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Oriana Palusci

aisff.starfiction@gmail.com

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COPY EDITOR

Francesca D'Angelo -

francesca.dangelo16@unibo.it

Federica Di Nicola - fededinicola6@gmail.com

PUBLISHER

Paolo Loffredo Editore srl

via Ugo Palermo 6

80128 Napoli - Italy

P.IVA 05014040876

R.E.A. NA 931959

+39 3248382362

www.loffredoeditore.com/it/

paololoffredoeditore@gmail.com

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ContactZone is an international double-blind peer-reviewed e-journal which publishes scholarly work on Science Fiction and the Fantastic connecting different languages, non-mimetic genres, and fields of study. It is the journal of the Italian Association for the Study of Science Fiction and the Fantastic. The areas of research range from literature to cinema, from media to comics and video games touching a wide spectrum of critical approaches, which includes literary criticism, ecocriticism, film studies, gender studies, cultural studies, postcolonial studies, linguistics, translation studies, critical race studies, queer studies. The journal welcomes papers from scholars, authors, teachers, and librarians supporting an innovative insight into texts written in English, but also in other languages, in order to promote a lively dialogue among critics and other specialists on an international level. *ContactZone* will focus on themes and topics dealing with the representation of imaginative and/or alternative worlds in the realms of science fiction and the fantastic.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4 Introduction. Dystopia, Ambiguous utopia, Ustopia
Palusci Oriana and Héliane Ventura
- 8 La lunga notte della svastica: Katharine Burdekin e il nazismo
Domenico Gallo
- 20 Cosmetic Surgery and Mythic Images in the Dystopian World of *Babel-17*
Jack Love
- 35 Oscillazioni tra materno umano e inumano in *The Handmaid's Tale* di
Margaret Atwood
Greta Francesconi
- 54 “Roses in the garden of that unseen world”: Nature and the “Dry Witch” in
Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam Trilogy*
Elena Bastianoni
- 70 “Everything matters, Junior. Why don’t you get that?”: A Psychoanalytic
Reading of Ron Currie, Jr.’s *Everything Matters!*
MaKenzie Hope Munson and Kevin Andrew Spicer
- 84 Speculative Reversals: Conflating (Parodied) Utopia and (Focalized)
Dystopia in Bernardine Evaristo’s *Blonde Roots*
Anna Pasolini
- 102 Il mondo senza internet. Paura e inquietudine nei romanzi distopici di
Giovanni Agnoloni
Dorota Karwacka-Pastor
- 112 Dystopia of Anxiety and Hope in Nayantara Sahgal’s. *When the Moon
Shines by Day*
Shwetha Elsa Louis and Sayan Chattopadhyay

Artwork

- 126 Trust the Gen Z
Claudio V. Coccoli
- 127 Notes on Contributors

Introduction

Dystopia, Ambiguous utopia, Ustopia

Oriana Palusci and Heliane Ventura

DOI: 10.26379/2006

Abstract

The ideal city [the favourite site of utopian literature] turned out to be only one step in a not yet imagined story. [...] In the second half of the nineteenth there were many signs of crisis and people started to think that utopia was certainly feasible but that, in reality, the utopian paradise hid hell.

Thus Raymond Trousson (2000: 183) defines the shift from utopian to dystopia (or dystopian) Western imagination. The very different, but in both cases shining, futures of William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890) and William Bellamy's *Looking Backwards* (1888) fade away and the gloomy outlines of a hell-on-earth landscape take shape among the thick fogs enveloping both individual lives and the whole social body: the triumph of capitalism, the rise of totalitarian regimes, the improvement of sentient machines and artificial intelligence lead humanity towards utter submission or physical annihilation. "*The Last Man in Europe*" is one of the titles considered by George Orwell for his great dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, centered on the sterile rebellion of its main character.....

La lunga notte della svastica. Katharine Burdekin e il nazismo

Domenico Gallo

DOI: 10.26379/1996

Abstract

Swastika Night (1937) by Katharine Burdekin (1896-1969) captures and narratively elaborates the complex anthropological relationship that constitutes the substratum on which the experience of European fascism was based. The role of women, homosexuality, motherhood, but also public health, the public and private sides of sex, the perception and exposure of the body, as well as certain aspects of racism in terms of biology, have been studied by numerous contemporary historians (such as Conte and Essner, 1995), but Burdekin's narrative version establishes a political and anthropological elaboration through literature exceptionally ahead of its time. *Swastika Night*, together with *Proud Man* (1934) and *The End of This Day's Business* (1989), are elements of a discourse not only feminist but more generally of gender studies that includes, even before Ursula Le Guin's *The Left End of Darkness*, the hypothesis that a person is capable of changing sex and the study, within the events of the novel, of the coming together of new identities. Reading Burdekin's novels makes it possible to hypothesize that science fiction is invented (and this is the case with some female writers who, although writing masterpieces, were not profound connoisseurs of the genre) when the yardstick of realism is no longer sufficient to describe certain situations with the necessary radicalism.

Cosmetic Surgery and Mythic Images in the Dystopian World of *Babel-17*

Jack Love

DOI: 10.26379/1997

Abstract

In Samuel R. Delany's *Babel-17*, Transport employees like pilots and navigators are often depicted as cosmetically altered humans. Cosmetisurgery (as it is called in the novel) of these characters is purely volitional and, as such, an expression of their individuality. I argue that the cosmetic alteration of human bodies into mythic images functions much like T.S. Eliot's "mythic method." In *Babel-17*, the most vulnerable human beings (Transport employees) find meaning and stability through their cosmetic modifications. Transport humans must literally connect their bodies to starships as pilots, navigators, and other positions in space. Living as appendages to larger machines is a dystopian nightmare that is both dangerous and dehumanizing. Through cosmetic alteration and the use of mythic images, Transport humans write stability onto their bodies. Though cosmetic alteration does not free Transport humans from the strictures of an intergalactic dystopia, it does provide them with stability, control, and individuality.

Oscillazioni tra materno umano e inumano in *The Handmaid's Tale* di Margaret Atwood

Greta Francesconi

/ DOI: 10.26379/1998

Abstract

Handmaids in *The Handmaid's Tale* are subhuman creatures, versions of the “simulacrum”, deprived of any kind of identity. They are mothers: the matrix conquered by a totalitarianism that has their body in order to dominate reproduction. This utopia presents an open-ended finale that extends the story up to the transmedial TV adaptation. Disclosing an escalation of liminal violence, the storytelling is inserted between the abjection and the holiness of a typical monstrous maternal. This analysis connects the mother-Handmaid to the cyborg: in feminist cyberpunk, a partial, assembled and denatured identity that will attempt to make a new overcoming utopia. How can a scientific and technological reworked version of identity release the feminine from mistreatment and exploitation? Dissolving binary ideologies like those between man and women, human and animal, organic and inorganic, that are all regulated by dystopian fluctuations between human and inhuman.

“Roses in the garden of that unseen world”: Nature and the “Dry Witch” in Margaret Atwood’s MaddAddam Trilogy

Elena Bastianoni

DOI: 10.26379/1999

Abstract

Starting from Pierre Hadot’s representation of the history of the idea of nature, this paper intends to explore the bond between femininity and nature in Margaret Atwood’s *MaddAddam Trilogy*, where character Toby can be seen as a reconfiguration of Graves’s “White Goddess”. As a posthumanist Hecate, “Dry Witch” Toby possesses a vast knowledge of nature’s secrets, including beekeeping and mycology. Toby’s nickname underlines the theme of witchcraft, a key topic in Atwood’s writing. The representation of the bees as intermediaries between the tangible and the unseen, with Toby as their listener, underlines the bond between femininity and nature and explores the metaphoric relationship between mycology and a way of promoting a more inclusive society for the non-human world. By presenting Toby as the guide of a society based on hybridization, Atwood promotes the renegotiation of the bond between humanity and nature as a chance of preserving life on the planet.

“Everything matters, Junior. Why don’t you get that?”: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Ron Currie, Jr.’s *Everything Matters!*

MaKenzie Hope Munson and Kevin Andrew Spicer

DOI: 10.26379/2000

Abstract

In Ron Currie, Jr.’s 2007 novel, *Everything Matters!*, the opening chapter describes a strange “voice” that addresses and informs a child in the womb, Junior, that an asteroid will incinerate the world in thirty-six years. The novel presents a perhaps somewhat contrived trope while simultaneously providing readers with opportunities to think through numerous relations between the apocalyptic, the dystopian, and the potentially catastrophic effects of this “certain knowledge.” We think that a perspective deeply influenced and informed by psychoanalytic thinking is very much called for. Lacan’s work will allow us to marshal a large number of details in the novel that we would like to account for; furthermore, the quite psychoanalytic opening chapter of the novel will allow us to talk about the emergence of the subject into a world that is constantly cut through with lack, finitude, and all of those incessant questions about the nature of meaning and whether or not anything “really matters.”

Speculative Reversals: Conflating (Parodied) Utopia and (Focalized) Dystopia in Bernardine Evaristo's *Blonde Roots*

Anna Pasolini
DOI: 10.26379/2001

Abstract

This paper sets out to analyse *Blonde Roots* (2009) by Bernardine Evaristo focusing on its textuality and narrative strategies in order to investigate the ways in which the novel's many inversions and subversions trigger a reflection on literary genre interlinked with political issues of gender, race and class. The novel retells an inverted version of the history of the transatlantic slave trade within a redesigned world geography which reflects human power distribution. It is both a "what if" and a "this is what was" story, a work of speculative fiction which problematizes clear-cut distinctions between utopia and dystopia showing that such a contrast depends on perspective and point of view. *Blonde Roots*' provocative reversals blend generic features, problematise traditional labels and bend established narrative conventions to foreground the (constructive and deconstructive) power of storytelling, which emerges quite forcefully also thanks to an intertextual web of strategic references to the Western literary canon. Investigating these references leads one back to scrutinising generic categories, as intertextual allusions at once question (parodically) and reinforce (ideologically) the dystopian framework of the novel and the discursive articulation of gendered and racialised bodies and identities it substantiates.

Mondo senza internet. Paura e inquietudine nei romanzi distopici di Giovanni Agnoloni

Dorota Karwacka-Pastor

DOI: 10.26379/2002

Abstract

In his literary production on dystopia – collected in the cycle *Internet: Cronache della fine* (2021) – Italian writer Giovanni Agnoloni, a member of the Connectivist literary movement, imagines the world of tomorrow suddenly deprived of Internet.

Among the incessant catastrophes that torment today's humanity, such a dramatic change could hypothetically occur, triggering a radical transformation in the reality that we know. However, the author believes that identifying the problem and describing this turning point is not sufficient. He rather concentrates on human beings and their desires, hopes and fears. Mankind, terrified by the European blackout resulting in the disconnection from the Net, would sink into chaos and solitude. Still, it would have an opportunity to reconnect with its most genuine self and with the others, without hiding behind a computer anymore. Agnoloni's focus is on the empathic concern for everybody's future. His moral imperative is to warn us against what is maybe inevitable.

Dystopia of Anxiety and Hope in Nayantara Sahgal's *When the Moon Shines by Day*

Shwetha Elsa Louis and Sayan Chattopadhyay

DOI: 10.26379/2003

Abstract

The article argues that the anxieties which drive the dystopian imagination in Nayantara Sahgal's novella *When the Moon Shines by Day* (2017) coincide with the contemporary displacement of dominant national ideals which emerged during the years of India's struggle for independence and its post-independent years by a new grand narrative of purity. It analyses dystopia's origins in connection with the postcolonial nation and the nation's relationship with its minorities. This problematizes the dystopian anxieties of the text which are unmistakably middle class in nature and prompts the question – who gets to label something as dystopian?

In the second section, the article finds that Sahgal's novella is an example of postcolonial dystopia, while simultaneously exemplifying critical dystopia. In doing so, it argues against Mrinalini Chakravorty's claims regarding postcolonial dystopia's rejection of utopian impulses and its subsequent stalling of the discourse on critical dystopias.