which makes this part of the book an interesting example of fictional non-fiction.

Luis Valera uses a similar procedure in order to create an allegedly non-fictional framework for the events narrated in his Spanish novella "Dyusandir y Ganitriya" (Dyusandir and Ganitriya, 1903). Instead of taking responsibility for the historical veracity of those events, the narrator attributes their knowledge to the testimony of a German archaeologist. This scholar, perhaps unreliable, tells him of his own discovery in Asia of ancient remains and documents, so that the text is presented as a novelisation of a historical account about an early Aryan civilisation in Asia, that of the Purunas. This is not directly linked to Persia or India, but appears as a fully invented ethnicity, including their religion, language, culture and institutions. Although these are common for the whole Puruna nation, it is divided in two rival kingdoms fighting for supremacy. This conflict is finally solved by the marriage of Dyusandir and Ganitriya, respectively the crown prince and princess of each of the kingdoms, after many adventures (some of them apparently supernatural) that they must undertake to secure their relationship against all political obstacles. The story comes to a happy ending, notably thanks to the deeds undertaken by the young woman, rather than by any male agency, let alone war. Valera shows

High fantasy and science fiction can be said to overlap more clearly in some instances, in particular if the invented past civilization is shown as having command of advanced technology before its disappearance in the mists of (fictional) history, such as it is the case in the French novels *La fin d'Illa (Illa's End*, 1925) by José Moselli and *L'incroyable histoire de Tali-Thô la décolorée* (The Incredible Story of the Discoloured Tali-Tho, 1932) by Ferdinand Duchêne, as well as in several narratives set in ancient Atlantis, such as the French short stories "Cataclisme" (Cataclysm, 1893) by Jean Richepin, "La malédiction du soleil" (The Sun's Curse, 1913) by Grégoire Le Roy and "Le déluge" (The Deluge, 1936) by René Le Cœur, and the Romanian long poem *Atlantis sau epoca de aur* (Atlantis; or, The Golden Age, 1929) by Cleant Spirescu. Conversely, there are narratives set in a future that looks like a mythic past, such as the Catalan tale "Los immortals" (*The Immortals*, 1899) by Alexandre de Riquer, a French poem titled "Le Dieu futur" (The Future God, 1911) by Sébastien-Charles Leconte and, especially, the rhetorically sophisticated French novel *Les surhommes* (*The Superhumans*, 1929) by Han Ryner.

how feminine endurance and strong will can be heroic, too. Ganitriya shows that a woman can prevail without recourse to violence, unlike the tyrannical queen regnant in Camille Mauclair's French cruel tale "Vie de la princesse Hérène" (The Life of the Princess Hérène, 1896). This violent ruling woman imposes her will upon her subjects and conquered enemies, thus becoming a fascinating example of feminine political agency threatening to subvert the patriarchal public order. Other fantasies prefer to portray feminine characters who succeed in peacefully negotiating their male-dominated societies to empower themselves and, indirectly, their mates as Ganitriya does in Valera's novella. Similarly, mildness distinguishes the idealised heroine of the French novella set in an oriental-like imaginary kingdom titled Djéta et Maknem (Djieta and Maknem, 1893) by Philippe Selk,

as well as the more assertive queen of Carles Riba's Catalan short story "La pietat de la reina Alina" (Queen Alina's Mercy, 1916) and the female protagonist of Eduardo Marquina's successful Spanish dramatic comedy in verse *El pavo real* (The Peacock, 1922),<sup>31</sup> where she is even transformed into that bird before her resilience allows her to recover her lost children and the love of their father, the monarch of an imaginary ancient Asiatic kingdom.

In these fantasies, the depicted heroic feminine qualities are related to love. They are virtually devoid of direct socio-political meaning in their context. By contrast, this dimension is paramount in some works published in the interwar period and showing early imaginary kingdoms and organised societies in order to speculatively reflect upon the origins of civilisation<sup>32</sup> and how culture and

This play by Marquina was, indeed, one of the very few high fantasy plays which was commercially successful on the stage back then, also due to its innovative scenery, costumes, etc. It is also one of the few which were actually written for the conventional scene. Despite the fact that they might have been eventually commercially staged, most high fantasy dramas were primarily intended to be read, even being sometimes impossible to stage due to their world's expanse, for example in the French short dramatic pantomime "Les bras levés" (*The Raised Arms*, 1896) by Remy de Gourmont, or because of their lyric lack of action, for example, in the Italian playlet in verse "I naviganti" (The Navigators, 1905) by Arturo Graf. In fact, playwrights were well aware that contemporary public taste and the practical conditions of the theatre usually precluded any performance showing high fantasy secondary worlds, except perhaps for single performances in the experimentalist theatres of Symbolist/Decadent circles, especially in Paris and Brussels, where some French high fantasy plays were, indeed, staged, such as the little dramas for marionettes by Maurice Maeterlinck from 1894 titled "Alladine et Palomides" (*Alladine and Palomides*) and "La mort de Tintagiles" (*The Death of Tintagiles*) and the lyrical playlet "L'errante" (The Wondering Woman, 1896) by Pierre Quillard. Nevertheless, other high fantasy plays written for those theatres, such as the French Wagnerian dramas in verse *Euryalthès* (Euryalthes, 1892) by François Coulon and *Les miroirs* (The Mirrors, 1908) by Paul-Napoléon Roinard, never reached them.

The fact that the secondary worlds in these works are not directly related to an attested civilisation in history distinguish them, for instance, from fictions set from the origins of sedentism to the Bronze Age, when communities were developing the traits of early states, such as an organised religion with a nascent clerical class and political authority exercised by a ruler or ruling minority, elected or not. Nevertheless, these fictions are sometimes very similar to those of high fantasy, especially when their authors only use archaeological knowledge in vague terms, focusing instead in secondary world-building. Widely constructed cultural traits, invented onomastics and imagined historical processes are features shared by high fantasy and this sort of 'protohistoric fiction.' In Latin Europe, this particular genre posited here was first inspired by the discovery of the Neolithic/Bronze age pike dwelling settlements in Europe. Several protohistoric narratives take actually place in them, but their communities are generally invented. This is the case in a number of narratives in French, beginning by Élie Berthet's "La cité lacustre" (*The Lacustrian City*, 1876), which was followed, for example, by Marcel Schwob's "La vendeuse d'ambre" (*The Amber-trader*, 1891), J.-H. Rosny aîné's *Eyrimah* (*Eyrimah*, 1893), "Nomai" (*Nomai*, 1897) and "Amour des temps farouches" (Love in the Fierce Age, 1933), Joseph Jacquin's "Grite, une petite fille de l'âge de bronze" (Grite, a Little Girl from the Bronze Age, 1911) and Jacques Bainville's "Kab l'architecte" (Kab the Architect, 1928). Other

(geo)politics clashes with ethics, in the manner of Laurence Housman's early masterful novella "Gods and Their Makers" (1897). For example, religion is shown to be an empty but perhaps necessary superstition in the Spanish playlet "El templo sin Dios" (The Temple without God, 1918) by Ramón María Tenreiro, or an illusory rampart against the dangerous forces of nature in the French short story "L'ensevelissement d'Olasryck" (The Burial of Olasryck, 1922) by Gabriel de Lautrec; both religion and sexual violence upon women underpin the ideology of military expansion in the Italian tale "La conquista" (The Conquest, 1925) by Fillia, and the lust for gold and foreign goods destroys a nation following a cultural mutation brought about by the ideas of a mad prophet<sup>33</sup> in the Catalan novella "Els hereus d'en Xanta" (Xanta's Heirs, 1935), later rewritten and retitled "Els hereus de Xanta" (Xanta's Heirs, 1964) by Lluís Ferran de Pol. Since one of the main points of all these works is to show the foolishness of common beliefs, especially in religious matters, and their manipulation in order to advance earthly interests, their fictional worlds do not

feature supernatural phenomena. By contrast, they appear in a later masterpiece of Latin European high fantasy, a Romanian short threeact drama in prose and verse written by historian and politician Nicolae Iorga titled Răzbunarea pământului (The Revenge of the Land). This play was premiered outdoors on a village in 1938, not long before the author's assassination by right-wing extremists and the occupation of parts of Romania by foreign powers in 1940. Iorga was aware of growing geopolitical tensions in Europe, where imperial expansionism by the totalitarian regimes imposed upon Germany and Russia was clearly on the rise when his play was written as a response to those growing threats. In fact, its plot generates what seems a parable linked to that situation. An agricultural pre-state community in an unidentified ancient region is invaded by another nation that has arrived there with its fleet and has all the attributes of a state, from a royal court to a standing army. After having occupied the country and built up a fortified city, they exploit the work of their new subjects and even try to impose their religion upon them. However, the land itself rejects the

significant narratives are closer still to high fantasy for their having portrayed less specific or even fully imaginary protohistoric cultures, such as the narrative poems "Le soleil de minuit" (Midnight Sun, 1876) by Catulle Mendès in French, "Os séculos mudos" (The Silent Centuries, 1884) by Teófilo Braga in Portuguese and "El bosc se defensa" (The Forest Defends Itself, 1910) by Alexandre de Riquer in Catalan, as well as the French stories "L'offrande à la déesse" (*The Offering to the Goddess*, 1890) by Bernard Lazare, "L'idole phallique" (The Phalic Idol, 1931) by Gérard de Lacaze-Duthiers and *Han, la néolitihique* (Han, the Neolithic Woman, 1936) by Julienne-M. Moulinasse & Raoul Bouillerot, and the Spanish tale "La mayor fiera del mundo" (The Biggest Beast in the World, 1930) by Fulgencio Chapitel (Alfonso Martínez Rizo).

Prophets are sometimes heroes in high fantasy. Although one of them already featured in Lamartine's *La chute d'un ange*, it was Friedrich Nietzsche who really established those sorts of literary characters within the genre that we could call prophetic high fantasy thanks to his German masterpiece *Also sprach Zarathustra* (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1883-1885). The fictional content in this and other works that can be classified in the same genre is often slight, but in some of them the authors tried to strike a balance between their didactic content (which can be, nevertheless, ironic) and both their narrative framework and/or their depiction of a secondary world. Among the most interesting Latin European examples of this approach to prophetic high fantasy are to be counted a few stories where the prophets' preaching does not mar the narrative, such as "Miracles" (1886) by Éphraïm Mikhaël, "L'ineffable mensonge" (The Ineffable Lie, 1889) and "La venue" (The Coming, 1891) by Bernard Lazare in French, "Clădirea minunată" (The Wonderful Building, 1908) by Theodor Cornel and "Povestea celui din urmă sfânt" (The Tale of the Last Saint, 1912) by Ion Pillat in Romanian, and "El fratricidio del santo" (The Fratricide of the Saint, 1923) by Huberto Pérez de la Ossa in Spanish. It is worth mentioning that modern classic Fernando Pessoa began a work of prophetic high fantasy in Portuguese titled "O livro do rei Igorab" (The Book of King Igorab, written around 1915), but he did not complete it.

invaders. Supernatural occurrences demonstrate the displeasure of local nature and gods, eventually expelling them from the conquered territory. Imperialism is, thus, defeated. This optimistic outcome, which was not commonly preferred following the Great War and the subsequent interwar geopolitical tensions, was eventually contradicted by historical reality, but Iorga's play still remains an interesting example of eucatastrophe, just before developments in the aftermath of World War II generally put an end to the history of native high fantasy in Latin Europe.

In that post-war period, both socialist realism imposed upon Romania as part of the Eastern Bloc and the increasing anglicised globalisation embraced in the Western part of Latin Europe meant that the history begun by Lamartine in 1838 and concluded by Iorga a century later could not be resumed, save for a few exceptions written by authors already active before the end of War Wold II.34 Latin European romantic exercises in mythopoesis, symbolist parables, realist (sub)creations of imaginary but historically plausible ancient civilizations, such as those above described have effectively been forgotten, although many of their authors are considered canonical today. As a result, high fantasy in that region ended by forgetting its own roots, usually preferring to follow successful Anglo-American models, which are now the only ones really well known by most younger readers and writers<sup>35</sup> of massmarket high fantasy across the continent. There

<sup>34</sup> Among the few high fantasy works written in Latin Europe between 1938 and 1954 (the date of Tolkien's first instalment of The Lord of the Rings) can be mentioned a number of Italian short stories such as "La morte del re Salibù" (King Salibu's Death, 1942) by Eugenio Prandi, "La bellissima fiaba di Rosa dei Venti" (The Very Beautiful Tale of Winds' Rose, 1948) by Riccardo Bacchelli and "La storia del mago Yaldiz" (The Story of Yaldiz the Wizard, written in the 1940s) by Saul Israel. In other parts of Latin Europe, a few already well-established authors also wrote high fantasy short stories in that period, such as "Histoire des hommes-creux et de la rose-amère" (The Tale of the Hollow-men and the Bitter-Rose, 1941) by René Daumal, "Les statues" (The Statues, 1947) by Marcel Brion and "La géante" (The Giantess, 1947) by Jules Supervielle in French, "Daim" (Daim, written in 1942) by Mihail Sadoveanu in Romanian, "A rota do bergantim" (The Route of the Brig, 1947) by João Barreira in Portuguese, and "Mitología de un hecho constante" (Mythology of a Constant Fact, 1948) by Tomás Borrás in Spanish, as well as plays such as El Ben Cofat i l'altre (The Well-Hatted and the Other One, 1951) by Josep Carner in Catalan and narrative poems such as "Les dieux décapités" (The Beheaded Gods, written in 1951) by François Brousse in French. To these titles can be added a number of works published between 1939 and 1954 in some genres related to high fantasy. For example, some stories are set in Atlantis or among the Amazons, such as "La fausse amazone" (The Fake Amazon, 1947) by Jules Supervielle in French and "La nau cretenca" (The Cretan Ship, 1953) by Antoni Rivera in Catalan. A couple of late novels on the pile-dwelling civilisations are Oulgwy des Sables Verts (Ulgwy of the Green Sands, 1940) by Jean Vergriete and La vengeance du Rhin (The Revenge of the Rhine, 1946) by Max Landreau (André Glory), both in French. Ethnographic fantasies following the model of Henri Michaux in Voyage en Grande Garabagne (1936) were relatively popular in that period. That significant collection of short accounts about the manners of numerous imaginary peoples visited by an unnamed traveller in an indefinite period was continued by further series of a similar kind by Michaux himself in his books Au pays de la magie (In the Land of Magic, 1941) and Ici, Poddema (Here, Poddema, 1946). He then collected these three volumes in Ailleurs (Elsewhere, 1948). Similar fictional ethnographic descriptions of ancient-looking imaginary nations and places, with their institutions, religion and manners were also published in Italian, such as "Il Regno dei Karseni" (The Kingdom of Karsenians, 1941), "I figli del sole" (The Sons of the Sun, 1942), "Armuria" (Armuria, 1942), "Una strana città" (A Strange City, 1950) and "Ascenzia" (Ascenzia, 1951) by Giovanni Papini, "L'isola dei sogni" (The Isle of Dreams, 1944), later retitled "La vita è un sogno" (Life is a Dream, 1944), and "Mamamel e Vusitel" (Mamatel and Vusitel, 1944) by Alberto Moravia, and "La fonte dei baci e delle lagrime" (The Fountain of Kisses and Tears, 1952) by Riccardo Bacchelli. Moreover, new myths of origin in the form of mythographic allegories were also published between 1939 and 1954, such as "Uriașii" (The Giants, 1943) by Tudor Arghezi in Romanian and "La création des animaux" (The Creation of Animals, 1947) by Jules Supervielle in French.

<sup>35</sup> I understand here as 'younger writers' those born after 1954.

have been some exceptions, though. Those artistically successful narratives written by older authors mentioned at the beginning of this survey can be counted among them. However, they do not seem to have been influential in shaping the current state of literary affairs.<sup>36</sup>

The writing of usually very long high fantasy novels and series of novels intended for a massmarket and also widely read by a large readership is such a recent phenomenon in (Latin) Europe that the short chronological distance to our own time prevents us to assess its literary dimension. What can be safely stated is the staggering number of published works of that sort.<sup>37</sup> As a mere indication of the huge scope of genre high fantasy imitating / emulating English-language models in Latin Europe, one could mention that even a super-minority language such as Romansh has produced at least a couple of pleasant genre high fantasy novels, respectively titled Emalio (Emalio, 2015) by Flurina Albin & Stina Hendry, and Oranja (Oranja, 2021), by Stella Sennhauser. It can only be guessed how many more such novels have been written and published in our century in other more widely used Romance languages. These figures must be so huge that they defy a sound philological and historical survey. However, even a look

at a limited sample of books hints at the fact that English-influenced globalisation has increasingly erased literary and cultural diversity in the realm of high fantasy in the European continent. Topics, characters and, in particular, modes of writing seem to have now lost their link to (Latin) European traditions in the art and craft of literature. There must certainly be exceptions to this literary uniformity, but most of them seem to have remained ignored. It is perhaps for future scholars, translators and fans to reveal more original and culturally European high fantasy works that the inertia of global market forces has kept hidden from us. This is why further research on high fantasy works written in Romance and other European languages, as well as further translations from them into English, are a pressing necessity in order to show to a global readership, or at least to thorough scholars in the field, that high fantasy literature was a diverse and international literary mode in the past, as it should be in the present and in a truly universal future.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> A possible exception to the latter contention is *Un long voyage* (A Long Trip, 2020) by Claire Duvivier. The literary approach and the style of this French novel seem more akin to those of the mainstream high fantasy narratives written by Charles Duits, Jacques Abeille and Isabelle Hausser than to those prevailing nowadays in genre ones.

<sup>37</sup> Stand-alone high fantasy novels of reasonable length (in my view, less than 400 pages) seem to be the exception rather than the rule among younger authors in Latin Europe. Among those shorter novels written with some regard to their literary style, some good examples are *La guerre des cercles* (The War of Circles, 1995) by Jean-Claude Dunyach in French, *Máscaras de matar* (Masks for Killing, 2004) by León Arsenal in Spanish and *A noite do caçador* (The Night of the Hunter, 2019) by Sandra Carvalho in Portuguese. Among works belonging to related genres such as Atlantis fiction and fictional 'protohistoric' speculation, further fine examples of reasonably lengthed novels are, respectively, *Atlantis, les fils du rayon d'or* (Atlantis, Sons of the Golden Ray, 1998) by Pierre Bordage in French and *Il tempo del tamburo* (The Drum Time, 2021) by Sabina Moretti in Italian. Significant high fantasy short stories, both genre and mainstream, have occasionally been written by younger authors as well. With an eye to linguistic diversity, I will just mention "Călăreții de fier" (The Iron Riders, 1985) by Rodica Bretin in Romanian, "L'Artigliopàpine" (The Claw-Slaps, 2004) by Michele Mari in Italian, "Morflam" (Morflam, 2012) by Pierre Bordage in French, "Corpo, alma e coração" (Body, Soul and Heart, 2012) by Carina Portugal in Portuguese, "Els noms dels seus déus" (The Names of Their Gods, 2015) by Ruy D'Aleixo in Catalan and "Abismo, abismo, abismo" (Abyss, Abyss, Abyss, Abyss, 2018) by José Ardillo in Spanish

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# "Aren't you gonna close her up? And cover all that beautiful machinery?" Critical Transhumanism in The Book of Boba Fett

## Dominik BAUMGARTNER Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, Germany

Transhumanism in the fictional world of the Star-Wars-universe is a well-known topic and has been widely studied both in fandom (Ajjviolin96, 2021) and academia (Wida, 2019). Darth Vader/Anakin Skywalker can certainly be considered the most famous cyborg of this vast science-fiction tale (Wida, 2019: 1828). His life-sustaining black armor with its iconic breathing sounds was deeply etched into cultural memory decades ago. His mechanically enhanced physical strength has also sent generations of fans into shuddering awe and continues to thrill, most recently in the season finale of the Disney series Obi-Wan Kenobi, which once again deepened the character development of Darth Vader into a bitterly merciless arch-villain (see "Part VI", Obi-Wan Kenobi: 2022). In many interpretations, Darth Vader is considered the caveat and prime example of transhuman transformation gone wrong. As Dong notes, "The story of Darth Vader, while powerful, is only a warning of a possible outcome of transhumanism on a single individual" (2014).

In its latest *Star Wars* franchise product, the series The Book of Boba Fett, Disney takes up the topic of transhumanism beyond the canonical character canon once again in greater detail and more critically. Thus, in the third episode ("Chapter 3: The Streets of Mos Espa") of the series' first season, viewers encounter cyborgs in the form of a gang of youths marauding through the streets of the town of Mos Espa on Tatooine, making the domain of Daimyo and of the titular hero Boba Fett unsafe. These so-called cyborg "mods," short for modified, optimize their bodies with droid parts for the purpose of increasing performance and implementing new physical and technical abilities. To do this, they visit shady establishments ("mod sheds"),

most comparable to tattoo parlors,1 where they obtain various cyborg implants and body hacking tools. These parts either replace body parts (arms, legs, etc.) altogether or modify existing ones (e.g., eyes, spine, abdomen) with new technical capabilities to enhance them.2 The native population of Mos Espa is quite critical of these cyborg youths because of their scavenging and arrogance induced by their technical superiority. In the course of the plot, however, Boba Fett allies himself with the street gang and quickly knows how to use their technical advantages for his own consolidation of power. Furthermore, in a crossover ("Chapter 4: The Gathering Storm"), the viewer learns that Boba Fett's companion and fellow fighter Fennec Shand has also been modified with droid parts after she was left critically injured in the desert of Tatooine in the fifth episode of the first season of the Star Wars franchise series The Mandalorian ("Chapter 5: The Gunslinger"), also from Disney. Boba Fett, finding her so close to death, saves Shand's life by taking her to a so-called "mod shed" where her abdominal gunshot wound is treated and a kind of lower abdominal prosthesis is implanted.

What is remarkable about the way the subject of transhumanism is dealt with in *The Book of Boba Fett* is the fact that it is a critical and multi-layered examination of the personal and social consequences of transhuman modifications. While social prejudice against modified humans (in part disparagingly and pejoratively called "mods") is overt, because transhumanism is perceived primarily as a kind of lifestyle phenomenon of a youthful anarchic subculture with negative consequences in terms

of character, Shand (like Anakin and later Luke Skywalker) personally experiences the benefits of the possibilities for optimizing the human body, because she probably would not have survived without the help of the mods.

Despite the initial experience of alienation and insecurity regarding her own body, Shand increasingly comes to terms with her "mechanical" parts, probably also encouraged by the encouragement of Boba Fett. In my opinion, Boba Fett appears in the series as a mediator between humans and non-human species and/ or cyborgs. Thus he is accepted as (probably the first) human into the tribe of the (humanoid) Sand People, because he avenges an attack on them despite the enmity between Sand People and humans, and also shows himself tolerant, even integrative, towards the transhuman Mod gang by making them cooperative. Fett, nonetheless, must first come to terms with the Mods' machine-like aesthetic. This becomes clear in a short exchange with the mod outfitter in his studio. In response to Boba Fett's astonished question as to whether he wouldn't like to cover up Shand's lower abdomen after the "operation" so that the cyborg prosthesis is not visible, the latter replies, "and cover all that beautiful machinery?" ("Chapter 4: The Gathering Storm" 2022: 9:07) Here we see that Fett's tolerance, however, does not extend as far as considering transhuman modifications to be attractive, such as the members of the youth mod gang. Moreover, in this and in the unconcealed wearing of the modifications, a certain pride of the mods for their "extensions" can also be seen.3

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The installation of the modifications in the "mod shed" accordingly does not appear to be particularly painful or intrusive for the "patients" or customers but is presented more like the application of tattoos or piercings as a kind of "beautification." Fett is explicitly asked "Aren't you little old to be here?" (Chapter 4: 7:29).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> There is a striking resemblance here to the cyborg extensions of the protagonist Max Da Costa in the film *Elysium* (2013).

In contrast, Anakin and Luke Skywalker, for example, still tried to cover up their cyborg prosthetic hands with gloves.

The portrayal of the Mods in The Book of Boba Fett also shows great similarities to the representatives of what Albert Cohen calls criminal subcultures (Cohen 1967: 24-32, 49-67, 121-137). Cohen's subculture theory, in my opinion, best captures sociologically what is presented in the series with the Mods.<sup>4</sup> According to Cohen, delinquent youths usually belong to a subculture that is a result of their members' problems of adjustment and low status in the established society. Disappointed integration processes or sociocultural inequality between social classes thus lead to the formation of youthful anti-systems with heteronomous values and life plans. According to Cohen, the delinquency of the members is to be understood as a form of self-esteem that could not take place due to failed integration into the majority society homonormously. Subcultures are thus characterized by heteronormous values, partly "antisocial" behavior, and partly hedonistic or exaggerated status gratification (cf. Wickert, 2022).

As is characteristic of subcultures, the Mods are marginalized by Tatooine's majority society as a criminal gang. According to their own statements, however, they only rely on delinquent behavior (i.e. stealing water) because they are unemployed (Chapter 3: 7:23). The Mods' lifestyle and values also differ from the mainstream: they "indulge" in some kind of hedonistic transhumanism and ride garishly painted Speeder-bikes, and even in terms of their urban clothing they do not conform to the pragmatic, earthy environment on Tatooine. The exaggerated display of their transhuman modifications can thus be interpreted as alternative status gratification against the background of Cohen's subculture theory.

In *The Book of Boba Fett*, the viewer is thus presented with a differentiated picture

of transhuman modifications. This image includes both the question of the purpose of such modifications and their legitimacy, as well as the personal and social consequences of transhumanism for a society in which transhuman humans, humanoids and nonmodified humans must live together. In the moral-philosophical debate and ethical considerations of transhuman modifications, the cinematic reappraisal of transhumanism as presented in the series The Book of Boba Fett can therefore serve as a low-threshold model of discourse. Complex and abstract ethical options are given a face, as in the series, that allows the viewer to empathize and tolerate, and thus to personally weigh rival options (approval or rejection of transhumanism) and possible tradeoffs (transhumanism as an aid to life in danger).

Furthermore, the transhumanism of the Mods can be interpreted, as we have seen, with the help of Cohen's subculture theory as a social critique of the lack of tolerance of the society depicted in The Book of Boba Fett. Within this paradigm, it becomes clear that a social marginalization of transhuman modified humans does not solve the underlying problems. Only Boba Fett's integrative behavior strengthens the Mods' sense of responsibility for the city of Mos Espa and their fellow citizens and channels their previously delinquent behavior into courageous defense of the civilian population and thus into socially compatible action. The Book of Boba Fett thus shows us both a critical transhumanism as well as a nuanced and well-composed critique of transhumanism itself and is worth seeing for that reason alone.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Their name also recalls the British Mod subculture of the 1960s (see <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mod\_(subculture)">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mod\_(subculture)</a>).

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### **Audiovisual Works**

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# Reflexiones / Reflections

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# Introduction — World War Tree

### Jonathan HAY University of Chester

In putting together this special issue of Hélice on Speculative Landscapes, it was our aspiration to uncover and amplify fictional perspectives which engage with, and speculate on, unfamiliar landscapes as something far more animate than mere resources to be either silenced or sensationalised by human inhabitants. As this volume's contributors illustrate with verve, landscapes have the potential to be reenvisioned as critical actants across a range of speculative literary texts, if only we decenter our typically anthropocentric perspectives enough to truly *notice* and *admire* the alien primacy and fecundity of their roiling seascapes and verdant vistas. Such a radical rethinking of our species' relation to the landscapes it inhabits, and lives and breathes alongside, is more crucial now than ever before in recorded history.

As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's Sixth Assessment Report concludes, our own planet's landscapes are rapidly undergoing drastic short-term transformative changes due to anthropogenic factors. The wholesale thawing of Arctic permafrost stands to exacerbate planetary warming to runaway levels (Allan, 2021: 1270); droughts in arid areas are massively exacerbated by agricultural activity (1984); greenhouse gas emissions disrupt natural weather systems so greatly that new microclimates emerge (3514); ocean

acidification threatens the viability of aquatic ecosystems (1200); biodiversity is in rapid decline around the globe (211); sea level rise will reclaim vast areas of low-lying land (1687); deforestation leads to greater annual ranges in temperature (2814); and each year, air pollution kills approximately 4.2 million humans (1516). In parallel, we live in "a period in which human activity has multiplied the rate at which species are disappearing from the earth by a factor perhaps as large as a thousand" (Wallace-Wells, 2019: 96). We can no longer ignore the anthropogenic aetiology of the Anthropocene, Cthulucene and Capitalocene; human agency is now in many senses inseparable from the transmuting landscapes of planet Earth.

Indeed, due to our collective economic fixation on GDP-led growth, we are the "single species that is responsible for the COVID-19 pandemic" (Settele, 2020: online). More specifically, widespread "deforestation, uncontrolled of expansion agriculture, intensive farming, mining and infrastructure development, as well as the exploitation of wild species have created a 'perfect storm' for the spillover of diseases from wildlife to people", when coupled with "the unregulated trade in wild animals and the explosive growth of global air travel" (Settele, 2020: online). And if we are to have even a chance of avoiding successive pandemics, we must fully recognise "the complex interconnections among the health of people, animals, plants and our shared environment" (Settele, 2020). The circumstances which give rise to such zoonoses are only exacerbated further by our fetishistic adherence to neoliberal economic paradigms, hence, the label zoonotic is greatly misleading, since "it is actually humanity's destruction of biodiversity that creates the conditions for new viruses and diseases like COVID-19" (Vidal, 2020: online). Our subjective pandemic experiences over the last three years vigorously underscore that we are animals, interconnected with the living world around us as much as the technological apparatuses we fashion.

For such de-anthropocentric reasons, amongst others, the term human is rapidly becoming an outdated signifier. Critical posthumanists, for instance, propose that invocations of the term human must be qualified via neoteric formulations such as the extended mind thesis, which posit no firm boundary between species and environment.1 As the rupture of our anthropocentric complacency in the pandemic context has foregrounded, our positionalities are certainly far more complex and interrelated than we typically acknowledge. As the prolific sf author Kim Stanley Robinson remarks of the COVID-19 pandemic, despite lifestyle alterations being most obvious, "the change that struck me seemed more abstract and internal [... t]he virus is rewriting our imaginations. What felt impossible has become thinkable" (Robinson, 2020: online). In a very science fictional manner, we are beginning to question many of our established assumptions about our role within the world around us. Perhaps humans have been theorising sentience wrongly for many centuries—we might instead begin to comprehend the totality of our planet as the only real consciousness we have yet discovered. Moving far beyond Enlightenment ideals of rational man, we are beginning to accept new ideologies of relationality, such as James Lovelock's Gaia hypothesis (Lovelock, 1972).

As when reading speculative fictions, there is a permanence to the expanded awareness of our biological positionalities which Robinson theorises that many of us have acquired since the pandemic began. Amidst this broader perceptual shift, the Anthropocene entirely subverts "the dream of science fiction that the twentieth century placed so much imaginative investment in" (Canavan, 2021: 263), of our species transcending our earthly existence; either physically in spaceships, or psychically, by theorizing ourselves as beings distinct from our environment. Yet in itself, it is pivotal that climate change is "an event which we have become so habituated toward that we imagine it as a catastrophe that has already happened, against which no point of political resistance seems imaginable" (Canavan, 2021: 257). However, by uncovering the largely occluded position of landscapes within the literary imaginary, we can begin to at least comprehend the boundaries of our anthropocentric biases, and interrogate just how short-sighted our ecocidal behaviours are in the face of Earth's almost unfathomable planetary deep time. As Amitav Ghosh emphasises:

> it was in exactly the period in which human activity was changing the earth's atmosphere that the literary imagination became radically centered on the human. Inasmuch as the nonhuman was written about at all, it was not within the mansion of serious fiction but rather in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Clark and Chalmers, 1998 & Ferrando, 2019.

the outhouses to which science fiction and fantasy has been banished. (Ghosh, 2017: 66)

For Ghosh, speculative literatures are therefore in the unique position of being able to imaginatively address our catastrophic, and yet simultaneously everyday, Anthropocene reality.

Although Homer's *Odyssey* famously includes a recurrent and defamiliarising focus on the inexplicably wine-dark sea [Ancient Greek: οἶνοψπόντος] that its characters cross and recross, it is not until Maragaret Cavendish's *The Description of a New World Called The Blazing-World* (1666) that the progenitors of our modern fantasy and science fiction texts began to interrogate the significance of landscape. From its earliest pages, Cavendish is at pains to foreground the significance of alien geography:

they were not onely driven to the very end or point of the Pole of that World, but even to another Pole of another World, which joined close to it; so that the cold having a double strength at the conjunction of those two Poles, was insupportable: [...] You must know, that each of these Worlds having its own Sun to enlighten it, they move each one in their peculiar Circles; which motion is so just and exact, that neither can hinder or obstruct the other; for they do not exceed their Tropicks: and although they should meet, yet we in this World cannot so well perceive them, by reason of the brightness of our Sun, which being nearer to us, obstructs the splendor of the Sun of the other World, they being too far off to be discerned by our optick perception, except we use very good Telescopes; by which, skilful Astronomers have often observed two or three Suns at once. [...] finding the Boat swim between two plains of Ice, as a stream that runs betwixt two shores, [she] at last perceived land, but covered all with Snow: from which came, walking upon the Ice, strange Creatures... (Cavendish, 2016: online)

Indeed, much of the early portion of this early speculative fiction text fixates on explicating the differences in landscape and inhabitants between its protagonist's familiar home planet, and the new world which she is quickly installed as Empress of. Even the starkly unfamiliar landscapes of *The Blazing World*, Cavendish implies by this plot point, are subject to the whims of human agency. Such proprietorial attitudes to landscapes remain ascendant almost four hundred years later, yet alien landscapes themselves are no longer confined to the imaginary realm of speculative fiction.

A century and a half later, Mary Shelley's early SF novel *Frankenstein* (1818) was famously conceived as a ghost story in a competition to match on paper the chilling atmosphere of 1816's 'Year Without a Summer'—an almost unprecedented climactic event affecting the majority of Europe, which had been generated by the explosion of Mount Tambora. The genesis of this foundational speculative text was therefore closely enmeshed with the vagaries of the earthly landscapes Shelley inhabited.<sup>2</sup> It is likewise instructive to consider the resolution of H.G. Wells novel *The War of the Worlds* (1897)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Hence, *Frankenstein* is much akin to Woodie Guthrie's concept album *Dust Bowl Ballads* (1940), itself a foundational popular music album, and an extended rumination on life in the American Dust Bowl of the 1930s—a miniature climate crisis resulting from cavalier agricultural practices across the Central states having disrupted the ability of indigenous grasses to reclaim sun-baked topsoil..

from a similar perspective. In its narrative, the ascendant, technologically superior, Martian invaders are ultimately "slain by the putrefactive and disease bacteria against which their systems were unprepared; [...] slain, after all man's devices had failed, by the humblest things that God, in his wisdom, has put upon this earth" (Wells, 2013: 120). Wells's famous eucatastrophe is not only de-anthropocentric, but also firmly grounded in the everyday world—rigorously upending our familiarity with the common cold to great dramatic effect. Yet it is less widely acknowledged that this nonanthropocentric ending was almost certainly inspired by Wells having lived through the first true global pandemic less than a decade earlier—the Asiatic flu of 1889 and 1890, itself a variant of coronavirus.3

Suggestively, Wells contracted what he describes as "influenza" paired with "congestion of the right lung" (Wells, 1967: 314) in April 1890, which left him incapacitated "in bed" (Wells, 2021: 157) for two days. Since he distinctively mentions this illness in multiple contemporary letters, we can safely infer that he contracted a particularly virulent strain of flu. If this inference is correct, not only did the cultural imaginary of the 1889/1890 pandemic indirectly contribute to the thematic genesis of The War of The Worlds, but the coetaneous coronavirus also contributed to the authorship of the text more directly, via its intrusion into, and subsequent coaction with, Wells's cells and microbiota. Nevertheless, it is understandable that for both logistical and anthropocentric reasons, co-authorship of texts is not typically attributed to microscopic forms of life, or in the case of Frankenstein, landscapes and volcanism. Ultimately, the two overtly warring species in Wells's text are rendered as planetary functions,

prompting a reconsideration of its title's significance.

Speculative landscapes often play a centralising role in more contemporary texts. J. G. Ballard's first four novels each document the intensification of one terrestrial atmospheric or meteorological datum into the form of a novum, with these particular phenomena thereafter forming almost the entire premise of their speculative visions. In The Wind From Nowhere (1961) constantly strengthening winds decimate human civilisation; in The Drowned World (1962) an underwater London has become a jungle interspersed aquatic world as a result of solar radiation melting the polar icecaps; in The Burning World (1964; later The Drought) a protracted drought generated by radioactive waste has left only minute portions of the globe inhabitable; in Equinox (1964; later The Crystal World) a strange crystalline manifestation begins to spread across the globe from out of the jungles of Africa. In each instance, our regular Earthly landscapes become transmogrified, and in short order, indifferently begin to reduce their human carrying capacity.

Meanwhile, in Brian Aldiss's sprawling novel *Helliconia* (1982-5), a future human civilisation on the text's eponymous planet is subject to phenotypic plasticity—like grasshoppers and locusts on our own Earth—and thereby undergoes a dramatic virusmediated biological upheaval twice every Great Year, in tandem with the other flora and fauna of the planet. Even more starkly than the Terran humans who observe their civilisations rising and falling on the planet from afar, Heliconian humans are co-active actants firmly grounded within the planetary landscapes they inhabit. Nevertheless, the amnesia caused by the immense length of the planet's Great Year

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Allen Stroud, for instance, neglects this background when discussing *The War of the Worlds* in the context of COVID-19 (Stroud, 2020).

(equivalent to 1959 terrestrial years) ensures that each human generation facing the recursive rupture of its ecological niche is unaware of the greater planetary cycles its existence contributes towards, and hence, generation upon generation lives and dies recursively with no knowledge of this long-dormant aspect of their species' biology. The greatest consciousness in the novel is therefore the intricate and self-perpetuating life systems of the planet Helliconia itself.

In Christopher Nolan's blockbuster film Interstellar (2014), a mid twenty-first century Earth is beset by climate change phenomena, and the human species is facing almost certain extinction until a beneficent extraterrestrial force points the way to a wormhole in space opening onto a dozen extra-solar worlds. With the aim of securing humanity's future, the crew of the Endurance sets out from a world ravaged by climbing temperatures and dust storms to find a suitable candidate for the rehabitation of Homo sapiens. Landing on an ocean world, the team is almost immediately engulfed by tidal waves many times the height of a terrestrial skyscraper, towering expanses of water which nearly eclipse the screen. As opposed to CGIgenerated environments, most shots in the movie were filmed on Earth against dazzling terrestrial backdrops, including those depicting the dazzling ice planet Mann.4 Likewise, by the end of the plot the survey team do not succeed in reaching a habitable planet, and the future of humanity is only secured by gratuitous time travel; by implication, Earth itself is the true best choice, prior to the onset of the Anthropocene.

Even more recently, N. K. Jemisin's *Broken Earth* trilogy (2015-2017) has become the first trilogy in history whose each individual

volume has won the prestigious Hugo Award.5 Depicting a harsh dystopian reality on a planet wracked by immense seismic activity, it sees a dystopian human civilisation enslaving and feeding off the powers of its own landscapeattuned Orogenes in order to eke out a meager living on a continent ironically named the Stillness. Only by learning to collaborate with the geological forces of the planet in humanoid form can humanity learn to free itself from its self-imposed shackles. Received with almost unparalleled fervour by fans of both Fantasy and SF, the trilogy's meteoric reception indicates that such commensurate depictions of speculative landscapes are beginning, perhaps, to establish a well-overdue niche within the minds of audiences.

World War Tree is not a battle. It is a dire call for action; for recognition of the puissance and irreducibility of our planetary environment, and towards a widespread recognition that the only speculative future which our species has *even the chance* of living upon Earth, depends upon our modes of relation with those same landscapes we continue to despoil and overpopulate in the present day. None of those speculative landscapes discussed in brief thus far are the subject of any of the six articles comprising the *Hélice* special issue which follows. Rather, between them, our contributors' articles delineate a tantalising plethora of further worlds and alien landscapes...

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Amongst the extraordinary contributions to this issue,<sup>6</sup> we must note that one article has been produced through, and in defiance

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> In this instance, the Svínafellsjökull Glacier in Iceland.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> At the time of its original publication.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> All of which are not only peer-reviewed, but also insightful, inventive, and wonderfully diverse responses to the issue's overarching theme of speculative landscapes.

of, the incalculably difficult circumstances of war. Despite her entire livelihood having been relocated following Russia's unjust invasion of Ukraine, and whilst under constant threat of unprovoked attacks upon unarmed civilians, Sofiya Filonenko has fought ceaselessly to preserve a culture of active scholarship at Berdyansk University, formerly located in the occupied territory. It is a testament to the resilience of her and her fellows that Sofiya's article on Edgar Rice Burroughs' *A Princess of Mars* appears in this special issue, quite in spite of ongoing attempts to render the Ukrainian populace voiceless.

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We are honoured to open the issue with an invited article by Chris Pak, author of *Terraforming: Ecopolitical Transformations and Environmentalism in Science Fiction* (Liverpool University Press, 2016). In this contribution, which comprises part of the ongoing collaborative research project Narrating Rural Change, Pak investigates depictions of farming and agriculture across landscapes in three exemplars of Welsh sf, proving, as he does so, the as-yet insufficiently appreciated wealth of that country's speculative tradition.

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# Visions of the Future, Farming and Land Use in Welsh Science Fiction

### CHRIS PAK Swansea University

Abstract: Farming is the quintessential human activity that has dramatically re-shaped landscapes across millennia. Highly politicised, farming landscapes have in different contexts been appealed to as support for Nationalist thought, instituted as policies for expansion and the displacement of other peoples and non-human agents, and constructed as sites for the consolidation of oppositional and radical politics. In the context of climate change, contemporary farming practices have been challenged by a range of alternative modes of land use such as rewilding, challenges to the meat industry and to industrial farming practices. The recognition of the need for change as a response to the effects of climate change and the national conversation about land use and farming in Wales discloses a contested space where visions of the future are hotly debated. This article examines works of Welsh science fiction that have attempted to narrate aspects of rural change from the vantage of futurity. Analysing Islwyn Ffowc Elis' A Week in Future Wales: A Journey to the Year 2033 (2021;

original Welsh version 1957), Lloyd Jones' Water (2014; original Welsh version 2009), and Cynan Jones' Stillicide (2019), it asks how rural change is conceived in the Welsh context and how these works relate to other narratives of climate change beyond the Welsh context. Focussing on how the resources of the mode are used to investigate the significance of farming landscapes, it will analyse how transformations that respond to key ecologic and socio-political issues are imagined.

**Keywords:** Rural change, farming, Wales, water, Cymru

Farming has dramatically re-shaped landscapes across millennia. Highly politicised, agrarian landscapes have been appealed to as support for nationalist thought, instituted as policies for expansion and the displacement of peoples and non-human agents and constructed as sites for the consolidation of oppositional and radical politics. Historically positioned at the margins of Empire, the Anglosphere and Europe, the question of a distinctively Welsh identity has been central to discursive

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This paper is an outcome of research for the project Narrating Rural Change, which received funding from the Learned Society of Wales and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC). The project website can be found at: <a href="https://ruralchange.swansea.ac.uk/">https://ruralchange.swansea.ac.uk/</a>

constructions of the Welsh nation and its future. Landscape occupies a key place in these debates about identity, nationhood and belonging, yet the changing patterns of land use and the role of farming in Wales take on new dimensions in the context of climate change. With 90% of Welsh land dedicated to farming (Neil, 2021), the constitution of farms in the light of their acknowledged contribution to climate change and the urgency of establishing food infrastructures to address food insecurity are both critical matters which position farming as central to climate mitigation and adaptation. The need for change as a response to the effects of climate change and the national conversation about land use and farming in Wales discloses a contested space where visions of the future are hotly debated. The importance of thinking through landscape, identity and climate change makes rural change crucial to the contemporary imagination of the future of Wales.

This article examines works of Welsh science fiction (sf) that narrate aspects of rural change from the vantage of futurity. Analysing Islwyn Ffowc Elis' A Week in Future Wales: A Journey to the Year 2033 (2021; Wythnos yng Nghymru Fydd, 1957), Lloyd Jones' *Water* (2014; *Y Dŵr*, 2009), and Cynan Jones' Stillicide (radio-play and print, 2019), it asks how rural change is conceived in the Welsh context. Focussing on how sf is used to investigate the significance of rural landscapes, it will analyse how transformations that respond to key ecologic and socio-political issues are imagined. These stories project and re-voice history whilst re-mapping identity to speculate on what Welshness might mean in the future. Key historical events function as touchstones of Welsh identity: the flooding of the Tryweryn Valley and the displacement of the Welshspeaking community of Capel Celyn to provide water for Liverpool in 1965—"a tinnitus in

the ear of Welsh history" as Lloyd Jones puts it in *Water* (2014: 282)—textures not only the climate-wracked future of that novel, but also the portrayal of novel water infrastructures in Cynan Jones' *Stillicide*. Whilst *A Week in Future Wales* was published before the Tryweryn Valley flooding, a footnote to the English translation reveals that plans for the dam were in place by the time Elis wrote the utopia (2021: 220). The incident therefore appears as one of numerous parallel developments to Elis' portrayal of a dystopian Wales.

The flooding of the Tryweryn Valley to create the Llyn Celyn reservoir has become an indelible symbol for Welsh nationalism. This event is one of numerous instances of the appropriation of land for English interests; in the 1880s Llanwddyn in North Wales was flooded to create the Llyn Efyrnwy reservoir, which supplied water to Liverpool and Merseyside, while in 1906 the Elan Valley reservoirs were completed to provide water to Birmingham (Griffiths, 2014: 451). The resistance to the Tryweryn Valley's flooding was informed by historical appropriations of Welsh land that went beyond the construction of water infrastructures. The Ministry of Defence's establishment of military facilities in Wales during the 1930s-1940s (Bohata, 2004: 82; Griffiths, 2014: 451; Atkins, 2018: 459) and England's Forestry Commission's acquiring of land for afforestation from the 1920s (Bohata, 2004: 81-85) provided a wider context for understanding the flooding of the Tryweryn Valley as an event of national significance.

The resistance in Wales to the displacement of the forty-eight Welsh-speaking residents of Capel Celyn "was a manifestation, and microcosm, of a much wider concern about Anglo-Welsh relations" (Cunningham, 2007: 633). A memorial painted in 1965 along the A487 that bears the words 'Cofiwch Tryweryn'

(Remember Tryweryn) has "arguably become the most important landscape of memory for this episode in Welsh history" (Griffiths, 2014: 456). The flooding of Tryweryn symbolises the complex and uneven power relationships between England and Wales and for the "drowning of a nation" (Griffiths, 2014: 452). The symbology of Tryweryn has been developed and promulgated in literature and other cultural productions to generate a 'prosthetic memory' of the event, in which "people are invited to take on memories of a past through which they did not live" (Landsberg, 2004: 8).

## Islwyn Ffowc Elis' A Week in Future Wales

A Week in Future Wales is a utopia first published by Plaid Cymru [Party of Wales], which was formed in 1925 to campaign for recognition of the Welsh language as the official language of Wales, and later for Welsh independence. Elis adapts the dream frame narrative seen in utopias such as W. H. Hudson's A Crystal Age (1887), Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward: 2000-1887 (1888) and William Morris' News from Nowhere (1890) such that experimental research into the fourth dimension shows that time-travel is possible for individuals who possess a specific genetic predisposition (Elis, 2021: 18-19). Protagonist Ifan Powell is transported first to an independent utopian Wales and then to a dystopian Wales that has become a totalitarian colony of England. This enables Elis to present two competing visions of Wales' future in order to agitate for political action in the present.

Elis' utopia is open and contingent: his two competing visions of Welsh futurity are unstable and do not exhaust alternative possibilities. Their realisation is dependent wholly on action in the present, as the doctor who sends Powell into the future explains. Philip E. Wegner argues that sf's utopianism "is [...] located in those moments where the closure of the conventional realist work is displaced by an openness to the unfinished potential of historical becoming" (2014: 577), while Matthew Beaumont argues that "[u]topian fiction dreams that the diffusion of its ideas in the present will create the conditions necessary for instituting its ideal society in the future" (2005: 194). A Week in Future Wales is no exception; Powell arrives to free Wales as a sceptic of independence and becomes committed to Welsh independence after direct experience with the possibilities for the nation. This experience takes the form of the utopian tour,2 which brings Powell into contact with Wales' future landscape and the ways of life which have shaped that landscape as an expression of a pluriform Welsh identity. Elis interrogates stereotypes of Welsh identity as nostalgic and archaic and negotiates between conceptions of an anachronistic parochialism and a version of modernity that challenges capitalism and English supremacy. A Week in Future Wales' depictions of vehicular travel offer views of the landscape that are informed by travel writing during the interwar period and beyond, which enables an experience of a constructed rurality that embodies national identity: "[C]ountryside recreation and tourism in the interwar years were shot through with notions of citizenship and 'anti-citizenship.' There were 'correct' ways of appreciating the countryside and the place of the motor car in this landscape was complex" (Gruffudd et al., 2000: 594).

David Matless explains of the 'motoring pastoral' that "the petrol engine allowed

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The utopian tour is a staple device of classic utopias, such as Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World* (1666) and Émile Souvestre's *Le Monde tel qu'il sera* (1846).

a nostalgic passage to an old country, its landscape and rustic inhabitants fitting through photography and prose into pictorial, pastoral conventions" (2016: 97). Elis' depictions of travel draw from the motoring pastoral but combine this form with utopia and sf to undermine nostalgic portrayals of a static rural landscape. Gruffudd writes that, "[t]o leave the currents of industrial capitalism was to leave English influence," and that counterpoising images of the self-sufficient peasant farmer with the capitalist was part of this rejection (1994: 72). Elis' utopian future is socially experimental, technologically adept, ambitious, plural and welcoming. Co-operative farms and other businesses are organised to constrain capital accumulation so that no individual or corporation can wield undue influence. Science and technology places Wales in a position of confidence vis-à-vis a world struggling with the legacies of capitalist exploitation, which threatens to erase national and regional identities.

# Pastoral and Agrarian Visions of Future Wales

A Week in Future Wales connects independence, the agrarian and pastoral vision of the Welsh landscape and a Blochian view of utopian hope as founded on hunger as the fundamental human drive (Bloch, 1996: 75). Mair, the daughter of Powell's host Llywarch and Powell's guide and love interest, reflects that "Man will never be clever enough to be completely free. He'll always want food" [Ddaw dyn byth yn ddigon clyfar i fod yn gwbwl rydd] (133; 128). Echoing Morris' News from Nowhere, the Welsh landscape is a distributed system of farms, industry and countryside that combines the pastoral and industrial. This vision draws on a well-established debate about

homecrofting, which was preoccupied with the relationship between industry and the local:

James Scott took up the campaign for 'Homecrofting a plan which expected to 'save industry by anchoring it to the soil' [...]. He re-envisioned the industrial valleys of Wales as a series of 'home-croft towns, in which a few thousand families make for one another everything they require... where the inhabitants produce not only food but everything climate allows.' (Linehan & Gruffudd, 2004: 53)

To safeguard against hunger and economic decline Wales prioritises agriculture. Powell's tour confronts him with a vision of "Wales [...] spread around us like a garden" [yr oedd cymru o'n cwmpas fel gardd] (133; 128). Government investment into agriculture, which "nearly left the nation broke," [fe fu bron i'r gwario hwnnw dorri'r genedl] is foundational to Wales' success and makes "Welsh agriculture today [...] the most successful in Europe" [Amaethyddiaeth Cymru heddiw yw'r fywa' llewyrchus yn Ewrop] (136; 131). An invention called "Silk Mist" [Tawch Sidan] is applied to fields to prevent soil depletion and to enhance plant growth, making this vision of an agrarian Wales dependent on technological investment (144; 138). Care is taken to ensure that farm and countryside are concordant with a pastoral vision for Wales. The invention «gwybrin» enables "[e]very building that's put up in the countryside, that is at risk of impairing the view rather than enhancing it [to be] made invisible" (155). As Mair explains, "[w]e're crazy about keeping the countryside beautiful" ['Rydy'ni'n benboeth dros gadw harddwch y wlad] (131; 127).

If this image of a pastoral Wales leaves little room for co-shaping the land in collaboration with non-human agencies, this problem is partially acknowledged in relation to technologies of weather control:

The weathermen can control the weather to some degree these days. But there's a school of thought that thinks it's better to let things take their course, so long as there aren't weeks of unbroken rain or a long drought. They interfere if that happens. [Mae'r gwŷr tywydd yn medru rheoli'r tywydd i raddau erbyn hyn. Ond mae ysgol sy'n credu bod y tywydd yn ei fympwyon naturiol yn well, ond bai fod wythnosau o law di-dor neu sychder hir. Maen' hwythau o blaid ymyrryd bryd hynny] (152; 146)

Utopian rural change is depicted as continuous with traditional views of a pastoral and agrarian landscape as an expression of Welsh national identity. Technology and new social and economic arrangements make such landscapes possible and reject their positioning as regressive. Yet despite the interplay between tradition and social transformation, the portrayal of gendered social roles, which assigns domestic duties to many of the women that Powell meets, and the failure to acknowledge non-human agents as co-shapers of the landscape aligns A Week in Future Wales with what Chris Ferns suggests is a problem endemic to libertarian utopias; the new, utopian social order that Elis depicts recapitulates gender stereotypes and anthropocentrism such that "it embodies a specifically male fantasy of establishing a familiar security" (1999: 174).

### The Local and the Global

Although the Welsh landscape can meet the nation's need for sustenance, it cannot satisfy the nation's desire for imported food that had once been a familiar part of life and so

the landscape is transformed technologically. Despite the localism of Wales' co-operative farms, mining, and other industries, utopian Wales is outwardly oriented. A technology that illustrates this orientation and which has implications for how the landscape and the local are constructed involves "bottling sunshine," [gostrelu pelydrau haul] which enables Welsh farmers to grow lemons, "coffee and cocoa and oranges and bananas," "all in greenhouses, of course" [coffi a choco ac orenau a bananâu [...] y cwbwl wrth gwrs dan fetel gwydrin] (32; 32). This technology is dependent on an international infrastructure for trade, as bottled sunshine is exported by tropical countries. Nonetheless the produce of distant lands is still imported; Llywarch explains that "Welsh produce isn't as good as what grows under natural conditions in the tropics and sub-tropics" ['Dyw'r cynnyrch Cymreig ddim cystal â'r cynnyrch sy'n tyfu dan amodau naturiol y trofannau a'r is-drofannau] (32; 32). Containment in greenhouses is crucial to maintaining continuity between past and future landscapes even if plantations of greenhouses-which are absent from the utopian tour-threaten to transform the rural landscape. Powell's concern upon learning of this arrangement centres on the possible abandonment of traditional Welsh produce: "[b]ut Welsh farmers haven't given up on growing wheat and raising sheep and cattle?" [Ond 'dydi ffermwyr Cymru ddim wedi rhoi'r gorau i dyfu ŷd a magu defaid a gwartheg?] (32; 32). Despite the near obsolescence of carnism in this future Llywarch explains that "we grow and raise more than ever" ['rydy'ni'n tyfu ac yn magu mwy nag erioed] (32; 33), thus asserting that the threat to national identity represented by the produce and production of utopian desire is minimised.

The symbol for Wales' confidence as an independent nation is its space programme,

which operates in collaboration with a "Worldwide Council for Moon Exploration" [Gyngor y Gymdeithas Fyd er Archwilio'r Lleuad] (169; 162). Wales' engagement with the unknown, both in nation-building and through space exploration, is proof for Powell that appropriate use of science and technology combined with humane social reform offer promising futures for nations such as Wales:

I was in a rich country, and in an age which was achieving astonishing things and keeping its head. The old rough and tumble of the 20th Century had passed away. These Welshmen could handle progress with wisdom and achievement with humility. Yes. This was an era to stay in. [Yr oeddwn mewn gwlad gyfoethog, ac mewn oes a oedd yn cyflawni'r anhygoel ac eto'n cadw'i phen. Yr oedd hen ruthr a brwysgedd yr ugeinfed ganrif wedi mynd. Yr oedd y Cymry hyn yn medru cydio cynnydd wrth bwyll a gorchest wrth wtleidd-dra. Oedd. Yr oedd hon yn oes i aros ynddi.] (171-172; 165)

Powell's journey through time is paralleled by the journey through space of the Gwalia II expedition, thus aligning both endeavours as instances of the extension of human influence over the boundaries of time and space. The heroic risks undertaken to land on and film the Moon using technology developed by a Welsh scientist is proof of the possibilities inherent in an independent and outwardlooking Wales. The "desolate landscape" [olygfa ddiffaith] of the Moon, despite the expedition leader's familiarisation of it as "something like the temperature on a sunny day in Wales in the middle of winter" [rywbeth yn debyg i dymheredd diwrnod heulog yng Nghymru yng nghanol y gaeaf] (170; 164), is dramatically alien but holds out the promise of possible Welsh colonisation in the distant future. Powell reflects upon viewing the footage that "[w] ords haven't yet been invented to describe the colour, or the desolation, or the paralysing fear that stalked me" [Nid oes eiriau eto ar gael i ddisgrifio'r lliw, na'r diffeithdra, na'r arswyd parlysol a oedd yn fy ngherdded i] (171; 164). Yet as Powell's experience of free Wales shows, the future need not be met with a paralysing fear but with enthusiasm. Powell reflects early on his tour that "[i]t's like being in a foreign country, which isn't quite foreign either. It's like I've found a Welsh colony in a land far away" ['Rydw i fel petawn i mewn gwlad ddiarth, sy heb fod yn ddiarth chwaith. Fel petawn i wedi dod o hyd i wladfa o Gymry mewn gwlad dros y môr] (61; 59). Space travel figures Powell's own expedition through time and his experience of utopian Wales.

# The Dystopian Counterpart to Utopian Wales

Equally, in its successive strand, the novel instead presents readers with a dystopian vision of Wales as future 'Western England.' Here the greatest fears of pro-Independence nationalists are realised; the Welsh language becomes extinct, funding for infrastructure, culture, and the arts is curtailed, free movement is abolished and labour exploited and alienated. England has furthermore displaced many rural communities to establish tracts of forest for logging. As Kirsti Bohata writes of Elis and other Welsh writers, "far from bolstering rural communities, as the Forestry Commission would have it, these writers perceive afforestation as contributing to the death of the nation by ousting the 'rightful owners' of the land and decimating the indigenous culture" (Bohata, 2004: 94-95). Elis' depiction of an afforested Wales erases

landscapes expressive of an authentic Welsh culture that has been linked to the image of the shepherd: "The battle between afforestation and agriculture (or 'Y Bugail a'r Coedwigwr' [The Shepherd and the Forester], as Richard Phillips put it in 1963) was to be a crucial chapter in the history of the Forestry Commission" (Bohata, 2004: 88). The close association between forests and imperialism in Wales and other key examples of the displacement of communities in Welsh history are subject to a cultural amnesia in this dystopian Wales, erasing possibilities for identification and the development of a distinct Welsh identity.

Landscape is crucial to depictions of a utopian Wales which acknowledge the pluriform identities constituting the nation. Elis' utopia rejects reification of Wales as sentimental, nostalgic and subject to a pastoralism that harks back to a vision rooted in archaism. Future technologies, new forms of cultural and artistic expression, new economic arrangements and national and international endeavour such as space exploration re-position the pastoral and agrarian Wales as future-oriented and oppositional relative to England's capitalist exploitation of the land. The dystopian vision opposes the agrarian and pastoral landscape with an afforested Wales that is rooted in activity conducted by England's Forestry Commission to forcibly re-shape the land. This factor draws attention to how contemporary approaches to climate change must be attuned to local views of the land, such that projected transformations do not impose landscapes that infringe on any historically informed sense of place. A Week in Future Wales does not offer a blueprint so much as a field of possibilities that are directly connected to Powell's contemporary moment. The first step on the route to utopia is the marshalling of support in the present for the establishment of a truly independent Wales.

### Lloyd Jones' Water

Set on the small lakeside farm of Dolfrwynog, Water portrays the last year in the lives of a Welsh family after—to the reader's best knowledge—the collapse of the world's cities. Although vague about the narrative's timeframe, a partial date implies that it begins in 2010, a year after the Welsh-language novel's publication. Only when we read of the Extreme Heatwave of 2089 do readers discover that the novel is set in 2110—a revelation prefigured in the first chapter by a line from the Welsh folk classic Pwy Fydd Yma 'Mhen Can Mlynedd? ["Who'll be here in a hundred years?"] (Jones, 2014: 9). Although the decrepit farmer Wil has a lifelong connection to the farm at the centre of the novel, his sister's family only fled the city to return to their ancestral home amidst the breakdown of social order, and are thus newcomers unfamiliar with life's necessities on a farm.

Water begins with an invocation of the farm as a performative space that connects the present to an imagined deep past: "this is where the life of the farm is staged every day; the very first act began here many centuries ago" [Hwn oedd llwyfan y fferm, ac yma dechreuodd yr act gyntaf ganrifoedd maith yn ôl] (Jones, 2014: 5; Jones, 2009: 5). Continuity between past and present can likewise be discerned in the landscape's appearance, which has long been shaped by its inhabitants. The life now present stands as a legacy for how toil connects the landscape to those who shape it: "[t]he small flowers of the field are their remembrance now" [Blodau mân y llawr ydi eu cofiant heddiw] (5; 5). Water establishes its analysis of climate change and its disruption to the land upon this legacy of work; an originary and ongoing shaping and maintenance. Wil's experience with the land positions him as a witness to the farm's economic decline prior to the novel's diegesis:

[W]hen he was a little boy, he'd seen a very different vista at the lower end of the farm: verdant green fields, rolling in graceful dips and curves toward the floor of the cwm. Dolfrwynog had been fecund and prosperous, thriving on grants and nitrates. But that had been replaced by failure and poverty and sadness. [A Wil yn fachgen ifanc, pan syllai i'r de, tuag at odre'r fferm, gallai weld caeau'n rowlio i lawr tuag at waelod y cwm. Bryd hynny roedd Dolfrwynog yn fferm fawr, sylweddol. Ond daeth methiant, tlodi, a thristwch.] (43; 36)

This passage is evocative of *hiraeth*, which Bohata explains is "the sense of a longing which it is impossible to assuage," and argues that it "reflects perhaps an inevitable response to the very literal loss of place, a response to the condition of exile from these home-places to which there is no possibility of return, except in memory" (2004: 102). In direct contrast to Elis' vision of a free Wales, the withdrawal of subsidies and nitrate fertilisers causes the landscape to deteriorate. Later, the collapse of a national infrastructure dooms Dolfrwynog to an entropy that constrains the lives of the family.

Water eschews romanticised portrayals of farming. Nico, a Polish stranger (and eventual lover to Wil's niece Mari) reflects on the Nazi slogan «Arbeit macht frei» when he exclaims "Does work make us free? Not bloody true! Hard work kill you if you're poor, kill you if you don't know how to get food" (113; 95). Amidst a changing landscape, the family struggles to survive as the stark realities involved in keeping themselves fed gradually come to command all their attention. Of the long-neglected countryside the narrator laments that "their only function today is to hold within their damaged folds all the spirits of the old kingdom" [a'u hunig swydd heddiw yw corlannu ysbrydion y

deyrnas] (6; 5). *Water* insists that this historical neglect of the land is symptomatic of broader societal attitudes that have led to closures that forestall adequate responses to climate change. A vicious cycle is instigated by lifestyles that deprivilege the land, thus enabling the climate crisis to develop—the effects of which further alienates humankind from that land.

The psychic and agential contraction of the world to the farm encourages Wil and his young nephew Huw to romanticise their homestead in ways that position it as a microcosm of the world. Wil, who had suppressed his desire for a life at sea in favour of inheriting the family farm, imagines that it encompasses the entire world. Huw, a young boy familiar with (but long cut off from) the internet's instant access to information whets his appetite for other modes of living, for "strange and distant lands," [lefydd anghysbell] with old issues of National Geographic and outdated history books (7; 6). Huw progressively identifies with an imagined pre-digital, pre-industrial and pre-national way of life, eventually taking on the role of the discursively constructed 'savage' to his sister Mari's 'civilisation.' For Huw, the farm and its inhabitants, its geese and cows for instance, provide the only touchstones for imagining the stories that he encounters in his history books. The landscape therefore shapes Huw's ability to conceive of the otherness of space (distant lands) and time (historical events); landscape and storytelling are implicated in a reciprocal imagining that helps him make sense of his life.

The world's contraction to the farm is a consequence of the fragility of the global economy and the digital systems that have alienated populations from any direct experience of the land. The ageing and sickening Wil is the last survivor who retains a semblance of the traditional farming knowledges that have enabled his family to persist, yet he has

failed to teach this knowledge to the others. The contraction of society discloses to the reader how essential the non-human is for humankind and how such lives have habitually been acknowledged as such by those who work the land. Wil reflects that "[h]e was a friend and a brother to the dogs... but he had a special relationship with the hens, as if they were all members of the same congregation" [Roedd yn frawd ac yn ffrind i'r cwn, ond roedd ganddo berthynas arbennig efo'r ieir, perthynas oedd bron â bod yn gapelaidd ei naws] (11; 10). He imagines the flock's wanderings across the farm-as-world in terms of the Welsh diaspora and of the hens' return to the henhouse as "the far-flung people of Wales returning to their homeland for the great annual festival of song" [bydden nhw'n ymgasglu gogyfer â'r gymanfa fawr] (12; 11).3 This daily cycle intersects in Wil's imagination with an annual cycle of exile and return, and with the seasonal cycle upon which farming is dependent.

Climate change's weird weather makes Wil's farming knowledge insufficient for sustaining the family, suggesting that traditional knowledge passed on orally and through practice within isolated families cannot adapt communities to the changing contexts that climate disruptions bring. Despite Wil's lifelong experience, he frankly admits that "I don't understand this weather at all" ['Fedra i ddim deall y tywydd 'ma o gwbwl'] (42; 36) and reflects on the proverb "March kills you, April skins you"4 which, "[1]ike so many other old sayings, he'd never thought about its meaning, not properly anyway" [roedd o wedi adrodd y ddihareb droeon heb feddwl yn iawn am ei hystyr] (100; 85). As March turns "unnaturally hot" [yn gynnes tu hwnt] (101; 86), Wil's reflection on the aphorism prefigures the storm and heatwave that ruins the family's harvest. During the heatwave Mari and Elin see the farm as a foreign landscape:

The pastures had been badly affected by the heatwave and they were turning a sandy yellow; the traditional greens of Wales had been blowtorched, and the family could be living in the scrublands of Mexico or Africa. [Roedd y borfa wedi crino, ac roedd y caeau'n edrych fel rhywle ym Mecsico; roedd hen lesni Cymru wedi'i losgi i ffwrdd fel côt o baent yn cael ei ddileu gan chwythlamp.] (207; 170)

The effects of climate change starkly bring home Wil's and Huw's romantic daydreams of distant lands. The proximity of these landscape analogues, now no longer distant through this transformation, and thus no longer a source of daydreaming and utopian speculation, provokes a sense of *biraeth* for the family. This transformation highlights how central landscape is to constructing a sense of identity and belonging.

Water presents us with individuals who tell stories about themselves and others as a crucial survival strategy. Their stories represent different ways of coping and living with change. Wil's sister Elin lives in her memories of her pre-apocalypse life and so fails to adapt to her new context. Elin's partner Jack is unable to transition from IT specialist to subsistence farmer and goes mad. The screen-world and the stories that are associated with the pre-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Jones' English translation of the novel makes the reference to the National Eisteddfod more direct, whereas the Welsh original instead merely refers to a "great assembly".

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> 'Mawrth a ladd, Ebrill a fling' (March slays, April flays) is the Welsh-language expression from which this translation is made (Jones, 2009: 85).

apocalypse are contingent and insufficient for the realities of a changing climate and the transformations to the landscape that it brings. The power of storytelling is forcefully conveyed through Mari, who takes on Scheherazade's role. Mari invents new stories about the past and her family to keep Nico on the farm and—at Nico's insistence—to captivate and thus win the favour of a group of power-brokers from a nearby slum. For Mari these stories are a way to invest traumatic events with utopian significance. Yet they are also ways to affirm imagined bonds and to captivate and persuade. Stories, then, tempt their listeners in various ways and have a mysterious power to reveal, conceal and inspire.

Lloyd Jones describes how Water speaks to and is informed by traditions in Welsh Mabinogion, writing—*The* for instance, and its tales of sailing and the sea. It is also a transplantation of elements of Wang Anyi's 1985 novella Baotown for the Welsh context (Jones, 12 September 2009). Baotown concerns a provincial Chinese town located near an illconceived dam subject to flooding. One of Mari's stories mirrors the tragic flood depicted in Baotown which drowns a village elder and a young boy, who is later positioned as the best that the new age has to offer. Nicknamed Dregs, his attempt to save Grandfather Bao during the flood is memorialised by a village writer and leads Dregs to being nominated as a Youth Hero by the Communist Youth League—a degree of attention that stands in stark contrast to the attention he received as a starving child when alive. Lloyd Jones uses Baotown's story of flooding as a frame for his portrayal of the flooding of Dolfrwynog's lake in the postapocalyptic Welsh future depicted in Water. The story of the flooding of Dolfrwynog's lake works at one level as a powerful tale about how climate change submerges connections between generations, overcoming both the best

of the old and new; tradition and innovation, community and concord have no place in the future portrayed in *Water*.

A specifically Welsh focus on rural change need not exclude connections to other locales. Mari's and Nico's sharing of the customs and traditions of their respective Welsh and Polish cultures affirm possibilities for meaningful exchange and understanding. By privileging story and the resonances between different places, Water reaffirms the importance of the stories emerging from Wales for a wider international context. Water underscores how climate change speaks to all communities and how one community's experience functions synecdochally for communities across the globe. This microcosmos is not meant to be taken too far, however, as the novel's record of the dangers of storytelling indicates, but it is meant to show how a changing landscape necessarily involves processes of storying to respond to those transformations.

### Cynan Jones' Stillicide

Cynan Jones likewise envisions water as central to the climate-wracked future of Stillicide. Having been initially shaped by the formal constraints of the radio production, the short stories of this collection recall its title; each is a drop that pools to converge on a fuller picture of the future of Wales and England. The stories making up Stillicide offer a window onto the lives of interconnected characters, and echo Paolo Bacigalupi's portrayal of drought in the Southwestern United States in works such as "The Tamarisk Hunter" (2006) and The Water Knife (2015), though Cynan Jones' style is far more elliptical and perspectival. Stillicide reflects on the utopian form of storytelling as a dangerous concept; Cynan Jones is more interested in how people adapt to life in a

changed context. Throughout the text's future landscape, individuals and groups cope as best they can, some with a lively inventiveness and others through hardship and struggle. These stories point toward the duties individuals bear to one another, duties of care within families, toward strangers, and to the wider world and its inhabitants. The central story sequence is a love story concerning John Branner, a soldier turned police officer who guards a water trainline to London. The militarisation of the rural—echoing England's Ministry of Defence's acquirement of Welsh land for army bases (Bohata, 2004: 82)—transforms the landscape and the lives of the rural communities of Wales. Branner struggles to perform the duty to kill that he insists on maintaining despite his wife's terminal illness. Branner's personal tragedy coheres with the loss of place, the sense of hiraeth, experienced by other characters in the accompanying tales, many of which explore the loss associated with the demand for new ways of living. These tales examine the reconfiguring of relationships to write the future of place in the Welsh context.

### Hydropolitics in 'The Water Train'

'The Water Train' connects a series of motifs: dreams, the kinetic trajectory of a bullet, rain and the dripping of water, the interiority of an individual's mind and the exterior perception of that individual's emotional and psychological state, explosive forces, birds and verticality, to name a few. Branner lives in an ongoing dream that enables the past to bleed into the present, and which orients him fearfully toward a future of pain. The story's images connect Branner's present to his past: Branner's first unforeseen meeting with his eventual wife after a calamitous bombing that leaves him one of only a few survivors is juxtaposed with

images of an explosive force, which in turn is connected to that of a train. A key dream in this story, of Branner and his wife looking toward a treeline facing the sea before it "explode[s] with silence" and the sight of a lone black bird that disintegrates into ash (Jones, 2019: 3) is an emblem for Branner's trauma: "Branner was not connected properly to himself. He could not step out of the moment with her in his dream just before the trees exploded" (9). Branner's adherence to duty at this story's end and at the end of 'Patrol,' the collection's final story, connects the images that structure the collection: "[t]he bullet's path, a dream burst into flame and char, disintegrate to ash. The train some crashing wave" (13, 174). The bullet, the unstoppable force of the train and rain stand as figures for an approaching future: "[t]he future now, a drop from a high building" (12).

The political undercurrent to Branner's story is the contested management of water and how London has begun to consolidate this resource. The water train—easier to guard than a pipeline from sabotage—is an extractive infrastructure embedding a mode of centralisation which fails to address the needs of dispersed rural communities. Sabotage by activists has encouraged security measures that make proximity to the train a death sentence. Branner's duty is to guard the train from the anonymous red blips that signal a presence, whether animal or human, a threat, or otherwise. While Branner's role is to identify and to confirm or reject such targets for the automatic weapons systems, or to make the kill himself, his captivation by the dream of the past as it meets the future makes his superiors uncertain as to whether he can maintain his commitment to this duty. Branner's own struggle is one between a closure of the future through a potential suicidal act or a strengthening commitment to his duty as an officer.

'The Water Train' opens with one such kill as Branner stands over the body of a boy he shot. His personal trauma is also implicated with the conflict of duty that these security measures create. Although "[t]hey weren't taking any chances now. Attacks on the line had increased," Branner's delay in responding to the target speaks to another duty that conflicts with this narrowing of possibility (5). Branner reflects on how the anonymous red blip identified by the train's digital systems could be an animal, and that "[t]here's no need for it to pointlessly die" (5). In 'Patrol,' Branner thinks that "[t]hey should not be here, in this place. Deer, dog, or man" (174). This ambiguous statement could be taken to refer to the interlopers approaching the water train but could also be universally inclusive and taken to refer to this moment in time and the complete context portrayed throughout the collection.

This 'place' is a moment in space and time that is textured by the values and systems that organise the communities around the water train. The water train is a symbol for the whole system of water management and the social organisation that coalesces around the new economic infrastructure of this climate-wracked future. Taken as a whole this water infrastructure figures an existence that excludes what cannot be looked at squarely (much as Branner cannot look toward the hospital where his wife is dying). The values and systems that texture this 'place' are established by those with the power to exclude but, as Stillicide shows, such exclusions are contingent and their re-emergence has the potential to contest dominant ideologies. Other stories in the collection draw attention to the exclusions that are necessary to maintain the fiction of a functioning society, each of which are associated with specific traumas; dispersed rural communities that no longer have a place in the wider national infrastructure, homeless children, exploited migrant workers and animals endangered by a mode of development that extends historical urbanisation and which simply exacerbates climate change. The effect of the concatenation of images in 'The Water Train' and 'Patrol' is to draw connections between disparate phenomena that are implicated in an overarching social and economic outlook. This context, one in which the material and social framework of Wales has been transformed by measures to manage water throughout England and Wales, underscores the far-reaching ramifications of economic decisions that exclude many, with lethal consequences.

### Developmentalism in 'Paper Flowers'

If this scenario recalls the displacement of rural communities such as that of Capel Celyn, then Cynan Jones ensures that land claims and displacement beyond the imperial centre are echoed by similar urban displacements. The stories unfold against the backdrop of an engineering scheme of great ambition and yet also of desperate folly and short-termism. To sustain London, a plan is conceived to tow icebergs from the Arctic Circle to England to meet the capital's demand for water. Yet an infrastructure commensurate with the feat becomes necessary to ensure that icebergs can successfully dock, and the development of this infrastructure necessitates the displacement of many urban families, who are simply offered housing in converted shipping containers in a move much spun for its cost-effectiveness. As the narrator of 'Paper Flowers' notes, "the mayor has announced that far more families will be moved from their homes than the water company first said," reflecting "[h]ow often the process of construction starts with destruction" (19). Indeed, the narrator thinks of how "[t] he city was full of streams and rivers, centuries

ago. But they covered them with tunnels and built houses over them" (22). Cynan Jones thus draws parallels between rural displacement and urban displacement at the hands of a short-term developmentalism organised around the needs of the elites of the imperial centre.

The dock's construction, as an exemplar of the ideology of developmentalism, is paralleled by acts of creation conducted at the margins, with individuals making use of scant resources to enhance rather than replace the spaces that environ them. In 'Paper Flowers' the narrator's lover and her child create artificial blooms from the detritus that is washed up along the banks of a desiccated river. The narrator concludes the story with a vision of hope: "I will imagine them filling the city with blooms. Dancing over the streets. Planting flowers in the cracks of the kerbs" (26), and indeed, we see these paper flowers again on hospital patients' tables in the story 'Butterflies.' These two practices, that of the large-scale dock construction that the section's narrator—a migrant worker—is engaged in, and the small-scale enhancements that are pushed into the future, are expressive of a utopian hope that emerges despite the anti-utopian perspective that undergirds the collection. In contrast to an ill-defined utopian dreaming that fails to address the present context, "[i]nstead of make-believing the big wide world, here she was. Building flowers" (18).

### Ways of Life at the Edge in 'Coast'

Water infrastructures are not the only forms of rural change that have caused dislocations to a sense of place. Wind turbines, too, have previously transformed the landscape and the inhabitants' relationship to that landscape, and are positioned as part of a cascade of change of which the water train and the scheme to tow

icebergs are only the most recent. In 'Coast' and 'Oxen' (the latter a short story rejected for the radio play series), Jones positions wind turbines as a short-sighted and futile imposition enacted upon the landscape. 'Coast' is positioned at the 'edge' and is the site of the emergence of Bronze Age artefacts unearthed by the encroaching coastline. In theoretical terms, the edge refers to Homi K. Bhabha's concept, which Chris Williams describes as a perspective "celebrating the ambivalent, the fractured identity and giving voice to those positions in the interstices of nationhood, those on the margins of the 'nation-space'" (2005: 13). Williams applies this concept to the Welsh borderland, both geographical and affective, and cites Laura di Michele's argument that "the border may offer 'a privileged angle of observation, a place from where one can relate Wales to England and Wales to its own history and myth, to the various "imagined communities" which constitute the idea of "Wales" as the nation experienced by different people at different times'" (Williams, 2005: 13-14; di Michele, 1993: 30). In 'Coast' the edge is the Western Welsh coastline. The unearthed artefacts, in contrast to the landscape of wind turbines and that of the water train, along with the reader's sense of Wales' landscape, generate a palimpsest of habitation and rural change that stretches into antiquity.

In the context of engineering solutions, 'Coast' insists on the transience of ways of life for which the Bronze Age artefacts operate in part as a synecdoche, just as much as large-scale engineering projects comprise a synecdoche for the capitalist economy and the pattern of developmentalism that functions as its support. David, the protagonist of 'Coast' was an engineer involved in the construction of a water pipeline prior to the institution of the water train. Reflecting on the encroaching shoreline, David thinks of his work as "[t]he engineering

of support. Holding things back. Or holding things up" (41). The sight of wind turbines that have been repurposed as flood defence systems prompts David to think of them as "a myopic attempt to harness Nature, now a hopeful bid to hold her back" (42). Yet the grandeur of the scheme to capture icebergs for water captivates his imagination:

There is a magnificence to the idea, he thinks. They're breaking from the ice cap anyway. Why let them melt into the sea? Like limpets, they're a ready crop. With a bit of effort. (44)

Animality in Stillicide offers another standpoint from which to understand the significance of human interventions into the landscape. Limpets form the basis of David's and his wife Helen's diet in a world in which food culture is undergoing change relative to the scarcity brought on by mismanagement, itself exacerbated by the changing climate. David's son Leo visits with a gift of lamb chops brought from the communal farm, which grows food of a quality starkly contrasting that produced by the superfarms of the city—which Helen considers inferior because of the poor quality of their soil. Yet the limpets also structure an analogy that speaks to David's attachment to place: "they barely move more than a metre from their home scar all their lives. They have a home scar" (52). The landscape thus provides a system of signification that helps David to situate himself and to explain his deep attachment to the place of his memory, a place that is visibly and progressively estranged. It is not so much the signs of human dwelling that anchor him to this place, but the persistence of other lives beyond the human that connect the transience of human endeavour to a longer timescale.

Leo works as a mechanic for the water train, which is an engineering feat aligned with that of

the iceberg scheme: "[t]he scale of the thing, the awesomeness of transporting that much water; the science of it! Leo looked strong, like he was stepping towards a life he understood" (46). Underpinning these solutions to water scarcity is a feeling for the technological sublime that has embedded within it a utopian impulse. Yet the confidence these technological solutions encourage is undermined throughout the story. The encroaching shoreline, which submerges structures that formed an essential part of David's sense of place throughout his life, is eerily mirrored by the view from Leo's residence of a farmhouse, flooded by a reservoir which provides water for the water train. Echoes of the Tryweryn Valley are mediated in this representation of an exploitative future water infrastructure.

### Politics and Utopia in 'Chaffinch'

The economics and politics of the iceberg scheme is addressed during a press conference in the story 'Chaffinch.' This story counterpoises the journalist Colin's questions regarding the social and economic implications of the project with the political spin placed on these implications by the story's narrator, Steven—a representative for the project. Key to the struggle over framing the project's outcomes and entailments is an attribution of ownership and control that positions it as either a project driven by the profit-interest of a private corporation or as the inevitable consequence of the necessity to provide water to London's population. One Westminster representative (Williams) asserts that "there's only going to be more of us" (67). Given this assumption, projections indicate that the Ice Dock project is the best solution to the issue not only of water scarcity but also of agricultural production. If this leaves the needs of rural communities unaddressed, then "[i]t's

a case, for the smaller communities, of properly managing the water they *do* have" (59). While rural communities are ostensibly excluded from the benefits of such plans, Williams insists that "Government *is* supporting smaller cities, as well as here [...] Plans for extra reservoirs are already significantly progressed" (61).

Political manoeuvring aside, the central repercussion of the project is ultimately the displacement of communities. Colin directly connects these future displacements with historical parallels: "[a]nd people displaced, again [...] As in the 1950s and 60s. Whole communities" (61). Although alternative housing has been provided, Colin notes that these new communities are effectively "[s] hanty towns! [Made o]ut of rusty metal boxes" (62), to which Williams counters that "[t]he re-use of containers from the decommissioned shipping yards provides a cost-effective and flexible solution with low eco-impact" (63). Yet it is Steven's argument that shifts the locus of responsibility for bearing the consequences of the iceberg scheme from the rural to the urban:

It will serve the city from *within* the city. This won't mean a community of farmers having their way of life destroyed so a distant town can have water. The people affected are from within the community that will benefit. It's time for the city to take responsibility for itself. (63)

The outcome of a debate organised around the responsibilities and duties of rural versus urban communities diverts attention from the overarching system of exploitation to which both groups are subjected. Conceptualising the city itself as an entity strips agency from the groups who are subjected to these displacements. During a press conference which takes place during a protest against the dock's construction, conference attendees and speakers

convene on the building's rooftop where the protestors' chants become indiscernible and their placards unreadable. Verticality dissociates these planners from the voices and experiences of the people they argue that they are serving. This failure to respond to the needs of the entire community is symptomatic of the attempt to re-shape conceptions of reality to enable the institution of a new infrastructure that excludes many: "[o]nce you change the idea of what constitutes the ground, we have so much space. You just can't see it from below" (69).

It is notable that Steven's internal response to Colin's criticisms is to reflect that "[c]learly he has no sense of wonder" (67), a stance which positions the technological sublime as innately capable of evacuating a critical stance toward the proposed projects. This sense of a critical, scrutinising glance is wrapped up with a rejection of utopian modes of thought. Steven explains that "[p]eople get on with it. People have always got on with it. Dystopia is as ridiculous a concept as Utopia. Ultimately we're animals, [... a]nd animals find ways" (68). In a collection that acknowledges animal extinction—and particularly given Steven's own reflection upon how "ninety-nine per cent of species that have ever lived have gone extinct" (57)—this conviction is qualified. Generalising particular communities or individuals in this manner enables an erasure of the distinctiveness of these groups and justifies decisions to displace or destroy them for the benefit of others.

### Conclusion

The three works considered in this article narrate aspects of rural change which centre on attachments to landscape, economic and cultural confidence, along with the equitable management of resources. While agrarian and pastoral landscapes are critical to the

establishment of a distinct Welsh identity that maintains a continuity with the past, these works situate rural change in relation to broader urban and infrastructural change to show the interconnections and dependencies between these different landscapes. Time-travel, postapocalyptic, utopian, and dystopian forms are leveraged to critique stereotypes that characterise Welshness as insular, archaic and backwardlooking and to imagine future possibilities rooted in conceptions of distinct Welsh identities. Such portrayals of pluriform Welsh identities challenge the values and assumptions embedded in English supremacy and capitalism. Key to the depiction of the future of the Welsh landscape is the patterning of the politics of landscape against the historical touchstone of the drowning of the Tryweryn Valley. As a form of prosthetic memory, narratives about the flooding of the Tryweryn Valley offer a strategy for how the works examined in this article use sf to think through what Welshness might mean for the future. Portrayals of futurity function as a form of speculative prosthetic memory which invites readers to entertain future possibilities as vicariously experienced stories. These works thus use landscape to mediate between contemporary conceptions of the past and future to critique, extend, and speculate on Welsh identities as they are projected into an imagined future.

The portrayal of ways of life that develop in relation to the lived experience of a landscape is fundamental to how these works address aspects of change and—in the twenty-first century—climate change. A Week in Future Wales proposes different configurations of farming systems, from traditional family-based smallholdings to co-operatively run farms, the plurality of which—the text insists—speaks to the lived variety of Welsh identities. Utopian rural change is anticipated with enthusiasm and

shown to be continuous with conceptions of an outwardly-oriented Welshness. Yet this utopian view of the future is contingent on activity in the present to realise these possibilities. Lloyd Jones rejects the romanticism of the isolated family farm in *Water* by portraying how fraught such systems are, and will continue to be as climate change transforms the landscape. Given *Water*'s analysis of the causes of climate change, which it grounds in an axiomatic refusal to engage with and form connections to the landscape, the text insists on the importance of human storytelling about the world as a crucial way to forge identities capable of addressing the attitudes and stances that undergird environmental change.

The farm is critical to the invention and maintenance of identities and ways of life that can lead to a flourishing of human and nonhuman agents, though in Water the obverse is demonstrated; rural landscapes are progressively estranged as climate change makes exiles of its dwellers. Cynan Jones in Stillicide draws attention to the longstanding neglect of the rural in favour of the interests of an urban elite, but shows how such groups nevertheless adapt to the climate change context. Rural and urban displacements caused by transformations to the landscape are shown to be driven by a short-term developmentalism that fails to tackle the drivers of climate change. Rather, the past is extended into the future, despite the historical record evident in the landscape, which can be read as a palimpsest of rural and urban change. The marginalised voices of the excluded nonetheless provide alternative views of the landscape that offer contestations to the dominant ideology of progress and developmentalism depicted in this collection of short stories.

A key aspect of these works is the connections they disclose between the rural and the urban, the agricultural and industrial, and the global systems within which Welsh industry

and agriculture are implicated. For Lloyd Jones and Cynan Jones, climate change is productive of hiraeth, a feeling of loss and exile brought about by disruptions to a sense of place, which these writers connect to a history of transformation to the Welsh landscape—such as that of the flooding of the Tryweryn Valley. Hiraeth is likewise fundamental to Elis' utopia, which for Powell once again becomes a 'no-place' after he becomes an exile. Thus the etymological ambiguity of More's original coining of utopia—as a pun that plays on the meanings of ou-topos (no-place) and eu-topos (good place) is connected to the sense of loss and exile from a future Wales that is simultaneously good and non-existent (Ferns, 1999: 4). All three writers explore how Wales' changing landscapes speak to different conceptions of Welsh identity. They use utopia and sf to construct identities rooted in national, family-based, and communal modes of connectedness that attempt, and sometimes fail, to resist the closure of the future.

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# Situating Solastalgia within Climate Fiction: Anthropogenic Expansions of Dystopian Fiction

### Julia E. KIERNAN Lawrence Technological University

Abstract: Climate fiction is a relatively new sub-genre of science fiction, gaining notoriety in the last decade. Throughout cli-fi familiar landscapes are framed by solastalgia—a relatively new term that describes mental distress triggered by environmental change—emphasizing to readers the catastrophic environmental effects of contemporary, 'right now' human choices. Using solastalgia as a framing device, this chapter offers an ecocritical analysis of Joyce Carol Oates "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" (2019) which contemporizes the environmental sins of man within a landscape that is eerily familiar, but clearly apocalyptic. In emphasizing the ways that environmental landscapes are shaped by human choices, this article offers a holistic approach to reading solastalgia; a reading not grounded in solely in Western, monological, and colonial constructs of science, but extending into the axiological inclinations of the humanities that contextualize human relationships with surrounding landscapes as dialogic and constructivist. Situating solastalgia at the core of the cli-fi genre, this chapter will offer a reading of "Sinners" that

examines the many interconnected dimensions of natureculture, emphasizing the competing forces of the human condition at play across dystopic, climate fiction.

**Keywords:** Solastalgia, cli-fi, natureculture, Joyce Carol Oates, dystopia

Initially, the question is: Who in our circle will die first?
Then: Who is next?
Then: Don't Ask.
(Oates, 2019: 65)

These lines are taken from Joyce Carol Oates' short story, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," published in the *New Yorker*'s fiction section in October 2019. The frontispiece image that accompanies the narrative features a green, surgical face mask (an object we are intimately familiar with now, but one which held much less significance at the time of publication) set against flames. Both these flames and the story's title reference a much earlier text of the same name, authored by American theologian Jonathan Edwards.

However, whereas Edwards' 1741 sermon situates God as a wrathful and vengeful arbiter of the sins of man, Oates' short story recasts and contemporises sin in the context of environmental catastrophe. Whilst both the story's imagery and the selected epigraph presage the ensuing COVID-19 pandemic, this post-publication context might encourage contemporary readers to interpret the story from an anthropocentric perspective. Although the epigraph is most easily related to the human characters of the narrative, a closer reading of the text—one which decenters human perspectives and centralises those of the landscape—gives readers pause and positions ethical questions not only in terms of the story's human actors, but also throughout the fiery landscape wherein the narrative is set.

"Sinners," is a story of climate catastrophe which falls under the burgeoning category of climate fiction (cli-fi). A subgenre of science fiction, cli-fi has steadily gained significance over the last several decades; in the last decade alone, "[1]iterature focused on climate change has become a major trend in English-language publishing and reading" (Schneider-Mayerson, 2018: 473). Cli-fi texts work to resituate human relationships with nature, particularly relation to dystopian catastrophes characterised by human illness, infection, and infirmity. The subgenre situates nature, and natureculture broadly, in terms of the corporeal, emphasising and interrogating the catastrophic environmental effects of human choice. As defined, "[n]atureculture is a concept that emerges from the scholarly interrogation of dualisms that are deeply embedded within the intellectual traditions of the sciences and humanities (e.g., human/animal; nature/ culture)" (Malone & Ovenden, 2006: 1). Such dualisms regularly pervade the dystopian themes of cli-fi, manifesting across landscapes roiling with the many horrors of environmental destruction.

A recurrent theme that is exacerbated by such readings of natureculture is duplicity, as characters endeavor to survive in a 'brave new world' whilst attempting to maintain the semblance of a near, but increasingly distant past. In cli-fi texts this longing can be theoretically framed via solastalgia—a twenty-first century term originally used to describe mental distress triggered by environmental change (Albrecht, 2003). More recently, solastalgia has been framed in terms of physical illnesses, particularly heightened by the catastrophic environmental effects on landscapes caused by contemporary 'right now' human choices. To position the human experience as one framed by natureculture accentuates solastalgia and also incites deep-seated fears of unknown futures. By offering a close reading of Oates' "Sinners," this article positions solastalgia as an important trope within both cli-fi literature and environmental humanities scholarship, situating environmental distress as not simply medical, but also sociocultural. This fosters acknowledgement that "[a]s a species, [...] we are not aloof from our biosphere, however great our power to alter it; we are enmeshed within it. The decimation of plant and animal life entails the potential destruction of humanity" (Hughes & Wheeler, 2013: 4). Solastalgia—which I argue is inherently an extension of natureculture—is used as a framing device to offer an ecocritical analysis of Oates' "Sinners," and explore how the story contemporises the environmental sins of man within a landscape that is eerily familiar, but clearly apocalyptic. In emphasising the ways that environmental landscapes are shaped by human choices, this article offers a holistic approach to reading solastalgia, one which examines the many interconnected dimensions of natureculture and considers the competing

forces of the human condition at play across dystopian, climate fiction.

I begin by examining various aspects of the cli-fi genre, followed by a review of the ways that scholars have situated solastalgia as an interdisciplinary concept. I then offer an overview and close reading of Oates' text in order to reposition solastalgia as a narrative device operative within cli-fi. This move attends to the ways that speculative landscape representations within cli-fi are framed by both place and health, and positions the landscapes we live in as actant and agentive territories. On these grounds, I argue that a defining feature of twenty-first century cli-fi is a lack of separation between human and environment. As such, this article points to ways that cli-fi texts work within the genre of speculative fiction to disrupt human-centric experiences, intertwining human existence with the natural world—a world that, while increasingly shaped by the human hand, is anything but tamed.

Dystopian fiction, itself a subgenre of speculative fiction, emerged in the nineteenth century as a response to utopian literature. Now, more than a hundred years later, as climate change escalates and ensuing climate catastrophes become increasingly normalised across our daily lives, media, and popular culture, it has proven necessary to coin a further and even more-specific genre-label for narratives that embody "dystopian visions of post-apocalyptic futures" (Kotva & Mebius, 2021). Cli-fi is "[c]haracterized most frequently by efforts to imagine the impact of drastic climatological change on human life and perceptions, cli-fi narratives can be set in the past, present, or near future of the planet" (Irr, 2017: online). Moreover, cli-fi narratives are now prevalent under the umbrella of dystopian fiction; for more than a decade they have, "eclipsed nuclear terror as the prime mover of

the apocalyptic and dystopian imagination" (Hughes & Wheeler, 2013: 1).

For twenty-first century readers, this subgenre narrates a present that is both strange and familiar; often, even the future settings of these texts are scarcely discernible from our current reality. Equally however, as Irr (2017) explains, a defining feature of cli-fi is its concern "with a temporality that is retrospective", meaning there remains a stable before and after, in addition to an attention to species adaptation, specifically human adaptation. In these ways, "cli-fi synthesizes past and present and projects the result into a largely unavoidable but still emergent or creeping future" (Irr, 2017). Aligning with cli-fi's retrospective nature is solastalgia—a term coined to capture the "relationship between ecosystem distress and human distress" (Albrecht, 2005: 41). Temporally speaking, "[t]he concept of solastalgia is a condition that captures the sense of lost home when still at home" (Askland & Bunn, 2018: 18), embodying a looking backwards while living within the present moment. As Galway et al. explain:

Solastalgia is an increasingly useful concept for understanding the links between ecosystem health and human health, specifically, the cumulative impacts of climatic and environmental change on mental, emotional, and spiritual health. Given the speed and scale of climate change and the unbridled advancement of resource extraction, more and more people will experience the unwelcome transformation of cherished landscapes and solastalgic distress. (2019: 15)

Central to this reading of solastalgia are implications of natureculture; articulated in their description of the "links between

ecosystem health and human health" as well as the contextualising of landscapes as "cherished;" both of which point to the entanglement of human lived experience in terms of place, specifically home. Solastalgia, then, situates the landscapes we live within as something more than simply inhabited by humans; they are places that are integral in how we psychically define ourselves and those around us. As such, landscapes comprise a physical arbiter of mental geography.

### Solastalgia

The term solastalgia was coined in 2003 by Glenn Albrecht—an environmental philosopher with theoretical and applied interests in the relationship between ecosystem and human health—and was later elaborated upon in a collaborative 2005 publication in PAN (Philosophy, Activism, Nature). As a term, it has been linked to the interdisciplinary field of medical humanities, but is also prevalent in scholarship ranging from psychiatry, to public health, philosophy, and history. As Albrect (2012) explains:

Solastalgia has its origins in the concepts of "solace" and "desolation." Solace has meanings connected to the alleviation of distress or to the provision of comfort or consolation in the face of distressing events. Desolation has meanings connected to abandonment and loneliness. The suffix -algia has connotations of pain or suffering. Hence, solastalgia is a form of 'homesickness' like that experienced with traditionally defined nostalgia, except that the victim has not left their home or home environment.

While the above definition does not directly situate solastalgia as an anthropocenic construct, Albrecht (2012) goes on to clearly contextualise the term in regard to human impacts on earth's various ecosystems: "Under the intertwined impacts of global development, rising population and global warming, with their accompanying changes in climate and ecosystems, there is now a mismatch between our lived experience of the world, and our ability to conceptualise and comprehend it". For the purposes of this article, my interest is in the "key theoretical aspect of solastalgia that sets it apart from related concepts"; namely, its "explicit focus on place: solastalgia is a placebased lived experience" (Galway et al., 2019). However, Askland and Bunn extend solastalgia further, both recognising the term's dependency on place, but also connecting it to community the people that live within a specific landscape. They explain that the:

sense of lost community [...] relates to [...] material and social ruptures [... i]t is, however, not just the scars on the physical and social landscapes that underpin this experience but also a temporal rupture, manifesting as dissonance between past experiences, present realities and future ideas of sociality and sense of self in place (Askland & Bunn, 2018: 18).

Drawing upon the work of these scholars, this essay argues that solastalgia—an emerging way of being with the lived environment—should be recognised as an inherent element within, and dominant theme of, cli-fi.

As individuals and communities continue to grapple, witness, and exist throughout the many escalating climate catastrophes and degradations of familiar landscapes, it is necessary to adapt solastalgia as a literary device within readings of cli-fi. As a state of

being, solastalgia is increasingly familiar and lived; it describes the experiences that weas humans—are experiencing frequently and repeatedly, as will be demonstrated through the analysis of Oates' narrative. It describes a distress that many of us have experienced, yet do not have any other word for. And, it is more than simply a "distress caused by the unwelcome transformation of cherished landscapes resulting in cumulative mental, emotional, and spiritual health impacts"—it is a direct assault on our home landscapes. Or, as Galway et al. articulate, when we connect solastalgia to place, we are using place to describe "home"; to articulate the loss of these "cherished landscapes" is to "emphasize the deep emotional attachment to places that is common among those experiencing solastalgia" (2019). For the purposes of this article, solastalgia is used to illustrate the ways that the destruction of "cherished" landscapes, as represented in cli-fi and particularly in Oates' "Sinners," give rise to various dimensions of human illness, both mental and physical.

In its earliest formulation solastalgia was created to describe mental anguish associated with loss of place. Accordingly, the majority of the academic research surrounding the term is mental health related, and focuses on cognitive, behavioural, and emotional wellbeing. Solastalgia nevertheless strongly aligns with cli-fi literatures in respect to their explicit framing of "familiar experiences such as anxiety, depression, loss, grief, and regret as related to climate change" (Schneider-Mayerson, 2018: 486). This essay, however, argues that solastalgia affects more than mental health. I suggest that we must position solastalgia as impacting physical well-being in line with, or alongside, the physical desolation of home landscapes. Increasingly, public health research connects the health of mind and body, arguing that these factors are interconnected. Poor mental

health contributes to and often encourages poor physical health. Thus, in witnessing or imagining the desolation and degradation of familiar, cherished landscapes, the "sense of disease or distress when loved environments are transformed" (Askland & Bunn, 2018: 18) is deeply relevant, due to its holistic effects upon population health. Just as we cannot separate mind from body, we also cannot separate nature from culture, nor global health from population health.

Positioned as a literary framing device, solastalgia provides one approach to understanding the ways that devastated landscapes are themselves agentive—that the illness of our planet, on either a local or global scale, impacts the health of its inhabitants including humans. This is a familiar concept to ecologists, but remains far from a mainstream perspective. Accordingly, when human illness is recontextualised in terms of natureculture, cli-fi becomes an invitation to audiences to embrace these co-dependencies, to position readers as "entangled with a range of nonhuman others; and to imagine what it means to be with each other in devastated landscapes" (Clary-Lemon, 2019: 2). The symbiotic implications of natureculture push back against the competing nature vs. culture dichotomy, and invite us to "stay with the trouble" (Haraway, 2016: 118; Clary-Lemon, 2019: 176); to unite "the complex metaphors people use to mediate their relationship with nature" (Langston, 2007: 5), and to exist on a "continuum of natureculture" (Clary-Lemon, 2019: 9, emphasis in original). Ultimately, "[p]lace is a defining element of solastalgia, and people-place relationships are central to the ongoing study of the links between environmental change and human health and wellness" (Galway et al., 2019).

### Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God

Oates' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" is particularly useful for examining some of the ways that natureculture, via solastalgia, is epitomised within the cli-fi subgenre. The narrative itself, while mundane—focusing on the primary character, Luce, and her husband, Andrew, who are planning a small party for friends—is ominous. The story's landscape, while set in a speculative fictional near future, mirrors the many human-induced environmental catastrophes that those who currently reside in the western United States are already experiencing annually: mudslides, firestorms, drought. The caveat—what sets this narrative in a time other than right now—is its location; Luce's town, "Hazelton-on-Hudson, is a hundred miles from New York City" (Oates, 2019: 65). Whilst fictional locations are common within Oates' work, the choice of the northeast United States is telling. In our own world, climate change is not yet overt in this region, and while increased temperatures and precipitation are forecast, they have not yet made their way there (US EPA, 2016). Thus, this choice of landscape is one of many which situates "Sinners" as a dystopian narrative.

Other aspects which will be discussed include the story's attention to illness, as embodied by both human characters and the home landscapes they inhabit. For instance, the upper-middle-class suburb of Vedders Hill, which is located in Hazelton-on-Hudson, is populated by what contemporary audiences would recognise as retired, middle-aged lawyers, academics, musicians, athletes, and so forth. However, an important caveat is that these characters—the youngest not even sixty-five—are, for the most part, plagued by multiple physical ailments; "Stage III colorectal cancer," "stenosis of the spine," "a mysterious

autoimmune disorder that mimicked certain of the symptoms of lupus but was (evidently) not lupus," "Crohn's disease" (65). Moreover:

Others in the Stantons' approximate generation, whom they've known since they moved to the area, in the early nineties, are reporting cases of diverticulitis, stomach cancer, pancreatic cancer, lung cancer (in someone who hasn't smoked for thirty-seven years), leukemia, lymphoma, failing kidneys, failing hearts, inflamed joints, neurological 'deficits,' even strokes! (65)

Both the afflicted landscape and its afflicted inhabitants have carefully been chosen to illustrate the nearness-perhaps, the consequences—of our contemporary, immediate, and everyday choices. Moreover, both the near future setting and Oates' declarative listing of health conditions serve to invite commonalities between audiences' now and the characters' now, temporalities that are evidently quite close. Yet, precisely how close remains unclear. In cli-fi, it is necessary to spark these temporal commonalities "[b]ecause identification with a narrative's character(s) is motivated by perceived similarity, it is likely that the alignment of worldviews, values, or ideology between the audience and the character can impact the level of identification that the audience feels" (Schneider-Mayerson et al., 2020: 2). In this regard, it is notable that for the most part, nothing in "Sinners" is unknown. The landscape destruction, while transposed, is already a reality for many readers. The human illnesses, while exacerbated, are also familiar. Oates' creation of a fictional landscape mimics the increasingly devastated landscapes of the western United States—namely California. Yet, other than Luce, the story's characters do not seem to notice anything out of the ordinary; her

husband regularly chides her for "what he calls her 'overreacting' or 'catastrophizing'" (65). Accordingly, it is vital to examine how Luce's character manifests solastalgia in response to the environmental destruction of her home landscape.

The trope of Luce catastrophizing is weaved throughout the narrative. We see it emerge not only in Luce's thoughts (or asides), but also in her husband's subtle misogyny, which he uses to downplay her reactions to the environmental degradation all around them:

Is that even a word—'catastrophizing'? Luce understands that Andrew means to affect a comical tone, a sort of cartoon rhetoric, to soften the mockery and the annoyance he so clearly feels; yet 'catastrophizing' also acknowledges the very real, the surely imminent catastrophe. (65)

Andrew's dismissal is intentional and repeated. Moreover, Oates' choice to use parentheses for words like "sometimes," "evidently," "seemingly," and so on point to a tone of misogyny throughout—one which dismisses and friviolises Luce's climate and health concerns. When positioned in terms of natural landscapes, which are traditionally characterised as female, we can perceive Oates offering an analogy which aligns society's dismissal of female health-related concerns (both physical and mental) to its similar dismissals of the catastrophic impacts of climate change.

This socially conditioned avoidance of uncomfortable truths is epitomised in a later excerpt when Andrew, reading to an academic audience and "channeling the voice of the eighteenth-century Puritan minister Jonathan Edwards," explains:

"We are spiders dangled by fate over the fires of Hell, and the slightest slip will plunge us into an eternity of misery—kept alive by machines, for which we may have to pay 'out of pocket."

Andrew's listeners laugh, uneasily. He may be joking—or half joking—but this is the nightmare that everyone in America dreads.

We know what our punishment is, but what was our sin? (66, emphasis in original)

What is most telling, perhaps, is that Andrew entirely fails to connect human sin to climate change—to the devastated landscape around him. Yet, what Luce and attuned readers recognise—as is made apparent via Luce's italicised thoughts and the subsequent scene—is that, even when living through the "floods, landslides, and firestorms" (65), there are two distinct segments of society: one that fails to recognise ecological changes, and one which fully recognises these shifting landscapes. In response to Andrew's wild ignorance, the following scene begins:

Global warming, Luce thinks, digging with a trowel in the rich, dark soil that she has created over many years of composting, but which now smells strange to her, rotting, feculent, as if teeming with toxic microscopic life. The hairs at the nape of her neck stir. There is no longer in this part of North America a guarantee of the protracted subzero temperatures that once killed off such virulent life.

If she wears gloves, Luce reasons. If she never actually touches the earth with her bare fingers... (66)

This shift to the garden is important for several reasons; it contextualises Luce' connection to the earth, her love of gardening (evident by her "many years of composting"), and her recollection of what has changed ("no longer"). Of most importance, however, is the way this narrative shift illustrates a "poignant moment [...] of solastalgia," which occurs "when individuals directly experience the transformation of a loved environment" (Albrecht, 2005: 46). While it is evident that Luce believes in climate change, connections to illness and place which are obvious to audiences throughout the narrative do not appear to be explicitly recognised by her as the story's central protagonist. It is this ignorance that is particularly unsettling for audiences, particularly in light of the solastalgia this article demarcates. As Albrect explains, solastalgia is "the 'lived experience' of the loss of the present as manifest in a feeling of dislocation" (2005: 45); above, this is most clear in not only Luce's wearing of gloves, but also her apprehension about touching the earth with her bare skin.

Via the lens of solastalgia we are able to see not simply environmental impacts and changes, but also the ways these manifest within a cherished space, namely Luce's home landscape:

[T]he rank smell of the soil around the house has returned, is, in fact, stronger this spring. Luce has scanned the scene with her binoculars and has discovered nothing to alarm her unduly, except that the repair work on the upper stretch of Vedders Hill Way, which was recently washed away in a mudslide. (65)

This passage epitomises the ways that the lived environment has transformed, illustrating that "[e]verything that was once familiar and trusted in our environment will be experienced as the 'new abnormal' as development and

climate pressures continue to build" (Albrecht, 2012). Nevertheless, as a result of its first person focalisation, this specific excerpt fails to make the connection between human health and environmental health, which furthers audience disbelief that the central characters are themselves unable to make this connection. As the narrative progresses, however, the relationship between the health of the two is made increasingly apparent, particularly in regard to Luce's retrospective questioning of her former life.

This questioning can easily be framed via the lens of solastalgia. As McNamara & Wetoby remind us, "transformation of place through human induced or natural change may diminish solace found in country, enabling the emergence of Solastalgia" (2011: 233). This emergence is made evident in Oates' story throughout the progression of the narrative:

Is it the earth, the water, the air? Contaminates?

Something is poisoning them. Seeping into their lungs, into the marrow of their bones.

Jesus, darling! Don't catastrophize!

When they first moved from West Seventy-eighth Street and Columbus Avenue to Hazelton-on-Hudson, in 1991, the air in the Hudson Valley was cleaner, the sky a brighter and clearer blue—Luce is certain. The white oaks and birches did not shed their leaves prematurely, in September. That maddening chemical odor wasn't borne on the wind, and the soil on Vedders Hill seemed more solid, substantial. Mudslides were unknown, as were firestorms. An excess of pollen was a far more serious problem than a depletion of ozone was. True, there were reports of acid rain in the Adirondacks, and the Hudson River had been heavily

polluted, like Lakes Ontario and Erie, upstate, but the media didn't make a fuss over it, and social media, that vehicle for channelling outrage, did not yet exist. Everyone sailed, canoed, kayaked on the Hudson River. Fished! The river's steely beauty prevailed.

What have we done? What have we failed to do? (67)

This excerpt echoes Andrew's earlier derision in its inclusion of the familiar dismissal "Jesus, darling! Don't catastrophize!," yet pushes back against his disregard by repeating Luce's counter "What have we done? What have we failed to do?" With this line, she recognises environmental loss in the graying of the sky, trees that no longer follow their natural leaf cycle, and degradation of the soil. The quote also connects to contemporary audiences, taunting readers for a lack of concern over the various environmental adversities most have lived through; high pollen counts, ozone depletion, acid rain, water pollution. Luce's looking backward, in conjunction with the gradual assault on her health, as well as that of friends and neighbours, clearly aligns with "the dominant components of solastalgia," namely "the loss of ecosystem health and corresponding sense of place, threats to personal health and wellbeing and a sense of injustice and/ or powerlessness" (Albrecht et al., 2007: 96). These threats and allusions to powerlessness increase as the narrative progresses, and as the line between human health and ecosystem health becomes increasingly blurred.

Oates' narrative, by its close, jumps between accounts of the devastation of landscape "[o]n this ravaged hill where half the landscape seems to have disappeared and the sky beyond the mountains is a fireball"; to that of the humans who live there, party guests in "[w]heelchairs, walkers, canes. Little knitted caps on (bald)

heads. A contingent of chemotherapy's walking wounded" to the concession via simile that the two are intimately connected, "[t]heir friends and neighbors are collapsing all around them in mimicry of the collapsing roads of Vedders Hill," and imagery that unites rather than dissociates: "A dazzling, beautiful, bloody sunset beyond the mountains, like a cluster of burst capillaries" (69). It is noteworthy that it is most often Luce making these connections between human health and planetary health at this late point in the narrative. It is her act of recognition that is central to our reading of solastalgia; the pain—either mental or physical—must be understood as interconnected in order for the full impacts of climate change on humanity to be realised. This recognition, however, appears to be embodied only by Luce, which can itself be read as a commentary upon female attunement to the natural world and our collective societies' inability (either conscious or unconscious) to position ourselves with (or alongside) nature—our failure to recognise natureculture as an inherent aspect of human existence. Oates' story, then, ultimately offers a commentary upon the ways that humans, as a species, continue to extract ourselves from the environments we live in, despite the growing and ever present linkages between who we are and where we live.

Still, what is perhaps most apparent across any reading of Oates' "Sinners" is the deep connections it posits between human agency and landscape agency. As the narrative recapitulates, humans continue to avert attention to—and even scorn—the reality of natureculture. We continue to turn away from our symbiosis with nature and refuse to see the inherent unity of the human and the natural. While the trajectory of Oates' narrative works to decenter human-centric experiences in an effort to privilege the landscapes we inhabit,

it is equally significant that so many characters within "Sinners," like so many members of our own contemporary societies, fail to make this connection. The actant role of the landscape in "Sinners" is clearly articulated, particularly in regard to the multitude of ways that desolate landscapes affect human health. Yet rather than issuing any call to action, its narrative functions to remind us of our continued inaction and the many impending catastrophes that lie ahead.

The landscapes that Oates offers are, in many senses, speculative, yet they are also looming and absolute. Stobbelaar and Pedroli define landscape identity as "the unique psycho-sociological perception of a place defined in a spatial-cultural space" (2011: 62). Although this definition is pertinent, in light of the ways that solastalgia affects landscape identity, it is also important to add temporality to our understanding of landscape identity, particularly as our landscapes are now changing at a pace where we can witness the ecological devastation of place—especially those places that are cherished—within a single lifetime, rather than generationally. Galway et al. (2019) also expand upon this theme, noting that inherent to "landscape identity is the ability to see oneself in the on-going creation

of landscapes and to acknowledge how one has been shaped by landscapes" (Galway et al., 2019). If we place landscape identity as a measure of natureculture, "Sinners" makes clear that many humans still locate themselves within a nature vs. culture binary, separating out human agency and environmental agency. As long as we, as a society, maintain this precarious duplicity, alien landscapes-many of which are no longer so alien-will continue to be exiled to the realm of the cultural imaginary as speculative possibilities, rather than the authentic and tangible physicalities they are and will increasingly become. Ultimately, whilst the subgenre of cli-fi works to destabilise these dichotomies, particularly those with settings easily recognisable to our lived experiences, it does not seem to encode affective potential. To incite change, a first step must be recognising the ways that the lived experiences of fictional characters embody our own relationships with place. Still, "the gulf between environmental awareness and efficacious action" (Schneider-Mayerson, 2018: 495) persists, despite both the proliferation of dystopian modes, like cli-fi, and the retrospective cautions that these narratives expose.

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# Posthuman Fiction: The Speculative Landscape of Shaun Tan's *Tales from the Inner City* & Nnedi Okorafor's *LaGuardia*

### KIRSTEN HUNT University of Minnesota

**Abstract:** Both *LaGuardia* by Nnedi Okorafor and Tales from the Inner City by Shaun Tan seek to conceptualize the interconnectedness of life on our planet by sketching a speculative landscape of future Earth. Tan's Tales from the Inner City decenters the human experience and demonstrates the agency of the natural world as animals regain, morph, and mutate against human impact. Whereas, in Okorafor's LaGuardia. intergalactic migration centralised to decentralize humans as the dominant life form, whilst paying attention to the complexity of interspecies relationships. In this article, both texts are analyzed through the lens of posthumanism to bring to the forefront what has often been considered merely a background element of speculative fiction texts—their setting. Two principal questions frame this enquiry; "How does the speculative landscape lead the reader into a different way of thinking and discussing prevalent issues in our world?" and "What is the role of speculative

fiction in offering a more nuanced and hopeful imaginative landscape to confront the climate crisis?" As a means of promoting expanded literary-ecological cognition, the article will proceed to recommend posthuman fiction as a new subgenre within the umbrella of speculative fiction.

**Keywords:** Posthumanism, anthropocene, speculative fiction, ecology, young adult.

"The universe is so close" (Okorafor, 2019)

For adolescent readers living in the era of the Anthropocene, the natural world and ecology of life has moved from a backdrop role to human rhythms to predominate the forefront of identity construction and sense of place on Earth, whether these generations are ready or not. Readers' sensory perceptions have become more attuned to the natural world, and with this new awareness comes anxiety about

the future and a need for literature that speaks to this change, which is capable of looking around the corner with trepidation into the unknown future. As I will shortly proceed to critically define, the role of posthuman fiction is a vital pathway for diverging from dystopian/ utopian stories that consume the larger cultural field of speculative fiction. Rather than focusing on dystopian depictions and utopian desires, posthuman fiction projects a more hopeful mirror of speculating on what if?, affording the adolescent reader insight into their identity as a human being in relation to the natural world of the Anthropocene. Via posthuman fiction, the reader's identity becomes an embodied and embedded form of coming-of-age narrative, within which Anthropocenic speculative landscapes prove central to internal growth.

speculative landscape posthuman fiction is focalised to demonstrate its agentic qualities that move it from a background element of narrative structure to the forefront. When a reader ventures across the terrains of an imagined future Earth, they are afforded an opportunity to reconstruct an altered identity—a mirror self that is not bound to the constraints of mimetic reality. Certainly, landscapes are pivotal to the worldbuilding of speculative futures more broadly; vital for the creative development of the story, and to position the reader within an imagined and constructed terrain. However, in the examples provided below, the landscape demonstrates an additional role within posthuman fiction, one that embodies agency and motive, operating both independently of, and in cooperation with humans, as supportive to their character development.

Set within speculative landscapes, *Tales from the Inner City* (2018) by Shaun Tan and *LaGuardia* (2019) by Nnedi Okorafor bring awareness to the Anthropocenic spectrum of anxieties and issues prevalent in our world,

such as climate anxiety, speciesism, xenophobia, and racism, to name but a few which emerged through this analysis. Both Okorafor and Tan create cartographies that are potentially plausible given our rapidly shifting mimetic landscapes. In his illustrated storybook Tales from the Inner City Tan depicts a surreal future where animals regain agency in the ruins of the urban landscape, theorising an ecological posthuman turn against anthropocentric norms. Meanwhile, in her graphic novel LaGuardia Okorafor imagines interplanetary migration, positioning Earth as a meeting ground for an interspecies community that supports imaginative identity construction in uncertain times.

Okorafor's and Tan's speculative landscapes neither resist conceptualising Earth's present or future, nor do they allude to dystopic demise. Rather, each author conceptualises Earth to explore the geologic and psychic turn to the Anthropocene and provide a place for possibility, hope, and constructive imagination throughout change and crisis on Earth. To the degree that Oziewicz affirms the necessity of stories to negotiate the "biocentric philosophical commitment to standing up for the planet and an applied hope articulated through stories" against the forces of an "ecocidal unconscious" (2022: 58), we can consider the position of posthuman fiction as a response to the call for "sustainable, equitable future for all forms of life on this planet" (2022: 59). As is demonstrated through this article's analysis of Tan and Okorafor's texts, traversing across a speculative landscape does much to 'stand up for' the planet by encouraging hopeful imaginative reconnections between readers and the natural world. By positioning posthuman fiction as a new subgenre, attention is paid to the broader field of speculative fiction, and also the popularised and frequently read dystopian story.

### **Diverging From Dystopia**

Considering our future Earth in speculative terms becomes necessary in order for humans to understand their evolving role in the Anthropocene. However, extrapolating from current trends to project visions of the future that actualise the classic "what if?" proposition of speculative fiction too often generates a plethora of dystopian stories that do little to offer a truly imaginative landscape of Earth—one differing from today's expectations—or simply promote fixation upon futuristic habitations divorced from Earthly considerations. To counter the persistence of dystopian stories, it is first important to consider that the field of speculative fiction encompasses an ever growing cultural field representative of a breadth of nonmimetic genres and mediums calling attention to itself as, "an inherently plural category" (Oziewicz, 2017: online). The malleable boundaries of the genre can be referred to as a *fuzzy set*, drawing from Brian Attebery's (1992) application, and further layered by Oziewicz within the context of speculative fiction as, "a category defined not by clear boundaries but by resemblance to prototypical examples and degrees of membership: from being exactly like to being somewhat or marginally like" (Oziewicz, 2017: 1). By resisting firm thematic boundaries, the broader field affords the consistently evolving form scope to articulate voices and representations of subcultural movements and undercurrents in society. Indeed, whenever "we try to envision a world without war, without violence, without prisons, without capitalism, we are engaging in speculative fiction" (Imarisha, 2015: 3). In this sense, speculative fiction as a cultural field can move readers to conceptualise different realities that subvert our consensus reality (Oziewicz, 2017: online). In diverging from dystopian remaining speculative, projections but

posthuman fiction presents itself as a subgenre that embraces speculative landscapes that are neither anchored in despair and destruction, or reversely, within the utopian myth that we can continue on with the status quo. In effect, readers gain opportunities to reimagine themselves that push the boundaries of what it means to be posthuman in the Anthropocene.

### **Posthuman Fiction**

"Putting posthuman theory to work is both exciting and daunting. Posthumanism invites us (humans) to undo the current ways of doing – and then *imagine*, *invent and do the doing differently*" (Taylor, 2016: 6, emphasis in original)

Tucked under the expansive umbrella of speculative fiction, I argue that posthuman fiction is a subgenre that draws upon tenets of posthumanist ideology to support a type of creative speculation that rests in more hopeful conclusions of future Earth. Posthumanism is a broad theoretical framework that recognises many schools of thought, and also comprises multiple practical applications across disciplines, operating in a malleable fashion to 'fit' within paradigms; "a philosophical stance about what might be termed a perpetual becoming" (Miah, 2008: 98, emphasis in original). There are however, constant ontological and epistemological undercurrents within this evershifting, often cacophonous frame of thinking. One theme foundational to posthumanist thought is the persistent questioning of anthropocentric values and the associated practices central to humanism. Posthumanists ask 'who matters' and 'what counts' in order to generate a current set of ethics that equally

values non-humans, other-than-humans, and more-than-humans (Taylor, 2016).

engage theoretically with To posthumanism, we must comprehend that the category of human emerged within a particular sociohistorical moment, stemming from the classical idea of man, a conception that encompasses all things, a kind of bodily perfection (Braidotti, 2013). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, being human was (read: still is) considered to be the highest level of being. However, the concept of human was (is) not inclusive to all peoples, and historically, the humanist ideology developed alongside whiteness, Christianity, and colonialism, the combination of which justified the exploitation of people of colour outside Europe, and the takeover of their resources. If others were considered not to be human, but rather, subhuman, then inhumane exploitation was deemed acceptable. Further, embedded within humanism is the Hegelian ideology that there is the self and there is the other; therefore, the exclusion of an indeterminate other proved necessary for a creation of a self, an "in and out group" so to speak (Guignion, 2019). In response to the abuses of humanism, posthumanism favours new possibilities that challenge the hierarchical barrier between humans and others whilst considering: what comes after?

Posthuman fiction therefore comprises a valuable conduit for adolescent explorations into unchartered territories in line with posthumanist theory; decentering the human, and undermining our dominant cultural constructions of *man* as the highest form of being. Drawing from scholars who engage theoretically at the crossroads of posthumanism and young adult literature (Paulsen *et al.*, 2022; Tarr & White, 2018; Taylor & Hughes, 2016), as well as posthumanism more broadly (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2013; Deleuze & Guattari,

1987; Ferrando, 2019), the following list serves as a guide to explore tenets of young adult posthuman fiction:

- (1) The human being is decentered.
- (2) Orders of hierarchy are disrupted.
- (3) More-than, other-than, and non-humans are central protagonists alongside the human.
- (4) The normalised human body of mimetic reality is disrupted either by machine(s) or by ecology.
- (5) Landscapes are brought to the forefront & have agency.
- (6) Identities are reconstructed and understood in a different manner to their typified construction within societal constructs and mimetic reality.
- (7) Ideas, thoughts, and stories do not have to resolve into a singular story or idea. Rather, there emerge opportunities for multiplicitous meaning and understanding.
- (8) Resistance is materialised to utopian and/or dystopian thinking.

This list is, of course, another 'fuzzy set' like the field of speculative fiction itself, and is not intended to be proscriptive or exhaustive of the manifold possibilities which arise within a posthumanist framework. To qualify this list within a posthumanist framework, it deserves clarification that each tenet is plural and rhizomatic. These tenets interact, merge, and entangle throughout the analysis in this article, and would, I assume, also do so in any future use. In this article, I will draw from this tentative list with a primary focus upon the fifth tenet—in line with this issue's overarching theme.

### Landscapes

In its insistence upon reimagining the human place in nature, posthuman fiction also emphasises the reimagining of the landscapes which humans occupy. Posthuman fiction brings awareness to the agency of the natural world, therefore its speculative landscapes become pivotal, as opposed to a background element. Evoking landscapes complete with sensory details is central to the development of all fiction in order to provide readers a world to exist in, however, landscape construction becomes especially imperative in the realm of non-mimetic representation. Specifically, speculative landscapes are agentic; their role in the development of narrative is centralised alongside the construction of human characters. Not only does the landscape function as a type of imaginative playground, but even key human aspects such as identity construction and coming-of-age revelations are often dependent upon the speculative landscapes they occur within. If differences and imaginative opportunities enter the world through fiction, it follows that we are creaking open a door that someone else can peer into, maybe even open. An example of one speculative landscape's focal narrative role is apparent, for instance, in Vandana Singh's The Woman Who Thought She Was a Planet (2008).

Throughout this collection of short stories, the reader is pushed to notice the small details of mimetic reality that magically transform to reveal hidden dimensions beyond. In the chapter titled *Thirst*, the unconscious fusion of nature pushes the reader into a multifaceted sensory experience that is an example of the ecologically altered posthuman body: "In the dream there were snakes coiling about her, dark and glossy as the hairs on her head, and an altar, and the smell of sandalwood incense, her mother's favourite kind" (Singh, 2008: 89). Subsequently, the

protagonist Susheela comes to understand her role amongst Snake divinities along with the root of the "nameless hunger that was in her" (96). Throughout the story that Singh weaves, the young protagonist Susheela experiences a slow transformation from human to snake, and more deeply, her life becomes less mundane, and she more alive: "A spasm shook her from head to foot; as she lost consciousness she felt warm currents coursing painlessly through her, stretching and squeezing, shaping and molding, as though she were a lump of clay in a potter's wheel" (103).

Singh does more than offer up a rich sensory story here; she utilises the landscape as an elemental part of the story, which interpellates Susheela to think more deeply about her connection to the universe, in a manner otherthan, and more-than human. Consequently, readers also benefit vicariously from her existential revelation, becoming remolded by the Earth ourselves. In the analyses that follow, I demonstrate that Tales from the Inner City and LaGuardia are similarly representative of posthuman fiction, via their inclination to highlight the centrality of speculative landscapes. Both stories affect readers visually and viscerally, in order to speculatively introduce readers to a future Earth that does not feel unreal, impossible, or dystopian. The reader can sense themselves in this landscape; it is after all Earth. Through these disrupted depictions of future Earth, Okorafor and Tan introduce our senses to new beings, and to a different way to imagine means of being in the future. By highlighting how speculative landscapes within posthuman fiction both operate and elicit awareness and comfort for adolescent readers in the Anthropocene, we learn about reconnecting with the natural world and our inherent connections with animals through Tales from the Inner City, and about reconstructing our

identity by becoming something more-thanhuman through *LaGuardia*.

## Ecological Posthumanism through *Tales from the Inner City*

"Run with us a while, they say, and we'll tell you a story"
(Tan 2018: 80, emphases in original)

In 2020, while the world locked down during the COVID-19 pandemic, animals and the natural world crept out and into the forefront of consciousness, in a brief moment termed the anthropause, which was generated by "the substantial reduction of human mobility observed during early COVID-19 lockdowns" (Rutz, 2022). Whilst human activity was stilled during quarantine, we were astonished and humbled by the animals that emerged into old habitats formerly expropriated by humans. Loggerhead turtles crawled onto shore during the day on a formerly human-crowded beach in Florida; the rare wildcat Guina was spotted in an urban space in Chile; and shy marine fish emerged within a once tourist rich area of the Galapagos Islands in Ecuador (Stokstad, 2020). This quick emergence of animals moved us, intrigued us, and then led many to question our influence on animals and the Earth. We noticed at least, and at last, that our presence is problematic—'WE are the virus!' becoming one the most influential anthropause memes, as humans took a backseat for a moment in time.

Nevertheless, this brief moment did indeed stir us to speculate on our continued role on Earth, sensing that our posthuman being will be faced with the natural world more directly as the impacts of climate change continue to redirect human attention to the landscapes that surround and sustain us; as posthuman fiction can remind us, we are interconnected equal beings. Thus, ecological posthumanism is a helpful framework that examines the interaction between humans and the natural world as the landscape of our mimetic natural world continues to slowly move to the forefront of our existence in the Anthropocene. For Chen, "[e]cological posthumanism is critically focused on how environmental changes force humans to come into physical contact with other nonhuman entities, how changing environments affect the human body, and how, as a result, they recontextualise and redefine the human experience materially, culturally, and biologically" (2018: 183). Hence, ecological posthumanism looks closely at how other-thanhuman actors shape the world, and how the agency of the natural world directly impacts the ways in which humans make sense of who we are in the world, as coexisting inhabitants.

this ecological Layering posthuman fiction highlights the pivotal role of the speculative landscape in affording adolescent readers a window wherein ecological implications are invited via protagonists' interactions with the landscape. Carroll (2011) and Dewan (2010) argue that any protagonist who intra-acts (Barad, 2003) in spaces such as forests, oceans, trees, gardens, and/or other natural ecologies creates a sense of heightened spatial understanding which can help support young people's identity construction, and provokes an invitation to become entangled within the intra-action of non-human matter to form a dynamic relationship among nature, as has been demonstrated via my engagement with Singh above. Nevertheless, other scholars such as Curry (2013) posit that hostile fictional landscapes instil that their protagonists must survive through adaptation and post-natural transformations. Consequently, here on Earth, young readers are developing a mixed relationship with the landscapes they inhabit.

There is harmony and love to be found, but there is also a tendency towards a growing hostility due to the disturbances caused by climate change.

The short stories which comprise *Tales* from the Inner City elicit the reader to critically consider the agency of the natural world, drawing specific attention to our relationships with animals. Through the collection of stories paired with stunning illustrations, Tan explores the intermingling of humans and animals against an alien cityscape where adaptation and survival are reimagined and speculated upon. For instance, Tan's creative weaving of the complicated relationship between humans and animals is beautifully portrayed in the story 'Bears with Lawyers.'

In this story, bears seek legal assistance from lawyers able to speak and study the Ursine language in order to sue humankind in a classaction lawsuit, leading to Ursidae v. Homo sapiens. "Human Law is not the only legal system on the planet, it turned out. There are as many systems as there are species, the lawyers for the bears explained to an incredulous room, under which all animals are recognised as legal entities within a cosmic hierarchy" (Tan, 2018: 175). Although the humans have the "best legal team that money could buy" (176), the bears show them non-human knowledge that suddenly appears indisputable, which shakes and shocks them. The bears' case proves strong, and the evidence appears clear that Homo sapiens is at fault for many crimes against the bears, "Theft. Pillage. Unlawful Occupation. Deportation. Slavery. Murder. Torture. Genocide. Not to mention all the crimes we'd never even heard of, things like Spiritual Exclusion, Groaking, and Ungungunurumunre" (177, emphasis in original). The humans fight with all their legal might in what they know is an impossible struggle against the mountains of evidence of anthropogenic harm. Thus, the humans gain insight into their own wrongdoing, "Deep in our hearts we knew they were right. Even as we fought our defense with such intellectual ferocity, as if to convince ourselves more than our opponents of a truth mired in self-contradiction" (178). Faced with this loss, the humans can only conceive of one thing to do, "we shot the bears" (178). And so, bears are gone, but the story ends with the arrival of a new legal team seeking reparations against Homo sapiens, "The cattle are here... with lawyers" (179).

Tan is critically calling attention to how those animals subject to acts of speciecide, if they were given agency (in this case legal agency), would bring us humans to our knees. We are already witnessing the legal phenomenon of granting personhood status to physical features on Earth. For example, the Whanganui River in New Zealand was declared a legal personhood in 2017, soon after a similar personhood status was granted to the Ganges and supporting tributaries in Uttarakhand, India, whereas Bolivia passed the Law of Mother Earth effectively granting the natural world equal rights to humans in 2010 (Andrews, 2019). These examples demonstrate the ethical shifting of human values in relationship with landscapes, and serve as a catalyst for future movements that recognise the cultural and ecological significance of the natural world. As is further evidenced below, Tan is not simply telling stories about agentic animals demanding justice; rather, he more broadly speculates on how future humans and future animals might intra-act, including how we humans could process the reorganising of species hierarchy, ridding us of the "false integrity not only of the humanist self but also the idea of nature as essentially natural, other, elsewhere, or outside" (Taylor, 2012: 359). As our world shifts through the parallel slow and quick cycles of climate

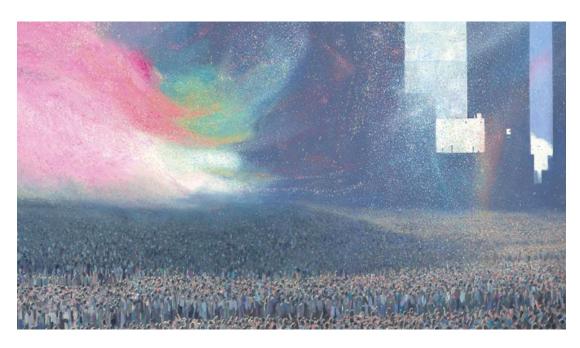
change, such ecological posthumanist themes in young adult literature have the potential to help address anxieties about the changing Earth.

In another story, 'The Butterflies Came at Lunchtime,' butterflies come in an unthinkable number to the tips of human noses, tickling the arms, and filling every space of a city during lunchtime, "Look! Look! There on your shoulder, your arm, your knee, your head! Hold still!" (18, emphasis in original).

They perch and hum their wings, bringing a moment of pure joy and quietude to the human mind, reminding us that there are other means of cognition aside from the endless chatter of our busy brains. "We thought of nothing but the butterflies, the butterflies settling on our heads, on the heads of friends and family, on everyone we knew and everyone we didn't, on the whole city all at once. *Don't move*, we whispered, wishing it could last forever. *Hold still! Hold still! Hold still!*" (18, emphasis in original). Here, Tan highlights how the sheer magnitude of butterflies coming to the city makes the humans of the story stop, look, feel,

and listen. The expanded sensory perception that Tan offers through the small but numerous butterflies provides an example of the enduring relationships we inherently sense within the ecology of the world. In this moment, as the butterflies reach toward us through the pages, we can feel the sense of making kin (Haraway, 2016).

Tan similarly directs readers conceptualise how the utter closeness of another species can shift our preconceived notions of love, togetherness, and public behaviors in his story 'The Public Called Them Indecent.' Enormous snails inch along the train lines in a city making love without a care or concern, "finding each other in the byways and intersections of our great city and making love right then and there, answering every shout of indignation with grace and pride in the slowest of slow dances in the dark" (61). In this story, humans gradually learn to love and be envious of the snails' beautiful presence in the world and unabashed love making over the course of a hundred years: "We would be so sad if they





ever went away, leaving us all alone with our small ideas about love" (61). As these examples highlight, anthropocentric biologists reduce animal behavior to mere 'tropisms when they are in reality so much more complex than that, merely *different* to human behaviours.

Long after this reading, we might continue to wonder about what animals could teach us if

they become centred in our thoughts, as a result of being literally magnified. The butterflies were innumerable, the snails were enormous; Tan plays with size and magnitude to centralise the validity of these animals' existence visually and mentally. In another story, 'The Monster of Our Nightmares Was Finally Dead' a gigantic shark spanning an unrecognisable length is captured and slaughtered; those humans responsible rejoice that "[t]he monster of our nightmares was finally dead" (65), only for the slaughter to leave them (and the reader) with a lingering sense of regret and guilt. "We searched for words that didn't exist, wondered why we needed them so badly, then went home" (67). In some instances we will never be able to answer that question, as Tan underscores by addressing what we lose when we neglect and destroy animals—such as in the story 'The rhino was on the freeway again.' As it opens, "We blew our horns in outrage! Men came, shot it dead, pushed it to one side. We blew our horns in gratitude! But that was yesterday. Today we all feel terrible. Nobody knew it was the last

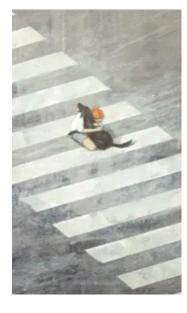


rhino. How could we have known it was the last one?" (105). Living through the time of the sixth mass extinction (Kolbert, 2014) drives us toward tremendous grief; just as the rhino is lost in *Tales from the Inner City*, we are continually losing our fellow animals to extinction. There is no meteor to blame this time; this time we are driven to look inward at the costs of our consumption.

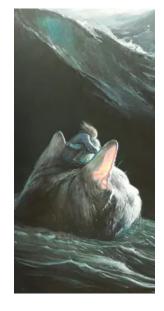
In an abrupt shift, the final story in the collection, 'We Tell Each Other the Same Story' sees posthumans considering their place upon what was once the Earth, "We stare at our own upturned five-fingered hands for a moment and ponder the crazy fluke of existence" (217). Tan's words ring with a sincerity and sadness at the potential for humans to be *more*, and for the harmful ways that we *still are*, "Still, we can't help fossicking about, forever looking backward. We are that kind of animal, as if the rebellion of our spines against gravity, this bizarre upright gait, had also caused some other anomaly of the eyes and mind" (218).

Tales from the Inner City brings its speculative landscape to the forefront of readers' minds, creating synaptic connections that are not easily drawn in mimetic reality. The butterflies elicit memories of joyful moments within the natural world, the slimy mating snails evoke much discomfort, but also acceptance that love is not tidy or simple. Most prominently, the reader considers their own relationship with animals, along with how climate change and shifting environments alter their phenomenological positionalities.

As such, through the lens of ecological posthumanism we can begin to mend the fractured relationships we have with animals and the natural world. Speculative landscapes play a valuable cognitive role in teaching us to replicate these lessons within our mimetic landscapes, which remain so deserving of close contemplation. This is not to say that humans should be pushed aside or disregarded; rather, Tan positions the human as insuperably connected to the animal, and the natural ecology







of the Earth as a reciprocal relationship between interdependent entities, giving a sense that we are not alone here. We have kin in animals, we share an old love, as Tan is reminding us. "Time flowed out before us, an endless river, the plains opened up, the sky lifted, and you cried out to me then, *This world is ours!* And so it was" (27, emphasis in original).

# Becoming Posthuman: Constructing Identity in the Anthropocene Through *LaGuardia*

"If adolescence is the time when one considers what it means to be human [...] then there has never been a period of history when it has been more difficult to figure out than now" (Ostry, 2004: 222).

Just as the changing ecology of Earth is central in reconnecting the self with the agency and intelligence of other Earthly actors through young adult literature, the ecological landscape also plays a pivotal role in constructing identity for the reader by repositioning its protagonists in a *speculative* landscape. One of the most prevalent themes in young adult literature—the coming-of-age theme, or *bildungsroman*—depicts a character's internal struggle which eventually concludes with their personal growth and identity construction. As the Earth changes, our lives also change, therefore ways in which we conceptualise humans growing from childhood to adulthood must also shift.

Literature which speaks to this often intense period of adolescent time is particularly pivotal in supporting contemporary children, and providing stories that are reflective of how young people construct their identity in the Anthropocene. As Phoebe Chen states, "for young adult protagonists" to sufficiently attain posthumanistic signification it is vital

that "their physical interaction with and within nature, ecology, and the environment is treated as foundational to their self-awareness and self-identity" (Chen, 2018: 180). On these grounds, it is crucial to interrogate how identity is constructed in young adult literature for a changing Earth where unknowing and indeterminacy are key components of growing up. In Nnedi Okorafor's LaGuardia, the central human characters literally transform from human to posthuman in a physicalised materialisation of interspecies union, and thereby demonstrate a future where humans can readily become more-than-human, and bring the reader into a space of curiosity towards their own potential to magically transform as a citizen of the future.

LaGuardia opens by portraying a changed Earthly landscape, with bright and vibrant animated florals crawling and reaching around architecture, amidst a tapestry of aliens from tiny blob creatures to shapeshifting kangaroos. Okorafor also builds in other familiar nearfuturistic elements that are already possible to imagine, such as self-driving cars, plasma screen tablets operated with full artificial intelligence, and so on. Each page of Tana Ford's vibrant illustrations builds on this interesting bricolage of creative imaginaries visually, alongside working to defamiliarise recognisable Earth systems. This grounded approach to speculating on the future brings the reader into a believable space, and also attunes the mind to the restructuring of human identity with the addition of intergalactic species as inhabitants of Earth.

The graphic novel's protagonist, Future Nwafor Chukwuebuka, enters the LaGuardia airport from Lagos, having been delayed going through a very familiar rite of travel—security. In the first pages, Okorafor sets the stage for a United States that is altered but hangs onto



dangerous *isms* that are not only still prevalent but heightened from intergalactic assimilation into the country, drawing connections specifically to racism and xenophobia as it currently exists.

Future travels to New York from Lagos for two key reasons. Firstly, she is pregnant but struggling to align values with her boyfriend Citizen who is actively supporting a movement agitating for a pure race of humans. Secondly, she is smuggling a floral named 'Let-me-live' into the United States to forestall a floral war. She arrives to the care and comfort of her grandmother Obioma, an immigration lawyer and supporter of the interspecies community. Intergalactic immigration thus decentralises humans as Earth's dominant life form while paying attention to the complexity of

interspecies relationships and suggesting what humans could become if we accept otherness.

However, posthuman identity LaGuardia is not simply a rejection of humanity. It is a re-engagement with our potential to become more-than-human by building community with other species from other dimensions and planets. Although Future provides a model of how to be effortlessly posthuman in LaGuardia, readers are also presented with an alternate focal positionality. Specifically, they have the opportunity to witness and potentially connect with the internal struggles of the character Citizen, as he reconciles his new interspecies identity with his xenophobic beliefs, "I kept getting those damn green hairs in my beard" (Okorafor, 2019, emphasis in original).





This interspecies union proceeds gradually throughout the novel as "Let-me-live" releases transformative spores into both Future and Citizen. The latter is less than accepting of his altered biology initially: "Your grandmother told me everything... How I got that alien DNA from that floral I gave you, how you smuggled it here." Citizen thus plays an important focal role in demonstrating resistance to posthuman means of being, and more broadly, a cognitive disconnection with the changed landscape of his world. "After I found out I had alien DNA, it was this quiet chaos... it's like not knowing

who you **are** anymore" (Okorafor, emphasis in original).

Both characters' struggles and revelations in the process of becoming posthuman are amalgamated in the birth of their child "Future Citizen"; a name suggesting that through interspecies relationships, we can ourselves become the posthuman body, we can become *more-than-human* future citizens of Earth. By shining a light on these characters, the reader understands that our human identity does not lose relevance or value in the territory of the future, rather, the human is afforded a deeper





insight into their existence (Chen, 2018). Not only can we understand our relevance into the future through *LaGuardia*, but in addition, we can also make connections to the ways in which we already embody a multitude of diversity via the human body's immense microbiome, or gut flora.

As Ironstone phrases it, "We are not alone," since that "the human microbiome has significant ontological and epistemological ramifications for thinking about who and what the human is" (Ironstone, 2018: 325). Indeed, the characters in LaGuardia have both an internal and external mutation and burgeoning plurality of the self, and we could assert that this dynamic representation of the posthuman body is a "hungry self to move itself in a direction that is not merely random but that coincides with where its own 'selfish' interests lie" (Glasgow, 2020: 201). The characters (read: us) hunger for change; outside of the mere happenstance of Let-me-live releasing spores, lies a selfish desire to transform into the posthuman self and body.

Conclusively, *LaGuardia* presents emergent themes about the future of our species, the relationships we make or break with beings initially alien to us, and ultimately how we could transform our identity from human to posthuman.

### Lines of Hope

"You leave, you return, you take, you bring. And so it goes. Good. We embrace you and we wish you safe travels" (Okorafor).

Our Earth-bound world is brimming with impossibilities and future possibilities in the era of the Anthropocene. Humans are simultaneously walking a line of hope and despair, navigating loss and unforeseen imaginaries. We can sense the Earth changing, and familiar mimetic landscapes are being drastically altered through abuse and neglect from human impact and consumption. We hope for "safe travels," as Okorafor terms the iterative nature of our existence and the hopeful possibilities of our future as a posthuman race. She says as much when she writes:

I believe in the existence of aliens. I fantasize about how their eventual arrival will force an amazing paradigm and identity shift in humanity and for the entire earth. I'm an irrational optimist, so I look forward to all this with excitement, anticipation and curiosity. The future portrayal in this series has its problems but it's not a dystopia.

The futuristic, altered landscape of Earth has largely been relegated to speculative fiction that insists on depicting demise through dystopian themes, or reversely,

through utopian desires that center humanistic idealism. However, one only has to look within our mimetic reality here on Earth to become cognisant that a futuristic, altered landscape is before us through the effects of the climate crisis. As our world changes in the Anthropocene, so must young adult literature shift to support adolescent readers in navigating this indeterminate time. The conclusions that are typically drawn from dystopian young adult literature fail at giving choice to outcomes; they leave the reader with a sense of hopelessness that marinates into a blend of fear, anxiety, and inactivity to effect positive change for the Earth. As a counter, posthuman fiction reveals a unique lens to explore the agency of the natural world, and further speculate on the posthuman self; creating moments of disruption to the otherwise automatic ways that readers make meaning (Hayles, 2017).1 Nestled within the rhizomatic tentacles of posthumanism, this type of fiction embodies indeterminacy, and reflects a disentanglement from anthropocentrism that is necessary in a world that is in flux and crisis. In my illustrative analyses of Tales from the Inner City and LaGuardia, the landscape is brought to the forefront of the story, and supports character development. From this perspective, the landscape embodies agency; it is centred equally alongside the protagonist and characters. The agency of the speculative landscape provides a cognitive shift, emphasising how narrative structures function differently within posthuman fiction in comparison to its umbrella genre of speculative fiction.

Both Tan and Okorafor write within a similar paradigm that unveils aspects of mimetic reality on Earth, whilst simultaneously inserting



futuristic speculation enveloped within the context of prevalent real-world issues that we currently face. They share the common thread of "staying with the trouble" (Haraway, 2016: 1) of our world, but refract and bend reality just enough to portray a layer we did not know or see. It is this refracted mirror of mimesis that pulls the reader to gaze at their posthuman self, and upon their relationship with the ecology of the Earth. Just as Okorafor expresses optimistic enthusiasm for the future of our existence, Tan also leans into a hopeful state of future existence

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This disruption to the nonconscious cognitive process has the possible result of pulling the reader into extended consciousness, and can thus promote creative identity construction. It is outside of the scope of this article to explore the nuances of Hayles' framework, but this matter nevertheless deserves mentioning through the posthumanist lens.

when he recently writes, "what gives me hope is the future that has yet to be imagined [...] I feel doors opening up, opening to things not yet known or thought about, I feel oxygen flowing in" (Tan, 2022: 187, emphasis in original). This kind of trepidatious optimism is rare, and yet both authors strike a long forgotten chord in human readers; hopeful imagination.

Tan has a posthuman pulse on the relationships between humans and animals, and a foreboding tone of what we risk losing if we continue on with the status quo and do not stop to consider our role as interconnected kin. We do not need to travel into the future or completely untether from reason and logic

to feel the tenderness and love that is waiting for us right here, right now, on Earth. Indeed, Okorafor also conceptualises the foreboding persistence of racism and xenophobia echoed far into the future; warning us of the omnipresence of dominance and power in societal structures. We might wonder, 'Is this really the future Earth we hope for?' leading us to consider the parts of ourselves that are yearning to reach out to an unknown *more-than-human*, posthuman self. We do not need to believe in the existence of aliens, or that florals and humans can interbreed to create a new type of human to imagine what we could be if we let go of anthropocentrism, and embraced otherness in all its forms.

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# The Impoverished Landscape: Navigating Absence and Ecological Resilience in Speculative Fiction

### OCTAVIA CADE SPECULATIVE FICTION WRITER, NEW ZEALAND

**Abstract:** The impoverished landscape in science fiction is arguably a reflection of the impoverished landscapes of contemporary reality. The increasing effects of climate change and biodiversity loss are reflected in environments that exhibit decreasing resilience to ecological disruption, whether it be the effects of ocean warming on coral reefs, or the transformation of rainforest environments into savannah. Speculative narratives that explore these landscapes, while arguably acting as a warning for possible futures to come, also offer ways by which these landscapes can be navigated. While the impoverished landscape is ultimately a dystopian construct, it is also a place to explore boundaries between the human and nonhuman, and between individuals and communities. Moreover, impoverished landscapes are places of conversation between the living and the dead, where human interactions with landscapes can be interpreted in terms of absence. How do humans relate to

landscape when significant portions of that landscape are gone? And, crucially, how does that impoverished landscape respond to the absence of humans—an absence which may ultimately be beneficial for the remaining community within that landscape? Apocalyptic narratives that engage with the impoverished landscape—narratives such as Sweet Fruit, Sour Land (2018) by Rebecca Ley, and Locust Girl (2015) by Merlinda Bobis—interrogate the place of humans within that landscape, and frequently reflect, in their characters, the impoverishment of their environment. Human response to the impoverished landscape, these stories argue, is indicative of resilience levels in culture as well as ecology.

**Keywords:** Impoverished landscape, resilience, dystopia, ecology, resources, community

Landscapes within speculative fiction are a source of opportunity. As in our own world, where landscapes reflect the priorities and

choices of its inhabitants, speculative fiction has the potential to use the environment as a means of expressing individual and community values. Societies that value sustainable and diverse landscapes have very different lifestyles than societies that, through the expression of their values, are engendering degraded and inhospitable landscapes. Dystopian fiction, in particular, is a vehicle for envisaging the realities of this latter presentation. All too frequently, extractive and exploitative practices result in environments that are increasingly incapable of supporting life. Subsequently, influenced as it is by climate change and biodiversity loss, dystopian speculative fiction provides an imaginative approach to navigating our own landscapes in ways that prioritise creativity and reconciliation with the nonhuman. That creative approach is able to re-imagine the impoverished dystopian landscape—stripped as it is of ecology and (increasingly) of meaning as a place of dynamism and resistance. Such is the case in Locust Girl: A Lovesong by Merlinda Bobis (2015) and Sweet Fruit, Sour Land by Rebecca Ley (2018).

The two texts discussed within this article may appear fairly distinct from each other, and Sweet Fruit, Sour Land and Locust Girl certainly take very different approaches to landscape. These differences prove valuable, however, as their diametrically opposing interpretations of theme prove jointly illuminating. Sweet Fruit, Sour Land depicts a landscape in the early stages of profound alteration. Ecological collapse and the implied devastation of insect populations has led to a severe food shortage, whilst the inability of existing communities to cope with the drastically reduced resources that are available to them results in mass migration and internal displacements. In the United Kingdom of the novel, the social and political response to this increasingly dystopian environment includes a rigidly controlled approach to reproduction, and the ability of the central characters Mathilde and Jaminder to navigate their reduced reproductive choices comprises the central concern of the text. Landscape, within this dystopian narrative, is ostensibly a background element, but one which nevertheless looms large in human affairs, and massively narrows the range of future possibility. Crucially, the loss of pollinating insects is likely to lead, over time, to different vegetation patterns both in the wild and in the communities that manage to survive within this increasingly ecologically impoverished environment.

Whereas Sweet Fruit, Sour Land makes clear the connection between ecology and landscape in a changing environment, Locust Girl, on the other hand, is set in a significantly more fantastic and unfamiliar landscape. It is a landscape so degraded, and so functionally sterile, that further environmental change has become almost impossible. Any regenerative potential must be supported by an outside source that has proven unwilling to provide it. The resultant wasteland environment is part desert, part bone-yard, lacking water, plants, and (most) animals. The only organisms able to exist there are locusts that survive by hibernating deep underground, and humans, who receive limited food and water from a more functional ecosystem across the border; a border they are not permitted to cross, preventing the migration of environmental refugees such as Mathilde and Jaminder. Bobis has produced an almost magical fable, as opposed to Ley's science fictional environmental dystopia, and the contrast becomes most apparent in their differing treatments of insects. The insects of Sweet Fruit, Sour Land impact on the landscape primarily through their absence. In Locust Girl, however, the nine-year-old protagonist Amedea has a locust embedded in her body; a narrative

choice which blurs the boundaries between human and nonhuman species and might, ultimately, lead to the survival of both.

Although both texts differ in genre, scale, and reproductive concerns-Ley's novel prioritises individual choice, whereas Bobis' is more greatly concerned with community capacity—they both figure landscapes as a means of exerting control over an outgroup. Whether that outgroup comprises women or the impoverished inhabitants of desert wastelands, the respective relationships with landscape manifest points of change within each text. Landscape, in both novels, is not merely a reflection of possible sterility and exploitation. It is also a place of resistance, where reproductive abilities and engagements with the nonhuman are able to generate a potential path forward, a path where resilience is returned to the landscape, and to the people that inhabit it. That resilience is two-fold, referring as it does both to ecological resilience—the ability of an ecosystem to recover after disturbance-and to human resilience, which can be perceived in the ability of individuals and communities to exhibit agency and to persist and thrive even under unfavourable conditions. Crucially, human resilience is heavily dependent on ecosystem resilience, as the ability of the latter to reliably provide ecosystem services, such as food and water, is necessary for human populations to survive and flourish.

## Sterility and the impoverished landscape

While landscapes comprise more than their ecological components, the influence of ecology on landscapes is vast. Animals and plants significantly alter the geography of a region, an effect evident in either their presence or their absence. That same ecology is susceptible

undermining, and an impoverished landscape may also be a sterile landscape. Given that ecosystem resilience is correlated with biodiversity, any factor which limits that biodiversity contributes to a vulnerable ecology, and to a landscape on the verge of change. Garry Peterson et al. comment, for instance, that the "consequences of species loss may not be immediately visible, but species loss decreases ecological resilience to disturbance or disruption. It produces ecosystems that are more vulnerable to ecological collapse" (1998: 16). Habitat loss, the introduction of monoculture practices in farming and food production, and pollution are all examples of change that can impact upon a landscape, and which can cause biodiversity loss in the ecology that exists within that landscape. Those speculative landscapes that exist within dystopian narratives are typically impoverished in these ways, and the biodiversity loss, subsequent lack of ecological resilience, and the creeping onset of sterility are often illustrated not only within the landscape in question, but also within the inhabitants of that landscape.

It may be instructive here to recall the legend of the Fisher King, whose incapacity through injury is reflected in the barren lands of his kingdom—the comparative democratisation of power exhibited by more contemporary speculative narratives may be indicative of a similar relationship between people and place. If the speculative landscape has become barren, then who is responsible for this inflicted sterility, and how might it be remedied? It is certainly easier to nominate a single figure as the answerable party, as opposed to an economic system, or wider community support of unsustainable lifestyles, but that is a fantasy on more than one level.

The failing landscape of *Sweet Fruit*, *Sour Land* is very much a series of implied

absences, and barren or sterile biologies are brought into focus via the ongoing struggle for provender. Food is a central concern in the novel's world, imported and rationed out due to failing natural supplies. Jaminder summarises a pressing environmental concern of her society regarding pollination: "Did you know that oats are pollinated by the wind, in the way that fruit is not?" (Ley, 2018: 286). She goes on to state that "I'm sure you could never imagine a place without fruit or vegetables, a place where there is only oats because there is only wind" (286). The apparent decline in insect populations is never really addressed within the text, aside from doomed, vanity attempts by the wealthy to import bees back into the UK, but the absence of pollinators is clearly having a significant effect on horticulture.

Moreover, there are vast swathes of landscape that have, on a global scale, become unfit to support the communities which have been built on them. Mathilde dreams of her former home in France, where she envisions "the land for what was left of it: scorched and tropical, parched and cracked, diseased" (6). It can be no coincidence, really, that Mathilde has somehow transposed the home of her childhood onto her own body. "Sometimes I feel that my body is a desert," she says (187), and correspondingly determines that she, too, will bear no fruit. This is not a decision made in carelessness or haste. It is, in fact, a decision that is likely to see her sanctioned, punished by a state which has mandated the fertility of its women. Mathilde's doctor, concerned that she is advancing in age without having borne a child, makes sure to expose her to the sight of another woman being medically raped in order that she conceives a child. That woman is drugged, strapped to a bed, and trying to scream. Nonetheless, "It's important that you saw that," her doctor tells her. "She was almost thirty," he says, speaking of the woman being violated in front of them. "Something had to be done" (92).

Although sterility is sweeping over the formerly fertile fields of the land, other natural resources cannot be left to lie fallow; such is the threat. After this traumatic experience fails to increase Mathilde's desire for children, her (voluntary) sterility in the face of the increasingly barren land is perceived by those in power as an implicit reproach to that same land, and an explicit reproach to the body politic that has decided that all women must personify fertility, even if that fertility is failing around them. Unlike Sweet Fruit, Sour Land's emphasis on individual experiences of sterility as reflections of wider ecological loss, Locust Girl places its sterile landscape at the forefront of the narrative, and minimises characters' engagement with notions of individual reproduction. Arguably, this is a direct result of character choice, as the protagonist of *Locust* Girl is a nine-year-old girl, albeit a nine-yearold whose body has been in the equivalent of suspended animation for ten years; the potential for childbirth is naturally not her primary focus. Little Amedea, however, is clearly unusual, and for more reasons than the locust embedded in her forehead. There are simply very few children in the desert wastelands. Arguably, children provide a more central concern of Sweet Fruit, Sour Land, as its landscape has not-quite yet-become so degraded that it is almost impossible to feed them. That day is clearly approaching, however, and hence the mandated reproduction enforced by the governmentintended to maintain proof of fertility in the midst of a failing ecosystem—evokes complex, often hostile responses in the characters.

This governmental response to increasing landscape sterility in *Sweet Fruit, Sour Land* is primarily resource-dependent. The novel's

London hosts an elite population of powerful individuals, who have chosen to hoard limited resources at the expense of the rest of society. "Why not save the privileged few that can be saved, why not live in the lap of luxury for your remaining years, if there are ways to do it," Gloria observes (227). Her sardonic appraisal of the situation is based firmly in an understanding of absence, of sterility and limitation, and how these social determinants are experienced by different people, in different ways, and in different places. As Gloria reveals, parts of Northern Europe are still able to grow their own food, but an influx of refugees to Norway brought disease that devastated its human population. Countries such as the United Kingdom, therefore, who lack sufficient food-producing capacity due to the increasing sterility of their landscapes, are exporting a perceived excess of women in order to bolster Norway's failing human population: "We get the produce that still grows in that milder part of the world, and they get our best women. Our most fertile. The ones who won't be missed. The ones who don't play by the rules. The ones who don't do their duty, they're the easiest to give up" (227).

Duty, in this context, is reproductive. It perhaps seems stunningly short-sighted to mandate reproduction within a landscape where the capacity to sustain human populations is rapidly decreasing, but then reproductive coercion, in this novel, is a form of population control that works on multiple levels. "They were the ones with the food, so they were the ones with the power" (8), Mathilde thinks of the remaining farmers—a sentiment that could just as easily apply to the politicians of both texts. In Locust Girl, food is rigidly allocated by those same politicians. Most characters inhabit a landscape that is wholly barren, wholly impoverished, with the only sustenance available to them being the meagre rations

periodically provided to them by what passes for a ruling body—albeit a ruling body that exists at a distance, behind a well-guarded border. These rations are insufficient, and the distribution of them is frequently unreliable. After a month when food is not provided, Amedea, her father, and their community are reduced to eating sand porridge and locusts. Amedea's father gives most of his own portion to his daughter—"I grabbed his bowl and ate his meal, having licked my own bowl clean. I crunched his share of locust, trying to convince myself I'd be full. My father believed little bellies must be treated well" (Bobis, 2015: 4)—but this is an unsustainable solution, and it is clear that the camp is starving. Furthermore, the locusts that they have been able to scavenge from the environment are becoming scarce, "burrowing deep beyond our reach" (5).

Diverse, interconnected food webs are indicative of a healthy environment, but in the barren landscape of *Locust Girl*, the food web no longer resembles a web at all. The humans of the camp consume a single species, because there is nothing else available. This consumption, moreover, is about to be inverted. When the camp is destroyed by bombing, Amedea is the only surviving part of it. Everything else belongs to the flames and to the locusts, who gorge on the charred bodies. Amedea, burnt but alive, has been buried underground; there she sleeps for ten years, trapped with a single locust: "It nibbled at me, thinking I was a stone blocking its way. It nibbled parts of my burnt crust in patches. Then it grew tired. It nibbled its way under my forehead and there slept my ten-year sleep" (9).

When Amedea wakes from her decade of hibernation, her body, covered in burn scars from the bombing, has been altered in one major respect. The locust remains embedded within her forehead, and the two organisms, sharing dreams and songs, subsequently begin to explore

the ruined landscape together. If Mathilde thinks of her body as a desert, and one reflective of the home she left behind, then "Amedea's locust reorients her embodied subjectivity to become in and of the environment" (Zong, 2020: 100). Neither of them are any longer a consumable commodity for the other; their relationship, now, is one of symbiosis instead of predation. It is this symbiosis which allows Amedea, eventually, to comprehend the wider predation that has resulted in that impoverished landscape in the first place.

The concept of a child who sleeps for ten years, leaving one dystopian landscape in order to enter another, has appeared more than once in recent Australian literature (Bobis is Filipino-Australian). In The Swan Book (2013) by the Indigenous Australian author Alexis Wright, a little girl called Oblivia falls asleep inside a gum tree and does not wake for years. Her now-elderly parents do not recognise her, so Oblivia, like Amedea, is forced to make a home and build a community with people she does not know, in a world that is both familiar and unfamiliar to her. This article does not extend to a close reading of The Swan Book, but it is mentioned here as a second example in service of my reproductive argument: texts such as Sweet Fruit, Sour Land that have adult protagonists who are concerned with childbearing and child-rearing engage with the lives those children might have, predicting the future world that they will inherit. Locust Girl, on the other hand, and The Swan Book to some extent, use the device of the lengthy sleep to bring that future to an existing child character. This particular strategy increases the sense of dislocation within the narrative, and indeed Amedea, bereft of her father and her community and even, in the early stages of her awakening, her language (Oblivia herself, on awakening, is also mute) is in some sense thrust into a landscape that is both familiar and alienating at once.

That alienation is deliberate on more than one level. As Amedea navigates the impoverished landscape of her future present, she discovers that the rations given out to the equally impoverished communities beyond the border have been adulterated. To quell discontent with repeated bombings and the periodic, fiery sterilisations of people and landscape, the people inhabiting that dystopian landscape are being made to forget. The seeds distributed as part of their rations encourage amnesia, both of individual and community stories, and erase memories of the fires that keep the landscape sterile. It is felt that a solid understanding of cause and effect, as it specifically pertains to that landscape, would only encourage 'strays' refugees who would leave the dystopian lands for the healthier ecologies inhabited by the powerful. "Strays are meant to forget their own stories from once upon a time, for good," Amedea is told, "So they won't attempt to walk to the border" (157). Naturally, those orchestrating this constant manipulation via rationing do not eat the contaminated food themselves, because their own memories are perceived as a necessary survival mechanism:

Those are *their* stories, *their* own devastation. All other stories and devastation must be forgotten, like they never happened. But not theirs, no, they never forget their own for good, even if they happened once upon a time. Here, they want only a momentary forgetting for rest. Because they're fearful that they'll forget and never remember, so they'll stop guarding the border, and they'll be unsafe again. (158)

These relationships between food, body, and landscape in *Locust Girl* are both complex

and corrupted, and the mechanism of that corruption is simplification. Both biologically and in terms of landscape, this simplification, achieved with fire, is an ongoing sterility that undermines ecology, devastates food webs, and impedes both reproduction and ecological resilience. In social terms, this simplification encompasses the destruction of individual and community memory, leaving the people of the wasted lands functionally incapable of improving their conditions or their landscape. It also, as Dolores Herrero comments, separates the privileged inhabitants of sustainable landscapes from their fellow humans who live across borders, and blinds them to "potentially fruitful contact" with the stories of outsiders (2017: 955). This is sterility of another sort which, like that of the landscape, has been engineered in order to reduce the possibility of political opposition.

In line with their provision of ecosystem services such as food and water, landscapes become a manipulated and contested environment due to human interests. This is particularly the case in speculative dystopias, where the control of limited resources is frequently a central narrative concern. This raises a crucial alternate consideration. If a speculative landscape can be manipulated in order to enable existing exploitative relationships within and between communities, is it possible that that same landscape can, even within a dystopia, be used to enable a more equitable and resilient environment?

## The dystopian landscape as a site of resistance

Within *Locust Girl*, exploitation centres around the treatment of people as landscape. Both entities are similarly made sterile, and such reproduction as is able to survive in an

impoverished environment (ecological and social) is limited, and unable to either mount, or continue, a sustainable resistance—a resistance which must, in both cases, involve an increase in system resilience. The merger of people and landscape is underlined by the parts of that landscape that are made of human bodies, or of human parts, as with the near-endless fields of bones that Amedea and her companion Beenabe travel through after the former is unearthed from her hibernation: "The sun leapt around what looked like white sticks and balls, hundreds of them, some piled together like kindling," and many other bones are laid out in a line "matching the length of the horizon" (13). Beenabe discovers that this line marks a border which the dead were not permitted to cross, and there is "half-buried barbed wire running for miles, alongside the line of skulls and bones" (15). To complete this picture of sterility offered by the remains of the dead, this desiccated and sterile landscape is filled with bones that represent the juveniles of more than one species. Amedea picks her way through the skeletons, noting that "my feet were intent on not hurting the skulls and bones, especially the very few little ones. They were curled beside the big ones or the big ones were wrapped around the little ones" (29). The same page depicts her observation of the skeleton of an unnamed animal, also wrapped around the remains of its young.

This depiction—not only of the innumerable dead, but of the relative rarity of the young, and their inability to survive the increasingly inhospitable landscape—is underlined by a further example of a landscape that has been altered, or created, by bodies. "Childless Cho-choli" (41) was once a member of a flourishing village, until the water that supplied that village was re-routed in order to better serve the interests of the powerful who

lived elsewhere: "they built pipes into our well and our water disappeared," Cho-choli explains, "So our village began drying up, even the wombs of our women" (42). Her two young children having died of thirst, Cho-choli retired to a cave, where her weeping filled the cave system with salt water. Discarded bones, salt water, and dead children combine, therefore, to depict a landscape that is not only impoverished, but also increasingly sterile and hostile to growth. This underlines, again, the fantastic morphology of landscape within the novel, where human bodies both alter landscapes and are reflective of them.

Whereas the dystopian desert landscape of Locust Girl is indicative of sterility, there is a limited landscape bordering that region that is capable of relative ecological health. The Kingdom Builders, who maintain the border and the landscape on either side of it (including their own comparatively healthy land, where food is produced and political decisions made) inhabit an environment where trees and animals survive. Animals, particularly, are not terribly common, and when they occasionally appear are typically hunted for their fur. This exploitation mimics that of the Kingdom Builders towards people like Amedea, who live on the sterile side of the border, and who must sometimes barter their own body parts for food.

Predatory relationships like these, however, can always be altered towards more regenerative connections. By crossing the border, Amedea demonstrates the potential permeability of that border, and brings the two communities closer together. This is not an entirely successful merger: the relationship between the two landscapes is too tightly controlled, and the Kingdom Builders have too great an interest in maintaining their own prosperity. Amedea, however, is herself a site of resistance, personifying in a unique form

the connection between body and landscape. The locust buried in her forehead, the locust that shares dreams and songs with her, is an opportunity for transformation. Amedea, who contains multitudes of stories in an environment where memories are controlled in order to support the continuation of a single story—one which valorises the Kingdom Builders and their continued destruction of landscape—becomes the locust. "My body grew, pushed to accommodate all voices from all sides of the border, both desert and green haven. I couldn't contain them. I couldn't bear the strain. My body burst and caught fire," (173) she says. From the charred remains of her body, the Amedea-locust emerges—"a locust with the heart and mind of a girl" (175), who can share memories and dreams with people who live on both sides of the border.

This transformation, this act of resistance, can be interpreted through a lens of human and nonhuman reconciliation, one which overlays the dystopian elements of the novel with "more hopeful, magical-realist imaginaries of multispecies movement" (Sadowski-Smith, 2021: 112). The historical sterilisations of the desert regions necessarily limit the human societies that live there, and have also killed the nonhuman inhabitants of that region, leaving it largely devoid of plants and animals. These organisms have stories of their own, and their loss contributes materially to the impoverishment of landscape on both a cultural and ecological level. Amedea's metamorphosis rebalances the relationship between human and nonhuman, and the locust becomes more than a consumable item in a degraded food web; it becomes a necessary part of a cultural ecosystem and a crucial influence on landscape, as it has in the past (and will be again in the future). Resistance in Locust Girl, then, is centred on the building of community links, not only within

a community, but between the human and the nonhuman.

The specification that this connection is built on the back of an insect is an interesting choice. Insects are, on the whole, perhaps not the most sympathetic of animals; readers may be forgiven for thinking that another mammal, for example, might be more successful in invoking identification and sympathy as well as reconciliation. Insects, however, are food. They are also pollinators, and therefore foodproducers; they are necessary to build resilient ecosystems. They are also, like other nonhuman animals, blind to political borders. Their ability to quietly fly, crawl, or otherwise creep over lines on a map makes them well-suited to stories that involve migration. It is notable that, in both the texts explored here, the connection between migration, story, and organism is interrogated in multiple and often contradictory ways.

The characters of Locust Girl exist in a world where migration is strongly discouraged. Attempts either result in death, leaving endless bones stretching along a border length of barbed wire, or otherwise the few successful migrants are forced into subservient positions and prevented from returning to their families. It is no surprise that the stories, and the memories, of this world are ruthlessly suppressed in order to propagate a rigidly limited set of experiences. In other worlds where migration is a fact of life, however, as in Sweet Fruit, Sour Land, migrants bring their stories with them (Mathilde is from France, and Jaminder from Kenya; both have come to the United Kingdom as environmental refugees). As a result, their experiences allow them to more effectively identify and resist the exploitation that landscape and opportunity have forced upon them. Their understanding of history, and their ability to recognise oppression and to communicate that understanding to others—"We look out for each other, don't we?" (172)—are advantages in maintaining their own agency and resilience both within the impoverished landscape, and in weathering the political response to that landscape.

Whereas exploitation is centred around treating people as inseparable from landscape in Locust Girl, in Sweet Fruit, Sour Land exploitation centres around treating people as a substitute for landscape. The increasing sterility of the land—a sterility primarily defined within the text by its inability to produce sufficient food to sustain human population levels—is contrasted with the novel's focus on women's fertility, and the expected expression of that fertility through state-mandated reproduction. The glaring reality that adding to the population of an existing community only increases pressure on an already vulnerable landscape, and on its faltering ecosystem services, is almost ignored by the state. It is, crucially, not ignored by the women who are expected to bear these children. They see, quite clearly, that fertility cannot be reassigned from landscape to individual as if it were a transferable resource. "It's cruel, isn't it?" says Gwendolyn. "A very specific type of cruelty. To impose children on people who can't feed them" (114). Mathilde's grandmother is in strong agreement. "How many friends have you lost to this insanity?" she says. "To this crazy notion that even though there's not enough for the living, we should make as much room as we can for the unborn?" (94). There is only one rational conclusion, she argues: "To bring a child into this nothing is cruel" (95).

If the choice to eschew personal sterility is a choice rooted in cruelty, then resistance, in *Sweet Fruit, Sour Land*, is connected to both sterility and to resilience in very distinct ways. Resistance is manifest in the deliberate choice to refuse to take part in human reproduction, and to embrace the possibility of sterility in self,

if not in landscape. Jaminder reasons that the world:

will go on without all of us. And maybe that's a shame for us, that our pocket of time on this earth was wasted and if viewed from faraway said something awful about human nature. But I don't think it's necessarily a shame for the earth itself. I think it could find a way to carry on without our disturbance. I think it would quietly thrive. (287)

Jaminder comes to appreciate the value of this anthropogenic absence, even though she has a child of her own to look after. Voluntary sterility, she accepts, is a valid choice. There is no unnatural bodily transformation within the novel; neither Mathilde nor Jaminder suddenly becomes nonhuman, nor do they take on nonhuman characteristics in the way that Amedea does. Instead, they come to value the nonhuman in a different way, realising that landscape is affected both by the presence of humans and by their absence. A similar argument is made by Alan Wiseman, who while arguing that "nature has been through worse losses before, and refilled empty niches," does acknowledge that "since some things we've done are likely irrevocable, what would remain in our absence would not be the same planet had we never evolved in the first place" (2007: 5). Those women in the text who choose to resist the continued exploitation of its impoverished landscape, and who centre that resistance within their own bodies, are materially contributing to the increased future resilience of the landscape that they inhabit, and the nonhuman organisms that live there.

This particular solution is one that might easily tip over into eco-fascism, yet Ley's presentation of the dual dystopian exploitation of landscape and women underlines the right to choose as a legitimate *choice*—one that is linked to landscape in collaborative and empathetic, instead of exploitative, ways.

### Conclusion

Both Ley and Bobis explore, in very different ways, the idea of re-establishing functioning and resilient communities within an impoverished landscape. Ley's approach is more focused on individual futures, and Bobis' on community memories, but they both ultimately interpret impoverished landscapes as sites of resistance and renewal. Both environments are presented as dystopias, and it is also true that the budding resistance in each novel does not transform those dystopias into more liveable and sustainable landscapes. The potential is there, however, even if that potential is wrapped in the bodies of insects, or manifests in a world where those insects no longer exist. Engagement with the nonhuman elements of the impoverished landscape encourages the valuing of those elements as important, necessary factors in the continuation of the landscape. That valuation will sometimes include the acknowledgement that, in impoverished landscapes, it is not always the human inhabitants who must be the sole priority. Ecological resilience is connected to human resilience, and the impoverished landscape—which lacks the former—will undermine the latter. Centring resistance to exploitative political relationships within the impoverished landscape, however, allows for the development and prioritisation of resilience on more than one level, and for more than one population.

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# Making Kin in January: An Ecocritical Analysis of Landscapes and Environment in The City in the Middle of the Night

### GUILLERMO GUADARRAMA MENDOZA Universidad Iberoamericana Puebla

Abstract: This article develops an ecocritical analysis of the landscapes and environment in Charlie Jane Anders' climate fiction novel *The* City in the Middle of the Night (2019). The novel is set in the far future on a tidally locked planet called January, and narrates the story of Sophie, a girl who learns how to communicate with the planet's native intelligent species the Gelet—whilst trying to convince January's decadent human cities to collaborate with them to face and survive climate change. The article's theoretical framework develops Luz Aurora Pimentel's critical discourse in *The Space* in Fiction [El espacio en la ficción], utilising discourse analysis to explore how January's landscapes and environment organise the novel's narrative discourse to put forward a critique of humanism. Centring upon the concept of the Chthulucene, the article concludes by reading Anders' novel in light of Donna Haraway's Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene.

**Keywords:** Chthulucene, discourse analysis, literary landscape, literary description, ecocriticism, science fiction.

This article stems from a pleasurable reading of The City in the Middle of the Night. Charlie Jane Anders' literary aesthetics and ecocritique were so powerful I felt invited to delve further into their textual dynamics, just for the sake of doing it. Hence I developed an analysis reliant on the fantastic system theory I will explain further on. My belief since I first read it was that the novel works as an allegory of the Chthulucene, installing Haraway's conceptual framework as a key aspect of this research project. Haraway proposes the term Chthulucene to name an alternative "third story" which, unlike the mainstream concepts of Anthropocene and Capitalocene, highlights that "human beings are not in a separate compost pile" than the one the myriad earth beings inhabit in these

times of ecological demise (Haraway, 2016: 55). When *Hélice* released a call for papers focused on speculative landscapes, that reflection grew another branch where such elements of Anders' novel were studied as active and significant. Hence the current article was born. I hope it contributes not only to getting audiences to befriend January's breathtaking landscapes and its sympoietic critters, but also to interrogating the conceptualisation and comprehension of science fiction as a genre.

In his seminal work Teoría general de lo fantástico: Del fantástico clásico al posmoderno [General Theory of the Fantastic: From the Classic to the Postmodern Fantastic (2015) Mexican novelist and literary theorist Omar Nieto elaborates a theoretical model of that which in Hispanic literary circles is usually called fantastic literature—a field of fiction which anglophone readers may recognise as equivalent to speculative fiction. In Hispanic scholarly discussions about fantasy and science fiction, both have generally been conceptualised as fantastic fiction. For instance, in his seminal work Literatura y fantasía [Literature and Fantasy] literary theorist Antonio Risco understands the fantastic literatures as a "vanguard of science insofar as they aim imagination to where it [the science] cannot reach yet" [adelantadas de la ciencia en cuanto apuntan la imaginación hacia donde aquella no puede llegar todavía] (Risco, 1982: 16). In his seminal anthology Teorias de lo fantástico [Theories of the Fantastic] David Roas considers science fiction as a subgenre of fantastic literature only distinguishable from the former because within it the impossible element is not supernatural (Roas, 2001: 8). As mentioned above, Nieto departs from such insights about fantasy and science fiction common amongst Hispanic discussions about the genre.

Nieto's theoretical approach theorises fantastic literature while emphasising the close relationship between textual form, narrative discourse, and ideology. Indeed, for Nieto fantastic literature is a field ripe for the study and comprehension of how otherness has been codified and represented in literature during any given time by any certain society: "the fantastic system is unthinkable without the idea of an alterity [...] otherness, is the opposite of order and is in a dialectical relationship with sameness" [el sistema de lo fantástico es impensable sin la idea de alteridad [...] *lo otro*, es lo contrario del orden y está en relación dialéctica con lo mismo] (Nieto, 2015: 62-63; emphasis in original). Fantastic literature thus implies "the staging of the limit between reality and imagination, sameness and otherness, as a textual possibility, by means of the story's productivity" [la puesta en escena del límite entre la realidad y la imaginación, lo mismo y lo otro, como posibilidad textual, mediante la productividad del relato] (Nieto, 2015: 63). Therefore, delving into a fantastic story means digging deep into conceptions of what otherness is and how it relates to sameness, according to that ideology or paradigm which informed the work's composition. As we will see in this article, understanding how the human and the non-human are codified as sameness and otherness in an ecological work such as The City in the Middle of the Night yields a clearer view of the narrative discourse set in motion by the novel, as well as the ecocritical ideology underlying it. One of this article's theses is that Anders' novel uses descriptive systems to build narrative landscapes, which play a crucial role in the codification and relativisation of sameness/ otherness and human/non-human binary oppositions.

Both the well-known concept of the novum and the general theory of the fantastic are fertile ideas to bridge narrative discourse, ideology and paradigm through interpretation. However, a further tool of textual analysis proves necessary to link form—in this work, the textual description of the landscapes in Anders' novel—and discourse. In her work *El* espacio en la ficción [The Space in Fiction] (2016) Mexican literary theorist Luz Aurora Pimentel analyses the mechanisms of description in narrative as well its role in the construction of symbolic meaning. For her: "the descriptive dimension of a story may constitute a vehicle for the development of the themes, a thematicideological reinforcement, or the place where the symbolic values of the story are forged" [la dimensión descriptiva de un relato puede constituir un vehículo para el desarrollo de los temas, un refuerzo temático-ideológico, o bien el lugar donde se forjan los valores simbólicos del relato] (Pimentel, 2016: 8). She defines description as the development of a textual equivalence between a noun and a predicative series whose limit is not determined a priori. The noun implies a descriptive theme or nomenclature, and the predicative series unfolds it into its attributes—details, components, particularities, and so on. The permanence of the nomenclature throughout the development of the description is termed the pantonym, and grants cohesion to the overall description (Pimentel, 2016: 26). Description is also modified by tonal operators; qualifiers such as adjectives, adverbs, analogies, and so forth, that bridge the description with the discursive level (Pimentel, 2016: 27).

The basic forms that a descriptive series might take are both paratactical: the synecdochical dominant (that which unfolds the parts of the descriptive theme; a pigeon has wings, beak, feathers, and so on), and the synonymical dominant (that which compares the descriptive theme to another in an analogical relationship; a pigeon is like a fat sparrow).

However, there are also hypotactical descriptive forms, which organise the description according to a preexisting model (Pimentel, 2016: 20-21). These models—there is usually more than one involved—organise the description into a system according to a paradigm: an idea of space and its logic, thus giving it a meaning beyond mere representation (Pimentel, 2016: 59-71). In brief, the treatment given to a description (whether it is mimetic or metaphorical, for instance, or whether it organises the descriptive theme's attributes according to an objective or subjective point of view), plays a key role in the configuration of the narrative discourse, as will be examined in Anders' novel.

## A Novel of Meaningful Landscapes

Charlie Jane Anders' *The City in the Middle of the Night* (2019) is a climate fiction novel whose actions unfold in a distant future, upon a tidally locked planet called January. There, a future humanity originating from Earth survives in cities located across the terminator line, the twilight fringe between day and night. The narrative follows the focal protagonists, Sophie and Mouth, in a series of adventures which take them from a city called Xiosphant all the way to the other side of January—via its alien landscapes—to a city called Argelo, to the night city, and then back to Xiosphant once more.

As a science fiction work, the novel relies on several nova, the most prominent of which is the planet January. As a tidally locked planet with a biosphere and biogeophysical cycles radically different than Earth's, January situates the whole narrative upon an extraordinary-yetnaturalised storyworld that exceeds background signification to dominate narrative discourse. January also embeds and plays host to the novel's second key novum: the encounter of

humanity with the Gelet—an alien sentient species native to the planet. The novel's third key novum is also subject to its principal one; anthropogenic climate change. It is this final element that renders *The City in the Middle of the Night* a climate fiction novel. Furthermore, a fourth novum—Sophie's transformation into a *mestiza*<sup>1</sup> of Gelet and human—comes into play towards the end of the novel.

The codification of these key nova rests on others of lesser importance associated with interstellar travel and colonization; humanity arrived upon January from Earth on a mothership, and deployed extraordinary technologies to carve cities into the ground, pull down meteorites full of useful resources, interbreed Earth's flora and fauna with January's, and so on. These secondary nova aren't fully explored nor developed in the narrative and are thus intertextual expressions of what Jonathan Hay understands as decayed nova (Hay, 2020: 7-9). As such, they play a key role insofar as they work as an intertextual generic network of science fictional conventions (decayed nova) over which the other nova are codified as a critical extraordinary element. That is, they represent key signifiers associated with the old, against which January, the Gelet, climate change, and Sophie's mestizaje are signified as novelties.

The novel's plot is generally narrated sequentially, from beginning to end, although it occasionally includes brief retrospections comprising accounts of past events recalled by characters, either as lines of dialogue or thoughts. The text's narrative is preceded by a metafictional "Translator's Note" which

comments on story events as well as on the colonists' reconnoitring of common names belonging to terrestrial flora, fauna, and objects to designate the native species and objects of January. The novel is divided into seven uneven parts made up of intercalated chapters that correspond to two parallel action lines; one for Sophie and one for Mouth.

The narrative deploys variable and character-dependent focal strategies. Sophie's chapters are consistently told by a consonant and simultaneous homodiegetic narrative figure focalised 'inside' Sophie's point of view (imparting a sense that Sophie's experience of diegetic events are being narrated by her as they happen). This narrative figure can, nevertheless, alternately be understood also as Sophie's retrospective narration of her experience of these same events after her transformation, as reminiscences she contributes towards Gelet consciousness. On the other hand, Mouth's chapters are consonantly told retrospectively by an heterodiegetic narrative figure with a non-focalised point of view (imparting a sense that Mouth's experiences of the events are narrated by an external narrator after they have happened). This narrator follows Mouth closely and abundantly employs free indirect speech, blurring the boundary between them. By the end of the novel, this opaque narrative figure can also be attributed to Sophie, as she relates Mouth's memories through tactopathic Gelet communication.

I am aware that "hybrid" is the mainstream term, and that it is even the one used by Anders to refer to the mixture of the two sentient species in her novel. Nevertheless, I agree with Bolivian philosopher Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui when she affirms that such a term "is a genetical metaphor, which connotes sterility" [es una metáfora genética, que connota esterilidad] (Rivera Cusicanqui, 2014: 70). I therefore prefer to talk about Sophie's transformation in terms of Rivera Cusicanqui's notion of mestizaje, since she understands this formation to be fertile, undetermined and inclusive.

## January as Landscape

If the novel's main novum is indeed the storyworld January, its alien biogeophysical cycles and biosphere, then the descriptive systems deployed to build the planet, and the information given through the narrative all serve to make it a meaningful landscape that embeds and supports the logic of the other key nova. The planet's geographical and astronomical characteristics are imparted by Sophie during the first chapter. We learn that January has no day-night cycle, a trait interpreted negatively by humans since their arrival: "the Founding Settlers arrived on a planet where one side always faces the sun and had no clue how to cope" (Anders, 2019: 15). We also learn that Xiosphant, the city where Sophie was born and lives at the beginning of the story, has a "temperate zone" (15) as well as a literal "dark side" with streets that climb "into deeper shadow [with] chill wind coming in from the night" (18), providing readers with information about the planet's environment and its effects upon the city, as well as how humans experience it. Hence, January's characterisation as a planet of alien landscapes is begun by making explicit the relation between the human and the non-

Indeed, throughout Anders' novel readers are encouraged to grasp and imagine January vicariously through landscape descriptions. The initial panoramic description of the planet comprises the beginning of Mouth's first focal chapter:

The Sea of Murder vanished behind them, and then they had nothing but the road. Deathly shroud on one horizon, white furnace on the other. Sky so wide it pulverized you to look up. No other features but the cracks and marbling in the stone underfoot. [...] A couple times,

a bison charged in from the night and tried to seize a person in its powerful maw, with more teeth than you could count, and razor-sharp threads crisscrossing between them. Once, a storm fell from a great height and set upon them, knives of rocky ice clutched in a million fists. [...] At last, though, when they seemed to have walked a dozen lifetimes, they saw a glow on the horizon: the lights of Xiosphant. The lights grew prouder and then vanished because the city was having its curfew. When the lights reappeared, they looked much closer. (39)

The descriptive theme is never explicitly mentioned, though it can be inferred; it is the point of reference, namely Mouth and the Resourceful Couriers who travel from the Sea of Murder to the outskirts of Xiosphant. This series unfolds descriptions of its subthemes; the landscape as seen from the road, the irruption of the bison, the storm, and the emergence of Xiosphant's lights over the horizon. Through the preeminence of verbs in this excerpt, environmental elements are granted agency; the Sea of Murder vanishes, the sky pulverises, the storm falls upon them, the city lights grow. This is a landscape whose elements act, rather than simply a background for action to take place.

The formerly omitted descriptive subthemes within the same excerpt describe the Couriers' actions: "The rhythm of their footfalls, chump chump chump, became a piece of music that never stopped, accompanied by the sled's churning wheels. [...] They had to build their shelter though they could barely stand, and hug each other as they shielded the sled with their trembling bodies" (39, emphasis in original). The first portion here is a synecdochical presentation of the Couriers that contributes to the sensorial dimension of the landscape whilst eliding their own agency. The second portion

presents the Couriers as abject beings in the face of a rainstorm, again generating a visceral paean to the planet's agency, characteristic of Sophie's Gelet consciousness—manifest via her atemporal narration of the text's narrative. It is also important that the series is metaphorical; night figures as a "Deathly shroud," and day a "white furnace," and hailing ice shards are "knives of rocky ice clutched in a million fists" (39). These figurations ease both the iconisation—the rendering of the focal object as an image by its figuration and particularisation through the description (Pimentel, 2016: 35) and the comprehension of such a fantastic landscape by the reader. But they also charge it with meaning; January is a deadly planet of coexisting extremes.

Though it might merely seem a brief initial tributary towards worldbuilding, this early description sets in motion a complex signification process. It already presents the semantic oppositions that the novel will develop and subvert throughout its narrative. We have the clear semantic and iconic contrast between day and night. Both of them are deadly, although in a diametrically opposed manner; one is deadly cold, the other is a furnace. One is way too bright, the other way too dark. The liminal region between them known as the road is a barren harsh-weathered duskland that reinforces the semantic opposition between humanity and non-humanity, both in opposing the pettiness of humanity in the face of a transcendental environmental force via the presence of harsh climate phenomena throughout the description, and in opposing humanity and otherness via the incursion of alien fauna from the nightside. Xiosphant lights glow according to an artificial day-night cycle inexistent in tidally-locked January, and hence, the city lights, which glow on and off cyclically, establish a stark contrast between the artificial

human landscape—and the non-human, natural one.

## Xiosphant as Landscape

We have seen how, within Mouth's first focalised description, Xiosphant is firmly associated with light. But it also receives deeper semantic meanings when Sophie describes it in a panoramic manner: "From up here, Xiosphant looks like a great oval, with a bite taken out of the right side. The farmwheels keep rotating, but all the buildings have sheer faces, so the whole city is asleep" (33). Once again, the descriptive system's deixis is a character's perspective. Xiosphant is presented in an analogical dominant (the city "looks like a great oval, with a bite taken out of the right side") and personification specifies that the buildings have "sheer faces" and the city "sleeps." On the other hand, the city's shape suggests its boundaries. The farmwheels comprise an extraordinary science fictional element which, nonetheless, is presented as everyday, and can hence be grasped and iconised by the compound noun used to name it. Xiosphant is thus characterised as a bounded extraordinary, yet humanised space.

The above description is immediately developed across a detailed panorama:

The part of town nearest me, the Warrens, is a heavy, colorless off-black with slate rooftops and tall white-brick rectangles, but the city picks up a glow as I look farther inward, toward the farmwheels and the main shopping district. The pall lifts slowly, until my gaze hits the center of town, where the great spire of the Council House and the golden domes of the Palace gleam under a silvery light. From there, the light blazes fiercer and fiercer, until you reach the day side of

town, which hurts my eyes even from here. And beyond that, the rays of the sun just poke out from behind the Young Father, though I don't look that far, for fear of hurting my eyes. Off to my right, outside the wall in the Northern Ranges, cattle jostle each other, surrounded by high fences. The outcroppings at the base of the Young Father have mining tunnels going into them, and a few craggy shells of old treasure meteors have come to rest farther north. (33)

This panoramic descriptive model is inseparably underpinned by a spatial one; the nomenclature's presentation of attributes is organised according to their distance from the deixis—the point of reference, following both a near-to-far and dark-to-bright logic—the latter comprising a science fictional element since such a spatialisation of day and night is a consequence of January's alien character. An urban model predominates, with subthemes encompassing the different parts of town; the Warrens, the shopping district, the center. The substitution of common nouns as proper nouns reinforces this urban model. The farmwheels, another science fictional attribute, also contribute to the townthematic logic and thus, although evidently not mimetic, the passage remains coherent with the descriptive form. January's dayside is characterised as a fierce and blinding boundary to the urban landscape.

Despite ostensibly being a nomenclature-bound description of Xiosphant, the above sketch spills over its boundaries to encompass its hinterland. Its description of Xiosphant's outskirts follows the same logic established by the formerly established urban descriptive model; just like the Warrens, the outskirts' subthemes are districts named by capitalised common nouns (the Northern Ranges, the Young Father). And, once again, although one

of these subthemes is science fictional—the "old treasure meteors"—it is nevertheless codified as an ordinary part of the landscape. The description of its outskirts' subthemes works to signify Xiosphant as a rapacious city, a trait which future information such as the following line only reinforce: "The 'road' ahead looks lifeless, drained by Xiosphant's endless water demands" (118).

Two aspects of this latter description are particularly relevant. First, it codifies extraordinary elements as ordinary by means of a realist descriptive model. The farmwheels, the spatialisation of day and night, and the treasure meteors are all extraordinary novelties in relation to the rest of the urban elements, which are recognisably commonplace. In the case of the farmwheels and the spatialisation of day and night, the descriptive form even privileges them; the farmwheels are described prior to the broader panoramic description, as moving in a sleeping city, while the inexistent diurnal cycle and the consequential spacialisation of night and day functions as an alternate spatial model which overshadows and structures the very description. The meteors are highlighted by virtue of being the last of the nomenclature's attributes to be presented.

Secondly, despite being organised by an urban model, the panoramic description highlights Xiosphant's embeddedness in January's environment. The planet's environment is manifestly so all-encompassing that it even informs one of the descriptive models; the aforementioned spatialisation of night and day. The landscape's dominance over human constructs is also suggested via the description of the city's outskirts, which comprises the same form used for its inner sections. The embeddedness of Xiosphant in its environment is reinforced when Sophie describes its weather in juxtaposition, as if it

were simultaneously occurring both at ground level and atmospherically: "A high-pressure cloud system scuds across our strip of twilight, too high and too dense to make out any individual clouds" (33).

Xiosphant's characterisation as a stratified society is also implied in the above description's specification that the Warrens are on the dark side, in contrast with a central district housing the Palace and Council House where light is "silvery." This description is consistent with the abundant informational data related by Sophie during the first chapter, characterising the city as hierarchical, and representing its stratification as spatialised. The presentation of the city as a microcosm is also important, a quality which will be reinforced by further descriptions.

It is now illuminating to analyse a handful of descriptions of Xiosphant's urban interior:

The streets of Xiosphant always feel narrow: so crammed with people, carts, and a few lorries that you can't get anywhere. But now, the empty streets yawn like chasms, and the whitestone slabs and cinderblock walls amplify every footstep. (35)

I follow the route my mother showed me, past a linen ware-house and a chemical plant, along a series of alleys that seem even darker than the other streets around here (35)

At the end of that lane, the paving stones of which are a little finer than the worn cobbles of the surrounding streets, there's a wide, ornate door made of some kind of heavy wood, but painted bright gold with crimson notes and two rows of decorative iron nails. (35)

These descriptive snapshots originate from the same passage, and are intercalated in the text by action sequences which have been omitted above. As can be seen, their organising model is once again the deixis' movement; the entire description is organised according to what Sophie sees as she moves through the city. The nomenclature is distinguished explicitly by the first sentence: the streets of Xiosphant. The development of the series is presented in synecdochical dominant, as it unfolds as a catalogue of the buildings contained by the town.

Once more, the description is underpinned by metaphorical elements that personify the city (the streets yawn, the buildings turn their back to Sophie). And, in this case, the material composition of the descriptive theme's attributes is also emphasised; we get to know what things are made of—whitestone, cinderblock, slate, stone, cobble, wood—which eases their iconisation and stresses the town's materiality. Nevertheless, subjectivity also plays an important role; to Sophie—and so to the reader—the streets feel narrow, crammed, empty, the alleys seem dark. All in all, Xiosphant's streets are signified as a dark industrial urban landscape, although this contrasts strongly and immediately with the last descriptive subtheme in the above extracts—the vivid door at which Sophie arrives at the end of her travelling. Such stark contrast within the urban landscapes of the city is reinforced by subsequent descriptions.

Xiosphant's streetscape would thus signify a binary opposition between enlightened ornate neighborhoods and grim industrial ones, if not for a later description which presents the cityscape as a palimpsest of juxtapositions:

Some of the buildings in this neighborhood have survived since the beginning of Xiosphant: you can tell by the perfect blocks of whitestone, quarried

by the Mothership or an airborne excavator, plus all the classical detailing. The next oldest buildings, including the Illyrian Parlour, come from right around the time of the Great Insomnia, when half the population of Xiosphant left to found another city across the sea, or a slew of smaller towns. You can tell their age by the smoky quality of the bricks, which were fired in this one type of furnace we don't know how to make anymore. Next, there's a mishmash of building styles, including rougher bricks but also hand-lathed stone, hauled from beyond the Northern Ranges, with some crude attempts to copy the older style of decorations. We also had that brief period, between wars, when prospectors kept finding new treasure meteors, and trade with Argelo brought lots of beautiful, handcrafted decorations. And then there's everything from the past eight generations, when we just built as much as possible, as cheap as possible, big blocks of cement like the one I grew up in. You can see the whole history of the city, looking at the buildings in any one neighborhood. (64-65)

Though this description occurs in a Sophie chapter, the narrative figure atypically employs the first person plural, which stresses the relationship between the observing character, her society, and the urbanscape, whilst endowing the description with a scholarly objectivity. What is essentially a catalogue of architectural styles is organised into a description by a historico-chronological model as the adverbs "next" and "then" refer to a temporal organisation which follows the order of Xiosphanti historical epochs. Each descriptive subtheme's material composition and ornamental qualities is detailed and associated with historical events or

epochs. Also important is the degradation from high to low technology, from high to lesser quality buildings, which signifies Xiosphant as a city mired in cultural decadence and technological retrogression. In any case, this descriptive system also signifies the town as a multilayered historical palimpsest, a city which is a microcosm in its own right.

Informational units throughout the narrative characterise Xiosphant even further. We know from the opening chapter that the city harbours a rigid and deeply stratified society. We also learn that it enforces a "neverending cycle of waking and sleeping" (33), and that its ideologies dictate that "If you can't sleep when everyone else does, you're not even human" (13)—a curfew patrol seeks out and detains perpetrators. This ideology signifies as a social value, and hence, not simply as a political control apparatus: "the residents were obsessed with making sure you slept at the right time" (40).

Xiosphant is thus projected as a rapacious urban landscape which nevertheless remains bounded by January's biogeophysical cycles, as well as the planet's alien environment and geography. It is characterised as a cyclical human microcosm, a stratified, policed and enclosed system; a palimpsest of juxtaposed industrial and ornamental architecture peppered casually with science fictional features such as the farmwheels and the spatialisation of day and night. Semantically, the city is associated with light, time, decadence, technological regression, statism, rigidity, authoritarianism, and an excess of order, control, and categorisation. It signifies as an artificial construct, something made up.

## Argelo as Landscape

The other big human city in January is Argelo, "the City that Never Sleeps" (170),

which is frequently signified as Xiosphant's opposite. The first description of Argelo comes from Sophie:

Argelo sneaks up on us: I don't even realize we're in the city until I can't find my way out again. A few mudand-brick shanties hug the rocks, and the muddy trail from the shore turns to slate, and then the next time I look up the buildings are cement and brick, taller and wider than before. The slate path becomes tar and then cement, and the buildings clump into city blocks. Argelo has no skin, and its bones jut almost at random, and none of this feels like a real city to me, after Xiosphant. (151)

Once more, the descriptive form presents the attributes in a synecdochical dominant as a series of the nomenclature's parts organised by the movement of the deixis from one point to another—in this case, from the outside of Argelo to its inside. Agency is endowed upon the city, as it "sneaks up" and its attributes "hug", "turn", "become" and "clump", an animalisation reinforced by the summarising subtheme at the end, which describes Argelo in an analogical dominant by comparing it to a shapeless organic body. Like with Xiosphant's descriptions, the material composition of the subthemes dominate the tonality of the form, thus highlighting the city's material dimension and installing it as an objective intratextual referent. Subsequent descriptions of Argelo reinforce such oppositional characterisation: "There was a poet once who said something like, Xiosphant is the city of dawn, but Argelo is the dusk city." (158, emphasis in original)

Argelo's interior landscapes also present it as Xiosphant's opposite by signifying it as dark and chaotic:

Everything smells like spicy food gone bad. [...] Music blares around us, and people shout in Argelan, a language that sounds like a throat disease. [...] The smoke comforts me with a coal-and-spice flavor one moment, then nauseates me with rancid fumes the next. So many fires, burning so many things, and meanwhile I haven't heard a single bell since we got here. (153)

A sensorial model organises the descriptive form, and the attributes are once more organised according to the deixis movement throughout the city's streets. The development of subthemes stresses the confusing disorder, by emphasising either the abundance of sensorial perceptions or their contradictory juxtaposition. The description continues deploying a flurry of sensorial perceptions organised by the deixis' movement model. Along with the direct references to disorientation and incomprehension, the whole passage reinforces the signification of Argelo's streetscape as chaotic and disorganised, both in time and space. Indeed, the absence of time measuring devices and practices in the city opposes it to Xiosphant; Argelo is a timeless place.

Yet, Argelo is also a place of diversity, as several informational units express, such as the following description:

And everywhere I look, I see strange clothing. No ankle-skirts or chemises like back home, no coveralls or linens. People wear colorful one-piece suits or multilayered dresses made of some kind of shiny fabric, or else thick denim jackets and trousers. Or they wear outfits that celebrate whichever compartment on the Mothership they trace their ancestry to. (153)

This sequence continues, detailing each of the different subcultural outfits of the catalogue. Thus the city is signified oppositionally, though this time as a colourful and culturally diverse place associated with freedom. Back in the city of dawn it is forbidden to identify oneself with one of the Mothership compartments, yet in Argelo doing so is commonplace.

Along with its cultural diversity, Argelo is also presented as a place of festivity and bodily expression:

I've never seen so many colors in one place: every nightclub and bar has a sign that glows pink, or red, or a color between blue and green that I don't even know the name of. The sharp edge of the Knife curves away from us, along a street paved with reflective stones that look like candies. [...] a sea of young people sways and drifts from place to place, holding drinks or gnarled pipes. Most of the people in the crowd are only a little older than Bianca and me, and they wear sheer clothing that exposes parts of their bodies. The sky looks just as gray as ever, but everyone's face is bathed in a hundred shades of orange and green. I can't help gasping at this radiance, this decadence, this liberation. (177)

Sophie's description of the Knife's hilt, Argelo's club district, is consistent with the travelling model, as is the employment of the catalog form. The subthemes' descriptions present the streetscape as a colorful, glowing, diverse, and youthful place. Significantly, this description is not organised by a comparative model opposing Argelo to Xiosphant, as if suggesting this atmosphere is something Argelo does have while the former does not. Meanwhile, the tonal operators are dominated by the attributes' materiality. Another constant is the

streetscape's embeddedness in its environment, as is evidenced by the inclusion of the sky as one of its attributes—this attribution is once again situated at the end of the series, as if implying that the whole theme is encompassed by it.

The capitalised common noun the Knife, which names the club district, is metaphorical and signifies Argelo as a sharp, violent place, something further descriptions and informational units will reinforce:

The [burning acid] rain was too dense to see through. The pavement smoked. [...] A woman shoved a burly man onto the pavement, not caring that the rain spattered her face. The man pulled a machete and swung it at the woman, with skinless hands. She splashed his face with rainwater using her bare hands, then sucker-punched him. (238)

The violence of the clash between the city's ruling families unfolds as the burning rain falls. Argelo's absurd human drama is thus firmly embedded in January's climate degradation. Alongside its violent nature, Argelo is also signified as a city in social decline, its poverty and precarity starkly contrasting its colourfulness and festive spirit.

However, just as with Xiopshant, the city of Argelo is also depicted as a historic place, a mishmash of material expressions associated with different epochs:

According to Mouth, every pile in this scrapyard tells a different story about Argelo. She points out a wire-mesh bundle of filthy, corroded old Founders' Celebration rattles, from a brief period when Argelo tried to mass-produce cheap junk to send to Xiosphant in exchange for food or technology. On the other side, a heap of busted shell

casings and shattered bayonets, from the last great war with Xiosphant (either the fifth or the sixth, depending on how you reckoned). She gestures at a wall of garbage that includes: melted plastic farm implements from when the Argelan People's Congress launched an "Everyone Farms" campaign; tarnished badges from political parties and families that nobody even remembers; rusteaten prospector gear from the heyday of treasure meteorites; packages for various fad cures for lightsickness, fungal infections, and delirium; and rotted placards depicting the great exodus from Xiosphant to Argelo. (262)

Through the discarded expressions of its material culture we approach the city's history as a site of significant social and governmental transformations associated with capitalism (the Great Argelan Prosperity Company), social revolution (the Argelan People's Congress), and plutocratic anarchy (the Nine Families, who despite not being a government, manage public infrastructure and rule throughout the events told in the novel). The first of these descriptions also highlights the extent to which Argelo's social order is a simulacrum, a simulated mausoleum to a misremembered past, something reinforced throughout part four by the characterisations of the nightclubs and other architectural expressions as parodies.

In this way, Argelo is, like Xiosphant, signified as a human microcosm alongside historical dimensions associated—in this case—with radical social transformations and artificial political organisations. These transformations suggest the city unfolds through time according to revolutionary dialectics, which are reminiscent of the notions of Progress and Modernisation, ideas in turn related to

capitalism. This point is reinforced by the fact that when Sophie and Mouth are in Argelo, another big political transformation related to a resource crisis caused by climate change is taking place in town: "The sky only just pissed alkali a short while ago, remember, and the southern root gardens and orchards are ruined. Argelo is running out of food and clean water" (265). This line also foregrounds the city's rapacity toward its environment, an impression reinforced by several references towards resource depletion by its surrounding trading partner towns during part four of the novel.

The explanation of its language provides a deeper perception of the city: "People in Argelo had no real way of reckoning the passage of time, but they had plenty of ways to talk about regret. A million phrases to describe what might have happened, what you should have done" (167). Thus, Argelo is a society oriented towards the past, in opposition to Xiosphant's future-orientedness. This passage continues, reinforcing the city's signification as a place of techno-scientific regression: "Several major sentence constructions in Argelan had to do with information that had been knowable in the past: knowledge that a person had taken to her grave, observations that could have been collected, texts that were no longer readable" (167). Further on, we read that "the order in which you say the words makes them subject or object, past or present, and so on. No tenses, qualifiers, or distinctions. [...] Argelan substitutes a million different terms for relationships: lovers, parent/child, teacher/student, friends, some combination of those" (171). This last trait explains Argelo's all-pervasive relationality towards Xiosphant in Sophie's narration. The absence of tenses and the preeminence of word order manifests a language of a society for whom place is more important than time. Argelo is thus associated with space and relationality, in

contrast with Xiosphant's relation to time and its rigid categorisation of temporality.

Argelo is projected as Xiosphant's counterpoint; a dark underground, yet equally a festive and rapacious urban landscape with neither clear boundaries nor cycles, which nevertheless remains firmly embedded in the ongoing crisis of January's harsh biogeophysical cycles. The city is characterised as a feral human microcosm, an anarchic-yet-stratified open and unruled social system, a place of material and cultural discarding and recycling. Semantically, Argelo is associated with dusk, timelessness, relationality, space, decadence, technological regression, transformation, flexibility, authoritarianism, an excess of freedom, deregulation, violence, and artificiality.

## The Night City as Landscape

The third geographical location of significance in Anders' novel is the night city, the non-human urban landscape of the Gelet, January's sentient alien species. The night city is described throughout the novel from Sophie's perspective, and by her Gelet friends sharing with her their memories of it via tactopathy whilst in part six it is described as directly experienced by both Sophie and Mouth. The first time it appears in the novel, the night city is described as:

a huge structure in the shape of a rose with all its petals spread, a circle surrounded by elaborate crisscrossing arch shapes. Only the very top pokes above the surface, and the rest extends far below the ice, but still its beauty almost stops my heart. A glimmering city, many times larger than Xiosphant, that no human eyes have ever seen. (32)

This brief description is distinctly different from descriptions of either Xiosphant or Argelo; it is organised by a spatial model whose deixis is located at ground level. It is also non-visual, for the shape and size of the structure are delineated precisely despite most of it lying underground. The series dominant is analogical; the night city is compared to both a rose and to Xiosphant. The attributes' details are shape-related, and the tonal operators characterise the construction as organic and beautiful. It also signifies as a mystery: "no human eyes have ever seen" it.

The night city is further characterised by descriptions consistent with this non-visual spatial model:

We live in a great city, far from here, under the crust of the night. Cliffs of ice, deep fissures, towering structures of stone and metal, and wheels turning far beneath us, fueled by underground rivers, and furnaces hotter than the touch of the sun. At the heart of our city, tiny creatures who look like us hang in a mesh of warm, dark threads, helpless and spindly. (87)

Once again, the city's underground quality is stressed, though in this case it is presented as dynamic; it has towering structures, turning wheels, furnaces, and is fuelled. Nevertheless, it also has a heart made of living creatures. The reference to the materials of which the descriptive subthemes are composed highlight the city's embeddedness on its subterranean environment, and signify it as telluric. The characterisation of the city as an intelligent living organism is reinforced later on:

I'm in the Gelet city: the giant vaults and galleries, struts of ice and iron and stone, machinery deep beneath our continental shelf. I see clearer than ever that the Gelet city is alive, with a heart of fire from inside our mountains, and a mind made up of the shared memories of every Gelet who's ever lived there. (203)

The presence of recognisable elements in the catalogues of both descriptions (towering structures, wheels, vaults, galleries, machinery) grants them cohesion as an urban description and eases the association of the unusual ones (cliffs of ice, deep fissures, underground rivers, struts of ice and iron and stone) via reference to a nomenclature: the Gelet city.

This characterisation of the night city as a place of techno-scientific, as well as cultural prowess is reinforced later: "I'm with all the Gelet in their city, long before humans first arrived. We had technology that shaped the rivers of water and fire, deep beneath the mantle, and ways to reshape living flesh, and we shared these techniques with everyone" (225). Another aspect that gets further reinforced by informational units is that "they built that huge city by mining deep caverns and tempering metal in the heat of a volcano, and by growing other structures organically. Sometimes she shows me some engineering feat that would make the professors at the Gymnasium sick with envy" (67).

The night city is thus associated with high biogeotechnological development, which nonetheless is telluric, organic, and non-rapacious. Quite contrary to the other cities of the novel, it utilises technology capable of meddling with January's biogeophysical phenomena for the betterment of Gelet life conditions by co-producing homeostasis. We are informed, for instance, that "Ancient crocodiles [Gelet] built some huge structure—or grew a living creature—to stop a glacier" (227) from colliding with their city, and that they "spent lifetimes cultivating this bloom. [...] These plants laced throughout the world, collecting

heat energy on the day side and redirecting it to the night, exhaling gases that calmed the skies" (303-304).

Just as with Xiosphant and Argelo, the narrator also describes the night city's streetscapes:

You can go to the fifth central hub, downtown, and get these boiled chestnuts from a chef who gets them direct from the source, a chestnut patch buried under the thickest part of the night. [...] And once you've had enough chestnuts, you can go down the side chute and find yourself in a party where the "music" is made by an orchestra of countless tiny trumpets, which pressurize and depressurize the air around me in subtle fluctuations that human ears couldn't even register. (306)

Sophie's perspective once again comprises the fundament, albeit she is now a mestiza of human and Gelet. We find the catalogue form once again, though organised by a 'tour guide' model revealed by the use of the second person to address an implicit reader, which also highlights her belonging to the place; she's now part of the night city, not a foreigner anymore. The attributes of this description are presented in the form of recommendations of what to do in town. References to commonplace parts of town (central hub), professions (a chef), and activities (a party) grant coherence to the description despite the fantasticity of its subthemes. The attributes' organisation follows a realistic logical-spatial model (downtown, down the side chute).

The description continues by utilising the same descriptive system to present the city as a fantastic alien-yet-familiar urbanscape:

Here in the midnight city, there's always a gathering, a celebration, someplace. I explore until my feet hurt, and I keep coming across another marvel. Like a school, where children, whose pincers look more like beaks, learn science and math from a teacher whose pincer encompasses all five of their tiny foreheads at once. [...] And just up the street, there's a theater where a dozen Gelet hang from stone ledges, and lean in to wrap all their pincers around a great tangle of flesh descending from the ceiling, which imparts a story to all of them at the same time. At another spot, a wide chamber with a low ceiling, the Gelet play a sport involving ice crystals and pressure-sensitive pads. (306)

Without humanising them—they remain quite alien—this description highlights Gelet culture, thus signifying them not only as sentient, but also as civilised. This revelation has been presaged by previous informational units: "We had music, and poetry, and the belief that you could own history but not the future. We had complicated mating dances" (225); "Around the steam jets at the city's edge, the crocodiles danced" (227).

The night city is therefore projected as an alien alternative landscape to Xiosphant and Argelo, as a telluric underground city beyond human perceptual possibilities, a fantastical

urban landscape under the night's ice crust, geoengineered through biotechnology, embedded in January's biogeophysical phenomena, and afflicted by its climate crisis. It is characterised as a cultural microcosm, a civilised governmentless social system focused on taking care of its people. Semantically, it is associated with January's nightside, presentness, memory, technological prowess, homeostasis, warmth, and care. It is ultimately signified as organic.

# Reading the Novel's Science Fiction through Chthonic Senses

Thus far, this article has delineated how the three civilisational landscapes embedded within January's environment have meaning beyond the literal information which their descriptions convey. Indeed, from the very first panoramic description of January, its landscape already establishes isotopies whose interplay will be key for the production of the narrative's discourse an isotopy being a thematic or signification line which unfolds with the development of speech, producing thematic continuity, semantic homogeneity, and coherence by means of repeating semes, and associating them in an isotopic field (Beristáin, 2018: 288-289). The interplay of these fields during the text's narrative can in turn be interpreted in search for a deeper meaning.

Thus far, the planet and its cities' descriptions allow us to group them in the following fields:

Xiosphant	Argelo	The Night City
Dawn	Dusk	Night
Light	Twilight	Darkness
Bright	Dark	Invisible
Mechanical	Feral	Organic
Industry	Orchards	Biogeoindustry
Timefulness	Timelessness	Memory
Time-oriented	Space-oriented	Present-oriented
Future-oriented	Past-oriented	Environment-oriented
Survival-oriented	Consumption-oriented	Care-oriented
Mountainous	Crevassed	Telluric
Enclosed	Open	Hidden
Order	Chaos	Organised
Monarchic	Plutocratic	Sociocratic(?)

Alongside these distinctions, the two human cities also figure as representations of the human in contrast with the non-human Gelet:

Xiosphant/Argelo	The Night City
Human	Alien
Sameness	Otherness
Artificial	Organic
Rapacious	Environmentalist
Violent	Peaceful
Decadent	Thriving
Competitive	Cooperative
Technological regression	Technological prowess
Necropolitic	Caring
Dystopic	Utopic

These isotopies play a key role in the production of the novel's narrative discourse. Via comparison of the isotopies established by the text's descriptions and informative units, the three cities can be read as representations of different social orders. For instance, Xiosphant is reminiscent of fascism, which is consistent with the fact that its social order stems from a circadian restoration—fascist regimes typically rely on discourses preaching a restoration of an 'original' or 'natural' order. It is also a city that cancels diversity of thought and belief, whilst imposing its own version of history and reality, something which societies based on epistemological models of circular truth have in common. On the other hand, Argelo is clearly anarchic and neoliberal, and the mafia-like ruling system of the Nine Families is consistent with the arboreal truth epistemological model, wherein there are many competing visions of reality.

Despite their differences, both human cities closely represent different branches of humanism, while the night city and the Gelet can be read as the chthonic beings Donna Haraway describes in Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene (2016). For Haraway, "Chthonic ones are beings of the earth, both ancient and up-to-the minute. I imagine chthonic ones as replete with tentacles, feelers, digits, cords, whiptails, spider legs, and very unruly hair" (Haraway, 2016: 2)—the Gelet are certainly replete with tentacles, feelers and hair. They are also earthly beings (they live deep underground), and their experience of time and history make them ancient and up-tothe minute since they keep collective memory alive by sharing it via tactopathy.

Furthermore, by performing homeostatic biogeoengineering, the Gelet's monstrosity—which is relativised as the narrative advances—has a double meaning consistent with Haraway's

philosophy: "Chthonic ones are monsters in the best sense; they demonstrate and perform the material meaningfulness of earth processes and critters" (Haraway, 2016: 2). They are sympoietic too: the night city is presented as a collectively-produced system without clear spatio-temporal boundaries (its tunnels are farreaching, its history never clearly organised) which is both adaptive (that is, "evolutionary" and with "potential for surprising change") and the precise location where "Information and control are distributed" among the Gelet (Haraway, 2016: 33). Finally, the Gelet are also kinmaking; their aim is to integrate into a sympoietic holobiont with humanity, to literally "share a common 'flesh'" (Haraway, 2016: 103), as evidenced by Sophie's transformation, in order to rehabilitate January.

If we follow this interpretive line and read the Gelet as Haraway's chthonic ones, January's humanity thus represents "Homo Sapiens [...] Modern Man"; "Burning Man"; "Species Man [...] Man the Hunter;" and sky-gazing Anthropos (Haraway, 2016: 30; 46; 47; 52). Indeed, as the isotopic fields reveal, human cities on January are associated with such concepts given via the manner in which they comprise rapacious and entropic landscapes. In Xiosphant's case, human order is portrayed as an autopoietic, selfproducing, spatio-temporally, clearly bounded, centrally controlled, and predictable system (Haraway, 2016: 33). On the other hand, Argelo's associative frame can be associated with the Capitalocene, which we must recall "was relationally made" (Haraway, 2016: 50).

Humanity's perceived self-sufficiency on January is nevertheless a misconception: "Humans couldn't have survived on this planet without all the work the Gelet had done before we got here [...] The farmwheels in Xiosphant, the fisheries and orchards of Argelo, they wouldn't even have existed" (320). They are

necessarily embedded in January's geostory, already a part of its ongoingness, regardless of whether humans consciously recognise this.

Reading the human/non-human binary in the novel through Haraway's conceptual framework produces the following isotopic fields:

The human	The non-human
Sameness	Otherness
Ordinary	Extraordinary
Usual	Novel
Anthropic	Tentacular
Sky-gazing	Chthonic
Destructive	Kin-making
Anthropocene/Capitalocene	Chthulucene
Autopoietic/Dialectic	Sympoietic
Fascist/Neoliberal	Holobiont
Circular/Arboreal	Rhizomatic
Artificial	Organic

This article now proceeds to analyse how these factors produce meaning through interplay. Whilst characters' actions are the main drive in negotiating the reader's journey through January's landscapes, the coexistence and contrast between these factors ultimately allows the novel to work as ecocritical science fiction. This is not only the case since the text's novum is a whole planet, but also due to the transgression of the isotopies established by the landscapes via means of the simulation of the classic and modern fantastic models—which

are codified as science fiction via means of a series of embedded nova.

## The Novel's Ecocritical Discourse

The extraordinary element of the novel (January and its landscapes) is not only codified as an expression of otherness, but also as a novelty (a novum) in contrast with the quotidian human world or the 'already-known.' As the novel's principal novum, the environment provokes the novelty of its other three key nova: a) the Gelet's

sentience is presented as a novelty against this science fictional world and the simulated human experience of it; b) Climate change is a new occurrence on January; c) Sophie's mestiza positionality, which is the new thing, the representation of the insolit transgression of orders by the cancellation of binarisms. Nevertheless, the science fictional yet ordinary verisimilitude of the human world rests upon the deployment of decayed nova: interstellar travel, generation ships, DNA manipulation, orbital landscape carving, and so on. These decayed nova are not only presented as marvellous (and so, as part of the ordinary), but also as ancient, which highlights other nova's novelty, while presenting a discursive counterpoint against technocratic ideologies, as if propounding that technology and technocracy won't solve the climate crisis.

Furthermore, the novel sets in motion a complex interplay of the different models for the fantastic theorised by Nieto; the classic, the modern, and the postmodern. Each of these models implies a different way in which the extraordinary transgresses the ordinary and puts it in crisis. In the classic model, such critical transgression is progressive and linear-spatial in an outside-in way, while in the modern model it unfolds as a revelation and stems from inside the domains of the ordinary. In its postmodern version, the critical transgression is achieved through the relativisation of the ordinary/extraordinary binary.

The classic fantastic model is simulated by Sophie's encounters with the Gelet, which summate in her transformation into a humangelet *mestiza*. This transgression is gradual, lineal, and spatial; Sophie first comes across a Gelet called Rose in the fringe of the night, when she is banished from Xiosphant. They befriend each other through a series of encounters that always take place in the nocturnal side of dusk,

with Sophie being saved by Rose's kind a couple of times when she goes further into the night, before ending up travelling into midnight to their city. Both the intensity of these encounters and their distance from human space gradually increase.

Sophie's transformation into a gelet-human *mestiza* codifies the internalisation of otherness into sameness, the integrative transgression of the extraordinary and the ordinary. By itself, this is already an insolit transgression of human ideologies, yet furthermore, after her transformation Sophie returns to Xiosphant (another spatial displacement), thus completing the transgression of orders, since for the first time, a living Gelet element has explicitly entered *inside* a human landscape. This manifestation puts the human status quo in crisis, as is confirmed by the government's frantic reaction towards Sophie's presence in town.

The modern fantastic model is deployed from the beginning of the novel by presenting the extraordinary world as ordinary; humanity living on an alternative planet which is radically different from Earth. By following that strategy, the text's verisimilitude depends on its own intratextual productivity and can be read, not as a mimetic reproduction of an extratextual objective real, but as an allegory pertaining to reality. This reading also conditions that the transgression of orders stems from the collapse of their division; in Anders' novel the ordinary is not put in crisis by a confrontation between the real and the unreal, sameness, and otherness, but rather, due to the invalidation of such a binarism. This is confirmed by Sophie's transformation; she collapses human/nonhuman, sameness/otherness divisions, and her transformation figures the revelation of the extraordinary as something already part of and repressed by—the ordinary.

The postmodern model implies the relativisation of the ideology organising the extraordinary/ordinary and sameness/ otherness binaries. In Anders' novel, this is achieved by an itinerant transgression of the extraordinary landscape (the night city) over the ordinary ones (Xiosphant/Argelo) which highlights the latter's artificiality. This is likewise set in motion from the very beginning of the narrative, with Sophie's first tactophatic communication with the Gelet; the first thing they show her is a panoramic vista of their city, which is described in contrast to Xiosphant. Subsequent encounters always involve a tactophatic vision of the night city, so the itinerant transgression of orders is carried out by the incursion of Sophie's experience of the night city's landscape over her experience of the other cities. The relativisation of orders is also achieved by the constant characterisation of the two ordinary urban human landscapes as absurd and randomly artificial, via presenting them as relative and contrasting them to another. The extraordinary/ordinary dichotomy is problematised further by the later characterisation of humanity as the real alien on January, an idea laid implicitly since the novel's outset, as readers have extratextual knowledge that they are not a native species to January.

Another simulacrum of the classic model is performed by January's weather taking over the human landscapes of Argelo and Xiosphant. Present since the first mention of a hailstorm in the second chapter, the burning rain—a fantastic element codified as a novelty and related causally to the main novum—gradually gains prominence until it ends up breaching Xiosphant's wall and palace. In this way another transgression of orders is delivered; a transgression of the human world by its environment. Yet, the case is also true the other way around. The burning rain's uncanniness and

external otherness is contested when the Gelet reveal that the freak weather is a consequence of human extractivism, an unforeseen consequence of a nomadic community called the Citizens having cut to extinction the volcanic flowers which the Gelet grew to stabilise January's weather: "gather[ing] every last bit, because it had a million uses" (303). The burning rain is thus resignified as a human phenomenon, and humanity is presented as January's true uncanny otherness. This narrative move also works as a non-mimetic extratextual referent pointing towards terrestrial climate change, which allows the novel to be read as an allegory for our own climate crisis.

Anders' novel deploys a science fictional and postmodern textual system where different landscapes perform an interplay of transgressions that end up relativising and collapsing pervasive human/non-human and sameness/otherness binaries. In this way the ordinary human world is put in crisis, and humanism is both criticised and revealed as an arbitrary, artificial ideology. On the other hand, in the figure of the Gelet and their night city, symchthonic worlding is presented not only as the ideal pathway for staying with January's environmental crisis, but as something ever and always already underlying the more overt human landscapes.

Ultimately, neither Xiopshant's strict self-sufficient organisation nor Argelo's revolutionary takeover of human institutions proves sufficient to cope with the crisis; the former remains "a collection of ancient machines that can't go much longer" (265), while the second's dialectics fail to actually change anything. The defunct Citizens' mysticism was not any better; even though they "had a whole other relationship with the road [January's terminator]" and sought to "learn to keep company with the day and the night [which they term Elementals]" (59), their

ignorance of Gelet systems of knowledge led them to be directly responsible for the onset of climate change in January.

## Conclusion

Only the Gelet's symchthonic, sympoietic way leads to January's homeostasis and rehabilitation, but embracing it means losing one's humanity, collapsing the human/nonhuman binary, and becoming "the greatest outlaw in history" (301). This path is nevertheless opened as a possibility by Sophie's kin-making from the moment she befriends the Gelet. Eventually, her mestizaje is spread more widely, given that the novel's fictionalised "Translator's Note" positions the entire novel as an enquiry into the genesis of "this emergent new form of human sentience [...] these hybrids" (9). Hence, the narrative works as an allegory of oddkin-making in the Chthulucene's urgent times; a fable of learning to dehumanise oneself and become-with the chthonic ones.

We can now recognise, through this minute analysis of the descriptions in Anders' novel, how January's landscapes are more than simply a background for action, and play an active role as signifiers in the narrative. We also tested the applicability of Nieto's general theory of the fantastic to science fictional narratives by analysing how The City in the Middle of the *Night* develops a complex version of the fantastic system, one that renders an ecocritical narrative discourse consistent with Haraway's conceptual framework of the Chthulucene. Regarding the novel's analysis, this thesis is of course partial, and leaves many of the work's dimensions unexplored. An analysis of characters' actions and paths of development would yield meaningful interpretations which could add depth to the present article, as well as delving deeper into the semiotic and philosophical

ramifications of Sophie's transformation. For the time being, let us depart from intratextual reality towards the ongoingness of more familiar extratextual material-semiotic landscapes, to the company of the myriad sympoietic critters of Earth.

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# Delineating Mars: The Geopoetics of the Red Planet in Edgar Rice Burroughs' A Princess of Mars

# Sofiya FILONENKO¹ Berdyansk State Pedagogical University

Abstract: Edgar Rice Burroughs' A Princess of Mars is an early example of a Red Planet depiction in science fiction, and also a trailblazing speculative landscape imaginary. As the first novel in the sprawling Barsoom cycle charting the adventures of the earthling John Carter and members of his family on Mars, it depicts the distant planet as not so much a space of utopia, but rather as an ideal setting for adventure and romance. Burroughs' Mars therefore becomes analogous to the American frontier, the edge of civilisation—the novel's narrative departs geographically, but perhaps not ideologically, from the earthly deserts of Arizona, where its Confederate officer protagonist formerly sought gold and fought the aborigines. This article argues that, beyond the frontier theme, the Martian landscape comprises a fictional fairy-tale reflection of Earth, transposed to an imaginary world which is not quite Mars itself. Ultimately, this is a *dead* landscape, no longer capable of supporting vegetation—and barely capable of supporting any life whatsoever—as Burroughs' depictions of landscape in the novel repeatedly underscore.

**Keywords:** Red Planet, Mars, Barsoom, gothic, genre history, geocriticism.

It could be argued that, just over a century ago, Edgar Rice Burroughs set the early groundwork for climate fiction by exploring the vicissitudes of a dying landscape in his novel *A Princess of Mars* (first serialised in *All-Story Magazine*, 1911). Burroughs' novel plays upon Percival Lowell's then-contemporary conceptualisation of a dead Mars whereupon ancient civilisations have perished, and

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> I am grateful for editorial input from Jonathan Hay, who was particularly of assistance during the process of finalising this article at a difficult time. I would subsequently like this scholar to be attributed as my co-author.

once powerful cities have been lost—along with Giovanni Schiaparelli's contemporary astronomical hypothesis of dried-up Martian canals—in order to outline a stark fantastic landscape comprising deserts, ruins, and dead seas. Specifically, A Princess of Mars is set within a dying Martian landscape whose seas have dried, and its atmosphere thinned, generating a terrain wracked by interracial and intertribal conflict resultant from the planet's endemic resource scarcity. By its close, the novel's terrestrial hero John Carter will have succeeded in prolonging the planet's life-carrying capacity by valiantly aiding Martian terraforming efforts, which seek to overcome entropy and keep the planet's atmosphere breathable.

John Carter is greatly aided throughout his adventures on the planet by his terrestrial musculature, which leads to aerobic prowess in the Red Planet's "lesser gravitation" (Burroughs, 2011: 15)—accordingly, the hero finds himself endowed with superpowers as a warrior through the planet's landscape itself.2 He becomes not only the typical romance hero, but also the saviour of the planet and its races from destruction. Within the novel's schema, the image of the Red Planet reflects ideas of colonialism, and the ideological constructs of the colonial novel of the early twentieth century; Carter performs colonial feats in an exotic wild space, exports the Earth's order, and starts a dynasty with the copper-red skinned (50) Princess of Mars Dejah Thoris. Thus, the landscape in this planetary romance comprises an embodiment of the ideological constructs of that time imposed upon the imaginary world of popular action adventure genres. I proceed

to demonstrate not only that Burroughs established the subgenre of planetary romance through a concatenated patchwork approach to popular genre conventions, but also that *A Princess of Mars* broadly initiated the significance of landscapes within the science fictional mode.

## The Martian Context

Throughout thousands of years of human history, the flaming Red Planet known in the Western world as Mars has fascinated and magnetically attracted earthly observers, giving energetic stimulus to astronomers' quests and artistic fantasies. In Roman mythology, the fiery Mars was associated with the deities of war, struggle, bloodshed and masculinity (as opposed to the feminine Venus). Literary visions of the planet include hundreds of texts spanning various genres, from poetry to utopian novels. Fictional descriptions of Mars have depended on scientific progress in their observations; writers' imaginations have followed contemporary research vectors, yet have added vivid details, delineating the Martian surface, coloring it with fantastic flora, fauna, lost races, giant cities and buildings. At the end of the nineteenth century, thanks to the bold insights of scientists armed with modernised telescopes such as Giovanni Schiaparelli, Camille Flammarion, and Percival Lowell,3 there was a wave of mass interest in the Red Planet. Their scholarly concepts were popularised by mass media, whilst semi-fictional depictions of Mars presented by scientists contributed to the Martian theme becoming

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Carter is, nevertheless, able to breathe unproblematically on the planet, despite its "very thin atmosphere" (Burroughs, 2011: 31).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> In 1877 Schiaparelli discovered what he believed to be Martian canals, spurring a flurry of astronomical interest centered upon Mars. Working in Schiaparelli's stead two decades later, Flammarion and Lowell both hypothesised that the ostensible canals were evidence of ancient civilisations on Mars.

accessible and intriguing to reading publics in the United States and Europe.

According to Robert Crossley, the 'Mars mania' spread fast, so that "[b]y the beginning of the twentieth century, the public infatuation with Mars had come into full bloom" (Crossley, 2011: 11). "Artificial channels" maps, following Schiaparelli, were printed in popular newspapers and magazines, and the planet's image was used in advertising and for composing popular melodies (Crossley, 2011: 11-12). This persistent attention produced an array of literary texts wherein Mars appeared as an ideal space for utopia, adventure, romance, or disaster. As authors projected their desires, dreams, prejudices, anxieties, and phobias onto the surface of a distant planet, Mars became a literary mirror of the Earth, in both its past and future. As a result, the literary history of the luminary has profoundly formed its position as a symbol, a cultural myth, and a field for endless speculations. Robert Crossley summarises the semantic diversity of the planet's literary versions:

> Mars has many meanings. Once upon a time, it meant a dying world that served as a grim and cautionary text for our own terrestrial destiny. It often has served as the canvas on which writers could depict their wildest fantasies, their darkest fears, their otherwise most unspeakable critiques, their spiritual aspirations. For some, Mars still represents a reconstituted frontier for a world in which all the frontiers have now vanished. For others, Mars is a laboratory and a playground of the mind, where speculation about alternative realities and alternative futures is sanctioned and where imagination is granted a license to explore ways in which we may save our

own endangered planet (Crossley, 2011: 19).

As one of the pioneers and classics of American popular culture and literature, Edgar Rice Burroughs' works belong to this "golden age" (Crossley, 2011: 5) of fiction about Mars.

Burroughs is widely considered the founder of the planetary romance subgenre, and the immensely popular bestsellers from his Martian cycle are considered to have been greatly influential in shaping subsequent perceptions of the planet, inspiring both explorers' investigations and artists' imaginations. Burroughs had a nonpareil talent for creating fictional worlds; his fantasy extended not only to Mars, but also to Venus (renamed Amtor), Caspak—a lost island near Antarctica—and the hollow terrestrial inner world of Pellucidar. Adventure comprises the universal narrative archetype of all his novels, regardless of whether the action unfolds on Earth, as in the Tarzan stories, or on a distant planet. Whilst scholars today interpret Burroughs' Martian novels in the frame of science fiction and/or science fantasy, and sf writers such as Ray Bradbury, Isaac Asimov, Philip Farmer, Arthur C. Clarke and Robert A. Heinlein have declared him to be their literary father and inspiration, at the beginning of the twentieth century the genre's coordinates were a long way from being outlined in theory. Therefore, it is important to recall that Burroughs' writing frequently demonstrates a daring and efficient combination of various generic elements; gothic and western, the love story and fantasy, the travelogue, and the survival narrative.

Burroughs managed to win readers' hearts by creating detailed pictures of remote exotic worlds, giving cosmic drive to storylines, and portraying active and recognisable heroes. His romance cycles tend to be highly formulaic which, of course, has flavoured critical evaluations of his oeuvre, his literary reputation, and his status in the general canon. John Taliaferro asserts in Tarzan Forever: The Life of Edgar Rice Burroughs, the Creator of Tarzan that "[d]espite his enormous appeal, his work is not taught in schools or welcomed in the American canon [...] One reason for Burroughs's undeserved ostracism is the stigma attached to pulp fiction" (Taliaferro, 2002: 15). Nevertheless, in the field of popular fiction, his works are widely considered canonical, and still captivate a mass audience, generate a desire to create post-stories and derivative texts, and see their plots adapted into the languages of cinema, television, comics, and video games. Burroughs' popularity amongst non-genre readers only reaffirms the immense significance of his fictional worlds to speculative fiction. Sharon DeGraw, for instance, rightly points to the fact that Burroughs possesses "a prominent place" in science-fictional histories "because of his tremendous popularity and literary and cultural influence," and concludes that "[i]n the age of pulps, Burroughs was king" (DeGraw, 2017: 9-10).

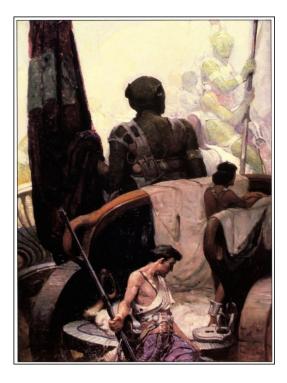
The genesis of *A Princess of Mars*, Burroughs' first planetary romance, has been widely described by his biographers and critics. Having tried himself in various professions and having suffered numerous failures, Burroughs turned to writing as an entrepreneurial project that would give him the opportunity to earn a certain social status and fortune. As John C. Tibbets describes:

One day in July in 1911, a 35-year-old Chicago pencil sharpener salesman, broke and desperate to feed his growing family, picked up his pen and indulged himself in his favorite pasttime, daydreaming. He hastily dashed off a wild tale about a Confederate Army captain who is mysteriously transported

to the planet Mars where he woos a princess and battles bizarre creatures. (Tibbets, 2011: 179)

He sent the new-born manuscript—a draft of forty-three thousand words—to Munsey's pulp magazine *The All-Story*, under the 'witty' pseudonym Normal Bean (a smart fellow) and with the title *Dejah Thoris, Martian Princess*. The editor accepted the text for publication, wrote off the fee of \$400, and altered the pseudonym to the somewhat subtler Norman Bean. The novel was published in serialised form with the title *Under the Moons of Mars*, from February to July of 1912. In September 1917, it was reissued as a hardcover book titled *A Princess of Mars* by the A. C. McClurg publishing house in Chicago, complete with illustrations by Frank Schoonever.

This first scientific romance by the American author was extremely popular, and laid the foundation for Burroughs' successful



literary career; he subsequently adhered to the principle of seriality to continue narrating the adventures of the main character John Carter.

Numerous sequels revealed the fate of this Virginian gentleman, his beloved Martian princess Dejah Thoris, their friends, enemies, and descendants. The novel's direct sequels are The Gods of Mars (1913), The Warlord of Mars (1913-1914), Thuvia, Maid of Mars (1916), The Chessmen of Mars (1922), The Master Mind of Mars (1927), The Fighting Men of Mars (1930), Swords of Mars (1934-1935), Synthetic Men of Mars (1939), Llana of Gathol (1941), and John Carter of Mars (1941-1943). The entire cycle is usually labelled the 'Martian series' or 'Barsoom series'—in line with the name Burroughs chose for Mars. Robert Bob Zeuschner insists that:

The importance of *A Princess of Mars* cannot be overestimated. It was responsible for an entire genre of pulp fiction and an important inspiration for Flash Gordon, George Lucas's films, and James Cameron's *Avatar* [...] It is one of the cornerstones of early American science fiction. Like the great adventure classics by H. G. Wells and Jules Verne, it gave direction and set the parameters for the pulp magazine stories for decades to come. (Tibbetts, 2011: 180-181).

Crossley likewise emphasises that "A Princess of Mars became a staple adventure book for male teenagers throughout much of the twentieth century" (Crossley, 2011: 162). The attentions of a vast amount of literary critics have subsequently focused on this book, the firstborn of its author's literary imagination. Princess has been studied in detail from various theoretical positions; as a fantasy autobiographical text, as

a reflection of racial and colonial constructs of the early twentieth century, and in the context of pulp fiction magazines. Scholars have laid particular emphasis upon issues of literary and scientific sources, and the genre specificity of the novel (Tibbetts, 181; Taliaferro, 220; Newell & Lamont, 75).

Among the key texts which influenced the ideological undertones of A Princess of Mars scholars name American frontier stories and European colonial novels, such as those by James Fenimore Cooper and Henry Rider Haggard, in such novels as The Last of the Mohicans (1826) and King Solomon's Mines (1885). These authors are united by traits such as subjectifying the motives of relations between different races, exploring lost civilisations, the struggle and courage of hyper-masculine heroes, love for exceptional women, and by their vivid descriptions of the exoticism of distant lands. As Johan Anders Höglund remarks, this specific genre of the early twentieth century "is often an optimistic and adventurous narrative that takes place in a frontier landscape that offers an opportunity for conquest and regenerative violence" (Höglund, 2014: 40), and hence, "American pulp fiction has been recognised as having its roots in the British gothic and sensation novel of the nineteenth century" (Höglund, 2014: 42), whilst making its own significant contribution to the adventure genre.

## **Planetary Romance**

Generic ambiguity was characteristic throughout early American science fiction, and the same is true for Burroughs' romance series. Sharon DeGraw characterises *A Princess of Mars* as "a Martian bricolage of modern and ancient, multi-generic elements" (DeGraw, 2017: 14).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> The texts in this list are sequentially dated according to their respective magazine publications in All-Story, Argosy All-Story Weekly, Amazing Stories Annual, Blue Book, Argosy Weekly and Amazing Stories.

Indeed, the story gradually unfolds—like a scroll—in front of the reader; its beginning couched in the leisurely style of a family novel abruptly leads into episodes in the spirit of westerns, and is next imparted the gothic setting of a mountain cave. There a fantastic force comes into play, which transports the hero to the alien environment of Mars without any perceptible spaceship or means of space travel whatsoever. Scenes on the Red Planet alternate tonally; adventures, romance, battles, and disasters seem carefully sequenced to keep readers in constant tension. The novel's plot concludes with a return to Earth, and a gothic finale in the same Arizona cave

Scholars have attempted to substantiate the paradoxical temporality of the novel's setting. For Paul A. Carter, "John Carter's Martian adventures [...] take place not in a futuristic setting, but in one of great antiquity. [...] In interplanetary stories, science fiction's bold voyage to the future has often turned into a nostalgia trip to the past" (Carter, 1977: 67). Whereas, for Sharon DeGraw, "[b]y combining the tropics and space in one planet and one narrative, Burroughs combines the past and the future of mankind, man's origins and his destiny" (DeGraw, 2017: 15). By depicting an exotic planet, others have argued that Burroughs balances feelings of reality and unreality: "Mars functioned as a bridge between the known and real and the unknown and fantastic" (Newell & Lamont, 2011: 78). Certainly, to gain a complete understanding of A Princess of Mars, it is very important to know the literary tradition on which its author relied, as well as the genre patterns upon which it is oriented.

Nevertheless, I contend that it is more significant to emphasise the fact that Burroughs established a new science-fictional subgenre altogether; planetary (or interplanetary) romance. Just as a medieval castle is the central

image of gothic fiction, so a distant exotic planet is at the heart of this subgenre, comprising the main venue of its action. An emphasis on fantasy setting is a common criterion for defining this subgenre. For instance, planetary romance has been defined as "a genre of science fiction that describes an adventure taking place on a planet's surface, especially in which the description of the planet is integral to the story" (Prucher, 2007: 146, emphasis mine), and on the terms that "[a] ny sf tale whose primary venue [...] is a planet, and whose plot turns to a significant degree upon the nature of that venue, can be described as a planetary romance" (Clute & Nicholls, 1995: 934, emphasis mine). Furthermore, for David Pringle:

Tales set on other planets are classed as science fiction, but there has long been one type, the planetary romance, that readers have felt belongs at least partly to fantasy. These are stories of adventure set almost entirely on the surface of some alien world, with an emphasis on swordplay (or similar), monsters, telepathy (or other underexplained 'magic'), and near-human alien civilisations that often resemble those of Earth's pretechnological past (featuring royal dynasties, theocracies, and the like). (Pringle, 2000: 38, emphasis mine)

Therefore, we will not be mistaken if we begin to consider planetary romance a primarily landscape-oriented subgenre, since its landscape settings play a prominent role, and carry the main semantic load.

Likewise, the study of the spatial dimensions of the planetary romance is based on the categories of geocriticism and literary cartography. The relevance of geographical humanities increased at the beginning of the new millennium where its increased prominence

was labelled a 'spatial turn' in theory. As Robert Tally has claimed, "[o]ver the past few decades, spatiality has become a key concept for literary and cultural studies." (Tally, 2013: 3). Eric Prieto further emphasises the fruitful interactions of literary research with other scientific fields:

Many of the most exciting recent developments in this burgeoning area of literary studies have involved an interdisciplinary turn toward themes and analytic tools that borrow from fields like cultural and social geography, urban sociology, environmental studies, and the phenomenology of place. Such tools have greatly enriched the study of literary space (Prieto, 2011: 13)

Subsequently, Neal Alexander further develops a focus upon the necessity for the interdisciplinary nature of such research:

Literary geography is an emergent interdisciplinary field of research situated at the interface between human geography and literary studies. It derives much of its energy and dynamism from a specific convergence of thought across otherwise divergent disciplines. [...] Like ecocriticism—with which it has some loose affiliations (as well as important geography differences)—literary often carried on under other names: imaginative geography, literary cartography, geocriticism, geopoetics, geohumanities. (Alexander, 2015: 3)

Geocriticism, as might be expected, extends to such fields as popular literature and cultural studies. Its genres and formulae are built on the phenomenon of escapism, which involves the reader's immersion in an imaginary world. Therefore, the creation of fictional

worlds is a necessary *modus operandi* for those writers working in the genres such as detective stories, historical adventures, westerns, fantasy, and so forth. Across this range of popular genres there is a clear correspondence between genre and setting, encouraging readers to recognise genres via their dissimilarly stylised descriptions of landscapes; as Lisa Fletcher points out, "geography and genre are mutually constitutive" (2016: 1), and therefore "genre writers are routinely described as experts in world-building for their skill for crafting plausible imaginary geographies and histories" (2016: 3).

For the planetary romance subgenre, there must be a special modification of the term landscape; I favor 'planetscape,' which The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction defines as "the surface geography of a planet; a pictorial representation of the surface of a planet" (Prucher, 2007: 148). Landscape is of course a broader concept, yet planetscapes comprise a very important portion of the semantic manifestation of landscapes in speculative fiction texts set upon distant alien worlds. Meanwhile, Robert Tally terms genres "mapping machines" and reveals that every genre is a map in a certain sense (2013: 46). Storytelling and plot-pacing provide mapping, and maps tell their stories to readers:

As narrators or writers survey the territory they wish to describe, they weave together disparate elements in order to produce the narrative, and these elements may include scraps of other narratives, descriptions of people or places, images derived from first-hand observation as well as from secondary reports, legends, myths, and inventions of the imagination. In producing this patchwork representation of a world (that is, the narrative itself), the narrator also invents or discovers the world presented in the narrative (Tally, 2013: 49).

These critical engagements constitute a rigorous theoretical framework for the analysis of Burroughs' novel *A Princess of Mars*. The Martian landscape of the novel is not limited to its descriptive setting, but is rather a complex semantic structure that combines scientific discoveries and Burroughs' flights of fancy, ideas about the Earth's past and bold projections into the future, medieval savagery, and futuristic innovations. The landscape of the Red Planet has not only a geographical, but also a sociocultural dimension; hence, it cannot be considered in isolation from the earthly scenery and earthly problems which Burroughs was engaged with.

## Martian Landscapes

Among researchers of the Barsoom series, the idea has become established that Mars became a new speculative frontier for Burroughs, during a moment at which the old American frontier had exhausted its possibilities for the adventures of heroes: "Burroughs used the Martian landscape to extend the idealised vision of the American frontier into the future" (Sharp, 2007: 96). Hence, it is no wonder that the action of the novel begins in an Arizona which has recently lost frontier status. There are numerous reasons for Burroughs having chosen this initial setting. The renowned contemporary astronomer Percival Lowell's astronomical observatory was located in Flagstaff, Arizona, from which he watched Mars through a telescope and expressed ideas about the artificial origin of channels on the planet, whilst hypothesising about its deplorable future. In addition, the mountainous desert landscape of Arizona might recall that of Mars, a parallel generally accepted by readers: "Before long, it would become a commonplace in the literature of Mars that no place on Earth looked more like the red planet than northern Arizona" (Crossley, 2011: 153). Carl Abbott explains Burroughs' paradigmatic speculative but nevertheless earthly landscape in more detail:

Because new planets are often imagined as places of grand vistas and wide-open spaces, the Landscape of the West has provided an easy source for sketching the appearance of new places. Since Burroughs launched John Carter's adventures, readers have come to expect Mars to look a lot like Arizona, or Death Valley, or perhaps an airless North Slope of Alaska, in part because such comparisons simplify the writer's task and make it easy for readers to envision unseen planetscapes. (Abbott, 2006: 20)

At the beginning of the novel, the lands of Arizona appear in daylight, whilst the hero waves goodbye to a friend: "The morning of Powell's departure was, like nearly all Arizona mornings, clear and beautiful" (Burroughs, 2011: 2). From a great distance, Carter surveys the valley, the mountains, and the plateau, looking for traces of danger. Next, the panorama narrows down to a significant detail, an Apache camp, which symbolises a threat to the hero and his friend: "[t]he little stretch of level land was white with Indian tepees" (5). Subsequently, escape and chase scenes unfold across these rocky settings, until they eventually lead the hero to the comparatively claustrophobic environment of a cave.

In the subsequent description of this particular setting, readers see it at night, when Carter magically leaves his body:

I saw stretching far below me the beautiful vista of rocky gorge, and level, cacti-studded flat, wrought by the moonlight into a miracle of soft splendor and wondrous enchantment.

Few western wonders are more inspiring than the beauties of an Arizona moonlit landscape; the silvered mountains in the distance, the strange lights and shadows upon hog back and arroyo, and the grotesque details of the stiff, yet beautiful cacti form a picture at once enchanting and inspiring; as though one were catching for the first time a glimpse of some dead and forgotten world, so different is it from the aspect of any other spot upon our earth. (13)

This description is dominated by the category not so much of the 'adventurous' as the Todorovian 'marvelous as is emphasised by the "strange" moonlight and "grotesque details" that make the scenery analagous to "some dead and forgotten world," foreshadowing the hero's transfer to another planet. This feeling of wonder is then repeated when the hero finds himself on Mars: "I opened my eyes upon a strange and weird landscape" (14). Carter once again sees lowlands, distant hills and rocks heated by the sun, and instantly identifies the area with "similar conditions on an Arizona desert" (14).

Hence, based on the genre patterns of frontier and captive narratives, Burroughs directly correlates the images of the Arizona desert, with its 'wild' Apaches, and the Martian surface, where John Carter finds himself under the threat of the green Tharks' aggression. This setting also introduces the theme of the complex relationship between the different Martian

races.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, since setting and genre are directly related, the Martian planetscape corresponds to various genre components; not only the western—as in the Arizona episodes—but also the tropes of adventure, gothic, love story, fantasy and catastrophe fictions.

The narrative of John Carter's adventures is enclosed in a double frame. Its initial introductory portion focalises the voice of the narrator, a fictional "Edgar Burroughs." This Burroughs is the fictional hero's nephew, and talks about his uncle, a polished Southern gentleman and a brave cavalry officer, with love and respect, reporting on the strange circumstances of his death and funeral—as in sensational novels. The second frame is gothic, expressed in the text through the cave topos. At first, Carter finds himself entering the cave when the Apaches pursue him across the Arizona desert. In this cave, the hero is ostensibly split into two bodies; one body remains inert in the cave, and the other is mystically transported to Mars. This is the same cave that Carter will find himself in when he returns from Mars to Earth following his heroic feats which bring about the novel's eucatastrophe.

The cave topos is analogous to the "transit into a sphere of rebirth [...] symbolized in the worldwide womb image" otherwise termed 'The Belly of the Whale' (Campbell, 2004: 83). Hence, it usually symbolises the hero's initiation, death, and resurrection, and here, Burroughs utilises gothic elements in its description. At first, the cave is associated with prehistoric times: "I found a large chamber, possibly a

Whilst Carter is initially captured by one particular tribe of green Martians, he spends most of the remainder of the novel aligned with the red Martians—the other extant race. These two prominent races are descended from ancestral races including yellow and black Martians, as later entries in Burroughs' series explore. Both races are oviparous, and whereas red Martians are humanoid, physically resemble humans in all but skin-tone, and have many similar social practices, green Martians have "an intermediary pair of limbs [...] used at will either as arms or legs" (15). Besides being hexapods, green Martians are comparatively warlike and uncivilized, and unlike their civilization-building neighbours, are a nomadic race divided into named tribes. For more on this subject, see Burroughs (2011: 71-72), Crossley (2011), Sharp (2007), Höglund (2014), Abbott (2006) and DeGraw (2017).

hundred feet in diameter and thirty or forty feet in height; a smooth and well-worn floor, and many other evidences that the cave had, at some remote period, been inhabited" (7). However, the obscurity in its depth signifies danger: "The back of the cave was so lost in dense shadow that I could not distinguish whether there were openings into other apartments or not" (7). Gothic details of smell and sound complete the picture: "a slight vapor filling the cave", "a faintly pungent odor", "some poisonous gas", "the silence of the dead," "a low but distinct moaning sound," and the specification that "there came again from the black shadows the sound of a moving thing, and a faint rustling as of dead leaves" (9-11). As a first-person narrator, Carter accentuates his own anxious state, instigating the general and intense nervousness which is associated with gothic conventions of suspense: "The shock to my already overstrained nervous system was terrible in the extreme" (11).

After he leaves the cave, the earthly landscape of the extraordinary Arizona desert opens up into outer space and acquires a new dimension. At this point in the narrative, the gothic mode dissolves into a fantastic one, marking the beginning of the hero's quest on another planet:

I turned my gaze from the landscape to the heavens where the myriad stars formed a gorgeous and fitting canopy for the wonders of the earthly scene. My attention was quickly riveted by a large red star close to the distant horizon. As I gazed upon it I felt a spell of overpowering fascination—it was Mars, the god of war, and for me, the fighting man, it had always held the power of irresistible enchantment. [...] My longing was beyond the power of opposition; I closed my eyes, stretched out my arms toward the god of my vocation and felt

myself drawn with the suddenness of thought through the trackless immensity of space. There was an instant of extreme cold and utter darkness. (13)

This description of the heavenly landscape both reveals Carter's nature—he is a military man to his core—and scales the story to cosmic space. Burroughs was not interested in the technical side of moving between planets—unlike Verne's From the Earth to the Moon (1865) or H. G. Wells in The First Men in the Moon (1901)—and hence, his works are not interplanetary, but merely planetary romances. The only qualities of the passage that signify Carter's abrupt and startling shift in location are its references to "the trackless immensity of space" and the "extreme cold and utter darkness" (13).

The gothic frame within the novel closes after Carter's sudden return from Mars; he discovers himself again in the same cave, and in the same body which has waited for him without ageing for fifteen years. Now he is able to see inside the cave in the dim light and finds the mummified remains of a woman along with human skeletons:

As I approached it I saw that it was the dead and mummified remains of a little old woman with long black hair, and the thing it leaned over was a small charcoal burner upon which rested a round copper vessel containing a small quantity of greenish powder. Behind her, depending from the roof upon rawhide thongs, and stretching entirely across the cave, was a row of human skeletons. From the thong which held them stretched another to the dead hand of the little old woman; as I touched the cord the skeletons swung to the motion with a noise as of the rustling of dry leaves. (202)

This scene suggests mystical rituals associated with an Indian cult of death, evoking both fear and a characteristically gothic anxiety in Carter. The secret of the cave remains like a silent question mark, since Burroughs never provides a rational explanation for what happened to the hero, whether he undertook real adventures on Mars, or whether the majority of the novel's chapters were only a strange dream. In this particular aspect, the cave figured as transitional portal to another reality brings the story rather closer to the genre of fantasy than science fiction.

The Martian visions in Burroughs' romances were influenced by Lowell's planetology, often relying directly upon the scientific ideas expressed in his books Mars (1895), Mars and its Canals (1906), and Mars as the Abode of Life (1908), in addition to their popular retellings in US mass media. Leathem Mehaffey has explored the extent to which Burroughs repeated Lowell's ideas, and concludes that, in general, the geography of his Mars corresponds to the hypotheses of that time. For Mehaffey, it is particularly telling in this regard that Burroughs mentions artificial 'channels' and dried seas, lack of water and other resources for life, polar seas, warm climate, dual moons, Martian measurements and time zones, in addition to "both the lower atmospheric pressure and lesser gravity of Mars" (Mehaffey, 2005). Mehaffey also demonstrates that Burroughs placed imaginary cities near the crossings of the canals or near so-called 'oases,' based on Lowell's Martian maps. However, I would contend that the principal scientific suggestion borrowed by Burroughs was the concept of a dying planet, along with how such a hostile environment can generate a violent struggle for survival and a general atmosphere of ruin and decay.

The particular mode of Burroughs' Mars imagery is particularly reminiscent of the famous last passage from Lowell's work *Mars as the Abode of Life* entitled "Martian life nearing its end":

A sadder interest attaches to such existence: that it is, cosmically speaking, soon to pass away. To our eventual descendants life on Mars will no longer be something to scan and interpret. It will have lapsed beyond the hope of study or recall. Thus to us it takes on an added glamour from the fact that it has not long to last. For the process that brought it to its present pass must go on to the bitter end, until the last spark of Martian life goes out. The drying up of the planet is certain to proceed until its surface can support no life at all. Slowly but surely time will snuff it out. When the last ember is thus extinguished, the planet will roll a dead world through space, its evolutionary career forever ended. (Lowell, 1908: 216)

For Burroughs, the accuracy of scientific facts was not so important as the brightness and eccentricity of Martian scenery, which profoundly motivates his novel's development and the actions of its central protagonist. Höglund expresses the idea that "Burroughs's 'Barsoom' clearly was intended as a setting for adventure" (Höglund, 2014: 126, emphasis mine). Likewise, Robert Crossley is absolutely right when highlighting that "Mars provided an opportunity for recovering the pleasures of romance" (Crossley, 2011, 149, emphasis mine). Hence, genre and landscape mutually determine each other, and from all the variety of then-contemporary planetological ideas, Burroughs selected those fragments that could most impress readers' imaginations,

allowing him to develop the novel's plot around these aspects of landscape. As Crossley continues, "his imagination is exotic, not astronomical; his artistic sensibilities run more to primary colors than to subtle tints [...] Astronomical images are incidental to the hormonal mayhem that runs the battery of Burroughs' plot" (Crossley, 2011: 151-152). His landscapes are akin to a list of alien wonders; natural, technological, and as mystical as telepathy—a typical Martian communication means.

Burroughs visualises the planetscape in rigorous detail, time after time attracting attention to impressive and luxurious Martian materials such as marble, gold, and diamonds, and to the exotic electrical power of Martian rays and radium devices. When Carter asks Dejah Thoris to draw up a Martian map to aid their escape, the princess "taking a great diamond from her hair [...] drew upon the marble floor the first map of Barsoomian territory I had ever seen" (110).

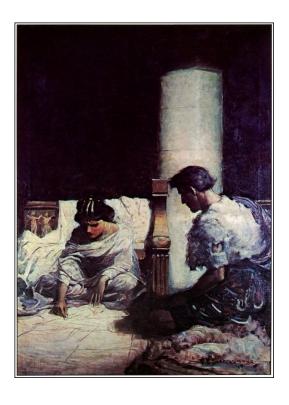
Carter elsewhere finds himself enchanted by the wild beauty of the Tharkian caravan heading through the desert, which he automatically associates with the lavishness of Eastern cavalcades back on Earth:

The gleaming metal and jewels of the gorgeous ornaments of the men and women, duplicated in the trappings of the zitidars and thoats, and interspersed with the flashing colors of magnificent silks and furs and feathers, lent a barbaric splendor to the caravan which would have turned an East Indian potentate green with envy. (98)

In this picturesque description, a parallel between oriental and extraterrestrial exoticism takes prominence, inviting then-contemporary readers to analogise the Martian landscape in a similarly proprietorial manner.

## **Dead Cities**

Burroughs utilises the Lost World and Lost Race formulae to model his Martian world, and this outlandish trend is especially evident in the cityscapes of Korad, Thark, Zodanga, and Helium. The first two are transitory habitats of the green Martians, and the second pair are the city-states of the red Martians. Korad and Thark are featured as ruins abandoned by ancient white inhabitants: "the buildings were deserted, and while not greatly decayed had the appearance of not having been tenanted for years, possibly for ages" (22); likewise, "the evidences of extreme antiquity which showed



all around me indicated that these buildings might have belonged to some long-extinct and forgotten race in the dim antiquity of Mars" (24). Thus, as Robert Markley points out, Burroughs' Mars is perpetually "haunted by its past" (2005: 188).

The models of Korad and Thark are constructed essentially as city-palimpsests wherein layers of an ancient, developed culture are hidden under the cover of the newest savagery. Carter seems to sense the invisible presence of the former inhabitants:

the fair-haired, laughing people whom stern and unalterable cosmic laws had driven not only from their homes, but from all except the vague legends of their descendants [...] the graceful figures of the beautiful women, the straight and handsome men; the happy frolicking children—all sunlight, happiness and peace. It was difficult to realize that they had gone; down through ages of darkness, cruelty, and ignorance, until their hereditary instincts of culture and humanitarianism had risen ascendant once more in the final composite race which now is dominant upon Mars. (76-77)

Carter is surprised by the architectural wonders, the grandeur of the buildings and the richness of their decorations: "The building was low, but covered an enormous area. It was constructed of gleaming white marble inlaid with gold and brilliant stones which sparkled and scintillated in the sunlight" (24). Mural paintings in these lost cities act like windows into the distant past of Mars. At first, the hero sees echoes of a formerly blooming nature within these walls: "The mural painting depicted scenes of rare and wonderful beauty; mountains, rivers, lake, ocean, meadow, trees and flowers, winding roadways, sun-kissed gardens-scenes which might have portrayed earthly views but for the different colorings of the vegetation" (29). Carter praises the technical excellence and "master hand" (29) of the ancient artists, and for readers too, such descriptions underscore the contrast between a flourishing nature confined to the past, and the planet's present thirsty territories; between the former high civilisation of the white Martians, and the Tkarkian brutality and insensitivity. Burroughs emphasises proportions to emphasise the difference between the two cultures; Tharks look "entirely out of proportion to the desks, chairs, and other furnishings" (24), a fact which allows the hero to guess that the size of the extinct Martian race was similar to the size of an ordinary terrestrial human.

Later, in another building of "real sleeping apartments with ancient beds of highly wrought metal swinging from enormous gold chains depending from the marble ceilings" (67), Carter observes more rich furnishings and mural paintings, wherein representatives of the white race are depicted directly:

The decoration of the walls was most elaborate, and, unlike the frescoes in the other buildings I had examined, portrayed many human figures in the compositions. These were of people like myself, and of a much lighter color than Dejah Thoris. They were clad in graceful, flowing robes, highly ornamented with metal and jewels, and their luxuriant hair was of a beautiful golden and reddish bronze. The men were beardless and only a few wore arms. The scenes depicted for the most part, a fair-skinned, fair-haired people at play. (67)

Contemplation of these frescoes unites Carter and the Martian princess in delight, the latter of whom pays tribute to the craftsmanship of the white race. These urban cityscape fragments paradoxically mix two-time planes; the medieval past and far future of our own Earth projected onto the Martian planetscape. Its cityscape acts as a map that guides the hero through space and time, and this map comes to life through the history of the planet, as it is related to Carter by the Martian princess. Hence, Carter navigates the Martian landscape through representations which remain akin to Earth's own past and future.

Burroughs' colourful descriptions of the exotic environment correspond not only to the adventure genre but also to travelogues; in these moments, Carter learns the way of life on another planet. For Höglund, "Carter's description of the alien biologies and customs of the Martians reads like nineteenth-century anthropology or travel writing" (Höglund, 2014: 44). Other critics have also theorised that the density and integrity of Burroughs' fictional world of Mars allows readers to immerse themselves in the atmosphere of a distant planet: "Barsoom was fully equipped [...] with geography, history, mythology, flora and fauna, human and unhuman inhabitants, science, politics, religion, architecture, law, and every other institution to be expected in a fully developed world" (Lupoff, 2005: 11).

Interestingly, however, the red Martian cityscapes of Zodanga and Helium are depicted more schematically, and without the decadent glamour of the Tharks' ruins. Despite their technological superiority, these cities still resemble fortified paramilitary fortresses, ready to fight each other, regardless of the high scientific discoveries they boast (such as special solar rays that make it possible to produce oxygen in factories, and to pilot flying boats). Burroughs delves further into medievalfuturistic detail to describe the lifestyle of this technologically-advanced race. First, he specifies that their houses are raised high up on metal support columns at night so that outsiders cannot get inside, this measure being motivated

by the high level of aggression in the Red Planet's society. Secondly, he paints pictures of a busy urban space, where catering establishments are automated:

Kantos Kan led me to one of these gorgeous eating places where we were served entirely by mechanical apparatus. No hand touched the food from the time it entered the building in its raw state until it emerged hot and delicious upon the tables before the guests, in response to the touching of tiny buttons to indicate their desires. (150-151)

This marvel of technology is a projection of the American technical innovations of that time, which in a similar manner speculated about the possibility of artificial food which might be produced without direct human input (Bowler, 2017: 16).

Zodanga and Helium are constructed primarily as settings for territorial combat, landscape-mediated decision additionally aligns the novel with the actionadventure genre. During his time in these cities, John Carter is no longer a prisoner, but a recognised warrior, and is even more visually similar to his hosts now that his body is painted red. Here, he liberates Dejah Thoris from an unwanted marriage, takes part in ground and air confrontations, conquers Zodanga together with the Tharks, and later struggles for the victory of Helium. The increasing pace of the novel's action in these chapters does not leave, however, time for detailed descriptions of these further exotic cities.

## (Non-Planetary) Romance

In addition to the conventions of western, gothic and adventure genres, the landscape of *A Princess of Mars* also obeys the rules of the

romance genre. The interspecies love story of John Carter and Dejah Thoris is deeply integrated into the novel's overarching survival plot about an earthling on Mars and his progress to the heights of power. Thus, the planet is adapted symbolically not only for battles and travel, but also for concerns pertaining to dating. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is chapter XIII, "Love-Making on Mars." Walking with the princess through the streets of Korad at night, Carter is acutely aware of the vast distance separating the two of them, given that they are representatives of different worlds, despite their natural empathic connection: "There seemed bonds of mutual interest between us as powerful as though we had been born under the same roof rather than upon different planets, hurtling through space some forty-eight million miles apart" (82). Such an awareness typifies the traditional image of a barrier separating the loving couple in a romance. In Burroughs' text, the different planets of the heroes engender not just a hyperbolised astro-geographical distance, but also the different cultures and even the different biological nature of the two lovers:

[I]t had remained for me to fall furiously and hopelessly in love with a creature from another world, of a species similar possibly, yet not identical with mine. A woman who was hatched from an egg, and whose span of life might cover a thousand years; whose people had strange customs and ideas; a woman whose hopes, whose pleasures, whose standards of virtue and of right and wrong might vary as greatly from mine as did those of the green Martians. (87)

In this way, the cosmic landscape models the psychological dimensions of the work and its development of a romantic storyline. The romantic entourage of a Martian date likewise conforms to the genre norms: "Day had now given away to night and as we wandered along the great avenue lighted by the two moons of Barsoom, and with Earth looking down upon us out of her luminous green eye, it seemed that we were alone in the universe, and I, at least, was content that it should be so" (84-85). The Moon is a traditional witness to courtship and love-making, and here, the cosmic scale of Burroughs' scenery emphasises the immensity, strength and eternity of the heroes' feelings. However, its author has not forgotten about the future catastrophic fate of Mars, and hence, the date is shrouded in a gloomy decadent glamour: "we walked the surface of a dying world" (85).

Throughout the novel's storyline, the couple act as universal and ideal He and She, the symbolic representatives of their respective planets: Dejah Thoris, Princess of Helium, true daughter of Mars, the God of War, and John Carter, Gentleman of Virginia, a couple whose love can cross the expanses of space. Hence, it remains very important for both of them to know where each other's homeland is located. Carter, aware of his feelings for the princess, recalls the earthly home of his relatives:

By nature a wanderer, I had never known the true meaning of the word home, but the great hall of the Carters had always stood for all that the word did mean to me, and now my heart turned toward it from the cold and unfriendly peoples I had been thrown amongst. (91)

Thus, the image of the native home is gradually transferred from Earth to Mars, and the protagonist, having become the leader of the Martians and found a mate, already thinks of the Red Planet as an appropriated territory created just for him, an earthling.

## Conclusion

In A Princess of Mars, Burroughs constructs a colourful and exotic landscape for the Red Planet, basing his ideas on contemporary scientific and fictional texts. His imaginary world is carefully curated to have an absolute effect on the imagination of his readers, so that the novel's landscape is maximally sharpened with impressive details. The landscapes of Burroughs' Princess paradoxically combine the atmosphere of the ancient medieval past, the American frontier, and the speculative future. The planet likewise acts as a projection of the future of the Earth, and as an object of colonial conquest for the hero, who becomes its ruler by the close of the narrative. The generic enigma of the romance is similarly superimposed on the variability of the landscape, which is presented variously as a field for battle, travel, love, and disaster.

Burroughs skilfully blends and switches generic modes, and each time does so by opening new dimensions of the Martian setting. He outlines the general background of the planetscape and the local places, cities, dry seas, canals, and oxygen factories that structure its surface like an imaginary semantic grid. The paradigm of the exotic background combines scientific components based on facts and the discoveries of scholars, alongside mystical revelations about the dying planet Mars. The novel's landscape therefore comprises the key image of Burroughs' planetary romance; it determines the characters, the plot lines and their development, along with the ideological messages of the work. The original double vision from Earth and Mars/Barsoom, even before the era of spaceflight, allows Burroughs to reveal the mutual dependence of both planets, theorise the interconnection of their climactic predestination, and to project it onto the fortune of the main heroes, whose love is

able to overcome insurmountable boundaries between planets and cultures.

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## ¿Un «nieto de Borges» en el canon literario español?: Reflexiones en torno a un libro monográfico sobre Juan Jacinto Muñoz Rengel

#### MARIANO MARTÍN RODRÍGUEZ Investigador independiente

Ana Abello Verano Lo insólito en la narrativa de Juan Jacinto Muñoz Rengel. Entre monstruos y ensoñaciones Madrid, Visor, 2022 280 p.

En el canon oficial de la literatura española actual en castellano figura una serie de autores ampliamente promovidos por la prensa, especialmente el influyente diario madrileño El País. Son autores que han contado desde el principio de sus carreras con el potente sostén publicitario de grandes conglomerados editoriales y de la crítica universitaria más poderosa. Ni siquiera los mordaces y fundados ataques de medios críticos como La Fiera Literaria han hecho mella en el prestigio literario de Javier Marías, Antonio Muñoz

Molina o Almudena Grandes, entre otros escritores ensalzados por los medios culturales oficiales desde la década de 1980 en adelante. Su aplastante presencia y una eficaz política de ocultamiento de otras posibles alternativas literarias en los órganos culturales, que aquellos consiguieron monopolizar prácticamente durante décadas con un concepto muy mimético y cotidiano de la ficción, han impedido hasta ahora que se reconozca mayormente el mérito de todo un grupo de escritores más jóvenes deseosos de devolver a la literatura española

un intenso compromiso con la inteligencia y la dignidad de la literatura como arte a la vez de la palabra y de la idea. Se trata de autores nacidos entre 1957 (año de nacimiento de Elia Barceló) y 1984 (el de Juan Gómez Bárcena), y educados en un medio que aún no desdeñaba por completo la meritocracia educativa o el saber humanístico. Todos ellos han leído y estudiado mucho, con una mentalidad realmente cosmopolita en el espacio y el tiempo, a la manera de su modelo reconocido en mayor o menor grado, Jorge Luis Borges.

Al igual que este su maestro argentino, muchos de ellos han dedicado grandes energías a la dignificación de la narrativa breve, y más concretamente del cuento especulativo en sentido lato. Su literatura es de ideas no porque intentaran propalar tesis o ideologías concretas, sino porque son las ideas y la reflexión sobre la realidad desde todos los puntos de vista, incluido el filosófico, las que inspiran y sostienen sus mejores creaciones. A diferencia de la literatura de buenas intenciones y fuertemente ideologizada y propagandística que hoy parece estilarse en el universo de la ficción especulativa, sus reflexiones no suelen ser didácticas, pues no persiguen dar respuestas ni convencer a nadie, sino encarar el enigma del universo natural y artificial con una mirada interrogante. Como en los cuentos especulativos de Borges, lo sublime y lo insólito del mundo se manifiestan en los de este conjunto de escritores mediante tramas simbólicas que pretenden que nos hagamos una idea de las múltiples dimensiones pensables de la realidad. Su propósito evidente es estimular la imaginación y la capacidad de raciocinio de los lectores a la vez, y de ahí que sean dos las modalidades narrativas modernas preferidas por ellos, la neofantástica y la prospectiva. Se puede hablar de neofantástico en su caso, porque la irrupción en la realidad fenoménica presente de seres y fenómenos preternaturales no inquieta ni suscita ya una duda que se resuelva en espanto, como solía ocurrir en el fantástico convencional anterior. Ante un mundo que se sabe no limitado a lo material sensible ni siquiera en el orden físico, lo insólito se introduce en el universo ficticio y lo amplía, al sugerir que pueden existir nuevas leyes, objetos o dimensiones espaciotemporales cuya extrañeza acabará por disiparse.

Por su parte, lo prospectivo amplía también la realidad, pero se trata de una realidad futura de la que se observan usos y costumbres que parten de lo que ya conocemos del presente y sobre lo cual podemos extrapolar al porvenir, generalmente por analogía. Tanto lo neofantástico como lo prospectivo han abierto nuevas y diversas vías a la ficción, ya que esa ampliación de la realidad mediante la especulación racional (prospectiva) o suprarracional (neofantástico) se basa en la explotación de un número potencialmente muy alto de posibilidades de alterar la realidad fenoménica, a la que se reducen voluntariamente aquellos escritores que solo ven y presentan la estrecha realidad de su yo, de su ambiente y de sus problemas y preocupaciones particulares, sobre todo de orden trivialmente sentimental, cuando no combinan lo pedestre de la escritura con el sectarismo político al servicio de determinados partidos repartidores de cargos y prebendas.

No caben dos modos más distintos de entender la literatura y practicarla que el de los realistas posmodernos del canon oficial y el de los cuentistas especulativos contemporáneos. Ambas concepciones de la ficción, la mimética y la especulativa, son literariamente respetables si saben explotar bellamente su materia, que es la palabra. Permítasenos creer, no obstante, que la ficción especulativa, y en particular la neofantástica y la prospectiva, entrañan una mayor exigencia intelectual y, a la vez, un mayor gusto por la experimentación de ideas y modos de plasmarlas en la escritura, además de exigir mucha dedicación para obtener la

sólida cultura y el extenso saber humanístico e incluso científico que resultan necesarios para poder fundamentar las especulaciones que sustentan aquellas dos clases de ficción. Por supuesto, no siempre el resultado está a la altura de las ambiciones implícitas en ellas. Ideas y situaciones inventivas no salvan literariamente una narración cuya prosa no se sustente en la variedad de recursos retóricos y en la pericia en su manejo. Afortunadamente, la degradación del dominio del propio lenguaje a consecuencia de la masiva exposición a la simpleza de la palabra audiovisual no ha impedido la aparición de autores de narración especulativa que han alcanzado en ocasiones un buen equilibrio entre las ideas y su expresión. Incluso podría decirse que han sido bastantes en los últimos años, pese al estruendoso silencio con que las instituciones y la prensa llamadas culturales han dejado en la sombra a numerosos escritores de ficción fantástica y especulativa en castellano dotados de alta conciencia literaria, tales como Pedro Ugarte, Ángel Olgoso, Manuel Moyano, Armando Boix, Luis García Jambrina, Santiago Eximeno, Eduardo Vaquerizo, Pablo Martín Sánchez, José Ardillo y otros. Entre ellos, tan solo Félix J. Palma y Juan Jacinto Muñoz Rengel han recibido cierto aplauso de los guardianes del canon, aunque ni siquiera ellos han adquirido la reputación que merecen en la literatura española.

Sin embargo, hay indicios de que esta situación culturalmente insatisfactoria y anómala podría cambiar. Aun antes de que la posteridad acabe poniendo a cada uno en su sitio, la labor reivindicativa del (neo) fantástico español reciente llevada a cabo, por ejemplo, por David Roas (él mismo un buen representante de esta generación de excelentes cuentistas fantástico-especulativos españoles) ya ha contribuido a abrir una brecha en el canon académico en pro de una mayor justicia

literaria. Por esa brecha y otras abiertas en otras universidades se están introduciendo en la fortaleza del canon jóvenes investigadores que se aplican a la exégesis de los autores estudiados de este grupo generacional que podríamos llamar de los «nietos de Borges». Entre esos investigadores figura ahora en primera fila Ana Abello Verano gracias a su estudio sobre lo insólito en la narrativa de Juan Jacinto Muñoz Rengel, una monografía que lo convierte virtualmente en un clásico contemporáneo. Si los admiradores de su obra ya lo barruntábamos, Abello Verano lo demuestra siguiendo un sólido método filológico e histórico en su análisis. Este mantiene su coherencia a lo largo de las partes que constituyen el libro.

La primera de ellas se titula «Juan Jacinto Muñoz Rengel y la literatura no realista como herramienta del conocimiento», cuya formulación ya indica la preferencia del autor (y de los cuentistas de su grupo) por una escritura que apela no solo a la emotividad, sino también a la inteligencia de los lectores. Aquella frase también parece ser un compendio de la obra de Muñoz Rengel, la cual se repasa en este apartado. En primer lugar, la investigadora presta especial atención a la narrativa breve del escritor, compuesta de dos libros de cuentos, 88 Mill Lane (2005) y De mecánica y alquimia (2009), y uno de microrrelatos, El libro de los pequeños milagros (2013). Los volúmenes de cuentos se destacan con justicia, no solo atendiendo a su cosecha de premios y su buena recepción crítica, normalmente fuera del coto vedado de la cultura oficial, sino sobre todo a su valor según criterios propiamente literarios, a saber:

el buen manejo de los diálogos, el control absoluto en la creación de atmósferas – con un retrato minucioso del contexto histórico cuando así se requiere [...]– y la compleja caracterización de los personajes protagonistas [...]. A esto se

suma una gran habilidad para mantener la tensión narrativa y elegir las voces que van a transmitir los acontecimientos, así como un exhaustivo trabajo con la dimensión lingüística. (25)

Estas características pueden predicarse asimismo del resto de la producción narrativa de Muñoz Rengel, aunque tal vez no con la claridad con que se manifiestan en los cuentos, el género que lo consagró, al menos entre numerosos aficionados españoles a la ficción fantástica y especulativa. No obstante, Muñoz Rengel no quiso encasillarse en ese género, sino que quiso demostrar su valor también en otras clases de narrativa. En concreto, se sumó a la boga de los microrrelatos entre los escritores de su grupo, aportando al género una sobresaliente capacidad inventiva, tal y como sugiere su variado bestiario, tanto terrestre como extraterrestre. No descuidó tampoco la novela, tentación en la que han caído varios de los «nietos de Borges», desoyendo las recomendaciones tácitas de su maestro. Muñoz Rengel ha publicado varias novelas estimables, una de las cuales, la breve titulada El asesino hipocondríaco (2012) fue la que cosechó mayor éxito público e incluso estima por parte de escritores consagrados, pudiéndose conjeturar que fueron el humor y la trama paródicamente policial, en el seno de una narrativa más bien realista, las que facilitaron una mejor recepción que sus ficciones especulativas, las cuales exigen seguramente de sus lectores un mayor esfuerzo mental. Muñoz Rengel no siguió por ese camino más fácil que le habría llevado al éxito de público, sino que demostró la seriedad de su planteamiento literario propio, centrado en lo insólito, lo fantástico y lo especulativo y explorando los trasfondos de la realidad, al publicar novelas como la demiúrgica El sueño del otro (2013) y la histórico-fantástica, con toques retrofuturistas, El gran imaginador (2016). Su originalidad las hace interesantes, pero no creemos que sea casualidad que Abello Verano les preste menos espacio en su estudio que a los cuentos. En cualquier caso, son estos últimos los que expresan con mayor hondura y variedad las concepciones literarias de Muñoz Rengel y su visión del mundo, tal y como las manifestó en ensayos como Una historia de la mentira (2020) y en su amplia obra de edición crítica y literaria, a través de la preparación de antología y la publicación de estudios, por ejemplo, sobre José María Merino. Esas concepciones deben bastante al posmodernismo, en la medida en que «prima el desconcierto epistemológico, desvalorizando cualquier idea suprema y concibiendo la realidad como una construcción conjetural al modo borgiano» (52). Sin embargo, todo ello no desemboca en un relativismo negador de la noción misma de verdad, que se supedita a los intereses particulares de determinados grupos de presión. Muñoz Rengel prescinde del activismo posmoderno en su literatura, que concibe más bien como el campo en que se juegan dos grandes cuestiones, «la naturaleza del mundo y la naturaleza del yo» (53) para que la ficción sirva para reflejar mejor la esencia inestable y cambiante de la realidad mediante la invención de situaciones insólitas y mentalmente estimulantes, ya sean racionales (en la ficción prospectiva) o no tanto (en la fantástica). Son estas situaciones las que demuestran la enorme capacidad imaginativa del autor, muy bien servida por su «arte narrativo», que es el objeto de la segunda parte del estudio de Abello Verano.

Como tal arte es común a toda la narrativa de Muñoz Rengel, no se hacen más distinciones entre cuento, microrrelato y novela a la hora de analizarlo. Los ejemplos proceden de las obras que mejor ilustran cada acercamiento a través de análisis muy meticulosos y precisos de sus procedimientos literarios preferidos. Así se destaca, por ejemplo, la variedad de estructuras narrativas de los textos, perceptibles incluso en el conjunto de microrrelatos de El libro de los pequeños relatos. Esta variedad no es un fin en sí misma, sino que sirve a la arquitectura conceptual de la narración de que se trate. Lo mismo puede decirse de su gusto por el «hibridismo genérico», entendiendo por tal la convivencia en una misma narración de rasgos de modalidades ficcionales diversas dentro del marco fantástico. Por ejemplo, en un libro como De mecánica y alquimia figuran cuentos ambientados en el pasado (la Toledo andalusí, por ejemplo), en el presente y en un futuro más bien distópico, de modo que el conjunto constituye un repaso de la historia a través de sucesos extraordinarios, una visión fantástica de nuestro devenir que se presenta como alternativa a las certezas que rodeaban la realidad antes de la crisis epistemológica posmoderna, al menos en lo que a su reflejo literario se refiere. Desde este punto de vista, a una literatura fundada en la consignación supuestamente fiel de un entorno mundano estable, Muñoz Rengel y los demás «nietos de Borges» oponen otra que se basa en un patrimonio de ideas y motivos procedentes del acervo cultural, esto es, en una biblioteca que aspira a menudo a la universalidad de la de Babel, pero con la diferencia fundamental de que no es la biblioteca la que abruma al escritor con su riqueza infinita, sino que este se la ha asimilado, de forma que puede ponerla al servicio de sus propios universos ficticios. Así procede Muñoz Rengel al aplicar profusamente a su narrativa los procedimientos intertextuales y hacer menudear en ella los homenajes literarios, por ejemplo, el muy amplio a Miguel de Cervantes en El gran imaginador. Importa señalar a este respecto que ni estos homenajes ni la amplísima cultura de que hace gala en sus obras a través de alusiones a obras pictóricas, musicales y literarias de distintas épocas y lugares son gratuitas. En general, son funcionales y resultan pertinentes para dotar de sentido al texto, además de contribuir a la ambientación y a su verosimilitud histórica. Además, este «caudal de sólida erudición [...] no oscurece en ningún caso la recepción de las obras» (120), esto es, su cabal entendimiento. Ni siquiera estorban a esta las numerosas «elucubraciones filosóficas» (125) que esmaltan sobre todo sus cuentos. Muñoz Rengel, filósofo de formación, domina bien esta difícil materia y consigue que los conceptos más abstrusos de la metafísica animen la acción, en vez de remansarla. Es algo que, aparte de Borges, muy pocos han conseguido en cualquier literatura.

Tras demostrar así de forma convincente la pericia narrativa de Muñoz Rengel, Abello Verano procede a un apasionante análisis de sus principales temas literarios, tanto en la vertiente fantástica como en la especulativa de su obra. Dada la enorme variedad de esta, no era fácil la elección. La estudiosa organiza su exposición en torno a varios que sirven para dar una buena idea del tenor de sus «preceptos de lo insólito», que es el título de esta tercera parte del libro. La organización de esta materia va de lo fantástico propiamente dicho a lo prospectivo. La «estética de lo fantástico» se articula en torno a diversos fenómenos inquietantes que difuminan los límites de lo real. Bastará enumerar los títulos de los diferentes apartados para conocer su tenor, pues una de las numerosas cualidades de este libro de Abello Verano es la claridad de su estructuración y la precisión de sus epígrafes. En este caso son los siguientes: «En los márgenes del sueño y la vigilia», «El doble o la invasión de lo inquietante», «Los límites entre realidad y ficción y otros guiños literarios» y «Las distorsiones espaciales y temporales». Cada uno de ellos da pie a análisis más detallados de las narraciones consideradas, análisis que se benefician de la amplia información facilitada en las partes anteriores del libro y que permiten

ahondar en la dilucidación de sus características y sus valores. De esta forma, queda completo el examen de lo fantástico posmoderno y contemporáneo en la ficción de Muñoz Rengel, sin que queden prácticamente cabos sueltos. Además, se trata de comentarios exhaustivos y rigurosos, sin dejar de ser amenos. Lo mismo podría decirse de los otros dos apartados dedicados a la ficción «insólita» del autor como tal, uno de los cuales asume el riesgo de su novedad.

La ficción especulativa de Borges y de sus «nietos» españoles no se suele atener a las distinciones tradicionales entre ciencia ficción y fantasía. Aunque existan ficciones que se pueden clasificar inequívocamente en una u otra modalidad, abundan también aquellas que presentan rasgos de ambas, con la consiguiente dificultad taxonómica y analítica que ello entraña si se adopta un método filológico riguroso, como ha hecho Abello Verano en este libro. Al encontrarse con esta dificultad en bastantes narraciones de Muñoz Rengel, la ha intentado vencer proponiendo un denominador común «entre lo fantástico y lo prospectivo», que en este caso es el «monstruo como motivo híbrido». Como el monstruo es un concepto muy extendido en la ficción especulativa española actual, así queda sugerida de nuevo la representatividad de Muñoz Rengel en la literatura del presente, al menos en el ámbito de la ficción especulativa. Por otra parte, la diversidad de «monstruos» es tal que resulta difícil encontrar semejanzas entre sus diversas especies indicadas en el sumario: «seres quiméricos», «bestiarios», «fantasmas», «arañas perversas e insectos mecánicos», «el gólem [...] y otros autómatas»... La enumeración misma sugiere la convivencia de seres materiales e inmateriales, de seres naturales y artificiales, de seres creados mágicamente y de otros fabricados mediante la tecnología. Tal vez habría convenido seguir distinguiendo entre unos monstruos cuya creación se ajusta a las leyes naturales y otros de índole sobrenatural, lo que habría dado lugar probablemente a una clasificación diferente en la que lo fantástico y lo prospectivo aparecerían separados, al menos desde el punto de vista hermenéutico. No obstante, la distinción correspondiente no se desprende con claridad de los textos mismos. Los monstruos de Muñoz Rengel son creaciones intelectuales cuya categoría ontológica es a menudo dudosa, tal y como corresponde a su propia concepción compleja de una realidad sin límites claramente marcados entre lo material y lo inmaterial, entre las cosas tangibles y las ideas. En este sentido, su obra parece estar más cercana a lo neofantástico que a lo propiamente prospectivo, cuya característica definitoria, según las teorías de Fernando Ángel Moreno sería el carácter proyectivo no sobrenatural.

la noción Aunque misma de «sobrenatural» sea dudosa de acuerdo con la epistemología que subyace a la narrativa de Muñoz Rengel, la ficción prospectiva implica un procedimiento de proyección a partir de alguna innovación material, generalmente de carácter tecnológico. Las consecuencias de esa innovación se suelen presentar en ficciones que desarrollan racionalmente sus premisas. Incluso en las ficciones demiúrgicas, en las que se cuestiona la solidez de la realidad a través de unas tecnologías virtuales que proponen ilusorias realidades alternativas, estas últimas son el producto de procesos físicos en el mundo material y no derivan, pues, de la manifestación de las realidades inmateriales o sobrenaturales preexistentes típicas de la ficción (neo) fantástica. Tal vez esta premisa básica, bastante ajena a los supuestos filosóficos de la literatura de Muñoz Rengel, explique que no haya cultivado apenas ese modo de ficción. Pese a ello, Abello Verano presta gran atención a su «estética de lo

prospectivo», tal como se manifiesta en unos cuantos cuentos que califica acertadamente de «ensoñaciones distópicas y apocalípticas». Todos ellos denotan una visión bastante negra de nuestro futuro conjeturado e incluso de nuestro presente, observado como si fuera una construcción monstruosa, derivada sobre todo de unas tecnologías fuera de control, sobre todo las informáticas. La actitud pesimista frente a la sociedad actual e hipotéticamente futura es muy corriente en la literatura actual, en la que la distopía se ha convertido en la variedad más corriente de la ficción prospectiva, aunque no hemos de ver en su cultivo por Muñoz Rengel la influencia de una moda, sino más bien un fruto de su cuestionamiento de la realidad, un cuestionamiento que afecta a todas sus dimensiones, sin excluir la social. Con todo, no parece que la tecnología lo disguste por ella misma, sino por el uso que hacemos, y haremos de ella. Un indicio de ello es el cariño con que presenta a los sabios victorianos empeñados en descifrar el lenguaje oculto de una muestra procedente de Marte en el cuento retrofuturista titulado «London Gardens», recogido en una antología Steampunk publicada en 2012. La tecnología, que ha permitido un viaje interplanetario, es ahí una vía para encontrar la clave del entendimiento del mundo en los propios signos de este, visto como un gigantesco artefacto semiótico. Una de las muestras descifradas, que constituye un homenaje intertextual a «La biblioteca de Babel», parece darle la vuelta a su angustioso modelo, pues si Borges nos da a entender simbólicamente el carácter indescifrable del universo, «London Gardens» indica más bien que el universo tiene sentido y que podemos descifrarlo. Además, sugiere que podemos disfrutar haciéndolo como ha disfrutado el sabio protagonista de su cuento, al que podemos considerar una contrafigura de los propios lectores de la narrativa de Muñoz Rengel, especialmente de su cuentos: sus enigmas filosóficos, sus cuestionamientos de la realidad, su hibridismo genérico o su culturalismo no son obstáculos al placer de la lectura, porque la escritura del autor hace que lo más difícil parezca asequible y que la curiosidad siempre se mantenga alerta, sin olvidar el hecho de que su humor e ironía previenen toda impresión de pedantería en su escritura.

El estilo de Muñoz Rengel suele sonar natural e incluso coloquial a veces, de manera que transmite el contenido más hondo sin que parezca tomárselo demasiado en serio, a diferencia de quienes adoptan un tono de lo más impostado y solemne para comunicar adocenadas reflexiones sentimentales blancos corazones. Es una pena que Abello Verano no haya dedicado apenas atención a ese aspecto. Aunque pedir a un autor actual que aspire a escribir con la perfección de Borges sería pedir peras al olmo en una sociedad que prima la imagen sobre la palabra, un estudio de la estilística de Muñoz Rengel como escritor representativo del grupo de «nietos de Borges» revelaría tal vez que en esto no ha escatimado esfuerzos. Sin embargo, sería injusto criticar el libro por una omisión que ni tan siquiera lo es realmente, ya que su objeto explícito es otro, el de estudiar lo insólito en la narrativa de Muñoz Rengel, y este programa lo ha cumplido con creces. Ojalá se publiquen otros libros como este sobre la obra de otros «nietos de Borges». Así se podría conseguir tal vez que la fortaleza del canon literario oficial español se abriera por fin a ellos y los colocara en el alto lugar a que los debería destinar su rigor intelectual, su inventiva y su pericia en el manejo de las estructuras y formas literarias.



## Emilia PARDO BAZÁN The Shadow

#### Translation by Álvaro Piñero González and introductory note by Mariano Martín Rodríguez

The Countess Emilia Pardo Bazán (1851-1921) stands out as one of the leading storytellers of her time. Although she has always been better known for her Naturalist novels, such as Los pazos de Ulloa [The House of Ulloa] (1886-1887), she has also authored many short stories showing her keen interest in exploring new thematic avenues in fiction. Her shorter tales are often realistic, but she did not eschew other more varied and exotic approaches. Being an extremely well-read writer, Pardo Bazán was perfectly aware of different literary and cultural traditions, both modern and ancient, as the setting of many of her stories show, from classical Greece to classical India, from Persia to early Arabia. Unlike some of her contemporaries in Spain, Pardo Bazán rarely used her outstanding ability to create plausible exotic scenarios in ancient legendary times to build up a wholly secondary world. She usually preferred to keep her more exotic creations in places recorded in human history. Nevertheless, she made at least a contribution to a particular strand of high fantasy that had already a certain tradition in her home country,

namely orientalist high fantasy written in the form of parables on different aspects of human nature and society in the framework of oriental-looking imaginary kingdoms, either unnamed or having invented names. Some examples of this sort of high fantasy parables coming from Spain have already been translated into English, such as "La esclava perfecta" (*The Perfect Slave*, 1872) by Federico de Castro (1834-1903) and "Benagissal, el profeta" (*Benagissal the Prophet*, 1924) by Alfonso Maseras (1884-1939). To these we add here "La sombra" (*The Shadow*) by Emilia Pardo Bazán, first published in the journal *Pluma y Lápiz* in 1900 and not collected in book form by the author.<sup>1</sup>

"La sombra" is a short tale featuring king Artasar, the monarch of one of the allegedly wealthiest and most powerful kingdoms in world history. However, no record of such kingdom exists as such. It is rather a purely legendary place with a monarch still more legendary than biblical Solomon, to whom he is favourably compared. Although there is an allusion to the Magi of Christian lore, the world of Artasar still remains vague with regard

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The translation is based on the following modern reissue of the tale: Emilia Pardo Bazán, "La sombra", *Cuentos completos*, published by Juan Paredes Núñez, volume 4, La Coruña, Fundación "Pedro Barrie de la Maza, conde de Fenosa", 1990, pp. 262-263.

to its place and chronology. Pardo Bazán uses the universal term 'templo' (temple) instead of church or any word related to Christianity. Moreover, Artasar uses 'tablillas' (tablets) to write his maxims as he were a Mesopotamian ruler. He keeps female slaves and is defended by guards from Nubia and the Caucasus. All these details build up an eclectic, oriental-looking secondary world akin to those of high fantasy, rather to those of true ancient history. Thus, Pardo Bazán could exploit the exotic appeal of her imagined place without compromising the universal validity of the moral lesson imparted through her parable. Artasar suffers from his low height, as it is shown by his own mocking shadow, which reads as a symbol of his physical

complex. This complex can be understood by all of us. Even successful and powerful people are not immune to it. What distinguishes Artasar as a wise king is that he is able to use his reason to accept himself and his shadow as they really are, *good* in themselves. He can then escape the golden prison of his own making and present himself in public, in front of his people, likely to rule as wisely as it can be expected from such an idealised monarch. This useful lesson is delivered by Pardo Bazán through a fine tale where the beauty of its style rivals that of its setting within a well-paced narrative. Furthermore, this story suggests that Pardo Bazán was a successful writer of the Aesthetic Movement as well.

#### EMILIA PARDO BAZÁN

## The Shadow

King Artasar, who after Suleiman or Solomon was the mightiest and the most opulent in the orb and who dreamt of having a palace hitherto unseen in which to accommodate his court's magnificence and the fantastic riches of his treasury, nursed another dream too, apparently more modest, yet infinitely harder to make true: to make himself taller. It should be noted that Artasar the Great and the Feared was of low stature, and in such heroic ages signs of strength and bodily sturdiness were worshipped. And when Artasar, after stepping down from his palanquin of cedar, ivory and gold, walked solemnly to the temple where his ancestors, the Magi, had worshipped the living God and where such saint worship still lingered on, and the crowds formed a double rampart of populace to see the king passing by, the latter's self-love suffered cruelly comparing the projection of his own shadow, tiny and lacking in majesty, with that of the herculean officers of his Nubian guard or with that of the handsome bowmen from the Caucasus, who freed the way ahead of him in the street. Like some sort of grotesque buffoon walking inseparably by his side and mocking the grandeur of his name, the irony of his short shadow accompanied him everywhere.

To prevent such sad effect, Artasar had shoes heightened with five-layered soles made for himself and began wearing a monumental tiara-like adornment around his temples. And it was as the saying goes, the cure was worse than the disease. The soles were the parody of a ridiculous plinth and rendered the king's walking awkward and clumsy, as if he were on stilts. As for the tiara, the burden of its weight forced him to bend his head, making his shadow take bizarre shapes, leading to mockery.

Desperate and weighed down by the mortification of his vanity, which suffered every time he appeared in public, Artasar resolved not to leave his palace ever again. Within the bounds of the palace there were most agreeable gardens and thick groves, and Artasar, in finding solace in them, began to forget his shadow's length and ceased to compare it to that of the rest of the mortals. And so he stopped worrying about the shape of his shadow, his soul regained peace and his heart was again at ease - the happy and serene times were back. What mattered his shadow to him? Did his shadow prevent him at all from reveling in the running of water, in the freshness beneath thickets, in the zither's chords, in the gazelle eyes and honey lips of the female slaves? Did it bar him at all from the joy of study and intellectual prowess? One day Artasar remembered, looked at his shadow... and reconciled with it – it was no longer ironic, it no longer humiliated him. It was a shadow like any other: harmless, natural, a good shadow...

And so, Artasar called for the scribe that wrote down in wax tablets the most memorable events of his reign and the maxims uttered by the monarch to compile them in a book meant to eclipse the *Proverbs* by Suleiman (what a

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shame that those tablets went lost in history!) and dictated him the following sentence:

'When we walk amongst men, we only exist for the length of our shadow. When we

retire, it is the capacity of our soul that makes us live.'

## Sofie PODLIPSKÁ A View into Hell

#### Translation by Tony Mileman and introductory note by Carleton Bulkin

The Czech author Sofie Podlipská (1833-1897) was the sister of the more famous literary figure Karolina Světlá (1830-1899). While not primarily a fantasist, Podlipská did share an interest in theosophy with many of her contemporaries.

The broader *fin de siècle* fashion of oriental mysticism so evident in Western Europe and the U.S. had fervent enthusiasts in Central Europe as well.<sup>1</sup> Bohemia itself was home to several spiritualist societies and specialized publishers of occult literature. Such interests were shared by many period scientists and scholars on both sides of the Atlantic, and they did not fall out of fashion until after World War II.

These currents are reflected in this story of involuntary trances ('magnetic sleep') from the author's posthumous collection *Pamět a smrt* (Memory and Death, 1903).<sup>2</sup> It tells of an older woman disturbed by clairvoyant visions of another world (or perhaps of our own world

reimagined), and the doctor who treats her. As such, it is an encounter between science and speculation at a time when the boundaries between them were more contested and more fluid than they later became.

The interaction between Podlipská's doctor and his patient anticipates that between the real-life Swiss clairvoyant Catherine-Elise Müller (pseud. Hélène Smith, 1861-1929), the daughter of a Hungarian merchant, and the Université de Genève professor of psychology Théodore Flournoy. This scholar concluded in a widely read study<sup>3</sup> that the source of Müller's visions was her imagination. His patient felt a keen sense of betrayal by Flournoy and disavowed her collaboration with him. Podlipská died before the publication of Flournoy's study; and while she may not have known of Müller previously, her reference in the story to "a war in India" suggests visions of the subcontinent that Müller experienced as a reincarnated Indian

Fekete 1996: 194. [Fekete, John. "Science Fiction in Hungary." *Science Fiction Studies* 16, no. 2 (July 1989): 191-200. <a href="https://zh.booksc.eu/book/27021900/659d93">https://zh.booksc.eu/book/27021900/659d93</a> (Access 22 January 2022).]

Originally published as "Vyhlídka do pekla" in Sofie Podlipská, *Pamět a smrt a jiné novelly*, Praha: Unie, 1903: 157-171.

Flournoy, Théodore. Des Indes à la planète Mars: étude sur un cas de somnambulisme avec glossolalie. 3rd ed. Genève: Georg, 1900. The work made Smith famous and led to an offer of employment from an American spiritualist (which she accepted). There have been numerous translations, including an initial one by Daniel B. Vermilye into English as A Case of Somnambulism with Glossolalia (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1900) and a recent retranslation by Sonu Shamdasani as From India to the Planet Mars: A Case of Multiple Personality with Imaginary Languages (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

princess. Regardless, Podlipská all but certainly knew of other contemporary spiritualists such as the Russian medium Vera Ivanovna Kryzhanovskaia (pseud. J. W. Rochester, 1861-1924) and the British theosophist Annie Besant (1847-1933).

In Podlipská's story, Dr. Freska appears first to be humoring his patient so that he might

understand the source of her illness, and then to conclude that any treatment must come from the same source as the visions themselves. His patient's visions then inspire him to return to a neglected love. This focus reflects early Czech science fiction and proto-science fiction's concern with human values rather than space-based adventure.

#### Sofie PODLIPSKÁ

## A View into Hell

"Another visitor? Who could it be? We are all here. I hope it is someone we know. Otherwise, that should spoil this delightful evening."

So did the members of this small and intimate gathering in a congenial, brightly lit green drawing-room begin to chatter, whisper, and crane their necks towards the door when the bell rang outside.

Meanwhile, they heard someone come into the anteroom and exchange words with the housekeeper, who had taken his coat. It was a man's voice. "Who can it be?" was written on each face. Yet one of the daughters of the family paled and then advanced towards the door.

She knew just who it was. It had been so long since he had last called on them that no one expected or counted on him to come again. No one could have guessed that it might be their dead friend, but she knew it was he, even with his voice indistinct.

God alone knew how her young heart was pounding, so hard that she could not even catch her breath.

Then the door opened, and the visitor entered. He was met by cries of joy and surprise.

Curtseying, Miss Leontina stepped back among all the others who had flocked to meet him, but he sought her out with his eyes and held his hand out to her.

This provoked her fresh indignation, bringing a fiery flush to her cheeks and a moist glow to her eyes.

"Dr. Freska!" the others cried out. "Where have you been? What have we done to offend

you to keep you away for so long? Why have you not paid us a visit? You are in good health, we hope."

Leontina asked no questions, mute but for her eyes, and she put another step between them.

Yet Dr. Freska, though bowing cheerfully to all his interrogators and pressing everyone's hand, directed a question of his own to Leontina: "What have you been doing since I last saw you so awfully long ago? Have you been happy and in good spirits?" He paused, and he clearly would have liked to ask, "Have you been thinking of me?"

Leontina whispered something with her eyes downcast. She gave the clear impression that Dr. Freska had been very much on her mind, and that his absence had distressed her – perhaps a little, perhaps very much.

Her younger sister Hedwig took the doctor's hand, shook it impatiently, and said, "well then, do tell, why have you not come for so long?"

"I'll be brief," he replied, "I simply have not had the time. And if you are not occupied with anything else, reading, music, or some play, I will tell you at length, and I can entertain you with my story all evening."

They all found the idea preferable to any other plans they had for the evening, and they took their places in a circle around the lamp.

Leontina glanced at him, and only then did she notice how distinctly pale and haggard the doctor was. He continued, "In fact, I have been so fully occupied in both body and spirit that the entire world slipped my mind."

Leontina lowered her head and thought to herself, "Love does this to men." She did not notice how Dr. Freska had turned to her nor, at first, how she alone was the object of his explanations. She then forgave him fully and listened suspensefully to his account.

"One day, first thing in the morning, my servant came into my room. He stepped up to my bed and woke me from my sleep.

"'Someone requests to speak to you,' he announced. It was still pitch dark. This was eight weeks ago, during Advent. 'What's the hurry,' I asked, 'why can't these people wait for visiting hours?'

"They have come by train and made their way straight here. They are from someplace called Kout, or something like that.'

"I had already started dressing. 'We are from the same region,' I said, 'Kout is a village near Domažlice. They all know me there, and they cannot help but think of coming to me. Who are they?'

"An old woman in peasant clothes, accompanied by a young fellow.'

"'Tell them I'll be right there.' Soon I was ushering them into my surgery.

"The old woman was trembling all over. The young man introduced himself as her grandson and the one who had brought her to me. Her eyes were squinting, and she slumped heavily rather than sat down on the divan that we had both led her to.

"I did not even have time to inquire what was the matter with the patient, for young Master Svoboda, looking at her with trepidation, said, 'For God's sake, look, she's falling asleep again. This is how the trouble starts. Maybe I can still stop her from sleeping. I kept her awake all the

way here; that's why the poor thing is so worn out.'

"'And why don't you want her to sleep?' I asked, as I brought out a bottle of smelling salts, which helped her become slightly more awake.

"'It's just awful when she falls asleep, dear doctor. She has such convulsions that our village doctor can't do a thing for them. This has gone on for God knows how many years; the convulsions used to come only sometimes, but now they happen whenever my poor granny falls asleep. It's become unbearable! We're all sick to death of it. None of us has slept for God knows how many weeks. We've got to stay up with her all night long now.'

"'There is nothing for it,' I said, 'but to let her sleep, I must see her in that state.' I called for an assistant, and on came the convulsions. I will not elaborate on them so as not to frighten you. I had never seen anything like it.

"Nevertheless, I managed to ease her convulsions sufficiently that Master Svoboda heartily declared me a miracle doctor. But I think the change of setting was also a contributing factor. Or it may be that the patient's condition had taken a new turn.

"Before long, about an hour later, my patient was dozing on the divan quite peacefully, whereas at home she would often be up all night twisting, tossing, and turning.

"I stood over her and observed her pale, gaunt, and wrinkled face. Her features were graceful, doubtless beautiful at one time. Her thick white hair cascaded down her temples to the nape of her neck.

"At first, her eyes were partly open and her breathing calm, but then a twitching grin began to play about her mouth, such as we see with a small child who is given to infantile spasms.

"Her expression grew ever more animated, her lips now in constant motion, and her breathing became more labored again. "Master Svoboda clutched my arm. 'Doctor,' he whispered, 'now she's going to start talking. This is even more dreadful.'

"'Have no fear,' I comforted him, seeing his fright. 'It is an illness, nothing more. Be brave. What is it like when she speaks?'

"'She has only spoken about twice so far, but even if we did stay with her through it all, it was impossible to listen or to watch.'

"Then go and get some fresh air, my friend, and leave the patient to me. You may leave this distressing scene; I shall observe your granny myself. I have no need of you here, and I can see that you have full confidence in me.'

"The young man gratefully complied, and I had the sleeping woman brought into the next room, where no one could disturb us. I sent for the nurse in case I should be called away, but I did not intend to leave her without good reason.

"As she lay there on the divan, Miss Leontina, she began to speak. I hope you are not nervous or frightened. And as for you, my friend Melchior, I may tell you that this was the first time I had witnessed the so-called 'magnetic' sleep you don't believe in."

\* \* \*

"And so the patient commenced to speak, but it was impossible to understand her. Her voice was constricted, and her pronunciation was slurred, as if she were inebriated. As she went on, her eyes suddenly opened, and she fixed them on a spot in front of her. She became ever more voluble. Then she raised her head, finally lifted herself up, and continued talking so fast that a froth developed around her mouth. She raised her hand and pointed a finger at where she was looking. I still could not understand a word she was saying, but I confess I was not without a certain horror at seeing her figure so unnaturally erect, and her entire posture, her

entire bearing, was such that she resembled an ancient Sibyl in every way.

"It was in fact quite a beautiful sight, even breathtaking, and I wished I could have the old woman painted in this paroxysm of hers. But she was a pitiful sight as she grew weak and her terrible convulsions left her.

"It took me longer to restore her to calm this time, and I was grateful to the nurse who so ably and conscientiously assisted me.

"I quickly made the rounds of my other patients and rushed home to my Sibyl. I decided to have her lodge with me until I could make sense of this strange case.

"After I discussed arrangements with young Master Svoboda, he left his granny in my care while he returned home for the time being. I anticipated that her treatment would be protracted, and I intended to remove her to the hospital if it proved necessary.

"But up to that point, I hardly expected this to become such a mysterious and interesting a case of magnetic sleep. I had developed no firm opinion as yet. After her last convulsions, the old woman slept for nearly twenty hours, and when she came to, it was a long while before she could understand what was happening to her.

"At last, she recalled how her grandson had brought her to Prague, and with tearful gratitude she thanked me for having taken such good care of her. She could not grasp why I had been keeping her in my own flat and attributed this to plain humanity. This won me boundless praise from her, and it was impossible to explain that her good opinion of me was only half deserved. In vain, I tried to convince her that I intended to make a study of her and to make some kind of discovery in her illness. To everything I said, she retorted 'no, no, you must be the soul of kindness to keep me here. I know what a bother I am to my family at home.'

"I was obliged to endure her unwonted adoration, and I repaid her good opinion of me with genuine kindness.

"In time, I came to see the advantage of this circumstance as well.

"The poor woman was as fearful of falling asleep as her grandson had been.

"She had been telling me that, in her sleeping state, she was not aware of herself and yet she would develop a sense of vast and dark misery. Then when she woke, she would have a sense of hopelessness.

"I consoled her with reassurances and promised to ease her condition so that at least she would not be afraid of falling asleep.

"As evening came on, she fell into a slumber that presented the same manifestations as before. Yet I managed to restore her calm through my ministrations. I waited eagerly for her to begin to speak again. Once she did, I meant to test her ability to respond to questions. And so indeed I did, but she could not hear me.

"I sat down beside her and took her hands. This was immediately helpful. She took a deep breath and spoke distinctly for the first time:

"Ah, it is you, my benefactor. Stay here with me. I am on a journey, but if you take my hand, I shall not lose my way."

"I will stay with you,' I said, 'provided you tell me where you are and what you are seeing."

"I am in what they say was once a paradise, where the first people lived," she told me, and she then began to describe the landscape more vividly and more precisely than any travelogue I had ever read.

"Some moments later, she was observing other landscapes unlike any known to me from geography. The scenes she described were sometimes blissful, sometimes poignant or nightmarish. At one point, she enabled me to witness a war in India. All this was shimmering in in her mind like a Fata Morgana in the air.

"I could never have thought such wonders possible, and I know not how to explain it.

"I invited some colleagues to these scenes, but unfortunately my patient would never speak intelligibly in their presence, even when the nurse was there. I could never induce her to speak clearly unless we were alone. But when that was the case, she would become ever more communicative and more animated. I was beside myself with astonishment: for her language would take wing, become poetic, and she would often speak in verse.

"Then as time went on, she would have visions not only of the present but also of the past. She told me of things utterly unknown to any living soul, and I should have taken them for sheer inventions had not so much about them proven so remarkably accurate.

"At other times, she would narrate historical events that were familiar to me. I have kept a diary of all this, dear Leontina, and I will bring it to you whenever you like. You cannot wonder at my being so captivated by all this. Believe me when I tell you that I sometimes felt as if I had lost my mind. I would pass entire nights without sleeping; if I were not at my Sibyl's side, I would become almost be beside myself with concern. My thoughts were in a constant churn, spinning round and round in my mind.

"What unsuspected abilities lie dormant in the human spirit? What is this sixth sense that can perceive things distant or past, or perhaps of the future? Why does it manifest itself solely in the context of some pathological state?

"I have reached no conclusion on this, but I am certain that the future holds the answer to these riddles. For the time being, I can only relate what I have observed."

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"But the strangest thing of all still lay in store for me. Indeed, it plunged me into chaos. "It was a gloomy day. The sky was so dreary that there was hardly any light. I woke up in the morning after a brief and fitful sleep. The first thing I did was to ask after the old woman. She was still fast asleep. Her seizures had persisted until midnight, and she began to sleep normally only about two hours afterward.

"I rushed to the city, where I went about my rounds in distraction. All my patients were on the road to recovery, all normal cases. The sounds of Christmas Eve could be heard in their homes. This was of no interest to me, and yet it is a day so dear to us since childhood that it stirs something in our hearts, something of joy and sorrow, of good fortune and bad, like bewitching sounds from the heavenly realm, so that we are involuntarily either uplifted or downcast. I too could not help but think several times that day, 'tonight it shall be Christmas.' And then these strange, recent experiences affected me all the more deeply.

"I returned home in the afternoon, and it was already dark again. I had taken lunch in a tavern away from the house. At home, the midday meal was long over. The old woman came to meet me in the vestibule. She had spotted me when I rang the bell. Helping me out of my coat, she asked whether I was tired. She was eager to be of help, so I asked her to brew me some tea.

"'Am I ever going to get better?' she asked as she poured it for me.

"The question startled me. It weighed on my conscience. While I had alleviated her suffering and been pondering it day and night, the truth is that I would have been less renowned for curing her than for a study of her illness. At the time, I might even have been sorry if it had all been broken off and left me unable to observe such a strange phenomenon.

"I told her I had hopes for her recovery, and she responded quickly and gratefully: "'Oh, I know, I know I'm in the best of hands!'

"I smiled distractedly, and she moved away and sat on a chair by the tiled woodstove.

"Immersed in my thoughts, I remained seated at the table. The lamp was flickering on my bureau by the window, where I had asked her to put it, thinking I would go sit there after finishing tea. The light at the tea-table was faint. Crimson sparks were shooting from the wood stove.

"Suddenly, the old woman stood up and advanced into the middle of the half-darkened room.

"I thought she was going to clear away the tea things, but she was asleep! She was untroubled by any convulsions at the time. Sleep had come over her while she was sitting by the stove, that unfathomable sleep in which she would experience her visions.

"There was no need for me to take her hand. Her speech was clearer than ever. Her voice was resonant.

"'Come with me, come with me,' she said, solemnly beckoning me. 'I have been traveling far, to a place I had never been. My head is still reeling from the journey.'

"As she staggered, I shot up and caught her in my arms. I placed her on the divan and clutched her hand.

"She was trembling, her teeth chattering. I felt goosebumps on her hands.

"'Such cold,' she said, 'such cold! Beyond even the cruelest frosts at home. What fun we have when it's cold in our lands, how the children's faces flush bright red, and how each of them scampers off to be at home by the hearth. Of course, we have some who lack hearths, the poor things. Unless they find shelter with good people, sadly, they are bound to perish. But here? They do not even have hearths at all. Don't they know how to build fires? But how strange my

eyes are; I can simply look upon anything, and I understand the reasons behind it. There is no need to ask questions of anyone.

"This is how I was certain they knew, in that vale, how to build fires, but they were all quickly blown out. This happens because of the relentless wind that howls here day and night. It lasts all year round, and everything is constantly being toppled over. It is impossible to build here. Every hearth is immediately turned to rubble, unable to withstand the gale. The spreading flames then lay waste to the countryside until there is no food to be had.

"'Yet I can see shapes. Are they people? They are crawling about on all fours. Sometimes they manage to build shelters, but otherwise they dwell in pits. What kind of existence is this? But perhaps they can at least keep themselves safe there.

"The poor wretches, doomed to eternal darkness! They may all be blind. I am able to see here, since I use my inner vision, but what darkness! My God! It is never this dark at home. There is always some flicker of light. There is nothing here, nothing! Where has the light of heaven gone that it never breaks through here? Nor is there even the dawn that comes after so many months to the polar regions I've traveled.

"'No, no, there is no dawn here. But even in such darkness, the people there can make everything out, perhaps by touch, who can say. Of course, that must be it. We have blind people too, and how capable they are. But here, absolutely everyone is blind, and no sighted person guides their steps.

"Oh, horror! What is that rumbling? It is water. Such ghastly water, dark, unseen, raging, and violent. Everything is deluged! That was a shelter for the people who live here.

"Oh, what horror! Such horror! They are fighting for their lives, but it is no good. Death consumes them. The wretched corpses are floating away, off to somewhere in the eternally restless seas.

"A few of the unfortunate creatures have escaped. With their eyes capable of seeing in the dark, they keep a lookout for much that is in their environment.

"And I can see all of it, I can see how every so often the floodwaters rise, and each time they lay waste to everything, and it is impossible to live in the highlands given the storms and the winds, given the cold and the great adversity.

"'However, there is no way to guard against the floods, no protection, and nowhere to take refuge. Survival is ultimately a matter of chance. And yet they are alive here. Strangely enough, they shall not lose their zest for life. Even after every disaster, so very many children are born. The poor babes! As darling as young ones anywhere.

"'But it is impossible to see to all the children; since there are so many of them, they cannot feed them all, and look now, here they go dying again in droves.

"'God only knows how all this life has held on at all, this progeny of a miserable generation of beings. Look, new children have been born, and although some will thrive, how many more of them shall perish. We have no experience of this where I come from.

"'See there! The horror, the horror! An earthquake. Everything has been laid waste all over again. The naked who were not crushed and wiped out have been forced to cover many miles in search of some new patch of land that can barely sustain them. My God! To make such a quest in that never-ending wind!

"'Forming a long caravan, they make their way. Look, they can see a valley in the depths of the darkness. It seems well hidden from the wind, and the dark maw of the cave greets them like some promised land. Joyful, they hurry toward it.

"'And once there, alas! A volcanic fissure has opened up, spewing out lava and wiping the wretches out as it erupts.

"'Suddenly a light, terrifying and blinding, bursts forth in the sky. Dear God, have mercy! This must be hell. I must go, I cannot bear to remain here.

"'But these poor wretches must hold on somehow,' a voice says to me, I know not whence.

"'So they must, and indeed several have escaped this catastrophe. They pour into the valley, but it has been buried in ash. And they must wander, wander without end.

"'I can't see them anymore, where have they gone?

"'Oh, that I could find my way home. Am I damned? Has eternal justice cast me forever down to hell?'

"At this point, my poor clairvoyant began to scream and thrash so violently that I could not remain a mere observer. I was so overcome with pity that tears fell from my eyes.

"With all of my will, I took both her hands in mine and cried out, 'tell me what it is that will cure you! Think on it, I implore you. There can and must be some answer that you yourself know.'

"My voice restored her to calm. She ceased to tremble and replied in a faint voice, 'Yes, I will think on an answer. Thank you for urging me on to this. But just one moment. There is something keeping me here. I realize that I am not in hell. I am told this is a part of our world, nothing more; although where it is, God knows. It is a part of creation where disasters are the rule, where one prospers only by chance and by exception. God continually breathes new life into this desolation so that Death not reign supreme.

"Consider the sheer wonder, the miracle of it. These beings neither despair nor curse their

fate. If you could but see their perseverance. Look, they're having a feast. Here in their pits, they are singing hymns of praise that they are still alive.

"'They rejoice when a child is born to them, and they never lament, never curse, even in the greatest distress. Each faces death so boldly that it holds no dread. While taking leave of the dead brings them sorrow, they believe that the dead are brought back to life in other living things. They support one another in true brotherhood and find recompense for disasters and calamities in everlasting kindness toward each other. There are no wars, no quarrels, no judgments.

"'The light of love shines in the darkness of their fate.'

"The old woman straightened up suddenly and then fell backwards so violently that I thought she was done for. I caught her in my arms, and when I saw that she was still breathing, I once again loudly bid her tell me what would cure her. Holding her firmly, I gripped her with all my might.

"Then she spoke in a weary voice: 'Say...say this: "Human Spirit, keep within your bounds!" Say it three times!'

"I obeyed, but as I said it for the third time, I could barely speak the words. It proved so very difficult, and I had a feeling that no one had the right to order a human spirit about in such a way. After all, nature herself sweeps away boundary stones and snatches us up into unknown currents. And yet I managed it. I am a doctor, and it is my duty to bring relief to the suffering."

"Oh, had I been in her place!" Leontina exclaimed, "I would not have asked to be cured."

Dr. Freska continued: "No sooner had I said these words than my clairvoyant went to sleep as quietly and soundly as a child.

"I stayed at her side for some time, leaning over her, and then it occurred to me that it was Christmas Eve. And her words came back to me: 'The light of love shines in the darkness of their fate.'

"Then I comforted myself with the thought that I had forbidden this human spirit to wander further.

"After all, there is no solution to the secrets of life and eternity but love everlasting. I sat down and fell asleep, greatly fatigued. When I awoke, I saw a light in the room.

"It was coming from the opposite window, where a Christmas tree was lit and the children were scampering around it.

"My clairvoyant remained asleep, and I wondered where her mind had been visiting, in what far reaches of the world, and whether she had looked in on some other planet.

"What a dark vista she had opened for me! "But love, love!

"I was thinking of love."

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"The old woman had been genuinely cured. I know how improbable all this seems. I myself believe that in time it may feel like a dream, and outside of this dear circle I know not whether I will dare speak of it, lest I should be thought a charlatan.

"I accompanied my clairvoyant to the train station this morning. Thanking me sincerely, she went off to the waiting room, small, stooped, simple, and uneducated."

When Dr. Freska had finished speaking, the silence was so profound that the buzzing of a fly could be heard, but then a lively and spirited conversation erupted.

He drew near to Leontina and whispered something in her ear, took her hand, and she nodded to him. They had so much to say to each other that Dr. Freska was unable to give answer to the many and curious questions from the rest of the gathering.

## Ángeles VICENTE An Absurd Tale

## Translation by Diana Palardy and introductory note by Mariano Martín Rodríguez

Recent research in different countries has brought new life to the work of women authors who had been neglected for different reasons, not all related to enduring patriarchal views among critics. Some of them were mainly forgotten due to the fact that they did not succeed in becoming famous in their own times, especially if they preferred to write in the genres that were frowned upon by the guardians of the literary canon. An example of this could be the fate of Ángeles Vicente, a Spanish writer born in 1878 who died in complete obscurity. Even today her date of death is unknown, although it can be assumed that she died before World War II. Her last known texts are from the 1920s. Vicente had published a few books in the early 20th century, namely a collection of fantastic stories based on Spiritism titled Sombras (Shadows, 1910), as well as Zezé (Zeze, 1908), a novel of manners of the 'regenerationist'1 style, which was quite common in Spain back then, but portraying a lesbian relationship that linked that novel to the copious erotic narratives in Spain, which were as popular among a wide readership as

they were despised by mainstream critics. That relationship was endorsed in the novel. This is why it was reassessed and republished as soon Spanish critics looked for early treatments of homosexuality in their modern literature. Vicente then acquired a new, better status as a writer. This has contributed to the recovery of both her Sombras and of another, more varied collection of short stories titled *Los buitres* (The Vulturs, 1908). Among the tales of the latter volume, the one titled "Cuento absurdo" (An Absurd Tale) is one of the few earliest narratives of anticipation written by a Spanish woman back then. It was also one of the few which were fully science fiction, too. This tale, where irony finely emerges from a simple and non-judgmental style of writing, narrates a global disaster caused by the use of technology by a mad scientist figure. Vicente eschews, however, any caricature of the man who extinguishes humankind by actually using the apocalyptic machine that he has invented, a machine that kills anyone instantly and on the spot, as the poignant but nevertheless mildly humorous descriptions of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Regeneracionismo (Regenerationism) was a cultural movement influential around the turn of the 19th century in Spain which sought to find the reason for the backwardness of the country compared to other Western European nations and proposed possible solutions, often related to an ethical approach to public matters and institutions. Narrative was often used to advance regenerationist ideas by showing the defects of the contemporary order and voicing alternatives through fiction, using mostly the realistic mode.

some of its victims in the city show. His global genocide was, however, intended for the greater good, as a matter of course. He wanted to put an end to all social evils by creating a tabula rasa of the old society and building a new, utopian one by saving a few chosen ones who would achieve it. The result is as one would expect knowing

human nature. How the scientist reacts to his failure is something that the kind readers will discover reading the following translation,<sup>2</sup> but we will still say that Vicente applies the principle that if reality does not conform to the utopian ideal, all the worse for reality, literally...

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> This is based on the following edition: Ángeles Vicente, "Cuento absurdo," *Los buitres*, edición e introducción de Ángela Ena Bordonada, Murcia, Editora Regional de Murcia, 2006, pp. 133-146.

#### ÁNGELES VICENTE

## **An Absurd Tale**

The social problem was definitively resolved by Guillermo Arides, the most incredible and brilliant anarchist of all time—past, present and future.

A passionate cultivator of science, he had devised a way to destroy humanity in a second, utilizing mysterious interplanetary fluids, accumulated and guided with admirable precision through a complicated apparatus he had invented. At a determined, propitious moment, humans (and animals that resemble humans in their physical constitution) would be annihilated. No one would be saved, except for him, Arides, and the chosen ones of his most zealous fellow believers of both sexes.

Since Arides made no attempt to conceal his project, he was detained and brought before a judge. But when he calmly presented his plan to destroy the world, he was ridiculed and thought to be completely insane. Since his madness was deemed harmless, he was set free. Even his own friends began to doubt his rationality, such was the magnitude of the undertaking. Nevertheless, they supported him and obeyed him, influenced by his persuasive eloquence as the enlightened one.

Such was the state of affairs when this momentous day arrived, and the apostle and his chosen ones congregated in his large laboratory.

"Brethren," Arides said to his followers, "I have called you here today because the time has come to end the existing tyranny, with all its privileges, with all its infamy. In one second, the evil work of so many centuries will be destroyed, and on this planet, no inhabitants will be left

except those of us who are gathered in this conveniently isolated enclosure. We will no longer have any laws aside from our instincts. All of you will be entrusted with the lofty mission of creating a new humanity. Our freedom will be our happiness...

Everyone listened to him in silence. The women were frightened. The men waited expectantly, skeptical, but also not free from fear.

Arides continued his discourse, while moving about his lab from one side to the other to perform some final tweaking of the machines. Then he turned to those surrounding him and asked, "Are you ready? Do you feel detached from the rest of mankind? Do you wish, like I do, for its destruction, so that from its ashes a new free and perfect humanity may arise?"

"Yes!" they all answered, captivated.

"May our wish be fulfilled!" exclaimed Arides, smiling blissfully. Then he approached a propulsion device and pulled a small lever.

All who surrounded him let loose a scream of terror. The atmosphere was inflamed with a vivid light and a violent jolt shook the earth.

Arides turned to his comrades with a triumphant gesture:

"Consummatum est! (*It has been brought to an end!*)" he shouted, raising his arms.

His companions, now recovered, looked at him with shock. They were moved, uneasy, but doubt was reflected on their faces: Could humanity possibly be destroyed so easily, in just an instant? Arides admonished them: "Do you doubt my work? Doesn't the absolute silence indicate anything to you? Listen! The old civilization has died!"

In fact, a deathly silence surrounded them, not disturbed by so much as a rustle of wind on that calm day. The carriages and trams circulating, the voices of the street vendors, the birds singing, all the sounds, the complicated harmony of life, which moments earlier had been spreading out in confusion over a wide area, had stopped.

A shudder of terror shook everyone.

"Go and look around town," continued Arides, "and you will be convinced!"

They followed him, disconcerted.

The streets and plazas were covered with rigid, inert bodies. Trams had derailed because of a lack of steering, one carriage had crashed against a wall, another had turned over with its wheels continuing to spin dizzily in the air... Some pedestrians were still standing, immobile. Ismael, the youngest of the survivors, touched one of these cadavers and screamed in terror when he saw it fall heavily to the ground.

Arides smiled and encouraged them to continue on.

They entered the stores and houses they found along the way. It was the same scene over and over again: There were rigid, inert bodies everywhere. Some had fallen and others stayed in the position they were in when the catastrophe hit. In the stores, shopkeepers and salespeople were gathered in groups, displaying distinct attitudes, some smiling, others serious and stoic, as if they were about to continue their conversation. In the houses, residents had been engaged in tending to their domestic needs. If it were not for the cadavers that had collapsed and for the rigidity of those that maintained a lively attitude, one might even doubt there had been a cataclysm. A servant was bending down

in front of a stove. A young woman was ironing beside her. In an office, there was a serious man that was reading, seated comfortably in an armchair. In another residence, an elegant lady was preparing her headdress...

Back in the street, a funeral procession, whose participants had toppled over, one on top of the other, blocked the way, forcing them to take a detour:

"Even the ones accompanying the deceased are dead!" exclaimed Arides, ironically.

There were a fair number of people stepping out onto their balconies, and hands of beggars reaching out for spare change, seated against the walls or the doorjambs. Here and there you could see dogs, immobile, as if about to race, dead little birds, carriages stopped as if the driver had fallen from his seat because the horse had slipped... In the door of a barbershop, the barber's assistant was leaning against the door frame, smiling at a seamstress, who was now lying down, sprawled out on the sidewalk...

As they came out onto a plaza, they found themselves forced to stop in front of a compact mass of cadavers clumped together, many of them on foot, with an expectant look on their faces, as if they were listening to a silent orator extending his arms from a large balcony.

"These are the strikers," observed Arides, "And there on the balcony is the mayor."

They had to go back, retracing their steps, and as they turned a corner, they found a group of soldiers that were perhaps heading toward the plaza to stop the demonstration of the workers. They were lying on the ground, rifles in hand, resembling a group of heroic combatants that had died under enemy fire. The officer that commanded them appeared to be lying on top of his soldiers, his head positioned upright and his back leaning to the right.

Some distance away stood a church and they headed determinedly toward it, entering

the premises. A priest was standing upright at the altar. The fluctuating lights of the candles vaguely illuminated the static, downcast faces of the worshippers in prayer. Arides and his companions stayed there for a while, examining everything. They had gotten used to the spectacle and felt strong confronting this widespread mortality.

"Have you seen this old man?" said one of the men to his companion.

"He looks like a saint!" she responded.

"That's why he is better off in the other world," exclaimed Arides, "'Let's go."

They left the church and continued on. Street after street, everywhere the same spectacle was repeated.

"Are you now convinced of the success of my work?" Arides asked his companions in the end

"Yes," one answered, "without a doubt. But now the bad part will be when the bodies decompose. We'll have an epidemic."

"Everything has been anticipated. I could burn everything in an instant, but that will not be necessary. I can just send the same current through space in a few minutes so that all the bodies will be reduced to ashes. Let's go to my lab and you shall see."

Indeed, they all gathered together in the lab and Arides turned on his device for a few minutes. Afterwards, they went around the city and saw that the annihilation was complete. Where there had been bodies, now there were only piles of rags.

Arides addressed a long speech to his companions, telling them to settle down wherever they wanted and to do whatever they pleased, according to their doctrines, that everything was theirs and that it was up to them to start a new free and happy generation.

"Take advantage of whatever you find at hand," he concluded, "but do not accumulate money, since that won't help you with anything. The land is ours!"

The group dispersed after brief deliberations, every person scouting around for accommodations, fixing them up according to their tastes. And Arides returned to his house satisfied, bringing with him the companion of his choice.

The new society was established and multiplied at will, but not without a few battles over the distribution of goods and women, even when Arides attempted to avoid quarrels. More serious fights occurred when they had to begin the exhausting work of tilling the land because provisions were running out. Ultimately, it did not take long for ambition and pride to make an appearance, followed by a procession of envy and resentment, and consequently, the struggle for men to tyrannize other men, in which the humble and the weak bore the brunt. It seemed that Nature was pleased with imposing herself on those rebels that had tried to mock her.

The doctrines of Arides no longer held influence.

Arides had fought to establish the new society in accordance with his ideals, but now he was tired: he saw the futility of his effort; he witnessed, regretfully, the resurgence of the most brutal instincts amongst those free creatures, who did not understand that by attempting to dominate one another, they were turning into slaves themselves. He felt compelled to assert himself and he knew that they obeyed him out of fear since he was no longer like a brother to his comrades, but an enemy, and that he himself saw the others as enemies too... and he regretted what he had done.

One night, with everyone gathered around Arides, they started arguing, as was customary:

"I am no longer giving any of you advice about anything," said Arides, in response to a question. "You are attempting to re-establish past customs. You don't want to live in peace. You are full of ambition. You are breaking with the tradition that we just started. You are re-establishing property. You are rendering our yearning for perfection futile. You are continuing the barbaric and merciless history of one hundred years of servitude and control, and you wish to pass it on to your children..."

"It's the fault of this man," exclaimed someone, "since he tries to take possession of everything that he comes upon. Like how he has moved into a palace and doesn't let anyone else inside!"

"That palace is my house," responded the accused. "I have taken possession of it just like you have taken possession of other things, and no one else may enter because I have the full right to live in peace and make myself comfortable!"

"I object," stated another person, "to the inconveniences that Manlio imposes on me. He insists on me being his servant, just because he is more enlightened and intelligent than me."

"And what would you do, you ignorant brute, if I didn't provide you with guidance?" shouted Manlio.

"The bad part is," said Ismael, "that the work has been divided poorly, because not everyone has the same willingness to work. If I produce ten of something, I want ten of something in return!"

"If you produce ten," answers Manlio, "you should settle for one and take the other nine from what others produce."

"But if the others don't produce ten or the quality is inferior or if I don't need it, I'll always end up losing in the distribution because I produce more. So there's Sixto, who now fancies himself a poet. Should I give him part of the fruit of my labor in exchange for some verses, which aren't useful to me at all? I don't even know, nor do I care, if they are good or bad! That isn't work!" "I, for one," interrupted Esther, the most beautiful and coveted of the survivors, "wish to leave my companion Honorio."

"Why?" exclaimed Honorio, with a blazing look in his eyes.

"I am exercising my rights. Arides has said that we are all free."

"You have lost your mind because you are so spoiled by everyone!"

"That's right!" agreed Aciscla angrily, "My man is crazy for you. But you'll be sorely disappointed if you think that I'm ever going to let that happen..."

"Esther is right," observed someone, "she is free, and if she wants to leave Honorio, no one has any reason to stop her."

"She will leave Honorio," shouted a male voice, "but not to be with you..."

"We'll see about that!"

"Not you or the other one!" exclaimed another voice. "Esther has promised to be my companion if she leaves Honorio."

"And do you believe that I am going to allow you to walk out on me?" shrieked a female voice, quivering with rage.

"I'm perfectly in my right to do it!"

"Here, no one has a right to anyone else!"

"But there are obligations!"

"It seems that Esther intends to drive all of us mad. She will want to be the queen!"

"It's because of her beauty!" shouted Sixto.

"Here he comes with his pompous poetry!

"We don't allow kings or queens!"

"She will belong to whoever wins her!"

"Look! Let's see if someone dares to fight me for her!"

"I will!"

"And I will!"

"And we will!..."

The chaos was frightening, fists landed like clubs on irritated faces, and all sorts of curses and insults spewed forth from their mouths.

Arides commanded attention with a gesture of irritation and a threatening tone of voice, and each of the contenders went their separate ways, grumbling like beasts just waiting for the chance to take down the trainer.

That night Arides retired to his home, more downtrodden and disillusioned than ever. What were all those years of study and sacrifice for? What could one expect from such brutally selfish creatures? What to do...? It's true that he could be the arbitrator, the king, the tyrant, whatever he wished, prevailing through terror, but instead of returning to the state of things that he had so despised, he would prefer to end everything. The new generation appeared to have atavistic instincts and one could hardly trust them. Even his companion had abandoned him...

He went to bed, but he could not sleep: along with disillusionment, desperation took hold of him. His nerves were frayed and an insatiable appetite for destruction overpowered and inflamed him.

"There is no doubt," he finally exclaimed, jumping out of bed, "selfishness, cruelty, wrath, envy, hatred, and bestial instincts are unavoidably innate in human nature. I should have thought not of transforming society, but of transforming humans... But is that something that is within

my means...? And is it worth it that this species, which only thinks of exploiting, oppressing and taking from others, should survive? Can I not imagine annihilating them? And supposing I could, do I have the right to do it...?

He stood up, with a gesture of irritation and an irate look, opened the window, contemplated the scenery in the light of the moon for a long time, as if he wanted to bid his final farewell to life, and finally headed, groping his way in the darkness, to the lab.

As he entered the large room, his heart felt oppressed: there were his mysterious machines, the docile devices that he had considered to be his most faithful friends, but which had also betrayed him. He had dreamed of destruction for the purpose of edification, but only the former had been realized...

In the shadows, with the complete certainty of one who manages instruments that are familiar to him, he tightened pulleys, adjusted gears, established contacts, and resolutely grabbed the handle of a hand-wheel and turned it with the energy of a madman.

The air burned as if it were a flammable gas, violent jolts shook the floor with the piercing, grating sound of a monstrous earthquake and the city was transformed into an immense bonfire...

# Sonetos latinoeuropeos del yo apocalíptico

#### Nota introductoria y traducción de Mariano Martín Rodríguez

Es notorio que el soneto es una de las grandes formas estróficas de la tradición del verso en las lenguas europeas desde su invención en la Italia medieval. Desde entonces se ha usado sobre todo en la poesía lírica, entendiendo por tal aquella que expone las vivencias, sentimientos e ideas personales de un yo literario, que se suele identificar convencionalmente con el yo autoral. Ese yo lírico puede describir sus emociones y su historia a través del soneto, que tendría así un núcleo narrativo al menos implícito, pero no suele entrañar la existencia de un mundo secundario de orden ficticio, sea este histórico (realista) o fabuloso (fantástico). Esto está especialmente claro en el soneto lírico moderno posterior al romanticismo y, en mayor medida, a la Modernidad del siglo xx, cuando la dimensión narrativa se destierra de la lírica, al menos en aquella canonizada por las instituciones culturales que se perpetúa mediante libros de texto, historias de la literatura y premios oficiales. Sin embargo, todo poema en verso puede ser narrativo, como lo ha sido durante milenios, y también lo puede ser el soneto. De hecho, existen bastantes en los que se prescinde del yo y la efusión lírica. Así ocurre en los magistrales sonetos parnasianos del libro Les trophées [Los trofeos] (1893) de José-Maria de Heredia (1842-1905), que constituyen estampas de aspecto objetivo de momentos de la historia

real y mitológica de Occidente, combinando lo descriptivo y lo narrativo para evocar exóticos mundos secundarios *realistas* del pasado. Otros sonetos latinoeuropeos del mismo período llamado de la Decadencia (1870-1914), van incluso más allá en lo ficcional al construirse en ellos fabulosos mundos secundarios, incluso del tipo que se podría considerar épico-fantástico, tales como «La montagna fatale» [La montaña fatal] (*Empedocle ed altri versi* [Empédocles y otros versos], 1892), de Mario Rapisardi (Mario Rapisarda, 1844-1912) y «La doma dels déus» [La doma de los dioses] (La columna de foc [La columna de fuego], 1911), de Gabriel Alomar.

Otros sonetos abandonan el pasado, prefiriendo especular sobre el futuro, en especial sobre finales catastróficos de nuestra civilización e incluso de nuestro planeta, tema que los decadentistas cultivaron a menudo a raíz del pesimismo que solían exhibir sobre el curso de la historia de Europa, sobre todo de sus países de lengua romance, considerados en declive. Entre las descripciones del apocalipsis que barruntaban los decadentes latinoeuropeos hay algunas hechas en la forma métrica que nos ocupa. Entre aquellas hechas en tercera persona destacan «Le dernier océan» [El último océano] (La mer [El mar], 1886), de Jean Richepin (1849-1926), y algunos de los Sonnets [Sonetos] (1898) de Pimodan

Gabriel de la Vallée de Rarecourt, marqués de Pimodan, 1856-1924), por ejemplo, «Le bon chimiste» [El buen químico] o «Dernier Sélénite» [Último selenita], entre otros de este autor, muy interesado por la especulación sobre el fin del mundo, del nuestro y de otros. Sin embargo, Pimodan, a quien hay que contar entre los grandes poetas cósmicos de su época pese al olvido en que pronto cayó su obra, no se limitó a esta clase de sonetos clasificables en la ficción especulativa, al menos en la medida en que construyen situaciones y mundos ficticios. Su inspiración apocalíptica también encontró expresión en algún soneto que se opone a la tradicional oposición entre lo lírico subjetivo y lo ficticio objetivo<sup>1</sup>. En el titulado «Sonnetcrépuscule» [Soneto-crepúsculo] (Lyres et clairons; Le coffret de perles noires [Liras y clarines; La caja de perlas negras], 1899)<sup>2</sup>, el yo lírico es inocultable. Es el propio yo del poeta el que canta y rima, y que se ajusta en todo al egocentrismo de la lírica subjetiva tradicional, con ese yo que se muestra sin pudor e incluso hace hincapié en su propio y alto valor de artista, tal y como sugiere en ese soneto la alusión a la musa que lo inspira. No faltan las consabidas protestas ante la supuesta incomprensión contemporánea de la voz del poeta, que sueña con verse reivindicado, vengado, en un futuro más o menos distante. El carácter lírico de tales manifestaciones es obvio, pero no lo es menos que Pimodan evoca en su soneto el fin del mundo y que imagina la manera en que se producirá, lo cual es claramente ficticio. El uso de los tiempos verbales del futuro indica que se trata de una profecía. Sin embargo, no se trata

de una profecía revelada, sino que es el producto de una especulación. Así pues, este soneto lírico es también *ficción especulativa*.

Este soneto profético francés había tenido un precursor en otro portugués escrito por António Gomes Leal (1849-1921) titulado «O astrólogo» [El astrólogo] (Claridades do Sul [Claridades del sur], 1875)<sup>3</sup>, el cual se centra en la profecía propiamente dicha. El tono admonitorio y vehemente es el de los profetas bíblicos, a los que se alude indirectamente al compararse el yo, que ha adoptado la máscara de un astrólogo, con un sabio caldeo. También bíblica es la visión de la destrucción universal como fruto de una degradación ética integral causada por un Enemigo, con mayúsculas, que no sería sino la personificación demoníaca del Mal. Hasta los signos del fin recuerdan la parafernalia simbólica del Apocalipsis por excelencia, el de Juan, del Nuevo Testamento. Con todo, el yo profético es uno moderno, subjetivo. No existe revelación divina, sino largo estudio y, sobre todo, todo se funda en la propia autoridad de yo, un yo que es lírico y «vidente» a la manera en que nos ha acostumbrado la Modernidad desde las teorías del voyant [vidente] poético de su contemporáneo Arthur Rimbaud (1854-1891). Al faltar toda idea de divinidad como instancia inspiradora, es el yo lírico el que acaba asumiendo por completo el anuncio del final colectivo, una destrucción que su mera visión personal presenta como ineluctable. Lo que le indigna a su yo no podrá sino recibir el castigo definitivo. Ahí tenemos una magna inflación de la personalidad que aceptamos arrastrados por la apasionada expresividad del poema, cuyo

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Objetivo por serlo los mundos de la ficción al ser esencialmente externos al yo personal, aunque la ficción sea homodiegética.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> La traducción se basa en la edición original, que se puede encontrar en línea: Pimodan, «Sonnet-crépuscule», *Lyres et clairons; Le coffret de perles noires*, Paris, Léon Vannier, 1899, pp. 286-287.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> La traducción sigue el original de la edición crítica siguiente: Gomes Leal, «O astrólogo», *Claridades do Sul*, edição de José Carlos Seabra Pereira, Lisboa, Assírio & Alvim, 1998, p. 200.

ritmo y movimiento conducen naturalmente a la palabra culminante final, en mayúsculas.

Otros sonetos latinoeuropeos del yo apocalíptico abandonan el procedimiento profético para adoptar otro más decididamente ficcional, al presentar el fin de la civilización como algo ya acaecido y que el poeta observa visionariamente. Así ocurre, por ejemplo, en el soneto rumano «Neant» [Nada] (Sonete Uraniei [Sonetos de Urania] 1902), de Gabriel Donna (1877-1944)<sup>4</sup>, cuyos primeros cuartetos ofrecen una bella descripción de la Tierra seca y muerta, sobre la que el Sol, personificado como Apolo, dardea trágicamente sus rayos, iluminando así ardientemente el desierto donde apenas se divisan algunos restos de piedra, y concretamente una esfinge, que la poesía simbolista y la literatura decadentista en general solían evocar como metáfora del misterio de la existencia y del universo. Ese mundo, al que se accede a través de una visión subjetiva, resulta al final dudoso. Aunque la bella expresividad de lo descrito le confiere un alto grado de materialidad ficticia, los últimos versos introducen una interpretación que hace que nos podamos preguntar sobre la categoría ontológica de la Tierra muerta. La visión puede ser, al cabo, una mera metáfora de un estado emocional de desolación desesperada ante la imposibilidad de recibir de la simbólica esfinge respuestas a las preguntas que plantea el vo escritor, ese genio que sostiene la visión entera, tras suscitarla, y que acaba así por combinar ambiguamente lo lírico y lo especulativo.

Una estructura semejante al de este soneto de Donna presenta uno catalán de Jeroni Zanné (1873-1934) titulado «Ciutat morta» [Ciudad muerta] (Imatges i melodies

[Imágenes y melodías], 1906)5. Ahí no es el mundo entero el que se describe con sus pétreos restos mortales, sino una ciudad suntuosa del pasado a juzgar por sus elementos arquitectónicos medievales y renacentistas, una ciudad poblada por aristócratas y clérigos capaces de sufragar tales obras. Ese ambiente se presenta al principio de forma muy original, exclusivamente mediante enumeraciones asindéticas sin verbos, pasando de lo material arquitectónico y artístico a lo atmosférico, con esas sombras e imágenes de muerte que se suceden en un crescendo de lo objetivo a lo subjetivo, hasta acabar caracterizando la ciudad descrita como un espacio de muerte, como el resultado de un apocalipsis localizado, tan pronto como aparecen los verbos con su soplo helado y espectral, y confieren a la ciudad su aire de terror. Sin embargo, al igual que en el soneto de Donna, se introduce finalmente la perspectiva lírica, pues en esa espantosa urbe vacía mora un yo que parece estar en su origen. Al declararse que el movimiento del yo, signo de vida, haría por desaparecer la ciudad muerta, se nos da a entender que se trata de una obra de su imaginación, de una frágil construcción subjetiva, quizá de una alucinación visionaria al modo de los paisajes de los poemas en prosa breves de Rimbaud. Sin embargo, ello no impide seguir apreciando la ciudad muerta como un posible mundo secundario, de acuerdo con la ambigüedad que parece ser una característica habitual de los sonetos del yo apocalíptico.

Tal ambigüedad es muy frecuente, pero no parece ser su elemento distintivo esencial de esta clase de sonetos. Ese elemento sería más bien la ya mentada fusión de lo lírico y lo especulativo, una fusión que se da en todos los

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> La traducción se basa en la reedición del poema en la antología siguiente: Gabriel Donna, «Neant», *Climat poetic simbolist*, ediție de Mircea Scarlat, București, Minerva, 1987, p. 51

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> La traducción se basa en esta edición: Jeroni Zanné, «Ciutat morta», *Poesia original completa*, edició de Martí Duran, Barcelona, Trípode, 2019, p. 318.

ejemplos recordados y, de forma nítidamente programática, en otro de Arturo Graf (1848-1913), un infravalorado poeta en toscano que se mostró siempre muy interesado por la poesía especulativa, incluida la apocalíptica, tal y como indican «È morta la vita» [Muerta está la vida] (Medusa [Medusa], 1890), que es un soneto ficcional en tercera persona, y «Apocalissi» [Apocalipsis], publicado en ese mismo libro Medusa<sup>6</sup>. Este último es un soneto también apocalíptico, como sugiere el título mismo, pero se trata esta vez de un apocalipsis personal. Desde el primer cuarteto está ya claro que el terreno en el que se produce el fin es subjetivo, al tratarse del alma y la mente de un yo completamente lírico. El terceto final es aún más explícito, ya que precisa que lo que se dispersa a los cuatro vientos, el objeto de la aniquilación, son los pensamientos del poeta. Sin embargo, al identificarse por completo el yo y el mundo, con una especie de planteamiento solipsista, la catástrofe mental se exterioriza y se convierte en cósmica. El sol se apaga, las tinieblas se

apoderan del universo, mientras que monstruos espectrales proliferan en ellas. El terror del fin se expresa de forma objetiva, como un proceso que tiene lugar materialmente, y de ahí la apariencia de especulación imaginaria que los fenómenos apocalípticos confieren a este soneto. Lo ficticio y lo lírico se combinan en él de manera inextricable y equilibrada, hasta el punto de que resulta difícil decidir cuál clasificación genérica es más pertinente. Esta dificultad acomuna todos estos sonetos y otros de la misma clase que podrían recordarse, por ejemplo, «Finis» [Finis] (1893), de Ion Luca Caragiale (1852-1912), y «Apocalipse» [Apocalipsis] (Eu e outras poesias [Yo y otras poesías], 1919), de Augusto dos Anjos (1884-1914). Todos ellos sugieren en cualquier caso que existen a veces intersecciones entre los géneros, incluso los discursivos, y que la literatura, incluso la especulativa, es extremadamente variada en sus planteamientos y formas de escritura.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Su traducción sigue el texto de la edición siguiente: Arturo Graf, «Apocalisse», *Medusa*, a cura di Anna Dolfi, Modena, Mucchi, 1990, p. 147.

#### ANTÓNIO GOMES LEAL

## El astrólogo

Quien tenga oídos, que oiga.

Quien tenga oídos, que oiga, y que el viejo mundo lo aprenda de memoria, pues lo que digo es fruto de un estudio insigne y hondo, como la ciencia de un caldeo antiguo.

Hace mucho que la Tierra, eternamente vencida por el Enemigo, es un charco inmundo, y hace mucho que le preveo un profundo fin y un castigo tremendo y trágico. Ayer por la noche fui a una montaña muy alta, y hete aquí que diviso en el horizonte diez signos, como en larga procesión...

Y esos signos, para mí que soy vidente, tenían claramente forma de letras, y en esas letras leí DESTRUCCIÓN.

#### **ARTURO GRAF**

## **Apocalipsis**

Un horrendo fragor lleno de espanto me raja el alma de arriba abajo; con ingente ruina se abre y se desploma el firmamento de mi mente.

Está apagado el claro sol que allí relucía antes; se extienden tinieblas espesas en derredor y un centelleo de rayos se enciende cruento por la oscura inmensidad.

Pasan nubadas de espectros y túmidas borrascas envueltas de monstruos en torbellinos; los elementos líquidos batallan revueltos.

Y mis pensamientos, como crinadas estrellas arrastradas fuera de sus órbitas, se disipan en la nada a los cuatro vientos.

#### **PIMODAN**

# Soneto-crepúsculo

¡Revivir en una lejanía que me lea y me vengue! No, no quedará nada; habré dado mi corazón a este siglo de dinero, a este siglo burlón en el que ningún transeúnte se cuadra ante el ideal

Luego he dudado de ti, mi musa, mi arcángel, mi divina amante, y, lleno todo de rencor, no he escuchado a veces tu canto victorioso, por creerlo demasiado altivo, demasiado fatal, demasiado extraño.

Soy un loco para mi tiempo... y un sabio para el porvenir, cuando los pueblos envejecidos, incapaces de acabar, buscarán en la muerte el universal remedio.

Pero no he cantado ese eterno sueño que el mundo, destrozado por otro Arquímedes, irá a dormir, hecho pedazos dispersos, sobre el sol.

### GABRIEL DONNA

### Nada

Bajo soles que se ciernen sobre blancos cementerios, hace mucho que han desaparecido los océanos enormes; fragmentos de frontones de estilo desconocido yacen aún, aquí y allá, como remembranzas.

Y el trágico Apolo otea la distancia; no puede entender la inmovilidad bajo su fuego y arde más fuerte, deteniendo su interrogación en la figura esculpida en piedra que es lo único que aún dura.

Justo como un sol que abrasa desolado las extensas llanuras en que una esfinge antigua, inmóvil, sigue asombrando el desierto, así mi genio inflama en mi corazón vacío las extensas arenas, mi deseo hecho pedazos, y en vano espera que hable la esfinge...

### JERONI ZANNÉ

### Ciudad muerta

Palacios de mármol. Grandes ventanales. Ojivas puras. Bronces. Tapices. Altas cúpulas. Arcos triunfales. Blancas capillas. Mosaicos floridos.

Brillantes cimborrios. Escudos ducales. Días sin vida. Tétricas noches. Sombra, misterio. Luces espectrales. Larga agonía. Lutos y desazones. La ciudad muerta zumba y retiembla. Un frío hálito pasa y colma calles y plazas de un vaho gélido.

No oso moverme: se derrumbaría la ciudad muerta en cuanto viera sobre sus losas un hombre vivo.

# El universo y la historia por partida doble a través de la fantasía especulativa panlatina. Tercera serie

Notas introductorias y traducción de Mariano Martín Rodríguez

# Amores prehistóricos: dos cuentos paleopatriarcales

La denuncia literaria de las sociedades patriarcales no es algo que haya tenido que esperar al activismo reciente. Durante milenios se ha dado por supuesta la superioridad del varón, con sus consecuencias históricas, tales como la tolerancia de la violencia sexual, la subordinación social de las mujeres y el monopolio del ejercicio del poder por un puñado de varones. Todo ello lo solían sostener convicciones culturales que consideraban que la feminidad entrañaba una

debilidad intrínseca tanto desde el punto de vista físico como del emotivo, incluso en el siglo XIX y principios del XX. Sin embargo, tampoco faltaban entonces autores que cuestionaran ese orden social heredado, por ejemplo, mostrando la monstruosidad de sus orígenes en forma de ficciones ambientadas en la prehistoria humana y centradas en las primeras manifestaciones de la pasión sexual masculina como causa de la victimización de la mujer. Dada la brutalidad

bestial de los primeros hombres según la ficción prehistórica temprana, coincidente con el concepto que se tenía en el siglo XIX de los primitivos y salvajes, tanto en el espacio como en el tiempo, no extrañará que la mujer aparezca casi siempre entonces más como una presa que el varón caza y esclaviza que como una compañera. Una novela escrita por una mujer y ambientada en el Neolítico de las civilizaciones llamadas lacustres de Europa central como es Des signes sur le roc [Signos en las rocas], de Julienne-Marie Moulinasse, incluso prolonga hasta 1930 la imagen tópica de la mujer resignadamente esclava en el seno de una sociedad en la que el varón más fuerte, el patriarca, tiene derecho de vida y de muerte sobre todos, sin que ello sea verdaderamente criticado, ya que tal estado de cosas se da por supuesto, al menos para aquel período. No obstante, el patriarcado en la ficción llamada prehistórica ya estaba agrietándose en los años treinta del pasado siglo, si hemos de juzgar por dos atractivos relatos ambientados en dos períodos muy distintos de la larguísima Edad de Piedra, uno a su principio y otro a su final.

El primero es brasileño y está firmado por Humberto de Campos (1886-1934). Se titula «O alce» [El alce] y figura, tal vez tras una primera publicación en la prensa que no he podido localizar, en el volumen O monstro e outros contos [El monstruo y otros cuentos] (1932)¹. Se trata de una parábola que persigue ilustrar el origen de la violencia machista sobre la mujer, entendida esta no como un ser humano, sino como un objeto, una propiedad que se usa al arbitrio del varón y que este defiende, también con violencia, ante cualquier rival, y de ahí que aquella violencia machista cause enseguida también víctimas varones. Para que la parábola en este sentido sea más clara,

Campos pasa voluntariamente por alto el hecho de que el ser humano, igual que sus predecesores homínidos, ha vivido siempre en sociedad. Sus protagonistas, que ya cuentan con nombre propio, tienen una vida comunitaria reducida al mínimo, seguramente para que no cupieran lecturas que atribuyeran a determinación social alguna el descubrimiento por uno de ellos del asesinato. Se trata de un crimen pasional que se explica como el resultado de la imitación de un fenómeno zoológico, una muestra de la inherente animalidad masculina, que se sugiere y critica tácitamente.

En el trío formado por un pareja de homínidos macho y hembra y otro macho que los acompaña, la crisis se produce cuando el varón emparejado descubre el abuso que el otro, aparentemente más fuerte y bestial, perpreta sobre su mujer, como si esta fuera un objeto y como si fuera la cosa más natural de nuestra especie en esa época. El varón al que le han robado la mujer, por así decir, es quien interpreta luego su situación como análoga a la de un venado que se ve obligado a combatir y matar a otro que sale del bosque y amenaza con llevarse la hembra del primero. La salvaje lucha entre los dos animales es descrita mediante una escritura épica que pone de relieve a la vez el ardor de ambos, pero también su crueldad, una crueldad que es común en aquel mundo, a juzgar por otros detalles que nos ofrece de él el narrador, el cual acierta a dar una idea cabal de la precaria posición entonces del ser humano. Este era ciertamente un cazador, pero se da a entender que aún no había descubierto la violencia contra sus semejantes, al menos hasta la rivalidad pasional que se narra. El luctuoso resultado no se describe, sino que se sugiere mediante una hábil elipsis, ya que el suceso mismo se sustrae a la descripción, de modo que la alusión final a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> La traducción que sigue se basa en la reedición siguiente: Humberto de Campos, «O alce», *O monstro e outros contos*, Rio de Janeiro – São Paulo – Porto Alegre, Mérito, 1962, pp. 77-83.

la sangre que sí ha llegado al río no deja dudas acerca de la violencia mortal producida, pero al mismo tiempo se indica así que el primer asesinato es un suceso tan atroz que ni siquiera sería narrable, al menos antes de que se volviera trivial en la (pre)historia humana. De esta manera, queda realzado lo terrible de un acto que hace retroceder al humano a la animalidad, esa misma animalidad que le ha servido de modelo para su violencia. Al menos cabe creer que no es innata en la humanidad. Sin embargo, la venganza personal contada en «O alce» señala los orígenes de la costumbre de recurrir una y otra vez a la agresión como una realidad histórica desde los albores de la humanidad y que afecta a todos los hombres por igual, sin que se salven de esa lacra moral los blancos, en contra de las teorías racistas ampliamente extendidas aún en la primera mitad del siglo xx. El mulato Campos niega la supuesta superioridad de las razas nórdicas al indicar claramente que sus personajes, tan irracionalmente entregados a la violencia en este cuento, son rubios, el rasgo físico convencional de las poblaciones que, debido al racismo común en aquella época, sobre todo entre los pueblos germánicos, se consideraban superiores a las demás. Al mostrarlos como lo hace en «O alce», Campos invierte ese tópico contemporáneo. La bestialidad masculina no conoce razas.

Tampoco parecen tan civilizadas como se presentaban implícitamente en los tratamientos arqueológicos de aquella época las poblaciones europeas del período neolítico que se creían habitantes en palafitos sobre lagos en Europa. Estas poblaciones eran, sin duda, más avanzadas tecnológicamente que los hombres de las cavernas, y se puede suponer asimismo que su orden social, tras la invención de la agricultura,

era más complejo, con una naciente división en clases y tal vez ya instituciones (proto) estatales, por ejemplo, a efectos de organización militar frente a la amenaza de otros pueblos que invadieran y les arrebataran sus tierras. En efecto, el propio hecho de vivir en lagos pudo entenderse como un mecanismo defensivo. Tal vez por ello, las ficciones narrativas y dramáticas sobre los lacustres, que constituyeron una especie de moda, sobre todo en Francia, insisten en la descripción de enfrentamientos bélicos que determinan el destino de civilizaciones enteras, y en este caso la de los propios lacustres frente a las oleadas de bárbaros nómadas. Este esquema narrativo lo sigue el maestro indiscutible de la ficción prehistórica, el belga J.-H. Rosny aîné (Joseph Henri Boex, 1856-1940) en su breve novela Eyrimah [Eyrimah] (1893), que es una magistral narración épica. En cambio, prescindió de la guerra en su cuento tardío, abajo traducido, «Amour des temps farouches» [Amor en los tiempos feroces] (1933)2. Como el propio título indica, su tema principal es el amor o, mejor dicho, el surgimiento del propio sentimiento del amor a la manera romántica en el seno de una sociedad que se presenta como una combinación de rasgos muy primitivos con otros ya propios de las civilizaciones históricas. Entre estos últimos se puede mencionar la existencia de una religión completamente institucionalizada. Existe incluso una clase sacerdotal que vive apartada en un espacio sagrado de carácter artificial labrado en la piedra, al que los lacustres laicos acuden únicamente con ocasión de ceremonias públicas especiales que se celebran en fechas concretas de un calendario sacro. En «Amour des temps farouches» se describe con detalle una de esas ceremonias, consistente en la ofrenda de numerosas riquezas al dios Sol,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> La traducción se basa en la reedición siguiente del original: J-H. Rosny aîné, «Amour des temps farouches», *Les conquérants du feu et autres récits primitifs*, préface de Fabrice Mundzik, Montélimar, Les Moutons Électriques, 2014, pp. 163-166.

para propiciárselo con la ayuda de los sacerdotes y sus conocimientos en materia de ritual y oraciones para que siga fecundando la tierra. Otro de los ritos es el sacrificio humano de un guerrero elegido al azar, aunque los sacerdotes no son quienes lo sacrifican directamente. El guerrero ha de enfrentarse a un uro o gran toro primitivo en una especie de ruedo, de forma que la religión satisface el gusto tan humano por los espectáculos sangrientos y, en general, por aquellos en que alguien arriesga su vida en público. El combate tauromáquico constituye, de hecho, el clímax del relato, y Rosny se recrea en sus detalles con indudable pericia narrativa y estilística. Sin embargo, no son la violencia ni la religión sus puntos focales. Vencer y matar al uro no solo significa que el guerrero salva su vida, sino que también obtiene la mano de la hija del jefe y, es de suponer, la jefatura misma a su debido tiempo. El guerrero designado por la (mala) suerte muere pronto, con lo que el Sol tendrá su víctima, pero un mozo salta al ruedo y consigue acabar con el gigantesco animal. Lo nuevo en ese mundo feroz evocado por Rosny aîné es que su móvil no es otro que el amor por la joven, que servirá de premio, algo de lo que el protagonista se avergüenza por ser un sentimiento del que se reirían sus compañeros en aquella sociedad patriarcal y machista. La muchacha no parece indiferente a él, pero su voluntad no cuenta. Su padre la dará como premio a quien mate al uro, sin más. El cuento tiene final feliz, como corresponde al género indicado en el subtítulo del cuento, «idilio». No obstante, no es solo el correcto emparejamiento por la compatibilidad

sentimental de chico y chica lo que determina ese carácter feliz. El comportamiento de él indica que la respetará y tratará con dulzura inéditas y contrarias a la concepción de la mujer como esclava aún dominante entre los lacustres del cuento. Así se abre la posibilidad de una evolución hacia la suavización del patriarcado mediante un mejor trato hacia las mujeres, sin que ello suponga un menoscabo de la dignidad heroica del varón que ha demostrado que no teme poner en peligro su vida. Es aún un paso incipiente, pero el contraste con el salvajismo de los primeros hombres de «O alce» es claro. Al pasarse de la animalidad a la humanidad y del Paleolítico al Neolítico, el sexo se convierte en amor y la ferocidad se vuelve ternura. Ahí radica, se sobreentiende, la verdadera civilización, de forma que al atroz modelo negativo del cuento del autor brasileño pueda suceder con el tiempo el positivo del belga. Ambos dibujan en sus parábolas dos figuras contrapuestas de varón. Las claras connotaciones de cada uno de ellos apuntan a críticas del machismo patriarcal que, no por ser indirectas, son menos nítidas. Además, el rechazo del didactismo y del mensaje predicado permiten que ambas narraciones puedan leerse y disfrutarse por sí mismas, como ejemplos notables de recreación especulativa de la prehistoria y de las pasiones desnudas que podían entonces surgir, sin que ello vaya en detrimento de la acción, del placer de la aventura que se desprende del espectáculo de unos personajes que actúan para dominar su destino y acaban consiguiéndolo, para bien o para mal.

#### HUMBERTO DE CAMPOS

### El alce

Era en las orillas del río Cobar, aún sin lodo y sin nombre, donde se abría día y noche, en aquellos tiempos inocentes del mundo, la boca monstruosa de la caverna. Abierta en la roca bruta por la fuerza inconsciente de las grandes aguas primitivas, la gruta enorme constituía el refugio seguro de los tímidos venados perseguidos, que allí iban a descansar, asustados, de la voracidad de los leones del Desierto. En ella vivía un rebaño de cabras silvestres, que alarmó el alto ribazo cuando llegó el troglodita, con su azagaya y su maza, dispuesto a ocuparla. Las cabras huyeron en tumulto, saltando de roca en roca, quebrando las uñas ásperas en las piedras oscuras de la orilla, y el hombre se quedó solo con sus armas y su valor, ante la Naturaleza misteriosa.

Cuatro lunas después, la caverna de las orillas del río era un hogar, semilla de una familia, esbozo indeciso de una tribu. Vivían en ella, en paz y silencio, Djeb, el cazador de uros; Elam, domesticador de abejas silvestres, y Heva, compañera y esclava de Elam. Vagaban estos últimos, casi perdidos, por la soledad de aquellos bosques occidentales cuando se encontraron con el primero y se pusieron a caminar juntos, solidarios frente a los peligros infinitos de la selva. La caverna, que Djeb había descubierto, les servía de abrigo. Por la noche, encendida la hoguera en la piedra porosa, se iluminaba la garganta enorme y los osos, los tigres, los uros, los mamuts, los ciervos, los leones, los elefantes y los mismos caballos bravíos paraban inquietos, preguntándose en silencio qué monstruo era aquel que abría las fauces rojas, donde bailaban

lenguas de llamas, en la ladera solitaria de la montaña.

La vida en la caverna era monótona, pero dulce. A altas horas de la madrugada, cuando estaban lejanos aún los primeros albores del día, Djeb llegaba a la boca de la gruta, defendida por grandes piedras amontonadas, consultaba las horas en la marcha silenciosa de las estrellas, prendía a su cuello de uro salvaje la gran piel de tigre, examinaba el extremo de la azagaya, cortada en los cuernos agudos de un antílope, y partía cauteloso a sorprender a los grandes herbívoros adormecidos. A veces, lo desviaban de su camino piaras de cerdos, que perseguía a la carrera, estremeciendo con el estruendo de sus pasos el enorme bosque reposado. Otras veces, se dejaba ir a la ventura hasta salir, ya alto el día, a las grandes vegas punteadas por la sangre de los cardos en flor, de donde partían manadas de caballos corriendo y relinchando, a galope tendido, al acercarse él. En esos viajes de nómada pasaba el troglodita días y días comiendo, con las manos de grandes uñas, pedazos de carne de uro mal tostada y bebiendo de bruces en la corriente de los ríos o, de pie, en la lámina espumante de las cascadas. De repente, volvía sobre sus propios pasos como si lo persiguieran, aullando, todas las fieras del bosque. Penetraba en la caverna, arrastraba por el brazo a la esclava del compañero, la tiraba sobre las hojas del lecho y se apareaba como los lobos, como los tigres, como los perros errantes de la selva, como todos los seres de la tierra bárbara. Tomaba en seguida sus armas de nuevo y partía sin rumbo, mientras la mujer se levantaba del montón de hojas, sin

rebelarse, echando a la espalda el tumultuoso caudal de los cabellos desordenados.

Una tarde, entraba Elam en la caverna cuando oyó, entre la queja de las ramas del lecho, los rugidos de amor del compañero, que había regresado. Bajo su cabeza, dorada como la de los leones, los cabellos de Heva, más gruesos y más claros, eran una gran mancha en el verde descolorido de las hojas. Se detuvo, mirándolos, y retrocedió. Una gran angustia le llenaba el abismo del corazón. Sobre sus hombros, curvándolo, oprimiéndolo, gravitaba el peso de un mundo. Le parecía a su inteligencia de primitivo que el bosque había rodado, con toda la brutalidad de sus troncos y sus ramas, sobre su cabeza impotente. Un deseo irresistible, insistente e imperativo lo llamaba de nuevo a la gruta, donde había dejado, enlazados como dos lobos, al amigo y a la compañera. Sin embargo, se paró, indeciso, con la mirada en el suelo, donde grandes hormigas cargaban, ayudándose recíprocamente, trozos de hojas, cortadas de una alocasia nacida sobre una piedra. Las miró y pensó:

—Las mujeres son quizás como la alocasia que nace en la piedra; todas las hormigas pueden devorarla...

No obstante, arrojó de sí ese pensamiento y siguió errando sin meta. Amanecía cuando el domesticador de abejas llegó, con su azagaya de caza, a la linde del bosque, lejos del río. La cautela involuntaria con la que caminaba hizo imperceptible su cercanía para los habitantes del claro. Tan solo un búfalo barruntó su presencia, aspirando con fuerza el aire en torno, desconfiado. Algunos ciervos levantaron la cabeza erizada de cuernos entrecruzados, aguzando el oído para oír mejor los ruidos. Pero todo volvió a la calma, a la serenidad, a la paz confiada, con la inmovilidad de Elam, oculto como una larva por el tronco de una gran haya con las raíces a flor de tierra.

El nómada examinaba interesado la vida armónica de las cosas cuando se aproximó a la orilla del bosque un gran alce cuyos cuernos superaban la altura de un elefante. Detrás de él caminaba, esquilando el césped tierno, una cierva de pelo bermejo, que parecía tranquila, como si confiara totalmente su seguridad al valor vigilante del compañero. De pronto, surgió del bosque, en sentido contrario, otro alce solitario, que marchó hacia la gran corza primitiva. El alce de la vega irguió la cabeza sembrada de cuernos y berreó con fuerza. El otro respondió y se enfrentaron. Un ruido de ramas secas restalló en la furia del choque. Con los cuernos enredados, cruzados y confundidos, los dos cuadrúpedos curvaban el lomo en dos arcos enormes. Un ruido más fuerte anunció que la lucha iba a terminar. Con la cabeza vuelta, el alce agresor cayó por tierra, con un berrido convulso, trémulo y ahogado que asustó a los uros distantes. El venado victorioso se desenredó del vencido, retrocedió dos pasos, embistió contra el cuerpo palpitante y le perforó el vientre con dos topetazos violentos, removiéndole las vísceras con los cuernos agudos. Acto seguido, baló con fuerza, llamando a la compañera. Está se arrimó amorosa, lamiéndole el pelo, como en un agradecimiento conmovido. Y siguieron pastando juntos, bajo la luz acariciante del sol, la hierba tierna del claro...

Elam había asistido inmóvil a la gran lucha de los ciervos. Cuando hubo acabado el combate, el bárbaro recuperó la azagaya, examinó su punta y regresó en dirección a la caverna.

A la mañana siguiente, las aguas del río Cobar lavaron por primera vez, en la gruta de los trogloditas, la sangre de un hombre.

### J.-H. ROSNY aîné

# Amor en los tiempos feroces Idilio prehistórico

Cuando el crepúsculo de la mañana empezó a extenderse sobre el lago, Uareh, hijo del Alce, salió de su cabaña acuática. El inmenso esplendor del cielo se derramaba sobre las aguas, y el joven pensaba que el cielo también era un lago, porque la lluvia desciende de él para fecundar la tierra.

Era el equinoccio de primavera, el día del gran Sacrificio al Fuego y a su Creador, el Sol.

Uareh pensaba en Wannaí, hija de Taúhn, uno de los tres grandes jefes del lago y envidiaba al guerrero, designado al azar, que iba a combatir por ella.

Si la costumbre lo hubiera permitido, se habría ofrecido a afrontar el Gran Uro del Bosque Azul, pero nadie puede oponerse a la tradición de los antepasados.

Un viento ligero agitaba las piraguas; el lago tenía esa irrealidad emocionante que vuelve más misteriosas las voces de las aguas, y Uareh pensaba que no hay vida sin agua; el fuego, solo, no haría sino desecar y endurecer la tierra.

A medida que la luz llenaba las nubes de llamas más brillantes, el número de lacustres aumentaba en el umbral de las cabañas, erigidas sobre pilotes.

Cuando Uareh columbró a Wannaí entre sus hermanas, su corazón se puso a latir como un corzo; más cercano a los hombres futuros que a sus compañeros, no solo codiciaba a Wannaí, sino que también habría querido que ella lo amase. Este sentimiento habría parecido

irrisorio a los demás guerreros y él se guardaba mucho de que se notara.

Ella parecía deseable a todos los machos, pues tenía el cuerpo robusto y bien formado, pero Uareh era el único que admiraba la gracia fina de su rostro y la tierna dulzura de sus ojos.

La muchedumbre empezaba a amontonarse en las piraguas, las mujeres vestidas de blanco y los varones con una piel de animal cruzada sobre los hombros y con la cara pintada de escarlata.

Cada piragua transportaba en profusión nenúfares, sagitarias, brotes de cañas, granos de lino, granos de trigo, telas teñidas y piedras brillantes para el dios.

Allá a la isla del Sacrificio, donde vivían los Hombres de Vida Oculta, los tres clanes habían enviado por adelantado el tributo vivo: corderos de cuernos de cabra, toros de las turberas, cuervos y lechuzas, que habían de ser degollados para obtener la victoria sobre el enemigo, la cosecha fecunda, la pesca y la caza abundantes.

Los grandes cuernos mugieron, la flotilla partió hacia oriente, cada piragua semejante a un islote de flores, mientras un colosal sol rojo, hoguera de los mundos, brotaba de las aguas.

Aclamaciones frenéticas seguidas de una larga melopeya saludaron al creador de los hombres, fecundador de las aguas, de los bosques y de las sabanas.

Apareció la isla del Sacrificio, bordeada por sauces centenarios y álamos antiguos, de una altura sorprendente.

Los Hombres de Vida Oculta se mostraron sobre un promontorio. Los cuernos rugieron y, a continuación, el más anciano de los sacerdotes avanzó hasta la orilla del agua. Su rostro árido parecía recubierto de corteza más que de piel, su larga barba blanca se desparramaba sobre su pecho como el liquen sobre las rocas y sus ojos opacos recordaban los élitros de los coleópteros. Sin embargo, su voz conservaba un poder misterioso y, cuando se hizo el silencio, clamó:

Jefe de los fuegos del Cielo y de los fuegos de la Tierra, tú que sacaste del agua al Gran Ancestro, Padre de los hombres, de los animales, de los árboles y de las hierbas, danos la victoria sobre nuestros enemigos, haz que nazca de nuestras mujeres una descendencia tan numerosa como las estrellas, llena las aguas y la tierra de presas abundantes, haz crecer el lino, el cáñamo y el trigo que alimenta a los hombres.

La multitud repitió a una sola voz:

Tú que sacaste del agua al Gran Ancestro, padre de los hombres, de los animales, de las hierbas y de los árboles...

Luego prosiguió el anciano:

—Te ofrecemos las flores, las semillas, las piedras brillantes, las hachas de bronce, los carneros pingües y los toros nacidos de la tierra profunda...

Los lacustres desembarcaron en tumulto y se apiñaron en torno al altar de granito, mientras que, sobre la meseta de un túmulo, los Hombres de Vida Oculta encendían la hoguera sagrada.

Brotó la llama; los mozos brincaron alrededor del túmulo, con las mujeres y las muchachas alrededor del altar; la alegría de las razas jóvenes se elevó hasta el cielo.

Luego se hizo un gran silencio y las cabezas se volvieron hacia la derecha del túmulo, donde la pendiente bajaba hasta la orilla del lago; en un ruedo rodeado de bloques erráticos se podía ver, colosal, el Uro del Bosque Azul. Apareció un guerrero, conducido por tres hombres.

Llevaba en la mano una espada de bronce. El azar lo había designado: debía combatir a la bestia formidable. Si vencía, le correspondería Wannaí; si era vencido, lo inmolarían en el altar solar y su cuerpo sería arrojado a la hoguera...

Permaneció inmóvil un momento, pálido y tembloroso. Luego, avergonzado de su temor, bajó al ruedo. El enorme animal parecía esperarlo. Avanzó, primero con lentitud, como si fuera a atacar de frente la cabeza de agudos cuernos... Pero, de pronto, brincó oblicuamente, con la esperanza de alcanzar la garganta.

El toro no se dejó sorprender; saltó a su vez y el hombre, tras haber golpeado en vano con su arma la cabeza inmensa, empezó a huir...

Apenas había dado veinte pasos cuando los cuernos agudos lo atravesaron...

El Uro corrió alrededor del ruedo, sacudiendo el cuerpo tembloroso del guerrero, del que se deshizo tras haberlo aplastado contra el granito.

—Herm, hijo de la Serpiente, ha sido vencido; ¡su espíritu se unirá al sol y vivirá en la luz! —declaró el jefe de los sacerdotes—... No hay final más hermoso.

La muchedumbre miraba, ávida y decepcionada por ese combate mediocre. Entonces avanzó Uareh y gritó con voz resonante:

—El hijo del Alce quiere luchar a su vez contra el Uro del Bosque Azul.

Una aclamación formidable saludó esas palabras; la muchedumbre, que sabía que Uareh era un guerrero excepcional, confió en un buen espectáculo y mil manos se alzaron en señal de alegría.

Uareh lanzó una larga mirada a Wannaí, quien le sonrió, orgullosa de verlo combatir por ella, y entró a su vez en el ruedo. El Uro, irritado, no esperó al ataque. Se precipitó frenéticamente sobre el guerrero, pero Uareh sabía cómo esquivar a los toros. Con la agilidad de un leopardo, se apartó, mientras que el animal, arrastrado por su impulso, proseguía la carrera.

Pronto volvió a la carga, aunque frustrado. Uareh habría podido herirlo, pero no lo intentó, para gran sorpresa de los guerreros, algunos de los cuales murmuraron. Hubo una carga en la que los cuernos estuvieron tan cerca del pecho de Uareh que se creyó que iba a quedar atravesado a su vez...

De repente, se lo vio saltar sobre el lomo mismo del monstruo. Mientras que la bestia, sorprendida, daba vueltas locamente, la espada de bronce le cortó la yugular, como lo hubieran hecho los dientes de un tigre y de una pantera.

Brotó un río de sangre, inundó los ijares rojizos y trazó una línea escarlata en el suelo...

El animal prosiguió al principio su carrera, pero, debilitado, se detuvo, permaneció un momento inmóvil y se desplomó.

Era la victoria. Varones y mujeres, todos los lacustres, así lo entendieron y saludaron al guerrero con un nuevo clamor.

Mientras tanto, Uareh había franqueado el recinto de granito y había avanzado hacia Wannaí, trémula y ruborosa de orgullo. —He luchado por ti, hija del Lince —dijo él...

Entonces declaró el jefe del Clan Rojo:

- —Tu fuerza te la ha conquistado y no debes ningún rescate.
- —Pero te daré, Gran Jefe, un hacha de jade, una lanza de bronce y un cuerno de pintura de guerra...

Después que el fuego hubo consumido los animales del Sacrificio, el cuerpo del guerrero matado por el Uro y el Uro mismo, la fiesta del Sol fue feliz. Una cierta dulzura reinó en las almas; la exaltación de la danza y la plenitud del festín crearon recuerdos muy dulces entre los jóvenes y revivieron los de los viejos.

Por la noche, el jefe del Clan Rojo hizo prosternar a la hija ante el vencedor mientras decía:

—Uareh, hijo del Alce, es ahora tu dueño; solo él te dará órdenes en el Agua y en la Tierra. Le debes tu cuerpo, tu trabajo y una descendencia abundante.

A continuación, Uareh se llevó a Wannaí en su piragua, bajo la sombra acariciante y la nieve luminosa de las estrellas. Habló con dulzura a la bella hija del lago y la apretó contra su corazón con una ternura que desconocían las mujeres esclavas de los Tiempos Feroces.

## La Atlántida hebrea: dos poemas simbólicos sobre Sodoma

La Atlántida es hoy la civilización perdida por excelencia. Aunque se trata de un mundo secundario ficticio más cercano a los espacios de la fantasía épica moderna que a los territorios de la geografía positiva, siguen abundando quienes buscan sus vestigios en algún lugar de la Tierra, tal vez porque el discurso historiográfico adoptado por Platón para narrar su mito atlante ha hecho que más de uno haya creído que se trata de historia real, sin parar mientes que la ficción también puede escribirse como si fuera historia. En menor medida, algo parecido ha ocurrido con un mito semejante también famoso, pero que procede de otra tradición literaria. En el libro hebreo del Génesis, las ciudades de Sodoma y Gomorra acabaron destruidas por una catástrofe que borró su civilización de la faz de la Tierra. Como en el mito de la Atlántida, fueron las maldades y la *hibris* de sus habitantes las que llevaron a una deidad, Yahvé en un caso y Zeus en el otro, a hacerlas sucumbir bajo los elementos, el fuego y el agua, respectivamente. En la Biblia hebrea, también se recurre al discurso historiográfico para narrar los hechos y, en consecuencia, tampoco faltan quienes sigan buscando las ruinas físicas de Sodoma en algún sitio del Próximo Oriente, con idénticos resultados nulos que cabe esperar cuando se trata de mitos inventados con fines de admonición moral, para condenar lo que a Platón o al ignoto autor o autores del Génesis les debía de parecer censurable. Otro rasgo común entre ambas

historias es su amplia fortuna en la literatura posterior, también en la edad contemporánea posterior a la Revolución Industrial, aunque con algunas diferencias.

Platón describe una civilización y cuenta su historia desde un punto de vista colectivo, histórico. En la Biblia, Sodoma es sobre todo el escenario en que se desarrolla la peripecia del patriarca Lot y de su familia, desde cuya perspectiva se presentan los acontecimientos. Esta diferencia de enfoque ha favorecido tal vez que la Atlántida haya suscitado más la imaginación especulativa que Sodoma, que rara vez ha protagonizado la ficción en sí misma, esto es, independientemente de Lot, mientras que no faltan las reescrituras de las vicisitudes de ese patriarca, entre las que figuran Fine di Sodoma [Fin de Sodoma] (1923), de Vincenzo Cardarelli (Nazareno Caldarelli, 1887-1959) y «Biografia de Lot» [Biografía de Lot] (Biografia de Lot i altres proses [Biografía de Lot y otras prosas], 1983), de Joan Oliver (1899-1986). No obstante, hay un par de cuentos sobresalientes en que se especula sobre la manera en que se habría vivido en esa ciudad hasta su destrucción, y en los cuales ni siquiera aparece aquella figura bíblica. Se trata de «Les vendanges de Sodome» [Las vendimias de Sodoma] (1883), de Rachilde (Marguerite Vallette-Eymery, 1860-1953), y «La lluvia de fuego» (Las fuerzas extrañas, 1906), de Leopoldo Lugones (1874-1938). Ambos se ajustan a la estética decadentista de su

época, con su recreación sensorial en la belleza de las cosas y de los seres, en el marco de una reconstrucción de ambientes antiguos típica de la ficción arqueológica coetánea.

Esta clase de reconstrucción ficticia brilla por su ausencia cuando la Sodoma evocada constituye un espacio de carácter simbólico ligado al espíritu decadente. En lugar del exotismo parnasiano explotado en aquellos dos cuentos, tenemos un uso de esa urbe como símbolo tradicional de la degradación moral derivada de los vicios contemporáneos, vicios en que insistieron ambiguamente, entre la condena y la fascinación, numerosos escritores en torno a 1900, cuando la moral (o hipocresía) victoriana había entrado en crisis. Como en la Biblia, la Sodoma simbólica encarna así la idea de pecado, pero en la literatura sodomítica simbólica parece haber salido del curso normal de la historia, que tan presente está en toda la ficción sobre la Atlántida, para configurar un mundo secundario que más bien parece existir en una dimensión distinta a la terrenal. Así ocurre, por ejemplo, en dos poemas de aquella época en que Sodoma parece ser un lugar concreto, pero en los que su existencia se reviste en parte de la abstracción de la alegoría.

En su poema francés «La cité rouge» [La ciudad roja] (Les fastes [Fastos], 1891)¹, Stuart Merrill (1863-1915) utiliza un lenguaje muy complejo, con multitud de figuras retóricas y profusión de símbolos más o menos crípticos, para sugerir el misterio de la encarnada ciudad descrita, que en el último verso resulta llamarse Sodoma. Algún detalle había apuntado a esta identificación, por ejemplo, la alusión a los volcanes y las flores de llamas de su erupción, que destruirá la ciudad en un río de fuego.

Asimismo, a los pecados de Sodoma se alude indirectamente al recibir aquella la calificación de ciudad del amor y del terror, de ciudad en que reinan unas tentaciones que fascinan y espantan a la vez a quienes temen morir en pecado y condenarse. No obstante, la índole de los vicios sodomíticos permanece vaga, tal vez para dar a entender su validez universal, sin olvidar que esa vaguedad constituye una invitación a la fantasía a través de un procedimiento intuitivo propio de la poesía simbolista. Lo mismo puede decirse de la quimérica galera que se dirige hacia la ciudad, con su cargamento de niños muertos que podría ser una alusión velada a los sacrificios infantiles practicados supuestamente por los púnicos. En cualquier caso, es ciertamente ominosa la atmósfera que rodea su singladura hacia la ciudad que va a ser destruida, en medio de paisajes sobrecogedores dominados por la muerte. Es quizá esa atmósfera terrorífica la que confiere marcado poder expresivo al poema, en el que brilla el dominio de la escritura del autor, un estadounidense afincado en Francia que supo explotar como pocos los recursos léxicos de su lengua de adopción. En «La cité rouge», la profusión retórica es tal que el elemento de creación ficcional queda como oculto bajo el ornato, un ornato que tiene su propio hechizo poético, el cual intensifica el misterioso atractivo de esta refinada Sodoma.

Más sobrio en su estilo es un poema rumano que comparte en gran medida el planteamiento adoptado por Merrill en el suyo. Se trata de uno titulado «Căderea Sodomei» [La caída de Sodoma], que su autor, Iuliu Cezar Săvescu (1866-1903), dejó manuscrito a su muerte y que tan solo vio la luz en 1984². En su Sodoma, también abunda el simbolismo

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> La traducción se basa en la edición original siguiente: Stuart Merrill, «La cité rouge», *Les fastes*, Paris, Léon Vannier, 1891, pp. 62-63.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> La traducción se basa en esta edición póstuma: «Caderea Sodomei», *Scrieri*, ediție îngrijită și bibliografie de Ion Popescu Sireteanu, prefață de Ion Popescu Sireteanu și Lucian Chișu, București, Minerva, 1984, pp. 132-133.

de las imágenes, sobre todo en aquellas que describen hermosamente el fin de la ciudad, con el cielo en tinieblas surcado por sombras aladas ondeando antorchas de las que gotea el fuego, mientras todo se compara a las angustias de un presidiario. Este símil sugiere que esta Sodoma podría ser también una construcción mental, una materialización simbólica del pecado criminal y de su castigo. No obstante, el poema de Săvescu se caracteriza por la mayor concreción del mítico mundo sodomítico, que aparece como una ciudad real, con sus palacios y templos que sirven de escena a la voluptuosidad que parece obsesionar a sus habitantes hasta enervarlos y robarles su vigor y salud, a la vez que se difumina la distinción entre los sexos y los géneros. Tales conductas determinan la necesidad de la caída de Sodoma, pese a la intervención piadosa de unos profetas que obran por impedir tal desenlace. La perversión no puede quedar sin castigo. Esta idea se ajusta en todo al modelo bíblico, del que este poema de Săvescu es una versión laica y fantástica, igual que el de Merrill. Esa visión moralmente conservadora es común a ambos, aunque no deberíamos sacar conclusiones precipitadas a este respecto. Tanto aquel poeta como este último pretendían seguramente reescribir el mito de Sodoma de forma innovadora, sin limitarse a glosarlo, tal y como indica la ausencia de las peripecias que hacen tan eficaz narrativamente los pasajes correspondientes de la Biblia. Su propósito literario parece haber sido más bien imaginar una civilización del pecado y el vicio fiel en su esencia a su modelo hebreo, pero que constituye una construcción literaria que pretende ser original en sí misma. Sodoma es en ambos casos el producto de un proceso individual de recreación de mundos ficticios mediante la invención simbólica, como corresponde a unos textos en los que el efecto literario fundamental sobre los lectores parece confiarse a la sugestión. En esta perspectiva, el hecho de que la verosimilitud histórica carezca de importancia en su escritura, a diferencia de los cuentos de Rachilde y de Lugones y de otros posteriores como «La caiguda de l'imperi sodomita» [La caída del imperio sodomita] (1976), de Terenci Moix, no reduce el interés como ficción especulativa e incluso fantástica de estas versiones simbólicas de la Atlántida hebrea.

#### STUART MERRILL

# La ciudad roja

Será en un país de crepúsculo en el que el sol de púrpura, a ras de horizontes que elevan volcanes leonados de florescencias, presagiará los días pesados de la canícula.

Un río de llamas extenderá allí sus aguas entre los archipiélagos de lotos y el arenal, donde la vieja Quimera, en el áspero celo del ensueño, retorcerá en un vuelo vano sus costados preñados de sollozos.

A veces, una galera de quilla negra y jarcias fúnebres exaltará, por la noche, sobre su popa empavesada y entre el llanto de los tambores y de las voces, el simulacro de oro de un monstruo de las tinieblas.

Luego, largando su vela al viento de la mala fortuna y sacudiendo las lontananzas

con el eco de sus remos siguiendo un ritmo bárbaro y grave de epitalamios, zarpará cargada de niños muertos hacia la Ciudad de amor y de alto espanto cuyo nombre solo se dice con sacramentos, por el miedo a fallecer en los momentos impuros en que su deseo de infierno asedió el alma ferviente; la Ciudad que, allá con sus estandartes de luto, sus bastiones de basalto y sus morgues, engañará con sus voces de tiorbas y órganos los cansados pasos de los Condenados y sus miradas extraviadas.

Y cuando lleguen los días pesados de la canícula, los volcanes, estallando en leonadas florescencias, harán aullar de horror, a ras de horizonte, Sodoma, la Ciudad Roja del crepúsculo.

### Iuliu Cezar SĂVESCU

### La caída de Sodoma

Sodoma y Gomorra han tenido que perecer. Con las manos alzadas al cielo, con la voz sosegada, se han parado a menudo los profetas a su puerta, tras haber venido para implorar que escaparan de la muerte.

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El desenfreno había sorbido incluso la médula de los huesos, el vigor había desaparecido de los músculos atléticos, el varón se había vuelto una mujer corrompida y la mujer, un esqueleto.

Los valientes habían olvidado su soberbia bravura, las doncellas pisoteaban su virtud en orgías y las formas se entregaban a cualquier boca y las bocas se mordían al azar entre ellas mismas.

En los palacios augustos con cientos de cintas, en la cabaña de los pastores, en el soto fresco, incluso en los templos ancestrales con sus largas y frías columnas se podían oír suspiros voluptuosos.

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Entonces quedó escondido el cielo entero bajo alas negras. El misterio, el misterio y la oscuridad cubrieron toda la ciudad. En el horizonte, Babel parecía un gigante.

Y sombras diáfanas, estatuas aladas, hendiendo con su vuelo la atmósfera, pasaban de un lugar a otro y, agitando sin parar antorchas ardientes, surcaban la oscuridad con gotas de fuego.

Se diría una niebla de sueños infernales que flotase sobre el cráneo de algún asesino que solo ve espectros flotando en su camino, en la húmeda celda de la vida de forzado.

## Fantasías de la Roma eterna: dos poemas narrativos heterocrónicos

La expresión Roma aeterna sugiere en sí misma una relación estrecha desde la Atigüedad entre esa ciudad y el tiempo. Más allá de sus vicisitudes como centro de un Estado imperial que resultó históricamente finito, Roma era el centro y símbolo a la vez de una civilización que muchos han mirado durante siglos como digna de emulación permanente, hasta el punto de justificar así la creencia en la eternidad de la urbs por excelencia. Así ocurrió a lo largo de la Edad Media, cuando el recuerdo y la nostalgia del imperio romano quedaron ligados, por ejemplo, en la obra política y literaria de Dante Alighieri. Aunque el ascenso de las monarquías absolutas y, a continuación, de las naciones liberales que las sustituyeron en gran parte de Europa hizo olvidar un modelo romano que todavía era operativo, al menos como ideal, en los imperios medievales supuestamente sucesores de Roma, esta pudo cobrar nueva vida al adaptarse su idea a los criterios etnicistas que sostenían con gran frecuencia la construcción decimonónica de la nación como comunidad cultural y soporte ideológico del Estado. Tales comunidades culturales se definían entonces en Europa principalmente según el criterio de las lenguas propias, entendiendo por tales las variantes lingüísticas regionales que hubieran tenido tradicionalmente un mayor prestigio como vehículo de una literatura más o menos rica, incluso sin el apoyo directo de un aparato estatal independiente.

Entre aquellas originarias del latín, dos se habían encontrado expuestas a la presión de otras que no pertenecían a la misma familia lingüística. Se trata en concreto del rumano y del romanche, lenguas a su vez divididas en diversas variedades regionales que no impidieron la consolidación moderna de dos de ellas como cultural y literariamente centrales, a saber: la rumana propiamente dicha, basada en el dialecto del antiguo País Rumano (Tara Românească, nombre autóctono del principado medieval correspondiente, más conocido en España como Valaquia) en torno a Bucarest, y la surselvana, (o suprasilvana), basada en el dialecto de la región de Surselva en torno a Glion (Ilanz en alemán). Por supuesto, las dos grandes áreas lingüísticas románicas (la dacorrománica y la retorrománica, respectivamente) abarcan también Kulturdialekte con una literatura propia muy estimable, tales como el arrumano de los válacos (vlahi) de los Balcanes meridionales y el ladino de Engadina.

Tanto el rumano como el romanche, en todas sus variedades, se vieron desde muy pronto ante el peligro de desaparecer por absorción lingüística de sus hablantes latinos debido a la pujanza de los pueblos llamados bárbaros, que se asentaron en tierras que antes habían pertenecido al imperio romano. En el caso de la Dacia, fueron sobre todos los eslavos quienes representaron la mayor amenaza lingüística para los hablantes de (proto)rumano, tal y como indica el inmenso

número de eslavismos, incluso morfológicos, que esmaltan esa lengua hasta nuestros días. Sin embargo, las hablas dacorrománicas no solo consiguieron sobrevivir, sino que incluso se extendieron a territorios que nunca habían sido romanos, lo que constituye un fenómeno excepcional de expansión neolatina en Europa. Esta pujanza lingüística no siempre estuvo acompañada de una pujanza cultural similar. El eslavón fue la lengua de la iglesia ortodoxa y de los principados rumanos hasta el siglo XVII. El rumano de Bucarest fue expandiendo su uso a partir de entonces, aunque no se consolidó por completo hasta el siglo XIX, coincidiendo con la afirmación del Estado rumano moderno frente a los imperios vecinos ruso y austrohúngaro, que trataban de imponer a sus súbditos de lengua rumana el ruso y el húngaro, respectivamente, incluso cuando Rumanía ya existía como país independiente. En el caso de la Raetia, fueron los germanos y sus hablas (sobre todo, los dialectos alemánicos y tiroleses) la amenaza mayor contra la pervivencia del retorrománico, que no ha dejado de retroceder en cuanto a los territorios en que se emplea hasta nuestros días, pese al apoyo moderno que recibe de las instituciones confederales suizas y de las de los Grisones, el cantón donde goza de mayor reconocimiento.

A diferencia del catalán, lengua central del grupo galorrománico meridional, la afirmación cultural del rumano y del romanche (entendiendo por tal aquí el surselvano en primer lugar) no se producía, pues, en un contexto exclusivamente latino. Al contrario, el mismo nombre étnico de los hablantes de tales lenguas indica claramente que todos ellos se consideraban en primer lugar *romanos*, para diferenciarse de sus vecinos lingüística y culturalmente amenazantes, que no lo eran. Tal romanidad asumida naturalmente se convirtió en motivo de orgullo nacional tan pronto como el etnonacionalismo se hizo fuerte en el siglo

XIX. Años más tarde, la creciente popularidad del indigenismo localista hizo que tanto rumanos como romanches insistieran más bien en sus lejanísimos ancestros prerromanos, los dacios y los réticos, pero al principio fue la idea de la pervivencia de la romanidad lingüística la que favoreció la definición de rumanos y romanches modernos como miembros actuales de una civilización de altísimo prestigio, cosa que naturalmente no podían hacer eslavos, húngaros o germanos. Esta identificación, muy ligada al mito de la eternidad de Roma, se plasmó en diversas manifestaciones literarias, entre las cuales presentan gran originalidad aquellas que explotan aquella identificación por encima del propio curso histórico al hacer coincidir, sin soluciones de continuidad, la época romana antigua y la época moderna de rumanos y romanches. Esta coincidencia no se explica de ningún modo, ni mediante viajes en el tiempo (gracias a máquinas a la manera fictocientífica o mediante transferencias mentales), ni tampoco mediante rememoraciones de supuestas vidas anteriores, que son los dos procedimientos preferidos en la modernidad para hacer convivir épocas históricas diversas, con sus cronologías respectivas, en el seno de una sola ficción. Simplemente, se hacen coincidir e interrelacionarse, al menos a través de algún elemento, humano o no, que las liga de manera significativa. Este procedimiento ficcional, que llamamos heterocrónico siguiendo las teorías de Brenda Dunn-Lardeau, se ha cultivado sobre todo en las últimas décadas, en un momento en que la propia historia se ha visto erosionada por un presentismo que ignora o desdeña la conveniencia de intentar comprender cada época y a sus personas desde su propia perspectiva, o bien que ve en la historia un repertorio de atractivos temporalmente exóticos que se pueden combinar anacrónicamente con fines lúdicos, tal como hace, por ejemplo, Álvaro

Cunqueiro (1911-1981) en *Las mocedades de Ulises* (1960). Sin embargo, la heterocronía ya se cultivaba, con otros propósitos como el nacionalista antes mencionado, en textos muy anteriores como «Sentinela romană» [*El centinela romano*] (1855; recogido en el libro *Mărgăritarele* [Las cuentas de collar] en 1863), que es un breve poema del gran escritor rumano Vasile Alecsandri (1821-1890)¹.

En él se presenta la visión que un narrador del presente en las cumbres de los Cárpatos habría tenido de un soldado de la antigua Roma que habría sido destinado allí como centinela para velar por los destinos de la Dacia conquistada y latinizada por Trajano. Este soldado, cuya descripción insiste en su apariencia y hazañas divinas, la defenderá sin cesar y sin cambiar gracias a su inmortalidad. Así lo hace, de hecho, hasta acabar con las oleadas de bárbaros que se sucedieron en Dacia tras el abandono de la provincia y obtiene la victoria tras una lucha que el poeta describe con gran vigor épico. Por desgracia, se oye luego un grito en el mundo que lo informa de que Roma y su imperio han dejado de existir. El soldado deja las armas y se dirige a las montañas mientras cae la noche y se desvanece la visión. Todo parece ser, pues, un sueño alegórico de la historia temprana de Rumanía, aunque su interpretación puede ampliarse hasta indicar un contraste entre el luminoso heroísmo antiguo y la oscuridad presente. En la fecha del poema, la revolución de 1848 había sido reprimida también en los dos principados danubianos de Valaquia y Moldavia, ambos vasallos del imperio turco, por no hablar de las regiones rusas y húngaras pobladas mayoritariamente por hablantes de

rumano. En ese momento de retroceso impuesto del movimiento encaminado a englobar a los rumanos en su propio Estado-nación independiente, parecía que el heroísmo de la resistencia étnica y cultural romana/rumana en aquella región, cuyo espinazo eran los Cárpatos, no bastaría para garantizar la emancipación nacional soñada por el autor. Es más, diríase que la romanidad lingüística misma de los rumanos, a quienes se identifica completamente con los romanos antiguos<sup>2</sup>, acabaría por retirarse ante la (re)presión de los imperios bárbaros que asediaban su espacio, unos bárbaros que se identifican significativamente con sus idiomas: el centinela romano se defiende también contra las lenguas que amenazan con sumergir el latín, evolucionado hasta el rumano, en el espacio carpático-danubiano. La historia acabaría desmintiendo ese pesimismo. El propio Alecsandri sería uno de los artífices de la Rumanía moderna como nación y como Estado, de modo que su poema perdió pertinencia política. Lo que no perdió es pertinencia literaria. La inspiración poética de Alecsandri, quizá el mayor escritor romántico rumano, brilla, por ejemplo, en las imágenes de un paisaje teñido de una subjetividad que preludia procedimientos descriptivos simbolistas, a la vez que acentúa la atmósfera fantástica propia de un fenómeno extraño y extraordinario como lo es la persistencia a lo largo de los siglos del centinela romano y de su misión. Es algo que cabe comparar con la propia pervivencia de la latinidad lingüística en una región que muy pronto dejó de pertenecer al imperio rumano y que sufrió innumerables invasiones alóctonas. Dar idea de tal carácter extraordinario parece

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> El texto de la traducción se basa en el de la edición crítica siguiente: Vasile Alecsandri, «Sentinela romană», *Opere*. I. *Poezii*, studiu introductiv, note și comentari de G. C. Nicolescu, București, Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Române, 1965, pp. 409-422.

Las palabras roman/român esto es, romano/rumano alternan en el original sin que existan distinción de significado. Para Alecsandri, los rumanos son romanos.

ser la misión que se fijó Alecsandri y que llevó a cabo con eficacia y belleza en este poema.

Un propósito similar se distingue en otro poema narrativo posterior, también heterocrónico, del otro pueblo latinoeuropeo expuesto a la asimilación etnolingüística y la desaparición cultural ante la presión demográfica y social de la población no latina, que es mayoritaria en la región política a la que aquel pertenece. Incluso en un contexto suizo de respeto exquisito de la diversidad cultural, los romanches no dejan de ser una minoría culturalmente potente, pero no por ello menos subordinada en el territorio en que lleva asentada desde la romanización. Esta situación culturalmente subalterna lo era aún más que hoy en la época en que el romanche no contaba con apenas reconocimiento institucional, pero en la que existía una clara conciencia étnica y un deseo de sentar las bases culturales de la nación romanche mediante la normalización de su lengua y literatura. Este proceso, que se produjo sobre todo en Surselva, constituye lo que se llama la Renaschientscha o renacimiento, y que guarda no pocas similitudes con la Renaixença catalana. La romanidad fue en ese período un motivo de definición nacional muy importante, tal y como indica el poema épico Ils retoromans [Los retorromanos] (1900), de Flurin Camathias (1871-1946). También lo indica, y de forma más original que en ese poema histórico, el breve poema heterocrónico titulado «La puorpra romana» [La púrpura romana] (1915), de Sep Mudest Nay (1892-1945)3. Su estilo es parnasiano, sobre todo en la bella descripción del bosque y de sus animales asustados al paso de un cortejo de antiguos cazadores romanos en los Apeninos. Sin embargo, la objetividad parnasiana deja paso pronto a un claro simbolismo o, si se prefiere, a la alegoría. Ese cortejo va precedido de una figura que se identifica con la de Roma conquistadora, cuya capa ondea al viento. De pronto, se produce el fenómeno fantástico, subrayado por el asombro de los miembros de la comitiva que lo presencian. La capa de púrpura, el color simbólico del poder en la Antigüedad romana, parece echar a volar y desaparece en el cielo, en vez de caer por la fuerza de la gravedad. La explicación llega más adelante, cuando la heterocronía se hace presente al indicarse que la capa ha alcanzado los Alpes y allí ha sido descubierta por unos pastores. La capa no es sino una metáfora de la propia lengua romanche en los Grisones, considerada así la principal herencia de Roma. Su púrpura pervive milagrosamente en las montañas como lo había hecho el centinela romano en el poema de Alecsandri. Sin embargo, el paralelismo heterocrónico entre los dos poemas, ambos deudores del concepto de Roma eterna, disimula una diferencia fundamental, que se corresponde a las muy distintas situaciones en que se encontraban ambas naciones. Mientras que el autor rumano insiste en la dimensión militar, que apunta a un contexto geopolítico, el romanche confía la romanidad a los campesinos y pastores que hablaban su querida lengua, en un ambiente idílico y apolítico. Alecsandri actúa de portavoz de una nación en busca de su Estado, incluso mediante las armas. Nay reduce la nacionalidad a la lengua y prescinde de todo ánimo bélico y polémico en su exaltación, que se queda en lo cultural. Tal vez no se podía hacer otra cosa a la vista de la pequeñez demográfica de la comunidad lingüística romanche, de la que Nay fue uno de los grandes promotores, hasta el punto de ser uno de los responsables políticos que llevaron a buen puerto el reconocimiento de su lengua en toda Suiza como nacional del

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> La traducción sigue el texto siguiente: Sep Mudest Nay, «La puorpra romana», regurdientschas da Gieri Vincenz, *Prosa e poesia*, Glion, Nies Tschespet, 1947, pp. 136-137.

RECUPERADOS / RETRIEVED WORKS

país entero, lo que a su vez facilitó su envidiable estatuto actual en comparación con lenguas europeas igualmente superminoritarias como el frisón o el sorabo. Sin embargo, estas cuestiones son ajenas a la literatura y a la ficción especulativa, que es lo que aquí nos interesa. Desde este punto

de vista, ambos poemas son buenas indicaciones de que la heterocronía no solo puede servir a un programa nacional determinado, sino que también puede hacerlo sin descuidar la propia belleza estilística y la fluidez narrativa que cabe esperar de un poema narrativo que se precie.

#### VASILE ALECSANDRI

### El centinela romano Poema histórico

El rumano no perece.

Ι

Desde la cima de los Cárpatos, desde la espesura de los abetos, he posado los ojos como dos águilas ágiles sobre ese valle hondo y cubierto de flores que se extiende cual niebla hasta el grandioso Danubio y de allí en la distancia hasta el Nistro, hasta el mar. Y en el amargo desierto, ¿qué encontró mi mirada? Encontró un valiente soldado con pinta de romano, magnifico, fuerte como un león y hermoso de rostro como un dios. Tenía en tensión el brazo izquierdo tras un escudo de hierro labrado que resplandecía como el sol y sobre el que se distinguía una loba argéntea que parecía estar viva y, bajo la fiera, dos niños, que parecían estar vivos también. Su mano derecha sostenía una espada y en su cabeza llevaba con orgullo un casco de oro brillante, como un dios inmortal.

El valiente montaba un caballo blanco inmóvil que, como él, permanecía inmóvil mirando hacia el este. Solo movía los ojos, que recorrían como los de un águila aquel horizonte ceniciento, largo, silencioso y desierto, donde se oían de vez en cuando, como en un sueño que pasa, un mugido sordo, murmullos horribles procedentes del norte, un largo ruido sofocado que venía del este.

La hierba no se agitaba, las hojas no se mecían. Volaban las aves a las montañas, temblaban las fieras en los bosques, la bestia del bosque tembló, porque el mundo aterrorizado, sumido en el asombro, lo recorrían escalofríos de muerte, presentimientos de un destino adverso. Y se veía en el cielo una gran águila, volando en círculos; se la veía flotando magnífica y, en su ronda triunfal, clavaba su mirada grandiosa en el bravo jinete.

- -¿Quién eres tú? ¿De dónde eres? ¿Qué te trae errante entre nosotros?
- —¡Soy romano y soldado de Trajano, el emperador! Mi anciana madre Roma me ha puesto esta arma en la mano, diciéndome con su propia voz:
- »—¡Hijo y elegido mío, tú, el más fuerte en bravura de todos mis niños, ve a Dacia, apresúrate, dispersa a los bárbaros y luego vigila eternamente, muy valiente centinela, y guarda las fronteras, que se oyen a los lejos pisadas enemigas resonando, voces bárbaras amenazantes...
- »¡Llegué y vencí! Acabé con todos los bárbaros y ahora en sus orillas, dueño y señor, espero las hordas tremendas, espero las lenguas enemigas que vienen del este como un diluvio infinito para cubrir y ahogar toda la tierra por donde pasan.
- —Oh, bravo desgraciado, perecerás aquí en los campos.

—¿Yo perecer, yo...? ¡Nunca! Aunque vengan gentes ceñudas, aunque vengan mares de fuego... No me voy a mover del sitio. Se secará todo lo que es verde, se secarán los ríos y el desierto se extenderá cada vez más a mi alrededor, pero yo lucharé eternamente en pie entre las olas ardientes; voy a luchar con vigor sin que me alcance la muerte, porque soy rumano de verdad, ¡y el rumano nunca perece!

II

### El agua pasa, las piedras permanecen.

Apenas ha dicho esto y de repente una flecha destella en el cielo, silba, llega, golpea el escudo, que resuena y la rechaza, la arroja al suelo como si fuese una serpiente venenosa. Tras ella en la distancia, allá al fondo, al fondo del horizonte, se levanta una nube negra llena de ruido atronador que sigue llegando, que sigue creciendo y que se extiende por los campos hasta donde se vislumbra el horizonte entre el norte y el este

—Centinela, vigila, la nube cruel avanza. Centinela, ¡muéstrate, se rasga la cruel nube...! ¡Mira, mira las hordas tremendas, miras las lenguas enemigas de gépidos y búlgaros, de lombardos y de ávaros! ¡Vienen también los hunos, vienen los godos, vienen, todos vienen a mares en caballos veloces como las golondrinas, sin riendas, sin sillas de montar, caballos que corren como el viento, que hacen temblar la tierra! ¡Muchos son, como la arena del mar, muchos, como las garras del remordimiento en un alma pecadora, en una mente sanguinaria! Sal, rumano, a matar; sé un rayo vengador, hazte un Danubio furioso, haz que tu destino sea implacable, porque ahí viene el diluvio y ¡lástima, lástima de ti!

#### -; Venga...!

Como una roca que salta de la cima de una montaña, retumba, rueda, cae, rompe y aplasta los bosques en su camino hasta el fondo, hasta el fondo abajo, así mi fiero soldado lanza su caballo sobre los bosques móviles de bárbaros invasores. ¡Los hace pedazos y los remata, los siega como gavillas, y los arrolla, y los rechaza, y los ahuyenta, y los vence! Su caballo se enfurece, muerde, salta relinchando con ardor, aplasta cuerpos bajo sus patas, hace pedazos las armas sonantes y trabajosamente nada en sangre y no cesa de embutirse en la multitud.

¡Cruel guerra! ¡Vista cruel! El hijo de Roma frunce el ceño... ¡Salen rayos de sus ojos! Los choques de las armas lanzan miles de chispas y brillantes tintineos. Vuelan las hachas lanzadas, zumban los arcos tendidos y las ligeras flechas cubren el hermoso sol. Los caballos saltan y relinchan, la lucha ruge, se encarniza, y los bárbaros todos son presa a montones de la muerte cruel. Diez caen, mueren cien, centenares vienen a ocupar su sitio. Millares enteros se desbandan y otros miles llegan en su lugar, pero el bravo se abre camino con su espada entre la masa y penetra entre las flechas, que es un rumano con siete vidas. En vano se enfurece la hidra, se tensa su cuerpo terrible, gime, aúlla y rechina y se enrosca alrededor. El hijo de Roma se enardece, abraza la hidra y la ahoga y la hace pedazos, y la vence y la derriba... Huyen los gépidos, huyen los búlgaros, y los lombardos y los ávaros; huyen también los hunos, huyen los godos, huyen en tropel, todos en tropel y se marchan, se marchan como el viento, atronando el mundo entero con sus aullidos bárbaros, con sus amargas quejas...

III

### Roma, Roma ya no existe.

¿Dónde están las hordas terribles? ¿Dónde están las lenguas enemigas? Han perecido, se han desvanecido de la vista, como en las mañanas de otoño se derriten, se desvanecen

al sol las nieblas venenosas. ¡Con qué ventisca de furor invadieron Rumanía! ¡Qué furiosos llegaron como dragones ceñudos, con un quijar en el cielo santo y el otro en la tierra! Pero se han marchado a su horrible desierto como no habían venido, dejando atrás el campo de batalla de la matanza. Ancho es el campo de ese combate, ancho y lleno de armas rotas, de cuerpos despedazados que yacen tendidos en montones, lleno de sangre que lo mancha y que hierve en el aire. ¿Dónde están tantas vidas, dónde los ojos audaces? La muerte fría se ha apoderado de ellas, en un instante las ha extinguido, y sobre el campo de muerte, cruel morada de destino nefasto, se ha hecho ahora, de pronto, un silencio pavoroso. Solo se oye de vez en cuando una voz quejumbrosa, un lamento lúgubre, el suspiro de un moribundo o el relincho doloroso de un caballo tumbado patas arriba que llama sin cesar a su amo caído debajo.

El sol cambia de sitio y se pone rojo como el fuego, cubriendo la llanura de un tinte púrpura como un sudario ensangrentado sobre una tumba triste y larga. Y en lo alto del cielo, sobre la tumba, chilla el águila con orgullo y en su giro triunfal corona con su vuelo al valiente vencedor.

¡Larga vida al soldado romano, pilar del mundo occidental! Tú con tu pecho paraste la cruel marea del este, y con tu brazo armado cambiaste el paso del destino. ¿Pero qué digo...?, Un escalofrío sacude las venas del mundo, porque de repente suena por el mundo una voz sin igual, sin nombre, y trae una negra noticia: *Roma, Roma ya no existe...* 

Ha hablado la voz, responde un largo retumbo como un trueno y la magnífica águila de Roma cae, lanzando un chillido lastimero. Ha hablado la voz, y con tristeza llorando el destino de su madre, el hijo de la vieja Roma deja caer las armas de las manos, frunce el ceño y, lleno de dolor, llama, pide la muerte.

Y su hermano el caballo, relinchando callandito, abandona el campo de batalla y se dirige despacio a las montañas, llevándose suave e imperceptiblemente a su querido dueño... Se van por un triste camino y a su zaga cae abajo una noche tenebrosa, una noche ciega, aterradora como el fondo de la tierra, como el secreto de la tumba. Y bajo sus negras alas se borra todo en un instante, como se borra con facilidad el ensueño engañoso y también el recuerdo santo de aquellos que ya no existen...

Montes Cárpatos, 1848

#### SEP MUDEST NAY

## La púrpura romana

Surge la aurora; la luz matutina cubre y dora el bosque apenínico. Las copas oscilan, susurran; los manantiales gorgotean, murmuran. Los pájaros despiertan, se elevan cantando en alegres piruetas el medio jubiloso; en lo alto, envuelta en la claridad de la aurora hace el águila gallarda su ronda.

¡Estrépito y trompas de caza a la vez! El bosque replica al cortejo de llamaradas. El ciervo se esconde en lo oscuro, inseguro por la lanza y la flecha; los corzos escapan aprisa, los pájaros se quedan quietos y guardan silencio. Y penetrando con viveza por arbustos y matorrales avanza la caza en la oscura espesura. Sobre magnífica yegua impetuosa se balancea Roma eterna blandiendo su lanza. En el aire flota la roja capa de púrpura romana sobre sus hombros. Como noble vencedora, reina suprema, guía Roma el cortejo de temor, y tras ella avanzan con furor los altivos caballeros y vasallos de la curia.

Ahora se detienen y miran sorprendidos, se asombran, quedan pasmados y miran hacia arriba, y ven elevarse en el aire luminoso un jirón de púrpura romana flotando, arrancada a la magnífica púrpura de la Roma eterna, señora suprema. El trozo de púrpura llevado al firmamento desaparece de la vista en el resplandor solar... Allá abajo, en el bosque, resuenan los cuernos de la caza romana en marcha distante...

Allí donde las ondas del laguito alpino saludan los rayos de la claridad matutina, las cimas doradas brillan en la aurora, el Rin y el Eno, en su fuerza juvenil, mugen desde las alturas y recorren los prados, allí en las cumbres se ha posado el jirón: unos pastores han hallado la púrpura romana. Es el romanche, nuestra querida lengua.

# Amores elementales: dos poemas narrativos sobre relaciones eróticas entre varones y hadas

Las hadas protagonizan la ficción maravillosa, que en castellano suele llevar el nombre popular de cuentos de hadas. Las hadas de esa ficción desempeñan funciones convencionales, tales como las de conceder dones a los príncipes y princesas recién nacidos, o de sacar de problemas a sus humanos protegidos mediante el poder de su magia. Otras veces, el enfado del hada es el que causa esos mismos problemas, que el héroe o la heroína acaban superando, normalmente gracias al valor y otras cualidades que demuestran a lo largo del cuento. Estos esquemas narrativos repetidos una y otra vez en el contexto de espacios ficcionales imaginarios asimismo fuertemente convencionalizados, incluso en las parodias y escrituras revisionistas de los cuentos de hadas, se distinguen de los de la fantasía épica en la medida en que esta última se caracteriza, al menos idealmente, por la (sub) creación de mundos secundarios fabulosos originales, esto es, inventados por los autores, que se basan en las ciencia humanas (historia, mitología, etnología, etc.) para fundar su propia verosimilitud y consistencia, así como su autonomía. Los mundos convencionales de los cuentos de hadas vienen en principio ya dados, prefabricados por el acervo folclórico y literario. Entre los mundos de la fantasía épica y los de la maravillosa existen, sin embargo, solapamientos.

El principal de ellos es quizá la clase de fantasía fabulosa que podríamos llamar elficológica o feérica, compuesta de aquellas ficciones en que los seres elementales como los gnomos o las hadas no aparecen aislados en sus relaciones con los humanos en el universo convencional de lo maravilloso, sino que se los presenta constituyendo comunidades propias, sociedades con sus propias características ontológicas y su propio funcionamiento, derivado de tales características. Estas sociedades se acercan tanto más a la fantasía épica cuanto más consistentes y autónomas son respecto a la humanidad, sobre todo si los propios seres humanos brillan por su ausencia en ellas, de forma que el mundo primario o fenoménico humano y el secundario feérico son entonces plenamente independientes entre sí, a diferencia de lo que ocurre en los cuentos de hadas convencionales.

Una posibilidad intermedia es que exista una interacción entre un mundo y otro, pero que aquella se limite a la intrusión de algún personaje humano en el espacio feérico o viceversa, sin que ello suponga un entrelazamiento entre ambos mundos, los cuales mantienen su carácter paralelo. Entre los numerosos ejemplos que se podrían aducir a este respecto, destacan dos breves poemas narrativos que presentan sendas comunidades de hadas y sus actitudes opuestas hacia los contactos con los hombres,

y concretamente con los varones con los que las hadas pueden mantener unas relaciones de tipo erótico, que alejan estos poemas de lo maravilloso al uso, a menudo escrito pensando en un público impúber. En cambio, los acercan a la larga tradición que, al menos desde la novela rococó *Le Sylphe [El silfo]* (1730), de Claude-Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon (1707-1777), ha explotado literariamente los amores entre espíritus elementales y seres humanos, aunque lo ha solido hacer desde el punto de vista humano y en el mundo primario, en vez de centrarse en la perspectiva y la comunidad de elementales, es decir, en el mundo secundario de estos, tal y como lo hacen los poemas traducidos abajo.

El primero es uno portugués titulado «Fata Morgana» [Fata Morgana], cuyo autor es Alberto Osório de Castro (1868-1946), quien lo incluyó en su libro A cinza dos mirtos [La ceniza de los mirtos] (1906)¹. Aunque el título remite a la clase de espejismo o ilusión óptica que toma su denominación del nombre toscano del hada (fata) hermanastra del legendario rey Arturo, no es esta la protagonista de esa narración lírica en verso, sino la reina Mab, un hada del folclore inglés cuyas travesuras describió William Shakespeare (1564-1616) en la tragedia Romeo and Juliet [Romeo y Julieta] (1597). Sin embargo, Osório de Castro se aleja de ese ilustre modelo al presentar a Mab como una verdadera reina. Si en esa obra de Shakespeare Mab es un ser elemental que aparece y actúa aislado, el poeta portugués moderno hace que sea una verdadera reina. De hecho, parece ser la soberana del mundo de los espíritus elementales femeninos, pues seres tan diferentes como las ondinas, las sílfides y las propias hadas de cualquier medio (mar, bosque, sierra, grutas...) acuden a la fiesta que ofrece Mab en su corte, en un lugar y tiempo indeterminados, pero de aire legendario y, como no podía ser menos, feérico. La suntuosidad y la belleza de tales seres y de sus atavíos, así como la alegría de sus danzas, aparecen descritas con el brillo de un estilo logradamente preciosista, en el que menudean las imágenes de flores y pedrerías, aunque sin excesos que estorben la propia fluidez narrativa.

Después de las fiestas, vienen las instrucciones u órdenes que confirman el poder de Mab. El uso de verbos en imperativo así lo indica, aunque el discurso de la reina venga diplomáticamente envuelto en exhortaciones de aire lírico. Se trata de confiarles la misión fundamental de confortar al Hombre, aquí con el sentido de varón, para que sus penas lo sean menos gracias a la ilusión, la esperanza y, sobre todo, el amor de la mujer, cuyo cuerpo sería el obseguio de las elementales. Una vez dada a conocer su voluntad, Mab asciende, seguida de la ronda de elementales femeninos, a través de un firmamento esplendoroso, habiendo transfigurado con su presencia el cielo y el mundo, que ahora se perciben como algo dulce y transparente. Ese ascenso y sus consecuencias son tácitamente irreverentes, al poder entenderse como una repetición de la Asunción de la Virgen María, la mujer casta por excelencia, pero en un sentido claramente erótico. El amor de la reina Mab es un amor sexual y corporal. Aunque no sean las hadas y sus compañeras del reino de los elementales quienes se apareen directamente con los varones humanos, la sensualidad amorosa es un don que reciben de aquellas y que les sirve de antídoto contra la tristeza y el sufrimiento. Las hadas de Osório de Castro son, pues, benéficas y, en cualquier caso, el poeta indica sutilmente, a través de la enaltecedora visión de la hermosura

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> La versión castellana se basa en la reedición que sigue: Alberto Osório de Castro, «*Fata Morgana*», *Obra poética*, I, introdução de José Carlos Seabra Pereira, organização de António Osório, Lisboa, Imprensa Nacional-Casa da Moeda, 2004, pp. 146-148.

de su mundo, que el erotismo es también algo bello y enaltecedor.

En cambio, el comportamiento de las hadas como comunidad dista de ser tan favorable a los intereses sexuales masculinos en un poema catalán algo posterior, titulado «Fada Doralissa» [Hada Doralisa], que forma parte de la serie de miniepopeyas épico-líricas que componen el *Poema del bosc* [Poema del bosque] (1910), de Alexandre de Riquer<sup>2</sup>. Ahí también nos hallamos en un espacio feérico poblado por hadas y ondinas que parecen formar una comunidad única, tal y como se desprende de la extensa y retóricamente riquísima descripción de Doralissa, el hada protagonista, cuya belleza es tal, mientras canta al pie de una fuente, que las propias ondinas, unos seres elementales normalmente ariscos y peligrosos, se dedican a peinarla admiradas en medio de un bosque, en la hora bellamente vaga del crepúsculo. El canto del hada no es sino una respuesta al que escucha, entonado por un ministril humano y cuya artística belleza es tal que el impulso erótico que lo inspira se contagia a la naturaleza, a los árboles y al bosque mismo. El hada no puede impedir quedar cautivada y une su canto divino al humano del poeta, multiplicando así su éxtasis sensual y la propia transfiguración amorosa de la naturaleza entera. Finalmente, se produce la fusión sexual entre ambos amores, cuya consecuencia inevitable es que el hada muere. La consumación del amor entre el hada y el varón se afirma, pues, como imposible, como si el contacto estrecho con el cuerpo varonil fuera incompatible con la esencia del hada como espíritu elemental. Las hadas y ondinas de su comunidad no pueden hacer otra cosa sino llorar su muerte y rendirle homenaje en forma de una estatua que la representa como si fuera el dios Amor. En su descripción, Riquer echa el resto de su potencia retórica, que no es precisamente menor, consiguiendo así que la belleza del lenguaje dé una idea de la propia hermosura del hada, así como de su monumento.

Mientras tanto, el poeta que la ha poseído sigue fuera del mundo de los elementales, prosiguiendo su canto como una tentación permanente que ataca la integridad del mundo feérico, hasta que las hadas acaban violentamente con la tentación y cierran otra vez su mundo amenazado por el arte y el amor de los varones de nuestra raza humana. A diferencia de lo que ocurre en Liliana (Liliana, 1907), de Apel·les Mestres, que es el gran poema catalán y románico moderno sobre una sociedad de espíritus elementales, los hombres no representan un peligro existencial para aquellos por su violencia, sino paradójicamente por su capacidad de seducción, especialmente la que entraña su arte. Las hadas son belleza, y la aprecian y la crean, pero la poesía humana parece ser el vehículo con el que la belleza transporta el engaño y la muerte al mundo castamente ideal de las hadas. El mensaje sugerido por el poema de Riquer no podría ser, pues, más opuesto al declarado por el de Osório de Castro. En este, la sensualidad es compatible con el género de hermosura de las hadas y sus otras compañeras elementales. En el de Riquer, la sensualidad las mata. Uno es muy libre de pensar que una cosa es mejor que la otra, según uno aprecie el libre placer del sexo o no, pero es de esperar que los lectores sabrán apreciar en cualquier caso todo lo que une a ambos poemas desde el punto de vista del dominio de la estética elegida por parte de sus autores y lo atractivo de su escritura, pese a las diferencias a este respecto. El portugués opta por un discurso más cercano al de la lírica, mientras que el catalán presta más atención a los efectos narrativos, entre los que destaca el

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> La traducción se basa en la reedición siguiente: Alexandre de Riquer, «Fada Doralissa», *Poema del bosc*, edició i introducció a cura de Roger Miret, Martorell, Adesiara, 2020, pp. 113-118.

del final del poema. Este final lo orienta incluso hacia lo fantástico propiamente dicho, ya que el grito del poeta determina el destino de la estatua del hada que tanto lo amó en vida y que parece haber seguido amándolo también siendo ella estatua. El estallido de la piedra esculpida hace pensar un vínculo misterioso e inexplicable

incluso en el propio mundo secundario de las hadas, y cierra de manera sugestiva y bastante original<sup>3</sup> esta excelente muestra del talento literario de Alexandre de Riquer.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Hay muchas historias de estatuas animadas por el amor (sexual), desde el mito griego de Pigmalión hasta «La Vénus d'Ille» [*La Venus de Ille*] (1837), de Prosper Mérimée (1803-1870), pero no parece haber demasiadas que liguen estrechamente el destino de una estatua al de su modelo en el momento de la muerte. Entre ellas, merecería ser más conocido el relato «Irma» (1881), de Eugenio de Olavarría y Huarte (1853-1933).

### ALBERTO OSÓRIO DE CASTRO

## Fata Morgana

A Fialho de Almeida

Nel plenilunio pio di calendimaggio. Gabriele D'Annunzio, *Intermezzo* 

Mab, la reina hada de color de jade, ofrece un besamanos a su corte en fiesta. Vienen hadas de los montes, del bosque; vienen de las grutas de oro y claridad.

En el claro de luna centellea el lago de los caladios, panoplia que refulge toda de espadas.

En el claro de las perlas, a la luz de la luna, bailan en corro las sílfides y las ondinas. Son de esmeraldas las hadas del mar, con pañuelos de espuma y trémulos reflejos.

Bailan las hermanas, y también las hermosas damas; bailan, bailan, bailan en un claro de luz; bailan, bailan, bailan las centellas, las llamas, finas lenguas de fuego, en el claro lirial.

Llamas de ametista, llamas de berilo, gira el corro en fuego, todo pedrería... Bajo la brillante tela argéntea del tranquilo claro de luna ríen, ríen, ríen, locas de júbilo.

En el claro de luna centellea el lago de los caladios, panoplia que refulge toda de espadas.

Y se desatan adorables risas de mujer, como si se partiera un regio hilo de perlas. Entonces la reina Mab, con su reír tan lindo, dulce flor de los labios escarlata, dice:

—¡Hadas, sois la Ilusión! ¡Vosotras, ondinas, el Amor! ¡Vosotras, la esperanza tenaz, sílfides, del corazón! Id a la casa del Varón y, allí donde lo viereis sufriendo, dejad el Amor, la Ilusión o la Esperanza.

»Y donde era negra la noche, vendrán las estrellas a dorar la oscuridad, tendrán más perfume las flores, serán más hermosas, hadas, por vuestra mano. Con el vino de luz de los pámpanos celestes, dadle la rósea embriaguez profunda de la Ilusión.

«Y vosotras, Ondinas, cuando el Varón se desespere, cuando sienta pesar más honda la soledad y los silencios agrestes, dadle el hechizo y la luz de los ojos de la mujer.

»Oh, sílfides, prended al sol su corazón.

»Como varita mágica os doy mi belleza, la boca en flor, las curvas de ánfora, la sonrisa, todos los matices de la humana mirada, toda la esbeltez del cuerpo de la Mujer, fruto del Paraíso».

Y Mab ascendía, ascendía despacio, desnuda, divinamente desnuda como el claro de luna.

En el claro de luna centellea el lago de los caladios, panoplia que refulge toda de espadas. Y se abren los lirios lánguidos y las rosas, y detrás de Mab asciende la farándula en el plenilunio. Gira y sube y desenrolla una lenta espiral... Abiertas, luminosas alas, extrañamente... La asunción llena el claro de luna de una erupción de plata, una lava lunar de perlas, de luz de nácar, de un ópalo de glaucas profundidades submarinas...

Pero tiembla la leve luz del cielo, en un sobresalto, y el corro asciende, asciende. Y cada flor exhala más fuerte su amor, su deseo de amar... Recuperados / Retrieved works

Y la risa de Mab sube tan alta, tan alta que apenas es la luz de la estrella de la mañana en la cima de las colinas.

Queda más transparente y profundo el silencio. Súbitamente, el cielo es dulce, entreabierta granada en el árbol del mundo... Es un broquel de oro el lago de los caladios, panoplia que refulge toda de espadas.

Goa, junio de 1905

### ALEXANDRE DE RIQUER

### Hada Doralisa

Era la hora en que los bosques quedan suavemente velados, era la hora indecisa de los dorados celajes, de las luces nubosas, de las flores cerradas, hora quieta y serena en que la alta luz del cielo acaricia la tierra y es la última ofrenda de un rayo de sol poniente en la muerte de un hermoso día.

Al pie de la fuente que ensancha un bello abrigadero, la hermosa Doralisa cantaba con voz enternecida y el contorno desnudo de su lindo cuerpo brillaba entre las flores estallando de vida.

Debajo de las ramas tiernas, la ondina, mientras alisa con un peine de oro, marfil y pedrería los bucles del hada, los besa, separando la guedeja ondulante que el aire acaricia.

Suave como la gavanza, la amorosa Doralisa, cuya fina figura armónica se curva con nobleza, tiene transparencias azules por entre la piel rosa; es como un pimpollo cerrado que se abre sonriente.

Sonríe a una voz firme y lejana, que se acerca y es como un canto de amor perdido en el infinito que expresa la nostalgia en los anocheceres mortecinos o la loca esperanza de un sueño indefinido.

Por los bosques de las hadas y las lagunas de las ondinas pasaba melodiosa, armónica y suave, acompañando los sonidos de argentinas cuerdas que extraen las notas de cristal de una lira.

Es una canción vaga que expresa lo que anhela sinceramente un poeta altivo y de corazón noble, el canto que un ministril eleva al terminar la jornada; es una balada de amor plena de poesía.

¡Oh, áurea molécula que, al pasar entre el follaje, besa en éxtasis la forma de un hada triunfante, portentosa como una diosa antigua que dobla flores y césped con el peso de su belleza soñadora y lánguida! ¡Oh, vibración discreta de un canto alibatiente, de un gran deseo de vida que se funde con el claror de las estrellas, que asciende con lentitud!

Los árboles resonantes, cautivados y amantes, besados por el canto, sentían fruición; se mecían las flores que los duendes impacientes rondaban con canciones de insectos rumorosos, y la blanca Doralisa, sintiéndose amar, juntaba a todos los cánticos su bella voz, al tiempo que se enlazaban el poeta y el hada como aliento perfumado de clavel y rosa.

En el azul profundo del cielo brillaba la primera estrella; el ruiseñor parecía agonizar en la sombra; las voces enternecidas subían derechas al cielo y los lirios, escuchándolas, chorreaban miel.

Un vértigo delicioso de espasmo de los sentidos abstraía y seducía al poeta con el amplísimo abrazo de una forma inmortal; de una muerte ideal se moría Doralisa.

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Cuando la abeja absorbe la miel de la corola, la brisa más sutil deshoja el capullo, lo eleva por los espacios adonde vuela deshecho, y así muere la amapola como debe morir el hada que, tentada, ha caído.

Por eso se lamentaban las ninfas y las ondinas del bosque, llorando quedamente a la hermosa Doralisa y, torciéndose los brazos, plañían y lloraban aquella flor abierta que besa con amor la luna emocionada.

El hermoso cabello finísimo cubre con sus onduladas cintas la vena azul que surca el pecho rosa, separa los dorados bucles que caen como cascadas con un arte exquisito y la inmortal forma del hada ideal se anuncia pura como himno que consagra la Naturaleza a la Belleza. Estalla irradiante de todo el amor ferviente que, al reunirlo con lirios, sentía el Artista todopoderoso, sin disfraz de tela vanidosa, creación insigne, serenamente bella. Y, cuando fueron a recogerla sus hermanas, las hadas, como un hermoso ramo todo pálido y marchito de flores del bosque, para llevar su cuerpo bajo la nave florida donde la Primavera tiene un trono eterno de vida bajo guirnaldas rosa de flores de verdadero rosal, la reina Morganda, con los ojos arrasados de lágrimas, transformó con su mágico poder el cuerpo en alabastro puro, rosado y transparente, con finezas florales, dándole el gesto sonriente de un Amor.

Entre el verde destacaba resplandeciente el hada sobre un pedestal de pórfido con venas de oro; metamorfoseada en obra de arte insigne y bueno, parecía escuchar, a lo lejos, un canto de amor procedente de aquel lugar donde ella, Doralisa, delirante y abstraída en un sueño luminoso, había acariciado en la sombra perdidiza aquel amplio abrazo de loco o de poeta.

Las hadas entristecidas, formando rítmico corro suave y flexible alrededor de la hermana,

con la cabeza caída hacia atrás y la mirada ardiente, festejaron la estatua con cantos de añoranza, y el bello cuerpo de alabastro, de espléndida blancura, se erigía como una joya en su peana de oro.

Pasó el claror que forma el sol naciente, pasaron los mediodías, la púrpura del ocaso, el azul frío de la luna serena y mortecina, y el tiempo no conmovió aquella sonrisa de vida que escucha día y noche, cautivada, el rumor de un canto bien conocido que habla de amor. Y, por más que pasaba el tiempo de las nidadas, el tiempo en que las flores se cierran poco a poco, el tiempo en que las crisálidas estallan desveladas y la hora en que la tierra siente un beso de fuego que envía el sol de estío creando gérmenes fecundos, nunca se apagaron los cantos enamorados con que el ministril glosaba una hora de ilusión, un breve momento de éxtasis y besos añorados, hasta el día en que, para no oír sus canciones, las hadas extinguieron con manos rencorosas al poeta, que acabó en la sombra de aquellos lugares encantados lanzando un grito de angustia que alcanzó las praderas. Y el hada Doralisa, posada como un Amor, al oír la voz que exhalaba la esencia de una vida, avivó locamente el fuego de los ojos, tembló entera mirando aterrada y el cuerpo alabastrino, tan frío y tan helado, cayó conmocionado hecho añicos.

Noviembre de 1901

## Informes selenitas: dos ficciones sobre los habitantes de la Luna

La Luna ha inspirado no solo a incontables poetas de todo el mundo, sino también a los escritores de ficción especulativa. Uno de sus pioneros, Luciano de Samósata (circa 120-180) imaginó en su Άληθη διηγήματα [Historia verdadera] el primer viaje imaginario a la Luna, un viaje que le permitió fantasear sobre sus fabulosos habitantes, muy distintos a los seres humanos de la Tierra tanto en costumbres como en aspecto. Así supo concebir especies y civilizaciones imaginarias por completo, pero que no eran fabulosas ni fantásticas, en la medida en que los selenitas descritos son fruto de una especulación racional ya de carácter fictocientífico, pese a la primacía del registro satírico adoptado por el autor. Su ejemplo no quedó sin imitar una vez que su obra se recuperó como modelo literario con el humanismo renacentista. En el Antiguo Régimen, su imitador más famoso y original fue Cyrano de Bergerac (1619-1655) gracias a su Histoire comique des États et empires de la Lune [Historia cómica de los Estados e imperios de la Luna] (1657), que rivaliza con su predecesor griego en inventiva satírica a la hora de describir a sus selenitas como seres escasamente antropomorfos, con su propia mentalidad y modos de vivir la vida, con sus creencias, políticas e intrigas.

Tanto en uno como en otro, así como en escritores que describieron las sociedades

selenitas incluso cuando ya se sabía que la Luna estaba deshabitada, como H. G. Wells (1866-1946) en The First Men in the Moon [Los primeros hombres en la Luna] (1901), reviste gran importancia la aventura del viajero imaginario desde cuya perspectiva se narra su descubrimiento de tales sociedades, así como sus peripecias en ellas. Se trata, pues, de textos novelísticos que albergan en su seno un alto contenido especulativo derivado de la construcción de mundos secundarios racionalmente verosímiles desde el punto de vista de su concepción. Los selenitas constituyen el novum suviniano de estas narraciones, cuya función es la de inducir un distanciamiento cognitivo a partir de la comparación implícita o explícita entre las civilizaciones selenitas y las terrestres contemporáneas, lo que a su vez funda la sátira que subyace a la mayoría de estas obras desde Luciano.

De este esquema general de las ficciones científicas ambientadas en la Luna se aparta, al menos en cuanto a su planteamiento literario, un breve texto decimonónico de Maurice Sand (Jean-François Maurice Arnauld, 1823-1899), titulado en el manuscrito «Quelques mots sur la Lune tirés des notes d'un voyageur» [Unas palabras sobre la Luna sacadas de las notas de un viajero], que había quedado inédito hasta esta primicia mundial de su publicación en

el presente número, a continuación de su traducción castellana<sup>1</sup>. Su autor es un gran escritor de los géneros especulativos que ha quedado eclipsado hasta hoy por su celebérrima madre George Sand (Aurore Dupin, 1804-1876), una de las grandes escritoras del Romanticismo francés. Apenas nadie recuerda, a falta de estudios y reediciones, una novela de extraordinaria originalidad sobre la materia de la Atlántida de su hijo Maurice titulada Le coq aux cheveux d'or [El gallo de los cabellos de oro] (1866/1867). Aunque esta no es la primera obra moderna que noveliza el famoso mito épicofantástico platónico, su novedad es indudable si observamos que, por su intriga, personajes (incluido el héroe galo del título, cuya semejanza con el posterior Conan howardiano salta a la vista), estilo y planteamiento general, es quizá la primera fantasía de sword and sorcery (espada y brujería). Pese al apoyo de su madre, quien escribió una amplia reseña para promocionarla, esta novela no tuvo éxito alguno, seguramente por adelantarse en varias décadas a aquella forma de high fantasy. El texto que ahora nos ocupa no tiene tan alta calidad. Su brevedad y el final un tanto abrupto hacen pensar que fue un experimento literario que Sand no quiso llevar más lejos, tal vez porque lo consideraría, con razón, demasiado alejado de las modas literarias de su tiempo. Aunque no indica la fecha y, por lo tanto, resulta imposible saber cuándo Sand lo escribió (¿sería por la misma época de su novela atlante, que revela un interés por la creación

de mundos secundarios en la que el autor no perseveró después?), es probable que se diera cuenta de que se trataba de una obra demasiado original como para poder ser bien acogida en un medio y una época en que el realismo literario estaba alcanzado la hegemonía. El informe sobre los habitantes de la Luna era bastante extravagante en su época. Tal vez en la de las Vanguardias y de la ciencia ficción wellsiana se habría entendido mejor su originalidad tanto en cuanto a la forma como en cuanto al contenido.

En lo relativo a la propia descripción de los selenitas o *lunarios*, Sand se distingue de sus predecesores por la extraordinaria riqueza de los detalles de orden biológico que aporta sobre las distintas especies de habitantes de la Luna. Estos se dividen en distintas especies, unas animales, de las cuales varias domésticas se presentan como semejantes a las terrestres en forma y función, y otras inteligentes, cuyo aspecto luce al principio bastante antropomórfico, tal vez para ir preparando a los lectores para los rasgos físicos cada vez más extraños que se van introduciendo gradualmente en la descripción, según avanza el texto. Estas especies inteligentes también se describen en primer lugar como paralelas hasta cierto punto con las razas terrestres, habiendo una incluso que consideran irracional para explotarla mejor, como en la esclavitud terrestre. Más adelante, la descripción de su forma de nacimiento, de desplazarse, de comer e incluso de morir y resucitar (si conviene a los herederos o descendientes, incluso siglos

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Esta sigue nuestra propia transcripción del manuscrito, hecha con la ayuda de Sara Avram, a quien agradezco sus correcciones. El manuscrito es bastante legible en general, pero no ponemos la mano en el fuego en lo referido a la exactitud de nuestra transcripción de las numerosas palabras inventadas por Sand que abundan en el texto, algunas de las cuales reescribió por encima de forma poco clara, pese a que el manuscrito presenta pocas tachaduras y correcciones, lo que hace pensar que se trata de una copia definitiva en limpio hecha por el propio autor. Sus cuartillas se conservan en la Beinecke Library de la Universidad de Yale y, concretamente, en el Fonds Maurice Sand, con la signatura GEN MSS 1463, Series III. Box: 7, Folder: 98 (Mixed Materials). Conste mi más sincero agradecimiento a esa Biblioteca por su amable realización y envío de una reproducción en PDF del manuscrito, así como su autorización a transcribirlo, publicarlo y traducirlo. Me gustaría mencionar expresamente a la bibliotecaria Naomi Saito por su disponibilidad y ayuda, así como al fotógrafo y al resto del equipo de la biblioteca por las buenas imágenes del manuscrito.

después) revela que su antropomorfismo inicial era engañoso. Son seres muy distintos a los hombres, y su biología, igual que la nuestra, determina en gran medida su civilización, tal y como la describe el anónimo viajero. Este presta especial atención a las reuniones mundanas, sobre todo a los banquetes. La extraordinaria forma de consumir y compartir alimentos entre los comensales tiene rasgos escatológicos que se sitúan en la tradición de Luciano de Samósata y Cyrano de Bergerac. La extrañeza que suscita esto y otras cosas como el ritual de nacimiento, con rasgos naturales y artificiales, queda acentuada por la parquedad de los comentarios del viajero, que deja que los lectores saquen sus propias conclusiones, entre otras cosas, sobre la relatividad de las costumbres. Estas pueden parecer groseras, cómicas e irracionales desde nuestro punto de vista humano, pero son lógicas y naturales habida cuenta de los condicionamientos naturales e históricos de la Luna. Estos últimos no se explican apenas en el texto, fuera de las alusiones a inventores y científicos que encontraron soluciones más o menos eficaces, pese a su loca apariencia, para algunos problemas lunarios. En cualquier caso, el viajero no juzga apenas. Su actitud es más bien la del testigo. Incluso su participación en los banquetes denota la actitud de un etnólogo o antropólogo que toma nota e informa simplemente de lo que ve. En consecuencia, no hace deducciones ni intenta analizar las causas y el origen de las costumbres extraordinarias a las que asiste, si estas no son evidentes. Por eso no cuenta la historia de los lunarios ni describe sus creencias. Esta renuncia es programática, pues las líneas finales se limitan a aludir a la existencia de un sacerdocio que mantiene secreto lo relacionado con la divinidad. El viajero hace votos por que los estudiosos de la Tierra aborden esta cuestión, pero él cierra su informe señalando así los límites de este:

no propondrá hipótesis explicativas sobre la religión, la cultura y, en general, la mentalidad selenitas, a diferencia de las teorías más o menos especulativas que sus contemporáneos estaban ya proponiendo, y que se seguirían proponiendo durante décadas sobre civilizaciones terrestres distintas a la occidental. Sand criticaba tal vez implícitamente el alejamiento de tales estudiosos de la realidad científicamente observada. Para su viajero, hasta lo más extraño parece natural en su contexto y no exige explicaciones que rebajen ilusoriamente la diversidad intrínseca de los seres, aunque estos sean imaginarios.

Esta actitud objetiva determina asimismo la escritura del texto. Pese al título y la alusión a una experiencia personal del viajero en la Luna, no puede afirmarse que se trate de un viaje imaginario, pues la narración de las aventuras del viajero brilla por su ausencia. Al igual que otros textos románticos igualmente aislados en su contexto, como la alegórica «Geografia Țintirimului» [Geografia del cementerio] (1840), de Pavel Vasici-Ungureanu, el de Sand es prácticamente pura descripción en forma de exposición o informe de divulgación etnográfica, aunque sea esta vez de seres fantásticos. El viaje imaginario implícito ha eliminado todo discurso novelístico, mutándolo en ficción de índole plenamente documental, esto es, lo que en inglés se denomina fictional non-fiction y que en castellano podría llamarse docuficción. Este procedimiento literario estaba aún en ciernes en la época de Sand. Apenas podríamos mencionar como precedente el Moon Hoax [bulo de la Luna] de 1835, atribuido a Richard Adams Locke (1800-1871), formado por una serie de textos sobre los selenitas que habría descubierto el astrónomo John Herschel (1792-1871). Sin embargo, al ser este un logrado fraude, no puede compararse en puridad con este opúsculo de Sand, cuyo carácter ficticio se desprende de su relación con el viaje imaginario literario,

en vez de hacerse pasar por real recurriendo a la autoridad del nombre de un científico real y prestigioso. Sand procedió más bien a crear un nuevo género de ficción mediante la desnovelización del propio viaje imaginario, algo que podemos apreciar mejor tal vez hoy que en su propia época, que asistió precisamente al triunfo definitivo de la novela. Formalmente, se oponía así demasiado a las tendencias coetáneas. Es una pena que Sand no se hubiera atrevido a consumar su rebelión literaria publicándolo, de haber encontrado dónde hacerlo.

Ya entrado el siglo xx, tanto la ficción científica como la presentación de mundos secundarios con un planteamiento etnográfico se beneficiaron de las ansias renovadoras de la literatura europea y americana que se sucedieron del Decadentismo a las Vanguardias. También resultaron beneficiadas de la mayor familiaridad del público occidental con las civilizaciones exóticas del pasado y del presente. Dar un paso más e imaginar sociedades extraterrestres y presentarlas como realidades observables científicamente era ya algo aceptable, incluso en los medios de la literatura popular. Así lo indica otra ficción lunar que se publicó en un periódico italiano dirigido al gran público, adulto o juvenil, titulado Giornale Illustrato dei Viaggi [Diario ilustrado de viajes]. Según su editor

moderno, en su número de 12 de marzo de 1922 vio la luz «Dalla Luna alla Terra» [De la Luna a la Tierra], de un tal Antonio Acierno<sup>2</sup>, del que poco se sabe, aparte de que colaboró con esa revista hasta 1932, siendo posible que su fallecimiento tuviera lugar poco tiempo después. Pese a esta oscuridad, cabe afirmar que esa obra selenita suya debió de tener alguna fama, pues parece haber sido víctima de plagio en Brasil en 1932. Humberto de Campos (1886-1934) publicó en el Diário Carioca un cuento titulado «Os sábios selenitas» [Los sabios selenitas]<sup>3</sup>. Este cuento figura en las listas de la protociencia ficción brasileña y ha sido objeto de un amplio y agudo acertado análisis en una tesis doctoral<sup>4</sup>, sin que nadie parezca haberse podido enterar en aquel país<sup>5</sup> de que se trata de una traducción fiel, pese a algunas modificaciones muy menores y con el título cambiado de aquel cuento italiano de Acierno<sup>6</sup>, cuyo nombre no se menciona como autor original en el Diário Carioca, donde el único nombre que aparece es el de Humberto de Campos. No sabemos qué pudo llevar a este a elegir concretamente aquel texto para darlo a conocer, previa apropiación, a los lectores brasileños, pero creemos probable que se sintiera atraído por la visión satírica de la humanidad, desde una perspectiva ajena. La idea de otredad como un procedimiento que descentra al hombre

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> El texto de la traducción se basa en el siguiente: Antonio Acierno, «Dalla Luna alla Terra», *Le aeronavi dei Savoia. Fantascienza italiana 1891-1952*, a cura di Gianfranco de Turris con la collaborazione di Claudio Gallo, Milano, Nord, 2001, pp. 65-68.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> La referencia bibliográfica completa es la siguiente: Humberto de Campos, «Os sábios selenitas», *Diário Carioca*, v, 1318 (24.11.1932), p. 1.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Marcos Antonio Maia Vilela, *A protoficção científica de Humberto de Campos*, Salvador, Universidade do Estado da Bahia, 2009

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Teniendo en cuenta la dificultad con que circulan los libros entre Brasil y el resto del mundo, no extrañaría que nadie haya podido tener en sus manos la antología italiana. Nuestro hallazgo ha sido completamente casual, al obrar en nuestro poder aquella y una reedición de *Lagartas e libélulas* (1935), el volumen póstumo de cuentos y crónicas de Humberto de Campos en que se recogió el relato «Os sábios selenitas».

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Es posible que ambos fueran, a su vez, traducciones de otro relato anterior de alguna otra lengua, pero no lo hemos localizado, de manera que el de Acierno sigue teniendo el carácter de original. No obstante, no hemos podido consultar el número de la revista en que se publicó, sino tan solo su reedición moderna por De Turris.

se ajusta al interés de Campos por combatir la autocomplacencia social humana, siempre en busca de desenmascarar satíricamente nuestras falsas seguridades, como hizo en su cuento fabuloso «As duas filhas do rei Hassan» [Las dos hijas del rey Hasán], recogido en Ásombra das tamareiras [A la sombra de los datileros] (1934). Como Acierno es precisamente lo que hace en su cuento, Campos se fijaría en él tal vez por esa razón, máxime teniendo en cuenta que «Dalla Luna alla Terra» es un texto bastante original y logrado, entre otras cosas por la fantasía de que hace gala al describir unos selenitas que, como los de Sand, no tienen aspecto antropomórfico, así como por el atractivo de su escritura.

A diferencia del texto de Sand, en el de Acierno se dan a conocer los selenitas en acción, mediante su presentación novelística, con alternancia de descripciones, diálogos y narración en un conjunto predominantemente narrativo. No obstante, la situación así expuesta es peculiar, pues parte de un debate sobre la existencia o no de vida inteligente en la Tierra, un debate que se desarrolla primero como una discusión entre tres científicos, antes de resolverse en una conferencia ante la Academia de Ciencias Lunares y Celestes pronunciada por un explorador que han enviado a nuestro planeta en una astronave inventada por aquel para salir de dudas mediante la observación directa de los terrícolas en su medio. Tanto en aquella conversación como en la conferencia que pone fin a la polémica se utiliza un registro científico que acerca la obra a la docuficción, aunque no quepa clasificarla en ella. Los selenitas no son objeto directo de observación etnográfica, a diferencia de lo que ocurre en el texto de Sand arriba comentado.

Los habitantes de la Luna son ciertamente peculiares y escasamente antropomorfos, tal y como se desprende de su descripción en términos que combinan lo monstruoso (para nosotros) y lo cómico (también desde nuestro punto de vista terrestre), pero tal descripción se enmarca en una acción que revela novelísticamente su comportamiento. Este parece ser muy humano. La manera en que los científicos selenitas entran en polémica, con amplio recurso al argumento de autoridad, y la insistencia en las propias hipótesis como si les fuera algo muy personal en ello son rasgos que no costaría mucho reconocer en científicos de nuestra especie. También parece muy humana la dificultad no solo de aceptar, sino incluso de concebir la diversidad radical de la existencia de otros seres inteligentes, a no ser que estos se ajusten a unos criterios basados en las características de la propia humanidad o, en el caso del cuento de Acierno, la lunaridad, por decirlo así. La facilidad con que se aceptan los datos que confirmarían en apariencia los propios prejuicios, sin buscar otros que pudieran refutarlos, se observa en el comportamiento del explorador, para quien un arriesgado encuentro fugaz con ciertos habitantes del planeta le basta para deducir que todos tan serían agresivos y aparentemente irracionales como aquellos. Para quienes entendemos, por ser terrícolas, con quiénes ha topado el explorador y que la Tierra alberga también seres capaces de acometer estudios científicos semejantes a los presentados por Acierno en el muy diferente medio selenita, este malentendido es cómico, pero también inquietante: ¿quién se atrevería a afirmar que nosotros, y nuestros científicos, no obraríamos de forma semejante en un caso similar? Ahí se genera en la obra el distanciamiento cognitivo propio de la ciencia ficción, ya que la sátira de la observación etnográfica de una civilización distinta se invierte, al convertirnos nosotros en el objeto etnográfico y sugerirse así que nosotros somos también seres tan extraños y extravagantes como los habitantes de la Luna. El cambio de perspectiva realizado por Acierno, cambio que también adoptaron en términos

parecidos otros escritores de su época, tales como José María Salaverría (1873-1940) en «El planeta prodigioso» / «Un mundo al descubierto» (1924/1929), nos invita a mirar la otredad como algo que habría que dar por supuesto, sin necesidad de intentar persuadirnos mediante didácticos discursos. La imaginación especulativa se basta y sobra para arrebatarnos a

la comodidad de nuestro mundo fenoménico y hacernos reflexionar sobre lo uno y lo diverso o, si preferimos disfrutar con el puro ejercicio de la fantasía y el bello manejo del lenguaje para crear atractivos universos ficticios, nos lo facilitan la inventiva y la sutil comicidad que demuestran estas dos agradables curiosidades literarias de Sand y Acierno.

### MAURICE SAND

## Unas palabras sobre la Luna sacadas de las notas de un viajero

(nota de un viajero encontrada en una bola de cera en la falda del monte San Gotardo)

La Luna está tan bien habitada que os voy a hablar de sus moradores, con los que he convivido mucho tiempo. No son tan diferentes de nosotros como se podría creer. Varias razas viven en ese satélite: la raza verde de ojos rojos y cabellos negros, la raza gris sin pelo y la raza blanca de cabellos verdes o amarillos. Están constituidos y hechos como nosotros, solo que tienen en la parte posterior un apéndice caudal desmesuradamente desarrollado, pero volveremos a hablar más adelante de ese interesante aparato que les es de gran utilidad. La raza gris de ojos blancos es generalmente ciega. Vive en cuevas naturales a orillas del mar, se alimenta de plantas saladas y mata con sus grandes y largos dientes a todos los individuos de la raza blanca que encuentra. A veces las razas se mezclan, lo que da lugar a productos monstruosos y paradójicos, que llamaremos mulos humanos. Estos mulos viven en sociedad, rara vez descansan en el suelo y comercian

entre los continentes del planeta gracias a su locomoción aérea.

Digamos unas palabras sobre sus viviendas. Construyen especies de jaulas de azúcar gomoso llamado silaf, que los protegen del frío gracias al carácter compacto de las moléculas que componen esa sustancia, cuya transparencia no los priva ni de un átomo de la luz nocturna sin calor que les llega de la Tierra. Es en jaulas similares, aunque más estrechas, donde se encierra a los recién nacidos, después de haberlos sometidos a una singular operación: se dejan en infusión en una especie de sal natural durante bastante tiempo, luego se sacan y se sumergen en agua hirviendo hasta que la piel se ampolla, después se raspan y secan en bramantes hechos de los intestinos de un buey de mar, que durante la noche sale del agua y va a pastar en las plantaciones de calabazas. Los hombres verdes destruyen muchos de esos bueyes de mar, llamados calabas. Luego los venden a las bandas de animales viajeros que atraviesan su

atmósfera periódicamente. He dicho animales, y me equivoco, pues son simplemente una variedad de los mulos lunares, una variedad muy poco inferior a la que vive en la tierra. La única diferencia entre ellos es que los primeros tienen la cabeza calva y los pies peludos, la cola es menos larga y se abre más en forma de abanico. El medio de locomoción de estas extrañas criaturas es aún más extraño: es atornillando su cola como un gigantesco resorte de reloj y relajándola sobre un cuerpo sólido como logran cruzar el espacio, y lo hacen con prontitud y rapidez considerables. Así pasan por todos los puntos de su planeta en poco tiempo. Esta innovación, además, es reciente, ya que data de hace tan solo veinte krurko (unos diez de nuestros años); se debe a un famoso científico que supo aprovechar esta fuerza de su apéndice caudal, desconocida hasta entonces. Esta raza mestiza es la esclava de la raza verde de tez azulada, cruzada de rojo sangre, lo que les da, a primera vista, la apariencia de nuestros indios norteamericanos. Las mujeres verdes (cratars), similares a hermosas estatuas de malaquita, tienen muy buena figura. Llevan vestidos largos, enlazados bajo el busto. Su cabellera magnífica se eleva en punta seis metros por encima del cráneo, para descender perpendicularmente, por detrás de la espalda, hasta el suelo, y les sirve de tercer punto de apoyo, lo que les permite dormir de pie sin fatiga alguna. Para peinarse utilizan peines nudosos bastabs hechos de siracote, una leche natural que se recoge en los estanques salinos. Algunas mujeres desaseadas o demasiado pobres se peinan a veces con los dientes, que, como todos sabemos, tienen la capacidad de retirarse de las mandíbulas. Una vez utilizados los dientes, se guardan en un farmirok (caja) hasta la hora de la comida, que se toma en el Pristufec o comedor.

Doy aquí por terminados estos detalles para ocuparme de sus medios de reproducción; estos detalles, aunque extraños, no dejan por ello de ser muy exactos. Las mujeres de la raza negra tienen cerca del pectoral derecho, bajo la glándula mamaria, una amplia abertura; es allí donde los niños acuden a buscar refugio, como entre los canguros, cuando la caída de las hojas los amenaza con una destrucción inevitable. De hecho, cada hoja seca se lleva a uno de los miembros de la familia lunar. Así como decimos en nuestro país que le quedan tantos años de vida, dicen ellos en el suyo que le quedan tantas hojas secas por caer. Los varones de veinticinco flakok (años) deben ser necesariamente padres a esa edad. Las mujeres de quince flakok también deben ser madres en esa época; montan en sus pituxas (especie de llama de pelo azul) y van, por ley natural, a buscar marido más allá del lago Piruste, cerca de Kikodek; es por senderos subterráneos revestidos de cera virgen por donde llegan hasta Tapandok las jóvenes, que acuden allí una vez al año. Es como un bazar inmenso, un mercado de cratars (varones de la raza verde). Todos quienes desean casarse se reúnen con gritos de alegría cada vez más fuertes y, acercándose luego unos a otros, comienzan una escena que temo relatar, por ser tan extraña. Se ponen cabeza abajo y, por medio de su orificio inferior, expulsan los gases contenidos en sus entrañas de forma lenta y prolongada. Es un gran placer para ellos. Los más ruidosos siempre ganan el voto y el aplauso de las asistentes y se los escoge de maridos en el mismo momento.

Esta ceremonia, que llaman Zicrodzag, es una de las más antiguas y nadie se casa si no ha participado en ella. Al año siguiente, si resulta del matrimonio un hijo, es indispensable volver a las orillas del lago Piruste en la misma época. Cada padre sube a la cima de un paupukoi (especie de palmera marítima) y arroja con fuerza a su niño al mismo lago. Tan pronto como termina esta ceremonia, todos los grandes dignatarios se acercan, agarrándose del ombligo, y van a pescar a los niños, a quienes se les aplica el tratamiento

especial de agua hirviente y raspado del que ya hemos hablado. Los hijos de la raza verde, la más inteligente de todas, solo vienen al mundo tras dieciocho meses de gestación.

Invitado por un cratar (hombre verde) a participar en una comida que ofrecía a un amigo, entré en el Pristufec (sala de banquetes), donde unos cincuenta triturius (hombres calvos grises) se preparaban para servir. Los invitados llegaban cada doce pendulos (minutos), vestidos a la última moda. Era una especie de blusa dentada llamada butangif hecha de krukuche (lino lunar), que les ceñía el costado, el vientre y las posaderas; nada más entrar, se sentaban cada uno en su gotof (especie de silla de dos patas), con un farmirok a sus pies, un kratir (silla de marfil) delante y, sobre esta silla de marfil, una gruesa bola, que era toda la comida. A una señal del maestro de la Buringue (casa), cada uno se levanta de su *gotof* y va a sentarse en el *kratir*. Las tripas aspiran la bola con un ruido formidable y sale por el extremo opuesto. Solo entonces es buena y sabrosa, y pasa al vientre de una persona, para volver a salir en un instante, aspirada por las tripas de otra, devuelta y tragada por todos los presentes. A continuación, se entabla la conversación. La forma de hablar es uno de los fenómenos más increíbles, hasta el punto de que la imaginación más rica no podría inventarlo. Es a través del ombligo por donde salen los sonidos con acentos estridentes y agudos que producen una música poco armónica a nuestros oídos. Tienen otra forma de conversar: acercan la oreja a la nariz de su interlocutor y tiran de uno de los dedos del pie. El saludo consiste en avanzar delicadamente el pie izquierdo y golpear con el dedo gordo el bajo vientre de la persona homenajeada; cuanto más duro es el golpe, mayor es la estima. Por eso es muy raro ver hombres con barriga, gracias a esa costumbre.

Todos los invitados salieron de la casa después de la comida, algunos en sus carnufs

(una especie de caballo), otros se lanzaron a brincar por el aire sobre sus colas de resorte. El carnuf es un animal adaptado a las necesidades del hombre. Es una especie de odre de color carne, con pelos cerca de la fosa nasal, cerca de las orejas y en el ano. Sus patas son tan cortas que no le sirven de nada, parecen salchichas y no tienen fuerza alguna. Es del tamaño de una barrica, tiene la capacidad de hincharse y elevarse en el aire; es una de las formas más agradables de viajar. Los lunarios utilizan también su piel para confeccionar una prenda que nunca llevan sobre el cuerpo, pero que acarrean como un paquete sobre los hombros, obteniendo mediante ese trabajo un calor y una transpiración de lo más saludables, una transpiración en tal abundancia que, al extenderse sobre la superficie de su globo, crea allí los lagos salados que vemos desde nuestro planeta y que a veces provocan, a mediados de pistor (setiembre), plagas en las inmediaciones de las grandes ciudades. Los científicos han hallado hace muy poco una forma de alejar esas exhalaciones: se trata de coger, por la mañana en ayunas, una rama fuerte de una especie particular de árbol, cortada horizontalmente, con cuidado de que el corte sobrepase unos lestos (centímetros) el labio superior. Durante ese tiempo hacen tocar una melodía con el chichikarufi, una especie de flauta hecha con la piel de sus uvas.

La época de los eclipses reviste gran importancia para ellos. Oh, entonces todo es barullo, un sálvese quien pueda. En primer lugar, esa época es muy peligrosa para los habitantes. Muchos de ellos se desgarran, porque su muerte no es, como en nuestro caso, la privación de la vida, sino un sueño letárgico que puede durar más o menos tiempo. Eso depende de sus hijos o herederos. Al cabo de varios siglos, cuando se siente la necesidad de un antepasado, se abre su tumba *ico* (especie de hojalata). Todos los presentes comienzan a soplarle, por medio de

una especie de canuto, un compuesto hecho de varias raíces, cuyos nombres se nos han olvidado, y luego se le inyecta en las fosas nasales y en los oídos una droga llamada *muziste* para algunos, *furop* para otros; se trata de una especie de embalsamamiento. Una vez terminada esta ceremonia, llevan el cadáver al pie de un volcán, lo acuestan sobre la lava aún caliente y le abren el lado izquierdo con el instrumento descubierto por el difunto Mijonico, famoso óptico, y vierte ahí una *tubiche* (botella) de *Brustillimane*,

planta sagrada que los *chlaudrak* (sacerdotes) utilizan para hacer sus sacrificios; entre nosotros es el olor de amoníaco.

Habría muchos volúmenes que escribir sobre los lunarios y su religión, bastante oculta a los profanos, pero espero que el tiempo lleve naturalmente a los sabios de nuestro planeta a levantar los misteriosos velos con que los sacerdotes rodean lo que tiene que ver con la divinidad.

### Antonio ACIERNO

### De la Luna a la Tierra

Los tres monstruos inteligentes, reunidos en lo alto de una gran montaña calcinada, se habían puesto a hablar, con voz gutural, de la posibilidad de un entendimiento con los lejanos habitantes de la Tierra.

Empuñando un enorme aparato fabricado con metales desconocidos y en el que se engastaban, para aumentar gradualmente las imágenes, decenas de lentes de cristal pulido mediante un procedimiento reciente, Sttaff, el más joven de los científicos selenitas, escudriñaba atento el espacio en dirección de nuestro planeta. A su lado, sentado sobre la roca, Herlowawth, el más anciano, hacía cálculos en una hoja de metal, parecida a nuestras aleaciones de aluminio, que sujetaba al mismo tiempo con cinco de sus seis manos y, además, con otra suplementaria que colgaba, rugosa, de la oscura extremidad de su cola.

Delante de estos dos, con un paquete de láminas abierto ante su único ojo de visión perfecta, Annianax, astrónomo que ya había calculado el número de estrellas de siete mil constelaciones invisibles, meditaba silencioso sobre los posibles resultados de aquella temeraria aventura.

—La máquina para volar inventada por el ingeniero Warthwift —dijo el venerable Herlowawth, mientras levantaba la enorme cabeza temblorosa, constelada de ojos— es el único procedimiento de que disponemos para descubrir si el planeta de que dependemos está, como se supone, habitado. Nuestros instrumentos para ver a distancia son, como sabemos, deficientes. Si los aparatos revelan

huellas de vida, evidenciadas por la modificación progresiva de la corteza terrestre, alejan rápidamente esa posibilidad los fenómenos producidos y una infinidad de circunstancias en que concuerdan algunos de nuestros colegas más eminentes.

—Es esa su opinión —respondió Annianax, interrumpiendo su examen del espacio y fijando en el Maestro su gran ojo congestionado—. El planeta de que nos ocupamos no puede estar habitado como la Luna, donde vivimos. La masa líquida que se mueve en derredor suyo, que ocupa tres cuartas partes de la superficie, y sobre todo la humedad ambiente son contrarias a cualquier manifestación de vida. Y si acaso mis cálculos fallaran, si hubiera por allá seres vivos, estos permanecerían necesariamente en un estado de inteligencia tan rudimentario que nos sería imposible entablar con ellos cualquier relación.

—¿Y aquellas señales que dibujan a veces en su atmósfera, en forma de rápidos trazos de fuego? —se atrevió a preguntar Sttaff.

—No significan nada, no representan nada. Son simples fenómenos magnéticos. La vida sería imposible en aquel medio, con aquellos obstáculos a su conservación, y si la vida es difícil, la inteligencia es, puede afirmarse, imposible.

Irguiendo la cabeza pesada y desnuda, en la que la edad ya había cerrado media docena de ojos, Herlowawth, el más anciano de los astrónomos selenitas, borró los cálculos con la mano de la punta de la cola y objetó sentenciosamente:

—Nuestro astro ha penetrado millones de veces en la sombra, inundándose de luz por el otro lado, sin que nuestros antepasados hayan despejado su gran duda acerca del misterioso planeta del que somos satélites. Las opiniones que os separan ya separaban antes a generaciones y generaciones. Los motivos que exponéis, las razones en las que os fundáis, ya sostenían los argumentos de nuestros abuelos. La teoría de Annianax de que la Tierra está deshabitada o que, de tener habitantes, estos se mantienen en un estado rudimentario y viviendo en la brutalidad más ruda y una ferocidad más acentuada ya era la de Clown, padre de Wluffuwit. Y la de Sttaff, que admite la capacidad del gran planeta y pretende que sus habitantes se hallan en un estado de cultura equivalente al menos al nuestro, tampoco es nueva. La defendieron, en tiempos que ya ni siquiera imagina el recuerdo, Sttowen, Aixley, Butternwamnd y otros cuyo nombre no imprimió la luz del saber en la memoria de las criaturas. Son embargo, lo que no tenían, como tenemos nosotros, era el medio de resolver tamaña controversia, esta duda espantosa, algo que ahora nos es posible gracias a la máquina voladora de Warthwift. Hagamos, pues, que parta con las provisiones apropiadas a reconocer el planeta que nos lleva por la inmensidad y que nos traiga informaciones seguras, claras y positivas sobre nuestro misterioso vecino del éter.

—¡Cúmplase tu orden! —aplaudió Sttaff. —¡Hágase lo que has dicho! —confirmó Annianax.

Un mediodía del pasado marzo, los leones que descansaban, con los ojos cerrados bajo la canícula, en el pequeño oasis de Amfitalah, en el Sahara, se levantaron de un salto, despertados de repente por un ruido insólito que bajaba del cielo.

Entornando los ojos fulvos para ver mejor en aquella orgía de luz que aturdía, las fieras distinguieron, muy arriba, una gran ave de forma nunca antes vista que descendía rápidamente en giros ligeros.

Una vez llegado a tierra, el pájaro enorme se posó estruendosamente en el suelo muelle, levantando una gran nube de polvo.

Transcurrido un instante, los leones vieron salir de él un monstruo de gran cabeza salpicada de ojos, el cual, al moverse sobre dos piernas cortas y enjutas, tenía la ventaja de poseer seis manos y otra más suplementaria en la extremidad de la cola.

Al verse en tierra firme, el monstruo miró escudriñando en derredor. De súbito, en cambio, al descubrir el oasis en el que seis leones lo miraban en pie, atentos a sus movimientos, se dirigió hacia ellos a saltos, aferrando en la mano una placa de metal que, a juzgar por los trazos dibujados en ella, debía de ser por lo menos un obsequio de los habitantes de la Luna a sus lejanos amigos de la Tierra.

Sin embargo, se detuvo a los pocos pasos, aterrado: había oído un rugido cavernoso, terrible, profundo, emitido ciertamente por los grandes habitantes del oasis. Se armó de valor, dio dos pasos más, y ya iba a dar el tercero cuando los leones, enfurecidos por ese desafío, dieron un salto de tres metros hacia él, enseñando los dientes y con la melena erizada.

Adivinando, más por instinto que por reflexión, la intención de las fieras, el selenita plantó en la arena los dos pies, las siete manos y, casi, la cabeza y, de un brinco formidable, ganó el aparato, que se puso rápidamente en movimiento y ascendió velozmente en espiral hacia el disco de la Luna.

La Academia de Ciencias Lunares y Celestes se había reunido aquella noche con toda la solemnidad imaginable. Había allí centenares de sabios, principalmente astrónomos, llegados de todas las regiones del satélite, para escuchar por fin la palabra del Emisario.

Separados por el venerable Herlowarth, que presidía la sesión, estaban el obstinado Annianax, partidario de la inhabitabilidad de la Tierra o de la irracionalidad de sus criaturas, y el joven Sttaff, que lideraba, en el círculo de los científicos selenitas, la corriente opuesta, ya que atribuía un alto grado de inteligencia a los posibles habitantes terrestres.

Abierta la sesión, hizo su entrada en el gran anfiteatro el emisario Warthwift, que había resuelto el gran problema gracias a la exploración del lejano planeta.

Pálido, grave el semblante, casi fruncido el ceño de sus veinte ojos por la emoción que lo embargaba, el aviador lunar, de pie y empuñando en medio del silencio general la hoja de metal que había llevado en su vuelo, comunicó, en medio de la formidable emoción general, lo siguiente:

—Científicos selenitas, se ha cumplido vuestra determinación. Fui al planeta que me señalasteis y está habitado de verdad, pero por seres con los que nos es imposible entablar relaciones. Los seres que allá viven lo hacen al aire libre, duermen en el rudo suelo, tienen cuatro patas, dos ojos y, en la cabeza, mayor que la nuestra, un remolino de pelos enmarañados. Apenas me vieron, abrieron de par en par sus enormes fauces y me saltaron encima con la segura intención de devorarme. En conclusión, el planeta está habitado, pero lo está por seres en un estado rudimentario de inteligencia, con quienes es imposible cualquier clase de comunicación.

Una vez terminado el discurso de Warthwift, Sttaff se dirigió a su adversario y lo felicitó.

—¡Has ganado, Annianax!

Y, besándose los cuarenta ojos, se abrazaron conmovidos con las catorce manos, incluida la suplementaria.

### MAURICE SAND

# Quelques mots sur la Lune tirés des notes d'un voyageur (trouvé dans une boule de cire sur le versant du mont St. Gothard) (note d'un voyageur)

La Lune est si bien habitée que je vais vous parler de ses habitants avec lesquels j'ai beaucoup vécu. Ils ne sont pas tellement différents de nous qu'on pourrait le croire. Plusieurs races peuplent ce satellite. La race verte aux yeux rouges, aux cheveux noirs, la race grise sans système pileux, la race blanche aux cheveux verts ou jaunes. Ils sont constitués et faits comme nous, seulement ils ont à la partie postérieure de leur être un appendice caudal excessivement développé, mais nous reviendrons plus tard sur cet appareil intéressant et qui leur est d'une si grande utilité. La race grise aux yeux blancs est généralement aveugle. Elle habite dans les cavernes naturelles sur les bords de la mer, se nourrit de plantes salées et tue avec ses dents larges et longues tous les individus de la race blanche qu'elle rencontre. Parfois les races se mélangent, ce qui donne bien à des produits monstrueux et paradoxaux, que nous appellerons mulets humains. Ces mulets vivent en société, ne reposent que rarement sur le sol et font le commerce entre les continents de la planète vu leur faculté de locomotion aérienne.

Disons un mot de leurs habitations. Ils construisent des espèces de cages en sucre gommeux appelé silaf qui les garantissent du froid par la compacité des molécules qui composent cette substance et dont la transparence ne leur enlève pas un atome de cette lumière nocturne sans chaleur qui leur vient de la Terre. C'est dans des cages semblables, mais plus étroites, que l'on enferme les enfants qui viennent de naître, après avoir subi une opération singulière : on les fait infuser dans une espèce de sel naturel, pendant assez longtemps, puis on les retire et on les plonge dans l'eau bouillante jusqu'à ce que la peau se boursoufle, ensuite on les gratte et on les fait sécher sur des ficelles, faites des boyaux d'un bœuf marin, qui pendant la nuit sort de la mer et va brouter les plantations de citrouilles. Les hommes verts détruisent beaucoup de ces bœufs marins, appelés calabas. Ils les vendent ensuite aux bandes d'animaux voyageurs qui

traversent leur atmosphère à des époques périodiques. J'ai dit animaux et j'ai tort, car c'est simplement une variété des mulets lunaires, variété très peu inférieure à celle qui habite le sol. La seule différence qui existe entre eux, c'est que les premiers ont la tête chauve et les pieds velus, la queue moins longue et s'étendant plus en éventail. Les moyens de locomotion de ces natures bizarres sont plus bizarres encore, c'est en arrondissant leur queue comme un ressort de montre gigantesque et en le détendant sur un corps solide qu'ils parviennent à franchir l'espace, et ils le font avec une prestresse et une célérité remarquable. Ils parcourent ainsi tous les points de leur planète en peu de temps. Cette innovation, du reste, est récente, elle ne date que de vingt *krourko* (environ dix de nos années); elle est due à un savant célèbre que sut mettre à profit cette force de leur appendice caudal, jusqu'alors ignorée. Cette race bâtarde est l'esclave de la race verte au teint bleuâtre, sillonnée de rouge sanguin, ce qui leur donne, à première vue, l'aspect de nos Indiens de l'Amérique du nord. Les femmes vertes (*cratars*) semblables à de belle statues de malachite sont fort bien faites. Elles portent des robes longues, qui s'attachent sous les seins. Leur chevelure magnifique monte en pointe aigue à six mètres au-dessus de leur crâne, pour descendre perpendiculairement, derrière le dos, jusqu'à terre, en leur servant de troisième point d'appui, ce qui leur permet de dormir debout sans aucune fatigue. Pour se peigner, ils se servent de peignes noueux bastabs faits avec la *siracote*, lait naturel que l'on récolte dans les étangs salés. Parfois certaines femmes malpropres ou trop pauvres se peignent avec leurs dents, qui ont, comme nous le savons tous, la faculté de se retirer de leur mâchoire. Une fois que les dents ont servi, elles se renferment sans un farmirok (boîte) jusqu'au moment des repas, qui se prennent dans le *Pristoufec* ou salle à manger.

Je clos ici ces détails pour m'occuper de leurs moyens de reproduction ; ces détails quoique bizarres n'en sont pas moins d'une grande exactitude. Les femmes de la race noire ont près du pectoral droit, sous la glande mammaire, une large ouverture ; c'est là que les enfants viennent comme chez les kangourous chercher un abri lorsque la chute des feuilles vient les menacer d'une destruction inévitable. En effet, chaque feuille sèche emporte avec elle un des membres de la famille lunaire. Aussi comme on dit chez nous il a tant d'années à vivre, dit-on chez eux il a encore tant de feuilles sèches à tomber. Les hommes de vingt cinq flakok (années) doivent être forcément pères à cet âge-là. Les femmes de quinze flakok doivent être mères aussi à cette époque ; elles montent sur leur pitouxas (espèce de lama aux poils bleus) et vont de par la loi de la nature chercher un époux au-delà du lac Pirouste près de Kikodek; c'est par les chemins souterrains tapissés de cire vierge qui vont jusqu'à Tapandok que les jeunes filles se rendent une fois l'an. C'est comme un immense bazar, un marché aux cratars (hommes de la race verte). Tous ceux qui veulent contracter mariage se réunissent en jetant des cris joyeux et toujours plus forts que les premiers, puis se rapprochent les uns des autres, ils commencent une scène telle que je crains de la rapporter, tant elle est bizarre. Ils se mettent la tête en bas et au moyen de leur orifice inférieur, ils soufflent longuement et lentement les gaz renfermés dans leurs entrailles. C'est une grande jouissance pour eux. Les plus bruyants remportent toujours le suffrage et les applaudissements des assistantes et sont choisis pour époux à l'instant même.

Cette cérémonie qu'ils appellent *Zicrodzag* est des plus anciennes et nul n'est marié s'il ne l'a accomplie. L'année suivante s'il en résulte un enfant du mariage, il est indispensable de revenir sur les bords du lac *Pirouste* à la même époque. Chaque père monte sur le sommet

d'un paupoukoï (espèce de palmier maritime) et lance avec vigueur son enfant dans le même lac. Aussitôt que cette cérémonie est terminée, tous les grands dignitaires s'avancent en se tenant par le nombril et vont repêcher les enfants auxquels on fait subir le traitement spécial de l'eau bouillante et du grattage dont nous avons déjà parlé. Les enfants de la race verte, la plus intelligente de toutes, ne viennent au monde qu'après dix-huit mois de gestation.

Invité par un cratar (homme vert) à venir prendre part à un repas qu'il rendait à un ami, j'entrai dans le *Pristoufec* (salle du festin) où une cinquantaine de triturius (hommes chauves gris) s'apprêtaient à servir. De douze pendoulos (minute) en douze pendoulos, les invités arrivaient vêtus à la dernière mode. C'était une espèce de blouse à dents appelée boutangif fait avec du kroukouche (lin lunaire), qui leur entoure les reins, le ventre et les assises ; aussitôt entrés, ils s'assoient chacun sur son gotof (espèce de chaise à deux pieds), un farmirok à ses pieds, une kratir (chaise d'ivoire) devant lui, sur cette chaise d'ivoire une grosse boule, c'était tout le repas. À un signal du maître de la Buringue (maison) chacun se lève de son gotof et va s'asseoir sur le kratir. La boule aspirée par le boyau s'engouffre avec un bruit formidable et sort par l'extrémité opposée. Ce n'est qu'alors qu'elle est bonne et savoureuse et qu'elle passe dans l'estomac de l'un pour ressortir à l'instant être de nouveau lancée dans l'espace, aspirée par le boyau de l'autre, rendue et avalée par tous les assistants. On se livre ensuite à la conversation. La manière de parler est un des phénomènes les plus incroyables, au point que l'imagination la plus riche ne saurait l'inventer. C'est par le nombril que les sons sortent en accents criards et aigus et qui produisent à notre oreille une musique peu harmonieuse. Ils ont encore une autre manière de converser ; ils approchent leur oreille du nez de leur interlocuteur et se

tirent un des doigts du pied. Le salut consiste à avancer délicatement le pied gauche et à frapper du gros orteil le bas ventre de celui à qui l'on fait honneur; plus le coup est fort, plus l'estime est grande. Aussi est-il fort rare de voir des hommes ventrus, grâce à cette coutume. Tous les invités quittèrent la maison après le repas, les uns sur leurs carnoufs (espèce de cheval), les autres s'élancèrent et bondir[ent] dans l'espace sur leurs queues à ressorts. Le carnouf est un animal approprié aux besoins de l'homme. C'est une espèce d'outre couleur de chair, velue près du naseau, près des oreilles et à l'anus. Les jambes sont si courtes qu'elles ne lui servent à rien, elles ressemblent à des saucisses et n'ont aucune force. Il est de la grosseur d'une barrique, a le don de s'enfler et de s'élever dans l'air ; c'est une des manières de voyager des plus agréables. Les Lunaires s'en servent aussi de sa peau pour s'en faire un vêtement qu'ils ne portent jamais sur leur corps, mais qu'ils traînent en paquet sur leurs épaules, gagnant à ce travail une chaleur et une transpiration des plus salutaires, transpiration si abondante qu'en se répandant à la surface de leur globe, elle y produit les lacs salés que nous apercevons de notre planète et qui occasionnent parfois vers la mi-pistor (septembre) des pestes aux environs des grandes cités. Les savants ont trouvé tout dernièrement un moyen de conjurer ces exhalaisons : c'est de prendre, le matin à jeun, une forte branche d'arbre d'une espèce particulière, coupée horizontalement en ayant soin que la coupure dépasse de quelques lestos (centimètres) la lèvre supérieure. Pendant ce temps on se fait jouer un air de chichikaroufi, espèce de flûte faite avec la peau de leur raisin.

L'époque des éclipses est d'une grande importance pour eux. Ho ! alors tout est en rumeur, c'est un sauve qui peut général. D'abord ces époques sont très dangereuses pour les habitants. Beaucoup d'entre eux se déchirent, car leur mort n'est pas comme chez nous privation

de vie, mais sommeil léthargique qui peut durer plus ou moins longtemps. Cela dépend de leurs enfants ou héritiers. Au bout de plusieurs siècles, quand on a besoin d'un aïeul se fait sentir, on ouvre son tombeau *ico* (espèce de fer blanc). Tous les présents réunis se mettent à lui souffler, au moyen d'une espèce de chalumeau, une composition faite avec plusieurs racines, dont les noms nous échappent, puis on lui injecte dans les narines et les oreilles une drogue appelée *muziste* chez les uns, *furop* chez les autres; c'est une sorte d'embaumement. Aussitôt que cette cérémonie est finie, on emporte le cadavre au pied d'un volcan, on le couche sur la

lave encore chaude et on l'on lui ouvre le flanc gauche à l'aide de l'instrument découvert par feu Mijonico, célèbre opticien, et on y verse une *tubiche* (bouteille) de *Broustillimane*, plante sacrée que les *chlaudrak* (prêtres) emploient pour faire leurs sacrifices; c'est chez nous l'odeur de l'ammoniaque.

Il y aurait bien de volumes à écrire sur les Lunariens et sur leur religion, assez cachée aux profanes, mais j'espère que le temps amènera tout naturellement les savants de notre globe à soulever les voiles mystérieux dont les prêtres entourent ce qui a rapport à la divinité.





