MELISSA CRISTINA SILVA DE SÁ

Stories to Make Us Human:

Twenty-First-Century Dystopian Novels by Women

BELO HORIZONTE

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Tese de doutorado apresentada ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Estudos Literários da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Doutora em Letras: Estudos Literários.

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To the ones who dare to dream new worlds.

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"Let's start with the end of the world, why don't we? Get it over with and move on to more interesting things."

— N.K. Jemisin, *The Fifth Season*

Abstract

Dystopian novels written by women in the twenty-first century tend to bring storytelling to the center of their narratives. The importance of telling stories in dystopias is nothing new: it is present in classics of the genre like Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1951). Nonetheless, women writers have associated this discussion on storytelling to the matter of being human. In the last decades, several novels have presented this trend, such as the ones by Ursula K. Le Guin, Margaret Atwood, and Octavia Butler. These texts rework science fiction's traditional conventions such as male protagonists, the dichotomy of technology being either purely good or catastrophically evil, and a westernized view of humankind. This dissertation investigates a trend in twenty-first century dystopian novels by women that thematizes storytelling and the sharing of experiences in narratives in which the act of telling stories humanize what is initially considered non-human. In the selected novels, storytelling is used by aliens, robots, and genetically engineered creatures to challenge what it means to be human, debunking traditional definitions of humanity and proposing alternative ways of living that point to other possibilities of social arrangements outside the current biological, evolutionary, and cultural view of humanity. In this context, traditional humanity is defined based on the idea of humans in opposition to animals, having intellect and creativity, being able to create cultural products. From the dystopian novels by women read for this research, I chose three to triangulate common topics inside the pattern of using storytelling to discuss and challenge what being human means: Le Guin's *The Telling* (2000), Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007), and Atwood's *MaddAddam* (2013). I also refer to other novels to illustrate points and present convergences and divergences. I consider the concept of dystopia and its relation to storytelling from a feminist point of view drawing mainly on Raffaella Baccolini's and Tom Moylan's debates in the field of utopian studies. Storytelling is analyzed in the novels in relation to Walter Benjamin's text, "The Storyteller," Paul Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*, and Brian Boyd's *On The Origins of Stories*. The matter of knowledge present in these dystopian novels by women is considered by examining the

proposed alternative communities formed in the texts. Finally, humanity as a category is discussed using mainly Boyd's considerations on evocriticism in contrast to the post-human perspective usually taken. The pattern observed in these dystopian novels by women reveals the many preoccupations of the twenty-first century through the bleak lens of dystopia, but with a critical twist that provides reflections on possible alternatives to humans' current ways of living. It is by telling stories that these alternatives are proposed.

Keywords: dystopian literature; storytelling; women.

Resumo

Romances distópicos escritos por mulheres no século 21 tendem a trazer o ato de contar histórias para o centro de suas narrativas. A importância de contar histórias em distopias não é novidade: está presente em clássicos como *Fahrenheit 451* (1951), de Ray Bradbury. No entanto, escritoras têm associado essa discussão sobre o ato de contar histórias com o significado de ser humano. Nas últimas décadas, vários romances apresentaram essa tendência, como os das escritoras Ursula K. Le Guin, Margaret Atwood e Octavia Butler. Seus textos ressignificam as convenções da ficção científica tradicional tais como protagonistas masculinos, dicotomia entre tecnologia ser puramente boa ou catastroficamente má e uma visão ocidental da humanidade. O presente trabalho investiga esse padrão nos romances do século 21 escritos por mulheres que tematizam o ato de contar histórias e o compartilhar de experiências em narrativas em que contar histórias humaniza o que é inicialmente visto como não humano. Nos romances selecionados, a narrativa é usada por alienígenas, robôs e criaturas geneticamente modificadas para questionar o que significa ser humano, desbancando definições tradicionais de humanidade e propondo modos de vida alternativos que apontam para outras possibilidades de arranjos sociais fora da atual visão biológica, evolucionária e cultural da humanidade. Nesse contexto, a humanidade tradicional é definida com base na ideia de humanos em oposição a animais, dotados de intelecto e criatividade e capazes de criar produtos culturais. Das distopias lidas para essa pesquisa, escolhi três para triangular temas comuns dentro do padrão de usar o ato de contar histórias para discutir e questionar o que é ser humano: *The Telling* (2000), de Le Guin, *The Stone Gods* (2007), de Jeanette Winterson, e *MaddAddam* (2013), de Atwood. Faço também referência a outros romances para ilustrar pontos e apresentar convergências e divergências. Considero o conceito de distopia e sua relação com a narrativa de um ponto de vista feminista, baseando-me principalmente nos debates de Raffaella Baccolini e Tom Moylan no campo dos estudos utópicos. Analiso o ato de contar histórias nos romances em relação ao texto "O narrador", de Walter Benjamin, e os livros *Tempo e narrativa*, de Paul Ricoeur, e *On the*

Origins of Stories, de Brian Boyd. Abordo o debate sobre o conhecimento nesses romances ao examinar as comunidades alternativas propostas neles. Finalmente, discuto humanidade como categoria usando as considerações de Boyd sobre o evocriticismo em contraste com a perspectiva pós-humana comumente utilizada. O padrão observado nesses romances distópicos escritos por mulheres revela as muitas preocupações do século 21 através das lentes sombrias da distopia, mas com o viés crítico que traz reflexões em alternativas possíveis aos modos atuais em que os humanos vivem. É através de histórias que essas alternativas são propostas.

Palavras-chave: literatura distópica; narrativa; mulheres.

Contents

Introduction

Dystopian fiction has been a fertile ground for writers to tackle the matter of what it means to be human. The issue is present in famous dystopias such as Philip K. Dick's landmark *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* (1968), later on adapted into the major motion picture *Blade Runner*, to Isaac Asimov's now-classic collection of short stories *I Robot* (1950), including more contemporary revisitations like the movie adaptation to Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2010) and Tommy Wirkola's *What Happened to Monday?* (2017). What lies in the core of humanity and what fine lines divide what is human from what is not – robots, aliens, genetically engineered creatures – have been problematized in twentieth-century dystopian literature and film.

The importance of telling stories in dystopias is also nothing new: Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1951) presents us a protagonist who rediscovers the power of fiction and the importance of storytelling. Yevgeny Zamyatin's *We* (1921) is written in the form of a diary, a format that would influence the genre for decades. The exploration of storytelling as a theme appears more provocatively in women's dystopias in the past decades, such as Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Word for World is Forest* (1976), Suzette Haden Elgin's *Native Tongue* (1984), Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), and Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* (1993). According to critics as Jayne Glover and Susan Watkins, these texts rework science fiction conventions, such as male protagonists, the dichotomy of technology being either purely good or catastrophically evil, and a westernized view of humankind (Glover 48; Watkins 119). They also play with the readers' expectations in often fragmented and discontinued narratives. This overt portrayal of storytelling differs from the classic dystopias because narrative itself is an issue in these novels.

Drawing on their predecessors, the selected twenty-first-century dystopian novels by women revalue storytelling and the sharing of experiences, proposing a humanization of what is

considered initially non-human[1]. They question, thus, the traditional assumptions on what being human means. In these novels, robots, aliens, and genetically engineered creatures blur the lines between what is human and what is not once they can understand and later create their own stories. These novels present what I propose to be "radicalized storytelling," a thematization of narrative, not only by using metafiction but also by presenting storytelling as the core of humanity. Storytelling becomes an oppositional body of knowledge capable of critically constructing a new reality while criticizing that of the reader's.

In this dissertation, the matter of being human tackles the issue of recognition. The robots, aliens, and genetically engineered creatures that fill the pages of the dystopian novels selected are not initially perceived as humans by the beginning of the texts, but they push the boundaries and question what a human being should be. This process of perception and recognition of what constitutes humanity is done mainly through storytelling. The ability to create stories and narratives change the way these initially non-humans are perceived and lead to a later acknowledgment of their humanity by characters in the novel and possibly by the reader. As a process, this recognition is dialectical, tense, and sometimes incomplete. As much as most novels selected tend towards a more plural concept of humanity that embrace otherness, they do not present it as an easy endeavor. Contradictions make part of dystopian fiction, and even though I argue in this work that storytelling makes us human, this connection is not a straight line. This happens because of the kind of story being told, and the kind of narrator matters to the perception of someone as human. In this sense, the chosen novels could be read as debates on the recognition of humans.

I have selected three novels as landmarks of research in this project: Le Guin's *The Telling* (2000), Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007), and Atwood's *MaddAddam* (2013). Other

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[1] Throughout this dissertation, I use "non-human" to refer to a specific subset: cyborgs, aliens, robots, and genetically engineered humans.

thirty-five novels were selected for this project, working as supporting novels. To be considered part of this trend analyzed in twenty-first-century dystopian novels by women, the novel had to portray any type of non-human in interaction with humans and present storytelling as the means to discuss what this humanity means. The novels were divided into three categories with each primary novel – Le Guin's, Winterson's, and Atwood's – as the most representative work in that aspect of the trend. The publication date spans from 2000 to 2017.

When discussing dystopias written by women, dystopian fiction written by men comes to mind. These novels present frequent themes of dystopia, such as a devastated world, corporation rule, experiments with humans, and the fear of human extinction. However, radicalized storytelling is not an overtly present theme in them as it is in dystopias written by women. To spot storytelling in women's dystopias is easy: most trendy Young Adult dystopian novels present it. In dystopias by men, nonetheless, it is not apparent. To mention some novels of the period: Mark Dashner's *The Maze Runner* (2009), Scott Westerfeld's *Uglies* (2011), Rick Yancey's *The Fifth Wave*, and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2016) – none of them point to a discussion that relates storytelling and narrative to what it means to be human. The way humanity is portrayed in these works is still an open field in the debate of recent dystopian novels.

A gendered selection of works was chosen first because of the observance of the trend and second because, traditionally, utopian and dystopian fiction by women has reshaped the genres. Novels such as Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), Joanna Russ's *The Female Man* (1971), and Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) have become synonym to a radical change in perspective in both utopia and dystopia. Reingard M. Nischik has pointed out the way gender issues "revise the traditional logic and designs of genre considering content, theme and form" (5), considering mainly Atwood's fiction. However, it may apply to dystopian fiction by women in general as well. What I believe to be prominent in women's recent dystopian fiction is precisely the way the act of telling stories humanize the non-human, thus presenting new alternatives and paradigms of humanity. The hybrid quality of these texts often thematizes this complicity with a critique of a

tradition that values scientific knowledge in disregard of the sharing of experiences and that configures our culture as white- and male-centered.

The primary focus of this work is to analyze the imbrications between storytelling and humanity and how they point to alternative ways of living and of being human. Even though this dissertation departs from a feminist perspective, it is not my main objective here to discuss how gender is represented in the selected novels. The representation of gender in dystopian fiction by women has a vast body of critical work that is referred throughout this dissertation such as in the articles of Raffaella Baccolini, Ildney Cavalcanti, Donna Haraway, and others. However, the argument for alternative ways of living moves along with feminist perspectives of rejecting patriarchy, heteronormativity, and exploitative capitalism, even though it is not limited to it. In the selected novels, storytelling works on the constant friction of voices to create new possibilities for being human and the following pages are dedicated to analyzing the different ways they operate.

The study of dystopian literature is frequently linked to that of science fiction. Many authors used in this work, such as Glover, Watkins, and Baccolini, often refer to the same text as dystopia and science fiction. As it is not my intent in this work to define a concept for science fiction and dystopia, I keep the terms used by the authors. Glover does not use the term dystopia, instead preferring to label these novels speculative fiction. For her, these texts oppose both literary and science fiction tradition: "Rather than making it doubly peripheral, however, this combination allows it to explore feminist issues in ways impossible in either mainstream fiction or traditional science fiction" (52). It is fiction that poses the matter of power at its very core. It questions notions regarding not only gender but also any other binary opposition considered fixed. Therefore, it can easily be related to notions of the ex-centric in Linda Hutcheon's terms and postmodern literature. It is no wonder that storytelling is such a permeating theme in this kind of fiction, often being linked to notions of identity and subjectivity.

For the discussion of dystopia, I mainly use authors who work on the political implications of dystopia as a genre, such as Tom Moylan, Baccolini, Lyman Tower Sargent, and Cavalcanti. I

acknowledge there are other definitions for the genre by different critics. However, I chose to focus on the former since it is not my objective here to define or articulate a definition for dystopian literature. A focus on the politics of dystopian narratives seems fit to a work that focuses on the redefining of how humans have seen and see themselves.

I use the terms storytelling and narrative interchangeably throughout this dissertation, first, because different authors use different terms and often both. Second, because I do not consider oral history as a category, but storytelling in a broader sense: the act of telling stories. Words such as tale, fable, myth, and fairy-tale are used referring to their frequent use, and not as specific concepts of oral history, anthropology, or Jungian psychology. Such particular uses of these terms would go much beyond the scope of this project.

I analyze how a trend in women's dystopian novels propose new alternatives to being human by storytelling. My analysis encompasses how the genre's common motifs of what it means to be human and storytelling are revisited by these women writers who revalue storytelling, proposing it is the definitive characteristic of humans. From Le Guin's radical problematizations of narrative, religion, and identity to Atwood's proposition of storytelling as the definitive human characteristic, including Winterson's questioning implications of what storytelling means to humans and non-humans, I map and analyze novels from 2000 to 2017 that radicalize what it means to be human in dystopian fiction.

Chapter 1, "A Genre of Survival and Storytelling," is dedicated to how the chosen novels, as dystopian narratives, use storytelling as a theme. The chapter, divided into three parts, gives a context on the study of dystopia according to authors such as Sargent, Moylan, and Baccolini. I emphasize the concept of critical dystopia and its importance to reading the analyzed novels. A second part focuses on the notion of hope, a controversial topic in the discussions of the genre. To consider hope, I use Ernst Bloch's definition, followed by Cavalcanti's appropriation of it to discuss women's dystopian fiction. Finally, I introduce the notion of radicalized storytelling, the crucial elements of all novels in the trend. For a thorough discussion on the topic, I use Le Guin,

Winterson, and Atwood as a the most apparent examples of a theme inside the trend. First, I consider how the first group (with *The Telling* as the most representative novel) attempts a definition of what storytelling is. In the novels of the second group, with *The Stone Gods* as its reference, I consider how these texts focus on the notion that storytelling is the very fabric of the world. Lastly, with *MaddAddam* as the most prominent novel, the third group presents how stories are used to create a new world.

In the following chapter, "The Meaning of Storytelling in Dystopian Novels by Women," divided into four sections, I discuss the issue of storytelling more closely. First, I consider the figure of the storyteller as a disruptor in culture. I draw mainly on Areti Dragas's study of how the storyteller is used in contemporary fiction and on Michael Jackson's observations on the cultural relevance of the storyteller in diverse societies around the world. I also draw on Walter Benjamin's considerations in the classical text "The Storyteller." Benjamin's discussion is relevant since it relates storytelling to the sharing of experiences in a given community, a fundamental aspect in my reading of the selected novels. This first section works as an introduction to the basic concepts of storytelling, and, from them, I move to the figure of the woman storyteller and its defiant role in culture in the second item. I focus on how women storytellers in these novels attempt to escape a dualist vision of the world and propose new alternatives to communities.

The link between stories and identities is explored in the third section. The focus is mainly on Paul Ricoeur, who has considered the implications of narrative and identity. For the French critic, narrative has a crucial role in the formation of subjectivity: "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience." One needs narrative to make sense of one's own existence. The very notion of culture as a symbolic system is linked to the ability of being able to experience narration. In an unexpected and unintentional dialogue with Ricoeur, I introduce Brian Boyd's discussion of storytelling and its importance in the development of the human mind. In his *On the Origins of Stories*, he claims that "storytelling is a human universal" (10)

and that art is a human adaptation, not a side effect of evolution. I intend to use his argument alongside Lisa Zunshine's reflections on fiction and Theory of Mind, meaning human capacity to infer meaning from people's behavior, language, and feelings. The human ability to conceive and understand stories is then an evolutionary trait that separates us from other animals, thus being the core of who we are as a species. This unorthodox theoretical choice is based on the premise that, although cultures develop differently around the globe, humans can only create cultures because they possess the fundamental capacity for creating narratives. I conclude the chapter with an analysis of the novels focusing on the non-human storytellers and how they use narrative to assert who they are and provoke the conservative visions of what being human means.

In Chapter 3, "Knowledge as Stories and Stories as Knowledge," I propose that storytelling is the form of knowledge used in the chosen novels. I use Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition* to start a discussion on the matter of legitimation of knowledge in postmodern societies. For Lyotard, "the grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation" (37). In postmodern societies, scientific discourse, which is possible of verification, gains the status of reliable knowledge, while narrative knowledge is neglected as unreliable, biased, and unimportant. The importance of the storyteller and his or her status as a source of knowledge is devalued. The analyzed women's twenty-first-century dystopian novels counterpoint this argument. They present accounts in which narrative knowledge is the only reliable and permanent source of knowledge; storytelling becomes the only possibility of sharing knowledge, since science has been devoid of meaning. The constitution of humanity is attached to the act of narrating: creatures initially considered non-human – the Crakers in Atwood's *MaddAddam* and the robot Spike in Winterson's *The Stone Gods*, for example – gain human status in the eyes of other humans when they can produce narrative knowledge and not scientific knowledge. In the fashion of critical dystopias as proposed by Moylan, the reader may be then asked to question his or her own society and the way storytelling may work to resignify experiences as well as the way knowledge is conceived. In the first group of

novels, narrative is the superior form of knowledge; in the second, there is a search for a non-binary way of thinking through storytelling; and in the third group, all forms of knowledge are considered narrative knowledge.

In the last chapter, "New Humanities," I analyze how the selected novels propose a much more plural concept to the idea of humanity. Yuval Harari's provocations regarding human evolution are used to dismantle the idea that sapiens[2] is the only possible human: other species of humans have existed before, such as the *Neanderthals* and the *Cro-Magnons*. I then consider Julio Jeha's ideas on how science fiction creates a radical estrangement of our world and how this is used in the analyzed novels to produce works of fiction that deviate from the white male paradigm. For this discussion on the meaning of human, it is crucial to consider Donna Haraway's reflections in her *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. She presents the idea of a cyborg identity, one that challenges tradition, subverting normativity, and proposing new forms of identity and belonging. Eduardo Marks de Marques's considerations on how the third wave in dystopian fiction is linked to the body are used to reflect on how the concept of humanity is stretched in the chosen texts. Finally, I analyze the novels according to the three previously asserted categories and conclude that in the first group, stories make humans better. In the second, stories define humans, while, in the third, they are the foundations of a new kind of humanity.

The analyzed trend in twenty-first-century dystopian novels by women – using Le Guin's *The Telling*, Winterson's *The Stone Gods*, and Atwood's *MaddAddam* as landmarks to the discussion – considers the theme of storytelling as a way of proposing new meanings to being human. They present a body of oppositional thought that appropriates a convention of the genre – the focus on narrative – as a theme to question the nature of narrative and its meaning to humans. These novels radically tell different worlds with their brave new humanities.

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[2] Whenever I use sapiens as a noun, I am referring to Harari's proposition.

Chapter 1: A Genre of Survival and Storytelling

1.1 The Conventions of Dystopian Narrative

Dystopias are filled with storytellers. In narratives that trace "the relationship between individual experience and the operation of the entire system" (Moylan, *Scraps* xii), storytelling is often the starting point to a reflection on a dismal reality. The presence of narrative as a theme became prominent throughout the twentieth century in dystopian novels written by women. Works such as Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, and its sequel, *Parable of the Talents*, are examples of dystopias in which the protagonists turn to storytelling to survive as independent thinkers in oppressive and violent societies. Their stories shape oppositional action against a totalitarian regime or terrorism. It is through the power of storytelling that their narratives become larger than life.

In the twenty-first century, this take on narrative gains a new meaning. The novels not only provide examples of narratives used for survival and hope but also question the very nature of storytelling and the way it shapes human experience. In Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Telling*, for example, telling stories is a way of living that defines an entire culture. A similar idea is found in Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy, in which stories and myths of creation are intertwined and responsible for the beginning of a new order. These dystopian narratives of the period comprising 2000 to the present form a new body of knowledge in the critical dystopia genre.[3] Besides being self-reflexive and having a utopian impulse, they lay bare, through the thematization of storytelling, the meanings attributed to being human.

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[3] I consider the year 2000 as the entrance of the twenty-first century for the purposes of this dissertation.

To understand negotiations with tradition, it is necessary to define "utopia" and "dystopia." Lyman Tower Sargent defines "utopia" as social dreaming – a collective impulse to imagine a reality better or worse than our own ("Three Faces" 3). One of the ways in which utopia can manifest itself is through literature; the other ways, or "faces," as Sargent calls them, being communitarianism and utopian social theory. He discovers the social implications of writing and reading utopian literature: even though an individual is responsible for the creation of the literary text, to imagine a different order of things is an act born from the worries and hopes of a given society. Thus, utopian literature would not be escapist, as some readers and critics might think.

For Sargent, a literary utopia *per se* is neither a positive nor a negative vision of a given society, but a text that presents the possibility of social dreaming. When referring to the positive utopia, meaning the envisioning of a society that a contemporary reader perceives as better than his or hers, he uses the term "eutopia." In this dissertation, I use utopia to refer to Sargent's eutopia unless otherwise mentioned. However, I consider the political dimension of his definition of utopia as an impulse and how the literary utopia – being it a positive or negative view of society – discusses political change.

As utopias can be perceived as a depiction of a better or worse society, critics such as Sargent find it inevitable to address the issue of the author's intention, a somewhat dangerous phrase in literary studies since the last century. The use of Wayne Booth's notion of implied author can help in this discussion, leaving the persona designed as the authorial voice in a text separated from the author as a person.[4] As political texts, utopian narratives can gain from a reflection on the context of their writing as well as the implied author's voice – such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* being written by George Orwell as a critique to the Soviet regime or Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* as a direct comment on post-Revolutionary Iran. However, it may also be relevant to consider the

[4] See Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961).

reader's role in the equation. The notion of a better or worse society varies not only through time but through different political and economic scenarios. Plato's *Republic* does not sound as the model of a better society for the twenty-first century reader. It is only a convention to read his text as a utopia in the present because of the critical history regarding it. If we were to imagine a reader unaware of it, Plato's society, with rigid social structure and strict rules, would seem nightmarish. The reading of utopian texts thus has much to gain from both the analysis of an effect on the author's contemporary reader *and* the history of the reading of such texts.

Lucy Sargisson dismantles the idea that links utopia to perfection. She writes, "Anti-utopians fear that Utopia will lead to the end of history, politics, and change. At the root of this fear is a mistaken association between utopianism and perfection, and between utopianism and fundamentalism" ("The Curious Relationship" 27). Sargisson argues for the intricate nature of utopia and politics by saying that utopias are always political in the sense that they always point to the flaws, strengths, and dreams of a society. For her, utopias are not static in nature, so they can never be perfect because "perfection is a final condition" (30). Utopias are founded on political dissonances and contribute to the debate over crucial issues of the time they are written.

The matter of utopian literature having or not a social function is often discussed. The everyday reader might be inclined to the old didactic function, in which the envisioning of a world better or worse than our own would teach something to society. Sargent dismisses such thought: "Utopia serves as a mirror to contemporary society, pointing to strengths and weaknesses, more often the latter" ("Three Faces" 28). There is no need to go far to understand this relation between the anxieties of a given time and the dystopian narratives produced. In Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy, the highly capitalist society with no ethics ruled by the corporate government is an extrapolation of the fears of neoliberalism[5] in the beginning of the 2000s, and the fear of extinction

[5] Meaning the idea that personal liberty grows when there is limited state influence on the market.

permeates the multiple narratives in Winterson's *The Stone Gods*, which presents environmental devastation.

Dystopia appears as a genre in the beginning of the twentieth century with narratives that portray gloomy and negative visions of society, often ruled by oppressive governments, or nearly destroyed by catastrophic events. A dystopia "is a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived" (Sargent, "Three Faces" 9). This simple definition stipulates, first, the portrayal of a society that does not exist and, second, a high level of detail in such description. These are Sargent's two requirements for a literary utopia, an umbrella term encompassing eutopia (the dream) and dystopia (the nightmare). Dystopias negotiate two impulses – the one towards change (utopia) and the other towards *stasis* (anti-utopia, a term I explain further on) – and for this reason, there is no stillness in the dystopian narrative. For instance, in Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy, on the one hand, Crake's attempt to wipe out humanity so a new kind of human, genetically altered, can thrive is a movement towards change; however, the cost of this change is genocide. On the other hand, the corrupt and violent society described in the novel contrasts strikingly with the peaceful Crakers, who adapt to the environment without vice or greed, and the reader might ask himself or herself if this change was not a positive one in the end. The impossibility of an answer and the constant play with humanity's values and fears define the dystopian narrative.

As a genre that engages with social fears, dystopias come in waves throughout the twentieth century, creating societies of despair based on the anxieties of the period, such as totalitarianism, communism, sexism, and nuclear war. Baccolini postulates that women writers especially have responded to these waves:

> genres change in relation to the times, and our times, characterized by a general shift to the right in the 1980s and 1990s, have produced what a series of scholars have addressed as a "dystopian turn" in Anglo-American science fiction. …This kind of writing, critical and

> ambiguous and mainly produced by feminist writers, has become the preferred form for an expression of struggle and resistance. ("The Persistence" 520)

Through extrapolation, women writers have portrayed and discussed issues such as gender inequality and individual and human rights in ways that challenge the traditional anthropocentric view of science – which centers on the well-being of humans instead of considering other forms of life as part of Earth's system – and social organization in tune with the political discussions of their times. The fears and anxieties of the twenty-first century, which involve the production and propagation of fake news in social media, environmental disaster, unregulated capitalism, genetic engineering, and hypermediality, appear in dystopian narratives by women as a resignification of the "dystopian turn" Baccolini refers to. Besides portraying these issues, the novels selected for this dissertation critically analyze the society being depicted in multiple levels, refusing simple solutions and cardboard saviors to the problems they present.

Dystopias do not deal with individual fears. For them to work, it is necessary to address social worries and exploit them in a manner that resembles our reality to provoke the necessary sense of relatability. The fear of being imprisoned, for instance, is not enough to create a dystopian scenario; however, the fear of losing rights in times such as wars and totalitarian regimes and being imprisoned without charges or fair judgment is a collective worry that can be used to create a dystopian society. In times of political or economic crisis, such scenario can be exaggerated in dystopian fiction so readers might relate to it, creating an effect of discomfort and uncanniness. Social paranoias and collective anxieties are the basis for a genre that works exactly on these conditions.

For instance, the final stories in Winterson's *The Stone Gods*, "Post-3 War" and "Wreck City," are only unsettling and terrible because the reader can relate to the sense of a world being destroyed by both natural and economic catastrophes that widen the gap between the rich and the poor. The protagonist, Billie, reflects on the matter: "The world you are looking now, the world that made way for World War Three, really begins in the 1980s when materialism became the dominant value. If

you could buy it, trade or develop it, it didn't exist" (164). Her thoughts are close enough to the reader's reality to be feared but exaggerated as a strategy to pinpoint a contemporary problem.

Le Guin depicts Terra, the name given to Earth in *The Telling*, as a society living under the constant fear of terrorism: "In late March, a squadron of planes from the Host of God flew from Colorado to the District of Washington and bombed the Library there, plane after plane, four hours of bombing" (4). Published in 2000, the novel portrays a constant threat by a religious extremist group that obliterates freedom of speech in most of the planet. This setting is relatable enough to the years before the War on Terror. The current worries about the existence of Daesh/ISIS (Islamic State) makes it even more relevant.

Of course, social anxieties eventually come back to make a dystopia from the past particularly relevant. Such was the case with Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Originally published in 1985, the novel became a best-seller in 2017 when U.S. President Donald Trump notoriously incorporated sexist terms and depictions of women in his speeches. The same happened with Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. According to Amazon's sales reports of 2017, *The Handmaid's Tale* was number 11 in the best-sellers, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was number 17, leaving behind previous record sales names such as Dan Brown's *Origin*.[6] Both dystopias, about totalitarian regimes and their reappearance in mass media markets, are telling of the fear for democracy, especially considering the rise of extreme right parties in countries such as Germany and France in the last decade.

The terms utopia and dystopia have many uses and definitions according to different authors in the literary studies. Drawing mainly on Sargent and Moylan, who emphasize the political and social implications of literature, I define utopia as the envisioning of a society portrayed as better than the one in which the contemporary reader lives. I consider dystopia the portrayal of a society depicted

[6] The Amazon top 100 of 2017 can be consulted online.

as worse than that of the contemporary reader based on collective fears. Thus, it is possible to have a small utopian society inside a dystopian one and vice-versa.

Another term that is often brought to the discussion is anti-utopia. For Sargent, a novel that depicts nightmarish societies in opposition to desirable ones is not necessarily an anti-utopia. He discusses how anti-utopian works are narratives that criticize utopianism or a specific "eutopia," to use his term for positive utopia ("Three Faces" 9). Moylan, though, uses the term to discuss political ideals. For him, anti-utopia is a movement toward *stasis* while utopia is movement toward progress. Considering the literary genres utopia and anti-utopia, both can have these political notions into play. Utopia and anti-utopia work as opposing forces of social dreaming and dystopian texts are not utopias with an inverted sign, but "works that [negotiate] the utopian and anti-utopian opposition" (Moylan, *Scraps* 127). Moylan considers how dystopias

> are not texts that temperamentally refuse the possibility of radical social transformation; rather, they look quizzically, skeptically, critically not only at the present society but also at the means needed to transform it. . . . the depiction [of such society] works not to undermine Utopia but rather to make room for its reconsideration and refunctioning in even the worst of times. (133)

There are no easy answers to the problems presented in dystopian narratives. The society depicted may be terrible, but the means to create a solution may be too. The text then navigates in the spectrum of utopia and anti-utopia in a way that might put the reader in an uncomfortable position.

The ambivalence of solutions to the political, economic, or social problems of the dystopian society are explored even further in critical dystopias. The term critical here is to emphasize the self-criticism of recent novels of the genre, not to claim dystopias of the past were not critical. According to Moylan,

> [the presence of] dystopias [that] are strongly, and more self-reflexively, "critical" does not suggest the appearance of an entirely new generic form but rather a significant retrieval and refunctioning of the most progressive possibilities inherent in dystopian narrative.

> These new texts, therefore, represent a creative move that is both a continuation of a long dystopian tradition and a distinctive new intervention. (*Scraps* 188)

This new turn encompasses novels published in the 1990s that frequently portray marginalized individuals and refuse closure, presenting open endings and multiplicity as resolution. Moylan calls them critical dystopias. Moreover, these dystopian texts create a rupture within the system depicted in the narrative as they propose radical alternatives, having what Baccolini calls a "utopian core," a concept that will be discussed further on.

All dystopias presented in this dissertation can be categorized as critical ones, with a higher or lower degree of self-reflexivity and utopian core. Collin's *The Hunger Games*, for example, is not overtly metafictional, but the first-person narrator, sixteen-year-old Katniss, constantly reflects upon the power of stories. In a world where children and teens battle to the death for state-supported entertainment there are no easy solutions to social welfare. However, Katniss's act of bravery in volunteering for the games and thus saving her young sister of such fate creates a space of utopia in District 12, the poor county where she lives with her family: the dream of selflessness and caring; the possibility of a space in which such virtues can flourish in opposition to the cruelty of the government. Even with the massive destruction of the whole district in the sequel *Catching Fire*, the trilogy insists on providing a utopian horizon – the possibility of the construction of utopian thought inside a dystopian narrative. The revolution to bring down the totalitarian government is only possible because small spaces of utopia exist. In this way, the Hunger Games trilogy, similarly to the other novels analyzed, refuses ready-made solutions and heroes, and leaves the text open to ambivalent discourses and narratives.

The counternarratives in these novels are often the place in which the utopian core resides. A term coined by Baccolini, counternarrative is an oppositional narrative in a dystopian text that works as a counterpoint to the system described in the dystopia. Every dystopia has a

counternarrative –[7] for instance, Winston's point of view in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Offred's tape recording in *The Handmaid's Tale* – but in critical dystopias, it is foregrounded. The counternarrative in the novels studied here is not only pervasive and critically analyzed but becomes a comment on the act of narration itself and the power it has to change the world.

In Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*, the racist and violent society that divides people between Nuru and Okeke echoes the 1994 Rwandan genocide in which extremists Hutu massively slaughtered the Tutsi. The use of rape as a weapon of war by the Hutu against the Tutsi women is mirrored in Okorafor's text: the protagonist herself is born from a particularly violent rape perpetrated by a Nuru man to an Okeke woman. All this violence in the narrative is justified by the writings in the Great Book: "'It's been written in the Great Book. We are what we are. We shouldn't have risen up in the first place! Let those who tried die for it'" (101). The voice of this unnamed man is the central belief of this society in which the Okekes, descendants of black people in Africa, who used technology for greed and destroyed the world. For this, these people are treated as less than human, having to pay for the sins of their predecessors. The consequences of genocide explored in the novel are an unavoidable comment on Rwanda's civil war, even though it is set in a post-apocalyptical version of Sudan.

Onyesonwu, an Ewu – a mixed-race young woman – decides to leave her small Okeke town for the Nuru cities and bring justice to her people. However, she finds out in her journey

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[7] It is worth mentioning here Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle*, which presents an alternative history scenario in which Germany and Japan won World War II. In the narrative-within-the-narrative, several characters read a novel called *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy*, which tells the story of a world where Germany and Japan lost the war, though the events unfolded differently from our official history. So, in this way, it is an alternative history inside an alternative history, which is ultimately a comment on the aftermaths of World War II in the reader's reality.

that it is her views, her counternarrative, that would change society, not an armed revolution. Onyesonwu affects many lives while traveling the wastelands mainly because she understands that "there was life *outside* the Great Book" (311). When the Nuru finally arrest her, her story spreads out and she rewrites the Great Book before her execution: "Onyesonwu did died, for something must be written before it can be rewritten" (415). She embodies the counternarrative; she becomes it. Differently from what happens in Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*; however, the protagonist is not a "last woman," one that dies so a new race emerges. Onyesonwu becomes a legend through salvation: by magically rewriting the Great Book, she changes the roots of that society by erasing the justification of genocide.

This idea of becoming a story, changing the world through a story or even creating a world with a story is common to the novels studied here, and it is a trend in twenty-first century critical dystopian novels written by women.[8] They present the anti-utopian and utopian ideas in their texts while criticizing them and maintain a utopian horizon within the work. Nonetheless, these novels strongly emphasize how storytelling creates and shapes not only individuals but societies too. The line between realistic and non-realistic fiction is blurred in the selected novels, because in some of them stories literally change the world, as characters, by rewriting a book, also rewrite the history and memory of a society using unexplained magical powers. Stories and their aftermaths seem a trend in women's dystopian fiction, and they are the means of change.

Dystopias offer a unique point of view for analyzing the problems of a given society. However, the way such analysis is done and its impact on the reader are open to debate. Both Moylan and Baccolini consider dystopias a means of taking the reader to a different place to make possible the analysis of reality in a totalizing way, a move impossible in the real world. We cannot adequately

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[8] See, for example, Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* and *The Book of Phoenix*; Lidia Yuknavitch's *The Book of Joan*; Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*; and Margaret Atwood's *MaddAddam*.

analyze the society we live in because we are part of it and thus are not able to see the totality of the system in which we are inserted, so it is only through estrangement – the construction of a different system – that the reader can question his or her reality and then act on it. Fredric Jameson, on the other hand, does not consider dystopia a kind of narrative that can provoke social change. For him,

> dystopia is generally a narrative, which happens to a specific subject or character, whereas the Utopian text is mostly nonnarrative and, I would like to say, somehow without a subject position . . . the Utopian text does not tell a story at all; it describes a mechanism or even a kind of machine. (*The Seeds of Time* 55-56)

In Jameson's view, the narrative quality of dystopia becomes its lack of critical analysis, thus making the dystopian text less critical than the utopian one. The possibility of analyzing the whole system, then, would not exist in dystopian texts as Moylan and Baccolini state.

Jameson claims that utopias offer the opportunity to rethink society. He considers them a literary form that has "always been a political issue" (*Archaeologies* xi), being the way in which one can envision his or her reality in totality. He writes, "[the] best Utopia can serve the negative purpose of making us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment [something I have myself occasionally asserted]; and that therefore the best Utopias are those that fail the most comprehensively" (*Archaeologies* xiii). If a utopian narrative creates another by attempting to solve a social problem, it is still a critical text. In *Archaeologies of the Future,* Jameson discusses the example of utopias of full employment and utopias of no employment at all and the way both solutions create potential problems within that society. This problem, although not addressed in the text itself, is perceived by the reader. In this sense, utopias are the genre of social critique, and not dystopias, which focus on individual experiences of opposition.

I disagree with Jameson, as do other critics such as Moylan and Baccolini. Dystopias can provoke the same social analysis. If utopias that fail may cause the reader to think about the status of the society he or she lives in, dystopias may have the same result, since they are already the failure

of a system that is considered utopian by a few. Even though dystopian fiction may not promote social change as Moylan hopes they do, they can pinpoint social problems and discuss them through their counternarratives and, in critical dystopias, by the questioning of this counternarrative.

Twenty-first century dystopias both criticize and pay homage to the classical dystopias of the previous century. As critical dystopias, they provide a

> textual re-vision [that] retrieves the memories of the oppositional past (with its stories of resistance and change) and enlists those forward-looking memories in the work articulating the next political steps, these texts at the end of the century take on hegemonic formulations as well as oppositional habits, breaking open favoured perspectives to move to what next needs to be done, by refreshing links between "imagination and utopia" and "utopia and awareness". (Moylan, *Scraps* 189)

This type of dystopian narrative refreshes the traditional counternarratives of dystopias by showing them from different perspectives, including points of view that are not portrayed in works from the beginning and mid-twentieth century. These include women, poor people, and people of color, usually marginal characters or utterly absent in traditional dystopian narratives.

Octavia Butler's 1993 critical dystopia *Parable of the Sower* "deliver[s] substantial analyses of our immediate 'dystopian' world, but also develops a significant counternarrative against their multiple dystopian realities" (Moylan, *Scraps* 194), as it discusses racist and gender violence in a dystopian scenario in which most solutions seem ambivalent. The protagonist, Lauren, is aware that the reality she lives in is much more complicated than having only one enemy: violence is perpetrated by both the rogue groups that assault individuals and by Lauren's own people. Even though the narrative follows Lauren's point of view, it criticizes that point of view, showing that it is neither right nor exempt of criticism.

The critical dystopias analyzed here are taken to the limit with the presence of counternarratives that are multiple and reflective of their nature as narrative. The act of storytelling is the most striking example of how the narratives of the 2000s and 2010s differ from the critical dystopias of

the 1990s. On the one hand, in Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, for instance, storytelling is the way the protagonist Lauren finds to deal with her condition in the world. Her thoughts later become the basis of a religious system, but the act of narrating *per se* is not questioned. She tells her story because this is the strategy that she finds to maintain her sanity. In Le Guin's *The Telling*, conversely, stories are also used as a basis of a religion-like system. However, this system – the telling – is multilateral and presents the perspectives of the many peoples of the planet that find in storytelling a way to understand the world. Differently from Lauren's words, which become a religion because people follow her beliefs, the telling from Le Guin's Aka is plural and does not seek a single vision, because what matters is not the content, but the ability to tell stories.

In Winterson's *The Stone God's*, the matter of storytelling is taken to the extreme with a framed narrative in which the authenticity of stories is questioned at the same time truth can be achieved solely by telling them. In the first section of the novel, "Planet Blue," the origin of Earth is rewritten as a colony for a former dying planet. In the third and fourth sections, Planet Blue is a story present in a book the protagonist is reading on the subway on Earth. The truth about the origins of the Earth does not matter because the only access humans can have to truth is a story. Even though there is a value in telling stories like the critical dystopias of the 1990s, the selected twenty-first century narratives not only bring it to the foreground, with use of metafiction and self-reflexivity, but also display the permanent question of why, how, and by whom stories are made.

1.2 Narratives of Hope

As a type of fiction that deals with impulses away from and towards social dreaming, dystopias often discuss the issue of hope. Even with the bleakest visions of the future presented in dystopian texts, hope becomes a fundamental part of the imagined society: it is both the driving force of protagonists who attempt to defy the system and the dynamic aspect of the narrative that articulates the *status quo* critically. Dystopias are then narratives of hope in the sense they navigate

through the polarized notions of utopia and anti-utopia – the two poles of social and political forces Moylan proposes.

Twenty-first century dystopian novels by women tend to present hope in the very act of storytelling, which is frequently the instance of the utopian horizon in them. In the dreadful scenarios of oppression and suffering created, the protagonists find hope in the stories they tell to survive and to make sense of their world. These novels focus on the notion that humanity can start over and thus define what being human means outside the humanist view[9] that still permeates Western culture. Through the stories told by the characters, this new definition emerges. Hope resides in the possibility of imagining the beginning of a new way of life for humans. Be it the resignification of a forgotten way of life in *The Telling*, be it the hybridity[10] of human identity in *The Stone Gods* or the construction of a new kind of humanity from scratch in *MaddAddam*.

The matter of hope is extensively discussed by the Frankfurt School philosopher Ernst Bloch. For him, utopian hope propels the world to change, being thus the driving force of humanity. In a more optimistic view of Western society than his Marxist contemporaries Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, Bloch attempts to resignify the then negative idea of utopia into the principle of hope, which named his most prominent work, published in 1959:

> Hope is not taken *only as emotion*, as the opposite of fear (because fear too can of course anticipate), but *more essentially as a directing act of cognitive kind* (and here the opposite is then not fear, but memory. The imagination and the thoughts of future intention described in this way are utopian, this again not in a narrow sense of the word which only defines what

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[9] For humanism I refer to the philosophical notion of putting humans at the center of the universe, valuing their agency and freedom.

[10] Here I mean the idea of a being composed of hybrid parts such as machine and human flesh, alien DNA and human DNA, and original human DNA and altered human DNA.

> is bad (emotively reckless picturing, playful form of an abstract kind), but rather in fact in the newly tenable sense of the forward dream, or anticipation in general. And so, the category of the Utopian, beside the usual, justifiably pejorative sense, possesses the other, in no way necessarily abstract or unworldly sense, much more centrally turned towards the world: of overtaking the natural course of events. (*The Principle of Hope* 12)

Utopian hope is essential to think the future and thus to politics. Literature and arts contain the anticipation of future possibilities, the material frame for the possibility of a utopia. As part of the Not-Yet-Conscious,[11] revealed in the ability to daydream, utopian hope can be shaped in cultural form.

For Bloch, figures of utopian hope pervade literature, arts, and folk tales in a way that makes it possible to say that this utopian impulse can be read as the pervading presence of hope as humanity's driving force. In his philosophical system, hope has four parts: 1) it is both emotional and rational; 2) it is open to what is still to come; 3) it relates to human's condition of lack of fulfillment, and 4) it implies a real future. In this sense, "Expectation, hope, intention towards possibility that has still not become: this is not only a basic feature of human consciousness, but concretely corrected and grasped, a basic determination within objective reality as a whole" (7). The consciousness, shaped into cultural forms, has the anticipatory content necessary for the way humans perceive, construct, and change the world. The analysis of the way hope appears in utopian images of society makes it possible their evaluation in terms of their potential for social transformation.

It is not my objective in this dissertation to present Bloch's complex system regarding hope and utopia, but I cannot avoid mentioning his work since it has influenced the research of major

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[11] Bloch criticizes the psychoanalytical view of the unconscious and its focus on night dreams by saying it revolves around trauma and that cannot be the driving force of humanity, since it is negative.

scholars in the field of utopianism and science fiction. These include Darko Suvin (who defines the poetics of science fiction using the concept of *novum*, appropriated from Bloch), Moylan (who proposes a history of utopia and dystopia in the twentieth century, especially the coining of the term "critical dystopia"), and Jameson (who is a commentator of Bloch's text). The three authors work from socio-political perspectives and recognize the subversive potential of utopian hope. They also focus on the interpretation of the images of utopian hope in culture, which I do, too, to the matter of hope in the selected twenty-first century dystopian narratives by women.

Ildney Cavalcanti uses Bloch's system to discuss feminist dystopias of the twentieth century, even though Bloch himself never mentions literary dystopias. She writes, "the presence of a strong utopian charge in this subgenre has led me to undertake a quest for utopia in dystopia, for the utopian traces and spaces found within the fictional realms of dystopia" (*Articulating Elsewhere* 54). In tune with Cavalcanti's study, I argue that twenty-first century dystopias by women also tend to articulate these utopian enclaves. Yet, instead of the presence of utopian hope in the act of women writing, the novels of this century frequently propose the creation of new worlds through storytelling – being it literal or figurative – in which a new, maybe utopian humanity, can exist.

In this way, these novels can be read as myths of creation, or at least as reworkings of such myths. Jameson proposes that Bloch's myths and fairy tales are the "authentic dramatization of the Utopian impulse" (*Marxism and Form* 145), since the very story they tell *is* the utopian impulse; it is the utopian longing hidden in religious symbols, the belief in the supernatural, and the tales of the beginning of time. Literary utopias, on the contrary, have this potential reduced due to their "multiple levels of the Utopian idea to the single relatively abstract field of social planning" (146) – they are the *figurative* use of utopia. The novels discussed in this dissertation, however, blur the boundaries between myth and literary utopia. As dystopian narratives, they portray decayed societies, but in their critical aspect, the presence of hope in the form of storytelling brings about mythical and fairy-tale-like proposals of a better future.

In twentieth-century classical dystopias, hope can only exist outside the narrative. Baccolini and Moylan point out how these dystopias are part of "traditionally a bleak, depressing genre with little space for hope within the story" (Introduction 7). *Nineteen-Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World*, often considered epitomes of classical dystopias,[12] leave their main characters with no possibility for a better future. The totalitarian regime they live in wins, and only the reader can see a prospect of hope if he or she considers the idea of dystopia as warning, a reflection upon a way of not letting the dystopian events happen in the real world.

Dystopias written by women in the twentieth century tend to present hope in a slightly more positive note. Katharine Burdekin's *Swastika Night*, published in 1937 under the pseudonym of Murray Constantine, for instance, created a world where Hitler won the war, and one thousand years later his image and ideas are transformed into the dominant religion. Women are distorted creatures, reduced to the only purpose or reproduction: "results from the construction of gender in the totalitarian state" (Baccolini, "Gender and Genre" 19). The glorification of a violent form of manhood has, though, a biological consequence, because

> the fascist empires of the Nazis and the Japanese are also approaching their end, for there is a shortage of baby girls and the percentage of female births are declining rapidly. … The men in the empire have failed to foresee the consequence of absolute female submission which is, ironically, that it will result in the destruction of male supremacy. (Russel, "The Loss of the Feminine Principle" 24)

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[12] Here I use Moylan's classification of classical dystopias. For him, even though in the future the regime in Orwell's novel may be debunked, during Winston's narrative, it was not. His definition of dystopia uses the notion of individual narrative. In Huxley's text, one may argue that people in the island still exist, and that they may be a utopian horizon, but again, considering the protagonist's counternarrative, there is no hope.

Accustomed to seeing women as nothing, as mere "female things," the protagonist is in shock when he sees an old photograph of Hitler and his girlfriend. The proof of Hitler as a man and not a god and of a woman as a person, not an animal, changes his beliefs about the world he lives in. With a long-lost book that explains how this world came to be, the photograph becomes the spark of a spiritual revolution the protagonist wants to start to bring down the totalitarian state and return women to their status as human beings. However, the Nazi beat him to death by the end of the novel while he was telling his son about the book. Even though there is no suggestion his son will continue his work or even that this "spiritual revolution" will promote any change, a little space for hope is created *within* the text.

The same ambivalent hope can be found in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, published in 1985, on the verge of the critical dystopian turn. In the novel, Offred, a handmaid under a totalitarian regime that controls women's bodies, tells her story of oppression in the Republic of Gilead, a country that one day was the United States. Frances Bartkowski discusses the relation between language and oppression/repression in the book, a theme also found in the classical dystopia *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. She writes, "The handmaid despairs; she still finds reason in the shadow-play of fantasy; it is hope in the register of an enslaved female voice in fiction" (135). However, hope here is considered as the inscription of a female self in a world that erased the "I" for women. It is an individual act of personal affirmation, not a political or social one. By the end of the novel, Offred runs away and enters a car, leaving the narrative to an ambiguous end. The epilogue of the novel shows an academic conference on the history of Gilead in which Offred's account is scrutinized. If, on the one hand, the conference tells the reader that the Republic of Gilead is over, on the other, the dismissive way the scholars discuss Offred's tale reveals that the situation of women is still that of inequality. The reading of this ambiguous ending is a point of debate regarding hope: if one considers the end of Gilead as evidence that the situation for women got better and that Offred's act of telling her story reached alike minds, then there is hope within the

text. If one understands the dismissive tone of the scholars as a discourse that continues to oppress women, though in a different way, then there is no hope.

The ambiguity in Atwood's text puts the notion of hope in the center of discussion, making evident that hope too is a matter of interpretation. Baccolini considers the novel a critical dystopia:

> Atwood employs the conventions of the diary and the epistolary novel to narrate the life of her protagonist. … Thus, it is the very notion of an impure genre, with permeable borders which allow contamination from other genres, that represents resistance to a hegemonic ideology that reduces everything to a global monoculture. (Introduction 8)

For her, the genre-blurring quality of the narrative is thus enough to produce a utopian horizon necessary to critically read the society portrayed. However, Moylan considers *The Handmaid's Tale* a classical dystopia: "Atwood seems to be pushing the classical form to its limits in an effort to find the right level of cognitive figuration for the bad times of the 1980s" (*Scraps* 164). The ambivalence of utopian and anti-utopian forces in the narrative's closure makes hope questionable; thus, there is no hope *inside* the narrative, only outside of it. I believe Atwood's novel creates such a controversy because it questions the place of hope in dystopian texts: the counternarrative. When Offred's story is not considered a trustworthy record – by herself and by the scholars in the postface – it puts in check the hope it contains.

As in *Swastika Night*, there is no assertion of hope for the characters at the end of *The Handmaid's Tale*. The horrors portrayed in twentieth-century classical dystopias by women are still envisioned as nightmares from which the reader may want to escape.[13] He or she must imagine the end of oppression and the survival of the protagonists' counternarrative to envision a utopian

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[13] Baccolini considers both novels discussed here as critical dystopias because of her revisionist approach to history. See "Genre and Gender in Feminist Critical Dystopias of Burdekin, Atwood and Butler."

space. Even if one considers that in women's classical dystopias, the ending is not as final and devastating as in novels such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World,* in which the system irrevocably defeats the protagonists, and their anti-utopian forces are strong enough to diminish the utopian possibility of hope for the characters.

Since critical dystopia presents instances of utopian horizons, hope becomes an unequivocal part of this type of narrative. Baccolini points out, "By resisting closure, [critical dystopias] allow readers and protagonists to hope: the ambiguous, open endings maintain the Utopian impulse within the work" ("The Persistence" 520). Hope then does not belong to the reader, who may reflect upon the warnings of a darker future, but to the protagonists who create utopia inside their dystopia.[14] The utopian enclave is clear by the end of the novel, even though the ending is unresolved. In Winterson's *The Stone Gods*, for instance, the incarnation of Billie in "Post 3-War" and "Wreck City" bonds with the robot Spike, and their space of interaction based on respect in a world in ruins is the utopian place of hope inside the novel. This utopian space provides the necessary critical enclave for social dreams of a better world.

The protagonists in critical dystopias are often ex-centric subjects – to use Linda Hutcheon's term – that are not ultimately obliterated by the system. Baccolini writes,

> In fact, by rejecting the traditional subjugation of the individual at the end of the novel, the critical dystopia opens a space of contestation and opposition for those groups – women and other ex-centric subjects whose subject position is not contemplated by hegemonic discourse – for whom subject status has yet to be attained. ("The Persistence" 520)

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[14] This might read as a simplification of the term "utopia," but most critics, including Baccolini, Cavalcanti, and Moylan use it this way. The idea is that a small community, based on values that differ from the dystopian societies, is a utopian system.

Critical dystopian narratives embrace individuals whose lives do not matter in the classical dystopia – mostly white and/or male-centered – such as the prostitute Ren in Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* or the mixed-race African woman in Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*. Their presences and voices in these texts provide a critical place to find hope, which is no longer a faded dream of a better world, but an action towards this world. It is no longer about Offred telling her story hidden in a room, but about stories that can effectively be used to change the system.

The idea of a utopian enclave in a critical dystopian narrative differs from Michel Foucault's notion of heterotopia. For him, the place of heterotopia can juxtapose and reconcile elements that are not compatible (418) and may have the function of a place of illusion in which humans can find solace for their compartmentalized lives (420). However, Foucault's heterotopia does not present any idea of hope but rather that of escape. Heterotopian spaces are places of discourse, sometimes contradictory ones, such as the prison or the brothel, and even though Foucault uses the image of the boat as a heterotopia – that brings forward openness and closeness of society promoting change – it is not a place of hope since it lacks the utopian horizon of the positions that have no real place (414). The utopian enclave is a space inside the dystopian narrative in which hope exists for the main characters not only in discourse, but in materiality. The God's Gardeners rooftop in the MaddAddam trilogy, for instance, is a place of hope for the gardeners in the sense that it is safe and provides hope for the characters that, from that place, construct their own narrative to resist the system they live in. It is not an escape from that reality nor the negation of it.

In the twenty-first century, storytelling tends to become the very utopian space that articulates hope for the characters, not solely for readers. As Cavalcanti writes,

> Feminist dystopias are in themselves "acts of hope". These spaces [of active transformation] are symbolized in the dystopian fictions by acts of narration, which double the women author's own subjective positions, while offering a commentary about self-reflexivity and hope. (*Articulating the Elsewhere* 5)

Although most of this fiction is self-reflexive or metafictional at some level, hope for a better humanity is expressed through the act of telling a story and thus being able to start over and/or create a new beginning for humans. These novels are critical dystopias because of their genre-blurring and complex critical analysis of the system, but they usually go further to point to a new and final hope: a new humanity that can only exist if stories are told.

Telling stories to have hope and then create a new world is the recurrent theme of the novels studied in this dissertation. Some of them present this feature in a metaphorical manner, such as *Mockingjay*, the final book of the Hunger Games trilogy, in which young Katniss Everdeen knows only her story can create a fair vision of the world and its history for her children, or Edan Lepucki's *California*, in which the protagonists tell a mythic version of their lives to their children so they can be accepted in a terrorist organization and survive. In other novels, the idea of creating a new world out of a story told is literal, such as in Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix*, in which a man, after hearing a strange tale, writes a book about it, and this very act is the beginning of a new organized society in Africa based on the myth of Phoenix. I argue, though, that this intertwining of hope, storytelling and myth is prominent in the selected novels.

Dunja Mohr presents the notion of transgressive utopian dystopias. For her, utopia infiltrated dystopian narratives in the twentieth century, creating utopia in disguise of dystopia. She claims that these dystopian novels

> incorporate within the dystopian narrative continuous utopian undercurrents. … these utopian strategies criticize, undermine, and transgress the established binary logic of dystopia. These 'dystopias' refuse the logic of sameness, dissolve hierarchized binary opposition, and embrace difference, multiplicity, and diversity. (10)

The novels picked for this dissertation can be considered examples of Mohr's transgressive utopian dystopias since they present these utopian impulses that are used to push monolithic views on what humanity is and present alternative ways of living that are open to plurality. Storytelling is the strategy to make apparent such impulses and storytellers in these novels transgress the limitations

of their societies by putting into question the concept of humanity. Their voices work to defy *status quo* and dismantle hierarchies of power.

The act of writing is a common feature for protagonists in dystopias, especially the ones Cavalcanti labels as feminist. However, writing a diary or letters shape the individual's experience that may or may not point out to a collective sense of creating a new world. Offred's tapes in *The Handmaid's Tale* do not have an impulse towards a new beginning as Phoenix's account has in *The Book of Phoenix*. The tapes are the result of one's acts of survival and resistance to a system, whereas, in the latter novel, the narrated tale creates a new world. In the selected twenty-first century novels analyzed, telling stories goes beyond that to incorporate the collective, humanity itself, and create something new. Hope exists for the protagonists, and the stories they tell help to start new paradigms for a new society and a new concept of being human.

The genre-blurring quality of these novels "represents resistance to hegemonic ideology and renovates the resisting nature of science fiction and makes the new science fiction genre also multi-oppositional" (Baccolini, "Gender and Genre" 18). The use of the conventions of myths of creation,[15] the parable,[16] and the fable,[17] added to the use of some science fiction features present in dystopias such as the presence of a *novum* (be it a new technology, genetic engineered humans, space travel, or robots) create complex narratives in which there is not a single force to oppose. Changing the dystopian society is only possible if the old ways of thinking that are androcentric,

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[15] Present in novels such as the MaddAddam trilogy, *The Book of Joan*, *The Book of Phoenix*, and *Who Fears Death*.

[16] Present in novels such as *The Telling*, *The Stone Gods*, and *Midnight Robber*.

[17] Present in novels such as The Lunar Chronicles series, The Hunger Games trilogy and The Skychasers trilogy.

hegemonic, and sexist no longer exist, and this change can only be achieved by creating new narratives to understand humanity under a new light.

1.3 Radicalized Storytelling

The novels analyzed present a feature I call "radical storytelling," that is, the thematization of telling stories that is not only mirrored metafictionally but adamant of the utopian horizon inside the narrative. Storytelling in these dystopian novels by women works as a force of creation that makes possible the proposition of alternative ways of living, including new social arrangements, the debunking of binary thinking, and the reconsideration of what defines a human being. The selected novels have in common the presence of creatures initially considered non-human, such as robots, aliens, mutants, and genetically altered creatures that, throughout the narrative, push the boundaries of what means to be human. The radical storytellers in these novels both question and affirm the power of a story in narratives that foreground storytelling as a form of knowledge and affirmation of identity.

I propose a division of the novels studied into three groups based on the main discussion of storytelling. The first group encompasses novels that discuss what storytelling is, often presenting the themes of identity, survival, and knowledge. The most representative novel of this group is Le Guin's *The Telling*. The second group has Winterson's *The Stone Gods* as its most expressive example. These novels tackle the notion that stories are the fabric of the world. Finally, the third group, with Atwood's *MaddAddam* as a representative, presents how stories create new worlds. I believe this division helps to explain my choice of the three books as the threefold foundation of this dissertation and to show how the thematization of storytelling in these dystopian novels by women form a dialogue of what storytelling means individually and collectively to define humanity. As dystopian narratives that present dreadful scenarios of oppression and destruction, these novels also portray the worries of early twenty-first century while pointing at how only a radical

intervention in society's arrangement can promote change. This intervention comes, in the selected texts, in the form of stories.

Before presenting the main novels in the three groups, it is essential to mention the dystopian novels by women published in the twenty-first century that do not take part in the trend I present here. Even though such discussion may seem counterproductive, I believe it is crucial so that this analysis does not become totalitarian: the multiplicity of dystopian narratives, given their genre-blurring qualities, produce a myriad of works that may help the reader consider current issues, such as hypermediality, environmental destruction, and human rights. Nonetheless, two dystopian novels fall outside of the significant tendency observed here. Among the thirty-six novels read for this research, only two do not follow the required characteristics of the trend: Karen Thompson Walker's *The Age of Miracles* (2012) and Christina Dalcher's *Vox* (2018). I believe they are worth mentioning because no literary trend is all pervasive, and there are always dissonant voices to be heard.

The Age of Miracles is a Young Adult dystopian novel in which a mysterious phenomenon, "the slowing," causes the rotation of the Earth to progressively lose speed. The focus of the narrative, however, is on the coming-of-age of the protagonist Julia, and the dystopia in the background works to highlight the rites of passage from child to young woman. Arnaud Schmitt says the novel is ultimately about "what it means to be a teenager in an ever-shifting and uncertain environment, not about this ever-shifting and uncertain environment" (4). Julia is the first-person narrator who tells the events of the dramatic changes in human society by the time she was eleven: "Our fates, so long written in the stars, had been rewritten in a day" (Walker 42). The narrative is individual, portraying Julia's perception of the consequences of "the slowing" without pointing out to the construction of a collective response to it.

The work is not a critical dystopia in the terms discussed here, since it neither brings the depiction and criticism of society nor presents a utopian enclave. On the contrary, *The Age of Miracles* has a bleak ending in which Julia holds onto stories – "I've become a collector of stories about

unlikely returns" (269) – to keep alive her memory of her first love, Seth, and, with him, the lost ways of the world before "the slowing." Nostalgia is an important notion throughout the novel, and the protagonist, as an adult, is not interested in taking part in a collective solution to the problems that humanity faces:

> My mother says I spend too much time thinking about the past. We should look ahead, she says, to the time that's left. But the past is long, and the future is short. As I write this account, one ordinary life, our days have stretched to the lengths of weeks, and it's hard to say which times are most hazardous now: the weeks of freezing darkness or light. (268)

Through the eyes of the protagonist, the reader does not find any hope for humanity's future. There is no escape, only the constant striving to preserve one's memory. The novel's final words reflect this worry, with Julia thinking about how an alien race would see the remains of humanity. Together with the crumbles of monuments and technology, she highlights "a patch of sidewalk on a California street" (269), the place where she, together with Seth, left a mark: "We dipped our fingers in the wet cement, we wrote the truest, simplest things we knew – our names, the date, and these words: *We were here*." One's story works not as creation, but as a record of what once had been.

Dalcher's *Vox* was announced as the next *The Handmaid's Tale* because of its reimagination of a totalitarian regime in the United States that takes away women's rights. However, besides this premise, *Vox* has little to do with Atwood's dystopia in its overtly agenda-driven plot. Jean is the first-person narrator, a former neurolinguistics researcher in a country where women can only speak one hundred words a day. If the limit is exceeded, the bracelet-counter in women's wrists releases an electrical current that grows stronger if one is to keep talking. Deprived of her rights to political and social life, Jean is trapped with her husband and four children – including a small girl – in a terrible silence. In a review for the *Washington Post*, Ron Charles writes,

> As a premise, this is a frightening extension of Saint Paul's prohibition against women speaking in church. That 100-word limit fulfills centuries of efforts to mute women, to

> punish them for talking, to disallow their testimony and to mock their speech with all those handy gendered slurs like "gossip," "catty," "bitchy," "hysterical," "nagging."

The implications of limiting the use of language – surveillance cameras make sure sign language is not used – are explored in the first third of the novel, in which Jean struggles with her self-expression while seeing her daughter silent and her sons becoming vocal defenders of the regime. However, it lacks the depth to keep this discussion going throughout the narrative.

The effort to regain one's voice, even though reinforced in the novel's propaganda "wake up call," is seen as an individual act. Jean is called by the government to help cure the aphasia of the president's brother using her previous research on the impairment. Bargaining for her chance to speak again, Jean sees an opportunity to work in the cracks of the system. Nonetheless, the collective dimension of the silence that women endure, and their striving for a voice is never shown, unlike most twenty-first century dystopias. This rather simplistic approach leads to an end in which the representatives of the regime are portrayed as "evil" in opposition to the inherent goodness in Jean and her friends. Similarly, Dalcher's novel falls into sexist portrayal of men and women, with Jean longing for her strong Italian lover, Lorenzo, who would protect her and "beat the living shit out of the bastard." A desirable man with toxic masculinity as the ideal partner to a woman whose purpose is to regain her voice seems problematic to a self-proclaimed feminist dystopia.

Language in *Vox* is a place for resistance, and the ability to speak, to tell of oneself, is portrayed as an essential factor in the formation of identity. This issue is prominent in the portrayal of Sonia, the protagonist's six-year-old daughter, who cannot read or listen to her favorite stories, talk about her daily activities, or interact with others. I agree with Charles when he writes, "Almost as soon as *Vox* pivots from exposition to action, it loses its edge." The narrative then becomes a thriller, filled with messages about the importance of voting and being politically aware, which is true, of course, but are too straightforwardly presented in the narrative to the point of being rendered naïve. The solution to women's problem is simplistic, with Jean and her friends solving it all

with poisoning. As a dystopia, *Vox* presents well the nightmarish society it creates but does not develop its aftermaths.

The Age of Miracles and *Vox* continue in the tradition of the dystopias by women of the 1990s, in which the focus is more on the individual than on the collective. In the first one, the dystopian scenario works to foreground a coming-of-age narrative about change, loss, and memory. In the second, struggling to have a voice in the world becomes literal in a woman's life. I believe these two exceptions to the trend of dystopian novels by women that center on collective action and on the questioning of humanity does not work against the thesis I propose here. They are reminders that, throughout any prominent trend in the literary world, there are always works that live outside it and that the trend can be defined in opposition to them.

1.3.1 Group One: Defining Storytelling

Storytelling tends to be radicalized by women writers in dystopian narratives in the twenty-first century to examine what it means to be human and propose alternative definitions it. The first wave in this tendency considers the matter through the reflection on what storytelling is. In Le Guin's *The Telling*, the protagonist Sutty is an Ekumen, an observer of worlds, who goes to Aka to study the culture. However, the time she takes to reach Aka is enough for a revolution to break forth on the planet, erasing the vestiges of the old culture and replacing it with the beliefs of a corporate state. As Jayne Glover observes, "Le Guin, in *The Telling*, is … interested in technology, but characteristically uses two opposing societies – one which encourages technological progress, and one which rejects it – to highlight the importance of diversity in a well-functioning society" (186). The revolutionaries are the technological branch, worried about the march on the stars and on transforming citizens into producers-consumers. The old Akan culture is the one with little interest in technological development, focused on the plurality of being. The clash between these two ideas makes Sutty ponder on the nature of storytelling, the main discussion of the novel.

Storytelling is presented in *The Telling* as a way to perceive and understand the world, as a form of knowledge. For Sutty, it is necessary to go to the countryside and find the remains of the old Akan culture to understand Aka: both its past and its present. With the folk people, she discovers that the telling is not a religion as the ones she knows on Terra; it is a way of living/perceiving the world through storytelling. The Akans turned narrative into the only form of knowledge, and the whole planet had only this culture of telling stories that are part of a bigger story. As knowledge is never-ending, so is the telling. Its practice surpasses the mere notion of religion as a totalizing force as we understand it traditionally. As presented in the narrative, the telling is

> a way of thinking and living developed and elaborated over thousands of years by the vast majority of human beings on this world, an enormous interlocking system of symbols, metaphors, correspondences, theories, cosmology, cooking, calisthenics, physics, metaphysics, metallurgy, medicine, physiology, psychology, alchemy, chemistry, calligraphy, numerology, herbalism, diet, legend, parable, poetry, history, and story. (91)

In this way, it is part of people's lives becoming a mixture of narrative, myth, science, and popular knowledge. It is the narrativization of life and, thus, it can be told and retold in different ways, sharing experiences and constructing new meanings. The Other is accepted in the telling, and transformation is welcomed.

The telling has its rituals, as Sutty discovers: "yearlong and lifelong cycles of patterns of feasts, fasts, indulgences, abstinences, passages, festivals" (93), and they would, if analyzed individually, characterize it as a religion.[18] The main beliefs of the telling, however, complicate its categorization as such: "there is no creator, only creation. No eternal father to reward and punish,

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[18] Paganism has the same relationship to nature. However, pagans have deities and specific cults for these deities while in *The Telling* there is a complete absence of the divine.

justify injustice, ordain cruelty, offer salvation. No binary Dark/Light, Evil/Good, or Body/Soul. No afterlife, no rebirth, no immortal disembodied or reincarnated soul. No heavens, no hells" (95). There is a rejection of binary thinking, of the division of the world between spiritual and material. Le Guin radicalizes the idea of presenting the very erasure of the figure of a god or gods, portraying a tradition with rituals, but devoid of a transcendental dimension to them. The telling and its practices are a means in themselves; they do not intend to unveil a mystery or provide a final revelation.

Glover does not develop the nature of the telling in her dissertation, using the protagonist's claim that it is neither a religion nor a philosophy in her own argument about ecology. However, she offers some interesting insights: "Although The Abor is a central text, the Telling is made up of many stories, which indicates to the reader of the novel that there is no single, correct path to a single, correct truth" (199). There is no centralization or totalization in the telling and indeed no central goal of providing salvation and access to an exclusive – for the chosen only – truth. *The telling* thus proposes a non-totalizing form of mythopoesis, being neither exclusively religious nor narrative, but encompassing elements of both.

The telling is so pervading in Aka's former culture that it is impregnated in language. People use "ritual phrases of greeting, leave-taking, permission-asking, and false gratitude, please, thank you, you're welcome, goodbye" (44), the kind of language forbidden by the corporation state, which considers them hypocritical and a delay to the development of an honest producer-consumer society. Glover points to how it is significant that people in the countryside "still make use of the forbidden pronoun, which is gender unspecific as well as both singular and plural, suggesting the balance urged by the Telling is even found in their language" (200). In this way, one may read that it is impossible to separate the telling from the language. It is as if belief, language, and storytelling became the same thing.

There is no attempt at achieving a whole self or attaching a meaning to human existence in the religious sense. The telling is the means and the end, making narrative the only possible way

of knowledge and of questioning knowledge. This new form of mythopoesis in which narrative, religion, and myth become the same and have no transcendental meaning breaks thus our expectations of what the goals of religion are. *The Telling* may be read as a provocation of the very role of religion in society.

Storytelling gains three primary meanings throughout the novel. The first one is related to telling stories to create and affirm one's identity. This feature is perceived during the conversation between Sutty and the monitor, Yara, when both tell the stories of their lives and can move past their traumas and own their personal history.[19] The second meaning is the idea that storytelling is a form of knowledge and that, as much as science, can convey an understanding of the world. Aka's community has all the information they need about the world, including the understanding of natural phenomena, philosophical questions, and medicine.[20] Finally, the third meaning is storytelling as freedom of speech. Only when one can tell a story freely, without the risk of being punished or persecuted, a society can thrive in its diversity. Sutty observes this in two repressive systems: the secular corporate state that forbids the practice of the telling in Aka, and the religious regime of Unism in her own Terra. Both work to silence stories that diverge from their point of view, thus providing little room for creativity and critical thinking.

These meanings are also present in other novels that are part of this first group, such as Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* (2000), Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), and Jeanne DuPrau's children's novel *The City of Ember* (2003) and its sequence, *The People of Sparks* (2003).[21] In

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[19] I discus the relationship between storytelling and identity in Chapter 2.

[20] In Chapter 3, I further explore storytelling as knowledge.

[21] The other novels read for this research that follow the pattern of this group: Joelle Charbonneau's The Testing trilogy, Edan Lepucki's *California*, Collin's The Hunger Games trilogy, Veronica

Hopkinson's novel, Toussaint is a highly technological world based on Caribbean myths and tales. Instead of knowledge founded on the parameters of Western science, there is the Granny Nanny, "a benevolent sentient computer that rules the planet with her 'Nansi Web'" (Marshall 220). The language this computer uses is the "Nanny Song," a combination of sounds that must be decoded by the inhabitants of Toussaint. A chip is implanted in their ears, an Eshu, so they can receive guidance from a reassuring voice their whole lives. However, there are outcasts in this society that, even though it provides stability and security, limits individual freedom and excludes dissidents to New Half Way Tree, a different dimension where people are abandoned to the demons of Caribbean folklore. In this sense, it is possible to read Toussaint as a flawed utopia and New Half Way Tree as a dystopia.

Hopkinson creates a narrative in which storytelling is the only form of resistance. The protagonist Tan-Tan is kidnapped by her father, a dissident in Toussaint, and together they are exiled in New Half Way Tree. Victim of paternal rape, Tan-Tan decides to walk around this world avenging the unprivileged by using the figure of the Midnight Robber, a trickster from the Caribbean Carnival that uses oral tales and linguistic innovations to mislead and outlaw its enemies. Emily Z. Marshall points out how "Hopkinson recasts the traditional male Midnight Robber and places a young black pregnant woman at the centre of the mas" (220). This subversion allows Tan-Tan to have her voice and come to terms with the violence she suffered and the upcoming birth of her child.

Instances of oral tales pervade the entire narrative in *Midnight Robber*. The novel is written in "the dancing polyrhythms of a panoply of Caribbean vernaculars with thoughtfully interpolated standard English" (Shawl) and make numerous references to Caribbean myths and tales.

Roth's Divergent series, Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*, Ally Condie's Matched series, and Lauren Olivier's Dellirium trilogy.

Understanding the logic of these stories is essential, because characters, places, and events only have meaning in relation to them. Furthermore, the novel itself is in an oral tale format: it is Tan-Tan's Eshu telling the newborn baby, Tubman, about the life of his mother.

> Oho. Like it starting, oui? Don't be frightened, sweetness; is for the best. I go be with you the whole time. Trust me and let me distract you little bit with one anasi story: It had a woman, you see, a strong, hard-back woman with skin like cocoa-tea. She two foot – them tough from hiking through the diable bush, the devil bush on the prison planet of New Half Way Tree. (Hopkinson)

This feature is discussed by Marshal, who writes, "it replicates the patterns of oral speech and incorporates the oral tradition onto the page" (220). Storytelling is the driving force of *Midnight Robber*; be it concerning the narrative structure, be it in Tan-Tan's appropriation of it to survive.

Storytelling here is portrayed very similarly to Le Guin's *The Telling*. It is a non-totalizing force that defies the reader's assumptions about technology, science, and knowledge, and works as a way to understand reality. Tan-Tan can only analyze her worlds – Toussaint and Half-Way Tree – and her life through storytelling. When she embodies the Midnight Robber, she finds the strength her physical body cannot give her. Nisi Shawl argues, "Telling stories that deprivilege the *status quo* is a doubly subversive tactic, and that's how *Midnight Robber*'s heroine, Tan-Tan, overcomes the awful odds against her." By outwitting foes and promoting justice with the power of language and tales, Tan-Tan finds a place of hope in the dystopian scenario of New Half Way Tree.

Midnight Robber fulfills the three meanings of storytelling proposed here: 1) identity – Tan-Tan tells stories to define who she is and how she relates to the culture she is in; 2) knowledge – the Granny Nanny technological system is based on songs and the cultures in both Toussaint and Half-Way Tree use oral tales to systematize knowledge; and 3) freedom – "because through storytelling she [Tan-Tan] is freed" (Marshall 221-22). Her embodiment and appropriation of the

Midnight Robber figure gives her the voice she did not have before to walk the world in New Half Way Tree.

The axis identity, knowledge, and freedom to define storytelling can be found in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* as well. The storyteller Jimmy/Snowman tries to understand who he is and his role in the apocalypse by telling the story of Oryx and Crake, his former lover and friend, respectively. This tale of betrayal and death is transformed into a myth so he can teach the Crakers, metaphorically, about what happened to the world and why they exist and should do things in a certain way. Finally, Jimmy/Snowman, through the telling of his story, accounts for his mistakes and is finally freed from his guilt and shame.[22]

The other example in this category is DuPrau's *The City of Ember*. In this children's novel, an underground city is isolated from the external world, powered by a generator. After almost a hundred years, Ember is dying. Lina and Doon, two twelve-year-old friends, find out the truth about the city: the hidden story that it was created by a group of scientists to survive an apocalypse but that, after a century, the citizens would have to follow a set of instructions to escape to the surface. Given the proportions of a narrative for children, in which solutions are rather simple, storytelling means identity for Ember. Through the recovery of this tale – in the form of old personal diaries and letters – not only Lina and Doon but the whole city understands who they are. The tales provide knowledge in the sense that they are the only source of information in a city where books do not exist. The recovered stories are the ultimate freedom: a way for the people of Ember to survive their fate and know the truth about the external world.

Storytelling also comes in the selected novels as the proposition of a new way of life, one that differs fundamentally from the social arrangements that cause the dystopian scenarios. It is as

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[22] I make a detailed analysis of storytelling in *Oryx and Crake* in my master's thesis "Storytelling as Survival in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*."

if the utopian core expands by the end of the narrative, openly questioning society's flaws and presenting solutions based on acceptance, life in community, and non-totalitarian thought. Through storytelling, the protagonists provoke the ones around them, and by extension, the reader. Baccolini comments on Le Guin's *The Telling*,

> In fact, in Sutty's recovery of the Telling, the novel's events are enriched with stories, almost parables, that resist the traditional pattern of reading and explication. The central element of the stories is their ambiguity, as they problematize both Sutty's and the readers' certainties. ("Memory and Historical Reconciliation" 124)

This new openness leads to the proposition of a society that not only recovers the old practices of the telling in Aka but also confronts the corporate state and demands substantial changes in the *status quo*.

This idea of blurring boundaries to promote critical thinking and lately change happens in the other novels in this category as well. The questioning of humanity as we understand it starts appearing in a more evident manner. In Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*, Tan-Tan changes her immediate world and the lives of people in New Half Way Tree, where she fights for justice. By the end of the novel, she gives birth to a son, Tubman, the first baby on that planet to be born with an Eshu (till then a feature exclusive of the people in Toussaint). Marshall proposes that "Tubman signals a passage towards a better future for the exiled Caribbean people and mythical creatures of New Half Way Tree and planet Toussaint; he bridges the gap between the Old and New World" (222). Tan-Tan's son is a hybrid human, one that can understand Granny Nanny and the desire for freedom of people in New Half Way Tree. The hybrid as an initial impossibility that becomes a hopeful reality is also present in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* when Jimmy/Snowman observes that the Crakers, initially incapable of creative thought, start developing cultural practices of their own.

Their radically different way of life challenge Jimmy/Snowman's conceptions about what humanity should be. Being human in these novels means being able to share stories.[23]

1.3.2 Group 2: Storytelling Is the Fabric of the World

The trend to thematize storytelling in the selected dystopian novels by women in the twenty-first century also tackles the idea that storytelling is the very fabric of the world. In some novels, this provocation appears in highly metafictional narratives while, in others, a world is created out of a story by supernatural forces. The prominent novel for this category is Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007), and the other novels are Amy Kathleen Ryan's Sky Chasers trilogy (2008-2010), Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* (2010), and Alyson Hagy's *Scribe* (2018).

The Stone Gods is a fragmented narrative that incorporates elements from different genres, including science fiction, castaway narrative, and post-apocalyptical tale in a highly metafictional manner. Instead of one dystopian scenario, the novel presents two that are connected in the plot and at the textual level: the occurrences in one story affect the other and their echo of the same passages throughout all stories. An interlude separates them, working as a comment on the themes of power politics and repetition portrayed in the other two dystopian narratives. *The Stone Gods* exposes the idiosyncrasies and contradictions of a capitalist dystopia, in both its prime and its fall. The novel is divided into four parts that echo each other: "Planet Blue," "Easter Island," "Post-3 War," and "Wreck City."

"Planet Blue" depicts a dystopian society in which technological advances did not save the planet Orbus of environmental disaster. As the first-person narrator, the scientist Billie Crusoe, warns, "We are running out of planet" (4). Central Power is the government, but it is highly influenced by the company MORE, whose branches include technology, lifestyle, and health

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[23] This matter of what it means to be human is more thoroughly explored in Chapter 4

enterprises. Through Billie's eyes, the reader has access to the counternarrative of this society in which women undergo surgery to look like children or teenagers and men do extreme body interventions to have animal-like features. Exploitation is the reason Central Power citizens can live such extravagant, luxurious lives: "We made ourselves rich polluting the rest of the world, and now the rest of the world is polluting us" (37). The discovery of Planet Blue, with living conditions like those of Orbus, comes as a last resort to this society that intends to continue the colonization logic to ensure its survival.

The novel fictionalizes the history of planet Earth, denaturalizing it, and exposing the many colonization stories of its development. Billie, labeled a subversive by Central Power, is forced to join the crew of the mission responsible for making colonization of Planet Blue possible: getting rid of the dinosaurs. As it is explained throughout the narrative, the mission's captain, Handsome, "[i]s looking for an asteroid. … He's going to use a gravity charge to deflect its course to collide with Planet Blue" (60). The proposition that life on Earth began because an intervention from Orbus connects this story to the two final ones. "Post-3 War" and "Wreck City" present an alternative history dystopian scenario in which our planet went through World War Three and is now a post-apocalyptic land with MORE as the only instance powerful enough to influence people's lives because the government has failed. In this version, Billie is also a scientist and finds a book called *The Stone God*s in the subway. The narrative textually reinforces the echoes of the previous ones, not only with repeated paragraphs and extracts but also through the constant feeling of history being repeated. According to Cavalcanti, this revision promotes an exaggeration of the dystopian principle through parts of "Planet Blue" and of the representation of a post-war context in which people live under degrading circumstances ("O amor" 5). The history of our planet is depicted as only part of a bigger story of colonization and repetition in the universe where minor interventions ignite another cycle.

In *The Stone Gods*, there is no difference between history and narrative. The understanding of a story is the only possible way to access the world, since all we have are scattered pieces of the

grand narrative of the universe that can be used to provide meaning for human life. In the third section of the novel, "Easter Island," for instance, Winterson interrupts the depiction of her dystopian world to go back to the seventeenth century and tell the story of a castaway, Billy, who is left alone on Easter Island after Captain Cook's ship departs. There, he observes the native inhabitants in a war over the meaning, construction, and destruction, of the famous stone statues. This retelling of the history of Easter Island works as another attempt to denaturalize history. As Hope Jennings argues, "Winterson's temporal sleight of hand is intended to provide an ironic shift in perspective, forcing us to view ourselves from outside our present point of view" (134). The world is built out of stories that are a force of creation and destruction. To read these stories is to be put in confrontation with the cyclic nature of the "quantum universe," as it is posed in the novel.

The Stone Gods is an embedded narrative that exposes how storytelling shapes the world and not scientific knowledge as humans would like to think. Eventually, the capacity of telling stories and questioning them is seen as the definition of the human condition. By incorporating characteristics of many genres, the novel presents an oppositional narrative that questions not only fixed social roles but human's relation to time. As Jennings states, "*The Stone Gods* explores the inherent dangers of repeating histories, since one of Winterson's primary aims is to unsettle views of the past and present as isolated phenomena" (133). The echoes of the past are explicit in the present as well as the references that highlight the cyclical nature of the universe. In this proposition, the universe is seen as a narrative, and storytelling is the human intervention.

Besides the intratextual references, the novel is filled with mentions, quotations, and pastiches of other narratives. Cavalcanti says that the many references to More, Shakespeare, Defoe, Eliot, and Calvino are resignified in a context that questions gender roles and fixed identities ("O amor" 3), while Jennings points out how the mention of these authors questions whether literature has a redemptive quality (136). Storytelling enables an attempt to embody the dynamic of a living story that changes itself along the way, being open to cycles of repetition that can suffer interferences and re-interpretations.

While *The Stone Gods* achieves this idea by creating a highly metafictional narrative with its proposition in its very textuality, in Hagy's *Scribe* the power of telling and writing can change the course of a life in the literal sense. In this dystopia, the United States has suffered a Civil War that, along with a plague, destroyed most of the country. The remains are left to men like Billy Kingery, who owns land and goods and allows people to live under his protection in exchange for unfair trade. Jason Sheehan explains,

> In Hagy's future, most everything has been lost. Literacy is no exception. But her main character (unnamed, defined – outwardly, at least – almost entirely by what she does, what she has done) is a professional writer of letters. She listens to what needs to be said, puts the words down on the page, occasionally better than the speaker ever imagined, occasionally word for word. But this isn't scrivening. It isn't taking dictation. There's some boggy, inexplicable hoodoo magic in her letter-writing, and a fair amount of superstition and faith put onto her by those who come to her doorstep.

The plot revolves around the unnamed protagonist writing a letter to a man called Hendricks, who wants her to read it aloud later in a crossroads so he can be forgiven for his sins. Reluctantly, the protagonist accepts the job and sets in motion the events that alter her and Hendricks' reality. Nevertheless, the protagonist does not merely write what is dictated. She has power over the written word and the ability to say what it needs to be said.

Hendricks accidentally kills one of the Uninvited, the people with Spanish names that lurk in the borders and attempt an invasion. Hagy's thematization of illegal immigration and its social tensions is subtle, to the point of being considered "mere references, nothing of great consequence, and hardly emotionally compelling to the reader" (Guynes). However, I agree with Sheehan's argument that *Scribe* is a novel about absences, as much about the stories told and the ones that are not. The discussion of the female body, messianism, fanaticism, and exploitation becomes more poignant because they are treated as common facts in the narrative. The realization

that the brutality of this world is similar to the ones endured in the reader's reality is the source of criticism being proposed in the novel.

Even though the protagonist writes letters, her powers are related to the old storyteller archetype, who can change the world with the power of words. Lydia Peelle writes in her review for *The New York Times*,

> In oral storytelling traditions, including the Appalachian Jack tales Hagy evokes here, story is understood not as a museum specimen but as a living, growing organism, constantly cultivated to serve both the cultural needs and the idiom of the moment. In nonliterate societies, minstrels occupy a place of power, both as guards of the people's history and remodelers of the myths they tell.

During her painful journey to the crossroads to read the letter, the protagonist encounters a boy that is later revealed as a past self of Hendricks. Her interaction with him and the story she tells – Hendricks' story – are powerful enough to alter Hendricks' timeline. The memories of that encounter that flood the present Hendricks' mind make him kill Billy Kingery, giving up the plot to betray the protagonist to steal her land. In *Scribe*, stories exist neither in the past nor in the present; they are the essence of the world and the ones who can master it can promote change.

If storytelling is what the world is made of, this discovery, in the novels mentioned, comes accompanied by a sense of revelation. Gaining power over a story means being able to change the outcomes. In Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*, Onyesonwu is an Ewu, a child from rape perpetrated by a light-skinned Nuru man to a dark-skinned Okeke woman. The two ethnicities live under a perpetual war justified by the Great Book, a narrative in which the Okeke are made responsible for the downfall of the world. In this dystopian scenario set in a future Sudan, science and magic coexist in Okeke villages and Nuru cities. Onyesonwu becomes a powerful sorcerer, an Eshu, and decides to avenge her people and prevent further genocide. When she finally reaches a powerful Nuru city, she uses her powers to destroy the Nuru army and bear gifts to women. She also rewrites the Great Book, changing history, so Okeke and Nuru do not have the narrative of war to live by:

"She was Onyesonwu. She had rewritten the Great Book. All was done" (418). In this way, the idea of storytelling being the fabric of the world becomes literal in a similar fashion to the one presented in Hagy's *Scribe*.

The stories presented in these novels propose that, to promote social change, it is necessary to defy the dominant narratives and create new ones that can assure societies that are fairer and more egalitarian. According to Jennings, "in Winterson's (somewhat technophobic) dystopia, … her vision of how we might dismantle repressive ideologies and myths through the articulation of new narratives that no longer reenact the same self-destructive cycles and repetitions of history" (133). From the examples mentioned in this section, the protagonists Billie, the unnamed story-teller, and Onyesonwu embody the necessary intervention for a new cycle to begin with a different logic that includes compassion and love, and communal life.

Most novels in this category end with the death of the protagonists, as if the power they used to understand and intervene in the world cost their lives. However, these deaths do not point to the lack of hope. In *The Stone Gods*, Billie dies in the two dystopian scenarios after a long consideration about the cyclical nature of the universe. In both times, she accepts, even welcomes her death, as if she is stepping into a more profound revelation. The unnamed protagonist in *Scribe* dies of poisoning during her journey to the crossroads, but not before she reencounters Hendricks, now changed, and understands that he became the intervention that world needed. Onyesonwu is killed after her revolution and later becomes an entity beyond the natural world. Hatice Yurtass writes, "Winterson does not insert hope for new beginnings into the visions of the end, as the end is only the beginning for the repetition of the previous destructive cycle." As much as this sense of sadness and loss pervades most endings of the novels in this category, I disagree that they do not present hope and only repeat previous horrors. The protagonists' stories effectively change the world around them and make it possible for others to build on their propositions of an alternative way of life.

Storytelling as hope and intervention is also present when one considers the different kind of humanities portrayed. In *The Stone Gods*, Spike is a *robot sapiens* that questions Billie's previous beliefs that machines are only programmed, incapable of learning and evolving. *Who Fears Death*'s Onyesonwu is a supernatural being that blurs the lines between what is human and what is not. Other novels present mutants and altered humans who can see the world differently and affirm themselves as part of community life.[24]

1.3.3 Group 3: Stories to Create a New World

If in the previous category storytelling created and destroyed worlds textually and supernaturally, in this last one it is the founding element of a new humanity. Myths of creation, folk tales, and fairy-tales revisited are told so new paradigms and new orders can be established in an organized community. In these dystopian scenarios, storytelling works as genesis, and the reader may have the impression that these narratives are tales of creation. Besides Atwood's *MaddAddam* (2013), this category includes Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix* (2015), Marissa Meyer's *Cinder* (2012), and Amy Kathleen Ryan's Sky Chasers trilogy (2011-14).

MaddAddam is the final volume of Margaret Atwood's homonymous trilogy. It has been acclaimed as a work in which she "hybridizes stories and myths [and] splices utopian and dystopian spaces" (Labudova 33), while presenting a post-apocalyptical future in which humanity is now reduced to a few survivors. The plot follows the one presented in *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*; moreover, the narrative works in the same way as its predecessors. In the present, there is an account on a post-apocalyptic environment in which few humans survived a plague that almost made humans extinct. Matters of survival are tackled in the material and existential sense.

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[24] This discussion is further explored in Chapter 4.

The Crakers, genetically engineered creatures that made it through the plague, start developing their own culture from the stories they heard. Toby, a surviving woman, is their mythmaker as she presents them myths of creation and tales that are later questioned and incorporated into a new culture. The accounts of a dystopian society that preceded this apocalyptic scenario are intertwined with this bare survival narrative: a highly capitalist world, which leads itself to destruction. This critique of our scientific driven era is made through Zeb's memories and retellings of his past life. This protagonist – a leader of the few humans alive in the post-catastrophe world – conducts the reader into a fragmented narrative of opposition and terrorism in a world that uncannily resembles our own.

MaddAddam points to how storytelling creates utopian scenarios, new worlds, and alternative ways of thinking humanity. Toby is the protagonist in this novel, which presents different characters in their acts of storytelling in the post-apocalyptic setting. Yet, rather than a conclusion, *MaddAddam* provides multiple possibilities and another open ending, more hopeful than the previous novels again, but still Atwoodianly ambivalent and ambiguous. The need for storytelling pervades the novel, although in a different way from *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*: the Crakers finally start developing their own stories and questioning their mythology. Toby, as the principal storyteller, also provides a compelling narrative vantage point that switches perspectives, presenting multiple characters points of view inside her narrative, some of them accurate, some of them false, some of them utterly ambiguous.

The narrative is a fabric of stories held together, and the reader must step into them, trying to find his or her pattern. *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* together can provide critical analysis of a social system, and the counterpart reading of these two novels makes it possible (Sá 33). *MaddAddam* is the "what happens next" part of the story. As Susan Watkins remarks, apocalyptic writing by contemporary women "uses sequels to generate new, gendered ideas about time, narrative, and history" (119). In this novel, humanity as we understand it, with its patriarchal values, is questioned, thus exposing the artificiality of discourses we perceive as natural.

Ladubova points to the hybrid genre quality of *MaddAddam* (28), which incorporates myths, stories, memoirs, testimonials, and castaway reports in its narrative. Coral Ann Howells, in her study *Margaret Atwood*, has pointed out the way Atwood operates as a shapeshifter writer, in the sense the Canadian author often challenges the boundaries of genres as well as any other conventional roles or categories, such as those assigned to women and men, writer and critic, and the dialectics between life and art. In *MaddAddam* once again this quality is perceived, and the very nature of humanity is posed into question. Toby's stories to the Crakers work as a way of humanizing them. Initially designed not to develop figurative thinking, religion, or narrative, the Crakers absorb stories to construct a new body of knowledge for them, thus defying their own limitations. When they create a culture of their own, the reader is then led to wonder whether the Crakers can be considered humans or not.

Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix* (2015) is a prequel to her most famous novel, *Who Fears Death*. The book starts with "Nobody really knows who wrote the Great Book" and it follows the journey of a man called Sanuteel that accidentally found "[a] tomb of old old technology from the Black Days, the Times of the Dark People, the Era of the Okeke." In this forgotten cave, he encounters a recording with the memories of a woman named Phoenix. After listening to it, he vows to the bird-like entity that appears in front of him to write it down, and this act becomes the origins of the Great Book, the text responsible for dividing Okeke and Nuru peoples in *Who Fears Death*.

This embedded narrative shifts to Phoenix herself, a genetically engineered human created in a private lab in New York City. With the ability to cast fire, burn to be reborn again, and to spread wings to fly, Phoenix uses storytelling to assert her identity in a world that outcast her: "'There is no book about me,' the voice said. "Well, not yet. No matter. I shall create it myself; it's better that way. … I call my story The Book of Phoenix. It is reliable and short, because it was accelerated …." Phoenix is three years old but looks like a forty-year-old woman. All interaction she has in the lab is with the scientist Bumi and her friend, Saed. After Saed commits suicide,

Phoenix discovers the atrocity of the experiments in the lab and flees. Her journey goes from traveling to Africa to know her ancestry – she was made of the DNA of a black African woman – to returning to the United States so she can rescue the specimens from other labs. The meaning of this journey that ends with the destruction of the world by fire is mixed to Phoenix's attempt to understand who she is and what her place among humanity is.

The Book of Phoenix discusses the ethics of science, especially genetic engineering. The "Big Eye" that monitors the corporations make sure the experiments in the seven towers are imprisoned and under control. Phoenix recounts, "My beginnings were in the dark. We all dwelled in the dark, mad scientist and speciMen, alike." Initially conformed to her fate in the lab, Phoenix considers her friend Saeed "[m]ore human than I am." When she discovers that being a weapon, a bomb that self-regenerates, is the purpose of her existence, she starts to question the nature of the other specimen and whether they – including herself – are human. The perception the world has of her, however, is that of a "dangerous non-human person." Throughout the narrative, Phoenix puts herself apart from the humans, but not without questioning the human part in her and the powers she has.

Phoenix's story is constructed on the idea of legacy – an allegory to colonialism. She revisits all stories she read about the Big Eye, mainly the one about the Ethiopian girl taken to Tower 1, considered "the Great Book of humanity," because her DNA dated back to the first human – Lucy – and she had hyperthymesia, the capacity to remember every moment of her life. The girl's DNA is coded to never age, making her forever trapped in a ten-year-old body. Eleven years later, "she escaped and threw herself from the roof of Tower 1. She left no suicide letter." Her clone, however, is still in a lab. Phoenix wants her to escape so she can not only avenge other lab subjects, but also give meaning to her existence. She wants to leave her story so people can understand why she chose to destroy the world. "To tell my tale, I will use the old African tools of story: Spoken words. They are worthier of my trust and they'll last longer. And during shadowy times, spoken words carry farther than words typed, imaged, or written." The lasting of her story is of ultimate

importance because she gives herself the status of an entity, a destroyer of worlds, judge of the human internal and external to her. The few survivors bear witness and start over.

The Book of Phoenix evokes the discussion of new beginnings presented in *The Stone Gods*, but here the human intervention is apocalyptic – both in the sense of destruction and revelation. Phoenix announces, "I am the sun. Ten thousand degrees Fahrenheit. Ani has pulled me to the earth. To wipe the slate clean. This is how it happens. New York's prodigal daughter returns home. Not just New York. I scorch the earth." Her decision to destroy humanity is based on the knowledge she has that seven LifeGen investors have taken the DNA of a young girl to make themselves immortal. In face of the terror that such men would control the whole world, Phoenix decides to give humanity a fresh start. She says, "Yes, I can do that. I am that. Phoenix Okore blew across the earth. She burned the cities. Turned the oceans to steam. She was the reaper come to reap what was sown. Wherever those seven men lived. Let them die. Let everything die. Let that which had been written all be rewritten." Her logic of bringing apocalypse to prevent a worse end is based on the identity she created to herself in her story: as she can be reborn from the ashes and learn, so can humans. The ones who survive start over without the threat of the seven immortal men.

Phoenix's legacy, *The Great Book*, however, is wrongly interpreted by Sanuteel, who decides to retell what he heard and is responsible for the creation of another dystopian society. Believing "[h]e was the chosen one" and at the same time fearing the presence of Phoenix, he writes his book leaving her out. The narrator at this diegetic level tells the reader, "And this was how the *Great Book* was rewritten as the story of The Okeke and Why They are Cursed." The racist content of the text that would cause terrible violence and slaughter in the future was not intended as such. Nonetheless,

> Sanuteel did not specifically set out to solidify the Okeke as slave and the Nuru as superior through powerful literature, but what is in one's heart comes out in one's stories. Even

> when he or she's retelling someone else's story. Sunuteel was old. He'd lived for a long time understanding his ancestors as slaves.

Sunuteel's identity, like Phoenix's, shapes the story he tells. However, differently from her, he does not question his surrounding nor revises the stories he hears. Instead, he reproduces his prejudices and ideas, delaying for centuries Phoenix's plan.

Sunuteel embodies the storyteller creator of worlds that does not dare to propose a new way of living. He becomes an agent of the very forces that scared him in Phoenix's tale of submission and abuse. Not only does he deny the authorship of the Great Book, but he never seeks out to understand and confirm the information he heard. "Instead, he chose to write fiction. It was as if he were possessed, for not only did he rewrite and rewrite, he became infected with stories. He wrote stories so tantalizing and addictive that those who heard it were sure that they heard truth." In this sense, the novel becomes a story of origins and a new society, but a better one. However, Phoenix's intentions of setting the foundations of a better world are realized later in the narrative of *Who Fears Death*.

These instances of radicalized storytelling in the selected dystopian novels by women in the twenty-first century emphasize the proposition of alternative ways of living while introducing non-human characters that question the idea of humanity. The first movement towards this discussion involves debating over what storytelling means, and the novels in this group highlight clashes between cultures and costumes. The second group involves that idea that the universe is a large story and humans can intervene in the story, thus changing the world. These novels are either metafictional or non-realist in the sense they propose the existence of supernatural forces and entities. Lastly, the third movement to discuss storytelling presents the idea of genesis, myths of creation that initiate a new arrangement for humans. The observed patterns have in common the use of storytelling to define identity, communities, and even humans as a species.

Chapter 2: "What Stories Are Made of": The Meaning of Storytelling in Dystopian Novels by Women

2.1 The Storyteller in the Twenty-First Century

To introduce the discussion of the figure of the storyteller, I analyze the reluctant storyteller in Le Guin's *The Telling*, Sutty. Her initial dependence of the written word – thus her frustration in not finding any historical record about Aka before the revolution – is expressive of her distrust of oral tradition, one that is easily destroyed, as it happened in this planet. Sutty discovers the world of the telling, a culture based on stories that could not be defined in the written texts she had access to during her travel to Aka. Contrary to her previous conceptions, the oral tradition is reliable in its regular changing form. By the end of the novel, Sutty becomes a storyteller herself: able to take control of the narrative of her life and share it with others. She jumps in and out of oral and written traditions –she tells the narrative of her life and writes her thoughts on Akan culture – and embodies the between-the-worlds nature of the storyteller.

For Areti Dragas, contemporary writers use the storyteller as a character who questions the *status quo*, and not solely as a common trope. In *The Return of the Storyteller in Contemporary Fiction*, she describes the storyteller as "a defiant figure, one that *challenges* the dominant conceptualization surrounding the novelistic author and calls for its re-evaluation" (Introduction). Considering the storyteller a shapeshifter, Dragas says he or she can walk through narrative layers assuming different roles. In Le Guin's *The Telling*, the storyteller is the protagonist Sutty, but also the third person narrator who ponders on Sutty's thoughts and opinions, telling the reader at the appropriate narrative time of the protagonist's traumatic past, and Ursula K. Le Guin, the implied author, who

envisions and gives voice to this multi-teller narrative.[25] Novels that present storytellers as prominent figures and storytelling as a theme frequently foreground stories as stories, not truths; versions of a fact that shake up assumptions regarding history, politics, and religion.

The reemergence of the storyteller in the selected dystopian novels written by women in the twenty-first century rescues the sense of community that is brought by the sharing of experiences. Le Guin's 2000 novel works as a first indicator of a trend that stands to this day in the genre: storytelling as a means to foster alternative communal values. Baccolini proposes that critical dystopias are texts in which a culture of memory is established, "one that moves from the individual to the social and collective and one that can also include a critical nostalgia (that) must be part of a social project of hope" ("Finding Utopia in Dystopia" 185). In this sense, the storyteller creates this movement towards the collective. For the act of telling a story requires one to be outside individual experience; for every storyteller, there must be a listener.

The experience of sharing experiences as a social event allows agency. For anthropologist Michael Jackson, "storytelling reworks and remodels subject-object relations in ways that subtly alter the balance between actor and acted upon, thus allowing us to feel that we actively participate in a world that for a moment seemed to discount, demean, and disempower us" (16). Stories can work to maintain or to defy the *status quo*. The storytelling continuous movement in a social group provides space for a cycle of innovation and sedimentation to happen which allows a community to establish itself. In the chosen dystopian novels by women, the devaluing of storytelling leads the world to catastrophe while its importance means communal life.

In this chapter, I consider three aspects of storytelling that are found in the selected novels: its meaning and function, how it is used to form and affirm identities, and how it is an inherently

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[25] Critics have pointed to how, in the case of *The Telling*, Le Guin is overtly using Sutty as a mouthpiece for her views on culture. See Jonas's review for *The New York Times* and Glover's dissertation.

human activity. For this discussion, I bring the reflection of storytelling in crucial points of history: Walter Benjamin's "The Storyteller" during the Second World War; Paul Ricoeur's considerations about the narrative experience in the 1980s; Brian Boyd's proposal of a biocultural approach of literature and Yuval Harari's remark of storytelling as the most fundamental aspect of *Homo sapiens* – both in the twenty-first century. These arguments on storytelling form a spiral of thought that start with the significance of narratives in the relationship between the self and the collective passes through how, philosophically, narrative is the human way of thinking and culminates in neurological and evolutionary research about how storytelling is an adaptation for humans.

While analyzing the work of Nicolai Leskov, Benjamin announces the death of the storyteller in Modernity because of the prominence of the novelist.[26] The individualistic nature of the novel works in opposition to the collective experience of stories. For him,

> The storyteller takes what he tells from experience – his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to this tale. The novelist has isolated himself. … To write a novel means to carry the incommensurable to extremes in the representation of human life. ("The Storyteller")

According to Benjamin, the main difference between stories and the novel is the absence of the need for explanation in the first ones. Stories are open to multiple meanings and teachings, while the novel extensively focuses on conveying a representation and attempts at teaching nothing.

Published in 1936, "The Storyteller" became later on a landmark for the academic response to the novel and established the notion that storytellers were in a decline era. The idea that the figure of the storyteller is less and less present throughout Modernity pervades literary studies contributing to a division between written and oral traditions. The focus on writing and textuality,

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[26] Nikolay Semyonovich Leskov, pseudonym Stebnitsky (1831–95), has been described as the greatest of Russian storytellers.

however, shifted in mid-twentieth century, according to Dragas in *The Return of the Storyteller in Contemporary Fiction*, because of the popularity of postmodern and postcolonial novels that foreground again the thematization of telling stories. Benjamin's announcement of the death of the storyteller helped to redirect literary studies towards the study of the novel.

In the critical dystopias studied here, conventions of the oral tale are incorporated into the written text as an attempt to rescue the sharing of experiences as the basis of communal life. The extent of this appropriation varies from novel to novel, but the storyteller, the listeners, and the formation of a new community around a story is present and foregrounded in all of them. Aside from the presence of storytellers, the narratives merge expressions such as "Once upon a time" or "Before this happened, the world was" into the written narrative. A safe space of hope in a dystopian world is created so the characters can make sense of themselves and their culture, be it the top of the mountain for the storytellers in Aka in Le Guin's *The Telling* or the personal space shared by lovers Billie and Spike in Winterson's *The Stone Gods*. When they talk about their lives, beliefs, and, most importantly, narrate their version of events, storytellers, and listeners bond. In this common ground of trust these characters can rethink their society.

Atwood's *MaddAddam* may be the most radical experiment in this merge of oral and written traditions. The novel revolves around the figure of storytellers – Toby, Jimmy, and Zeb – and how the stories they tell shape a new reality, making it possible for the Crakers to create their own culture. Even its structure is settled according to who is telling the story at a given time. The novel starts with "In the beginning, you lived inside the Egg" (3), as Toby tells the story to an audience of listeners using a very traditional form of introduction. In the following chapter, the third person narrator states, "About the events of that evening – the events that set human malice loose in the world again – Toby later made two stories" (10). The mythic quality of the narration and the foretelling of the outcomes of the story in the introduction are well-known techniques to hook listeners. The chain of storytelling in the novel goes as: 1) Toby the storyteller tells the Crakers the origins of their lives as myth; 2) Zeb tells the story of his life to Toby – a story presented to the

reader through the third-person narrator; 3) Toby tells the story of Zeb's life to the Crakers, turning him also into a mythical figure; and 4) Blackbeard, a young Craker, considers the events of his youth and Toby's last days. All these tales contribute to question the world as it was and what it can be after the apocalypse. The multiple narratives and their storytellers create a genre-blurring text – using Baccolini's definition – that wavers between oral and written traditions.

The storyteller disturbs the narrative conventions and, thus, the way they are usually analyzed. Typically, Western-centric readings have privileged textuality and writing. Dragas points to how such readings viewed storytellers as figures that belong to postcolonial and third-world countries. In this sense, oral tradition is the "other" against which Western written tradition could define itself. Benjamin has set the tone for the analysis of the novel for decades, defining the genre as one that deals with individual experiences. He postulates, "The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others" ("The Storyteller"). There is no room for sharing in the modernist novel, in which narrators traditionally focus on the struggle of a character's attempt at unity. Dragas argues that Benjamin's text is partially responsible for the individualist reading of the narrative of the novel and that the presence of storytellers and storytelling conventions in the novel itself is a form of resisting tradition and challenging "our critical categories in which narrative is ordinarily examined" (Introduction). For the storyteller brings narrative as testimony as well as imagination, fact and fiction, written and oral. His or her figure resides in the non-resolution of binaries, therefore, his or her non-conforming nature.

Stories are multiple in meaning, role, and function and because of this, they are potentially subversive. He or she calls the reader's attention to the plurality of meaning a story may have and how it can be changed in tone and approach when it is retold. Especially in dystopian narratives, the storyteller is rebellious, feared by oppressive societies not only because of his or her knowledge but for the ability to transmit it further. Even the most personal story, when shared, has the potential to change the *status quo*. For instance, in *The Telling*, when Sutty and Yara share their stories,

they "expurgate some of the emotion they have been holding on to, and which have been fueling their anger and zeal. … because they listen to each other, they also have a greater understanding of the other's position" (Glover, *A Comparative Study* 204). When they become both storytellers and listeners of the stories of their lives, they find common ground even in their opposite visions of the world. Because of this experience, Yara helps Sutty, and she can propose political and cultural changes to the corporate state.

As the listener is a potential storyteller, the act of retelling gains a multi-layered dimension. Benjamin, considering the short story, says that it "has removed itself from oral tradition and no longer permits that slow piling one on the top of the other of thin, transparent layers which constitutes the most appropriate picture of the way in which the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of a variety of retellings" ("The Storyteller"). Differently from the written, oral tradition not only welcomes appropriation and imitation but depends on them for survival. A story only lives if someone retells it. In the novels studied, this break on traditional assumptions of authority highlight not only the sense of community since the knowledge of the story belongs to everyone, but also the impossibility of narrating the truth. Storytellers know their story has a life of its own and that it is always open to interpretation and change. The same story can be used to marvel and to terrify. In Le Guin's *The Telling*, Sutty finds out that truth is multiple: "There was no correct text. There was no standard version. Of anything. There was not one Arbor but many, many arbors" (111). Supposedly the book containing all records of oral tales, the Arbor, lives on the retelling of itself.

Any discussion of tradition in Western culture must take note of Homer as the storyteller *par excellence*, who allegedly composed his poems through the observation of nature. Although

numerous scholars have defended or objected to the idea of Homer being an individual ,[27] *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are undeniable landmarks of literature that influence both oral and written traditions. These two texts defy clear definitions between oral and written traditions, with scholars defending their origins as old folk songs, put together in written form much later. The many retellings of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* throughout history have rendered many versions that analyze different aspects of the epics, keeping their relevance in the Western imaginary. More recent versions include Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*, in which *The Odyssey* is transposed to the American Civil War context; Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*, in which the devastation of the Trojan war is seen through the eyes of the women in the city, and Atwood's *Penelopiad*, a retelling of *The Odyssey* through the eyes of Penelope, attempting to explain the twelve murdered maids episode.

The relationship between the storyteller, the listener, and the tale is memory. Benjamin claims that "the listener's naive relationship to the storyteller is controlled by his interest in retaining what he is told. The cardinal point for the unaffected listener is to assure himself of the possibility of reproducing the story" ("The Storyteller"). Even though this assertion is valid to retelling, I do not think the relationship between storyteller and listener is naive. Both co-create the story, because memory is a process and not a storage. Remembering is reinterpreting. Memory as co-creation is particularly true for myths: to create a myth, it is necessary to forget the story behind it. When Toby adds to the Craker's mythology in *MaddAddam*, she actively forgets Zeb's story. The openness of Zeb's narrative, made of tales with multiple interpretations, gains an even broader meaning when he becomes something beyond a man, but the figure of courage and resilience in Craker's mythology.

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[27] For a critical summary of this discussion, see Gustavo Frade's article "Homero e a questão homérica."

As much as forgetting is an essential aspect of memory, it is still a delicate subject to approach. Baccolini proposes that in most critical dystopias by women, "resistance is maintained through the recovery of history and literacy, together with individual and collective memory" ("Finding Utopia" 166-67). The storyteller usually provides the narrative of the past that, retold, can provoke the necessary change in the dystopian society. For minority groups, especially, the idea of recovering history is part of a process of recognition; "what renders forgetting problematic is the issue of positionality. The vital notion of 'active forgetting' clashes with the choice of what can be forgotten, what must not be forgotten, and who makes the decision" (Baccolini, "Finding Utopia" 169). As memory is often associated with empowerment, forgetting can be seen as apathy, even danger. After drawing on Paul Ricoeur and Ernst Bloch for the philosofical discussion on memory as a mere deposit of ideas, Baccolini concludes that memory is a "repository of experience" that can be incorporated into the utopian idea of social dreaming if one abandons the notion that it is static. ("Finding Utopia" 170) The storyteller needs both remembering and forgetting to have stories to thrive. On the one hand, by remembering the past, he or she can raise awareness of the community and challenge its values; on the other hand, to create a new story, it is necessary to forget, so novelty may arise.

The equilibrium among memory, forgetting, and accountability is very delicate. The image of the angel presented in Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History", one that is looking back to the past and pointing to the future, encapsulates the ethical implications of the writing of history. The ones remembered are the ones who have a future; therefore, to have a better future, one needs to remember the past and recognize it. To account for the mistakes of the past, especially when one thinks about the state, is to remember and resignify history. Baccolini concludes, "Historical amnesia, therefore, leads us toward Anti-Utopia and, together with nostalgia, it creates a false sense of the past as a better time" ("Memory and Historical Reconciliation" 119). This combination of lack of history and nostalgia is present in the Hunger Games trilogy, for instance, in which the state institutionalizes the murder of children as entertainment in the name of a long-

lost peace while erasing any historical record of the past. The ethics of forgetting walk the line of accountability and the possibility of a new beginning. In the concluding chapters of *Mockingjay*, the Hunger Games final volume, the rebels successfully conquer the Capitol and bring down the regime of horror. Initially, they propose a last edition of the Hunger Games in which the sons and daughters of the Capitol's leaders would participate to be slaughtered as a form of revenge. The memory of the hundreds of children from the Districts who died in the games for entertainment are the driving force of the revolution, and they are for the first time honored as people and not as pawns when the rebels claim the Capitol. However, to move on and create the basis for a new society, the rebels let go of their revenge and the past, so change can happen.

In *The Stone Gods*, during the expedition to Planet Blue, captain Handsome tells a story: "We found a planet, and it was white like a shroud. The planet was wrapped in its own death" (62). The extract describes the finding of a crypt in which the remains of cars and planes rested. Billie does not believe it because there is no sign of human life outside her planet, Orbus. Handsome then concludes that "Life in Orbus began as escaping life from the white planet – and the white planet began as escaping life from… who knows where?" (68). The cycle of colonizers and colonized exists because the knowledge of the past is forgotten. The rescue of this knowledge by a storyteller promotes a change in the order of things. However, his or her story is forgotten once more so the cycle of the world can begin again. This new phase though starts slightly different because of the storyteller's intervention. To remember, but remember it differently, as Adrienne Rich demands. Forgetting is an ambiguous force in the novel, one that is both creative and destructive.

The storyteller is also a disturbance in the system because of his or her authority. While the story is being told, the storyteller has control over the world. Dragas writes, "Although stories are not his own, he nonetheless temporarily acquires and excludes authority through the performance or telling of his story" ("A [His]tory of the Storyteller"). In Okorafor's *Who Fears Death,* the protagonist Onyesonwu meets a storyteller in the village. To assert her rightful role, the woman

announces, "The news I bring from the West is fairly fresh. I was trained by my parents who were storytellers, as their parents were. My memory holds thousands of tales" (101). At that moment, she is no longer a woman, but the Storyteller archetype, sharing with her listeners her knowledge of the world. After her performance, Onyesonwu ponders, "This first story we know from the Great Book. We retell it to ourselves time and time again when the world doesn't make sense" (99). As a storyteller herself, Onyesonwu recognizes how a story is always open. Because if the story of the Great Book is repeated long enough, its multiple meanings can travel the land and promote change. Due to this, Onyesonwu, with the storyteller authority, can retell such a subversive version of it that the whole world is literally rewritten.

Storytelling as process involves narrative that is not only limited to words. Jackson writes

> In exploring the ways in which storytelling contrives to cross and blur the line between different subjectivities, or between the space we call private and the space of the world, we must remember that these infringements are seldom simply conceptual or abstract. They are experienced and enacted in and through the body, and involve forms of mimetic play, gesture, intimacy, and phatic communication that challenge logocentric notions of meaning. (28)

In Atwood's *MaddAddam*, the Crakers are a more apparent instance of such bodily experiences. They sing ritualistically while stories are being told, repeat words, and create chants, but they also mimic the storyteller and create a space of affection shared by ones present in the circle. All these aspects are part of the story too. In this dissertation, I focus on the linguistic aspect of storytelling, but I acknowledge it is not the only, neither the most relevant, aspect of the process of telling a tale. The bodily experiences present in narrative are focus for future research.

The sharing of experiences promoted by the storyteller creates a community. According to Benjamin,

> one can go and ask oneself whether the relationship of the storyteller to his raw material, human life, is not in itself a craftsman's relationship, whether it is not his very task to

> fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way. ("The Storyteller")

The storyteller acts as a counselor or teacher to the people and can incorporate the story into his or her own existence, a fact that gives the storyteller an aura of importance. Benjamin, nonetheless, fails to consider the other side of the coin of the storyteller's experience as participant in the arrangement of a community. If the experience of sharing affects the storyteller's life, it does so to the lives of the listeners. The tale is no longer the storyteller's only, but the listener's as well. The permeable relationship between these two parts may inspire the creation of a new order of things, a new community. Even if storytellers leave, their story lasts long enough so the social order might change.

The MaddAddam trilogy is an example of a community formed because of a storyteller.[28] Jimmy was supposed to be the Crakers' caretaker and make sure they would live; however, because of the stories he told them, they start organizing themselves differently. The instinct-driven group now live according to the mythology of their new culture: Crake is the creator of the world; Oryx created the animals, and Jimmy is Crake's prophet, the only one capable of contacting Crake directly. The Crakers must bring Jimmy a fish in the storytelling ceremony. For this ritual, they have to learn how to fish since they are herbivores. Then they repeat the story learned in the form of chants and put unique garments in the storyteller. When Jimmy leaves the Crakers, they settle their community based on the principles they learned from him, appropriating when needed. Toby,

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[28] Considering the trilogy, a community is also formed by the written narrative: Blackbeard's book for the Crakers. However, the oral tale is still predominant in importance. The same happens in other novels of the *corpus* such as Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*, Le Guin's *The Telling*, and Jemisin's *The Fifth Season*.

who occupies Jimmy's place when he gets sick, expands their mythology in the storyteller role, and finally one of the Crakers themselves, Blackbeard, takes this place in his community.

In the novels analyzed here, the storyteller is the one to bring the proposition of new ways of living. The knowledge of the past recovered and the narration of it in the form of a story, with multiple meanings, create the communal experience. The content of these stories questions the values of a previous community and point to radical changes in society. In *The Telling*, Sutty's stories not only affect her perception of her life but expose the abuses of Corporate power and fundamentalism. When she tells this story to the Akans and the Ekume, people stress their communal values and attempt to use the telling once again in a new practice. In *The Stone Gods*, Spike's and Billie's retellings of canonical literary texts as well as the way the narrative itself presents multiple layers of storytelling challenge the reader to see the cyclical aspect of history. The only way out is forming a community based on trust, acceptance, and love. Finally, *MaddAddam* presents storytellers who construct a mythology, giving birth to a new culture. Simultaneously, the sharing of experiences of the MaddAddamites assure their survival as possibly the last reminiscent of *Homo sapiens* life in the planet. However, their lives depend on accepting the proposition of living differently from the past and finding alternatives to old assumptions about belonging and existence.

Stories enables humans to explore their societies. Jackson remarks, "'fictional' narratives persistently address quotidian problems of injustice, revealing the frailty of authority, mocking the foibles of men, and shaming all those who mask their greed and ambition with the language of ideology and the trappings of high office" (27). For Plato, poets have no place in the *polis* because they are disruptors in his ordered ideal state. Storytellers are voices heard in a given community and the multiple meanings of their stories are outside their control. Thus, stories are living organisms that carry thought-provoking questions about a society and, sometimes, these questions might lead to revolutionary ideas.

The reemergence of the storyteller in dystopian novels by women in the twenty-first century is a rescuing of the sharing of experiences to assert communal life. These novels denounce

how an individualistic, information-oriented, and scientificist culture is unable to sustain itself. Only through the formation of a community where people can share their knowledge and vision of the world can humanity survive. This humanity, however, is no longer based on binary notions and exclusivism. The storyteller as a disturbing presence proposes to the community a new way to see humankind and humans in collective, sharing-oriented, and multi-knowledged societies. The formation of what Baccolini calls a culture of memory in these novels points to collective action of hopeful change. In this sense, the storyteller appears in the twenty-first century as an oppositional force to challenge the present by remembering the past critically and proposing new ways of living for the future.

2.2. Radical Storytellers

The storyteller is an archetype found in all cultures.[29] From the bard to the chronicler passing through the teller conducting a circle around the fire, storytellers are part of the culture, because, without them, there would be no culture at all. Dragas writes that "the storyteller is a re-teller of stories, a re-worker of stories we all know and love, a re-shaper of histories, genealogies, tribal lore, gossip, and lies" ("A [His]tory of the Storyteller"). The storyteller's knowledge maintains the fundamental aspects of a culture present. The repetition of a tale can become the origin of a myth or an important belief and pattern of behavior. A tradition is formed when a chain of stories can be replicated (Dragas, "A [His]tory of the Storyteller"), making storytelling a vital ability to be developed by a group. Because of this, the storyteller in many cultures is associated with wisdom, power, and knowledge.

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[29] Here I follow Dragas's definition of archetype – a common figure present in stories from different cultures – rather than the Jungian concept.

Northrope Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* defines archetypes as repeated symbols embedded in cultural meaning. For him, such figures help humans to understand their world. Thus, archetypes are developed according to humans' needs and concerns through time. Frye is not interested on the origins nor on the collective impulses of archetypes, but rather on how they appear and reappear in literary works. It is not the focus of this dissertation to enter Frye's theory, but it is worth mentioning his work since it encompasses the prevalence of archetypes in cultures. The storyteller as an archetype is found repeatedly and the reader can easily identify him or her.

The functions of storytelling are as multiple as the traditions they keep. Stories can provoke shock, wonder, or fear. They can be used to teach, to instruct, and to explain. It might be interesting to think about these functions of storytelling as a spectrum: on one end we have stories to instruct, teach, explain, and comfort, while on the other, there are stories to deceive, hide, and manipulate. The tone in the same story can vary to the extent the same sequence of events can have completely different meanings. The storyteller is an essential pillar of collective life because it maintains the chain of stories running in a given tradition. The extermination of a culture is intrinsically linked to the destruction of this very chain. Indigenous populations, for example, use their stories and myths to maintain their identity. The storyteller is at the same time responsible for keeping the story of his or her own tradition and for connecting these stories to different ones.

The survival of a story depends on both oral and written traditions. Dragas points to how "[t]hroughout the history of literature we find the storyteller reflected in the text, the close relationship between the writer and the storyteller, and the awareness of the text and story as a communally constructed and shared experience" ("A [His]tory of the Storyteller"). Thus, the belief that the literary text works apart from the oral text would be a fallacy. Literature, when understood as the ways in which stories manifest themselves, is a constant exchange between the story told and story written. For a tale to survive, it depends on both oral and written traditions.

Concerning gender, the storyteller as an archetype is not expressed as feminine or masculine. Dragas asserts that it is "the storyteller's nature to be constantly evasive: he does not rest in

one stable figure, or even gender. He is not an individual, but a voice that speaks a message." Yet, if the archetype is genderless, the same does not happen to flesh and blood storytellers. Western culture still perceives the female storyteller as one who deceives and tricks. A woman possessing knowledge has been seen as a threat, as a witch. The Catholic Church and the Puritans had women and men burned at the stake for heresy, though the stigma of the devious storyteller in cultural imaginary is still related to women.[30] The witch is the storyteller with knowledge of a different kind, related to different categories such as nature and the female body. Benjamin's text does not mention the image of a woman storyteller, referring to sailormen and travelers always assuming them as male figures. In the novels selected, the presence of women storytellers presents a focus on the formation of an identity, stories of intervention, and knowledge of the Earth in opposition to the male storytellers, who focus on justification, stories of colonization, and scientific knowledge. Women storytellers are perceived as producers of narratives that disrupt the order of things and open the debate for other social possibilities.

A woman's voice as a storyteller works inevitably as a questioning of the *status quo* in most Western societies.[31] The resignification of myths and stories associated with women have been collected by anthropologists, psychologists, and writers alike. Clarissa Pinkola Estés's famous book *Women Who Run with the Wolves* is the result of a research with storytellers around the world, most

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[30] In *The Women's History of the World*, the historian Rosalind Miles proposes to understand the history of women under patriarchy, from the matrifocal societies of the Bronze Age to contemporary societies. For her, the silence of women in narrating their part in history is adamant of the view of how the woman storyteller was dangerous and had to be silenced.

[31] Miles states that patriarchy works under the premise of seeing women as less than. Thus, their voices are not worth hearing and allowing such is a threat to the notions of the uncapable woman. In this manner, the woman storyteller is a disruptor, even to contemporary societies.

of them women, who could tell stories from their culture about the Wild Woman archetype. The trend is strong among Jungian scholars who work at rescuing archetypes related to women and have contributed to both New Age movements and to the appropriation of fairy-tales and myths by women writers.[32] The gendered storyteller that is revealed a woman usually breaks the reader's expectations and makes a statement on the value of a woman's voice.

Adrienne Rich considers how, by revising the past, it is possible to search for an identity, reread concepts, and bring about change that effectively breaks tradition. In her text "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," she considers looking at literary tradition with different eyes since the act of revising can be the only way to both criticize and rescue this very tradition. Rich writes,

> A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see – and therefore live – afresh. (19)

The idea of knowing the past, but "knowing it differently," is a way towards the affirmation of multiple identities. Rich's text, published in 1972, considers sexual politics in terms of men and women, but it is possible to expand this notion to different identities such as women of color, trans women, homosexual women, etc. The revision of history, literature, and language brings

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[32] Marion Woodmans's *Addiction to Perfection* (Studies in Jungian Psychology); Sylvia Brinton Perera's *Celtic Queen Maeve and Addiction: An Archetypal Perspective*; Massimilla Harris and Bud Harris's *Into the Heart of the Feminine: Facing the Death Mother Archetype to Reclaim Love, Strength, and Vitality*. Overtly Sacred Feminine texts that use women archetypes to resignify stories: Bethany Webster's website and course *Discovering the Inner Mother*; Miranda Gray's *The Red Moon*; and Maureen Murdock's *The Heroine's Journey*.

down the monolithic vision of these categories. Women storytellers frequently challenge the past, making it possible for the reader to enter a tradition from a different perspective, and possibly question the society he or she lives in.

In the novels studied here, female storytellers comment on the gendered spaces and roles in most Western societies. These women create the necessary disturbance in the narrative to provoke a sense of estrangement only possible in a sexist culture that is still bound to the male storyteller as a source of wisdom and knowledge. Baccolini discusses how the appropriation of generic fiction by women challenged the fixed notions of space and role related to gender. Science fiction (including most dystopian fiction) is even more open because of its projecting quality:

> women's sf novels have contributed to the exploration and subsequent dismantling of certainties and universalist assumptions – those damaging stereotypes – about gendered identities; and they have done so by addressing, in a dialectical engagement with tradition, themes such as the representation of women and their bodies, reproduction and sexuality, and language and its relation to identity. ("Finding Utopia in Dystopia" 165)

The re-reading of tradition evokes elements of the past while proposing alternatives to the future. Women storytellers bring change in their very existence since they break the reader's expectations about the role of women.

Sutty's gender in Le Guin's *The Telling* is not a problem for the Ekumen or the Akans; however, her memories of Earth show marks of repression. Her homosexuality can be punished by death on Terra since the establishment of Unism, the fundamentalist religion that became dominant, pervading political instances, and that labelled her gender inferior. When she tells her own story by the end of the novel, she is speaking up to the society that killed her partner and diminished her existence. Likewise, Winterson's *The Stone Gods* presents four narratives, three of them narrated by women. The many incarnations of Billie, the human, and Spike, the robot, and their love story are defiance both to the corporate government and to fixed roles they are expected to perform. Billie is a scientist, disrespected by her peers, even though she is the primary specialist in

the area, and she refuses to have the surgical intervention that would make her look forever like a teen, turning her into a target for criticism and shame. Spike is the most advanced form of artificial intelligence ever made, and she is frequently raped by the male crew of the space ship. Billie and Spike's stories inside a story comment on the cycle of destruction promoted by a society that assigns different values to different genders. Finally, *MaddAddam* states that the ones to live are the ones who reject gendered notions of belonging and value. The Crakers are ignorant of gender difference, acting by instinct to mate, incapable of sexism and violence; the MaddAddamites need to forget gendered differences to survive as some of the few humans left in the planet and are open to the possibility of producing descendants with the Crakers. In opposition to these two groups are the violent Painballers, criminals who continue to practice sexual violence, isolated in a now-foreign world to die. Toby as the storyteller in the novel is a symbol that the old ways no longer apply and that a new culture must emerge. She creates a world for the Crakers where the behaviors of the past that lead to destruction are unthinkable.

The selected novels present women storytellers as world makers with knowledge that goes beyond dualist envisioning. Dragas states that "the move between truth and lies, fiction and knowledge, is the paradox but also the power of the storyteller. His art encompasses dualities and brings them together through story" ("A [His]tory of the Storyteller"). The revision of the past originates stories in which binary concepts no longer work. The proposition of the new society is based on the coexistence of categories – human and alien, human and machine, and human and altered human, but also men and women, heterosexual and homosexual – to the point they no longer apply. In this sense, a woman's art as a storyteller is a conscious act of criticism in the extra-diegetic level and an act of creation in the intra-diegetic level. The world women storytellers bring to life is that of radical revision.

At the end of Le Guin's *The Telling*, Sutty is the negotiator between the Akans and the corporate government. She says, "That it's not just the books in the Lap of Silong that we're talking about, but all the books, everywhere, and all the people who read the books. The whole system.

The Telling. They'll have to decriminalize it" (263). Her vision, however, is not naive. Aka is never going back to the way it was before the corporate government took over. The decriminalization does not bring the past back but points to a new horizon of possibilities that "We have to try," as Sutty says. Contrary to Glover, who finds this open ending gloomy ("A Comparative Study" 206), I consider the final page of *The Telling* one of the most optimistic and promising of the novels analyzed, since it points to collective action and solidarity.

Winterson's *The Stone Gods* may read as pessimistic because of the presentation of repeated cycles of colonization, but I consider its depiction of worlds ending as a comment on new beginnings rather than a statement of *stasis*. In the four sections of the novel, a world is on the brink of destruction: Orbus is being devasted by a mysterious red dust in "Planet Blue"; the way of life of the natives is changing due to a new leader in "Eastern Island," and, people living in a radioactive wasteland are being threatened by corporate government in the stories "Post 3 War" and "Wreck City". In these three scenarios, the old ways of living end badly. The repetition of the pattern of conquest leads to destruction. Throughout the narratives, love is pointed out as the intervention necessary to start a new way of doing things such as the Alternative community – the idea of a group that could live outside the corporation government – in Wreck City, one based on tolerance: "The key to happiness is tolerance of those who do not do as you do" (208). The view of the universe as quantum, meaning one in which is "neither random nor determined" (215) focuses on the importance of such interventions.

History is seen here as a never-ending cycle of writing and rewriting with multiple outcomes that can be altered and influenced by humans: "There are potentialities and any third factor – humans are such a factor – will affect the outcome." In such a way, the narrative of life on the planet is always open and not trapped in the Sisyphean vision of repetition without change. By narrating, humans question their narrative and can create new ones for themselves. The fragmented structure in *The Stone Gods* mirror the many interventions that happen in the course of its four sections: the finding of Planet Blue, the asteroid that kills the dinosaurs, the castaway in

Eastern Island, the kidnapping of Spike in Wreck City. The direct address to the reader is possibly the most radical form of interventions portrayed in the novel: "I think all my life I've been calling you, across time. Steadily sending the signal, sure that, one day, you will hear" (220). A new cycle, the possibility of beginning again, requires a collective effort that begins with a story being heard.

A more radical experiment on world creation based on coexistence and tolerance is Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* in which Onyesowu dismantles the division between two identities – Okeke and Nuru – with the rewriting of a book. The almost mystical quality of Okorafor's narrative can be read as a comment on how a story has the power of both provoking destruction and peace. Change comes not with the erasure of history, but with the re-visiting of it.

> If Onyesowu had taken one last look below, to the south, with her keen Kponyungo eyes, she'd have seen Nuru, Okeke, and two Ewu children in school uniforms playing the schoolyard. To the east, stretching into the distance, she'd have seen black paved roads populated by men and women, Okeke and Nuru, riding scooters and carts pulled by camels. In downtown Durfa, she'd have spotted a flying woman meeting up a flying man on the roof of the tallest building. (419)

In this way, *Who Fears Death* is Rich's idea played literally: to actually revise history. Onyesonwu as a woman storyteller can go beyond the differences between race, gender, and even natural and supernatural. She unites a community around a different narrative of history.

The selected novels present mostly women storytellers as world creators with knowledge that goes beyond the dualist view of the world. The binaries male/female, technology/nature, white/non-white, heterosexual/homosexual and, mainly, human/non-human are not only questioned, but surpassed with stories that emphasize a new order of things that are radically different from the old ones. Le Guin's Akans with their telling in Aka organize their knowledge in such a way that the difference between science and religion does not exist. In the same manner, the robot Spike in *The Stone Gods*, designed to be "in the service of humankind" (174), disconnects from the mainframe when she faces reality and proposes that a radical rearrangement of society is needed

so humans can "begin again" (216), without the Us v. Them dichotomy. Finally, the Crakers and the MaddAddamites in Atwood's novel share offspring pointing towards a future based on different human biology, behavior, and belief. The three women storytellers in these novels – Sutty, Spike, and Toby – like others mentioned throughout this dissertation, are responsible for opening the way for these new possibilities of being human through their storytelling in their communities.

As critical dystopias, these novels display nightmarish realities in which a utopian horizon is present. Even though these places of hope sometimes exist inside the dystopian society – such as the people of the countryside in *The Telling* or the God's Gardeners in the MaddAddam trilogy – the most hopeful possibilities are revealed in these narratives' open endings in which a radical community is being formed. Propelled by non-humans that push the boundaries on the traditional definitions of humanity, these proposed social arrangements are portrayed as the only solution for survival. I consider briefly here the new worlds and new paradigms of the selected novels according to the three groups proposed in Chapter 1.

The novels in the first category usually end with a negotiation between two groups. In Le Guin's *The Telling*, Sutty confronts the corporate state demanding the freedom to practice the telling. Similarly, in the City of Ember series, the people from Ember and from Sparks must establish a community together. Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* ends with the protagonist Tan-Tan confronting her stepmother about the abuses of her past and going to settle her new life outside the rules of Junjuh. Something similar happens in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, in which Snowman/Jimmy must show himself to the unknown survivors. Confrontation is the only solution to make one's story heard so a better community based on tolerance can thrive.

Alternative communities exist as a proposition in the second category. Winterson's *The Stone Gods* ends with a vision-like scene in which Billie finds a haven in the woods and claims she finds "you." The disruptive address to the reader refers again to the idea of working as a collective to survive. In Okorafor's *Who Fears Death*, Onyesonwu rewrites the Great Book, altering history, and the reader has a glimpse of Nuru, Okeke, and Ewu playing together; the opening of a new

world with new propositions. Hagy's *Scribe* ends with Hendricks's timeline altered by the protagonist's powers as a storyteller pointing to the way that narrative can effectively alter one's life. Finally, a tale of love and compassion to change the world is the ending in Yuknavitch's *The Book of Joan*.

In the third category, the critical dystopias by women show the reader the community proposed. In The Sky Chasers trilogy, humans find a new planet to live. Atwood's *MaddAddam* is possibly the most adamant about the new way of life with Pigoons, survivors, and Crakers holding a trial together, establishing the basis of a new legal system, and with the birth of hybrid offspring. In Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix*, an autobiography found in a cave promotes the settlement of a new order for humans.

These new worlds formed have in common non-humans as storytellers. Their stories initially humanize them in the eyes of the human characters, but later they work to erase the initial differences between them. As robots, aliens, genetically-engineered humans, or mutants, they can see beyond human's binary thinking limitations and make possible the envisioning of an alternative way of life. Through their stories, these initially non-humans assert their identities and create a culture of their own, blurring the constructed differences between human and machine, human and alien, and "natural" and artificial human.

2.3. Stories and Identities

Storytellers can use their tales to construct their identity and inscribe their social self. When telling one's account or even someone else's, the storyteller presents his or her perceptions of the world and spins the tale according to his or her intentions, aiming at the desired effect. Justine Cassell explains,

> Storytelling is an important activity for the construction of the self, for the construction of the world, and for the construction of the nouns by which we lead our lives, and thus an activity that encourages storytelling is a potential space for the maintenance of an identity that is not voiceless. (307)

To be able to narrate oneself is essential to be actively part of society and have a sense of identity. For this reason, minority groups often undergo the rescuing and recreation of a tradition to reassert their identity. In dystopian narratives, the recovery of the past, including its history and story, is the way for the protagonists to create an identity different from the homogeneous mass intended by either government or corporate control. The stimulation of storytelling in a group is then a call on the formation of the identity of this group.

Storytelling has often been used to discuss what it means to be human. Paul Ricoeur in *Time and Narrative* proposes that human experience can only be comprehended through narrative. Following his argument, it is possible to say that the ability to tell stories is at the core of humanity because it is how we can perceive ourselves as humans. According to William Dowling, Ricoeur says that "the ways we understand each other in daily life involve an irreducible narrativity" (5). Thus, storytelling does not only shape individuals' identities and social selves but is essential to the way humans think and experience the world. In this sense, nothing exists outside narrative.

Ricoeur, however, is not following here the poststructuralist claim that everything is textual, but the idea that humans are cognitively prone to narrate as a tool to understand the unfolding of events in one's life through time. According to him, "time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience" (*Time and Narrative*). Ricoeur's work aims at demonstrating how this argument is not tautological, but the description of a "healthy cycle" that defines the human experience. Drawing on Augustine's *Confessions* and Aristotle's *Poetics*, the French philosopher considers the nature of time and narrative using the first reflections on the definition of time and the latter on *mythos* (emplotment): "the experience of an individual into a cohesive story" (Scully). Ricoeur creates a complex system based on the idea of a threefold mimesis: mimesis_1, mimesis_2, and mimesis_3.

To summarize, the three notions of mimesis help to understand the relationship between the storyteller, the story told, and its context. The movement from one mimesis to the other is

spiral, going from a pre-understanding to a new understanding through narrative. Mimesis$_1$ is the pre-configured: the traditions, assumptions, preconceptions, and prejudices that exist in the story-teller's and listener/reader's context and it shapes the way he or she sees the world. Mimesis$_2$ is the configured, Aristotle's notion of emplotment. Finally, mimesis$_3$ is the refigured; it is the story reinserted in the consciousness of the reader or listener "whose way of being in the world has been altered by their reading" (Dowling 2). In every narrative, there is a movement from mimesis$_1$ to mimesis$_3$, from a simple daily account to the *Odyssey*.

Culture is seen then as a symbolic system that makes possible the understanding of human action. Mimesis, according to Ricoeur, "only takes place in its full scope when the work deploys a world that the reader appropriates. This world is a cultural world" (*Time and Narrative*). The reader or listener in a certain way re-appropriates the story, making it his or her own, giving it the meaning more suitable personally and culturally: "We are following, therefore, the destiny of a prefigured time that becomes refigured time through the mediation of a configured time." This process of filling a story with meaning from the restrictions of a culture to the openness of a new possibility of perceiving the world enables the thinking that storytelling defines who we are and that telling a story is a way of proposing identities and a vision of the world. This conclusion may seem evident, but Ricoeur's process of analyzing the relation between narrative and time extensively shows how embedded human experience is in narrative and how it is possible to define as human one who can narrate and perceive time narratively.

As an example, I take Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy, in which the gaining of consciousness by the Crakers runs parallel to their abilities of understanding, copying, and later creating their own stories. Firstly portrayed as creatures "definitely not like us. … No way close" (*MaddAddam* 35), they become increasingly aware of the world around them, how their actions affect it and how to inscribe their self: "I am Blackbeard, and this is my voice that I am writing down to help Toby. If you look at this writing I have made, you can hear me (I am Blackbeard) talking to you, inside your head. That is what writing is" (376). The Craker's journey from listening to Snowman's stories

in awe to the writing of their myths can be read as the description of the movement from $mimesis_1$ to $mimesis_3$. Not by coincidence does the perception of them as human appear when they show they can go from the realm of the pre-configured to the reconfigured.

The implications of these new storytellers in the selected novels, nevertheless, is not of merely being humanized so they can be inserted into a human culture. Their reconfiguration makes possible a new reading of the world, one that is radically different from that of "old" humans. In the Crakers' world, as much as they tell stories and create their myths the same way the human survivors do, there is no racial difference, no violence. They eat grass and leaves, purr to cure the wounded, and mate seasonally. Their biological characteristics and their behavior would be enough to categorize them as something other than human, close to animals. At the same time, they become human in the eyes of the other humans because they can mimetically express their reality; they also defy that very humanity by presenting alternative paradigms and ways of living.

Mimesis is what makes it possible for an individual to experience perception and imagination so he or she can examine different scenarios, consider them, and find the one that is most suited to the situation. In this sense, narrative is the means through which humans can think beyond their here-and-now making storytelling both a cognitive exercise on speculation and decision making and the way humans understand their reality. Ricoeur writes,

> Narrative understanding is not limited to pre-supposing a familiarity with the conceptual network constitutive of the semantics of action. It further requires a familiarity with the rules of composition that govern the diachronic order of a story. Plot …, [seen as] the ordering of events (and therefore as interconnecting the action sentences) into the total action constitutive of the narrated story, is the literary equivalent of the syntagmatic order that narrative introduces in the practical field. (*Time and Narrative*)

To understand a story, one must be aware of the ways an event can be emplotted as well as of the cultural symbols necessary for that story to be told and understood. In this way, the storyteller and the listener/reader are in a constant exchange between sedimentation of paradigms and innovation.

Narrative time is of utmost importance to Ricoeur because it disrupts linear time and makes reflection possible. Plot is considered a teleological movement because it creates tension between the two different levels of narrative. Dowling explains this movement by considering how the time of the characters in a given literary text unfolds parallelly to that of the reader. He posits,

> The crucial difference is that the reader is always conscious of viewing events through the eyes of a narrator, who, knowing the story as a whole, is already viewing them in terms of their outcome, and who is viewing that outcome as an order of moral or ethical significance. *Telos* thus becomes a movement toward that moment of *anagnorisis* or recognition when those following the story will have revealed to them what the narrator has known from the outset. (49)

In Ricoeur's system, narrative time is a way to experience morality. It makes us observe the world as other people do. Hence, narrative may radically change the way one perceives the world. Literature then is not departed from everyday life, nor the reader's world is apart from the world portrayed in a given narrative. The subversive power of narrative is the constant spiral movement of mimesis.

The radicalized storytelling I propose in the analysis of the selected novels happens when these characters, initially considered non-human, tell their stories to assert their identities and negotiate their roles in a culture. Aliens, robots, and genetically altered humans narrate; thus, they create themselves to the listeners of their stories and convey their propositions of alternative ways of living. To analyze the relationship between storytelling and identity, I consider three novels from the corpus as examples: Le Guin's *The Telling*, Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix*, and Yuknavitch's *The Book of Joan*.

Le Guin's Hainish universe is based on the idea of a plural concept of humanity. The Hain, the oldest humans, experimented with their genetics and left many colonies in different planets that had no contact with them for millennia. So, humans evolved differently in several planets in a myriad of gender configurations, ethical beliefs, and social arrangements. The very premise of

the texts in the Hainish cycle, according to the activist-editor Adrienne Maree Brown in Julie Philip's essay "Ursula K. Le Guin Was a Creator of Worlds," is to show how "the way we live right now is not the only possible way for humans to live." In thought-provoking experiments in the form of science fiction, the Hainish novels (*The Left Hand of Darkness*, 1969; *The Dispossessed*, 1974; *The Telling* 2000) bring about humanity as a concept to be continuously stretched.

The humans from Aka and Terra in *The Telling* organize themselves differently, although they share the "fear of Otherness" (Glover, *A Comparative Study* 195). Because the planet has only one big continent and small islands, Akan culture is much more homogeneous than that on Terra. Sutty ponders on how "[m]aybe the system had been so universal that nobody could imagine living outside of it, and only self-destructive insanity could subvert it. It had been the way of life. It had been the world" (Le Guin, *The Telling* 118). That is how she understands the ways by which the corporate state could so easily take over the entire planet: "All Dovza had done was take the system over and change its goals" (119). From a culture focused on collective well-being to one whose target is collective wealth; the new Akan society rejects any form of expression that has not a marketing value. Any different way of thinking is a threat to their balanced system. Conversely, on Terra, different cultures were persecuted by the Unists, who believed in a single religion to rule over all the others. The existence of the Other is punished by death. The two forms of fundamentalism, one secular and other religious, are portrayed as equally damaging.

Sutty's experience in Aka proposes that cultural clash can only be resolved through the sharing of experiences. The protagonist's initial resistance to the Monitor, the representative of the corporate state that follows her, is broken when they sit face to face to tell the stories of their lives and their suffering under different types of oppression. Sutty for being a homosexual Hindi in Terra and Yara, the monitor, for watching his grandparents, leaders of the telling, being tortured and killed by the state when he was a child. They "engage in a utopian process of memory and telling that leads to awareness and an acceptance of individual responsibility and possible individual

and collective action" (Baccolini, "Memory and Historical Reconciliation" 129). By recognizing each other's pain, they find common ground to respect and understand each other.

The recovery of cultural history of the Akans equals Sutty's and Yara's recovery of their personal history. Sutty's travel to the countryside recuperates fifty years of cultural manifestations banished by the corporate state. The practices that once had been part of the whole planet were relegated to the countryside, the only place they could continue existing on the underground. When Sutty demands the reassurance that all books from the telling be accepted again, she defies the Ekumen recommendations of non-interference to make sure a cultural identity is not forgotten. Nonetheless, she is only able to do that because she owns the narrative of her past. Sutty "needs to recover, preserve, and study the culture of Aka and to come to terms with her past and sense of self" (125). Yara, contrarywise, can face his fanaticism and acknowledge that he had a happy childhood with his grandparents, great storytellers of their time. The knowledge of who he is, no longer a monitor to the corporate state, but a person with a unique narrative, lets him choose a fate of his own – the rescuing of Aka's telling mirrors the journey for Sutty's and Yara's identity.

This cultural clash that ends in reconciliation is not simplistic or naive. Baccolini highlights that:

> [T]he novel identifies a utopian process of memory and telling that leads to individual and moral responsibility and awareness (a way of finding one's place in a historical context, of living in the present and past simultaneously) and possible individual and collective action (a way of building one's future). … This horizon also encourages acceptance of responsibilities – not a nostalgic, static condition but a vital, critical process of memory and knowledge that does not dwell on denial and guilt and is therefore also instrumental for an active sense of identity. ("Memory and Historical Reconciliation" 122)

The sharing of experiences between Sutty and Yara is not like the conventional Christian notion of forgiveness as forgetting. Their discontent and grudges remain, but they now see each other as humans – Akan and Terran. To surpass their differences involves active forgetting and creation of

a common story. Storytelling in this novel reaches places argumentation or scientific knowledge cannot. Conflict is necessary for the creation of a new society that incorporates elements from the old and the new, but so is recognition of identities – individual and collective.

In Yuknavitch's *The Book of Joan*, storytelling is also a way of asserting one's identity and proposing a future in which this identity can exist. The novel also flirts with apocalyptic logic; yet, its apocalyptic agent, Joan, does not initially aim at leaving survivors. She believes humanity is doomed and deserves to perish. Nevertheless, the survivor experience – for her, her loved one, and the exiled humans – changes her perspective and the novel can be read as ultimately about how narratives of destruction find a way to become narratives of new beginnings.

As Laura Feigel points out in her review to *The Guardian*, *The Book of Joan* revises medieval logic. The two narrators are Christine de Pizan – after the poet and philosopher who argued for the importance of women in society in the fifteenth century – and Joan of Arc, the young woman who allegedly heard voices that prompted her into becoming a war leader. Armies with children are used by corporations and states to fight over the planet's scarce resources, while the wealthy go to live in a space station, CIEL. The dehumanization of the inhabitants of CIEL paints a critical portrait of aristocracy: wealthy people, alienated from the harsh reality of most humans, obsessed with their heritage and at the same time suspicious of each other, paranoid about supposed acts of treachery. The environment of luxury and violence of the Middle Ages aristocracy often object to criticism for being promiscuous and sadistic is taken to a further degree. The people in CIEL have deformed bodies, especially genitalia, and "[a]ll sex is restricted to textual" (34); however, people give in to their sexual desires inconspicuously in their cells. Torture sessions and executions are broadcast for entertainment even though all CIEL citizens know that at age fifty, they are going to be executed.

In Yuknavitch's rendition of medieval persona, very much in tune with Rich's idea of writing as revision, Christine is a forty-nine woman about to be executed. She excels in the art of grafting skin and turning it into graphs, the only form of text permitted, and uses it to her "literary

resistance movement" (22), which hundreds have joined to bring about a new way of living for a species now deprived of gender. Christine claims, "A new philosophy took hold and pulsed: the idea that men and women – or the distinction between men and women – was radically and forever dead." Using the skin grafts to spread her ideas, Christine uses her own body in the last act of defiance: to tell the story of Joan of Arc.

Skin graphing is a means of storytelling. Christine says she wants "her [Joan's] story back" (23), but her telling of it, *The Book of Joan* we read, reveals more about Christine than Joan. During her life, Christine has graphed people's bodies to convey her ideas, and when she is about to die, she decides to tell a story to define her identity and social self: a revolutionary, a fluid gendered person, an artist, and a traitor. Christine uses narrative forever marked on bodies to gather a community that makes life at CIEL bearable. The revolution she claims to have started was not the act of a woman alone, but it was fostered in a community that shared their experiences and identities in graphs on their skin.

The image of the protagonist marking her skin with Joan's story, choosing different limbs to each part of the narrative, has a significant meaning in terms of understanding how humans relate to narrative. Telling stories is what is left of humanity, it is present even when an apparent "devolution" – the deformation of the bodies of people at CIEL – takes place. The craving for narrative is the reason Christine calls her uprising a literary movement: since humans understand the world through narrative, it is impossible to have a revolution without it. She considers that "perhaps we were some new species, some new genus with alternative sexual opportunities" (22). However, Christine's narration is about understanding what humanity is at its core, while, at the same time, rejecting that humanity in favor of a new one.

War in the novel is frequently connected to being able to appropriate a story and shape it to a given context. Christine's opposition is Jean de Men – reference to the French poet Jean de Meun, Pizan's contemporary – the leader at CIEL and responsible for Joan of Arc's execution. Jean is also responsible for turning Joan into a martyr, graphing the most famous story, also a

Book of Joan. He alleges Joan was misunderstood, by him as well, and ahead of her time, and that her death should be remembered for the saint she was. By telling Joan's story, Jean is also telling his own and asserting his identity and social self as a repented leader, worried about people, and willing to make the world a better place. With Joan's threat eliminated, he is free to use his pre-configurations of welfare and privilege to reconfigure a story and interpret it as a tale of war that justifies exclusion and exclusivism.

The two "books of Joan" thematize how narratives work to reconfigure both storytellers' and readers' realities. Christine and Jean have an audience craving for their stories: humans deprived of their old human body that need narratives to make sense of their selves that are disconnected from their previous culture. A community with shared beliefs is formed around the two storytellers: the radical followers of Christine, who reconfigured the narrative into an invite to a new form of experiencing the body, and the followers of Jean, who interpreted it also as a call for a new life, one that desperately needs a fertile woman to guarantee the survival of the species. As Ricoeur writes, "the narrative work is an invitation to see our praxis as it is ordered by this or that plot articulated in our literature". *The Book of Joan* proposes in its final scenes that it is Christine's view that ultimately settles the remaining community at CIEL. By challenging the relationship between humanity and the body, both Christine and Jean assert their identities and create a community of shared experiences that will retell their stories, reconfiguring it into the ever-going struggle between bringing innovation and maintaining tradition.

The pattern observed in the selected novels is that the storytellers are the ones initially cast aside of humanity for being genetically altered, specimen, mutants, robots, and aliens. They assert their identities through the stories they tell and are labeled humans, but instead of fitting into the traditional roles regarding gender, class, and power politics, they change their environment and create a community with different propositions. These communities display different social arrangements, such as the rescuing of the telling in Le Guin's novel, which has a gender-neutral organization and a communal life based on collective wealth, the erasure of racial difference that

is proposed in Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix* and realized in *Who Fears Death*, and the resignified relation to mutated bodies in Yuknavitch's *The Book of Joan* which proposes a new way to experience sex and sexuality.

The dystopian novels by women studied flirt with the notion of a paradise, of a community designed under better the desire of creating a better world. According to Ingrid Daemrich, narratives by women that incorporate the idea of paradise and storytelling often center on the problems and limitations of those who cannot engage in the quest for paradise. She writes, "By incorporating a 'playful pluralism' of perspectives and meanings, the motif changes the shape of narratives from a familiar, scripted, linear progression to unfamiliar, open-ended, fluid structures that signal stories in progress" (217). Thus, the communities formed are never considered paradise achieved but rather propositions of different ways of living in construction based on the human capacity of telling stories. The ethical dimension of Ricoeur's mimesis cycle is present to ensure narrative to be repeated and reconfigured.

2.4. The Evolution of Stories

If storytelling can be used to create social selves and identities, how does it relate to the more psychological and even neurological aspects of the human brain? Why do humans so fiercely cherish fictional accounts? Can humans be defined as the species that tell stories? In the selected novels, storytelling defines what is human and what is not. More than physical and behavioral characteristics, the ability to understand and create fiction is the ultimate judge of whether a creature can be perceived as human. However, the very possibility of a character moving from non-human to human shows that there are multiple ways of being human.

The following section is divided in two parts. The first enters the realm of biocultural studies in literature, explaining the evolutionary traits that allowed humans to have art as an adaptation, and subsequently, the ability to tell stories. The second is a discussion on how storytelling is a human trait and on how humans, as animals of the *homo* genus, do not consist of a single

species throughout history. This approach in literary studies is fairly recent and may seem to contradict many notions of feminist and cultural studies I present here. However, this disagreement is only apparent. The understanding of how humans, as animals, evolved and became storytellers establishes a common ground, a "human nature." Having such a point of departure does not erase differences, on the contrary.

The ability to narrate and to create fiction allowed humans to form complex societies and to develop different cultures. Jackson considers how

> phylogenetically, the counter-factuality of stories remind us that our evolutionary passage to humanity has depended heavily on a natural ability to lie – to use language not to represent and communicate what is the case but to speak otherwise, in terms of what is in one's interest and to one's advantage to say." (26)

From this capacity to lie systematically humans created elaborated works of fiction. A simple story about how there is no fruit nearby, while in fact there is, comes from the same evolutionary trait that allowed Shakespeare's plays and *Bhagavad Gita* to exist. The cultural factor accounts for diversity and for the many ways that humans can live. Thus, having a common "human nature," the ability to tell stories, allows for infinite possibilities of ways of living and the multiple meanings these ways can have.

2.4.1. Humans Have Evolved to Tell Stories

To show the possibility of bringing literary studies closer to the recent biological discoveries on the human mind is the purpose of Brian Boyd's *On the Origins of Stories*. For him, literary theory has isolated itself from biology and anthropology and even from literature itself by holding onto post-structuralist notions that, although relevant to the development of literary studies, do not connect to the complexity of human experience and recent studies on human evolution. Boyd comments, "storytelling is at the heart of literature, yet literary studies all too rarely explore our ability as readers to construct a story on meager hints, to fill the gaps and infer situations. We take

the process for granted" (10). To understand how and why our species has evolved to create fiction is relevant to a field that studies what can be considered a repository for humanities' capacity for representation and for elaborated forms of telling what is not real.

It is necessary to consider art first in order to understand fiction. Boyd defines art as cognitive play with pattern. It is "a specifically human adaptation, biologically part of our species. It offers tangible advantages for human survival and reproduction, and it derives from play, itself an adaptation widespread among animals with flexible behaviors" (1). He goes on to explain how many animals play and emphasizes how human play is highly social because of shared attention and cooperation. With very long childhoods, humans have time and security to develop their play and fine-tune their abilities to produce art. Boyd claims that art is universal and that every human – with the exceptions of the ones suffering from specific mental disabilities – can produce art, especially the art of fiction.

There are some reasons to consider art at a biocultural level. No society lacks art; it persists generation after generation; art has the same "major forms" such as music and manual work in all cultures; producing art takes time and is costly, but humans do it all the same; it brings about intense emotional reactions to individuals; and anyone can produce art without specialized training (73).[33] To take biology into consideration does not mean to dismiss the cultural aspects of artistic production. Different cultures develop different artistic techniques and different relationships to art, but the act of producing art is the result of an adaptation, meaning that it has a function. Art helps us "refine and retune our minds in models central to human cognition" (381) like social relations, movement, sound, and images; brings a high social status to individual artists; makes

[33] Boyd explains that writing, reading, and science, contrary to art, are social and cultural products that require instruction.

coordination and cooperation better; and promotes creativity collectively and individually. As the art of fiction, storytelling is also part of this pivotal human adaptation.

Humans spend a considerable amount of time in stories that are not true. From literature to cinema going through children's make-believe narratives and gossip, storytelling is at the center of human life. While high primates developed their communication to report vital events such as the presence of predators and resources, humans stepped beyond that to invent narratives about people who never existed doing things that were never real. Boyd connects this to human cognition and our imperfect memory: "the apparent weakness of memory, in reconstructing rather than passively recording experience, seems an evolved design that allows us to recombine freely our past experiences so that we can imagine and presimulate our future" (16). His idea is not far from Ricoeur's point on the three mimesis – the pre-configured, the configured, and the reconfigured – that shows human's capacity to envision new ways of life through narratives. The proximity between the authors' approaches, a philosopher and an evolutionary biologist, points to the prominence of storytelling not only in human activities but in human cognition.

Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* plays with this notion of art as a human evolutionary adaptation. In his project to create genetically engineered humans to replace *Homo sapiens*, Crake designed many "solutions" such as seasonal mating, herbivore eating habits, citrus scent to repel insects, and even instant death at the age of thirty. However, the erasure of symbolic thinking, one of Crake's primary goals, could not be done. The Crakers were still able to create art. By the end of the novel, when Snowman returns to the Crakers, he sees a figure looking like a scarecrow around them. He then can see a whole set of ritual in front of him:

> Now he can see the percussion group. The instruments are a hubcap and a metal rod – those create the clanks – and a series of empty bottles dangling from a tree branch and played with a serving spoon. The boom is from an oil drum, hit with what looks like a kitchen mallet. (419)

Snowman is finally able to understand what is happening when one of the Crakers say, "We made a picture of you, to help us send our voices to you." As genetically engineered humans, the Crakers still have art as adaptation.

The relationship between art and humanity is one of the main themes in *Oryx and Crake*. The function of art, its value, and relevance are a frequent debate between friends Jimmy and Crake. As a "words person," Jimmy defends art while Crake sees it as irrelevant. Nonetheless, it seems that Crake's disregard for the arts was not merely a matter of value. In the final sections of the novel, Snowman remembers Crake's words:

> *Watch out for art*, Crake used to say. *As soon as they start doing art, we're in trouble*. Symbolic thinking of any kind would signal downfall, in Crake's view. Next they'd be inventing idols, and funerals, and Linear B, and kings, and then slavery and war. (419-20)

Art here for Crake is not about art *per se*, but about humanity. His worries revolve around humans' ability to create culture and have cultural practices that, in his view, can only lead to destruction, oppression, and suffering. Crake sees art as the first stage of failure, as proof that humans can only go one way: violence. He never considers that art can go the other way around and allow humans to envision new possibilities. The Crakers, by the end of the MaddAddam trilogy, end up doing just that.

The patterns Boyd refers to in his definition of art are "agents and actions, character and plot, intentions and outcomes" (91). The deviation and following of these patterns provoke emotional reactions in our bodies that eventually can interfere in our neural activity. Stories cause listeners and readers to act like they have experienced the events narrated. In another link to Ricoeur's ideas, stories are how humans experience otherness. Scientific proof of this, according to Boyd, is the existence of mirror neurons that are activated when we get in contact with fiction. They produce the same reaction as if we were to experience what is being told.

Humans have the capacity to understand each other's reasonings and thoughts by observing their behavior and making assumptions about it, that is, they possess a Theory of Mind. Literary

studies have failed to consider this fundamental concept until very recently, even though humans can only understand literature *because* we have a highly developed Theory of Mind. It is even possible to say that literature is Theory of Mind at play because we can only understand characters' intentions, actions, and their subtilties due to it. According to Boyd, "we understand each other so much better because unlike chimpanzees we have crossed a cooperation divide and from infancy have a greater motivation to social engagement and shared attention than any other species" (142). During our childhood, our Theory of Mind is developed, making it possible for us to understand each other's actions, imply reasons, and deduct outcomes.

Boyd's propositions derive from the theory of evolution of species. His point of departure is that

> *adaptations* are complex biological systems, physiological or behavioral, which through the cumulative Darwinian process of *blind variation and selective retention* have developed a *design* that reliably serves some *function*, in other words provides sufficient solution to some problem a species faces to improve chances of survival and reproduction. (381)

For him, art constitutes one of such adaptations that have allowed humans to survive in the environment. The functions of art are thus

> (1) *to refine and retune our minds* in modes central to human cognition – sight, sound, and sociality – which it can do piecemeal through its capacity to motivate us to participate again and again in these high intensity workouts; (2) to raise the *status* of gifted artists; (3) to improve the coordination and *cooperation* of communities, in our very social species; and (4) to foster *creativity* on an individual and social level.

Differently from other high mammals, that can play with flexible behaviors, humans can create and perceive pattern, thus finding making art fulfilling and crucial to acquiring new skills. For Boyd, storytelling comes from our capacity to understand one another by the use of humans' high Theory of Mind. Telling stories also attend a purpose, that is to direct attention, encourage cooperation and creativity.

Narrative is a strategic part of human survival. It allows us to think beyond the present moment, passing on shared beliefs and values that sustain complex cultural and social relations. Boyd explains,

> With narrative we could, for the first time, share experience with others who could then pass on to still others what they have found most helpful for their own reasoning about future actions. We still have to act within our own time, but with narrative we can be partially freed from the limits of present and the self. And our ability to see connections between accounts of the past and present or future action prepared us for some of the core fascinations of fiction. (166)

Throughout the evolution of *Homo sapiens*, fiction is present even at most disadvantageous times and is pervasive to every individual. Skillful creators of fiction, though, gain a higher level of attention from listeners and readers and have their stories passed on more often.

Attention is crucial to storytelling. Humans differ from other mammals because their attention can be shared. Prominent storytellers are individuals that have understood and mastered the elements of narrative that most attract listeners/readers. Narrative has conventions to follow with action and character to be emploted, and both storytellers and listeners are aware of it. However, good storytellers know how to catch the attention of listeners by at the same time pleasing them with having their expectations met and surprising them. Boyd elaborates,

> Such conventions tend to reflect the regularities most important to human lives and minds. We are not *taught* narrative. Rather, narrative reflects our mode of understanding events, which appears largely – but with crucial exceptions – to be a generally mammalian mode of understanding. The many culturally local conventions of human behavior and explanation tend to be adjustable parameters with common cognitive systems. (131)

In this sense, Ricoeur's ideas of humans understanding the world through narrative is accurate. But, as most mammals share this feature, it is possible to consider that humans not only understand the world through narrative, but they also understand it through untrue narratives.

Boyd's discussion on how humans evolved to tell stories does not disregard the other side of the coin, that we have evolved to be listeners as well. He writes, "We are not passive receptacles but highly active reconstructers" (173). The understanding of the world through narrative calls for some of them to be selected and passed on to future generations since they are keepers of relevant modes of living to a given society. That is the reason some narratives perish while others survive, especially in the case of literature, be it oral or written. Works such as the *Iliad*, the *Bible*, and the *Bhagavad Gita* carry values considered essential to survival and coexistence in their cultures of origin – and conversely shape the way their cultures value ideas; however, they succeed through time because they skillfully attracted readers' attention. Listeners thus could remember these stories to pass on to the next generations, even though the story is never the same. Our imperfect memories allow us to fill in the gaps, highlight some aspects, hide others, so every listener is also a storyteller responsible for the constant movement between innovation and sedimentation of a culture. Even with the advent of the written text, it is possible to observe the constant reconstructions in narratives, from the many versions of the *Bible* to the never settled form of online publication.

I use *On the Origins of Stories* in this dissertation as a source for scientific evidence of the role of narrative in our species and I bear in mind that Boyd's work is also a proposition for a new type of literary analysis. For him, "much subtle evidence for human psychology has accumulated in the world's literature, and perhaps nowhere more than in the way story and counterstory weave together in the web of human life" (174). The rescuing of understanding how a storyteller gets the listeners' attention conducts us to explain the "design of a story;" one of Boyd's objectives. Even though I do not attempt to provide evolutionary literary criticism – an evocritic – analysis, here, I agree with his biocultural approach to literature in the sense that it encompasses an understanding of human biology to the impacts of a culture without losing sight of the common ground in the development of the human mind

No wonder science fiction has turned to exploring the importance of storytelling as an essential part of humans more deeply. As recent research understands better the functioning of

human neurological pathways, the relationship between our Theory of Mind, reasoning, and neural responses to literature flourish. Science fiction has drawn not only on the implications of humans' capacity to understand themselves and their environment but also on our capacity to act on it. If telling stories is such a definitive characteristic of our species, what happens when we experiment on ourselves or encounter humanoid aliens? Are we/they still humans? Dystopia, mainly, has frequently dealt with these questions by exaggerating the tensions of the present time in the form of future speculation. The selected dystopian novels by women analyzed here add to this body of exploration on the connections between storytelling and human nature. However, even in their nightmarish societies of extinction and exploitation, our ability to narrate is presented as hope to create something new.

2.4.2. The Ability to Tell Stories Defines Being Human

In Yuval Harari's controversial *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, fiction is seen as collective imagination used to create different realities made of norms and values. It is unique to *Homo sapiens* as a species, the only one to have a Cognitive Revolution that resulted in *sapiens* conquering the whole world. Harari states that this happened about 70,000 years ago when the ability to speak about things, events, and people that are not true emerged (24).[34] This new capability gave *sapiens* the advantage of cooperation in large numbers: the sharing of a belief, a fiction, holds people together towards a larger goal. As a result, other *homo* species that lived alongside *sapiens* for a time such as *Neanderthals* and *Denisovans* became extinct.

Harari sees storytelling as a universal *sapiens* trait, responsible for all the other forms of fiction that developed later. Because we are highly social animals, *sapiens* have depended much on

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[34] Harari refers to humans as *sapiens* throughout his book because, according to him, other humans, such as the *Neanderthals*, existed before.

gossip so successful individuals can be followed and groups aggregated. Differently from Boyd, Harari does not attempt to define art as an adaptation. Under the umbrella term "Cognitive Revolution," he poses the idea that somehow *sapiens* evolved the ability to gossip to the point it became the basis for fiction, without following carefully evolutionary considerations as Boyd does. Harari's book has interesting insights about humans in the plural, not only as *sapiens* as we usually do, and undoubtedly provides interesting points on how fiction shapes the natural world. However, his overview of humankind is dangerously imperialistic. The contradictions of thought are many, and there is a pinch of sensationalism and incorrectness to his historical accounts.[35] Still, the considerations on the Cognitive Revolution and later the future of *Homo sapiens* are worth reading since they pose the importance of fiction to the establishment of our species and to its supposed continuity.

One of the claims in *sapiens* is that the complexity of human negotiations, ideologies, and conflicts are due to fiction. For him, "none of these things exists outside the stories that people invent and tell one another. There are no gods in the universe, no nations, no money, no human rights, no laws, and no justice outside the common imagination of human beings" (28). This

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[35] Galen Strawson points to the inaccuracies on the account of the Battle of Navarino. John Sexton has called Harari's book "a speculative reconstruction of human evolution." Harari claims that morality is a fiction, but later on refers to the treatment of animals in food production chains as criminal. His claim that empires have been the most successful way of being to *Homo sapiens* dangerously approach justifying genocide, and create a hierarchy among cultures that puts imperialistic ones at the top. The biggest contradiction is that even though the empire logic still prevails and is responsible for contemporary technology and ways of life, Harari claims that the world leaders of today are pacifists. An argument easily refuted by an analysis of the American war industry, massive investments on strategic welfare, and the number of civil wars.

statement seems obvious, however, the affirmation that money, for example, is a fiction that most *sapiens* agree on, unravels the immense *sapiens* capacity for fiction that we tend to take for granted.

Mark Turner is another author to consider the human ability to narrate as essential to our condition. In *The Literary Mind*, he defends that "narrative imagining – story – is the fundamental instrument of thought. Rational capacities depend on it" (4). The human mind is capable of projecting one story onto another, expanding it when it's necessary to create new possibilities of thinking, thus making storytelling "indispensable to human cognition generally" (5). In this sense, there is not much difference in elaborating the plot of *Anna Karenina* or telling a neighbor about how someone lost their keys again: all minds are literary minds because that is how our cognition works and how humans extract meaning from it. Turner focuses on the parable genre to show how the human mind constructs stories and projects them.

A problem with Turner's theory is that humans have an extraordinary capacity for expression in various and subtle manners. Boyd points to how the parabolic principle cannot explain narrative fully. He claims,

> Stories differ from events not only because they are indirect but also because they are told by storytellers. We interpret the actions of others all the time, and we often act … only because we want others to interpret our actions in this or that way. Storytelling is a particular kind of action, and telling a particular story invites an audience to interpret not only the story's events but also the storyteller's action of telling. (369-70)

Meta-representation is key to human storytelling. It allows us to be aware of the act of telling itself, thus opening multiple interpretations by both storytellers and listeners.

This meta-representational ability humans have results from our understanding of mental states. Lisa Zunshine in *Why We Read Fiction* defends that reading fiction challenges our Theory of Mind because of the multiple levels of representation implied. She writes that "fiction engages, teases, and pushes to its tentative limits our mind-reading capacity" (4). That is why people with autism do not frequently show interest in storytelling and in narrative according to their placing

the spectrum (8). Autists have problems with Theory of Mind, thus having difficulties in social communication, implying meaning, and understanding fiction. Humans dive into multiple levels of Theory of Mind in fiction. It enables us

> to invest literary characters with a potential for a broad array of thoughts, desires, intentions, and feelings and then look for textual cues that allow us to figure out their states of mind and thus predict their behavior, our metarepresentational ability all allows us to discriminate among the streams of information coming at us via all this mind-reading. (60)

That is why, when reading Winterson's *The Stone Gods*, one can be aware that what one is reading is not true and at the same time engage in it. It also allows one to relate what he or she is reading to the world. Moreover, the reader can grasp the overall complexities of the narrative inside a narrative and even imply and predict the behavior of all the characters involved, as well as the implications of the events narrated. This massive cognitive effort is often disregarded by literary studies but it is at the core of how humans live.

Are humans then animals that tell stories? According to recent discoveries, it is possible to say so:

> *Storytelling* appeals to our social intelligence. It arises out of our intense interest in monitoring one another and out of our evolved capacity to understand one another through *Theory of Mind*. Our capacity to *comprehend events*, many facets which we share with other animals, underlies our capacity for story but should not be confused with *narrative*, with *telling* events, an effortful process we undertake only to direct the attention of others to events real or imagined. (Boyd 382)

At the core of fiction lies the opening of perspectives and the possibility of envisioning other prospects of life. The novels I selected indicate that in many senses. They are works of fiction written by and aimed at humans that evolved to create and understand events that are not real. They are dystopias, a genre whose very definition is the envisioning of a different reality. They meta-represent storytelling by presenting multiple narrative voices. They discuss the mechanics

and reasons for storytelling. And, finally, they meta-represent the idea of thinking about alternative ways of living.

2.4.3. When Aliens, Robots and Genetically Modified Creatures Tell Their Stories

As Harari states at the beginning of *Sapiens*, non-*sapiens* humans existed and will come to exist. Our species has been the solo human for about 13,000 years. It is not agreed whether *sapiens* are responsible for the genocide of previous hominids, for successful offspring, or a bit of both. However, technology has opened the debate about how far we can go and still be humans. Our species has been intervening in its biology for millennia, but robotics, space exploration, genetic engineering have put the question closer to us. Science fiction has been debating this for long, and a question it should ask is: If androids dream of electric sheep, can they also tell stories?

The perception of the non-human as human, or non-*sapiens* as *sapiens*, to follow Harari's usage, in the selected novels happens when they can tell stories and create their myths. The most prominent examples are the robot Spike in Winterson's *The Stone Gods*, the degenerate human survivors in Yuknavitch's *The Book of Joan*, and the genetically engineered Crakers in Atwood's *MaddAddam*.[36]

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[36] These are the examples chosen to be discussed; but the pattern is observed in the other novels of the corpus. I present here the novels and their most prominent non-human presence: *The Telling* (Akans), *Midnight Robber* (Tan-Tan's hybrid son), *The Testing* (the zombies), *Divergent* (the genetically altered people of Chicago), *Who Fears Death* (Onyesonwu), *Cinder* (Cinder),*The Book of Phoenix* (Phoenix), and *The Fifth Season* (the Orogene people and the Stone Eaters). There are also novels in which the idea of a non-human is not explicit, but in which there is a questioning of whether humanity is still the same after a major catastrophe like DuPrau's *The City of Ember*, Lepucki's

Spike is the robot created for presenting solutions for humanity's problems in Winterson's *The Stone Gods*. In her first appearance in the section "Planet Blue," her time of service has ended; she returned with the crew from the successful mission of finding a new planet so the inhabitants of Orbus can get another chance. However, she is to be debriefed and later destroyed. Billie considers in her first sight of her,

> there's a robot with them – well, a *Robot sapiens*, incredibly sexy, with that look of regret they all have before they are dismantled. It's policy; all information-sensitive robots are dismantled after the mission, so that their data cannot be accessed by hostile forces. She's been across the universe, and now she's going to the recycling unit. The great thing about robots, even these *Robot sapiens*, is that nobody feels sorry for them. They are only machines. (6)

Even though Billie recognizes that Spike is a being that has had experiences worth preserving, the scientist considers her an *it*. Moreover, Billie's empathy towards the regretful robots does not affect her to the point of humanizing Spike and her suffering.

Her point of view slowly changes throughout the narrative. Spike decides to run away in order not to be dismantled, and she rescues Billie, a target for the government for being considered a rebel, so they can join the mission that returns to Planet Blue. Billie says, "*Robo sapiens*. As far away from a BeatBot [a simple machine robot] as Neanderthal Man is from us. No, I have to revise that because we are regressing. … Meanwhile, the *Robo sapiens* is evolving" (17). This consideration slightly shifts Billie's perception of Spike: if the robot is evolving, it means it is an independent being, with a conscience, and able to adapt to its environment.

California, Collin's *The Hunger Games*, Condie's *Matched*, Olivier's *Dellirium*, Hagy's *Scribe*, and Ryan's *Spark*.

The interaction between the two women – since the robot is gendered as female – lead to a love affair. Nonetheless, Billie still resists changing her preconceptions towards Spike: "'You are a robot,' …. 'And you are a human being – but I don't hold it against you.' 'Your systems are neural, not limbic. You can't feel emotion.' Spike said, 'Human beings often display emotions they do not feel. And they often feel emotions they do not display'" (76). According to Cavalcanti, love is the intervention necessary for Billie to humanize Spike and to later shatter her previous binary views on human as opposed to machine ("O amor"). I agree that their affair helps Billie to see Spike under different light; however, I do not think it is at this moment that the robot is humanized. Even after their affair, Billie insists on long talks about the definition of human, an attempt to rationalize the difference that exists between her and her lover.

Only when Spike reports having been able to understand literature does Billie let go of her resistance: "I can say no, I can change my mind, I can have regrets, but I can't wipe out the yes. One word, and a million worlds close" (83-84). As Spike shows herself as one capable of feeling emotion towards poetry, she is humanized in Billie's eyes. She exhibits the kind of cognitive understanding associated with humans and the common understanding of the world through narrative. Since they now possess a common ground, Billie feels safe to get closer to her.

But it is when Spike is able to tell a story that Billie ultimately recognizes her love for her: "I kissed her and forgot death" (108). There is no longer the worry that they are not equals. Spike obliges Billie's request for a story when they are waiting to die on Planet Blue. She tells of a "world formed out of Nothing" (109), formulating on the previous story she heard from Captain Handsome about unusual, dangerous, and decadents far-away planets and transforming it into a genesis myth: "and out of Nothing will come a tree, and in the tree will sit a bird…." She appropriates poetic language and can discuss her and her lover's imminent death in the form of a genesis story of new things to come.

Spike puts herself as part of the intelligent life, but she rejects humanity's view of being superior to other forms of life. She claims, "There are many kinds of life …. Humans have always

assumed that theirs was the only kind that mattered. That's how you destroyed your planet" (79). For her, it is necessary to value life itself and to intervene to stop cycles of destruction. When faced with the reality of her death, she sends a signal to the moon and says, "One day, perhaps, maybe, when a receiver is pointing in the right direction, someone will pick this up. Someone, somewhere, when there is life like ours" (100). This "ours" refers to Billie and herself, beings capable of intervening. Spike does not attempt to feel as part of humanity or even to be considered human. It is Billie who perceives her as human when she becomes a storyteller. In the other sections in the novel, Spike appears again as attempting interventions and promoting change, breaking binaries and boundaries, and proposing ways of life that are not only more ecological, but fairer to all beings.

The survivors at the space station CIEL in Yuknavitch's *The Book of Joan* suffer from the aftermaths of living in space, and their bodies become deformed and infertile. The only feature that humanizes them for the reader is their insistence on producing art, specifically skin graphing, a form of storytelling. The protagonist Christine considers, "At one time, in the early years here, I remember, we still believed that ascension involved some rise into a higher state of being. Not just an escape from a murdered planet to a floating space world, but a climb toward an actual evolution of the mind and soul" (7). Their situation, though, presents to the reader humans as the leftovers of humanity in abject bodies that are described in gruesome ways. Yuknavitch's descriptions of sex sessions and torture procedures are graphic and gory as if to reinforce that the individuals living on that space station have nothing do to with humanity. It is only with Christine's storytelling that the narrative humanizes them.

Christine hesitates between considering her people a new species or just humanity's decadence. She wonders, "Maybe there never has been a time when we were human apart from this. Maybe we were always meant to come to this part of our own story" (44). As she defines history as destiny and humankind as a species doomed to fall, her narrative approximates to that of apocalypse in which the revelation is that the human's desire for destruction ultimately reflected on the

body. Yet, Christine advocates for humanity at the core of things when she is graphing her skin with Joan's story. Then instead of the horrid descriptions of violence and corruption, the reader is given an account on desire not as a destructive force, but as the creation of life. "In a world that had lost its ability to procreate, the story of love became paramount" (15), considers Christine talking about her wish to write Joan's story in her body.

The Book of Joan is not about coming back to some ancient human time when humanity was pure and unaware of evil. Storytelling humanizes the inhabitants of CIEL who crave stories to the point they graph them on their skins, but Christine's revolution aims at a way of life that is neither the violent behavior on CIEL nor the destruction on Earth. She points out to a different solution in which humans must accept their deformed bodies but not embrace their decadence. There is not the desire of coming back to humanity as it were, but the initial humanization of people on CIEL works to suggest that the reader should reflect on how life is possible outside humanity's status, even the paradigm of the body. Humans must become something else to survive – that is Christine's objective with her stories.

The Crakers in Atwood's *MaddAddam* are on the verge of Harari's idea of Cognitive Revolution. They are beginning to use language in the unique way that makes possible to tell about what is not real. The previous volumes of the trilogy, *Oryx and Crake*, and *The Year of the Flood*, present how the initial design to make the Crakers unable to represent reality failed. At the end of both novels, the Crakers create a ritual for Snowman with singing and a representation of him under the belief that they were curing him. In *MaddAddam*, the surviving scientists that helped to create the Crakers form a community. During a conversation, one of them says, "Too bad you didn't code in a Cancel button for the singing. … It gets on my nerves" (43), to which the response is, "The singing was not my idea. We couldn't erase it without turning them into zucchinis." The capacity for representing the world real and interpreting it is portrayed as a core feature for humanity.

The Crakers initially engage in simple rituals with Snowman – and later with Toby – in which singing and storytelling are present alongside with offerings and symbols. The ceremony is described as tiring for Toby: "not only she has to put on the absurd red hat and eat the ritual fish, which isn't always what you'd called cooked, but there is so much she needs to invent" (105). She must balance keeping the story straightforward and mythology-like while at the same time being of interest to the Crakers. Based on these stories, they build their myths, including genesis.

By the conclusion of the novel, Blackbeard tells the ending of Zeb's and Toby's story, how they died, and what their deaths meant. After this, they can join the human survivors in a council to decide the fate of the criminals, an act that can be understood as their reckoning as equals. The MaddAddamites humanize the Crakers after they see that they have developed their own culture. However, the Crakers do not want to become humans; instead, they still see humans as the "two-skinned ones," fragile because they do not have natural features in their bodies to help them survive in that hostile environment. The contact between these two ways of life and the offspring that comes with it point to a shared life between these two species.

The storytellers in the selected novels studied in this dissertation do not want to become *Homo sapiens*. The traditional human status, which was used in works such as Isaac Asimov's "The Bicentennial Man" and Steven Spielberg's *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*, as a goal for machines and other forms with consciousness is obsolete. The stories the protagonists in these novels tell work to affirm their identities and to define them as new species. They do not want to be like *Homo sapiens*; they want to be *homo crakers*, *homo machina*, and *homo aka* with their unique paradigms to live by. In this way, storytelling can be a movement from creating a self (identity) to establishing a shared culture (society), and finally as a definitive feature of a species (a new human).

Chapter 3: Knowledge as Stories and Stories as Knowledge

3.1. Scientific and Narrative Knowledge

The trend of using storytelling to discuss the meanings attributed to the human experience in twenty-first-century dystopian novels by women focuses on the idea of communal life. They present these communities as ones formed around the act of storytelling. Sharing stories around a circle is a frequent image throughout the selected novels, as well as sections in which a portrayal of traditional stories cast light on the current events of the narrative. The rescuing of stories equals the foundations of the new community. In *The Telling*, for instance, Sutty and the Akans negotiate the existence of their group after she and Yara share the stories of their lives right after the community revisits their traditions. The same idea is present in *The Fifth Season*, each chapter of which quotes a piece of lore that is later reviewed by the protagonist in her pursuit of finding a surviving society. A similar strategy is used in *The Year of the Flood:* The Gardener's chants introduce the chapter and are used to regulate the life of the people in the Rooftop Garden. Narrative knowledge reflects the human experience of living in a community.

The knowledge produced in these stories is not limited to the scientific paradigm and often relies on and rescues folklore, indigenous knowledge, and religion. These traditions are often portrayed as a way of living in tune with nature and fellow humans and amplifying the possibilities of achieving a more harmonious society. The ultimate consequence of this rescuing of knowledge is its use by the initially perceived as non-humans, who then elaborate on them to create their own and consequently open up the possibilities of being human.

There is no rejection of the scientific method, but rather an attempt to escape the science/nature dichotomy and propose alternative ways of living based on more open and critical forms of knowledge. The use of the scientific method in these new societies is still highly present, nonetheless. For example, in *MaddAddam*, the surviving humans develop their housing using observation, hypothesis, testing of hypothesis, and drawing of conclusions. In *The Stone Gods*, Spike still uses her scientific data to make decisions and help the people around her. The difference in these novels is that the way of looking at the world is changed when other forms of knowledge

are incorporated. The view of the world as a living thing, in *The Fifth Season*, for instance, gives the peoples of the Stillness great respect and fear for the Earth. However, it does not prevent them from studying geology and learning about their environment. Science and narrative are inseparable, and storytelling becomes a form of knowledge.

3.1.1 In Pursuit of Knowledge

The analysis of knowledge is a somewhat controversial field in philosophy dedicated to defining knowledge as a concept. What exactly means to know something? According to Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa and Matthias Steup, in their entry for the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, knowledge "seems to be more like a way of getting at the truth." The articulation of the meanings and conditions of this proposed truth fosters the debate amongst philosophers, especially in the twentieth century, but there has been no agreement on the mode of analysis. Some epistemologists such as Linda Zagzebski even reject the notion that knowledge can be analyzed.

My aim in this dissertation is not to present a definition of knowledge; however, it is essential to consider that there are multiple approaches to the analysis of it and no consensus. Philosophers find it challenging to distinguish knowledge from belief or even say they are the same thing. For this reason, when I refer to knowledge, I mean a way of providing access to a fact. In this sense, science is a form of knowledge because it is a form of accessing the world.

In Le Guin's 2000 novel, the telling is a form of knowledge because it enables the Akans to reflect and act upon their reality. Sutty, after her observations on the planet, concludes that the telling "is a way of thinking and living developed and elaborated over thousands of years by the vast majority of human beings on this world, an enormous interlocking system" (98). She learns that in Aka this way of knowledge allowed its inhabitants to understand their environment, and make decisions about agriculture, medicine, and engineering.

3.1.2. The Postmodern Condition

Jean-François Lyotard analyzes the condition of knowledge in contemporary societies, the one he refers to as "highly developed" or "postmodern." He considers the crisis of narratives at the end of the nineteenth century as a starting point to show the relationship between narratives and science, specifically the legitimation of the two discourses. The status of science and its control of knowledge in contemporary societies is the focus of Lyotard's T*he Postmodern Condition*.

The transformations that occurred in society post-industrial age, as well as the development of technology, have impacted our relationship to knowledge. For Lyotard, this change is inevitable because "the nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged within this context of general transformation" (4). The technology involved in spreading knowledge produces the idea of "knowledge as a product" instead of "knowledge as training." In this sense, knowledge is produced to be sold as a commodity and the idea of the acquiring it through time becomes increasingly obsolete. The primary objective in these postmodern societies is no longer knowledge *per se*, but the exchange of it. The circulation of information is, for Lyotard, the most dramatic impact on human's relation to knowledge in highly developed societies. It becomes then commerce as any other in which power politics play to determine what knowledge is useful and what is not.

Lyotard's text, published in 1979, is a valid starting point to discuss how the free and rapid access to information is not a transparent transaction as it may initially appear to be. It is impossible to produce knowledge without a political bias and even the discourse of science that frequently claims its neutrality on political matters is embedded on perspectives and points of view associated to different instances of power. An example of this in the selected novels is the MaddAddam trilogy in which a corporate state overtly sells knowledge to its citizens while still attempts at preserving the idea that scientific research can only bring progress. In *Oryx and Crake*, Snowman says "On day one they toured some of the wonders of Watson-Crick. Crake was interested in everything – all the projects that were going on. He kept saying 'Wave of the future'" (236). The college named after the discoverers of DNA focus on scientific research that promises the solution for humanity's

needs such as cure for diseases, and food availability. Nonetheless, each research project in Watson-Crick is tied to a corporation. The novel takes the idea of corporate funded science to an extreme: while the discourse focuses on science for the benefit of all, it is actually directed to a few corporate elites.

Another example of the insistence of portraying science as neutral is *The Stone Gods*. In the novel, the discovery of another planet, presented as a wonder for the population and as a sign of the potentials of humanity, is funded by corporate owners who want to scape Orbus, a dying planet. So every scientific development is aimed at providing this breakthrough. However, as the protagonist Billie finds out, that "the rich are leaving [to newfound Planet Blue]. The rest of the human race will have to cope with what's left of Orbus, a planet becoming hostile to human life after centuries of human life becoming hostile to the planet" (73). The widespread propaganda of science being able to save Orbus life is just used so the population can support the program and promote more funding. The name of the ship that is going to take the rich to their new planet is Mayflower, a comment on how the corporate logic of late capitalism in the United States is the founding element of Planet Blue.

Lyotard proposes the existence of narrative knowledge, a form to access the world that differs from science. He writes,

> scientific knowledge does not represent the totality of knowledge; it has always existed in addition to, and in competition and conflict with, another kind of knowledge, which I call narrative in the interests of simplicity. … I do not mean to say that narrative knowledge can prevail over science, but its model is model is related to ideas of eternal equilibrium and conviviality. (7)

Narrative knowledge derives from traditional customs, passed through generations mainly through oral storytelling, bringing knowledge of the natural world as well as narratives around morals and ethics. This is the kind of knowledge Benjamin evokes in his "The Storyteller," the knowledge that comes from experience.

For Lyotard, the crises of grand narratives brought the delegitimation of knowledge, especially science. In modern societies, operating under Enlightenment logic, there is a meta discourse to justify science by itself using some grand narrative. For example, the idea of progress and science as essential to the development of a better humanity. The notion of objectivity and neutrality masks this positivistic view still present in today's scientific research. Conversely, postmodern societies do not present grand narratives, and metadiscourse is absent since grand narratives are no longer credible. The crisis of narrative brings about delegitimation. Thus, postmodern knowledge, the knowledge that doubts grand narratives, becomes the solution to combine opposing forces.

Lyotard claims we live today mostly on a postmodern society, however most views on science are still rooted on the Enlightment logic. Mainly when the scientific discourse is directed to the general public with promises of better life and health. What the chosen novels show is how most Western societies live in between the two paradigms: science still uses its grand narratives to justify itself, however more cracks appear on those discourses. In novels such as *The Stone Gods*, and the MaddAddam trilogy, science is the last grand narrative standing. The dismantling of it, however, is not its total obliteration: it is seeing science for what it is – a form of knowledge like many others.

3.1.3 Organizing Knowledge

Science and religion are of the main subsystems inside a culture that shape the way knowledge is organized. According to Julio Jeha, culture is a complex of actions, beliefs, traditions, norms, and values that distinctively constitute the way of living of a group. It is a system that attempts at homogenizing the many idiosyncrasies and contradictions inside a group. This mechanism ensures the identity and survival of a group in opposition to others (139). Ideas on science and religion play a crucial role in these systems because they provide the tools by which such homogenization can take place. The specific jargons and practices of science, as well as the rites and rituals of religion shape a given culture and help to spot individuals that do not conform.

Religion proposes a single grand narrative to explain and organize knowledge in the world. Jeha defines it as the model capable of interpreting the universe according to a deity (140). In the religious model, creators and creatures have a purpose and roles to play in the culture and behavior that deviates from the assigned roles are punished. Boyd considers how "storytelling, like other arts, can open up new possibilities, but it can also be commandeered by religion's power to enhance within-group social cohesion" (199). In this sense, religion is the totalizing narrative. It is narrative knowledge that claims to be absolute.

Religion as knowledge has root on how the human mind works by creating narratives. Boyd writes,

> religion offers another reassurance to creatures with both the blessings and the curse of imagination. Our metrarepresentational minds allow us to entertain images of our own death or our absence from the world after death. That such imaginings have haunted our species since long before the first civilizations is a matter of archeological record. (285)

In this sense, religion offers consolation and reward. Following a specific set of rules, a society can thrive or perish under the protection of a supposed divine being. As knowledge, it is static; it does not encourage elaboration or criticism. It is a fixed way of accessing the world. It is, nonetheless, appealing to humans' narrative minds that want to attach meaning to existence.

Science proposes the description of the natural world, even though it does not correspond to the objective world as many people think. According to Jeha, symbolic worlds and scientific models describe and re-describe the world, but none of them present a literal truth as a direct correspondence to the world. The scientific model represents physical surroundings for prediction and control (150). Science does not equal knowledge nor does science equal reality. It is a type of knowledge that attempts at describing the world and its phenomena by creating hypothesis and testing them. The results are descriptions, not absolute truths.

Boyd considers science as a narrative that attempts at being verifiable. In this sense, it is the opposite of religion because one of its assumptions is critical thinking. However, this does not

mean that science cannot be totalizing. Scientific discourse as derived from the Enlightenment disregards the perspectives of marginal identities such as women, and people of color. In this way, it becomes fixed in an idea of totality that denies its own principal of verification. Science as knowledge should be open to welcome different manners of explaining the natural world in verifiable ways that include these marginal identities.

The selected novels provide a discussion on the organization of knowledge and on how the division between the narratives of science and religion are not as clear cut as one might think. In *The Telling*, for instance, the narrative knowledge of the telling cannot be categorized as religion because it is not totalizing and neither as science because of its holistic view of the world. However, it bears aspects of both: it gives purpose to human existence and encourages critical thinking. In *The Fifth Season*, the stone eaters have advanced knowledge of the natural world, however they can only convey it to humans through storytelling that aims at attaining knowledge to existence.

3.1.4. The Idea of Science

Science has gained in the last centuries the status of a prestigious form of knowledge, often defended as the most precise and comprehensive way to access the world. Sandra Harding, in *Objectivity and Diversity*, has pointed out how "each of the various criteria proposed for distinguishing modern Western science from other knowledge-seeing practices has slowly but surely withered away" (x). She discusses how this view on science is detrimental to the scientific project itself: how on closing the door to other forms of knowledge, the scientific method remains limited.

A definition of science as proposed in the twentieth century states it as,

> a distinctive method (induction, deduction), a critical attitude toward traditional belief, a distinctive language (mathematics, observation sentences), a distinctive metaphysics (disenchanted, secular, material, primary and secondary properties), and a distinctive epistemology (justified true belief).

Harding considers, however, the way other forms of knowledge also fit into this definition. As examples, she cites how indigenous knowledge has often been labeled as non-scientific, but remarks how Micronesians developed a complex navigational system thousands of years ago. They followed scientific principles such as observation, reproducibility, and verification. Their logic was executed and recorded differently from Western views of science, being then considered non-scientific. Even Islamic and Hindu knowledge, which have contributed greatly to the development of mathematics, are often called anti-scientific and mere "cultural expressions" when it comes to other fields of study such as medicine.

In times in which the science has been put into question by movements such as Flat Earthers and AntiVax, it may seem counterproductive to criticize the scientific discourse and value other forms of knowledge. Is not the anti-vaccine movement "another form of knowledge that questions science"? The answer is no. Such movements that deny scientific evidence and create their own methods of "finding the truth" are fully moved by conspiracy theories based on the idea of negation, not of proposition. Indigenous knowledge does not deny science; it proposes other manners of accessing the world. It is not a situation of one or the other as it is with the absurd Flat Earth Movement. Broadening Western perspectives on what science is and can be may enable solutions to the problems of the contemporary world, according to Harding. Incorporating elements from "other sciences" is not bringing the supernatural back to the table, or the fall into conspiracy theories, but the insertion of different logics that are not rooted in positivism, exclusivism, and the view of humans as separated from nature.

Objectivity is a founding claim of science, and Harding proposes that it is possible to review and reclaim this notion bringing new perspectives into the scientific discourse. Moreover, such perspectives may come from indigenous knowledge and other forms of "sciences." Science today, as it is done in the West, especially in developed countries, is deeply rooted in positivist notions and Christianity's suppositions (Harding xiv). Putting science out of "prestigious knowledge" pedestal may help to look more critically and diversify at its practices. As science is

one of the subsystems that influence our culture, a change in its perspective may fundamentally alter the *status quo* for a more inclusive society.

This idea of having a different perspective on science pervades most of the novels chosen for this dissertation. An obvious example is *The Telling*, with its unique holistic view of the world through narrative knowledge, but it is also present less explicitly in novels such as *Midnight Robber*, the Broken Earth trilogy, and *Who Fears Death*. These novels offer a different view of science that is more diversified and understood under different paradigms.

3.2. Perceiving the World

The selected novels show how the initially considered non-humans construct their knowledge, their way of accessing the world, and how this changes their relation to others. When they show they can organize knowledge, they are valued by the humans around them, often being humanized. As robots, genetically engineered humans, and aliens display narrative expertise, the human experience at its primal is recognized. One can think about the world narratively and represent it.

Harari poses that *Homo sapiens* has endured a Cognitive Revolution, responsible for enabling sapiens to conquer the world, including the other human varieties that existed previously. According to him, as a species, we survived and thrived because of our unique language: the ability to speak about fiction is an exclusive feature of sapiens. He writes,

> fiction has enabled us not merely to imagine things, but to do so collectively. We can weave common myths such as the biblical creation story; the Dreamtime myths of Aboriginal Australians, and the nationality myth of modern states. Such myths give sapiens the unprecedented ability to cooperate flexibly in large numbers. (25)

The development of the narrative is responsible for sapiens' survival. It enables social life in large groups, allowing cooperation between strangers if they share the same narrative belief.

Jeha considers the worldbuilding of fantasy worlds a distinctive evolutionary human trait because it allows humans to disconnect relations in the material world and reconnect them to fundamentals only existent in their imagination (1). Precisely this happens to the Crakers in the MaddAddam trilogy, for instance. They start with myths of creation, with a search for explaining how their world came to be. By the end of *MaddAddam*, they have developed art. They produce pictorial representations as well as stories that are no longer wholly attached to cosmogenesis. They have learned to produce representation of things only present in their cognition. The same can be said of Spike in *The Stone Gods*. She can create tales of her own, stories about fictitious exotic planets. When both Crakers and Spike show their abilities, the humans around them first respond with wonder and later with acknowledgment. These non-sapiens to use Harari's term, share a ground because they access the world based on the same principle of narrative.

It is possible to establish here a link between Harari's thoughts on an interpretive history of humanity and Boyd's proposition of art as adaptation. Even though they do not refer to each other, the two authors are aligned in centering the ability to create fiction, from its most basic level, such as gossip, as the fundamental quality of human nature. Both of them recognize the roles of culture in forming identities but propose that biologically *Homo sapiens* are prone to tell stories and to organize knowledge around this notion. I believe this biological take on the common grounds of human's mind is not restrictive, and denying of culture. Quite the contrary. Because we can create fiction, we have developed so many different cultures that mold our experiences in various manners. As Harari addresses the issue of culture, he states, "ever since the Cognitive Revolution, there hasn't been a single natural way of life for sapiens. There are only cultural choices, from among a bewildering palette of possibilities" (45). These myriad possibilities, though, are enacted through the unique way *Homo sapiens* access the world.

In this way, storytelling has an essential role in human life because it sharpens our social cognition. With this ability, humans have created various societies and operated under different discourses of how to perceive the world. Philosophy and science are part of such discourses that

guide humans in their organization of the world and their life in large groups. However, narrative knowledge might be considered the only kind of knowledge since humans process information narratively. Many of the selected novels explore this notion, as I discuss later in this chapter.

How can humans have such a sharp perception of their environment and the capacity to understand it narratively? Humans have a highly developed Theory of Mind, the ability to attribute mental states to oneself and others. According to Zunshine, "Theory of Mind appears to be our key cognitive endowment as a social species" (8). Even though other mammals can understand others' actions, behaviors, desires, and feelings, humans do it in a very advanced manner. Even simple daily accounts presuppose many levels of Theory of Mind. For example, the sentence "It is absurd that you considered what I might have felt about what you wanted me to feel" implies very complex layers of intentions, feelings, and desires. However, (most) humans have no difficulty in understanding it.

This capacity for Theory of Mind enables storytelling. Zunshine proposes that "Theory of Mind makes reading fiction possible, but reading fiction does not make us into better mind-readers" (35). The idea is that humans have Theory of Mind regardless. It is how our brains are wired. Thus, narrative as knowledge is possible. Humans understand metarepresentation and implications about things, people, and events that never existed. They can follow stories, repeat it to others, interpret it, and alter it because of Theory of Mind.[37]

Psychology and neuroscience alike have recognized that humans do not have perfect memories. When remembering events, our narrative minds fill in the gaps and create impressions that are not always an accurate report of what happened (Boyd 153). However, instead of weaknesses,

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[37] Contrary to bees, which can report the discovery of a source of nectar to another bee, but the insect that receives the information cannot pass it on, unless it goes to the source too (Jeha 42). Then it can give the info to another bee, but not retell the info first received.

this particular feature allowed humans to create. To be in constant storytelling, not only representing their realities but creating it.

3.3. Questioning and Proposing Knowledge

The selected novels question the nature of knowledge and propose more plural, open ways of seeing the world. The starting point of this discussion often starts with the protagonist finding out that the world he or she knows, based on the premises of science as progress, is limiting, violent, exclusivist, and dangerous. Science is presented as a tool for manipulation and to justify questionable actions and politics that often lead to the revocation of human rights, forbid freedom of speech, and cause genocide. Other forms of knowledge such as narrative are proposed to counterpoint this view and allow the protagonists to assert themselves, their culture, and their communities so later on a new way of living is possible.

Following my division of the novels into three groups, I propose that in the first group the questioning of science and the valuing of narrative as a form of knowledge creates the idea that narrative knowledge is the only possibility against the manipulation of the scientific method. These novels defend that it is through the abandonment of science and the use of storytelling as knowledge that it is possible to establish a more ethical and democratic community. The second group presents all forms of knowledge as limited. Even though science is questioned and narrative knowledge is revalued, neither is considered superior. Narrative knowledge is used as a powerful source of revolution, but it is not implied that the communities formed will use it solely. In the final group, science is also initially shown as a discourse to manipulate people and provoke destruction; however, the rescuing of narrative knowledge has a profound impact on the scientific discourse. Eventually, the idea that prevails is that all knowledge is narrative knowledge, even science, that is part of a story constructed in the past and now merged into other stories.

3.3.1. Group 1: Narrative Knowledge as the Alternative

The clash between the technocentric corporate state and the old Akan tradition of the telling is the primary conflict in Le Guin's 2000 novel. In Sutty's perspective, the two visions of the world need to coexist, but it is unquestionable for the reader that she prefers the telling, which she views, and defends, as a superior form of knowledge. For the Akans, the only way to access the world is through storytelling, a way of living that allowed them to have relative peace for millennia. As plurality is a fundamental part of the telling, in which there is no absolute truth, it becomes a democratic space where differences can be worked out by telling stories. Sutty embodies this ideal when she can make peace with her past after telling her life story to the monitor Yara. She also establishes a negotiation with the totalitarian government that will allow the practice of the telling once more. Even though Sutty – and consequently the reader – knows that it is impossible to return to the traditional ways, she hopes that narrative knowledge can once again allow plurality and consequently create cracks in the totalitarian system.

The telling is a form of knowledge, thus a way to access the world. Through narrative, the people of Aka developed their culture, creating practices that allowed their survival, such as agriculture and medicine, and cultural practices like community arrangement and education. Differently from science, the telling is based on what Lyotard calls "customary knowledge" (19). According to him, the transmission of values and practices are done through storytelling, and the outcomes of the stories are used to legitimize institutions and present models of behavior that can then be integrated into social life. "[T]he areas of competence whose criteria the narrative supplies are thus tightly woven together in the web of forms, ordered by the unified viewpoint characteristic of this kind of knowledge" (20). The Akans cannot separate the way they tell stories from the content of them. The two things are the same. As Elyed, a native Akan, tells Sutty about the telling, "it's all we have. You see? Without the telling, we don't have anything at all" (142). Storytelling is the *modus operandi* of that society in the sense that all narrative and fiction is a reflection on knowledge.

The premises of the telling as a form of knowledge differs from science. Even though the telling has some categorization, it is still based on the idea of narrative explaining everything. For instance, Sutty remarks,

> Some maz were physicians, healers, herbalists, or botanists. Like the leaders of exercise or gymnastics arts, they told the body and also listened to the body (the body that was Tree, that was the Mountain). Their telling were factual, descriptive, medical teachings. (Le Guin, *The Telling* 114)

The focus of the telling, differently from science as a form of knowledge, is not on explaining the way things work by doing experiments and formulating a hypothesis. They *tell and listen* and, through observation, create the narrative around the knowledge focused. Even in their more specific types of knowledge, the maz do not abandon their narrative logic, still holding to their principles of wholeness – present in the extract above in the notion that the body is the Tree and the Tree is the Mountain and the Mountain is the world.

Sutty is the one who creates categories for the teachings of the telling. She compares them to the sciences of Terra, like medicine, physics, mathematics, and biology. The Akans, however, do not make such Aristotelean divisions. They say, "We're not outside the world, yoz. You know? We are the world. We're its language. So we live and it lives. You see? If we don't say the words, what is there in our world?" (142). The idea of nature is not separate from culture and language is not only a means to communicate, but is considered a way to keep the world alive. If stories are not told, the world does not exist. This knowledge then does not work according to the scientific method but rather on a more traditional way of accessing the world that can be found in some indigenous peoples.

Plurality is a vital characteristic of the telling as knowledge. The first instance it can be observed is in its subject matter. Sutty ponders on how it "seemed to be endless, even now, when so much had been destroyed" (110). As there are no ultimate versions of narratives, the telling is very mutable. Besides the multiple accounts on the same narrative, written and oral, this plurality

also resides on the fact that each listener becomes a potential teller. In this never-ending chain of stories, knowledge is always in the making, never fixed. Moreover, there is no sense of goal or progress in a scientific way, but only the experience of everything being subject to the curious eye of narrative:

> The other instance of plurality concerns the undogmatic presentation of its teaching. There were no rules. There was always an alternative. The storytellers, when they commented on the legends and histories they told, might point out that that had been a good way or a right way of doing something, but they never talked about the right way. (105)

There is no idea of reaching the truth or explaining something in absolute terms. The telling is mutable by its very nature, and so are the many interpretations and views on its teachings. It focuses on the present, and the people of Aka recognize that judging the past or projecting the future is reductive. It narrows the possibility of understanding the world through different eyes from one's own.

Notwithstanding, the telling has some principles concerning the way it is structured. As Sutty learns, one of these principles is the notion that one is two that is three that is five. This idea is presented and explained through the image of a tree:

> "The trunk of the Tree. … The branches and foliage of the Tree, the crown of leaves. He [Elyed] indicated the five-lobed 'cloud' that rose above the trunk. "Also this is the body, you see, yoz. The body is the body of the world. The world's body is my body. So, then, the one makes two." His finger showed where the trunk divided. "And the two bear each three branches, that rejoin, making five." His finger moved to the five lobes of foliage. "And the fiver bear the myriad, the leaves and flowers that die and return, return and die. The beings, creatures, stars. That being that can be told." (96)

This imagery represents not only the interconnectedness of all things and beings but also the idea that one's eye may attempt to differentiate each part of the world (in this case, the Tree); however,

this division is only apparent because all is one. This constitutes the foundation of the telling as knowledge.

Another principle is "the mountain," or the idea that one cannot see or understand all things. Elyed explains to Sutty that in the Tree, "we don't see the roots. We cannot tell them… The mountain is the root." He acknowledges that there are mysteries to the world, things that cannot yet be narrated, but that should be respected either way. There is no drive towards solving these mysteries as in science as knowledge. These are considered only narratives that await to be told.

Even though every Akan is a teller, the maz are the most respected. In the communities, they are the ones to be heard in conflicts and considered in times of difficulties. They also tend to the people. According to Sutty's observations,

> the essential work of the maz, what gave them honor among the people, was telling: reading aloud, reciting, telling stories, and talking about stories. The more they told, the more they were honored, and the better they told, the better they were paid. What they talked about depended on what they knew, what they possessed of the lore, what they invented on their own, and evidently, what they felt like talking about at the moment. (115)

There are reports on abusive maz, or as Yara, the monitor, calls them, the boss maz. However, the maz's portrayal throughout the novel, though, is mainly positive. Even though they are versed in the telling, they are not considered superior to the people or considered ones to have access to mysteries the common people cannot understand. Access to information is open to all, and there is not censorship nor hierarchization of knowledge.

Language is an essential part of understanding the people's relation to the telling, to themselves, and the maz. Writing on a topic related to this, Jeha says that in a first moment, thought originates language, but in a second moment, language influences thought and, consequently, the perception of reality (130-31). Le Guin explores this idea in her novel extensively since one of the modes of control of the corporate state is language. There are forbidden words, phrases, and texts.

Producer-consumers substituted for the word individuals; new pronouns were created to replace old ones embedded with cultural meaning. One of them is a singular/dual pronoun, very particular to the Akan language, often used to refer to couples or a pregnant woman: "This pronoun had been banned by the Corporation. Use of it in speech or writing was punishable by fine" (*The Telling* 112). This pronoun is used to speak of and to the maz.

> Because maz were couples. They were always couples. A sexual partnership, heterosexual or homosexual, monogamous, lifelong. More than lifelong, for if widowed they never remarried. They took each other's name. The Fertiliser's wife, Ang Sotyu, had been dead fifteen years, but he was still Sotyu Ang. There were two who were one, one who was two.

The use of the banned pronoun encapsulates one of its basic teachings: the two that are one. It does not only refer to the maz, but to a way of living. Forbidding it is a way the corporate state has to control the telling and make it more difficult for people to talk about it.

The standardization proposed by the Corporation has the goals of prohibiting ideographic writing, some old words, and salutations, and extreme didacticism. The latter also works to inhibit the practice of the telling because it denies its openness. The absence of the division of knowledge into different disciplines makes knowledge more horizontal in the sense that there is no hierarchization. Information about the natural world is not more important than information about a long-lost tale about heroes. Nor are the maz seen as more or less important. Maybe only as more or less experienced, or more or less influent. Extreme didacticism acts against the telling as knowledge because it settles truths, hierarchization, and division.

Memory plays an essential role in the telling, and not only in Baccolini's cultural and historical analysis of it. The Akans rely on memory so they can spread knowledge: "Write down what I tell you! 'all maz kept saying. "Memorise it! Keep it to tell other people!" (Le Guin. *The Telling* 116) The telling is not dependent on the written word, even though it values it. Their writing in ideograms also shows the importance of memory and interpretation for them. Transmission of knowledge is an integral part of it, and every listener has the responsibility of being a potential

teller. In the end, there is no difference between storytellers and listeners, as they are all part of the narrative of the world.

The holistic view of the world is not presented on in the Tree as a symbol or belief. It is expressed politically. Aka's society focuses on collective well-being rather than individual well-being as the corporate state proposes. The community thrives as a whole because there is no difference between individuals: all are part of the endless telling that is ultimately the world. Sutty considers,

> The people here meant not my people, but people – everybody, humanity. Barbarian didn't mean an incomprehensible outlander, but an uneducated person. On Aka, all competition was familial. All wars were civil wars. … But these wars and feuds had been fought by professional soldiers, on battlefields. It was a very rare thing, and treated in histories and annals as shamefully, punishably wrong, for soldiers to destroy cities or farmlands or to hurt civilians. Akans fought each other out of greed and ambition for power, not out of hatred and not in the name of a belief. They fought by the rules. They were one people. Their system of thought and way of life had been universal. They had all sung one tune, though in many voices. (106)

The kind of knowledge privileged by one society affects the way it is organized. In the telling, the universal ideal is used to create authentic democratic spaces in which the well-being of the community is the goal. The plurality as a principle of the telling opens up to the respect for different ways of living. Aka does not register discrimination regarding gender, sexuality, skin color, or wealth.

The principles of the telling are portrayed as the only way humans can understand their reality from an ethical and genuinely democratic point of view. Sutty, as the protagonist and main point of view of the novel, works as the mediator on the conflict between science and narrative. For her, the questioning of science leads to the proposition that narrative knowledge is a more positive way to observe and act upon the world. "One was not asked to believe, only to listen"

(104). Her fight for the acceptance of the telling as a form of knowledge in Aka once again is also a fight for democracy and for a space in which alternative ways of living can coexist.

Le Guin's novel proposes new social arrangements. Its representation of the telling as narrative knowledge that creates a democratic space works towards the idea that all humanity is humanity. That without hierarchization, the idea of progress, and the search for truth, an equal society can exist. A similar notion can be found in other novels of this group. As examples, I analyze Hopkinson's *The Midnight Robber* and Atwood's *The Year of the Flood.*

In *Midnight Robber*, storytelling is also a form of knowledge that defies the view of science as the only way to access the world. Differently from *The Telling* in which an outsider compares and contrasts the new portrayed culture to that of the reader's, Hopkinson's novel creates a total immersion in a world with a different logic, language, and organization. Using a Caribbean matrix to create other forms of knowledge, *Midnight Robber* also points to the idea that only narrative knowledge can create a democratic space.

The protagonist, Tan-Tan, lives the first part of her childhood in Toussaint, a planet that follows the Caribbean culture paradigm. The transmission of knowledge through music and the technology developed having names such as eshu work to show that it is possible to envision a different organization of knowledge outside the Westernized paradigm of science. As Harding claims in *Objectivity and Diversity*, the approach to science mainly practiced today is not the only option. It is a product of Enlightenment and Positivism that persists. Toussaint is a highly technological world that has very little in common with the references we have regarding artificial intelligence or development. At the beginning of the novel, Antonio, Tan-Tan's father, is using highly advanced technology to go home. After he enters a command, "it bleeped a confirmation at him in nannysong, and his eshu appeared in his mind's eye" (Hopkinson, *The Midnight Robber*). The use of Caribbean vernacular and syntax mixed with English by characters and narrator alike breaks the association made between Caribbean cultures and illiteracy, underdevelopment, and poverty. It is portrayed as a language spoken by a highly technological society.

This initial break with expectations of what science looks like is not the only rupture regarding knowledge proposed in *Midnight Robber*. The narrator muses,

> You never wonder where them all does go, the drifters, the ragamuffins-them, the ones who think the world must be have something better for them, if them could only find which part it is? You never wonder is where we send the thieves-them, and the murderers? Well master, the Nation Worlds does ship them all to New Half-Way Tree, the mirror planet of Toussaint.

This other dimension that looks precisely alike Toussaint in geographical terms is a penal colony, left to its own resources. The exile Tan-Tan and her father endure shows how even scientific knowledge under a different paradigm is still exclusivist. Without other forms of knowledge, it can become totalitarian.

It is through narrative knowledge that an alternative to society is portrayed. Tan-Tan, embodying the trickster Robber Queen, seeks to undo the wrongs done to people like herself – victims of poverty and abuse. New Half-Way Tree is a violent world in which different species live, but often without having much contact with each other. Tan-Tan disrupts this logic when she goes to live in Douen for a while and makes no difference between human and non-human in her acts of trickery. The birth of Tubman, Tan-Tan's son, is the realization of change. He is born with an eshu, a life-accompanying entity that only exists in Toussaint. He becomes a bridge between the two worlds and the possibility of healing the community. He is also the addressee of the narrator, who instructs Tubman to accomplish his mission using storytelling as knowledge. The only way for Tan-Tan's son to understand his reality is by listening to its stories.

The novel, through the voice of the narrator, Tubman's eshu, points to the idea that narrative knowledge is the basis of a fairer, more democratic society. Because the community is formed through the sharing of stories, humans and non-humans start to live together. Moreover, Tubman is raised in a new way to access the world, one that considers many voices.

Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* can also be read as an example of using narrative knowledge to defend a more democratic way of living. Adam One, the leader of the God's Gardeners, uses

storytelling to convey his ideas and establish his community. He even uses scientific data, but he transforms them into narrative in a way very similar to what happens in Le Guin's *The Telling*.

The Year of the Flood criticizes science as knowledge under the premise that all uses of science will become unethical. Adam One defends that it is not trough logic that people will be convinced of taking care of the environment or treating each other better; it is through belief. For this, he creates a whole theology based on ecology. The saints are relevant environmentalists such as Dian Fossey and Chico Mendes, and the commandments are recycling, vegetarianism, and community life. The world outside the Garden, as portrayed in the narratives of protagonists Toby and Ren, is exceptionally violent and unequal. The corporate funding of science that followed the logic of progress by the sake of progress made social mobility, public security, and wealth distribution a distant memory.

In the selected corpus, this is the only novel in which narrative or customary knowledge calls itself religion. However, its most important values can be read as materialistic. The belief in God is secondary to environmental actions. The Garden works as an alternative way of living, what Cavalcanti calls a utopian space inside dystopia. Communal life is organized around storytelling, and knowledge is taught and passed on by narrative. The stories of saints, practices, and values are the way the Gardeners access the world. As most of the participants are there because of the social, economic, and political consequences of the unethical use of science, they are open to abandon its paradigm and dive deep into a new form of knowledge. Nonetheless, the Garden is not anti-scientific. As it is common in Atwood's novels, violent dualities – as Linda Hutcheon refers to them – are in clash throughout the narrative. Because even though narrative knowledge is adopted as the alternative for a more democratic society, the results of scientific research permeate these stories. Adam One justifies vegetarianism based on previous scientific data, and the same applies to his environmental choices.

The Gardener's way of seeing the world through their dual religious and materialistic narratives become the basis for the new world. In the next novel, *MaddAddam*, Toby passes on the

knowledge she acquired from the Gardeners to the Crakers, the genetically engineered humans that survived the plague. Narrative is the only form of knowledge that resisted and that allowed not only Toby, but the other humans to survive the catastrophe. Through the stories about saints, recycling, and animal life, they put together what they needed to survive in hostile environments. When all institutions crumble in the apocalypse, all that is left is narrative.

The Year of the Flood proposes that narrative knowledge works to create a more egalitarian world. The stories told become values. These values are recognized as valid practices and are later turned into belief. Belief assures that the practices are followed, creating a peaceful, democratic community with fairer wealth distribution and a positive attitude towards the environment.

The selected novels in the first group point to the idea that science seen as a synonym of knowledge is responsible for unequal, often totalitarian societies. Narrative knowledge is perceived as the only possibility to create alternative ways of living that allow humans and non-humans to collaborate, different groups to respect each other, and safe spaces to exist. This form of knowledge becomes then resistance, the only possibility to escape the world as it is and to attempt at creating a new one.

3.3.2. Group 2: The Search for Non-binary Thinking

In *The Stone Gods*, different types of knowledge are not defined in opposition to others. All forms of knowledge are recognized as limited and equally biased, used to manipulate the masses. The new communities formed by the end of the novel do not try to choose between narrative and scientific knowledge; they attempt to live outside of binary thinking that, for them, is the cause of social injustice.

In a highly metafictional and self-aware narrative, *The Stone Gods* questions not only the nature of storytelling and its meaning in human life but also knowledge and its use by humans. The unethical use of scientific knowledge leads Orbus, the planet portrayed in the first section of the novel, to an environmental disaster of such proportion that the only solution is to colonize

Planet Blue. The limitations of science to understand and explain the human experience are one of the main themes in the novel, and is shown in the conversations between Billie, the scientist, and Spike, the robot *sapiens*. However, differently from the books in the first group, this novel does not find in narrative knowledge the ultimate solution. Narrative is also questioned through the interactions Billie has with Captain Handsome. Using a single type of knowledge reduces criticism and limits human experience.

The view on science presented in the novel is what Harding calls "science as usual," meaning a reproduction of exclusivist and elitist visions of the nineteenth-century scientific method that permeates the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Billie overtly addresses these issues. Right at the beginning of the novel, she says, "I am here today to answer questions" (Winterson 4). She is explaining people from Orbus about newfound Planet Blue, perfect for human life, except for the presence of dinosaurs. The presentation of them as predators makes her uncomfortable: "It's the wrong answer. I am here to reassure. A scientist steps forward. That's better. Scientists are automatically reassuring." Billie knows that in the environment she lives, scientific discourse is used to reinforce the *status quo* and reassure an elite worried about the end of their supremacy. Behind the research and hypothesis lie the interests of Central Power, the country Billie lives in, and of MORE enterprises. The rich and powerful need to feel confident about investing in Planet Blue, and science needs to reflect that.

Another idea that is questioned in the novel is that science is infallible. In a country where age reversal is common as well as artificial intelligence, science sustains itself on the promise of being able to achieve it all. When confronted with the idea that Orbus is doomed and that in fifty years it would be inhospitable for human life, a TV presenter bursts out, "It's never too late! said Manfred. That's delusional, depressive and anti-science" (37). Even provided with the facts by Spike, the most advanced robot *sapiens*, and confirmed by Billie, a scientist, Manfred cannot see beyond the scientific discourse of progress.

However, narrative knowledge is also considered biased and lost in old paradigms. The significant example is Captain Handsome, "the space privateer – don't use the word 'pirate.' He was swashbuckling freelance predator with semi-official sanction" (56). At first sight, Handsome seems to defend narrative knowledge by bringing about the importance of poetry and storytelling to a mainly illiterate society. The baggage he has, though, filled with "encyclopedias, dictionaries, a Uniform Edition of the Romantic poets, and the complete works of Shakespeare. … Scott, Defoe. We netted as much as we could. … Captain Cook's Journals. … A repeating world – same old story" (59) is telling of a different idea. The same old story, as Billie observes, follows the logic of domination and of equaling women and people of color to land to be conquered. Handsome is not bringing narrative knowledge as the solution to a society lost in scientific knowledge solely, but only as another type of knowledge equally used to maintain the *status quo*.

Different from what the novels in the first group posit, narrative knowledge is not inherently good. *The Stone Gods* discusses how all the ways humans access the world need to be continuously revised. Billie reflects on the discourses of progress and power endorsed by science, while Handsome shows narrative knowledge in service of a logic of domination. Finally, Spike disrupts the narrative and points out to the limitations of human knowledge that cannot see beyond binary views of good and evil, conqueror and conquered, and success and failure. Narrative as a form to access the world needs to be criticized as well, even though it provides the presence of multiple voices.

There is one aspect valued in narrative knowledge, though. It has revolutionary potential because it is an open system, as people from different backgrounds and qualifications can participate. Billie, in the fourth section of the novel, meets Alaska, a teenage girl who ran away from home to live in Wreck City, where the defects and undesirable live outside the domains of Central Power and MORE corporation. The girl explains, "We are founding an alternative community" (206), and Billie initially dismisses her for believing she is superficial because of her regular champagne drinking. Nonetheless, Alaska has a set of beliefs based on tolerance. Her group is open to

everyone, even six nuns that wander Wreck City, radioactive kids, and the lot. She embraces Spike's presence without any questioning of her status as human or not. The alternative – the name the people in Wreck City use to refer to themselves – uses narrative knowledge to convey their ideas and to build their society. They listen to each other and accept differences.

An example of this is the Vegans collaboration with the World of Leather group. Billie is in shock when she first learns it and makes fun of the alliance. To that, Alaska explains, "they thank us for taking it away for them. They're not judgmental. Don't you think that's the key to happiness?" (208). This utopia of acceptance rationale is later considered by Billie, who says, "The realistic, hard-headed practical types got us to the edge of melt-down." At this point, she approximates to Spike's vision of the world and to the idea that criticizing Central Power's politics is not enough; it is necessary to propose solutions and to strip away totalizing conceptions and perceptions of the world. It is in the plurality of narratives that revolution can take place.

The binary Them X Us does not equal Central Power X the manipulated masses, as Billie initially thinks. She considers herself a revolutionary, especially in the first section of the novel, but is unable to see that she is also perpetuating the logic of Them X Us. She judges people and puts herself above others by thinking she is the one who does not buy the logic of the system. To that, Spike says, "Humans have given away to a 'they.' You aren't able to fight the system because without the system, none of you can survive. You made a world without alternatives, and now it is dying, and your new world already belongs to 'they'" (79). Billie perceives that she was still embedded in the old logic, whether she used scientific or narrative knowledge. The problem is not the form of accessing the world, but the values repeated through them.

One of Mohr's justifications for using the term "transgressive utopian dystopias" for novels such as *The Stone Gods* is the persistent search for a different way of seeing and perceiving the world. She writes,

> the thematic concerns of these 'dystopias' involve transgressions of subject/object, male/female, human/animal and human/alien or human/non-human, master/slave,

> nature/nurture, nature/culture, mind/body, sanity/madness, self/other, literacy/orality, codes/stereotypes, the relation between myth/history with regard to the (im)possibility of a representation of reality and truth(s). (10)

In *The Stone Gods*, seeing the world in a new logic requires abandoning binary thinking. Billie resists the idea, still fixated on the scientific method and its divisions and categorizations. A holistic view of the world is initially something incomprehensible to her. Spike explains, "The universe is an imprint. You are part of the imprint – it imprints you, you imprint it. You cannot separate yourself from the imprint, and you can never forget it. It isn't a something, it is you" (105). This idea of the whole may initially be perceived as similar to that presented in Le Guin's *The Telling*; however, it goes into a different direction. The point is not sacredness, the merging of the universe into a single being, but the dissolution of binaries — the absence of boundaries between a "you" and everything.

It is no wonder that the novels in this second category present propositions of a new community, and not the functioning arranging. Like the other books in the group, *The Stone Gods* plays with language and metafictional narratives to provoke the reader into recognizing the power of storytelling. However, the idea of living outside binary thinking is still difficult to conceive. Spike tells Billie about such a world, "There's a planet, said Spike, made of water, entirely of water, where every solid thing is its watery equivalent. There are no seas because there is no land. There are no rivers because there are no banks. There is no thirst because there is no dry" (76). Spike proposes conceptual notions, and characters such as Alaska envision a politics of tolerance; however, the actual societal results are not portrayed. Differently from the novels in the first group that negotiate between two systems of knowledge, favoring narrative one, the second division does not have practical claims. The philosophical and textual implications of the erasing of binaries, though, lead to the idea that all kinds of knowledge are limited. The first step to create a new world is recognizing this insufficiency.

Finally, using narrative knowledge for change does not mean the abandonment of science. In the novel, science and narrative are not oppositional forces. Each has its role in the production of knowledge as well as in disinformation. The merging of the two offers more possibilities of fairer societies and could help to explain the universe. By the end of the first section of the novel, when Billie and Spike are about to die because of the fallen asteroid, the scientist comments:

> Ironic, isn't it, if that is what happens, and then millions of years in the future some bright geo-scientist will find evidence of the asteroid collision that wiped out the dinosaurs, and they'll call it the best coincidence that ever was, even though the chances of a gigantic asteroid hitting the planet right here, on a Sulphur deposit, are – well, what are they, Spike? (92)

To that, Spike replies, "Once in two billion years." The explanation of the meaning of life and the coincidences of the universe can only come when the scientifically and narratively understanding of facts coexists. The reverse is also true: to understand the world, it is necessary to doubt all forms of knowledge. From this, a new logic emerges outside binary thinking that proposes the basis of a fairer society. *The Stone Gods* uses metafiction to make the reader question binary thinking, considered the basis for all social injustices. The other novels in this category point to the same idea. To amplify the discussion, I analyze Okorafor's *Who Fears Death* and Yuknavitch's *The Book of Joan.*

Who Fears Death tackles the idea that it is possible to change the world through narrative and that this world created is less binary, thus, more democratic and fairer. In the land where the light-skinned Nuru and the dark-skinned Okeke are in a constant war, and the result is Okeke genocide, the need for changing the world arises from stories. Moreover, from the necessity of rewriting the stories that have justified Okeke submission for so long. The protagonist, Onyesonwu, brings about the erasure of the difference between Nuru and Okeke. Not through violence, as it is done by the Nuru, but by eliminating the notion that the two peoples are opposites in the first place.

Magic and science in the novel do not exclude each other. As in *The Stone Gods*, the two forms of knowledge are put continuously under scrutiny. The book presents products of both

science and magic as regular, daily things, like the device in the form of a coin that "people used to keep the time, the weather, to carry a file of The Great Book. This one had a recording mechanism. Its tiny black camera rose up, making a clicking and whirring sound as it began to record" (20). The use of such technology, however, could not be more horrific, since it is used to record the rape of an Okeke woman by a Nuru man. In the same scene, Najeeba, the woman, uses magic no numb herself: "Now her Alusi, that ethereal part of her with the ability to silence pain and observe, came forward. Her mind recorded events like the man's device" (20-21). The products of science and magic serve similar purposes, be they evil or good. Magic is not associated with goodness nor technology with evil. The Nuru use magic, have their Sorcerers and spell books, the same way the Okeke use the products of science such as tablets, recorders, and communicators. The knowledge that comes from science and the one that comes with magic have the same value in this society, and people look at them with equal suspicion.

If the binary between science and magic is not considered in that world, others are. According to Onyesonwu, they are the cause of social injustices. Such oppositions include Nuru/Okeke, light/dark, domination/submission, and male/female. As Nuru, light, domination, and male are the positive side of the binary, the other side is defined as lack. In this dynamic, there is always going to be exclusion. If the Okeke are the non-Nuru, in a culture of domination, they have to be destroyed. The Okeke women are the most subjugated group in the novel, suffering racial and sexual discrimination and being the main target of violence. Society is built to privilege the binary positive side while working towards the near destruction of the other. I emphasize near because it is relevant to remember that without the presence of the other by which one is defined, it is impossible to have a binary. Thus, the destruction of the negative side results in the erasure of the binary itself. The novel, however, poses a different question: is it possible to end the binary without termination? What if, instead of destruction, it was possible to exist construction, fusion?

Onyesonwu embodies the negative side of the binary: she is Okeke, dark-skinned, subjugated culturally, and a woman. Moreover, she is an Ewu, a child of a rape. She is the ultimate

outcast: hated by the Nuru but feared by the Okeke. Her decision to end the suffering of her people and to lead an expedition to create a revolution is her journey of understanding that to end the country's division, it is necessary to propose a new form of living that questions the fixed visions of knowledge people have. Onyesonwu understands that instead of guns, she needs words to rewrite history itself using her magic. As in other novels of this group, the metafictional solution to a new society works in abstract terms, and the reader has only a glimpse of a final scene in which Nuru and Okeke children are seen playing together.

Magic as knowledge seems to propel the revolution, but it is not favored as a better form of accessing the world. It is a powerful force, as much as science, but it also has its limitations. Onyesonwu uses her magic to kill people before her final act of dissolving the binary. In this way, it is possible to say that, in *Who Fears Death*, the solution to an unfair society comes with the old ways in which violence still rules. Only with the beginning of the new world is it possible to envision a type of knowledge that is not part of the domination logic. This new society, not portrayed in the novel, is established under democratic and egalitarian values.

Another example in this group of attempting to erase binary thinking to create a new form of knowledge that can make a fairer society possible is Yuknavitch's *The Book of Joan*. The novel presents, mainly through one of its protagonists, Christine, the idea of knowledge of the body. Based on narrative knowledge, it proposes that the body has a logic of its own, a story to tell through its sensations and experiences. Listening to the knowledge of the body lays the new paradigms for a future human society away from the imperatives of violence and destruction.

The members of the CIEL space station, suffering from extreme body deformation, create practices such as graphing to mark the skin and tell the stories on and about their bodies. Christine, the most talented grapher, spends the last days of her life writing the story of Joan. Each part of the body is carefully chosen to represent certain aspects of the story, and Christine often wonders whether, in those new bodily experiences, they had not become a new type of human. She muses, "perhaps we were some new species, some new genus with alternative sexual opportunities" (22).

The changes in the body promote the shifting in a paradigm of knowledge: scientific knowledge has led humans to where they are now. Narrative knowledge has been used to manipulate them through a fake Book of Joan. As the two are considered with similar awe and suspicion, the idea of a third kind of knowledge emerges.

Joan also experiences accessing the world through the body. When she was a child, she connected to the Earth through vibrations as "the sound lowered and began to take shape in her body" (53). Later, "the sound vibrations finally dropped into a kind of low bowl swirling in her skull and then pinpointed itself just between her right eye and ear. Like a fingerprint of sound, touching her." Joan controls the powers of the Earth because she can access them through her body. This new form of knowledge allows new abilities that are beyond scientific or narrative explanations. It points to understanding the body not as a counterpoint to the mind, with the body as the negative side, but as a source of experience. This shift in the paradigm allows an equal social organization because everyone has a body. Thus, all humans possess this knowledge without having to worry about their access depending on money or power.

The Book of Joan explores the possibility of living outside binary thinking by reversing the negative side of the binary mind/body. However, it does not merely rearrange the binary logic, giving preference to one side of it. It suppresses it because the revaluing of negative aspects necessarily promotes the questioning of the binary itself. As it is usual in the novels of the group, how this proposed society is going to work is not shown. Christine endorses this new form of knowledge with Joan as an example of it, but the specific applications of a knowledge of the body are not portrayed. It is up to the reader to imagine how this new world looks like.

Like the other novels in the group, *The Book of Joan* presents binary thinking as the leading cause of social injustices. The opposition creates a privilege to one side, and consequently, the other suffers from discrimination, oppression, and domination. Science and narrative knowledge are not considered incompatible, but rather equally problematic in a sense it can be used for good and for bad. Yuknativitch's novel is the only one in the category to propose a new form of

knowledge to end the binary: knowledge of the body. The idea of "bringing the flesh story silently to life" (34). The proposed societies, never adequately portrayed, have alternative ways of living that promote democratic spaces and equality.

The selected novels in this second category do not idealize narrative knowledge nor do they devalue it. All forms of accessing the world are presented as faulty in a way and used to manipulate the masses. However, it is acknowledged that narrative knowledge has revolutionary potential. It can destabilize the *status quo* and open room for change.

3.3.3 Group 3: All Knowledge Is Narrative Knowledge

Toby, the protagonist of Atwood's *MaddAddam*, understands that narratives construct knowledge, not only affirm identity. She says, "once the Gardener Adams and Eves taught you something, you stayed taught" (10). The means used to convey their teachings is narrative knowledge. Differently from Toby's experiences portrayed in the previous novel, *The Year of the Flood*, in *MaddAddam*, she consciously chooses storytelling. It is not an act of survival for her anymore, but a social articulation that enables a new culture to develop. The following excerpt shows how storytelling is shaped into narrative knowledge: "Once Toby has made her way through the story, they urge her to tell it again, then again. They prompt, they interrupt, they fill in the parts she's missed. What they want from her is a seamless performance, as well as more information than she either knows or can invent" (45). Initially, Toby thinks that her task involves only repeating the genesis of the Crakers; however, they demand the creation of knowledge. Based on that narrative, they want to understand the world they live in as well as how they can better exist in it.

MaddAddam proposes that all knowledge is narrative knowledge. Human brains are wired to narrate and to understand the world through narrative. Thus, scientific, philosophical, and customary knowledge derive from narrative. In this sense, the scientific method is a narrative with specific rules, and so is philosophy. For Boyd, art is what enables humans to explore: "By fostering our inclination to think about possible worlds, art allows us to see the actual world from new

vantage points. Therefore, it enables science" (124). Humans invent stories because of our development of art as adaptation. Therefore, further narratives humans use to explain the events of the world all derive from our capacity to create fiction. Under a different paradigm, Ricoeur states that putting events in a specific order to understand them, adding perspective, and negotiating with culture is the human mode of thinking. Mammals also understand their environment narratively (Boyd 131), but only humans can elaborate on this narrative to create ideas that are not true. From the combination of understanding the world through narrative and being able to create fiction, narrative knowledge establishes itself.

The Crakers are initially designed never to develop art, but start creating their symbols, narratives, and culture derived from the stories they heard from Jimmy in the first volume of the trilogy, *Oryx and Crake*. Their existence tackles the idea of the impossibility of humans being non-narrators: even altered in a genetic level to have colorful skin, exhale citric scent, and eat grass; art and its narrative form, storytelling, persists. There is something human strictly connected to it. When one of the MaddAddamites, the remaining humans and the scientists responsible for engineering the Crakers, complains about their singing, he hears the answer from a fellow scientist: "The singing was not my idea. ... We couldn't erase it without turning them into zucchinis" (*MaddAddam* 43). To maintain humans' high level of cognition and Theory of Mind, the scientists could not get rid of art. Since art as adaptation allows humans to construct their body of knowledge and culture, without it, human cognition as we understand it does not exist.

Narrative knowledge lasts. Differently from the novels in group one, in which narrative knowledge is considered superior, and from group two, in which it is view as limited as all forms of knowledge, the third group presents the idea that narrative is unavoidable to humans, and it will always exist. Narrative equals knowledge. *MaddAddam* ends with Blackbeard, a young Craker, saying, "and these new Words I have made are called the Story of Toby" (387). He teaches the youngest, the ones born hybrid – MaddAddamite mother and a Craker father, to write so they can keep

track of the stories told. Blackbeard is put as the generation of Crakers on the verge of a Cognitive Revolution – using Harari's term – with narrative knowledge fully developed.

The MaddAmites survive because of the stories and practices Adam One told them in the Garden. Information such as the importance of storing food, choosing the right plants to eat, and building shelter were given through the Gardeners' tales and fables. The group used narrative knowledge to convey scientific data, but in *MaddAddam*, the scientific logic does not matter anymore. What matters is the story and how it can be used to provide safety and social organization. Further observation of natural elements will provide new stories with different data. In this way, narrative knowledge is neither positive nor negative; it merely is. The outcomes of it can be either positive or negative.

MaddAddam evokes the idea of stories very powerfully as the beginning and the end of things, in a permanent cycle. The novel starts with "The Story of the Egg, and Oryx and Crake, and how they make People and Animals; and of the Chaos; and of Snowman-the-Jimmy; and of the Smelly Bone and the coming of the Two Bad Men" (3) and finishes with "The Story of Toby" (388). The first story, created by Jimmy and further developed by Toby, can be read as the last story of humankind as it were before the apocalypse. It turns into myth the events of the previous novels, *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*. "The Story of Toby" is told by Blackbeard and becomes the first story produced by the Crakers themselves and becomes the founding text of a new culture. The novel returns to the first day of humans by the fire, sharing stories and building up their knowledge of the world. As happened with humans, the Crakers now enter this phase of evolution that, in the novels of the third group, will, later on, bring about other stories of end and beginning of different humans.

The notion of narrative as never-ending present in this group is evident in *MaddAddam*. Evolution for humanity comes together with the evolution of stories and narratives. However, narrative knowledge is not sacred as the novels in group one, especially *The Telling*, present. Nor do they have the prerogative of dismantling binary thinking in order to create a better society as

the novels in group two. Narrative in the third group is the model for the human mind. A better society will be created not because storytelling is present, but on the values and social arrangements proposed in the stories told. As Toby explains, "There's the story, then there's the real story, then there's the story of how the story came to be told. Then there's what you leave out of the story. Which is part of the story too" (56). The attention on the meta elements of narrative knowledge allows a critical view of it. To understand the grand narratives of a culture allows one to learn the values that it cultivates. Similarly, to uncover the voices unheard and the stories not told also shows how a society works.

MaddAddam explores knowledge as narrative because of human's biological design. Accessing the world through narrative is not a matter of choosing which kind of knowledge one wants to rely upon, but an imperative. All knowledge is narrative knowledge. The discourses of science and philosophy are also narratives. In this regard, it is irrelevant to put narrative knowledge as superior to science or even as equal to it. Narrative is simply the *modus operandi* of humans.

N. K. Jemisin's The Broken Earth trilogy is a dystopia in which our world – called the Stillness in the novel – suffers from frequent earthquakes. The orogenes are the ones able to "sess," to feel, the Earth and control it, preventing cataclysms and minor shakes. However, they are also feared because of their powers that, without training, can destroy whole cities. Living in an almost medieval society – very little social mobility, strict class roles, and isolated walled cities, the people in the Stillness rely on lore to survive a Season, a long period of disaster provoked by an earthquake. During Seasons, the weather changes for decades, and dangerous and unpredicted phenomena like acid rain might happen. The main protagonist, Nassun, is an orogene on the run trying to survive a Season while looking for her kidnapped daughter.

In the trilogy, narrative is how knowledge is passed on not because it is considered a better or more efficient form of knowledge but because it is seen as the only one. Nassun comments on stonelore, the collection of narratives that teach how to survive a Season: "all children learn them, in creche. Everyone grows up on campfire tales of wise lorists and clever geomests warning

skeptics when the signs begin to show, not being heeded, and saving people when the lore proves true" (*The Fifth Season*). Narrative knowledge allows survival in the Stillness as well as the justification for political, economic, and social organization. It is the ultimate knowledge, having the force to build, shape, and destroy a world.

Nassun's point of view is presented to the reader in the second person: "You are she. She is you. You are Essun. Remember? The woman whose son is dead." In *The Stone Sky*, the last volume of the trilogy, it is revealed that Hoa, the strange immortal being that befriends Nassun, is the one telling the story to Nassun herself, who is recovering from an experience of death and rebirth as another entity. Hoa explains, "in this moment I remind myself of why I continue to tell this story through your eyes rather than my own: because, outwardly, you're too good at hiding yourself" (*The Stone Sky*). He uses storytelling not only to affirm Nassun's identity but also to convey the knowledge of how and why the world works in a certain way. Hoa is witness to history: he has seen many apocalypses, has caused one and wants Nassun to understand that the Stillness – Earth – will continue to live despite humans. Mortality gives humanity a limited view of creation, and, because of this, narrative is the way our brains are wired. It is how we can make sense of our existence and understand space and time. Hoa's storytelling is not a move in the direction of the self, of reaffirming who Nassun is as a person, but a social one. He wants to convey the knowledge of the world – history, geological changes, experiences, and experiments – and he is only able to do that through narrative. Narrative is how humans perceive the world.

As in the other novels of this group, The Broken Earth trilogy equals narrative knowledge to knowledge itself. There is no difference between narrative and science since the strategies of surviving the Seasons, the use of the Obelisks – mysterious objects that fly in the sky – and history are all the same thing, conveyed in the same manner. It is passed from generation to generation through the lorists, and it is because of narrative that humans have survived multiple large-scale geo events. Storytelling is the only way people in the Stillness access the world not because they find it more sacred, more appealing, or more revolutionary, but because humans can only do this:

to tell. In this sense, narrative knowledge is neutral: it was used to destroy the Stillness in the past and can be used to restore it.

The idea of the never-ending cycle of stories is approached thematically in the trilogy. One of the narrators, Hoa, points out, "this is what you must remember: the ending of one story is just the beginning of another. This [large scale destruction] has happened before, after all. People die. Old orders pass. New societies are born. When we say the world has ended, it's usually a lie, because the planet is just fine (*The Fifth Season*). When humans thrived and perished in the Stillness, narrative remained and worked as the driving force for the construction of a society intended to be better than the previous one. Hoa uses narrative because it encompasses all other forms of knowledge. It is both genesis and doomsday of humanity since it is how humans think. Humanity lives in different cycles that are started and ended by narrative knowledge. Each civilization is created around a grand narrative, and when this civilization dies out, the next one uses its ruins to create another one.

In Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix*, the protagonist, a human genetic experiment in a corporate lab, tells her story initially to affirm her identity. Later, she understands that it has also become a register, a source of knowledge. Phoenix's narrative becomes the foundation for how a whole society is going to be organized. The novel presents the idea that all knowledge is narrative; even science and customary logic are applied and understood through narrative.

Narrative as knowledge is very present in Phoenix's and in Sanuteel's lives. He uses her tale to create another one. On the one hand, Phoenix's liberation rewrites history: she causes an apocalypse, with few human survivors. She uses narrative knowledge to both understand the world around her and to propose a new one. On the other hand, Sanuteel appropriates Phoenix's narrative to make his own. For him, Phoenix's tale is an understanding of how his world came to be so unfair. This knowledge is later passed to his peers, who further elaborate on it to justify and comprehend their experiences of social injustices. Phoenix and Sanuteel embody the human need for

telling stories and the inevitability of their production. With every confrontation, humans respond with a story.

The idea of the cyclic narrative is also very relevant in the novel. The end of Phoenix's story is the beginning of Sanuteel's. Phoenix uses narrative knowledge to unveil the unethical behavior of scientists because she knows that science itself is also another narrative to be contested. Sanuteel accesses Phoenix's tale and uses it to explain the existence of oppression in the society he lives in. While Phoenix uses narrative knowledge to liberate, Sanuteel employs it to oppress his people. Each stage of history comes with its teachings through narrative. Thus, narrative knowledge is neither good or bad. It is a permanent force in humanity's history.

Narrative is the source of all knowledge, and it is inevitable. Humans rely on storytelling, and Okorafor's novel proposes that stories are more than the affirmation of identity; they are part of the collective construction of narrative knowledge. As Phoenix tells Sanuteel, "You can rewrite a story, but once it is written, it lives. Think before you do; your story is written too and so is the map of the consequences." Each story adds to knowledge, shaping it, and creating different social arrangements. Humans tell themselves and the world through narrative.

The examples in this chapter have mainly focused on the relationship between humans and knowledge. Non-humans such as the Akans in *The Telling*, Tan-Tan's son in *Midnight Robber*, the Crakers in Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy, Spike in *The Stone Gods*, Joan in *The Book of Joan*, the Stone Eaters in *The Broken Earth* trilogy, and the specimen in *The Book of Phoenix* use narrative knowledge to construct their own cultures and societies, but does this mean they are human? Since humans are defined as the species that tell stories to understand the world, the moment non-humans narrate, do they turn into humans? These considerations bring about Harari's ideas of the times when sapiens are no longer a single ramification of the *homo* genus.

Chapter 4: New Humanities

4.1. The Search for Humanity

In the last chapter of his *Sapiens*, Harari discusses the idea of the Frankenstein prophecy. For him, even though the most prevalent reading of Mary Shelley's novel seems to be the horrific consequences of playing God, there is an even scarier meaning to it that popular culture frequently puts aside: the idea that, with the rapid development in technology, *Homo sapiens* will eventually be replaced by another being. These new creatures will have different characteristics and worries that will render *Homo sapiens* not so special and maybe even obsolete.

To Harari, the Frankenstein prophecy is inevitable, and these next humans, not *sapiens*, will inherit the Earth. He writes,

> we seek comfort in the fantasy that Dr. Frankenstein can create only terrible monsters, whom we would have to destroy in order to save the world. We like to tell the story that way because it implies that we are the best of all beings, that there never was and never will be something better than us. Any attempt to improve us will inevitably fail, because even if our bodies might be improved, you cannot touch the human spirit. (402)

Sapiens, as the only human species for thousands of years, has lived anthropocentrically.[38] This may be seen obvious, but for Harari, this view of the world from the point of view of *sapiens* is later reinforced culturally by the idea that *Homo sapiens* is a unique and superior kind of human. Western

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[38] Non-anthropocentric views of the world and environmental ethics is a fair recent philosophical trend in Westernized societies. It defends that the "we" is all the environment and that the idea of "other animals" should not exist. All creatures are part of the same system and have equal parts to play in it. This view, however, is prevalent in indigenous communities and Eastern philosophies such as some branches of Buddhism and Hinduism.

philosophy has been especially drawn to this idea of the distinctiveness of our mind for centuries. Harari goes further: for him, the anthropocentric discourse helped to disguise a horrible truth about the survival of *sapiens* among other human species: genocide. He defends the idea that the Replacement Theory seems correct and *Homo sapiens* killed the other human species such as the Neanderthals (15-17).[39] However, according to Harari, we are close to the conclusion that "scientists could engineer spirits as well as bodies," and this new human, with different abilities and cognition, may be not a horrendous Creature, but a being genuinely improved in relation to *sapiens*. One that renders *sapiens* insignificant and poorly fit for the environment – for Harari, the same happened to the *Neanderthals*, *Cro-Magnon*, and *Denisovans*.

Harari's approach to history, one that intends to consider the very idea of happiness of a species, is considered very controversial by most historians. Nonetheless, I find the last chapter of *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* thought-provoking and relevant when one considers twenty-first century dystopias. The end of *Homo sapiens* is one of the most significant themes in science fiction, and the dystopias by women analyzed in this dissertation seem to give it an exciting turn. These new humans, creatures of technological advances and alien worlds, share with *sapiens* its most treasured characteristic – the ability to tell stories. *sapiens* is no longer exclusive for its

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[39] The other prominent theory is the Interbreeding Theory. According to it, humans have mingled and reproduced with fellow humans in the past. The Replacement Theory has been the most used recently; it implies that all humans today are "pure *sapiens*," derived from the species that appeared in East Africa 70,000 years ago. In this way, we share genetic baggage. However, there has been a debate about whether *sapiens* living today have traces of DNA that can be traced back to *Neanderthals* or *Denisovans*. If this hypothesis is proved correct, then the genetic material *sapiens* have is much more varied. Nonetheless, it is likely that the two situations happened: both mingling and elimination.

unique use of language to create fictional worlds; worse: it is inferior to the abilities of these new species that create societies that can survive where *sapiens* cannot. Being human does not mean *Homo sapiens* in such novels. It becomes an expanded concept that encompasses other species. In a way, it is a regression to the times when *sapiens*, *Neanderthals*, and *Cro-Magnons* co-existed.

The pattern observed in the selected novels is that storytelling defines what being human means. In these twenty-first-century dystopian books written by women, when those initially considered non-humans tell stories, they are perceived as humans. However, instead of integrating the previous human culture and reproducing its practices, these "new humans" propose other forms of humanity with other social arrangements, beliefs, gender configurations, and culture. They point to how humanity is a plural and open concept and not a restrictive ideal.

Humanity is traditionally defined under two parameters: the capacity for reasoning and the capacity for emotion.[40] The first approach postulates that humans, as opposed to animals, can reason about their own reasoning – in Theory of Mind, this characteristic is called metarepresentation. It differentiates humans from other mammals that are also capable of reasoning, such as chimpanzees. Humans also use reasoning for co-operating, an adaptation that allowed the species to live in larger groups and spread around the world (Boyd 53). Zunshine's approach to Theory of Mind and fiction and Boyd's biocultural analysis of literature take into consideration reasoning as a fundamental evolution in human brains. Philosophy has also devoted a vast amount of its body of work to the idea of reason. Aristotle refers to humans as rational animals capable of accessing and understanding the truths of the world (Kietzmann 25) having thus the right to rule. Kant's transcendental idealism, precisely his idea of synthesis, exemplifies this trend in Western tradition.

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[40] There is an underlying characteristic as well: as far as we know, humans are the only species that know about their own mortality. This capability lies behind dystopia – the thought that the world will end if things go on like a certain way.

Andrew Brook defends that cognitive science today relies heavily on Kant's concept of the mind and the self. Empirical psychology, including the works of Freud, defines the mind in a Kantian manner: the consciousness that a subject has of represented objects unified through synthesis (Brooks). Humans are self-conscious in their reasoning processes; we can infer, sense, and attribute meaning to events by using logic.

A second approach to the definition of human considers that we have a complex set of emotions that allow us to be a unique species. It is not that the cognitive processes of the mind are denied. On the contrary, they are reasserted and expanded: differently from other animals, humans use emotions in reasoning processes being able to create and express our selves. It is not solely metarepresentation that defines the species, but the experience of acting on the world through the emotions that forge the self. As an instance of this rationale, one may consider Romanticism, which defines humanity in such terms. William Wordsworth's famous assertion that poetry is "an overflow of powerful feelings" with "its origin in emotions recollected in tranquility" reads as a statement on the human creative force. The Romantic genius may be interpreted as nothing more than the human who lives to its fullest potential, extracting from experience the emotions that give each human a unique self, capable of creating using reason, something no other animal can do.

Dystopia – and science fiction in general – has often used these two parameters to explore and extrapolate the idea of humanity. On the one hand, Philip K. Dick's and Isaac Asimov's works use the reason approach to define humans. If machines can learn, represent, and have a consciousness, then aren't they human as well? What are the consequences of such a change? These are often the questions raised in their novels. On the other hand, books such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* use the emotion approach to debate what being human means. For instance, if all of humanity is drug-induced happy and content, is it human at all? If humans cannot express their emotions and create, is it worth having such a complex mind in the first place?

I do not believe, though, that works of fiction adopt one approach only. They exist in a spectrum with reason and emotion as opposing forces in what comes to defining humans. Dystopian narratives oscillate in this spectrum, often moving towards one pole or the other. The novels selected for this dissertation follow the trend of valuing emotions, asserting the idea that they power the human narrative mind. For instance, in Jemisin's The Broken Earth trilogy, the orogenes – altered humans with the power to listen to and manipulate the Earth itself – are presented as the ones whose emotions are disconsidered: "But a rogga [derrogatory term for the Oregenes] is not any man. Roggas have no right to get angry, to want justice, to protect what they love" (*The Fifth Season*). Orogenes are bound to obey humans and are recognized for their reasoning, but it is in the category emotion that they are excluded. If their feelings and experiences do not matter, they are inferior; their narratives have no value. It is through their storytelling that orogenes start to form their identity and show they feel just like humans do. The allusion to slavery is apparent in Jemisin's text. White supremacist thought thrived on the notion that black people were less than human, possessing reason and feelings inferior to the white person's. Scientific racism, a distorted version of social Darwinism, was used to justify the enslavement of black people in Africa by Europeans. Religious discourse, especially Christianity, also corroborated the idea with the statement that black people had no souls. In Jemisin's trilogy, the orogenes are used for labor by other humans and belong to the bottom of society. They are both feared and labeled inferior, unpredictable creatures with no feelings and morals.

Many novels use the idea of less than-human experience to denounce social injustices. In Collins's The Hunger Games trilogy, the people in the districts are seen as inferior. They work to sustain the Capitol but live in terrible circumstances: rationed food, extreme poverty, and terrible work conditions. Their children are sent to slaughter on national TV for the entertainment of the Capitol in a fashion that does not differ from Christians sent to die in the Colosseum. The figure of the protagonist Katniss is constructed to show the narrative of the districts: they too have valid emotions and experiences, and they too are deserving of a dignified life. In Meyer's *Cinder*, the

cyborg protagonist works as a mechanic in the suburbs of New Beijing. Her kind is used in pharmaceutical trials, so "real humans" do not have to undergo dangerous side effects. Cinder's tutor dismisses her because she cannot cry and doubts her ability to grieve her sister's death. During the most painful period of her life, the Imperial soldiers question if Cinder can feel anything at all. When her lover, the prince Kaito, finds out she is a cyborg, he rejects her in disgust, asking if their affair was real or just programmed. Again, storytelling – using the Cinderella fairy-tale topic – is the resource to rescue Cinder's experience and show that she is capable of emotion as any human. In these novels, the district subjects and cyborgs work as an allegory for minorities. They represent the less than human experience of black and indigenous people, women, and the poor.

These alternative ways of being human that encompass differences are portrayed in narratives that foreground storytelling. Many of them, such as Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy, Yuknavitch's *The Book of Joan*, and the Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*, are often labeled postmodernist for their use of metafiction, self-reflexivity, language experimentation, and radical representation of ex-centric subjects. However, their definition of human that falls into the emotion extreme creates an idea of postromanticism.[41] These novels present the idea of the value of art, self-expression, passion, and purpose in one's life. They also use allegorical narratives to convey a sense of beauty and meaning to chaotic events. What deviates them from a pure Romantic aesthetics is the absence of the idea of the sublime. There is no grand awe in human experience. Humans are only a speck of dust in a vast universe; instead of fear and dread, this rationale is portrayed matter-of-factly.

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[41] Claudia Moscovici discusses the persistence of Romantic ideals and representations in literature and arts despite the Modernist and Postmodernist movements. She coins the concept of Postromanticism in *Romanticism and Postromanticism*.

Radicalized storytelling – a feature of all the novels analyzed – propose that it is necessary to acknowledge the plurality of the concept of human[42] to create new worlds. In this sense, they present the scenario Harari predicts in his book: non-*sapiens* humans coexisting with *sapiens* humans and the conflicts and cooperation that can arise from this contact. By telling their stories, all species of (non-)human claim their identity and dismantle the notion that *sapiens* is the possible paradigm for humanity.

4.2. Humanizing the Non-Human

When discussing notions of humanity in thought-provoking texts, words such as posthumanism and transhumanism come to mind. In general terms, posthumanism opposes the humanistic idea that humans, possessing reason, are at the center of creation. Transhumanism, on the contrary, continues the humanist project in which human beings can, through reason, evolve and improve themselves by means of technology. However, instead of having a divinity as the propeller of this evolution – as in the intelligent design theory, humans are responsible for it. As much as the terms posthuman and transhuman are valid for the discussion of dystopias, especially science fiction, I do not use them in this dissertation because the reading I propose for the selected novels is centered on the idea of human as *genus*. This rather biological view is relevant because the initial non-humans presented in these texts are a different *species* of humans. The cyclic nature of these narratives, which often return to the beginning of times, reinforce the connection to a previous time in history when humans were a plural concept. The end is the beginning is the end. The selected novels present the notion that history is a spiral, going through the same moments, only on different levels. This focus on the plurality of humanity that existed before – and that may exist

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[42] The notion of plurality of the concept of human rejects the Humanist notion and encompasses an anti-anthropocenic vision of the world. It opens the category humanity to diversity.

in the future – makes the use of notions such as post and transhumans not particularly useful in this dissertation.

The movement present in the selected novels is not of showing life after humans, but life when the lens of what being human means are taken away. Jeha discusses the necessary estrangement to break such a hegemonic view on humanity. The dominance of the adult European white male has determined the perception of the world that is imposed on the rest of humanity (231). The construction of what is the human experience is shown in the selected novels as it is: a construction. Humanity is a broader term that encompasses the humans that existed before us and the ones that will come to exist. In stock, there is storytelling, the feature in the human cognition that enabled the creation of different complex cultures.

The movement perceived in these dystopias written by women is the radical estrangement Jeha discusses. These novels portray human individuals that are aligned to the feminine, black, indigenous, mechanic, and alien; traces that have been disassociated of the "standard humanity." Radicalized storytelling in these texts allows this representation of humanity to be challenging also of the limited perception humans have of their ways of living. As Harari poses in the final considerations of his book, the reaction of humans to these new humans is an imperative of our times as well as how alternative ways of living will emerge. These new human organizations, as the selected novels show, may align to traditional knowledge, different gender relations, and radically different social arrangements.

In her "A Cyborg Manifesto," Haraway considers the notion of a defying entity, the cyborg. Her "ironic political myth" (150) defines cyborgs as

> resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. No longer structured by the polarity of public and private, the cyborg defines a technological *polis* based partly on a revolution of social relations in the *oikos*, the household." (151)

Cyborgs are beings that break boundaries: the first, the one between human and animal; the second, between living organism and machine, and finally, between the physical and non-physical. The radical aspect of cyborgs is accepting and embracing contradictions while rejecting totalizing thought.

The selected novels are full of cyborgs. Their presence destabilizes the rigid concept of human and ruptures clear-cut definitions. If the common ground for humans is storytelling, then the possibilities are infinite. The creation of cultures, identities, and social arrangements is never-ending; thus, it is unreasonable to expect a single way to be human. The cyborg imagery helps to understand two essential arguments: that contradictions should be embraced rather than relegated to totalizing thought, and that one should take responsibility in the relations between social relations and technology (181). In this sense, the aliens, robots, and genetically enhanced humans presented in the novels embody the cyborg identity.

These contradictions in essence that the cyborg identity possesses can be found in the Stone Eaters, beings that can walk through the Earth at a rapid pace in Jemisin's The Broken Earth trilogy. Their bodies are made of stone, and they feed on rocks. They are survivors of time immemorial, with a primal and robust connection to the Earth itself. During the season that strikes the Stillness, the Stone Eaters get involved with humans. The protagonist, Nassun, notes their peculiar ways,

> Hoa moves slowly again. They don't do this often, stone eaters. Movement is the thing that emphasizes their uncanny nature, so like humanity and yet so wildly different. It would be easier if they were more alien. When they move like this, you can see what they once were, and the knowledge is a threat and warning to all that is human within you. (*The Stone Sky*)

The external appearance of a Stone Eater is different from whatever found in humans. However, they have something human that connects them with others. Stone Eaters both defy and acknowledge humanity and its possibility of change. The same way Stone Eaters were once the paradigm and are not anymore, the humans in the Stillness are susceptible to the same.

Another example of a cyborg is Phoenix, the protagonist in Okorafor's *The Book of Phoenix*. A genetically engineered human, Phoenix has the power to set herself and her surroundings on fire and rise from the ashes once again. She can also fly and connect to immaterial beings. Mmuo, one of her allies, says about her,

> You are an American, Phoenix. So though you know Africa well, you will believe in the power of science over all that we know. But you are an African, too, so you know it in your flesh, your strange flesh, that the spirit world rules the physical world.

Phoenix believes that science and the will of the goddess Ani coexist and mold each other. She uses science and all her scientific knowledge to understand the world around her and act on it; at the same time, she unquestionably believes in Ani, being capable of feeling the presence of the goddess and talking to her. Phoenix lives the contradiction and embodies it – she is both an experiment and the chosen daughter of the goddess.

The common ground for the non-humans, the cyborgs, in the selected novels, is their use of storytelling to challenge other humans. Beings of contradiction and irony, as Haraway defines them, these non-human characters both resemble and deviate from *Homo sapiens*; both follow and stray from humanity. It is precisely due to this uncanniness that humans initially are so eager to label them as non-human. Nonetheless, the capacity to tell stories brings them close humans that are forced to reconsider their preconceptions about what is contained in the word human.

4.3. In the End, Humans

According to the categories established in this dissertation for the selected novels, I analyze how the perception of humanity happens. The texts in the first category, which has Le Guin's *The Telling* as its prominent example, bring about a morality tone that establishes that stories make humans better. This judgement is also found in the other novels of the group from The Hunger Games trilogy to the more experimental *Midnight Robber*. The novels in the second division attempt at defining human as the one who tells stories. In these highly metafictional works, narrative is the

most treasured resource in a dystopia of scarcity. Winterson's *The Stone Gods* is the representative of the group. Finally, with Atwood's *MaddAddam* as the primary example, the third category focuses on the creation of a new humanity that will coexist with *sapiens* in a new world. The novels in this group propose radical societies that challenge single narratives. Storytelling in the selected novels works both to rescue a discussion on the power of narratives and as a way to widen the definitions of humanity.

4.3.1. Group 1: Stories Make Better Humans

The novels in the first category have storytelling as a moral standard. For them, diverse and fair societies use storytelling as a form of knowledge and construct societies around it. The more a group or a character uses storytelling, the more humanly elevated they are in their own view of the world. As a primary example, I analyze Le Guin's *The Telling* and in a second moment I use examples from Roth's Divergent series and Olivier's Dellirium series.

Part of the Hainish Cycle novels, *The Telling* discusses human diversity. In Le Guin's universe, the Hain, the first humans, colonized other worlds. Some of these worlds were left behind, forgotten, with human DNA in them that evolved and adapted to different environments for thousands of years in their unique ways. Terra – the name for Earth in this universe – is one of these abandoned experiments of colonization, as well as Aka, Athshe, and Gethen. Some humans, such as the Akans, are very similar to the humans from Terra – that I will refer to as *sapiens* – in physical appearance and cognition.[43] Humans in Athshe, on the other hand, are green-furred and

[43] Sutty, the novel's Terran narrator, does not mention any difference between the Terran humans or Akan humans. She says things like "the vast majority of human beings in this world" (98). However, as Akans and sapiens developed in two different planets from the same *homo* variation, it is somewhat accepted in the Hainish universe that they are two different species.

one meter tall, while androgynous humans populate Gethen. The encounter of different humanities – Terran and Akan – in the novel becomes a potent reflection not only to define what is human but to state that stories make humans better.

The Hainish novels and short stories frequently draw on conflicts between different kinds of humans and the consequences of these conflicts. Focusing on the novels, Elizabeth Cummins writes,

> the integrity of individual people, societies, and worlds can be achieved when the uniqueness and difference of each separate thing is honored. The integration of these diversities is achieved when the interactions and interdependency among them is respected. The search for a mode of human relationships based on integration and integrity is reflected in the structural feature that the three major Hainish novels share. (71)

The possibility of integration and integrity is found through love for the difference (*The Left Hand of Darkness*), the search of a common language (*The Word for World is Forest*), and personal maturity (*The Dispossessed*). As thought experiments on what it means to be human among a diversity of humans, the works in the Hanish cycle might be read as a critical evaluation of humanity's values and capabilities and to what extent they hold.

Cummin's comment appeared before *The Telling* was published; however, I would like to take her rationale and state that the novel presents the possibility of integration and integrity through storytelling. This theme is also mirrored in the novel's structure, which unfolds in first-person narration. Sutty's personal story mingles with the story of Terra and Aka, and both contain and amplifies the value for the narrative form that the novel proposes. As a dystopia, it works differently from the previous Hainish novels because it presents the narrative of the individual versus the collective, a struggle for a narrative to continue to exist amidst totalitarianism. *The Telling* is the only Hainish novel in which the society portrayed is on the verge of extinction and is fighting for its right to be once more.

The first chapters of the novel try to separate the Akans living in the cities and the ones living in the countryside. Sutty says,

> the other Two Observers presently in Dovza City, they had all discussed the massive monoculturalism of modern Aka in its large cities, the only places the very few offworlders permitted on the planet were allowed to live. They were all convinced that Akan society must have diversities and regional variations and frustrated that they had no way to find out. (13)

The corporate state controls writing, speech, and media, focusing on the "march to the stars," technological development, and behavior. When Sutty hears she is allowed to visit the people in the countryside, she asks if they are "an ethnic fragment population." Her Ekumenical Envoy, a kind of supervisor, states they are "sectarians, … rather than ethnic. A cult. Possibly remnants in hiding of a banned religion." The citizens under corporate control are frequently described as dull, and the Akans in the countryside are seen as lively and exciting. To Sutty's eyes, and consequently, to the reader's, the ones that follow the telling are better humans.

The Telling is about being able to tell multiple stories because, without it, there is oppression. The narrator considers the situation on the planet,

> Aka's abrupt and tremendous technological advance was sustained by rigid discipline universally enforced and self-enforced. It seemed that everybody in the city worked hard, worked long hours, slept short hours, ate in haste. Every hour was scheduled. Everybody she'd been in touch with in the Ministries of Poetry and of Information knew exactly what they wanted her to do and how she should do it. (34)

The one-story of the corporation suppresses human's creativity and ability to build different realities. Their focus on uniformity creates a society with the same problems, such as traffic, burnout, and fanaticism. Without the openness to different narratives, there are no inventive solutions to these problems. Instead of the claimed technological development, Aka is merely copying other planets that have undergone the same process centuries before it.

Le Guin has often been labeled a moralist writer. Tony Burns disagrees; he argues that she is not a moralizing author, but someone who "considers humans as beings by nature ethical animals, and who, as a result, has an overriding interest in the ethical dimension of human existence" (140). He goes on to present how Le Guin's texts are embedded in Taoism and on the view that alienation from other's humanity eventually deprives us of our status as a human. This notion is very present in *The Telling*: the Akans that embrace difference are better humans than the ones in Dovza or Terra. When Sutty, in her conversation with the monitor Yara, can see him as an equal and not an enemy, she becomes a better human too. She says, "thank you for telling me what you told me, Yara. … And for letting me tell you. I hope you… I hope things work out. Goodbye" (255). At this moment, she gains wisdom and finally understands the Akans.

Contrary to the Akans that follow the corporate state and the Terrans that follow one religion fanatically, the ones who live the telling have a better vision of the world and can propose alternative ways of living. However, not only that, there is a moral judgment of superiority to them. Maz Uming remarks about humans,

> so, without the telling, the rocks and plants and animals go on all right. But the people don't. The rest of the world knows its business. Knows the One and the Myriad, the Tree and the Leaves. But all we know is how to learn. How to study, how to listen, how to talk, how to tell. If we don't tell the world, we don't know the world. We're lost in it, we die. But we have to tell it right, tell it truly. That's what went wrong. Down there, down there in Dovza, when they started telling lies. … Telling people that nobody knew the truth but them, nobody could speak but them, everybody had to tell the same lies they told. Traitors, usurers! Leading people astray for money! … No wonder the world stopped going around! (145)

For him, storytelling is necessary for humanity to establish. Humans' learning and creating are done through storytelling, the ability to describe, and inscribe oneself into the world. Nonetheless, storytelling can also be used for manipulation, and the lack of variety of narratives lead to greed

and ruin. Maz Uming tells Sutty about the malpractices that led to the corporation state and the forbidding of the telling. It is clear for her and the reader that the telling is a superior way of living.

The Akans, humans that are not *sapiens* from another world, may be read as cyborgs in Haraway's terms. They reject duality, attempting to create a sense of wholeness in their knowledge. In this sense, they integrate differences and propose pacific coexistence and non-violent societies. The development of their technology, however, is very different from the humans' in Terra and the ones they influenced in Aka. Nevertheless, by the end of the novel, Sutty proposes the return of the telling's practices so society can integrate their way of living to the new technologies developed. This vision holds the promise of a society that treasures storytelling and make humans better.

The notion of human diversity focused on integration and integrity that uses storytelling as a common ground for humanity is also found in the Young Adult trilogies Divergent and Dellirium. In both series, storytelling is the factor that shows the better side of humanity, a proposition of alternative ways of living. The rescue of the past is the central theme in the novels, and it is the retelling and resignification of this past that can construct a fairer society in comparison to the ones previously portrayed.

In Roth's Divergent trilogy, the protagonist, Tris, finds out she and all the inhabitants of Chicago – a city previously thought to be the last one in the world – are part of a genetic experiment. Afflicted by genetic anomalies, humans decide to isolate the city and use a strict system of factions to control the citizens. This method allows the selection of humans without the anomalies that will further be reintegrated into society. Throughout the three novels, Tris fights for the recovery of the past and for her story to be heard. She does not see the difference between the so-called anomalies and people like herself. It is clear for the characters and the reader that Tris is a better human and that her ideals are superior.

Lena, in Olivier's Dellirium series, refuses to undergo the procedure that erases love from the human brain. Love, in this dystopian society, is considered a disease that has to be eliminated so a more organized society can happen. What Lena understands is that love is not only about

people's relationships, but about their commitment to themselves and their authenticity. The latter comes out through storytelling, which can only be performed by the ones who had not had the operation; it turns out that taking out love of the equation makes people less imaginative and critical. Lena is also a symbol of freedom and forms the promise of a better humanity, one that can integrate love to pursue a better living.

Both Tris and Lena know they are challenging what it means to be human. About the Divergent series, Marks de Marques and Pereira argue that Tris knows that her process of knowing the truth about herself leads her to information that will resignify her notion of self and change her concept of humanity (123). Like Lena, Tris knows that her quest for the truth about herself has consequences on the system that works to erase the notion of multiple narratives. Their search on the individual level inadvertently points to a collective struggle of silencing.

There is no doubt in both narratives that the society that manipulates the gene pool and erases love is oppressive and that the better humanity is the one proposed by Tris and Lena in their respective novels. As it is common in Young Adult narratives, the two young women save the day and open the doors to a society that embraces a multiple meaning for humanity. They aim at integrating different forms of human: in Divergent, the genetic anomalies and the so-called pure human DNA, and in Dellirium, the diverse societies that can be formed when love is not banished – with different social and marital arrangements.

4.3.2. Group 2: Stories Define Humans

In this second category, the novels use storytelling to define whether a being is human or not. They propose societies based on more egalitarian principles that value diversity and reject binary thinking, but the reader does not see how these humans organize themselves. There are only discussions about how it would be. I analyze Winterson's *The Stone Gods* as the main example in this category and later comment on Hagy's *Scribe* and Yuknatitch's *The Book of Joan*.

The Stone Gods can be read as an attempt to define what it means to be human. Throughout its multiple-layered narratives and stories inside a story, the novel explores humanity's strict meanings attributed to the human experience with its two main characters: the robot Spike and the scientist Billie. First assigned as a machine with programmed capacities, Spike is repeatedly called non-human by the other humans she encounters, including Billie. However, as the interaction between the two intensifies, Billie starts to doubt whether Spike is so unlike her. When the scientist finally acknowledges that Spike is human – to the point she falls in love with her – it is because of the stories she tells. Spike can create stories and metaphors to understand the events of her life; she has a sense of self mediated through storytelling. As in the novels in this category, in *The Stone Gods*, the ability to tell stories defines the human in a very straightforward manner.

Billie's movement goes from considering Spike a mere *robo sapiens* to seeing her as a *homo machina*. This exploration of the limitations and limits of humanity happens in the first part of the novel, "Planet Blue," and is later repeated in the last two parts, "Post War 3" and "Wreck City." Billie says, "nobody feels sorry for them. They're only machines" (6). Even though she is a discontent citizen, Billie buys into the prevailing assumptions of her society that robots have to serve, to think logically following a program. However, she is startled by Spike's capacity to reason and wonders if robots are not evolving while humans are regressing. Still, Billie's convictions about a strict division between humans and machines prevail during her first encounters with Spike. The logic behind is that humans have an exceptional quality to define them against other beings.

Billie's attempts to find this quality lead her to extent conversations during her space travel from Orbus to Planet Blue. Pink, the girl-like woman celebrity that gained a ticket to the space exploration program, despises the notion that Spike is having sex with Captain Handsome: "no offense intended to you, Spike. I'm not prejudiced or anything, it's not your fault that you're a robot – I mean, you never had any say in it, did you? One minute you were a pile of wires, and the next thing you know you're having an affair" (69). To that, Spike responds she is not in love with Handsome, but Pink insists, "Well, of course not – y'know, like I said, you're a robot." Spike

retorts, "That isn't why I don't love him" (70). For her, she is capable of love and also of not loving someone. The phrase "you're a robot" permeates the narrative at this point whenever Spike makes the crew uncomfortable, especially Billie. The scientist insists on the emotional divide: humans have emotions, and robots do not.

The emotional assumption falls apart when Billie sees herself unavoidably attracted to Spike. She says, "I don't want to get personal … but I'll say it again – you are a robot. Do you want to kiss a woman so that you can add it to your database?" (76). Spike, however, is not fooled by the scientific disguise in the question. She responds, "Gender is a human concept … and not interesting. I want to kiss you." Cavalcanti argues that *The Stone Gods* presents a visionary and utopian side of contemporary feminist science fiction: the redesigning of bodies that go against dualist and hierarchical patriarchal values with hybrid bodies ("O amor" 19). In this way, readers may see possibilities outside binarisms that bond the female body to repetitive social practices. Billie and Spike's relationship exposes such a vision of binary bodies because they explore new sensual and sexual experiences. They are not only defying the notion that Spike is a robot but the idea that she is female or assigned as female by the crew.

The idea that robots depend on humans, and therefore, are inferior is also discussed in the novel. Billie uses this argument after she acknowledges that robots can feel and express emotion. Spike says, "That was once true. … It isn't true any more. We are solar-powered and self-repairing. We are intelligent and non-aggressive. You could learn from us" (79). When Pink interrupts the conversation to say humans could never learn from a robot because they know nothing about life, Spike comments that "There are many kinds of life. … Humans always assumed that theirs was the only kind that mattered. That's how you destroyed your planet." It is clear at this point in the novel that Spike has more knowledge about building a new world than any other person on the ship. She asserts herself not only as a repository of human science but as a critical thinker who is also able to feel emotions and has ideas for a better future. To Billie's and the reader's eyes, she starts being less of a machine.

Another aspect of humanity is related to the notion of consciousness. In *The Stone Gods*, it is Spike herself who presents this discussion to Billie: "is human life biology or consciousness? If I were to lop off your arms, your legs, your ears, your nose, put out your eyes, roll up your tongue, would you still be you? You locate yourself in consciousness, and I, too, am a conscious being" (76). As a conscious being, Spike is self-aware. Boyd writes, "greater self-awareness offers real advantages in anticipating other's actions and reactions, but it also carries costs, including the ability to envisage our own death and absence from the ongoing world" (404). When robots start evolving beyond their initial programming, they gain consciousness of life and also of death. Their existence is reflected in the same way human existence is. Spike poses the notion that she not only feels and thinks like Billie, but that she sees life in the same manner.

Spike, however, is only perceived as human when she shows she can weave a tale. After she takes part in Handsome's stories about forgotten planets and decaying civilizations, Spike starts to be considered a living being. Billie says, "she was alive, reinterpreting the meaning of what life is, which is, I suppose, what we have done since life began" (99) right after she mentions she forgets "all the time that she [Spike]'s a robot." The ultimate acknowledgment of Spike's unquestionable humanity is when Billie asks her to tell a story. While waiting for their imminent deaths, Spike tells a metaphorical tale about a planet made out of Nothing. From that, they discuss the meaning of love and Spike defines it as "the chance to be human" (110). At this point, able to create her narrative, use metaphors, and elaborate on abstract concepts, Spike becomes human to Billie's and also to the reader's eyes.

This same movement is repeated in the last section of the novel, "Wreck City," when the other incarnation of Spike tells an alternate Billie that she has chosen to disconnect from the main-frame. Billie becomes outraged, claiming Spike is not a person, she is not even a robot, "she's training" (210). In this part, Spike is still a prototype with only a head. However, she is convinced she will learn to be depressed and have all the other feelings. When Billie goes out to be shot by the soldiers after the robot that has gone loose, she sees Spike as a human, finally. They share a

conversation about a book Billie found on the subway, *The Stone Gods.* When Spike shows she can understand stories, Billie is convinced she will evolve to tell them as well.

In "Post War 3," Billie defines her job as "I teach a robot to understand what it means to be human" (162). Nonetheless, it is Spike who ultimately teaches Billie the lesson. Considering Spike as human does not mean she will behave like *Homo sapiens* or continue with their way of living. On the contrary, Spike expands the concept of humanity. With new forms of humanity appears a new hope for a world in which the cycle of destruction will not prevail. Spike is not bound to gender, binary thinking, or organized society. She embodies the possibility of a different future for a different humanity with other values. A way of living that Homo sapiens may not understand, but that is not inhuman.

The protagonists of Hagy's *Scribe* and Yuknavitch's *The Book of Joan* also propose a different future for humanity. Having powers that initially make them be perceived as non-human, abnormalities, and even monstrosities, these women gain recognition as humans when they show their abilities to understand and create narratives. Their capacity for narrative surpasses that of *sapiens* and can have effects in the physical world.

The unnamed protagonist in *Scribe* has the power to intuit what it needs to be said by a person and write it in a letter. In this way, she is not dictated what to write, but she finds the words using an ability that the humans around her do not understand. Because of this, she lives isolated in a decadent house and is feared by her neighbors. They search for her abilities only when they need to write a message since, in this post-apocalyptic world, literacy is rare. Hendricks, a mercenary hired to fool the protagonist and steal her property, initially loathes her for her non-human qualities. However, throughout the narrative, he sees that she is human just like him; she only is capable of finding one's story and manifest it into the world in a different way.

In Yuknavitch's novel, Joan can communicate with the Earth itself and use its powers. Armies around the world use her abilities as they see her as a mere tool for war. Joan's movement from non-human to human also passes through storytelling: before her execution, she tells her

story to an interrogator. Christine, a revolutionary, finds in her words inspiration to free her people from the oppressive system they live in. Joan then becomes human, as different as the people in the space station CIEL – where Christine lives – that had their bodies changed due to lack of gravity. Humanity becomes a broad concept that accommodates the poisoned humans left on Earth because of radiation, the deformed people at CIEL, and Joan herself.

Both women tell stories, theirs, and others and drastically affect their societies. The unnamed narrator in Hagy's novel literally changes the world: she is able to encounter a past version of Hendrick's self and tell him the story of his life. The words have such an impact on him that he is forever changed, and his present self, inundated by new memories, decides to help the protagonist instead of killing her. This act sets in motion events that will change the community around them and enable a fairer society to flourish. In *The Book of Joan*, Joan's final words are in the form of a letter to her lover, Leone. There, she promises a different future for Earth: "A different story, leading whoever is left toward something we've not yet imagined" (260). Humanity, now an open concept, has to find a new way to live on a hostile planet.

In the two novels, there is the representation of a humanity unknown to *sapiens*. Similarly to *The Stone Gods*, it is a new way of thinking and reflecting about the world. Nevertheless, instead of being feared, this new humanity is welcomed once *sapiens* understands that they are human as well because they tell stories and that humanity is a plural concept.

4.3.2. Group 3: Stories Are the Foundations of a New Humanity

The novels in the third category also portray the negotiations between humans and initially considered non-humans. However, the third group presents the beginnings of society and the first foundations of a new human culture. Differently from the novels in the second category that only point to the possibility of a new world, these explore the options of having humans and new humans negotiating their cultures. As the primary example of this group, I discuss

Atwood's *MaddAddam* and how the Crakers evolve. Later, I comment on Meyer's *Winter* and Jemisin's *The Stone Sky*.

MaddAddam already begins with a conflict between two different kinds of humans: the Maddamites, survivors of the virus that almost obliterated the *sapiens* population, and the Crakers, genetically engineered humans that are not affected by the plague. For the first time in the trilogy, the Crakers encounter a group of humans.[44] The initial interaction already poses the differences between the two species: the male Crakers, who mate seasonally, understand that Amanda and Ren are ovulating and start performing their mating rituals. Toby witnesses the act and labels it "a cultural misunderstanding," even though she wishes to separate them. Marks de Marques calls attention to how this first encounter sets the tone for the discussion on whether the Crakers are humans:

> to see it as a cultural misunderstanding (in which case the Crakers are humans who share a different culture) and to have the desire to separate them, much like people do with animals, with cold water. It is important to mention, though, that not once is the word rape is used throughout the narrative to describe the sex act. ("Children" 142)

The Crakers have no notion of rape because of their mating seasons. For them, an ovulating female is looking for a male. Still, the Crakers express emotion, have reason, Theory of Mind, and empathy, attributes that would define them as human. The violence of the first encounter and its horrible ambiguity haunts the narrative.[45]

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[44] In *Oryx and Crake*, they meet Oryx, who they consider a deity, and later Snowman-Jimmy, who becomes their prophet. There is a brief hint of the Crakers' presence in the final pages of the second volume, *The Year of the Flood*.

[45] In the interpretation of the novel I propose, the Crakers rape the women because they are humans, even though of a different kind – they are *homo crakers*. Later on they understand the meaning

Initially, the Maddamites see the Crakers as aberrations. Brilliant scientists kidnapped by Crake to create his project of enhanced humanity, called Paradice, they call the genetically altered creatures "Frankenpeople" and "walking potatoes." The desire for distance, though, is frustrated when the Crakers insist they want to see Snowman-Jimmy, who is in a coma in the Maddamites' place. Toby, now in charge of teaching them about the world, sees in this act of empathy and compassion, the possibility that "they're people" (*MaddAddam* 34). To that, the response is, "they're definitely not like us. … No way close. They should go back to wherever they live" (35). This refusal to see them as humans may be because the Maddamites created the Crakers. They witnessed the DNA manipulation and the many trial and error projects that led to the Crakers. The absence of a "human spirit," or of "the mystery that is human life," is met with suspicion.

Throughout the novel, the Maddamites, mainly Toby, start perceiving the many ways in which the Crakers are close to humans. Crake's vision of replacing humanity with an improved version of it that would be incapable of symbolic thinking and, therefore, of creating the concept of a god results in irony: the improvement of humans creates other humans.[46] For Crake, what defines humanity is the presence of culture, and the Crakers start developing one. According to Marks de Marques,

> this means that Jimmy allows the Crakers' entry into the symbolic world of culture and, thus, a return to humanity (or humanism), the very traces of which Crake tried to erase in his

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of this action and learn about consensual sex. This also works as another comment on how Crake's experiment failed: his idea of using mating seasons to end all sexual violence backfires.

[46] For a discussion on how Crake's project can be understood as both posthuman and pre-human, see Marks de Marques's "Human After All? Neo-Transhumanism and the Post-Anthropocene Debate in Margaret Atwood's MaddAddam Trilogy."

> creation. Language is, thus, both restorative and creative, as it creates the Crakers' myths of origin and, by doing that, restores their human position. ("Children" 140)

The way the Crakers establish their customs and their mythology unsettles the Maddamites because it reminds them of the primal days of *Homo sapiens*, their first rituals, art, language, and myth.

The Crakers' capacity for symbolic thinking endorses the perspective that storytelling is at the deep core of humanity. While discussing the works on the Paradice project, Manatee says, "the singing was not my idea. … We couldn't erase it without turning them into zucchinis" (*MaddAddam* 43). Other features also prevailed, such as imagination and Theory of Mind. During the process of creating better humans due to their lack of human qualities, Crake carried out the idea that there is a human nature, after all, and that it is not possible to erase it. *MaddAddam*, however, shows this is not limiting. Humanity can take many forms, but it has, in its foundation, the capacity for telling stories.

Initially only listening to Snowman-Jimmy's stories, the Crakers later participate in it: "Once Toby has made her way through the story, they urge her to tell it again. They prompt, they interrupt, they fill in the parts she's missed. What they want from her is a seamless performance, as well as more information than she either knows or can invent" (45). The repetition with difference creates the necessary environment for the Crakers to train their narrative abilities and their capacity for mimesis. Their curiosity and close observance of humans prompt young Blackbeard to ask Toby to teach him to read and write. Now with more tools, the Crakers do not need to rely on the Maddamites for their narrative experiences. Marks de Marques writes,

> such stories (obviously invented) are, thus, transmitted in a vertical hierarchy, from humans to posthumans. But at the moment, Blackbeard learns how to read and write; he also learns how to tell stories. The entry into the symbolic world of narrative and storytelling allows the young Craker boy to replace his human proxies in the construction of a genuine Craker mythology. ("Children" 143)

With their customs and stories, the Crakers establish their culture that can now be recorded and passed to the next generations. Along with storytelling, they gain a sense of history and identity.

The Crakers' humanity is acknowledged by humans the moment they tell their stories. From that on, they are seen as individuals, each with a different personality, that should be respected. The Maddamites ally with the Crakers to fight the Painballers – violent criminals who survived the plague and continue to murder, rape, and torture – even though the Craker's role is limited to tracking. "We do not do battles," tells Blackbeard, "but Crake made the two-skinned ones so they could have a battle" (*MaddAddam* 160). After the battle, during the trial, the Maddamites stop considering the Painballers humans: "Who cares what we call them. … So long as it's not people" (367). There is a consideration about using their sperm since they are "true humans," but the argument falls flat. With three women pregnant with Crakers' children, the horror is not the hybrids to be born, but the idea of a Painballer's offspring. Ren warns, "A child with such warped genes would be a monster. … The mother couldn't love it" (369). Even though the Crakers are not voting members in the trial because of their non-violent nature, their presence establishes that the Maddamites see them differently now.

Even though the Crakers share with the Maddamites the ability of storytelling – reason enough for them to be considered humans in the narrative – they have significantly different features. Besides their seasonal mating, herbivorous eating, and colorful skin, they display unintended abilities from the ones designed by Crake. When Snowman-Jimmy is in a coma, the Crakers claim they communicate with him, "nevermind that he's unconscious, they're convinced they can hear him" (45). The same thing happens when Snowman-Jimmy dies. Blackbeard says, "but Snowman-the-Jimmy was travelling in his head far, far away, as he had travelled before, when he was hammock and we purred. But this time he went so far away that he could not come back" (364). The

Crakers also understand the genetically altered pigs, pigoons,[47] through some mind-reading ability, and they translate the pigoons' wishes to humans and vice-versa.

MaddAddam portrays at the same time the dawn and the dusk of humanity. On the one hand, *Homo sapiens* is almost extinct and with few means of survival. On the other hand, the Crakers are adapted to the environment and are creating the foundations of a new human culture. The presence of the hybrids expands, even more, the horizon of a future in which humanity is a broader and more inclusive concept in cyclic history.

The foundations of a new human culture are also portrayed in Meyer's *Winter* and Jemisin's *The Stone Sky*. The final volumes in the series The Lunar Chronicles and The Broken Earth trilogy, respectively, the two novels present the genesis of a new humanity based on the principles of collaboration and respect for diversity. Amongst the ruins of a violent world, the protagonists in both stories pave the way for a new society that accepts humanity in plural form.

In *Winter*, the cyborg Cinder and her revolutionaries dethrone the queen of Luna, Levana, a tyrant that oppressed her people for almost two decades. Lunars are descendants of Earthens who colonized the moon[48] an era before. In the specific life conditions at Luna, they have developed the unique ability to manipulate bioelectricity. Highly trained Lunars can take over a person's mind

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[47] The pigoons first appear in *Oryx and Crake* as pigs who had human's neocortex' cells implanted successfully. After the plague, the pigoons escape the labs and organize themselves. The Maddamites understand they have some kind of cognition, but do not understand it fully. The Crakers can understand the pigoons and communicate with them.

[48] The moon is an essential symbol in both novels. In *Winter*, it is the place where new humans first appeared, while in *The Stone Sky*, the destruction of the moon by the first altered humans caused the devastation of the Earth and its cycle of destructive seasons.

and create a glamour – an illusion to fool one's eyes. Due to this enhanced capacity, Earthens have distanced themselves from Luna and forbid migration. When coronated queen of Luna, Cinder starts negotiations with Earthens. Being both a cyborg and a Lunar, she embodies the multiple meanings of being human. She says to Earth leaders,

> I believe Earthens and Lunars can coexist peacefully. … We've seen it in Farafrah and other north African towns over the past decade, where close to fifteen percent of the population is made up of Lunar [illegal] immigrants. They work together. They trust each other. (788)

When questioned about whether she was not too young to understand the complications of international politics, Cinder presents well-researched data while adding, "I have a computer in my *brain*" (789). The new paradigms present by her broaden the perspectives about humanity. Cinder is a cyborg; she thinks and acts differently from other humans, and so do Lunars, who have found a way to coexist with Earthens on the margins of society.

Multiple humanities coexist by the end of *The Stone Sky*. In this novel, sapiens descend from the people of Syl Anagist, a highly technological civilization. The cyborgs created by these people, millennia later, become the Stone Eaters. Finally, the orogenes are hybrids of sapiens and Stone Eaters. After thousands of years of hiding and war, these three types of humans can live together in a new world. Hoa, a Stone Eater and one of the main narrators, comments on Remwha, a Stone Eater resistant to change, "There is the despair of ages on his face, all because he refuses to admit that there's more than one way to be human." The trilogy ends with Hoa and the protagonist, Nassum, who is now reborn in a new form, another kind of hybrid that highlights the novel's central theme of a stretched definition of humanity, talking about their plans of a new society. Hoa says, "Don't be patient. Don't ever be. This is the way a new world begins." The final words in the novel, "let's get to it," are telling of the foundations of this new world that now holds many humans organizing themselves differently to survive in a planet frequently under geo-catastrophes.

In both novels, the new humans propose alternative ways of living through community life that respects and values differences. They attempt to reject race, gender, and sexual discrimination

openly based on the principle that, if cyborgs, mutants, and hybrids are humans, other prejudices are absurd. These new humanities are proposed using storytelling. In *Winter*, Snow White's fairy tale frames the narrative, playing with readers' expectations and showing, in the narrative form itself, that stories can have multiple meanings. In *The Stone Sky*, the revelation that Hoa was the narrator all along and an unexpected central character in the story is a significant piece on the debate of humanity. Hoa, a Stone Eater, tells the well-crafted tale we have been reading since the first book. It is highly probable that the reader has humanized him all along.

Stories in these novels, like the others in this third category, are the basis of community life. They are not only the promise of a better world but the foundations of this world at work. Story-telling is the human common ground that is used to explore the manifold ways humanity can present itself.

Final Considerations

Life after *sapiens* does not mean life after humans. It means a different life, under different paradigms, having different stories to shape its reality. It may bring brave new worlds that we cannot even start to imagine, prompted by technological advances. This is no new scenario since we, *Homo sapiens*, once shared the world with fellow human species. In the past, our species could adapt and survive, thriving while others perished, but this position is not guaranteed. Who knows the sort of adaptation the future requires from us?

This debate over the place of *sapiens* in the world, be it our worth, survival, or ability, has been present in science fiction from early on. Shelley's *Frankenstein* haunted our dreams of humans conquering mortality while Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* questioned the morality of setting humans apart. Nevertheless, why is now dystopia the genre to take on this discussion and pour multiple forms of humanity in nightmarish visions of our future?

Dystopias have always worked with the uncertainties of the times. In his article celebrating one hundred years of dystopian novels published, André Cáceres names at least one prominent dystopia for each decade of the twentieth century. He also mentions that in Brazil, the search for the term dystopia has increased ten times, according to Google Trends. The peak of searches was October 2018, the month of Brazilian presidential elections. A similar event had happened worldwide in 2016 when the election of Donald Trump propelled the sales of dystopian novels on Amazon. In times of political uncertainties, readers and writers alike seem to turn to the imagining of the worst of times.

The depiction of a totalitarian regime is still a typical trace in many dystopias and are especially prevalent in Young Adult novels. A hundred years after Zamyatin's *We*, young readers are presented to state oppression in Collin's The Hunger Games trilogy, Charbonneau's The Testing trilogy, Meyer's The Lunar Chronicles, Oliver's Delirium series, Roth's Divergent series, and Ryan's Sky Chasers trilogy. While the adult part of the corpus also presents elements of totalitarian states,

such as Le Guin's *The Telling*, most of them address more complex forms of control like façade democracies ruled by corporate forces. Environmental issues also play their part in most novels selected and are frequently the reason for worldwide catastrophes.

Twenty-first-century uncertainties were added to these common themes in dystopian narratives by women. Marks de Marques calls it the third wave in dystopian fiction, one that draws attention to the body. The advances of technology in cybernetics as well as in genetic engineering raise complex ethical and existential questions. How much is human enhancement still human? What can happen to us as a species once these enhancements are part of daily life? What I believe the selected dystopian novels by women do is look at these questions not trying to demonize or solve them, but as attempts to find new models for human life. It is no wonder the narratives that follow the analyzed trend are filled with instances of hope and promises of new beginnings. Amid the horrible scenarios of oppression and disaster, the possibility of a new world emerges on the horizon.

In the conclusion of her work, Glover states that recent critical dystopia presents pessimistic scenarios, even though she recognizes the complexity in the themes proposed in these novels. She writes,

> the later novels, all written around the turn of the millennium, begin to question more rigorously the nature of human behavior. They ask what it is that separates culture from nature, and whether the desire for mutual interrelationships between Others is achievable in the face of the kinds of futures that are likely for our planet. (252)

This insistent quest for the human, I propose, is done through the thematization of storytelling, but not as a pessimistic endeavor. The novels I selected portray horrible scenarios for humanity, but they also provide room for the articulation of hope.

The way new worlds are brought, differently from the dystopian narratives by women of the past decade, is through the rescuing of sharing of experiences. One of the primary traces in the selected novels is the attempt to find common ground for all humans. By going back to the

traditions of the past, to storytelling, it is possible to envision a new future. After all, humans excel at creating narratives. Why not use them to create different ways of living?

These novels may arise from the twenty-first-century anxiety of lack of connection paradoxically provoked by the advent of social media. During political uncertainty, when totalitarian ideas come back to the public debate, while environmental disaster and economic crises lie in the background, finding what it means to be human bonding with another human is a common theme in the selected novels. Even if this human is not a human the way we used to think. Storytelling is all about this authentic experience of shared attention: for every storyteller, there has to be a listener. Humans, after all, evolved to be able to do this.

I have divided the selected novels into three categories, each representing a specific focus in the trend of using storytelling to discuss what is human. The first, in which I used Le Guin's *The Telling* as the prominent example, defines storytelling considering narrative knowledge as a superior form and stating that stories make us better humans. This group is by far the biggest – total of twenty-four novels – and points to a more moralistic tone inside the trend. The prevailing notion is that humanity not only can be improved, but that the key to it is the sharing of experiences. The dystopian scenarios presented are based on the lack of storytelling and how societies that undervalue it are deemed to be extinct. To say that these novels insist on a moral solution is not to say that they lack on complexity. They present comprehensive discussions on the power of narrative, from the metanarrative of *The Telling* to the overt didacticism of DuPrau's *The City of Ember*.

Winterson's *The Stone Gods* heads the second category, which has four novels. They share three major points: the world itself is built out of stories, the solution to the proposed problems is non-binary thinking, and stories are the defining factor of humans. These are the most experimental novels, as they use metafiction and embedded narratives constantly. They reflect on how narratives are constructed and on their power over people. Power becomes magical or supernatural to some extent – it is as if storytelling becomes a force that opens up the mysteries of the universe. *The Stone Gods* insists on the repetition of history, that is only one more narrative; *Who Fears Death*

creates a new world out of a story by supernatural forces; *Scribe* has a protagonist that can change the past because of her ability to tell stories; and *The Book of Joan* presents the notion of a "narrative revolution". These novels experiment on narratives that could exist outside binarism.

The third category has ten novels, with Atwood's *MaddAddam* as the chosen example. These novels have the following focus: stories create a new world, all knowledge is narrative knowledge, and narrative creates a new humanity. The creation of the new world is explored extensively in these texts not as a promise or as an experimentation, but as propositions of new societies that have as their basis different values regarding gender, race, and class. The worlds in these dystopias start as "bad place," but they evolve, through the power of storytelling, to hopeful communities that radically differ from the mistakes of the past. These alternative ways of living include different human species coexisting after major catastrophic events, such as in The Broken Earth trilogy and *MaddAddam*.

The biocultural approach to our species – how our minds work, how *Homo sapiens* have evolved to have the ability to tell stories, create fictional worlds, and care about tales that are not real – is relatively recent in literary studies. It raises the question of why this is relevant at all in discussing a text. However, when dealing with novels that so explicitly deal with what makes humans human, it seems unavoidable to look at the recent theories regarding the role of narrative to our species and how we have evolved to be where we are. This approach to the study of dystopian narrative has not been done so far.

Feminist, environmental, and racial readings of dystopian texts by women have been proposed in the past few decades. This dissertation aligns with such projects that work to expose and reevaluate the limitations of our cultural preconceptions and prejudices. To use this perspective along a biocultural viewpoint may seem irreconcilable, but I believe one has much to gain to consider these two approaches when reading dystopia – and also science fiction in general. In texts that question humanity, its biology and place concerning other beings, how come not to consider

the common ground between us all humans? Our capacity for Theory of Mind, storytelling, and play does not depend on the culture we are inserted. We all have it regardless.

The kind of stories we tell and the kind of stories that are important and relevant are cultural matters, but the ability to tell stories is for all humans, *how* we do that is a cultural factor. To be aware of how important stories are to our evolution as a species helps us to look at literary stories through different lenses: the texts we read are the result of a series of adaptations that allowed our species to thrive. Stories are not only the matrix of individuals and cultures but of our species. So it is sensible that science fiction addresses so obsessively the matter of what being human is and that recent works rely on the power of stories. The stories humans have developed till now shaped the world we live in; thus, what if we had told different stories? How would this world be different from ours? That is what the selected novels explore: the incredible power of storytelling and its impact on human life – both individually and collectively.

Many questions resist in this area that are beyond the scope of this project. One of them is the prevalence of the Young Adult dystopian novel and its constant depiction of extraordinarily violent and oppressive societies. Another is the specific ways myths – especially fairy-tales and quests – are reworked in the narratives to reevaluate familiar tropes of dystopia and science fiction. A further exploration of these themes has much to contribute to the field of dystopian studies.

This research continues the mapping of dystopian novels written by women while it points to an emerging trend. The use of storytelling to question what it means to be human in an overt manner that carries in itself the anxiety of our times. A quest for defining ourselves in times of deep fakes, fake news, and so many other forms of inauthenticity. These novels search for the meaning of storytelling at the core of the human experience at the same time that they acknowledge multiplicity, plurality, and difference.

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