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"Let the Past Teach You": An Ecocritical Analysis of Medievalism in Selected Works of Twentieth-Century United States Science Fiction

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Abstract

The present study aims to analyze the presence of medievalism in selected works of United States science fiction written in the twentieth century. Medievalism is here understood as the practice invested in any reception and use of elements tied to the Middle Ages. The analysis is conducted through a posthumanist ecocritical perspective. The study intends to shed light on the way in which Western temporalities inform and shape attitudes and practices toward the nonhuman realm. The modes in which the West and especially the US position themselves toward the Middle Ages are under particular scrutiny here. Medievalist works of science fiction can in fact reveal Western dominant temporal perceptions. Such works, however, can also unsettle hegemonic temporalities. Narratives that present diverging modes of temporal perception may produce different understandings of the relation between the past and the present, the medieval and the modern, nature and culture, and humans and nonhumans. This study aims to demonstrate that medievalism can both reinforce and unsettle anthropocentric worldviews. The corpus of texts that have been selected for this analysis comprises Edgar Rice Burroughs's *A Princess of Mars* (1917), Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (1980), Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), and Octavia E. Butler's Earthseed series (1993-1998). The study embraces an intersectional approach. Such an approach takes into account intersecting systems of oppression that affect negatively not only the nonhuman realm, but also marginalized sections of the human population.

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Chapter One: Introduction

This study analyzes instances of medievalism, which I understand as any reception and use of elements tied to the Middle Ages, through the lens of ecocriticism. Ecocriticism is understood here as a theoretical approach that explores cultural depictions of environmental matters.[1] The version of ecocriticism discussed in this analysis is informed by posthumanism. Here posthumanism is seen as invested in the critique of anthropocentrism and humanism. Dominant Western temporal models are grounded in progress narratives. These narratives have often justified the oppression of the more-than-human.[2] The medievalist texts under consideration here resist such perspectives. Instead, they present an ecological awareness that may predate current times.

The corpus of texts that have been chosen comprises works of the United States science fiction of the second half of the twentieth century. For this analysis, I have selected Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*, Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo*, and Octavia E. Butler's Earthseed series. This study aims to explore how narratives that present diverging modes of temporal perception produce different understandings of the relation between the past and the present, the medieval and the modern, nature and culture, and humans and nonhumans. Hopefully, this discussion will contribute to introducing discourses on ecology and temporality within medievalism studies and environmental humanities, especially within the theoretical approaches of ecocriticism and posthumanism.

In the present introductory chapter, I will first explain the criteria of selection of the material by defining medievalism, science fiction, and the temporal, geographical, and cultural coordinates under consideration. Then I intend to highlight this study's relevance within the socio-cultural context of the current climate crisis and define its key aims and research questions. I am then going to present the state of the art on the topic at hand and how my study fills the gap in the current field of knowledge. Finally, the theoretical and methodological lenses that frame the analysis will be defined.

1. Definitions and Criteria of Selection of the Material

1.1. Defining Medievalism

This study investigates how Western temporalities inform and shape attitudes and practices directed towards the more-than-human. In order to do so, it focuses on how the West and especially the US position themselves towards the Middle Ages. This is accomplished through the study of medievalism in literary texts. Before proceeding with this analysis, a definition of medievalism and an explication of its

[1] Cf. Clark 5.

[2] The term "more-than-human" is often used in environmental humanities to indicate species diversity. It resituates humans into a wider multispecies context. At times, "nonhuman" is also used here to indicate organisms that do not belong to the human category. See D. Abram; Price and Chao. I privilege "more-than-human" over terms such as "environment" or "nature." Where the former implies a centrality of the human in respect to what surrounds it, the latter confounds the co-implication of nature and culture. See Estes 18-19; Lavery and Finburgh 19-20.

development in the US are required. Medievalism does not present one single definition that is agreed upon among scholars. This is motivated by the variety of practices and discourses that it comprises. These range across temporal, geographical, and cultural contexts. Multiple scholars have attempted to formulate what medievalism is. Tison Pugh and Angela Weisl argue that "medievalism refers to the art, literature, scholarship, avocational pastimes, and sundry forms of entertainment and culture that turn to the Middle Ages for their subject matter or inspiration, and in doing so, explicitly or implicitly, by comparison or by contrast, comment on the artist's contemporary sociocultural milieu" (1). Medievalism then consists in the reception and use of beliefs, practices, imagery, narratives, and forms that are linked to the Middle Ages. The term refers both to the academic field and to creative practices in literature, art, and entertainment.

The development of medievalism studies is quite recent. It distinguishes itself from medieval studies. Medievalism studies deals with the reception of and responses to the Middle Ages, while medieval studies analyzes medieval literature, culture, and history. Medieval history has been the object of study for centuries, since the Middle Ages was considered over. Yet medieval studies grew into an academic field in the late nineteenth century. Instead, medievalism studies only developed in the 1970s.[3] In its early stages, the field was mostly invested in the study of nineteenth-century British medievalism in the Romantic and Victorian periods. Gradually, the interest moved towards the study of national medievalism (Altschul; M. Berger; Utz). In this context, medievalism is studied in light of its role in processes of national identity formation. In recent years, scholars have started to focus on global medievalism as well (D'Arcens, "Global"; Weisl and Squillace; Young and Finn). The field seems thus to follow the transnational turn that can also be witnessed in other areas of study.

This study, however, focuses on US medievalism. Admittedly, within a globalized world defined by networks of power and porous boundaries, it is no longer possible to isolate a national lens from a global one. Yet the US is a country that appears central to planetary dynamics. Its local and international policies have wide implications for the rest of the world. It is thus relevant to inquire into the cultural narratives through which the US validates its position, power, and politics. The nation thus still seems a useful category through which to frame cultural phenomena, such as the phenomenon of medievalism.

The kinds of medievalism under consideration here are creative literary products. Creative forms of medievalism construct a largely imaginary version of the Middle Ages. In this context, the Middle Ages is not to be intended as a historical category—as the period of Western European history that spans roughly from the fifth to the fifteenth centuries—but as a loose conceptual category. The latter depends on modern perceptions of elements that are deemed medieval. Medievalism then does not necessarily reproduce the historically accurate Middle Ages. Creative medievalist works are mostly interested in using the past for the needs of the present. As Pugh and Weisl's definition suggests, they respond to the socio-cultural milieu of the author who employs them. The works analyzed in the following chapters are instances of

[3] For a discussion on the distinction between medieval studies and medievalism studies, see Matthews 1-8.

creative medievalism. Here the medieval is evoked in order to comment on current concerns and to defend specific agendas. These range from the support of nationalist US views in Chapter Two to the critique of ecological oppression, nuclear power, white supremacy, and sexism in Chapters Three to Five.

The historical accuracy of literary depictions of the Middle Ages is not of primary concern here. Rather, this study focused on how the Middle Ages is represented in literary works. Such depictions reflect and contribute to shaping Western ideologies and practices, specifically in terms of attitudes towards the more-than-human. For this reason, ecotheory will be applied to the study of medievalism. This approach, termed "ecomedievalism" by Valerie B. Johnson ("Applying Ecotheory" 31), will be further discussed below. Suffice it to state at this point that ecomedievalism, a little explored area of study so far, analyzes depictions of nature in works of medievalism. It investigates how the medieval and the natural mutually construct one another in medievalist works. Ecomedievalism can serve as a useful framework through which to consider how medievalism may either justify or unsettle anthropocentric views.

The fact that medievalism is used to support contemporary ideologies belies the notion that the past remains in the past. It reveals, rather, its enduring existence in the present. Every act of medievalism is an act of interpretation of the medieval past. Such interpretations can invite hate and discrimination just as much as they can teach lessons of inclusiveness and ecological ethics. It seems relevant then to identify the implications and consequences of how the medieval past is interpreted. In this light, the injunction "Let the Past Teach You"—a quotation borrowed from Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Talents* after which the present study is titled—is meant as an invitation to consider how the medieval past can constitute a source of inspiration and a model for the development of a more ecological and ethical future.

This study focuses on SF medievalist works written by US authors. The relation between medievalism and the US might not be immediately clear. The ethos of the US is seemingly at odds with the Middle Ages. Kim Moreland argues that "the medievalist impulse clearly runs counter to the major U.S. cultural tradition" (12). At least since the Enlightenment period, the US has considered itself as the antithesis of European medieval political, economic, and socio-cultural structures (Pugh and Aronstein 11-2). In this period, the US built the image of itself as a nation defined by reason, modernity, and progress, with all these traits considered in stark contrast to the Middle Ages. This is a perception that has endured in many US medievalist expressions. In such views, the US as a democratic system is set against the aristocratic Middle Ages (Moreland 12). While the US presents a horizontal form of government where power is given to the citizens, the Middle Ages featured a hierarchical system ruled by a restricted privileged class of people. The economic systems of the US and the Middle Ages also appear different. The US is defined by capitalism, a profit-oriented system based on the private ownership of the means of production. Medieval feudalism, by contrast, was a socio-political and economic system that regulated relationships among lords and vassals grounded in land property and use. Furthermore, the Middle Ages is a European historical period that involved multiple countries. The US, on the other hand, espouses a nationalist stance. It bears a strong sense of its national identity, which has engendered the myth of US

exceptionalism. The latter, based on the conviction that the US constitutes the model for other countries to follow, has motivated its foreign policies oriented toward expansion and control of other countries. The US considers itself a bearer of progress. By contrast, the Middle Ages is viewed as a static and regressive dark period of history.[4] Pugh and Weisl, however, argue that "medievalism . . . need share none of these characteristics [of the Middle Ages] and many American narratives of medievalism combine a medieval setting with a quintessentially American . . . narrative" (42). Medievalism does not necessarily reflect the actual Middle Ages. The medieval can be reimagined and adapted to changed situations. Through this process of reinterpretation, the Middle Ages can be used to suit the needs of the North American context.

For this reason, despite its differences from it, the US manifests an enduring fascination with the Middle Ages. This interest is arguably motivated by the fact that, as a young nation, the US cannot boast a very old tradition. It thus longs for an authoritative past (Moreland 9). It has therefore often claimed the medieval past for its own. It could be argued, however, that the US, as a settler-colonial society, is rooted in the European legacy, even though it has constructed its own independent identity. Medievalism in the US reached its peak in the nineteenth century. Since then, it has never disappeared completely. However, since the 1960s, it has once again returned to the center stage. The Middle Ages has been invoked in architecture, TV series, movies, videogames, literature, and cultural and political discourses (Eco 63; Falconieri 69). The sheer quantity and variety of medievalist material produced between then and now testifies to the liveliness of the medieval past in the imagination of the present. Within such media, the Middle Ages bears multiple—often mutually exclusive—meanings that read the present through the framing device of the past. Medievalism has become then a pervasive, if often inconspicuous, presence in the US.[5]

1.2. Defining Science Fiction

Science fiction is defined here as a literary genre that does not depict reality as it is but portrays it in an imaginative, hypothetical mode. It invites its readers to consider alternative configurations of current societal structures and ideologies. There does not exist one single definition of the genre. Numerous attempts at exhaustive definitions have been made. Rigid conceptions of the genre are rejected here. To this end, the acronym SF is adopted in order to pinpoint its variety and its cross-contamination with other kinds of fiction. It is also used to indicate a vision of science fiction that departs from Eurocentric stances.

As in the case of medievalism, the definition of science fiction has been at the center of academic debates. There is no consensus on a single definition of the genre. As Paul K. Alkon notes, "the polysemy of the term *science fiction* [is] reflected in the inability of critics to arrive at agreement on any one definition [italics in the original]" (9). The difficulty in defining it lies in the fact that it has undergone

[4] I expand on the Middle Ages as Dark Ages in section 3. I return to this concept in Chapters Two and Three.
[5] Numerous volumes have been dedicated to the analysis of medievalism in North America. See J. Fraser; Lears; Lupack and Lupack; Moreland; Rosenthal and Szarmach.

various changes in time. It has also been cross-fertilized by other genres. One of its most influential definitions belongs to Darko Suvin. Suvin defines it as "*a literary genre whose necessary and sufficient conditions are the presence and interaction of estrangement and cognition and whose main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment* [italics in the original]" (*Metamorphoses* 7-8). In his view, science fiction extrapolates aspects of the current world in order to imagine alternative ones. It is thus tied to the constraints of scientific knowledge and technologies. His definition not only separates SF from literary realism, but also from other "estranging" narrative modes, such as fantasy. According to Suvin, fantasy lacks cognitive plausibility (8).[6] Where the former belongs to the realm of the possible, the latter—with its magic and supernatural elements—belongs to the realm of the impossible. Yet this approach fails to recognize how the two genres often intersect and cross-pollinate. This makes clear-cut categorical separations problematic.

Science fiction's blurry contours suggest the need for more inclusive definitions that recognize the genre's hybrid nature.[7] Perhaps John Rieder should be followed then as he rejects a rigid definition of science fiction. He sees SF as a "web of resemblances" (Rieder, *Colonialism* 17) across multiple works. This is motivated by the impossibility of tracing a common thread across all the texts that are considered science fictional. The boundaries of the genre are thus fluid. Henceforth, the acronym SF will be used. The latter was used by Judith Merril in the 1960s in order to stress the genre's permeable boundaries. It was then adopted by scholars and readers, including Donna Haraway (James 10-11). Haraway argues that SF comprises "speculative fiction, science fiction, science fantasy, speculative futures, speculative fabulation" (*Primate* 5), to which she has added "string figures, speculative feminism, science fact" (*Staying* 2). The acronym gestures toward the genre's variety and its cross-pollination with other kinds of fiction. It liberates it from an attachment to technophilic allegiances that are implied in the term "science." In fact, SF does not necessarily revolve around hard science, nor does it need to focus on technological developments. "SF" points to a more open understanding of the genre. It involves an exercise of the imagination that invites reflection on multiple temporal dimensions. It moves the readers to consider past, present, and future realities and to envision alternative configurations of a given society.

The choice of "SF" has the advantage of recognizing the blurred lines between science fiction and speculative fiction.[8] The relation between the two has been frequently debated. While some propose science fiction to be a wider category of which speculative fiction is a subset (Labudova 28), others—such as Robert Heinlein, who coined the term, and later generations of the 1960s and 1970s—propose that the latter should substitute the former (James 62).[9] "SF" admits the relation between the two without falling into rigid taxonomical distinctions. It also opens the genre to works that do not follow the parameters of

[6] SF has often been defined against fantasy. See Asimov, *Asimov on SF* 17-8; Franklin 23; Robinson 54-5; Rose 18.
[7] Adam Roberts proposes a historicist approach to SF. He identifies three distinct histories. See Roberts, *SF* 2-3.
[8] For a discussion on the relation between speculative and science fiction, see P.L. Thomas. The debate has also been fueled by such authors as Margaret Atwood and Ursula K. Le Guin. See Atwood, "In Context"; Le Guin, "Review."
[9] See Heinlein.

science fiction as conceptualized in more narrow definitions. These, for instance, comprise works of Afrofuturism, which are addressed in Chapter Five. Such works mingle the tropes of science fiction with fantastic elements rooted in the African-diasporic cultures. The acronym implies greater inclusivity and departure from Eurocentric standards, taking into account non-Western modes of expression.

However, while embracing a fluid definition of SF, this study historicizes its growth from its self-conscious emergence at the turn of the twentieth century to the end of the century. The analysis begins in Chapter Two from the early twentieth century in order to contextualize the convergence of SF and medievalism within histories of US imperialism. Each chapter looks at how generic conventions adapt to twentieth-century changing socio-cultural contexts. The chapters explore how SF mutates in terms of themes, styles, and ideologies across the decades, especially since the 1960s. The genre's development is traced from the pulp age, through the New Wave of the 1960s and 1970s, to the post-New Wave of the 1980s and 1990s. Through this contextualization, it is possible to witness how the medieval is evoked in distinct cultural contexts. Its meaning and function mutate along with the times.

1.3. SF and Environmental Humanities

SF is often considered valuable for discussions of the more-than-human. It has become especially relevant with the rise of the notion of the Anthropocene. The latter has stimulated debates within environmental humanities about the need for new literary approaches in terms of style and genre. Established narrative conventions are often deemed not well suited to address climate change. The climatic situation requires narratives that translate the climate crisis's large scales into ones that are comprehensible to humans. SF works can engender reflections on entangled temporalities in the search for an ecological ethics. While SF is often linked to the future, it is also capable of reflecting on the past. The past that is addressed in SF texts is often specifically the medieval past.

The Anthropocene is the geological era proposed by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer in 2000. It declares humans geological agents. Human activities are deemed the prime cause of ecological degradation. The effects of such practices can be read in the earth's stratigraphic layers (Crutzen and Stoermer 17). While in April 2024 the proposal of a new geological era has been rejected, the concept remains a valuable cultural category.[10] It highlights the temporalities of the climate crisis and the impact of humans on the planet. The West has traditionally rested its foundations on the divide between nature and culture. This separation has justified extractivist policies and untrammeled industrialism. The latter have engendered the current climate crisis. The Anthropocene stresses that this rigid distinction is not tenable (Bonneuil and Fressoz 32–3; Chakrabarty, "Theses" 201-7; Haraway, *Staying* 32; Latour 50). Climate change makes the entangled relation between nature and culture and humans and nonhumans evident.[11]

[10] https://www.theguardian.com/science/2024/mar/22/geologists-reject-declaration-of-anthropocene-epoch.

[11] The name and dates of the Anthropocene have attracted criticisms. I use "Anthropocene" as an umbrella term that comprises the discourses about it. It should be noted that *anthropos* does not consider differentiated sets of responsibilities and implications for human categories that hold different degrees of power in terms of race, gender,

The Anthropocene does not have one official departing date. It is linked to a network of processes that unfold at different temporal junctions. These range from the conquest of the Americas, the Industrial Revolution, up to its more blatant manifestation from the second half of the twentieth century onwards. The refusal to ascribe a single cause to the climate crisis avoids mystifying the interlaced relations between colonialism, capitalism, and environmental injustice. Despite the controversies surrounding its name and starting dates then, the Anthropocene remains a useful lens through which to consider both unequal power dynamics that have led to climate change as well as planetary multispecies entwinements.

What is relevant for this study is that the Anthropocene troubles scalar perceptions. It forces humans to consider vast temporal scales. This is owing to the complex temporalities involved in the process of ecological degradation. These concern both humans and nonhumans. Timothy Morton defines climate change a "hyperobject," i.e., an entity so massively distributed in time and space that it confounds human perception (*Hyperobjects* 1). The Anthropocene requires then an attentiveness to scale. This entails considering coexisting factors that range from the environmental, the political, the social, the cultural, to the economic. Scalar perception is to be applied both to geographical scales and temporal ones. The focus of this study is, however, on questions of temporality. This focus aligns with an increased interest in temporality and scale in relation to climate change in environmental humanities.[12] Humans have a limited temporal imagination. This hinders them from perceiving nonhuman rhythms and scales. It also prevents them from fully realizing the long-term effects of extractive practices. Timothy Clark argues that, in order to perceive hyperobjects, a process of "scalar translation" is then required. It consists in the transposition "into a representation on the human scale events and processes that exceed or escape the usual geographical and temporal limits of how we think, or feel involved" (49). This concept stresses the need to translate the incommensurable scales of climate change into terms that humans can understand. Through this process, humans can begin to expand their ability to perceive vast scales of time.

Literary texts can play a crucial role in the process of temporal scalar translation. Since its birth, the Anthropocene discourse has seeped into environmental humanities. The latter observe the cultural, historical, socio-economic, and ethical causes and implications of the ecological crisis. This approach complements a purely techno-scientific understanding of climate change. The field is also invested in the social and cultural factors that can translate the contents of scientific knowledge in order to promote ecological awareness (Death 445-6; Keller 581; Kuznetski 50). Individual choices alone are not sufficient to address climate change, which requires local and planetary intervention. Yet the climate crisis has been seen as "a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination"' (Ghosh 9). Literary works can aid in criticizing harmful stances and in envisioning counter-hegemonic modes of multispecies co-existence. This can be accomplished through compelling narratives and imagery. The literary reflection on the past, the present,

class, and ability. See Davis and Todd; Davis et al.; De Cristofaro, "Patterns"; Lewis and Maslin; H. Sharp; Whyte, "Indigenous Climate Change."

[12] See Chakrabarty, "Theses"; Clark; Hartog; Huebener; Leckie; Nixon; Taylor, "Ends"; Thomashow.

and the future helps to illuminate the history of attitudes toward the more-than-human that have affected the present. It reveals the "slow violence" (Nixon 2) that is exerted in invisible ways on nonhumans and humans. Stories are the primary assets through which this violence can be made visible. Literature can educate readers to widen their temporal imagination and to perceive invisible nonhuman temporalities. It can also alert them to the long histories of intersecting forms of oppression.

The Anthropocene also unsettles established narrative modes. The large scales that it involves have led scholars to question the conventions of literary realism. The latter seem implicated in anthropocentric stances and human exceptionalism. Furthermore, they impose numerous narrative constraints. These involve the representation of limited timespans, locales, sets of characters, and the plausibility of the events narrated (Clark 81; Ghosh 15, 63, 78; Kerridge 159-60; Trexler 233). The Anthropocene motivates the need for narrative modes that make sense of convoluted temporalities and nonhuman agencies. The answer has been looked for in speculative kinds of fiction. SF appears especially suitable for addressing the challenges posed by the climate crisis. In its early stages, SF has often served to reinforce the dominant order (Death 444). However, especially from the second half of the last century, it has also addressed ecological concerns.[13] It can then offer its readers channels through which to predict and lament the consequences of current practices. It can also offer alternatives to the dominant condition.

While SF is a privileged genre for addressing the Anthropocene's challenges, a distinct kind of fiction—climate fiction—has been developed in order to describe works that are specifically concerned with climate change.[14] As in the case of SF, the boundaries of climate fiction are blurry. It is at times seen as a kind of SF attuned to issues of climate change. Others suggest that, while it can take the shape of SF, it can also gear toward a more realistic approach (LeMenager 222). Despite its recent formulation, fiction interested in climate and ecological matters has a longer history. Especially in the second half of the twentieth century, works that discussed terraforming, nuclear winters, and geological processes could be considered early cli-fi examples (Trexler 8). It is, however, during the 1980s and 1990s that greater awareness about the climate entered the mainstream (9). Climate fiction has increased in number since the 2010s.[15] The works analyzed in the following chapters have not been regarded as climate fiction, with the exception of Butler's series. Most of them do not specifically focus on the climate. Yet they all revolve around ecological concerns and human-nonhuman relations. Even though they do not focus on climate change, they address the histories and temporalities of ecological oppression and environmental justice. While this study does not deal directly with the Anthropocene, it explores the conditions that have made current attitudes and practices possible.

One reason for the development of the cli-fi category is tied to matters of prestige. Climate fiction is generally considered a more serious avenue of reflection on ecological matters than SF. Dan Bloom argues

[13] See Clark; Haraway, *Staying*; Heise, "Letter"; Malvestio; P. Murphy.
[14] Works generally included within this category are, for instance, Margaret Atwood's Maddaddam trilogy (2003-2013), Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* (2009), and Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* (2012).
[15] See Johns-Putra.

that “sci-fi is mostly for escapism and entertainment,” while cli-fi consists in “facing the reality of global warming” (Bloom qtd. Plantz). While SF is now largely accepted as a respectable genre, it has often been seen as a non-serious kind of fiction. Amitav Ghosh deems SF unfit to address ecological challenges because it only addresses the future and extraterrestrials (7, 72). In his view, SF’s focus on futurity confounds the reality of the Anthropocene. His stance, however, contradicts his own statement that “what fiction makes possible is to approach the world in a subjunctive mode . . . To imagine other forms of human existence is exactly the challenge posed by the climate crisis” (128). What Ghosh describes here is exactly what many works of SF do—they allow readers to envision the world through “what ifs” and to train their imaginative abilities. They help readers to think of alternative world configurations.

A frequent misconception about SF is that it is solely concerned with the future. Ghosh identifies this trait as one that makes the genre not suitable for addressing climate change. Yet SF is better equipped than numerous conventional narratives to tackle ecological questions. It not only embraces the more-than-human and avoids constraints of probability and individualism that bind the realist novel, but it also engages with vast spatial and temporal scales. As Heise asserts, it “has never limited itself in temporal or spatial scale in the way mainstream novels have” (“Letter” 1097). SF is then a valuable tool to think across multiple scales of time. It is not merely future-oriented, but it is also capable of addressing the past and the present (Jameson, *Archeologies* 345; Opitz 124; Roberts, *SF* 26). It can reveal how the past is never really over. The past that SF addresses is often specifically a medieval one.

This study is thus concerned with the triangulation of medievalism, SF, and ecological concerns. The analysis of the depiction of human-nonhuman relations within medievalist SF can reveal how the medieval past is represented for contemporary agendas. Medievalist SF allows readers to perceive the entwinement of the past, the present, and the future. It can help to unsettle linear Western temporalities. It does so by stressing the way the past lingers in the present. This has wide implications for practices toward the more-than-human. The challenge to hegemonic temporalities reveals the history of ecological disruption. It can also point toward temporal views that are more in tune with nonhuman temporalities.

1.4. SF Medievalism

As the position of such critics and writers as Amitav Ghosh proves, SF is generally associated with spaceships, aliens, and faster-than-light travel. From this perspective, there would seem to be little space within it for considerations that address real-life concerns of the present. Most of all, its association with the future makes SF an unlikely genre through which to consider matters related to the past and to history. Due to the very fact that SF is often linked to the future, SF medievalism has not received the same attention as medievalism within fantasy fiction. In fact, unlike in the case of SF, there exists a large body of academic writing on fantasy medievalism (Dell, “Yearning” 72; Falconieri 72; Kears and Paz 18; Young, “Place” 4). In this case, heroes who roam and wander in worlds filled with magic, monsters, and dragons appear immediately traceable to medieval models.

However, medievalist patterns appear in multiple SF works. As argued above, SF works move freely between the temporal dimensions of the past, the present, and the future. They are often the site where historical knowledge is considered, shaped, and questioned. SF authors at times specifically consider the medieval past in their works or use the medieval past to shape the world-building within their novels. Such works can be set in the Middle Ages. In this case, the past is accessed through time travel or alternative histories.[16] Characters travel back in time to the medieval past. Alternatively, SF medievalist works can be set in recent, contemporary, or future times. In this case, medieval models are projected forward in time (Kears and Paz 21).[17] The works under consideration in this study belong to this second category. They feature either contemporary or futuristic settings that present medieval elements. The references to the Middle Ages in such works can be expressed through the cultural, political, economic, or religious aspects of the societies depicted in the novels that evoke the Middle Ages. This is, for instance, the case of Edgar Rice Burroughs's Mars series and Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Here alien societies present certain features that resemble those of the Middle Ages. In other cases, characters consciously retrieve elements from the Middle Ages in order to defend their own positions. It is possible to witness this mode of medievalism in Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* and Butler's *Parable of the Talents*. At times, such elements are even retrieved unconsciously, as in the case, for instance, of Hoban's *Riddley Walker*. Here the characters reinterpret the medieval painting of a hagiographic legend without being aware of its medieval provenance. If the medieval is not the primary topic of concern of SF, it nonetheless appears frequently to color settings, characters, motifs, plots, and imagery.

The way the medieval is addressed in SF varies depending on shifting socio-cultural contexts. SF, especially in its early stages, seems a genre tied to modernity, progress, science, and technology. Such features are seen as opposed to the Middle Ages. The latter is deemed pre-modern, pre-technological, and pre-scientific. When the Middle Ages is represented in SF then, it is often in a dismissive way. Such views celebrate modernity over the surpassed medieval past. On the other hand, there can also exist depictions that present the Middle Ages in a more positive light. In this case, the medieval in SF can manifest a nostalgic longing for the past. Such a past is seen as preferable to the present. There also exist, however, SF works that do not necessarily manifest a rejection of the medieval past nor a desire to return to it. These works rather consider the way the medieval and the modern interact in contemporary or future contexts. The novels considered in Chapters Three to Five follow this pattern. The implications of such attitudes toward the Middle Ages are further addressed below. Suffice it to say for now that the ways in which SF represents the medieval reflect specific temporal perceptions. They reveal how modernity perceives its past and specifically its medieval past. Such temporal perceptions can affect views on the more-than-human. Medievalist SF is a helpful avenue of research where these dynamics can be observed.

[16] This is, for instance, the case in Connie Willis's *Doomsday Book* (1992).
[17] This is the case of, for example, Walter Miller's *The Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959).

1.5. Time and Place

The timeframe under consideration is comprised between the 1960s and the end of the twentieth century. Chapter Two, which focuses on Edgar Rice Burroughs's Mars series, moves back to the 1910s and 1920s in order to contextualize early SF medievalism. The remaining chapters address works of the second half of the twentieth century. These include Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), Hoban's *Riddley Walker* (1980), Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) and Butler's Earthseed series (1993-1998). The reasons for selecting this timeframe are multiple. In the first place, the period's beginning aligns with that of the Great Acceleration, which indicates a spike in the industrial activities' effects on the planet (Gergan et al. 95). It is in response to the consequences of extractivism that the 1960s and 1970s witnessed the birth of the US environmental movement and of a heightened ecological consciousness (Evans 435-8; Heise, *Sense* 20). This concern was reflected in SF works, which began to address ecological matters with greater intensity.

This period of increased ecological awareness was also one of revived interest in the Middle Ages. This is testified by the rise of medievalism in different media and by the birth of medievalism as a field of study during those years. The convergence of a rise of interest in ecology and medievalism might not be a coincidence. For the counter-culture the Middle Ages often represented a time of harmony and closeness with nature (Matthews 177). Such an attitude expressed a reaction against unrestrained industrialism and the logics of the capitalist economy. This view of the Middle Ages is often accompanied by a sense of nostalgia for a time far away from the corrupt and disenchanted present. The works selected here do not manifest these same sentiments. They do not reveal a desire to return to an idealized past. Yet they do borrow elements from the Middle Ages in order to develop ecological ethical models. A link between medievalism and ecologism can then be identified in the period under consideration.

The latter end of the selected timeframe coincides with the end of the twentieth century. This choice is motivated by the birth of the Anthropocene concept at the turn of the century. Its popularization has stimulated new considerations on literary depictions of the more-than-human. Academic discussions have also led to greater self-reflexivity within literary texts about ecological matters and strategies of representations.[18] This study then configures itself as a logical and chronological premise to further investigations of twenty-first-century SF ecomedievalism. Such studies may consider how the notion of the Anthropocene affects the literary representation of ecological matters. Furthermore, Will Steffen et al. argue: "[e]nvironmental problems received little attention during much of the Great Acceleration" (850). Yet even before the seismic shift triggered by the Anthropocene notion, it is possible to witness complex reflections on human-nonhuman relations and on humans' effects on the planet within medievalist works of SF. Such works constitute relevant examples that have influenced later twenty-first-century texts.[19]

[18] See Johns-Putra; Trexler.

[19] *Riddley Walker* has influenced several contemporary works, such as David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) and Will Self's *The Book of Dave* (2006). Furthermore, it is hard to miss the similarities between the Earthseed series and works such as Margaret Atwood's Maddaddam trilogy (2003-2013) and Chang-rae Lee's *On Such a Full Sea* (2014).

Yet another criterion of selection of the works analyzed here involves the choice of focusing on US authors. The US is one of the prime contributors both to the climate crisis and to the dissemination of works that discuss ecological concerns (Leikam and Leida). The country is one of the key planetary polluters and fossil fuel consumers. It is also one of the countries with the highest degree of influence on global dynamics and an agent of neocolonial ventures that cause environmental injustice. The US' international politics during the second half of the twentieth century were crucial for the deterioration of ecological conditions. Bonneuil and Fressoz argue: "the Great Acceleration cannot be understood without the Second World War, the Cold War in which two blocs rivalled one another in the mobilization of the globe, and – since it emerged victorious – without American imperialism" (289). For this reason, US national and foreign policies feature prominently in SF works of the period. Such works reflect on the country's anti-environmental politics. Yet the US has also produced the majority of climate science and warnings. It also has one of the most active environmental movements in the world (Ghosh 136). Not only do US authors produce a great quantity of SF that addresses ecological issues, but it is in the US that ecocriticism has developed in its early stages.

While today's climatic condition has consequences at a global level, it is also a domestic issue. The national economic and political structures of the US have a deep impact on the globe. In an analogous way, SF is a privileged genre for the representation of cross-cultural planetary encounters. At the same time, it is also informed by national boundaries. As Canavan and Link argue,

> national borders continue to frame both national literatures and the history of criticism that has sprung up around them. . . . This tension is alive in SF scholarship as well . . . Not only in terms of its continued dominance of the global cultural industry, but also in terms of its outsized position as the world's largest economy, its largest military, and its largest polluter, the sheer gravitational mass of the United States continues to drive both utopian and dystopian speculation about the shape of the present and the prospects for the future. (3-4)

The US becomes a central object of reflection as a locale involved in the maintenance of geopolitical world balances. This order privileges the interests of Western powers to the detriment of the more-than-human and the Global South. The US also often becomes the setting for counter-hegemonic movements of resistance against climate injustice. Especially in light of the fact that the self-conscious development of SF took place in the US (Roberts, *SF* 49), the privileged relation between SF and the US should not come as a surprise. Therefore, the works under consideration reflect concerns that are specific to the historical, cultural, and geographical context of the US. Yet they also reflect the duality of SF as a transnational and national genre. In this sense, they portray matters with repercussions that reverberate across the globe. They reflect the same tension between the local and the planetary that defines climate change as an issue.

2. Aims and Research Questions

The present study aims to analyze instances of medievalism in selected SF works written by US authors in the second half of the twentieth century through a posthumanist ecocritical lens. It explores how medievalism has reflected and affected attitudes toward the more-than-human in US culture. On the one

hand, medievalism has contributed to bolstering the oppression of the more-than-human and marginalized social categories. The use of the medieval for modern agendas has served to reinforce the nature/culture divide. This divide has intersectional implications. It negatively affects multiple groups in terms of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and species. In fact, this division implies the perceived superiority of the human seen as the Western, white, able-bodied, and heteronormative male over other categories of embodied subjectivity. While this normative conception of the human is associated with the realm of culture, all Others are relegated to the realm of nature perceived as inferior. This stance is also grounded in a linear vision of temporality. According to this view, time moves from the past to the future in one single direction and in an uninterrupted way. This temporal perception justifies narratives of progress. The latter promote unrestrained human development through industrial extractive practices that negatively affect the more-than-human. In the case of medievalist discourses, progress narratives have often been justified through the conceptual divide between the medieval and the modern. In this view, modernity has overstepped the medieval past. This perception can be witnessed in Edgar Rice Burroughs's Mars series, which is discussed in Chapter Two. Here medievalism reflects a logic of domination of the normative notion of the human over more-than-human and racialized Others. Such a position results in the marginalization and exclusion of the latter as worthy objects of consideration.

On the other hand, medievalism can be used as a tool of resistance against such dominant anthropocentric temporal models. SF medievalism can unsettle the divide between the past and the present, and specifically the medieval and the modern. By doing so, SF medievalism can also serve to dismantle hegemonic Western dichotomies. It can thus help guide ecological practices. This is made possible through the critique and subversion of the logic that medievalism has often supported. In the works discussed in Chapters Three to Five—*The Left Hand of Darkness*, *Riddley Walker*, *Mumbo Jumbo*, *Parable of the Sower,* and *Parable of the Talents*—the kind of medievalism that is used to marginalize and exclude trans-species Others is countered in two distinct ways. On the one hand, the works present dramatizations of medievalist patterns that further such exclusionary views. They depict exclusionary types of medievalism in a critical manner. This depiction serves to highlight the harmful consequences of such views. On the other hand, they offer affirmative medievalist models. They do not merely present negative examples of medievalism, but also demonstrate how medievalism can be put to liberatory ends. These medievalist models focus on counter-hegemonic modes of relating to the more-than-human. Such perspectives reject anthropocentrism and acknowledge multispecies entanglements. In all of the novels taken into consideration, the medieval/modern divide is disrupted along with the nature/culture one.

The works discussed in the following chapters display an internal dialogue between two distinct ways of using the medieval. This allows readers to visualize the implications of how medievalism is employed. In fact, the medieval can be manipulated to defend different political agendas. It can legitimize hegemonic narratives and ideologies. Yet it can also provide models of resistance against oppression (Fedriga 71; Pugh and Weisl 13). The Middle Ages becomes a repository from which it is possible to

select certain aspects while discarding and minimizing others. New meaning is attributed to the medieval according to the needs of the present. It appears urgent that the narratives that these kinds of medievalism generate and spread be scrutinized in their assumptions and implications. For the scope of this study, medievalism can either confirm and aggravate Western anthropocentric perceptions of the more-than-human, or it can offer counter-models of ecological thought and action. The medieval can promote inclusive visions of intra- and interspecies entanglements. It can become a tool to undo current harmful practices. Works that feature a dialogue between contrasting kinds of medievalism provide readers at once with a critique of exclusionary medievalism and with creative medievalist ecological models.

Such alternatives may not point the way out of the climate crisis. However, by focusing on multiple temporal dimensions, the works under consideration expand the readers' sense of time. They revise current notions of history and progress that perpetuate the two divides between medieval and modern and nature and culture. The works selected here also invite their readers to practice counter-hegemonic temporal perceptions that are in tune with nonhuman temporalities. Such kinds of medievalism are geared toward a more ethical understanding of the relations that bind the past to the present and the human to the nonhuman. The revision of enduring narratives constitutes, borrowing Matthew Taylor's words, a form "of changing the present . . . by changing (our relationship to) the past" ("Ends" 947). The way the West relates to its medieval past can inform and shape the ecological views of the present. It thus appears relevant to demonstrate the responsibility involved in the creative use of the medieval for contemporary purposes. Literary works contribute to the formation of current temporal, ecological, and political assumptions. Narratives alone do not directly determine action. Yet they can lay the cultural groundwork that prepares readers to embrace counter-hegemonic understandings of interspecies relations. The latter are necessary for taking action in the present in order to shape an ethically-oriented multispecies future.

3. The Originality of the Study of US Ecomedievalism in SF

The present study builds on numerous different avenues of already existing fields of research. It is informed by scholars who have addressed medievalism within SF. It also borrows insights from scholars who read medieval material under the lens of ecotheory. However, it is especially situated at the intersection of medievalism studies and environmental humanities. In particular, it is grounded in the approach of ecomedievalism. Little research has been conducted on ecomedievalism. SF medievalism especially has not been analyzed through the lens of ecotheory yet. This study intends to contribute to expanding this area of knowledge. It expects to do so by focusing on matters of temporality within the texts under consideration. In fact, ecomedievalism has not focused so far on ecological implications of the temporal perceptions expressed in works of medievalism. This analysis intends to fill this gap in the knowledge. In order to do so, it brings together discussions of temporality within medievalism studies and environmental humanities. This approach sheds light on how the conceptual divide between the medieval and the modern goes hand in hand with the nature/culture and human/nonhuman dichotomies.

In order to consider how attitudes toward the more-than-human are expressed in medievalist works of SF, this study builds on the work of scholars who have addressed the presence of medievalism in SF. Among them, certain studies focus on the continuities that can be traced between medieval culture and SF. Kathryn Hume ("Anatomy"; "Quest Romance") stresses the structural similarities between medieval quest romances and SF, while Flo Keyes approaches the continuities between medieval romance literature, SF, and fantasy through a Jungian study of archetypes in *The Literature of Hope in the Middle Ages and Today* (2006). These scholars make valid points in noting the links between medieval romance and SF. However, I am less interested in considering the continuities between the medieval past and SF than I am in addressing how the imagination of the Middle Ages translates into SF.

On the other hand, numerous academic works contain sections in which SF is discussed as an aspect of popular culture. Alan and Barbara Lupack's *King Arthur in America* (1999) discusses Arthurian works of SF in the section "The Arthurian Tradition and American Popular Culture." More recently, medievalist works of SF are also discussed among other genres in *The Middle Ages in Popular Culture* (2015) edited by Helen Young. While acknowledging the blurry boundaries of SF, such approaches obscure the nature of SF as a distinct genre in its own right. Young compensates for this lack of attention on SF's specificity in the edited volume *Fantasy and Science Fiction Medievalisms* (2015). Here multiple contributions show the variety of meanings that the medieval acquires within SF. They address works that range from Isaac Asimov's *Foundation*, Walter Miller's *Canticle for Leibowitz*, Pearl North's 2009 *Libyrinth*, to the TV series *Stargate SG-1*. Carl Kears and James Paz's edited volume *Medieval Science Fiction* (2016) constitutes another important addition to the field. A part of the contributions frames instances of medieval culture as (proto-)science fictional or considers how "science" and "fiction" interact within them. The remaining articles, more in tune with the purpose of this study, consider how the medieval is imagined in SF works. There also exists a variety of chapters in edited volumes or articles—many of them spread across the issues of the journal *Studies in Medievalism* (*SiM*)—that address SF medievalism.[20] So far, then, no attempt has been made to address SF medievalism in a monograph. I do not engage equally with all the contributions mentioned above. However, they constitute a useful groundwork on which to build the present research. Although these works are essential for contextualizing this study within the existing field of knowledge, none of them chooses as their focus attitudes toward the more-than-human, nor do they engage with the theoretical approaches that environmental humanities have to offer.

Ecotheory has been mostly addressed within medieval studies. A considerable amount of criticism has been written on medieval materials through the lens of ecocriticism, human-animal studies, eco-materialism, and posthumanism.[21] Through such approaches, scholars look at medieval texts to discover

[20] See Griffin; Henthorne; Howey; J. Johnson; Kaufman, "Future"; Lindsay; Lukes, "Dystopia."
[21] On readings of medieval culture from ecocritical lenses, see Cohen and Duckert; Howe and Wolfe; Rudd; Scarborough; Siewers; Mic. Warren; T. White. For two surveys on ecocritical approaches to medieval studies, see Johnson, "Potential Futures"; Nardizzi. A large body of work at the intersection of human-animal studies and

the ambivalent ways in which medieval people interacted with the nonhuman. This research is especially informed by Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's work. It ranges from discussions of monstrosity to considerations of stones (*Hybridity, Monster Theory, Of Giants, Stone*). He has published several volumes that explore the challenges posed by animals, monsters, and inhuman matter to human categories of identity. The present study engages with SF depictions of the largely imaginary Middle Ages. Yet the convergence of medieval studies and environmental humanities demonstrates to what extent the medieval past is replete with examples that aid one in understanding harmful practices toward the more-than-human. At the same time, it also offers ways forward that depart from the dominant views. The Middle Ages has thus much to offer to modes of engaging with the nonhuman.

While eco-readings of medieval texts abound, the same cannot be said of such readings of medievalist texts. Yet in recent years the study of medievalism through ecocritical lenses has started to receive critical attention. Valerie B. Johnson has made a crucial contribution in this regard. She laments that "medievalism seems to have found little place in ecocritical considerations" ("Potential Futures" 2). In order to address this knowledge gap, she has coined the term "ecomedievalism," which consists in the study of medievalism through the lens of ecocriticism ("Applying Ecotheory" 31). Ecomedievalism can be useful for revealing romanticized ecological fantasies within medievalist narratives. Cultural constructions of nature in medievalist texts often serve to justify exclusionary views. Ecomedievalism can help to tackle such constructs. It can also address how medievalist works build ecological positions rooted in medieval models. Johnson ("Potential Futures") mentions many research avenues on which ecomedievalism can build, such as object-oriented ontology and waste-studies. She also advances the possibility of extending the loci of research to popular culture. She mentions, for instance, animated movies and fantasy fiction, such as *The Hobbit* and *Game of Thrones* (2-3). Although she does not address SF, the latter constitutes another promising area of research for eco-readings of medievalism that is yet to be fully explored.

An important addition to the field is the *SiM* volume on ecomedievalism (2017). Karl Fugelso explains that it had received few submissions compared to other *SiM* volumes. He takes this as a sign that

> ecotheory is only now gaining traction among students of medievalism and that many scholars may not yet be comfortable with it. And that newness would seem to be confirmed by the wide range of the contributors' historical examples, of their interpretations of ecotheory, of their methods in applying it, and of their conclusions about the actual or potential impact of ecomedievalism. (xii)

Since then, publications on the topic have slowly grown in number. Yet they remain defined by different isolated readings. Both the articles in the *SiM* volume on ecomedievalism and the pieces published in journals and volumes often limit themselves to works written in the nineteenth-century or to fantasy medievalism.[22] A work that comes close to the present study's scope is Carissa Turner Smith's *Cyborg*

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medieval studies addresses human-animal relationships in the Middle Ages. See Resl; Salisbury; Salter; Steel, *How Not, How to;* Yamamoto. For posthumanist readings of medieval culture, see Joy and Dionne; Montroso; M. Moore.

[22] See Fouto; Haught; Helbert; Higley; Kelly, "Eco-Tourist"; Kowalik; Myers; Riley; Risden. Various works focus on Tolkien: see Dickerson; Giblett; Martinez. For contributions on ecomedievalism that move beyond nineteenth-century authors or the fantasy genre, see Czarnowus, "Greening"; Hennig; Hsy, *Antiracist* 63-78.

Saints (2020). Smith considers depictions of medieval saints in middle-grade and young adult fiction through the lens of posthumanism. She argues that saints challenge the supposed autonomous sovereignty of the humanist subject. They reveal relational bonds with bodies, places, and objects. Smith deals with medievalism, the crisis of the humanist subject, and genre fiction much like the present study (1-25). However, *Cyborg Saints* is not concerned with multispecies networks as much as it is with technology. It does not address SF in the specific either. Rather, it focuses on fantasy fiction. Her work also considers questions of temporality. These are to a certain extent intrinsic to discussions of medievalism. Yet it does not revolve around them nor are temporal considerations tied to ecological ethics.

Therefore, while the works mentioned above have opened a discussion on the study of ecomedievalism, to my knowledge no monograph has been written that addresses the topic that is discussed here. None of them looks at SF. None of them focuses either on perceptions of time expressed in medievalist works that may affect Western modes of relating to the more-than-human. The present study aims to fill this gap in the existing knowledge. In order to do so, discussions of temporality in medieval and medievalism studies about the medieval/modern divide are put in a so far unattempted dialogue with work on temporality in environmental humanities. Such an approach stems from the conviction that the medieval/modern divide goes hand in hand with the nature/culture and human/nonhuman divides.

Numerous scholars have theorized the implications of the medieval/modern divide within medieval and medievalism studies. Medievalism describes the ways modernity positions itself toward the medieval past. Temporality is thus a central category to medievalism. It may seem obvious that modes of apprehending the Middle Ages are enacted through a temporal lens. After all, the Middle Ages is a temporal category. It describes a period of Western society's past. However, attitudes toward and assumptions about that past vary significantly. Stephanie Trigg argues: "[m]edievalist temporality is not only a property of medievalism: it is instrumental . . . for modernity's sense of its own past" (207). The present may see itself as rigidly separated from the Middle Ages. Alternatively, it may see itself involved in a fluid conversation with it. The implications of such perceptions are not obvious.

In this sense, it is helpful to consider how modernity positions itself toward the Middle Ages. This relation generally expresses itself through assertions of continuity or alterity in relation to the past.[23] A relation of continuity stresses the affinities between past and present, while a relation of alterity insists on the radical difference between them. The impression that has prevailed within both academia and popular culture since the late twentieth century is one that sees the Middle Ages as radically separated from modernity. It is seen as the West's radical Other, characterized by a "hard-edged alterity" (Nichols 49). This view then stresses the aspects that distinguish the past from the present.[24]

The present often turns its attention to the Middle Ages. In fact, the medieval is the Other against which modernity constructs itself. It is evoked to suit the present's needs. Medievalism is then defined by

[23] Cf. Haydock.
[24] See D'Arcens, "Introduction" 4; Falconieri 6, 10; Rosenthal and Szarmach 3-4.

its presentism. Presentism is the practice of reading the past according to the assumptions, ideologies, and interests of the present. Louise D'Arcens suggests that "the study of medievalism sets out to analyze the fact of presentist medievalism in its many iterations, taking as its fundamental premise that presentism is vital to the postmedieval afterlife of the Middle Ages, and key to its continued potency and relevance within the modern" ("Presentism" 184). Medievalism is tied to the interests of the present, be they artistic, literary, political, religious, or simply recreational. Presentism is then the primary object of medievalism. D'Arcens identifies three kinds of presentist medievalism. The first is tied to a progressivist model of history, whereby the Middle Ages are superseded by modernity, which is deemed superior to it (184-5). The second consists in a nostalgic approach that views the Middle Ages as a noble past against which the present is found wanting (185-6).[25] The third position "queries linear models of temporality, depicting the medieval past as alive and present within modernity" (186). The latter best reflects the works analyzed in Chapters Three to Five. They all challenge linear models of temporality. They also show how the medieval and the modern interact with each other. On the other hand, the first two positions—the progressivist and the nostalgic one—both see the Middle Ages in a relation of alterity with modernity. Within such positions, the divide between medieval and modern is viewed alternatively as positive or negative depending on historical and cultural contexts.[26]

In the case of the progressivist vision of history, the Middle Ages is seen as an outdated past that is superseded by modernity. This stance subscribes to a negative view of the Middle Ages. The nostalgic vision of history sees the medieval past as an ideal lost period. It adheres to a positive view of the Middle Ages. Both perceptions are often ideologically laden. The Middle Ages has been weaponized at multiple points in history in order to justify exclusionary positions. It has served to validate imperialist, colonialist, racist, and sexist stances. This has been accomplished by passing off mythologized narratives as historical facts. These narratives lend an appearance of legitimacy to toxic ideologies. Exclusionary medievalism permeates US history. It serves to validate the oppression of those who fail to adhere to the parameters prescribed by Western modernity. It appears imperative then to tease out the strategies through which exclusionary medievalism operates. The use of the medieval to oppressive ends can function precisely through two operations that see the medieval either in a negative or a positive light.

The negative view of the Middle Ages associates it with the qualities of darkness, ignorance, violence, and uncleanliness. It adheres to the myth of the Middle Ages seen as the "Dark Ages." According to this view, modernity is radically separated from the Middle Ages. It is depicted as civilized, rational, and progressive in radical opposition to it.[27] This view is grounded in a conception of history as progressive and linear. This perception has often undergirded colonialist, imperialist, and expansionist projects. In this context, the West depicts itself as triumphantly modern and progressive, while it links its

[25] See also Aronstein 12: "the two dominant views of the medieval past, the progressive vision of history . . . and the nostalgic vision . . . coexist as often as they compete."
[26] Cf. Matthews.
[27] On the "Dark Ages," see also Elliott, *Politics* 25-30, 52; Kaufman and Sturtevant 1-28; Matthews 19-24.

Others to the negatively perceived Middle Ages. Through this process, the Other becomes "displaced" in time (Barrington, "Global" 184-6; Brown 553; Davis, *Periodization* 20; Davis and Altschul 2; Ingham and Warren 2). This displacement validates Western claims to lands, resources, and bodies by asserting to modernize them. The US has often presented itself as having overcome the medieval past. This discourse also permeates current US political discourses and exclusionary ideologies that marginalize immigrants and people with different religions or ethnicities.[28]

Dominant attitudes toward the Middle Ages are reflected in literary works. The tendency to represent a disjunction between the medieval and the modern also appears in SF. The way the Middle Ages is depicted in SF varies depending on historical and cultural contexts. However, one prevailing attitude toward the Middle Ages in SF is one of dismissal. This stance reiterates the view of the dark Middle Ages that needs to be overcome.[29] As Kears and Paz argue, "SF writers can often be found adhering to . . . the dismissal of the 'medieval' as a time of barbarism and backwardness" (23).[30] In this context, modernity is seen by contrast as enlightened and civilized. This kind of SF medievalism also confirms progressivist models of history. They thus reflect the view of time as linear and unidirectional that underlies progress narratives.

On the other hand, there exists a parallel mode of depicting the Middle Ages. The latter revalues the period in positive ways. It conceives of it as an ideal lost past. The medieval here is tied to magic, nature, chivalry, heroism, faith, and authoritative institutions. It is often sought after in escapist terms. The Middle Ages is seen once again in opposition to modernity. Yet, in this case, modernity is tied to an industrialized and disenchanted present. In positive perceptions of the Middle Ages, the medieval functions as a vessel for nostalgia. It manifests a dissatisfaction with the present. In this sense, nostalgia can express a criticism of Western notions of progress.[31] Yet it can also be deployed in harmful ways. Positive views of the Middle Ages have also been used to oppressive ends. The desire to return to the Middle Ages entails the engagement with what Susan Aronstein defines as the "politics of nostalgia" (12). The latter indicates that nostalgia can bear political meanings and shape individual and national values. In exclusionary nostalgic forms of medievalism, the medieval is imagined as a period of lost purity, order, and integrity. This view supports claims of origins that favor exclusionary models of identity and nationhood (Young, "Place" 2). It involves the assertion of a shared medieval past defined by patriarchy, military power, and ethnic purity. Medievalism is crucial to processes of identity formation rooted in androcentrism and ethnocentrism (Davis, "Veil" 113; Geary 7-17; Young, "Whiteness" 42-5). It can also serve to bolster a sense of

[28] See Holsinger, *War on Terror*; J. Smith.
[29] This depiction appears, for instance, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Earth's Holocaust" (1844), L. Sprague de Camp's *Lest Darkness Fall* (1939), Isaac Asimov's *Foundation* (1951), and Vernor Vinge's *A Fire Upon the Deep* (1992).
[30] See also Massey 96.
[31] Nostalgia has long been dismissed as a manifestation of "displaced emotionalism and sentimentalized pseudo-politics" (Holsinger, *Premodern* 5). However, recent work on medievalism has reevaluated nostalgia. See Boym; Dell, "Nostalgia"; Dinshaw, *How Soon is Now* 35; Soper 260; Trilling, *Aesthetics.* Similar dismissals of nostalgia have also been frequent in ecocritical studies. See Morton, *Ecology* 162. Other scholars are more supportive of the role that nostalgia can play for ecological awareness. See Bonnett.

superiority. The latter is derived from the belief of belonging to an illustrious tradition. Through this process, claims to expansionism and imperialism are justified.

As anticipated above, cultural products often reproduce dominant positions toward the Middle Ages. This is not reduced to the negative views of the Middle Ages, but it also extended to positive ones.[32] Both stances are featured in SF. The latter can also display romanticized depictions of the Middle Ages. This is, for instance, the case of many space operas. Here the hero retraces the steps of questing knights in outer space, such as in George Lucas's *Star Wars*. The nostalgia witnessed in such works is often tied to a set of conservative values.[33] They are often linked to the celebration of a male hero, chivalry, military prowess, and a hierarchical structure. They prove that SF can validate dominant socio-cultural ideologies.

Negative and positive views of the medieval used for exclusionary purposes often go hand in hand. The two approaches involve respectively the rejection or the celebration of the Middle Ages. For this reason, they might seem incompatible. One declares the detachment from the Middle Ages, while the other traces a relation of continuity with it. In reality, both the progressivist and nostalgic models of history imply the separation of the medieval from the modern. Even nostalgic claims to the past are made while being firmly situated in modernity (Altschul 175; Barrington, "Global" 183; Trilling, "Medievalism" 219). They do not erase the distance between modernity and the Middle Ages. This point is demonstrated in the discussion of Edgar Rice Burroughs's work in Chapter Two. Here the author employs both the progressivist and nostalgic views of the Middle Ages in order to defend the superiority of the hero in the novels over the racialized and animalized aliens he encounters.

The implications of the medieval/modern divide have prompted scholars in medieval and medievalism studies to critique rigid historical periodizations. They also advocate for expansive notions of temporality that depart from the linear ones. These include such scholars as Carolyn Dinshaw (*How Soon is Now*), Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (*Medieval Identity Machines*), and Cathleen Davis (*Periodization*). All of them denounce the implications of the medieval/modern divide and the Western hegemonic ideological agendas it has served to validate. They argue that this divide rests on monologic notions of history. Here history is intended as a chain of flat, serial, and linear causality. This conception of time serves to validate progress narratives. Their work is joined by scholars within postcolonial and critical race studies, who challenge progressivist conceptions of time and history that presuppose a neat medieval/modern divide. They look into how such stances have legitimated imperialist and colonialist practices.[34] They illuminate the racism, heteronormativity, and androcentrism that often underlie medievalist practices.

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[32] Nostalgic views of the Middle Ages in literary works can be found in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954) and in C.S. Lewis's Cosmic Trilogy (*Out of the Silent Planet* [1938]; *Perelandra* [1943]; *That Hideous Strength* [1945]). The time travel category constitutes a particular case. If it often reiterates the medieval/modern divide, it can also defy rigid temporal binaries. See D'Arcens, "Presentism"; Kang 248-54; Trigg 204; Vishnuvajjala.

[33] On conservativism and medievalism in *Star Wars*, see Aronstein 122; Moberly and Moberly, "Revisiting" 161.

[34] For critiques of the medieval/modern divide at the intersection of medieval and medievalism studies and postcolonial theory, see Altschul; Chakrabarty, *Provincializing*; Cohen, "Introduction"; Davis and Altschul; Lampert, *Postcolonial*; Ingham and Warren. A parallel body of work has addressed the vexed issues of periodization and the relations between race and the medieval through the lens of marginalized communities and people of color.

All these voices counter dominant Western views of time. The critique of hegemonic temporal perceptions entails the rejection of claims of either radical alterity or unfiltered identification with the Middle Ages. It stresses instead the ways in which modernity dialogues with the medieval past and it embraces dimensions of (a)synchronicity, co-temporality, and multidirectionality. This study joins Dinshaw, Cohen, Davis, along with others, in their advocacy for nonlinear, overlapping modes of temporal perception. The critique of rigid periodizations is not, however, intended to suggest a denial of historical change. It should not ignore the dynamic transformations that take place through time. It should rather go along with the recognition of specific socio-cultural and historical contexts. Yet the acknowledgment of shifting historical dynamics should not engender a temporal perception that legitimates anthropocentric views and practices.

The scholars above illustrate how the medieval/modern divide has been used to validate intersecting forms of injustice. However, this discussion has not been extended to consider the same implications that this divide has for ecological matters. In parallel to the work done within medieval and medievalism studies, scholars in environmental humanities have also addressed narrow temporal views. As mentioned above, environmental humanities have witnessed an increased interest in reorientations of temporal perceptions in relation to the climate crisis. Such positions are concerned with countering the progress narratives that constitute the central ideology of the industrial capitalist West. The latter justify social and environmental injustice. As Bonneuil and Fressoz suggest, "[p]rogress, the veil of modesty clothing the damages of industrial capitalism, . . . justified the fate of its victims . . . The ideology of progress was also built upon a contrast between the technological West and the barbarous rest" (265). This narrative has justified the oppression of marginalized communities, who are perceived as remnants of an uncivilized past. They are trampled in the relentless Western march forward in time and in space. Progress narratives have also masked the ecological consequences of human development. In this context, the material earth is left as a backdrop and seen as exploitable. Such views have validated untrammeled expansion and extractivism without attention to the implications of such practices for both human and nonhuman Others. Barbara Leckie argues that climate change

> rethinks the temporal models indebted to origins, linearity, progress, and teleology on which the Global North typically relies to address climate change questions . . . The Global North needs compelling alternatives to the way in which the climate change story has been told, alternatives that rethink the chronological and representational models on which it has relied. (xvi, 3)

Leckie stresses the need for revised temporal conceptions. This implies a departure from models indebted to linearity and teleology. Such a need is motivated by the consequences that these temporalities have on beliefs and practices that have engendered climate change. The search for alternative modes of perceiving time does not necessarily entail the categorical rejection of progress. Yet it does imply the rejection of the unethical practices that progress narratives have bolstered. A revision of the narratives that the West uses

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See Hendricks; Heng; Hsy, *Antiracist*; Kaufman and Sturtevant; D. Kim; Lomuto; Perry; Rambaran-Olm; Vernon, *Black MA*; Whitaker, *Metaphors*; Whitaker and Gabriele.

to justify its agendas is then necessary. What narratives are chosen to read the world and how they are told is relevant. Narratives are among the main tools through which humans understand and visualize time. Literary texts can thus be privileged loci where to shape temporal perceptions aligned with ethical ecological practices. Through literary works, it may be possible to challenge hegemonic notions of time.

A shared call has thus been advanced for alternative conceptions of temporality both in medieval and medievalism studies and in environmental humanities. Both focus on the critique of linear temporalities that support progress narratives. Yet, so far, there have been no attempts to put these debates in dialogue. This study then brings together questions on temporality in medievalism studies and environmental humanities. Medievalism studies considers how the medieval/modern divide engenders narrow temporal perceptions. Environmental humanities stress the consequences of narrow temporal perceptions of the more-than-human. Once such discussions are joined together, it can be argued that the medieval/modern divide is tied to other dichotomies, including the nature/culture and human/nonhuman ones. This conversation illuminates how influential the medieval/modern divide is to models of temporality that uphold anthropocentric development. It also highlights the need for, in Cohen's words, "more complicated narratives of heterogeneity, overlap, sedimentation and multiplicity" ("Introduction" 2-3). This position then looks for temporalities that abandon progressivist and hierarchical models of history and that are instead geared toward more complex and nonlinear understandings of time. The following chapters provide examples of SF medievalist works that either reinforce or unsettle linear temporalities. Those that challenge rigid divides—between the medieval and the modern and between nature and culture—display a recognition of multispecies entangled networks of temporalities and agencies. Such works illustrate the possibility of building an affirmative ecological ethics based on medieval models.

As suggested above, SF reflects dominant temporal views. These include both the progressivist and nostalgic stances toward the Middle Ages. Yet SF medievalism can also dismantle rigid periodizations. It can challenge the medieval/modern divide. Yet not all of such depictions present an affirmative framework that can aid in reconfiguring human-nonhuman relations. There exists—in SF, popular culture, and political and economic discourses—a mode of seeing the medieval as darkly familiar. In this context, modernity imagines a return of the medieval in the present. This reveals apocalyptic anxieties about the current society's collapse. The crisis of modernity is viewed as a result of the excess of progress. The degeneration of modernity into the Middle Ages leads the society to a new "Dark Ages" (Falconieri 17-21; Freedman and Spiegel 702). The vision of the end of Western modernity signals a crisis in the idea of progress in light of socio-economic, political, and ecological changes. It configures a breakdown of the medieval/modern divide. This trope serves as a warning against the risk of modernity crumbling under the weight of its unjust structures. Yet, in this scenario, the Middle Ages retains a negative connotation of regression and decadence. This narrative often appears in SF. Here authors imagine neomedieval (post-)apocalyptic futures where modernity declines into pre-modern states of disorder and repressive regimes. The trope is exemplified by Walter Miller's *Canticle for Leibowitz* and Margaret Atwood's *The*

Handmaid's Tale.[35] Such narratives started to grow in number in the second half of the twentieth century in response to anxieties over ecological decline, nuclear weapons, and industrial capitalism.

The return of the Dark Ages has also been theorized in the 1970s in political and economic theories. On the one hand, scholars have prophesized the coming Dark Ages and the decline of the US empire's primacy, comparing it to the fall of the Roman Empire (Berman; Greer; Minc; Vacca; Ph. Williams).[36] On the other, the field of International Relations has developed the notion of neomedievalism. It theorizes a globalized world order that returns to medieval structures of political organization (Aalberts 33; Holsinger, "IR"; Pugh and Weisl 140-55; Robinson and Clements 59-60). Such theories—still in vogue today—compare the weakening of the nation-state to medieval contexts. National sovereignty's decline in this scenario is owing to competing non-state entities and fluid territorial networks. Neomedievalism is also tied to techno-feudalism. The latter compares the economic structures under neoliberal corporate capitalism to feudalism (Altschul 178-80; Morozov; Terlouw). These theories describe a late-stage capitalist world that reverts to premodern dynamics. In this context, priority is given to corporate profit over public institutions, human rights, environmental policies, social justice, and planetary health.

Neomedieval and techno-feudal theories have risen in concomitance with the efflorescence of neomedieval works in the second half of the twentieth century. Economic-political theories, literary texts, and popular culture have fed off one another. Academic theories and SF both display medieval scenarios projected into the future. Each is influenced by the other's neomedieval arguments. This is made clear by Kaufman, who shows that Stephen J. Kobrin, in his discussion of neomedievalism and the digital world economy, refers to *Star Wars* in order to illustrate his argument ("Unmoored" 7).[37] Kobrin argues: "[i]n politics and economics, as in science fiction movies, it may help to attempt to visualize the unknown future in terms of the known past" (364). Political theory is infected with imagery drawn from SF. In turn, SF often reflects on political conformations by depicting future neomedieval and techno-feudal world orders. This point is further addressed in Chapter Five, which discusses Butler's Earthseed series.

The prospect of a return to the darkly familiar Middle Ages reveals anxieties over an oversaturated Western modernity that cannot survive its own excesses. It thus offers a critique of such excesses. However, this vision fails to visualize the future as anything but a dark return to the past. It forecloses the ideation of affirmative practices. It hinders attempts to build counter-hegemonic ethical practices that may positively affect human-nonhuman relations. For this reason, a more productive approach could respond to Rosi Braidotti's call for the need for both the resources of critique and creativity. These are deemed central to the disruption of exclusionary modes of seeing the human. The two resources must

> proceed together in the quest for affirmative alternatives which rest on a non-linear vision of memory as imagination, creation as becoming. Instead of deference to the authority of the past, we have the fleeting co-presence of multiple time zones . . . This dynamic vision of time enlists the

[35] See Trexler 97. On medievalism in *Canticle*, see Griffin; Jancovich. On medievalism in *Handmaid*, see Lukes, "Comparative" 4-5. I further discuss post-apocalyptic narratives and medievalism in Chapter Four.
[36] See Höglund 1-19.
[37] On a neoliberal corporate ethos in medievalist works, see Moberly and Moberly, "Reincorporating"; Rabiee 183.

creative resources of the imagination to the task of reconnecting to the past. (*Posthuman* 165)

Critique and creativity are necessary tools to envision counter-hegemonic frameworks that are opposed to linear temporal perceptions. These are instead grounded in nonlinearity, heterogeneity, and dialogue. This appears relevant for subversions of the medieval/modern divide. The past is thus placed in a productive discussion with the present. On the one hand, then, the literary works under consideration operate a critique of rigid views of temporality grounded in the medieval/modern divide and tied to other Western dichotomies. On the other, such works open roads to affirmative politics and ethical practices that recognize multispecies entwinements. They do so by troubling rigid binaries and temporal periodizations.

The novels under consideration here depart both from negative and positive views of medieval alterity and from views of the Middle Ages as alarmingly familiar. Yet the rejection of linear progress narratives need not imply a nostalgic, technophobic, and anti-modern desire for a return to the past. Such a stance manifests a defeatism over the chance of shaping ethical multispecies futures. Rather, this critique is directed against the unrestrained, uncritical uses of technology that derive from anthropocentric views. The position advocated for here is one that escapes both triumphalist techno-optimism and defeatist alarmism as responses to ecological issues. Haraway argues that both stances are unhelpful in tackling climate change (*Staying* 3). I join her in the call for "staying with the trouble." The latter does not entail

> clearing away the present and the past in order to make futures for coming generations . . . staying with the trouble requires learning to be truly present, not as a vanishing pivot between awful or edenic pasts and apocalyptic or salvific futures, but as mortal critters entwined in myriad unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings" (1).

The relationship with the past implied in this concept departs from both the categorical rejection of the past in favor of the future as well as from the nostalgic desire to return to it. It implies building over troubled histories in transformative ways that recognize entangled multispecies networks.

A study of ecomedievalism in SF can fulfill the role of staying with the trouble, of building over the medieval past in order to construct affirmative possibilities in the present for the future. This approach may help in unveiling how certain kinds of medievalism reinforce anthropocentric stances that fuel exploitative practices. It may also prove the potential of medievalism in configuring counter-hegemonic multispecies relations. The climate crisis requires a leap of imagination for humans to address its vast overlapping scales. SF medievalism can help illuminate the nonlinear bonds that tie together the past, the present, and the future and the histories of social and environmental injustice. It can serve to reconsider notions of history, progress, and teleology and to engage with concepts of temporal heterogeneity, asynchrony, and multiplicity. Hopefully, through this process, rigid binaries may be defied and disrupted.

4. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

The dissolution of the medieval/modern divide and of dichotomic thinking as a whole aligns with the critique of binary thought embraced by multiple theoretical strands of environmental humanities, especially those of ecocriticism and posthumanism. Both critical fields frame my ecomedievalist

perspective. Both take part in the twenty-first century "nonhuman" turn, which indicates a growing concern with decentering the human in order to recognize multispecies entangled networks (Grusin vii). The nonhuman turn has also expressed an interest in unsettling the dichotomies that validate the oppression of nonhumans and of sections of the human population on the grounds of their race, gender, class, physical ability, and sexual orientation.

4.1. Ecocriticism

The US environmental movement arose in the second half of the twentieth century in response to ecological anxieties. Yet ecocriticism as an academic field only developed in the 1990s within American literary studies (Heise, "Comparative" 19). It consists in "an interdisciplinary movement committed not to any one methodology but to . . . the subject of how literature and other media express environmental awareness and concern" (Buell qtd. Fiedorczuk 7). It is a cultural approach made out of various procedures and methods that is interested in ecological matters.[38] Literary ecocriticism focuses on the role of literary texts in the depiction of the more-than-human and of human-nonhuman relations. It analyzes how literary works represent human attitudes toward the more-than-human in specific historical moments. It thus contextualizes such relations in particular socio-cultural frameworks (Heise, "Letter" 1097). This study shares with ecocriticism the belief that literary works are valuable tools that reflect and shape attitudes and practices toward the more-than-human. Medievalist SF can be particularly enlightening in this regard.

Early efforts—what Buell defines as the first wave of ecocriticism (*Future* 17-28)—mainly focused on white male nature writers and environmentalists, such as English Romantic poets, American Transcendentalists, John Muir, and Aldo Leopold. They also revolved around views of nature both as based on attachments to local places and as a pristine, uninhabited wilderness where to escape temporarily from civilization. This view not only maintains the nature/culture divide intact, but it also fails to consider how the wilderness notion is tied to masculine colonial aggression against Indigenous peoples, women, and the more-than-human. It was meant to validate the appropriation of lands deemed uninhabited.[39]

The stance on which this study rests gears closer to more recent approaches that focus on reciprocal human/nonhuman entwinements (Buell, *Future* 22). What is of particular relevance for the present study is that ecocriticism has shown an increased interest in matters of temporal scales and perceptions. It has also expanded its field of study by addressing less recent timeframes such as the medieval one, as proven by the multiple works on medieval material from ecocritical perspectives mentioned above. The exploration of medievalism in SF can be considered as situated within the temporal turn in ecocriticism. Attention to modernity's stance towards the medieval can help understand how temporal assumptions shape human-

[38] See also Oppermann, "Theorizing" 105.
[39] See Estes 22-3; Garrard 59-84, 178; Heise, "Comparative" 19, *Sense* 28-9.

nonhuman relations. All the works under consideration address the entangled relations between the past, the present, and the future that involve both human historical temporalities as well as nonhuman ones.

Ecocriticism has also turned away from ecocentric positions toward approaches that blend ecological concerns with ones of social justice (Buell et al. 419). It is a political approach that counters interlinked structures of domination.[40] Ecological oppression cannot be read apart from social injustice tied to racial, gender, ethnic, class, and species identity and to economic and political dynamics. Ecocriticism has thus expanded its intersectional dimensions. It has given rise to sub-categories, such as ecofeminism, environmental justice, and material ecocriticism, and it has opened a dialogue with other fields, such as human-animal studies and postcolonialism. This study draws from various ecocritical branches that grow out of such concerns. It embraces an intersectional lens that counters joint systems of oppression. The following chapters draw multiple insights from ecofeminism and environmental justice ecocriticism. Both approaches note how intersectional discrimination has often been validated by the nature/culture divide that relegates alterity to a "natural" and thus inferior status.

Ecofeminism focuses on the interlinked oppression of women and the more-than-human, which have been associated with each other in order to demean both. It argues that the domination over both relies on cultural constructs that rest on hierarchical man/woman and nature/culture dichotomies (Gaard; Plumwood, *Feminism*; K. Warren). While men are associated with the positively-valued spheres of culture, reason, and the mind, women are tied with the less-valued realms of nature, irrationality, and the body. Ecofeminism advocates for the end of androcentrism and anthropocentrism through the dissolution of dichotomic thinking (Daigle, "Environmental" 886-7). Some ecofeminists subvert the hierarchical scale of binary thought by privileging the bond between women and nature over that between man and culture. Such a view is fundamentally essentialist. It reinforces the naturalized conception of women based on biological sex instead of considering the culturally constructed nature of gender in patriarchal societies. It also reinforces binary thinking (Garrard 24). Other ecofeminist strands address natural-cultural entangled knots. They focus on the socio-cultural circumstances that shape value systems in which discrimination is rooted. Most of the scholars I converse with are informed by feminist stances concerned with ecological matters. Ecofeminism is especially addressed in Chapter Three in the reading of Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*. The chapter considers how medievalism, ecologism, and feminism inform one another.

Yet strands of ecofeminism have been criticized for failing to attend to matters tied to race, ethnicity, ability, and class that intersect with those of gender, and to consider women's differentiated positionalities. While many ecofeminists do consider intersectional questions, environmental justice ecocriticism makes it its explicit aim to denounce the unequal distribution of environmental risk and oppression among women, BIPOCs, and the poor. Born as an interdisciplinary movement, it has also been applied to literary studies by scholars such as T. V. Reed, Joni Adamson, Mei Mei Evans, Rachel Stein,

[40] See N. Fraser 96; Garrard 3; Oppermann, "Future" 16.

and Rob Nixon.[41] Insights from environmental justice ecocriticism are especially relevant for Chapter Five, which discusses Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* and Butler's Earthseed series. The medievalism of both of the authors pushes back against racist and settler-colonialist histories tied to the slow violence of eco-injustice and the political and economic structures that maintain systemic inequalities.

Another research field tied to ecocriticism that is relevant for this study is human-animal studies.[42] The latter, applied to literary studies, looks at literary depictions of human attitudes toward animals, human-animal interactions, and animal subjectivity (Phelpstead 10). It advocates for the recognition of animal rights and to the end of anthropocentrism. It highlights the relational bonds between human and nonhuman animals (Steel, *How to* 4).[43] Similarly to ecocriticism, it argues that the nature/culture and human/nonhuman binaries are socially constructed. It then deems it more appropriate to speak of hybrid and relational natural-cultural realms. Numerous scholars also look at how human/nonhuman distinctions have perpetuated the oppression of both humans and nonhumans (C. Kim; Z. Jackson). They stress the ties between animalization and racialization, exploring intersectional avenues of concern within animal studies. I engage with human-animal studies scholars throughout the chapters, which also showcase how attitudes toward animals during the Middle Ages inform current conceptions reflected in SF works. Chapters Two and Five also address racist dynamics of animalization within medievalist texts.

Recent work in human-animal studies also looks into entangled multispecies agencies. The field is thus also tied to another ecocritical branch relevant to this study, i.e., material ecocriticism. The latter extends the inquiry on the nonhuman to inorganic matter, landscapes, toxic substances, infrastructures, and the climate as entities endowed with agency and entangled with humans. These interlaced elements produce configurations of meanings and discourses that can be read as stories (Iovino and Oppermann 7). A concept central to the field is Stacy Alaimo's transcorporeality, which points to the porosity of matter and its permeability to external influences, including pollutants and diseases (*Bodily*). It denounces the effects of environmental injustice produced by industrial capitalism and of the unequal distribution of its consequences on different sectors of the human population. Another central notion to material ecocriticism is Jane Bennett's vibrant matter, which stresses the vitality and agency of material embodiments (*Vibrant Matter*). Both of these scholars share feminist stances with ecofeminism in their aim to unsettle the dichotomic hierarchies that contribute to oppressing the more-than-human and women. All such notions will recur in the following chapters. All the texts considered here address the agency and vitality of matter. In line with SF's focus on hybrid beings, the works under consideration also display in multiple ways the recognition of multispecies entangled networks of humans, animals, plants, and matter in general.

[41] See Adamson et al.; Nixon; T. V. Reed. Intersectional ecocritical concerns have also been expressed from within Indigenous studies. See Adamson; Adamson and Monani; Kimmerer; Mariani.
[42] While it shares numerous methods and aims with ecocriticism, human-animal studies is a distinct yet complementary area of studies. See Armstrong and Simmons 1, n2.
[43] Central contributions to the field include the early ones of Peter Singer and Mary Midgley and those of Jacques Derrida (*Animal*), Giorgio Agamben, Cary Wolfe, and Donna Haraway.

As demonstrated from the above description of selected branches of ecocriticism, the theoretical approach is defined by a variety of different methods, critical concepts, and frameworks and by a strongly interdisciplinary nature (Maufort 103). What binds ecocritical approaches together is a rejection of binary thinking and of anthropocentrism. Despite an initial resistance to theory, as it gained greater self-reflexivity, ecocriticism has begun to build a more structured discursive-material theoretical apparatus that can frame literary readings.[44] Ecocritical approaches have mostly favored thematic approaches. While the present study mostly focuses on matters tied to thematics within close readings of the texts selected, it also considers questions related to form and especially to narrative structure, style, and the use of language.

4.2. Posthumanism

Posthumanism shares numerous features with ecocriticism. Developed during the 1990s, posthumanism is an interdisciplinary movement that has also seeped into literary studies. This study engages more specifically with "critical posthumanism." The latter consists in a self-reflexive set of discourses that operate a critique of the discursive and material structures, arguably derived from Renaissance and Enlightenment humanism, that have bolstered a universalized notion of the human intended as white, heteronormative, able-bodied, and male, hereby called Man (Braidotti, *Posthuman*; Wynter, "Unsettling" 260).[45] The notion of Man has served to disparage all those gendered, racialized, and naturalized Others declared as different because they do not adhere to the parameters imposed by dominant Eurocentric ideologies. This view of Man validates exclusionary hegemonic political and socio-economic Western positions. The latter are rooted in progress narratives that have driven colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. This has penalized the more-than-human and marginalized human categories. The notion of Man often underlies exclusionary medievalism. This point is argued in Chapter Two in the analysis of Burroughs's Mars series. Here the hero embodies the figure of Man that is set against gendered, racialized, and naturalized Others. His superiority is defended through the temporal strategies of medievalism.

Posthumanism not only counters humanism's racist and patriarchal foundations, but it also challenges its anthropocentrism. Braidotti (*Knowledge*) argues that the posthuman predicament is defined by the convergence of the critique of humanism and anthropocentrism. Posthumanism dethrones humans from their presumed exceptionalism, discards the notion of the sovereign autonomous human, and recognizes the relations of entanglement and interdependence that tie humans to the more-than-human and machines (Herbrechter et al. 7). It comprises multiple areas of research that investigate the cultural representations of humans' relational bond with technology, animality, monstrosity, and ecology (Nayar, *Posthumanism* 45-6). Posthumanism, like multiple branches of ecocriticism, is ethically invested in defying hierarchical dichotomic thinking. The following chapters address different modes of engagement

[44] See Junquera et al. 14-5; Oppermann, "Discontents" 160-1; Seymour 26.
[45] See Bignall 298-9; Herbrechter et al. 3-26. Henceforth, I address critical posthumanism as posthumanism for brevity.

with technological, animal, monstrous, and ecological alterity. All the novels discussed in Chapters Three to Five present posthumanist medieval models grounded in the rejection of binary thought.

In particular, this study revolves around the crisis of the medieval/modern divide along with the nature/culture and human/nonhuman ones. This crisis presumes the challenge to linear temporalities. Posthumanism aligns with views of temporality that feature in the works under discussion. The "post" of posthumanism does not imply a temporal overcoming of humanism that follows linear progressive timelines. It constitutes a deconstruction of humanism and its unethical implications (Herbrechter et al. 15). It does not represent a break from the past, but a critical intervention over it. Posthumanism interrogates what it means to be human within changing scenarios moved by globalization, technological development, neoliberal capitalism, and climate change (Herbrechter et al. 17). Yet it should not be considered a recent condition of modernity. As suggested above, numerous scholars have looked at the past—including the medieval past—from a posthumanist lens. This endeavor does not consist in the search for instances that prefigure posthumanism. It looks for expressions of a humanity that has always already been enmeshed with the more-than-human (Wolfe 9). This search stems from the belief that premodern models of the human and the more-than-human have much to offer to ecological criticism (Joy and Dionne 6; Steel, "Medieval" 3). The works discussed in the following chapters seem to borrow and recycle such medieval models. Posthumanism is then deeply invested in questions of temporality. As in the case of the works under consideration, it rejects linear narratives of untrammeled progress in favor of the recognition of heterogeneous multidirectional temporalities.[46]

Among the scholars who are central to the field, this study is especially informed by Donna Haraway and Rosi Braidotti. Both manifest ambivalent sentiments toward technology. While recognizing that it has been used as a tool of oppression, they also emphasize the possibilities that technology offers for counter-hegemonic resistance (Braidotti, *Posthuman* 89-95; Haraway, *Manifestly* 9-13). This stance distinguishes critical posthumanist positions from transhumanism. The latter consists in an accentuation of humanism in a quasi-utopian vision of human techno-enhancement and bodily transcendence (Herbrechter et al. 10-1). Critical posthumanism escapes both the extremes of technophobia and techno-optimism. While recognizing the imbrication of technology, the human, and the more-than-human, Haraway and Braidotti do not limit their focus to technology. They address subjectivities that are in tune with the more-than-human world and ecological practices. Similarly, this study considers the relation of humans both with technology—which is especially relevant in SF works—and with multispecies nonhumans. However, while it analyzes how the works under consideration represent the relation between humans and machines and acknowledges the need for an ethical use of technology, the aspects of posthumanism that are of most interest here are those engaged in questions of multispecies co-existence and kinship.

[46] See also Ferrando 28: "Posthumanism does not contemplate a linear notion of time."

Both Haraway and Braidotti display feminist and materialist stances. They both seek to blur the nature/culture divide along with other harmful dichotomies that have led to interlinked forms of domination of all those devalued as Others. They critique humanism's universalism, the colonial and capitalist expansion it bolsters, and the intersectional violence it makes possible. Although posthumanism often builds on the anti-humanist stances of feminist, postcolonial, critical race, and queer theory, it has often been criticized for failing to attend to non-Western worldviews, maintaining a Eurocentric position instead (M. Jackson, "Introduction" 2). Efforts have thus been made to decolonize posthumanism and to open a dialogue with Indigenous studies, postcolonialism, and critical race theory.[47] The opening of posthumanism to diverse perspectives answers Papaschase Cree scholar Dwayne Donald's call for an "ethical relationality," defined as

> an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to more deeply understand how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other . . . It is also an ethical imperative to see that despite our varied place-based cultures and knowledge systems, we live in the world together with others and must constantly think and act with reference to these relationships. (535-6)

The concept stresses the need to recognize trans-species relational networks and to open a dialogue between diverse situated knowledge systems that, while recognizing their differences, can converse with each other. It urges to respect both difference and relationality. Chapter Five especially, which addresses medievalism in Afrofuturist works, engages with scholars who unite discourses within posthumanism and critical race studies (Z. Jackson; Mbembe; Weheliye). They reveal that the roots of posthumanism can be found in earlier Black thinkers. They also foreground matters of race in the significations of the human. This appears relevant in order to counter the figure of Man upheld within exclusionary kinds of medievalism.

Posthumanism proves to be a ripe terrain for framing literary readings. Literary works constitute spaces where the encounter with human and nonhuman Others is shaped and debated. They also address what it means to be human and to relate to the more-than-human (Daigle, "Environmental" 896; Nayar, *Posthumanism* 49). Such depictions can bring forth ethical modes of engaging with nonhuman difference. They can substitute unitary humanist belief systems grounded in exclusionary positions. Posthumanism has deep implications for literary studies and the analysis of SF medievalism. Haraway considers SF a privileged genre for exploring bonds with technology and with the more-than-human at large.[48] She also suggests that the tools through which to achieve cyborgs and eradicate anthropocentrism are "retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities. In retelling origin stories, cyborg authors

[47] On posthumanism and Indigenous studies, see Byrd; Bignall; Sundberg; Tallbear; Todd. On posthumanism and postcolonial/critical race studies, see Burton; Z. Jackson; Last; King; Lillvis; Taylor, *Universes*; Weheliye, *Habeas*.
[48] On the relation between posthumanism and SF, see also Vint, "Posthumanism." Considerations of the entwinements of the human especially with technology could already be witnessed before posthumanism's official development, within SF in particular. SF writer Stanislaw Lem has contributed to SF theory and to posthumanism through his considerations of human engagements with technology in his *Summa Technologiae* (1964). The work's title is fashioned after Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*. The work then is itself a form of medievalism. The text proves an already existing engagement with SF, literary theory, and posthumanism in the 1960s. His theory, unlike this study, focuses on technology, futurology, and cybernetics rather than on multispecies entanglements.

subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture" (*Manifestly* 55). She stresses the importance of retelling stories that lie at the foundation of Western cultural identity. As shown above, the medieval has proven central to the West's self-definition. The works under consideration can be considered spaces for revisiting medievalist narratives in ways that point to the formation of a multispecies ecological ethics.

Literary works can map posthumanist questions not only on a thematic level, but also on a formal one. As mentioned above, posthumanism is deeply invested in matters of temporality. It denies, like the sort of medievalism I engage with in the next chapters, linear temporalities. This critique of sequential time is reflected in literary works on a formal level through a disruption of chronological linearity within the narrative structure (Caracciolo 1112-4). This feature can be found in all of the works discussed in Chapters Three to Five. They present in their specific ways traits of narrative fragmentation, interruption, incompleteness, multi-perspectivism, anachronism, and nonlinearity. While not all the works in question bear all such features, they all present at least some of them in different combinations. All of them unsettle linear narration. They thus complement at a formal level the disruption of the linearity implied by the medieval/modern divide that also takes place at a subject-matter level. This disruption contributes to challenging humanist restrictive notions of temporality. It can serve to shape counter-hegemonic visions of multispecies networks that deny hierarchical schemes. This kind of creative medievalism that unsettles temporal linearity often finds a home in such SF works as the ones in the next chapters. As mentioned above, SF can challenge linear temporalities and narrative unity.

4.3. Posthumanist Ecocriticism

While posthumanism is generally viewed as invested in the condition of the human in a digitalized, globalized, and technologically-mediated world, it also addresses ecological concerns, more-than-human entwinements, and porous material boundaries. It is committed to defying hierarchical dichotomies at the foundation of humanism. Ecocriticism and posthumanism thus share common features. Oppermann argues that "with their intersecting stories and theories, posthumanism and ecocriticism have something in common: they introduce changes in the way materiality, agency and nature are conceived" ("From Posthumanism" 24). In two separate articles ("From Material"; "From Posthumanism"), she advocates for a posthuman ecocriticism that operates an ecological critique of material networks and assemblages of human, technological, animal, and plant agents and hybrid configurations of organic and inorganic matter that belie dichotomous schemes. J.J. Cohen also mentions posthuman ecocriticism in reference to the project of recognizing the agency and storied nature of matter ("Posthuman" 29). Similarly, Stacy Alaimo argues for a posthuman environmental ethics that addresses affirmative material-discursive practices and human-nonhuman relations (*Bodily* 142).[49] In light of the features shared by certain strands of ecocriticism and posthumanism, many scholars have called for a convergence between the two approaches.

[49] Other scholars have addressed the convergence between the fields, referring to it alternatively as posthuman(ist) ecocriticism, ecological posthumanism, or ecocritical posthumanism. See Fetherston; Marland; Vakoch.

This study's theoretical framework is thus informed by a posthumanist ecocritical approach that recognizes the common features between the two fields. The advantages of this approach lie in the fact that it preserves the focus on ecological concerns of materiality and agency within literary texts that is inherent within ecocriticism rather than on triumphalist transhumanist stances. It also retains the critique of humanism at the heart of critical posthumanism. The latter is not always guaranteed in ecocritical readings (Daigle, "Environmental" 883). The dismantling of humanist dualistic thought that this study embraces is not only meant to discard the nature/culture and human/nonhuman divides. It is also meant to challenge the medieval/modern divide that has served to justify linear progress narratives. Through this process, literary works of medievalist SF can revise dominant notions of human identity, history, and time.

5. Structure

The four chapters that follow explore depictions of the medieval within SF through the analysis of selected works of twentieth-century US authors. The way modernity situates itself in relation to the Middle Ages bears implications for temporal perceptions that inform dominant Western ideologies. The latter have often served to oppress both the more-than-human and sections of the human population. The way the medieval is represented in SF works that address entangled dimensions of the past, the present, and the future can reflect and shape attitudes and practices about the more-than-human.

Chapter Two will demonstrate how both the nostalgic and progressivist models of history that rely on the medieval/modern divide can serve to uphold the notion of Man. This argument will be developed through the analysis of Edgar Rice Burroughs's Mars series with a focus on the series' first novel *A Princess of Mars* (1917), which is considered an example of an early SF work that employs medievalism to exclusionary ends. The novel revolves around the encounter between the protagonist John Carter and the alien species on Mars. The work borrows motifs from medieval chivalric and travel narratives through the mediation of US frontier narratives. Through such models, it bolsters a normative conception of the human as white Western male embodied by Carter. His sense of superiority over the hybrid and racialized aliens is established in temporal terms. On the one hand, the hero subscribes to a nostalgic notion of history by identifying with positively valued medieval chivalric models. On the other hand, he adopts a progressivist conception of history aligned with a linear view of temporality. This view justifies domination over the more-than-human. This is expressed through the protagonist's depiction of the aliens on Mars in medieval terms. In this case, the medieval is negatively perceived. In this chapter, I will make use of the theoretical tool of Cary Wolfe's "species grid" (*Animal Rites*). His theory will be used to map how Carter sees, in line with humanist standards, the aliens within a hierarchy of animality. The aliens are discussed along with medieval monsters. For this reason, insights from the field of monster studies will also frame the analysis. The work reveals anxieties over preserving medieval/modern, civilized/savage, human/nonhuman, and nature/culture divides, which validate anthropocentrism, racism, and sexism.

While Chapter Two will demonstrate how the medievalism exemplified by Burroughs's work negatively affects attitudes and practices that implicate multiple trans-species Others, Chapters Three, Four, and Five will explore works that critique such exclusionary medievalism. They shape instead counter-hegemonic medievalist models grounded in an ecological posthumanist ethics. In Chapter Three, the study will jump from the early twentieth century to the late 1960s. In this period SF begins to investigate multispecies entanglements with greater intensity under the impulse of the rising environmental movement. The chapter is going to focus on Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969). The work depicts the arrival of Genly Ai, an envoy of an intergalactic federation, on the planet Gethen. Gethen presents two main alien societies, Karhide and Orgoreyn, which showcase forms of government that echo respectively medieval and modern political and cultural structures. The protagonist initially sees Karhide as a darkly perceived Middle Ages, while he views Orgoreyn as an enlightened, modern society. Gradually, Genly revises his original impressions. By showing his change of heart, the novel seems to question linear notions of history that see the modern as superseding the medieval. The blurring of the medieval/modern divide is inscribed here within the work's questioning of dichotomic thought in general, specifically of the man/woman, nature/culture, and human/nonhuman divides. Karhide in fact entertains a respectful, horizontal relationship with the more-than-human in line with ecological posthumanist views. By showing how Genly learns to accept the "medieval" Others, the work presents the medieval society as a model for engaging with the more-than-human. Such a model departs from hegemonic concepts of progress and embraces multiple forms of trans-species alterity. The novel proves that medievalism can be used to advance feminist and ecological positions. Toward the chapter's end, I will also apply Le Guin's theory of the carrier bag of fiction to the novel. Her theory laments heroic quest patterns that revolve around conflict and violence. She argues instead for an alternative model grounded in an ethics of care that revolves around collecting experiences, knowledge, and affects.

Chapter Four will consider a reflexive instance of medievalism in Russell Hoban's post-apocalyptic novel *Riddley Walker* (1980). The work revises the trope of a darkly familiar Middle Ages projected onto a post-apocalyptic future by addressing the implications of how medieval models are recycled and interpreted. The novel comments on the anxieties felt by the US in response to the nuclear threats of the Cold War period. The work is set in the world destroyed by a nuclear event. The surviving society has lost the pre-apocalyptic cultural archive. One of the few remaining cultural artifacts is a medieval legend that has been reinterpreted as an origin myth of the post-apocalyptic condition. At first, the story serves as a cautionary tale. Yet, as the society starts evolving, it is reinterpreted as a narrative that justifies unrestrained linear progress. The novel features a mode of meta-medievalism that reflexively comments on the implications of the interpretations of the medieval legend for the post-apocalyptic society's attitudes and actions toward the more-than-human. The chapter will also analyze the way the main character, Riddley Walker, moves from an interest in notions of power and progress tied to nuclear weapons to a questioning of his society's dominant values toward the realization of trans-species

entwinements. Riddley's character development is determined by a series of medieval models that he finds along his journey. Through the contact with medieval artifacts, he experiences a destabilization of linear temporal schemes that force him to confront the interlaced bonds of the past and the present and of the human and the more-than-human. In my reading, I will make use of a posthumanist ecocritical approach combined with insights drawn from Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque. The example of Hoban's novel demonstrates how medieval motifs, material artifacts, and stories can either reinforce anthropocentric stances that are detrimental to the more-than-human or bolster a sense of kinship and respect for human-nonhuman networks. The ambivalent readings that can be made of such medieval models highlight the responsibility inherent in acts of interpretation and storytelling for the shaping of collective ecological values.

Finally, Chapter Five will be devoted to an analysis of Afrofuturist medievalist works. It will consider Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972) and Octavia Butler's novels *Parable of the Sower* (1993) and *Parable of Talents* (1998) as examples of Afrofuturist works that employ medievalism in a manner relevant both to the more-than-human and to matters at the intersection of race, gender, and species. The works of both of the authors critique the use of the medieval models of the Knights Templar and Crusaders to exclusionary ends. Such malevolent medievalism is also accompanied by the oppression of the more-than-human in the name of progress and advancement. In the case of Butler's novels, the society depicted is also defined by a neoliberal neomedievalist mode of capitalist economy that exacerbates ecological degradation and social injustice. The posthumanist ecocritical framework will be complemented here by a conversation with scholars who stress matters of race as central to posthumanist discourses. Both of the works reveal the slow temporalities of environmental and social injustice. At the same time, they also respond to exclusionary medievalism with counter-medievalist models. In *Mumbo Jumbo*, the latter are drawn from a requalification of medieval epidemics, while in Bulter's works they are borrowed from Benedictine monastic communities. Yet both of the authors also root the medievalism of their respective works in African diasporic histories. The counter-hegemonic Afrofuturist medievalist models of each novel adhere to a posthumanist view of relational subjectivities. Out of this ecological posthumanist medievalism emerges an inclusive, multispecies ethics. This stance unsettles binary thought, linear views of history, and progress narratives. All of the novels defy the histories of colonialism and capitalism. They embrace coiled, nonlinear temporalities in the search for ecological Black futures.

The examples provided in this study do not claim to exhaust the ways in which medievalism can be read under the lens of ecotheory. This is a field that has just recently started to gain attention. Therefore, there is plenty of material to be analyzed and different research avenues to be tackled. The limited corpus is determined by spatial limitations that have required a selection of the material taken into account. Yet the works under consideration exemplify larger patterns within SF medievalism. Medievalism can be used to support different ideological stances. It can serve to exclude multiple human social categories, but it can also promote inclusive and humane values. This distinction can also be applied to ecomedievalism.

Medievalist works can bolster anthropocentric stances. However, they can also help shape a more expansive sense of entangled networks of agencies, influences, and temporalities. The study of US works of SF medievalism may thus contribute to denouncing the use of medievalism as an instrument of trans-species oppression. More crucially, it may also serve to promote ethical intra- and interspecies bonds. This can be accomplished through the unsettling of the dominant temporal perceptions that inform and shape Western anthropocentric and oppressive practices.

Chapter Two: Exclusionary Medievalisms in Edgar Rice Burroughs's *A Princess of Mars*

1. Introduction

The present chapter aims to analyze Edgar Rice Burroughs's *A Princess of Mars* (1917). It presents the novel as an example of an early work of SF that depicts the relationship between the Self and the Other. The encounters between the protagonist of the novel John Carter and the alien species on Mars are read as examples of medievalism. In particular, the chapter argues that the different modes of referring to the medieval in the novel express a fear of the situation in which the divide between humans and non-humans is blurred. In this context, Burroughs presents the hero as the epitome of civilized society. This presentation is achieved by identifying the hero with medieval models tied to chivalry. Through this association, Carter is constructed according to the hegemonic conception of the human as a Western white male. He is presented as superior to animalized and racialized Others, who are marginalized due to their identity. In this sense, the aim of this medievalism is to exclude all those who depart from dominant notions of the human. The main theoretical take on the question of the Self as distanced from the imaginary Middle Ages in Burroughs's novel is Cary Wolfe's species grid. Wolfe's theory is useful in tracing how the different Martian aliens are placed within a hierarchy of animality. The different alien beings are going to be discussed together with hybrid monstrous creatures that haunted the medieval imagination. Hence the interpretative framework of monster studies will also prove useful in the analysis.

Burroughs's imaginative depiction of Mars has influenced considerably later works of SF, as the examples of *Flash Gordon* (1934-2003), Isaac Asimov's Foundation trilogy (1951-1953) and Robot series (1940-1995), *Star Trek* (1966-1969), and more recently James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009) make it clear. Any discussion of the work's medievalism and its influence on later texts requires an analysis of how the Middle Ages was imagined and used by Burroughs. In the course of the novel, a narrative of progress is constructed. In this narrative, time is shown as linear and one-directional. The conquest and exploitation of the nonhuman Other are also justified in the name of the advancement of civilization. Burroughs's novel turns the Middle Ages into a mythical cultural period used to exclusionary ends. This mode of representing the medieval affects ways of engaging with multiple Others and, in particular, with the more-than-human world.

1.1. Emergent SF and Imperialism

A Princess of Mars (*PM*) is the first of eleven works that make up the Mars series (1912-43).[50] The work was first serialized as *Under the Moons of Mars* in the pulp magazine *The All-Story* and was published as a novel in 1917. Pulp magazines, which developed in the 1880s thanks to advances in cheap paper

[50] The other works of the series are *Gods of Mars* (1918 [*GM*]); *The Warlord of Mar*s (1919 [WM]); *Thuvia, Maid of Mars* (1920), *The Chessmen of Mars* (1922), *The Master Mind of Mars* (1928), *The Fighting Men of Mars* (1931), *Swords of Mars* (1936), *Synthetic Men of Mars* (1940), *Llana of Gathol* (1948), and *John Carter of Mars* (1964).

manufacturing techniques, began to gain relevance in the US at the turn of the century and to cater to specific markets. The first pulps that specialized in what later came to be called science fiction were published in the 1910s (Ashley 22; Roberts, *SF* 51). While narratives that can be seen as belonging to the SF category have long preceded those published in these magazines, the genre started to take shape officially along familiar lines within the pulps. Given the instant popularity of the series, Burroughs's work comes to position itself as central in a crucial period for the self-conscious development of the genre. It also came to shape the policies and parameters of the early pulp magazine stories.

Many SF scholars have noted how the emergent genre of SF developed in concomitance and dialogue with imperial and colonial ideologies. These ideologies developed with technological advances and geographical expansion (Clareson, *Some Kind of Paradise* 4; Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. "Empire" 231; Grewell 26; Kerslake 106-8; Roberts, *SF* 50). This led to conservative tendencies visible in many early pulp works written in the first half of the twentieth century, which often recycled tropes of the literature of earthly colonization. In his discussion on the significance of colonialism for the development of SF, John Rieder argues that "the period of the most fervid imperialist expansion in the late nineteenth century is also the crucial period for the emergence of the genre" (*Colonialism* 2-3). In the US in particular, SF became more popular as the nation's imperial interests, under the pretense of global peace and democratic ideals, grew stronger and asserted themselves through military and economic interventions. With its focus on travel on and colonization of other planets, on encounters with different alien anatomies and worldviews, and on territorial expansion and intercultural conflicts, the development of early SF as a recognizable genre is thus deeply involved in discourses of Western and specifically US colonialism, imperialism, and expansionism.

It is essential to note that, as Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr. suggests, "[t]o say that sf is a genre of empire does not mean that sf artists seek to serve the empire" ("Empire" 241). SF has often contributed to questioning fantasies of colonization on Earth and in space. It has criticized the expansionist logic on which these projects rely. However, especially in their early manifestations in pulp magazines, SF works like Burroughs's series have often served to support and justify imperial and colonial agendas. This ideology presupposes the endless conquest of foreign lands and peoples and the exploitation of their resources thanks to technological developments (Clareson, "Emergence" 5; Macleod 231; Rieder, "American Frontiers" 167). This kind of stance has often been validated and justified through narratives of progress. In this understanding, progress is conceived of as a unidirectional line extending from the past into the future in a constant motion of advancement and of overcoming the past. Many scholars agree on perceiving most of the early SF, of which *A Princess of Mars* is a representative example, as a genre that strongly supports a narrative of progress.

In this light, early SF, concerned as it is with the expansion and dominion over alien planets, does not generally present a pronounced environmental consciousness like most later works of SF—especially from the 1960s—do. Brian Stableford writes that "there are very few early stories with ecological themes"

and that pulp magazine writers "were often oblivious to the simplest matters of ecology" ("Ecology" 365). Clearly, identifying a certain trend in SF writings of the period does not imply that all works followed this pattern.[51] However, while it is possible to find multiple major exceptions to this general trend, most of the texts written at this early stage of the genre's development seldom question the divide that separates nature from culture and the Self from the Other. They have actually often reinforced anthropocentric stances and have asserted narratives of progress and Western dichotomic divides both in their structure and in the values they promote.

1.2. Plot and Genre

The Mars series revolves around the adventures of the protagonist John Carter and his friends, family, and allies on Mars or, as the planet is called in the series, Barsoom. This chapter sees *A Princess of Mars* as representative of the whole Mars series. However, it also considers the entire arch of the first three novels. These also include *The Gods of Mars* (1918 [*GM*]) and *The Warlord of Mar*s (1919 [*WM*]). The three works make up a self-contained trilogy. The third novel ties up the loose ends of the plot that were left unresolved in the first two books. The plot of the first novel begins with John Carter prospecting for gold in the Arizona desert following the defeat of the Confederate army, of which he is a veteran, in the Civil War. Chased by a group of Apaches, Carter takes refuge in a cave, from where he is teleported to Mars. There he encounters a group of green aliens called the tharks who take him captive. When the tharks kidnap Deja Thoris, a princess of another alien group, Carter makes it his mission to save her. The many adventures that ensue are all motivated by his desire to protect the princess and to bring order on Mars among fighting alien groups. By the end of *A Princess of Mars,* he manages to marry Deja Thoris. However, he is teleported back to Earth after having fixed the Atmosphere Plant that regulates the air supply on Mars. Once back on the red planet in the next two novels, Carter undergoes various trials, goes on perilous treks, and fights against aliens and wild creatures. Eventually, he becomes the planet's ruler by the end of the third novel of the series.

The series' first novel has been at times considered to be one of the first examples of the subgenre of the space opera (Lawson 213; Scholes and Rabkin 171). The term was coined by Bob Tucker in 1941 to characterize in a derogatory way spaceship stories rich with adventure and stereotyped, superficially designed characters by comparing them to "horse operas," i.e., westerns.[52] However, the novel has been more accurately regarded as a planetary romance. The latter can be defined as a subgenre that consists in escapist tales set almost entirely on another planet among alien species (Clute 934-36; Prucher 146). Planetary romances share numerous features with space operas. However, they mainly diverge from the

[51] Some exceptions are represented by the "last man" narratives. Examples include Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826), M. P. Schiel's *The Purple Cloud* (1901), and Jack London's *The Scarlet Plague* (1912). Brian Stableford's entry on ecology in the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* also mentions J. D. Beresford's "The Man who Hated Flies" (1929) and Stanley Weinbaum as an author who "showed anything more than a rudimentary consciousness of the subject" (365) in the early twentieth century. On early SF that addresses ecological issues, see B. Moore 187-211.
[52] On space opera, see Monk 295-316; Pringle 35-48; Stableford, "Space" 1138-40; Westfahl, "Beyond" 176-88.

latter in that they do not adhere to plausible scientific laws. Rather, they often focus on monsters, exotic settings, swordplay, supernatural powers, and romance. Furthermore, they generally revolve around the encounter between the hero and "near-human alien civilizations that often resemble those of Earth's pre-technological past" (Pringle 38). Neither the space opera nor the planetary romance closely adhere to the notion of SF as a genre grounded in scientific fact and prophetic vision as theorized by the central figure in the genre's development Hugo Gernsback (qtd. Westfahl, "Mightiest Machine" 19). However, both subgenres have achieved great popularity in the first decades of the twentieth century. Burroughs's novel, whose hero is mysteriously teleported to Mars where he interacts with medieval-like alien societies, adheres to the parameters of the planetary romance. In fact, the novel is regarded as the one that has single-handedly given rise to the SF subgenre.

The kind of plotline that characterizes planetary romances borrows multiple features from narratives of exploration and conquest of foreign earthly lands and of encounters with unfamiliar Others. As Greg Grewell argues, "the science fiction industry has essentially borrowed from, technologically modernized, and recast the plots, scenes, and tropes of the literature of earthly colonization—but without, except in rare cases, questioning, critiquing, or moving beyond the colonizing impulse**"** (26). With its depiction of exotic hostile landscapes and of different types of alien species and races, the kind of planetary romance represented by Burroughs's series can be said to be particularly influenced by lost races stories, travel narratives, and marvelous journeys that were in turn inspired by geographical exploration and imperial conquests (Clareson, *Lost Lands* 714-5; Pringle 38; Rieder, *Colonialism* 43). Developing in the 1880s, lost race stories, which retain elements of medieval travel narratives (Gunn 256; James 13-4), focus on the discovery of primitive and anachronistic civilizations in remote, previously undiscovered regions of the planet.[53] They blend adventure tales with travelogues' ethnographic approach.[54] As John Rieder suggests, lost race stories' nostalgic interest in anachronistic pasts reveals an indebtedness to the late nineteenth century's neomedieval "romance revival" (*Colonialism* 34). In this light, "the ancient forms of quest romance and the marvelous journey inevitably referred to contemporary colonial and imperial situations" (35). Explorations of lost lands thus acted out fantasies of mapping and conquering unexplored territories and their peoples. In such stories, the heroes overcome the obstacles posed by nature in order to access secluded areas, defeat their enemies, save princesses, and become rulers. In planetary romances, this pattern is transposed onto outer-space settings. Through this spatial dislocation, the desires and fantasies about the earthly exploration of lost race stories are simply projected onto outer space, reflecting the need, as geographical expansion progressed, to fight against the disappearance of territories yet to be conquered.

Many scholars have noticed and commented upon Burroughs's medievalism. However, such discussions have mainly addressed other works from the author's corpus (Galloway 100-8). When

[53] H. Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) constitutes one of the most representative texts of the lost race subgenre. For a thorough list of examples of lost race narratives, see also James 14-15.
[54] For more on SF and anthropological discourses of the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries, see Barnard 59-66.

discussing *A Princess of Mars,* they either only briefly mention the novel's medievalism in passing or focus on specific aspects, such as the courtly love tradition that can be traced within the novel (Scheil 201-16).[55] No discussion thus far has focused on the broader implications of the novel's medievalism in its depiction of the encounter between the hero and the nonhuman aliens, nor on how frontier tales, chivalric romances, and planetary romances intersect and inform the way the more-than-human world is depicted.

In light of the above, this chapter aims to analyze the novel as an instance of medievalism. I argue that the work represents the medieval through two main operations. In the first one, the hero identifies with medieval chivalric models mediated by the frontier and Southern gentleman traditions. This mode reflects a nostalgic conception of history. In the second one, the novel associates the aliens with medieval monsters. This second mode reveals a progressivist view of history. Both medievalist modes presuppose a conceptual divide between medieval and modern. This results, on the one hand, in reinforcing the normative notion of the human embodied by the hero. The latter is in fact viewed as the epitome of civilized modernity. On the other hand, it leads to the marginalization of the nonhuman Other that is relegated to a primitive past. Before discussing how the work associates the hero with medieval chivalric models, it is first necessary to address how it borrows from the frontier and Southern gentleman traditions, which mediate the medieval inspiration of Carter's character.

2. The Frontier and Southern Gentleman Tradition in *A Princess of Mars*

At the time of Burroughs's writing, the frontier had been closed for over twenty years. This led to an ideological vacuum in US culture. The frontier myth was in fact central to the nation's identity through what Richard Slotkin has theorized as the regeneration of the American spirit through the violence exerted onto the land and Indigenous peoples.[56] The consequent anxiety about the exhaustion of new unexplored lands to conquer and to exploit explains why planetary romances borrow traits from frontier narratives. As David Mogen argues, "[t]hough the concept of the 'frontier' is a distinctively American metaphor, American frontier literature can also be interpreted as a particular manifestation of what might be called the literature of imperialism" (19). In this light, planetary romances associate outer-space conquests with the settlement of the Americas and the US imperial enterprises. The frontier is thus displaced to outer space—what John F. Kennedy would later call the "next frontier"—along with the narrative tropes and ideological values tied to it (Kerslake 174; Mogen 27; Pfitzer 55; Rieder, "American Frontiers" 167). Through this displacement, the frontier myth's ideological underpinnings—of Manifest Destiny, exceptionalism, progress, and Social Darwinian survival of the fittest—as theorized by figures such as Frederick Jackson Turner and Theodore Roosevelt are secured against their loss. This process has ensured

[55] Markley notes that Burroughs's text contains "strains of chivalric medievalism" (183). However, he only lists it as one aspect that characterizes the text among many, without focusing on the implications and effects of its medievalism. Edward James defines in passing the Martians as "almost all fixed in a pre-technological and pseudo-feudal epoch" (46). Paul Carter notes that *A Princess of Mars* is "a nostalgia trip to the past" to a society organized into feudal monarchies (67). John Seelye mentions that Carter is an "atavistic survivor of King Arthur's court."
[56] See P. Sharp 48-63; Slotkin, *Regeneration*.

the perceived presence of potentially infinite frontiers to explore and conquer in outer space. The tendency of emerging SF works to borrow from the narratives of the frontier celebrating male heroism had already started to gain momentum in dime novels of the nineteenth century, such as in the case of *The Huge Hunter: or, The Steam Man of The Prairies* (1868) by Edward S. Ellis. However, this kind of frontier theme achieved popularity especially with Edgar Rice Burroughs's Mars series and later with E.E. "Doc" Smith's *The Skylark of Space* (1928).[57]

Many scholars have noted that *A Princess of Mars* is patterned after frontier narratives (Mogen 12; P. Sharp 96). Carter is a prospector mining in the Arizona desert with his friend Powell. He argues that "we were extremely fortunate, for late in the winter of 1865, after many hardships and privations, we located the most remarkable gold-bearing quartz vein that our wildest dreams had ever pictured" (*PM* 12). The novel stresses his role in the taming of the frontier wilderness and the extraction of its resources through mining so as to obtain material gain. The relationship with the nonhuman is depicted from the start as one grounded in personal interest. The desert is presented as an obstacle to overcome as evidenced in Carter's emphasis on the hardships he suffers in the hostile environment in order to achieve his goals.

Furthermore, the novel informs the reader of the Indigenous groups that inhabit the territory and of their interactions with the protagonist. Carter reports that he and his friend had not seen

> [the] hostile Indian[s] . . . that were supposed to haunt the trails, taking their toll in lives and torture of every white party which fell into their merciless clutches . . . I too had lived and fought for years among the Sioux in the North, and I knew that [Powell's] chances were small against a party of cunning trailing Apaches. Finally I could endure the suspense no longer, and, arming myself with my two Colt revolvers and a carbine, I . . . started down the trail taken by Powell. (*PM* 12-3)

Carter stresses his experience in fighting against Indigenous groups. The latter are described as merciless enemies who must be defeated in line with depictions of them in frontier narratives. Once separated from Powell, Carter arms himself with his revolvers and carabine as it is proper for the pioneer stock to which he belongs and goes looking for his friend. In this context, the Indigenous groups are presented as an extension of the nonhuman realm of the desert. They constitute an obstacle to the hero's search for gold.

After his tight escape from the "pursuing savages" (*PM* 15), he finds himself teleported from a cave to a hostile land that resembles the Arizona desert. Upon John Carter's arrival on Mars, the protagonist describes the landscape. He states that "[i]t was midday, the sun was shining full upon me and the heat of it was rather intense upon my naked body, yet no greater than would have been true under similar conditions on an Arizona desert" (*PM* 21). In this context, a parallel is explicitly established between the Arizona desert and the arid and desolate landscape of Mars. The frontier narrative is thus merely transferred to a different setting, while the parameters and tropes of the genre remain unvaried.

As soon as he arrives on the planet, Carter's pioneering instincts take over. He comments: "I longed to explore the country before me, and, like the pioneer stock from which I sprang, to view what the

[57] *The Skylark of Space* has been considered the most representative example of space opera, which features "Injuns among the stars" (Aldiss, qtd. Käkelä 433-4).

landscape beyond the encircling hills" (*PM* 50). A connection then is repeatedly established between the main hero and the explorers of the frontier with whom he shares a spirit of adventure and a desire to explore the unknown land in front of him. This very spirit of adventure motivated the frontiersmen to expand their control over the US territory in order to tame it and exploit its resources.

Burroughs's depiction of the Martian landscape casts the planet's more-than-human world as an obstacle to overcome much like that on Earth in frontier tales. Carter undertakes numerous arduous journeys through the wilderness. He describes how he "struck out upon the mossy waste across which, for two hundred dangerous and weary miles, lay another main artery leading to Helium" (98) and his crossing an "unknown and hostile valley" (*GM* 26). The planet's landscape is thus described as a hostile, dangerous place. This depiction resembles ways of representing the frontier as a site of struggle in need of taming. Similarly, the Martian land becomes the object of conquest for the hero who becomes its ruler by the end of the third novel. In this sense, the rugged hero embraces Theodore Roosevelt's "cult of strenuous life" (Shi 214), consisting in the regeneration of masculine prowess through the contact with the regenerative wilderness and the fight against its inhabitants. Such a trajectory served to recreate the lifestyle of the pioneers—Captain John Smith, Daniel Boone, Leatherstocking, Davy Crockett, Kit Carson, Buffalo Bill, among many—whom Roosevelt admired and after whom Burroughs fashioned his protagonist. In fact, Burroughs himself had enlisted in the U.S. Army at Fort Grant and offered to be part of Roosevelt's Rough Riders. He shared the heroic, pioneering spirit of the character he penned down on paper.[58]

Moreover, the alien species on the planet are associated with Indigenous groups found on Earth. As Carter openly states, "I could not disassociate these people in my mind from those other warriors who, only the day before, had been pursuing me" (*PM* 24). The aliens are explicitly likened to the Indigenous groups he had left behind on Earth. In this context, then, the pattern traced in frontier narratives whereby the pioneers explore the hostile wilderness, fight the native inhabitants perceived as savages, and gradually gain control over the explored area is simply transported to an outer-space setting.

Carter is equally informed by US Southern values. He is presented as a Confederate war veteran and has "slaves fairly worship[ing] the ground he trod" (*PM* 6). Furthermore, he describes himself as

> Captain Jack Carter of Virginia. At the close of the Civil War I found myself possessed of several hundred thousand dollars (Confederate) and a captain's commission in the cavalry arm of an army which no longer existed; the servant of a state which had vanished with the hopes of the South. Masterless, penniless, and with my only means of livelihood, fighting, gone. (*PM* 11)

The novel's beginning is set in 1866, immediately after the end of the Civil War. The hero, belonging to the losing side of the Confederates, appears as an embodiment of the Lost Cause. The latter consists in the myth whereby the supporters of the Southern system of values could romanticize the antebellum period and the ideologies of the South (Gallagher 1; Nolan 12). Ex-Confederates aimed to present their cause as one worth fighting for, defending the institution of slavery and the constitutionality of the secession.

[58] See Seelye.

Carter is described as a perfect embodiment of the Southern gentleman. He is presented as a "splendid specimen of manhood . . . with the carriage of the trained fighting man . . . His manners were perfect, and his courtliness was that of a typical southern gentleman of the highest type. His horsemanship, especially after hounds, was a marvel and delight even in that country of magnificent horsemen" (*PM* 11). Following the traditional depiction of Southern aristocracy, Carter embodies its dominant ideals of masculinity. These include fighting skills, physical prowess, sophisticated manners, a sense of honor, duty, courtesy, and horsemanship. As Craig Friend and Lorri Glover stress, "as white southerners became nostalgic over the Old South and the 'Lost Cause,' memory of that honor . . . became central to conceptualizations of southern history and southern men" (viii). The Martian setting produces the perfect context where the hero can redeem the defeat of the South in the Civil War. It also serves to heal the threatened sense of white masculinity felt widely in the period of the novel's publication following economic shifts and cultural transformations that took place at the turn of the century.[59] On Mars, Carter has once again the chance to prove his honor and fighting skills, ensuring the victory of civilized values.

3. Chivalry is Not Dead: Identification of the Hero with Medieval Chivalric Models

The frontier and Southern gentleman traditions afford Burroughs with medievally inspired models of masculinity. To position a character as the Other, it is necessary to first identify the Self against which the Other is defined. As Patricia Kerslake argues in her discussion on SF and imperialism, "a discussion of the Other is impossible without a primary definition of the Self, which, in turn, rests upon where we see ourselves located" (9). Borrowing from Edward Said's notion of the Other and of the opposition between center and periphery, Kerslake extrapolates these concepts beyond the context of Said's discussion of orientalism and applies them to the conventions that inform human encounters with aliens in SF.[60] She argues for the imperative within them to define the human from Earth as central before introducing the alien as Othered and peripheral. In *A Princess of Mars,* the heroic Self embodied by Carter is not only located in relation to the Other spatially, coming from Earth to a distant planet, but also temporally. In this light, the first mode of depicting the medieval in the novel establishes a nostalgic identification of the hero with medieval models. The latter are used as a paradigm of his identity formation. Carter's adherence to the normative conception of the human as Man is supported by his identification with models of medieval chivalric masculinity mediated by the frontier and Southern gentleman traditions.

As mentioned above, early works of SF often replaced the cowboys and pioneers' revolver with a ray gun, moved the hero from Arizona desert to Mars, and replaced Indigenous adversaries with aliens.[61] In turn, frontier narratives often followed the narrative patterns traced by medieval chivalric romances. In

[59] In the urban context of the turn of the century, an anxiety toward alienation and emasculation was greatly felt among the bourgeois male class due to the rise of the suffragette movement that threatened the patriarchal structure of society and to the increased material comforts, office work, and home life that followed industrialization and urbanization. See Lears 59; Markley 185; Stecopoulos 171-2.
[60] See Said.
[61] Cf. Amis 44.

this context, a knight became a pioneer or a cowboy, a sword became a revolver, the forest turned into the American wilderness, and wild men, dragons, giants, and beasts of the medieval forest were transformed into Indigenous enemies and animals that populated the frontier. Frontier tales thus made consistent use of medieval models to characterize the American soil and its heroes. Indeed, many of the authors and public figures who championed the frontier ethos by whom Burroughs had been influenced have drawn inspiration from chivalric romances teeming with knights, damsels in distress, wild beasts, and hostile enemies, all elements that are directly recuperated by Burroughs in his series. Among them (Filonenko 131), James Fenimore Cooper transported the Middle Ages to a US context in the Leatherstocking series. Theodore Roosevelt's vision centered around frontier heroes much like Cooper's Natty Bumppo, who embodied chivalric ideals. Owen Wister, author of *The Virginian* (1902), also romanticized frontier heroes and "traced the code of the cowboy back to the Middle-English chivalry" (D. Branch 149). He has been recognized as one of Burroughs's main sources of inspiration (Pfitzer 55; Porges 368). The pervasive medievalism of these figures and more generally of frontier narratives was central to the nation-building process in the expansion westward.

The frontier explorers identified themselves with medieval knights. The latter were considered emblematic figures of "mobility and freedom" (Riddy 239) and models of chivalric masculinity. By contrast, women were relegated to the role of helpless and submissive damsels forever in need of being saved by "our American Sir Gawain […] who rescues fair ladies […] riding into the sunset with the woman left behind" (Rosenthal and Szarmach 7). Women were rather expected to attend to domestic duties as mothers and angels of the hearth.[62] Knights also embodied the spirit of conquest and the willingness to endure hardship, fending themselves from the dangers of the wilderness and its inhabitants in order to strengthen the powers of civilized society (Auerbach 134-35). The pattern of medieval romances provided the settlers with a narrative tool to describe their experience in familiar terms and to create a line of continuity with heroic enterprises. The medieval past was thus looked upon with nostalgia as a time of heroism and masculine adventure.

The medievalism that can be identified within frontier narratives has also been transposed in SF works that borrowed patterns and motives from such models. As Rieder argues, both frontier narratives and SF "have in common . . . a strong affinity to the medievalist and imperial adventure fantasies that enjoyed popularity during the Romance Revival of the late nineteenth century" ("American Frontiers" 169). In this light, then, medievalism appears already woven into the roots of the SF genre. Indeed, as Thomas Clareson suggests, SF stories often "bring to mind Beowulf and other warrior kings as well as the knights of medieval romance, to say nothing of Ivanhoe and Natty Bumppo" (*Understanding SF* 26). They are thus bound both to frontier narratives and, through them, to medieval narrative structures and motifs. On the one hand, then, the medievalist patterns within genre can be partly explained by its long and

[62] For a discussion on the "cult of domesticity," see Hovet.

complex history that can be traced back at least to the Middle Ages, thus bearing numerous structural and thematic similarities to medieval narratives. At the same time, however, many SF works often consciously draw both directly and indirectly from medieval material perceived as a suitable vehicle for contemporary agendas.[63] Works such as *A Princess of Mars* borrow medieval models through the mediation of frontier narratives and the conception of the Middle Ages that can be identified within them.

In a manner similar to frontier pioneers, Southern models of masculinity also relied on conceptions of medieval chivalry. As Rollin Osterweis argues, a "Southern cult of chivalry developed principally from a fusion of the tradition of 'The Virginia Gentleman' with those medieval notions best exemplified in the writings of [Sir Walter] Scott" (87).[64] Southern models of knighthood were mediated by the works of Sir Walter Scott. Burroughs borrowed from Scott and those who were influenced by him, such as James Fenimore Cooper, models of heroic chivalry (Seelye). Through Scott, the tropes of medieval romances became models of chivalric masculinity that infused the present with the qualities of a past nostalgically idealized and seen as glorious. After the Civil War, the South's interest in medievalism did not wane. Feeling threatened in their social, economic, and political order by the emancipation of African Americans, the Lost Cause myth provided Southerners with a narrative through which they could look back romantically at the antebellum period and at the Middle Ages, which they associated with chivalry, honor, masculinity, and racial purity.

The medieval aura of the Mars series and Scott's influence on it were already noticed at the time of publication. Thomas Metcalf, editor of the *All-Story Magazine*, suggested that Burroughs could write "something like, say 'Ivanhoe', or at least of the period when everybody wore armor and dashed about rescuing fair ladies" (Metcalf, qtd. Porges 116). The result was *The Outlaw of Torn*, which was rejected several times in view of its lack of adherence to medieval history. Responding to the critiques, Burroughs replied that "nobody *knows* anything about the manners, customs or speech of 13th century England [italics in the original]" (qtd. Porges 119). His comment illustrates how the author prioritized the adventurous nature of the plot over historical accuracy, a fact that can also be clearly witnessed in the Barsoom series. This disinterest in historical facts coheres with his sources. Both the frontier and Southern traditions turned the Middle Ages into a romanticized myth.[65]

Burroughs presents his hero as the embodiment of chivalric models mediated both by the frontier and Southern gentleman tradition. Both these modes of invoking medieval chivalry mingle and blend in depictions of John Carter's character. Carter is depicted as a knight whose masculine traits are defined by his bravery, adventurous spirit, courtliness, fighting skills, and strength. As Carter suggests, "my mind is

[63] For a more general discussion on the similarities between SF and medieval models such as chivalric romances, see Hume, "Anatomy," "Quest Romance".
[64] See also Pugh and Weisl (39-40): "[i]n such novels as *Ivanhoe and Quentin Durward*, Scott . . . reinscribed such literary and cultural stereotypes from western accounts of Crusades as the virtuous knight, the beautiful beloved, and the treacherous Saracen. These are not just cultural artifacts, but also exempla."
[65] For a discussion on how Southern chivalry relied on a mythologized version of the Middle Ages, see Pugh 1-25.

evidently so constituted that I am subconsciously forced into the path of duty without recourse to tiresome mental processes . . . cowardice is not optional with me. (*PM* 14). He presents himself as predisposed to act in dangerous situations, risking his life in the name of honor and duty. This depiction follows that of the medieval knight who possessed heroic qualities dictated by a strict moral code of honor.

Like frontiersmen and knights, Carter is an adventure-seeker. He has "ever been prone to seek adventure and to investigate and experiment where wiser men would have left well enough alone" (*PM* 33). The brave and adventurous spirit that Carter and the pioneers embody is one commonly used as a plot device in chivalric romances. In Chrétien de Troyes's *Yvain* (c.1180), Calogrenant recounts: "I had gone off adventuring. . . The path I took turned to the right within a forest thick and deep" (vv. 167-171). The knight generally enters the forest to prove his skills and physical prowess through adventure. The hero who sets forth into the wilderness, as in Carter's case, is moved by his curiosity and courage so that he may test his masculine strength and valor.

Carter's trajectory on Mars echoes that of his heroic models as he undergoes the journey of initiation. Before entering the world of otherness, the hero must cross the boundary separating the world of the Self from that of the Other. In frontier narratives, the frontier itself represents a boundary to be crossed. Frederick Jackson Turner in fact called it "the meeting point between savagery and civilization" (200). In SF, this act is represented by what Jeffrey M. Wallmann defines as the Crossing of the Threshold. It embodies a "tension between the known and the unknown" (99). Wallmann sees this transition as a structural pivot for SF stories. This trope is borrowed from multiple antecedents that revolve around a heroic quest. It constitutes a rite of passage from one phase of a journey to another, which requires the hero to endure trials and tribulations. This very same movement from the known to the unknown, from the world of the civilized Self to that of the wild Otherness is also central in chivalric romances. Like medieval knights, Carter must cross a threshold to enter the Otherworld. This entryway marks the separation between the realm of the court and the realm of supernatural entities, where common norms are subverted. The two dimensions are often connected by a limen (C. Saunders 45, 78). In the novel, the threshold is a cave. This cave is evocative of the description of the Green Chapel in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The chapel is described as an "old cave" (IV.2182) and it has been argued to be a portal to the Otherworld (Siewers 39-40). Once he is teleported from the cave to Mars, Carter begins what might be considered his journey of initiation.

On Mars, Carter travels through various areas. He often depicts his journey as filled with dangers:

> [t]hrough two long weeks I wandered, stumbling through the nights guided only by the stars and hiding during the days behind some protruding rock or among the occasional hills I traversed. Several times I was attacked by wild beasts; strange, uncouth monstrosities that leaped upon me in the dark, so that I had ever to grasp my long-sword in my hand that I might be ready for them. (*PM* 109)

This quote stresses Carter's experience with the Martian more-than-human world. His journey is that of an action-packed quest of trial and discovery. Like in the case of questing knights, Carter's wanderings serve

to test him and strengthen his society's values. Northrop Frye argues that "the dragon-killing and giant-quelling of chivalric romance suggest a civilizing force gradually increasing its control of a turbulent natural order" (*Secular Scripture* 173). Indeed, Carter's valor is proven through his ability to kill savage beasts and monsters. The alien creatures he fights against appear as the very embodiments of the wilderness, which proves to be his prime enemy. These encounters constantly reiterate the opposition between the human embodiment of civilization and the nonhuman savage world that is typical of early SF works. A continuity is established between the monster-slaying knight, the brave pioneer fending himself from the hostile creatures of the US wilderness, and Carter's killing of alien monsters.

The identification of Carter with knightly models of chivalric romances is reinforced by his gallantry. Like in the case of the pioneer, the Southern gentleman, and the knight, Carter's trajectory is shaped by his need to protect his damsel in distress and main romantic interest throughout the novels, Deja Thoris, as well as other female characters from threats of sexual assaults and forced marriages with repulsive alien brutes. For example, after one of the innumerable instances where the hero saves his princess, Deja Thoris's father acknowledges "the chivalrous kindness that John Carter had accorded my daughter. They told me how he fought for her and rescued her" (*WM* 127). In this context, Carter is openly associated with the values of chivalry that are proper to a knight in shining armor. The few female characters in the novels are only ever presented as weak and in need of being saved by the heroic actions of the protagonist.

Carter's knightly masculine identity is also defined by his fighting skills. He argues that "[i]f I sometimes seem to take too great pride in my fighting ability, it must be remembered that fighting is my vocation . . . I am very proud that upon two planets no greater fighter has ever lived than John Carter" (*WM* 108). Not only does Carter state that fighting is his main talent, but he also suggests that he exceeds in combat his enemies and allies alike both on Earth and in space. His dexterity in the art of war, swordsmanship, shooting, and dueling reflects the knightly models embodied by pioneers and Southern noblemen. In each of these figures the ability to use physical strength is one of the necessary traits that prove the hero's manliness.

The novel also emphasizes Carter's physical superiority over the aliens. Carter argues that "as on so many other occasions when I had been called upon to face fearful odds upon this planet of warriors and fierce beasts, I found that my earthly strength so far transcended that of my opponents that the odds were not so greatly against me as they appeared" (*GM* 60). His strength is especially impressive on Mars, where, thanks to a lower air pressure than on Earth, he can move with great agility. The Martians are depicted by contrast as "less agile and less powerful, in proportion to their weight, than an Earth man" (*PM* 24). The novel stresses repeatedly Carter's human superiority over the aliens in terms of physical prowess. This allows him to have the upper hand in every situation. He prevails over all his alien enemies with ease. The latter appear intrinsically inferior to him in view of their nonhuman nature that has not endowed them with the same qualities that the hero possesses.

Carter's medievally inspired chivalric superiority serves to justify his gradual dominion over the planet and the inferior nonhuman aliens. This dynamic replicates the colonization of the Americas and the conquest of the "Wild West" on the part of the pioneers. Carter actively intervenes in conflicts among alien groups. As Deja Thoris argues, "[w]as there ever such a man! . . . I know that Barsoom has never before seen your like. . . Alone, a stranger . . . you have done in a few short months what in all the past ages of Barsoom no man has ever done: joined together the wild hordes of the sea bottoms and brought them to fight as allies of a red Martian people" (*PM* 147). Carter appears as an extraordinary individual capable of heroic feats. The princess stresses that he has succeeded where no one else has due to his unique knightly features. Under his military leadership, Carter manages to bring different alien groups together under a common goal. His superiority enforces the obedience of those who recognize him as representing higher civilized virtues. Despite coming from another world, he manages to lead and control the different alien groups on Mars. He intervenes in the conflicts on the planet, manages to set it back to order, and to establish peace. This pattern echoes that of US imperial ventures.

Carter depicts himself as guided by divine intervention. He argues that "there surely is a kind and merciful Providence which watches over me" (*WM* 81). He often thanks the heavens that protect him from any harm in his wanderings. In this light, he follows in the tracks of the frontier pioneers, who embodied the nation's Manifest Destiny. In this context, the nation was perceived as charged by Providence with the mission to expand its model of democracy and freedom. In turn, both Carter and the frontiersmen seem to fashion themselves after medieval knights. The latter were deemed destined to accomplish their missions following the will of God (Kaeuper 105). In all of these cases, the actions of the hero are validated by a higher power that justifies the violence committed against the Other in the name of God and his glory.

Rather than being seen as an interference in Martian politics, he is welcomed as a superior leader and prized with many honors. Carter himself comments: "[f]or nine years I served in the councils and fought in the armies of Helium as a prince of the house of Tardos Mors. The people seemed never to tire of heaping honors upon me" (*PM* 153). The hero becomes a welcomed champion of the Martians. He is eventually granted the title of warlord of the entire Barsoom after having initially rejected it in keeping with the benevolent and democratic self-characterization of the US empire (Newell and Lamont 75). The settler-colonial ideology that underpins the text then can be seen as a continuation of the medieval chivalric models weaponized to support the modern civilizing force embodied by Carter. In fact, as Tommaso di Carpegna Falconieri suggests, "[h]istoricized, as many medieval myths have been, and thus made out to be the heroic paladin of the people, of the nation and . . . its warlike capacity, the medieval knight has nourished the imaginations of the entire West and, contextually, has represented one of the myth-engines of nationalism" (107). Indeed, just like in the case of the pioneers, Carter's association with chivalrous knights seen as naturally superior defenders of order works to support nationalistic principles of American exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny (Hume, "Anatomy" 19). The knightly models appearing in frontier narratives reemerge in the novel in order to color outer space colonization.

From what has been discussed so far, it emerges that, by recuperating medieval models borrowed from the frontier and Southern gentleman tradition, Burroughs's notion of masculinity reflected in Carter adheres to that which characterized the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. As Kim Moreland argues, "contemporary evocation of medieval chivalry . . . came to function as a standard against which modern American life was judged and found wanting" (7). A desire to return to models of the past is thus made evident by conceiving medieval chivalry as the epitome of civilized values proper to the contemporary Western white man. It is in this very period that the dominant code of masculinity was defined in relation to the High Middle Ages (Richards 216). The medieval knight was imagined as the embodiment of the virtues of bravery, loyalty, courtesy, strength, and duty proper to the contemporary civilized gentleman. Carter's chivalry then appears informed by a confluence of such interpretations of medieval knighthood appearing in both frontier narratives and in the tradition of the Southern gentlemen.

This medievally inspired depiction reveals nostalgia for an idealized past. The identification of the hero with medieval chivalric models is in fact dependent on a nostalgic conception of history. The Middle Ages is perceived in this context as separated from modernity. It is associated with positive qualities tied to chivalry, heroism, and authoritative patriarchal institutions that ensure peace and order. The Middle Ages becomes an ideal, lost past. As Reneé Trilling argues, "nostalgic appropriations must present the past as absolutely and irrevocably separate from the present. Once situated on the far side of the barrier of time, the medieval can operate as a site of projection for fantasies of wholeness and escape" ("Medievalism" 219). While a retrieval of medieval models would seemingly imply a continuity with the medieval, it actually presupposes a conceptual medieval/modern divide.[66] Such a divide can be overstepped to suggest the authority of tradition. However, it is still possible to claim a certain distance from the Middle Ages by virtue of one's situatedness in modernity. In *A Princess of Mars,* Carter borrows models of masculinity from medieval knights to give luster to his persona through the authoritative support of the chivalric tradition, while still embodying civilized modernity.

4. Identification of the Alien with Medieval Models: The Monstrous and Barbaric Other

Burroughs presents Carter as the embodiment of the civilized human Self, while the world upon which he arrives is characterized by a distinct alterity. Kerslake suggests that many SF works revolve around the encounter between the Earthly human identified with the Self and the alien associated with the Other (10).[67] For the Self to be established as the dominant, central norm, the Other must be conceptualized in opposite, adversarial terms. The Other can stand for multiple categories of alterity departing from the normative figure of Man. Most often, it blurs the borders between the human and the nonhuman. SF works reflect an anxious need to define the normative conception of the human against that which is not human or not human enough according to Western standards. As Mark Rose suggests, "[t]he idea of the

[66] See also Aronstein 12; D'Arcens, "Presentism" 184-6; Prendergast and Trigg, "What is Happening" 217.
[67] See also Langer 3; McCracken 102; Roberts, *SF* 16-7.

'nonhuman' is the idea of the 'other' writ large. Seen in this light, the content of science fiction can be understood as a version of the fundamental dichotomy through which we conceive our existence" (192). Such a dichotomy, according to Rose, must constantly be renegotiated and redrawn in view of its porousness and instability. This opposition between the Self and the Other, human and nonhuman, is precisely the narrative structure that defines Burroughs's *A Princess of Mars.* In this light, the second mode of invoking the medieval in the novel consists in the projection of medieval traits onto the alien Others in order to reinforce their perceived alterity. The way Burroughs represents the Martians is reminiscent of the monstrous races appearing in medieval texts.

All of the aliens Carter encounters are, to a greater or lesser degree, characterized by hybridity. They mingle human and nonhuman features. Carter repeatedly describes Martians as monsters. In one of the instances when he fights hostile aliens, he comments: "I could see converging upon us a hundred different lines of wildly leaping creatures such as we were now engaged with, and with them some strange new monsters which ran with great swiftness, now erect and now upon all fours" (*GM* 19). Here the aliens are called both creatures and monsters. Such a description suggests their hybrid liminal status. Furthermore, they are moving on both two and four legs. This creates a sense of undecidability concerning their human or nonhuman nature.

While the aliens that populate Barsoom are all characterized by hybridity as they mingle features that belong to multiple species, both human and nonhuman ones, they are not all evaluated on the same terms. In fact, Carter encounters multiple kinds of aliens that can be placed on a scale that ranks them from the most savage and animalistic to the most civilized and human-like. These alien species are evocative of the hybrid and monstrous creatures—dragons, giants, wild men, cynocephali, blemmye, sciapods, among many others—populating the medieval imagination and its cultural artifacts. These monsters depicted in medieval texts all reflected a fear of hybrid figures that escape rigid categories and that cannot be confined nor defined into clearcut taxonomies. The same anxiety over species classifications returns in Carter's attitude toward the Barsoomian alien species.

According to proponents of monster theory, the monster escapes taxonomic orderings. It signals a breach of boundaries and warns against the dangers of such crossings (Cohen, *Monster Theory* 13-14; E. Graham 39; Montroso 104). Any category of difference can be inscribed onto the monstrous body. However, one of the greatest anxieties these creatures reflect is that of the blurring of the boundary separating the human from the nonhuman. Dominant medieval strands of thought organized this divide by ordering all beings into a hierarchical *scala natura* that positioned God at the highest point of the chain, followed by humans, animals, and finally inert life-forms. As long as notions of the human were grounded in hegemonic European standards, monstrous hybrid creatures were considered inferior forms of being. Defining the position of the monsters in the Great Chain of Being derived from a need to establish the

position of the human within God's creation.[68] Definitions of the human against that which it is not human had relevant theological implications for determining the extent of Christianity.

However, the concern over monstrous beings that do not fit within the category of the human precedes the Middle Ages. Many medieval thinkers and travelers were influenced in their opinions and assumptions about monsters by Pliny the Elder's encyclopedic work *Natural History*. Here he describes systematically around forty different monstrous races by drawing from Greek accounts of marvelous creatures—from Homer, Ctesias, and Megasthenes to Alexander the Great and Herodotus (Friedman 5-7; Ramey 90). Reflections on monsters were heavily influenced by geographical travels and reports of distant lands. The latter grew in intensity especially with the higher rate of spatial mobility and cross-cultural contact motivated by the Crusades (Berlekamp 169). Such accounts have informed depictions of flora, fauna, and hybrid beings in numerous medieval texts. These include bestiaries, manuscript *marginalia*, *mappae mundi*, travel narratives, and chivalric romances. Drawing from the prior accounts of wonders contained within such texts (Macleod Higgins 9; Vu 20), *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (c. 1356) is one of the most famous travel narratives of the Middle Ages. In describing the pilgrimage to the Holy Land of the fictional persona of Sir John Mandeville, it reflects the theologically inflected geography depicted in *mappae mundi*. In these maps, the further one moves from the known center to the foreign periphery, the more frequent depictions of monsters become, providing examples of otherness that contrasted with the European perceived normality (Braidotti, "Signs" 293; Edson 105; Greenlee and Waymack 71; Macleod Higgins 63).

Questions about the boundaries between the human and the nonhuman continued beyond the medieval period. Older perceptions came to bear an impact on new contexts. Mandeville's visions of fantastical creatures and monstrous races affected later fantasies and expectations about newly discovered foreign lands and their inhabitants. The wonders described in such texts were extrapolated from their Eastern context and were transplanted onto the Americas (Dathorne 41; Friedman 1). Christopher Columbus, among other explorers, anticipated to find the same monstrous races that he found in Mandeville's *Travels* in the context of the "New World." In this light, the medieval nature/culture binary and the conception of the human as the highest being out of all others served as a tool for conquest and exploitation. This shows how medieval monstrous races became an important contribution to the way the West imagines the Other.[69]

If the specific shapes that the monster takes and the interpretations assigned to it are historically contingent, the figure of the monster itself reappears repeatedly through the ages in different guises.

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[68] On the connotations that the word "monstrum" carried and how they developed in the period from the late Roman times through the Middle Ages, see Friedman 108-30. The fact that it was ascribed in different contexts to animals, inanimate objects, hybrid creatures, and humans illustrates the slippery boundaries of the monster itself.

[69] While Friedman argues that, for the most part, the explorers' expectations of finding monstrous races in the Americas were disappointed (199), Ramey, on the other hand, argues that many of those who arrived there, including cartographers, traced the probable geographical locations of troglodytes, giants, cannibals, and unicorns in what are today the US and Canada (105).

Medieval monsters reemerge in SF in the form of extra-terrestrial aliens. These creatures once again serve to test and gauge the boundaries of humanity. Texts such as *Travels*, along with other accounts of wonders and marvels such as *The Wonders of the East* and *The Letter of Alexander to Aristotle,* have been considered at times as proto-SF.[70] In turn, many SF texts draw inspiration from medieval accounts that feed into the depictions of outer-space beings. The same anxiety toward monstrous creatures felt during the Middle Ages can be traced in *A Princess of Mars* in Carter's attitude toward the Martians. The work itself appears as a travelogue, where the author gives detailed descriptions of the hero's surroundings in terms of the alien species he encounters and the local flora and fauna he comes across.

In the depiction of the aliens, great attention is given, just as in the medieval period, to the hierarchical ordering of the alien beings based on their degree of humanity or, rather, of animality. In the attitudes that Carter displays toward the diverse types of Martians, it is possible to observe how Burroughs places them within a conceptual hierarchy of medievalized animality. In this context, the medieval is associated with the nonhuman, and both are rejected as savage, repulsive, wild, and uncivilized. In *Animal Rites*, Cary Wolfe presents a grid of species significations based on the degrees of humanity/animality on which the marginalization or integration within civilization of a being depends.[71] Cary Wolfe's species grid, divided into four categories (the animalized animal; the humanized animal; the animalized human; the humanized human), provides a valuable tool that applies to both Burroughs's and medieval classifications of aliens/monsters. This grid also informs how the medievalized alien species are evaluated based on the degree of hybrid animality they display. In the subsections below, the aliens in Burroughs's work are classified according to Wolfe's categories along with medieval monstrous creatures.

4.1. The Animalized Animal

Wolfe's category of the animalized animal appears useful in discussing certain monsters in the work. Wolfe defines the animalized animal as the worthless and expendable nonhuman onto whom violence is permissible (101). The novel teems with aliens described as wild beasts. Among these, there are white apes, horse-like creatures called thoats, lion-like banths, hippopotamus-looking apts, and elephant-like orlucks. This first list already shows that many of the aliens are compared to earthly animals. Other creatures, however, are human-animal-plant hybrids, such as the plant-man, the man-flower, and the calot tree. These beings depart from existing animal species. They are defined by a higher degree of hybridity.

> One of the creatures Carter encounters upon his arrival on Mars is the great white ape. As he argues, they were that most dreaded of Martian creatures . . . of all the fearsome and terrible, weird and grotesque inhabitants of that strange world, it is the white apes that come nearest to familiarizing me with the sensation of fear. I think that the cause of this feeling which these apes engender within me is due to their remarkable resemblance in form to our Earth men, which gives them a human appearance. (*GM* 23)

[70] For a discussion on proto-SF works of the Middle Ages, see Kears and Paz 3-17; Vu 18-21.
[71] Wolfe follows Jacques Derrida's notion that the Western carnophallogocentric structure of society enables speciesism by allowing the nonhuman to be killed without consequences—what Derrida calls the "noncriminal putting to death" (qtd. Wolfe 100).

The white apes are described by the hero as one of the most dangerous and aggressive animal-like aliens to be found on Barsoom. The immediate reaction Carter has upon encountering them is one of repulsion caused by their grotesque appearance. This attitude is consistent with his response to most of the creatures with which he interacts.

These descriptions of the alien as grotesque appear frequently in SF. The grotesque can be defined as the phenomenon whereby "things that should be kept apart are fused together" (Harpham 10). The grotesque is then an anomaly. It represents a mixture of elements that do not belong together and violate the conceptual borders separating vegetal, animal, and human. This leads to the creation of entities that cannot be easily placed in clear taxonomies.[72] The hybridity of monstrous aliens stresses transgressions from the norm that breach the human/nonhuman divide. This produces an epistemological anxiety.

Carter's emphasis on the apes' grotesque nature highlights his fear of them. This fear is motivated by the animals' similarity to humans. The resemblance is seen by Carter as disturbing in that it threatens to breach the nature/culture divide. The sense of unease that the apes produce in the hero is traceable to a resistance and a refusal to acknowledge humans' own kinship with nonhumans. This kind of attitude is summarized by Braidotti. She argues that "[t]he monster helps us understand the paradox of difference as a ubiquitous but perennially negative preoccupation. . . The monster is neither a total stranger nor completely familiar: he exists in an in-between zone" (Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* 216). Braidotti explains how the human is always defined against that which it is not. On the one hand, the ape appears familiar due to its resemblance to humans. On the other hand, it comes across as a stranger because it is not in fact human and thus defined by a radical alterity. The animal's simultaneous similarity and difference unsettles the nature/culture and human/nonhuman divide. Since this process forces Carter to recognize his own animality, it engenders in the hero an even greater desire to keep those borders intact.

Carter attempts to distance himself from the familiar/unfamiliar apes by killing them repeatedly. It is through the act of killing that he asserts his own human superiority. Carter suggests that these "fierce and savage brutes . . . know not what defeat means until cold steel teaches their hearts no longer to beat" (*GM* 24). In this sense, if the hostile creatures cannot be trained to obey the orders of superior beings, they must be defeated. They cannot be transformed or appropriated, but they can only be annihilated to protect the category of the human. In fact, while some of the creatures can be tamed and exploited to serve the needs of "higher" forms of beings as will be shown in the next subsection, most creatures on Mars that fit within the category of the animalized animal can only be killed without any remorse nor repercussions in order to preserve the boundary that separates the human and the nonhuman.

While most creatures are described through their resemblance to earthly animals, others present a higher degree of hybridity. Even in the case of beings such as the plant men that depart from known

[72] For a discussion on the grotesque in SF, see Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., "Grotesque"; Rose 186.

categories, Carter's description reveals a desire to assign them to a specific taxonomic placement. Upon his first encounter with the plant men, he describes them:

> [o]dd, grotesque shapes they were . . . and yet, at a distance, most manlike in appearance . . . that single cursory examination of this awful travesty on Nature would have proved quite sufficient to my desires had I been a free agent. The fastest flier of the Heliumetic Navy could not quickly enough have carried me far from this hideous creature . . . the beast was equipped with a massive tail . . . Feeding with the herd were many of the little fellows not much larger than those which remained attached to their parents. (*GM* 13)

Carter once again defines these creatures as grotesque. They mingle in fact human, animal, and plant traits. His first impression from afar is that they look like men. By observing more closely, however, his assessment shifts and he begins to see the plant man first as a travesty of Nature, then as a hideous creature, and, finally, as a beast. The fact that he refers to the group as a herd implies that he considers them more as animals than humans, despite their hybrid nature. Carter then seems eager to place the creature within a clear category of animality.

He further determines that they are animals by describing them as devoid of the features that generally qualify humans: "[t]heir actions and movements are largely matters of instinct and not guided to any great extent by reason . . . They live upon vegetation and the blood of animals, and their brain is just large enough to direct their movements in the direction of food" (69). In this light, Carter's ascription of the somewhat loose category of the animal to the plant men is decided on the grounds of their lack of speech, lack of reason, and their inability to fight against their most basic and base instincts. This is true for all the animal-like aliens. Carter considers all of them "poor, unreasoning, irresponsible brute[s]" (*PM* 69). This stresses how the depiction of the plant men as lacking reason is extended to all the aliens considered to be animals by the hero.

The same criteria for establishing the distinction between humans and nonhumans were at work in the minds of medieval thinkers. As Karl Steel suggests,

> [f]or Augustine, for Aquinas, for a host of other thinkers, to be human at all is to be a mortal body conjoined with an immortal, rational soul, and to be a beast is to be precisely that form of life barred from reason and delivered over to everlasting, meaningless death . . . without reason, there could be no free will, and without free will, there could be no moral culpability: lose human difference, and the whole edifice of divine justice collapses. (*How Not* 3)

As Steel stresses, different criteria were used for defining the human. The main discriminating factors included having an immortal soul, free will, and reason. This mode of categorization was espoused by multiple influential figures, from St. Ambrose and Augustine in the fourth and fifth centuries, Isidore of Seville in the sixth century, to Bernard Silvester, Thomas Aquinas, Albert the Great, and Bartholomeus Anglicus in the twelfth and thirteenth. In *The City of God*, for instance, Augustine attempted to determine whether monstrous creatures were to be considered human. He concludes that either they do not exist; if they do exist, they are beasts; or if they have human features, they are human (XVI, ch. 8, 662). While not excluding that the creatures might be human as long as they possess rational attributes, he rejects resolutely the possibility of hybridity. He thus sees them either as humans or beasts like Carter does in the

case of apes and plant men. While both are defined by hybridity, they are classified as killable animals due to their behavior and lack of reason.

The animalized animals of Mars find their closest parallels in the animals and types of monsters, such as dragons and griffons, that populated the medieval imagination. The latter were unambiguously excluded from humanity on the grounds of their lack of speech, reason, free will, and culture. Both real animals, used for transport, clothing, food, and entertainment, and imagined monsters were regarded as distinctly separated from humankind. This distinction justified an instrumental view that considered their putting to death not only permissible, but also rightful.

The association between medieval and Martian monstrous animals appears viable in light of the medieval setting Burroughs creates on Mars. If Carter is a knight wandering through the wilderness, the alien beasts stand for the medieval monsters to be slayed and whose descriptions abound in bestiaries, encyclopedias, and travel narratives. As Kerslake argues, "[i]n the same way that Beowulf overcame great adversity to achieve the destruction of Grendel, so the monsters of SF provide yet another measure against which humanity may constantly redefine itself" (13). In discussing the Other in SF, Kerslake includes the monster. Its radical difference becomes crucial to its marginalization in a way analogous to that operating in the Middle Ages. If both real and imaginary medieval animals can fit in the category of the animalized animal, it is because medieval texts themselves—such as, for instance, medieval bestiaries—often included both existing, if exotic, animals and fantastic beings that were purely figments of the medieval imagination (Hoffmann 101). Such texts rarely made a distinction between fact and fiction in view of the confusion over the ontological nature of the species themselves.

Creatures similar to those on Mars can be found, for instance, in Mandeville's travelogue. In his narration of his travels in distant lands, he describes multiple wonders and grotesque sights—among them, crocodiles, blue elephants, rats as big as dogs, geese with two heads, and dragons. He relates of one of the islands of the East that "a great part of this country is waste and wilderness, and uninhabited; therefore there are great numbers of dragons, crocodiles and other kinds of reptiles, so that men cannot live there" (135). Here, like later on Burroughs's Barsoom, a neat distinction is made between the realm of humans and that of hostile nonhumans: where one is the other cannot be. Furthermore, he describes creatures that blur the boundaries that separate plants and animals. For instance, a "fruit as big as gourds," which "when it is ripe men open . . . and find inside an animal of flesh and blood and bone, like a little lamb without wool" (165), echoes depictions of Martian hybrids such as the plant men. In this light, although the grotesque did not exist as an aesthetic category in the Middle Ages, it can still be applied to medieval monsters. In fact, their hybridity and ontological instability defy clear-cut taxonomies.

4.2. The Humanized Animal

A Princess of Mars also features kinds of alien animals that fit within the humanized animal category. Wolfe associates this group with pets. For all his disgust for alien animals on Mars, Carter establishes an

affective bond with Woola, a creature of the alien species called the calot. The animal eventually becomes his loyal pet that saves the hero multiple times in his adventures. Carter at first describes Woola thus: "[i]t waddled in on its ten short legs, and squatted down . . . like an obedient puppy. The thing was about the size of a Shetland pony, but its head bore a slight resemblance to that of a frog, except that the jaws were equipped with three rows of long, sharp tusks" (*PM* 30). Woola's appearance is compared to that of various earthly animals, from ponies and frogs to animals with tusks. The calot cannot be assigned to a clear-cut taxonomy in view of its hybrid nature. For this reason, Carter at first sees Woola as a "ferocious-looking monstrosity" (31). By calling him a monster, the hero seems to acknowledge its undecidable epistemological status that departs from known classification systems.

In spite of Woola's hybrid nature, Carter is eager to place the alien animal within the canine category of earthly species taxonomies. He defines the creature as a "Martian watch dog" (*PM* 31) and argues that the calot "owing to its intelligence, loyalty, and ferocity is used in hunting, in war, and as the protector of the Martian man" (34). Furthermore, Woola is depicted as holding "more love, more loyalty, more gratitude than could have been found in the entire five million green Martians" (37-8). The typical traits of earthly dogs are thus ascribed to the calots. Sherryl Vint argues that the depictions of animal aliens in SF follow the "various prejudices and preferences that have emerged from our long co-evolution with other species" (*Animal Alterity* 137). The bond between humans and dogs is in fact one with a long history wherein canine companions have been used for hunting, herding, protection, and company. It is thus no coincidence that the same features and personality traits usually attributed to dogs—historically human's best friends and trusted companions—are also applied to Woola, who becomes Carter's loyal domesticated pet.

Despite the appreciation the protagonist has for his alien pet, their relationship is still informed by Carter's own utilitarian needs and interests. This is emphasized in a scene where they exchange a moment of affection: "I rubbed the poor old fellow's head and back, talked to him for a few minutes, and then in an authoritative tone commanded him to follow me . . . Woola was my devoted slave from that moment hence, and I his only and undisputed master" (*PM* 51). After displaying tenderness for his pet, Carter describes Woola as a slave and their relationship as one between master and subject. Woola's value is thus established on instrumental grounds. Their bond is viewed as one founded on property and ownership. Carter's attitude toward Woola is summarized by Yi-Fu Tuan's theory that "affection is not the opposite of dominance; rather it is dominance's anodyne . . . dominance may be combined with affection, and what it produces is the pet" (1-2). Tuan argues that what underlies the tendency on the part of humans to have pets is their desire to control and tame creatures they deem inferior to them. Here the logic of dominion is closely accompanied by a romanticization of those who become dominated. The bond that Carter establishes with Woola is defined by such dynamics of both dominance and affection for the creature. He enforces with him a relationship that is fundamentally asymmetrical.

After having learned how to tame Woola and how to make him act upon his will, Carter decides to train another domesticated species, the horse-like thoats:

> [I] rapped them sharply between the ears to impress upon them my authority and mastery. Then, by degrees, I won their confidence . . . I was always kind and humane in my dealings with the lower orders . . . my thoats will obey my every command, and therefore my fighting efficiency is enhanced, and I am a better warrior for the reason that I am a kind master. (*PM* 68-69)

Here Carter manifests his desire to impress his control over the thoats. While claiming he has always been kind to animals, he stresses his superiority by seeing them as belonging to lower orders. Furthermore, his motive in treating Woola and the thoats with kindness and care is explained by his conviction that this kind of behavior is functional to making the animals more subservient and obedient to humans rather than being grounded on a sense of kinship with the alien creatures. He thus puts his own human needs over those of the nonhuman animals.

The relationship between Carter and Woola echoes that between many medieval knights and their animal companions and the affective bonds established with them—from Gawain and his horse in *Gawain and the Green Knight* to Yvain and his lion in *Yvain*. In fact, as Woola saves Carter from a fearsome white ape, the protagonist argues that "I could not . . . have deserted my rescuer without giving as good an account of myself in his behalf as he had in mine" (*PM* 36). A bond is established between the two on the grounds of a reciprocal debt. Similarly, Yvain, upon encountering a lion in the clutches of a dragon, "decided he would go / and help the lion, for a low, / deceitful, deadly thing, with reason / may be harmed, and so full of treason / and poison is the snake" (vv. 3165-69). Yvain thus saves the lion. In turn, to show its gratitude, the latter helps Yvain in defeating his opponents, from knights to giants and demons. On both occasions, it is possible to witness an affective bond that ties humans and nonhumans together.

However, while multiple chivalric romances display expressions of affection for the nonhuman, the relationship between the knight and animals is still informed by a logic of dominion. Both the lion and the calot are ferocious beasts. Their taming shows the superiority of the human who can control the powers of nature of which the creatures are embodiments. Even in the case of the nonhuman companions of questing knights, the needs of the animals are subordinated to those of their masters. In fact, in commenting upon the bonds between knights and their animal companions, Karl Steel argues that "[n]one of these special relationships demand that humans abandon their superiority to animals in general; . . . none calls for a general reverence for or reexamination of what constitutes life, human and nonhuman alike" (*How to* 222). Rather, Steel argues that these are instances where it is possible to see at work what Cary Wolfe defines as the logic of the pet (223). This logic singles out a specific animal as the sole exception that is deserving of human love and whose death is worthy of grief. In chivalric romances, the knights, for all their affection toward their animals, do not hesitate to kill and have their "pets" kill other beasts and monsters. Similarly, Carter, with all the praise and esteem he has of Woola, finds almost all of the other creatures repulsive and deserving of death and he consistently uses his calot for his own needs.

Furthermore, the way the calots are used for various human purposes resonates more generally with ways of dealing with animals in the Middle Ages. While many noblemen and noblewomen kept pets, animals were mostly used as tools and resources for practical purposes. When medieval peoples did have what now would be called pets, excessive displays of interspecies affection and prioritizing an animal over a human were practices that were met with high suspicion in the Middle Ages (Rehn 123). In fact, this affection engendered fears of crossing borders between the human and the nonhuman. This could undermine the former's superiority over the latter.[73]

4.3. The Animalized Human

The novel also features aliens that can be considered as adhering to the category of the animalized human. Wolfe includes within this category those humans who are perceived as akin to animals in order to justify oppression against them in a speciesist framework that makes it possible (101). In this context, humans are excluded from the category of the human and relegated to the status of animality. This perception makes them killable and disposable. The most representative examples of this group in the novel are the tharks. The tharks are a green, six-limbed, oviparous, brutish, and violent alien population with tusks. They are described as "little above the plane of the dumb brutes that serve [them]" (*PM* 54). They are thus depicted as a step above animals but one below humans in a liminal state between savagery and civilization.

Their liminal status is made clear by Carter's descriptions. One of the tharkian warriors, Tars Tarkas, is seen as a "terrific incarnation of hate, of vengeance and of death. The man himself, for such I may call him, was fully fifteen feet in height" (*PM* 23). Yet Carter describes their leader, Tal Hajus, as

> the most hideous beast I had ever put my eyes upon. He had all the cold, hard, cruel, terrible features of the green warriors, but accentuated and debased by the animal passions to which he had given himself over for many years. . . . his enormous bulk spread itself out upon the platform where he squatted like some huge devil fish, his six limbs accentuating the similarity in a horrible and startling manner. (96)

Carter sees the tharks as belonging potentially to the category of the human. In fact, he calls Tars Tarkas a man. However, their appearance that mingles human and animal traits and their uncivilized and violent behavior leads Carter to define the tharks like Tal Hajus as brutal monstrous beasts. The status of the green aliens is then never fully decided. Rather, it always remains torn between the categories of the human and that of the nonhuman.

The animalization of the tharks echoes the ways Indigenous people have been historically seen as less-than-human. The green aliens are compared to the Apaches that Carter had left behind on Earth. The hero states that "their trappings and ornamentation bore such a quantity of gorgeously colored feathers that I could not but be struck with the startling resemblance the concourse bore to a band of the red Indians of my own Earth" (*PM* 123). As anticipated above, the frontier narrative has been transposed to space in *A Princess of Mars* in order to preserve its ideological power in support of conquest and expansion (Pfitzer

[73] An example of this can be found in the *Canterbury Tales*, where Chaucer stresses the Prioress's excessive love for her pet dogs. See Czarnowus, "Echoes" 3; Steel, *How Not* 30-40.

55-6). The tharks' depiction follows the typical representation of Indigenous peoples as savage, violent, and animal-like. A connection is made between the enjoyment of torture on the part of both groups. The Apaches capture Carter's friend "for the fiendish pleasure of the torture" (*PM* 29), while the tharks find the painful death of others "provocative of the wildest hilarity" (29). This feature serves to highlight the savage nature of both groups against which Carter is set as the embodiment of a civilized society.

The tharks are also depicted through the rhetoric of the Vanishing Indian, whereby the US Indigenous peoples were believed to be destined to extinction.[74] The tharkian life is "a hard and pitiless struggle for existence upon a dying planet, the natural resources of which have dwindled" (*PM* 40). Here Carter stresses the precarious state of a people who fail to adapt to the changing conditions of the planet on which they live. He highlights the scarcity of the resources on Barsoom. These are managed by the rival group of red aliens "in the face of the brutal and ignorant interference of your green men" (54). The tharks, like in the case of the Indigenous peoples, are seen as unable to manage the planet's resources properly. They are depicted as backward within the progressivist framework that sees only those who can control the ecological conditions of inhospitable contexts as civilized. This narrative has been used to justify the appropriation of Indigenous lands in order to "improve" the territory. The existence of the tharks is doomed to disappear just like the "foliage of the luxuriant Martian vegetation" (66) that once populated Mars. This comparison connects them with the realm of nature as opposed to that of culture. The prospect of the extinction of the green tharks along with the disappearance of the planet's greenery echoes the frontiersmen' nostalgic lament for the loss of the Indigenes and for the tamed wilderness.

The tharks are not only likened to nonhumans and Indigenous groups, but they are also associated with the medieval. The novel emphasizes how the Martians descend from a more advanced civilization—"like [Carter him]self . . . fair-skinned, fair-haired people" (*PM* 59). This ancient society is depicted as

> a highly cultivated and literary race, but during the vicissitudes of those trying centuries of readjustment to new conditions, not only did their advancement and production cease entirely, but practically all their archives, records, and literature were lost. Dejah Thoris related many interesting facts and legends concerning this lost race of noble and kindly people. (62)

This ancient population is seen as highly advanced and is defined by refined civilized ways. However, due to wars and political instability, all that remains of this great society is but ruins. The novel suggests that "they had gone; down through ages of darkness, cruelty, and ignorance" (66). The present condition of the Martians as defined by darkness and savagery is thus evaluated in contrast to this past civilized society.

The depiction of the condition of the Martians echoes the conception of the Middle Ages as a dark, violent period—the Dark Ages—set against modernity. By contrast, the latter is defined as civilized, rational, and future-oriented. Such a view came into being already in the sixteenth century to create a distance from the medieval past and to establish a continuity with the classical period (Matthews 20; Pugh and Aronstein 5). This mode of viewing the Middle Ages aligns with a conception of history seen as linear

[74] See also Dippie.

and progressive (D'Arcens, "Presentism" 184). In this light, if the ancient civilization Carter admires evokes the Greek and Roman ones, the current state of the tharks echoes the medieval period. Thus, the same connotation of the Middle Ages as dark and stagnant, evaluated negatively when compared with Antiquity, is attributed to the condition of the Martians. This implies that the planet had undergone the same evolutionary stages of Earthly historical periodization.

The Dark Ages notion entails a divide between medieval barbarity and modern civilization.[75] In discussing how the medieval/modern binary has been instrumentalized to justify the conquest and oppression of "un-modern" peoples, Carol Symes suggests that "[m]odern Europeans and their imitators squeezed the diversity of 'medieval' pasts into a homogenizing narrative of barbarity from which they, qua modern people, had liberated themselves" (717). This progressivist mode that conceives of history as a series of stages, each one superseded by the next, has served to support a triumphalist vision of the West as modern and progressive and to uphold imperialist and expansionist projects. In the novel, Carter aligns himself with the original Martians in contrast with the animalized tharks. He thus associates himself with people deemed more evolved in order to justify his own superiority over the aliens.

The depiction of the tharks as living in the Dark Ages is reinforced by the medieval traits with which Burroughs characterizes them. Carter argues that

> the green men of Mars, being a nomadic race without high intellectual development, have but crude means for artificial lighting; depending principally upon torches, a kind of candle, and a peculiar oil lamp . . . it is seldom used by these creatures whose only thought is for today, and whose hatred for manual labor has kept them in a semi-barbaric state for countless ages. (*PM* 33)

Here the tharks are described as lacking sufficient intellect and advanced technology to be qualified as modern and civilized. Their technological level resembles the one that was achieved during the Middle Ages. Lacking electricity, they use candles and oil lamps. Their depiction as having lived in a semi-barbaric state for a long time is in line with notions of the medieval as dark and barbaric. Although the Martian setting mingles medieval-like features with futuristic ones such as the presence of advanced technologies, this technological knowledge is not evenly distributed and the general atmosphere is one that evokes a medieval past used to characterize a world of decaying population and dwindling resources.

The tharks' social structure is ordered in a hierarchical manner that resembles that of the Middle Ages. Rank among the tharks is decided on the grounds of military ability. The ruling tharks are in fact fierce warriors. As one of the Martians informs him, "[t]he man whose metal you carry was young, but he was a great warrior, and had by his promotions and kills won his way close to the rank of Tars Tarkas" (58). Carter gradually wins the respect of the green aliens that keep him captive at the beginning of the novel by obtaining the spoils of his enemies defeated in battle. Social standing among the tharks is decided on the grounds of strength, violence, and exertion of power.

[75] See also Barrington, "Global" 184-6; Brown 553; Dagenais and Greer 435; Davis, *Periodization* 20; Davis and Altschul 2; Ingham and Warren 2.

The tharkian warriors echo more specifically medieval ethnic groups called barbarians by the Greek and the Romans. Carter describes how "[b]ehind us we left the stricken city in the fierce and brutal clutches of some forty thousand green warriors of the lesser hordes. They were looting, murdering, and fighting amongst themselves" (*PM* 148). The tharkian armies are described as "hordes" like in the case of groups of invading barbarians. This connection is further enhanced by their activities of looting, murdering, and fighting. Such wartime actions reiterate the aliens' brutality in association with that of medieval barbarians. Falconieri argues that

> [i]n conventional wisdom, the Medieval Era may be summed up with chivalry, but also with barbarism. The barbarian is a wild man who transgresses the elementary laws of common life; he is the Other, a symbol of divorce from the civilized world . . . [who] fights with brutality and cruelty. (133)

If Carter is associated with medieval chivalric models, the tharks are likened to savage medieval barbarians. This also testifies to the double standard that is applied to the hero of the narrative and to those deemed aliens Others in their respective medievalized connotations. The violence enacted by Carter as the embodiment of Western civilization is celebrated as exemplary of chivalric martial power. When it is the alien Other who is associated with the medieval, the violence implied in this connection is repudiated, condemned, and considered barbarous and brutal.

The tharks are associated at once with a less-than-human status and with a supposed medieval brutality. This can be especially evinced in Carter's depiction of the green warrior Lorquas Ptomel: "this monster was the exaggerated personification of all the ages of cruelty, ferocity, and brutality from which he had descended" (*PM* 65). Here the tharkian is not only compared to a monstrous beast, but also presents the features of cruelty, ferocity, and brutality that have been generally associated with medieval barbarians. The simultaneous medievalization and animalization of the alien Other appears in line with dominant modern ways of conceiving the Middle Ages. Karl Steel comments that

> [i]n the self-regard of modernity, the medieval is not just more violent than the present; in its "savagery" . . . it is more animal: closer to beasts, more intimate with them, and unthinkingly prone to what is presumed to be "animalistic" behavior. Assumptions like these hold that . . . the past animal, bound unthinkingly to now outmoded traditions and stupid, pointless violence, while the present is human, able to master its instincts. ("Toward a Medieval Posthumanism")

Here Karl Steel comments on the modern tendency to view the Middle Ages as characterized by a kind of brutality associated with nonhuman beasts. This very tendency also appears in the novel. The tharks are associated both with the nonhuman and the medieval or, rather, associated with the nonhuman because presenting medieval traits and vice versa. The notion of medieval brutality that Steel laments in progressivist notions of modernity engenders an animalization or naturalization, and therefore a marginalization of all those deemed Others in view of hierarchical species divisions. In the work, medievalism thus serves to reinforce the narrative of progress that underlies many works of SF and that justifies a logic of superiority over both the human and nonhuman Other.

Indigenous groups, in a manner akin to the tharks to which they are compared, have not only been animalized, but they have also been historically associated both with medieval barbarians and monstrous

creatures. This characterization dates back to the conquest of the Americas and it continued with the expansion Westward. As Helen Young argues, medievalism has for long served imperial and colonial projects with Indigenous peoples being "Othered through medievalist temporalities" ("Decolonizing" 50). In particular, Young mentions Thomas Percy's comparison between Britons and Cherokees in light of their shared tradition of painting their bodies to intimidate their enemies. The comparison, as Young argues, positions the latter within a past dimension and considers them wild because they fail to adapt to the standards of modernity (51). In this move, both colonized people and their land are imagined as medieval in order to justify the conquest and oppression of both. They are seen as in need of being modernized and brought up to date. The same strategy that has characterized many colonial projects also appears in frontier narratives. If the pioneers were depicted as embodying chivalric medieval models, they also concomitantly ascribed Indigenous peoples to an asynchronous past dimension, often specifically medieval.[76] They thus imposed a European historical developmental framework onto them. In his SF series, Burroughs appears to retrieve the association of Indigenous people with medieval models of barbarism and wild savagery through his depiction of the green aliens.

Indigenous groups have not only been compared to medieval native inhabitants of Britain before the Saxon invasion, but they have also been associated with the monstrous races that fired the medieval imagination. Certain monsters found in medieval texts could also be categorized as animalized humans. In this context, the characterizations of the Indigenous Other in frontier narratives and of the tharkian Other in *A Princess of Mars* borrow from medieval materials. While many monstrous races could fit within Cary Wolfe's third category, I will only focus on two specifically: the wild man and the cynocephalus.

Wild men are recurrent figures in medieval literature. Although not included in the original Plinian races, they take on the features of several of them (Friedman 200). They are usually depicted as uncivilized creatures that display both human and animal traits and that could be potentially violent, aggressive, and lustful (Bernheimer 3-4; Yamamoto 9-10). When confronting these wild creatures, "the heroes antithetically assert themselves as courteous" (Ferlampin-Acher 244). The encounter with the wild man serves then to assert, by contrast, the hero as civilized. If wild men might have once been human, they are portrayed as having reverted to a state of animality. It is the latter that distances them from the courtly knight. In *Yvain*, for instance, Calogrenant meets a herdsman who can be considered a wild man. He describes him by using various animal analogies: "[h]is brows were full, his face was flat, / with owlish eyes, the nose of a cat. / His wolfish mouth was split apart / by wild boar's teeth" (vv. 279-82). Despite his self-identification as a man, the herdsman's animal features and uncivilized manners are markers of alterity that blur human categories and make him inferior to the civilized knight. As Friedman suggests in his discussion on medieval monstrous races, the wild man is found once again in depictions of

[76] See also Kendrick 123-4. Laura Kendrick suggests that parallels were traced between Indigenous peoples and medieval peoples that are evident, for instance, in Virginia pioneer John White's supplementation of "pictures of naked and tatooed [sic] American Indians with pictures of similarly naked and tatooed [sic] early Europeans" (123-4), later interpreted as representations of Picts and Britons.

explorers and colonizers upon their arrival to the Americas, where the features of this hybrid figure were transposed onto Indigenous inhabitants (200). The latter have been depicted, in much similar ways, as "less than human – naked, violent, warlike, and frequently, more animalistic than human" (Bataille, qtd. C. Kim 44). The tharks, with their proximity to a natural state and their violent ways, resemble the wild men that were later superimposed onto Indigenous bodies.

Another monstrous creature that made its way into the expectations, fantasies, and imagination of the Americas and that contributed to representing Indigenous peoples as monstrous animalized Others is the cynocephalus (Friedman 207; Rehn 124). Often found in medieval encyclopedias and travel narratives, the cynocephalus is generally described as a cannibalistic and pagan human with the head of a dog. It thus blurred the lines between the category of the human and that of the nonhuman. While sources such as Mandeville stressed their rationality, others were less confident in their civilized status (Rehn 130-2). On the one hand, their depiction as cannibalistic eaters of human flesh would suggest that, after all, they were in fact regarded as human. On the other hand, it was still a degenerated kind of humanity that mingled animal and human traits. Their otherness was further emphasized by their location in faraway lands of the East. The cynocephali, as in the case of other monstrous races, were used to represent and highlight racial otherness in less-than-human terms.

If the medieval monstrous body served to warn one against the crossing of the human/nonhuman divide, it also functioned to instrumentalize this divide so as to exclude the Other that diverged from the normative definition of the human, representing racial alterity in association with nonhumanity. This implies a demeaning of both marginalized humans and nonhumans, compared to each other to suggest the inferiority of both in contrast to the human. These medieval monstrous figures flow into the representation of the tharks as badly disguised animalized Indigenous people relegated to a barbaric past. The association between the racial Other and the animal Other has served for centuries to justify colonialism and oppression. The human/nonhuman divide has been weaponized to validate the conquest of lands, animals, and people by equating them all to nature as opposed to culture (Glick 641; Vint, *Animal Alterity* 112-13). This has been noticed by many scholars at the intersection of animal, postcolonial, and Indigenous studies (Belcourt 5; Deckha 280; C. Kim 24; Struthers Montford and Taylor 3). The view that Western white people are superior to both animals and colonized bodies relies on the reciprocal association between the two, one serving to dismiss the other. Vanessa Watts (Mohawk and Anishinaabe Bear Clan) suggests that the strategies to fight this process "must extend beyond granting humanity to Indians. It is the perversion of the animal-human closeness that cultivates a space for violence against Indigenous peoples" (119). What is needed then is not simply to disentangle associations between racial Others and nonhumans, but to dismantle the hierarchical racist and speciesist framework on which this connection relies. In view of how the medieval has often been tied to animality and barbarism, medievalism has played a relevant role in furthering this narrative by relegating Indigenous groups to a past associated with the less-than-human. The Indigenous body is medieval and thus wild, wild and thus medieval, a process illustrated in the tharks'

depiction as both bestial and medieval-like. This works to justify Carter's superiority as the epitome of civilized humanity over the animalized, indigenized, and medievalized tharks. Here these attributes are not separate and autonomous but each grounded in the other.

Carter eventually manages to befriend or, rather, teach the meaning of friendship to the seemingly unredeemable tharkian brute Tars Tarkas. The hero thus earns the undying loyalty of the green alien. The latter tells Carter: "it has remained for a man of another world to teach the green warriors of Barsoom the meaning of friendship" (*PM* 152). Tars Tarkas comes to play the role of the noble savage who befriends the hero in many frontier narratives. However, both here and in frontier narratives, the bond established between the hero and the Other mostly constitutes the exception to the rule. The general attitude that Carter displays toward the tharks stays one defined by his own perceived superiority over them. The green race remains biologically and culturally alien (Markley 192; P. Sharp 95). Similarly, in some instances, the wild men of medieval texts are not necessarily depicted as hostile. In *Yvain*, for instance, the herdsman himself, despite presenting the features of a wild man, kindly gives the knight directions to a magic fountain. However, in both the cases of tharks and wild men, the superiority of the hero is still emphasized and never questioned. As Kerslake argues,

> [w]hether the alien is portrayed as aggressive and troublesome or friendly and sociable is academic. The issue is not the approachability (or otherwise) of the Other, but that the myth of the alien as the noble savage has been perpetuated. . .. The moment either group is aligned too closely with its alternative is the moment difference becomes similarity and when the Other merges into 'us.' (20)

As Kerslake's comment suggests, for the alien to remain an alien, it needs to be recognized by its distinct markers of difference. If these markers disappear, then there is no clear identifier that distinguishes the Self from the Other. The Other becomes the Self, and the alien ceases to be alien. It could be argued that this is, to a certain extent, the case of the alien species that can be identified with Wolfe's category of the humanized human. As the next section suggests, the alien species of Mars that conform to the latter category are closely associated with humans from Earth.

4.4. The Humanized Human

The novel also features aliens that fit within the category of the humanized human. Wolfe includes in this group those who adhere to the normative notion of the human deemed as superior and civilized (101). The red race to which Deja Thoris belongs possesses the most human-like features. In fact, Carter argues that "I was more than willing to take my chances among people fashioned after my own mold rather than to remain longer among the hideous and bloodthirsty green men of Mars" (50). The red aliens are closer to Carter in manners and looks. For this reason, he prefers them to the tharks. He sees them as the most civilized race on Mars. They are in fact associated with technological proficiency, ecological management, literacy, and a structured society. The red aliens thus function as a mirror of earthly humanity.

This evaluation of the red aliens is made evident in his depiction of Deja Thoris. She is described as "a slender, girlish figure, similar in every detail to the earthly women of my past life" (*PM* 46). Her

manners are "so earthly womanly, that though it stung my pride it also warmed my heart with a feeling of companionship; it was good to know that someone else on Mars beside myself had human instincts of a civilized order" (52). Here Deja Thoris is equaled to earthly humans and specifically to earthly women. Her civilized traits are extended to her people as a whole. Her human appearance and behavior lead Carter to recognize her as kindred and belonging to the same civilized order as himself. This suggests that the hero only views as civilized those bearing human qualities that resemble his own.

The red Martians also present a medieval-like societal structure. Upon seeing a navy officer throw his sword at his feet, Carter explains that "[i]t is the oath of fealty that men occasionally pay to a Jeddak whose high character and chivalrous acts have inspired the enthusiastic love of his followers" (*GM* 138). Such an oath echoes the bonds that tied together vassals and lords in medieval times. It stresses the regard with which Carter is held. He is in fact treated as a lord. His words highlight, however, how medieval traits attributed to the red aliens, unlike barbarism and savagery ascribed to the medievalized tharks, are once again associated with the positive values of chivalry, honor, nobility, grace, and order applied to Carter himself. In fact, the red aliens are defined by nobility in manners and rank. Deja Thoris is thus depicted as the courtly princess to Carter's knightly persona.

One of the most relevant factors that distinguish the red Barsoomians from the other aliens is their ability to control the planet's ecological conditions. Carter believes that the ability to manage the land is a sign of civilization. This can be deduced by his comments concerning a forest that attracts his admiration:

> I could not help but note the park-like appearance of the sward and trees. The grass was as close-cropped and carpet-like as some old English lawn and the trees themselves showed evidence of careful pruning . . .. All these evidences of careful and systematic cultivation convinced me that I had been fortunate enough to make my entry into Mars on this second occasion through the domain of a civilized people. (*GM* 12)

Here Carter explicitly expresses his opinion that one of the markers of civilized people is the ability to manage and tame their surroundings according to their own needs and interests. The kind of nature that is privileged and held in higher esteem by Carter is one that is rigorously tamed and cured.

In reality, Mars is depicted as a planet far from being rich in luxuriant vegetation and resources. As Carter suggests, "a natural forest" is "so rare a thing upon the bosom of dying Mars that, outside of the forest in the Valley Dor beside the Lost Sea of Korus, I never before had seen its like upon the planet" (*WM* 86). The planet is thus presented as drying up and slowly dying. Burroughs had in all probability been influenced in his characterization of Mars by the theories of the astronomer Percival Lowell (Lawson 214; Markley 192-3; Mehaffey). Lowell's descriptions of Mars were accepted up until the 1940s. His vision of a dying planet of dried canals and harsh landscapes grants Burroughs the opportunity to depict Mars's more-than-human world as hostile and as an obstacle to fight against in the struggle for survival. While doing so, he reproduces on Mars similar conditions to those of the American frontier, which was often characterized by inhospitable and hostile lands that the pioneers were supposed to tame and improve.

Given the precarious conditions of the planet, the red Barsoomians take on the responsibility of making life manageable on Mars through a series of terraforming interventions and advanced technological implementations. Terraformation consists in the process of making human life on a planet possible by transforming and adapting its conditions to make them closer to those on Earth by intervening on the planet's climate, atmosphere, and ecology (Pak 1). In replying to the green aliens' leader who had attacked their airship, Deja Thoris argues:

> you know full well that were it not for our labors and the fruits of our scientific operations there would not be enough air or water on Mars to support a single human life. For ages we have maintained the air and water supply at practically the same point without an appreciable loss, and we have done this in the face of the brutal and ignorant interference of your green men. (*PM* 53-4)

Deja Thoris explicitly sets her own people against the savage tharks in light of the disinterest of the latter in the planet's management. In doing so, she emphasizes their backwardness. She also echoes the rhetoric employed by colonizers against Indigenous groups due to their lack of technological tools and their different ways of approaching the land. The land was therefore considered empty and seizable.[77] This kind of belief subscribes to a narrative of progress that envisions the "improvement" of nature through anthropogenic modifications as a sign of civilization. The terraforming process on the part of the red Martians implies a desire for mastery over the nonhuman that prioritizes the interests of the sovereign human and its projects of conquest and settlement. Their ability to manage the more-than-human and their technological knowledge make them superior, in Carter's view, to all the other inhabitants of Mars.

This fantasy of endless technological control and of the colonization of other planets through terraformation still informs geo-engineering projects and space missions. For instance, Burroughs's vision has deeply affected the President of the Mars society, aerospace engineer, and great admirer of Burroughs, Robert Zubrin. Zubrin seems to follow the author's view of the Middle Ages as a dark and static period of time. He has in fact stated that like "the Great Frontier that shattered the static, stultifying, irrational, dogmatic, and completely stratified world of medieval Christendom . . . the colonization of Mars will usher in a new stage of social progress and technological innovation" (15). Zubrin, just like the author of the Barsoom series, blends conceptions of progress grounded in the medieval/modern divide with notions of the regenerative power of the frontier, transposed to an outer space that is perceived as holding limitless resources that are ready to be accessed and exploited.

The pattern of transition from a medieval-like darkness to an age of civilized progress is one that characterizes the trajectory of Deja Thoris's people and that sets them apart from all of the other Martians that are perceived instead as inferior. Deja Thoris informs Carter that "the red race of today has reached a point where it feels that it has made up in new discoveries and in a more practical civilization for all that lies irretrievably buried with the ancient Barsoomians" (*PM* 62). Although the times of the ancient Martians had been succeeded by the Dark Ages, the red aliens have gradually managed to evolve back to

[77] For a discussion on how farming and agriculture shaped settler colonialism and the relations between native peoples and colonists, see V. Anderson. See also C. Kim 45; Rieder, *Colonialism* 31.

the level of civilized development of that great society. This progression signals the closing of the gap that separates the red aliens from those ancient people that Carter had only seen in paintings and had associated with his own humankind. It thus associates them with modernity in contrast with the tharks, who are relegated to the barbaric Dark Ages.

However, the resurgence of civilized manners is not simply tied to ecological management and technological power, but also to questions of racial purity. In the seventh book of the series, the reader is reminded that "[t]he dominant race in whose hands rest the progress and civilization . . . differ but little in physical appearance from ourselves. The fact that their skins are a light reddish copper color and that they are oviparous constitute the two most marked divergences from Anglo-Saxon standards" (*Fighting Man* 12). Here it is stressed how much the red aliens resemble specifically Anglo-Saxon humans. Carter himself plays a crucial role in this process. As Slotkin argues in his discussion of racial stereotypes and social Darwinian theories influencing Burroughs's text, despite the fact that the racial purity of the red aliens had gone lost in time due to dynamics of intermarriage, the offspring that results from the union between Deja Thoris and John Carter promises a renewal of the original purity of the "fair-skinned" race thanks to Carter's own "masterful" Anglo-Saxon blood (*Gunfighter Nation* 203-5). This discourse echoes Anglo-Saxonist claims that have served to sustain the exclusion of Indigenous groups, African Americans, as well as other marginalized groups from discourses concerning American nationalism, identity, and full citizenship (Zimring 15). Through such Anglo-Saxonist stances, the latter are exclusively granted to white US citizens, and most perfectly embodied by white US men.

Coming full circle with Carter's identification with medieval models to support his superiority, Burroughs subtly engages with a medievalism that has justified white US dominion by virtue of their Anglo-Saxon blood and origins. Reginald Horsman argues that "by 1850 American expansion was viewed in the United States . . . as evidence of the innate superiority of the American AngloSaxon branch of the Caucasian race . . . a sense of racial destiny permeated discussions of American progress and of future American world destiny" (1). While the kind of Middle Ages that is hailed in this ideological discourse was largely imagined and far from being historically true, it was romanticized as an ideal era of racial purity and military conquest. Anglo-Saxonist discourses were functional to bolstering the narrative of progress that underlies the expansion Westward and the taming and exploitation of the wilderness. This shows how racial beliefs grounded in medievalism also shaped attitudes toward the more-than-human.

In a related manner, the association between the realm of primitive nonhuman nature and that of human civilized culture emerges in the novel as threatening the racial boundaries that separate the different alien groups. The rejection of racial hybridity mingles with the fear of nonhuman hybridity and especially of the crisis of the separation between humanized humans and animalized humans. This fear of miscegenation and hybridization is expressed in terms of a fear of bestiality and of a mixing that is not simply interracial, but interspecies. On one of the multiple occasions where Deja Thoris is about to be

forced to marry a tharkian warrior, the latter is described as a brutal monstrous beast. The potential union between the two triggers Carter's horrified response:

> [t]he thought that the divine Dejah Thoris might fall into the clutches of such an abysmal atavism started the cold sweat upon me. Far better that we save friendly bullets for ourselves at the last moment, as did those brave frontier women of my lost land, who took their own lives rather than fall into the hands of the Indian braves. (*PM* 65)

The characterization of the thark as a bestial monster makes the sexual threat to Deja Thoris one that borders on bestiality.[78] In commenting upon the monster's function as a warning against interracial mingling, Cohen stresses how in narratives of the frontier the "Indians" depicted as prone to kidnapping white women embodied this monsterized fear of miscegenation (*Monster Theory* 15). This same fear is explicitly evoked through Deja Thoris's green captors.

Once again, the tharks evoke not only Indigenous peoples populating the frontier, but also the very monstrous creatures with which the latter were associated, i.e., the cynocephali. This monster was itself a result of interspecies mingling and it was said to kidnap and rape women (Rehn 129). In her discussion on the medieval romance *Sir Gowther*, Emily Rebekah Huber contextualizes the dog-related imagery of the Middle Ages and discusses the connotation of the cynocephalus. She argues that "[t]he taboo of miscegenation makes up the body of the pagan cynocephalus, wherein religious difference is figured as racial difference, and, remarkably, as species difference (or crisis)" (293). The possibility of the union between humans and not-fully-human creatures threatens the boundary that separates them and blends concerns about race with those about species. This concern clearly reappears in the depiction of the tharks.

In analyzing the alien species, I have used Wolfe's species grid. However, these taxonomical distinctions are arbitrary ideological fictions constructed in support of the humanistic divide between nature and culture. In fact, neither the human nor the nonhuman are separate categories, but they mingle and interact with one another. This is especially true in the case of the Martians that are all defined by hybridity. This questions supposedly pure categories. It is for this reason that Carter struggles to constantly reinforce those boundaries. This is how he counters his revulsion for hybrid beings that pose the threat of the return of a barbaric past. The confrontation with savage medieval-like monstrosity reasserts the boundaries of the normative conception of the human conceived of as Western white Man. In his insistent attempts to fit each alien species within a category, Carter reflects an impulse consistent with colonizing narratives. The aim of those narratives is not simply to discover and explore, but also to map, classify, and conquer lands, people, and resources. The creation of a hierarchical taxonomy is thus functional to asserting one's superiority and power over the inferior Others.

In light of the above analysis, it is possible to observe how the Mars series constantly praises the same identified with positive medieval models. At the same time, it rejects the Other associated with animal and medieval traits. Both operations presuppose a conceptual separation of the medieval from the

[78] See also Lawson 213.

modern. The nostalgic view that underlies the identification with medieval chivalric models derives from the perceived inadequacy of the present that is regrettably separated from the medieval past. This same conceptual divide is more intuitively evident in the second mode of presenting the medieval in association with the aliens. The latter view subscribes to a progressivist notion of history that views historical stages as superseding one another. Through this separation, the human hero is depicted as the embodiment of civilized modernity in contrast to the aliens who are relegated to a monstrous and barbaric past. The divide between the medieval and the modern thus serves in the novel to reinforce the nature/culture and human/nonhuman divides. In this light, once the Middle Ages is seen as over, they are put to the use of the present, shaping the relationship between the Self and the Other.

5. Influence of Burroughs on Later Works

Burroughs's work has influenced many later SF authors. He was one of the best-selling authors of the first half of the twentieth century and has had a deep influence on both the development of the genre itself and on multiple later authors who openly recognize their indebtedness. With his vision of Mars and his heroic explorer John Carter, US writer Ray Bradbury claims that Burroughs "has probably changed more destinies than any other writer in American history" (Bradbury et al. 17). Robert Zeuschner argues that "[t]he importance of *A Princess of Mars* cannot be overestimated. It was responsible for an entire genre of pulp fiction and an important inspiration for *Flash Gordon*, George Lucas's films, and James Cameron's *Avatar*" (qtd. Tibbetts 181). Especially in the 1930s and 1940s, Burroughs's triumphalist celebration of US exceptionalism and expansionism through the depiction of a medievally inflected frontier in outer space has left its mark not only on space operas and planetary romances such as the nationalistic serialized comic strips *The Adventures of Buck Rogers* (P. Sharp 113) and its competitor *Flash Gordon*, but also on many writers of the so-called Golden Age of SF.[79] These include Robert Heinlein, Isaac Asimov, and the British Arthur C. Clarke. All of them have been recognized as champions of humanistic progress and technological development.

The magazine *Astounding Stories*, where many Golden Age works were published, was defined by a strongly techno-optimistic and anthropocentric stance. As Brian Stableford and David Pringle argue, according to this stance, "humanity was destined to get the better of any and all alien species" (624). Its editor John Campbell Jr. furthered the celebration already present in the early pulps of narratives of progress that supported male imperial expansion to new outer-space frontiers and informed by a logic of the dominion over nonhuman alien Others (Roberts, *History* 195). In his introduction to *The Astounding Science Fiction Anthology*, Campbell argues that the "Renaissance was, in a large sense, the outgrowth of a great concept: that men could make the things they wanted . . . The Renaissance began the period of both understanding and using nature" (x). Campbell believes that only after the perceived end of the Middle

[79] Alex Raymond, the creator of *Flash Gordon*, has looked extensively at medieval romances for inspiration for his comic strip. See Scott.

Ages has the Western world witnessed the triumph of humanistic values. This reinforces notions of the Middle Ages as static and primitive. The kind of vision that Campell celebrates here is one that eventually led to the Industrial Revolution that has made possible technological development, geographical expansion, and a systemic exploitation of the more-than-human world.

This transition from medieval to modern is one that has been imagined time and time again in SF. Isaac Asimov also embraced this pattern. He openly recognized the influence of pulp fiction on his works: he included within them "larger-than-life heroes . . . just because pulp fiction always did (The Shadow, Doc Savage, etc. - I read them and was influenced by them)" (qtd. Ingersoll 74). Despite moving away from this SF model in his works (Roberts, *SF* 57), he has repeatedly reproduced the conceptual divide between the medieval and modern that can be witnessed in Burroughs within both his Foundation and his Robot series. Following Edward Gibbon's *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–1789) and its account of the fall of the Roman Empire and the start of the Middle Ages, the Foundation series (1951-1953) recounts of Hari Seldon who uses the science of psychohistory to shorten the thirty thousand years of barbaric stagnant Dark Ages that will follow the fall of the Galactic Empire. He thus ushers in a new age of enlightened knowledge by establishing the Foundation, which serves as the seed for a second Galactic Empire that will restore modern Western civilization.[80] This medieval to modern transition is accompanied by a triumphalist frontier rhetoric (DiTommaso 272; Mogen 39). The new Empire is in fact compared to the US empire and its expansion through technoscientific progress.

Similarly, in *The Caves of Steel* (1953), Asimov sets two radically different lifestyles against each other: people on Earth live in underground cities due to overpopulation and Spacers live comfortably in outer-space colonies. Within a detective story framework, the protagonist Elijah Baley realizes the necessity for colonizing extra-terrestrial planets to escape stagnation. While on Earth a movement named the medievalists nostalgically calls for a return to the soil on the surface of the planet, Baley believes that their aims lead only "[b]ackward . . . to an impossible past" (*Caves of Steel* 156). By contrast, he asserts: "[w]hy not move forward? . . . Go back to the soil, but go back to the soil of other planets. Colonize!" (156). Both in *Foundation* and *Caves*, Asimov retrieves Burroughs's view of the medieval/modern divide. He views the Middle Ages as a time of ignorance, primitiveness, and backwardness that needs to be overcome in favor of a modern civilized Empire that is to be achieved through progress, expansion, and colonization of outer-space planets.[81] A similar view of the Middle Ages can also be found in another space opera TV series influenced by Burroughs—*Star Trek* (1966-1969). The medieval here is often presented reductively as a mere immaterial fantasy within a work that promoted American values of modernity, progress, and technology in the exploration of the "Final Frontier" of outer space.[82]

[80] As Asimov reports in his memoir, Campbell himself demanded from him a saga that would depict "the fall of the Galactic Empire, the Dark Ages that followed, and the eventual rise of a Second Galactic Empire" (117).
[81] On how the Middle Ages is presented as the Dark Ages in the Foundation series, see Käkelä; Riggs 121-5.
[82] See Massey 95-114. He describes the episode "Shore Leave" of *Star Trek: The Original Series,* where Spock and Kirk shoot at a medieval knight only to discover that he is a vegetable construct with "the same basic cell structure as

Time and time again, this same conception of the Middle Ages as distinctly separated from modernity can be found in multiple works of SF (Kears and Paz 23). The way the Middle Ages is represented in such works can either reflect a nostalgic view of history, a progressivist one, or both as in the case of Burroughs's series. In such works, of which the Barsoom series is just one representative example, visions of the future and alternative worlds are conditioned by dominant preconceptions and assumptions about the medieval past, which is at once radically separated from modernity and always returning to haunt the present. As argued above, the kind of periodization that enforces a divide between the medieval and the modern presumes a linear conception of time. This notion keeps afloat persistent narratives of modernity that champion unrestrained progress with their call to trample over inferior human and more-than-human Others in the endless march forward in time and outward into space.

6. Conclusions

Considering the influence of Burroughs's series on later SF works that have made their way into popular culture, it appears of the utmost importance to tease out the implications of the way the Middle Ages has been represented in such texts. Its impact on how US culture engages with multiple Others, especially with the more-than-human Other, needs to be acknowledged. In this light, this chapter analyzes *A Princess of Mars* as an instance of medievalism. It shows how the novel retrieves medieval models in two distinct ways. On the one hand, it borrows medieval models of chivalric masculinity mediated by the frontier and Southern gentleman traditions for Carter's characterization. The hero embodies knightly values. Through this association, his superiority over the aliens of Mars is asserted. The identification of the heroic Self with medieval models of chivalry lends support to Carter's adherence to the normative conception of the human as Western white Man. The aim of such medievalism is to exclude those who depart from the dominant notions of the human. This mode of representing the medieval relies on a nostalgic view of history that idealizes the past. This view does not undermine the conceptual separation of the medieval from the modern, but rather presupposes it. In this sense, it makes use of the authority of tradition in order to reinforce exclusionary stances in the present.

On the other hand, the novel presents the aliens on Mars in similar terms as monstrous races were perceived in the Middle Ages. Carter places the aliens within a hierarchy of animality. This reveals an anxiety for hybridity similar to the one that informs dominant medieval attitudes toward monstrous races. The aliens are at once animalized and medievalized. The hero is seen as the epitome of modern civilization in contrast to negative medieval traits projected onto the alien Other. In this case, the Middle Ages is associated with savagery and violence and it is set against an enlightened modernity. This view reflects a progressivist notion of history seen as a series of stages, each one superseded by the next. In this

the plant here, even the trees, the grass (qtd. Massey 101). Once again, the medieval is tied to the nonhuman in contrast to the heroes who embody humanity. This produces a tension similar to that in *A Princess of Mars.* Attitudes toward the Middle Ages similar to those in *Star Trek* also appear in the TV series *Crusade* (1999). See Howey 167–73.

context, the hybrid alien Other is relegated to the medieval past and seen as backward and savage. A connection is traced between animality and medieval primitivism.

The Middle Ages then is celebrated when identified with the Western white Man. It is condemned when it is associated with alien Others. Both of these medievalist modes rely on the medieval/modern divide to assert the superiority of the human hero and to marginalize the hybrid Other. This results in reinforcing narratives of progress and normative conceptions of the human. This exclusionary discourse relies on a series of binary couples (medieval/modern, uncivilized/civilized, periphery/center, nature/culture). The dominant Western powers that the hero represents are associated with the second element in each dichotomy. The Middle Ages becomes then a usable past that reinforces hierarchically ordered divides. Both moves work jointly to justify expansionist projects and the conquest and exploitation of the more-than-human world.

By analyzing how modes of representing the medieval in Burroughs's work contribute to shaping dominant exclusionary ideologies and practices, this chapter has shown the deeply intersectional consequences of medievalisms that work to reinforce and justify the oppression of multiple trans-species marginalized groups. This demonstrates how one form of oppression often goes hand in hand with others working at the intersection of race, gender, and species. Understanding how US medievalism has served for centuries—from the conquest of the Americas to twentieth century SF works such as Burroughs's—as an instrument of oppression appears necessary to counter harmful distortions.

Chapter Three: Blurred Dualisms and the Acceptance of Alterity in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*

1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on Ursula K. Le Guin's novel *The Left Hand of Darkness*. The text is discussed as an example of a SF work that blurs the boundaries between the medieval and the modern. The novel depicts two alien countries, Karhide and Orgoreyn, which present forms of government that echo respectively medieval and modern structures. The medieval and the modern are made coeval. The breakdown of the medieval/modern divide is inscribed within the work's concomitant questioning of dichotomic thinking in general. This chapter analyses several divides—man/woman, nature/culture, human/nonhuman, and medieval/modern—that are disrupted in the novel.

The work focuses on the encounter between the Self and the Other by analyzing the attitude that the protagonist Genly Ai displays toward the population of the planet Gethen. This chapter examines the character's trajectory as it develops from distrust and prejudice toward the Gethenians to acceptance and understanding. Genly learns to embrace the "medieval" Others and their posthuman modes of being. The novel thus upsets linear and progressivist notions of history that views the modern as superseding the medieval. The work presents the medieval country of Karhide as an alternative model of ecological thinking that departs from hegemonic concepts of modernity and progress. This leads to a more horizontal relationship between humans and the more-than-human. Finally, this chapter applies Le Guin's theory of the carrier bag of fiction to the novel in question, whereby Le Guin laments traditional heroic narrative patterns that revolve around conflict and violence. Rather, she proposes an alternative narrative model, which can be witnessed in the novel, grounded in an ethics of care. Such a model centers around collecting experiences, knowledge, and affects.

On the one hand, this chapter aims to demonstrate that the novel criticizes a specific form of medievalism. It is a form that conceives of the medieval as a radical opposite of modernity. The work also criticizes the narrative of progress that this conception entails. On the other hand, this chapter intends to show that the novel embraces a mode of medievalism that unites concerns about gender equality and environmentalism. Such medievalism is conducive to an acceptance of multiple forms of alterity and to a posthumanist ethical understanding of multispecies relational and reciprocal bonds.

1.1. Environmentalism, New Wave SF, and the Cultural Climate of the 1960s

The Left Hand of Darkness was written by Ursula K. Le Guin in 1969. It won both the Nebula (1969) and Hugo Awards (1970). The plot revolves around the arrival of Genly Ai, an envoy of an intergalactic league of planets called the Ekumen, on planet Gethen and around his mission to convince its population to join the federation. Besides its inhabitants' lack of binary notions of gender and of the concept of war,

among the planet's defining traits there are Gethen's ecological conditions. Gethen is also known as Winter since its climate is extremely cold. Gethenians had to adapt to harsh ecological conditions in order to survive. The cold climate has affected their social development, mindset, and ecological approaches.

The novel's attention to the more-than-human is part of a larger concern about ecological issues in the 1960s. The question of ecology had already been addressed occasionally in early SF.[83] However, as was argued in the previous chapter, the general trend was one that disregarded the more-than-human world and focused on celebrations of progress and expansion. It was only in the 1960s and 1970s that the US environmental movement started to develop officially (Heise, *Sense* 8; Latham 116; Love 1-2).[84] The movement's birth was a response to growing overpopulation, pollution, nuclear contamination, resource shortages, and ecological degradation. Such anxieties dominated the ecological imagination of the period.

The Left Hand of Darkness, much like other works in Le Guin's corpus, such as for instance *The Word for World is Forest* (1972) and *The Dispossessed* (1974), is deeply informed by the cultural climate of the period when it was written with all its ecological implications. In such novels, Le Guin addresses modes of coping with harsh environments, the ways ecosystems affect human worldviews, and the damaging effects of the Western myth of progress. By displacing these concerns onto outer-space planets that mirror planet Earth, Le Guin establishes a critical distance through which to consider alternative modes of approaching the more-than-human.

Her works often involve a critique of the Western and specifically the US powers that perceive humans as superior to other life-forms. However, rather than merely focusing on the US, Le Guin considers alien planetary ecosystems that rest on networks of interdependent entities. She is a transnational writer who transcends national borders to address the planetary implications of ecological entanglements. In discussing the need to approach ecological issues from a planetary rather than local perspective, the scholar Ursula Heise urges for an eco-cosmopolitanism. She defines it as "an attempt to envision individuals and groups as part of planetary 'imagined communities' of both human and nonhuman kinds" (*Sense* 61). Le Guin adopts an ecological perspective grounded not in local ties, but in systems of exchange encompassing entire planets. She thus presents an eco-cosmopolitan vision that embraces new modes of being with the more-than-human.

Such ecological concerns were part of a larger trend within the New Wave SF, of which Le Guin is considered a representative author. The New Wave included works written between the 1960s and 1970s. Such works were defined by postmodern experimentation in both form and content, a privileging of soft sciences over hard ones, and attention placed on contemporary social concerns.[85] The parallel development of environmentalism and New Wave SF is not a mere coincidence. As Rebecca Evans suggests, "the New Wave's shifts in subject matter were a response to the cultural anxieties that fueled

[83] On the early SF works that displayed environmental concerns, see footnote no. 54 in the previous chapter.
[84]This environmental awareness long preceded ecological discussions in academia. Environmental humanities only truly started to gain traction in the 1990s (Heise, "Hitchhiker's Guide" 505).
[85] For an in-depth overview of the New Wave SF, see Harris-Fain 31-43; James 167-208.

such movements as environmentalism" (438). Not only did environmentalism borrow speculative strategies to raise awareness of ecological issues, but SF also became increasingly invested in addressing environmental themes (Evans 436).

Environmentalism, however, was not the only social issue tackled by the New Wave. The latter developed in conjunction with the geopolitical tensions between the US and the USSR during the Cold War and with the protests against the Vietnam war. In her world-building of Gethen, Le Guin imagined the planet's inhabitants lacking the concept of war. Such a feature was meant as a thought experiment in response to dominant anxieties of the time concerning US international affairs. The influence of both events is reflected in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. While imagining a society differing from that on Earth, she still addresses and criticizes injustice, oppression, and violence.

The 1960s were a time of intense social upheaval and of movements revolving around civil rights, feminism, and gay rights. These social trends in the US were often addressed by SF authors. Such a socio-political climate is reflected in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. The novel has been most often analyzed from the perspective of gender studies. SF before the New Wave often catered to a majority of male readers (Hollinger, "Feminist Theory" 126; Karolin 15). While explorations on gender and sexuality did exist in early SF (Lefanu 2; Lothian 70; Roberts, *SF* 73), the 1960s' cultural turmoil and the birth of second-wave feminism multiplied SF works revolving around such themes and written by women. Many novels started to challenge gender roles and women's position in society. SF, with its reflection on alterity and alternative modes of being, provides fertile ground for analyses of difference, sex, and gender (Hollinger 128). Le Guin's thought experiment about the Gethenian intersexual nature can thus be traced back to a cultural context wherein new ideas about gender were being developed both in cultural theory and SF.

1.2. Plot and Genre

The Left Hand of Darkness is one of the novels comprised within Le Guin's Hainish cycle. The works share a common history whereby the Hainish people colonized all inhabited worlds that have since evolved independently. The novels are set at different moments of such history. Throughout them, the reader finds references to the intergalactic League of All Worlds, its decline, and its reshaping into the Ekumen.[86] The work is set quite late in the cycle's timeline. Genly Ai, an Ekumen envoy, is sent to Gethen in order to convince its population to join the league. He first arrives to the medieval-like Karhide. He becomes involved in the country's political schemes. He is initially assisted by the king's counsellor, Estraven. However, Estraven loses the favor of the king and is thus exiled. Consequently, Genly also falls out of the king's graces. He decides to visit the state bureaucracy of Orgoreyn. Once again, he precipitates into the country's political intrigues. There he is arrested and imprisoned. Yet he is saved by Estraven and

[86] According to the cycle's internal chronology, the sequence of the six main Hainish novels is as follows: *The Dispossessed* (1974), *The Word for World is Forest* (1972); *Rocannon's World* (1966); *Planet of Exile* (1966); *City of Illusions* (1967); *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969).

together they go on a journey through the icy glaciers of Gethen in order to reach Karhide once again. They eventually manage to arrive back to the medieval-like country. However, Estraven is killed. Yet, thanks to his friend's political calculations, Genly convinces Karhide's king to join the Ekumen.

Fredric Jameson argues that the novel mingles travel narratives, myths, politics, straight SF, dystopias, adventure stories, and romance ("World Reduction" 221). Despite its eclecticism, the novel is generally regarded as a planetary romance (Collins, "Anthropological SF" 257; Pringle 39), which makes it similar to Burroughs's series. Like *A Princess of Mars,* the work appears as a travelogue that focuses on the encounter between the Self and the alien Others on a remote planet. It also preserves the affiliation that the planetary romance bears with lost race stories (Barnard 65; Lavender, *Race* 160). The Gethenians are in fact a civilization that has lost contact with other worlds. Karhide is especially reminiscent of the pseudo-medieval societies in Burroughs's stories and lost race tales.

Like lost race stories, the novel adopts an anthropological approach. Genly is an external observer who analyzes a different culture and environment in a purportedly impartial manner. The narrative is presented as a collation of disparate documents collected by Genly. These include his official reports to the Ekumen and those of previous envoys, Estraven's diary entries, and Gethenian myths. Many critics have recognized the relevance of anthropology in Le Guin's writing. Her father, Arthur Koebler, was in fact an anthropologist. His influence can be arguably witnessed in her works (Collins, "Sail" 182-3; Davison-Vecchione and Seeger 120-21; Rochelle 410).

However, Le Guin does not merely follow the pattern traced by early SF on outer-space colonization. She revises the genre in line with the sensibilities that were dominant in the 1960s. Rob Latham stresses "the entropic dissolution of the scientific modes of missionary imperialism accomplished by the New Wave" (491). The New Wave thus subverted earlier SF narratives (James 173; McGuirk 130). Le Guin herself comments on the regressive traits of the pulp tradition. She argues that "if you declare [a person] to be wholly different from yourself . . . You have made it into a thing, to which the only possible relationship is a power relationship" ("American SF" 209). She laments early SF's tendency to marginalize difference in terms of gender, class, race, and species, criticizing its imperialist underpinnings. She holds similar reserves for anthropological approaches (Fayad 61-2). While integrating them in her stories, she challenges their colonial legacy and their purported universal objectivity.

At first glance, *The Left Hand of Darkness* seems to follow a pattern similar to early SF in depicting Genly's prejudices against Gethenians and their planet. However, his gradual transformation from biased, close-minded, and arrogant to self-aware and accepting of diversity challenges traditional SF narratives. The novel's first lines—"I'll make my report as if I told a story . . . Truth is a matter of the imagination" (*LHD* 1)—already alert the reader to the narrator's unreliable perspective and to the fallacies of scientific and anthropological discourses. Genly gradually realizes that his assumptions about Gethen and its inhabitants were mistaken. This shift signals a departure from traditional SF patterns and early anthropological texts toward a greater acceptance of cultural diversity.

Le Guin also follows the mode of medievalism detectable in Burroughs's works and lost race tales. Yet the way she approaches the medieval differs radically. Comments on Le Guin's medievalism have mainly focused on her Earthsea series (Bloom 4; Bittner; Drout; Pfeiffer; C. Thompson). Le Guin herself has addressed the medieval references in her corpus. She defines her early works as "fairy tales in space suits" (qtd. Bernardo and Murphy 3). With a degree in medieval romance literature, Le Guin was well-positioned to refer to medieval culture in her novels. However, critics have only addressed the medieval echoes within the novel in passing (Jameson, "World Reduction" 227; Suvin, "Parables of Freedom" 156) or have focused on specific aspects while only addressing *The Left Hand of Darkness* among other works (Braswell). Such brief mentions fail to tease out the deeper implications of the work's medievalism and do not consider how it relates to ecological matters.

This chapter analyzes how the novel blurs the divide between the medieval and the modern. The undoing of the medieval/modern dualism is inscribed within the work's questioning of dichotomic thinking as a whole. I first address how *The Left Hand of Darkness* revolves around the disruption of the man/woman, nature/culture, and human/nonhuman divides. The chapter demonstrates that the undoing of such dualisms relates to that between the medieval and the modern. To this end, it will describe the respectively medieval and modern countries of Karhide and Orgoreyn, their diverging views of the more-than-human world, and Genly's first impressions of each alien country. Subsequently, the protagonist's revision of his own views will be illustrated. Central to his transformation is his trek through Gethen's glaciers with Estraven. Through his immersion in the alien landscape, Genly overcomes dualistic thinking. Finally, Le Guin's theory of the carrier bag will be applied to the novel.

2. The Disruption of Dualisms in the Novel

The novel is structured around multiple dichotomic pairs and their disruption. The centrality of the undoing of dualisms within the work is already suggested by the title itself. "The Left Hand of Darkness" alludes to a poem that is an integral part of the official religion of Karhide, the Handdara. Estraven, who is a believer in Karhide's religion, recites the poem to Genly:

> Light is the left hand of darkness
> And darkness the right hand of light.
> Two are one, life and death . . .
> Like the end and the way. (*LHD* 233)

The poem encapsulates the worldview of the Handdara followers. They do not view dichotomic pairs as opposites, but as co-existing interdependently. The poem moves Genly to note: "you are as obsessed with wholeness as we are with dualism" (233). Yet Estraven replies: "[d]uality is an essential . . . So long as there is *myself* and the *other* [italics in the original]." While Gethenians defy hierarchical dualisms, they do not erase difference, nor do they incorporate one into the other to create undifferentiated wholes.

The stance of the inhabitants of Karhide that can be evinced from the poem echoes posthumanist ecocritical views. Posthumanism criticizes the normative notion of the human as Man that views differing

modes of embodiments in terms of gender, race, and species as inferior. This notion rests on dualistic views that privilege man over woman and culture over nature and consider difference as pejoration. By contrast, posthumanism embraces a monistic view that "results in relocating difference outside the dialectical scheme, as a complex process of differing which . . . is based on the centrality of the relation to multiple others" (Braidotti, *Posthuman* 56). Like Gethenians, posthumanism does not reject difference nor distinctions between the Self and the Other but views them outside rigid schemes and considers the relational bonds between apparent opposites. This challenges fantasies of wholeness by embracing multiplicity while disrupting exclusionary hierarchical dualisms.

Ecofeminist Val Plumwood adopts a similar perspective. She argues that Western dualisms enable the exploitation of women, nature, and BIPOCs and serve to justify interlinked forms of oppression (*Feminism* 41-68). However, she argues that merging together dichotomic pairs "is neither necessary nor desirable, because while dualism makes difference the vehicle for hierarchy, it usually does so by distorting difference" (59). It only achieves a new negation of difference that denies multiplicity. By contrast, Plumwood advocates for "a non-hierarchical concept of difference" (60). While the distinction between elements in a pair exists, it is not placed on a hierarchical scale. Difference is acknowledged, but it does not become a radical alterity.

Both posthumanism and ecofeminism have developed after the novel's publication. However, the critiques of humanism and of universalized conceptions of subjectivity already appeared in the 1960s. The views of Braidotti and Plumwood resonate with the poem that Estraven recites. The poem at first glance implies a distinction between the Self and the Other. This is not, however, a rigid and definitive separation. It also stresses the mutual interdependence of apparently opposite elements without privileging either. The poem then highlights how the people who believe in the Handdara religion adopt a monistic, non-hierarchical concept of difference. Multiple dichotomic pairs are considered in the novel. The following sections address respectively the man/woman, nature/culture, and human/nonhuman divides.

2.1. The Man/Woman Divide

Among the main dichotomic pairs blurred within the novel is that between man and woman. Le Guin imagines Gethenians as defying binary notions of sex and gender.[87] An in-depth description of their intersexual nature is found in the chapter "The Question of Sex."[88] The chapter is a report of the Ekumen investigator Ong Tot Oppong, who visited Gethen before Genly. In the report, she relates that during the

[87] I use the pronouns they/them for Gethenians. In fact, while in the novel Le Guin has opted for the pronouns he/him, she has since regretted this choice as it obscures the Gethenians' binary-breaking gender identity (*Language of the Night* 169-70).

[88] While the novel refers to Gethenians as androgynous, hermaphrodites, or ambisexual, I follow Mascha Helene Lange in judging "intersexual" the most appropriate term. "Intersex" defines people "born with sex characteristics . . . that do not fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies" (UN, qtd. Lange 117-18). Lange suggests that the terms used by scholars are often outdated in light of recent discussions in gender, queer, and intersex studies. She argues that "intersex" is an open term that can include many identities outside the male-female matrix. It can apply to people who identify themselves as either or neither gender, but it can also be adopted as a separate gender identity (130-31). This definition thus fits best the indeterminate identity of Gethenians.

stage of the Gethenian sexual cycle called Somer, the inhabitants of the planet are intersexual. While not sexually active during this period, "you cannot think of a Gethenian as 'it.' They are not neuters. They are potentials" (*LHD* 94). They are then both male and female. They become either male or female at the peak of their monthly estrus cycle called Kemmer.

This social conformation is depicted as contributing to greater gender equality and a more just society. Ong Tot Oppong argues that, since any Gethenian is liable to beget children, "no one is quite so thoroughly 'tied down' here as women, elsewhere, are likely to be—psychologically or physically. Burden and privilege are shared out pretty equally; everybody has the same risk to run or choice to make" (*LHD* 93). The role of the mother in Gethenian societies is not confined to women since there are no strictly men nor women on the planet. The investigator thus assumes that the absence of fixed biological sexes prevents the development of gender stereotypes.

The Gethenians enjoy a high degree of sexual freedom. The investigator notes that "[p]airing seems to be the commonest custom, but . . . groups may form and intercourse take place promiscuously among the males and females" (*LHD* 91). Furthermore, "[i]ncest is permitted" (92). The sexual practices of Gethenians are not severely restricted nor are they moderated in any way. This is also noted by Genly: "there is less coding, channeling, and repressing of sex there than in any bisexual society I know of . . . Sexual fear and sexual frustration are both extremely rare" (177). Despite the few restrictions mentioned above, rape does not exist on Gethen. As Ong Tot Oppong observes, "coitus can be performed only by mutual invitation and consent" (94). While the absence of rape is partly motivated by physiological constraints, it may also be ascribed to the sexual freedom that the Gethenians enjoy.

The novel's depiction of sex and gender was pioneering in the historical and cultural context in which it was written. However, it has since encountered severe criticism (James 185; Karolin 21-22; Roberts, *SF* 72). Critics have mainly accused the novel of having a masculine focus. The work has also been criticized for its use of male pronouns for intersexual people, for its masculine depiction of Gethenians, for the male perspective of the narrator, and for the lack of homosexuality as a possibility for Gethenians within the work (Annas 151; Lefanu 143; Lem, "Lost Opportunities" 22-24; Russ 215-17).

Gethenians also seem problematically driven by biological determinism. As the investigator Oppong observes, the "sexual impulse is tremendously strong in this phase, controlling the entire personality . . . [kemmer] rules the Gethenians" (*LHD* 90, 93). Sexual intercourse seems not motivated by desire, but by biological impulses. If the novel aims to question gender stereotypes, it never separates discussions of gender from biological factors related to sex. Biological determinism is especially problematic in light of how it has served to justify racism, sexism, and speciesism. As Helena Feder suggests, "[w]e fear biological determinism not only because of the use made of the idea in the past, but also because Western culture at large continues to attribute every action and desire of other animals to a reductive notion of their biology, summed up in the derogatory (and tautological) use of the term 'instinct'" (233). Within Western dualistic schemes, the qualification of a feature as natural or determined

by biology entails that it is considered as separate from the realm of culture. In view of the hierarchical evaluation ascribed to the realms of nature and culture, all that is associated with nature is also consequently seen as inferior. This justifies multiple forms of oppression that vilify difference.

In Le Guin's initial response to criticism in "Is Gender Necessary?" (1976), she defended her own choices. She also deflected attention from matters of gender to other aspects of the novel. She argued that "[t]he fact is that the real subject . . . is not feminism or sex or gender . . . it is a book about betrayal and fidelity" (157). However, she has since modified her initial position. In 1987, she published a revised version of the essay that does not efface the original version. Here she admits the faults of the male-centered perspective (*Language of the Night* 171), the use of generic male pronouns (169-70), the lack of homosexual representation (169), and her initial defensiveness (157).

Le Guin's self-aware reflection on her earlier works has continued through the years. She further commented in a 2013 interview for *Paris Review* that "[*LHD*] was my ignorant approach to feminism. I knew just enough to realize that gender itself was coming into question. We didn't have the language yet to say that gender is a social construction" (qtd. Wray). While some aspects of the work appear outdated in light of the more than fifty years of evolving gender theory that separate today from 1969, the novel should be regarded as a product of its time. Second-wave feminism was just starting to develop. If Simone De Beauvoir had already advanced the argument of the social construction of gender, it is only in the 1970s and 1980s that the notion comes into full shape thanks to figures such as Judith Butler.

Some of the flaws ascribed to the novel can also be justified by Le Guin's choice of making her readers read the story through Genly's masculinist and biased perspective. His view on sex and gender departs from the Gethenian ones. Genly is in fact from planet Terra. The latter is the name with which Earth is commonly referred to in the Hainish cycle. His worldviews are informed by his planet's culture, which mirrors an Earthly Western one. He reflects on views of gender roles within his own culture: "[t]he heaviest single factor in one's life, is whether one's born male or female. In most societies it determines one's expectations, activities, outlook, ethics, manners . . . It's extremely hard to separate the innate differences from the learned ones" (*LHD* 234). Genly stresses the assigned roles and expectations determined by his society's binary thinking. To divide the world into two categories limits the possibilities of women within the society and forces individuals into arbitrary and reductive molds. By arguing that it is hard to determine innate differences from learned ones, Genly reveals the weight of his own society's worldview over him. He struggles to recognize the social construction of gender roles.

Despite his presumption of scientific impartiality, Genly fails to perceive the Gethenians beyond his culture's gender binary system. This is evident in his attitude towards Estraven. He sees them as "one of the most powerful men in the country" (*LHD* 5) and argues that "it was impossible to think of him as a woman" (12). Yet, when Estraven's behavior does not cohere with Genly's expectations of masculinity, he describes the king's advisor as "womanly, all charm and tact and lack of substance" (12). Genly admits that "[t]here was in this attitude something feminine, a refusal of the abstract, the ideal. . . which rather

displeased me" (212-13). Not only does Genly see them mistakenly as alternatively masculine or feminine, but he also reveals a negative evaluation of feminine traits. This stance coheres with hierarchical dualistic schemes criticized by Braidotti and Plumwood. Genly's limited comprehension of intersexuality leads him to argue: "I don't trust Estraven, whose motives are forever obscure" (7). The failure to place him in a specific gender category causes Genly to mistrust the only person who believes in his mission.

Yet the envoy is aware of the inaccuracy of his own judgement. He asserts: "I was still far from being able to see the people of the planet through their own eyes . . . my efforts took the form of self-consciously seeing a Gethenian first as a man, then as a woman, forcing him into those categories so irrelevant to his nature" (*LHD* 11-2). He therefore recognizes that his perception does not reflect Gethenian reality. However, he struggles to change his perspective. In showcasing Genly's limited and biased point of view, Le Guin criticizes Western binary notions on gender and the prejudices and assumptions accompanying them.

2.2. The Nature/Culture Divide

Another dichotomy related to the man/woman one is that between nature and culture. Indeed, as Ong Tot Oppong argues, "[t]here is no division of humanity into strong and weak halves, protective/protected, dominant/submissive, owner/chattel, active/passive. In fact, the whole tendency to dualism that pervades human thinking may be found to be lessened, or changed, on Winter" (*LHD* 94). This quotation reveals that the breakdown of the gender binary is part of a crisis of hierarchical dichotomic thinking in general. This breakdown is conducive to a society that is not focused on the exploitation of and dominion over "inferior" Others, including the more-than-human world.

While critical attention has mostly focused on the impact of gender and sex on Gethenian life, the climatic conditions of the planet are believed to bear an equally relevant impact on their worldview, beliefs, and thought. Ong Tot Oppong speculates that "the dominant factor in Gethenian life is not sex or any other human thing: it is their environment, their cold world" (*LHD* 96). The investigator suggests that the cold climate of the planet all year round affects many aspects of Gethenian culture, from where they live, what they eat, how they move around, to how they think.

Both the absence of hierarchical dualisms and the climate shape Gethenian modes of relating to the more-than-human. As Genly notes, "[e]ven the wilderness is carefully husbanded there, and though that forest had been logged for centuries there were no waste places in it, no desolations of stumps, no eroded slopes. It seemed that every tree in it was accounted for" (*LHD* 175). Because of the scarcity of resources on the planet, Gethenians tend to the natural world with attentiveness. They are careful not to waste anything. While they could employ extractive measures to obtain more resources, they embrace an ethics of care rather than a logic of extraction.

Genly also comments on how the climate has affected Gethenian societal development. He argues:

> [t]he electric engine was developed, radios and power loom and power vehicles and farm machinery and all the rest began to be used, and a Machine Age got going, gradually, without any industrial

> revolution, without any revolution at all . . . So they have gone very slowly. . . a hasty observer would say that all technological progress and diffusion had ceased. Yet it never has. (*LHD* 98)

While Gethenians possess advanced technologies, they have developed slowly without a myth of progress. They did not experience an industrial revolution. This appears relevant in light of how the Industrial Revolution has been tied to the start of the Anthropocene (Crutzen and Stoermer 17). It signaled in fact an increase in production and fossil fuel extraction. By emphasizing the Industrial Revolution, Le Guin falls short in identifying the cause of the phenomena of social and environmental injustice that can be traced further back to colonialism. Yet she pinpoints a significant factor that has contributed to climate change.

The work encourages a comparison between Gethen and Earth. They present differing developmental and ecological approaches. As Genly argues, "Winter hasn't achieved in thirty centuries what Terra once achieved in thirty decades. Neither has Winter ever paid the price that Terra paid" (*LHD* 98). Le Guin also mentions the harmful consequences of exploitative Terran practices in other Hainish novels. For instance, in *The Dispossessed*, the Terran ambassador on Urras relates: "my Earth is a ruin. A planet spoiled by the human species. We multiplied and gobbled and fought until there was nothing left, and then we died. We controlled neither appetite nor violence; we did not adapt" (286). In addressing the Earth's state, the novel operates a criticism of unrestrained violence led by anthropocentrism. By setting the plot on Gethen, Le Guin challenges the centrality of Earth and presents Gethen as an ecological alternative to the dominant Earthly model.

The novel also criticizes Earthly politics of speed. The Gethenians adapt to nonhuman rhythms rather than forcing the nonhuman to adapt to their own. This is reflected in the slow pace of their modes of transportation:

> the weather makes slow going for powered traffic most of the year . . . Gethenians could make their vehicles go faster, but they do not. If asked why not, they answer 'Why?' . . . Terrans tend to feel they've got to get ahead, make progress. The people of Winter . . . feel that progress is less important than presence. My tastes were Terran . . . I wanted to get out and run. (*LHD* 50)

Their slowness is not merely dependent on the harsh weather, but also on the value system that does not rely on a myth of progress. Speed in fact appears at the center of notions of progress that sustain Western capitalism. Rob Nixon defines this capitalistic logic driven by speed as turbo-capitalism. He argues, "[o]urs is an age of onrushing turbo-capitalism . . . speed has become a self-justifying, propulsive ethic" (8). The current society is thus grounded in a politics of speed that prompts Western powers to a relentless march forward at whatever cost. Genly adheres to this imperative. He is irritated and perplexed by the slow paces of Gethenians. In focusing on Gethenian rhythms, the politics of turbo-capitalism that have destroyed Terra in the novel are criticized by Le Guin.

If their refusal to rely on technological means might also be due to a need to preserve their "physiological weatherproofing" (*LHD* 28), Gethenians' ethics of care owes to their value system that defies nature/culture dualisms. This approach embraces trans-species entwinements. Their views thus map posthumanist ecocritical stances arguing for an undoing of nature/culture divides in favor of relational

networks within a nature-culture continuum (Braidotti *Posthuman* 47-8; Haraway, *Species* 25; Opperman, "From Posthumanism" 26). This position challenges the self-justifying logics of unrestrained growth and the domination over trans-species Others. Rather, it aims to build horizontal relationships with the more-than-human world.

Genly struggles to understand the Gethenians' mentality. He tries once again to find explanations through ecological determinism. Like in the case of their sex and gender, their worldview is seen as determined by natural conditions. Genly asks Estraven: "why you've never seen fit to invent airborne vehicles? . . . 'How would it ever occur to a sane man that he could fly?' Estraven said sternly. It was a fair response, on a world where no living thing is winged" (260). Genly ascribes the lack of flying vehicles to the absence of birds from which Gethenians could have drawn inspiration. Yet Genly's ecological determinism fails to recognize the degree to which nature and culture are tied together and co-act in relational networks. By explaining their thinking through ecological determinism, Genly separates the Gethenians from the realm of culture, relegating them to the realm of nature. He thus reinforces the nature/culture divide.

Genly's struggle to accept Gethenians' worldviews is extended to his failure to adapt to the cold climate. He complains even on a rare warm day: "the splendid, radiant, traitorous sun of Winter . . . I have never before been hot, on Winter; I never will be again; yet I fail to appreciate the event" (4). Furthermore, he believes that "Winter is an inimical world" (98). Genly's use of "traitorous" and "inimical" for nonhuman elements reveals his view of the Gethenian more-than-human world as antagonistic and hostile.

Yet even the recognition of interdependence on the part of Gethenians does not necessarily entail harmonious interspecies bonds. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen argues, "[p]osthumanism must not be blind to terror and tumult . . . Wildness is not always affirmative, and nature really can be red in tooth, in claw, in unwanted enmeshments" ("Posthuman" 35). This is reflected in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. The relationship between Gethenians and their planet does not necessarily run smoothly. If Genly's view of Gethen as inimical reveals more about his own culture than that of Gethenians, Winter does present a harsh climate that can cause its inhabitants to die because of the extreme cold or because of hunger.

Gethen's harsh landscape evokes that of medieval Iceland. Le Guin's corpus shows a considerable debt to Old Norse literature. The author notes that, for instance, "*Rocannon's World* is full of Norse myth barely disguised" (qtd. Plotz).[89] Norse culture, while rooted in Scandinavian paganism, bears the impact of Iceland's landscape (C. Abram 18). The region's settlement began in the second half of the ninth century. Iceland becomes the basic setting for Old Norse literature. In the novel, the planet's society and environment are influenced by Norse literature and medieval Iceland as a historical place. The Icelandic society endured a harsh climate defined by long and cold winters. Gethen's climate appears modeled on it. In Iceland, the climatic conditions were not stable and changed over long periods of time and so is the case

[89] On Le Guin's debt to Old Norse myths, see McCaffery and Gregory, "An Interview" 29-31.

for the Gethenian climate. The cold weather has fueled the mythologies and cultural imagination of Icelandic society. Gethenian culture is constructed by Le Guin under the same premises. The Gethenian cultural repository features ice giants modeled after frost-giants within Icelandic mythology.[90] Furthermore, Old Norse traditions have retained from their pagan past a weakened presence of dichotomic thinking, especially for what concerns the nature/culture and man/woman divides. This feature resurfaces in Gethenian culture. Finally, Le Guin endows Gethenians with the same belief in relational entanglements and in the complementarity of apparently dichotomic elements as was present in Old Norse culture.

The weather on Gethen is extremely cold. Genly describes the climate as characterized by "months and months of unrelenting cold, sleet, ice, wind, rain, snow" (*LHD* 132). While a distinction in seasons exists, when compared to earthly standards Gethen is extremely cold all year round. Winter is the dominant season on the planet. This characterization of the climate echoes depictions of *Fimbulvetr*, mentioned in Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, written in the early thirteenth century.[91] *Fimbulvetr* is described as a mighty winter when "snow will drift from all directions. There will then be great frosts and keen winds. The sun will do no good. There will be three of these winters together and no summer between" (Sturluson 52-3). *Fimbulvetr* was believed to precede Ragnarök, the end of the world in Norse mythology. Bo Gräslund and Neil Price suggest that it might have been inspired by a 536 CE volcanic eruption that caused significant ecological upheaval (437). The world's renewal after Ragnarök could be interpreted as the return of a warmer period (438).

In the novel, Gethen is undergoing an Ice Age. However, as Ong Tot Oppong argues, "[c]onditions may have been fairly mild for their first 40 or 50,000 years here" (89). Estraven also relates theories about the possible "end of the Ice" (*LHD* 225) due to an increase in volcanic activity. They both suggest that Gethen's climate will not be stable forever. The planet undergoes dynamic processes of slow change. This resonates with the possible transition to a warmer period after the sixth century disturbance. Furthermore, it also evokes the High Middle Ages' temperature fluctuations. The period between c.a. 950 to c.a. 1250, characterized by the Medieval Climate Anomaly, witnessed warmer temperatures across Europe. It was succeeded by the Little Ice Age.[92] The LIA was characterized by colder temperatures and longer winters across Europe. The novel's focus on vast temporal dimensions and climatic change invites the readers to reflect on human and more-than-human relationships in the past and present. In particular, Le Guin shows that it is possible to adapt to harsh conditions while acting responsibly towards one's surroundings. She shows that the planet is not as static as it may appear at first. Rather, it undergoes ongoing and dynamic processes of slow change.

The way the Gethenian worldview is influenced by the planet's climate seems modeled after Icelandic culture. Christopher Abram argues that, "because Iceland's climate, geology, and landscape are

[90] For a discussion on Old Norse frost-giants, see Jakobsson; McKinnell; Motz.
[91] See Larrington et al. (eds.); Ross; Sturluson xi-ii.
[92] For a discussion on the MCA and LIA, see Hoffmann 320-42.

so unusual in a European context, we might assume that they have shaped Iceland" (24).[93] However, Abram cautions not to fall into crude determinisms and broad generalizations. Recognizing how climatic and ecological pressures may have affected the Icelandic worldviews and practices does not entail reducing their culture to one solely determined by such factors. Rather, their social and cultural development and the ecological conditions they lived in reciprocally affected each other (C. Abram 24). Like in the case of Icelanders, the Gethenian landscape proves central to the development of culture. The latter arises out of the interaction with both physical and social contexts. In turn, their beliefs and actions have also shaped their surroundings and guided ecological change.

The cold weather affects the cultural imagination of Gethenians in the way it affected it in the case of Iceland. One of the officials he meets in Orgoreyn tells Genly: "[y]ou're not what I expected . . . an ice-ogre I expected" (*LHD* 114-5). Before encountering Genly in person, the Gethenian had thought Genly would resemble an "ice-ogre" from descriptions he had received of the envoy. The figure of the ice-ogre reappears in Old Norse mythologies in the form of the *jötunn,* a frost giant. The latter is a central element of Old Norse mythology, especially of its creation story (Jakobsson 182; Motz 83-4). The term has been variously translated as "ogre," "troll," or "monster."[94] Le Guin seems to have taken inspiration from Norse mythology in order to depict a culture that has developed in a similarly cold environment and in harsh ecological conditions.

The Gethenian breakdown of dualistic thinking also resonates with Icelandic ecological approaches derived from pagan traditions of mainland Scandinavia prior to the Christian conversion of the late tenth century. As Snorri Sturluson relates in the *Prose Edda*'s prologue, "[the Norse] reasoned that the earth was alive and has life . . . It fed all creatures and took possession of everything that died" (2). The *Prose Edda*, written in the early thirteenth century, constitutes the main source material for Old Norse-Icelandic culture. While this material is filtered through the mediation of Sturluson's Christian perspective, his work remains the most detailed representation of the Old Norse body of myths and pagan religion. The pre-conversion beliefs of Northerners transpire through his authorial voice. The quotation above, for instance, stresses pagan beliefs in the agency of matter and in the bond between the more-than-human and humans.

Old Norse texts equally reveal a blurring of the nature/culture divide.[95] Carl Phelpstead narrates an episode of the *Eyrbyggja* saga, written in the mid-thirteenth century and set in Iceland in c.a. 870–1030 (5-7). The text shows a character who, like Gethenians, is concerned with tending the land's forests so as not to deplete them: "Snorri the Godi started exploiting Krakunes woods with a great deal of tree-felling. Thorolf Lame-foot thought the woods were being destroyed, so he rode over to Helgafell and asked Snorri to give him back the woods, claiming he had only lent them and not given them to him" (*The Saga of the People of Eyri* 132, qtd. Phelpstead 6). Thorolf appears concerned with the unrestrained use Snorri makes

[93] Ecocritical readings of Old Norse-Icelandic literature have recently grown in numbers. See C. Abram; Barraclough; Hennig et al.; Overing and Osborn; Phelpstead.
[94] See Jakobsson 185-9.
[95] See also C. Abram 26-28; Eriksen and Kay.

of the woods the latter had acquired from him. While Thorolf might be motivated by instrumental concerns about resource scarcity, the episode manifests an ecological care similar to that of Gethenians. His attitude challenges greed and indifference to ecological degradation. His indignation does not end with his death. Thorolf turns first into an undead spirit and then into a bull causing environmental havoc. Not only does the text highlight how the way humans affect the more-than-human realm has consequences that turn against the perpetrators, but it also shows a confounding of the borders between nature and culture as Thorolf turns into a nonhuman supernatural being.

Furthermore, the blurring of the nature/culture divide is paired, like in the novel, with that between man and woman. Recent studies have questioned stereotypes that associate Vikings with solely masculine and virile qualities. A DNA study of the remains of what was until then considered a high-status male warrior of the tenth century found in Birka, Sweden, revealed that the body was in fact not biologically male as previously believed, but female.[96] This instance has wide implications for reconsidering the gender norms and role of the "Viking" Age and contemporary stereotypes attached to the period (Price et al.). Furthermore, Norse mythology features gods who often change their own sex in different occasions. Loki, for instance, turns into a mare in order to seduce a stallion (Kaufman and Sturtevant 123). The finding of the Birka woman warrior and the range of sexualities and shifting gender identities of the Norse pantheon invite the thought that notions of gender and sexuality in Old Norse culture were more complex and nuanced than what a binary logic would allow.

Gethenian culture is modeled on the Old Norse one also due to the idea that paired elements are dependent on each other. On Gethen, the countries of Karhide and Orgoreyn are associated respectively with the religions of Handdara and the cult of Yomesh. The Handdara religion places particular value in darkness: "[p]raise then darkness" (*LHD* 247). On the other hand, the followers of Yomesh reject darkness and praise the light: "those that call upon the darkness are made fools of . . . for they name what is not" (163). Yet, as suggested above, the opposition between the two is only apparent since, as the title itself suggests, there cannot be one without the other. The association of Karhide with darkness and Orgoreyn with light echoes aspects of the Old Norse creation myth. Two realms were believed to have come into existence out of a void: Niflheim, which was characterized by ice and darkness, and Muspelheim, which was associated with fire and heat (C. Abram 50). Life was created out of the encounter between lava and ice, giving shape to the first giant, Ymir (C. Abram 51). The equal relevance of both elemental forces relates to the importance of balance, entanglement, and co-existence of opposites that lie at the roots of *The Left Hand of Darkness* and of posthumanist ecocriticism. Like Karhide and Orgoreyn, the co-existence of Niflheim and Muspelheim is crucial to the existence of trans-species life.

Despite the nuanced complexity of the Old Norse-Icelandic worldview, its mythology and culture have often been appropriated to support disparate and at times mutually exclusive political agendas. The

[96] See Hedenstierna-Jonson et al.

nineteenth and early twentieth century witnessed a new interest in all things medieval and especially in the medieval North. Both in Britain and the US, the cult of the North celebrated the virile heroic spirit of the Norsemen fighting against the hostile, frosted wilderness. This constituted a nostalgic anti-modern response to the pressures of industrialization and a way of finding refuge in a world of pristine nature, order, and simplicity (Freedman and Spiegel 681; Fowle and Lahelma 4; Helbert 11-12; Wawn 372).[97]

Yet the myth of the North in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century was not a mere manifestation of pastoral sensibilities. It also bolstered nationalistic sentiments. Vikings embodied a pure, strong race from which to claim ancestry in order to justify white superiority. This discourse, grounded in social Darwinism, constitutes a variation on Anglo-Saxonism called Nordicism (Falconieri 135-36; Leerssen 24; Teulié). In the US, claiming Norse origins meant that the pre-Columbian Viking discovery of Vinland could serve the purpose of supporting colonization.[98] The cult of the North also functioned as a rhetorical tool to validate expansionist imperial projects. The political appropriation of medieval Scandinavian culture in the US is still an ongoing phenomenon, especially among far-right groups.[99]

However, Le Guin's medievalism appears directly traceable to medieval sources rather than Romantic interpretations of the Middle Ages. She defies the connection between harsh landscapes and virile prowess by populating the planet with aliens who defy gender binaries. She also undoes the racist implications of the myth of the North through a narrative that focuses on the acceptance of difference. Furthermore, nineteenth-century medievalisms saw in Icelandic lands a pristine wilderness in contrast to modernity, thus reinforcing the nature/culture divide. Le Guin is more in tune with medieval sources wherein the two mingle in a nature-culture continuum. The Gethenian view of nature, much like the medieval Icelandic one, acknowledges reciprocal more-than-human networks.

Moreover, Le Guin's medievalism is not accompanied by a nostalgic thrust. As Abram argues,

> romanticism is founded in a sort of radical nostalgia, a yearning for a prior world in which Man was as yet unalienated from Nature . . . I don't believe that nostalgia for the world of Norse paganism is an appropriate response to any ecologically centered reading of the Norse myths. It also runs the risk of aligning ecological nostalgia with the unsavory, dangerous, and unjustified ethnocentric fantasies. (C. Abram 177, 174)

According to Abram, nostalgia for Old Norse culture is undesirable in that its wish to go back to a state of pure nature is unattainable and thus counterproductive in combating the current climate crisis. It also carries the risk of perpetuating exclusionary narratives. Le Guin eludes nostalgic yearnings by avoiding

[97] Numerous works embodying the cult of "Northerness" have been written by illustrious figures of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These include the British Thomas Carlyle, C.S. Lewis, William Morris, Sir Walter Scott, and J. R.R. Tolkien; American authors Ralph Waldo Emerson, H.R. Haggard, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and William Gilmore Simms, and the Canadian poet Archibald Lampman. See Bentley; Herbert; Teulié.

[98] For a discussion on the US debt to Norse mythology, see Barnes; Kolodny; Thurin.

[99] Neo-Nazi/-fascist groups often use symbolism derived from Norse mythology. This interest has in turn been inherited by the Nazi appropriation of medieval Norse culture for exclusionary purposes. Neo-pagan groups that take inspiration from the Old Norse polytheistic pantheon also use medieval mythology to advance their white supremacist agenda. This applies, for instance, to Wotanism and certain sub-groups of the cult of Asatru. Various members of such groups took part in the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, and were seen wearing and brandishing several Nordic symbols (Falconieri 137-41; Kaufman and Sturtevant 141).

presenting the closeness to the more-than-human of Gethenians as a rejection of modernity. She does not relegate them to a premodern past dimension. Rather, their society reconciles an ecological sensibility with the knowledge and the controlled use of advanced technology.

Apart from references to the Middle Ages, Le Guin adds technology to the world she builds in the form of electric cars, factories, radios, computers, and spaceships. While rejecting the myth of progress, she also avoids a nostalgic vision of the medieval as a return to a pristine pre-technological world. She argues: "I am not proposing a return to the Stone Age. My intent is not reactionary, nor even conservative, but simply subversive. It seems that the utopian imagination is trapped, like capitalism and industrialism and the human population, in a one-way future consisting only of growth" (*Dancing* 85). Le Guin rejects the myth of unrestrained growth. However, this does not entail a technophobic attitude. She draws a distinction between how technology is used as a tool for exploitation and injustice and, on the other hand, used to facilitate communication and information. Genly's "ansible communicator" appears to embody the latter. The ansible is a technological communication tool of the Ekumen that can "produce a message at any two points simultaneously" (*LHD* 37). It facilitates communication in an expanded universe wherein it is possible to enter in contact with other planets decades apart from each other. The ansible facilitates relational bonds between multiple entities.

2.3. The Human/Non-Human Divide

Not only does the Gethenian worldview reveal a crisis of the nature/culture divide, but their subjectivity itself blurs the boundaries between humanity and nonhumanity. The Gethenians consider themselves human. While conversing with Genly, the king of Karhide argues, "I don't see why human beings here on earth should want or tolerate any dealings with creatures so monstrously different" (36). On the other hand, he has Genly tested to verify that he is not in fact from Gethen: "Estraven had the physicians send me endless tapes about you . . . they all say you're not human" (33). By having the Gethenians see themselves as humans and Genly as an outer-space alien, Le Guin reverses the premises of conventional SF contact stories wherein the human heroes from Earth arrive upon a society depicted as radically Other and alien. She thus reveals the relativity and social construction of difference based on one's positionality.

At the same time, while seeing themselves as human, Gethenians confound clear definitions of humanity. As Oppong speculates, "[i]t seems likely that they were an experiment . . . Human genetic manipulation was certainly practiced by the Colonizers" (*LHD* 89). She argues that Gethenians are an experiment of the Hainish colonizers, who modified them genetically only to abandon them to their own devices. Their biological traits are the product of human intervention. This defies divides between what is considered natural and what is considered artificial and constructed through human knowledge systems.

Furthermore, their sexual reproductive system radically differs from the known human ones. The investigator Ong Tot Oppong relates that "[a]s with most mammals other than man, coitus can be performed only by mutual invitation and consent" (*LHD* 94). Like many nonhuman animals, the

Gethenians can become sexually active only when in the oestrus phase, i.e., the recurring monthly period of sexual receptivity and fertility in the reproductive cycle of many nonhuman mammals. Their similarity to animals in this respect thus blurs the divide between humans and nonhumans.

The Gethenians thus occupy a liminal position between humanity and nonhumanity. They can be seen as embodying, in Donna Haraway's terms, cyborg subjectivities. Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" was meant as a contribution to and a revision of socialist feminism. While she has since developed her theories in directions more oriented toward the organic nonhuman, the cyborg theory appears still relevant within contemporary culture and posthumanist thought. Haraway defines the cyborg as a monstrous figure, "a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (*Manifestly* 5-6). The cyborg moves beyond dichotomic divides and challenges unitary notions of identity in terms of gender, class, race, and species. She sees this figure both as a reality within contemporary techno-culture, for instance through genetic engineering, as well as a creature represented in SF. Gethenians embody cyborg posthuman subjectivities by defying man/woman, human/animal, and organism/machine dualisms.

Le Guin places herself in a line of women writers who use the cyborg/monster/alien to reassert the centrality of marginalized Others and to represent differences not in pejorative terms, but as forms of posthuman subjectivity (Braidotti, "Teratologies" 157-65). The intersexual and not-quite-human nature of Gethenians echoes teratological discourses about hermaphrodites that consolidated themselves during the Middle Ages.[100] The hermaphrodites similarly blur sex and gender binaries by presenting both male and female features. Le Guin thus weaves in her work another medievalist layer that pushes back against Burroughs's use of patterns that can be found in medieval travel narratives.

Braidotti argues that the categories of otherness ascribed to monsters have historically been those of "sexual difference and sexual deviation (especially homosexuality and hermaphroditism); race and ethnicity; the non-human" ("Signs" 292). She stresses the role of genderized, racialized, and naturalized narratives in constructing discourses about devalued alterity. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this dynamic was already at work in the Middle Ages. During this period, the human/non-human nature of monstrous beings was also determined through questions of sex, sexuality, and gender.[101] The hermaphrodites are exemplary of this tendency. Leah DeVun argues: "hermaphroditism carried with it a taint of nonhumanity: a human hermaphrodite must really be either male or female and not an intermediary sex, or else s/he must be in some sense not quite human" ("Animal Appetites" 466). Their sexual difference was tied to nonhumanity and monstrosity. This evaluation, grounded in Aristotelian thought, is reflected in medieval depictions of hermaphrodites, from *mappae mundi* to travel narratives.

However, schematic taxonomies within medieval thought shook under the pressures exerted by hybrid figures. If monsters warned one against the blurring of boundaries, they also held a mirror up to the

[100] Definitions of hermaphrodites in the Middle Ages were divided between those following Hippocrates, who believed that they constituted a separate third sex, and those following Aristoteles, who denied the possibility of an intermediate sex among humans. See Daston and Park 118-123; Nederman and True 501.
[101] DeVun, *The Shape of Sex* 40-69.

forbidden fantasies of the medieval society. Through them, alternative social modes of being could be experimented with, generating a simultaneous sense of repulsion and attraction for monsters (Cohen, *Monster Theory* 16-17; Delumeau, *Paura* ch. 1). Robert Mills proposes that "medieval bodies were themselves sometimes 'cyborg' bodies, to the extent that their figuration blurs artifice with nature, organic with inorganic . . . sexuality with monstrosity" (131-2). Like the cyborg, Gethenians and medieval hermaphrodites are expressions of hybrid non-conformity. They refuse to be contained unambiguously within conventional categories of male or female and of human or monster. They resist clear-cut classifications. In doing so, they offer a positive reconsideration of difference, not in terms of abnormal monstrosity but in terms of multiplicity.

Like medieval Aristotelian thinkers, Genly struggles to classify Gethenians' identity. He judges it to be inscrutable. In conversing with Estraven, he thinks to himself: "[w]as it in fact perhaps this soft supple femininity that I disliked and distrusted in him? . . . Can one read a cat's face, a seal's, an otter's? Some Gethenians, I thought, are like such animals, with deep bright eyes that do not change expression when you speak" (*LHD* 12-15). In this scene, Genly is painfully aware of his inability to understand and trust Estraven's intentions. Like medieval thinkers associating hermaphrodites with nonhumanity, Genly ties Gethenians' sexual nonconformity with nonhumanity, judging both as impenetrable. He associates Estraven negatively with womanhood and animals. Both appear unintelligible and distant. They are thus presented as a radical alterity, which is then in turn projected onto Estraven. Genly reproduces views ascribing animals and women to the natural sphere so as to demean them both. Only toward the end of the novel does Genly finally manage to move beyond hierarchical dichotomic thinking and accept both the Gethenians' posthuman and intersexual nature as well as the different climate.

2.4. The Medieval/Modern Divide

Dualism and its disruption resurface through the medieval/modern divide. The same bias that Genly holds for the Gethenian intersexual identity and the more-than-human realm is also directed against the different political systems, cultures, and worldviews that define respectively the two main countries featured in the novel. He evaluates both on the basis of his own cultural standards. Le Guin has explicitly defined Karhide as a "feudal monarchy" and Orgoreyn as a "modern-style bureaucracy" (*Language of the Night* 169). The medieval monarchy and the modern bureaucracy co-exist on Gethen. In this sense, Le Guin makes the medieval and modern interact. The novel upsets the medieval/modern divide, presenting them on a plane of temporal coevality. Yet Genly sees them as radically opposite competing systems. He initially values the modern over the medieval. The latter is seen as outdated and backward.

The first country Genly visits as he arrives on Gethen is the feudal monarchy of Karhide ruled by the psychologically unstable king Argaven XV. The medieval echoes are expressed explicitly in the novel. As Genly argues, a "Karhidish village is like an ancient castle of Earth" (*LHD* 274). Earth's medieval past is transported to a present dimension. Its political organization evokes a medieval one. Estraven states:

"it's my business to know the Domains. They are Karhide. To govern this land is to govern its lords" (6). Genly reflects on this: "[t]he seeming nation, unified for centuries, was a stew of uncoordinated principalities, towns, villages, 'pseudo-feudal tribal economic units,' a sprawl and splatter of vigorous, competent, quarrelsome individualities over which a grid of authority was insecurely and lightly laid" (99). The country presents a centralized power in the monarch. Yet Karhide is divided into Domains. Each is ruled by lords exercising independent power over their lands. This system echoes that of the High Middle Ages defined by a decentralized structure of power and competing jurisdictions. Kingdoms were divided into fiefdoms. Feudal lords exercised ample authority over their domains, while being subjected to the rule of the monarch and Church.

Furthermore, the culture of Karhide is characterized as a mainly oral one. Genly comments that "Karhiders do not read much as a rule, and prefer their news and literature heard not seen; books and televising devices are less common than radios, and newspapers don't exist" (29). Like in the case of medieval societies, information is delivered mostly orally in Karhide. In this context, the radio appears as the technological substitute for medieval official speeches held for the population.

Moreover, in traveling through Karhide, Genly is welcomed in inns and local dwellings. He states that "where inns are wanting one may count infallibly on the code of hospitality. Townsfolk of Co-Domains and the villagers, farmers, or lord of any Domain will give a traveler food and lodging" (106). Genly's description of hospitality in Karhide echoes medieval modes of lodging pilgrims and travelers in inns, monasteries, or local houses on long journeys. This applies, for instance, to both Icelandic and Anglo-Saxon societies (Aalto 31-43; Gautier 23-44). Medieval lands were not as densely populated as today. Therefore, when traveling to a remote destination, travelers were often welcomed by inns, monasteries, or local villagers.

The novel opens with a ceremony for the building of a new arch that echoes medieval celebrations. Genly describes the parade in detail:

> I was in a parade . . . Rainclouds over dark towers . . . a dark storm-beaten city of stone. First come merchants, potentates, and artisans of the City Erhenrang, rank after rank . . . Next come the lords and mayors and representatives . . . a vast ornate procession that moves to the music . . . Next, a troop of jugglers . . . Next, the royal party, guards and functionaries and dignitaries of the city and the court, deputies, senators, chancellors, ambassadors, lords of the Kingdom . . . Death walks behind the king. Behind death come the students of the Artisan Schools, the Colleges, the Trades, and the King's Hearths. (2-3)

From the first pages, the reader is immersed in a medieval-like city of stone adorned with dark towers. The ceremony echoes medieval parades performed on secular and religious occasions. The parade features a sequence of people in a specific order determined by rank. It also presents typical figures such as jugglers and groups echoing medieval guilds. The presence of Death further alludes to medieval allegories. Death appears in processions in visual and literary depictions of the *danse macabre*. Death walking behind the king is most likely meant as a *memento mori* that should remind the king of his mortal state (Delumeau, *Sin and Fear* 72-85).

During the ceremony, blood is mixed in the mortar used to set the arch's keystone. Genly asks Estraven: "[a]re your keystones always set in a red cement?" (5). They reply: "[v]ery-long-ago a keystone was always set in with a mortar of ground bones mixed with blood. Human bones, human blood . . . We use the blood of animals, these days." The shift from a violent human sacrifice to a symbolic ritual derived from an older tradition hints at a society that has changed with time. Furthermore, in the parade, Genly also mentions "eight guards armed with 'foray guns,' also relics of a more barbaric past" (3). Karhide's "barbaric" past is thus mentioned twice. On both occasions it is tied to violence and blood. While the society might have shown greater signs of aggression in the past, it has evolved to a stage of greater peace.

This episode echoes a scene in the *Eyrbyggja* saga. The scene relates that "[t]he circle where the court used to sentence people to be sacrificed can still be seen, with Thor's Stone inside it on which the victims' backs were broken, and you can still see the blood on the stone" (37). The saga was written in the thirteenth century. The stories are set in a much earlier period during the settlement of Iceland as far back as the ninth century. This scene recalls older "barbaric" bloody pagan rituals that explain a local stone's red color. In this case as in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, a distance is set from the past barbaric actions that color stones red. While not showcasing a historically accurate Middle Ages, the novel loosely distinguishes high from low Middle Ages in Karhide.

Another aspect that echoes medieval traditions is the Shifgrethor system of honor and pride. Genly renders this elusive concept as "prestige, face, place, the pride-relationship, the untranslatable and all-important principle of social authority" (*LHD* 13). Shifgrethor is a code of manners that mediates every exchange among Gethenians. This social code determines the rank and social standing of each individual, channels and contains rivalries, and serves to preserve or increase one's reputation and save one's face. Shifgrethor resembles the code of honor that regulated relations among knights and nobility during the Middle Ages. While the latter often demanded the use of violence to prove one's own honor, Shifgrethor's purpose is to redirect aggression through verbal speech. At the same time, the medieval code of manners similarly determined one's social standing and directed relationships with others. Among various traits, it also required the exercise of courtesy. Much like Shifgrethor, it entailed the adherence to a rigid etiquette and polite behavior that functioned to stifle tensions and avoid humiliation (C. Taylor 73).

The planet's diet reflects medieval ones. Genly describes the products available: "[t]here are no large meatanimals on Winter, and no mammalian products, milk, butter or cheese; the only high-protein, high-carbohydrate foods are the various kinds of eggs, fish, nuts, and the Hainish grains" (10). The population consumes a mostly vegetarian diet. The food eaten reflects the planet's scarce resources. Medieval lower social classes had a similar diet based on cereal, vegetables, and fruits. They occasionally ate meat, although less often than higher classes. Food access became especially difficult with the fourteenth century's famines.

While bearing close similarities to medieval culture, Karhide also presents traits that differ from it. As Le Guin argues, "[c]lass structure was flexible and open; the value of the social hierarchy was less

economic than aesthetic, and there was no great gap between rich and poor. There was no slavery or servitude" (*Language of the Night* 162-3). Gethen departs in numerous ways from medieval societies. The latter had a rigid class hierarchy, slavery, and a wide gap separating the rich from the poor. Le Guin does not simply transport a historically accurate version of the Middle Ages to another planet. She mixes and matches aspects of medieval cultures and blends them together with technological elements.

The novel also departs from medievalisms that associate a pseudo-medieval world with violence and brutality. As Andrew Lynch argues, "[w]ar lies at the heart of contemporary medievalism. … War's continuing presence, in reality and imagination, has linked modernity closely to the Middle Ages …. War seems to typify the 'medieval'" (135). Whether in a negative connotation in association with bloody and brutal barbarians, or in a positive one related to medieval martial heroism, the medieval is often mentioned in connection to weapons, crusaders, and war in general. Le Guin avoids such associations in her depiction of Karhide. It is not the background of bloody battles, but the setting for the encounter with difference.

The culture of Karhide is nourished by the country's religion of the Handdara. Genly relates that "[t]he Handdara is a religion without institution, without priests, without hierarchy, without vows, without creed . . . Its only fixed manifestation is in the Fastnesses, retreats to which people may retire and spend the night or a lifetime" (*LHD* 54). This religion appears greatly elusive to Genly. While lacking the features he lists, it does have established practices and beliefs. Le Guin was inspired by Daoism in developing the Handdara. In fact, its followers value notions of inaction, unlearning, balance between opposites, and interdependence.

Yet Fastnesses also echo medieval monasteries. Both consist in physical retreats related to religious orders. Both feature a lifestyle within a community defined by physical labor, the value of silence, the appreciation for the nonhuman world, and the isolation from the outside world in a woodland. Genly relates: "[t]ime was unorganized except for the communal work, field labor, gardening, woodcutting, maintenance . . . a day might pass without a word spoken" (*LHD* 58). The retreats' activities reflect those of medieval monks dedicating themselves to communal physical work. Monastic life did not merely entail contemplation and prayer. Work consisted in farming, gardening, animal husbandry, and cleaning, among other activities. Furthermore, "silence was conceived as one of the structural elements of monastic common life" (Gehl 135). The quietness in retreats echoes the value placed on silence within monasteries.

Another aspect the Handdara and medieval monastic institutions share is a respect for the nonhuman. While Christianity contains anthropocentric views, David Herlihy argues that a recreational attitude valuing nature for its restorative powers could be found in religious currents, especially those inspired by St. Francis.[102] As John Aberth argues, "St. Francis was fully a part of the ascetic monastic tradition that already evinced a deep appreciation for nature" (48). Monastic life was defined by animal stewardship, sustainable agricultural practices (Rasmussen 258), and by a life where monks retreated in

[102]See White, Jr.

forests to find spiritual renewal away from worldly distractions.[103] Similarly, the followers of the Handdara religion are "less aware of the gap between men and beasts, being more occupied with the likenesses, the links, the whole of which living things are part" (*LHD* 233). They embrace the breakdown of the nature/culture divide. They accept and recognize the reciprocal and relational networks of co-acting human and nonhuman forces and act in accordance with their beliefs. Like medieval monks, their closeness to the more-than-human is reinforced by their isolated location in the midst of a woodland.

The centrality of relationality within the Handdara is reinforced by an emphasis the novel places on weaving. The leader of the Handdara is called Faxe the Weaver. Their epithet stresses the notion of interlacing elements joined together.[104] This theme reiterates the message of the poem recited by Estraven. Apparent opposite entities are revealed to be complementary aspects weaved together. The relationship between different elements is always in flux. The worldview of the Handdara followers seems to espouse a Spinozist monism. Baruch Spinoza argues that matter is non-dualistic, allowing for a dynamic and relational conception of trans-species ties. This position lies at the roots of critical posthumanism.[105]

The rejection of Western dualisms and of progress is reflected in notions of temporality. Genly comments on the fact that "[i]t is always Year One here. Only the dating of every past and future year changes each New Year's day, as one counts backwards or forwards from the unitary Now" (2). Gethenians count time in relation to the current year, which is always Year One. Their notion of temporality is not future-oriented, but present-oriented. The absence of a myth of progress is reinforced by a lack of a sense of forward and linear temporal progression. While Earthly temporal notions are fixed, temporality for Karhiders and to a certain extent for Gethenians is more dynamic. Each event is in a bond with the present. This emphasizes the importance of relationality.

One more aspect that defines the Handdara is its association with darkness. The Yomesh religion of Orgoreyn is, by contrast, associated with light. As Genly stresses, "[u]nder that nation's politics and parades and passions runs an old darkness, passive, anarchic, silent, the fecund darkness of the Handdara" (59). Darkness in the Handdara religion is associated with "[t]he unknown . . . unforetold, the unproven, that is what life is based on" (70), Faxe suggests. It is associated with uncertainty and acceptance of ignorance. However, while Yomesh rejects its opposite of darkness, the Handdara recognizes the necessity of both. As suggested above, the title of the novel itself—*The Left Hand of Darkness*—refers to a poem encapsulating the belief within the Handdara that light and darkness and other apparently opposite couples are actually complementary, mutually constitutive, and interdependent. One cannot exist without the other.

Genly is frustrated with the religion's lack of answers. He describes it as "an introverted life, self-sufficient, stagnant, steeped in that singular "ignorance" prized by the Handdara cult and obedient to their rule of inactivity or noninterference. That rule . . . is the heart of the cult, and I don't pretend to understand

[103] Yet the monastic conception of nature was rooted in ambiguity, combining connotations of trial, disorder, and danger with those of refuge, appreciation, and responsibility for Creation (Delumeau, *Sin* 18; Glacken 302-4).
[104] For a discussion on how the theme of weaving is reinforced in terms of imagery in the novel, see Ketterer 19.
[105] See Crellin and Harris 471.

it" (59). He comments that "[i]t is elusive. It is always somewhere else" (54). Genly declares his distance from the worldview advanced by the Handdara. He recognizes his failure to understand its precepts.

Unlike Karhide's religion, Genly's hierarchical dualistic thought sees darkness negatively. Having left Karhide, he states: "I felt as if I had come out of a dark age, and wished I had not wasted two years in Karhide" (114). By defining the medieval-like country as a "dark age," Genly perpetuates the stereotype of the Middle Ages as Dark Ages. The medieval is perceived as a static period of obscurity, ignorance, and irrationality. It clashes with the modern values of order, certainty, and clarity to which Genly adheres. He further argues that he "had two years of color, choler, and passion in Karhide. A change was welcome" (113). He associates Karhide with irrational qualities that counter his own notions of what constitutes civilization. Furthermore, his evaluation of Karhide is not only associated with a negatively-valued darkness, but it is also defined in temporal terms. His movement outside of the country coincides in his mind with a movement forward in time. He reinstates a medieval/modern divide that devalues the past in favor of a progressivist notion of history. Modernity is seen as overcoming the past so as to reach an enlightened civilization.

While Genly presents Karhide as backward and static, Le Guin avoids the reassertion of depictions of the medieval as crystallized in time. The absence of a myth of progress does not entail no change at all on Gethen. Indeed, Genly ponders:

> [s]low as their material and technological advance had been, little as they valued 'progress' in itself, they had finally, in the last five or ten or fifteen centuries, got a little ahead of Nature . . . On this basis of material stability Orgoreyn had gradually built up a unified and increasingly efficient centralized state. Now Karhide was to pull herself together and do the same; Tibe [the counselor after Estraven] was after something surer, the sure, quick, and lasting way to make people into a nation: war. (*LHD* 101-2)

Tensions over the border between Karhide and Orgoreyn have aggravated the animosity between the two countries. After Estraven's deposition as king's counselor, Tibe aims to shape Karhide after Orgoreyn, attempting to shift the popular opinion by arousing fear and hatred. Orgoreyn has already started to gradually develop into a centralized nation. The two countries are moving in the direction of introducing war in their culture. Le Guin portrays societies that are not static but that are undergoing gradual change.

After leaving Karhide, Genly arrives to the modern state bureaucracy of Orgoreyn. Here,

> [t]he system of extended-family clans. . . was 'nationalized' several hundred years ago in Orgoreyn. No child over a year old lives with its parent or parents; all are brought up in the Commensal Hearths. There is no rank by descent. Private wills are not legal: a man dying leaves his fortune to the state. All start equal. But obviously they don't go on so. (*LHD* 115)

Orgoreyn is divided into Commensalities, a term that signifies the whole State, its sub-sections, its institutions, official posts, and citizens. The part and the whole are blurred in Orgoreyn. "Commensality" comes from "to eat together" and suggests a communal and cooperative form of living. As Genly observes, "people [are] trained from birth in a discipline of cooperation, obedience, submission to a group purpose ordered from above. The qualities of independence and decision were weakened in them" (173). While people are taught to cooperate with one another, they are also raised to obey orders. The

communalist aura is thus merely a façade revealing beneath it an authoritarian surveillance government that reduces individuality.

The governmental setup of Orgoreyn is symptomatic of the changes taking place on Gethen. Orgoreyn had become "an increasingly mobilizable society, a real nation-state . . . the Gethenians might have an excellent chance of achieving the condition of war" (49). It has become a centralized nation-state. It had started to gather weapons, establish prisons and labor camps, and form a secret police organization to surveil the population. All these are signs of an increasing tendency toward militarization.

Orgoreyn manifests a strong nationalistic vein accompanied by exclusionary politics toward foreigners. As the border Inspector tells Estraven, "[i]f you have no intention to return to your own country you will be sent to the Voluntary Farm, where there is a place for criminal riffraff, aliens, and unregistered persons. There is no other place for indigents and subversives in Orgoreyn" (79). The rigid border control is typical of an authoritarian state that represses dissidents. Orgoreyn has often been compared to the Soviet Union in that it seems to reflect the anxieties pervading the US about the USSR's invisible control through fear and labor camps. Yet its xenophobia also reflects US nationalism and its anti-immigrant politics of the Red Scare. Le Guin comments on the political dynamics of the time, implicitly criticizing both sides.

Among the most evident manifestations of the country's repressive politics is its institution of Voluntary Farms, which are described as a version of labor camps. As Genly states,

> [t]he regime of the Voluntary Farms is a fairly recent thing, limited to one country of the planet . . . At Pulefen Farm we were, as I said, underfed for the work we did, and our clothing . . . was completely inadequate for that winter climate. . . The intent of the place and its regime was punitive, but not destructive, and I think it might have been endurable, without the druggings and the examinations. (177-78)

Genly does not recognize the danger he is under in the midst of the political schemes in Orgoreyn. He is eventually arrested and sent to one such farm. In these farms, absent anywhere else on Gethen, prisoners are forced to work under severe conditions with little food and inadequate clothing. They are drugged and subjected to interrogations. They live in a condition that curbs their spirit and destroys their individuality. The country hides the violent repression of dissidents beneath a surface of neatness and respectability.

The exclusionary politics of Orgoreyn are reflected in its religion, the cult of Yomesh. Originally one with the Handdara, it departed from the latter. This religion has reinstated hierarchical dualistic thinking, especially the nature/culture divide. Estraven tells Genly that "[t]he Yomeshta would say that man's singularity is his divinity" (232). Genly realizes that they see themselves as "[l]ords of the Earth, yes. Other cults on other worlds have come to the same conclusion. They tend to be the cults of dynamic, aggressive, ecologybreaking cultures. Orgoreyn is in the pattern, in its way" (233). The notion of humans' singularity, shared by Earthly Western positions, validates human superiority over all other beings. This justifies an instrumental view of nature, seen as separate from culture. The progress myth grounded in the nature/culture divide is thus rehabilitated and lies at the root of the country's rapid changes.

The followers of Yomesh venerate a divinity called Meshe. Meshe represents "[o]ne center, one seeing, one law, one light" (163). The religion associates light with knowledge, valuing them over darkness and uncertainty. While the Handdara privileges darkness but recognizes the interdependence of darkness and light, the religion of Orgoreyn only embraces light: "[t]here is neither darkness nor death" (163). It perceives darkness as an illusion. Its hierarchical dualism is reasserted in the view of only one element in a pair as valuable. This denies the possibility of a dynamic balance of opposites.

The belief in progress and hierarchical dualisms is further reflected in the different notion of temporality expressed within the cult of Yomesh when compared to the Handdara religion: "[t]he Yomeshta count in 144-year cycles for the Birth of Meshe . . . but this system is strictly cultic and is not officially employed even by the government of Orgoreyn" (301-2). The Yomesh cult counts time from the birth of Meshe. While not officially employed by the government, the perception of time as linear and progressive could still be presumed to influence the country's culture.

One of the myths tied to the Yomesh cult echoes the Icelandic creation myth. This myth of Orgoreyn is, however, described as Pre-Yomesh. It thus finds its roots in the Handdara cult. It seems to blend both religions' worldviews. The myth states: "[i]n the beginning there was nothing but ice and the sun" (237). The sun melts the Ice, out of which emerge three shapes: "[o]ne of the ice-shapes said, 'I bleed.' Another of the ice-shapes said, 'I weep.' A third one said, 'I sweat.' . . . He that said 'I sweat,' he gathered up soil and seawater and with them made trees, plants, herbs and grains of the field, animals, and men" (237-8). The ice-shapes melt into milk that nourishes humans. Edondurath, the first to wake up, afraid of the other humans around him, kills them all except one. Gethenians were born out of the union of the last two survivors. This myth echoes the Icelandic creation myth. Like the pre-Yomesh myth, the lava from Muspelheim melted the ice from Niflheim. Out of the ice came the first ice-giant, Ymir. He gave life to other giants through his sweat like the story's third ice-shape. Milk also resurfaces in the Icelandic myth. The giants were nourished by the milk of a cow. More beings are created by the cow and giants, giving life to the first gods. The gods, like Edondurath, kill most of the giants. Ymir's body, however, gave shape to the land.

The myth depicts the shift from horizontal to vertical relations among beings. Abram argues:

> [i]n its earliest phases, this version of the pagan cosmos is nonhierarchical and nonteleological . . . There is no ontological distinction to be drawn between human, giant, god, animal, vegetable, and mineral . . . The fundamental development that takes place across this point of fracture is a transition . . . to a structured anthropocentrism . . . The gods occupy the subject position that human beings occupy in modernity and its antecedent worldviews, insisting upon an absolute separation of themselves from the objectified Other. (C. Abram 56)

The myth represents a transition from the non-dualistic world to the one that develops a hierarchical mindset that separates nature from culture and posits humans/gods above all other beings. The pre-Yomesh myth could be seen as depicting a similar shift from the non-dualistic mindset of the Handdara religion to the anthropocentric dualism of the Yomesh following its departure from the original Handdara.

Orgoreyn reproduces the violence at the root of its mythology and the exclusionary politics that it implies. Yet Genly ignores the signs of danger. On the contrary, upon his arrival in Mishnory, the capital of Orgoreyn, he is enthusiastic about a culture so different from that of Karhide. He describes the city: "Mishnory was cleaner, larger, lighter than Erhenrang, more open and imposing . . . There was no clutter and contortion, no sense of always being under the shadow of something high and gloomy, as in Erhenrang; everything was simple, grandly conceived, and orderly" (*LHD* 113-4). Genly here manifests his preference for the new country in comparison to the one he just left. The capital of Karhide, Erhenrang, is presented as gloomy, cluttered, irrationally designed, and chaotic. If Karhide is devalued for its darkness and disorder, Orgoreyn is prized for being its opposite. It is described as a place of light, clarity, cleanliness, and order.

Genly's appreciation for order is further reinforced. He relates that "[a] brief official bulletin repeated every so often said simply that order was being and would be maintained along the Eastern Border. I liked that; it was reassuring and unprovocative . . . order will be maintained" (112). Genly finds this assurance comforting. It strikes him as a sign of a civil government. This impression is confirmed by the comforts he finds in Mishnory. Unlike the spartan Karhide, Orgoreyn has heating systems, blankets, showers, and other services that seem luxuries to Genly. He sees these as signs of an advanced society.

Once again, Genly expresses his preference for Orgoreyn over Karhide in temporal terms. Orgoreyn "looked like a country ready to enter the Ekumenical Age" (114). Noticing that Mishnory lacked elegance, Genly states that "[e]legance is a small price to pay for enlightenment, and I was glad to pay it" (118). His comments imply that entering Mishnory feels like entering a new age. This temporal dimension is tied to enlightenment. Not only does this reinforce the tie between Orgoreyn and light as opposed to the dark Karhide, but it also echoes a historical period associated with order, reason, modernity, and brightness.

The departure of Orgoreyn from the medieval culture of Karhide is reinforced by its distancing from traditions associated with the Middle Ages. Genly is told that "[w]e don't have titles in Orgoreyn, dropped all that with the New Epoch" (144). This comment stresses the absence of titles in Orgoreyn. The latter is thus set apart from Karhide, where titles are used much like in the Middle Ages. It also suggests that this choice is seen as signaling the entrance into a new epoch removed from an outdated past. In praising Orgoreyn, Genly reinforces the divide the medieval/modern divide.

Genly ties Orgoreyn to the Enlightenment. The latter is rooted in a worldview that germinated with Renaissance humanism. It asserted the centrality of reason, knowledge, and the universalized notion of the human as Man. The superiority of Man was grounded in patriarchal Cartesian dualisms that objectify nature. This stance lies at the roots of Western culture, contributing to the current climate crisis (Braidotti, *Posthuman* 13-15; Eckersley 1-2; Rigby 65). Genly sets up the connection between the medieval Karhide and its non-anthropocentric religion with negative qualities of irrationality, darkness, and disorder. Orgoreyn and its "ecology-breaking" cult of Yomesh is located in a modern, superior temporal dimension associated with values—light, order, progress, and reason—whose roots can be traced to the Renaissance.

3. Genly's Character Development

Genly's limited perspective renders him unable to see the power struggle between the two countries in which he is involved. It is due to his close-mindedness that he is captured and imprisoned in Orgoreyn. He escapes thanks to Estraven, and together they journey across the glaciers to reach Karhide. Genly has been reluctant to embrace Gethenian worldviews. Only following his imprisonment does he start to change his mindset. He is forced to revise his opinions of Karhide, Orgoreyn, and of Gethen as a whole. The trek on the Gobrin Ice constitutes a pivotal moment for his character development. He starts to overcome dualistic thinking and to embrace difference. He slowly moves beyond the nature/culture, man/woman, and medieval/modern divides.

The exploration of the relationship between the Self and the Other toward acceptance is articulated through the growing bond between Genly and Estraven. Genly does not trust Estraven initially. On the ice, they finally have a chance to truly start communicating with each other. Estraven argues: "'I am the only man in all Gethen that has trusted you entirely, and I am the only man in Gethen that you have refused to trust . . . 'I'm sorry, Estraven'" (*LHD* 199). Estraven believes in Genly's mission to have Gethen be part of the Ekumen and tries to help him. Yet Genly repeatedly refuses any aid Estraven tries to extend to him. Only after being saved from the labor camp does Genly understand Estraven's positive intentions.

Their bond is strengthened by the hardship they face together. Initially, the glaciers are only seen as obstacles: "it was wild country, steep, full of creeks and ravines . . . I had time to wonder what I would do in this forsaken place if Estraven did not come back" (205). The landscape is described as wild and forsaken, a place of danger. Not to trust each other on such a journey would mean certain death. The characters realize they need to rely on one another to survive. Each is indispensable to the other.

Up to this point, the narrative merely reiterates traditional narratives of heroic explorers battling against the hostile wilderness. Svenja Engelmann-Kewitz comments on the little attention ice has received within environmental humanities. She argues that "landscapes as extreme as Arctica and Antarctica are way too hostile for humans to associate ideas of reconnecting with nature . . . They often remain tied to stories of survival and dominance and rarely to those of coexistence." The ice might seem so barren and lifeless, as Genly perceives it at first, that it cannot convey a sense of lively relational bonds between humans and the land. It is rather perceived as inimical to humans. Where one is the other cannot be.

However, Genly and Estraven's relationship is not merely forged out of shared adversities. They come to enjoy the experience and their surroundings. As Genly comments, "enormous letters of black and white DEATH, DEATH, written right across a continent. The sledge pulled like a feather, and we laughed with joy" (*LHD* 220). He further reveals that "[w]hat I was given was the thing you can't earn, and can't keep, and often don't even recognize at the time; I mean joy" (220). Despite the ominous landscape evoking death at every turn, Genly experiences joy due to the bond that is gradually established between himself, Estraven, and the ice.

The ice has often been seen as a metaphor for Gethenian society's immobility (Roberts, *SF* 91). Yet

it is more than that. It is presented as a physical material entity described in all its inconceivable beauty. Genly relates that "Estraven stood there in harness beside me looking at that magnificent and unspeakable desolation. 'I'm glad I have lived to see this,' he said. I felt as he did. It is good to have an end to journey towards; but it is the journey that matters, in the end" (220). The landscape is seen as magnificent and unspeakable. The characters feel a sense of awe for the beauty and greatness of the glaciers. They are no longer only focused on reaching their destination but are absorbed by the icy vastness around them.

Estraven carefully annotates in their journal the material features of the landscape. They pay special attention to the volcanoes in the midst of the glaciers: "[w]e creep infinitesimally northward through the dirty chaos of a world in the process of making itself. Praise then Creation unfinished!" (227). The activity of the volcanoes interacting with glaciers is seen as a generative act of dynamic and ongoing creation. Volcanoes are entities able to shape lands. Estraven acknowledges the lively agency of natural forces.

Ice is also viewed as something that has agency. It is described as such at multiple points: "[a]n arm of the glacier has withdrawn" (222); "ice-river running down from the plateau" (222); "[t]he world around us, ice and rock, ash and snow, fire and dark, trembles and twitches and mutters" (229). These descriptions highlight the nature of ice as, in Jane Bennett's terms, vibrant matter (x). The latter consists in the notion that all matter possesses vitality. As Bennett argues, "[b]y 'vitality' I mean the capacity of things . . . not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (viii). Both humans and nonhumans share a material status and are capable of agency. Divisions between them are minimized. Bennett's theory is located within posthumanist and new materialist stances on nonhumans.[106] Volcanoes and glaciers, while seemingly inert, move, preserve, create, and unmake.

By focusing on the material agencies of volcanoes and glaciers, the novel departs from tales depicting the elements as fierce antagonists. It rather configures them "as co-constitutive living things constantly being entered and entranced in a process I call going glacial" (Duckert 70). Lowell Duckert sees "going glacial" as a recognition of ice's agentic nature and of human co-implication with ice-scapes. Through his appreciation of glaciers, Genly unlearns to separate humans from the more-than-human. He learns to go glacial.

The volcanoes and glaciers lead Genly to define the territory as a "vastness of fire and ice" (220). This expression echoes ways of referring to Iceland as the "Land of Fire and Ice": "[v]olcanoes are a unique natural feature of this new landscape . . . In *Vǫluspá* [a poem of the *Poetic Edda*] . . . the natural and cultural spheres of the Icelandic experience are symbiotically related to one another. They are part of the same ecology" (C. Abram 17). Like in the case of Gethen, volcanoes and ice are integral aspects of Iceland's landscape and take on a cultural value. Research also suggests that expressions of aesthetic appreciation for the landscape similar to those of Genly and Estraven can be found in Old Norse literature

[106] See also Chen; Cohen "Posthuman"; Iovino and Opperman.

(Phelpstead 7-10; Waage).

Genly and Estraven also face a loss of orientation on the ice. Genly relates that "[t]here was dull light all around, everywhere. When we walked on the crisp snow no shadow showed the footprint . . . No sun, no sky, no horizon, no world . . . The illusion was so complete that I had trouble keeping my balance" (*LHD* 260). As Estraven suggests, "daylight's not enough. We need the shadows, in order to walk" (267). The shadows' absence in the diffused sunlight reflected on snow is called in the novel the Unshadow. After their experience in the Unshadow, Genly realizes the relational bond between what he thought of as irreconcilable opposites. He recognizes that light is truly nothing but the left hand of darkness.

Genly is slowly transformed by his contact with an alien person and an alien world. He realizes:

> I thought it was for your sake that I came alone, so obviously alone, so vulnerable, that I could in myself post no threat, change no balance: not an invasion, but a mere messenger-boy. But there's more to it than that. Alone, I cannot change your world. But I can be changed by it. Alone, I must listen, as well as speak. (259)

Envoys are sent alone to other planets so that they can be changed by the world with which they interact. The Ekumen's purpose is not to colonize other planets. It is to facilitate communication and cooperation.[107] Genly is put in the position to learn from Gethenians. He recognizes that communication is not possible without listening and embracing the Other's side. Through his immersion in the glacial landscape, Genly is changed by Gethen. He recognizes the entanglement of separate elements and the vibrant agency of the more-than-human and establishes an affective bond with the land and Estraven.

The experience on the ice brings Genly closer to the Handdara's rejection of hierarchical dualisms. The breakdown of the nature/culture divide leads to a crisis of dichotomic thinking in general. It is in fact during their trek through the glaciers that Genly finally comes to accept Estraven for who they are:

> [a]nd I saw then again, and for good, what I had always been afraid to see, and had pretended not to see in him: that he was a woman as well as a man . . . what I was left with was, at last, acceptance of him as he was. Until then I had rejected him, refused him his own reality . . . For he was the only one who had entirely accepted me as a human being . . . and who therefore had demanded of me an equal degree of recognition, of acceptance. (*LHD* 248)

Genly realizes that he had refused to see Estraven's identity due to his phobic mindset. By contrast, Estraven has fully accepted Genly from the start. Genly states: "[l]ight, dark. Fear, courage. Cold, warmth. Female, male. It is yourself, Therem. Both and one. A shadow on snow" (267). The breakdown of one divide is connected in Genly's mind to all others. His blurring of boundaries between nature and culture and man and woman invites him to revise his entire hierarchical dualistic mindset.

Genly accepts Estraven and comes to see him as a friend. He overcomes obstacles of communication and his prejudices and establishes an affective bond with one whom he had viewed as radically Other. Genly clarifies that "it was from the difference between us, not from the affinities and likenesses, but from the difference, that that love came" (249). The novel stresses that understanding and appreciation can move across species, sex, gender, and race not in spite of differences, but in virtue of that

[107] See Cornell 322; Higgins 336. Not all critics agree on this point. See Hay 4-5.

very alterity. The latter is not to be seen as antithetical, but simply as another equally valid mode of being. The novel rejects early SF masculine patterns of conquest or assimilation of aliens. It focuses on forming ethical inter-species bonds.

Genly's internalization of the Gethenian worldview can be evinced by his reaction to the arrival of his colleagues. He comments: "[t]o her eyes we were all aliens . . . they all looked strange to me, men and women, well as I knew them" (296). He associates himself with the Gethenians—the aliens—rather than with members of his own species. The relation between the Self and the Other appears subverted. He sees his companions as strange in view of their differentiation into men and women. He has become so accustomed to Gethenians' intersexual nature that he feels discomfort at the idea of a gender binary.

He has the opposite reaction when meeting a Gethenian doctor. Genly finds the non-binary traits of Gethenians to be more familiar: "[h]is quiet voice and his face, a young, serious face, not a man's face and not a woman's, a human face, these were a relief to me, familiar, right" (296). Interacting with a Gethenian feels more natural than any encounter with his own kind. He feels relief at the doctor's fluid sexual and gender identity. The experience on Gethen has altered how Genly perceives himself and others. He values dynamic multiple identities over rigid modes of embodiments. He no longer identifies as Terran, but as a Gethenian. In this sense, he comes closer to posthuman beings.

Finally, Genly shows that he has assimilated Gethenian thought by walking to the Domain where Estraven's family lives. He travels there to commemorate the death of his friend, who was killed for returning from exile. He describes his journey: "I walked east and south into the steep harsh country full of crags and green hills and great rivers and lonely houses" (298). While the envoys "had been authorized to use the aircars" (297), Genly decides to walk. As Alice Jenkins argues, the "emphasis on pedestrian travel subverts any teleological reading . . . refusing to privilege origins and destinations over journeys and routes" (328). Genly has departed from his original Terran tastes for fast modes of transportation. He rejects the politics of speed that Nixon identifies at the roots of turbo-capitalism. Like Gethenians, he has become more attuned to slower paces. He gets to enjoy the journey rather than focusing on the destination.

His change of mindset extends to his opinion of Karhide and Orgoreyn. Genly's acknowledgment of the mutual necessity of both light and darkness carries with it a reevaluation of each country. He recognizes that a place with only light such as Orgoreyn is, like the Unshadow, dangerous and deceitful. It is in Orgoreyn that Genly is deceived and imprisoned almost to his death. The country he had viewed as the most modern, civilized, and enlightened is revealed to be the one most capable of brutal violence.

Concerning Karhide, Genly had initially associated the medieval-like country with the Dark Ages. While the official religion of the country itself privileges darkness, Genly's use of the term carries a negative connotation of irrationality and backwardness. Through his experience in the Unshadow, however, Genly realizes the crucial role played by shadows. Darkness is reevaluated in positive terms. The reconsideration of darkness also leads to reexamining the Middle Ages itself. As Genly comments after arriving back to Karhide, "I fell asleep with a pleasant sense of security, an assurance of Karhide's

extraordinary and unfailing kindness to the stranger. I had landed in the right country in the first place" (280). Karhide is reconsidered as a place of safety and of kindness. It is now seen as the right country where to accomplish his mission. It is in fact the first to accept Genly's invitation to join the Ekumen.

Genly is initially arrested upon coming back to Karhide. He describes how he is treated in prison:

> [f]rom the start . . . they treated me well. My Karhidish jail was a furnished room in the Tower of the Lords-Elect in Sassinoth; I had a fireplace, a radio, and five large meals daily. It was not comfortable. The bed was hard, the covers thin, the floor bare, the air cold—like any room in Karhide. But they sent in a physician . . . I think the door was left unlocked. (284-5)

Genly's stay in the prison in Karhide differs radically from that in the Voluntary Farm. In the latter, he was under-fed, under-clothed, drugged, and forced to work even as his health deteriorated. In Karhide, he is treated with dignity. He is provided with basic but essential services. The novel reinforces the idea that the supposedly backward and irrational country is far more humane than the one deemed more civilized.

However, far from presenting an unambiguous victory of Karhide over Orgoreyn, the novel highlights problematic aspects of both countries and, through them, critical aspects of the world beyond the novel. On the one hand, Orgoreyn represents the risks of an unrestrained desire for progress and expansion leading to an "ecology-breaking" mentality. It also embodies the danger of authoritarian, militarized, and oppressive governments. On the other hand, Karhide is also criticized for the fickleness of its leaders who are either egotistical lunatics or sly political schemers. Furthermore, despite the service paid to their country, Estraven is killed as a traitor for having returned from exile. Neither country is presented as perfect.

The re-evaluation of the two countries does not thus merely subvert the original presupposition that Orgoreyn is superior to Karhide. Rather, following the notion that darkness and light are necessary to one another, the novel depicts the complex and dynamic nature of balance and of processes of ongoing change. Genly asks Estraven the reason for helping him: "'[w]hat were you after?' 'I was after what you're after: the alliance of my world with your worlds . . . 'You mean, even if it was Orgoreyn that made the alliance—?' 'Even if it was Orgoreyn. Karhide would soon have followed'" (198). Estraven privileges the values embodied by the Ekumen—"communication, trade, treaty, and alliance" (85)—over affiliations to any particular country. Here it is possible to witness Le Guin's transnational thrust. Estraven is more focused on what he believes might benefit the planet as a whole rather than fixating on the primacy of his own homeland. National borders are transcended in light of a wider scope of intercultural cooperation.

Karhide and Orgoreyn are necessary for each other just as much as light and darkness are. Genly embraces a mindset typical of Karhide in recognizing the interdependence between the two thanks to Estraven's input. The medieval is no longer seen as a backward antecedent temporal dimension. It is presented as coeval and complementary to Orgoreyn. The blurring of the medieval/modern divide is accompanied by Genly's rejection of the nature/culture and man/woman divides. The crisis of one dualism leads to the breakdown of dichotomic thinking as a whole. As Kate Soper argues,

[n]o longer automatically conceived as a relatively primitive staging post en route to some higher

> telos or more sophisticated stage of human understanding and self-realization, that which has gone before can be revisited not only as a source of instruction on the present, but also as existing in some kind of intellectual and developmental parity with it… once confidence in the Enlightenment discourses of human identity and historical 'progress' has been eroded, the pre-Enlightenment past can no longer be so readily judged as less cognitively informative or culturally advanced. (256)

Once the medieval/modern divide is blurred, the present can no longer claim an ethical or epistemological superiority over the past. The latter is not only able to present lessons for the present, but it can dialogue with it on an equal plane. The medieval society in the novel in fact provides a model of ecological and inclusive posthumanism that can speak to contemporary times in the midst of a climate crisis.

Many scholars have criticized the view of the Middle Ages as static and dark, which were similar to Genly's first impressions of Karhide.[108] Critics of the rigid medieval/modern divide such as Kathleen Davis (*Periodization*), Carolyn Dinshaw (*How Soon is Now*), and Thomas A. Prendergast and Stephanie Trigg (*Affective Medievalism*) refer to Bruno Latour in order to support their argument. Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern* has been widely debated since its publication. While being highly influential, it has also been criticized by several scholars.[109] At the same time, the work has been taken up by scholars of medievalism for its nonlinear and layered notions of temporality and by posthumanists for its ideas on trans-species agencies and relationality. Latour's work is useful in highlighting the connection between these two fields. Indeed, he ties the premodern/modern divide with the nature/culture one:

> [a]s the moderns also extended this Great Divide [between Them - all the other cultures - and Us - the westerners] in time after extending it in space, they felt themselves absolutely free to give up following the ridiculous constraints of their past which required them to take into account the delicate web of relations between things and people. (39)

What Latour defines as the "modern Constitution" of the seventeenth century has ensured that Western modernity considers itself as both separated from Others associated with the past and from nature.

He suggests that it is no longer possible to sustain the notion of a linear temporality—of "time as an irreversible arrow, as capitalization, as progress" (69)—because we have never been modern. He argues:

> [w]e have all reached the point of mixing up times . . . Let us suppose, for example, that we are going to regroup the contemporary elements along a spiral rather than a line . . . Such a temporality does not oblige us to use the labels 'archaic' or 'advanced', since every cohort of contemporary elements may bring together elements from all times. In such a framework, our actions are recognized at last as polytemporal. (75).

Latour substitutes a linear idea of temporality with that of polytemporality. Le Guin's medievalism is an

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[108] Davis defines periodization as "not simply the drawing of an arbitrary line through time, but a complex process of conceptualizing categories, which are posited as homogeneous and retroactively validated by the designation of a period divide" (*Periodization* 3).

[109] Crystal Bartolovich, speaking "for 'modernity,' for the 'human,' and even for 'progress'" (18), opposes the critique of modernity, progress, and rigid periodizations of Latour and of scholars from medieval and medievalism studies who follow him by suggesting that such critique is an obstacle to the development of marginalized groups who are precluded from enjoying the benefits of progress. She also laments that he does not sufficiently factor in capitalism as a source of oppression and his skepticism toward notions of revolution. Such accusations have been directed to him by others as well (Hornborg; Malm, *Progress*; Noys). Eco-Marxist Andreas Malm also criticizes Latour's blurring of the lines between the social and the natural and notions of hybridism. Both Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway, while borrowing some of his concepts, lament that his flat ontology does not sufficiently consider questions of power, knowledge, and subjectivity. See Bartolovich; Braidotti, "Framework" 42; Haraway, "Promise of Monsters"; Hornborg 119; Malm, *Progress*; Noys.

expression of polytemporality, whereby notions of archaic and advanced are questioned through Genly's revised views on Karhide and Gethen. In Le Guin, the past is not surpassed, but retrieved in fragments that are reassembled to create new medievalist wholes. Her medievalism also resists notions of the Middle Ages as monolithic. She combines medieval aspects ranging temporally and geographically from Old Norse paganism and Icelandic settlement to feudal institutions of the High Middle Ages and monasticism.

4. *The Left Hanf of Darkness* as a Medievalist Carrier Bag of Fiction and a Critical Utopia

Through Genly's character development, Le Guin advances at once a critique of exclusionary medievalisms and an affirmation of an alternative medievalist model. On the one hand, she reveals the inaccuracy of Genly's initial assumptions about Karhide and Orgoreyn. She shows the limits of his masculinist, speciesist, and dualistic perception resting on a belief in a progressivist notion of history that values modernity over the medieval. On the other hand, she presents a medievalist model that offers an ethical understanding of interpersonal and interspecies relational bonds. The latter embodies the possibility of "opening up of a world without temporalized violence against that which is different and distant" (Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* 20). The medieval Karhide in fact is retrieved from the temporal margins to which Genly had relegated it. He also embraces Karhide's own non-dualistic mindset that pays attention to relational networks of interdependent trans-species entities. Genly is thus changed by his close contact with the alien Other and an alien world.

In presenting a critique of exclusionary medievalisms as well as offering an affirmative alternative, Le Guin seems to apply her own theory of the carrier bag to the novel. Although she wrote "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction" in 1986, several years after the publication of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, the novel already fits the parameters described in the essay. Here the author laments traditional quest narratives revolving around the male hero and his "killer story" of conquest. She defines these stories as having the shape of an arrow or a spear: "the proper shape of the narrative is that of the arrow or spear, starting here and going straight there and THOK! hitting its mark (which drops dead); . . . the central concern of the narrative, including the novel, is conflict" (*Dancing* 169). Here Le Guin criticizes narratives of linear progress. In such stories, the focus is on violence, competition, and domination. This very narrative structure characterizes many works of early SF, such as Burroughs's Mars series. Le Guin is critical of such regressive and exclusionary narratives. Instead, she advocates for a new kind of narrative: "we've all heard all about all the sticks and spears and swords . . . but we have not heard about the thing to put things in, the container for the thing contained. That is a new story" (*Dancing* 167). This new narrative presents itself as a carrier bag. It revolves around gathering and collecting things, experiences, knowledge, diverse things bundled together.

Commenting upon Le Guin's theory, Donna Haraway embraces her carrier bag concept. She criticizes the quest pattern wherein there is "only one real actor, one real world-maker, the hero, this is the Man-making tale of the hunter on a quest to kill and bring back the terrible bounty. . . All others in the

prick tale are props, ground, plot space, or prey. They don't matter; their job is to be in the way, to be overcome, to be the road, the conduit" (*Staying* 39). Haraway comments on how the stories rejected by Le Guin presume one single hero. Everyone else is either a secondary character or an enemy to be defeated to be able to claim supremacy. Haraway suggests that carrier bag stories can give rise to "stories of becoming-with, of reciprocal induction, of companion species" (119) and "tales to use for retelling, or reseeding, possibilities for getting on now, as well as in deep earth history" (119). Stories about containers rather than weapons can generate a heightened ethical understanding of interdependent multispecies realities. Such tales do not erase prior ones. They constitute a revision of conquest narratives. The new meanings illuminate both the present and the past.

Both Le Guin and Haraway's views lament the flaws of traditional quest patterns focusing on the mastery over nature and the marginalization of all those who do not fit into the role of the hero. Le Guin subverts this narrative within her works. *The Left Hand of Darkness* follows this pattern. As Vera Benczik argues, "Le Guin's narratives can be read as critical reenactments of the traditional quest romance" (178). Her work engages with the regressive medievalism of traditional quest narratives that had been absorbed into early SF works. It challenges the values they generally support through a logic of recycling and transformation.

At first glance, the novel does appear to follow a quest pattern. Genly arrives to a realm of alterity, visits medieval-like courts, travels across the planet's wilderness, and has a mission to accomplish. Yet the novel unsettles the trope of the powerful hero defeating enemies and saving damsels in distress. Estraven argues that "[t]here is a frailty about [Genly]. He is all unprotected, exposed, vulnerable" (*LHD* 227). Unlike traditional heroes, Genly does not come across as fearsome and undefeatable, but as fragile and vulnerable. Rather than saving damsels in distress, he becomes the damsel in distress saved by Estraven.

Furthermore, the story's beginning is set in Spring. Genly relates: "it was spring of the Year One in Erhenrang, capital city of Karhide" (*LHD* 2). This temporal setting is typical of traditional quest romances. However, as Albrecht Classen argues "[c]ourtly romance, courtly love poetry, and even heroic epics are usually set in the time of spring and summer or do not reflect upon external conditions; the heroes do not suffer from cold and snow, nature is pleasant" (125).[110] Spring in romances and on Gethen differ significantly. Even during the Spring, Gethen's weather conditions are not mild: "[t]he snow still fell, a mild spring blizzard" (*LHD* 10). Unlike in courtly romances, Genly does suffer from the cold and repeatedly describes the planet as hostile. In a parallel manner, in medieval quest romances, "[t]he enemy is associated with winter, darkness, confusion, sterility, moribund life, and old age" (Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* 187-8). Le Guin initially sets up this expectation. Genly sees the weather as an enemy and darkness as negative. Yet the trek on the Ice reverses this pattern by having Genly experience an appreciation for the cold landscape. The latter is no longer seen as an enemy. The negative connotation of

[110] Classen, however, notes that there are exceptions to this rule (128-50)

darkness is also subverted as it is eventually seen as necessary.

Le Guin also advocates for challenging the linear progression typical of quest narratives. She theorizes carrier bag narratives as defying "the linear, progressive, Time's-(killing)-arrow mode" (*Dancing* 170). This rejection also applies to *The Left Hand of Darkness*. The chapters written from Genly's perspective in a linear fashion are interspersed with others that interrupt the plot's progression. Oppong's report describing Gethenians was written before Genly's arrival on Gethen. Estraven's chapters often recount events that have already been addressed in Genly's chapters from a different viewpoint. Other chapters containing legends are also weaved into the work, projecting the reader into Gethen's historical or mythical past.

Le Guin also argues that while conflict can be present, it should not be the main focus. The carrier bag story should be "full of beginnings without ends, of initiations, of losses, of transformations and translations, and far more tricks than conflicts, far fewer triumphs than snares and delusions; full of spaceships that get stuck, missions that fail, and people who don't understand" (*Dancing* 169). Such stories open the character to failures. Genly "came alone, without arms or defense, with nothing but a communicating device, and his ship" (*LHD* 85). His quest is not centered on conquering Gethen nor on violent conflict. Rather, it is aimed at initiating intercultural cooperation. His mission is also fraught with many failings—a failure to understand Gethenians, to perceive the plot against him, and to help the friend who had helped him.

In this light, *The Left Hand of Darkness* can be seen as having the shape of a carrier bag. It recycles and revises medieval patterns. It decenters notions of competition, conflict, and conquest. Instead, the work focuses on gathering and collecting experiences, information, and affects. The work, in line with Le Guin's theory, embraces an ethics of care that welcomes difference—of race, gender, species—without establishing hierarchies. It offers a model for multispecies flourishing even in extreme conditions. This appears extremely relevant in a day and age when the world is suffering the effects of a climate crisis. While the Gethenian climate is not anthropogenic, it challenges its inhabitants to adapt and survive. The model of Karhide suggests that it is possible to adopt an ethical mode of relating to the more-than-human even under a condition of extreme climatic patterns and to respect difference rather than neutralize it.

At the same time, the novel does not present Karhide unproblematically as a utopian society. According to Darko Suvin, utopia can be defined as "the verbal construction of a particular quasi human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community" (*Metamorphoses* 49). To be considered utopian, a society must feature some aspects that work better than in the author's own world or society. Utopias thus propose alternative realities by implicitly criticizing the current ones at any given historical time. Many critics have argued for the classification of the novel as a utopia (Jameson, "World Reduction" 224; Keulen 93; Roberts, *SF* 77). Such critics locate the work within a wider rekindling of the utopian

impulse in connection to the emancipation movements of the 1960s.[111] Le Guin follows the blueprint offered by Thomas More's early sixteenth-century utopian society. The main character travels to arrive to a removed place, visits the society, and learns about its cultural and social organization radically different from their own. This plotline, which can also be detected in *The Left Hand of Darkness,* is shared by numerous utopias written from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. Le Guin's work especially echoes William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890) (Brigg 41). Morris, like Le Guin, uses medieval models for his utopian society. He similarly criticizes notions of unrestrained progress and the exploitative nature of industrial capitalism.[112]

On the other hand, the novel does not seem the expression of a purely utopian vision. Le Guin herself states that "the question arises, Is the book a Utopia? It seems to me that it is quite clearly not; it poses no practicable alternative to contemporary society, since it is based on an imaginary, radical change in human anatomy" (*Language of the Night* 171). Le Guin denies the possibility that the novel may be a utopia in that the change it describes is unattainable. It could be argued, however, that doubts concerning its utopian nature revolve more around the continuance of exploitation and injustice in the societies depicted in the novel.

> Other scholars suggest that the work is a critical utopia. Tom Moylan defines them as works aware of the limitations of the utopian tradition, so that these texts reject utopia as a blueprint while preserving it as a dream. Furthermore, the novels dwell on the conflict between the originary world and the utopian society opposed to it so that the process of social change is more directly articulated. Finally, the novels focus on the continuing presence of difference and imperfection within utopian society itself (*Demand* 10–11).

In the novel, imperfection in the form of conflict, power imbalance, and deceit are retained and criticized. It does not present a society that has already achieved a perfect state and is thus unchanging. Rather, it shows two societies in constant flux. Not all of these changes are presented as positive. The threat of war looms over the two countries. Despite this, Le Guin offers a model of society rooted in medievalism that mingles environmentalism, technological knowledge, and a departure from binary notions of sex and gender. She unites critique and creative alternatives together. Le Guin suggests that SF "is an essential guide to our understanding of what we ourselves are and may become" (qtd. Flood and Lee). What is represented in Karhide's more ethical ecological approach is a possibility for the world beyond the novel to adopt a different approach to the more-than-human realm. While not being a utopia, the novel offers a utopian impulse. It does so by showing an alternative society questioning progress, violence, and sexism.

5. Conclusions

Despite its flaws and outdated aspects, *The Left Hand of Darkness* still speaks powerfully to current times more than fifty years after its publication and still enjoys great popularity among scholars and readers.

[111] See Fitting 143.
[112] However, in mingling the medieval with modern technological features, Le Guin dispenses with Morris's nostalgic vision of a return to a pre-industrial pastoral past in the future.

While the novel does not present an entirely utopia vision, it offers at once both a critique of regressive and exclusionary medievalisms resting on dominant Western discourses as well as an alternative medievalist model grounded in an ecological approach toward the more-than-human world.

At first glance, the novel seems to reiterate the narrative patterns typical of early SF works such as Burroughs's Mars series. The work presents itself as an exploration of the relationship between the Self and alien Others. Genly's initial attitude is one defined by a perceived superiority over Gethenians. His outlook on the culture and identity of the planet's inhabitants is deeply biased and close-minded. This forestalls his ability to embrace Gethenians' posthuman nature as hybrid cyborg beings that defy separations between organism and machine, human and nonhuman, and man and woman. The same attitude is evident in Genly's response to the planet's climate. He perceives the planet itself as inimical. Genly thus reiterates the divides that lie at the foundation of dominant Earthly Western modes of thinking.

The same biased mindset is also directed toward the two countries he explores on Gethen. He evaluates the medieval-like monarchy of Karhide and the modern state bureaucracy of Orgoreyn according to his cultural standards. The two countries coexist on Gethen on a plane of coevality. Yet Genly defines the separation between the two countries in temporal terms. Karhide is at first deemed as a dark past temporal dimension associated with disorder, irrationality, and backwardness. By contrast, Orgoreyn is seen as a country that has entered a new age of enlightenment. It is tied to order, reason, knowledge, light, and clarity.

With the plot's progression, Genly starts to revise his original views. He understands that darkness and light, respectively associated with Karhide and Orgoreyn, are essential to one another. Orgoreyn is revealed to be much less "enlightened" than it was originally believed to be. On the other hand, Genly retrieves the medieval-like Karhide from the temporal margins to which he had relegated it and modifies positively his assessment of the country. The countries finally are placed on the same temporal plane.

The blurring of the medieval/modern divide is inscribed within the work's questioning of dichotomic thinking in general, and specifically of the nature/culture divide. Genly's reevaluation of both countries takes place during and after his trek on the Gobrin Ice with Estraven. During the journey, Genly adapts to and is changed by Gethen's more-than-human realm. He recognizes the entanglement and reciprocal necessity of apparently opposite elements. He acknowledges the vibrant agency of the more-than-human. Finally, he establishes an affective bond with the land and Estraven. He thus comes to accept the medieval Karhide, Gethenians' posthuman identity, and the planet's ecological conditions.

By presenting Genly's change of heart, the novel upsets linear and progressivist notions of history that see the modern as superseding the medieval. It rejects the notion of the Middle Ages as a dark, barbaric, and static period of time. Not only does Le Guin present the medieval and the modern as coeval, but she also depicts precarious balances between societies undergoing complex and dynamic processes of ongoing change. She also avoids monolithic depictions of the Middle Ages by taking inspiration from different cultural traditions of the period that range both geographically and temporally.

Le Guin counters exclusionary medievalisms that have served to marginalize multiple trans-species Others. She subverts this mode by presenting Karhide as a medievalist paradigm of posthumanist ecological thinking that departs from hegemonic concepts of modernity and progress. It entertains a horizontal relationship with the more-than-human realm and embraces multiple forms of alterity that cross species boundaries. Her medievalism, however, refuses to depict a romanticized Middle Ages associated with a return to a pristine wilderness as opposed to modern culture. The medieval setting is accompanied by a presence of technological features. She presents a medievalism that blends medieval references and technological innovations with a concern for environmentalism, gender equality, and pacifism.

In this light, *The Left Hand of Darkness* takes the shape of a carrier bag. The novel collects multiple concerns together, showing the ties that bind different marginalized categories. Furthermore, it revises medievalist patterns revolving around quests of conquest and dominion over the Others. Rather, the work focuses on gathering experiences, information, and affects. It embraces an ethics of care that welcomes multiple forms of alterity and embraces a posthumanist ethical understanding of multispecies relational and reciprocal bonds within a nature-culture continuum. *The Left Hand of Darkness* thus continues to hold relevance in today's age of the Anthropocene in that it suggests the possibility of humans and more-than-humans coinhabiting worlds without prevarication, exploitation, and domination. The novel decenters humans in favor of a posthuman hybrid nonconformity, pointing toward possibilities of multispecies flourishing even under extreme and harsh conditions.

Chapter Four: Post-Apocalyptic Meta-Medievalism in Russell Hoban's *Riddley Walker*

1. Introduction

This chapter analyses Russell Hoban's post-apocalyptic *Riddley Walker* (1980). The work is read as an example of a late-twentieth-century SF novel that reflects on the US anxieties triggered by the nuclear threats of the Cold War period. It depicts the world brought to ruins by a nuclear apocalypse. One of the few surviving artifacts of the pre-apocalyptic culture is a text that describes a medieval painting of the legend of St. Eustace in Canterbury Cathedral. This chapter aims to discuss how the medieval artifact becomes a tool through which the novel's society explains its current condition. On the one hand, the legend is read as a cautionary tale on the risks of repeating past errors. On the other, it is interpreted as a narrative that justifies unrestrained progress. This chapter argues that the novel presents a form of meta-medievalism that dramatizes the way medieval models are decontextualized and reinterpreted. This has wide implications for how the society within the novel relates to the more-than-human.

This chapter also follows the main character, Riddley Walker, in his transition from an acceptance of his community's mindset to the development of his own personal outlook on the world that questions established dominant cultural values. Riddley's character growth depends on medieval models that he finds on his journey of discovery. This chapter presents the rejection of nuclear power and the embrace of interspecies networks as central to the main character. The dogs that accompany him along the way, his vision of the medieval Green Man, and the puppet of Punch appear all fundamental for the protagonist's development. Both the Green Man and Punch are interpreted in light of posthumanist ecocritical theory and Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque. The novel demonstrates how medieval models can both reinforce anthropocentric stances and promote respect for multispecies entanglements.

1.1. The Plot

Riddley Walker was written in 1980 by the US author Russell Hoban. Before moving to England in 1969, Hoban had been known as an author of children's books. Yet in England he started publishing novels targeted to adult readership. *Riddley Walker* is listed among the latter works and has received the most critical attention among the author's corpus. It also won a Nebula Award in 1981. The novel is set in Kent over two centuries after a nuclear event that has destroyed civilization. Humanity has since rebuilt itself to a basic level of development. Among the traces of the previous civilization, there is a medieval painting of the legend of St. Eustace. The legend is turned into an origin story of the post-apocalyptic condition that revolves around Eusa, the scientist responsible for the nuclear detonation. The story is transmitted through traveling puppet shows performed by the government authorities of Abel Goodparley and Erny Orfing. The puppet shows circulate the story's official interpretation. Yet the novel's society is slowly changing and the Eusa story is reinterpreted in a such a way that it may justify the pursuit of nuclear power.

The novel follows the protagonist, Riddley Walker, in his path from acceptance of the narrative transmitted by the government—the Mincery—to a questioning of his society's ideologies. He escapes from his community after finding the puppet of Punch, which signals the presence of other stories that his government keeps hidden. He follows a pack of dogs to where the Mincery has imprisoned Lissener, the "Ardship of Cambry" and member of the Eusa folk, the descendants of Eusa who are said to retain nuclear knowledge. The Ardship is ritually interrogated by the Mincery every twelve years, after which he is murdered. Riddley frees Lissener and together they find sulfur, one of the presumed ingredients for nuclear bombs. Then they part ways. Lissener goes to Canterbury to find the Eusa folk and Riddley looks for Belnot Phist to form an alliance with him against Goodparley's rule. Yet Riddley is captured by Goodparley, who performs for him a show about Punch. Goodparley eventually sets Riddley free.

Riddley heads to Canterbury to find Lissener. He feels a growing desire for nuclear power. However, the dogs lead him to Canterbury Cathedral's crypt, where he sees a medieval Green Man. From that moment on, he no longer craves nuclear knowledge. Afterward, Riddley finds Lissener, who has formed an alliance with Orfing in order to gain power and punish Goodparley. The latter is captured, made blind, and released. He and Riddley decide to start a new puppet show. However, they meet Granser, Goodparley's abusive father, who believes to know the formula for nuclear power. One of the ingredients is the sulfur Riddley has with him. By mixing the ingredients, Granser accidentally creates gunpowder. In the explosion, Granser and Goodparley are killed. Riddley then encounters Orfing, who lets him know that Lissener had also died in an explosion caused by gunpowder. Together, Riddley and Orfing start a traveling puppet show based on Punch.

1.2. The (Post-)Apocalyptic Genre, the Historical Context of the Novel, and Nuclear Anxieties

The novel belongs to the SF post-apocalyptic subgenre. The latter "represents the survival of individuals . . . and/or societies . . . after a catastrophic event" (Malvestio 28). It grapples with the collapse of societies and ecosystems. The Western notion of apocalypse developed in a religious context. One of its main meanings is that of unveiling what was previously hidden (B. Moore 39-40). Thus, the apocalypse does not merely stand for the end of the world, but for the imminence of a new one through the second coming of Christ. Yet as Olivia Murphy suggests, "apocalypse seems largely to have shrugged off its ancient meaning of 'revelation' and now stands in for any end-of-the-world scenario" (245). The apocalyptic imagination has largely departed from the concept's theological implications and has become secularized in narratives that imagine the collapse of modern civilization following catastrophic events (Garrard 89; Hicks 2; Kovacs and Rowland 7-11; Tate 12).

Apocalyptic narratives have existed for centuries, and each epoch developed its own apocalyptic imagination in response to the socio-cultural anxieties of the time (Mussgnug 1150). Post-apocalyptic works started to develop in British and US SF within early-nineteenth century "Last Man" narratives, which were a response to emerging anxieties about the impact of human activities on the more-than-

human world and of technological development (Nicholls 581; Rigby 67-8; Seed 3). A good example could be Mary Shelley's *The Last Man* (1826). However, most post-apocalyptic works up to the mid-twentieth century do not critically reflect on the anthropogenic nature of catastrophes. Rather, the blame is placed on factors outside human responsibility (Stableford, "SF and Ecology" 137).

Post-apocalyptic works received a surge in popularity in the second half of the twentieth century. Increasing awareness of overpopulation, pollution, resource exhaustibility, and ecological degradation have led to a proliferation of such narratives. Emphasis was placed on various anthropogenic catastrophes (Heise, *Sense* 26; B. Moore 222). Many works focused on the atomic threat and the effects of radiation in response to anxieties triggered by the WWII Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings (Brians 54-5; Hicks 3; Nicholls 582). While nuclear power was already addressed in earlier SF works, such as *Flash Gordon*, the works of the second half of the century departed from the triumphalist mode of seeing atomic power as a possible tool for US supremacy (P. Sharp 122-130). As the nuclear weapon transitioned from the realm of SF to that of reality, SF works started to reflect fears of nuclear annihilation.

The Cold War gave great impetus to post-apocalyptic narratives on atomic warfare. They became especially prominent in the 1970s and 1980s as the tension between the US and the URSS escalated. It is within this context that Russell Hoban wrote *Riddley Walker.* The novel manifests the nuclear anxieties felt more in the US than in any other country. The author himself has stressed the way the work reflects the cultural imagination of the period: "perhaps if we look at possible projections, we can back away before they actually happen . . . If you ask me what are the probabilities of a nuclear war now, all I can say is that the dangers of it proliferate" (qtd. E. Myers). Rather than envisioning the nuclear threat as a limited concern of the Cold War, Hoban stresses the future increase of the possibility that another bomb may be detonated. He sees the role of fiction as one of making projections in order to prevent such scenarios.

Scholars discuss whether an apocalyptic imagination still endures. Buell argues that apocalypticism has been superseded by the sense of ongoing crisis (*Way of Life*, xiv), while others, like Killingsworth and Palmer, suggest that it is alive and well (Heise, *Sense* 141-2). The proliferation of twenty-first-century post-apocalyptic fiction proves that it has not exhausted its power of attraction. The anxieties of the Cold War are even more pronounced, albeit in different ways, in the globalized present and are evident in such works as Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (Hantke 15; Neagu 242). Twenty-first-century anxieties mostly center on the War on Terror, climate change, and neoliberal capitalism (Hicks 3; Tate 5).

1.3. Post-Apocalypse and Medievalism

Many scholars argue that the atomic and ecological anxieties of the US within apocalyptic SF since the mid-twentieth century bear similarities to the fears of the end due to hunger, plagues, and war that fired medieval imaginations (Delumeau, *Sin and Fear* 96-7; Eco 79; Falconieri 18-9).[113] While Frank Kermode believes that such parallels can be attributed to the recursive nature of apocalyptic anxieties (95-6),

[113] Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul Freedman do not agree on this point (15).

contemporary manifestations of a "sense of an ending" seem grounded in real climatic, economic, political, and military threats of unprecedented dimensions.

Furthermore, a sense that modernity is turning into a new Middle Ages has pervaded public discourse. This can be witnessed in discussions that warn against the arrival of the new Dark Ages (Berman; Falconieri 13-5; Ferguson; Ph. Williams) and in SF works that translate the apocalyptic vision of the future into a medieval past (Hantke 3; Kaufman, "Unmoored" 6). As Fredric Jameson argues in discussing the Unknowability Thesis, if the apocalypse is an unprecedented event that stands for a radical alterity, "human beings cannot really imagine and represent the radical Other–whether this is utopia, alien life, the future, or . . . the apocalypse and its aftermath" (De Cristofaro, "Impasse" 67). Human imagination cannot picture anything beyond its power of perception. Post-apocalyptic worlds, especially from the 1970s onwards, thus resemble what is known as the historical medieval past (Falconieri 17). Post-apocalyptic medievalism can already be found much earlier in works such as Richard Jefferies's *After London* (1885) and mid-twentieth-century works.[114]

Although there exists some variation among medievalist post-apocalyptic texts, most feature waste-landed worlds devoid of technology and large-scale social structures, with small communities who rely on hunting and gathering, repressive political or religious regimes, and/or bands of neobarbarians that ride on horseback and yield pseudo-medieval weapons. In certain instances, "the fact that these imagined futures are colored in 'medieval' hues betrays a fear that the darkness of the Middle Ages might return should the triumphant visions of Golden Age SF fail and its rational male heroes (and readers) forget to assert their modernity through the ongoing progress of science and technology" (Paz 223). The presentation of modernity as neomedieval reinforces the view of the Middle Ages as a dark period.[115] As Nicholls argues in his discussion of post-apocalyptic narratives (583), especially in the 1980s, the post-catastrophic setting becomes a backdrop for neobarbarian tales of masculine conflict and survival.

Language is often used as a tool for authors to highlight "primitive" or "neobarbarian" settings. *The Wake* (2014) by Paul Kingsnorth, for instance, is written in a fictional language that mixes Old English and Modern English in order to highlight the novel's medieval setting (Hsy, "Language Ecologies" 376-8; Walkowitz 101-4). The use of language to characterize "primitive" scenarios is also frequent in post-apocalyptic works. The societies in such novels often speak dialects that depart from Standard English and feature neologisms and archaisms that are meant to signal the mutation of language once the cultural repository of a civilization goes lost following catastrophic events. Examples of works that make use of invented "primitive" languages are post-apocalyptic works such as David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004),

[114] Among them, there are Fritz Leiber's *Gather, Darkness* (1943); George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1949); Pat Frank's *Alas, Babylon* (1959); Walter M. Miller's *Canticle For Leibowitz* (1959); and Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965). Miller's work has often been compared to *Riddley Walker*. See Cockrell; Cowart 81-3; Doherty; Porter 452-3.
[115] Examples of works that feature at least some of these elements are Robert Adams's *Horseclans* series (1975-1988); more recently, S.M. Stirling's *Emberverse* novels (2004-2018); Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006); Howard Kunstler's *World Made by Hand* trilogy (2008-2016). Numerous movies follow this pattern, including *Soylent Green* (1973), the *Mad Max* series (1979-2015); and *Waterworld* (1995).

Will Self's *The Book of Dave* (2006), and Sandra Newman's *The Country of Ice Cream Star* (2014). Both Mitchell and Self have drawn inspiration from Russell Hoban in their use of invented languages (Eve 1; Tate 26). Indeed, *Riddley Walker* can be included in this list. Hoban's use of language through the creation of the dialect of "Riddleyspeak" to characterize the degraded condition of the society within the novel appears as one of the work's defining traits.

On the other hand, certain post-apocalyptic works present the medieval setting as preferable to the pre-apocalyptic civilization. They function along the lines of Brian Aldiss's notion of "cosy catastrophe" (315), whereby the apocalypse leads to a more positive condition for the protagonists.[116] As Nicholls suggests, in such works "the new world is seen as more peaceful and ordered, more in harmony with Nature, than the bustle and strife of civilization" (581). They tend to feature an anti-modern, technophobic, and escapist desire to return to an idealized pastoral past (Trexler 97). This notion subscribes to the belief that if modernity were to collapse, it would be possible to rebuild the world anew in a medievalized frontier kind of scenario.

If post-apocalyptic narratives can succumb to depictions of pseudo-medieval settings as either a new dark age or a pastoral scenario, medievalist post-apocalyptic works can also present critiques of modernity's unethical practices. They can blur the medieval/modern divide by revealing the enduring weight of the past onto the present. This troubles the rigid temporal taxonomies that rely on linear sequences of cause and effect and recognizes temporal overlaps, co-presence, and synchronicity. *Riddley Walker* is one such text that employs medieval models to question modern civilization, disrupt linear temporalities, and demonstrate the presence of the past into the future and the role of interpreting that past.

Numerous scholars have addressed the medieval elements in Hoban's novel (Ackerley; Cowart 99-101; Huisman; Laity; Lukes, "Surrogate" 275). However, none of the work's readings focus openly on the implications of the novel's medievalism in light of ecological matters. This chapter intends to illustrate how the legend of St. Eustace is interpreted in separate ways that affect the ecological outlook of the novel's society. On the one hand, it is read as a cautionary tale on the risk of repeating errors of the past. On the other hand, it is seen as a narrative that justifies progress to re-obtain nuclear power. The novel highlights the process whereby medievalism can support both narratives of nostalgia for a pre-technological past and of anthropocentric development. This chapter also traces the trajectory of the main character from an acceptance of his society's ideologies to a questioning of its values. Crucial in this process are the dogs that accompany him on his journey, his vision of the medieval Green Man, and the puppet of Punch. Both the Green Man and Punch are interpreted in light of both posthumanist ecocriticism and Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque. The novel thus demonstrates how medieval models can also promote awareness of multispecies entanglements.

[116] Aldiss indicates two medievalist works, George R. Stewart's *Earth Abides* (1949) and John Wyndham's *The Day of the Triffids* (1951), among the trope's most representative examples (315-6).

2. The Legend of St. Eustace and the Interpretations of the Medieval Past

The novel is set in Kent, around 2400 years into the future after a nuclear catastrophe called the "1 Big 1" in the novel (*RW* 19). The protagonist and first-person narrator of the story suggests:"[w]e dont know jus how far that count ever got becaws Bad Time put an end to it. Theres a stoan in the Power Ring stannings has the year number 1997 cut into it nor we aint never seen no year number farther on nor that" (*RW* 125). The year 1997 is the last recorded year preceding the nuclear event that has led to the post-apocalyptic condition of "Bad Time." The date remains as a trace on a particle accelerator. The absence of any clear temporal reference unsettles the reader by engendering a loss of temporal orientation. The historical present is turned into the ancient past of a post-apocalyptic future in ways that challenge human temporal imaginative abilities.

After several centuries, humanity has rebuilt itself to a basic level of development. As Riddley reports, "[i]t aint jus only forming they ben doing there with stock and growings they ben digging they ben croaking iron" (*RW* 24). The society has organized itself in settlements sustained by farming, livestock, the scavenging of metal parts of pre-apocalyptic machinery, and the manufacturing of iron tools. Communities are controlled by the authority of the Mincery that lives on the island of Ram. The society's economic, social, and political setup has been alternatively defined as either a new Iron Age (Cowart 86; Hannah and Mayer 192; Mustazza 17) or as medieval (Doherty; Laity; Lake 158; Lukes, "Surrogate" 278; Mullen 402). While Riddley's community does not correspond exactly to either definition, the ascription of Iron Age or medieval traits to his society appears useful in describing its "primitive" or "premodern" condition without scientific or technological knowledge.

Riddley's society lives amongst polluted landscapes. Goodparley tells Riddley that "[the trees] dont take no read of us we dont matter nothing to them. Time on far on wewl be dead and theywl be swaying in the morning wind the same" (*RW* 132). He dethrones humanity from its supposed centrality and privileges more-than-human deep time over human temporalities. Yet the novel's depiction of the land questions multispecies resilience in the face of catastrophe and reveals the nuclear explosion's effects in both its immediate and prolonged effects. The story that the society circulates about the apocalyptic event relates:

> [t]hay wun the Warr but the lan wuz poyzen frum it the ayr & water as wel. Peapl din jus dy in the Warr thay kep dyin after it wuz over . . . Evere thing wuz blak & rottin. Ded peapl & pigs eatin them & thay pigs dyd. Dog paks after peapl & peapl after dogs tu eat them the saym. Smoak goin up frum bernin evere wayr . . . Cudn be shur uv nuthing din no wut wuz sayf tu eat or drink. (33)

The legend relates how, following the nuclear war, its consequences could be witnessed for a long time. The land and water became polluted and everything turned dark and rotten. Animals and humans started to eat each other, and fires burned everywhere. A sense of uncertainty of the survival of all life dominated.

Despite the centuries intervening between the nuclear event and Riddley's narration, the more-than-human world has not recovered. It was "never like it ben befor. Day beartht crookit out of crookit nite and sickness in them boath" (*RW* 19). He also notices "a wite shadder on that old conkreat wall . . . you cudnt make out no arms parbly the hans ben covering the face" (76). The world is still affected by the long-term

effects of pollution and nuclear radiation. The material traces of radiation can still be seen in the shadows of bodies burned by the explosion on the walls. The work stresses how the nexus of nature, society, and technology may have nefarious consequences and leave traces spanning vast temporal scales.

Radiation has also left an enduring mark on humans. The Eusa folk bear on their bodies the signs of radiation-induced mutations. Eusa himself, the scientist responsible for the apocalypse, is described as "crookit" (*RW* 81), that is, deformed. The Eusa folk, in turn, have "[f]aces with 3 eyes and no nose. Faces with 1 eye and a snout. Humps on backs and hans growing out of sholders wer the leas of it they had every kynd of crookitness" (174). Their "crookedness" has led to the development of new abilities among them, such as a telepathic power. They have become posthuman beings, whose bodies bear the effects of the reciprocal entanglement and exchange between bodies and external matter.

The post-apocalyptic society lives among the ruins of the previous civilization. The only few traces remaining of the past are its material ruins, from crumbled buildings to "some kynd of machine . . . you cudnt tel what it wer" (*RW* 8), i.e., pieces of unknown machinery. The current society, however, has forgotten the historical, cultural, and technological memories of the past, and knows not how to interpret its traces. The pre-apocalyptic cultural archive is lost. The work actualizes the fears of the "total destruction of the archive" ("No Apocalypse" 28) caused by the prospect of nuclear catastrophe theorized by Jacques Derrida. The nuclear war becomes the absolute referent of any discourse and experience because it equals the destruction of their archive (Derrida 18).[117] The new society constantly reflects on the nuclear past, which is its only referent.

Yet the work does not truly represent the total archival loss hypothesized by Derrida. James Berger suggests, "[v]ery few apocalyptic representations end with the End. There is always some remainder, some post-apocalyptic debris" (34). The post-apocalyptic scenario presupposes, because of what Jameson describes as the Unknowability Thesis (*Archeologies* 107-18), that something always remains of the known world that prevents total archival destruction. Riddley's society reveals an archival fever in its struggle to find traces of the past in order to rebuild the pre-apocalyptic archival knowledge.

A similar impulse has given rise to medievalism itself as a practice. Medievalism arose in response to "acts of destruction which both defined the past as medieval and threatened to efface medieval culture" (Matthews 2). In the wake of the Reformation in the 1540s, the dissolution of medieval monasteries that preserved ancient and medieval texts triggered an archival impulse to preserve material that was in danger of going lost. The concern with conserving medieval material was motivated both by a spirit of antiquarianism and the need to justify political and religious agendas with the authority of tradition (M. R. Jones 92). The post-medieval archival fever derived from the perception of a rupture between premodern and modern times. In *Riddley Walker* the situation is reversed. The desire to retrieve information about the past is dictated by the perceived rupture that separates the lost modern age from neo-premodern times.

[117] See also Fest.

Among the few contents of the post-apocalyptic cultural archive, there is the legend of St. Eustace, albeit preserved in a distorted form. It represents the principal tool through which Riddley's society attempts to discover information about its past. The legend originally derives from a 1480 medieval painting on the walls of Canterbury Cathedral. Although the painting has gone lost along with the majority of the traces of the past, its description, originally found written down in the only known surviving text of the twentieth century, continues to circulate in oral form in the post-apocalyptic context.

The legend was highly popular in the Middle Ages. It described the conversion to Christianity of a Roman general under Trajan named Placidas, who was baptized as Eustace. The surviving twentieth-century text writes: "[t]he Legend of St Eustace dates from the year A.D. 120 and this XVth-century wall painting depicts with fidelity the several episodes in his life" (123). It reports that Eustace converted after a vision of Christ between the antlers of a stag while hunting. It describes the series of events that test his faith, including his wealth being stolen, his wife being kidnapped, and his sons taken away by a wolf and a lion, and how, thanks to his faith, he is rewarded with obtaining his wealth and family back. Finally, it describes his martyrdom caused by his refusal to reject Christianity in front of Emperor Hadrian.

The postapocalyptic civilization must confront issues of hermeneutical decoding of the scant cultural archive available. Since the new humanity has no external referents that allow it to understand the legend's meaning, the cultural artifact has been reinterpreted. As Martin L. Warren suggests, the legend becomes a palimpsest, a text of many layers used "to construct a version of the past that accounts for and shapes the present of Riddley's world" (161). The struggle for the production of meaning out of the painting's description results in a proliferation of different interpretations. This suggests the instability of the signifying process and the changes Riddley's society is going through.

2.1. The Legend of Eusa as an Origin Myth and Cautionary Tale

The dominant way in which the legend of St. Eustace is reinterpreted is the Eusa story, an origin myth that explains the post-apocalyptic condition. Eustace is distorted into Eusa, a scientist employed under Mr. Clevver in a time of war. Mr. Clevver believes that the only way to stop the war is through nuclear power: "[w]e keap fytin aul thees Warrs wy doan we jus du 1 Big 1" (*RW* 30). Eusa follows his boss's order, develops nuclear weapons, and brings about "Master Chaynjis," i.e., the apocalyptic end of civilization. Eusa gains nuclear knowledge by tearing apart the so-called "littl Shynin Man the Addom" found between the antlers of the "Hart uv the Wud" (31) by pulling his outstretched arms, after killing the hart/stag itself. Out of the two torn pieces of the little shining man a light starts to shine. Having triggered the apocalyptic "Bad Time," Eusa must suffer for his actions, losing his wife and sons and then finally being murdered.

The story turns the medieval legend about a Christian conversion into at once an explanation of the end of the previous civilization and the origin of the current one. It is at once a tale of the end and an origin myth. The vision of Christ between the antlers of a stag becomes the figure of the atom that is split in two through nuclear fission, imagined as a little shining man torn apart by Eusa. The memory of the

past distorted in the Eusa story is kept alive through itinerant puppet shows followed by an exegesis of the shows called the "connexion," whose formulation is a responsibility of "connexion men." The latter must explain the meaning of the story to people, a role the protagonist inherits from his deceased father.

The puppet show and "connexion" derive from a sequel of the Eusa story that exists in two versions, respectively of the Eusa folk and the Mincery. The Pry Mincer (a distorted version of the prime minister) Goodparley relates the Mincery's version to Riddley. After the nuclear event, Eusa is killed. His head is thrown at sea, where it swims to the Ram. It orders the political authorities to create a show that would provide "a lessing and a lerning Iwl tel every 1 my story so theywl know that road I took wrong and what harm I done" (*RW* 81). The story is a cautionary tale that warns Riddley's society against the errors of the past. The post-apocalyptic civilization inherits Eusa's guilt through the shows.

The hegemonic interpretation of the story is controlled by the Mincery. As Riddley suggests, "the Mincery never has allowit no show of figgers only Eusa nor they wunt allow no 1 only Eusa show men to carry a fit up" (*RW* 132). It does not authorize the performance of any other show apart from that of Eusa, nor does it allow anyone other than the Pry Mincer and the Wes Mincer to perform it. As Derrida argues, "[t]here is no political power, without control of the archive, if not of memory" ("Archive Fever" 11n1). The Mincery holds power over the society's cultural archive and historical memory by regulating the message enforced through the puppet shows and by possessing the written description of the painting.

The puppet shows serve as religious ceremonies, government propaganda, and entertainment. Riddley notes: "[e]very body knows bits and peaces of [the Eusa story] but the connexion men and the Eusa show men they all have the woal thing wrote down the same and they have to know all of it by hart . . . No 1 else is allowit to have it wrote down the same which that dont make no odds becaws no 1 else knows how to read" (*RW* 29). The shows are the only source of information for the largely illiterate community. The political authorities are the only literate people in Riddley's society, through which culture circulates orally. The transmission of information through oral shows serves a purpose similar to that of medieval mystery plays, which explained the scriptures to people (Laity).[118] Mystery plays were responsible, like the Eusa shows, for circulating cultural values authorized by the Church's central control.

The story warns against the dangers of technological excess and of history repeating itself. While the novel is set in England, it responds to the nuclear anxieties that dominated the US in the second half of the century. The reference to the US concerns is hinted at through the phonetic similarity between "Eusa" and the USA. It creates a connection between the US nuclear power, St. Eustace's legend, and the novel's nuclear event (Self ix). Charles E. Gannon notes that "the ultimate fear of Anglo-American hegemony [is] not the end of empire, but the end of history itself, and the discourse that is its celebrator, its herald, its archivist, its eulogist" (32). Hoban reflects on the US's fear of the end of history and the loss of its cultural archive. He addresses the US's arrogance, unquestioned technophilic attitude, and lack of foresight.

[118] See also Ackerley 172.

The explanation of the nuclear disaster is mingled with religious imagery partly derived from the original legend, even though the current civilization has no memory of concepts of religion and God. The division in two of the "little Shining man the Addom" evokes at once the responsibility of the US for developing nuclear technology and the split of the atom; the Biblical account of the Creation that culminates in the Adamic sin and guilt and the fall from Eden; and, finally, the figure of Christ in the legend of St. Eustace substituted by the little shining man.[119] Eusa's employer is represented in the Eusa shows through a puppet with a "red face and littl poynty beard and the horns and all" (*RW* 137). His link with the Devil himself reinforces the religious overtones of sin and repentance within the narrative.

Eusa's story, as in the case of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, is invested in questions of duality and unity. This imagery pervades the story and the novel itself. As the shining man cries out, "I wan tu go I wan tu stay. . . I wan tu dark I want tu lyt I wan tu day I wan tu nyt. . . I wan tu woman I wan tu man . . . I want tu plus I want tu minus I wan tu big I wan tu littl I wan tu aul I wan tu nuthing" (*RW* 32). The shining man lists a series of dichotomies within himself that his laceration has made separate. From the division of the atom to Eusa's head being separated from his body, the narrative critiques the implications of dualistic thinking at the foundation of Enlightenment humanism. Nuclear power has been achieved by tearing apart the outstretched body of the little shining man, which also evokes Leonardo Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, the emblem, according to Braidotti, of the universalized notion of Man (*Posthuman* 13). Eusa's actions have led to a separation of the realm of culture from that of nature and to a conceptual and material Cartesian separation of mind from body. It has caused a degradation of the more-than-human realm and a detachment of humanity from the nonhuman. As Riddley writes, "[n]ever in my woal life put foot outside a fents without at leas 5 mor for dog safe" (28). Riddley's society has built fences around the villages to protect itself from external threats. The nonhuman realm is perceived as inimical.

2.2. The Legend of Eustace as a Justification for Nuclear Power

The post-apocalyptic civilization is gradually changing, and its ideologies along with it. Riddley reflects on his society's transformation: "[t]hem in our crowd . . . ben mosly agenst the forms and the diggings and that. Agenst all them new idears of moving things frontways like Goodparley ben talking of . . . All the peopl I wer frendy with they rathert be a moving crowd and foraging ful time nor stop in 1 place jobbing on a form" (*RW* 70). The society is moving from a nomadic foraging one to a stationary one that relies on agriculture with a growing population and centralized power. Like in the case of Gethenians, Riddley's society exists in a state of flux. If its structure has been compared to a medieval-like one, this depiction does not share the stereotyped view of the Middle Ages as a time of stasis, but as one of ongoing change.

Such transformations require new narratives that guide the political agendas of the shifting society. Goodparley and Orfing change the interpretation of the Eusa puppet shows. In the new version, Eusa promises "Good Time which I mean every thing good and every body happy and teckernogical progers

[119] See also Cowart 93; Lake 166; Mustazza 21.

moving every thing frontways farther and farther all the time" (*RW* 48). Yet Mr. Clevver does not agree with the prospect of making "Good Time" accessible to everybody. He steals Eusa's knowledge and uses it to "do a Bad Time" (50). The story's new interpretation presents Eusa as a generous figure who associates technological advancement and progress with a perfect society. The nuclear apocalypse is rather blamed on his employer, depicted as the culprit of "Bad Time." The Mincery strategically modifies the original interpretation of the legend. Its doubly removed meaning and its transformed message serve to justify the desire to regain nuclear power.

Goodparley even manages to extract a formula for gunpowder out of St. Eustace's legend. While trying to interpret the twentieth-century text written in standard English, he comments: "[s]ome parts is easyer workit out nor others theres bits of it wewl never know for cern jus what they mean . . . Its blipful it aint jus only what it seams to be its the syn and foller of some thing else" (*RW* 124). Goodparley dramatizes the struggle for interpretation. He understands the legend as a text containing an encrypted message where each word signifies something else in relation to chemistry and physics. Through this belief, he achieves a chemical formula out of the legend for what he presumes to be nuclear weapons. Goodparley believes that, by regaining explosives, they will obtain the "clevverness" that made "Good Time" possible. He argues that, before obtaining the past's marvelous technologies, "[y]ouve got to have the Power then befor youwl have the res of it" (*RW* 143). He ignores the cautionary message behind the legend's original purpose. Civilization is thus "coming to the curse roads" (41). Such crossroads separate two pathways guided respectively by the cautious approach of the legend's first interpretation and by the narrative of progress implicit in Goodparley's re-interpretation. The road that the society is taking is the second out of the two. It is bent on repeating the past.

Riddley's society perceives itself as inferior to the pre-apocalyptic past. This regression is painfully acknowledged by the characters. Goodparley laments: "*we aint as good as them befor us. Weve come way way down from what they ben time back way back* [italics in the original]" (*RW* 125). Riddley also mournfully recognizes that "by the time they done 1997 years they had boats in the air and all them things and here we are weve done 2347 years and mor and stil slogging in the mud." In one scene, Riddley contemplates some broken pieces of machinery. The sight prompts him to cry out: "[o] what we ben! And what we come to!" (100). He feels nostalgia for the lost past of perceived superior means with respect to the present. Goodparley and Riddley find the current condition disagreeable in light of the achievements of the past that they hope to emulate.

Such a lamentation echoes the *ubi sunt* tradition typical of medieval texts. It consisted in reflections upon the ruins of a glorious ancient past. This rhetorical trope can be witnessed in the Old English poems *The Ruin* and *The Wanderer* within the Exeter Book manuscript dated to the tenth century CE. Both poems define the present as degraded and corrupt in contrast to a nostalgically viewed past. *The Wonderer* recites: "[t]hus Man's Creator destroyed this world's habitations, until . . . the ancient works of giants stood idle. He then who wisely thought of this foundation and this dark life deeply thinks through . . . will

say these words: '. . . How that time passed away, grew dark beneath night's cover as if it had never been" (North et al. 174, lines 85-96).[120] Similarly, *The Ruin* presents a rumination on ruined buildings created by giants: "[w]ondrous is this wall-stone, the Fates destroyed it, shattered the town buildings, giants' work crumbles" (North et al. 269, lines 1-2).[121] In both poems, the ancient past constitutes an exemplary model for the present. As Renée R. Trilling argues, such poems forge "links between people and events of the past and those of the present, resulting in a view of history as a constitutive element of the present rather than as a prelude to it" (*Aesthetics* 23). The past is not simply discarded or supplanted, but deeply felt and inhabited. Riddley initially presents a similar view of the pre-apocalyptic past as that presented in the Old English elegies. He contemplates the mechanical ruins of the past civilization, which is considered to be made of giants greater than the current society and nostalgically desires to return to the past.

The contemplation of ruins can serve to evoke the transient nature of civilizations. It holds the potential of decentering humanity and departing from anthropocentric positions (B. Moore 64). *The Wanderer*, for instance, warns its readers that "wealth is ephemeral; here man is ephemeral; all this foundation of earth will become desolate" (Bradley 325). The poem emphasizes the temporary condition of earthly possessions. However, Goodparley and Riddley's reflection on the ruins of the past does not hold such implications. Their nostalgia departs from that evoked in the original interpretation of the Eusa story as a cautionary tale. It comes to serve as a justification for the reattainment of the very nuclear power that had led to the end of civilization. Their stance is rooted in an anthropocentric desire to have control over the more-than-human and each other.

2.3. Hermeneutic Struggle, Postmodern Deconstruction, and Meta-Medievalism

The medieval legend of St. Eustace produces a proliferation of multiple interpretations. It mediates the access to the past and it embodies a model for two diverging stances that demonstrate the hermeneutic challenge of interpreting the past and its texts. In fact, as Lorna the "tel woman"—the female equivalent of a "connexion man"—tells Riddley, "[y]ou hear diffrent things in all them way back storys but it dont make no diffrents. Mosly they aint strait storys any how. What they are is diffrent ways of telling what happent" (*RW* 20). Her comment dramatizes the fact that stories of the past reappear in constantly different versions. She suggests that they merely constitute different ways of relating the past.

Yet the way the legend is re-interpreted influences the cultural and ideological principles that guide the actions of the society within the novel in radically differing ways. As Goodparley comments, "[w]ords! . . . theywl move things you know theywl do things. Theywl fetch" (*RW* 122). Words and stories

[120] "Yþde swa þisne eardgeard ælda Scyppend / oþþæt burgwara breahtma lease / eald enta geweorc idlu stodon. / Se þonne þisne wealsteal wise geþohte / ond þis deorce lif deope geondþenceð, / frod in ferðe, feor oft gemon / wælsleahta worn, ond þas word acwið: / Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom maþþumgyfa? / Hwær cwom symbla gesetu? Hwær sindon seledreamas? / Eala beorht bune! Eala byrnwiga! / Eala þeodnes þrym! Hu seo þrag gewat, / genap under nihthelm, swa heo no wære" (North et al. 174, lines 85-96).
[121] "Wrætlic is þes wealstan, wyrde gebræcon; / burgstede burston, brosnað enta geweorc" (North et al. 269, lines 1-2).

have the power to move and shape events. This is especially true of the legend of St. Eustace. Different versions and interpretations of the story have vastly different repercussions on the mindset and practices of the new humanity. The latter is divided between the guilt felt for the actions of the past and the desire to obtain power through technological progress and in particular through nuclear weapons.

Despite the novel's bleak post-apocalyptic scenario, it reveals an inventive playfulness involved in acts of interpretation and creation. The legend functions, in a postmodern spirit, as a site of revision of the past and as a ludic space that engenders new narratives. It is deconstructed to constructive ends. Hoban himself is considered a postmodernist writer (Hollinger, "Postmodernism" 236; Kelley 274). His writing, defined by "ludic wordplay, ironic humor, reflexivity, dissonance, pastiche and unconventional narrative style" (Wilkie-Stibbs 165), tests the boundaries of postmodern reality. Discussing the nuclear threat to the archive, Derrida argues that "the hypothesis of total destruction watches over deconstruction . . . This is why deconstruction . . . belongs to the nuclear age. And to the age of literature" ("No Apocalypse" 27). The threat of loss leads to the recognition of the contingency of discourses, texts, and institutions. *Riddley Walker* is a representative example of the literature of the nuclear age. It illustrates how the threat of destruction engenders the deconstruction and reconstruction of the narratives of the past.

St. Eustace's legend becomes a postmodern site of regeneration of meaning. Marcus Bull argues that postmodernity entails that "we have abandoned our faith in history as progress, a sort of straight line stretching from then to now, so instead we now play with the past, treating it like a giant shopping mall full of images, motifs and ideas which we can consume in whatever combinations we choose" (9). Such a perspective engenders a temporal perception whereby fragments of the medieval past are embedded within the present and removed from their historical context. This process can be seen as one of "utilitarian bricolage" (Eco 67). Eco defines it as a mode of selection and re-organization of medieval fragments to create new meanings. This kind of medievalism is part, for Eco, of a postmodern predicament that retrieves the past for presentist agendas.[122] In the literal post-modern context of the novel, the society uses medieval models to create decontextualized interpretations of the past. It deconstructs the legend and reconstructs it to illuminate the present. Its interpretation does not lend any importance to historical accuracy, but it is only relevant in light of the needs of the present.

A defining trait of postmodern medievalism is its rejection of temporal linearity. Riddley questions notions of coherent linearity within the narrative process of meaning-making: "I don't think it makes no diffrents where you start the telling of a thing. You never know where it begun realy. No moren you know where you begun your oan self" (*RW* 8). Riddley blends a rejection of narrative linearity that prompts his belief about the insignificance of chronological order with an awareness of the temporal uncertainty of origins, causality, and linear progression in terms of both personal and collective history. He points to a parallel uncertainty of the origin of stories and of "your oan self," both individual and collective.

[122] See also Coote 30; Marshall 23-4; Pugh and Weisl 12-29.

The uncertainty of collective beginnings and trajectories unsettles notions of temporal progression that presuppose a beginning and a projected end. The novel further challenges them by conflating the world's end with the beginning of a new one. The disruption of linear time is typical of post-apocalyptic works, especially medievalist ones. As James Berger suggests, "[t]emporal sequence becomes confused. Apocalyptic writing takes us after the end . . . The writer and reader must be in both places at once, imagining the postapocalyptic world and then paradoxically 'remembering' the world as it was, as it is" (6). The reader is challenged to perceive multiple temporal dimensions at once. In *Riddley Walker*, the interpretation of the Eusa story as a cautionary tale entails the perception of the twentieth-century modern past as a dark era that reflects how the Middle Ages is often perceived as the Dark Ages. The relationship between the medieval and the modern is qualitatively reversed. However, by changing the narrative and presenting the pre-apocalyptic modern civilization as a time of greatness, the Mincery rehabilitates the perception of modernity as the apex of civilization and reduces the present pseudo-medieval condition to a time of darkness, albeit in a temporally reversed way. Both views unsettle linear temporality. Yet both reinstate the medieval/modern divide.

At the same time, St. Eustace's legend confounds such a conceptual divide. The remains of the past that inform the novel's society signal the impossibility of a complete rupture between the past and the future. The gap is filled by archival knowledge and hermeneutic gestures toward it. The past becomes embedded and living in the present. In addressing the SF subgenre of dying earths, James Paz discusses how "fragmented memories of the past are carried into visions of the far future and on how those futures may cast their shadows into the past and alter it" (218). Such works reconstruct the Middle Ages in the future and disrupt fixed conceptions of time. This operation can be witnessed in the transformation of the legend into the Eusa story. The text about the medieval painting is deconstructed and transformed into a story that explains the present. By disrupting temporal taxonomies, the work counters hegemonic temporal perceptions grounded in notions of origins, linearity, teleology, and progress that define the Global North and its presumed superiority.[123]

The novel's critique of linear temporality and unrestrained progress does not merely rely on a medieval/modern inversion that depicts the future as a return to the past. Rather than simply presenting a pseudo-medieval post-apocalyptic setting, the work highlights self-reflexively the process whereby medievalisms are created. Goodparley argues that "[w]hat ben makes tracks for what wil be. Words in the air pirnt foot steps on the groun for us to put our feet in to" (*RW* 121). The past's traces are the blueprints that shape the present. The work does not merely precipitate its fictional world to a neomedieval era, but consciously dwells on the implications of presentist uses of the past. It is thus defined by a form of meta-medievalism that reflects on the inscription of the medieval past within the present, on processes of de- and re-contextualization of medieval models, and their consequences on the society's beliefs.

[123] Cf. Leckie ix-3.

The meta-medievalist dimension is in line with the work's postmodern nature. The latter can also be witnessed in the work's language. The legend's proliferation of meanings owes especially to the ambiguous "Riddleyspeak," the post-apocalyptic dialect of the novel. It constitutes, as Jeffrey Porter notices, an "antilanguage," an experimental language that uses "slang, neologism, nonsense, wordplay, onomatopoeia, homophony, paronomasia, homonymy, catachresis, and other tropes traditionally held in contempt by normative critics for playing on the slippery side of the signifier" (450). Riddleyspeak's lack of one-to-one correspondence between signifier and signified leads to riddles and puns that make the production of meaning unstable.[124] It is defined by sparse punctuation; phonetic spellings like "fizzics" instead of "physics"; archaisms such as "withering"; distortions of words such as "Prime Minister" becoming "Pry Mincer"; cockney slang such as "wotcher" derived from "what cheer" (*RW*, "Glossary" 235); technological and scientific jargon such as "pirntowt" for "printout"; and onomatopoeias such as "arga warga … suggestive of gobbling-up" (233). Such traits contribute to the creation of a dialect that reflects, in its distance from the familiar Standard English, the degraded and "primitive" condition of the post-apocalyptic society of the novel.

The language has mutated in time along with the post-apocalyptic society. At first glance, Riddleyspeak seems a broken down, fragmented dialect. The impoverishment of the language corresponds to that of Riddley's society. This language has not yet become fixed and has, for this reason, also been compared to Middle English of the High to Late Middle Ages, from which Hoban has partly drawn inspiration (Schwetman 216; Self).[125] Riddleyspeak could be defined as a medievalist language, although its reference points are not reduced to the Middle Ages alone. As Rafał Borysławski suggests, medieval culture was prone to symbolic representations and tended to endow cultural expressions with multiple layers of signification (45). Medieval texts' polysemous character appears reflected in Riddleyspeak, where most words come to absorb multiple meanings that lead to different interpretations.

The fragmentation of language echoes the tearing apart of the "Addom" and thus nuclear fission. It reflects not only the fragmentation of post-apocalyptic culture, but also of postmodern times, where knowledge, time, space, and narratives seem equally fragmented. Riddleyspeak reflects the sense of uncertainty of the post-nuclear society toward a past of which it bears no memory, but whose traces endure not only in a distorted legend, but also in the language. As Marie Maclean argues, the language contains "certain strange relics, weird mutations which are in fact the tokens of another distant, infinitely alien . . . world, the realm of high technology in which we live" (214). Hoban himself comments that "language doesn't stand still, and words often carry long-forgotten meanings" (*RW,* "Afterword" 225). The archaisms, slang, and technological allusions in Riddleyspeak refer to forgotten concepts. They allow the pre-apocalyptic culture to transpire through the language that has preserved, while transforming, its traces. It retains the memory of the past in an encrypted form and reveals the historicity of words.

[124] For a description of "Riddleyspeak," see Dowling 391–417; Maynor and Patteson 18-25; Schwetman 212-19.
[125] https://sa4qe.blogspot.com/2011/02/russell-hoban-in-conversation-with-will.html

If the language has mutated partly because the original meaning of words has been lost, the readers in turn struggle to understand Riddleyspeak. As Hoban argues, "it works well with the story because it slows the reader down to Riddley's rate of comprehension" (*RW*, "Afterword" 225). Riddleyspeak's opaqueness heightens the sense of confusion of both Riddley's society with regard to the past and of the readers with regard to the fictional future society. As Porter notes, "human survival is primarily a hermeneutic problem . . . postatomic men must interpret the vestiges of a vanished culture, but the traces are little more than riddles" (452). The novel presents a two-way struggle for interpretation. Both the characters and the readers need to decode the text in front of them, the world in one case, and the novel in the other, both appearing as riddles.

The omnipresence of riddles is already hinted at in the work's title and in the name of the eponymous character, who is at once a riddler for his readers and a riddle-solver in the novel. As he affirms, "Walker is my name and I am the same. Riddley Walker. Walking my riddels where ever theyve took me" (*RW* 8). As Lorna notes, by vocation and by profession as a "connexion man," "there aint nothing what *aint* a tel for [Riddley] [italics in the original]" (7). Riddley always looks for further meaning in all that he sees as if he were trying to solve a riddle and find connections among separate elements in order to interpret and decode their hidden message.

The function of Riddleyspeak echoes that of riddles in the Middle Ages. While discussing the Anglo-Saxon riddlic tradition that culminates in the riddle collection of the Exeter Book, Borysławski argues that riddles "are concerned with a subtle game of hiding and unveiling their content. Thus, they are secrets open only to those who are able to discover and then apply their codes in order to disclose their mysteries" (8). Riddles often challenge established meanings and prevailing orders in such a way that they deepen one's knowledge of the world allowing for it to be seen in a new light. While this is true of numerous riddles in the Exeter Book, it appears especially evident in the double entendre kind of riddles that the polysemous and ambiguous Riddleyspeak most closely resemble, such as Riddle 25 "Onion/Penis" or Riddle 42 "Cock and Hen/Sexual Intercourse". Such riddles involve a description that leads to two possible solutions, one of which is of a sexual/erotic nature. While the double entendres could awaken the medieval mind to the omnipresence of sin and therefore serve as a warning, they also violated taboos while openly celebrating human sexuality (Borysławski 154). They thus at once served to increase one's knowledge of the world and to present a new way of looking at the world. This process of discovery and knowledge can be similarly identified in Riddley's attempt to understand the world around him. By extricating himself through riddles of language and reality, Riddley learns to question and look beyond the accepted meanings dictated by his own society. Borysławski suggests that especially

> in the Old English riddle tradition, there are no riddles which would be entirely focused either on the element of knowledge, or the element of entertainment . . . they, as it were, create something which already exists anew . . . such an intellectual game of wit results . . . in participating in the process which Mikhail Bakhtin called "carnival". Riddles, similarly to the carnivalesque element, enter the game where prevailing truths and laws are relative and are therefore suspended and reinstated. (8)

Riddles merge the didactic purpose of attaining knowledge and wisdom with entertainment purposes of play and amusement. Borysławski defines this playful process as an instance of the carnivalesque, which involves an overturning of established hierarchies and values. The riddles lead to a reconsideration of hegemonic notions and views. They subvert established meanings and create a new order.

While Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque will be further addressed below, suffice it to say for now that, far from being an impoverished language, Riddleyspeak embodies the carnivalesque spirit of subversion and regeneration of meaning through its riddlic quality that reshapes reality through playful language. Riddleyspeak's riddlic nature enables a creative process of change and renewal. It creates ironic connections between seemingly incompatible elements, such as St. Eustace's legend and a story about a nuclear catastrophe. It shows that dominant and established perceptions are not the only possible ones.

The transformative nature of riddles serves the same role that medievalism does in general. Borysławski argues that "[t]he aim of such riddles is not, however, to destroy but rather to construct anew, to stimulate fresh perception, to defamiliarize in order to portray the world in a novel, breathtaking way" (22). The subversive nature of riddles does not merely reject established norms. It builds upon them to shape them anew. This is the very effect of the novel's medievalism. It does not merely deconstruct the medieval past, but it also reinterprets it in such a way that shines a new light on the original legend.

This process of deconstruction and reconstruction appears within Riddleyspeak. The novel dramatizes a tension between fragmentation and wholeness (Schwenger 256), the "1ness" and "2ness" of things, which are reflected in the language. Riddley comments on each word's multiple meanings: "[h]e wer talking so many levvils at 1ce I dint all ways know what he meant realy I just wisht every thing wud mean jus only 1 thing and keap on meaning it not changing all the time" (*RW* 145). He attempts to make whole the fragmented information he collects on his society and the past. Yet he is challenged by duplicity and ambivalence at every turn. The wordplay, puns, and riddles that emerge from Riddleyspeak "reminds us of the inherent duplicity of language" (Porter 463). They force the reader/listener to keep in mind multiple meanings at once.

This appears evident in the case of a central aspect of the Eusa story that takes on different meanings: the "Hart of the Wud." As the glossary that follows the end of the novel explains, "[t]he hart of the wud is where Eusa saw the stag who was the hart of the wud. The heart of the would is also the essence of one's wanting, the heart of one's deepest desire. The crypt in Canterbury Cathedral with its stone trees is the spiritual hart of the wud" (*RW,* "Glossary" 235). The "hart of the wud" then refers to the stag in the medieval legend; the one in the Eusa story; a story called "Hart of the Wud"; as well as the "heart of the wood," or even the "heart of the would," meaning the core of human desires and possibilities. The polysemous quality of the expression necessarily slows down the process of meaning-making and any straightforward interpretation.

The carnivalesque nature of Riddleyspeak also serves to unsettle established notions of the past and the present. Scientific notions such as the atom, by becoming the "Addom," echo the biblical figure of

Adam and take on a religious meaning that associates nuclear fission and the apocalypse with the Fall, making the beginning and the end of humanity come full circle. In turn, religious narratives like St. Eustace's legend become the explanation for a nuclear apocalypse and are thus desacralized. Similarly, the expression A.D. – anno Domini – comes to signify "All Done" (*RW* 125). This resemantization evokes the destruction of the previous civilization and suggests that traditional religious Western temporalities have stopped being relevant.

The irreverent distortion of pre-apocalyptic notions and values reveals a critical attitude that exposes the contradictions of the past. Porter argues that "[b]y suspending realist notions of meaning and by breaking the common rules of discourse," the novel "project[s] verbal counterrealities wherein the values and norms of official language are criticized and ultimately disrupted" (450).[126] The "corruptions" of the English language stress the problematic aspects and ethical failures of the past, while rebelling against its established meanings. The playful Riddleyspeak criticizes nuclear consciousness. As Hoban suggests, "the language degrades the past. The situation they're in is a result of all those clever people before them. Over two or three thousand years they've downgraded all the names, so Herne Bay becomes 'Horny Boy' and Dover becomes 'Do It Over' and Faversham becomes 'Fathers Ham'" (qtd. McCaffery and Gregory, *Interviews* 130). The play on the words of the past takes on an evaluative quality that engenders an ethical reflection on notions, principles, and practices taken for granted by the modern past.

Among the clearest examples that reveal the tension between 2ness and 1ness within the language is the expression "together," which Riddleyspeak renders as "to gether." The latter emphasizes how unity is broken into two segments. It highlights the theme of division out of wholeness that recurs throughout the novel. Yet the expression "to gether" also means "to gather." The notion of gathering then points to a desire to reunite, collect, and assemble different elements together. In this sense, in the separation of "together" into "to gether" it is possible to witness at once the fragmentation that overwhelms Riddley and his society as well as a tension and impulse toward putting pieces back into a whole.

Riddleyspeak does not only stress 2ness, but also the 1ness inherent in everything. It unifies diverse meanings within polysemous words. Through an act of playful bricolage, it synthetizes linguistic elements of the past and present by mixing neologisms such as "arga warga" with altered words such as "ministry" becoming "mincery." The latter exemplifies the dialect's folk etymologies, which consist in "a process that adapts unknown words or parts of words to known ones in certain languages" (Michel 1002). While retaining residual parts of computer jargon, the meaning and/or form of such words are altered to make them more familiar: "blipful" (referring to flickers on a screen) becomes "meaningful" or "symbolic." Folk etymologies, as Jonathan Culler argues, "are valued for the punlike quality, as they forge unexpected connections" (2). Similarly, David Lake argues that puns "assert the mystical union of concepts we normally keep separate" (157). Both scholars argue that folk etymologies and puns create connections

[126] See also Cowart 88-90.

between previously unrelated elements. They forge unity out of plurality. Riddleyspeak carries traces of the old civilization, making connections between the seemingly separate past and present.

The process of interpreting the past in order to read the present is not an end in itself. It has profound consequences on the characters' worldviews and practices. Playing with language and narratives contributes to both supporting and questioning dominant worldviews. The interpretation of St. Eustace's legend establishes the ideological framework after which the structure of society and its developmental trajectory are patterned. The process of de- and re-construction in Riddleyspeak facilitates a new ethical understanding that derives from the renewal of meanings. The language itself seems to reject hierarchical dichotomic thinking through its carnivalesque subversion of established values and the ties it forms among seemingly irreconcilable elements.

3. Riddley's Character Development

The tension between 1ness and 2ness is not only present at the level of language but is a recurring theme in the novel. Riddley argues, "[y]ou try to make your self 1 with some thing or some body but try as you wil the 2ness of every thing is working agenst you all the way" (*RW* 149). The work follows Riddley's struggle toward 1ness and the challenges he faces as he tries to put back together the fragments of his personal and collective "memberment [memory]" (6). The theme of fragmentation is featured in the atom's fission, the opposition between "Good Time" and "Bad Time," pre- and post-apocalypse, mind and body, nature and culture, and human and nonhuman. This leitmotif is unsettled by the expression "memberment" itself, which indicates a desire to recompose memory and identity (Porter 460).

As in the case of Le Guin's Genly, Riddley undergoes a process of growth from acceptance of his society's narratives to the formation of his own perspective. Riddley's trajectory and the novel itself begin with his naming day. He recounts: "[o]n my naming day when I come 12 I gone front spear and kilt a wyld boar" (*RW* 1). The novel starts with the successful result of a hunting quest. The hunting expedition creates a parallel with the beginning of the legend of Eustace itself, which also begins with a hunting quest. Like Eustace, previously called Placidas, Riddley receives his name after the hunting session.

The killing of the boar is part of a ritual of transition from childhood to adulthood. Riddley describes the event: "us foraging our las boar . . . on the day I come a man" (*RW* 1). The event is an integral part of Riddley's recognition as an adult. The novel's ritualized representation of the hunt creates a connection with hunting in the Middle Ages. As Susan Crane argues, "hunting treatises in English and French describe a kind of hunt so elaborated and formalized that scholars invoke the term 'ritual' to account for it" (63). Hunting treatises depicted the activity of hunting as highly ritualized. The hunt followed specific rules and served specific functions.[127]

In the novel, hunting also serves the purpose of asserting control over the more-than-human. Riddley comments that the animal he kills "parbly ben the las wyld pig on the Bundel Downs" (1). His

[127] See Crane 64; Cummins 68–83, 96–109; Thiébaux 59-66.

comment dramatizes how, despite the animal's near extinction, Riddley's society imposes that he should kill the boar nonetheless. It reveals an anthropocentric mentality that is not concerned with the consequences of human actions on animal welfare but privileges the ritual killing that symbolizes human superiority over the animal. Hunting served a similar role in the Middle Ages. Crane argues that "the aristocratic household, under the lord's rule, can dominate a fearsome and adversarial world of nature" (69). Hunting was designed to celebrate aristocracy's dominion over animals and the more-than-human, perceived as hostile and fearsome.[128]

The hunt is also tied to cultural constructs of masculinity. Riddley does not merely become an adult by killing the boar: he "come a man" (*RW* 1). His post-apocalyptic society has rebuilt a patriarchal order with rigid gender divisions. This can be evinced not only by the fact that all authority figures are men but also by the fact that women's roles are diminished: "[l]eave the telling to the women and connect with a mans doing" (65). Riddley is advised to dedicate himself to manly roles that require action and physical strength. Hunting provides him with a way to assert his virile prowess. The same applies to the Middle Ages. In Malory's *Mort Darthur*, Sir Tristam is praised "as he growed in myght and strength, he laboured in huntynge and hawkynge — never jantylman more than ever we herde rede of" (I, 375, lines 16-17). The hunt was not only crucial for knights to prove their martial skills, but it was also linked to virile models of chivalry (Rooney 58). Tristam's evaluation as, in Malory's words, a "gentleman"—or, rather, a knight—is crucially determined by his hunting abilities. The stress laid on the knight's ability to master the skills that are considered necessary for his status and rank reflect the value placed in hunting in the Middle Ages. The parallel emphasis on Tristam's growth in "might and strength" reinforces the connotation of hunting as a manly ability that validates and reinforces the knight's virile prowess.

However, the value attributed to the hunting quest is deflated in the work. Riddley comments: "[t]he woal thing fealt jus that littl bit stupid. Us running that boar thru that las littl scrump of woodling" (*RW* 1). Instead of seeing it as an assertion of his masculine prowess and superiority over the more-than-human, Riddley dismisses the role that his society attributes to the activity. As Crane notes, in the Middle Ages the boar was perceived as "fierce to a fault" (65). It held high symbolic value in view of its threatening appearance and fierce temperament. Yet in *Riddley Walker,* "[h]e dint make the groun shake nor nothing like that when he come on to my spear he wernt all that big plus he lookit poorly" (1). The boar's appearance itself challenges its perception as a threatening enemy. Its small size and scrawny look suggest the threatened condition of the species in a world of scarcity and of polluted lands. The contrast between the expectation and the reality of the hunting quest challenges the heroic nature of the ritual of initiation.

Furthermore, Riddley does not see himself as superior to the animal. He describes the scene: [h]im on 1 end of the spear kicking his life out and me on the other end watching him dy. I said, 'Your tern now my tern later'" (1). Through his suggestion that his own turn to die will come, Riddley establishes a sense

[128] See also Harrison 74.

of reciprocal vulnerability. It highlights the reality in which both human and nonhuman animal are destined to die a harsh death in a world defined by struggle. He counters the hierarchical scale that is implied in the activity both by his own society and medieval ones. The novel subverts from the start the expectation of Riddley's quest as one of prevarication and conquest. It already hints that the protagonist exhibits a different mindset from that of his own community.

Following his naming day, a series of events that occur change the course of his path. As his father dies, Riddley inherits his role as a "connexion man." He is told that "[n]o use asking other peopl they dont know no moren you do. Now your dads gone youwl be connexion man at How Fents peopl wil be asking you in stead of you asking them. You bes start putting things to gether for your self you aint a kid no mor" (*RW* 14). Having gone through his initiation into adulthood, Riddley is expected to take on his own responsibilities without relying on others and to start building his own interpretations of the Eusa shows.

However, Riddley goes further than this in the development of his critical ability. While scavenging pieces of machinery, he finds an unfamiliar puppet: "it wer a show figger like the 1s in the Eusa show . . . This here figger tho it wernt like no other figger I ever seen" (*RW* 72). He is supposed to deliver anything he finds to the Mincery. Yet the puppet entrances him so much that he cannot bring himself to part from it. He seems to realize that other realities may exist beyond the Eusa story that the Mincery keeps secret. From this moment on, Riddley starts questioning his society. He runs away following a pack of feral dogs.

Although his escape from home denotes a disagreement with the Mincery's master narrative, Riddley is still influenced by his society. Upon his arrival to a nuclear power plant's ruins, he exhibits an attraction to nuclear power: "[u]p to then I ben agenst Goodparley and I ben agenst what ever he wer for. . . How cud any 1 not want to get that shyning Power back from time back way back?" (*RW* 100). Riddley's journey proceeds in a nonlinear way. If he initially questions his society, he soon becomes obsessed with ideas of power, progress, and advancement that lead him to join the race to recreate nuclear weapons. He thus demonstrates an ambivalent stance with regard to the "clevverness" of the past. It is only after a vision of the medieval Green Man that Riddley changes his mindset, rejects nuclear power, and starts to feel an expansive sense of multispecies entanglement. The medieval Green Man and the figure of Punch play a vital role in his growth and in the development of a posthumanist ethical perspective. Indispensable in this process of gradual emancipation and awareness are the dogs that accompany him through his journey.

3.1. Dogs as Companion Species

After his escape, Riddley follows a pack of wild dogs. His canine companionship is an exceptional event for the novel's society. The latter sees dogs as "some thing you cant get close to. They keap ther farness nor you cant trap them nyther theyre too clevver. Plus theyre a danger theywl eat you if they catch you oansome" (*RW* 13). Dogs have become threats to humans and cannot be tamed. As Emma Marris suggests, "[w]olves are, for many people, the living embodiment of wildness. Dogs, on the other hand, are

the nonhuman animal we have most closely adopted as one of our own: man's best friend, the apogee of domestication" (64). The same perception that has conventionally seen wolves as threatening is held now toward dogs.[129] The fact that "man's best friend" lives beyond the walls of inhabited centers stresses the post-apocalyptic human/nonhuman divide.

In the novel in question, the divide between humans and dogs is explained by the fable "Why the Dog Wont Show its Eyes." Lorna recounts that "[t]ime back way way back befor peopl got clevver they had the 1st knowing. They los it when they got the clevverness and now the clevverness is gone as wel" (*RW* 17). The 1st knowing consists in the reciprocal understanding and collaboration between humans and nonhumans. She relates that humans acquired this ability by looking in the eyes of a dog they fed. They started journeying and foraging together with dogs. They became co-evolutionary partners. Yet Lorna suggests that the man and the woman began to wonder: "[i]f the 1st knowing is this good what myt the 2nd knowing and the 3rd be and so on?" (18). They gained "clevverness" by looking in a goat's eye. From then on, they asserted their dominion over animals. They no longer regarded them as partners but as tools. Humans began farming, raising livestock, and developing at ever-increasing rates in a progressive movement that eventually led to the "1 Big 1."

The story dramatizes the trajectory human development has taken since the start of farming and animal domestication. The loss of the 1st knowing and the achievement of "clevverness" describes the march forward of humans in the attempt to gain ever-increasing power over other humans and the more-than-human. William Ruddiman argues that the Anthropocene began with the expansion of agriculture 8,000 to 6,000 years ago, which, like in Lorna's story, caused the shift from hunter-gatherer nomadism to permanent settlements (Rull 1058). Unlike Le Guin, who ascribes the roots of the climate crisis to the Industrial Revolution, Hoban traces the early manifestations of destructive human practices back to the early human history. The fable also shows that the human/nonhuman divide is socially constructed and historically contingent. It develops across centuries along with human modes of perception.

According to the tale, after the nuclear event, dogs become inimical to humans. Lorna relates that "[m]an and woman starveling in the blackness looking for the dog to eat it and the dog out looking to eat them the same . . . It wont show its eyes no mor it wont show the man and woman no 1st knowing" (19). Relations between humans and dogs become ever more strained. Dogs are no longer domesticated animals that follow humans' orders, but dangerous creatures. They do not reciprocate the human gaze anymore. Lorna's story dramatizes John Berger's argument that, unlike in pre-industrial times, "animals are always the observed . . . They are the objects of our ever-extending knowledge. What we know about them is an index of our power, and thus an index of what separates us from them … That look between animal and man . . . has been extinguished" (14). Although human-animal studies has developed beyond Berger's theories, the question of reciprocity of the gaze is central to the human-dog relations in the novel. With

[129] T. Thompson 17.

human development, the dogs do not show their eyes.[130] The human gaze has turned animals into objects, tools, or meat, no longer expecting a reciprocal interaction. Similarly, Derrida reflects on the epistemological violence within the refusal to acknowledge the reciprocity of the interspecies gaze and each animal's subjectivity (*Animal* 4-11). He stresses the need to move the attention toward animals' own positionality, rather than merely focusing on humans. It is in the acknowledgment of the reciprocal nature of the interspecies gaze that the 1st knowing is located.

The loss of the 1st knowing has led to a separation of culture from nature. In the post-apocalyptic context, the latter has been relegated to the margins not only conceptually, but also materially:

> all them years you heard storys of dog peopl. Peopl with dogs heads and dogs with peopls heads . . . The Ram dint allow no 1 in the dead towns but when I ben littl we use to sly in when ever we got the chance and kids a nuff for crowd. Trying if we cud see dog people . . . My dad use to say all that about the dog peopl wer jus so much cow shit. He said hewd give odds it wer plittical. (*RW* 14)

With the separation of humans from the nonhuman, the society has developed legends about what might lurk at the uninhabited margins of their environment. They imagine them to be populated by hybrid creatures that transcend the divide between humans and dogs. Yet not everyone believes in them, such as, for instance, Riddley's father.

Stories about monsters with dog-heads echo depictions of monsters in medieval teratological texts of the Eastern *Mirabilia* tradition. As Anna Czarnowus argues, "[t]he Eastern *Mirabilia* are not only marvels to be perused and admired but also perilous foes who have to be confronted unless they can be avoided. Marvel mixes with fear in descriptions of contact with these marvelous races" ("Mirabilia Tradition" 487). Such fabled monsters elicited ambivalent sentiments that changed across the Middle Ages. The creatures Riddley mentions resemble in particular the dog-headed cynocephali, discussed in Chapter Two, that appear in texts such as *The Wonders of the East*, *The Letter from Alexander to Aristotle, Liber Monstrorum*, and *Mandeville's Travels*.[131] Like in the case of the medieval imagination that populated the margins of the known world with at once fascinating and threatening creatures, Riddley's society also peoples the world beyond the walls of their inhabited centers with dog-headed monsters. The medieval conception of monstrous races was motivated by political and religious reasons to reassert the centrality of Western society and Christianity over racialized and pagan groups in the East. Similarly, Riddley's father's dismissal of the dog-people legend highlights the political function the story serves. It keeps people from exploring areas they are not supposed to and encourages a fear of the outside world so as to reassert the centrality of the Mincery's rule.

In a culture wherein dogs are seen as threatening Others, Riddley becomes intimate with a pack of wild dogs. Riddley relates his encounter with the leader of the dog pack: "theres the black leader stanning oansome in front of me. . . his yeller eyes ful on me . . . We wer stood there looking at each other" (*RW* 67). As Lorna suggests, the "1st knowing [is] in the new dog the black leader" (69). Riddley and the dog

[130] For a critique of Berger's argument, see Burt; Pick.
[131] See also Czarnowus, *Inscription of the Body* 122-3; "Mirabilia Tradition" 490-2; Friedman 61.

look each other in the eyes. Through that reciprocal gaze, Riddley gains the 1st knowing and becomes "dog frendy" (85). He does not merely look at the dog but recognizes the dog's act of staring back at him. From that moment on, Riddley and the dogs travel together and establish a bond of mutual cooperation.

However, Riddley does not domesticate the dogs or turn them into his pets, nor does he assert his dominance over them. The dogs are depicted as having a will of their own: they "had ther oan progams" (182). Riddley believes that the dogs have their own subjectivity and plans. They guide Riddley and stop him from taking certain decisions. In one scene, Riddley relates: "I startit off then I stoppit and looking back and going tords the gate agen. The 2 nexters they begun grooling and smarling and showing toofy. I said, 'All right then have it your way.' Off we gone tords Cambry then" (154). The dogs realize that Riddley's hesitation in moving forward is due to his desire to find Goodparley in order to help him regain nuclear power. They dissuade him from his plan so that he may continue his road toward Canterbury. The relationship between Riddley and the dogs is one whereby the two parties negotiate decisions together.

Riddley and the dogs are tied together by bonds of exchange. Riddley recounts that "there come back 1 of them and bringing him a hynt leg of a goat . . . Which he offert us . . . Lissener and me we et a littl jus to show meat brothers only we dint fancy it raw nor dursnt make a fire. We made do with some of the roady I had in my pockits . . . I give some of it to the black leader and the 2 nexters" (*RW* 87). The dogs hunt for Riddley and Lissener and they in turn give them back their food. The exchange is not merely material. In one scene, the black leader of the pack "pusht his nose in to my han . . . he wantit me to pet him" (196). A bond of affection is established between Riddley and the dogs grounded in mutual respect.

Riddley's respect for the dogs' subjectivity can be evinced by his refusal to give them names. He writes: "I knowit [the pack leader] dint have no name the other dogs callt him by nor I wunt try to put no name to him no moren Iwd take it on me to name the litening or the sea" (*RW* 85). He resists the logocentric temptation to impose his control over the world through language and the act of naming. Derrida traces the roots of this tendency to Genesis in Adam's process of naming God's Creation. This process grants Man dominion over Creation and enables language to establish the human/nonhuman divide (Derrida, *Animal* 15). In recognizing the dogs' nameless nature, Riddley defies the anthropocentric need to impose oneself over nonhuman Others. He forms a horizontal relationship with the dogs.

The human/dog relationship in the work, torn between hostility and respect, evokes the ambivalent modes of perceiving dogs in the Middle Ages. As Balázs Szendrei notes, in late medieval Europe dogs "can be called polysemous symbols" (41) used to communicate various meanings. On the one hand, both dogs and wolves were depicted as threats or even hellhounds, emissaries of the devil (Delumeau, *Paura*; Huber 289-90). On the other hand, dogs were also presented as positive figures that cooperated with humans and mediated human meanings. The late fifteenth-century chivalric romance *Sir Gowther*, for instance, tells of the shift of Sir Gowther from demonic to saintly figure.[132] Like in *Riddley Walker*,

[132] See Robson; Zacher.

Gowther feeds with the dogs, is guided by them in his path to redemption, and extends acts of care toward them. The medieval text displays a wide range of depictions of canine animality, from the demonic connotations of hellhounds to the redemptive role of "Holy" greyhounds. Indeed, *Sir Gowther* draws extensively from the hagiographic tradition, wherein animals are often central to the lives of saints (Czarnowus, *Inscription* 120-22; Huber 286; Szendrei 43).[133]

Animals also play a crucial role in St. Eustace's legend. Many scholars write that the acts of kindness saints extend toward animals in hagiographic texts are signs that indicate medieval conceptions of interspecies relationships. However, Dominic Alexander suggests that "[t]he animals in miracle stories cannot be taken as straightforward representations of the natural world. They are apt to be associated with metaphors" (14-5). He thus argues that this kind of approach imposes modern interpretations onto medieval mentalities and literary forms. However, animals remain central to hagiographic tales. In the case of St. Eustace's legend, Elke Koch traces the animals' role to one of "mediation between God and men . . . The mediating function is manifest . . . in animal epiphanies," that is, "episodes in which God becomes visible in the shape of an animal" (31-2). She argues that the stag in the legend becomes the Creator speaking through Creation and a mediator between Eustace and the world. She extends the discussion to all the animals in the legend, including the dog and the lion that take away Eustace's children delivering them in safe hands and a lion that refuses to harm Eustace and his family. In all these cases, the animal's role is one that encourages cooperative interspecies relations.[134]

Similarly, the dogs in Eusa's story, patterned after the hounds that accompany Eustace on his hunt, also serve the role of mediators. The story relates: "[t]hay dogs gon crinje then & wimpert. Eusa sed tu thay dogs, Garn the trak & fyn . . . Folleree sed, Lukin for the 1 yu wil aul ways fyn thay 2. Folleroo sed, Thay 2 is 2ce as bad as the 1. Eusa sed, I woan be tol by amminals. He beat thay dogs & on thay gon" (*RW* 31). The dogs that follow Eusa, Folleree and Folleroo, attempt to stop him from killing the little shining man. However, Eusa refuses to be commanded by animals. The dogs become mouthpieces for Eusa story's original message. They warn the scientist against the danger of nuclear weapons. Unlike in St. Eustace's legend, Eusa does not follow the guidance of animals and the story shows the nefarious consequences of his dismissal of the dogs.

The fact that Riddley is accompanied by dogs parallels both Eustace and Eusa's trajectories. Yet his relationship with the animals departs from both that of Eustace and Eusa. Riddley argues: "[t]heres dogs in the Eusa Story. Folleree & Folleroo. Theyre mor blip dogs nor real Is tho" (*RW* 21). He recognizes that the dogs in the story are not real dogs but have an allegorical meaning. They are the vehicles through which a message is told. Yet, as Haraway argues, "[d]ogs, in their historical complexity, matter here. Dogs are not an alibi for other themes; dogs are fleshly material semiotic presences" (*Companion Species* 5). Dogs are not merely symbols that stand for other significations. Rather, they are material and real presences.

[133] See also Cohen, "Gowther Among the Dogs"; Salter 78-81.
[134] See also Salter 65-66; Thiébaux 64-5.

If the dogs within the story mediate a human message, the dogs that accompany Riddley are viewed as material and embodied beings. They are, in light of Haraway's theory, companion species, that is, "coshapings all the way down, in all sorts of temporalities and corporealities" (*When Species* 164) that constitute a form of non-humanism. The notion of companion species indicates a reciprocity in the entanglements and co-evolutions that bind together humans and animals and, in this case, dogs. It unsettles the nature/culture and human/nonhuman divides. Riddley sees the pack of dogs as companion species. He acknowledges their nonhuman subjectivities and establishes with them a mutual understanding. The relationship between him and his canine companions indicates a posthuman ethical relationship that pays attention to nonhuman alterities and recognizes post-anthropocentric trans-species entanglements.

3.2. The Medieval Green Man and the Agency of Nonhuman Matter

The dogs that accompany Riddley play a decisive role in the development of the plot. Following Riddley's craving for nuclear power and "to happen that 1 Big 1" (*RW* 158), the dogs guide him to the "stoan wood unner the groun the hart of the wood in the hart of the stoan in the woom . . . of Cambry" (161), that is, among the tree-shaped columns of Canterbury Cathedral's crypt. Looking at the stone pillars, Riddley begins to sober up from his hunger for power:

> it come to me what it wer wed los. It come to me what it wer as made them peopl time back way back bettern us. It wer knowing how to put ther selfs with the Power of the wood be come stoan. . . . . Them as made Canterbury musve put ther selfs right. Only it dint stay right did it. Somers in be twean them stoan trees and the Power Ring they musve put ther selfs wrong. (161-2)

Riddley admires the pre-apocalyptic society for its artful creations rather than for its nuclear knowledge. He starts to question the ethical soundness of his desire for nuclear power. Without completely dismissing the past's achievements, he criticizes the excesses to which the old civilization had pushed itself.

Riddley contemplates the "stone wood" with awe. He describes the columns with minutia: "I put my han on a stoan tree trunk . . . Fealing the carving unner my hans it . . . All them hans digging and cutting and hoysting and joyning and carving. All of that to put the Power of the wood to gether with the Power of the stoan in that wood of stoan trees" (*RW* 162). He pays attention to the shape and details of the stone out of which the columns are made and the way it has been carved. As Val Plumwood suggests, "in western culture, stones have not been given an honoured place . . . Stone is dead matter – a mere resource or pure enabler . . . There are dissidents, of course, to the dominant culture's devaluation of stones" ("Journey" 20). Plumwood laments the lack of interest Western modernity has in stone. She admits, however, the existence of dissidents to this indifference. Riddley is one such dissident. Through his contemplation of stone, he is able to think across vast dimensions of human and geological time.

He reflects on the columns' ancient nature. He expresses his belief that "it lookit like it wer stanning in its oan time not the same time I wer in" (162). Riddley experiences an asynchronous temporality.[135] He feels that the columns stand not in the present, but in their own temporal dimension. As J. J. Cohen argues,

[135] Cf. Dinshaw, *How Soon Is Now* 41-72.

"stone will arrive into the present as alien presence . . . arches and cathedrals triumphantly announce stories of a past otherwise intangible . . . Stone is thick with sedimented time. Within both medieval and modern environmental imaginings, rocks and people inhabit temporalities and magnitudes profoundly different" (*Stone* 36). Riddley feels that the temporalities inhabited by himself and the stone diverge. He feels the epochs sedimented in the stone, which appears as an alien presence. The medieval columns serve as a receptacle of human memory and a vehicle through which to perceive vast human historical times and the presence of the medieval past in the present.

However, stone does not only carry the memory of the medieval past, but also the traces of the nuclear explosion. Riddley describes Canterbury as "[j]umbelt stoan and crummelt birk . . . No stilness like the other dead towns tho. Qwick it wer. All of it qwick and a qwickful hy moving coming up out of the groun and hyering hyering up thru the rain in to the dark what stans for ever on them broakin stoans with its hans over its face" (*RW* 157). The stone walls and ruins capture the human-shaped shadows caused by radiation and retain the explosion's energy. As Karen Barad notes, the "temporality of radiation exposure is not one of immediacy . . . Radioactivity inhabits time-beings and resynchronizes and reconfigures temporalities/ spacetimematterings . . . Matter is spectral, haunted by all im/possible wanderings" (G109, G113). Radiation's effects are both instantaneous and delayed. Canterbury records the explosion's instant through the shadows on the walls, and the long temporalities of radiation through the energy it retains. Stone reveals both the radiation's transcorporeal nature, which Stacy Alaimo defines as the interpenetration of bodies and the more-than-human ("Elemental Love" 303), and what Rob Nixon calls slow violence, the delayed effects of radiation on bodies and matter (2). The radiation recorded in the stone blurs the inside/outside and past/present divides.

Riddley is inspired by the crypt to write a story about stone and its agency. In the tale "Stoan," he relates that "[s]toans want to be lissent to . . . theywl talk and theywl tel if you lissen. Theywl tel whats in them but you wont hear nothing what theyre saying without you go as fas as the stoan. You myt think a stoan is slow thats becaws you wont see it moving . . . That dont mean its slow tho" (163). Riddley's story embraces the stone's inhuman otherness. As Cohen argues, "[l]ithic materiality pushes story into expanses too large to be contained by periodizations like 'classical,' 'medieval,' 'postmodern.' Stone . . . carries also a past surpassing human enframing . . . Thinking geologically brings the medieval and the modern into unaccustomed proximity" (*Stone* 8-9). The stone pillars invite consideration not only of historical medieval time, but also of geological deep time. Riddley compares humans' fast paces to lithic slow movements. Against lithic scales, human temporalities compress and the medieval and modern appear close together. By stressing stones' paces, Riddley defies, in line with ecological posthumanist stances, the idea of inhuman matter as inert. Stones are agents that move and speak in their own time and language.

Riddley does not stop at the surface of the stone. Rather, he ventures to its core through his imagination: "[t]here are the many cools of Addom which they are the party cools of stoan. Moving in ther millyings which is the girt dants of the every thing its the fastes thing there is it keaps the stilness going.

Reason you wont see it move its so far a way in to the stoan" (*RW* 163). He imagines the dynamic motion of the molecules and sub-atomic particles of the stone as a great dance. If Riddley starts questioning nuclear power, he does not seem to reject a kind of proto-quantum physics. Rather, he celebrates the movement of matter and within matter. His admiration of atomic motion reinforces the idea that matter is not inert but lively and vibrant as argued by ecomaterialist scholars.[136]

His contemplation of the stone pillars prepares Riddley for an epiphanic moment wherein he envisions a Green Man that leads him to give up his quest for nuclear power. The Green Man was a decorative motif that ornated medieval Romanesque and Gothic churches from the eleventh to the sixteenth century, though they have been traced further back to the first century BCE or earlier (Dinshaw, "Ecology" 347; Gibson 22; Varner 115). Scholars debate over its provenance and meaning without having reached a universal consensus. It has often been considered as a symbol related to pagan fertility rituals and cycles of death and renewal. This view owes to Lady Raglan, who in 1939 turned the Green Man into an icon of interspecies connection derived from ancient pagan beliefs. A variant of this interpretation discusses the Green Man as tied to pagan residues in medieval festivities of May Day and other festivals, and in particular to Jack-in-the-Green and the Lord of Misrule/Robin Hood tradition (Centerwall; C. Collins 65-6; Speirs; Stock 266-7; Varner 135-6). More recently, scholars have questioned these theories (Dinshaw, "Ecology" 352; Mi. Jones 186; Larrington 227). Yet the perception of the Green Man as a symbol for interspecies entanglement persists both among later scholars and in popular culture.[137] The Green Man has also been interpreted as a Christian symbol, potentially associated with the Biblical Tree of Life (Dinshaw, "Ecology" 350; Huisman 360). Other interpretations see the figure as a darker symbol of human's fallen nature and sin that reflects the relationship between humans and nature as hostile (Basford 19-20; Keetley 2; MacDermott 192).

Following Riddley's vision of the Green Man, the dogs invite him to dig among Canterbury Cathedral's ruins. As Riddley relates, "the black leader sniffing and scratching on a stoan with his paw and looking at me. It lookit like he wantit me to shif that stoan. Which I done. It come out easy there wer a hidey hoal and some thing in it . . . It wer Greanvine" (167). The dogs lead him to where the carved face of the Green Man lays buried. It constitutes the same face that Riddley had envisioned in his mind and that led him to the epiphany. The latter changes his views and determines the course of his actions from then on. The epiphany in "the hart of the wood in the hart of the stoan" continues the parallelism between Riddley and Eustace's trajectories. It serves as a stand-in for the vision of Christ between the stag's antlers that leads to Eustace's conversion. In more secular terms, Riddley is converted to an ethical stance that rejects nuclear weapons and violent prevarication.

Riddley describes Greanvine in detail. It is "[c]arvit out of wood and paintit . . . the vines and leaves growit out of his mouf . . . May be he ben peggit to a poast or he ben a kynd of head on a poal" (*RW* 167-

[136] See Jane Bennett; Cohen, *Stone*; Iovino and Opperman.
[137] See, for instance, W. Anderson; Varner.

8). The figure has the shape of a carved wooden face with leaves and vines growing out of its mouth. Riddley realizes that it must have been a decoration hung up in Canterbury Cathedral. He recognizes its ancient nature: "[i]t wer his look he wer looking at me from time back way way back" (168). Much like in the case of the crypt's stone pillars, Riddley experiences a moment of temporal asynchrony. Indeed, he perceives the Green Man as inhabiting a different temporal dimension from his own, one that he enters into dialogue with by looking at the leaf-covered visage. Once again, Riddley encounters medieval temporalities directly through the contact with its artifacts.

Regardless of its true meaning, which remains speculative, the Green Man has remained a symbol of interspecies entanglements in the popular imagination (Larrington 228; Varner 150). The novel's medievalism involved in the resignification of the Green Man follows the same pattern. The figure becomes a medieval model for posthuman ethics. It constitutes a hybrid figure that blends human and plant traits. Riddley describes the way the vines shoot out of its mouth "[l]ike he ben breaving and suddn the breaf coming out of his mouf ternt in to vines and leaves . . . The look of that face saying so many diffrent things only no words to say them with" (*RW* 165). Human breath turns into more-than-human vines. Its language beyond words is nonhuman. The Green Man challenges the Self /Other, nature/culture, and human/nonhuman divides. As Alan Montroso argues, "these heads best represent the contribution of medieval monsters to contemporary posthumanist thinking" (109). It questions the notion of an untainted and self-enclosed humanity by showing the reciprocal interlacement of humans and plants. It reveals the way medieval models can be used to foster a posthumanist ethics that celebrates hybrid interspecies assemblages (Dinshaw, "Ecology" 354).

The Green Man's posthuman potential is not reduced to a single individual but refers to everything and everyone. As Riddley suggests, "[i]t wer every face. It wer the face of the boar I kilt and the dog that old leader. It wer the face of my father what ben kilt in the digging . . . it wer the Littl Shyning Man" (*RW* 166). Riddley includes the boar and the little shining man in the list besides his human acquaintances. The Green Man's face thus moves beyond humanity to encapsulate animality and atomic matter as well. It becomes a post-anthropocentric figure that denounces radical interdependence and interconnectedness.

The Green Man's hybridity adheres to the aesthetic mode of the grotesque. As Sara Shabot argues, "[g]rotesque bodies are hybrid bodies: mixtures of animals, objects, plants, and human beings," defined by an "embodied and open subjectivity . . . that defies clear definitions and borders and that occupies the middle ground between life and death, between subject and object, between one and many" (229). Grotesque bodies can be seen as posthuman. They challenge humanity's borders and are defined by relationality and liminality.

The term "grotesque" is derived from the Italian "grotta," that is, "cave," in turn derived from the Greek "kryptos," meaning "hidden," in view of the secluded, hidden away nature of caves. The coinage of the term can be traced back to the sixteenth-century interest in Roman antiquity. This interest led to the discovery of frescoed caves near Rome. The frescoes depicted hybrid figures that blended features of

humans, animals, and plants. The latter were thus defined as grotesque (Harpham 461; Kayser 19; Matthews 20). Therefore, "grotesque" did not exist as a concept during the Middle Ages. However, it can be considered a transhistorical concept that reemerges in different epochs, although each historical period's relation to the grotesque changes along with the specific cultural trends of the time. Medieval culture was rich with representations of hybrid beings that can retrospectively be seen as grotesque.

Mikhail Bakhtin has developed one of the most influential theorizations of the grotesque in *Rabelais and his World* (1984). He argues that, while the roots of the grotesque can be traced further back in history, the Middle Ages is the period that can be identified retrospectively as the one of highest development of the grotesque, which slowly gives way to a new bodily canon in the Renaissance (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 320-22, 380-1; Bishop 50-1; Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. *Seven Beauties* 184). Among its traits, Bakhtin includes exaggerated features, an open-ended nature, an earthy dimension, and a subversive potential. The traits Bakhtin defines as grotesque can be found in the Green Man that Riddley finds among the ruins.

The Green Man's grotesque nature is defined by its exaggerated traits. It has "a thick kynd of face. Thick nose . . . Thick mouf ½ open and the leafy vines growing out of boath sides . . . His eyes wide open with sir prize" (165). The face has overall protruding and open features. As Bakhtin suggests,

> the nose and mouth play the most important part in the grotesque image of the body . . . all that seeks to go out beyond the body's confines. Special attention is given to the shoots and branches, to all that prolongs the body and links it to other bodies or to the world outside. . . But the most important of all human features for the grotesque is . . . the gaping mouth. (*Rabelais* 316-7)

The grotesque body presents open and bulging features that exceed the body itself. Riddley's description of the Green Man's mouth, nose, and eyes follows such traits. The vines that protrude from its gaping mouth fit Bakhtin's notion. Their role is to connect the figure to the outside world in a relational way that echoes Braidotti's idea of a posthuman subject as relational and defined by multiplicity (*Posthuman* 49).

The vines qualify the Green Man's body as incomplete and dynamic. Riddley argues: "this here man dying back in to the earf . . . new life growing out of him" (168). The human blends with the plant and undergoes a process of dynamic change of death and renewal that denies finality. Bakhtin argues:

> [t]he grotesque unfinished and open body (dying, bringing forth and being born) . . . is blended with the world, with animals, with objects. It is cosmic, it represents the entire material bodily world in all its elements . . . [It] is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. (*Rabelais* 26– 27, 317, 339)

Bakhtin sees the body as trans-species, relational, incomplete, and involved in a process of becoming. The Green Man incarnates a trans-species multiplicity. It embraces horizontal differences without turning into an undifferentiated whole. It is defined by a motion of dynamic becoming. Its human-plant hybrid nature could be seen in light of the posthumanist notion of becoming-plant, a variation on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming-Other, which involves the in-between state of multispecies symbiotic alliances (Deleuze and Guattari 238).[138] The Green Man's becoming-plant describes a posthuman relation whereby human and plant are mutually changed by their bond wherein nonhuman agencies are recognized.

[138] See Deleuze and Guattari 232-309. For a discussion on the notion of becoming-plant, see Houle.

Another aspect that allows to define Riddley's depiction of the Green Man as grotesque is its attention to the bodily lower stratum. Riddley imagines "the vines growing up thru his arse hoal up thru his gullit and out of his mouf" (*RW* 168). The Green Man is defined only by a face. Still, Riddley mends the mind/body separation by completing its body in his imagination. He envisions the vines' path from the Green Man's anus, through its guts, and out of its mouth. Bakhtin stresses the relevance of bowels, genitals, and the anus for grotesque bodies:

> it is within [these convexities and orifices] that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome . . . Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body-all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world. (*Rabelais* 317)

Bakhtin calls this focus on the body's lower stratum the "material bodily principle." Once again, the attention to orifices and movements across the body's confines stresses a posthuman, open-ended relationality and a two-way dialogue between the Self and the world. It also celebrates the body without rejecting any of its aspects and functions. Riddley's focus on the Green Man's lower body presents the bodily element as life-affirming, which appears all the more relevant in a post-apocalyptic context.

The figure of the Green Man also engenders a subversion of hegemonic discourses and ideologies. It proves to be a catalyst for Riddley's character development and a change in his mindset:

> [c]oming in to Cambry . . . I ben thinking on . . . The 1 Big 1 . . . I dint know what the connexion wer with that face in my mynd only I knowit that face wer making me think diffrent. I wernt looking for no Hy Power no mor I dint want no Power at all . . . I cud feal some thing growing in me it wer like a grean sea surging in me it wer saying . . . THE ONLYES POWER IS NO POWER. . . I wer 1 with Greanvine . . . I cudnt think of no 1 I wantit to be on the same side with no mor. Wel the dogs. (*RW* 166-7)

Riddley realizes through the Green Man that his fixation with nuclear power has been futile and that no power is the only real power. From the life-affirming recognition of trans-species horizontal networks can only come a rejection of hierarchical thought that prioritizes death-inducting domination. Riddley feels himself become one with the Green Man and enveloped by a "green sea." He participates in the process of becoming-plant as he lets go individual desires to welcome posthuman networks of agencies. He departs from previous alliances with Goodparley or Lissener, and feels close only to the dogs and the Green Man.

The grotesque quality of the Green Man leads Riddley to a disruption of hierarchical structures and social norms. The grotesque is one of the main elements that sustain Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque. Bakhtin describes the carnival as a celebration that allowed a "temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed" (*Rabelais* 10).[139] While it was originally tied to medieval festivities (4-5), it is not limited to a set temporal period. Carnivalesque traits resurface in other epochs

[139] Not everyone agrees on the subversive potential of the carnivalesque. Others see it as a tool for reaffirming social order and a release mechanism. See Banfield 3; Matheson and Tinsley 7; Ravenscroft and Gilchrist 37.

through literature (34-35, 217-8; Danow 3-4). If carnival celebrations consist in a temporary subversion of order that is however soon reinstated, Bakhtin also argues in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* that "the carnival sense of the world also knows no period, and is, in fact, hostile to any sort of conclusive conclusion: all endings are merely beginnings; carnival images are reborn again and again" (165). Bakhtin intends the term "carnivalesque" in a broad sense that is not confined by limited temporal boundaries. Unlike such figures as C.L. Barber (*Festive Comedy*) and Northrop Frye (*Anatomy of Criticism*), who believe that the festive overturning of values ultimately serves to reinforce social order, Bakhtin believes that the carnivalesque holds the power to challenge and question accepted norms and values (G. Saunders 154-55). It leads to the re-examination of the social order and to the attainment of a new perspective that looks toward greater social justice (Gardiner, "Bakhtin's Carnival" 32). The grotesque Green Man embodies such carnivalesque qualities. In fact, the grotesque contributes to the carnivalesque traits of transgression, renewal, and re-examination of established hierarchies.

Riddley's embrace of the carnivalesque and grotesque nature of the Green Man opens the novel to an ecological posthumanist ethics. His attitude departs from the response Burroughs's John Carter has against the grotesque alien hybrids discussed in Chapter Two. Where Carter's reaction is aligned with a reassertion of hierarchical humanist positions that value the purity of the category of the human, Riddley finds in the grotesque medieval Green Man a model to challenge established views and embrace horizontal, relational understandings of the more-than-human. Posthumanist ecocritical discourse and Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque-grotesque appear highly compatible in view of their common focus on corporeality, materiality, reciprocal entanglements that reject hierarchical and mutually exclusive dichotomic pairs, and processes of dynamic, unfinished becoming. Indeed, scholars argue for the usefulness of Bakhtin's theory for both posthumanist and ecocritical analyses (Casid; Ferrando; Gardiner "Ecology and Carnival"; Lousley; McDowell; P. Murphy). This conjunction appears especially valuable for discussions of ecomedievalism owing to the carnivalesque's roots in the Middle Ages. The Green Man thus constitutes a form of posthumanist carnivalesque-grotesque medievalism.

Through his encounter with the Green Man, Riddley moves from a perception of fragmentation to a sense of the interconnectedness of everything and the responsibility that comes with it. Riddley comments:

> I dint have no 1 on my back only my self. Only my self! Looking at them words going down on this paper right this minim I know there aint no such thing there aint no only my self you all ways have every 1 and every thing on your back. Them as stood and them as run time back way back long long time they had me on ther back if they knowit or if they dint. (*RW* 111)

Riddley retrospectively realizes that there is no such thing as the individual separated from the rest. He feels that he carries the weight of others and that, in turn, others carry his weight, both in the present and the far past. He acknowledges how each action has consequences that can span great scales of time.

However, Riddley does merely endorse a static societal condition in his rejection of power. He later corrects his statement that the only power is no power and suggests: "[w]el now I sust that wernt qwite it. It aint that its NO POWER. Its the not sturgling for Power thats where the Power is . . . Its tuning in to the

worl its leaving your self behynt and letting your self be … in tu the hart uv the stoan hart uv the dans" (*RW* 197). Riddley's critique does not entail stagnation and a rejection of social transformations. Rather, he challenges the struggle for power guided by individualistic and anthropocentric drives. He suggests the need to leave the ego behind to recognize one's presence in the world and its dynamic networks of change.

Central to his character growth and his realization of dynamic 1ness are not only the dogs and the Green Man, but also the character of Lorna the "tel woman." She tells Riddley that

> the manying and the millying its all 1 thing it dont have nothing to gether with . . . Thats how it is with what we are its all 1 girt big thing and divvyt up amongst the many . . . It ben here befor us nor I dont know what we are to it. May be weare jus only sickness and a feaver to it or boyls on the arse of it . . . Wel I cant say for cern no mor if I had any of them things in my mynd befor she tol me but ever since then it seams like they all ways ben there. . . Thats why I finely come to writing all this down. (*RW* 6)

Lorna explains to Riddley the concept of multiplicity within unity. She stresses the radical entanglement between different elements. She also suggests that, while humans are included within such relational networks, the latter are not reduced to humanity, which is only a small part of such bonds both physically and temporally. Lorna thus displaces humans from their centrality to celebrate multispecies and multitemporal entanglements. Her explanation has wide reverberations for Riddley. Her words drive him to seek connections among separate and fragmented elements and prompt him to write his story down.

Lorna becomes central to Riddley's narrative despite the neo-patriarchal social structure that has been rebuilt in the post-apocalyptic context. As Daniel Lukes argues, "this neomedievalist post-apocalyptic future has reverted to a homosocial world in which women are generally reduced to their wombs" ("Surrogate" 278). Women's devalued role can be deduced by the different evaluations that the society has of "connexions" and "tells." As one of the members of Riddley's society explains: "[w]hat I connect is shows I aint no tel woman" (*RW* 13). The official interpretation of the Eusa story that transmits the cultural values to the community can only be performed by men, while women are in charge of telling stories and interpreting signs, which are deemed less significant. Riddley, however, ignores his own society's mindset and lets himself be guided by Lorna's words. Rather than becoming a "connexion man," much like a "tel woman," he starts reading the signs he finds scattered in the world and looking for their meanings. He thus rejects his phallocentric society's principles.

Yet Riddley must face his own phallocentric drives. At the power plant, he "begun to feal all juicy with [power] . . . Not jus my cock but all of me it wer like all of me wer cock and all the worl a cunt and open to me" (*RW* 159). He blends desires for nuclear power with sexual ones. Sara France argues: "[a]llusions to victory in nuclear warfare are frequently constructed as a form of sexual dominance: nuclear accomplishment correlates with sexual prowess" (83). Riddley reiterates the sexualized nature of nuclear discourse. The work ties the destructive potential of hypermasculine charges and nuclear weapons together. This argument repeats the stance of ecofeminist scholars who recognize the tie between the exploitation of women and the more-than-human. In the crypt, envisioned as a female "woom," Riddley is figuratively born again. His change reveals a departure from patriarchal values and anthropocentrism.

The novel also destabilizes conventional gender roles through the mythical figure of Aunty, death's embodiment in Riddley's culture. Aunty is imagined with "[s]toan boans and iron tits and teef be twean her legs plus she has a iron willy for the ladys it gets red hot. When your time comes you have to do the juicy with her like it or not" (*RW* 90). Aunty defies the gender binary: she has both female and male genitals. The union of organic flesh and inorganic matter turns her into one of Haraway's cyborgs and defies conventional ties between the female body and fertility. She brings about death through sex. Once again, death and sex are linked together. Yet in this case it speaks to masculine anxieties over dominance.

The greatest threat posed by Aunty's body are the "teef be twean her legs" that echo the *vagina dentata* in medieval representations of women. This visual trope can be considered, along with the other features of Aunty's body, as grotesque. Women's bodies have often been one of the privileged sites of grotesque depictions (Banfield 8; Csicsery-Ronay, Jr. *Seven Beauties* 193; Russo). Bakhtin comments upon figurines of senile pregnant hags: "[t]his is a typical and very strongly expressed grotesque. It is ambivalent. It is pregnant death, a death that gives birth" (*Rabelais* 25). The *vagina dentata* similarly associates sexual organs related to birth with protruding teeth that deny fertilization. It becomes an ambivalent grotesque symbol that mingles life and death together. Her grotesque body becomes a powerful challenge to the patriarchal nature of Riddley's society.

3.3. The Puppet of Punch and Riddley's New Show

By the end of the novel, gunpowder has been reinvented, most of the characters have died in the ensuing explosion, and the central authority of the Mincery is in disarray. While gunpowder's rediscovery casts a dark shadow over the future of post-atomic society, Riddley offers a deviation from the dominant Eusa narrative by establishing with Orfing a new traveling puppet show that diverges from the traditional script. The new show offers an alternative to the established interpretation of the decontextualized medieval legend. Central to the new show is the puppet of Punch that Riddley has found amid the wreckage.

The plot of the original show on which Riddley and Orfing's "Punch and Pooty" show is based consisted in Punch's exhibitions of wit and violence at the expense of other characters. Among the characters of the original show that survive in the new one are Judy, Punch's wife, who becomes Pooty; their child; and the devil, sometimes called Drop John. Riddley and Orfing's show has preserved the coarse jokes, double entendres, and violent scenes originally featured in Punch and Judy shows (Orenstein 76-7). Although with some variation, the plot of such shows, which is retained in the novel, revolves around Judy leaving the baby in the care of Punch, who proves to be a bad babysitter and eventually beats up multiple characters with a slapstick and overcomes them through trickery.

The origin of the Punch and Judy tradition can be traced far back in time. Goodparley tells Riddley: "[t]his here figger his name is Punch which hes the oldes figger there is. He wer old time back way way back long befor Eusa ever ben thot of. Hes so old he cant dy" (*RW* 131). Goodparley recognizes Punch's ancient roots. The first recorded show about Punch took place in 1662 in England. The puppet has evolved

from the sixteenth-century Pulcinella (Orenstein 58-9), a character of the Italian Commedia dell'Arte who plays the role of the trickster and servant, often humorous and defiant of authority. With time, he has become coarse and braggart in speech and behavior (Speaight 13). The same features resurface in Punch.

Speaight also argues that, while deriving from Pulcinella, many of the features of Punch can be further traced back to medieval traditions. Punch is partly derived from the medieval jester tradition. He is dressed "in red and green and yeller does and a poynty red hat with a yeller wagger on it" (*RW* 133). The clothes he dons resemble the traditional motley worn by professional fools in medieval courts. Much like the fool, Punch speaks with great liberty, makes coarse jokes, and defies figures of authority, while entertaining the audience with humorous wit (Speaight 22-3). Punch also has traits in common with the Vice figure of morality plays of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The characters in morality plays represented human virtues and vices. The Vice figure, often presenting a hunched back like Punch, was both a sinner who invited other characters to sin and a buffoon and quarrelsome braggart ("Punch and the Puppets" 548-50; Speaight 23-4).

Bakhtin argues that both the jester and morality plays are endowed with the medieval carnivalesque spirit (*Rabelais* 8, 15). They both involved laughter that penetrated serious and authoritative contexts. The Commedia dell'Arte itself has often been claimed to derive from carnivalesque medieval festivities, such as the Feast of Fools that featured bawdy songs and rhymes, dancing, drinking, and feasting, and the hierarchical inversions of roles embodied by the "Lord of Misrule" (Gardiner, "Bakhtin's Carnival" 29). Pulcinella, as Bakhtin argues, has also been depicted as "being elected the king of clowns" (247). Punch, in turn, has often been linked to the Lord of Misrule (Speaight 23). The different traditions from which Punch derives have strong ties with the carnivalesque spirit that originated in the medieval period. Punch, like the Green Man, stands for yet another medievally derived model that offers the subversive, counter-hegemonic power of the carnival. Like the Green Man, Punch embodies certain grotesque features that are an integral part of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque. These include both his physical traits and his coarse jokes focused on the bodily lower stratum.

Punch's physical appearance can be deemed grotesque. Riddley describes the puppet: "[i]t wer crookit. Had a hump on its back . . . The face had a big nose what hookit down and a big chin what hookit up and a smyling mouf" (*RW* 72). Punch is "crookit": his physical features are deformed and depart from conventional bodily norms. This is owing to his hunched back, and protruding nose and chin. His features have been inherited from Pulcinella. According to Antonio Pasquelino, Pulcinella's "beak nose and peculiar voice make him resemble a bird, the word bird (ucello) being used to refer to the male sexual organ" (20). The sexual allusions in the nose, the chin, and the hump have also been noted in Punch (Reeve 139; Shershow, *Puppets* 139). Bakhtin sees the "humps of huge proportions, or monstrous noses" (328) in Rabelais as grotesque elements that exceed the norm. The same features are exhibited in Punch.

Punch's speech is also defined by grotesque phallic imagery tied to an earthy dimension. Most of his jokes and comebacks are of a sexual nature. As Goodparley performs the show to Riddley, Riddley

interacts with the puppet: "I said, 'Cant you get your down be low up here?' Punchs voyce said, '*I can all ways get it up you bes stan wel back here I come*.' Up he shot then and zanting a bout with a longish flat stick [italics in the original]" (*RW* 133). In the new show that Riddley and Orfing perform they remain faithful to this kind of humor: "Punch said, '*Thats me Im Old Man Salty from Salt Town which Ive got the stick to prove it*.' Erny said, 'Salt aint sticky.' Punch said, '*May be Im honey then whynt you lick my stick and fynd out*?' Erny said, 'This aint that kynd of a show [italics in the original]" (215). The bawdy and coarse jokes of Punch's repertoire constantly bring the attention of the audience to the bodily lower stratum and to sexual organs that typify the grotesque.

Besides the crucial role played by Goodparley in explaining to Riddley the Punch and Judy tradition, the first seed of the new show Riddley and Orfing develop is planted with the interaction between the Green Man and Punch that Riddley imagines after his vision among Canterbury Cathedral's ruins. Riddley creates an extemporaneous show that has the two medievally derived figures interact:

> Punch said, '. . . If the way is diffrent the end is diffrent. Becaws the end aint nothing only part of the way its jus that part of the way where you come to a stop. The end cud be any part of the way its in every step of the way thats why you bes go ballsy.'
> Greanvine said, 'Is that how you all ways go?'
> Punch said, 'I am the balls of the worl I am the stoans of the worl. I am the stoans and I have my littl stick.'
> Greanvine said, 'Is that your tree then is that your living wood?'
> Punch said, 'Yes thats what it is its that same and very wood what never dys.'
> Greanvine said, 'Wel then is there hoap of a tree?'
> Punch said, 'Theres hoap of the wud in the hart of the stoan.'
> Greanvine said, 'What stoan is that then?'
> Punch said, 'Balls. Which thems the stoans what never dys.'
> Wel of coarse Punch wud say that. Thats how he is hes that way myndit. (*RW* 172)

The grotesque element reemerges in the dialogue. A serious discussion on hope, regeneration, and alternative pathways born out of Riddley's reflections in the crypt converges with Punch's bawdy celebration of sexual energies. The play on stones and sexual organs echoes medieval double entendres. As Cohen notes, stones were "designations for the testicles. These terms likely pun on the various medieval meanings of "ston," activating its associations with value and fertility. . . A rock, so often dismissed as sterile and passive, inhabits the interior of the body at the origin of life" (*Stone* 22). The grotesque element opens a continuity between the regenerative nature of the more-than-human and the possibility to change the course of human history through a celebration of bodily energies of life rather than the destructive power of nuclear energy.

The dialogue between the Green Man and Punch sets the scene for Riddley and Orfing's new show. Riddley comments: "[r]eady to cry ready to dy ready for any thing is how I come to it now. In fear and tremmering only not running a way. In emtyness and ready to be fult. Not to lern no body nothing I cant even lern my oan self all I can do is try not to get in front of whats coming" (*RW* 204). He recognizes the futility in trying to stop the motion of events. He seems to draw from the exchange between the Green

Man and Punch both the “hoap” the Greanvine mentions and Punch’s “ballsy” take on life. He is ready to take on the world and its obstacles. It is with this attitude that he begins to perform the show with Orfing.

Riddley and Orfing, however, worry at the beginning. As Riddley argues, “[w]e dint know if that care making Mincery wer going to let us run luce with our fit up and our 2 bags of figgers” since "it aint no Eusa show its some kynd of a new show” (*RW* 207). The new show departs from the only show that was allowed to be performed until then. Riddley and Orfing must face an initial resistance to the change that the new show represents. Yet the show integrates elements of the Eusa story within it. The two shows have separate sets of puppets except for one: “1 figger hes the same and very 1 in boath bags of figgers. Mr Clevver. Which hes Mr On The Lewil and hes callit Drop John as wel. There he is the name changes but he don’t” (206). The puppet used to represent Mr. Clevver in the Eusa show resurfaces in the Punch and Pooty one as the Devil. The Devil’s omnipresence in Riddley’s culture suggests the need for the new society to confront the nature of evil within humankind that is “[s]um tyms bytin sum tyms bit” (206). The Devil figure is sometimes the victor and sometimes defeated as are the base drives of humanity.

Although integrating aspects of the older narrative, the new show threatens the post-apocalyptic established order. Riddley and Orfing know, as Goodparley says, that the new central authorities might be “afeart [they will] bring down [the] Mincery with Punch” (*RW* 180). Punch defies the status quo of the Eusa story. The show incarnates the carnival spirit that “offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things” (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 34). Punch prompts the audience to question human nature’s contradictions. The carnivalesque nature of the new show is defined, besides by the element of the grotesque, by dimensions of laughter, improvisation, social critique, and disruption of the separation between audience and show.[140]

The principal feature that defines the new show is its humorous nature. As Goodparley tells Riddley, “this show . . . it ben jus to make peopl larf. Give peopl a bit of fun” (*RW* 140). The show is meant to make people laugh. However, it is not “jus” that. Laughter does not appear as an end in itself. As Chris Ackerley suggests, “[i]n Riddley’s old world Punch cannot be shown, as his corrosive laughter erodes the Ram’s authority. Even in the new show Punch says things that Riddley cannot; he is licenced for anarchy” (188). Punch rebels against the established order and invites laughter rather than sorrow and guilt. He counters the reactions that the Eusa show is meant to elicit. In the Punch show, the audience confronts humanity’s darkest traits, is asked to recognize them and laugh at them. Laughter creates a distance between the audience and Punch’s violent behavior. It exorcises such elements within the community. It is meaningful that the first village where Riddley and Orfing perform is called Weaping. Punch forces Weaping to laughter, creating the groundwork for a new perspective that looks at the present’s possibilities rather than the past’s mistakes.

[140] See also Orenstein 56.

The new show is also based on improvisation. Goodparley tells Riddley that the Punch and Judy show "its meant to stay the same all the time" (*RW* 132). Yet Riddley senses that "[i]t aint in the natur of a show to be the same every time it aint like a story what you pas down trying not to change nothing which even then the changes wil creap in" (205). He realizes that, unlike the written-down Eusa story, the oral puppet show is rooted in improvisation and variation. As Claudia Orenstein suggests, "the distinguishing feature of popular forms has always been the balance they strike between . . . established convention and novelty and improvisation . . . That balance allows them to keep pace with the often changing political world in which they find themselves" (56). Oral shows are meant to change with every performance in a way that ensures their continued carnivalesque potential and their usefulness for socio-political critique.

The Punch and Pooty show serves as a vehicle of social critique. As one of the inhabitants of Weaping realizes, "theres moren 1 kynd of crookit. Theres crookit on the out side and theres crookit on the in side. Which Im beginning to think may be this here humpy figger is some kynd of a nindicater" (*RW* 215). Punch is not merely "crookit" in terms of his deformed physical features, but he is also "crookit" on the inside. He is a "nindicater" of violent, selfish, and destructive behaviors that echo the ones that led to the apocalypse. The show's subversive power is not derived from Punch's defiance of power and authority. In significant ways, Punch is the figure of authority that misuses his power and oppresses multiple social groups. The slapstick he wields and that he uses to beat other puppets embodies such a violent exercise of power. Historically, Punch made extensive use of stereotypical images both misogynistic and racist (Hume, "What is Punch" 654; Orenstein 57-8, 84; Shershow, "Cultural Appropriation" 545). Punch then serves to critique the harmful and dangerous mindset and practices that will inevitably engender death and destruction. He reflects the base aspects of humanity.

However, Punch is punished for his actions. Even after defeating the Devil, he is haunted by his ghost Drop John, who "hops on to Punchs back its clinging to him all prest up agenst his hump" (*RW* 139). Punch must carry the weight of his actions. The show suggests that no one escapes the consequences of one's decisions. As Bakhtin argues, carnivalesque laughter leads to "the defeat of fear presented in a droll and monstrous form, the symbols of power and violence turned inside out, the comic images of death and bodies gaily rent asunder. All that was terrifying becomes grotesque" (*Rabelais* 91). The terrifying manifestations of power are neutralized by depicting them through the grotesque Punch and his haunting.

The outrageous Punch triggers an ethical response in the audience. One of the audience members in Weaping jumps up mid-show to stop Punch from eating the baby that Pooty had left in his care: "[n]o sooner does Punch get his hans on that babby nor in comes a big hairy han which it grabs Punch and my han inside Punch. Its Easyer he yels, 'You littl crookit barset I tol you not to try nothing here!'" (*RW* 219). The reaction to Punch's behavior is so deeply felt and immediate that Easyer forgets to be watching a show and jumps to save the baby. As Hoban argues, "Punch is that force that has no morality, no law; he wants immediate gratification for whatever urge he has at the moment. Our task, our burden, our human inheritance, is to try somehow to put together our need for a system of morality and our recognition of the

amoral, unlawful urges in us" (qtd. Haffenden 143). Punch seems to first confront the audience with the desires of lust and violence that lie in the dark folds of humanity and then encourage the possibility of moving beyond them through ethical responses (Gannon 34).

The show then has a didactic character. The latter is prompted through audience participation: "Pooty terns to the crowd she says, 'Wud you please keap a eye on [Punch] . . . Give us a shout wil you if he dont mynd that babby right.'" (*RW* 217). The audience is given the chore to keep Punch's unrestrained desires in check and to stop him from eating the baby. The show offers, as Laity suggests, "a greater role for the member of the community, but . . . also [gives] them more attendant responsibility." It triggers an ethical response, mingling a didactic purpose with entertainment (Orenstein 73). The image of eating the baby suggests that the selfish and short-sighted drives that guide Punch's actions may hinder futurity itself. The role given to the audience awakens it to act against injustice. The dissolution of the divide separating performers and spectators echoes the very dynamics of the carnival, wherein everyone is an active participant (Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 7-8). Riddley and Orfing stimulate the audience to rebuild the ethical premises of the post-apocalyptic society.

Finally, the show and the novel, much like the carnival itself, have an open quality to them. Riddley asks himself, his audience, and the reader: "[w]hy is Punch crookit? Why wil he all ways kil the babby if he can? Parbly I wont never know its just on me to think on it" (*RW* 220). Riddley ends the novel with yet another riddle. In the postmodern fashion of rejecting grand narratives and totalizing certainties, Riddley denies definitive answers to the work's riddles and celebrates epistemological uncertainty (Hollinger, "Postmodernism" 236). Yet the work offers an open story that points toward a more ethical conception of the relation among humans and between them and the world surrounding them.

The novel stresses a sense of uncertainty about the future. Riddley concludes: "[w]hat the nex time wil bring no 1 cant never say" (*RW* 213). He wonders whether the new show will succeed in producing an ethical perspective. He accepts the uncertainty that comes with the future and, in Kate Rigby's words, "dances with disaster," that is, "to develop modes of personal and collective comportment that are no longer premised on certitude . . . but that instead presuppose the unforeseeable" (20). This attitude relies on improvisational skills that are, however, grounded in planning and preparation to respond to catastrophes. The notion bears an affinity with Haraway's concept of "staying with the trouble"—the ability, in an uncertain world, of staying grounded in the present without trying to erase troubled past histories but building onto them in transformative ways (*Staying* 1-4). *Riddley Walker* embodies one such stance in the way it reflects on the uses humanity makes of the past. As Haraway suggests, "it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with . . . It matters what stories make worlds" (12). The novel dramatizes this notion by showing the consequences of how different stories are retold and interpreted and what stories one chooses to tell one's own stories. Riddley changes the story through which to recount the past and the present by moving from one medieval model to another. By changing the story, he may change his society's path and its attitude toward the more-than-human.

The novel features the utopian impulses contained within the carnivalesque spirit. Orfing asks Riddley: "Riddley dyou think theres hoap of any thing?" Riddley replies: "Theres new earf on the barrens all the time" (*RW* 198). Riddley believes in social regeneration and takes inspiration from the more-than-human. The carnivalesque process of death and renewal and disruption of oppressive order holds a utopian potential of hope for the development of new modes of being with the more-than-human. Many scholars have expressed doubts about the carnival's utopian nature (Morson and Emerson; Webb), while others have defended this concept (Gardiner, "Bakhtin's Carnival"). As Gardiner specifies, "Bakhtin was not 'deeply suspicious of all Utopian visions,' as Morson and Emerson suggest, but only to what Moylan has called a 'static, reified object of a perfectly passive society'" (30). The qualities of openness, incompleteness, dynamic becoming, horizontal relationality, and solidarity define such utopian impulses and make the novel's carnivalesque utopian traits highly compatible with a posthumanist ethics. Riddley's show inspired by Punch and the Green Man contains a utopian impulse. It also reflexively criticizes the existing status quo and incorporates ambiguity and openness. Like in the case of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, it contains elements of Moylan's critical utopia, as described in the previous chapter, that counters static notions within traditional conceptions of Utopia.

4. The Challenges of the Post-Apocalyptic Genre

Post-apocalyptic novels can awaken in readers a sense of urgency about ecological matters. As Ursula Heise argues, post-apocalyptic works can be "understood as a form of risk perception" (*Sense* 141). They may affect the ethos manifested in responses to the risk and reality of ecological catastrophes. The subgenre's usefulness, however, has been questioned. One of the reasons is its frequent reliance on the pastoral tradition (Heise, *Sense* 122). Such rhetoric portrays the apocalypse as a desirable event along the lines of Adiss's cozy catastrophe. It often features an anti-modern desire for a return to a premodern pastoral context. This trend is also present in some post-apocalyptic medievalist works, wherein the pastoral is tied to escapism and nostalgia (Farrier 2-3; Gifford 47). As Timothy Morton argues, ecocriticism needs "a progressive view of ecology that does not submit to the atavistic authority of feudalism or 'prehistoric primitivism'" (*Ecology* 162). This nostalgic vision hinders the possibilities of the present. Furthermore, such narratives are often accompanied by a masculinist ethos that recreates a patriarchal society and a frontier logic of imperial expansion and survival against the wilderness (Hicks 4-5; P. Sharp 172; Weaver 100; Pa. Williams 304).

At first glance, *Riddley Walker* seems to follow such conventions. The novel dramatizes the effects of destructive technologies and the society's initial resistance to new discoveries and inventions in a patriarchal premodern context. However, the work does not present a pastoral vision. As Paul Brians argues, the work rejects the vision of post-apocalyptic "barbarism as an idyllic pastoral" (79). The post-apocalypse is defined by a harsh life and an inimical relationship with the more-than-human. The society also presents the same desires for power of the pre-apocalyptic civilization. It is not presented as static, but

as undergoing dynamic processes of change both in its social set-up and ideological principles. Even Riddley, who departs from dominant societal stances, does not present a radically technophobic attitude. He rejects nuclear power but is fascinated by proto-quantum physics. The novel thus does not romanticize pre-industrial pastoralism. It reflects critically on such traditions and denounces the long-term effects of short-sighted, anthropocentric practices enabled by technological tools used without ethical restrictions, while also creating a tie between such anthropocentric stances and patriarchal social structures that are critiqued through the characters of Lorna and Aunty.

Furthermore, where Riddley's trajectory leads him to a newly found appreciation for the more-than-human in the form of dogs, stones, and human-plant relational entanglements, his perception is not based on a separation between nature and culture as the pastoral trope implies. He embraces posthuman networks of agencies and of exchange within nature-cultural realms. Humans are perceived, in line with ecological posthumanist thought, "as an assemblage, co-evolving with other forms of life" (Nayar, *Posthumanism* 3-4). Riddley's notion of the human moves beyond the individual self to recognize multispecies entangled agencies. Furthermore, the novel presents interspecies networks in ways that move beyond the purely affirmational. The work highlights the consequences of human actions on the environment, which has become polluted and barren. In turn, it also stresses the transcorporeal effects of nonhuman matter such as radiation on humans.

Riddley Walker also refuses the often-mournful tones of post-apocalyptic works criticized by many scholars. Micheal Branch ("Are You Serious?"), Ursula Heise (*Imagining Extinction*), and Nicole Seymour (*Bad Environmentalism*) question pastoral elegiac depictions of the future. Seymour looks at works that present environmental concern through "irreverence, ambivalence, camp, frivolity, indecorum, awkwardness, sardonicism, perversity, playfulness, and glee' (4). In tune with such positions, the novel embraces carnivalesque laughter. Its grotesque traits do not reconcile with pastoral romanticization in view of the relevance laid on openness, transformation, and relationality (Gardiner, "Ecology and Carnival" 782-3). In line with a carnivalesque posthumanism, the novel invites its readers to laugh at linguistic irreverence, at grotesque multispecies entwinements, and at humanity's base aspects.

The post-apocalyptic genre also tends to simplify large-scale interlinked phenomena involved in climatic issues by presenting one single factor as the cause of disastrous scenarios (Garrard 105-7; Malvestio 32). *Riddley Walker* does see the nuclear event as the main culprit of ecological devastation. Yet the novel also mentions climate change. As Goodparley reflects, "[m]ay be it wer the barms what done it poysening the lan or when they made a hoal in what they callit the O Zoan. Which that O Zoan you cant see it but its there its holding in the air we breave. You make a hoal in it and Woosh! Nomorair" (125). If he simplifies the dynamics of ozone depletion, his comment still addresses the co-presence of multiple factors that have led to ecological degradation that transcend the nuclear catastrophe. Even post-apocalyptic works that do not directly address ecological upheavals such as nuclear ones reflect on the effects of human practices on the more-than-human. As Peter Schwenger argues, the defining feature of a

nuclear apocalypse "is that this apocalypse is man-made" (37). Much like contemporary works that address the anthropogenic nature of the climate crisis, nuclear catastrophe stories emphasize planetary vulnerability and Western society's responsibility for ecological degradation.[141]

The (post-)apocalyptic genre has also come under attack for the way it fails to stress the multi-scalar dimensions of catastrophe (Garrard 105-7; Malvestio 32). It also often forecloses futurity by presenting a rupture between past and future and an erasure of the past in order to start anew as the only possible solution to current problems. Scholars in environmental humanities often consider such narratives as a paralyzing obstacle for the conception of viable alternatives to disaster in view of their refusal to engage with the present's possibilities (Clark 84-91; Haraway, *Staying* 3-4; Malvestio 32-3; Trexler 120).

The novel avoids falling into such risks. It traces a continuity between the past and the present through the stories derived from artifacts of the medieval past that guide the actions of the present. The work proves the impossibility of starting anew, departing from the errors of the past, and building a new society from scratch. The past always haunts the present in ways that require a responsible interpretation of its traces. *Riddley Walker* plays with dimensions of the past, the present, and the future that unsettle linear notions of temporality and invite new alternative temporal experiences of a-synchronicity, heterogeneity, overlap, and sedimentation. It also confronts the vast temporal scales involved in the current ecological crisis by highlighting the ties between long human histories and geological time.

Finally, the focus of many post-apocalyptic works on white Western communities also erases the ties between ecological transformations, colonial violence, and the experience of BIPOC groups who have survived apocalyptic events (Anson 68-71; Hsu and Yazell 349-50; Weaver 100; Whyte, "Anthropocene" 225). *Riddley Walker*, unlike the works analyzed in the next chapter, repeats the presentation of the post-apocalypse from a Eurocentric perspective that does not engage with intersections of race and climate. Yet, while not addressing such issues directly, the novel critiques the ideologies and practices of Western modernity that have contributed to the ecological crisis and phenomena of environmental injustice. It presents a counter-discourse to the hegemonic ideologies of the West, its exceptionalism, and unrestrained anthropocentric development (Latham 103-4; Lindner 73). The novel challenges Eurocentric cultural systems and related conceptions of history and temporality that have validated narratives of unrestrained progress at the expense of both nonhumans and underprivileged sections of the human population.

5. Conclusions

While *Riddley Walker* has been written in response to the Cold War climate of the 1970s and 1980s, the work still speaks powerfully to the current apocalyptic imagination tied to the climate crisis. The work explores the potential consequences of anthropocentric and individualistic Western desires for supremacy and power through violent prevarication that result in the novel in a nuclear event. The latter does not only lead to the collapse of civilization, but also to severe damage to ecosystems that reverberate centuries after

[141] On the relation between narratives on nuclear catastrophes and climate change, see Aravamudan 8; Cordle.

the event. The novel thus shows how short-sighted actions can lead to long-term consequences that span vast scales of time.

The novel demonstrates the impossibility, even after an apocalyptic phenomenon, to start anew without the influence of past human histories of beliefs and practices. This is dramatized through the novel's medievalism. The work stresses how the description of the medieval painting of St. Eustace's legend is decontextualized and reinterpreted to guide the ideologies of the post-apocalyptic society. On the one hand, the legend becomes an origin myth that explains both the end of the old civilization and the beginning of the new one as well as a cautionary tale that warns the new society against the repetition of the actions of the past that have led to the apocalypse in the first place. On the other hand, the legend also highlights how narratives shift and mutate along with society, adapting to its needs and transformations. In this context, the legend is reinterpreted once again by Goodparley and Orfing in order to justify the renewed pursuit of power through the obtainment of atomic weapons and the march forward of progress.

Through the legend, the medieval past becomes embedded and living in the present. It thus disrupts the conceptual divide that separates the medieval from the modern. By disrupting temporal taxonomies, the work counters hegemonic temporal perceptions grounded in notions of origins, linearity, teleology, and progress that define the Global North and its presumed superiority over both other human and nonhuman Others. The novel's critique of temporal linearity and unrestrained progress does not merely rely on a medieval/modern inversion that depicts the future as a return to a pseudo-medieval past. More relevant is the reflexive dimension of the work concerning the process whereby medievalisms are created. The way the legend is interpreted affects the society's mindset, practices, and outlook on the more-than-human realm in significantly diverging ways. The novel presents a form of meta-medievalism that dramatizes the way medieval models are decontextualized and reinterpreted for presentist agendas, such as the drive for unrestrained progress that defines Western modernity and the Mincery in the novel.

The hermeneutic difficulty in reading the artifacts of the past and the instability of their meaning is greatly owing to the ambiguous and polysemous nature of Riddleyspeak. Riddleyspeak embodies the carnivalesque spirit of subversion and regeneration of meaning through its riddlic quality that transforms and reshapes reality through playful language. The novel's dialect dramatizes the tension within the novel between fragmentation and unity. On the one hand, its lack of one-to-one correspondence between signifier and signified leads to wordplays, riddles, and puns that engender plural ramified interpretations. On the other hand, it also allows the readers to connect seemingly incompatible concepts.

The tension between duality and unity is a recurring theme within the novel. This chapter also traces Riddley's struggle to move beyond 2ness toward 1ness and his transition from acceptance of his society's established narratives to the development of new narratives grounded in other medievally derived models. Indispensable in this process are the dogs that accompany him through his journey. Furthermore, both his vision of the medieval Green Man and the puppet of Punch, derived from medieval traditions of the jester, the Vice figure, and the Lord of Misrule, are central to Riddley's character growth and to the maturation of

an ecological posthumanist ethics. Both the Green Man and Punch are analyzed through a dual perspective that highlights the affinity of posthumanist ecocriticism and Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque. Both figures allow Riddley to question, challenge, and subvert the dominant ideologies of his own society and depart from its either nostalgic or progressivist interpretations of the past.

The Green Man's grotesque, open, relational, and hybrid body becomes a model for challenging established views and embracing a heightened sense of posthuman multispecies networks. The new show that revolves around Punch defies the mournful undertones of the post-apocalyptic genre as it forces its audience to acknowledge humans' responsibility over their actions through laughter and moves humanity to an ethical response. Both figures highlight the utopian potential of the carnivalesque intended in the broad sense of the term. In fact, if the carnival describes a temporary overturning of values, the enduring presence of the carnivalesque spirit as expressed within literary works such as *Riddley Walker* engenders nonetheless new perspectives that reconsider and challenge established norms and meanings. It therefore points to the regeneration of the society's ethical premises and its modes of being with the more-than-human. The novel thus demonstrates how medievalism can function as a tool to defend multiple mutually exclusive positions. It reveals the importance of how the past is interpreted for the needs of the present and what models are chosen to guide the actions and ideologies of the contemporary society for the development of ethical understandings of multispecies relationships.

Chapter Five: Medievalist Afrofuturism in Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* and Octavia E. Butler's Earthseed Series

1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on Ishmael Reed's novel *Mumbo Jumbo* (*MJ*) and Octavia E. Butler's novels *Parable of the Sower* (*PS*) and *Parable of the Talents* (*PT*).[142] The analysis considers how both of the authors' works dramatize a kind of medievalism used by exclusionary groups to justify their socio-political agendas. In *Mumbo Jumbo*, such medievalism involves the continued presence and retrieval of the medieval model of the Knights Templar. In Butler's works, on the one hand, medievalism appears at the level of the socio-political structure of the country, which echoes that of the Middle Ages. On the other, it emerges through the conscious retrieval of models drawn from medieval Crusaders, which were meant to justify the demonization of the Other.

In both of the authors' texts in question, such medievalisms are accompanied by oppressive practices against the more-than-human. This chapter employs once again a posthumanist ecocritical framework to observe how narrow conceptions of the human and rigid temporal perceptions reinforce the nature/culture divide. I enter into dialogue with scholars who center posthumanist discourses around matters of race, while questioning hierarchical dichotomies through non-Western epistemologies. They reveal the imbrication of the human and the more-than-human by challenging how Black people have been seen as less-than-human.

In Reed and Butler's works in question, exclusionary kinds of medievalism are set against counter-medievalisms endorsed by the protagonists. The medieval models borrowed are respectively medieval dancing manias and carnivals in the case of *Mumbo Jumbo*, and Benedictine monasteries in the case of Butler's novels. Such counter-medievalisms are conducive to the development of posthumanist relational identities that defy nature/culture dualisms and oppose linear notions of history and progress narratives.

In both cases, the attention paid to human-nonhuman relationships converges with intersectional consideration of racial and gender issues and questions of social justice. Both of the authors root their medievalism in African diasporic cultures and histories. I argue that in both cases the way the past is used to inform the present through medievalism is situated within an Afrofuturist framework. Both share an Afrofuturist attention to entangled temporal dimensions of the past, the present, and the future. This play with temporality is meant to push back against racist, liberal humanist histories of colonialism and capitalism and the slow violence of environmental injustice. It also serves to envision Blackness at the center of plights for an ecological ethics.

[142] *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* are part of Butler's Earthseed series. It was supposed to be a trilogy completed by a final book, *Parable of the Trickster*. The third novel, however, was never completed.

Finally, the chapter demonstrates that, while both of the authors tie the liberatory and ecological projects of their respective protagonists to medieval models, the novels under scrutiny do not reject modernity altogether but they demonstrate the potential of modern technologies. The works comment on the unequal access to technology among differentiated sections of the US population. However, they all recognize the emancipatory possibilities that posthuman technology offers to marginalized groups.

1.1. SF, Race, and Afrofuturism

SF's roots, as anticipated in Chapter Two, are tied to colonialism and racism. SF's early history is dominated by white male authors (O'Neill 77; Yaszek, "American SF" 58). Many of them have displayed racist tropes that range from ethnic stereotyping to race wars (Landon 198).[143] Numerous scholars address the relation between race and SF (Kilgore; Langer; Leonard; Nama). Isiah Lavender III argues that the encounter with racial difference, especially with Blackness, is often rendered through racially coded tropes (*Race* 7-8).[144] The SF motifs onto which racial anxieties can be mapped include aliens, androids, viruses, and zombies.[145] From the 1950s, SF has tended to present a "color-blind future" wherein all racial conflicts are resolved (Bould 177). This partly explains the inadequate attention that is paid to racial matters and to Black authors' marginalization in SF.

The fact that white authors have prevailed in the SF industry does not mean that Black SF authors have been completely absent.[146] During the genre's early stages, several Black SF writers explored the relations between race and futurity.[147] Yet only from the mid-twentieth century have African Americans started to gain prominence within SF and to write back against the tradition that demeaned and excluded them. It is only in the 1990s, however, that such works have been grouped under the label "Afrofuturism." The term was coined by Mark Dery in 1994. Achille Mbembe summarizes its features thus:

> Afrofuturism is a literary, aesthetic, and cultural movement that emerged among the diaspora during the second half of the twentieth century. It combines science fiction, reflections on technology in its relations with black cultures, magic realism, and non-European cosmologies, with the aim of interrogating the past of so-called colored peoples and their condition in the present. (163)

Literary SF is only one of the modes through which Afrofuturist aesthetics can be expressed. Afrofuturist SF has developed since the 1960s (Samatar 175-6).[148] Afrofuturist authors denounce the normative vision of white futures that SF often imposes and the marginalization of African diasporic authors from the genre (Lavender, "Ethnoscapes" 187-8). They claim their place within SF discourses in order to adjust racial power imbalances and to subvert tropes used against BIPOCs (Roberts, *SF* 96; Womack 17-8).

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[143] On future-war stories, such as George Tomkyns Chesney's "The Battle of Dorking" (1871), see P. Sharp 89-106.
[144] Reading SF tropes as racially coded might reinforce prejudices about racial alterity. See A. Butler 104. However, the association is often made explicit by the authors themselves as in the case in Burroughs's Mars series.
[145] See also Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., "Dis-Imagined Communities" 228; Diehl 96-7; Roberts, *SF* 98.
[146] See Yaszek, "History" 44.
[147] Examples of early Black authors' works include Martin Delany's *Blake* (1859); Edward A. Johnson's *Light Ahead for the Negro* (1904); George S. Schuyler's *Black Empire* (1936–8). See Jackson and Moody-Freeman; S. Thomas.
[148] Authors of this literary tradition include Steven Barnes, Octavia E. Butler, Samuel R. Delany, Andrea Hairston, Nalo Hopkinson, N. K. Jemisin, Nnedi Okorafor, Ishmael Reed, Charles Saunders, and Nisi Shawl.

Unlike white-authored SF, Afrofuturist SF often blends SF tropes with non-Western modes of scientific and cultural knowledge that encompass magic, dreams, voodoo, and spirituality; they have been dismissed in light of notions of Western scientific rationality (Death 448; Dubey 31-35). Afrofuturism is also concerned with temporality. It involves a "chronopolitical intervention" (Eshun 292) through a reorientation of the vectors of Black temporalities "towards the proleptic as much as the retrospective" (289). Indeed, on the one hand, Afrofuturism critically reflects and responds to colonial pasts and dominant historical accounts. On the other, it asserts Black people's centrality in both dystopian and utopian futures. Through such temporal interventions, Afrofuturism challenges linear and progressivist conceptions of temporality, which is rather perceived as unfixed and open (Eshun 297; Samatar 176).

Afrofuturism also disrupts the colonial narrative of linear progress that justifies the exploitation of the more-than-human (Rollefson 84). Allison Mackey argues: "Afrodiasporic, African, and Indigenous and Aboriginal futurisms participate in widespread cultural debates about humanity's responsibility toward the environment" (530). Afrofuturist authors who address ecological matters reveal the intersectional oppression that falls on racialized Others and the more-than-human. They also push back against apocalyptic narratives that privilege representations of whiteness, obscuring the apocalypses that Black and Indigenous groups have had to survive (Yaszek, "History" 48). In light of the above, it is possible to concur with Alexander Weheliye, who claims that Afrofuturist fiction points toward "a posthumanism not mired in the residual effects of white liberal subjectivity" ("Feenin" 22). Afrofuturism embraces forms of subjectivity that engage both with the organic and inorganic nonhuman and multiple non-linear temporalities (Death 448-454).

1.2. Medievalism and Race

African Americans have been excluded not only from the imagination of the future, but also from the memory of the past. They have often been denied the ability to claim a shared belonging to the nation in light of Anglo-Saxonist discourses. According to such beliefs, those who professed to have inherited their racial traits from the Germanic Anglo-Saxons, who had invaded England in the Early Middle Ages, were inherently superior.[149] By asserting the nation's medieval roots, politicians and writers have exploited the authority of the past as a precedent and constructed the Middle Ages as "an era of racial purity and military subjugation of 'foreign' peoples" (Vernon, *Black MA* 7).[150] Such a strategy enforced a portrayal of the US as a land of freedom that would not clash with the presence of slavery and Indigenous removal.

Not only have African Americans been excluded from the medieval past, but that past has been used against them. This is the case in the Southern US context, where medievalism justified slavery. Slave

[149] This rhetorical strategy was used in the US by numerous public figures, including the US presidents Thomas Jefferson and Theodore Roosevelt. See Kendrick; Rabiee 160, 169; Slotkin, "Nostalgia" 615.
[150] On medieval views of race, see Hahn; Hendricks; Heng; D. Kim; Lampert, "Race"; Lomuto; Whitaker, "Race-ing"; Young, "Place." On the post-medieval implications of assumptions about race in the MA, see Kaufman and Sturtevant; Perry; Rambaran-Olm; Vernon, *Black MA*; Whitaker, *Metaphors*; Whitaker and Gabriele.

owners fashioned themselves after feudal lords and their slaves after serfs. Yet Eugene Genovese argues: "[t]he Old South was hardly a refurbished medieval society . . . These slaveholders were 'modern' men who accepted the world of the nineteenth century, with its idea of Progress" (31-2). While the plantation reflected a romanticized, pastoral vision of the past, it was already implicated with global capitalism (Pugh 7; Rabiee 7). Sylvia Wynter argues: "plantation was an intrinsic and functional part of a capitalist system which consisted of a mode of production based on free wage labor coexisting and dependent on a mode of production based on slave labor" (*Metamorphosis* 105-6). The plantations that were justified through a medievalist rhetoric were part of a system that reduced the slaves to exploitable natural resources and that concomitantly disrupted local and global ecosystems, causing soil degradation and biodiversity loss.[151]

For this very reason, Black authors have often engaged with the Middle Ages in order to claim the past and national belonging (Vernon, *Black MA* 18).[152] Such medievalisms have been mostly addressed in fantasy fiction.[153] Nevertheless, the same operation appears within SF. Medievalist Afrofuturist SF can already be found in the early twentieth century with W.E.B. Du Bois's "The Princess Steel" (1910) (Vernon 107-110). Such narratives have risen in number since the mid-twentieth century. Both Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* and Butler's Earthseed series can be considered medievalist Afrofuturist works of SF. Medievalism has been addressed both in Reed's works (Hoffman, "Darker Shade;" "Pomorex") and Butler's novels (Kaufman, "Future"; Shinn 204-5). Yet in both cases the works are either not addressed at length or the intersections between medievalism, race, gender, and ecology are not discussed in depth.

This chapter argues that both works dramatize an exclusionary white supremacist medievalism that borrows its imagery from medieval Knights Templar and Crusaders. In both cases, such medievalist groups display a lack of concern for the more-than-human and reinforce the nature/culture divide. Exclusionary medievalisms are set against counter-medievalisms endorsed by the protagonists. The latter are conducive to the formation of posthumanist relational identities that recognize nature-cultural continuums and defy linear temporalities and narratives of progress. Both in Reed and Butler, the attention paid to multispecies relationships intersects with matters of social justice. The works of the respective authors will be analyzed separately, yet with attention to how they converge and differ from each other.

2. *Mumbo Jumbo*

2.1. Plot and Genre

Mumbo Jumbo was published in 1972. The work is set for the most part in the 1920s in New York, though the plot covers events that span millennia into the past and decades into the future as well as multiple geographical areas, from Haiti and New Orleans to Egypt and continental Europe. The plot revolves

[151] Scholars have proposed to define the Anthropocene as "Plantationocene" to indicate the implications of sixteenth-century plantation systems dependent on forced labor for the current climate crisis. The plantation economy motivated colonial oppression and contributed to monocultures, biodiversity loss, species extinction, and endangered ecosystems. See Davis et al.; Haraway, "Anthropocene"; Koegler.
[152] Among them, there are, for instance, Frederick Douglas, W.E.B. Dubois, and Jessie Redmon Fauset. On African American medievalism, see Hanlon; Hsy, *Antiracist*; Looney; Vernon, *Black MA* 45-101; Whitaker, "Race-ing."
[153] See Davis and Saunders (eds.); Deonn; E. Elliott; Neal; Vernon, "Writing."

around the outbreak of the "virus" Jes Grew, which spreads from New Orleans to New York and is associated with the Harlem Renaissance and, more generally, with African diasporic cultural expression and empowerment. The "virus" attracts two opposite reactions. On the one hand, the secret white supremacist Order of the Wallflower and Hinckle Von Vampton, a thousand-year-old Knight Templar, are determined to stop Jes Grew from spreading in order to curb Black vitality. On the other, the HooDoo priest PaPa LaBas and his crew search for the ancient Book of Thoth to which Jes Grew is connected so as to ensure its continued existence. In the end, the HooDoo practitioners prevail over the Order. The Book is, however, destroyed. Yet Jes Grew proves to be unstoppable as it reappears in the 1970s. The novel also explores multiple subplots, including the ones that touch upon the US' (pseudo-)history, from Warren Harding's presidency to the occupation of Haiti.

The novel, in a postmodern fashion, blends multiple literary genres, including the alternative history, detective or thriller story, SF, and myth. It also mixes visual material and a written text. Through pastiche and collage techniques, it includes pictures, illustrations, handbills, newspaper clippings, tarot cards, invitations to parties, quotations from historical and critical texts, and letters.[154] The work also includes footnotes and a partial bibliography that lists most of the sources cited. In such an eclectic collage, Reed throws together unofficial historical accounts, secret society conspiracies, outbreak narratives, jazz, historical figures, African American folklore, Egyptian mythology, cultural heritage repatriation, police corruption, and Voodoo gods.

This encyclopedic, jumbled ensemble serves to destabilize the reader into a realm where fact and fiction cannot be easily told apart. As Roxanne Harde argues, "Reed authenticates his re-vision and inclusion of African American history with the trappings of historical scholarship" (363). He plays with history by enveloping a story about African American culture within the formal traits of academic scholarship. Such a revisionist approach serves to unsettle official Western narratives. It asserts African American centrality within discourses from which they have been historically excluded or marginalized.

The novel not only comments on the history of oppression of African Americans, but also on the oppression of the more-than-human realm in the name of unrestrained progress. At the same time, it also brings attention to the marginalization of Black communities from discourses on ecological issues. The revision of hegemonic historical accounts thus also serves to put Blackness back at the center of ecological projects. It implies a rejection of the humanist hierarchical ethos that privileges the normative notion of the human as (white) Man above all other categories of embodied subjectivities. This is primarily accomplished through the celebration of Jes Grew, a boundary-breaking virus that moves across humans, animals, plants, and machines, and that is tied to non-Western African diasporic cosmologies. It is through this historically recursive "virus" that Reed expresses dynamics of African American resistance against and subversion of the hegemonic Western culture that are concomitantly tied to an ecological ethics.

[154] For a discussion of Reed's postmodern techniques, see Ebbeson; Gates, Jr.; Hogue.

2.2. Conspiratorial Medievalisms

The antagonists in the plot use medievalism in order to defend their exclusionary ideologies. Under a posthumanist ecocritical lens, such an ideology has negative implications for how the more-than-human is regarded. The antagonists' medievalism aims to suppress all those who diverge from the Western hegemonic norm in terms of religion, culture, race, ethnicity, gender, and species. It embraces the normative notion of the human and its concomitant nature/culture dichotomy, according to which different species are classified in a hierarchical order. Such a stance is aligned with a transhumanist perspective that entails a rejection of the flesh in favor of a world closed off to nature. It is also accompanied by a linear and flat vision of temporality, which justifies narratives of unrestrained progress. This transhumanist position conflicts with an ecological posthumanist advocacy of relational non-hierarchical bonds and non-linearity. Because of such a stance, they view the spreading of the posthuman "virus," which reveals porous interspecies networks, as a conspiracy and an apocalyptic threat to the stability of the Western socio-political order. They also use the "virus" as a tool to demean the Black protagonists, who embrace Jes Grew's viral and vital quality. Yet Reed deflates the antagonists' myth of Western monocultural superiority by subverting their medievalist accounts of history.

The main target of Reed's historical revisionism through his depiction of the antagonists is the Western Judeo-Christian hegemonic culture. The latter is embodied by the secret society of the Atonist Path, represented in the novel by its military wing, the Wallflower Order. Those who threaten the Atonist Path "would receive the wrath of . . . the Wallflower Order . . . An establishment which had been in operation for 2,000 years . . . Their enemies, apostates and heretics were placed in dungeons, hanged or exiled or ostracized occasionally by their own people" (*MJ* 47). The Wallflower Order uses violence in order to ensure the centuries-old dominance of the Euro-Christian Atonist tradition and to expand its cultural imperialism.

Atonism is a two-thousand-year-old movement. Toward the end of the novel, PaPa LaBas explains the origins of both Jes Grew and the Atonist Path. He reveals that Atonism derives from Egyptian cults. It developed out of Set's rejection of Osirian cults, which revolved around dancing and music, and from which Jes Grew itself was born. Looking at Osiris's followers dance, Set reacts with jealousy: "[h]e considered the music 'loud' and 'boisterous.' . . . Enjoying themselves when there was hard work to be done, countries to invade, populations to subjugate" (*MJ* 163). Set establishes his own religion "based upon Aton (the Sun's flaming disc)" (174). The novel suggests that "this was nothing new because the Egyptians had . . . worshiped the Sun in a pantheistic manner. With Set, the Sun's flaming disc eclipsed the rest of its parts" (173). Set's religion stands in symmetrical contrast to the Osirian cult. Where the latter is a celebration of plurality, peace, nature, and music, the former is a rejection of all such features. Rather, it centers—as "atonism" may suggest in its evocation of atonal music—on a singularity that extends from the musical realm to all aspects of life.

In virtue of its emphasis on singularity, the Atonist path lies at the foundation of every monotheistic

religion—including Christianity—that is devoted to one single god and claims to detain the only truth. However, the novel stresses that Atonism is not merely a religious orientation, but a more general ideology: "[p]olitically they can be 'Left,' 'Right,' 'Middle,' but they are all together on the sacredness of Western Civilization and its mission" (*MJ* 136). Atonism supports a monopolizing ideology that suppresses all that diverges from the Western hegemonic norm in terms of religion, culture, race, ethnicity, gender, and species.

The Atonists have also inherited from the cult of Aton a disdain for the more-than-human. Set is portrayed as the one who "went down as the 1st man to shut nature out of himself" (*MJ* 162). Through his own religion, Set would "overcome the nature religion of Osiris. He would be the reverse of Osiris who was associated with fertilization and spring; he would become Aton the 'burner of growing things'" (174). If the cult of Osiris embraces a continuum of nature and culture and celebrates the variety of the natural world, the Atonist Path as originally traced by Set is radically closed off to nature and to its vitality.

This same opposition between nature and culture can be found in the Wallflower Order's ideology, centuries after the development of Atonism. This is highlighted in the description of its headquarters:

> [e]verything is polyurethane, Polystyrene, Lucite, Plexiglas, acrylate, Mylar, Teflon, phenolic, polycarbonate. A gallimaufry of synthetic materials. . . . Plastic will soon prevail over flesh and bones. Death will have taken over. Why is it Death you like? Because then no 1 will keep you up all night with that racket dancing and singing. The next morning you can get up and build, drill, progress putting up skyscrapers and…and…and…working and stuff. (62-3)

The Atonist ideal world is one dominated by plastic. Everything organic is rejected, including bodily flesh. Its stress on singularity is not to be confused with the Spinozian monism espoused by posthumanists. While the latter is defined by multiplicity and relational bonds that challenge hierarchical dualisms, the Atonist unity implies a dualism between opposing elements, where one is embraced and the other is dismissed. The vision of a world of plastic that transcends the flesh seems rather to point toward a form of transhumanism, which entails not a rejection of liberal humanism, but its exasperation. It revolves around a "technological 'enhancement' . . . Transhumanist visions or fantasies of disembodiment are the logical consequence of a dualist mode of (Christian, neoplatonic, Cartesian) thinking that distinguishes between body and mind, mortal flesh, and immortal soul and believes in their separability" (Herbrechter et al. 11). It envisions a transcendence of the flesh toward a post-biological state.[155] Its focus on the technological improvement of extraordinary individuals also ignores matters of social and environmental justice in the name of progress (Hayles 263-4). The Atonists' nature/culture dualism is itself fueled by a progress narrative that justifies the marginalization of the more-than-human for human advancement through technological innovation. This view also implies a progressivist vision of temporality.

Atonism's necessity to close nature off is also tied to the urge to control and contain it. The Hierophant, the Wallflower Order's leader, reflects wistfully on "2,000 years of probing classifying attempting to make an 'orderly' world . . . 2,000 years of patrolling the plants. He would miss the daily

[155] See also Ferrando; Wolfe.

species count. The Ethiopian Leopard was just about due . . . Several other species he wanted to rub out" (*MJ* 153). In stressing the process of multispecies classification and selection, the novel shows implied violence within the epistemological impulse to contain the world within rigid categories in accordance with humans' idealized image of it. The Hierophant's desire to dominate nature by deciding about the extinction of multiple species further indicates the Atonist lack of a sense of interspecies entwinement.

While Atonism is presented as ancient, the novel explicitly creates a privileged connection between the Wallflower Order and the Middle Ages. PaPa LaBas relates that the Atonist Church, i.e., Christianity,

> becomes stronger as the years pass . . . The rites associated with Osiris and other pagan gods continue underground. The only remedies the Church knew was . . . throwing those possessed by demons into dungeons, burning it out of them. They killed millions of people this way but it didn't put an end to the dance epidemics, heresies, witchcraft, infidels, and remnants of "pagan" religions. . . . The rest of the population was being depleted by physical plagues. (*MJ* 172)

With the Church's dominion during the Middle Ages, Atonism grew more powerful. As Christianity became the Roman Empire's only legal religion in the late-fourth century, "[r]eligious affairs acquired a civil, juridical dimension . . . An organized, articulated, hierarchical Church now defined orthodoxy" (Peters 2). The tool through which to impose orthodoxy was violent repression of all those deemed heretics, infidels, and pagans. The novel thus associates the latter with the subversive energies of Osirian cults and, later, of Jes Grew.

Jes Grew is seen as the main threat to the stability of the Western global dominion. The Hierophant is confronted with the danger posed by the "virus":

> [y]ou know we're in trouble, don't you? You've seen the young men wearing slave bracelets, sitting in the cafés quoting nigger poetry. The young women smoking Luckies, wearing short skirts and staying out until 3:00 in the morning . . . Didn't you realize that the 'pagans' would refuse to be Milled and Humed at your Universities . . . and purge the Atonist from their minds? (*MJ* 66)

Jes Grew does not merely represent African diasporic expression and empowerment, but it also points towards gendered emancipation and subversive energies that challenge the universalized notion of the human as the Western white male. Jes Grew carriers are defined here—much like the infidels of the Middle Ages of the previous quote—as pagans. This stresses the continuity of the threat in the Middle Ages and the 1920s.

In view of this threat, the Hierophant begrudgingly hires Hinkle Von Vampton to stop it from spreading. Von Vampton is "often referred to by the disputants as 'The Grand Master'" (*MJ* 55). He is a Knight Templar, whose leaders acquire the title of Grand Master. The novel mentions repeatedly the Order's history, mingling fact and fiction. It is described as a "Tac Squad for Western Civilization; a mighty highway patrol assigned to protect the pilgrims en route to the Holy Land from attack by infidels and robbers" (56). The Templar Order, or Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, was established in 1118 by a knight, Hugh of Payns, with the approval of King Baldwin II.[156] It was

[156] The main sources of Templar history derive from the chroniclers William of Tyre, Michael the Syrian, and Walter Map. On the history of the Templars, see Forey; Haag; N. Morton; Nicholson.

granted headquarters on Jerusalem's Temple Mount, believed to have been Solomon's Temple, from which the Order gains its name. The Order's main purpose was to protect the pilgrims traveling to the Holy Land (Haag 95-6). The Order owed its obedience to the sole authority of the Pope. It was therefore placed above feudal and royal powers.

Hinkle's status as a Knight Templar is also asserted through his physical appearance.[157] For instance, "the pendant he wore about his neck . . . depicted 2 Knights riding upon 1 horse" (*MJ* 131). The image coincides with that of the Order's seal. Indeed, "[t]heir seal alludes to this brotherhood in poverty by depicting two knights . . . having to share a single horse" (Haag 96-7). It embodies the values of humility and poverty to which the Order had committed before gaining considerable wealth. In fact, the Order combined knighthood and monasticism. While they were tied to obligations of poverty, charity, and obedience, they also obtained the material possessions to which military orders were entitled (Haag 102, 130). The medieval chronicler William of Tyre laments the Order's departure from its earlier simplicity: "[a]t length, however, they began to neglect 'humility'. . . To the churches of God also they became very troublesome, for they drew away from them their tithes and first fruits and unjustly disturbed their possessions" (526-7). The Templars would growingly attract resentment for their increased power and wealth. The novel furthers their negative representation by defining them as "filthy ruffians, thugs" (187) in order to unsettle their reputation. The symbol Von Vampton wears is transposed onto the cover of the novel's first edition. It is placed in the upper-right corner, while the center is dominated by a doubled image of Josephine Baker superimposed onto a rose. Henry Louis Gates Jr. argues that the rose represents the Voodoo God Erzulie (704). The cover is thus dominated by a depiction of African diasporic culture, while the Templar seal, representing the forces set against Jes Grew, is placed at the margins. The cover itself, then, is involved in the play that aims to reassert African culture's centrality versus the Western hegemonic forces associated with the Middle Ages.

Von Vampton manipulates the Hierophant in order to be assigned the mission of stopping Jes Grew. The relationship between the two dates back to the twelfth century. Hinkle reminds him that "your King Philip 4 and the pope, Clement . . . brought the charges against my Order . . . After all we did to defend your wretched tails" (*MJ* 67). The Hierophant replies: "[y]our Order became so powerful that it threatened ours. . . . I was given my orders and I had the pope and my king execute them. The charges they brought against you were all proven, even 'worshiping the devil in the form of a cat,' 'spitting, stamping, urinating on crucifixes'" (67). Hinkle blames the Templars' fall on the Hierophant. Historically, as the Templars attracted resentment of powerful authorities, Clement V dissolved the Order in 1312 after King Philip IV's arrest of the Templars, especially in view of the accusations against them, which ranged from homosexuality, defiling the crucifix, to practicing pagan rituals. Some of the knights managed to flee,

[157] The novel's frequent allusions to medieval culture are emphasized visually. Hoffman notes the illustration of an angel bestowing a sword to a figure he identifies as Sir Galahad ("Grail" 1246). Another painting depicts Archangel Michael pointing towards an approaching storm to a group of maidens. It has been explained by Reed himself as "a painting of Europe, personified as a knight, rallying her white nations against the Asian Hordes" (Martin 111).

while others were tortured and murdered (Haag 207-238; Nicholson 69-81).

The novel traces such historical events through characters who have experienced them. It entwines the Templar Order's real history with the fictional Wallflower Order, deemed responsible for the Templars' fall. Von Vampton sees the Jes Grew "emergency" as a way to reinstate the Knights Templar into the Wallflower Order to redeem their reputation. He perceives his mission as "this Crusade" (*MJ* 71). The Hierophant himself believes that "[*o*]*nly* [the Templars] *could defend the cherished traditions of the West against Jes Grew* [italics in the original]" (*MJ* 15). The containment of Jes Grew is seen as an ideological continuation of the very Crusades that were initiated in order to assert the power of the West and its hegemonic culture over dissenting identities. The Jes Grew carriers appear as contemporary versions of the pagans and heretics against whom the Crusades were fought (Hoffman, "Grail" 1247). The authority of medieval culture is retrieved in modernity in order to justify exclusionary agendas in view of the significant historical precedent of the Crusades.

The novel combats the master culture embodied by the antagonists. It unsettles historical accounts by implying that the Templars' anomalous rituals were tied to the rites of Osiris, written down in the so-called Book of Thoth. The latter had been found by Von Vampton before the Third Crusade (1189–1192) and "[w]hat [the Templars] derived from the Book were strange ceremonies . . . They practiced these Petro rites in secret" (*MJ* 188). Reed revises history's course by depicting the Templars as entwined with African religious rites. This strategy suggests that, even in the Middle Ages which white supremacist groups locate as a time of racial purity and Western domination, representatives of that culture—the Knights Templar—were influenced by rituals derived from the cult of Osiris, to which in turn Jes Grew is tied. The novel challenges Western cultural dominance by claiming an African presence even where it is believed not to have existed. It demonstrates the constant existence of cultural exchanges across the ages.

The rhetoric that the Atonists employ to defend Western hegemony is often used in postmedieval times. Multiple groups, mostly with right-wing affiliations, have borrowed motifs, imagery, and ideologies from the Middle Ages (Sévère 4-5)—and especially from the Knights Templar—in order to lend an aura of legitimacy to their discriminatory practices and white supremacist, misogynistic agendas (Millar and Costa Lopez 4).[158] Even after the civil war, the US South's interest in medievalism mentioned at the beginning of this chapter did not wane. Southerners felt threatened in their socio-economic and political structures by the end of slavery. The "Lost Cause" myth, described in Chapter Two, provided Southerners with a narrative through which they could look back romantically at the antebellum times and at the myth of the Middle Ages of chivalry, honor, masculinity, and racial purity. This context provided fertile ground for the development of reactionary organizations, such as the Ku Klux Klan. In the Middle Ages they found a framework for their self-representation as virile Crusaders against heresy and racial impurity.

The KKK's medievalism serves to uphold ideals of heteronormative masculinity and white

[158] See also Byman; Elliott, "Internet"; Falconieri 105-109.

supremacy. This ideological framework relies on the identification with nineteenth-century interpretations of the Crusaders and Knights Templar, from whom they took their white tunics with a cross over it.[159] The KKK members fashioned themselves after idealized Christian aristocratic white male knights in order to justify the use of violence while preserving a sense of justice and piety (Kaufman and Sturtevant 83-4). The KKK's chivalric self-representation is best witnessed in Thomas Dixon Jr.'s *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of Ku Klux Klan* (1905): "men with their tall spiked caps made a picture such as the world had not seen since the Knights of the Middle Ages rode on their Holy Crusades" (316). The work openly associates the spiked-hooded KKK members with knights fighting in the Crusades. Within the work, African Americans are portrayed as primitive and even compared to the Black Death, associating them with an inhuman status (Pugh and Weisl 143) and with a contagious virus much like Jes Grew itself.

Reed depicts the 1920s socio-political climate that led to the KKK revival. He stresses that "[*t*]*he late Teens and early 1920s are a bad time for civil liberties* [italics in the original]" (*MJ* 48). He writes:

> 61 lynchings occurred in 1920 alone. In 1921, 62, some of the victims, soldiers returning from the Great War who after fighting and winning significant victories . . . thought that America would repay them for the generosity of putting their lives on the line . . . Instead, a Protestant country . . . executes soldiers after a manner of punishments dealt to witches in the "Middle Ages." (30)

Without mentioning the KKK explicitly, Reed refers to their typical extrajudicial practices. They would lynch African Americans in order to discourage them from pursuing their freedom (P. Sharp 97). The violent act is tied to the widespread notion that the Middle Ages were defined by frequent witch-hunts. That the "Middle Ages" is put into scare quotes might suggest that such organizations' use of the medieval to justify their violent acts is based upon a constructed version of the Middle Ages. In the oppressive climate of the Segregation period, Jes Grew pushes back against the seems of the system. The Wallflower Order and Von Vampton, then, evoke such groups who employ the model of the Templars and the Crusades to justify racialized violence and who will also be found below in Bulter's novels.[160]

The Templar's afterlife is also tied to the Order's association with Masonry. The novel explains that "[t]he Templars went underground. A corrupt form of their rites continued as Masonry, which you will notice also traces its origin to the Temple of Solomon" (*MJ* 189). With time, Templary became tied to Freemasonry, an exclusive fraternal organization associated with secret knowledge linked to Solomon's Temple. One of the accounts of Freemasonry's medieval origins—derived from the Scottish Micheal Ramsey—was grounded in the Crusades and the Knights Templar (John Bennett 152-54; Finke 68-72; Haag 12).[161] This medievalism follows Umberto Eco's "Middle Ages of Tradition," which "[swarms] with Knights Templars, Rosicrucians, alchemists, Masonic initiates, neo-Kabbalists, drunk on reactionary poisons sipped from the Grail, ready to hail every neo-fascist Will to Power" (71). The medievalist model of masculinity that inspired many masonic lodges justified a membership based on the exclusion of all

[159] See MacLean; Millar and Costa Lopez 11-12.
[160] This kind of medievalism can also be found within Nazism, white supremacist religious groups (Wotanism, Irminism, and Heathenry), and even in current KKK revivals. See Falconieri 109-31; Gardell.
[161] Ramsey originated the link between Freemasonry and Templary: "every Mason is a Knight Templar" (Gould 19).

those who were not white able-bodied males of decent social standing (J. Anderson 51). Once again, Templary comes to be associated with exclusive secret societies.

The novel devotes attention to the underwood of rivaling masonic lodges. It dramatizes how, over time, African Americans had started to found their own lodges, following the input of African American abolitionist Prince Hall. The character of Buddy Jackson explains that he is "the Grand Master of the Boyer Grand Lodge #1 inaugurated March 18, 1845, by the Prince Hall Grand Lodge or African Lodge #1 . . . The Caucasian lodges . . . refused to recognize our lodges" (*MJ* 192-93). Yet he continues:

> we found out why they didn't want us around and didn't want us fooling with Masonry and naming our lodges Temple of Solomon so and so. . . . We learned what we always suspected, that the Masonic mysteries were of a Blacker origin than we thought . . . they were worried that we would find out . . . that the reason they wanted us out of the mysteries was because they were our mysteries! (194)

Much like the Knight Templars who derive their rituals from the Egyptian cult of Osiris, the afterlife of Templary through Freemasonry's medievalism is equally said to derive from ancient Black traditions. Through this play with history, Reed sabotages white medievalist rhetoric that grounds racism in an illustrious tradition of chivalry and reveals the way African-derived culture has been stolen and absorbed without receiving credits by the very members of societies that marginalize that culture.[162]

The masonic lodges view Jes Grew as a conspiracy meant to unsettle Western civilization. Von Vampton wonders: "[w]as the Jes Grew an intelligence which . . . owned an administrative arm capable of wising people up?" (*MJ* 139). The "virus" is seen as an organized attempt to uproot hegemonic powers. Reed seems to depict what Millar and Costa Lopez term "conspiratorial medievalisms," which involve the Knights Templar (KT). They define "the KT as a form of discourse that . . . operates socially and politically as a mode of interpreting history and expressing security claims. . . KT discourses constitute a specific violent, racialised security imaginary, which we term conspiratorial medievalism" (2).[163] The Templars' model is mobilized in a conflict between white male Christianity and racialized and gendered enemies. Conspiratorial medievalisms result in discussions around emergency and national security enforcement through violence in order to defend Western powers perceived as threatened by a conspiracy. This urgency is motivated by an anxiety over the loss of hegemonic agency (Millar and Costa Lopez 9).

This anxiety over hostile conspiracies reaches paroxysmal levels in the novel and turns into the fear of a "white apocalypse." Jes Grew "threatens our National Security, survival and just about everything else you can think of" (*MJ* 93); it promises "the end of Civilization As We Know It" (4); finally, "[t]he Black Tide of Mud will engulf us all" (69). Jes Grew threatens the stability of the national

[162] It should be noted that even Black Lodges functioned on exclusive identitarian grounds. Freemasonry's ethos, even among Black masons, remains largely tied to a masculinist vision. See Strombeck 303-5; Wallace.

[163] Conspiratorial medievalisms proliferate in white supremacist groups both in real life—as the people dressed as Knights Templar at the 2017 Charlottesville rally testify—and on online platforms such as Reddit, YouTube, and 4chan (Elliott, "Internet" 7). Millar and Costa Lopez mention *The Hidden Templar* YouTube series, which deals with climate change conspiracy theories. Climate change is seen as an invention meant to weaken national sovereignty (8). See Kaufman and Sturtevant 88-90; KTOI, "The Hidden Templar: Climate Change Cult"; Wollemberg.

and even planetary order. It is indicative that the rise of the "virus" is deemed "the end of the world as we know it" rather than the end of the world in general. What threatens the medievalist Atonists is the decline of their own institutions and sources of power that, to them, encompass the entire world. That Jes Grew is described as a tide of Mud not only seems to evoke racist anxieties of contamination, but also a perception of uncleanliness tied to inimical racialized forces.[164] Reed here appears to be criticizing apocalyptic narratives that focus on the vulnerability of white Western society without considering ecological transformations, colonial violence, and the experience of BIPOC groups. Not only does the apocalypse here concern the white society, but the latter seems actively threatened by Black agency and freedom (Morris 37; O' Neill 77-78; Yaszek, "History" 48).

The apocalypse takes the specific shape of a pestilence. Viruses have often been read under posthumanist and ecocritical lenses in view of their liminal nature. Their status defies life/nonlife, corporeal/incorporeal, and human/nonhuman divides (Yazgünoğlu 43). Their omnipresence in human lives and bodies belies the presumed sovereign autonomy of the human. The latter is always already a posthuman assemblage of co-acting multispecies agencies (Haraway, *Staying* 65; Moelling 159; Nayar, "Foreword" xv). Some such entities—certain bacteria, for instance—are beneficial. Others are harmful to the human body. They reveal its vulnerability and its transcorporeal openness to outside influences and threaten its perceived superiority (Daigle, "(post)human" 29). Viruses then decenter humans' position within the larger more-than-human context.

While Jes Grew enlivens the body, the Order perceives it as a threat because of its stance grounded in hierarchical binaries. In view of such hierarchical categorizations, viruses' liminal nature is often used against racialized groups in order to assign them to an inferior category. The link between contagion and racialized Others is not a new one.[165] The dynamic whereby the body of the racial Other is seen as the source of infection that threatens white manhood was already in place during colonization (Haraway, "Biopolitics" 223). This association can still be witnessed during health crises, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, which has made social inequalities more visible and has triggered racist sentiments and a spike in police brutality (Braidotti, "We"; Douglass; Goldberg; Li et al.). In the novel, African Americans are not simply seen as vectors of contagion, but their culture is itself seen as a virus. They are relegated to the realm of the nonhuman and need to be extirpated to preserve the Atonists' nature/culture divide.

It seems paradoxical that a "virus" tied to African American culture is feared as something that may cause the apocalypse. The settler colonialisms that led to Indigenous genocide and African slavery "have been ending worlds for as long as they have been in existence" (Yusoff xiii). This is made clear in Alfred Crosby's articulation of ecological imperialism (*Ecological Imperialism; The Columbian Exchange*). The latter considers how the intercontinental exchange of animals, plants, microbes, and people in the

[164] For discussions of racist notions of uncleanliness, see Zimring.
[165] On racist outbreak narratives, see Wald. The trope of the racially-coded virus appears often in SF. See Browning; Diehl; Lavender, *Race* 118-56. Multiple works, however, have dramatized critically this SF motif. Among them are Octavia Butler's "The Evening and the Morning and the Night" (1987) and Junot Diaz's "Monstro" (2012).

sixteenth century has transformed world ecosystems and affected, under unequal power regimes, the lives of Indigenous people and Africans. One mode through which white settlers had caused an apocalyptic event was precisely through diseases.[166] Even more recently, multiple epidemics resulted from the ecological exploitation for which Western dominant powers, who in the novel side with Atonism, are responsible (Rigby 81-3). The anthropogenic nature of certain diseases reveals that humans are not set apart from the nonhuman as the Atonists would believe.[167] The work turns a racist trope on its head by dramatizing the Atonists' hypocritical association of racialized Others with apocalyptic fears of contagion.

The anxiety, typical of conspiratorial medievalisms, over Jes Grew's containment appears in the Atonists' attempts to stop the epidemic to prevent the apocalyptic decline of the hegemonic medievalist West. As the first Jes Grew "symptoms" start to appear, the city's Atonist Mayor asks the doctors:

> can't you put it under 1 of them microscopes? Lock it in? . . . It's nothing we can bring into focus or categorize; once we call it 1 thing it forms into something else. . . . Well, what about the priest? We tried him but it seized him too … if Jes Grew is immune to the old remedies, the saving Virus in the blood of Europe, mankind is lost. (*MJ* 4-5)

Jes Grew defies rigid boundaries and reveals the porosity of bodily, cultural, and national borders. It triggers in the Atonists the fear of powerlessness, which engenders the need for a biopolitical intervention to regulate both social behavior and borders. Michel Foucault's notion of biopower involves the governmental regulation of aspects of "health, sanitation, birthrate, longevity, race" ("Birth of Biopolitics" 73) and the enforcement of docile bodies through cultural, social, political, and technological means (*Discipline and Punish* 135-169). The exchange above manifests an anxiety over the impossibility of containing the "virus" through usual methods to produce docile bodies. Attempts to use Western science and Christian religion, representative tools of hegemonic forces, fail. Multiple other stratagems are enacted—African dances being outlawed; police corruption; a masonic president being planted in the government; the publishing of newspapers that undermine the public opinion of African American cultural expression; a Talking Android, a mouthpiece of African American culture, to unsettle the community from within. All strategies fail against Jes Grew's eruptive force.

If the Atonists see Jes Grew as a conspiracy, the novel reveals them to be the real conspiring entity. Indeed, "[w]hen an extraordinary antipathy challenges the Wallflower Order, their usual front men, politicians, scholars and businessmen, step aside. Someone once said that beneath or behind all political and cultural warfare lies a struggle between secret societies" (*MJ* 18). Such secret societies as the Wallflower Order and the Knights Templar act in the shadows to sabotage African American culture. Their decisional power proves that, rather than the victims of a conspiracy, they are actively conspiring.

However, PaPa LaBas is also involved in conspiracy theories. His assistant reprimands him: "[y]our

[166] While Crosby has been criticized for his Eurocentric perspective and for his exclusive focus on biological factors (Huggan and Tiffin 3; Foster and Clark 186-7), ecological imperialism appears useful to express how ecological degradation in the colonial context went hand in hand with Indigenous genocide and removal, and chattel slavery.
[167] Covid-19 has been seen as the outcome of human-animal relations resulting from habitat destruction (Edwards; Malm, *Corona*; Mussgnug 1155-56). Yet the consequences of diseases, which include but are not limited to Covid, affect the planetary population unevenly on the grounds of intersectional axes of race and social class. See Douglass.

conspiratorial hypothesis about some secret society molding the consciousness of the West. You know you don't have any empirical evidence" (*MJ* 25). LaBas believes that secret societies shape Western civilization. However, his belief turns out to be true. While African Americans such as Buddy Jackson are equally shown to be involved in masonic lodges, this is meant to challenge Freemasonry's exclusivity. The novel thus asserts African American presence within the interstices of the dominant culture. As Anthony Zias suggests, "Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* is not necessarily attempting to convince us of a conspiracy but satirizes our need for conspiratorial explanations" (149). In his play between fact and fiction, Reed unsettles any epistemological certainty. He also deflates the myth of Western monocultural superiority and deconstructs the historiographical practices that sustain it by excluding African Americans. This is also accomplished by unsettling the myth-making medievalist practices. Indeed, the Wallflower Order's "Crusade" to stop Jes Grew results in a failure.

Finally, the novel defies the notion of Jes Grew as a catastrophe. Von Vampton resembles "the 4th Horseman of Apocalypse" (*MJ* 55). The association of the Knight Templar with the Apocalypse's fourth horseman, who represents death, reveals the destructive and, indeed, apocalyptic implications of the Atonist agendas rather than Jes Grew's. The "virus" is defined as "potentially deadly or benevolent depending upon how you look at it" (65). The novel undermines the Atonist Path's universalistic gesturing that sees the "virus" as an apocalyptic crisis. It stresses, rather, the relativity of points of view, which depend on differentiated positionalities. Instead, the novel presents Jes Grew, yes, as an apocalyptic event, but as one that promises the collapse of the settler-colonialist and imperialist scaffolds of Western society.

2.3. Jes Grew as an Anti-Plague

Against the Atonist forces stands Jes Grew. The "virus" is tied to African American cultural expression. Although it is much more ancient, the 1920s Harlem Renaissance's ebullience re-materializes Jes Grew's energies. It is also linked to the African diaspora: "Jes Grew carriers came to America because of cotton" (*MJ* 16). The "virus" arrived from Africa to the US because of chattel slavery. Yet it constitutes a response to such oppressive institutions. One of the Jes Grew carriers relates his symptoms: "he felt like 'deserting his master,' . . . he felt he could dance on a dime. . . . he was hearing shank bones, jew's harps, bagpipes, flutes, conch horns, drums, banjos, kazoos" (5). Jes Grew is tied to dancing and music, but it also infects people with a desire for revolution. Although it develops out of African diasporic cultures, it is not Black people alone who can catch Jes Grew: "[i]t knows no class no race no consciousness" (5). It stands for the empowerment on the part of multiple social categories. Unlike the monopolistic Atonists, it celebrates multicultural vitality at the intersection of race, gender, class, and species.

Jes Grew is linked to medievalist models that counter those of the antagonists. It is often tied to the Black Death. What is known as the Black Death is a disease caused by the microorganism *Yersinia pestis*, transmitted through flea bites (Green, "Pandemic" 52). During the Middle Ages, there have been multiple surges of the plague. The Black Death, one of the largest-scale catastrophic events in history, spread

through Europe between 1347 and 1353 (Green, "Introduction" 9-12). It spread because of multiple interacting factors, from the increased mobility caused by the Crusades, sociocultural habits of diet, hygiene, and housing, to climatic factors that affected human-animal relations (Rigby 55).

In fact, the emergence of the plague was determined by dynamics between humans and nonhumans (the bacteria, the fleas that transmitted the bacteria, and the rats that carried the fleas). The Black Death can be considered a trans-species disease caused by the closeness of humans to animals. The same can be said about Jes Grew: "30,000 CASES REPORTED INCLUDING COWS, CHICKENS, SHEEP AND HORSES, DISPROVING SPECULATIONS THAT ITS EFFECTS ARE CONFINED TO THE HUMAN SPECIES. EVEN THE SAP IN THE MAPLE TREES MOVES NASTY" (*MJ* 105-6). Jes Grew is not a plague spread through bacteria; it is a "psychic epidemic" (5). Thus, it is not spread from animal to human. Yet the novel stresses that it can infect animals and plants, both featuring the same vitality and dynamism of Jes Grew. The latter highlights kinship bonds between humans and nonhumans and celebrates the vibrant agency of both.

The Atonists' apocalyptic fears of Jes Grew parallel those about the medieval plague. As Michelle Ziegler argues, "[f]or the premodern world, as for our own, plague was not just a health crisis. All plagues are a threat to civil society; they jeopardize . . . the fabric of communities and the institutions that maintain order" (267). Much like Jes Grew, which threatens the Atonist powers' stability, the plague was a catastrophic event beyond mere questions of health that led to medieval society's breakdown. If its causes are now well known, multiple reasons were advanced at the time (Delumeau, *Paura* chap. 3; Rigby 3). It was seen either as a divine punishment or as a natural event (Aberth 2). The two explanations were not mutually exclusive (Smoller 158). It could be seen both as apocalyptic and natural, or even as a divine punishment enacted through natural phenomena.

This understanding opened the way for scientific investigation (Smoller 158). Medieval physicians mostly ascribed its causes to the corruption of the air, in turn either produced by celestial influence or terrestrial events (Aberth 52-6). Such plague epidemics were fundamental to the development of modern public health and regulated social behavior to prevent and stop diseases. They were thus instrumental to the emergence of biopolitics (Rigby 64; Wald 18). As seen above, biopolitical intervention can be witnessed in the urgent provisions taken by the Atonists, who act at a governmental level to ensure national security. Much like the medieval physicians, the Atonists also attempt to find solutions to the "virus" from both the field of religion, by exorcizing the Jes Grew carriers, and science, by analyzing the epidemics through microscopes.

The biopolitical nature of epidemics also reveals social vulnerability. Plagues are "a powerful and historically lethal way of labeling enemies and outsiders, a disturbing vector for our fears surrounding the fragility of the social bond" (Cooke 183). The anxiety caused by the plague during the Middle Ages led to the search for scapegoats, i.e., Jewish communities (Green, "Introduction" 16). Disease was linked to a specific ethno-religious group. This same process is retrieved in the novel. Reed manipulates the trope

whereby a specific social group, in this case African Americans, is associated with infectivity. The novel dramatizes the discriminatory practices tied to epidemics that can be traced back to the Middle Ages.[168]

The connection between Jes Grew and the Black Death is further reinforced through implicit references. The latter can be found in the "Partial Bibliography" at the end of the novel, where Reed includes the texts he has quoted throughout *Mumbo Jumbo*. Among these works, volumes such as *Rats, Lice and History* (1935) by Hans Zinsser, *Plague* (1954) by M.D. R. Pollitzer, and *The Black Death* (1969) by Philip Ziegler openly address or mention the medieval plague. While they are not quoted in the text itself, they are inserted in the bibliography. Their inclusion suggests a connection that the reader is invited to make between the epidemic described within the novel and the Black Death of the Middle Ages.

However, Jes Grew is not merely associated with the Black Death. Its closest connection is with a series of European epidemics grouped under the label of "dancing manias." The novel relates that "[t]he Wallflower Order remembers the 10th-century tarantism which nearly threatened the survival of Church. Even Paracelsus, a 'radical' who startled the academicians by lecturing in the vernacular, termed these manias 'a disease'" (*MJ* 64). The dancing manias reached a peak in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in the wake of the Black Death and waned in the seventeenth century (Hatfield et al. 137; Lanska 132). While the symptoms—the urge to dance, move, and scream until exhaustion—were interpreted as signs of demonic possession, today scholars agree that they consisted in psychogenic illnesses especially triggered by the prevailing sense of uncertainty caused by the Black Death (Waller 624). The first to view such epidemics as psychic, as noted in the novel, was sixteenth-century physician Paracelsus (Lanska 135-9). Jes Grew itself is defined as a "a psychic epidemic" (5). In both cases, the symptoms are the result of a cultural and social form of contagion. In both cases, the dancing frenzies disrupt normal life. In the Middle Ages, "[p]easants left their ploughs, mechanics their workshops, housewives their domestic duties, to join the wild revels" (Hecker 110). They thus constituted a threat to social order feared by both medieval authorities and medievalist Atonist ones. It is for this reason that the Wallflower order considers tarantism a threat to the survival of the Church.

Among the variants of dancing manias, tarantism developed in Southern Italy. While its origins are uncertain, it reached its peak in the fifteenth century and was a psychogenic reaction to the real or imagined bite of a tarantula (Hecker 132-45). The main symptom was frenzied, sometimes erotic, dancing. Jes Grew's symptoms are similar: "people were doing 'stupid sensual things,' were in a state of 'uncontrollable frenzy'" (*MJ* 4). Jes Grew infects people with a desire to dance, make music, and seek social contact. With tarantism, "there was, according to popular opinion, no way of saving life except by music . . . It was much more common . . . to hear accounts of many who . . . perished miserably because the tarantella, which would have afforded them deliverance, was not played to them" (Hecker 149). Both epidemics are tied to music and bodily movement perceived as cures. Both are at odds with the Atonist

[168] See also Hsy, *Antiracist* 43-62.

rejection of music and dancing. The novel suggests a direct connection between the two epidemics, or even the dancing manias as an early Jes Grew manifestation. Reed seems to imply that the ascription of the label "disease" to dancing manias can be read in light of the Atonist desire to invalidate subversive energies and, thus, categorize them as illnesses.

> In fact, if it is placed in connection with the Black Death, Jes Grew is also distanced from it. It is *unlike physical plagues. Actually Jes Grew was an anti-plague. Some plagues caused the body to waste away; Jes Grew enlivened the host. Other plagues were accompanied by bad air (malaria). Jes Grew victims said that the air was as clear as they had ever seen it . . . Some plagues arise from decomposing animals, but Jes Grew is electric as life . . . Terrible plagues were due to the wrath of God; but Jes Grew is the delight of the gods* [italics in the original]. (*MJ* 6)

Jes Grew is again compared to the Black Death. Reference is made to the body's decay, the belief that it was caused by bad air or divine punishment, and its nature as a physical plague spread through germs. Yet the tie is made only to be denied. Jes Grew is an *anti-plague* that brings life to the carrier. It is rather tied to medieval tarantism, which invited people to dance. As Carolyn Dinshaw argues "asynchrony, in the form of restless ghosts haunting the present, can be the means of calling for justice for past exclusions and injustice" (*How Soon is Now* 9). Dancing manias reappear in the form of Jes Grew. Such an asynchronous presence places African diasporic culture at the center of Western phenomena, while challenging conventional historiography. By presenting Jes Grew as a manifestation of the dancing mania, the novel destabilizes rigid medieval/modern divides.

2.4. Jes Grew's Posthumanist Carnivalesque Nature

Jes Grew is presented as a counter-medievalist model that destabilizes the rigid separation of the medieval from the modern. It also embodies the spirit of renewal and reversal that defines the multicultural medievalism of New Orleans's Mardi Gras carnival, to which it is associated via the mutual connection of Mardi Gras and Jes Grew to the city's African diasporic Voodoo traditions. Jes Grew embodies carnivalesque energies conducive to the formation of posthuman relational identities that embrace plurality, openness, and change. It reveals the porous, relational, and transcorporeal nature of matter. Such a position is also shared by the characters of LaBas and Black Herman, who recognize interspecies entanglements. This posthuman subjectivity bears implications for configurations of power at the intersection of race, gender, and species. Through its subversive carnivalesque posthumanism that integrates African-diasporic cosmologies, Jes Grew and its carriers unsettle the Western hegemonic discriminatory infrastructures of power upheld by the Order and its concomitant progressively linear temporal perceptions that have bolstered environmental injustice.

Besides medieval dancing manias, Jes Grew is also tied to Haiti—the first US colony to obtain independence in 1804—and to its Voodoo tradition (Browning 90). Jes Grew first appears in New Orleans, which received migration influxes from Haiti and was affected by its Voodoo culture (Hurston 318). Voodoo is a syncretic belief system practiced in West Africa and the Caribbeans that borrows practices from many African creeds (Ramin and Nowrouzi Roshnavand 42). On the other hand, Hoodoo

"might be called Vodoun streamlined" (Reed, *Shrovetide* 10) as a result of its contact with the US Southern culture. From Hoodoo, Reed developed Neo-Hoodooism, a translation of Voodoo into a literary aesthetics (Lock 69). Voodoo is seen in the novel as "pantheistic, becoming" (*MJ* 35). Neo-Hoodoo reflects its features of plurality, openness, and improvisation. It also borrows Voodoo's subversive energy. Helen Lock argues that Haitian Voodoo followers had to absorb aspects of the Catholicism imposed onto them (69). Voodoo subverts what it cannot fight, a strategy that Reed employs in Neo-Hoodooism. His medievalism could be seen in light of Neo-Hoodooism. He appropriates, while subverting, the medievalist rhetoric of white supremacists and responds to them with Jes Grew's counter-medievalism. He opposes the West's centrality by subverting its history and myth.

Because of the tie between Jes Grew and Voodoo, Reed turns the US occupation of Haiti (1915-1934) into a war motivated by the need to stop Jes Grew. Indeed, "Holy Wars have been launched against Haiti . . . Southern Marines . . . destroyed the government and ruined the economy in their attempt to kill Jes Grew's effluvia by fumigating its miasmatic source" (*MJ* 213). The war is defined as a "Holy War." It is perceived in a line of continuity with the Crusades against paganism. Haiti is seen as the source of Jes Grew's subversive "pagan" energies. The historical event is medievalized and seen as part of a larger plot to defend the Euro-Christian order. The novel also stresses the brutality of the Marines who looted and ruined the country. Their behavior challenges the supposedly heroic ideals behind an occupation labeled as a new Crusade. And yet Haiti "becomes a world-wide symbol for religious and aesthetic freedom" (64). Despite the Atonists' attempts to silence the news about the war, Haiti embodies the same subversive Voodoo energies that fuel Jes Grew.

In turn, Voodoo is also linked to the multicultural context of New Orleans and its Mardi Gras carnival. Reed argues that, like Voodoo, "Mardi Gras is also of ancient origins . . . polytheistic, just as Vodoun is; it involves drumming and dancing as in Vodoun; both 'religions' include masking and costuming. Heathen and Christian rites blend . . . Both Mardi Gras and Vodoun include secret societies equipped with flags, songs, and other rites" (*Shrovetide* 11). Mardi Gras shares a kinship with Voodoo practices. In view of the bond between Voodoo, New Orleans, and Jes Grew, the latter could be seen as a manifestation of carnivalesque energies. Jes Grew embodies the same spirit of renewal and reversal of values that defines the carnivalesque.[169]

As mentioned in Chapter Four, there is no consensus on the carnivalesque's revolutionary potential. Some argue that the carnival reinforces the established order both in medieval and current contexts (Bell; Gluckman 109; Schechner), while others defend carnivalesque subversiveness beyond the carnival's temporary limits (N. Davis 117; Godet 7-9). The truth lies probably somewhere in the middle. If not intrinsically revolutionary, it can open a space for challenging hegemony (Godet 13-15), its subversive quality depending on how it is adapted to different historical contexts. Reed's position toward Mardi Gras

[169] Other critics have noted the carnivalesque element in Reed's works. See Fehrle 32-5; Hume, "Ishmael Reed" 510.

reflects this stance. He notes its ambivalence by arguing that it can be seen as "an obscene Confederate pageant" (*Schrovetide* 32). Mardi Gras is likened to subversive Voodoo energies. Yet it can be coopted by authorities that see it as a display of power that preserves the boundaries—of gender, race, class—that the carnival would blur. Reed confirms the carnival to be an event with many interpretations.

This ambivalence is also evidenced by two kinds of Mardi Gras medievalism—exclusionary and multicultural—that reappear in *Mumbo Jumbo*. While the festivity could be traced to the Middle Ages, participants have made a conscious use of medieval elements (Vishnuvajjala and Barrington 254-5). In the first kind, "the Middle Ages [is] invoked to shore up social hierarchy and (white) privilege, to glorify martial conquest, and to preserve race, gender, and class distinctions" (246-7). Vishnuvajjala and Barrington associate it with chivalric and courtly love medievalisms, appropriated to exclusionary ends (255). The Creole elite in New Orleans was responsible for introducing pageants, parades, balls, and masquerades meant to echo a chivalric past to which they linked themselves (Gill 143). The Americans turned those Creole traditions into exclusive occasions to affirm their financial and political superiority (Vishnuvajjala and Barrington 256). The situation changed in the Reconstruction era, when chivalric medievalisms were employed to assert New Orleans's white identity against emancipated Black communities. Behind the official celebrations, the organizers committed illegal activities tied to the KKK (257). This link is stressed in the novel, where Reed dramatizes that a "man wearing a mask that reveals only his eyes and mouth calls the meeting to order" (*MJ* 18) to deliberate the murder of the New Orleans mayor infected with Jes Grew. The mask evokes both those of the Krewes as well as of the KKK. It demonstrates the complicity of both organizations in the attempt to stop Jes Grew.

Yet there exists another kind of Mardi Gras medievalism: the comic one. It is possible to find "an unruly Middle Ages that breaks down borders and celebrates the mingling of classes, races, and cultures" (Vishnuvajjala and Barrington 247). This other kind is more in tune with the carnival's subversive medieval roots. In view of New Orleans's multicultural nature, Mardi Gras absorbs aspects of French, Spanish, African, Indigenous, and US traditions. BIPOCs' celebrations were initially restricted to Congo Square (255). Reed dramatizes how Jes Grew had emerged in the 1890s: "something was Jes Grewing just like the 1890s flair-up. We thought that the local infestation area was Place Congo" (*MJ* 4). The viral source in the late nineteenth century had been the area where the multicultural Mardi Gras was celebrated. Jes Grew seems an expression of Mardi Gras's subterranean energies. Especially from the early twentieth century, with immigrant influxes and the gradual emancipation of women, Mardi Gras started to incorporate BIPOC elements (Barrington, "Forget" 11). The festivity's medieval roots of excesses and defiance of social hierarchies became prevalent. Mardi Gras also became an occasion to voice social and civil matters. Jes Grew's re-surfacing appears then tied to the renewal of carnivalesque energies (Godet 5). The two medievalisms featured in the novel—those of the Atonist path and of Jes Grew—can be found at the foundations of New Orleans to which Jes Grew is tied.

Jes Grew thus embodies the energies of the Mardi Gras carnival. It shares with it carnivalesque

features. It involves inclusive participation, laughter, improvisation, and adaptability, while it rejects any form of dogma and completeness. These traits respond to Reed's Neo-HooDoo aesthetic: "[l]ike the . . . carnival, the concept of Neo-Hoodooism incorporates influences from numerous sources and discourses and distrusts essentialist (in Bakhtin's words, 'monologic') claims to one truth" (Fehrle 38). Neo-HooDoo, like Mardi Gras, celebrates multiculturalism, openness, and exchange, a feature that can be noted in the work's incorporation of Egyptian mythology, medievalism, African Voodoo, and the Jazz Age.

Jes Grew leads to tighter bonds rather than to their rupture as is the case of normal plagues. The Black Death led to the weakening of social ties. This is testified in both fictional and non-fictional accounts of the time. Giovanni Boccaccio dramatizes the plague's consequences in the *Decameron*: "[t]his tribulation pierced into the hearts of men, and with such a dreadful terror, that one brother forsook another, the uncle the nephew, the sister the brother, and the wife her husband" (12).[170] The pope's physician, Guy de Chauliac, lamented that "[a] father did not visit his son, nor the son his father. Charity was dead" (qtd. Gasquet 50).[171] Both Boccaccio and Guy de Chauliac wrote in the mid-fourteenth century, at the height of the Black Death epidemic. As their accounts reflect, the epidemic revealed the porosity and vulnerability of bodies. Fears of contracting the disease caused a decay of mutual care and social ties.

By contrast, Jes Grew celebrates bodily porosity. In a Neo-HooDooist fashion, it evokes the medieval epidemic while subverting its premises. Jes Grew "infects all that it touches" (*MJ* 13); it moves people to "dance belly to belly and cheek to cheek" (21). Like the medieval plague, it reveals the permeability of bodies. Yet it invites people to remove distances. Its carnivalesque nature produces relational and open bodies infected with liveliness. Jes Grew stresses Alaimo's notion of transcorporeality (*Bodily Natures*), which involves the receptiveness of all bodies to external matter. It affirms the interconnectedness among bodies. The word "contagion" derives from the Latin *contagio* ("to touch together"). One of its earliest usages refers to the circulation of revolutionary ideas deemed dangerous: "[t]he circulation of disease and the circulation of ideas . . . [b]oth displayed the power and danger of bodies in contact" (Wald 12-13). This appears relevant when considering Jes Grew. The latter *is* dangerous, yet not to the body, but to the Atonists' status quo and rigid hierarchical boundaries. It spreads through all bodies, crossing corporeal and racial borders.

Jes Grew also denies the nature/culture divide. Its transcorporeal quality coheres with posthumanist notions of subjectivity. The latter is defined by processes of relational becoming, which in turn "assume that subject formation takes place in-between nature/technology; male/female; black/ white; local/global; present/past—in the spaces that flow and connect the binaries" (Braidotti, *Posthuman* 164). Like Voodoo and the carnival, Jes Grew embodies processes of co-becoming. Itself a nonhuman entity, it spreads among all species, genders, and races. From an epidemic, it becomes a pandemic (*MJ* 65), and it emerges

[170] "era con sì fatto spavento quale tribulazione entrata né petti degli uomini e delle donne, che l'un fratello l'altro abbandonava e il zio nipote e la sorella il fratello e spesse volte la donna il suo marito; e (che maggior cose è e quasi non credibile), li padri e le madri i figliuoli, quasi loro non fossero, di visitare e di servire schifavano" (9).
[171] "Le père ne visitoit pas son fils, ne le fils son père. La charité estoit morte" (Guy de Chauliac 167).

recursively. It negates the notion of a discrete, sovereign humanity. The latter is defined by multiplicity (Halberstam and Livingston 14; Puar 57). Much like *Riddley Walker*, Jest Grew features a posthuman carnivalesque nature.

This posthuman subjectivity bears implications for configurations of power at the intersection of race, gender, and species. Posthumanism considers the inclusions and exclusions in/from the "human." Yet BIPOC scholars critique some of its strands' Eurocentrism and lack of engagement with non-Western views.[172] Braidotti herself, who relies on continental philosophy, recognizes the need for a decolonized posthumanism that covers the "the missing links between postcolonial theories, the environmental humanities and indigenous epistemologies" ("Framework" 49-50). Race-critical and postcolonial scholars have applied posthumanism to Black realities (Burton; Ellis; Z. Jackson; Last; Lillvis; Taylor, *Universes*; Weheliye, *Habeas*) and have entered the dialogue with Black scholars such as Sylvia Wynter, Suzanne and Aimé Césaire, and Hortense Spillers, seeing in them the germs of a Black posthumanist thought.[173] Such scholars center posthumanist discourses around matters of race, while questioning hierarchical binaries through non-Western epistemologies. Achille Mbembe sees Afrofuturism as a privileged genre that "rejects outright the humanist postulate, insofar as humanism can constitute itself only by relegating some other subject or entity (living or inert) to the mechanical status of an object or an accident" (163). It reveals interspecies bonds in a way that challenges how Black people have been seen as less-than-human.

Jes Grew's posthumanism unites a breakdown of the nature/culture divide with attention to racial justice. Its posthuman nature is grounded in Afrofuturist models and extends African roots to European medieval and medievalist traditions. Reed subverts the "dehumanizing" stereotype that ties Blackness to nonhuman diseases. Race is "a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans" (Weheliye, *Habeas* 4). This hierarchical differentiation needs to take into consideration racial logics. Reed turns the trope into a celebration of the interstitial presence of infectious African diasporic cultures. The anti-plague also stresses relational interspecies bonds.

This latter point is insisted upon not only through the nonhuman Jes Grew, but also through its main supporter, PaPa LaBas. Like Jes Grew, LaBas is tied to Voodoo cosmological beliefs. He is defined as a

> botanist, animal impersonator . . . He is contemplative and relaxed, which Atonists confuse with laziness because he is not hard at work drilling, blocking the view of the ocean, destroying the oyster beds or releasing radio active particles that will give unborn 3-year-olds leukemia and cancer. PaPa LaBas is a descendant from a long line of people who made their pact with nature long ago. He would never say "If you've seen 1 redwood tree, you've seen them all"; rather, he would reply with the African Chieftain "I am the elephant," said long before Liverpool went on record for this. The reply was made when a Huxley had the nerve to warn him about the impending extinction of the elephant—an extinction which Huxley's countrymen were precipitating in the 1st place. (*MJ* 45)

LaBas is in tune with the more-than-human. He is a botanist and has a close relation to animals, which are

[172] See Deckha; Z. Jackson; King; Todd; Weheliye, *Habeas* 9-10.
[173] This dialogue is complicated by distinct historical coordinates and ontologies. Yet it can aid each area to overcome some of its own limitations. Numerous works have addressed this convergence and the difficulty in reconciling these positions. See Cilano and DeLoughrey; Curtin; Huggan and Tiffin; M. Jackson, "New Ecologies 25-6; Koegler; Nixon; Winnubst 97-99.

both aspects of his role as a HooDoo priest. He embraces a horizontal ethics of trans-species care that is critical of practices of environmental injustice. References are made to the destruction of animal habitats and to the release of radioactive waste. LaBas is also attentive to species singularity and endangerment. In vindicating the words of an African chieftain, he privileges his cultural roots over the colonial European knowledge associated most likely with the anthropologist Thomas Henry Huxley. LaBas's advocacy for nonhuman life is grounded in African traditions. He also denounces the exclusion of African thought from discourses on the more-than-human and the Western complicity in environmental injustice.

LaBas's friend Black Herman also shares a bond with the nonhuman. He is able to "perform the trick of the Human Seed. Lying buried underground for 8 days" (*MJ* 33). Through the trick, he attunes himself to the rhythms and cycles of plant lives that differ from Western linear temporalities. The Human Seed echoes the Voodoo practice of zombification, with involves live underground burial (Browning 25). The evocation of the Haitian zombie not only highlights the blurred human/nonhuman and life/nonlife boundaries, but it also brings to mind the historical colonial background of the zombies as Haitian slaves who haunt the colonial land (McCormack 266). Once again, abilities tied to the more-than-human derive from an affiliation with Voodoo. A posthumanist ethics is here founded on African diasporic cosmologies. Voodoo considers "the mutual responsibilities and respect that, the cosmology insists, accompany interconnection" (Taylor, *Universes* 144). Voodoo enforces a care for the nonhuman in virtue of multispecies entanglements.

However, LaBas and Black Herman's proximity to the nonhuman is not essentialized. Scholars are at times skeptical of the posthumanist rejection of the "human" as many Africans and African Americans have been denied humanity (Huggan and Tiffin 135; C. Kim; Last 64). Zakiyyah Iman Jackson specifies that Black people have actually been perceived as a debased and inferior form of humanity. The aim is not to reintegrate Black people into the "human," but to transform the category from within ("Animal" 672; *Becoming* 1-44). Such a stratagem can be found in *Mumbo Jumbo,* where processes of animalization or thingification are disentangled from their use as technologies of colonialism and slavery. They are reclaimed in order to experiment with unruly forms of subjectivity that disrupt human-nonhuman distinctions. The character's closeness to the nonhuman does not reiterate the relegation of racialized Others to the natural realm. Rather, it challenges the nature/culture divide and revalues the more-than-human in positive terms in alignment with African traditions.

Both ontology and epistemology in the novel displace Western references and rely on non-Western cosmologies. This extends to an ironic derision of Western science. The different worldviews derived from Western science and African cosmologies are exemplified by the case of possession. The novel explains that "[o]nce in a while 1 is possessed by a loa. The loa is not a daimon in the Freudian sense, a hysteric . . . The last thing these attendants would think of doing to a loa's host is electrifying it lobotomizing it or removing its clitoris, which was a pre-Freudian technique for 'curing' hysteria. No, they don't wish it ill, they welcome it" (*MJ* 50). Voodoo does not conceive of hysterical episodes to be

suppressed with force. It conceives of spirits inhabiting people's bodies. This is instantiated through the possession of LaBas's assistant Earline by the loa Erzulie, goddess of love and women's sexuality (Dayan 6; Gate, Jr. 704). The presence of a powerful female spirit also departs from monotheistic religions such as Christianity that do not feature female gods.

While Reed has been criticized for not embracing feminist views sufficiently (B. Smith; Strombeck; Wallace), he does address the gender inequality promoted by Atonist monotheistic religions. LaBas argues that Christians and Muslims both "agree on the ultimate wickedness of woman, even using feminine genders to describe disasters that beset mankind. Terming women cattle, unclean" (*MJ* 35). In highlighting how women are reputed inferior, LaBas stresses how they have been linked to animals to demean both in light of the hierarchical dichotomies that distinguish man from woman and nature from culture. LaBas critiques worldviews that resort to hierarchical classifications to justify intersecting oppressions. Instead, Voodoo provides women with the freedom to practice their beliefs. After being freed by Erzulie, Earline decides to recover her cultural roots: "I'm thinking about going to New Orleans and Haiti, Brazil and all over the South studying our ancient cultures, our HooDoo cultures" (206). Through the space given to women in Voodoo, the novel stresses gender matters that intersect with racial and ecological ones.

The critique of Western dualisms also implies a critique of progress. LaBas, Black Herman, and Benoit Battraville, the leader of the Haitian resistance, argue:

> Highways leading to nowhere. Highways leading to somewhere. Highways the Occupation used to speed upon in their automobiles, killing dogs pigs and cattle belonging to the poor people. What is the American fetish about highways?
>
> They want to get somewhere, LaBas offers.
>
> . . . They are after themselves. They call it destiny. Progress. We call it Haints. Haints of their victims rising from the soil of Africa, South America, Asia. (*MJ* 135)

The three characters stress the environmental injustice for which the US is responsible and which affects both animals and people who do not have the resources to defend themselves, while also denouncing oppressive colonial practices in Africa, South America, and Asia. They highlight how the effects of US policies act at the intersection of class, race, gender, and species. The fixation with highways stands in a metonymic relation with the larger US concern with moving forward in a linear manner in space and in time. The characters refer to the myth of progress and to the flat temporality that does not account for the US responsibility over the effects of their oppressive politics nor for non-Western temporalities.

By contrast, Jes Grew follows nonlinear cyclical temporalities. LaBas argues: "Jes Grew has no end and no beginning. . . . when it returns we will see that it never left . . . They will try to depress Jes Grew but it will only spring back and prosper . . . A future generation of young artists will accomplish this" (*MJ* 204). Jes Grew is a surge of life that emerges periodically; it is a never-truly-defeated spirit of resistance. Like the carnivalesque energy, it is unbounded, unfinished, and recursive. Through its circularity, Jes Grew allows for a resurfacing of the past and becomes a hope for the future. Its medievalism qua embodiment of carnivalesque energies and asynchronous manifestation of tarantism disrupts rigid

periodizations and linear notions of time.

Despite its tie with the Middle Ages, Jes Grew's closeness with the more-than-human can be traced to ancient Egypt. LaBas describes its origins along with the cult of Osiris. Set's Atonism was defined by a rejection of life, music, peace, and the more-than-human. By contrast, the Cult of Osiris was "associated with fertilization and spring" (*MJ* 174), wherein the members would "permit nature to speak and dance through them" (165). Osiris himself had learned the trick of the Human Seed practiced by Black Herman. The ritual imitates the more-than-human cycles of death and rebirth. This identification with the natural realm allows for the emergence of an alternative conception of temporality that interrupts linear ones. This same temporality is adopted by Jes Grew.[174] Once again, the link between closeness to nature and African diasporic culture is not essentialized. Out of the ancient Egyptian rites of Set and Osiris, there emerge both the Atonist Path and Voodoo traditions. African culture is not inherently more in tune with the more-than-human rhythms in a way that would legitimate their exclusion from the "human." The Osirian embrace of the natural world derives from an ethical understanding of the blurred boundaries among earthly entities.

Through LaBas's revelation of the ancient origins of both Jes Grew and Atonism, Reed dislocates the roots of civilization in its dual aspects from Europe to North Africa. As Whitaker suggests while taking up Fabian's notion of the "denial of coevalness," "the study of the European Middle Ages has denied Blacks the right to a shared medieval past that would, in turn, authorize them to share the present that emerges from it" ("Race-ing" 6). *Mumbo Jumbo* responds to such a boundary by displacing Eurocentric master narratives temporally and spatially. The European Middle Ages is shown to brim with Africa-derived cultural traditions. In mingling historical and fictional aspects, Reed obfuscates hegemonic Western discourses by confounding accounts of official and politically situated histories. One of the strategies to unsettle historical accounts is a practice he calls "synchronizing," i.e., of placing elements that belong to different times in the same temporal dimension (Reed, qtd. Gaga 53). Through this process, whereby a Knight Templar coexists with the Jazz Age culture and with centuries-old Egyptian cults, Reed highlights the presence of the past into the present and disrupts linear accounts of temporality.

The adoption of nonlinear time also takes place at the level of the narrative structure. The plot moves backward to Ancient Egypt and forward to the 1970s. During the latter period, LaBas argues: "[i]n the 20s they knew. And the 20s were back again. Better" (*MJ* 218). He reveals the resurgence of Jes Grew in response to the civil rights movements. Jes Grew and history are not depicted as circular. Jes Grew implies the ability of subversive agencies to transform history gradually. Reed describes his approach to temporality as one of "Necromancy," i.e., "to write about a time like the present, or to use the past to prophesy about the future" (*Shrovetide* 130). This temporal view seems in tune with the Afrofuturist attention to entangled temporal dimensions of the past, the present, and the future, and to a past that lingers in the present and ripples into the future in a gradual co-becoming with other human and

[174] This is not meant to argue that only one single mode of temporality exists in a given culture. See W. Johnson 490.

nonhuman forces. Explorations of alternative temporalities that take into consideration more-than-human rhythms push back against racist histories of colonialism and the slow violence of environmental injustice.

2.5. Afrofuturism and Technology

The novel not only discusses attitudes toward the organic nonhuman, but also toward modern technologies. The critique of unrestrained progress does not entail a rejection of technology. Rather, it derives from a rejection of the dynamics of hierarchical power and privilege that are asserted through technology and its unequal distribution. The Atonists put technology at the service of exclusionary politics. The Hierophant's attention moves "from screen to video screen as he watches the progress of the epidemic. . . . Sounds of tape recorders of its human voice at high speed" (*MJ* 63). The Atonists employ techno-scientific tools to advance environmental and racial oppression. This reflects a long history of technology used to forward colonial violence (Hines et al. 3).

Race itself is seen as a technology to be exploited. Von Vampton plans to halt the epidemic through the imaginary technology of "Talking Android":

> The 2nd Stage of the plan is to groom a Talking Android who will work within the Negro, who seems to be its classical host; to drive it out, categorize it analyze it expel it slay it, blot Jes Grew. A speaking scull they can use any way they want, a rapping antibiotic . . . In other words this Talking Android will be engaged to cut-it-up, break down this Germ, keep it from behind the counter. (*MJ* 17)

The Talking Android is supposed to infiltrate the Black community and disrupt it from within. Unable to find any Black person who would sabotage its own community, Von Vampton has his fellow Knight Templar Hubert "Safecracker" Gould impersonate it by wearing blackface, a plan that is exposed by LaBas. That the figure of an android is evoked to impersonate and control a Black person suggests that the Black body is equaled to an exploitable machine. This mindset lies at the roots of slavery. Racialized Others were thought to be incapable of using technologies and to be examples of technologies themselves (B. Coleman; Kevorkian; Lavender, "Ethnoscapes" 187). The android has often been used in racially coded ways. The android in blackface exposes how Black people have been seen as exploitable tools.

If Afrofuturism explores how technology has been used against Black people, it also presents it as an empowering tool. Jes Grew "slips into the radiolas and Dictaphones" (*MJ* 64) and it "*is electric as life* [italics in the original]" (6). It moves across radio networks that propagate music. Weheliye argues that one of the first sound technologies that disseminated Black music was the phonograph, which became popular during the Jazz Age and that "gesture[s] toward a more complex interaction between embodiment and disembodiment, the human and posthuman" ("Feenin" 25). Jes Grew uses technology to spread African American culture and music. A disembodied and nonhuman entity, it materializes into multi-cultural, multispecies bodies. It is a posthuman entity that traverses human, animal, plant, and machine.

Its technological diffusion stresses the relevance of subversive tools of communication. The way Jes Grew spreads is compared to "Booker T. Washington's Grapevine Telegraph" (*MJ* 13). A connection is traced between Jes Grew and the secret antebellum communication systems among slaves mentioned in

Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery* (1901). Reed argues for the revolutionary power of networks, which in the novel are created through technological means. This system counters the Wallflower Order's efforts to use technology against Jes Grew. As Beth Coleman argues, "technology's embedded function of self-extension may be exploited to liberate race from an inherited position of abjection toward a greater expression of agency" (177). Through the ability to propagate their culture across technological media, Black people assert their agency. The novel implicates the Black community in the twentieth century's techno-cultural dimension.

Jes Grew is reflective of Black posthumanist thought. If the distance between nature and culture is closed, so is that between humans and technology. While Atonism embraces technology but close itself off to nature, Jes Grew embraces both. It is a posthuman entity that is halfway between the organic and the virtual. It is relational in its ability to move through information networks to spread Black culture and bring people together multiculturally. Such occasions of exchange through music, dance, and celebration engender posthuman relational and ethical multispecies communities that counter constraining forces.

Mumbo Jumbo aligns with an Afrofuturist framework. It suggests self-reflexively the subversive power of SF: "the book of Science Fiction might be more revolutionary than any number of tracts, pamphlets, manifestoes of the political realm" (*MJ* 18). Through Afrofuturism, Reed explores the ties that bind past, present, and future together. He shows how the intersecting histories of the technologies of racism and ecological oppression endure in the present. He also reveals the possibility to intervene in the said histories in order to transform the future. If the novel critiques the myth of progress that relies of the rigid past/present and nature/culture divisions, it does not reject the products of modernity altogether. Rather, it distinguishes between modes of using tools that have been exploited to oppressive ends and to liberatory ones. Yet it does object against the notion that they are uniquely valid instruments. Instead, the mode of relating to the nonhuman, both organic and inorganic, is grounded in African diasporic culture.

3. The Earthseed Series

3.1. Plot and Genre

Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993 [*PS*]) and *Parable of the Talents* (1998; [*PT*]) make up the Earthseed series. While *Mumbo Jumbo* has not been generally seen as a work concerned with ecological matters, the Earthseed novels have been classified as early examples of climate fiction (Burkhart 287; LeMenager 270). Climate fiction is understood here as a "significant body of narrative work broadly defined by its thematic focus on climate change and the political, social, psychological and ethical issues associated with it" (Goodbody and Johns-Putra 2). Before the coinage of the term by Dan Bloom in 2007, numerous works, especially between the 1980s and 1990s, have started to portray ecological matters tied to resource shortages, animal endangerment, and climate change that were entering the mainstream attention (Death 438; Streeby, *Imagining* 11; Withers 161-3). Butler has stated that she considers "ecology, especially global warming . . . almost a character in *Parable of the Sower*" (qtd. Rowell 61). As

Shelley Streeby demonstrates through her research in Butler's archives, the author had shown concerns with the Reagan administration, which had not only forwarded neoliberal deregulation, privatization, and unrestrained capitalistic growth, but had also hindered environmental policies and regulations (83-88).

Not coincidentally, Reagan was also responsible for contributing to neoconservativism's embrace of medievalism. The latter was especially a reaction to the threat posed by social and civil rights movements against the ideal of a militaristic white patriarchal society that upheld Reagan's socio-economic agenda (Aronstein 7-8; Henthorne 74). The president repeatedly presented himself as a crusader of conservative campaigns. He was criticized for his language: "[f]renzied calls are being made for crusades . . . [This is] outright medievalism" (Arbatov 4, qtd. Kengor xi-xii). In the novels, Butler dramatizes the medievalist rhetoric employed by right-wing politicians such as Reagan and the consequences of conservative social policies that do not attend to the needs of women, BIPOCS, and the nonhuman.

Under a posthumanist ecocritical lens, the conception of the human that emerges from such practices and that is mirrored by the right-wing medievalist forces depicted in the novel is once again an exclusionary one grounded in the nature/culture binary. This stance suppresses all kinds of alterity, from racialized and gendered to naturalized. Butler's work addresses matters of environmental injustice by tackling how the past is levered by the right to advance its liberal humanist agendas. The novels also reflect discourses within the field of International Relations and economic theory that posit a return to socioeconomic and political dynamics that echo medieval ones. They reveal how the neomedievalist mode of capitalism aggravates ecological degradation and reinforces social intersectional inequalities. The works address the entangled and complex temporalities of slow violence intrinsic within such dynamics.

The novels, however, also present a counter-medievalism in tune with an ecological posthumanist ethics. The protagonist, Lauren, founds a religious community, which seems patterned after the model of medieval Benedictine monasteries. It constitutes a counter-hegemonic model of eco-communalism grounded in diversity, equality, and environmentalism, opposed to the practices of both neoliberal neomedieval capitalism and the right-wing forces in the novel. As in the case of *Mumbo Jumbo*, the posthumanist ethics that emerges from the counter-medievalism is also informed by African-diasporic histories of slavery and cultural traditions tied to ecological practices. In fact, Caitlin O'Neill takes Butler as a model in her advocacy "Towards an Afrofuturist Feminist Manifesto." Butler envisions Black womanhood at the center of plights for ecological ethics in a futuristic setting that positions the works in an Afrofuturist framework. Through such a framework, she investigates the possibilities for an African American feminist imagination of an ecological future.

The works' dual focus on the uses of the past and of the possibilities of the future, between medievalism and futurism, entails a disruption of linear conceptions of progressive time used to the detriment of the more-than-human realm. The rejection of linear progression is also partly supported at the level of the narrative structure. The first novel is mostly linear as the plot is unveiled through Lauren's chronologically-ordered diary entries, punctuated by excerpts of Lauren's collection of verses about her

religious beliefs called *Earthseed: The Book of the Living*. Yet the second novel adds the voices of Lauren's daughter, Larkin, and her husband, Bankole, to the narrative. Larkin's voice comments on her mother's life retrospectively from a future point in time, showing the consequences of her past actions. The multi-perspectivism of *Parable of the Talents* also serves to provide the readers with a counterpart to Lauren's own viewpoint and beliefs. Such a strategy complicates the narrative in a reflexive way and allows for a plurality of perspectives to enter the text.

The first novel is set in California in the 2020s in the midst of a climatic, financial, and political crisis. People live in gated communities to protect themselves from outside threats. Lauren Olamina, an African American teenager who lives in a walled compound, starts to develop her own creed, Earthseed. Once her enclave's wall is breached, she escapes northward and starts collecting converts to her religion along the way. They finally arrive at the land property of one of Lauren's travel companions, where they found Acorn. The second novel, winner of the 1999 Nebula Award, begins the narration from 2032 and recounts Acorn's struggles under a Christian fundamentalist rule. After being enslaved by the followers of a religiously intolerant US president, the community frees itself, but it comes apart. After many years, despite having been separated from her daughter, Lauren rebuilds many Earthseed-based communities and sponsors space missions that will expand her religion on other planets.

3.2. Neoliberal Neomedievalism

Parable of the Sower presents a dystopian scenario defined by social inequalities, violence, neo-slavery, a weakened nation-state, and climate change. Middle-class and wealthy communities group themselves into walled compounds. Lauren's enclave, Robledo, is an "island community, fragile, and yet a fortress" (*PS* 127). The walls shield them from the indigent, mostly climate refugees and victims of the financial crisis who often turn into thieves, murderers, or addicts. Their lives are enclosed within the compounds: "[g]o out in a bunch, and go armed" (8). People only leave the gated area armed and in groups. Wealthy people, on the other hand, can afford better lifestyles: "with their big guns, private armies of security guards, and up to date security equipment, they're better able to fight back" (110). The novel reveals a rigid gap between the rich and the poor. However, people within the walls also live in modest conditions. They go to bed early to save electricity, cultivate their own food, and have barter as the main exchange system.

Nonetheless, the walls provide Robledo with a sense of protection. They are however mere "illusions of security" (*PS* 125). The walls re-create a sense of normalcy and respond to nostalgia for the past. Yet as the plot unfolds, they are revealed to be a precarious and ineffective measure. Both within and outside the walls, despite the efforts of people like Lauren's father to assist one another, suspicion as well as asymmetrical sexist and racist power dynamics prevail. Lauren realizes: "[w]hen apparent stability disintegrates . . . People tend to give in / To fear and depression, / To need and greed. / . . . They divide. / . . . For survival, position, power. / They remember old hates and generate new ones" (97). People in her community racially discriminate against other members of the multiracial enclave. On the streets, "it

didn't help [to be] black" (304); inter-racial groups draw attention and risk their lives. Women are also discriminated against and targeted. Even inside the enclave, men like Richard Moss, who has three wives, have established their own patriarchal family where women are under the man's rule. Racial and gender injustice have intensified in the novel's speculative future.

The precarity of the social structure is motivated by the lack of protection under a social welfare system in view of the near-complete privatization of all public areas. This includes the privatization of security. As one of her brothers is missing, Lauren's father comments: "[w]e can't afford [the police's] fees . . . Even then, if you call them, they won't show up . . . for two or three days" (*PS* 66). Furthermore, as it is illegal to camp on the streets as people do outside enclosed compounds, "the cops knock them around, rob them if they have anything worth stealing, then order them away or jail them" (47). The police and other emergency services are ineffectual and unconcerned with helping citizens. They are actually often corrupt and take advantage of the powerlessness and poverty of citizens despite taking fees from people who ask for their services.

Privatization also extends to essential goods like water and to education. Lauren notes that "many public-school systems around the country gave up the ghost and closed their doors. Even the pretense of having an educated populace was ending" (*PT* 365). Public education has been interrupted. Yet Lauren wonders: "I haven't noticed any new government education or jobs programs. There's been no government help for the homeless, the sick, the hungry . . . although I'm sure some people somewhere are richer now" (*PT* 83). The cutting back of numerous governmental areas has not been followed by improvements in other social sectors. Lauren implies that the money saved in public expenditure is gained by a few people with power.

The policies of the president elected in *Parable of the Sower* align with Reagan's deliberations. The president intends to "get laws changed, suspend 'overly restrictive' minimum wage, environmental, and worker protection laws for those employers willing to take on homeless employees and provide them with training and adequate room and board. What's adequate, I wonder" (*PS* 26). Like Reagan, he dismantles social aid, welfare assistance, and environmental protections in the name of neoliberal industrial development. This leaves both the population and the environment deprived of rights and of protection.

Entire towns have become privatized. Lauren reports: "[c]ompany towns began then to come back into fashion. They offered security, employment, and education . . . the company that educated you owned you until you paid off the debt you owed them. You were an indentured person" (*PT* 365-6). One such foreign corporation called KSF has bought the town of Olivar. It offers job opportunities and security in turn of low salaries that force workers to indebt themselves and become indented serfs, what in the novels is defined as "debt slavery" (*PS* 113). Choosing Olivar over gated communities means "mov[ing] into another fortress" (119), into yet another illusion of safety that limits freedom. The works critique the power of corporations to turn people into commodities. Lauren is told that "President Donner's all for them" (307). The suspension of workers' rights has allowed companies to exploit citizens. The weakening

of constitutional rights has allowed the re-appearance of forms of slavery aided by advanced technology, such as the "slave collars, dog collars, and choke chains" (*PT* 80). The collars transmit electric shocks to the victims to force people to work or sell their bodies.

The intervention of supranational corporate entities such as KSF points to an increasingly globalized world, in which the power of the nation-state is growingly weak. Lauren comments: "we're barely a nation at all anymore" (*PS* 20); the president is just "a symbol of the past for us to hold on to as we're pushed into the future" (51). The nation holds a semblance of normality and tradition through the formal preservation of governmental structures. Yet as Lauren is told, "[m]aybe [another country]'ll absorb what's left of us. Or maybe we'll just break up into a lot of little states quarreling and fighting with each other over whatever crumbs are left. That's almost happened now with states shutting themselves off from one another, treating state lines as national borders. . . . Federal, state, and local governments still exist—in name at least" (310). As neoliberal policies hollow any notion of shared wealth and identity and as the nation becomes the chessboard of supranational and local entities that contend control over the exploitation of people and natural resources, the country is torn between globalization and fragmentation motivated by a vacuum of central power.

The scenario of privatization, gated communities, a weakened nation-state, and multiple centers of power, which depicts an exasperation of current global patterns, is the result of neoliberal policies. Such phenomena have raised alarms since the mid-twentieth century about the return of the Middle Ages of fragmented loyalties and pre-national sovereignty (Holsinger, "IR" 165). Many works, including the *Parable* novels (Kaufman, "Future"), are read under the lens of "neomedievalism" developed by the field of International Relations.[175] The notion was first theorized by Hedley Bull in 1977. It describes a possible world politics configuration that would replace sovereign states, wherein the nation-state exists but is weakened. The nation-state would share authority with higher supranational entities such as corporations and lower local, subnational ones. IR has adopted the political and economic structure of the Middle Ages as an analytical model. Feudal authorities responded to the vassals below and the Church and the Holy Roman Emperor above (Falconieri 20-5; Holsinger, "IR" 172). The current system of decentralized authorities, competing jurisdictions, and fluid boundaries configures a tension akin to that between the universalization of the Church and the fragmentation of kingdoms into fiefdoms of the Middle Ages. While neomedievalism was not intended to depict a dystopian scenario, Bull himself argues that it might engender a "more ubiquitous and continuous violence and insecurity" (247). It has often taken up dystopian connotations, warning against a regression of modernity into the Dark Ages ruled by injustice.

The IR theory of neomedievalism overlaps with the related economic theory of "neo/techno-feudalism" or "New Feudalism." The latter refers to the dominion over the government and economy of corporate techno-lords that exploit the population turning citizens into serfs (Pugh and Weisl 149-55). It

[175] Similar readings have been made on Margaret Atwood's The Maddaddam trilogy (2003-2013) and Chang-rae Lee's *On Such a Full Sea* (2014). See Irr; Kaufman, "Future"; Spiegel.

does not suggest a surpassing of neoliberal capitalism, but that capitalism may resemble feudal configurations in its unequal redistribution of wealth, stagnation, and neoliberalization (Morozov 91, 96). Milan Zafirovski links forms of neoconservativism like Reagan's to a return of feudal-like class divisions and economic and political inequalities (404). Neo-feudalism is often associated with the erosion of the public sphere concerning law, property, security, and education as well as with the frequency of walled and guarded suburban communities (Kobrin 385; Stone and Kuttner). Combined, both theories from IR and economics suggest that modernity is vulnerable to dreaded returns of a past that engender a generalized sense of uncertainty and disorder.

Such a medieval-like political and economic condition appears reflected in the novel. The population that has enough wealth lives in walled and guarded fortresses. Geographical mobility, much like in the Middle Ages, has become arduous and it requires moving in group and armed. People have reverted to barter, to self-sustaining forms of labor in order to survive, and technologies such as electricity are barely used if not by the wealthy. Many have become indentured servants, acquiring a status similar to medieval feudal serfs or slaves. The country is barely a country anymore, divided between foreign corporations and single states contending their borders. This tension between universalization and fragmentation echoes the one that defined medieval Christendom. All such features suggest a neomedieval condition of the US. Through the depiction of a neomedieval/techno-feudal condition, the novel dramatizes anxieties over the loss of control at a national level and of a modernity that reverts to precedent configurations of economic and power dynamics that overlook concerns over ethical labor, public health, social and civil rights, and environmental justice.

Concerning the last point, the novel shows how such a neomedieval political and economic setup has contributed to the climate crisis, which in turn has intensified social inequalities. As Lauren relates,

> [t]he climate is still changing, warming . . . we'll go on getting a lot of violent erratic weather around the world. Sea level is still rising and chewing away at low-lying coastal areas . . . Half the crops in the Midwest and South are still withering from the heat, drowning in floods, or being torn to pieces by winds, so food prices are still high. (*PT* 79)

The anthropogenic effects of untrammeled industrial development and resource exploitation have led to drastic changes to ecosystems, from temperatures and sea levels rising, which leads to coastal erosion, crop failures due to desertification and floodings, to resource shortages that raise food and water prices.

The most dire effects are felt by vulnerable social groups in terms of overlapping factors of race, gender, and social class. Lauren comments: "[t]here's a big, early-season storm blowing itself out in the Gulf of Mexico. . . . There are over 700 known dead so far. . . . Most of the dead are the street poor who have nowhere to go and who don't hear the warnings until it's too late for their feet to take them to safety" (*PS* 14-5), while "the rich are escaping by flying out in helicopters" (232). Disadvantaged social groups do not have access to resources and technologies and cannot be prevent or redress emergencies. While in Lauren's community people at least have radios, old TVs, and computers shared among its members, people who live in worse conditions do not have access to information. The technological divide

determines the possibility to react to the climatic events brought about by a privileged select group.

While Reed exposes how white elites imagine the apocalyptic end of their world order, Butler dramatizes a scenario that affects multiple marginalized social groups, which are the main casualties of environmental injustice. The apocalypse, however, is not sudden nor caused by one factor such as a plague (Johns 401). It is depicted as a slow process caused by various intervening factors. Bankole argues:

> I have read that the period of upheaval that journalists have begun to refer to as "the Apocalypse" or more commonly, more bitterly, "the Pox" lasted from 2015 through 2030 . . . This is untrue. The Pox has been a much longer torment. It began well before 2015, perhaps even before the turn of the millennium. It has not ended. I have also read that the Pox was caused by accidentally coinciding climatic, economic, and sociological crises. It would be more honest to say that the Pox was caused by our own refusal to deal with obvious problems in those areas. . . . I have watched as convenience, profit, and inertia excused greater and more dangerous environmental degradation. (*PT* 3-4)

The first signs of "the Pox" could be witnessed already before the turn of the millennium. This implies that the scene depicted in the novel is not a futuristic or speculative possibility. It implicates the period in which the novels were published. Bankole traces the causes of the worsening situation to the passivity, greed, and short-sightedness both of individuals and state leaders who fail to recognize the mutual connection between humans and nonhumans and thus actively contribute to the current state of affairs. The novel seems to comment on the already-mentioned notion of "slow violence" that Rob Nixon defines as invisible and protracted violence exerted on the more-than-human and marginalized groups. The climate crisis is the result of slow violence that builds up gradually. Such violence, "dispersed across time and space" (Nixon 2), requires people to be attuned to vast scales and the slow rhythms of anthropogenic ecological changes. The novel invites the reader to expand their temporal imagination and to visualize the invisible, delayed effects of actions that have taken place in the past, the effects of which are witnessed in the present, and dreaded for the future.

The novel points the attention to the temporalities of the climate crisis. Lauren comments that

> [t]here seem to be solid biological reasons why we are the way we are. If there weren't, the cycles wouldn't keep replaying. . . . We can go on building and destroying until we either destroy ourselves or destroy the ability of our world to sustain us. Or we can make something more of ourselves. . . . And some of the new people who emerge from all this will develop new ways to cope. They'll have to. That will break the old cycle, even if it's only to begin a new one, a different one. (*PT* 356)

Lauren laments the cyclical repetition of historical events that indicates a failure to learn from the past. Yet, much like LaBas, who hopes for future improvements, she is not resigned to accepting circularity. Here circularity should not be seen as opposed to the linear and progressivist notion of history. The past's repetition stands rather for a commitment to moving forward without the intention to adapt and learn from experience and history. In reflecting on the present, Lauren looks at the past for explanations and at the future for solutions. This projection backward and forward in time coheres with the Afrofuturist aim to investigate multiple temporal dimensions to envision possibilities for counter-hegemonic affirmation.

Lauren stresses the need to remember the past to find in it lessons for the present. She writes: "To

survive, / Let the past / Teach you— / Past customs, / Struggles, / Leaders and thinkers. / Let These Help you. / But beware: / God is Change. / Past is past. / What was / Cannot / Come again. / To survive, / Know the past. / Let it touch you. / Then let / The past Go" (*PT* 372). Lauren warns her followers to keep the past in the past. Yet her temporal perception seems at variance from linear hierarchical notions of history that devalue the past in favor of a constant forward-movement. She invites the readers to build a sense of intimacy with the past and learn from it. At times, the past from which she seeks support is precisely medieval. She asks her friend:

> "[d]id you ever read about bubonic plague in medieval Europe?" . . . "Some survivors thought the world was coming to an end." "Yes, but once they realized it wasn't, they also realized there was a lot of vacant land available for the taking, and if they had a trade . . . they could demand better pay for their work. . . . They were slow changes compared to anything that might happen here, but it took a plague to make some of the people realize that things could change . . . Things are changing now, too." (*PS* 51-2)

In trying to plan for survival and adaptation in a dystopian setting, Lauren invites her friend to consider how people reacted to a catastrophic event such as the Black Death. The past is brought closer to the present in a way that deflates apocalyptic fears of the end. The plague was a large-scale event, yet it did not cause the end of the world. Lauren teaches the ability to adapt to the changes by considering how people responded to adversity in a way that would benefit them. Lauren fulfills Butler's self-defined role as a "HistoFuturist," a figure who "extrapolates from the human and technological past and present by researching, archiving, and then working over research materials to speculate about possible futures that might materialize on their foundations" (Streeby, "Reproduction" 721). Both Butler and Lauren, in a way similar to Reed's role as a Necromancer, look at the past not to know what the future will look like but to imagine and shape a better one, which would be based on the ability to look both forward and backward. The Middle Ages becomes a tool to stretch the temporal imagination of the present to other temporalities and modes of responding to crises.

One of the dangers of forgetting history and of losing sight of changes that take place over time is the re-emergence of older forms of oppression. In the wake of the Pox, President Andrew Steele Jarret is elected. Jarret is the leader of a party, which also functions as a church, named "Christian America." He establishes a religious authoritarian fascist regime that responds to the motto "make America great again" (*PT* 15). The slogan would have resonated with Reagan's own campaign slogan and sounds equally familiar to current readers in light of its reappropriation by ex-president Donald Trump. His rhetoric celebrating "'[o]ne nation, indivisible, under God,' and patriotism, law, order, sacred honor, flags everywhere, Bibles everywhere" (145) has multiple citizens believing that "it's our patriotic duty, everyone's duty, to support Jarret in his 'heroic' effort to revive and reunify the country" (155). Jarret evokes a nostalgic image of the country grounded in ideals of heroism, honor, order, supremacy, and piety. This notion is based, against Lauren's belief in adaptability, on a desire to retrieve a glorious past and on crystallized beliefs that deny diversity and change.

Jarret also borrows from the past in order to uphold his ideology through the authority of tradition.

One of his goals is to reunify the country under the one single creed of Christianity. As Lauren laments,

> Jarret supporters have been known, now and then, to form mobs and burn people at the stake for being witches. . . . A witch, in their view, tends to be a Moslem, a Jew, a Hindu, a Buddhist, or, in some parts of the country, a Mormon, a Jehovah's Witness, or even a Catholic. A witch may also be an atheist, a "cultist," or a well-to-do eccentric. . . . And "cultist" is a great catchall term for anyone who fits into no other large category, and yet doesn't quite match Jarret's version of Christianity. (*PT* 15)

In one of his sermons, Jarret further states that

> [t]here was a time, Christian Americans, when our country ruled the world . . . Now look at us . . . Why have we allowed ourselves to be seduced and betrayed by these allies of Satan, these heathen purveyors of false and unchristian doctrines? These people…these pagans are not only wrong. They're dangerous. They're as destructive as bullets, as contagious as plagues. (85)

The new presidency, which Reed would define as Atonist, does not concede any other form of subjectivity that diverges from traditional Christian values. It imposes a uniformity among the population that erases alterity. Like in *Mumbo Jumbo*, marginalized realities are also deemed contagious as plagues. Differing modes of being are violently repressed by Jarret's followers, who persecute and burn people at the stake. Even though Jarret formally condemns this, his inflammatory speeches encourage such behavior. The rhetoric in Jarret's speeches makes use of terms—"witches," "heathens," "pagans"—that evoke responses of the medieval Church against heterodox expressions. More precisely, his sermon decrying the degeneration of a formerly glorious, divinely-elected nation follows the rhetoric of the jeremiad used in Puritan sermons. His speech reflects the idealized, exceptionalist image of a "city upon the hill." His denunciation of "witches" evokes the late seventeenth-century witch-hunts within Puritan colonies.

Jarret's own medievalism seems mediated by Puritanism. New England Puritans often referred to medieval texts, which deeply affected their imaginations.[176] Furthermore, the Salem Witch Trials have been perceived as occurring "at the intersection between a receding medieval past and an emerging enlightenment" (Rosenthal 61). In reality, witch trials are mostly a post-medieval phenomenon, which reached its climax in the seventeenth century (Kaufman and Sturtevant 9-10). However, the germs of the association between witches and heresy taken up in Jarret's speech actually began earlier, in the Middle Ages (Maraschi 9, 14-5). As Jeffrey Burton Russell argues "[t]he development of medieval witchcraft is closely bound to that of heresy . . . Both experienced rapid growth in the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries" (3, 19).[177] The Church's attention to the definition of orthodoxy also entailed an increased concern over the repression of dissent, much as in the case of President Jarret's efforts to ensure homologation among the population. In a theocratic society like Jarret's one, the display of heterodox beliefs deemed dangerous to the Church also acts against the State and needs to be suppressed. Nonetheless, the first influential articulation of witchcraft and its condemnation—especially in association, though not exclusively, to women—took place in the late fifteenth century with the *Malleus*

[176] Harrison T. Meserole refers to Nathaniel Ward, Cotton Mather, Anne Bradstreet, Edward Taylor, and others as examples of figures of Puritan New England whose works feature medieval references (116-120).
[177] In agreement with other scholars, Kallestrup and Toivo suggest that the demonization of witches was linked to the persecution of heretical groups like the Cathars and Waldensians (4-5). See also Cohn; Gaskill 19-20.

Maleficarum written by Dominican inquisitor Heinrich (Institoris) Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, which instigated a series of witch trials (Broedel 3; Gaskill 22-3; Pócs 370). The witch figure remained tied to heretic and diabolic traits motivated by a fear of differing beliefs (Kallestrup and Toivo 5). Therefore "the episode whose participants in authority drew on the medieval to justify their actions has continued in American history to be viewed, for the most part, in the real or imagined terrain of a malign medieval world" (Rosenthal 68). The Salem witch trials can thus be seen as instances of medievalism that associates the Middle Ages with witchcraft and its heretic quality and that is in turn borrowed by President Jarret.

Jarret's words fuel violence in his followers. A Christian America extremist group, the Jarret's Crusaders—"a kind of secret society" (*PT* 320)—feels legitimized to practice what Jarret preaches. One of Acorn's neighbors describes the Crusaders' attacks: "[t]hey didn't steal or burn anything until they had beaten us, shot us . . . They all wore big white crosses on their chests" (14). Lauren wonders:

> [i]t sounds like . . . a revival of something nasty out of the past. Did the Ku Klux Klan wear crosses—as well as burn them? The Nazis wore the swastika, which is a kind of cross . . . There were crosses all over the place during the Inquisition and before that, during the Crusades. So now we have another group that uses crosses and slaughters people . . . He wants to take us all back to some magical time when everyone believed in the same God, . . . stomping anyone who was different. There was never such a time in this country. But these days . . . history is just one more vast unknown to them. (14-5)

The extremist group, like the Wallflower Order, is a secret society that believes in a conspiracy against the Christian religion on the part of "infidels." It feels the need to set civilization into order through violent acts. The tunics with a cross its members wear echo those of Crusaders or Knights Templar. Lauren creates a link with other groups, such as the KKK and Nazis, that have also not coincidentally drawn inspiration from the Middle Ages. All such groups exemplify right-wing organizations that use medievalism to validate discriminatory ideologies. Medievalism then appears both through the emergence of medieval models at the level of the socio-political structure and through conscious retrievals meant to justify the demonization of the Other. Little does it matter that their nostalgic ideologies based on a patriarchal society of one single faith and racial purity are not grounded in historical fact. The ignorance of history engenders revivals of past forms of oppression.

While the idea of a revival of something from the past seems to allude to the medievalism of Jarret's Crusaders, it also evokes slavery. The work describes the reemergence of multiple forms of slavery besides debt slavery. Jarret Crusaders build "reeducation facilities" to coerce the "pagan infidels" into Christian conversions. This is the fate that befalls Earthseed believers: "[t]hese were God's people come to bring the true faith to the cultist heathens" (*PT* 204); "people with crosses have come and put slave collars on us" (188); "they rape us . . . lash us . . . let some of us die" (212). Community members are enslaved, beaten, raped, and killed; their freedom, possessions, and children are stolen.

At first glance, Acorn's enslavement does not evoke antebellum slavery. The community is multiethnic and the attackers target all kinds of alterity. Christian America believes that women "must be silent and obey the will of her husband, father, brother, or adult son" (*PT* 98); the Crusaders are

homophobic and "[t]hey lashed Allie and Mary [two Acorn members] until Mary died" (249); they are insensitive to mental disabilities as a member of Christian America kills "a seven-year-old boy who had Tourette's syndrome . . . said he had a devil in him" (275); while helping the indigent, they also feel powerful enough to target many of them: "[n]o one would see a problem until the camps were a lot bigger and the people in them weren't just drifters and squatters" (228). They suppress all that does not align with their conservative values. Patricia Melzer notes that Butler "does not foreground racial oppression in her analysis of social justice" (41). She seems to expand the targets of her critique to all kinds of vulnerable Others under a system of neomedieval global capitalism.

Yet the medievalism of Jarret's Crusaders is combined with references to African enslavement. Butler roots medievalism, employed by Southern slave owners, in histories of racial oppression. This extends to the forms of slavery found in the novel. About company towns, Lauren notes that "[t]his business sounds half antebellum revival and half science fiction" (*PS* 115). Even in traditional modes of slavery, "[t]hey like white men to be [slave] drivers" (306). Lauren feels that her group has "become the crew of a modern underground railroad" (277). They represent a resistance movement that attempts to save people who have survived slavery, rape, and violence. In a way similar to Reed, Butler plays with the past, present, and future by juxtaposing asynchronous historical moments that range from the medieval Crusades, Puritan doctrine, antebellum slavery, to SF corporate dystopias. Butler dramatizes, as Marlene D. Allen argues, the "boomeranging" of history (1358). Through this anachronistic overlap, she shows how social and environmental injustices are the legacies of histories of intersecting systems of oppression.

Much like Reed, Butler also dramatizes, in Zakiyyah Jackson's words, the plasticity of "the human" (*Becoming* 3). Lauren relates that in the "reeducation camp," they were treated as "machines—or domestic animals" (*PT* 219). The animalization and objectification of Acorn's members are made possible by the fact that the notion of humanity is rendered flexible in order to justify subjugation. This condition echoes the antebellum treatment of slaves, now expanded to multiple alterities. It also reflects the hierarchical conception of the human on which the Crusaders rely by virtue of a conceptual human/nonhuman divide.

The Crusaders manifest an unethical lack of concern for the more-than-human. Lauren laments,

> [s]ome of us were being made to cut down both the mature live oak and pine trees and the saplings that we had planted. These trees not only commemorated our dead and provided us with much protein, but also they helped hold the hillside near our cabins in place. Somehow, our "teachers" have gotten the idea that we worshipped trees, thus we must have no trees nearby except those that produce the fruit and nuts that our "teachers" like to eat. Funny how that worked out. The orange, lemon, grapefruit, persimmon, pear, walnut, and avocado trees were good. All others were wicked temptations. (*PT* 213)

The Acorn community is forced to cut down trees that have both an affective and practical value. The slavers justify the violence on the more-than-human with their rigid ideological beliefs. Their behavior echoes the way in which pagan views surviving in the Middle Ages were persecuted by the Church. The latter intended to eradicate pagan sites of worship and sacred groves (Aberth 83; Delumeau, *Paura* ch.

12).[178] In fact, the cutting down of trees in *Parable of the Talents* is aimed at repressing the community's "pagan" ways in order to defend the Christian faith. The Crusaders' careless ways reflect the short-sighted attitude that has led to a climate crisis in the first place. It is, however, their very ignorance of the interconnections between human and nonhuman that leads the Crusaders to their defeat. A landslide caused by the cutting of the trees that held the hill in place destroys the machinery controlling the collars around the enslaved people's necks. This allows them to set themselves free. The novel demonstrates that the lack of ethical care for the natural world affects not only the more-than-human, but also the perpetrators themselves. It thus affirms the relational networks of multispecies agencies.

3.3. Ecological Posthumanist Counter-Medievalism

Against a scenario that witnesses the return of the medieval at a political and economic level in the US and within extremist right-wing groups, Lauren seems to enact a counter-medievalist model that is opposed to the exclusionary, capitalistic, and extractivist ends for which the medieval is used by hegemonic Western forces. She develops an eco-ecommunalist group patterned after the model of medieval monasteries. Such a model is based on the values of solidarity, environmentalism, and inclusivity. It is aligned with a posthumanist ethics of relationality that acknowledges dynamic multispecies co-becomings. Her posthumanist community, however, is not simply grounded in Western medievalism, but also in African diasporic history and culture. The concept of the garden appears central to both the medievalist and the African diasporic traditions.

From the beginning of *Parable of the Sower,* Lauren sees both the dangers and the power of religion as an entity that guides people. She distances herself from the God of her Baptist father: "my father's God stopped being my God" (*PS* 7). She is skeptical of "a big-daddy-God" (14) that intervenes in people's lives: "[n]othing is going to save us. If we don't save ourselves, we're dead" (54). She believes that such a mode of faith inhibits people from taking life into their own hands. Christianity appears to her based on the notion of immutability that clashes with her own views. She recognizes the need for an alternative that might motivate people to survive in a crisis. She comments: "[p]eople forget ideas. They're more likely to remember God" (208). She believes in religion's power to shape communities and direct socio-political agendas. Thus she creates Earthseed, which revolves around notions of change and adaptation. It encourages people to take agency over their lives.

Earthseed takes inspiration from existing religions. It borrows "Buddhism's insistence that nothing is permanent and all suffering results from our delusions of permanence" (*PS* 25). It even absorbs Christian elements: "[b]its of the Bible had done that to me, staying with me even after I stopped believing" (188). One element that she preserves from her Christian upbringing is the tradition of the New Testament's parables, two of them providing the novels with their respective titles. The integration of

[178] Animism and pagan practices were not completely purged. Pagan residues persisted, as well as syncretic practices that merged Christian and pagan features, and appropriations of sacred groves on the part of Christians. See Aberth.

aspects of Buddhism and the Bible indicates the pluralistic and inclusive nature of Earthseed. Lauren's religion does not reject existing precepts. Rather, it learns from all kinds of sources, including religions that it does not wholly embrace.

Both of the Earthseed novels end with the transcription of the two parables after which they are named. Lauren argues that "[m]y 'talent,' going back to the parable of the talents, is Earthseed" (*PT* 17). She follows the parable's message of improving the world with what is available. However, she uses the parables to preach Earthseed, which departs from the Christian faith. The subversive reading of the Bible has historically been practiced by African American slaves to assert their agency against the antebellum imposition of the Bible onto them (M. Coleman 188; Ruffin 91-2). Lauren's use of the Bible resonates with Black liberation theology, which has taken up the way slaves appropriated Christian religion in order to enact social change (Manuel; Ruffin 88-110; Tweedy; Wilson 109-110). Her use of the parables actually aligns with what William Herzog II defines as their original purpose: "[t]he focus of the parables was . . . on the gory details of how oppression served the interests of a ruling class . . . they explored how human beings could respond to break the spiral of violence and cycle of poverty created by exploitation and oppression" (3). Earthseed follows the socio-political implications of the parables. It is an emancipatory religion that advocates for the oppressed. Lauren incorporates and subverts what she cannot change in a manner that echoes Reed's Neo-HooDooist aesthetic rooted in subversive African diasporic practices. Lauren herself is connected with African religions. Her second name is Oya: "the name of a Nigerian Orisha—goddess—of the Yoruba people. . . . goddess of the Niger River, a dynamic, dangerous entity. She was also goddess of the wind, fire, and death, more bringers of great change" (*PT* 44). Oya incarnates a paradigm of change and dynamic transformations. Lauren's name attunes her with forces of change embodied by the mutable goddess. It reconnects her with her ancestry.

Earthseed's value system clashes with that of Christian America and of Jarret's Crusaders. Its defining feature is its inclusivity: "[e]mbrace diversity. / Unite— / Or be divided, robbed, ruled, killed / . . . Embrace diversity / Or be destroyed" (*PS* 185). Earthseed espouses a pluralistic ethics. Acorn is composed of "Black, White, Latino, Asian, and any mixture at all" (*PT* 39). The multiethnic community welcomes all genders, sexual orientations, races, and ethnicities. Even if Acorn's official religion is Earthseed, "[y]ou don't have to join Earthseed" (71). Acorn accepts people of different religions. Most members have endured loss, poverty, violence, and slavery. Lauren herself is a Black woman from the lower-middle class with a disability called hyperempathy. Everybody supports and cares for one another, building affective bonds; decisions are made collectively. Her community sets itself as a counter-hegemonic model of democratic living grounded in diversity as opposed to the patriarchal, heteronormative, classist, ableist, racist hegemonic society.

The community is committed to environmentally ethical practices that counter both the governmental support of neoliberal capitalism and the Crusaders' disinterest in the more-than-human. Earthseed is "about learning to live in partnership with one another in small communities, and at the same

time, working out a sustainable partnership with our environment. It's about treating education and adaptability as the absolute essentials that they are" (*PT* 356). Acorn's communalism implies the shared existence with both other humans and with the nonhuman. Their creation of a garden is determined by the need for self-sufficiency as well as by the necessity to find ethical ways of sustaining themselves. Knowledge about local plants, cultivation methods, and ecosystems is essential, as the landslide caused by the Crusaders' ignorance demonstrates.

Earthseed places importance on the care for the more-than-human. *The Book of the Living* reads: "There is nothing alien / About nature. / Nature Is all that exists. / It's the earth / And all that's on it. / It's the universe" (*PT* 380); "[g]od is Change— / Seed to tree, tree to forest; / Rain to river, river to sea; / Grubs to bees, bees to swarm. / From one, many; from many, one; / Forever uniting, growing, dissolving" (*PS* 299). Earthseed adopts a posthumanist understanding of multispecies relations that counters hierarchical dualistic thinking, specifically the nature/culture divide. It perceived everything as contained within the sphere of nature. Earthseed embraces a posthumanist monism defined by horizontal, reciprocal multiplicity. The notion of more-than-human elements uniting, growing, and dissolving coheres with evolutionary biologist Lynn Margulis's theory of "symbiogenesis," which involves ongoing processes of symbiotic co-evolution (Haraway, *Staying* 58-67; Streeby, *Imagining* 71). To exist is to become with multiple others in entwined networks of agencies. Against human parasitism, Lauren hopes that Earthseed may lead toward mutualistic and symbiotic multispecies relations. It thus constitutes an anti-capitalist posthumanist model of relating to the nonhuman.

Earthseed also implies a view of identity as embodied in tune with posthumanism. Lauren claims: "[w]e are flesh—self aware, questing, problem-solving flesh" (*PS* 141). She describes a subjectivity rooted in the flesh. Yet embodiment also implies being transcorporeally vulnerable to external influences. Lauren suffers from hyperempathy, a disease that forces her to feel the suffering of others: "[h]yperempathy is what the doctors call an 'organic delusional syndrome.' . . .. Thanks to Paracetco . . . the particular drug my mother chose to abuse before my birth killed her, I'm crazy. I get a lot of grief that doesn't belong to me" (*PS* 12). The condition is caused by her mother's drug addiction. Its effects are passed on from mother to daughter, affecting Lauren's neurochemistry. The pharmaceutical industry within advanced capitalism is responsible for distributing an unsafe drug that has caused children to be born with multiple diseases (Alaimo, *Bodily* 12, 21). Lauren's subjectivity blurs the lines between what is naturally given and what is artificially produced through human intervention. She embodies one of Haraway's posthuman cyborgs, especially as her theory is influenced by SF woman writers of color such as Butler herself (*Manifestly* 54-63). A condition that amplifies empathic responses is especially debilitating in the dystopian world filled with violence and injustice.

Yet her hyperempathy also makes her more sensitive to animal pain. As it happened in *Riddley Walker*, dogs are no longer domesticated because people do not have the necessary resources to care for them. Lauren comments: "I wish I knew more about them. I've read books about them being intelligent,

loyal pets, but that's all in the past. Dogs now are wild animals" (*PS* 197). They have become a threat to the community. Lauren appears curious about an animal alterity that she has never experienced intimacy with. However, her dad encourages her to practice her shooting on animals to see if she would be able to endure killing someone: "we came abreast of the dog that had been shot. . . . I saw its bloody wounds as it twisted. I bit my tongue as the pain I knew it must feel became my pain. . . . I drew the Smith & Wesson, aimed, and shot the beautiful dog through its head. . . . I had felt its pain as though it were a human being" (41). Lauren's empathy is extended to the dog. The sharing of pain with an animal suggests a horizontal and mutualistic relationship established with creatures that have equal dignity to humans in a way that blurs the lines between the human and nonhuman. This extension of empathy beyond the human counters the hegemonic perception that sees the land and the animals as mere tools to exploit and benefit from.

Lauren appears inspired by the same repertoire of medieval religious communities as the Jarret Crusaders. Yet she employs such models to different ends. Amy Kaufman notes how numerous SF works, including *Parable of the Sower*, fight medievalisms with counter-medievalisms: "[c]ross-dressing, tormented, suffering leaders of resistance movements both political and religious, followed by peasants, manipulated by the powerful, semi-divine, and publicly martyred: to medievalists, these heroines should be nothing if not familiar" ("Future" 18). She argues that many SF women characters oppose neomedieval patriarchies by channeling medieval saints and heretics. Lauren, accused of being a pagan witch, fits within such a description. Kaufman passingly mentions cross-dressing as a phenomenon that resonates with medieval models. Lauren often disguises herself as a man: "'I was thinking of traveling as a man' . . . 'That will be safer for you'" (*PS* 161). Cross-dressing is a safer option for traveling on the road, which is especially dangerous for women, both alone and in company.

Medieval literature abounds with cross-dressing heroines. From saints to damsels, the reasons for women in medieval texts disguising themselves as men vary. Such saints as Marina, Pelagia, and Eugenia cross-dress as monks in order to live a pious life close to God.[179] Yet most instances of women taking on male identities are motivated by the need to escape persecution. Two Old French texts, the twelfth-century *La Chanson d'Yde et Olive* and the thirteenth-century *Le Roman de Silence*, feature protagonists who disguise themselves as men to obviate the obstacles that their womanhood entails (Watt; Weisl). Such texts demonstrate both the performability of gender and the adverse conditions women were forced to undergo in a patriarchal society that forced them to find protection under a disguised gender identity. The same occurs in the neomedieval context of *Parable of the Sower,* where it is safer for Lauren to travel as a man on roads that target women who are identified as more vulnerable.

However, one example of counter-medievalism that has not been addressed in readings of the novels is the way in which Lauren's community resembles a medieval monastic order. Lauren argues that Earthseed is grounded in the ability to "learn to shape God with forethought, care, and work; to educate

[179] See Grayson; Jacobus de Voragine.

and benefit their community, their families, and themselves" (*PS* 246). Acorn presents a well-defined structure bound together by rituals, labor, education, and an ethics of care concerning the poor. The group becomes independent thanks to its trade and agricultural practices. The same features could be found in Benedictine monasteries. Although monastic communities can be traced back to Egyptian cenobites of the late third century (McLean 13-4), it was Benedict of Nursia who initiated the Western structured monastic life, based on his mid-sixth century *Rule of St. Benedict* that guided the monks' behavior and described the monastic organization (Landsberg 34). The monastery was a self-sufficient community, under the leadership of the abbot, grounded in prayer, work, and education, and composed of a series of land properties (Lawrence and Burton 20-3; McLean 15-6).

Acorn presents a similarly well-defined structure. It is based on the religion of Earthseed. As Lauren suggests, "[c]eremony is needed" (*PT* 62). Acorn is a spiritual family defined by common rituals. Such rituals include moments of communal prayer in honor of the dead: "'I would like to give [the dead] a grove of oak trees,' . . . We can find the words.' 'Words from the Bible, perhaps?' 'Any words, memories, quotations, thoughts, songs . . . Then we buried our dead and we planted oak trees" (*PS* 310-11). Commemorations for the dead involve forms of ritualized prayer and a burial practice in their cemetery, where they plant trees for the deceased. The lives of Benedictine monks were equally punctuated by moments of collective prayer, though such rituals occupied a more crucial role in their lives than in those of Acorn members. The burial practices at Acorn echo those of medieval monasteries. Cemetery orchards appear already in the St. Gall plan of an ideal Benedictine monastery dated c.a. 820–830 CE (Landsberg 36-7). In such an area, trees were planted between the tombs of the dead monks to honor them much like it happened in the case of the Earthseed community.

Acorn also gives importance to manual labor. Lauren argues: "[e]veryone works here, kids and adults. You'll help in the fields, help with the animals, help maintain the school and its grounds, help do some building. Building homes is a communal effort here. There are other jobs— building furniture, making tools, trading at street markets, scavenging. You'll be free to choose something you like" (*PT* 71). While everyone can choose their job based on personal inclinations, all must contribute to the community's upkeeping. Just as much attention to labor was paid in Benedictine monasteries. Benedict specified that there was to be "nothing harsh or burdensome" (qtd. Lawrence and Burton 27). The Rule prescribed a careful division of time between prayer, work, and study. Work could include craftsmanship, work in the fields, or house duties (30). Even though, with time, the liturgical duties took over manual ones, other monastic orders such as the Cistercians continued to give importance to practical work (104).

Acorn also requires regular meetings to make shared decisions about the community. Lauren explains: "[o]ur Gatherings . . . can cover anything at all to do with Earthseed or Acorn, past, present, or future, and anyone can speak" (*PT* 63). While Lauren is in all effects the leader of the community, all are involved in the decision-making process. Each member's decisional power is dependent on how long they have stayed in the community. New-comers get "[n]o vote, but . . . get a share of the profit from the sale

of the crop, and from the other businesses if things work out. That's after [they]'ve been here for a year. [They] won't have a decision-making role unless [they] decide to join" (71-2). Despite the horizontal organization, there exists a degree of hierarchy in the community. While such a structure was more pronounced among Benedictine monks, their organization functioned along similar lines. The abbot, elected by the monks, would be head of the monastery and a guide for the monks. Yet like in Lauren's case, he would "solicit the opinion of the whole community" (Lawrence and Burton 22). The Rule also emphasized the bond of fraternal care shared among monks, a relationship that can also be found in the Earthseed community. Furthermore, like in the case of the monks who would renounce personal ownership (25), Acorn is also based on communal principles.

Furthermore, Earthseed prizes education. As Lauren explains, "[o]ne of the first duties of Earthseed is to learn and then to teach" (*PT* 71). The ability to learn and teach from one another is oriented toward the acquisition of a flexible adaptability through skill and knowledge. Benedictine monasteries equally valued intellectual work. Not only were the monks in charge of copying manuscripts to preserve books, but the monastery property often included a school, much like in the case of Acorn, for the child oblates who would become monks (Lawrence and Burton 128). With the late-twelfth-century expansion of secular schools, monks from various orders would be sent to study at university (132). Similarly, Earthseed "set up grade schools and eventually colleges, and offered full scholarships to poor but gifted students" (*PT* 376). Once her religion expands in size and finances, Lauren is able to fund the university education of many community members in a way that demonstrates the value given to education within Earthseed.

Earthseed welcomes people who do not have the resources to sustain themselves. The Benedictine Rule also placed emphasis on aiding the poor: they fed and clothed those in need, extending to them hospitality, medical help, and teaching to surrounding communities (McLean 15). Lauren Mancia argues that monasteries were much more inclusive places than they are given credit for: "the medieval monastery was a heterogeneous world shaded in grey. A historically accurate 'Benedictine option' becomes one that embraces diversity rather than homogeneity" (118). The monasteries were also born out of the encounter with Germanic cultures as well as Middle Eastern, African, and Asian influences (123-4). In a similar manner, Earthseed is defined by multiculturality and was not completely closed off to the world but extended help to those in need.

Acorn is a self-sufficient community physically removed from inhabited centers. Yet it is not completely isolated. Lauren argues: "instead of depending only on what we can produce and instead of only bartering with near neighbors, we can grow a business as well as a community and a movement" (*PT* 65). Bankole worries that, with the community's growth, "our size and success will make us the castle on the hill—everyone's protector in this area" (67). Many community members aim to expand trade and contacts with the outside to improve Acorn's finances. The image of Earthseed as a castle on the hill echoes that of a monastery and its role in nearby communities. Although monasteries are often presented as isolated places removed from the outside world, they were economic and cultural centers. They built

trade relations and networks beyond the monastery walls. As Mancia argues, echoing Bankole's comment concerning Earthseed, "monasteries were innovative cities on hills, exemplars that drew from and gave back to the diverse world around them" (118). Monasteries would be in constant contact with the society and its lay institutions on social and financial grounds and to expand religious piety, much like Earthseed.

Acorn is destroyed by the Jarret Crusaders. Lauren laments: "[t]hey've burned our books and our papers" (*PT* 209) and destroyed their land. Monasteries went through a similar fate at multiple points in history. Benedictine monasteries in sixth-century Italy were burned down by the Lombards and were later rebuilt (Lawrence and Burton 33). In the 1540s, the dissolution of monasteries decided by Henry VIII led to the destruction of their books, buildings, and gardens (McLean 55). Yet, after Acorn's destruction, Lauren rebuilds Earthseed into something greater than a single community: "[i]t owned land, schools, farms, factories, stores, banks, several whole towns. And it seemed to own a lot of well-known people—lawyers, physicians, journalists, scientists, politicians, even members of Congress" (*PT* 377). Earthseed becomes something akin to the Benedictine monasteries that occupied "a prominent position in the social landscape of Europe as land-owning corporations, ecclesiastical patrons, employers of labour, and centres of learning" (Lawrence and Burton 17). It turns into an ethical counterpart to such corporations as KSF that oppress people and ecosystems, becoming a wealthy center of power like medieval monasteries.[180]

Another feature Acorn shares with medieval monasteries is the presence of a garden. On the property "[t]here was . . . one dependable well, a half-ruined garden, a number of fruit and nut trees, and groves of oaks, pines, and redwoods. . . . They scavenged what they could from abandoned farms and settlements, they traded at street markets and traded with their neighbors" (*PT* 19). All members dedicate themselves to "composting, watering, weeding, picking worms or slugs or whatever off the crops" (*PS* 304). Their self-sufficiency not only depends on their financial trade, but also on the cultivation of the land. Monasteries similarly featured gardens. Monks themselves, like the Acorn members, improved their knowledge and resources by importing, exporting, and trading plants (McLean 25). Benedict's *Rule* made special mention of gardens: "the monastery should, if possible, be so constructed that within it all necessities, such as water, mill and garden are contained" (*Rule* 91). A garden was considered one of the monastery's necessities. It served an aesthetic as well as a practical purpose, for the obtainment of food, seasoning, medicine, and dye (Harvey 2). The importance given to gardens is also owing to the monastic view of human's position within a larger natural order, which led to a respect for the land and climate. Robert Nisbet suggests that the Benedictine monastic order constituted the first Western ecological community after the fall of Rome, aware of the mutual bonds between humans and nonhumans (320). Such a view continued to persist in the utopian tradition (320-1). Monasteries also contributed to the development of horticultural techniques, which they learned from books (Landsberg 34-5). Acorn members similarly learned gardening techniques through books.

[180] For a discussion on the parallelisms between modern corporations and medieval monasteries, see Toswell.

One of the main features of medieval gardens, which pertains both to monasteries and Acorn, is the fact that they were enclosed by some sort of protection. Lauren describes: "[w]e have, always, a special need for spiny, self-sufficient desert plants . . . They serve as part of our thorn fence. Cactus by cactus, thornbush by thornbush, we've planted a living wall in the hills around Acorn" (*PT* 23). The land is surrounded by a fence made of spiked plants meant to protect both the garden and the people from outside threats. Medieval gardens, including monastic ones, were typically enclosed within walls or thorn hedges similar to the ones built at Acorn. This type was called the *hortus conclusus*, the enclosed garden (Bayard 9; Harvey 111). The use of fences made of thorns is illustrated, for example, by the writings of Gertrude of Hefta, a late-thirteenth-century Saxon nun and mystic. While describing her visionary experience, Gertrude relates: "[t]he merciful Lord showed her a very small and extremely narrow garden . . . It was surrounded by a hedge of thorns and a feeble trickle of honey was flowing through it" (158).[181] The thorny imagery of the Crucifixion combines with that of the *hortus conclusus* of the Song of Songs (McAvoy et al. 475). Female mystics often employed garden imagery in their writings. Its metaphorical use not only illustrates horticultural practices used at the time, but also resonates with Lauren's own use of gardening metaphors and biblical references as a source for her religion. "Earthseed" itself is named after seeds meant to spread and grow that echo the parable of the sower.

If the garden performs the practical purpose of providing sustenance, it is also tied to the utopian tradition. That of Acorn is not the only postmedieval garden that recuperates the medieval *hortus conclusus*. Members of the nineteenth-century Arts & Crafts movement, such as William Morris, attempted to emulate medieval gardens. As Cathleen Coyne Kelly argues in discussing Morris's re-creation of the *hortus conclusus*, "it is the wall that makes a garden most 'medieval'" ("Translatio" 37-8). Within the walls, a sense of peace and order could be enjoyed against the chaotic industrial life. The aim was to create a utopian enclosed realm protected from external threats that followed Morris's medieval models. Gardens appear central in his vision of a utopian society in *News from Nowhere* (Giesecke and Jacobs 12). He has also written of establishing a monastic order grounded in ecological and socialist values against the hectic modern age (Eckersley 164-5). Ralph Adams Cram, influenced by Morris, was equally fascinated with the idea of a utopian medievalist society, following the model of walled medieval towns and monasteries as suggested in *Walled Towns* (1919).[182] Both Morris and Cram's utopian models resemble at first glance Lauren's own enclosed, ecological, communitarian set-up.

The utopianism inspired by medieval gardens can be traced back to the first biblical garden. From the beginning, the notion of the garden is tied to that of an enclosed space. Not only does the word "garden" derive from the Latin *gardinus* meaning "of or relating to an enclosure," but Paradise itself derives from the Old Persian *pairidaēza*, "enclosure" (Kelly, "Translatio" 24-5), the latter adopted into the

[181] "Benignus Dominus, compatiens demonstravit illi hortulum valde parvum nimisque angustum, qui diversorum florum vernantia plenus, spinis erat circumseptus, et modicum mellis erat fluens in ipso" (Paquelin, ed. 122).
[182] See W. Graham 171-234; Matthews 100-102.

Old Testament Hebrew as "pardes" to indicate a park or garden enclosure (Burrell and Dale 110-11). The terms come together in the paradisiacal garden of Eden, an enclosed realm of peace and harmony with nature, which represents the first Christian utopia. As Kelly argues, in medieval Europe "every garden, particularly when enclosed, invites us to recall that ur-garden . . . sometimes the heavenly Paradise or the Garden of Eden" (26).[183] Since then, the Western utopian tradition also present in SF is entwined with the imagination of an enclosed garden (Giesecke and Jacobs 7).[184] The enclosure serves as a boundary between the inside and outside. The walls and fences of utopian gardens speak of dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, of who is allowed in the utopian space.

Lauren's community, despite being diverse and welcoming, still operates according to the process of inclusion and exclusion inherent to walled enclosures, one that was also at work in her old gated compound. Larkin's commentary on her mother's diary entries sheds light on this point: "she saw her father's error when he could not see it—his dependence on walls and guns, religious faith, and a hope that the good old days would return. Yet what more than that did she have?" (*PT* 136). Lauren is willing to defend her community at all costs: "if people threaten us or our crop, we kill them" (*PS* 305). Acorn could at first seem to replicate the dynamics of Robledo, an enclosed community surrounded by walls and suspicious of outside threats, which needs to protect itself even with violent measures. Acorn's inclusivity has then its limits. The community's dynamics seem to follow those of typical enclosed utopias, starting with that of Thomas More.[185] The latter places a similar attention on gardens, inspired by enclosed monastic ones (Giesecke and Jakobs 10; Rebhorn 140-41). Exclusivity seems the basic premise for the existence of such communities.

The construction of an enclosed garden surrounded by walls also implies the distinction between wild and tamed nature. Lauren stresses that "[t]he land surrounding us, however, is as empty and wild as any I've seen" (*PS* 296). While Acorn is defined by a carefully cultivated garden, the land outside is described as wild and empty. At first glance, such a distinction between wild and tamed nature echoes that which operated in medieval conceptions of enclosed gardens. The latter were meant to keep nature walled out: while the inside, regulated by a human improvement on the nonhuman, was a realm of peace and order, the outside of wild woods was one of chaos and lack of civilization (Giesecke and Jakobs 9; Haskell 193; Knight 393). The notion of an enclosed garden utopia itself appears then inimical to the wilderness. However, gardens are ambivalent places. If they can stand for an expression of privilege, exclusivity, and control over nature, they can also represent a collaborative communion with the more-than-human that acknowledges mutual multispecies care (Burrell and Dale 109, 122). In fact, Lauren's *The Book of the Living* makes clear the centrality of multispecies partnership: "[p]artnership is mutualistic symbiosis. Partnership is life" (*PT* 133). Earthseed does not conceive of a hierarchical distinction between different

[183] See also Henisch 150-70; Pearsall 237.
[184] Examples include Ernest Callebach's *Ecotopia* (1975) and Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* (2009).
[185] Cf. Stein 116-17.

kinds of nature in light of human benefit. Relations are intended as symbiotic and mutualistic, which is reflected in the cultivation of the garden.

In Acorn's case, the need for defensive walls suggests the impossibility of complete inclusivity in light of the hegemonic culture that does not share ideals of openness, diversity, and environmentalism. The exclusion/inclusion process is not dependent on the individuals' embodied subjectivity. It operates on the basis of one's willingness to embrace alterity and change. By Butler's admission, the novel does not present a traditional static utopian scenario: "I find utopias ridiculous. We're not going to have a perfect society until we get a few perfect humans, and that seems unlikely. Besides, any true utopia would almost certainly be incredibly boring, and it would probably be so overspecialized that any change we might introduce would probably destroy the whole system" (Butler, "Interview" 69). Earthseed is not a static, perfect society in line with traditional utopias, but a dynamic, changing community. Butler's works have often been described as critical dystopias, which developed in response to the 1980s and 1990s conservativism and capitalism (*Scraps* xii). Moylan and Baccolini define them as texts that present a dystopian society, but that "maintain the utopian impulse within the work" and open a "space of contestation and opposition for those collective 'ex-centric' subjects whose class, gender, race, sexuality, and other positions are not empowered by hegemonic rule" (7).[186] Earthseed offers such subjects a space for collective resistance and anti-capitalist living. If Acorn does not seem a utopia defined by peace and plenty in view of the changes it has to face, it points to a model of community-building based on affective bonds, multispecies responsibility, inclusivity, and ecologism.

In particular, in light of its shared features with Benedictine monasteries, Acorn can be defined as an "ecostery." Ecosteries, i.e., communities that show a "debt to ecological principles and the utopian model of the Christian monastery, may furnish the future steady-state society with the same guidance that monasteries of the Dark Ages provided to the rising medieval culture of Western Europe" (LaFreniere 319). Such centers, dedicated to ecological learning and teaching, much as in the case of Acorn, are conceived of as quasi-monastic groups. They do not deny the existing global issues but retain a utopian impulse by building an alternative to the Western hegemonic societal system. Ecocommunalism theorists such as LaFreniere have taken the Benedictine system as a model for potential alternatives grounded in ecological values and a sense of community.[187] While Éva Federmayer denies that Acorn may be defined as an ecostery on the grounds that it is not an ascetic and closed-off community as monasteries are believed to be (358), monasteries were not isolated from the outside world, but participated in it both on a social and economic basis, becoming lively cultural centers for nearby communities. Earthseed does not remain a small community but gradually grows into a network of multiple ones with influence and power.

However, Earthseed does not seem to be only inspired by medieval monastic traditions. Acorn's garden and the spreading of physical and figurative seeds resonate with matters of BIPOC survival and the

[186] See also Chang; Peel 53.
[187] For an in-depth discussion of the medievalism of ecocommunalism, see Eckersley 160-70. See also Roszak.

African diaspora. Having to abandon her enclave in Robledo, Lauren collects seeds from home and takes them with her to Acorn: "[w]e can build a shelter, put in a winter garden from the seed I've been carrying and collecting since we left home" (*PS* 302). The seeds are meant to ensure the group's survival on a new land and transplant her botanical traditions in an unfamiliar context. Seeds are not only physical entities on which their sustenance depends, but they are also the symbolic inspiration for Earthseed. Lauren coins the name while tending her family's garden in Robledo: "I found the name . . . while I was weeding the back garden and thinking about the way plants seed themselves, windborne, animalborne, waterborne, far from their parent plants. They have no ability at all to travel great distances under their own power, and yet, they do travel" (73). Earthseed is meant to encourage people to spread and grow like seeds in multiple areas, including outer space, in order to survive and adapt. Such a process echoes quite literally the notion of diaspora. The term derives from the Greek "to sow, scatter" (Thomashow 182), reflecting the mobility of people forcedly removed from their homes into new contexts. Haraway notes that Butler's novels are rooted in "the problem of destruction and wounded flourishing . . . in exile, diaspora, abduction, and transportation— the earthly gift-burden of the descendants of slaves, refugees, immigrants, travelers, and of the indigenous too" (*Staying* 120). Lauren's trajectory, as mentioned above, is one that openly evokes that of African slaves, uprooted from their own context into new ones, subjected to violence and oppression, and forced to adapt to changed conditions.

The garden is central to the tie between the novels and the African diaspora. As mentioned above, Crosby's notion of environmental imperialism points to the transatlantic movement of peoples, animals, microbes, and plants. Judith Carney stresses how this process was not merely carried out by the white settlers. Enslaved Africans contributed to the US agricultural history by introducing plants and food staples from their homes into the country ("They Carry Life" 37-38). The survival of runaway slave communities often depended on the ability to make the best of the resources they had. The latter often consisted in the seeds they carried with them, which they could plant to sustain themselves (35). Even on plantations, the slaves could cultivate their own dooryard gardens, which allowed them to preserve their homelands' botanical legacy (Carney and Rosomoff 124-38). Such gardens, unlike plantations, featured a variety of different plant species (Carney, "Plantationocene" 1076). They constituted not only modes of survival, but also interstitial spaces of resistance against the proto-capitalist plantation system. Sylvia Wynter also stresses the radical difference "between the plantation and the plot, and the structure of values which each represent' ("Plot and Plantation" 99). She notes the emancipatory, counter-cultural potential of a slave plot, where the slaves transplanted their cultures onto unfamiliar soils. The plot in fact also reflected a different approach to the more-than-human, based on partnership rather than exploitation.

Lauren's act of carrying seeds is colored by the memory of African diasporic cultures and histories. Her garden, made out of the seeds she has brought from home, equally constitutes a space of interstitial counter-cultural resistance against unethical corporations and the government that supports them. Acorn's garden is then patterned at once after European medieval models and histories of African slavery. Butler's

medievalism inserts matters of race in a novel that juxtaposes multiple temporalities, from medieval ones to those of the European settlement of the Americas. Her medievalism counters that of Jarrett's Crusaders. The latter draws inspiration from the Crusaders to justify the joint use of religious faith and violent militarism. By contrast, Lauren's counter-medievalism is grounded in a quasi-monastic ecocommunity rooted in diasporic legacies and values of inclusivity, ecologism, and adaptation.

3.4. Afrofuturism and Technology

The kind of ecocommunalism outlined by LeFreniere, after which Acorn seems patterned, does not come without its criticisms. As Eckersley states, such critiques revolve around the notion that

> it is naive, voluntarist, simplistic, and blind toward certain recalcitrant aspects of human nature. These are serious obstacles to the widespread acceptance of ecocommunalism as an appropriate political framework for social and ecological renewal in the modern world. Indeed, a case will be made that ecocommunalism needs to be supplemented by political engagement with state institutions if it is to not to remain an ephemeral and/or marginal political phenomenon. (163)

Furthermore, yet another risk such kinds of societal organizations incur is an escapism into a nostalgic realm removed from modern realities. Yet, as Jennifer Atkinson observes, since the 1990s, utopian representations of gardening communities have actually often been politically oppositional (238).[188] Lauren's vision for Earthseed avoids falling into such risks. Earthseed's development after Acorn's fall is made possible by her legal action to be compensated for the damage Jarret's Crusaders have inflicted on her community. Thanks to the financial compensation, she builds a network that involves cooperation with institutions such as universities and research centers. Earthseed's ecocommunalism is then supplemented by an active engagement with state institutions that deny its status as an escapist utopian dream.

Furthermore, her vision for Earthseed does not involve a nostalgic desire to return to the past. Lauren stresses that "[i]t's important that we become a self-sustaining economic entity or we're liable never to move out of the nineteenth century!" (*PT* 65). She urges the pastoral community to expand networks of exchange, both financial and those of communication and knowledge. Lauren also perceives the empowering potential of technologies, while distinguishing between the uses made by white elites and marginalized groups. Wealthy elites are portrayed as using technology for escapist purposes and for reinforcing their privilege. Yet Lauren also believes in technologies' ability to improve the lives of marginalized groups. She reports that

> [s]cientists in Australia have managed to bring a human infant to term in an artificial womb . . . Consider, though: eggs combined with cloning technology (another toy of the rich) would give men the ability to have a child without the genetic or the gestational help of a woman. . . . women will be free to do without men completely, since women can provide their own ova. . . . I can see artificial wombs being useful when we travel into extrasolar space. (*PT* 83-4)

Lauren considers the implications of scientific discoveries for matters of reproductive justice and women's emancipation. She is also attentive to the unequal opportunities caused by the gap between the rich and the

[188] Moylan, for instance, praises works that avoid the "compromises and weaknesses found within Utopian dreaming and actual opposition—refusing the temptation to move quickly to a restful refuge (in one's own garden, by the riverside trees, or in some solipsistic cul-de-sac) and to forget the need for collective action" (*Scraps* 276).

poor, stressing how, for the wealthy, such tools are only playthings rather than a way to improve social sectors. Furthermore, she looks forward to the prospect of the use of cloned eggs for space travel.

Lauren's interest in technology is also motivated by her vision for Earthseed. Lauren insists to her husband that: "[w]e need the stars, Bankole. We need purpose! We need the image the Destiny gives us of ourselves as a growing, purposeful species . . . That's why the Destiny of Earthseed is to take root among the stars" (*PT* 177). An important aspect of Earthseed revolves around "Destiny," i.e., the project of founding Earthseed communities on extra-terrestrial planets. Lauren believes that it provides her followers with a long-term purpose that keeps them motivated. Advanced technologies result indispensable for the accomplishment of Destiny. It is for this reason that she finances space programs and research in the field.

In a country where only a select few have access to technology, the fact that a Black woman from humble origins becomes an influential leader who invests in education and space programs situates the novels in an Afrofuturist feminist context. O'Neill argues for an Afrofuturist feminism, whereby "speculative representations of Black women and girls that creatively resist oppression and organize for the liberation of Black, queer, women, and trans people in future worlds and alternate universes are an example of political action" (65-6). Afrofuturist feminist sensibilities see SF as a tool for an anti-capitalist and anti-white-supremacist vision of systemic change. Lauren's example follows this pattern. By borrowing different models from the past, the present, and the future, she endures hardship and envisions an alternative path to the Western hegemonic imperative of untrammeled progress. She builds a community rooted in diversity, gender equality, communalism, ecologism, and equal access to education. Lauren looks both at the past and the future through her Afrofuturist medievalist project. Her medievalism does not look nostalgically at the pre-modern past. It acknowledges how the past and the present can enter into a dialogue with one another. It counters the way the past has been used to provide conservative groups with justifications for discrimination. Finally, it demonstrates how the medieval past can offer ethical models that can be adapted to current needs and reveals the lability of rigid temporal dimensions.

Yet there are problems with the frictionless celebration of Lauren. *Parable of the Talents* highlights the problematic aspects of her vision through the insertion of the voices of her daughter and her husband. Larkin has grown away from her mother, having been kidnapped by the Jarret Crusaders as a baby. She expresses some reservations about certain aspects of Lauren's project. She is especially critical of Earthseed's "Destiny": "[s]o much needed to be done here on earth—so many diseases, so much hunger, so much poverty, such suffering, and here was a rich organization spending vast sums of money, time, and effort on nonsense" (377). Larkin touches on an important weakness of Earthseed. Lauren's fixation with extra-terrestrial colonization draws attention away from the existing Earthly issues that concern both social and environmental injustice. Her solution of founding homes on other planets hinders the possibility of addressing the problems on Earth, especially in light of the power and wealth that she has acquired.

Still, Lauren's vision of outer-space colonization seems to provide an ethical counterpart to traditional SF imaginaries such as the ones of Edgar Rice Burroughs's Mars series, which project the

histories of European colonization and of the US imperialist expansion onto other planets. Yet the name given to the first Earthseed spaceship to leave Earth, "Christopher Columbus," casts a dark shadow on the possibility of a genuinely new beginning that departs from the oppressive models of the past. Lauren dissociates herself from the name: "I object to the name. This ship is not about a shortcut to riches and empire. It's not about snatching up slaves and gold and presenting them to some European monarch. But . . . [t]he name is nothing" (404). The fact that Butler did not complete the third volume dedicated to the space enterprise leaves the reader with questions on whether the name really *is* nothing, or whether it may prefigure a darker outcome of "Destiny," which might actually echo the Manifest Destiny that has justified projects of conquest and oppression. The novel stresses the importance of which models are borrowed from the past lest that past returns to haunt the present. It does not shy away from delicate questions on how Earthseed may be improved and refuses to depict it as an all-encompassing solution to planetary problems. The value of Earthseed for contemporary discourses lies not so much in its "Destiny" as in its focus on climate injustice that considers overlapping factors of race, gender, class, and species as well as in its gaze backward and forward in envisioning possibilities for the present. Earthseed points to the need for collective action and a multispecies ethics of care.

4. Conclusions

Mumbo Jumbo and the Earthseed novels shed light in similar ways on how medievalism can be employed both to reinforce exclusionary positions responsible for intersecting systems of oppression and to advance inclusive ecological posthumanist models of thought and action. Both Reed and Butler dramatize the appropriation of medieval models to bolster exclusionary stances. In *Mumbo Jumbo,* such medievalism is patterned after the model of the Knights Templar. In Butler's works, on the one hand, it appears at the level of the socio-political structure of the country, depicted as living under a neomedieval/techno-feudal condition. On the other hand, it is expressed through extremist groups inspired by medieval Crusaders. Both the Wallflower Order and Jarret's Crusaders defend a Christian orthodoxy against all other creeds, which are discriminated against as pagans and heretics. Both are grounded in an exclusionary ideology that suppresses all that diverges from the Western hegemonic norm in terms of religion, culture, race, ethnicity, gender, and species. The belief that marginalized groups conspire to weaken Western civilization motivates the use of violence in order to defend social order.

In both cases, such medievalisms are paired with a disregard for the more-than-human. The Atonists shut nature off in favor of an artificial world. Jarret's Crusaders transform Acorn into a wasteland. The *Parable* novels also stress how the neomedieval government neglects climate issues. In both of the authors' works in question, an exclusionary kind of medievalism is tied to the nature/culture divide that fails to account for relational multispecies entanglements. The novels address matters of environmental injustice that stress interlinked systems of oppression at the intersection of race, class, gender, and species.

Yet the novels combat the antagonists' medievalist master narratives. *Mumbo Jumbo* presents a counter-medievalist model through Jes Grew, which is associated with the same urge to dance to the music of tarantism. Both constitute a threat to the social order. By depicting Jes Grew as the expression of a medieval epidemic, the novel destabilizes medieval/modern divides. Furthermore, in view of the bond between Voodoo, New Orleans, and Jes Grew, the latter can be seen as embodying the spirit of renewal that defines Mardi Gras's multicultural medievalism as opposed to its exclusionary medievalisms. In the Earthseed series, Lauren's community resembles, in its structure and focus on work, education, rituals, gardening, financial self-sufficiency, and care for those in need, a medieval Benedictine monastery. It can thus be considered an ecostery, which is based on ecological values and a sense of community.

In both cases, the works' counter-medievalisms are also conducive to the formation of posthuman identities that counter dualisms. Jes Grew—an entity that crosses human, animal, plant, and machine—creates relational open bodies that align with posthumanist views of subjectivity. Similarly, Earthseed is grounded in the recognition of mutualistic and symbiotic bonds with multispecies agencies. Both Jes Grew and Earthseed acknowledge the natural-cultural continuum and the entangled co-becoming of all matter. At the same time, while both of the authors tie the liberatory and ecological projects of the respective protagonists to medieval models, they do not reject modernity and its advanced technologies altogether. Rather, they distinguish between uses of technology put to exclusionary and emancipatory ends.

Furthermore, the authors root both exclusionary anti-ecological and posthumanist medievalist models in African diasporic histories, epistemes, and cosmologies. *Mumbo Jumbo* sabotages the Atonists' medievalist models and hegemonic historical accounts. This is accomplished by revealing an African interstitial presence within medieval culture. Reed revises history by depicting the Templars' involvement in African rites and Atonism's origin in African religions. He unsettles white supremacist discourses that rely on ideas of medieval racial purity and on the presupposition of European dominance. At the same time, the anti-plague is also grounded in Voodoo cosmologies. Parallelly, the medievalism of Jarret's Crusaders is accompanied by references to African enslavement. Butler roots medievalisms in histories of racial oppression. Yet she also shows how the garden's centrality does not only depend on medieval models, but also on the African diasporic gardens as places of resistance to the plantation system.

Finally, in the works in question, the characters express a critique of flat linear temporalities tied to progress narratives. The writers, through their respective Necromantic and Histofuturist approaches, disrupt rigid periodizations by juxtaposing asynchronous historical moments. Both reflect on cyclical patterns. Yet they also argue for the possibility of learning from the past and intervening in the present to shape the future in a way that affirms the agentic power of Black groups against the narratives that exclude them from dominant historiographic accounts. Furthermore, the spanning of the narratives over large scales of time invites the readers to focus at once on the slow violence of colonial oppression and environmental injustice as well as on nonhuman temporalities. The simultaneous backward and forward gaze enforced by a medievalist Afrofuturist framework prompts readers to extend their temporal

imagination and visualize the invisible, delayed effects of actions that have taken place in the past. This engagement with multiple temporal dimensions coheres with the Afrofuturist aim to envision possibilities for counter-hegemonic affirmation that unsettles traditional Western temporal models. The vision that emerges from such an approach is one of inclusive, ecological, multicultural communities grounded in medievalist models as well as African diasporic cultural histories.

Conclusions

As the texts above illustrate, from the perspective of US medievalist science fiction, the Middle Ages is often seen as an empty repository that can be filled with multiple—often mutually exclusive—meanings. The kinds of medievalism that have been analyzed here are creative literary products. Creative forms of medievalism construct an imaginary version of the Middle Ages. Diverse significations of the medieval are woven into narratives that are often ideologically laden. Narratives are one of the prime vehicles through which dominant cultural values spread across a given society. In turn, values and worldviews inform human actions and practices. In particular, how societies think about the more-than-human realm that encompasses them can contribute to determining how they act towards it. Such a phenomenon has wide implications for planetary multispecies prosperity. Given the bonds that tie nature and culture together, it affects humans and nonhumans alike. In this sense, medievalist narratives can either reinforce or unsettle anthropocentric stances. It appears then relevant to inquire into the use to which the Middle Ages is put within the stories and discourses that circulate across a given culture. For this reason, this study has investigated how medievalism both reflects and affects perceptions of the more-than-human. It has done so through the analysis of SF texts written by US authors of the twentieth century.

This study has stemmed from the premise that Western cultural values about ecological matters are particularly influenced by dominant notions of temporality. Questions of temporality are here understood as central for shaping understandings of the more-than-human. The way Western modernity positions itself toward its medieval past constitutes a telling marker of how Western temporalities are perceived, justified, and established. Literary works constitute helpful locations where such dynamics can be observed. Indeed, the way literary texts represent the medieval reveals how modernity views its past and specifically its medieval past. In doing so, such works illuminate the more general temporal perceptions concerning the past, the present, and the future that color Western modernity. This study has attempted to demonstrate that such temporal perceptions can affect views on the more-than-human in significant ways.

Chapter Two has argued that Western temporality implies a conceptual disjunction between the Middle Ages and modernity. In this view, modernity has overstepped the medieval past. The overcoming of the Middle Ages can be seen as either desirable or regrettable. The two attitudes are not, however, mutually exclusive. In both cases, this separation often rests on a view of temporality as a flat, unidirectional, and linear progression. This temporal perception often underlies narratives of progress. Such narratives tend to promote the anthropocentric, unrestrained, and therefore unethical development of modernity through intensive extractive practices. These practices presuppose a radical separation between nature and culture that does not consider multispecies entangled networks. The medieval/modern divide is inscribed within a larger framework that is rooted in dualistic thinking. This system concomitantly also separates humans from nonhumans and nature from culture. Such a system is highly hierarchical. It upholds a narrow conception of the human as Western white Man. It demeans and excludes all the other

categories of embodied subjectivity that do not adhere to this hegemonic standard. This argument has been developed through the analysis of Edgar Rice Burroughs's Mars series, with a focus on the first novel of the series, *A Princess of Mars*. The work features both the nostalgic and the progressivist views of the Middle Ages, which are rooted in the medieval/modern divide. Both views serve the normative notion of Man embodied by John Carter. On the one hand, the hero identifies with positively valued medieval chivalric models. On the other, he depicts the aliens on Mars in medieval terms. In this case, the medieval is negatively perceived. The aliens are also racialized and animalized at the same time. By asserting himself as the emblem of civilized modernity, Carter's domination over the more-than-human is thus justified. The novel demonstrates a concern over maintaining neat separations between opposite elements of dichotomic pairs, including those between the medieval and the modern, nature and culture, and the human and the nonhuman.

On the other hand, Chapters Three to Five, have considered how medievalist works of SF can also represent the unsettling of the medieval/modern divide. Medievalism can also challenge dominant Western anthropocentric temporal models. Such kinds of medievalism embrace temporalities that move beyond views of time as a straight arrow speeding forward from the past into the future. Instead, they acknowledge temporal multidirectionality, multiplicity, heterogeneity, sedimentation, and (a)synchronicity. Such a counter-hegemonic nonlinear temporal model facilitates the disruption of the medieval/modern divide along with those between nature and culture and humans and nonhumans. The medievalist works that adhere to this temporal view build an ecological ethics grounded in medieval models. This is the case of the SF works analyzed in Chapters Three to Five—*The Left Hand of Darkness* by Ursula K. Le Guin, *Riddley Walker* by Russell Hoban, *Mumbo Jumbo* by Ishmael Reed, and *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents* by Octavia E. Butler. These novels counter exclusionary kinds of medievalism in two distinct ways. On the one hand, they depict them in a critical manner. Through such critique, they display harmful consequences of the agendas to which exclusionary medievalisms subscribe. On the other hand, they also display affirmative counter-medievalist models grounded in an ecological posthumanist ethics. Such alternative stances reject anthropocentrism and embrace posthuman multispecies relational entanglements.

In all of the novels under consideration, the medieval/modern divide is disrupted along with the divides between nature and culture and between the human and the nonhuman. The works under consideration show that SF medievalism can serve to dismantle Western hegemonic dichotomies. The blurring of binary thought is central to the task of unsettling the Enlightenment humanist worldview critiqued by posthumanist scholars. The rejection of rigid hierarchical dichotomies may prompt a reconsideration of the "middleness" of the so-called Middle Ages. The term itself has often taken on a negative connotation—one that characterizes the historical period as a transitional, marginal moment in time squeezed between two greater epochs, those of antiquity and of modernity. In light of the posthumanist ecocritical lens that has framed this analysis, however, "middleness" rather stands for an

unsettling of rigid binaries. Furthermore, from the lens of a nonlinear temporal model, such a "middleness" does not imply a fixed position, but rather an axis of becoming, of bidirectional movement forward and backward, a dynamic space across which temporal dimensions move freely. In this sense, the counter-hegemonic nonlinear temporalities expressed in the medievalist works of SF considered here highlight how the past haunts the present and the future. In turn, the present and the future look backward at the past in the search for explanations, justifications, and sources of inspiration. By re-evaluating the middle position of the Middle Ages, it is possible to reject both the relations of clear-cut alterity and the continuity in relation to the present. Rather, this position points to a dynamic engagement between the past, the present, and the future.

The medievalism identified within the works discussed above expresses a sense of polytemporality. The display of such a temporal perception does not automatically imply less anthropocentric and more ethical engagements with the more-than-human. However, when accompanied by an attentiveness to multispecies entanglements, as is the case of the works here considered, a more expansive view of temporality can contribute to enhancing humans' ability to appreciate the vast temporal scales involved in the climate crisis. Through this process, it becomes possible to recognize the long history of ecological oppression and its intersection with histories of social injustice. It also allows readers to visualize the entangled nature of human and nonhuman temporalities. This expansive view of time extends the reader's temporal imagination, which seems fundamental to understanding the large scale of the entangled phenomena involved in climate change. Literary texts can play a crucial role in this process of temporal scalar translation and representation. Narratives are one of the main vehicles through which it is possible to visualize temporalities. SF in particular appears as a privileged genre through which to address entangled dimensions of the past, the present, and the future. It is also the genre that historically has been the most invested in exploring the encounter with the Other, both human and nonhuman. For this reason, it seems especially well-suited to consider the implications of how the Middle Ages is perceived and represented in light of ecological questions.

The present study of ecomedievalism in SF has demonstrated that certain kinds of medievalism tend to reinforce anthropocentric perspectives and to validate the oppression of multiple trans-species othered beings. At the same time, however, this study has hopefully illustrated that medievalism can also contribute to the formation of a multispecies ecological ethics grounded in the acknowledgment of relational entangled networks of agencies, influences, and temporalities. Medievalism can thus be turned into a vehicle for multiple conflicting agendas. The ideologies that accompany it shift and change along with changing cultural and historical contexts. It is for this reason that each chapter has framed the works within their own cultural environment. SF adapts to twentieth-century changing socio-cultural contexts. The meaning and role of the medieval mutate along with them. The many meanings that the medieval can take on should prompt a consideration of the responsibility involved in the creative use of the Middle Ages for contemporary scopes. This analysis intended to invite readers to realize the weight and

significance of practices of storytelling and of interpretation for the formation of a collective ecological multispecies ethics. If the medieval past has been used to justify and validate the oppression of multiple trans-species Others, this should not entail a desire to do away with that past altogether, to leave it behind, and discard it completely along with the heaps of waste generated by contemporary culture. Rather, as is exemplified in the works taken into consideration, it prompts the need, in Haraway's words, to stay with the trouble (*Staying* 1-2). Staying with the trouble does not entail rejecting the past or romanticizing it. It requires one to stay in the present while building over troubled histories in transformative ways that aim to shape multispecies relational bonds. The kinds of medievalist SF works analyzed above offer their readers a vision of staying with the trouble. They can contribute to denouncing the use of medievalism as an instrument of trans-species oppression. At the same time, they also prove that the medieval can promote inclusive visions of intra- and interspecies entanglements. They do so by recycling and repurposing images, motifs, narratives, patterns, and structures associated with the medieval past. They use such sources of inspiration to offer the counter-models of ecological thought and action. These can hopefully help shape an ethically-oriented multispecies present and future.

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