

NATURE FIGHTS BACK: AN ECOFEMINIST READING OF *GOLD FAME CITRUS* BY CLAIRE VAYE WATKINS¹

A NATUREZA REVIDA: UMA LEITURA ECOFEMINISTA DE *GOLD FAME CITRUS*
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ABSTRACT

The relationship between humans and nature has long been a subject in literature. The dystopian novel *Gold Fame Citrus* (2015) by Claire Vaye Watkins speculates about the future implications of the drought in the state of California, United States, imagining its impacts on the lives of individuals and communities and the shifts in their relationship with the landscape. In the novel, nature writing is frequently employed to represent this transforming environment. A significant element in this dystopian scenario is the characterization of the Amargosa Dune Sea, an expanding sea of sand dunes that threatens to cover the whole region and thus shapes the lives of people. In this article, through ecofeminist lenses, we analyze the representations of nature in *Gold Fame Citrus* to investigate how nature writing can rewrite tainted paradigms and new modes of agency. We demonstrate that instead of passive matter, nature is imbued with agency and power in the narrative, which challenges androcentric values such as power and control over nature and instrumentalism. In this manner, Watkins' dystopia has a warning effect regarding the urgency of dealing with the climate crisis as well as of rethinking the ways we discuss, represent and relate to nature.

Key words: Climate crisis. Contemporary Literature. Dystopia. Ecofeminism. Nature writing.

RESUMO

A relação entre humanos e natureza tem sido um tema recorrente na literatura. O romance distópico *Gold Fame Citrus* (2015), de Claire Vaye Watkins, especula sobre as implicações futuras da seca no estado da Califórnia, Estados Unidos, imaginando seus impactos na vida de indivíduos e comunidades e as mudanças em sua relação

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com a paisagem. No romance, a escrita sobre a natureza é frequentemente empregada para representar esse ambiente em transformação. Um elemento significativo nesse cenário distópico é a caracterização do Amargosa Dune Sea, um mar de dunas em expansão que ameaça cobrir toda a região e, assim, molda a vida das pessoas. Neste artigo, sob uma perspectiva ecofeminista, analisamos as representações da natureza em *Gold Fame Citrus* para investigar como a escrita sobre a natureza pode reescrever paradigmas distorcidos e novos modos de agência. Demonstramos que, em vez de matéria passiva, a natureza é imbuída de agência e poder nessa narrativa, o que desafia valores androcêntricos como o poder e o controle sobre a natureza e o instrumentalismo. Dessa forma, a distopia de Watkins tem um efeito de alerta a respeito da urgência de lidar com a crise climática, bem como sobre a necessidade de repensar as maneiras como discutimos e representamos a natureza e como nos relacionamos com ela

Palavras-chave: Crise climática. Distopia. Ecofeminismo. Escrita da natureza. Literatura Contemporânea.

Introduction

Literature has long played a significant role in our perceptions of the natural world, capturing the shifting boundaries among humans and non-humans. Historically, the relationship between humans and nature has been a recurring theme in nature writing—both fictional and non-fictional—demonstrating how human perspectives shape our comprehension of the environment. However, as contemporary environmental crises such as climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss intensify, literature has taken a distinctively speculative turn. Authors with deep ecological sensibilities are now utilizing futuristic genres to imagine the planet's fate in the Anthropocene².

One contemporary author that addresses climate change and its consequences is Claire Vaye Watkins. She has established herself as a prominent writer of the American Southwest since the publication of her first book, the short stories collection *Battleborn* (2012)—for which she received several awards, such as The Story Prize and The Dylan Thomas Prize, and was listed as “5 Under 30” by the National Book Foundation. After this success, she published her debut novel, *Gold Fame Citrus* (2015), a dystopian work in which she imagines the future implications of a severe drought in the state of California, United States. She is also the author of *I Love You but I've Chosen Darkness* (2021), an autobiographical novel that deals with themes such as motherhood, loss and family trauma, and is about to release her fourth book called *Yellow Pine* (2026)³.

2 The Anthropocene is a “the designator proposed by Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer for what they see as the new geological epoch that came after the Holocene, which would have started with the Industrial Revolution and become intensified after World War II” (Danowski; Viveiros de Castro, 2017, p. 4). It represents the current epoch marked by intense human interference on the Earth's systems, which has caused significant impacts such as altered landscapes, biodiversity loss, and climate change.

3 The estimated publication date of *Yellow Pine* is July 21st, 2026, as it is available at: <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/778526/yellow-pine-by-claire-vaye-watkins/>. Accessed on: 11 jun. 2026.

Although the desert landscape of the American Southwest features in all her works of fiction, it is in *Gold Fame Citrus* that nature takes more space in the narrative. The American Southwest is a region characterized by mainly arid and semi-arid climate, but anthropogenic climate change has been contributing to increasing desertification of its landscape. This threatening reality is represented in *Gold Fame Citrus* by the presence of the Amargosa Dune Sea, a personification of a natural force that covers the region and menaces the lives of not only human beings but also the majority of the local fauna and flora. In the novel, after all technological and scientific attempts to control the crisis have failed, the region starts being evacuated. However, outlaws and marginalized individuals remain among the decays of the cities, and a nomadic colony settles in the middle of the desert.

In this context, the plot of Watkins' dystopian novel follows the trajectory of the protagonist Luz Dunn, ex-model and poster child, and her partner Ray, army deserter, who initially live in a starlet's abandoned mansion in the city of Los Angeles. Surrounded by luxury goods, they lack basic resources and survive only on ration soda and crackers. But when they encounter the two-year-old child Ig, they assume she needs rescuing and adopt her. Shortly after, they determine their home is no place for a child and they decide to adventure through the desert in search for a better place. Structurally, *Gold Fame Citrus* is divided into three books, each one featuring a different part of their journey: from leaving the city, having their separate ways among the desert, and reuniting in the colony. This journey is accompanied by many challenges, and through the changing scenarios of the city, the wilderness or the desert, the characters are led to rethink and reinvent their relationship among themselves and nature.

Dystopias are works of fiction which describe considerably worse future scenarios (Cranny-Francis, 1990), often featuring oppressive governments, extreme inequality or environmental disasters. Different from classic dystopias, which carry a majorly pessimistic tone and have tragic endings — according to Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan in their book *Dark Horizons* (2003) — critical dystopias are dystopian works that carry a utopian impulse at the level of the form through two main textual characteristics: by containing open or ambiguous endings, and by employing genre blurring. The authors comment on how genre blurring is a powerful critical tool for writers: “By self-reflexively borrowing specific conventions from other genres, critical dystopias more often blur the received boundaries of the dystopian form and thereby expand its creative potential for critical expression” (Baccolini & Moylan, 2003, p. 7). Therefore, while open endings are sites of empowerment and resistance for the protagonists of dystopias, genre blurring gives more creative freedom for writers. In this article, we read *Gold Fame Citrus* as a critical dystopia since it contains an open ending, and also blurs the lines between the genres by having a strong presence of nature writing.

Nature writing enriches the dystopian narrative of *Gold Fame Citrus* as nature becomes an active agent. Accordingly, Watkins creates an immersive setting by bringing to the forefront of the novel the severity of the drought and other impacts

of the climate crisis in California, and thus stresses the urgency of rethinking the relationship between humans and nature. Don Schesse suggests that: “As in all compelling nature writing, the relationship between self and nature, nature and culture, evokes important truths about self and society” (1996, p. 309). Consequently, nature writing is a valuable tool for reevaluating our bond with the environment. The text plays with the historical associations between women and nature, bridging new meanings to their relationship in *Gold Fame Citrus*. Natália Fontes de Oliveira comments that the women-nature connection is one that has persisted across cultures, literatures and arts, and emphasizes that, in western thought, “women are viewed as closer to nature in binary opposition to men, who have metaphorically and historically been associated with culture” (2021, p. 2). The deconstruction of these dualized oppositions is targeted by ecofeminism, since it has been an instrument for characterizing nature, as well as women and other minorities, as passive entities and objects of male control and domination.

Ecofeminism is a term coined by Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le féminisme ou la mort* (1974) that today has grown into both a theory and an activist movement. According to Greta Gaard, “ecofeminism’s basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature” (1993, p. 1). While mainstream green philosophy holds anthropocentrism—the view that human beings as the central creatures in the universe—responsible for our current environmental problems, ecofeminism points to a deeper issue: androcentrism, defined by Janis Birkeland as “an interpretation of human nature that assumes the universality of a masculine model of Man and its associated values” (1993, p. 24). In this sense, an ecofeminist standpoint looks into the approximation of women and nature not in a manner that reinforces essentialisms but one that seeks to understand the links between their forms of oppression. In *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1980), ecofeminist and historian of science Carolyn Merchant investigates the representations of nature in Western history and identifies two main metaphors of nature as female: the metaphor of nature as a nurturing mother, “a kindly beneficent female who provided for the needs of mankind in an ordered, planned universe”; and nature as disorder, a “wild and uncontrollable nature that could render violence, storms, droughts, and general chaos” (1980, p. 2). These contrasting images, projections of humans’ fears and desires onto the external world, have provoked responses that maintained, for the most part, a sense of interconnection and dependency on nature — viewed as a living and agent female entity.

A significant shift in our relationship with the natural world happened during the establishment of Modernity and the rise of the Scientific Revolution. Seventeenth century thinkers such as Francis Bacon, Pierre Gassendi and René Descartes introduced a mechanistic view of the cosmos that led to what Merchant calls the “death of nature”. The author comments about the impact of this perspective: “Because nature was now viewed as a system of dead, inert particles moved by external, rather than inherent forces, the mechanical framework itself could legitimate the manipulation of nature”

(Merchant, 1980, p. 193). Hence, the machine metaphor endorsed the notion of mastery over nature, as the human rational mind was seen as capable of control while nature was characterized as still matter through the reason/nature dualism⁴.

In face of the many challenges humanity has experienced because of our limitless exploitation of nature, especially concerning climate change, contemporary thinker Isabelle Stengers appeals to the concept of nature as a female being by calling our living planet Gaia⁵:

Gaia is ticklish and that is why she must be named as a being. We are no longer dealing (only) with a wild and threatening nature, nor with a fragile nature to be protected, nor a nature to be mercilessly exploited. The case is new. Gaia, she who intrudes, *asks nothing of us*, not even a response to the question she imposes. Offended, Gaia is indifferent to the question “who is responsible?” and doesn’t act as a righter of wrongs – it seems clear that the regions of the earth that will be affected first will be the poorest on the planet, to say nothing of all those living beings that have nothing to do with the affair (Stengers, 2015, p. 46).

Therefore, from this perspective, the nature of the Anthropocene cannot be interpreted in any of the ancient denominations nor continue to be seen under the mechanistic view of nature as passive. It calls for a different way of thinking that possibly implies a new language and cosmology. What better field to reimagine new ways of seeing and making sense of the world than literature?

In this article, through ecofeminist lenses, we analyze the representations of nature in *Gold Fame Citrus* to investigate how nature writing can rewrite tainted paradigms and new modes of agency. We demonstrate that traditional depictions of the land as woman, such as nature as a nurturing mother and nature as disorder, are employed in the novel in a subversive way among the classic ideas of pastoral and wilderness. We show that, instead of passive matter, nature is imbued with agency in the narrative, thus challenging androcentric thought.

American pastoral from utopia to dystopia

The description of the scenario of *Gold Fame Citrus* highlights natural elements from the beginning. Due to the hostile environment because of the water and climate

⁴ Val Plumwood defines dualism as “the process by which contrasting concepts (for example, masculine and feminine gender identities) are formed by domination and subordination and constructed as oppositional and exclusive” (1993, p. 31).

⁵ The denomination of Gaia is a reference to environmentalist James Lovelock’s Gaia hypothesis named after the Greek goddess. By observing the planet’s atmosphere and the interaction of living organisms with their inorganic surroundings, Lovelock postulates that the Earth functions as a self-regulating system analogous to that of a single organism.

crisis, nature is a constant concern to the main characters who live in the city of Los Angeles. Ironically, in this context, it is not darkness, but the excess of light which creates the apocalyptic atmosphere: “Sun of suns. Drought of droughts. There were their days now, Luz and Ray and the merciless sun up in the canyon, a family of light in this mansion cantilevered into the hillside, a bridge for a driveway” (Watkins, 2016, p. 4). The persistence of light, heat and dryness represent a threat to the characters who carry light even in their names. With their identities tied to that decaying environment, Luz and Ray remain in the region.

A desire to connect with certain elements of nature characterizes human behavior in the novel. However, fauna and flora are increasingly getting scarce. Only the most adaptable types of plants resist there, but, from a human-centered view, these are considered pestilent and undesirable: “Plantwise there was the dried pool slime and the gnarled leafless grapevine and spiny somethings coming through the planks of the deck, too savage to kill” (Watkins, 2016, p. 6). Similarly, the animals left are not those which bring comfort and pleasant experiences, but rather those which are poisonous or pose some kind of threat to humans. The omniscient third person narrator expresses the protagonist’s idealized views towards nature and how they are confronted with a different reality:

Where were the wild things seeking refuge from the scorched hills?
Where was the birdsong she’s promised herself? Instead: scorpions
coming up through the drains, a pair of mummified frogs in the
waterless fountain, a coyote carcass going wicker in the ravine. And
sure, a scorpion had a certain wisdom, but she yearned for fauna
more charismatic. “It’s thinking like that that got us into this,” Ray
said, correct (Watkins, 2016, p. 7).

Luz Dunn’s romantic expectations showcase an instrumental relationship with nature. As defined by Birkeland, instrumentalism implies that “things are valued only to the extent that they are useful to Man” (1993, p. 24). This shows that androcentric values are ingrained in her identity. A half-latina woman and ex-model and actress shaped within the Hollywoodian industry, Luz has a past of objectification. As she learned to mold herself to the male gaze, it is no wonder she sees the world through a similarly instrumentalizing perspective. Especially the usage of the word “charismatic” exhibits this projection onto nature. Just as women have often been shaped into decorative objects for the appreciation of men in the media and in real life, nature is also valued for its beauty — but only in certain aspects and elements. The comment expressed by Ray brings a critical perspective to the matter that is also stressed by the assent from the narrator.

Contrary to human expectations, nature is represented in the beginning of the novel as a female entity who refuses to fulfill human desires, thus challenging anthropocentric and androcentric thinking:

Nature had refused to offer herself to them. The water, the green, the mammalian, the tropical, the semitropical, the leafy, the verdant, the motherloving citrus, all of it was denied them and had been denied them so long that with each day, each project, it became more and more impossible to conceive of a time when it had not been denied them. The prospect of Mother Nature opening her legs and inviting Los Angeles back into her ripeness was, like the disks of water shimmering in the last foothill reservoirs patrolled by the National Guard, evaporating daily (Watkins, 2016, p. 7).

The image of “Mother Nature” as a now sterile and barren body calls attention to the consequences of human unhinged exploitation and violence to the land. This state of hopelessness contrasts to the mention of a promise abundance that has been extinct. The natural elements listed in the quotation, such as abundant water, fauna and flora, are recollections of the pastoral. Ingrid G. Daemmrich summarizes the pastoral motif in literature as an integration of different theological and mythological notions of “the site of ineffable bliss to the beginning or end of human history” (2003, p. 213). The representations of the land as a heavenly place on Earth is a narrative closely tied to the history of colonization of the United States. Annette Kolodny investigates the metaphor of the land-as-woman in literature and its connection to what she calls the American pastoral impulse. The author explains that the notion of the land as a receptive female entity was promoted to encourage settlers to explore the land:

America’s oldest and most cherished fantasy: a daily reality of harmony between man and nature based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine — that is, not simply the land as mother, but the land as woman, the total female principle of gratification — enclosing the individual in an environment of receptivity, repose and painless and integral satisfaction (Kolodny, 1975, p. 4).

The pastoral, therefore, is a utopian dream very present in the American imagination. In *Gold Fame Citrus*, the protagonist’s constant yearning for a pastoral nature is filled with irony and enhances the apocalyptic appeal of the novel. Despite the biodiversity loss and the hostile climate, Luz Dunn’s behavior reveals a hint of denialism: “Yet Luz yearned for menagerie, left the windows and doors open day and night to invite it, even when Ray complained of the dust, even when he warned that the Santa Anas would drive her insane” (Watkins, 2016, p. 7). Thus, the protagonist oftentimes puts her well-being at risk while trying to achieve a romanticized connection with nature.

Instead of heavenly connotations, the landscape in the novel is filled with hellish imagery, especially with the presence of fires: “Air hazy and amber with smoke. Malibu burning, and Luz’s old condo with it. Ticks clinging to the dead grass. [...] Some ruined heaven, this laurelless canyon” (Watkins, 2016, p. 7). The Santa Ana winds, also

known as “devil winds”, are intense and dry winds that represent a seasonal threat in California. In the novel, due to anthropogenic climate change and water crisis, their effects are heightened.

Faced with these natural threats, scientific and technological means are employed to extinguish the fires: “The skies were batshit back then: bureaucrats draping valleys under invisible parachutes of aerosols, engineers erecting funnels to catch the rain before it evaporated, Research I universities dynamiting the sky” (Watkins, 2016, p. 8). Such description illustrates the idea of mastery over nature, as the authorities choose to fight against nature desperately attacking it with all their might. The failure of the androcentric front in this battle has a warning effect since it shows that, after a certain point, man-made destruction might backfire, and humanity may not stand a chance against nature’s force.

In addition, the incorporation of technological machines in the description of the natural scenery helps deconstruct the culture/nature dualism. Ecocritic Lawrence Buell comments on the increasing difficulty of distinguishing between the natural and human-built dimensions of the environment: “Human transformations of physical nature have made the two realms increasingly indistinguishable” (2001, p. 3). In the Anthropocene, the idea of nature as a separate reality from culture is an impossibility. Human control and technology have contributed to shape the environment as portrayed in Watkins’ dystopia:

Once, an early canyon project, Luz and Ray hiked up the mountain called, horrifically, Lookout, and came upon a derelict cloud seeder, one of those barn-size miracle machines promised to spit crystalline moisture-making chemicals into the atmosphere. Another time they hiked up a back ridge and picnicked above that colorless archipelago of empty and near-empty tanks strung throughout the city (Watkins, 2016, p. 8).

In the quotation, the obsolete cloud seeders are symbols of human failure in curbing the water crisis. Furthermore, by hyperbolically referring to empty water tanks as archipelagos, the author satirizes human attempts to artificially create conditions for human life in a habitat unsuitable for it. This highlights the need for our species to search for adaptation in a manner that recognizes our own vulnerability. Such a perspective challenges the androcentric notions of mastery and power over nature.

Facing the Amargosa Dune Sea

Parenthood has a transformative impact on the main characters’ worldview, as they are led to consider the child’s needs and face the threatening reality of the climate crisis. After “adopting”⁶ a two-year-old girl named Ig, Luz and Ray decide to

⁶ In the novel, the adoption of the child is not a legal act. Upon finding a child on Venice Beach and

leave the city in search for a better place. Utopianism fills Luz's imagination as she daydreams about moving to an earthly paradise. She makes a mental list of all the beautiful things she hopes to find and share with the child, including "find a little cottage on a sound where the air is indigo and everjeweled with mist", "take Ig walking in the rainforest, barefoot", "pry open rotting logs and watch grubs and slugs and earthworms at their enrichment business", "come upon a moose", "assemble a rainbow salad" (Watkins, 2016, p. 55). These and other items characterize her romanticized image of wilderness. Ecocritic Greg Garrard explains the relevance of the concept of wilderness in western tradition:

The idea of wilderness, signifying nature in a state uncontaminated by civilisation, is the most potent construction of nature available to New World environmentalism. It is a construction mobilised to protect particular habitats and species, and is seen as a place for the reinvigoration of those tired of the moral and material pollution of the city. Wilderness has an almost sacramental value: it holds out the promise of a renewed, authentic relation of humanity and the earth, a post-Christian covenant, found in a space of purity, founded in an attitude of reverence and humility (Garrard, 2004, p. 59).

Consequently, wilderness implies an idea of nature as a pristine environment that is often welcoming to receive human beings by offering physical and spiritual nourishment. As idealization, in the novel, such reality is completely out of reach due to the implications of the climate crisis. The desert is overwhelming and a flight to another region is a promise difficult for the characters to keep for many reasons. Firstly, Ray's criminal records create obstacles in their way, since they cannot legally cross state borders. Moreover, crossing the dunes is an exhausting challenge as nature shows no mercy on their way. As Mary Hunter Austin, a pioneering nature writer of the American Southwest, wrote in her classic *The Land of Little Rain* while describing the Mojave Desert in California: "Not the law, but the land sets the limit" (1903, p. 3).

At the start of their journey through the desert, Luz spots the Amargosa Dune Sea near the city and is, at first, amazed by its sublime beauty. The purple colors from the sunset remind her of the once abundant fruits on that land, which is now covered by sand. Furthermore, the intense sunlight creates a white effect on the top of the dunes, generating the illusory image of snow:

Luz studied the mountains ahead, watched the sunset coloring them as the things gone from them: lilac, plum, lavender, orchid, mulberry, violet. [...] Above those spoilt purple mountains materialized a glowing wedge of light, whiter than the sun, thin, blurred, and

connecting with her, they realize she was being abused by her former caregivers. Then, in a moment of impulse, Luz and Ray decide to flee with the child in an act that ambiguously could be considered both kidnapping and rescuing.

radiant. Snow, Luz thought, unable to stop herself (Watkins, 2016, p. 84).

The image of snow in this context is significant because it represents the protagonist's desire to find a better place, one that would be colder, have abundant fresh water, and possibly provide spiritual or emotional healing. This, however, ultimately proves to be just a distant hope. In this manner, the protagonist projects ideas of comfort onto the landscape while there is, in reality, only extreme heat, light and sand to be found. The enormity of the dunes is described by the following quotation: "The dune was not atop the empurpled range before them but beyond it, beyond it by miles and miles. The white was not a rind of ice, not a snowcap, but sand piling up inland where the Mojave had been" (Watkins, 2016, p. 84-85). The Amargosa is, therefore, an expanding desert that overwhelmingly escapes their understanding. As they venture further into this land, the characters increasingly experience a loss of direction. The desert then presents itself as a powerful force that challenges human notions of control over nature: "All the while the dune lorded over them, in front of them and behind them, to the east and to the west, somehow. A passively menacing sight and Luz could not take her eyes from it" (Watkins, 2016, p. 94). The usage of the expression "lord over" here satirically discloses the tendency to employ human metaphors to refer to nature, as the dunes are described as behaving with arrogance such as a male master. By figuratively taking charge, this representation of the landscape helps deconstruct gendered conceptions of nature as female.

The power and agency of nature become even more prominent in the second book of *Gold Fame Citrus*. In this section, the narrative shifts away from the characters' storylines to focus on describing the emerging desert landscape and the various perspectives that seek to understand this new reality arising from the climate crisis. Nature writing is blended within a polyphony of discourses from the media. The narrator introduces a view of the Amargosa Dune Sea via satellite imagery: "From space it seems a canyon. Unhealed yet scar-tissue white, a wound yawning latitudinal between the sluice grafts of Los Angeles and the flaking, friable, half-buried hull of Las Vegas. A sutureless gash where the Mojave Desert used to be" (Watkins, 2016, p. 113). Although to the human eye the dunes seem incredibly large and menacing, compared to the proportions of the planet, they are a tiny spot. Hence, the Amargosa is likened to a wound and the Earth is analogously a hurt body as a consequence of human unhinged violence to the land. This hurt is not insignificant, but it may present more harm to certain species such as ours than to the entirety of the planet.

As a result, the description of the landscape in the novel draws attention to the actions and driving forces in the planet that are beyond human control. The Earth has suffered many geological changes throughout its own time scale; thus, it also remains resilient against anthropogenic impacts in the narrative. Sedimentary rocks and mountains made of sand continue their movements. A zoom in the satellite image showcases these motions and the amazement they provoke:

Closer and the eyebrian swoons again: these mountains move as if alive, pulsing, ebbing, throbbing, their summits squirming, their valleys filling and emptying of themselves. Mountains not mountains. Not rock, or no longer. Once rock. Dead rock. The sloughed-off skin of the Sierra, the Rockies, so on. Sand dunes. Dunes upon dunes. A vast tooth-colored superdune in the forgotten crook of the wasted West (Watkins, 2016, p. 114).

With the comparison of the mountains' movements to living motion, this description makes a reference to animism — a cosmology present, for instance, in many indigenous cultures (Viveiros de Castro, 1996) — that attributes spirit and agency to both humans and non-humans. Therefore, this association opens space for a possible refusal of mechanicism, which, according to ecofeminist Val Plumwood, “involves a stripping process, the stripping out especially of mindlike qualities such as agency and goal-directedness” (1993, p. 115). Accordingly, a mechanistic view sees nature as formed by dead, inert particles. However, in the novel, the sand dunes act independently, uniting and separating their parts at their own free will. In this manner, by suggesting that nature is capable of agency, the novel challenges the Cartesian logic of dualisms and the instrumentalist view of nature merely as a resource. Moreover, the novel plays with the notion of animism in order to emphasize nature's capacity to surpass human arrogance described in “the world's most invasive species no species at all” (Watkins, 2016, p. 116). The idea that inorganic matter acts like an organism creates ambiguity and highlights the uncertainty present when dealing with this dystopian landscape.

Other various metaphors are conceived in order to grasp the reality of this nature. In this instance, representations of nature as disorder prevail, such as in: “The Amargosa was a disease: a cancer, a malignancy, a tumor. A steamroller, a plow. A hungry beast, a self-spawning corpulence, a bloated blob gobbling land, various images of appetite, projections of our ugly, innermost selves” (Watkins, 2016, p. 120). In this quotation, the Amargosa is compared to the things we humans tend to fear the most, unforgiving diseases and monstrosities within ourselves that we are often not able to control or repress. But besides this, machines typically used in agriculture are also listed as the prompters of ruin. The mention of the steamroller and the plow among the names of human diseases juxtaposes the problems and violence caused by nature itself with those caused by human action, thus drawing attention to the complexity of the conflict between humans and non-humans.

The quotation “the Amargosa is both siren and jagged reef, its good vibes a blessing, its curse just as likely” (Watkins, 2016, p. 125) summarizes the ambiguous quality of this environment. Compared to sirens⁷, the mythological female hybrid creatures, the sand dunes symbolize danger, and at the same time, they bring wonder.

⁷ Sirens are mythological figures in Greek mythology. They are mentioned, for instance, in Homer's *Odyssey*.

As the sirens lead sailors to destruction luring them with songs, the Amargosa enchants people's senses while concealing many hazards.

As the land becomes obsolete to the human instrumentalist perspective, the government establishes the area as a wasteland. In official documents, the Amargosa Dune Sea is referred to as “*inhospitable, barren, bleak, and empty*” (Watkins, 2016, p. 122). Nevertheless, the satellite image spots a colony close to the dunes, indicating that, against all odds, people resisted evacuating the region. Then, the chapter closes with the gaze turned back on the protagonist Luz Dunn and her child Ig: “And beyond that, in terrain not yet subsumed by the dune, an anorexic wannabe orphan languishes in a vintage car on the shore of a sulfur lake, abandoned with the nameless child she took. Through playing house, dying of thirst” (Watkins, 2016, p. 126). Unnamed in this quotation, the characters are portrayed not as central but as a part of something bigger. As a result, human life assumes a different dimension in this extract of the novel, which introduces an anti-anthropocentric approach to the implications of the climate crisis.

By depicting natural forces acting according to their own will, *Gold Fame Citrus* challenges the androcentric notion of control over nature. Furthermore, by showing how vulnerable human beings can be — and how the violence we direct to the environment can backfire as harm to ourselves — the novel deconstructs the dualist view of separation between humans and nature. Though the lives of the protagonists remain important, this shift calls attention to the need for thinking about the environment beyond human interest, in order to see nature not simply as an instrument, or a resource, but as intrinsically valuable.

Final considerations

Within an ecofeminist perspective, we demonstrated that nature writing is employed in *Gold Fame Citrus* in a manner that challenges traditional representations of the land as woman. First, we discussed that pastoral and the recollection of its utopian imagery — with the land as a nurturing woman — is contrasted to the dystopian scenario of the novel, as both emphasize the effects of anthropogenic climate crisis and criticize the romanticized view of nature as pristine. Moreover, we illustrated that the desert, or the wilderness, is in the novel far from a welcoming environment to human beings fleeing from the bitterness of the city, since it is depicted as a menacing and hostile place, despite its beauties. In this context, the metaphor of nature as disorder is frequently applied to describe the Amargosa Dune Sea in a manner that defies androcentric thought. Instead of a passive female entity, nature is filled with power and agency. This contributes to questioning androcentric values such as the idea of control over nature and instrumentalism.

Through nature writing, the novel helps bring awareness to the severity of the climate crisis and to the urgency of reshaping our ways of seeing and being with

the environment. Though the plot is set in near-future California, the portrayal of the devastated landscape shows that we might already be living alongside dystopia. Drought, desertification, biodiversity loss and other environmental problems caused by anthropogenic climate change are part of present concerns. Therefore, Watkins' dystopia conveys a warning effect against the consequences of androcentrism and its endorsement of the exploitation of nature and other minorities.

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