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'What hath God Wrought': Dystopia, Empathy and Revolution in Naomi Alderman's *The Future*

José M. Yebra
Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana, Universidad de Zaragoza

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Abstract: This article delves into Naomi Alderman's *The Future* (2023), a sci-fi feminist dystopia that revisits and updates her previous novel, *The Power* (2017). Whereas in *The Power*, a cataclysm turns gender roles upside down, *The Future* goes further as it seemingly features the end of Western neo-liberalism and civilization. In the Capitalocene envisaged in *The Future*, there are still a few survivalists, i.e. nomad characters in a pluriversal scenario, who contest the new order (a continuation of its predecessor) and struggle for an ethical one based on a partnership model where empathy and a liberating revolution can replace a hierarchical and exterminist paradigm. Yet, this paper argues, this dystopia recalls Alderman's previous fiction: it is at once parodic, devastating and especially cautionary because the system which intends to replace the current techno-dystopia can be easily corrupted. As the analysis of the novel shows, a dystopian regime is cyclically replaced by a similar one in the Capitalocene. To explore Alderman's latest dystopia and its redeeming features, this essay considers Riane Eisler's "dominator" and "partnership" models, Jeremy Rifkin's conception of empathy, and Hannah Arendt's idea of revolution.
Keywords: Alderman; Dystopia; Partnership model; Empathy; Revolution

ES 'Lo que ha hecho Dios': Distopía, empatía y revolución en *The Future*, de Naomi Alderman

Resumen: Este artículo profundiza en *The Future* (2023), de Naomi Alderman, una distopía feminista de ciencia ficción que revisita y actualiza su anterior novela, *The Power* (2017). Mientras en *The Power* un cataclismo pone del revés los roles de género, *The Future* va más allá, puesto que supuestamente presenta el fin del neoliberalismo y la civilización occidental. En la era del Capitaloceno que propone *The Future*, aún hay algunos supervivientes, es decir, personajes nómadas en un escenario pluriversal, que se oponen a un nuevo orden (una continuación de su predecesor) y luchan por otro más ético basado en un modelo de cooperación donde la empatía y una revolución liberadora pueden sustituir un paradigma jerárquico y exterminista. Sin embargo, este artículo defiende que esta distopía recuerda las novelas anteriores de Alderman. Es, al mismo tiempo paródica, devastadora y especialmente aleccionadora porque el sistema que pretende reemplazar la tecno-distopía actual se corrompe con facilidad. Como demuestra el análisis de la novela, un régimen distópico es sustituido por otro similar en el Capitaloceno. Para analizar la última distopía de Alderman y sus pocos puntos positivos, el artículo hace referencia a los modelos de dominación y cooperación de Riane Eisler, el concepto de empatía de Jeremy Rifkin y la idea de revolución de Hannah Arendt.
Palabras clave: Alderman; distopía; modelo cooperativo; empatía; revolución

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1. Introduction

In the Bible, Numbers 23:23, the prophet Balaam is offered a reward by Balak, the Moabite King, if he curses the Israelites. After struggling to find a curse, Balaam relinquishes and states: "What hath God wrought." That is, a prophet's words are futile when it comes to God's divine plan. The biblical extract gained prominence when Samuel Morse used it in the first Morse message from Washington to Maryland in 1844. In recalling

Balaam's words, Morse acknowledged the magnificence of God's creation, of which his invention was just a tiny part. However, while in the original, divinity manifests itself metaphysically, namely in a thwarted curse, in Morse's case, Balaam's words are applied to the concreteness of a telegraph message. This duality is characteristic of Naomi Alderman's biography, politics and artistic trajectory. Brought up in a Jewish Orthodox family, her religious stance changed when she visited a liberal Synagogue as she was writing *Disobedience*, her first novel. As Alderman points out:

> The Ba'al Teshuvah (return to Orthodoxy) movement has been growing in strength over the past 30 years and a lot of the Rabbis whose sermons I heard were part of that ideology, insistent that it wasn't even OK to feel **tolerant** towards non-Orthodoxy. However, I have done a lot of thinking about this stuff in the past six or seven years – and I've changed my mind on a lot of issues. (2009, n.p.)

Henceforth, she opts to come "back to the text, [and] forget anything that any preacher ever taught you" (Alnes 2013, n.p.). Alderman's discourse has shifted between Jewish foundational narratives and video game aesthetics,[1] the magnificence of creation and destruction, and their playful reproduction on screen. The cataclysm of *The Power* (2017) and the resetting of *The Future* (2023) constitute dystopian foundational narratives in which science-fiction meets the Scriptures and invites readers to explore the danger of power. For George F. Botjer, in recalling Balaam's words, Morse's invention was ground-breaking because it compressed space and time to a frame of simultaneity which started the electronic age (2016). This sense of compression of time and space informs Alderman's latest two novels and is related to the battle between messianic idealism and the futility of humans' tragic end. Therefore, this paper argues that *The Future* is a cautionary tale which, like *The Power*, updates previous dystopias and anticipates an unfortunate utopia to warn of the risks of unrestricted power. In both novels, revolutionary forces attempt to remove patriarchal, neoliberal regimes. Yet, regardless of the legitimacy of these revolutions, they end up becoming corrupt, especially in the context of the Anthropocene and the Capitalocene. Although feminism, ecology and social justice are fragile, Alderman's novels do not disregard them. On the contrary, as mentioned above, *The Future* (and *The Power*) raises awareness of the devastating effects of unruled power and the disregard for the marginalised.

The Anthropocene, theorised by Paul J. Crutzen (2006), addresses the sense of an era and of an ending, the need to explain the harmful human effect on the planet and the urgent need to react (Moore 2016). The Capitalocene is an alternative and more contextualised term than the Anthropocene, which, for Donna Haraway "points directly to a voracious political economic system that knows no bounds, one where human lives, the lives of other creatures, and the beauty and wealth of the earth itself are figured as mere resources and externalities" (in Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin 2015, 7). While the Anthropocene was essentially a geological concept, the Capitalocene is more focused on the ravaging impact of capitalism and is therefore particularly relevant since the effects of Modernity, especially liberal humanism and economic liberalism, are more prevalent and destructive than ever before. It can be argued that the proliferation of dystopias in recent literature is, among other things, a response to a general crisis. In this sense, *The Future* overlaps utopian and dystopian discourses, the characters playing with the idea of a revolutionary new start after an ultracapitalist world collapses. Yet, they move away from Hannah Arendt's conception of a post-revolutionary beginning. For Arendt, revolutions make sense as long as they entail an overall political change that guarantees people's actual freedom (1990). Instead, in *The Future* (and *The Power*), revolution runs the risk of becoming a mere transfer of power, allowing the Capitalocene to continue.

Alderman's *The Future* is ambitious, featuring a fake dystopian end of the world where the third and fourth technological revolutions, together with a post-Newtonian paradigm, converge with the Bible to understand human nature and the risks of Western civilization gone astray. The fake end of the world at the beginning of the novel paves the way for an apparent utopia that hides a forthcoming surreptitious dystopia in the epilogue. While *The Power*, also a dystopia, overturned gender roles to parody and question how power and violence determine social relations, *The Future* explores the malfunction of civilization as a whole and the risks to itself and the planet. In other words, *The Power* delves into the legitimacy of a violent female dystopia "as contributory to cyberfeminist countercultural movements" (Yebra 2018, 72) whereas *The Future* speculates on a new paradigm that attempts to reformulate tech-neo-liberalism and the Capitalocene. In both novels, a dystopian scenario is replaced by a utopia that eventually turns into a dystopian regime. However, *The Future* transcends the gender crisis of *The Power* and makes reference to an overall planetary state of emergency. To explore the dynamics between dystopia and utopia in *The Future*, this article will address Riane Eisler's "dominator" and "partnership" models, Hannah Arendt's conception of power and revolution, and Jeremy Rifkin's theory of empathy.

As mentioned above, *The Future* follows the lead of *The Power*, which, according to S. J. Parris's review, is also a "satirical dystopian tech-thriller" moving "between alternative past, recognisable present and speculative future" (Merritt 2023, n.p.). Zimri Nommik, Ellen Bywater and Lenk Sketlish, three billionaires and the chief executives of Anvil, Medlar and Fantail ("barely disguised versions of Amazon, Apple and Facebook/Twitter)" (Merritt 2023, n.p.) control the world. The novel starts when the three receive a message from an app announcing the end of human civilization. Hence, they head for their bunkers, but their plane crashes on a remote island where they live thereafter. The compression of time and space and the post-Newtonian paradigm are represented in the novel by juxtaposing discourses, especially sci-fi dystopia (video-game

[1] Alderman has been a videogames creator for a long time. She discussed on the complex relationship between videogames and storytelling as closer to each other than most think (2015: n.p.).

scenarios and eco-terrorism), and the Survivalist Forum, where participants discuss philosophy and recall passages from the Old Testament. The irony of Alderman's dystopia is that the end of the world is just a trick devised by Martha Einkorn, Lenk's right-hand at Fantail and the daughter of Enoch, the leader of a religious sect. In fact, Martha is part of a resistance group that fights against the status quo. Echoing the feminist terrorism of *The Power*, Martha, together with Badger Bywater, (Ellen's child) Selah Nommik, (Zimri's wife) and Albert Drabrowski (the former president of Medlar) plan the three billionaires' disappearance. As a consequence of their plan, there is an unexpected side-effect, namely the accidental disappearance of Lai Zhen, "a former refugee turned survival-tech influencer" (Merritt 2023, n.p.). The eco-terrorists intend to abolish the dystopia produced mainly by the effects of technology, social inequalities and the environmental crisis and replace it with a utopia. Yet, the new regime is as dystopian as its predecessor in the long run. Rosie Braidotti's discussion of the archaic mother (1996) is applicable and questioned in *The Power*, which thus departs from classic ecofeminism. Instead, José M. Yebra approaches *The Power* from the ethics of care throughout "'Acheronta Movebo.' Violence and dystopia in Naomi Alderman's *The Power*" (2018). This same ethics of care, which entails connecting and working "self-and-other together" (Held 2006, 12), is also a guiding principle in *The Future*, although the protagonists fail to understand it. Only Lai Zhen remains an activist and an ethically-committed character throughout. In featuring how dystopia replaces dystopia in the name of caring for the other, be it marginalised groups or the environment, the novel underscores the importance of a true ethics of care to challenge neo-liberalism, which is at its most rampant in the era of the Capitalocene.

This conflict between the neoliberalism represented by Zimri Nommik, Ellen Bywater and Lenk Sketlish and the forces of resistance is rooted in human history and religion, as evidenced in the Survivalist Forum. Time and space are compressed in the Forum since techno-geeks use it to discuss the old Scriptures and human evolution. Indeed, the novel presents very short chapters, mixing internet chats and posts, Biblical passages and opinions, and video-game-inspired scenarios where Lai Zhen and the three billionaires fight for survival in a virtual dystopia designed by their nemeses. The overall impression is one of simultaneous newness and remoteness. Henceforth, in view of this duality, I will focus on two pairs of concepts, uncertainty/trust and fragmentation/unity. The first binary is debated thoroughly in the Forum and is related to survivalism. The Forum participants think that originally humans trusted each other. However, with progress, uncertainty gained ground and trust in the future and in others declined. As for the second binary, it constitutes the main concern of Enoch, Martha's deceased father and former leader of the Enochites' doomsday cult. The sect regrets the entropic dispersion of original unity (often associated with wholeness) into chaotic fragmentation. The following sections will address how both binaries work in *The Future*, mainly through the interference and tensions between Eisler's "partnership" and "domination" models, and Rifkin's idea of empathy and Arendt's power discourses.

2. Fox vs Rabbit: Redefining Riane Eisler's Chalice and Blade

In one of the extracts from the Name the Day Survivalist Forum,[2] a participant recalls the allegorical story of two brothers, Fox and Rabbit (Alderman 2023, 259). The brothers stand for two kinds of humans, the original hunters/gatherers (foxes) and the settlers/farmers (rabbits). Their story is one of hatred for each other (262) because their way of understanding life is radically different. While Fox trusts nature and others because his survival depends on relationality, Rabbit's philosophy is derived from a feeling of distrust and uncertainty. The difference between Fox and Rabbit is based on the following premises: in owning the land as "a sacred right" (261), Rabbit is aligned with private property and economic liberalism with an eye to preventing uncertainty. In taking care of his properties, Rabbit creates "a single powerful God rather like him – a shepherd to lost sheep" (261); hence, the birth of monotheism is connected with struggling against uncertainty through believing and by settling down. In the case of Judaism, the people of Israel are nomads always in search of the Promised Land for stability and a future. Both liberalism and monotheism are thus connected with an obsessive concern with the future. As the main voice of the Forum points out when addressing the main revolution in human evolution: "This is the essential problem. We can imagine the future" (265). Once the future is conceptualised and materialised, despite its abstractness, it becomes Rabbit's fixation, namely a tool "to convince ourselves that we're OK and safe" (267) by owning land or goods. In this sense, Rabbit is especially aligned with Protestantism, rather than Judaism, because the certainty of faith is linked with individual freedom and the prosperity of work and liberal capitalism. In this context, Fox falls from grace because his mere existence is threatened and threatening; it is a mirror of humans' origins and of the delusive nature of certainty. According to the Forum, this is the reason why "Rabbit people persecute and loathe and murder Native people and Indigenous people and travelling people and nomadic people and homeless people and anyone without a house and a nation-state" (266). The echoes of current politics, especially in the USA, and of the colonisation of other places like Australia, resonate in the tale. Not only were the countries built on annihilating native, indigenous and nomadic peoples, many ultra-right populists in the US (and worldwide) exclude the poor, homeless and immigrants. Be that as it may, Rabbit's atavistic hatred towards Fox was originally instinctual and biological, but it reached its climax in religion, particularly the Judeo-Christian Old Testament in Alderman's novel. If farming inaugurates the shift from nomadism to settlement and a fixation with the uncertainty of the future and distrust, monotheism institutionalises these changes.

The Rabbit and Fox fable recalls and updates Riane Eisler's "Cultural transformation theory" (1995). In her view, notwithstanding human cultural diversity, there are two main models of society:

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[2] The Forum is called Name the Day presumably because the expression calls for identifying the date of the apocalypse.

> The first, which I call the dominator model, is what is popularly termed either patriarchy or matriarchy—the ranking of one half of humanity over the other. The second, in which social relations are primarily based on the principle of linking rather than ranking, may best be described as the partnership model. In this model—beginning with the most fundamental difference in our species, between male and female—diversity is not equated with either inferiority or superiority. (1995, xvii)

For Eisler, the partnership model was prevalent at the beginning of humanity until, "following a period of chaos and almost total cultural disruption, there occurred a fundamental social shift" (xvii) towards the dominator model. Although Eisler extends the phenomenon worldwide, she takes on a Western perspective. However, her cultural transformation theory and social models are relevant, as they still apply in sci-fi feminist dystopias set in the Capitalocene like *The Future*.

Eisler uses a double metaphor, the chalice and the blade, in reference to the two models and the cataclysm which changed prehistoric Western civilization from one "that worshiped the life-generating and nurturing powers of the universe—in our time still symbolized by the ancient chalice" to one that worshipped "the lethal power of the blade" (xvii). It would be simplistic to literally identify the life-generating chalice of the partnership model with Fox and the life-taking blade of the dominator model with Rabbit. Yet, dividing the world into antagonistic forces of trust and distrust resulting in dystopian scenarios is similar in both Eisler's model and Alderman's texts. For Eisler, the primacy of the blade is in crisis and "we must find ways to break through to a different kind of future" (xxiii). In other words, the concept of domination, as often found in different forms of "monotheism" does not hold, and the model of evolution must be contested. Both Eisler and Alderman's texts are concerned with the future. It would be inaccurate to "blame" old Jewish religion for the success of the domination model. As Eisler points out, this cultural transformation is a much older and culturally diverse phenomenon (95). However, given Eisler and Alderman's cultural traditions, the Old Testament is a crucial element to understand the process their texts convey. In *The Future*, there are references to Genesis, primarily its inclusion of "Men —mostly brothers— who hate each other" (Alderman 2023, 109). In fact, echoing *The Chalice and the Blade*, the Survivalist Forum argues that Genesis is "about the stupidest thing humans ever did. We ended our own world. We captured and domesticated ourselves" (109). Henceforth, the Forum recalls pairs from the book of Genesis to explain the war between settlers/farmers (Cain, Jacob, Isaac, Joseph and Lot) and hunters/wanderers (Abel, Esau, Ishmael, Joseph's bothers and Abraham) and how the victory of the former made up that future which has become the present and the core of Western civilization (110). Like Eisler, Rosie Braidotti's theory of nomadism argues in favour of those wanderers and their lifestyle, which history has silenced. Challenging borders, Braidotti's nomad "is a figuration for the kind of subject that has relinquished all idea, desire, or nostalgia for fixity" (2011, 57). Thus, she vindicates change, border-crossing and relationality as ethical principles to overcome overlapping dystopias, principles which *The Future* also upholds.

Following Braidotti's philosophy, *The Future* features the collapse of civilization and a new war to overturn the domination model represented by Zimri Nommik, Ellen Bywater and Lenk Sketlish and their companies. When it seems they could even utter the Biblical "What hath God wrought", as if they themselves were the Gods controlling the world, they prove to be vulnerable. In fact, the three cannot see their hunter/wanderer nemeses (Badger, Selah, Albert, and Martha) play Gods with them. Hence, the billionaires are puppets because of their blind involvement in the domination model that eventually equates them with all other humans. Once they cannot trust their family, subordinates and friends, the blade no longer provides certainty and the(ir) system collapses. A nomadic conception of the human in a partnership context seems the only way out of the loop of dystopias, although its mere survival is under threat.

3. Rifkin meets Eisler and Alderman

Jeremy Rifkin's concepts of empathy and resilience recall Eisler's partnership model. Regarding empathy, Rikfin argues: "The most important question facing humanity is this: Can we reach global empathy in time to avoid the collapse of civilization and save the Earth?" (2009, 10). Likewise, Haraway argues that the Capitalocene and its hierarchical conception of violence is too destructive a force to persist in time (in Davies and Turpin 2015, 7). Hence, it seems mandatory to put an end to exterminism (i.e. the socio-political, economic and military conditions that menace life and dignity) and look for alternatives, empathy being a crucial force. For Haraway, not all humans are responsible for today's dystopias but rather neo-liberalism, its elites, and exploitative practices are. By pointing to science-fiction to convey alternatives to the Capitalocene (255, 263), Haraway aligns herself with *The Future.* Zimri Nommik, Ellen Bywater and Lenk Sketlish manipulate people's fantasies and wishes through the data they gather. Moreover, they own large territories (Alderman 2023, 375), arguing they intend to protect the environment while they really use them to build up bunkers to survive the apocalypse. Alderman's novel engages with a threatening dystopia which Rifkin feels is unavoidable unless measures are taken. However, whereas Rifkin believes in global empathy and human progress to overcome economic and environmental crises, *The Future* is more cautionary. The era of globalisation is, for Rifkin, an opportunity to deepen into a global consciousness based on relationality. This is an idea he already explored in *Biosphere Politics* (1991) and that he has further analysed in the video *The Shift to Biosphere Consciousness* (2024). In it, Rifkin explores the change of the new generation concerning freedom, power and the bond between the individual and the community. In all three cases, the author points to a shift from an understanding of individuals (and nation-states) as competitors to a more empathic and relational world (2024). He aligns himself with this global consciousness that represents the new generation when he wonders: "Does anyone here believe that we are going to be able to address climate change and bring the human

family together and take our responsibility for our fellow creatures and the Earth we live in with that [individualistic and competitive] worldview?" (2024). In other words, in order to survive, empathy for each other (as well as for any other creature on the planet) seems mandatory.

In *The Future*, empathy is problematised once and again. The main theory of the Enochites is that of fragments, namely "that the world had fallen from a beautiful and united whole into mere shards" (Alderman 2023, 122). This idea of a primordial unity is contested by Martha, who argues that "the pieces can be enough to comfort in a broken world" (127). In fact, she finds out that, even in the future, perfect wholeness is just a utopia (129). The arguments of the Enochites resonate with neo-conservative/liberal ideas of current populisms, especially their nostalgic claims of an idealised past of unity and integration. Yet, Enoch's theory is allegedly empathic because he claims that "we are connected, one to the next to the next" (159). Thus, Enochism also echoes the relationality of Rifkin's global and biosphere consciousness. This conundrum is none other than the empathy/entropy model Rifkin addresses (1991, 2009, 2024). Terms like efficiency and resilience, which humans have developed to adapt to multiple technological, economic and cultural changes, must be rethought to accommodate empathy. Rifkin even speaks of the *homo empathicus*. The problematic conception of empathy in *The Future* is associated with globalisation and its new forms of relationality, but also with pre-modern civilizations, especially their religious manifestations. The novel frequently recalls the fate of Biblical Sodom and its most famous citizen, Lot. In the city of Sodom, the Forum says, it was a crime "to feed the hungry and clothe the naked" (Alderman 2023, 103). In other words, the sins of the city were not of a sexual nature, as tradition has often affirmed, but of lack of hospitality and empathy for those in need. The city's population was distrustful, preferring a fragmentary social organisation rather than a communal, empathic one. In this sense, the novel establishes a fictional connection with neoliberal USA, where it is set, because "there are places where it's a crime to help homeless people" (103). Without forgetting that *The Future* is a novel and its references to the US are fictitious, it is a crime, for example, to shelter undocumented refugees (legalistically termed "harboring" in US penal code). Moreover, there are populist discourses that often criminalise the other (black, immigrant or poor) and reject support to those in need through public subsidies. In other words, both Sodom and current societies fail to see that their lack of empathy and their detachment from nature are lethal: "The story of Sodom is a story of terror. These cities: Don't trust them. They will all come crashing down" (111).

In *The Age of Resilience*, Rifkin reconsiders the dynamics between entropy and empathy and points to the crucial role of resilience to overcome the supremacy of efficiency. Hence, he argues: "Hopefully, the journey we are now embarked on in the Age of Resilience will steer us to a new Garden of Eden, but this time not as master but as kindred spirit with our fellow creatures with whom we share our earthly home" (2022, 6-7). This paradigm shift that Rifkin announces based on human empathy may seem rather utopian, but it is also promising. In *The Future*, there is room *a priori* for utopia, particularly in the actions started by Badger, Selah, Albert, Zhen and Martha. In *The Power*, Alderman had already explored the poetics and politics of utopia. Some girls start developing a biologically-modified organ and skill to attack male aggressors with an electric discharge. What at first is an isolated case spreads worldwide so that the status quo overturns, women becoming the powerful gender. Guerrillas of women looking for revenge flourish along the planet, and new regimes, as harsh as those instituted by men, rule the world. Men suffer assault and discrimination and fight for equal rights just like women had done before. In other words, it is not the structure of the system that changes, but its victims, because the apparent utopia turns into another dystopia. Tatiana Moskalev murders her husband (Alderman 2017, 97), the president of the country, to set up Bessapara, the republic "where the Big Cataclysm and Change unfold" (Yebra, 74). Likewise, the utopia Badger, Selah, Albert and Martha envision is brief and very problematic from an ethical standpoint. Indeed, it begins with the use of Albert and Selah's "*happymeal*" program to unethically alter people's comments and manipulate the general public. Moreover, the revolutionary process climaxes when the four attempt to neutralise the rivals to succeed. In any case, the Capitalocene eventually thrives.

Regarding the Bible, *The Future* focuses especially on Sodom. One of the chapters, "bones and plastic packaging," is even arranged in sub-chapters recalling the moment when Abraham asks God whether He would destroy the city if there were 50 righteous people. Abraham continues asking in a sort of countdown so that God concedes he would not destroy a city of wicked citizens even if only a few were righteous ones (Genesis 18, 16-33). Likewise, when Badger, Selah, Albert and Martha think that social inequality and the digital dictatorship have gone too far, the countdown starts with their first rhetorical question: "Would you save the city for fifty?" (234). It goes on with forty, thirty, twenty, ten and finally: "Or it is [...] just time to give up?" (238). Throughout the countdown, Alderman's recurrent ideas of destruction and reconstruction in messianic terms turn up, as well as the ethical implications of these turning-points. Do all the abuses committed by the powerful (interference in people's wills, new forms of slavery, widespread mental health problems, social surveillance and populist environmental policies) justify the revolution that these four characters crave? It is debatable when society is not willing to undertake it "despite all historical indications that this type of situation leads inexorably to violent revolution" (235). For the narrator, citizens willingly accept their status as neo-slaves (235-6), an aberration which intends to move readers, since *The Future* is a cautionary tale. Badger, Selah, Albert and Martha do not ask God to destroy the world. They play Gods themselves, using AI to convince the three wealthiest people on the planet to escape a fake apocalypse. As a side-effect of their plan, Lai Zhen ends up with the three billionaires on a remote island. Thus, the novel questions not only the status quo, but also the ethical implications of a revolution to set up a new paradigm. What have these new Gods wrought? Is the sacrifice of three people ethically legitimate and justifiable for the sake of the majority and a greater good? What is their paradigm like? Which collateral damages could the new context produce? Following

Alderman's thought, power corrupts; therefore, although the project of these new Gods is positive, it is doomed to failure. As for the ethics of sacrificing a few for the common good, it is justifiable (as the feminist coup d'etat in *The Power*) because revolution seeks justice, but not legitimate. The new paradigm reverses the old one, redistributes wealth, and respects the environment and minorities. However, when reworking the system from above, the new paradigm is likely to reproduce the same errors because there is no structural change.

4. Revolution and its ethical undertones in *The Future*

As mentioned before, revolutionaries' anger in *The Future* mostly results from social inequality and climate change. Hence, they feel legitimised to overtake Anvil, Medlar and Fantail in a revolution leading to a utopian state. That is why they intend to "subsidise [...] vegan meals [...] rationalize deliveries [...], pay for electrified vehicles" and make education, energy and resources publicly owned (Alderman 2023, 90). Very much in line with the sci-fi terrorists of *The Power* and drawing on the aesthetics of video games, Lai Zhen attempts to overturn the parameters devised by Anvil, Medlar and Fantail, and "online fundamentalists" (194). Donna Haraway also proposes an alternative discourse that aligns with Alderman's latest novels. In Haraway's view, there are ways to fight the exterminism of the Capitalocene, namely "a story of SF, speculative fabulation, speculative feminism, scientific fact" (2015, 269). The discourses of literature, science and social justice are thus the axes of a revolutionary movement that Haraway argues for and *The Future* envisions, albeit in a dystopian scenario in the case of the novel. Lai Zhen is the executing arm of the revolutionary plans of Badger, Selah, Albert and Martha. It soon becomes obvious that revolution is neither simple nor without consequences. In fact, their battle against the three mega-companies has dramatic effects on anonymous citizens worldwide (Alderman 2023, 223), which urges the four to change their strategy (224). Hannah Arendt's ideas on revolution are valuable to explore the insurgent movement of *The Future*.

For Arendt, one should keep in mind that "the end of rebellion is liberation, while the end of revolution is the foundation of freedom" (1990, 142). In this sense, she argues for a process of overall political change whereby citizens are granted the public space to speak and make decisions freely. Thus, she differentiates between social and political revolutions. Revolutionaries address economic and social hardships, rather than political freedom and, in Arendt's view, it is very common for them to result in violent tyrannies and totalitarianism. She does understand that conditions of extreme poverty and inequality are breeding grounds for this type of events. Yet, she concludes that "the whole record of past revolutions demonstrates beyond doubt that every attempt to solve the social question with political means leads to terror" (Arendt, 112). The rage of starving masses is very compelling, a biological energy that explains the (physical and emotional) moving force of the revolutionary process (112-13). This is the case of the French Revolution, which, for Arendt, was also an example of futility because there was no true change of the political system and because it did not provide spaces for enduring freedom. For Arendt, true political revolutions entail a complete structural and organic transformation.

As concerns *The Future*, Arendt's words on violence, technology and revolution are especially relevant: "It is only the rise of technology, and not the rise of modern political ideas as such, which has refuted the old and terrible truth that only violence and rule over others could make some men free" (114). Anvil, Medlar and Fantail prove technology to be a violent weapon, though it often operates insidiously. These companies permeate people's lives, controlling their data, personal information and eventually their wills. Hence, when Badger, Selah, Albert and Martha intend to overtake Anvil, Medlar and Fantail, it looks a promising act. Selah speaks of "a beautiful world on the far shore" (Alderman 2023, 167). She even breaks up her missing husband's company, starts non-profit programmes and buys large territories to protect wildlife sanctuaries (375). Yet, it is Martha who, like Allie/Mother Eve in *The Power*, becomes the guru of a new order, ecological, empathic and all-embracing. In an interview to explain her project, Martha proves to be a master of propaganda. When she announces new ecological measures, "the applause clattered like raindrops" (378). Like Allie/Mother Eve's terror regime, Martha's beginning is ethically dubious, namely taking down the three billionaires' plane on Admiral Huntsy Island (379). She tries to legitimise her violence in the name of an ethical revolution and a new utopia. Whereas Allie/Mother Eve justifies her violent order as a feminist reaction against patriarchy, Martha justifies hers in ecological terms: "We had to do it quickly [...]. Eventually all these things would have got solved or the human race would have totally collapsed and the planet would have righted itself one way or the other" (405). It is not surprising that both women were raised in radical religious households, which explains their utopian projects and Messianic discourses. Revolution is their goal and the ethical justification of all their trespassing. In presenting Martha and Allie/Mother Eve as leaders of allegedly ecological and feminist utopias which turn into dystopias, both novels may seem ambivalent on feminist and environmental groups and politics. However, both *The Power* and *The Future* raise consciousness and thus go to the heart of the problem. Overcoming patriarchy, the Capitalocene and other supremacist discourses and regimes cannot be achieved by simply replacing the leaders unless the underlying structure is also reformulated. The population cannot be forced to accept new measures but it must be made aware of the change and apply them accordingly. This is a key idea in Arendt's theory of revolution that literally applies to Alderman's novels. Like God in the aforementioned biblical episode of Sodom, being flexible and empathic and taking responsibility for one's discourse —however legitimate and justifiable it may seem— must be adapted to the circumstances and guiding principles of *The Power* and *The Future*. When intolerance replaces intolerance, even in the name of justice and reparation, the effects can be devastating because the structures have not been rethought, let alone substituted.

The epilogue of the novel, even after the acknowledgments, addresses the state of the world many years later. Martha's plans have turned into a new dystopia, a totalitarian regime (416). Thus, the new order is not different from the prior one because it is also tyrannical and exclusionary. Defying God's words to Abraham on Sodom, the regime started by Martha is not open to forgive a few for the greater good of the majority. The world is still divided between foxes and rabbits, as represented by two women. The former, a fox, continues running, like her ancestors, because "if they're not after her now, they soon will be" (417). Indeed, this woman, like Zhen before, is persecuted by the US government. The fact that Zhen's revolutionary spirit is continued by a woman generations later is very relevant, proving the cyclical nature of power but also giving a glimmer of hope. It is significant that the last lines of the novel indicate that there are always others to take up political causes of resistance. Like Martha, the new US president is "an Enochite [who] belongs to one of the more extreme wings of the belief" (417). The two "species" inhabit a post-apocalyptic scenario; Zhen's successor is still a fugitive threatened by Rabbit's neoliberalism, now in the form of technology corporations. She is resilient, but only as long as she escapes the powerful. On the other hand, drawing on Martha's father's fragments theory, the new US president intends to "unite the world under a single world order" (417), thus preventing fragmentation and uncertainty. Hence, she fights environmentalists and separatists alike to create unity and avoid dissidence. In other words, the ecological and egalitarian revolution that terminated Nommik, Bywater and Sketlish's regime becomes a tyrannical order because, following Arendt, the core political order remains the same; in other words, rather than the birth of a new political order and freedom, the future successors of Badger, Selah, Albert and Martha address economic and social liberation.

The pair Zhen/Martha updates Foucault's conception of resistance, which is connected with Arendt's revolution. For Foucault, "where there is power there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (1978, 95). In challenging the power of her father or of technological mega-corporations, Martha legitimises them, more so when her regime replaces, but (echoing Arendt) perpetuates their politics in the long run. Zhen's case is more complex because she reframes and contests resistance following the de-essentialised fluidity of Braidotti's nomadism. She is a survivalist threatened by an anonymous murderer in a world where the limits between so-called reality and virtual reality blur. However, she is also Martha's lover, who obtains a survival software from Martha. Thus, Zhen embodies the intricacy of resistance since, as Foucault points out, "there is no single locus of great Refusal" (95-96). Martha and her partners challenge power, become the new power and grant resisting forces. Hence, power is porous and changeable since foci of resistance (like feminist survivalists) subvert it through insidious daily actions. In this sense, amid the generalised dystopian landscape, there is still hope because there is resistance, albeit a minority and a feeble one.

From the above, Alderman's novel responds to current anxieties, particularly the obsession with uncertainty, power and control. The fixation with unity and the fear of fragmentation run through *The Future* and are reminiscent of growing populist rhetoric. The idea of coming back to a primordial unity (of the country, of the family, of values etc) is recurrent, as evidenced in Trump's slogan "Make America great again" and Putin's dreams of a new Russian empire (Dickinson 2024, n.p.). In both *The Power* and *The Future*, the dystopia is worldwide, yet it radiates from the USA. The same applies to Alderman's mentor Margaret Atwood. Although she is Canadian, her iconic *The Handmaid's Tale* is also set in a dystopian USA. The cultural influence of the USA, its puritan tradition and current populism are factors for these writers to convey dystopia in that country. Contrary to simplistic populist discourses on national or cultural identities, *The Future* points to how complex and contradictory they are. While populism idealises the past in terms of original unity as opposed to current chaos and fragmentation, Alderman's novel shows how easily utopias can turn into dystopias. In this sense, unity often fails to be integrative, as populism argues, because it excludes the marginalised and dissidents. This is the case of the regime resulting from Badger, Selah, Albert, and Martha's utopia. Already Lenk Sketlish reduces actual people "to a kind of general human" (325) to homogenise the population and sell his products. In simplifying society, as populists and tycoons like Sketlish buttress, outsiders are excluded. Populism appeals to "the people" and capitalism treats citizens as customers, which integrates and marginalises human beings as long as they comply with certain premises. The new regime intends to change the status quo, investing the benefits of the technological corporations on equality and environmental projects. However, the capitalist structure remains intact because Badger, Selah, Albert, and Martha impose their integrative model (however fair it may be) throughout the world. In the epilogue, many years after the main plot, the effects of their regime are patent: "Nothing can be permanently settled or solved. No state is perfect; no utopia exists but that leaves someone out" (416). In summary, *The Future* makes it clear that capitalism and populism claim to be inclusive but inevitably seem to marginalise those who do not fit into them.

5. Conclusions

The Future starts with a dystopia replaced by a utopia that eventually turns into a new dystopia. In this complex process, the novel features a networked world which is, notwithstanding, unjust and controlled by a minority. The new post-Newtonian and post-digital paradigm is not better than the past as both are related to the domination model. The novel features post-Ice-Age civilizations (whose ultimate stage is the Capitalocene) characterised by the success of the Rabbit and texts like the Old Testament. The partnership model that Badger, Selah, Albert and Martha initially attempt to impose fails, demonstrating the transience of change, the need to resist the siren songs of populists, and the necessity of continued resistance. While Rifkin argues for human innate empathy, Alderman's latest two novels present quite a different picture. For example, the humanity of *The Future* is, except for a brief revolutionary period, neoliberal, selfish, distrustful and

fragmented for the sake of uncertainty. There is always an elite, mostly represented by Ellen, Zimri and Lenk, which institutionalises control and certainty (no matter how unfeasible they are) as tools and values to dominate resources and other humans. Therefore, after sending the three billionaires to an island (which recalls incarceration of political enemies), revolution works for some time until the regime is corrupted.

The problem *The Future* addresses is human impotence and its dire consequences, much in line with Arendt's concept of power and violence. When power and empathy falter, weakness surfaces in different forms of violence and control. In this sense, the implicit references to current populisms are obvious and often satirical. In the novel, the powerful and the revolutionaries that many years later take their place pretend they care about the environment, equality and human rights. However, they are only concerned with surviving the apocalypse in their bunkers and establishing their rules on the earth. Hence, despite the apparently good intentions of the new elite, power seems to be closer to the blade than to the chalice. This means that Rifkin's empathic civilization is difficult to achieve in *The Future*, at least in the long term. Empathy is an act of resistance in dystopian scenarios that can lead to revolutionary changes. Yet, only Lai Zhen (and other citizens in a hostile cybernetic world) seems to understand and practise empathy to its final outcomes, fighting authority and remaining nomads. Unlike Lot, who was forgiven by God, it is uncertain whether the new rulers will spare the life of the unnamed woman in the epilogue. In other words, the new order of the epilogue excludes outsiders, a position which is informed by current populism's exclusionary discourses: most populist leaders instrumentalise "the people" as an integrated and integrating whole. However, in practical terms, when they propose mass deportations of immigrants and criminalise minorities for the sake of social order, it is evident "the people" excludes "non-normative" people and attitudes. The extremist Enochite who controls the US government intends to restore unity and abolish fragmentation (i.e. diversity) in entropic terms. Thus, playing God, she updates Balaam's words granting her mission a Messianic message: "Her faction believes that the prevention of 'pieces' is the moral duty of every one of God's creations and that she must unite the world under a single world order" (Alderman 2023, 417). The success of *The Future* as a dystopia is connected with the tension between power and futility. In line with Arendt's concept of power, the billionaires and their successors in the far future pretend they can control humanity and play God, which is a symptom of impotence. It is out of their powerlessness that their aggressive misconception of power thrives. They cannot suppress the underlying spirit of Fox, which reminds Rabbit of its weakness. Hence, the Biblical sentence "What hath God wrought" does not work when it comes to their achievements and their attempt to eliminate empathy and trust. Despite this dystopian scenario, the fact that survivalists who follow the example of Lai Zhen still populate the planet is encouraging and recalls God's benevolence in the episode of Sodom. Thus, *The Future* is a cautionary tale, a dystopia with a glimpse of hope if measures are taken. Its cautionary message is not something new because it dates back to sacred texts: "Abraham and Lot are a warning against what we have already done. Abraham and Lot are a warning not to do it *more*" (363, italics in the original). It is encouraging as well because, instead of choosing gold and objects, the Forum invites readers to "choose to trust" (363).

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