

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

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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 *Teorías 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 thematic-ideological 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-yet-naturalised 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*¹ 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.

¹ 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-human.

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 night side. 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 town-thematic 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 "never-ending 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 mud-and-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 splattered 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 Xiosphant, 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 scrapyards 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; rust-eaten 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 colonial 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 unruly 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 fantasticism 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 urban scape:

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 Light Bright	Dusk Twilight Dark	Night Darkness Invisible
Mechanical Industry	Feral Orchards	Organic Biogeoindustry
Timefulness Time-oriented Future-oriented	Timelessness Space-oriented Past-oriented	Memory Present-oriented Environment-oriented
Survival-oriented	Consumption-oriented	Care-oriented
Mountainous Enclosed	Crevassed Open	Telluric Hidden
Order Monarchic	Chaos Plutocratic	Organised 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 Sameness Artificial	Alien Otherness Organic
Rapacious Violent Decadent Competitive	Environmentalist Peaceful Thriving Cooperative
Technological regression Necropolitic	Technological prowess 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-to-the minute since they keep collective memory alive by sharing it via tactopathy.

Furthermore, by performing homeostatic bioengineering, 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 far-reaching, 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, self-producing, 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 Ordinary Usual	Otherness Extraordinary Novel
Anthropic Sky-gazing Destructive	Tentacular Chthonic Kin-making
Anthropocene/Capitalocene Autopoietic/Dialectic	Chthulucene Sympoietic
Fascist/Neoliberal Circular/Arboreal	Holobiont 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 human-gelet *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/non-human, 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 one 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 Xiosphant'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/non-human 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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