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## **Women and Cli-fi: Ecological Science Fiction in the Time of the 'Anthropocene'**

Giulia Verardi

University of Perpignan, France

Over the last two decades, the number of fictions about climate change, global warming, and environmental issues has escalated, reflecting the current problems that our planet and our societies are dealing with. Unstable weather conditions, droughts, forest fires and floods are part of the daily news, as well as the Covid-19 pandemic which, three years later, still affects people around the world. By approaching the environmental debate through the literary field, the genre of climate fiction invites us to become aware of the urgency of the moment, not only by depicting the disastrous consequences that anthropogenic climate change can bring but also by offering possibilities for rethinking our social system to avoid environmental catastrophe. Derived from science fiction, the term 'climate fiction', or 'cli-fi', was first coined in 2008 by Dan Bloom, who identified a new genre of novels, short stories and movies dealing with a disruption of the Earth's climate caused by human activities. This article approaches the debate about women's role in reshaping science fiction through the subgenre of climate fiction, and, in particular, through the cli-fi novels written by Ursula Le Guin, Octavia Butler and Margaret Atwood. The first part highlights the way their novels imagine the transformation of societies based on violence into post-patriarchal communities in harmony with the natural world; the second part explores the sf criticism and theories that these writers have developed; and the last part argues that these writers have revised science fiction, a genre which has been predominantly associated with white male authors and male heroes, and in which women, LGBTQ and people of colour were often underrepresented both as writers and as characters.

### **Making kin after the apocalypse**

As a subgenre of science fiction, cli-fi focuses on what the future might hold in a climate-changed world during the Anthropocene, which is the current geological period 'during which human activities have impacted the environment enough to constitute a distinct geological change', and is supposed to have started either with the Industrial Revolution or with the dropping of the atomic bomb in 1945 (National Geographic Society). However, despite the

concept being formally recognised with the creation of the Anthropocene Working Group (AWG) in 2009, the formalization of the Anthropocene Epoch as an interval of geologic time still awaits confirmation by the International Commission on Stratigraphy and the International Union of Geological Science (Rafferty 2020). As the economist Kate Raworth suggests, the Anthropocene might also be called 'Manthropocene' or 'Northropocene', because the AWG is mainly made up of men and very few members are female scientists or come from the global south (Raworth 2014).

This period is often represented in post-apocalyptic sf and cli-fi novels which aim at exposing the consequences of living in the Manthropocene and propose an alternative model of society which could replace the old, patriarchal order. For instance, Ursula Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* (1985) starts with 'A First Note', in which the writer presents her book and its protagonists, the Kesh, a tribe of indigenous people living in a far distant future: 'The people in this book might be going to have lived a long, long time from now in Northern California' (Le Guin 2019: 7). Characterised by a peculiar verbal construction, this phrase can be confusing for the reader who may wonder whether the writer is referring to a future situation or rather to a past one. The fictional anthropologist Pandora is trying to reconstruct 'an Archaeology of the Future', looking for people who are not the dead, but the unborn, living under the Hill of Possibility, in a potential future time. She is looking for people who behave similarly to the indigenous of that place, owning 'their Valley lightly, with easy hands. They walked softly here. So will the others, the ones I seek' (15). Indeed, as Le Guin later stated, the reason she wrote *Always Coming Home* was to tell stories about her world, the world of her childhood, in California. However, to be able to write about this place she needed to learn from the people who lived there: 'the old ones, the first ones, trees, rocks, animals, human people', and hence, she had to 'come home' (Le Guin 1988: 8). Thus, it can be argued that her story set in the Dreamtime future is, in reality, a celebration of the silenced past, of the Native Americans, whose oral literature she listened to and from which she created her story.

In the novel, Pandora's essays are separated by the voices of the Kesh, 'speaking for themselves in stories and life-stories, plays, poems and songs' (Le Guin 2019: 7), such as the story narrated by a Kesh woman named Stone Telling, who tells her life story, from her childhood to the narrative present. In particular, Stone writes about her father, who belongs to another group of people, the Condors, a patriarchal society based on war, violence and exploitation of nature and women, which finally collapses. The two societies represent two ways of inhabiting a place: the first being the ecological approach to the world represented by

the matrilineal Kesh community, while the second is the anthropocentric way of living in contemporary Western civilisation. As Val Plumwood observes, Western thought is based on the separation of humans and the natural world (Plumwood 1993), a human/nature dualism which is represented by the hierarchical Condor society in *Always Coming Home* and refused by the Kesh community who lives in harmony with the place and the beings within it.

A similar satirical version of our society is represented in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998), which depict a mid-2020s dystopian world wrecked by climate change. This period of apocalypse, also called the 'Pox', is not caused by 'accidentally coinciding climatic, economic, and sociological crises' (Butler 2019b: 4), but by the denial of human beings to deal with those problems, leading to environmental problems, wars, poverty, and diseases. Moreover, the dystopic California in which the story is set, guided by the Christian American church, is characterized by cities taken over by companies, a reference to the early American company towns and debt slavery, which, according to the protagonist Lauren, are an 'old hat in science fiction. [...] The company-city subgenre always seemed to star a hero who outsmarted, overthrew, or escaped the company' (Butler 2019a:116). In this world however, instead of escaping, people are willingly trying to be employed in these cities in exchange for security, food, and jobs.

Lauren Oya Olamina lives with her family in a walled neighbourhood, from which they rarely go out because the world outside is too dangerous. The neighbourhood represents a safe place for its inhabitants, a very fragile and temporary nest that, as Lauren foresees, will be attacked and set on fire by outsiders. Believing that change is an essential part of reality, Lauren decides to face the current problems and build a better future. Travelling as a man instead of a woman for safety, she sets out on a journey north, gathering more people and creating a peaceful community based on the faith she calls Earthseed. The name of her religion comes from her belief according to which people will have to act like plants, seed themselves away from their endangered neighbourhoods, among the stars, where more life-bearing planets have been discovered. She founds a self-sustaining community that finances scientific exploration to settle in outer space; her last journal entry recounts that the space shuttles are leaving for the Earth's first starship with the children of Earthseed, who represent the next step for the human species.

A similar speculation about what society could become is made by Margaret Atwood in her *MaddAddam* trilogy (2003-13), in which the anthropocentric capitalist society is destroyed by a global pandemic which (almost) makes the central character, Jimmy, the last man on earth. He is not alone, though, in this post-apocalyptic world where he has to take charge of the

Crakers, a genetically modified group of humanoids who were bio-engineered by Jimmy's best friend, Crake. The Crakers represent the new post-human species created to replace the old one, which Crake aims to destroy by eliminating the three external causes of death: war, contagious diseases, and overpopulation. Hence, he includes a virus in a new pill that he has designed and commercialised, causing a global pandemic which kills the majority of people on the planet because, according to him, breaking the link between two generations would be a more efficient way of destroying an entire civilisation if technology is forgotten and the tools are not available anymore.

To ensure their survival, Crake selects traits from among the animal kingdom and implants them in the Crakers. For instance, Crakers can survive on a wide variety of simple vegetation, solving the problem of food scarcity. Sex occurs as a purely reproductive act, during limited polyandrous breeding seasons, so that sexual or romantic frustration is completely absent and subsequent violence is avoided. The Crakers join other human survivors, among whom there are some members of the God's Gardeners, a small eco-conscious religious community who predicted that humanity would be annihilated by a Waterless Flood, that is, Crake's viral pandemic.

### **Transtextuality: science fiction and speculative feminism**

For the purpose of this study, I am going to explore some of the transtexts produced by the authors in order to analyse their interpretation of the novels they wrote and, more generally, of the science fiction genre. Among the five types of transtexts identified by Gérard Genette, the ones which are most relevant to my analysis are *metatexts*, secondary texts that comment on the primary text, and *architexts*, which concern the generic conventions within which a text is read or should be read (Genette 1997: 1-8). As Adeline Johns-Putra argues, transtexts written by authors 'are an essential part of any textual interpretation [...] all transtexts end up colliding or cohering with the narratological elements of the core text' (Johns-Putra 2022: 286), and provide readers with a direct critique or interpretation of their literary works, helping 'to construct conceptual frameworks in which to read them' (289).

Emerging in the 1960s, Le Guin was one of the first women to reach international and academic acclaim in the genres of science fiction and fantasy, 'marginal genres' that Le Guin chose 'precisely because they were excluded from critical, academic, canonical supervision, leaving the artist free' (Le Guin 1989: 234). Moreover, as Le Guin later observed, the 1960s and '70s saw the entrance of a substantial number of women writers into science fiction which,

'along with some unconventional males of the same generation, enlarged the scope of the genre, increased its literary and intellectual sophistication, introduced credible female and nonheterosexual characters, and improved the general quality of the prose' (Lafreniere 2008).

One of the common literary themes in speculative fiction that Le Guin helped to revolutionise was the concept of utopia, something that we cannot reach 'by going forward, but only roundabout or sideways; because we're in a rational dilemma, an either/or situation as perceived by the binary computer mentality, and neither the either nor the or is a place where people can live' (Le Guin 1989: 98). According to Le Guin, utopia has often been Euclidean, European, and masculine, a rationalist utopia whose main aim has always been progress and whose main tense has only ever been the future. On the contrary, she stresses the importance of the process, rather than the progress, the way to arrive there, a way which must be backward and inward, to find our roots, our home, to have a sense of where we live, to speculate on an inhabitable future in order to have a habitable present. It can thus be argued that this is the purpose for which *Always Coming Home* tends to mix the past with the future, a society which is yet to come and, at the same time, is already gone, lost, since, according to Le Guin, a science fiction novel should avoid 'the linear, progressive, Time's-(killing)-arrow mode of the Techno-Heroic' and redefine 'technology and science as primarily cultural carrier bag rather than weapon of domination' (170).

The linear trajectory of the spear is the one followed by the Condors, a society based on war and considered by the Kesh to be in the time 'outside'. This rejection of linearity is also embodied by the narrative structure of the novel, for which Le Guin considers the 'natural, proper, fitting shape' to be a bag (Le Guin 1989: 169), holding words, holding things in a disorderly way, where things are not tied neatly together but are entangled with each other. *Always Coming Home* illustrates this theory in that it does not follow a linear chronology, but it tells the story of the Kesh community through different 'tools' found and assembled by the fictional anthropologist Pandora: the life story recounted by a Kesh woman; Pandora's reflections and explanations concerning the Kesh culture; a novel written by the Kesh writer Wordriver; as well as poems, myths, tales, dramas, recipes, and even a glossary of the Kesh language.

Le Guin replaces the 'bright [...], aggressive, lineal' utopia with its opposite, 'dark [...], participatory, circular' (Le Guin 1989: 90), a kind of utopia represented by the Kesh community and the values they preach. While utopias often emerge from some cataclysmic event, no information is given about the origins of the Kesh, apart from their creation myths, according

to which they have always existed. Moreover, they have no central government in the Na Valley, in that each individual participates in the community's life in order to maintain peace and stability, in a sort of anarchy, a form of government which challenges the more statist visions of the utopian genre.

Critics have contended that *Always Coming Home* marked a departure for both Le Guin and feminist utopian fiction which, during the 1970s, arguably became more depressing and pessimistic as a consequence of the dystopian preoccupations of the New Wave (Fitting 1990; Khanna 1990). According to Le Guin, the New Wave contributed to 'an increase in the number of writers and readers, the breadth of subject, the depth of treatment, the sophistication of language and technique, and the political and literary consciousness of the writing' (Le Guin 1993: 18). For example, when discussing the political awareness found in science fiction, Le Guin draws a distinction between 'making a new world: a different world', which she considers as an act of 'fantastic imagination', and 'making the world new [...] different: a utopia or dystopia', which is an act of 'political imagination' (Le Guin 1989: 46). To these concepts, she introduces a third facet of imagination, the 'religious imagination', which aims at 'making the [old] world' (46), because, as she suggests, 'To make a new world you start with an old one [...]. To find a world, maybe you have to have lost one' (48). This insight is reflected in her novel, where she chooses to reinvent the world of her own childhood in California. To some extent, this is a realistic approach, to which Le Guin adds that 'science fiction and realism are versions of the same literary trends – they both depend, in a sense, on science to tell us what is real' (Walsh 1995: 195). However, whereas literary realism tends towards a metonymic or denotational representation of reality, Le Guin asserts that science fiction is inherently metaphorical, serving as a means to discuss and explore our current human condition: 'The future and space travel are just metaphors. They are very useful and beautiful metaphors for talking about us now, but they are not predictions' (Walsh 1995: 196).

Le Guin's resistance towards hard sf is matched by Atwood's reluctance towards the category of science fiction, preferring instead the term 'speculative fiction' when describing her novels that delve into imagined futures and possible societal and environmental changes. However, although Atwood draws a distinction between science fiction, which explores impossible events, and speculative fiction, which examines plausible occurrences, she also acknowledges that 'the terms are fluid. Some use speculative fiction as an umbrella covering science fiction and all its hybrid forms – science fiction fantasy, and so forth – and others choose the reverse' (Atwood 2022: 8). As with Le Guin's criticism, how we define science fiction,

according to Atwood, rests upon the genre's relationship towards realism and plausibility. Whereas Atwood seems to subsume science fiction under fantasy, which Le Guin regards as featuring wholly impossible elements unlike sf, Atwood's subsequent hedging of how the genre is defined and perceived is read by Le Guin as a desire to avoid being labelled as science fiction and, therefore, as part of a 'literary ghetto' (Le Guin 2009).

Nonetheless, like Le Guin, Atwood has sought to use the genre, whether we call it science fiction or speculative fiction, as a vehicle for revolutionising the concept of utopia. In her essay, 'Dire Cartographies' (2011), Atwood introduces the term 'ustopia' as a combination of 'utopia' and 'dystopia'. She believes that these two ideas, the imagined perfect society and its opposite, contain latent versions of each other. Utopias are often associated with depicting ideal societies or some variation thereof, aiming to eliminate societal problems such as war, inequality, poverty, gender disparities, and other issues. On the other hand, dystopias are commonly seen as the antithesis of utopias, portraying bleak and oppressive societies characterized by suffering and tyranny. However, Atwood suggests that both utopias and dystopias can coexist within the same narrative. Scratching beneath the surface, she believes that a yin-yang pattern emerges, with hidden dystopias within utopias and concealed utopias within dystopias (Atwood 2011: 66-96).

For example, the world depicted in the *MaddAddam* trilogy is dystopic in that a significant portion of the human population is divided between a technocratic society and a state of anarchy, before being annihilated. However, within this dystopia, Atwood incorporates elements of a concealed utopia. One aspect of this utopia can be seen in the presence of God's Gardeners, who revere the sacredness of nature and the interconnectedness of all life. Their dedication to environmental preservation and spirituality represents a utopian striving in the midst of the surrounding chaos. Another utopian element lies with the Crakers. By designing the Crakers to be free from common human ailments, Atwood explores the potential for an improved existence, where physical and emotional hardships are diminished or eliminated. Importantly, rather than relying on external social structures or manipulations of the mind or soul, it can be argued that Atwood places the source of this utopian potential within the human body itself, through Crake's re-engineering of the DNA code.

However, whereas Atwood proposes the posthuman as an extrapolation from current gene technology, Butler emphasises that non-western peoples were historically viewed in some sense as posthuman: as bodies that could be measured, quantified, and disposed of. In her essay, 'The Lost Races of Science Fiction' (1980), Butler addresses the absence of Black, Asian,



Hispanic, Amerindian, and other minority characters in mainstream science fiction, questioning why they have been overlooked. In response to this question, Butler suggests that the presence of minority characters, particularly black characters in her example, disrupt the narrative and shift the focus onto race if the authors are limited in their thinking and unable to envision their characters in broader contexts. Therefore, Butler highlights the danger of stereotyping, whether it is conscious or unconscious, and draws parallels to the struggles that women have faced in combating such limitations, arguing that just as it is unnecessary to overly emphasize a character's race, it is also unnecessary to overly emphasize a woman's femininity.

According to Butler, there are several reasons for the exclusion of minorities in science fiction. She identifies conscious racism as one of the factors, where authors deliberately choose not to include diverse characters due to biased beliefs or prejudices. She also highlights the influence of habit and custom, where adherence to established norms can hinder the inclusion of minority perspectives. Another reason she is ignorance, wherein writers may lack knowledge and understanding about minorities, leading to a lack of representation. Butler emphasizes the importance of research in gaining insights into different cultures and perspectives, but also the significance of recognizing that they are writing about people, human beings with the full range of human experiences, concerns, flaws, skills, hopes, and so on. It is thus imperative to depict characters from minority backgrounds as fully realized individuals with diverse traits, rather than reducing them to stereotypes or token representations. By acknowledging the complexity and diversity of humanity, Butler encourages a more inclusive and multidimensional representation of marginalized groups in science fiction and fantasies, such as her own *Parable* novels.

### **Cyborg identities: gender and race in cli-fi**

In surveying the critical thoughts of Atwood, Butler and Le Guin, two tendencies become apparent. One is that, despite disagreements between how they might define science fiction, all three approach the genre in relation to literary realism and the representation of reality. For Atwood and Le Guin, this relationship turns upon questions of logic and plausibility; for Butler, it involves the inclusion of peoples, who were part of the historical record, but whose presence was subsequently marginalised or erased. The second tendency is that, by aligning themselves with a form of realism in their otherwise non-mimetic fictions, they each question what it means to be human or how humanity has been represented. For Butler and Le Guin, this means

focusing upon indigenous or diasporic populations; for Atwood, it involves developing a posthuman species that reflects back upon the nature of humanity.

These questions can be considered further alongside Donna Haraway's influential 'Cyborg Manifesto', originally published in 1985. As with other post-structural feminist thinkers, Haraway emphasises that gender is not a fixed, inherent category but is instead a social and ideological construct that exists dynamically within other social, economic, cultural, and institutional relations. Thus, Haraway also highlights the intersections between gender, race, class, and property. This 'post-gender' way of looking is closely related to her concept of the cyborg (Haraway 2004: 7-45). Being a cyborg, according to Haraway, goes beyond personal freedom and self-construction; it involves networks and interconnectedness. As a cyborg, an individual exists as a collection of networks, constantly exchanging information with the multitude of networks that constitute their world. Haraway extends this understanding to feminist science fiction, suggesting that the concept of 'women of color' can be seen as a cyborg identity, a subjectivity that emerges from the fusion of outsider identities (14-5). In this context, being a cyborg represents a mode of resistance and empowerment. Therefore, Haraway calls for a reimagining of gender, challenging the essentialist views imposed by Western patriarchal norms. She envisions a utopia that moves beyond the limitations of gender, seeking a world where gender distinctions are deconstructed and reimagined. In this regard, Haraway makes explicit reference to the work of Butler (37), but as my earlier discussion of Atwood and Le Guin indicates, the role of utopia, its relationship to race and gender, and its articulation through the science fiction genre, is central to their fiction too.

Le Guin had already attempted a deconstruction of gender roles in her landmark novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969). However, as she later acknowledged, her thematic treatment contained 'timidities or ineptnesses' (Le Guin 1989: 14), such as her retention of the pronoun 'he' to refer to the hermaphroditic Gethenians instead of utilizing the more inclusive generic singular pronoun 'they' (15). As she also admitted, her early literary influences tended to be white and male derived from 'English, European, ancient Nordic and Roman and Greek [...] an overwhelming inheritance of wealth and antiquity and power' (Le Guin 1988: 4). Only gradually did Le Guin begin to absorb influences closer to home, such as the landscape of Oregon where she settled and raised her family (8), before she could finally write a novel set within the landscape of her childhood: 'To write the book I had, at last, and entirely, without reservation, to come home' (9). This process involved learning the 'geology and climatology and botany and zoology and ecology and anthropology' (9) of the Napa Valley in Northern

California, but most of all, the history, language, and folktales of the indigenous population. The further that Le Guin went into the natural history and cultural geography of the region, the further she also departed from her earlier male-dominated literary influences. This shift in Le Guin's approach also allowed her to explore and depict women's experiences more authentically, and to break free from the confines of the traditional epic heroic narrative.

As a result, in *Always Coming Home*, Le Guin delves into women's perspectives by portraying strong female characters like Stone Telling and Pandora. The Valley of the Kesh, the world depicted in the book, provides Le Guin with a platform to advocate for sexual equality, environmental consciousness, and utopian ideals. The Kesh society operates on the basis of female descent, where property, responsibilities, and other aspects are passed down from mother to daughter and so forth. This matrilineal system reflects a fundamental respect for women's autonomy and their central role in the community. Sexual relations within the Kesh society are viewed as a natural aspect of life and are not restricted to marriage, and homosexuality is not prohibited. Moreover, their religious beliefs incorporate a female deity represented by Coyote and emphasize the interconnectedness of all beings, living and non-living entities, which are all regarded as people.

A significant distinction between the Kesh and the Condors lies in their perspectives on women and gender. Stone Telling's experience living with the Condor people exposes the stark contrast between their hierarchical society and the egalitarian values of the Kesh. The Condor society exhibits a rigid social structure that advocates for male superiority and the domination of nature and relegates women to a subordinate position, denying them full agency and personhood. Stone Telling's confinement and restricted movement within the City of the Condor symbolize the oppressive nature of their society, where she is denied the freedom to go outside alone, to read and learn new arts, while she is expected to marry. Through the comparison between the two societies, Le Guin underscores the vitality, openness, and success of the Keshian culture while highlighting the destructive consequences of the Condor society's values and practices. The wastefulness of resources, particularly in the pursuit of weaponry, leads to their ultimate downfall, as starvation and disease ravage their community.

A similar societal collapse is depicted in the *Parable* series, which also explores the concept of slavery in a modern-day setting. In this reimagining of slavery, Butler expands the notion to encompass not only racial slavery but also forms of bondage based on gender and economic circumstances. Some characters in the series, such as the mixed-race runaway slaves who join Lauren's group, represent this intersectionality of oppression. They face multiple

layers of discrimination and subjugation based on their race, gender, and economic status. Economic disparities and financial struggles lead individuals to become trapped in systems of debt, effectively rendering them enslaved to their creditors, as argued above. Moreover, marital slavery is another theme explored in the series, as represented by Zahra Moss, a homeless 15-year-old girl purchased by Richard Moss, a polygamist, in what Lauren perceives as a form of slavery. By intertwining race, gender, and economic disparity within the concept of slavery, Butler illuminates the various dimensions of power dynamics and oppression present in the society she portrays. Her exploration of these themes serves to critique and challenge societal norms and systems that perpetuate inequality and subjugation.

In contrast with a society where self-interest prevails, with individuals primarily concerned with their own well-being, Lauren establishes the Earthseed community, which emphasizes the importance of collective action and cooperation, urging its members to prioritize the group's well-being over individual interests. The concept of Earthseed revolves around the belief that all individuals are interconnected and that their actions should reflect a shared responsibility towards one another. These principles align with Lauren's hyperempathy, a condition which compels her to experience and share the emotions of those around her, fostering a deep sense of empathy and understanding towards others.

Finally, gender is also a key theme in the *MaddAddam* trilogy, which explores the dynamics of power and violence between men and women in the dystopian society depicted in the novels, a society where women are often marginalized and objectified, subjected to violence and exploitation. For example, with his reputation for assaulting and murdering women, characters like Blanco, the misogynistic manager of SecretBurgers, exemplify the objectification and mistreatment of women in this society. Toby, one of the protagonists, manages to escape this oppressive environment when she encounters the God's Gardeners, who offer her an alternative and more empowering community. Ren, the other protagonist, turns to trapeze dancing at the sex club Scales and Tails as a means of survival in a society where opportunities for women are limited and institutions of sexual exploitation are socially accepted. However, after the global pandemic, the power dynamics shift. Surviving rapists are hunted, captured, and put on trial, and a post-apocalyptic community emerges based on the values of the Crakers and the God's Gardeners. Through these narrative elements, Atwood explores the repercussions of a society steeped in misogyny and the transformative possibilities that arise when oppressive systems are dismantled.

Moreover, as Richard Northover argues, throughout the trilogy, 'the control of the word shifts from male domination [Jimmy in *Oryx and Crake*] through female mediation to the non-human Crakers' (Northover 2016: 84), signifying a transformation of authority and agency. The diffusion of knowledge among the Crakers plays a significant role in their empowerment and ability to absorb and transmit learning to future generations. Toby's position as a spokesperson represents the inclusiveness of the posthuman world, as she speaks not only for herself and her own experiences but also for the diverse communities that have survived the apocalypse, fostering a dialogue that integrates feminine and masculine, human and posthuman perspectives. It can thus be argued that Toby's interactions with non-humans reflect a more inclusive and egalitarian approach, emphasizing the interconnectedness and interdependence of all species. This arguably amounts to a speculative Anthropocene feminism that also highlights the trilogy's attention towards issues of liberation, particularly for female characters, and the exploration of the transformative potential within a post-apocalyptic context (Ringo and Sharma 2020). For example, in the final novel, Toby's journey towards emancipation is exemplified through her effective storytelling and her role as a teacher to a Craker child named Blackbeard. Her ability to pass on knowledge and engage in intergenerational teaching signifies the importance of education and storytelling as means of empowerment and resistance.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, science fiction allows authors to question established norms, challenge traditional ways of thinking, and imagine new possibilities for social organization. In the context of climate fiction, the portrayal of ecological catastrophe, extreme sexual violence and its resolution within post-apocalyptic societies serves as a reflection of the authors' vision for social rebuilding. By exploring how society addresses and manages sexual violence, writers depict the potential for conflict resolution and resistance against exploitation, the building of a community in which social relations can be redesigned from the remnants of the old so that new values and new writings can emerge. In particular, they aim to widen the imagination of their readers, highlighting the flaws and unhealthy aspects of our world in order to suggest a way out, an alternative society that requires a shift in perspective. Overall, women writers have reshaped science fiction by using it as a vehicle for social critique, not only of the present but also the potential for a better future, where equality, justice and sustainability are prioritized, because, as Le Guin states, one of the functions of science fiction is a 'question-asking: reversals of a

habitual way of thinking, metaphors for what our language has no words for as yet, experiments in imagination' (Le Guin 1989: 9).

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