

# «There must be darkness to see the stars»: How contemporary women writers have been queering the way to mixtopic world-making

---

Andrea Raso

## Abstract

Focussing on a number of literary works in English(es), this article intends to show how contemporary women writers have been enacting the disruption of the polarity not only between the fantastic and the real but also between apocalyptic scenarios and the utopistic urge of subgenres like solarpunk. By embracing the concept of mixtopia, as proposed by Giuliana Misserville, I will thus attempt to prove how, in a world ravaged by climate change and shaped by A.I., several women writers bring to the fore the relevance of a technocritical approach in form and content, queering the material-semiotic nature of sci-fi itself, originally a male-dominated genre, and now a wild land of uncharted territories, full of eco-aware possibilities

## Keywords

Mixtopia, Queerness, Science fiction, Speculative fiction, Climate fiction, Ecocriticism, Solarpunk

# «There must be darkness to see the stars»: How contemporary women writers have been *queering* the way to mixtopic world-making

Andrea Raso

## Women's journey to Ustopia

Forty years ago, Ursula K. Le Guin addressed the graduating class of 1983 at Mills College, Oakland, with a speech titled "A Left-Handed Commencement Address". This event is exemplary of what was to become a radical change within the sci-fi and fantastic literary genres, opening a debate on how gender issues in literature project into the world, only to be continuously reabsorbed from reality back into fiction. Indeed, Le Guin began with a significant premise: «I know there are men graduating, and I don't mean to exclude them, far from it» (1983: 1). Yet, she went on, it is necessary to acknowledge the presence of women in places where it has not historically been a matter of fact, since even the triviality of uniforms can and does reflect questionable gendered norms passed on from (male) generation to (male) generation, «these 20th century dresses that look so great on men and make women look either like a mushroom or a pregnant stork» (*Ibid.*). Similarly, the rhetorical tradition of public speaking cannot be separated from the norms of the national language, and «the language of our tribe is the men's language» (*Ibid.*). Here, Le Guin's hint to tribality may sound more akin to an anthropological treatise<sup>1</sup> than to what is expected from the preface to a discussion around linguistic habits, but there is no denying, as she observes, that «[i]ntellectual tradition is male» (*Ibid.*). Women know it as well as they know that a man's world speaks a man's

---

<sup>1</sup> Predictably, owing to the scholarly legacy of his father, Alfred Louis Kroeber, an eminent figure in the field of anthropology.

language, and that men's words «are all words of power» (*Ibid.*). That is why, she adds, "we need some words of weakness [...] instead of talking about power, what if I talked like a woman right here in public? It won't sound right. It's going to sound terrible" (*Ibid.*: 2).

Before going any further, however, it should be stressed that, in the same way as Le Guin does not intend to exclude male subjects from the cultural debate, the focus on (English-speaking) women writers in this article is not intended as the affirmation of the qualitative superiority of their literary works. Rather, the aim is to demonstrate how, quantitatively, women's interpretations of the genres of sci-fi and the fantastic have allowed for more eco-aware worlds to flourish out of dystopic scenarios, displacing and replacing them within a more balanced, non-determined/deterministic framework, something that even Yugoslav-born writer Darko Suvin detects in Le Guin's art when he says that «the centre of Le Guin's creation is the double star of identifying the neo-capitalist, individualist alienation and juxtaposing to it a sketch of a new, collectivist and harmonious, creation» (1988: 139).

Moving deeper into the legacy not only of living, but also of now-late contemporary women writers such as Le Guin herself and Octavia E. Butler, the cartography of a major shift out of the utopia/dystopia polarization is easily traced. Margaret Atwood, for instance, famously coined the term *ustopia* as the balance between worlds that are seemingly poles apart, «the imagined perfect society and its opposite», because «each contains a latent version of the other» (2012: 66). More interestingly, though, Atwood also brings our attention to the fact that sci-fi has changed profoundly since its heyday, when the desire to conquer new planets and to travel through time was still the cue of works such as Garrett P. Serviss's *Edison's Conquest of Mars* (1898) and Jack London's *Star-Rover* (1915). Such enterprises entailed a motion to more-or-less defined, albeit unconventional, places and therefore required first the creation of new means of transport that could carry the tale-teller safely to and back from parallel realities. A similar tendency remains visible in several books and blockbuster adaptations, such as Andy Weir's *The Martian* (2014) and Ridley Scott's adaptation (2015) starring Matt Damon. But this kind of narrative has a clear nostalgic feel to it and is symptomatic of an idealistic yearning to bring back the now-obsolete subgenre of space opera, namely the cradle of historical franchises like Gene Roddenberry's *Star Trek* and George Lucas's *Star Wars*. Instead, one might argue, the idea of space-conquering today is part of an apocalyptic anxiety pertaining more to the socio-economic sphere, as Elon Musk and his epigones are striving to make of outer space territories the backup

home of humankind after Earth's destruction<sup>2</sup> – although this topic would require a digression beyond the scope of this article.

Instead, Atwood captures the essence of a literary attitude much more attuned to the present times, in that she notes that «[o]nce 'the future' became an established location, writers could feel free to jettison the travel episode and [...] plop the reader right down in the midst of things» (2012: 72). In other words, she unveils the speculative potential of realism (intended more as a critical observation of reality than a reversion to the traditional canon), which exemplifies the need of a high degree of rigour to avoid the over-generalization of umbrella terms such as "speculative fiction". If, as Simona Micali puts it, speculative fiction holds together sci-fi, which represents «its most rational and "realistic" modality» (2019: 4), and the fantastic, which is the opposite, one might in fact better understand why Le Guin (2009) once accused Atwood of dismissing the classification of "science fiction" and embracing the general term "speculative fiction" instead, allegedly distancing her literary output from the perceived "anti-real" limitations of the sci-fi genre. Still, Atwood's response is thought-provoking to say the least:

What I mean by 'sci-fi' is those books that descend from H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, which treats [...] things that could not possibly happen – whereas, for me, "speculative fiction" means [...] things that really could happen but just hadn't completely happened when the authors wrote the books. (2012: 6)

Without taking sides, Atwood's approach points to a relevant deviation from the original grounds of sci-fi, and that is why critics may restrain from proclaiming her works as experiments in, say, sociological realism:

I am often [...] told: I am a silly nit or a snob or a genre traitor for dodging the term because these books are as much "sci-fi" as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is, whatever I might say. But is *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as much "sci-fi" as *The Martian Chronicles*? I might reply. I would answer not, and therein lies the distinction. (*Ibid.*: 2)

In short, Atwood seems to praise any attempt to overcome the limits of strictly labelled genres to engage *creatively* and *speculatively* with the real

---

<sup>2</sup> Winterson 2021: 240-242.

world. These are qualities she more directly finds in classics such as the already-mentioned *Ninety-Eighty-Four* (1949) by George Orwell and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), while her modesty keeps her from admitting how she is herself among those who have best interpreted the teachings of these predecessors – or at least, she avoids doing so in non-fiction. Instead, in *Old Babes in the Wood* (2023), she recently did so in one of the most enjoyable pieces, "The Dead Interview", an imaginary, psychic-mediated conversation she entertains with Orwell himself. The interview, a veritable rollercoaster of emotions for any bibliophile, goes from detailing Atwood's traumatic reaction to first reading *Animal Farm* as a young girl and her appreciation of Orwell's passion as a gardener, to tackling themes like communism and political correctness. Above all, it comes through as a literary relay race in which the tight rhythm of the repartee between the two serves as evidence of the analogous poetic interpretation of the real as offered by two authors whose lives have barely brushed – «*I was ten when you shed the meat envelope*» (2023: 81). The subtext to this story is not hard to define, in that Atwood leads Orwell's answers in the direction of her own poetical quest, as much as she does in the questions posed to him. After enticing Orwell to consider the value of literary works by women and "colonials" he neglected in his lifetime – «*Oh, they're writing up a storm these days! Though some colonials, and even some women, were writing when you were still... I guess you didn't read the women much*» (*Ibid.*: 81) – Atwood engages in a discussion with him about the importance of a realistic turn in speculative fiction. Again, "realistic" should be intended as the *situated* interpretation of reality's implications and does not necessarily correspond to fictional world-making as the formal reiteration of the one we are living in at this historical moment. While in the past Atwood has often stated how her «rules for *The Handmaid's Tale* were [...] not [to] put into this book anything that humankind had not already done, somewhere, sometime» (2012: 88), here she explicitly argues that to interpret the world by digging into its complicated structure, rather than to create a new structure altogether, is not to dwell on a pessimistic view of today's seemingly unavoidable tragic events, but to stretch the ear to what the present, or the past, has to tell us of what might be coming next:

[...] *people sometimes make you out to be Mr. Gloomy Pants because of the boot grinding into the human face forever in Nineteen-Eighty-Four, but I've never thought that: there's a note on Newspeak at the end, written in the past tense, so the totalitarian world in the book must be over.*

**I'm glad you've grasped that. Many did not. I was attacked for pessimism.** (2023: 87-88)

Clearly, Atwood not only looks up to Orwell for his ability to avoid anyedulcorating shortcuts, but also for his critical evaluation of events, while today «[t]hings have become quite polarized» (*Ibid.*: 90). Furthermore, Atwood is disproving the conviction of those who see in writers of speculative fiction some sort of clairvoyants – hence, also, the mockery of Mrs. Verity, the medium in the story. This attitude, she suggests, has to do with the definition the term “future” is generally given in the 21st century:

*Winston Smith says in Nineteen Eighty-Four, when he begins writing his ill-fated journal on that beautiful cream-coloured paper. “For whom, it suddenly occurred to him to wonder, was he writing this diary? For the future, for the unborn...How could you communicate with the future? It was of its nature impossible. Either the future would resemble the present, in which case it would not listen to him; or it would be different from it, and his predicament would be meaningless.” However, here I am, in my present but your future, and I believe I do understand Winston Smith’s predicament. [...] you couldn’t possibly have known how close to reality that would become in this age, via the Internet! (Ibid.: 88)*

The ecocritical turn at the end of the story is also noteworthy. Without diminishing the value of Orwell’s literary legacy, Atwood closes on his talent as a gardener, letting him know that the rose bushes he had planted at Wallinton back in 1936 are «[s]till blooming, every summer. It seems kind of symbolic» (*Ibid.*: 94). And indeed, beyond the limits of science as we are traditionally accustomed to thinking of it, which «will never be enough» (*Ibid.*: 84), the Earth is what we should all be turning to, as Orwell is heard saying:

**I did love it, the gardening (Sighs) So wonderful... the hard work, the digging and so on, the fresh smells, even the smell of manure... then out of the dirt and the sweat, like a miracle, a beautiful thing growing... I suppose it’s what I miss the most about the Earth. The beauty of it. (Ibid.: 93)**

If Atwood’s reminding him that «we’re facing a more insidious crisis. [...] the living Earth is threatened» (*Ibid.*: 94) may come through as a pessimistic conclusion, it is the hope embodied by the younger generations that we are left with – the hope of those who are «[t]rying to reverse the damage we’ve done» (*Ibid.*)

## #Solarpunk; or, the limits of utopia

Even more than Atwood, who came to explicitly tackle the theme of ecology only with her *MaddAddam Trilogy*<sup>3</sup>, literary ecocriticism owes its fortune to the legacy of Octavia E. Butler. Renowned for their exploration of race, gender, and biopower dynamics, Butler's contributions adeptly weave environmental concerns into anti-apocalyptic narratives. Central to her literary repertoire is the *Parable* series, including *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998). Set in a near-future California scorched by the ravages of climate change, these follow the ordeal of their protagonist, Lauren Olamina, as she develops an anti-transcendental belief system known as Earthseed. Butler highlights the social repercussions of environmental degradation and urges readers to acknowledge the pressing need for ecological stewardship. However, by resorting to a kind of ecology attentive to race and gender issues and the socio-economic consequences thereof, Butler's literary endeavours transcend the boundaries of traditional sci-fi. That is why her works cannot be simplistically compared to traditional environmental studies such as those carried out by Rachel Carson in her ground-breaking text *Silent Spring* (1962), in that, as Frazier notes, «[t]he tradition of U.S. environmentalism has been very white and very wed to the notions of liberal reform», while «*Parable of the Sower* gestures toward an abolishment of the larger white supremacist, capitalist-driven structure of American society and thus mainstream environmentalism with it» (2016: 47). Indeed, what we witness is the exact opposite: it is Butler's macrotext that has contributed to the success of the environmental humanities as an interdisciplinary field, so much so that second-wave ecocritics like Louise Westling acknowledge «[t]he ecological complexity of Butler's imagined world», one that is «richly suggestive of present human political, social and scientific dilemmas open to far more pedagogical approaches than can be described» (2012: 87).

One may argue that Butler's idea of what it means to incorporate reality into sci-fi is remarkably close to Atwood's, even though Butler does not feel the need to escape the compound of sci-fi in favour of the broader definition of speculative fiction. In fact, during an interview with Charles

---

<sup>3</sup> Although *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) is set in an ever-more barren world, in it the ecological crisis is contingent upon the analysis of Gilead's regime and its exploitation of fertile women's bodies, while the *MaddAddam Trilogy* makes of ecology the driving force behind the entire narrative.

Rowell, Butler not only affirmed that «I went on writing sci-fi because [...] I enjoyed finding out what was real, or at least what everybody assumed was real» but, for instance, when recalling an anecdote involving a young man met on a bus, she provided a straightforward distinction between the dissimilar aim behind two genres that are deceptively close, but actually distant – sci-fi and fantasy:

[...] he said “Oh, sci-fi. I’ve always wanted to write sci-fi about creatures from other galaxies”. I said, “Why do they have to be from another galaxy?” [...] And I realized that there probably are people who want to write sci-fi [thinking it] is anything weird that they choose to write. [...] you just might want to call what you’re writing fantasy. (Rowell 1997: 55)

Thus, in *Parable of the Sower*, rather than taking the escapist route to a fantastical universe whose basic societal structure has no ties with the here and now, Butler *speculatively* re-elaborates the patriarchal symbolic order as she experienced it, even more so for being at the intersection of race (she was of African-American descent), gender (she was a woman writing within a male-dominated genre), and sexual orientation (she was lesbian). Still, refuting the utopistic way out of the normative precepts of Western society, her novels feature subjectivities evading all identitary definitions, especially regarding sex and gender. While Olamina’s sex would historically require of her to be the image of passivity, she defies social convention and activates for the creation of an alternative community, known as Acorn; while her brother Keith is the epitome of toxic masculinity, their father, despite being conditioned by the cognitive bias promoted by the system, is guided in his life by the care and love for his children. Shahnavaaz believes that «what this tells us of the social hierarchy in Butler’s world is that it is a direct reflection of our own». (2016: 43)

Accordingly, an explicit analogy between Butler and Atwood can be found on at least two levels: the “realistic” turn in SF (read sci-fi *and* speculative fiction)<sup>4</sup>, and the rejection of mainstream apocalyptic narratives of the future. In the first case, Butler’s own words often find resonance in Atwood’s. For instance, when once asked about where she found inspiration, Butler replied, «I didn’t make up the problems [...] All I did was look

---

<sup>4</sup> As Donna J. Haraway writes, SF worlding and storying are label-free practices: «[SF as] the webs of speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, sci-fi, and scientific fact». (2016: 101)



around at the problems we're neglecting now and give them about 30 years to grow into full-fledged disasters» (2000: 165). As for the anti-apocalyptic discourse, this is essential for the understanding of the fine line between dystopia and utopia and their convergence in a mutual aim, namely the problematization of extra-textual reality<sup>5</sup>. Hence, against catastrophism, Atwood conceives the plot for *The Year of the Flood* as a synthesis of dystopian and utopian forces, where the Edenic beauty of a changing universe can be *creatively* reinterpreted – rather than be a merely ideological reiteration of the real world – starting afresh thanks to the simple flight of a dove, paramount symbol of hope, capable of holding the whole world in the width of its wingspan:

But how privileged we are to witness these first precious moments of Rebirth! How much clearer the air is, now that man-made pollution has ceased! This freshly cleansed air is to our lungs as the air up there in the clouds is to the lungs of Birds. How light, how ethereal they must feel as they soar above the trees! For many ages, Birds have been linked to the freedom of the Spirit, as opposed to the heavy burden of Matter. Does not the Dove symbolize Grace, the all-forgiving, the all-accepting? (2010: 70)

The biblical undertones to this passage are undeniable, as they often are in Butler, whose *Parables* evoke the gospel. Yet, while in Atwood this choice might be interpreted as announcing the realization of a utopian dream<sup>6</sup>, in the case of Butler, polarized interpretations aiming to box her inside either the dystopian or utopian frameworks are virtually unjustified, since they do not consider that Butler equips all her characters with *agency* in the face of the dystopic worlds they happen to inhabit, but with no need for over-embellishment. On the contrary, as is the case with most writers of speculative fiction, Butler's *modus operandi* does not entail any univocal solution to the problems of our contemporaneity, as one single view inevitably falls back into determinism: «[...] there's no single answer that will solve all of our future problems. There's no magic bullet. Instead there are thousands of answers – at least. You can be one of them if you choose to be» (2000: 165). Still, Butler too incessantly looks for hope in a wasted world, since «the very act of trying to look ahead to discern possibilities and offer warnings is in itself an act of hope». (Stillman 2003: 16)

---

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. Del Villano 2017: 195.

<sup>6</sup> See note 11.

Nowadays, the battle against apocalyptic scenarios is progressively passing to the front of Artificial Intelligence which, Micali reminds us, should be approached in a “technocritical” way, objectively examining the risks and possibilities of our contemporaneity<sup>7</sup>. At present, this growing awareness is found across different (sub)genres. For instance, in the non-fiction book *12 Bytes. How We Got Here, Where We Might Go Next*, Jeanette Winterson hints at a gnostic evaluation of modern times, which wipes out not only religious but also any scientific suggestion of final judgment:

Secular doomsayers warn of the coming AI apocalypse: we will be A) wiped out, B) stripped of our humanity, C) replaced by robots, D) forced into new inequalities where the rich will be smart implant/genetically/prosthetically/cognitively enhanced, and everyone else will be left bidding for low-paid skivvy work on out of-date phones. (2021: 96)

Another unique way of facing similar issues can be found in eco-speculation and, more specifically, in the relatively new genre of solarpunk, one lacking an unambiguous definition, in that, while it is generally known as developing from sci-fi, it configures first as a paradigmatic shift in thought, a social movement begun thanks to the solid participation of the Tumblr community around 2014<sup>8</sup>. Its purpose is to foster creative practices responding, tangibly and conceptually, to the exigencies of our time, employing the key concepts of recycling, self-production, and exchange, under the auspices of a revitalized sense of communitarian empathy<sup>9</sup>. A slightly clearer definition could be found in its denomination: “solar” and “punk”. A clear derivation of cyber- and steampunk, solarpunk art stands in stark contrast to such antecedents, as it focusses on ecological considerations like those concerning renewable energies, while only subsequently integrating an impulse towards utopian aspirations. However, the “punk” bit expresses a desire to retain cyberpunk’s propensity to social revolution. Thus, as a literary genre, solarpunk is the result of specific sociopolitical manifestoes, rather than a spontaneous cultural manifestation. When dealing with it, we should remember that, while in the *Solarpunk Manifesto* we read that solarpunk «can be utopian», it is genuine optimism it mainly

---

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. Micali 2019: 180-181.

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. Więckowska 2022: 349.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. Misserville 2023-b.

dwells on, and sci-fi is enlisted in it as far as it manifests as a «form of activism» (Solarpunk Community 2019: online). This seems to be the reason, for example, that the solarpunk literary scene took more to produce longer works by single authors, whereas it abounds in anthologies and collaborations, even exceeding the geographical borders of Canada and the U.S.<sup>10</sup>, where the movement originated: *Solarpunk: Ecological and Fantastical Stories in a Sustainable World* features stories by Brazilian authors written as far back as 2012. Then came the first Italian solarpunk anthology, *Assalto al sole*, edited by Franco Ricciardiello in 2020.

By subverting the dominion of the matrix, solarpunk embraces a less sombre vision than traditional dystopian settings, endeavouring to divest itself from the shackles of capitalism. That is why solarpunk narratives seem to incorporate a sense of *communitas* as presented in the philosophy of Roberto Esposito, who backtraces the significance of community-building in the term *munus*, namely the etymological core of society itself:

[T]he *munus* indicates only the gift that one gives, not what one receives. All of the *munus* is projected onto the transitive act of giving. It doesn't by any means imply the stability of a possession and even less the acquisitive dynamic of something earned, but loss, subtraction, transfer. It is a "pledge" or a "tribute". (2010: 5)

Within solarpunk, the centrality of the *munus* may denote a revitalization of communal values, aiming at accentuating cooperation and collective agency. Hence, the decisive departure from the individualistic and profit-driven ethos of the capitalist cadre, in favour of a common pooling of resources to engender sustainable and resilient realities. In a sense, that is why promoters of solarpunk tend to distance themselves from the notion of the Anthropocene and critically embrace one of its mutated forms, instead: the Capitalocene. Indeed, if they are in line with Donna J. Haraway's statement that «[t]he Capitalocene [...] does not have to be the last biodiverse geological epoch that includes our species too» since there are «so many good stories yet to tell, so many netbags yet to string» (2016: 49), they refuse her anti-humanist invitation to learn how to "stay with the trouble",

---

<sup>10</sup> This is the case of Italian literature, which has established a fruitful dialogue with international SF. For the analogies and differences between North American and Italian women writers of the fantastic, see Giuliana Misserville, *Donne e Fantastico: Narrativa oltre i generi* (2020-a).

that is to survive in an infected world, which may eventually bring about the extinction of the human race. Said otherwise, Haraway's non-natalist motto «Make Kin Not Babies!» (*Ibid.*: 102) is only half accepted: while striving for communal kinship, solarpunk does not willingly accept what is mistakenly perceived as an anti-progressive or even post-apocalyptic race towards the end of humanity.<sup>11</sup> As for the anthropogenic perspective, solarpunk accepts it as something that «marks the extent of the impact of human activities on a planetary level, and thus stresses the urgency for humans to become aware of pertaining to an ecosystem» (Ferrando 2019: 22), but this can only be a partial acceptance. In fact, the Anthropocene, a term coined by Nobel Prize winner Paul Crutzen (2000), implies that humanity has been oblivious, until recently, of the ongoing ecological crisis, which is a complete misconception of world governments' decennial disregard of ecologists' outcry (see Gore 2006).

Nonetheless, I would advise for a slightly divergent appraisal, in opposition to the claim that solarpunk stories where the "group" safeguards the individual are revisitations of Octavia Butler's oeuvre (Abbate 2020: 14). In fact, in *Parable of the Sower*, communities prove no more advantageous than relying solely on individualistic tendencies. In the story, Olamina's father endeavours to cultivate a self-sufficient community within a dystopian setting, but as he later laments to her, his project has been «balancing at the edge of [the abyss] for more years than you've been alive» (1993: 58). Despite bringing together a disparate assemblage of neighbours under a mutual aid society, he struggles to forge a supportive community with shared goals, since community membership is predicated upon property ownership, thus falling back into the same capitalistic mindset he was trying to disrupt in the first place. Far from being the haven of stability he had imagined, his community inevitably devolves into distinct microcosms, where the fear of a hostile outside world crumples people back into the stifling solace of the nuclear family. And, as Stillman argues, «neither

---

<sup>11</sup> While Haraway's philosophy does not easily fit into a single category, Haraway is known for refusing definitions such as that of posthumanist (cfr. 2008: 17-19) even when her work clearly configures as a non/in/post-human deconstruction of anthropocentrism. Likewise, although Haraway does not advocate for the erasure of humanity, her "plea for other-than-biogenetic kindred" (2018: 69) may be described as anti-natalist, not necessarily as a reactionary desire for humanity to go extinct but as what Patricia MacCormack defines as the process of "altering the way we as humans occupy the world" (2020: 7), in that "the fear of human extinction is a necessary part of empathy that dismantles human privilege" (*Ibid.*: 16).

traditional communities, based around church and neighborhood, nor the nuclear family structure can respond effectively to the corrosive and destructive changes underway» (2003: 18).

It is true that, as Abbate contends, among the ruins of a brutalized world, Olamina brings about a sense of rebirth (*Ibid.*: 14-5), but this is possible as far as she challenges the “virtue” of passivity imposed on her by the very community claiming to protect her. That is, for change to occur, Olamina must tear down the walls of such community, facing the disconcerting truth of a ravished Earth, and not turning her back to it. Instead, if promoters of solarpunk are known for their reliance on utopian vigour, much of their literary output falls short of the ambition to exceed apocalyptic narratives whenever they label successful enterprises on Earth – such as Olamina’s – as «utopian» (*Ibid.*: 14), with the risk of participating in reactionary behaviours<sup>12</sup>. Of course, certain solarpunk authors employ images less utopistic than the «web of living organisms» Ernest Callenbach (2021: 50) proposed in his *Ecotopia* (1975), and in fact, it is odd that possibly the greatest representative of solarpunk fiction is Kim Stanley Robinson, whose books are the exact opposite of comforting. In them we may find an eventual optimistic message, but the realistic turn leaves no room for edulcorating, let alone utopistic, descriptions of truth. Aptly conceived midway between fiction and non-fiction, his *Ministry for the Future* opens with an unsettlingly raw assessment of the present:

And then the sun cracked the eastern horizon. It blazed like an atomic bomb, which of course it was. The fields and buildings underneath that brilliant chip of light went dark, then darker still as the chip flowed to the sides in a burning line that then bulged to a crescent he couldn’t look at. The heat coming from it was palpable, a slap to the face. Solar radiation heating the skin of his face [...] Wails of dismay cut the air, coming from the rooftop across the street. Cries of distress, a pair of young women leaning over the wall calling down to the street. Someone on that roof was not waking up. Frank tapped at his phone and called the police. No answer. (2020: chap. 1)

---

<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, Ricciardiello (Misserville 2023-c) claims this is true of Atwood’s *MaddAddam Trilogy*, which he deems conservative. However commendable, it should be noted that, contrary to Solarpunk’s manifestoed civil defiance, Atwood’s is a one-off experiment in climate-fiction (cli-fi), which is enough to make it worthy of praise.

In short, certain literary undercurrents of solarpunk inadvertently debunk the movement's own belief that «[s]olarpunk stories aim for a unity of theory and practice, showing not only that a better world is possible, but also how we can work toward it» (Wagner and Brontë 2020: 14). Also, they neglect a significant part of Butler's quest, which, rather than sugar-coating reality, intensifies «dangerous tendencies in contemporary society [...] in order to forewarn of the perils latent in the present», showing «how future dystopias result from current utopian dreams (and political powers) of certain segments of [...] society» (Stillman 2003: 15). Butler's message from the margins ultimately speaks directly to the centre as she does «map, warn, and hope» (*Ibid.*) in the face of the dangers of a community whose *munus* disregards the benefits of intersectionality – those backyards of reality where races, genders, sexualities, physical and mental disabilities, neurodivergences, non-conformities come together against all forms of compartmentalization, be it between nature/culture, man/woman, black/white, dystopia/utopia. In this sense, Haraway believes that,

Butler's entire work as an SF writer is riveted on the problem of destruction and wounded flourishing – not simply survival – in exile, diaspora, abduction, and transportation – the earthly gift-burden of the descendants of slaves, refugees, immigrants, travelers, and of the indigenous too. It is not a burden that stops with settlement. (2016: 120)

This perspective offers a new interpretation of reality's complexity, without opting for the escape rope out of its many entanglements, and confronting them instead, which is made, as we will see, into the *raison d'être* of so-called *mixtopia*<sup>13</sup>.

A more aware conception of neighbourhoods as complex webs where issues such as class are not treated as an already-overcome reality but as very much present, and limiting, social factors, is curiously found in much young-adult literature such as that of Charlie Jane Anders, an acclaimed trans writer, whose most noteworthy work so far probably is *The City in the Middle of the Night* (2019), where neighbourhoods are not the merry dots of the same harmonious map. The story revolves around the so-called Perfectionists, an influential group among the ruling families of this fictional world: they attend the most exclusive schools and reside in opulent housing, while their social status separates them from the rest of society.

---

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. Misserville 2020-b.

Anders is undoubtedly close to solarpunk climate fiction (cli-fi) yet does not shy away from including the catastrophic effect of climatic phenomena such as toxic rain. To describe this book as dystopian literature might be far-fetched, but the worrying environmental backdrop is undeniable, setting the tone for an objective exploration of the devastating consequences of governmental negligence. In this case, too, the realistic turn proves essential, as within the Perfectionist's micro-community, a very thin surface of hypocrisy veils their much darker propensity for violence against minorities in the name of their selfish interests – a question resonating heavily in our present. The dichotomy between their pursuit of stability and the crumbling reality surrounding them creates a palpable tension, and the impending catastrophe not only stands for the fragility of a utopian project, but also accounts for the illusion of a world where dystopia and utopia do not co-exist at all.

### **Mixtopia: *Queering* reality**

What has been presented so far is hardly a satisfactory excursus of some of the numerous paths speculative fiction can thread when dealing with utopia and dystopia, as well as with their innumerable derivatives: ustopia, eutopia, anti-utopia, uchronia, and many more. At times, it is even hard to keep up with literary theory as definitions multiply without respite. After all, though, as Winterson reminds us through the words of French author Albert Camus, «*To name things wrongly is to add to the misfortune of the world*» (2019: 79). That is why I intend to show how the concept of *mixtopia* may finally come to represent a *fil rouge* within the limitless range of speculative fiction, and do it on multiple levels too, reinforcing the ontology-epistemology interconnectedness. Proposed by Giuliana Misserville (2020-b), *mixtopia* is a concept overcoming the limits of both the real/fictional and utopia/dystopia dichotomies, with a material-semiotic impulse towards the imagination of new creative (discursive) practices to be performed (materially) in our daily lives, triggering Haraway's string-figured notion of world-making (2016: 9), a series of entangled porous identities, forever in-between, enabling the creation of a brand-new kind of critical thinking (Vallorani 2020: 11).

Contrarily to subgenres like solarpunk, which relies extensively on imageries that are more utopistic than utopian, this approach establishes a permeable refusal of the more-or-less easy "optimism of the will" often found in solarpunk fiction (Misserville 2023-a: 7) and allows writers

of speculative fiction to intersect the borders of a new genealogy of sci-fi that could be described as *queer*, both in relation to the appropriation of what was originally a derogatory term and to its consolidation as a fluid concept resistant to definition and whose theorization can only map its mobile nature (cfr. Jagose 2005: 2). In this sense, queerness is functional to the analysis of sci-fi, which not only is «a slippery [category] with a fraught history» (Calvin 2023: 49), but originally emerged as a highly conservative artform. Thus, to “queer” sci-fi does not necessarily mean to impose a queer exegesis on stories which do not advocate for a thorough reversal of heterosexual and/or cisgender epistemologies, but to stress those that entail a critical evaluation of binary or over-polarized notions of subjectivity. Indeed, as Silvia Antosa observes,

Queer is (dis)located in the in-between spaces of identities in order to subvert the very idea of a coherent subjectivity. [...] Since it avoids a univocal definition, however, queer is a highly contested term that has a variety of uses [...] we talk about queer using the plural: only in this way can we acknowledge its peculiar dialogic, self-defining and even contradictory nature. (2012, 9-10)

When dealing with science fiction, then, queer theory encourages the further development of narratives that could overthrow the clichés of early sci-fi scenarios – namely man’s exteriorisation of his normative desires and fears through tropes like space travel and alien attack – in favour of the de-marginalization of historically neglected nomadic voices<sup>14</sup>, but by integrating gender issues within an intersectional space where a broader identitary spectrum is adopted. In the footsteps of authors such as Samuel R. Delany, who began his literary career in sci-fi by celebrating his non-conforming sexuality, queer science fiction (QSF) therefore strives to look inwardly, bringing the hermeneutical value of emotions to the fore and dialoguing with the real to give substance to queer existence, which has been historically deemed unreal and unnatural<sup>15</sup>. This is the aim of anthologies such as *Irregulars: A Shared-World Anthology* and *Sisters of the Revolution: A Feminist Speculative Fiction Anthology*, featuring contributions by Angela Carter, Joanna Russ, and Nnedi Okorafor, while in Italy, the *DiverGender* anthology (2019) fittingly includes both short stories and an

---

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. Braidotti 2011.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. Lucas 2023.



array of essays pinpointing the key elements of SF.

What is particularly relevant is *how* new queer worlds are being imagined, that is as counter-cartographies with progressively blurred borders, which do not so much problematize the relation of speculative fiction to its many subgenres as they stress the need for an intersectional approach to race, gender, disability, class (etc.) as they intertwine also in the direction of ecocriticism, a tendency deriving from the critical utopias, also describable as mixtopias, of the 1960s and 70s, when optimistic literature came to support new waves of political activism (Baccolini & Moylan 2003: 2). At this time, certain feminist utopias played an essential role, affording women the opportunity to delve into the intricacies of gender-based social injustice in a manner that resonated with the masses both emotionally and intellectually. Through the depiction of societies wherein gender roles were reimagined, these narratives not only brought attention to the condition of (biological) women but also prompted readers to scrutinize prevailing norms in matter of sexual orientation, hence the tight bond between feminism and LGBTQIA+ movements<sup>16</sup>. The confirmation of how utopian critical speculation can sometimes act as an indispensable instrument in the pursuit of liberation is offered by Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), where the construction of a better future society serves as a vehicle for exploring the complex declinations of biopolitics. Set against the backdrop of a dystopian present, the novel follows the protagonist, Consuelo (Connie) Ramos who, as the title suggests, navigates between her grim present life spent in the mental institution she is unjustly committed to, and a world yet to come where gender equality and environmental sustainability are tangible realities. Interestingly, Piercy interrogates the very notion of utopia itself, recognizing its inherent complexities and contradictions. The flaws and tensions of any utopistic project are not left unmarked, so that utopia is revealed as an ongoing process rather than a static endpoint. More importantly, as far back as the 70s, Piercy already assumed an intersectional posture in the face of gender and race inequality and the way they affect those living in liminal spaces (the "edge") by choosing to make a Mexican-American woman from Spanish Harlem the protagonist of what has also been defined «an androgynous novel» (Piercy 2021: online). A novel where essentialist expectations are reversed to the extent that a woman whose uterus is surgically removed after delivering a stillborn child does not have to face the fact of being "no

---

<sup>16</sup> See note 18.

longer a woman. An empty shell” (1976: 45), and the reduction of birth-rates does not call for the tyrannical exploitation of fertile women as in *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

Almost fifty years later, Piercy’s legacy has been expanded on by authors such as Naomi Alderman, who in *The Power* (2016) unsettles the established norms of Western biopower within an imagined matriarchal regime, where female power is abused to the disadvantage of the male population. Addressing contemporary debates on gender politics and traversing the trite nature/culture divide, Alderman’s nuanced approach to queerness counterintuitively dismantles dualistic notions ingrained in biology by revealing the limits of utopia, whose Manichean matrix presupposes the binary distinction between what is accepted and the abject portion of society, which is kept at the margins:

The shape of power is always the same; it is the shape of a tree. [...] It is the shape that lightning forms when it strikes from heaven to earth. [...] the shape electricity wants to take is of a living thing, a fern, a bare branch. The strike point in the centre, the power seeking outward. [...] Orders travel from the centre to the tips. (Alderman 2017: 3-4)

Contrarily, Alderman subtly reconfigures both the social and symbolic orders through a deconstruction of patriarchal precepts that deviates from parallel reversals in favour of a non-binary route, which allows for intersectionality to take centre stage (cfr. Raso 2023). Intersectionality, that is, in the way Kimberlé Crenshaw conceives of it: the analysis of «[d]iscrimination [that] like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another» (1989: 149) but that, on the point of collision, always examines incidences and not indiscriminating chaos. Besides, as Deleuze and Guattari argued in their seminal *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980),

The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification. It can be torn, reversed, adapted to any kind of mounting, reworked by individual group or social formation. (1988: 12)

In speculative fiction, maps are not the immutable compasses of paper we are used to think of and often take on a symbolic hue instead. Others, although material, continuously shift their co-ordinates, as a parody of those traditional maps sticking to the illusion of geographical indissolubility. Symbolical maps are found in Butler’s *Kindred*: «I told myself the map

was more a symbol than a necessity anyway. If I had to go, I knew how to follow the North Star at night» (1988: 143). Atwood speaks of “dire” cartographies, space-time maps resulting from «[t]he many fictional inner journeys available to us» (2012: 70). In *The Earthsea Cycle*, Le Guin is aware that some places cannot be reached following maps if not those one always carries inside. One of Winterson’s favourite metaphors is that of maps, which evoke the utmost importance of remapping the latitude and longitude of both the human and textual body: the pseudo-historical maps of *Sexing the Cherry*; the magical maps of Venice in *The Passion*; maps that become as subjective as one’s journey in *The Stone Gods* or configure as hypertextual directions within the virtual reality of *The PowerBook*; while in *Written on the Body*, we find the trite colonialist metaphor of the adventurer mapping the physical surface of the lover’s body (Lindenmeyer 1999: 56).

A convincing interpretation of literary maps is offered by novelist Laura Pugno, who in speculative fiction sees the outlines of a “wild” territory, an uncharted universe full of possibilities, surrounded by unstable boundaries (2018: 37). It can be city and countryside; it can be rural without resorting to mystifying bucolic scenarios, as in N. K. Jemisin’s *Broken Earth Trilogy* and Masande Ntshanga’s *Triangulum*. It is a place whose mere existence is proof enough of how oppositions such as the nature/culture divide are ill-founded. More importantly, it shows that, as Nicoletta Vallorani suggests, even a focus on the English-speaking world must encompass all those countries where the appropriation of the English language – which is never *one* – is the consequence of a colonial past (2023: 9). This is the case of authors like Tlotlo Tsamaase, from Botswana, who wrote *The Silence of the Wilting Skin* half-way between English and tswana, without the use of italics. No wonder, the publishing industry too has been embracing more of what Lidia Curti might have called «hybrid fictions» (1998: 80-106) and Justine Larbalestier (2002) hermaphrodite narratives. Borrowing Haraway’s words, we may also talk of queer stories rich in humus from intersectional com-post<sup>17</sup> that give voice to all the «[c]ritters – human and not» that «become-with each other, compose and decompose each other, in every scale and register of time and stuff in sympoietic tangling, in ecological evolutionary developmental earthly worlding and unworlding» (2016: 97), that is narratives whose ontological plane is animated by subjectivities that are not informed by the dichotomy of lithic identities.

---

<sup>17</sup> See Ferrante 2022.

Today, the disturbance of essentialist depictions of nature is often rendered through the (eco)aware acceptance of gender non-conformity by means of technological progress, as in Winterson's *Frankissstein: A Love Story* (2019), a rewriting of Mary Shelley's classic featuring a transgender protagonist. Throughout the novel, the characters engage in spirited debates echoing the ongoing discussions around the Posthuman. By mitigating the Cartesian prioritization of mind over body, Winterson offers some ethical considerations of the condition of trans people by reasoning on the common conception of them as monstrous, unnatural entities. Her approach is not far from the themes dear to philosophers the likes of Paul B. Preciado, who reflects on the fate of what he calls «techno-soma-subjectivities», i.e. ultra-contemporary, AI-regulated bodily (re)configurations, whose fate is determined by a technological progress that has negative effects on them only when used in reiteration of the same old norms (2013: 79). As the sub-heading of Winterson's novel indicates, what is being told is a love story, whose purpose is to give an answer to a core question: «What happens to labels when there is not biology?» (2019: 311). While Winterson provocatively suggests brain uploading and cyborgization as feasible options, she offers a nuanced blend of optimism and caution as she reasons on the positivism of stories that, while hinting at the future, she interprets as having ancient roots<sup>18</sup>:

Animal, vegetable, mineral. The gods appeared in human form and animal form, and they changed others into trees or birds. Those were stories about the future. We have always known that we are not limited to the shape we inhabit (*Ibid.*: 115)

In the same line, she believes in the acentric potential of A.I. in the face of binarism – «f\*ck the binary» (2021: 182-200) she says: the key is confronting reality head-on rather than succumbing to its illusory representations, because «binaries belong to our carbon-based past» and «[t]he future is not biology – it's AI» (2019: 72). She therefore presents us with an existential conundrum: we either surrender to an apocalyptic mindset or employ all available means for the benefit of the planet and of all beings, biological or

---

<sup>18</sup> Winterson is known for her many retellings of old stories: the re-writing of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* pairs with *Weight* (2005, her personal interpretation of the myths of Atlas and Heracles) and *The Gap of Time* (2015, her take on Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale*).

not. The reader is compelled to confront reality while engaging in thoughtful action to ensure a sustainable future for (post)humanity, rather than allowing to be deafened to the outcry of the world by the opiate effect of merely utopistic scenarios.

Interestingly, qsf's assessment of the pros and cons of technology does not exclude a spiritual consideration of what it means to be human today. *Freshwater* (2018) by Akwaeke Emezi is a case in point, since it defies easy categorizations, as much as its creator does: Emezi is a Nigerian non-binary trans woman, raised in Aba and now living in New Orleans. It is only natural that they provide us with new frameworks in which to interrogate general perceptions of queerness in the non-Eurocentric context of Africa. Emezi faces the complexity of subjectivity by appealing to the concept of *ogbanje*, namely the idea of reincarnation in Nigerian Igbo mythology (Magaqa and Makombe 2021: 25), dialoguing with late authors like Chinua Achebe, while disjuncting traditional views on queerness (*Ibid.*: 30). To do so, Emezi seamlessly blends the mystical and the everyday, the physical and metaphysical, as the story revolves around the character of "the" Ada, whose «gender flexibility» is indicated by the article preceding the name, as a sign of «compound identity» (*Ibid.*: 27). The Ada's journey, while encompassing elements of the speculative, also grapples with issues such as mental health and self-discovery, and that is how, like many of their fellow-writers, Emezi challenges the notion that speculative fiction must exist in a realm thoroughly detached from our own. In short, they illuminate our shared experiences, while proving how qsf is *relationality* – body and spirit – supportive of individual uniqueness but never individualistic, whereas labels are mere devices aiming to pin down one's subjectivity by fixing it within the confines of identitary norms:

Forgive us, we sound scattered. We were ejaculated into an unexpected limbo – too in-between, too god, too human, too halfway spirit bastard. Deity seed, you know. We never used to be alone, not in Ala's underworld womb, tucked in with the others, the brothersisters. Each time we left, we promised to come back, promised never to stay too long on the other side, promised to remember. We floated smoothly then, like a paste of palm oil, red and thick. Our mother was the world, even as she is now. But then she chose to answer some man's prayer and our smoothness was interrupted by the grain of baritone. (Emezi 2018: 34-35)

By refusing any biographical mimicry of life (*bios*), all the authors mentioned so far reflect on subjective experiences only in the measure that

these are transformed into a kind of art rejecting autoreferentiality. They assert their power of selective acceptance and, by incorporating those immanent fragments of reality that Barthes would call “biographemes”, or splinters of daily life (1989: 7), unveil the consent they grant to at least a portion of the real world, dragging it out of the shadows and illuminating it through the act of creation. They ultimately confirm Albert Camus’s idea of literature, which, he believes,

[...] can neither totally consent to reality nor turn aside from it completely. The purely imaginary does not exist, and even if it did exist in an ideal novel which would be purely disincarnate, it would have no artistic significance. (1984: 269)

The unity of pure reasoning is thus dismissed as false, as it lacks a foundation in a reality whose “silence” can in fact be voiced through the *trans*-figuration of tangible elements into an immanent transcendentalism (cfr. *Ibid.*). Then, whenever a writer, especially a woman writer, openly relies on personal experience, the resulting artwork should not be equated to shallow biographism, in that it would ensnare its significance within yet another essentialist trap. Rather, it should be looked at as a situated as well as speculative version of life, as is often the case with new memoir-forms, certainly exemplified by Billy-Ray Belcourt’s *A History of My Brief Body: A Memoir* (2020), a poignant exploration of personal and collective being(s), blending poetic prose and raw vulnerability to offer a powerful testament to the complexities of Indigenous and queer subjectivities.

The final question is: who or what are all these beings, eternal inhabitants of such uncharted territories? A possible answer would be that they are monstrous configurations whose strength lies in their *trans-ness*. Those labelled as «incomprehensible, insane or even inhuman» – Trans/post/metahuman? – and yet thriving in sci-fi land as the expression of the *humane-ness* of the person-animal-machine, «the very figure of the alien her/him/itself» (Pearson 2008: 73) that the past had tried (with no success) to destroy. They are cyborgs, robots, bio-mothers, and techno-bodies; gay, bi, lesbian trans women and men, and non-binary individuals – the living words of LGBTQIA+, endlessly mistreated as nothing more than a soulless acronym (see Caruso 2022), and ever more excluded from pseudo-feminist discourses<sup>19</sup>. They are Frankensteinian monsters, strong with rage (see

---

<sup>19</sup> For more on feminism’s relation to queerness, see Fasoli 2021 and Pitch 2021.

Stryker 1994), outsiders who once lived at the margins and have now invaded the centre. They promote the promethean power of making oneself fiction and conceive their and others' existence as storytelling. They live in the vulnerable gap between beginning and end, end and beginning, proving how, when it seems like black-and-whiteness is the only possible answer, there will remain the hopeful certainty that «there must be darkness to see the stars» (Le Guin 2012: 110), the bright and dark sides of the Moon: no detail overlooked, no being neglected. They are the past – they have always been there. They are the present – they are scrambling to be seen. They are the future – new and renewed. They are all of us, and we are them.

## Works Cited

### Primary sources

- Alderman, Naomi. *The Power: A historical novel* [2016], Penguin Books, London, 2017.
- Anders, Charlie Jane, *The City in the Middle of the Night*, Tor Books, New York, 2019.
- Atwood, Margaret, *The Handmaid's Tale* [1985], Random UK, London, 2000.
- Atwood, Margaret, *The Year of the Flood* [2009], Knopf Doubleday, New York, 2010.
- Atwood, Margaret, *Old Babes in the Woods*, Chatto & Windus, London, 2023.
- Butler, Octavia E., *Kindred* [1979], Beacon Press, Boston, 1988.
- Butler, Octavia E., *Parable of the Sower*, Warner Books, New York, 1993.
- Butler, Octavia E., *Parable of the Talents*, Warner Books, New York, 1998.
- Callenbach, Ernest, *The Complete Ecotopia* [1975], Heydey, Berkeley, 2021.
- Emezi, Akwaeke, *Freshwater*, Grove Atlantic, New York, 2018.
- Kimberling, Nicole and Hope, J.D., (eds.) *Irregulars: A Shared-world Anthology*, Blind Eye Books, Bellingham, 2012.
- Le Guin, Ursula K., "A Left-Handed Commencement Address", *American Rhetoric*, 22 December 1983, <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/ursulakleguinlefthandedcommencementspeech.htm> (last accessed 10/06/2023)
- Le Guin, Ursula K., "The Year of the Flood by Margaret Atwood. Margaret Atwood doesn't think she writes sci-fi. Ursula K. Le Guin would like to disagree", *The Guardian*, 29 August 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com>

- com/books/2009/aug/29/margaret-atwood-year-of-flood (last accessed 13/06/2023).
- Le Guin, Ursula K., *The Farthest Shore*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 2012.
- Le Guin, Ursula K., *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Gollancz, London, 2017.
- Lodi-Ribeiro, Gerson, (ed.), *Solarpunk: Ecological and Fantastical Stories in a Sustainable World*, World Weaver Press, 2018.
- Piercy, Marge, *Woman On the Edge of Time*, Fawcett Crest, USA, 1976.
- Ricciardiello, Franco, (ed.), *Assalto al sole*, Delos Digital, Milan, 2020.
- Robinson, Kim Stanley, *The Ministry for the Future*, Orbit E-books, 2020.
- Treves, Silvia and Mortillaro, Caterina (eds.), *DiverGender*, Delos Digital, Milan, 2019.
- VanderMeer, Ann & Jeff, (eds.), *Sisters of the Revolution: A Feminist Speculative Fiction Anthology*, PM Press, Binghamton, 2015.
- Winterson, Jeanette, *The Passion*, Atlantic Monthly Press, New York, 1987.
- Winterson, Jeanette, *Sexing the Cherry* [1989], Random UK, London, 2017.
- Winterson, Jeanette, *Written on the Body* [1992], Random UK, London, 2009.
- Winterson, Jeanette, *The PowerBook* [2003], Vintage, London, 2014.
- Winterson, Jeanette, *The Stone Gods* [2007], Penguin Books, London, 2008.
- Winterson, Jeanette, *Frankissstein: A Love Story*, Vintage, London, 2019.

## Secondary sources

- Abbate, Giulia, "Trionfano nuove eroine, guaritrici della specie", *Leggendaria* 143 (2020): 14-15.
- Antosa, Silvia, "Introduction", *Queer Crossings: Theories, Bodies*, Ed. Silvia Antosa, Mimesis, Milan, 2012: 7-14.
- Atwood, Margaret, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*, Virago Press, London, 2012.
- Baccolini, Raffaella and Moylan, Tom. "Dystopia and Histories", *Dark Horizons. Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, Eds. Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan, Routledge, New York-London, 2003.
- Braidotti, Rosi, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2011.
- Butler, Octavia E., "A Few Rules for Predicting the Future", *Essence* (May 2000): 165-166.
- Calvin, Ritch, "Queer SF", *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Sci-fi*, Eds. Lisa Yaszek, Sonja Fritzsche et al., Routledge, London-New York, 2023: 49-56.
- Camus, Albert, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, Vintage, London, 1984.
- Carson, Rachel, *Silent Spring* [1962], Mariner Books Classics, Boston, 2022.



- Caruso, Antonia, *LGBTQIA+: Mantenere la complessità*, Eris Ed., Turin, 2022.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics", *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1 (1989): 139-167.
- Crutzen, Paul J. and Stoermer, Eugene F., "The 'Anthropocene'", *Global Change Newsletter*, 41 (2000): 17-18.
- Curti, Lidia, *Female Stories, Female Bodies: Narrative, Identity and Representation*, Macmillan Press, London, 1998.
- Del Villano, Bianca, "Pragmatica e genere: la ustopia ecocritica di Margaret Atwood", *Prospero. Rivista di letterature e culture straniere* 22 (2017), EUT Edizioni, Trieste: 185-210.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Athlone, London, 1988.
- Esposito, Roberto, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, Stanford University Press, Stanford (California), 2010.
- Fasoli, Annachiara, "La differenza di Haraway: La spaccatura nel dibattito femminista", *Etica & Politica / Ethics & Politics* 33.1 (2021): 565-588.
- Ferrando, Francesca, *Philosophical Posthumanism*, Bloomsbury, London, 2019.
- Ferrante, Antonia Anna, *Cosa può un compost: Fare con le ecologie femministe e queer*, Luca Sossella Ed., Venice, 2022.
- Frazier, Chelsea M., "Troubling Ecology: Wangechi, Octavia Butler, and Black Feminist Interventions in Environmentalism", *Critical Ethnic Studies* 2.1 (2016): 40-72.
- Gore, Al, *An Inconvenient Truth: The Planetary Emergency of Global Warming and What We Can Do About It*, Rodale, Emmaus, 2006.
- Haraway, Donna J., *When Species Meet*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2008.
- Haraway, Donna J., *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, Duke University Press, Durham-London, 2016.
- Haraway, Donna J., "Making Kin in the Chthulucene: Reproducing Multispecies Justice", *Making Kin, Not Population: Reconceiving Generations*, Eds. Donna J. Haraway and Adele E. Clarke, Prickly Paradigm Press, Chicago, 2018.
- Jagose, Annamarie, (1995) *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, NYU Press, New York, 2005.
- Larbaestier, Justine, *The Battle of the Sexes in Sci-fi*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, 2002.

- Lindenmeyer, Antje, "Postmodern Concepts of the Body in Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*", *Feminist Review: Negotiations and Resistances* 63, Sage Publications, New York, 1999: 48-63.
- Lucas, Julian, "How Samuel R. Delany Reimagined Sci-Fi, Sex, and the City", *The New Yorker*, 3 July 2023, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2023/07/10/samuel-r-delany-profile> (last accessed 01/03/2024).
- MacCormack, Patricia, *The Ahuman Manifesto: Activism for the End of the Anthropocene*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, 2020.
- Magaqa, Tina and Makombe, Rodwell, "Decolonising Queer Sexualities: A Critical Reading of the Ogbanjie Concept in Akwaeke Emezi's *Freshwater* (2018)", *African Studies Quarterly* 20.3 (2021): 24-39.
- Micali, Simona, *Towards a Posthuman Imagination in Literature and Media: Monsters, Mutants, Aliens, Artificial Beings*, Peter Lang, Oxford, 2019.
- Misserville, Giuliana, "Chiamiamola Mixtopia", *Leggendaria* 143 (2020-a): 7-9.
- Misserville, Giuliana, *Donne e Fantastico: Narrativa oltre i generi*, Mimesis, Milan, 2020-b.
- Misserville, Giuliana, "Fuori dalle riserve, per nuovi immaginari", *Leggendaria* 159 (2023-a): 5-7.
- Misserville, Giuliana, "Città future e solarpunk. Incontro con Giulia Abbate", *La mano sinistra*, 1 April 2023-b, <https://podtail.com/podcast/la-mano-sinistra/citta-future-e-solarpunk-incontro-con-giulia-abbat/> (last accessed 15/06/2023).
- Misserville, Giuliana, "Climate fiction. Incontro con Franco Ricciardiello", *La mano sinistra*, 17 May 2023-c, <https://podtail.com/podcast/la-mano-sinistra/climate-fiction-incontro-con-franco-ricciardiello/> (last accessed 17/06/2023).
- Pearson, Wendy Gay, "Towards a Queer Genealogy", *Queer Universes Sexualities in Sci-fi*, Eds. Wendy Gay Pearson, Veronica Hollinger et al., Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 2008: 72-100.
- Pitch, Tamar, "Sul disegno di legge Zan", *Studi sulla questione criminale online*, 6 May 2021, <https://studiquestionecriminale.wordpress.com/2021/05/06/sul-disegno-di-legge-zan/> (last accessed 19/06/2023).
- Preciado, Paul Beatriz, *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, The Feminist Press at NY City University, New York, 2013.
- Pugno, Laura, *In territorio selvaggio: Corpo, romanzo, comunità, nottetempo*, Milan, 2018.
- Raso, Andrea, "Towards Non-binary Science Fiction: Naomi Alderman's *The Power* athwart Difference Feminism", *de genere - Rivista di studi*

- letterari, postcoloniali e di genere*, 9 (2023): 65-84, <https://www.degenere-journal.it/index.php/degenere/article/view/185>.
- Rowell, Charles H., "An Interview with Octavia E. Butler", *Callaloo*, 20.1 (1997): 47-66.
- Shahnavaz, Delia, "Earthseed Planted: Ecofeminist Teachings in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*", *The Pegasus Review: University of Central Florida Undergraduate Research Journal*, 9.2 (2018): 40-46.
- Stillman, Peter G., "Dystopian Critiques, Utopian Possibilities, and Human Purposes in Octavia Butler's *Parables*", *Utopian Studies* 14.1 (2003): 15-35.
- Stryker, Susan, "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage", *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1.3 (1994): 237-254.
- Suvin, Darko, *Positions and Presuppositions in Sci-fi*, Macmillan Press Press, London, 1988.
- Vallorani, Nicoletta, "Lo sterile 'equilibrio perfetto': L'utopia-groviglio", *Leggendaria* 143 (2020): 10-1.
- Vallorani, Nicoletta, "Territori comanche: la fantascienza e il sociale", *Leggendaria* 159 (2023): 8-9.
- Wagner, Phoebe and Brontë, Wieland, "Solarpunks & Storytelling in the Capitalocene", *American Book Review* 41.4 (2020): 14-15.
- Westling, Louise, "Literature and Ecology", *Teaching Ecocriticism and Green Cultural Studies*, Ed. Greg Garrard, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012: 75-89.
- Więckowska, Katarzyna, "Appositions: The Future in Solarpunk and Post-Apocalyptic Fiction", *Text Matters* 12 (2022): 345-358.
- Winterson, Jeanette, *12 Bytes. How We Got Here. Where We Might Go Next*. Vintage, London, 2021.

## Sitography

- Piercy, Marge (2021), "Woman On the Edge of Time", *Marge Piercy Official Website*, <https://margepiercy.com/woman-on-the-edge-of-time> (last accessed 01/03/2024).
- Solarpunk Community, *A Solarpunk Manifesto* (2019), *Solarpunk Italia*, <http://www.re-des.org/a-solarpunk-manifesto/> (last accessed 15/06/2023).

## Filmography

*Star Trek: The Original Series*. Directed by Gene Roddenberry, performance by Leonard Nimoy, William Shatner, DeForest Kelley, Nichelle Nichols, NBC, 1966-1969.

*Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope*. Directed by George Lucas, performance by Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher, Peter Cushing, Alec Guinness, 20th Century-Fox, 1977.

*The Martian*. Directed by Ridley Scott, performance by Matt Damon and Jessica Chastain, 20th Century-Fox, 2015.

## Other works of SF mentioned

Garrett P. Serviss, *Edison's Conquest of Mars* (1898).

Jack London, *Star-Rover* (1915).

Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (1932).

George Orwell, *Ninety-Eighty-Four* (1949).

Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Earthsea Cycle* (*A Wizard of Earthsea*, 1968; *The Tombs of Atuan*, 1970; *The Farthest Shore*, 1972; *Tehanu*, 1990; *Tales from Earthsea*, 2001 collection; *The Other Wind*, 2001).

Margaret Atwood, *MaddAddam Trilogy* (*Oryx and Crake*, 2003; *The Year of the Flood*, 2009; *MaddAddam*, 2013).

Jeanette Winterson, *Weight* (2005).

Andy Weir, *The Martian* (2014).

Jeanette Winterson, *The Gap of Time* (2015).

N. K. Jemisin, *The Broken Earth Trilogy* (*The Fifth Season*, 2015; *The Obelisk Gate*, 2016; *The Stone Sky*, 2017).

Masande Ntshang, *Triangulum* (2019).

Tlotlo Tsamaase, *The Silence of the Wilting Skin* (2020).

## The Author

### Andrea Raso

Andrea Raso (*he/him*) graduated in English Literature from Tuscia University and obtained his MA degree in English and Anglo-American Studies from La Sapienza University with a thesis on the Italian reception of Virginia Woolf's political and literary texts. At present, he is a PhD candidate at

Roma Tre University with a project on Jeanette Winterson at the intersection between postmodernism and the Posthuman. His research interests include gender and transfeminist readings of works spanning from Modernism to contemporary literature, ecocriticism, and queer science fiction.

Email: andrea.raso@uniroma3.it

## **The Article**

Date sent: 30/06/2023

Date accepted: 28/02/2024

Date published: 30/05/2024

## **How to cite this article**

Raso, Andrea, “«There must be darkness to see the stars»: How Contemporary Women Writers Have Been Queering the Way to Mixtopic World-Making”, *Other possible worlds (theory, narration, thought)*, Eds. A. Cifariello - E. De Blasio - P. Del Zoppo - G. Fiordaliso, *Between*, XIV.27 (2024): 547-575, <http://www.between-journal.it/>