https://doi.org/10.22409/gragoata.v28i61.56688.en

Article

Writing Back to *The Bible*: Feminist and Post-Colonial Ecocriticisms in Ursula Le Guin's "She Unnames Them"

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Abstract

By positing that the first woman's actions were the catalyst of humanity's fall from God's grace, and, from then on, fostering biased and misogynist views of the role of women in society, the biblical narrative of Adam and Eve has become one of the most influential texts in the History of Western women. Although the authority of the Book of Genesis to dictate the status quo of women has been repeatedly called into question over the centuries, it was with the advent of Feminism that the movement of "writing back" to the Bible was intensified. This article examines how, by using strategies of literary fantasy, Ursula Le Guin's short story "She unnames them" rewrites the biblical text of Genesis. In Le Guin's narrative, Eve is given protagonism so that, through the rebellious initiative of unnaming, she is able to create a meaningful connection between herself and the animals that populate the Garden of Eden. The specific aim of the article is to explore the articulations between feminism, post-colonialism and ecocriticism in Le Guin's short story, linking the strategy of "writing back" with ecofeminism through Val Plumwood's conclusions on binarism, as well as with post-colonial ecocriticism, via Mary Louise Pratt's concept of Eurocentered planetary consciousness, among other theories that help explain the power relations between the human and the non-human spheres.

Keywords: *Ecofeminism. Post-colonial ecocriticism. Ursula Le Guin. "She unnames them". Writing Back.*

Recebido em: 06/12/2022
Aceito em: 11/01/2023

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How to cite:
SCHEIDT, Déborah. Writing Back to *The Bible*: Feminist and Post-Colonial Ecocriticisms in Ursula Le Guin's "She Unnames Them". *Gragoatá*, Niterói, v. 28, n. 61, e56688, may.-aug. 2023. Available from: https://doi.org/10.22409/gragoata.v28i61.56688.en

Introduction: The Misogynous Trajectory of the *Book of Genesis*

The National Gallery of Canada, in Ottawa, houses a sinister painting by German Renaissance artist Hans Baldung Grien (1484-1545), Albrecht Dürer's most celebrated student. The 64cm x 325cm oil on panel, known as "Eve, the Serpent and Death" (Fig. 1), depicts those three figures against an ominous shadowy background. Eve has been made the primary focal point since, unlike the other two darker figures, her body is flooded in light and fully exhibited. Contrary to the usual employment of luminosity to suggest sanctity in religious art, here light is used to emphasize Eve's brazen sexuality. Her facial expressions are lustful, her genitals are not covered by the customary vegetation, her left hand is holding the serpent's tail, while the fatidic fruit is half-hidden in the right one, suggesting that she is conscious of the transgressive nature of her actions. Adam is characterized as Death itself. His body is in an advanced state of disintegration, his rotten left hand is reaching for Eve at the same time that it is being bitten by what A. Kent Hieatt (1983) has described as a weasel-faced serpent. This perverse cat's cradle game has puzzled critics for centuries and, for Hieatt (1983, p. 299), Eve can be seen here "exercising a sexual temptation upon Adam [...]. With devious slyness, she extends her hand towards the serpent's tail, representing both Adam's sexual member and Satan.".

Figure 1 - Eve, the Serpent, and Death.
GRIEN, Hans Baldung. Eve, the Serpent, and Death (c. early 1510s–1530).
Oil on panel, 63 × 32.5 cm[1]

[1] Available from: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hans_Baldung_Grien_-_Eve,_Serpent_and_Death.JPG. Accessed: 30 oct. 2022

Grien's painting is but one example of the misogyny that the *Book of Genesis* has inspired in Western culture since its composition, probably in the 7th or 6th century B.C. (DAVIES, 2007, p. 37). While the episodes that recount Adam and Eve's creation and "fall from grace" occupy a few pages in the *Bible*, the influence of these narratives has been paramount and the significance of the *Book of Genesis* for the history of women, in Kristen Kvan, Linda Schearing and Valeries Ziegler's (1999, p. 16) evaluation, is especially noteworthy. A great deal of debate has been motivated by the fact that the first woman was fashioned as an "afterthought", after all the animals were created by God and named by Adam. The metaphors of the work of a "great sculptor", which implies God's superior artistic skills, or "a great potter", which points to his expert craftsmanship, cannot be applied to Eve as she was not formed directly from the "dust of the ground", but from Adam's rib (KVAN; SCHEARING; ZIEGLER, 1999, p. 26). This process of creation can be read as a reinforcement of God's original aim, according to the *Book Two of Genesis*: Eve was meant to be a "helper" or "helpmeet" who would also atone for the first man's loneliness.

However, the foremost justification for misogynous readings of *Genesis* lies in the fact that Eve defied God's authority and committed the first sin, also convincing Adam to do the same. God's punishment in chapter three of *Genesis* impacts the whole of humankind and even some species of reptiles. The couple are banished from Eden and, as a reminder of her contravention, Eve and her female descendancy would forever suffer intense pains at childbirth and have to abide by their husbands' authority. For following Eve's example, instead of an amenable life in the Garden of Eden, Adam would have to exert himself working the soil for sustenance. The serpent's penance was to crawl and eat dust and become woman's enemy for ever after. Since the inception of this creation myth, Eve's disobedience has been seen by many Christians as the root of all suffering on earth so that, ultimately, *Genesis* can be said to have changed the optics about women in history.

In *The Rise and Fall of Adam and Eve,* the literary historian Stephen Greenblatt (2017) marvels at the perpetuity of this particular narrative and at its capacity to persuade generation after generation of its legitimacy, in spite of all the counter-evidence accumulated by science over the centuries (GREENBLATT, 2017, p. 14). His analysis reveals that discursive and artistic versions placing Eve in an infamous limelight proliferated at an astounding rhythm as every detail of that biblical episode was scrutinized along the centuries. The critic surveys several of the Christian historical figures who upheld the Adam and Eve account and who greatly influenced the directions that the readings of the myth have taken to date. The 4th century bishop and theologian Augustine of Hippo's views of *Genesis*, even if inadvertently, "[…] opened the floodgates to a current of misogyny that swirled for centuries around the figure of the first woman" (GREENBLATT, 2017, p. 151). Many subsequent church

fathers, such as Jerome, Aquinas and Peter Damian became well-known for their fierce condemnation of Eve, a judgement that they extended to the entire womanhood. That attitude was reflected in several of the actions of the Inquisition that targeted women, and in other materials not approved by the church, but popular nonetheless, such as the 1486 book *The hammer of witches,* in which the Dominican friars Heinrich Kraemer and James Sprenger justify their opinion that more women than men turned to witchcraft due to the female quintessential vice inherited from Eve (GREENBLATT, 2017, p. 165).

Significantly, Greenblatt also traces some of the counter-discourses by women who questioned either the prejudices and misogyny they saw in the *Book of Genesis*, or the prejudicious and misogynist readings inspired by it. One of them is the mid-fifteenth century humanist Isotta Nogarolla, who relativized Eve's guilt based on the premise that she had not been born perfect and endowed with free will as Adam had (GREENBLATT, 2017, p. 167). Another woman who fought against monologic readings of the Adam and Eve episode was Arcangela Tarabotti, born in 1604, and forced into a nunnery because of a defective leg. Her courageous book *Paternal Tyranny*, published posthumously and consigned to the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, contains the following counter-narrative:

> "Truly," God tells Eve, "the devil stands for the male, who from now on will cast on to you the blame for his failings and will have no other purpose than deceiving you, betraying you, and removing all your rights of dominion granted by my omnipotence." (TARABOTTI, *apud* GREENBLATT, 2017, p. 170).

In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, now with some more freedom of speech, also posited that the biblical views on the Creation and the Fall were conducive to the empowerment of men over women (WOLLSTONECRAFT, *apud* GREENBLATT, 2017, p. 171). That was the starting point of the feminist movement, which, according to Kvan, Schearing and Ziegler (1999), would revolutionize religious studies through the consistent analysis of the male bias of religious texts as well as the biased readings that these texts have been submitted to along the centuries.

Feminism also boosted a proliferation of alternative versions of the Adam and Eve episode in non-fictional, fictional, poetic and other artistic settings. One example is modernist poet, writer and critic Laura Riding's avant-garde short story, published in 1935, "Eve's Side of It", which presents Lilith, Adam's first wife in the famous Jewish *midrash*[1], as Eve's alter-ego and her inspiration for leaving the Garden of Eden (RIDING, 1994). Jewish feminist theologian Judith Plaskow's 1972 rewriting of the same *midrash* titled "The Coming of Lilith" (PLASKOW, 1999) is another narrative that imagines a relationship between Lilith and Eve. In Plaskow's version, Adam sends rebellious Lilith away from

[1] Midrash is a traditional Jewish strategy of appending texts to the *Bible* to correct inconsistencies or fill in missing information. Lilith, Adam's supposed first wife, created at the same moment as the first man, was imagined in the Middle Ages as an attempt to explain the discrepancies between the first and second chapters of Genesis.

Eden and builds a wall around it to avoid Lilith's bad influence on his new wife, Eve. Eve, however, climbs the wall, gets to know Lilith and both women form an alliance, managing to transform Eden. Judith Wright's 1966 ecocritical poem "Eve to her Daughters" critiques Adam's presumption to become the "new God" and posits that, for the sake of the environment, women should take over the organization of the world (WRIGHT, 2005, p. 1579).

North-American speculative fiction author Ursula K. Le Guin (1929-2018) also produced her own rewriting of the *Book of Genesis*. The very short story (around 1000 words long) "She unnames them" was first published in *The New Yorker* in 1985 and has, since then, been frequently reprinted and anthologized. According to the author herself, "She unnames them" is one of her favorite creations in short fiction. She recounts having the inspiration for the story – and speedily writing the first version – just after having received an award. She "was feeling good", she recalls in her characteristic sense of humor, to the point that she "was feeling like rewriting the *Bible*" (LE GUIN, 2016, p. 371). Intentionally or not, the story blends motifs and themes from the versions by Riding, Plaskow and Wright, such as the depiction of Eden as a gilded prison, the fact that Eve does not eat from the tree of knowledge and leaves the garden on her own accord, as well as voicing environmental preoccupations.

Despite its conciseness, its witty poetic prose style and the whimsical nature of the plot, "She unnames them" is fraught with social and cultural criticism, conforming to Le Guin's idiosyncratic approach to speculative fiction.

Ursula Le Guin's rewriting of *Genesis*: Fantasy with Very Serious Intents

After obediently abiding by realism in her first incursions into fiction in the 1950s, since, in her words, the strict rules of modernism "had decreed that non-realistic fiction, if not mere kiddilit, was trash", Le Guin (2016, p. 11) came to the conclusion that "the ground [realism] offered [her] particular talent was small and stony" and that she "had to find [her] own way elsewhere". The ancient literary mode of fantasy and its contemporary development, science fiction, turned out to be that way. Although she considered the division into "genres" either a "categorical imperative of critics" or a commercial stunt devised by publishers, Le Guin provided her own practical differentiation between fantasy and science fiction. Whilst in literary fantasy, imagination takes precedence and the writer is completely free to create the rules for her/his fictional world, she wrote in a preface, in science fiction, the rules of science must be observed, the writer must "make some effort not to violate physical possibility, though stretching scientific ideas much farther than a scientist would" (LE GUIN, 2016, p. 369).

Critics have often remarked that Le Guin's 23 novels and more than 100 short stories move between the realms of science fiction and fantasy. Although at the beginning of her career, Le Guin became well known for her science fiction novels and stories, Mendlesohn and James (2012, p. 120) claim that, after the 1970s, her fantasy narratives, highly influenced by her anthropological gaze, became "her best-known and best-loved work." Following the age's *zeitgeist*, Le Guin's writings started to display a preoccupation with feminism and the constructed nature of gender (MENDLESOHN; JAMES, 2012, p. 122). Those concerns further enhanced the serious intent behind Le Guin's fantastic universe, considering that, as Rosemary Jackson (2009, p. 2) puts it, "[l]ike any other text, a literary fantasy is produced within, and determined by, its social context. Though it might struggle against the limits of this context, often being articulated upon that very struggle, it cannot be understood in isolation from it." Fantasy, Jackson (2009, p. 2) goes on, remonstrates against certain cultural constraints and becomes a "literature of desire", opening up "for a brief moment, on to disorder, on to illegality, on to that which lies outside the law, that which is outside dominant value systems."

In her preface to *Buffalo gals and other animal presences*, Le Guin's collected "animal, vegetal and mineral" stories and poems (LE GUIN, 1988, p. 9-10), first published in 1987, the author acknowledges her discontent and rebellion against the repressive patriarchal rules that have guided Western culture and her desire for environmental and gender equality. The presentation of alternative realities and non-human perspectives, frequently placing the reader in the non-human protagonists' shoes are some of Le Guin's strategies attempt to accomplish that goal. In "She unnames them" the story that closes *Buffalo gals and other animal presences*, two main elements characterize the narrative as fantasy: the presence of talking animals and an anachronistic approach to narrative time.

The introduction to *Buffalo gals* justifies the fact that many of the non-human characters in the collection are endowed with consciousness and verbal skills. Le Guin's intent is to challenge man's deafness and insistence on hierarchical discriminations, placing himself as the autocratic ruler of a "rational" phallocentric world:

> By climbing up into his head and shutting out every voice but his own, "Civilized Man" has gone deaf. He can't hear the wolf calling him brother—not Master, but brother. He can't hear the earth calling him child—not Father, but son. He hears only his own words making up the world. He can't hear the animals, they have nothing to say. Children babble, and have to be taught how to climb up into their heads and shut the doors of perception. No use teaching women at all, they talk all the time, of course, but never say anything. This is the myth of Civilization, embodied in the monotheisms which assign soul to Man alone. (LE GUIN, 1988, p. 12).

"All creatures talk to one another", Le Guin (1988, p. 13) concludes, "if only one listens". By making use of the creative prerogatives of literary fantasy, "She unnames them" reimagines Eve's destiny, giving her a leading role in the course of events. Le Guin addresses questions of dominance involved in the act of naming, and also ascribes power and voice to what she calls "non-men" so that they can gain control of their subjectivities and their future. Narrative structure corroborates this design, as the author starts the story *in media res,* inviting the reader to witness the decision-making processes and the various reactions of groups of animals to the act of unnaming:

> Whales and dolphins, seals and sea otters consented with particular grace and alacrity. (LE GUIN, 1988, p. 194).
>
> [The yaks] discussed the matter all summer. The councils of the elderly females finally agreed that though the name might be useful to others, it was so redundant from the yak point of view that they never spoke it themselves, and hence might as well dispense with it. (LE GUIN, 1988, p. 194).
>
> Among the domestic animals, few horses had cared what anybody called them since the failure of Dean Swift's attempt to name them from their own vocabulary. Cattle, sheep, swine, asses, mules, and goats, along with chickens, geese, and turkeys, all agreed enthusiastically to give their names back to the people to whom—as they put it— they belonged. (LE GUIN, 1988, p. 194).
>
> The cats of course steadfastly denied ever having had any name other than those self-given, unspoken, ineffably personal names which, as the poet named Eliot said, they spend long hours daily contemplating. (LE GUIN, 1988, p. 195).
>
> The insects parted with their names in vast clouds and swarms of ephemeral syllables buzzing and stinging and humming and flitting and crawling and tunneling away. (LE GUIN, 1988, p. 195).

This witty poetic treatment dispensed to the manifestations of diverse species – from the largest mammals on earth to the "ubiquitous" little creatures such as mice and fleas (LE GUIN, 1988, p. 194) – covers the first 60% of the story and serves as a measure of Le Guin's narrative and thematic preoccupation with equality between humans and non-humans. It is only after animal agency in the act of unnaming is made clear that another of her purposes – deconstructing the "Man vs. Nature" game and the speciecist rationale fostered by the biblical text – comes to surface, with the revelation of the partnership between the animals and the first woman. Eve's role as catalyst for the initiative is established in a shift to first-person narration, after which the reader discovers the underlying principles of unnaming, as we shall see further down.

Besides endowing non-humans with cognizance, another fantasy strategy adopted by Le Guin involves the story's very unusual temporal dynamics. References to "Adam", Adam's father and "the garden" (LE GUIN, 1988, p. 195) clearly point to the Eden as the setting for the narrative and to the *Book of Genesis* as the "hypotext", or the original text that

inspires the rewriting (GENETTE, 1997, p. 5). However, trying to establish a traditional timespan for the events within the Edenic period of the *Bible* might present the reader with a challenge, since *Genesis* events happen in parallel with other assorted time markers in the story.

While the unnaming process is seen through the lenses of the animals' collective consciousness, there are various references to events that would have happened subsequently to the *Genesis* Edenic period, such as the biblical narrative of the Tower of Babel, a reference to T. S. Eliot's modernist poetry on cats in conjunction with Platonic philosophy, and two allusions to 18th century cultural and scientific events: the Houyhnhnm sections in the novel *Gulliver's travels* and Karl Linnaeus's taxonomic classification. Although apparently haphazard, all of these references contribute, either more openly or obliquely, to a crucial theme in the story: the constructive or harmful possibilities of language in the relations between humans and animals. Behind their amusing façades, these little anachronic details hide, in Le Guin's characteristic style, serious concerns pertaining to sociology and cultural anthropology, such as the human attempts to better understand and relate to animals, and the role of naming in producing a "Eurocentric planetary consciousness" with colonizing intents, as we shall see further down.

The appearance of the first woman as narrator in the second part of the story brings new elements to this fantastic temporal framework and reveals Le Guin's engagement with feminist ecocriticism. While the theme of the narrative is asserted with the completion of the unnaming project – which causes an unprecedented experience of closeness among the woman and her non-human companions – structurally, Le Guin's expert treatment of language can be perceived in the repetition of "they", "them" and "their", as well as the high recurrence of reciprocal and reflexive pronouns scattered along the story. The next step, Eve's meeting with Adam to return her own name to the donor – after which the adoption of the pronoun "she" in the title acquires a special significance – turns out to be anticlimactic (although, as Nancy Walker [1995, p. 32] observes, Le Guin also applies aspects of situation comedy to the episode):

> [...] I could not now, in all conscience, make an exception for myself. I resolutely put anxiety away, went to Adam, and said, "You and your father lent me this—gave it to me, actually. It's been really useful, but it doesn't exactly seem to fit very well lately. But thanks very much! It's really been very useful."
>
> It is hard to give back a gift without sounding peevish or ungrateful, and I did not want to leave him with that impression of me. He was not paying much attention, as it happened, and said only, "Put it down over there, OK?" and went on with what he was doing. (LE GUIN, 1988, p. 196).

The male/female relationship adds extra layers of complexity to the treatment of time in the narrative, since, with these details, it becomes clear that Le Guin is positing Adam and Eve's relationship as a couple

(something only superficially explored in the *Book of Genesis*) as the seed for the nuclear family model. Their marriage is clearly dysfunctional, lacking dialogue and equality, and abiding by traditional gender roles, if we consider that Adam is working at "fitting parts together" (fixing a machine or an engine, perhaps?) while the wife is expected to "put things away" and get dinner ready on time (LE GUIN, 1988, p. 196). The woman's rebellious act of leaving "paradise" is, therefore, a result of God's/Adam's self-centredness and authoritarian attitude regarding the establishment of both species and gender hierarchies, which had led to her "imprisonment" in an unequal relationship.

Considering the author's approach to historical references throughout the whole story, it is possible to observe that Le Guin, conforming to her own definition of fantasy mentioned previously, follows the biblical hypotext selectively, adhering relatively more closely to the biblical narrative up to Book three of *Genesis*, prior to the appearance of the serpent and Eve's original sin, two crucial events in the *Bible* that do not occur in "She unnames them". It is also important to notice that snakes are not included by Le Guin among the animals being unnamed, perhaps to circumvent any preconceived ideas associated with serpents and to lessen the depreciatory burden that these animals have carried since God cursed them in *Genesis*.

In its fantastic existence, partly isolated from the development of mainstream humanity, Le Guin's Garden of Eden becomes a type of metaphorical island as far as the conjugal life of the first two humans is concerned. That island is not, however, totally impervious to extramural historical influences, as the animals' perceptions and argumentation reveal in the first part of the story. If, from the historical pointers presented by the text, the world outside the walls of the garden seems to have continued to develop in a recognizable way for us readers, unidealized and conflict-ridden, internally, the forces of a Judeo-Christian approach to family try to maintain intact the illusion of a "paradise" lost in time. Utopia, nonetheless, is only valid for Adam, comfortable with his self-absorption and complacent attitudes towards Eve. Her refusal to continue accepting the species and gender-biased treatment imposed to her and the non-humans by God/Adam reveals not only her own desire for emancipation but her commitment to what we would call today environmental justice.

Behind its witty and mischievous façade, Le Guin's "fantasy" calls attention to the imbrication between three momentous spheres of cultural studies: feminism, post-colonialism and environmentalism, which we will examine in the next sections.

Feminist Ecocritical "Writing Back"

Used originally by Salman Rushdie in 1982 in his article "The empire writes back with a vengeance", and again in 1989 – in Rushdie's homage – as the title of the seminal book on post-colonial theory by

Australian critics Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1989), the expression "writing back" points to specific literary devices that are, at the same time, clever, playful and very serious, as parody, pastiche, satire, quotation, allusion, appropriation, irony and other intertextual strategies are bound to be (See HUTCHEON, 2002). Due, mainly, to the success of Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's book, the term came to be associated with a particular type of literary dialogism in which texts that had been regarded as canonical by dominant cultural circles are confronted and contested by minorities and marginalized groups. From that perspective, "writing back" is a concept that can be applied both to post-colonial and feminist analyses, since, as Ashcroft *et al*. (2007, p. 93) put it, "both patriarchy and imperialism can be seen to exert analogous forms of domination over those they render subordinate." Accordingly, analogous strategies of resistance can be verified in both fields (ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN, 2007, p. 95).

"Writing back", in Thomas Bonnici's useful definition, is a strategy in which "a new literary text is created from the gaps, silences, allegories, metaphors and ironies existing in a text, which is generally 'canonical'", to "subvert the canon and inscribe the experiences of the marginalized subject" (BONNICI, 2007, p. 228, my translation)[2]. Feminist and post-colonial instances of "writing back" would be, therefore, struggling against the hegemonic power of canonical texts, which in many instances attempt to "put the lid" on "[…] class, ideological and other conflicts, divisions and hierarchies within society" (GRAHAM, 2011, p. 20) by trying to suppress language's fundamental dialogical nature. This conflict is expressed in the famous Bakhtinian/Volosinovian quote:

> The very same thing that makes the ideological sign vital and mutable is also, however, that which makes it a refracting and distorting medium. The ruling class strives to impart a superclass, eternal character to the ideological sign, to extinguish or drive inward the struggle between social value judgements which occur in it, to make the sign uniaccentual. (VOLOSINOV, 1986, p. 23).

The boom of Cultural Studies in the second half of the twentieth century forced that lid open and stirred even the most traditional fields of knowledge. Theology and, more specifically, the *Book of Genesis* were not immune to cultural scrutiny. When feminist authors write back to the *Bible*, they are boldly challenging the quintessential "eternal" text, one of the narratives of the Christian world that most effectively tries to curb alternative meanings and interpretations. The *Bible*'s intended uniaccentual character focuses on the omnipotence of its central ruling entity, "the Lord God" (incidentally, the word "Lord", either as an adjective or a noun, appears more than 7,000 times in the King James version), who has absolute protagonism in the creation of everything on Earth and is, therefore, "father of all". He produces man in his "image" and "likeness" (Gn 1,26) to be his designated representative on the planet;

[2] Original version: " A reescrita é um fenômeno literário, usado extensivamente em diversas literaturas, através do qual um novo texto literário é criado a partir de lacunas, silêncios, alegorias, metáforas e ironias existentes no texto geralmente "canônino". É uma estratégia amplamente usada na literatura pós-colonial e que a literatura feminista emprega para retrucar as bases patriarcalistas do texto "original", redescobrir o espaço feminino construído pelo novo texto, dar voz à mulher silenciada pelo patriarcalismo."

thus, establishing and perpetuating maleness as the paradigm for his own authority. The animals, designed to be Adam's "help meet", are the first beings submitted to man:

> And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.
>
> And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living crea- ture, that was the name thereof.
>
> And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. (Gn 2, 18-20)

Not having found any help meet among animals, woman is then produced:

> And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;
>
> And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. (Gn 2, 21-22)

As Greenblatt's (2017) appraisal sustains, these circumstances have instigated a great deal of debate in the field of theology. Regarding critical interpretations of the Book of Genesis from a gender perspective, Kvan, Schearing and Ziegler (1999) point out two opposing currents. Traditional hierarchical interpretations have defended women's subordination to men obeying a "divine chain of command" (KVAN; SCHEARING; ZIEGLER, 1999, p. 372) based, among other arguments, on the ideas that the first woman was created as a "helper", and on the chronological order both of creation – man was created first mirroring God's perfection – and of the Fall – woman was the first to sin and to persuade man to do the same (KVAN; SCHEARING; ZIEGLER, 1999, p. 373). Feminist interpretations, on the other hand, have less unified positions. Some feminist theologians, such as Phillis Trible, cited by Kvan, Schearing and Ziegler (1999), argue that new, non-male-controlled readings (and translations) of the text reveal the true egalitarian stances of the first man and woman.

Most feminists, however, dismiss any possibilities of interpreting *Genesis* in an egalitarian way, as, in their view, the text is too intrinsically sexist (KVAN; SCHEARING; ZIEGLER, 1999, p. 378). By critically and creatively reimagining such narratives, the strategy of "writing back" presents opportunities for women fiction writers and poets – who do not have to compromise either with the "sacred" nature of the biblical text or its historical roots – to highlight such sexism and bias, and insert themes and discussions of contemporary interest into the biblical text, thus filling in the gaps of the text, or playing with its ironies and inconsistencies, according to Bonnici's concept of "writing back". "Writing back", Kvan,

Schearing and Ziegler (1999) claim, can encompass a wide range of preoccupations, as

> […] many interpreters have called for a rethinking of the Genesis story that reconsiders not only the relationship between men and women, but also the relationship between human persons and the natural world. Both environmentalists and ecofeminists have found in Genesis 1-3 the roots of Western tendencies to abuse the environment […]. (KVAN; SCHEARING; ZIEGLER, 1999, p. 371).

Because it calls attention to the reestablishment of the interconnectedness between "earth itself and the life on in" (ASHCROFT; GRIFFITHS; TIFFIN, 2007, p. 67) and the common oppression that patriarchy imposes on both women and animals, Feminist Ecology, or Ecofeminism, is a suitable theoretical tool to apply to the reading of "She unnames them". In this context, this article attempts to analyze "She unnames them" from environment philosopher Val Plumwood's views on dualism and its relation with ecofeminism.

In *Feminism and the mastery of nature,* Plumwood (1993) posits that current environmental imbalances are caused by the stark dividing line historically drawn between humanity and nature, in which, even when humans take measures to protect nature, they do so having in mind their own survival and well-being rather than the natural world's survival and well-being, thus producing a human hierarchical superiority over nature. As Plumwood (1993, p. 2) puts it, in a Western anthropocentric setting, dualisms construct "human identity as 'outside' nature". She claims an "ethic of nature", in which "[…] both men and women must challenge the dualised conception of human identity and develop an alternative culture which fully recognises human identity as continuous with, not alien from, nature" (PLUMWOOD, 1993, p. 36).

From a gender perspective, dualisms ingrained in Western culture, such as "human/nature", "culture/nature", "reason/nature", "mind/body", "master/slave", "civilized/primitive", "public/private", "subject/object", "self/other", "production/reproduction" (PLUMWOOD, 1993, p. 43) – among many other dichotomies pointed out by the author – reinforce a dominant role that can only exist when in contrast to its disempowered counterpart. Plumwood (1993, p. 46) calls attention to the fact that the left-side terms of the binaries (representing elements such as "human", "culture", "reason", "mind", "master", "civilized", "public", "subject", "self", "production") have been associated with superior (male) – productive, progressive, creative – characteristics, while the terms on the right-side – "nature", "body", "slave", "primitive", "private", "object", "other", "reproduction" – are assigned to inferior (female and non-human) physical, reproductive, instinctive domains.[3] Terms on the right-side function as "instrumentalization", that is, they seem to function merely as a means to the existence and success of the first, "superior", term (PLUMWOOD, 1993, p. 53).

[3] Although for this analysis we refer to the first term of each binomial as human and male and the second as female and/or animal, Plumwood (1993, p. 72) clarifies that the power relations within those dualisms are relative to the context being discussed and that the left-hand term in each dualism refers to "a master identity defined in terms of multiple exclusions, and in terms of domination not only of the feminine but also of the slave (which usually combines race, class and gender oppression), of the animal, and of the natural."

In this male-constructed dual view of the world, women and non-humans are relegated to the background. "Backgrounding", in Plumwood's theory, consists, thus, of a common form of denial that constructs women's and non-human contribution to society as circumstantial, when set against men's "[…] dominant, foreground sphere of recognised achievement or causation" (PLUMWOOD, 1993, p. 21). Nature, in particular, is usually backgrounded […] as a limitless provider without needs of its own" (PLUMWOOD, 1993, p. 21). Another effect of such polarizations is that they lead to "homogenizing", an instrument to deny diversity and individualization to what is placed on the right-side of the binaries, reducing them to a "function" (PLUMWOOD, 1993, p. 55). In a binary system, nature is especially susceptible to becoming homogenized:

> The natural world is homogenised and defined negatively and in relation to humans as "he environment". "If you've seen one redwood you've seen 'em all" expresses a common kind of insensitivity to the incredible diversity and richness of nature, treating beings in nature as all alike in their defectiveness, their lack of human qualities. (PLUMWOOD, 1993, p. 70).

Understanding these binarisms and fighting them can help form "the basis for a critical ecological feminism in which women consciously position themselves *with* nature" (PLUMWOOD, 1993, p. 21, my emphasis) and not *above* nature, as patriarchal societies tend to do.

In her introduction to *Buffalo gals and other animal presences*, Le Guin acknowledges and questions, in an ironic tone, this same type of dualism:

> In literature as in "real life", women, children, and animals are the obscure matter upon which Civilization erects itself, phallologically. That they are Other is *(vide* Lacan *et al.)* the foundation of language, the Father Tongue. If Man vs. Nature is the name of the game, no wonder the team players kick out all these non-men who won't learn the rules and run around the cricket pitch squeaking and barking and chattering! (LE GUIN, 1988, p. 11).

Many of the stories that compose Le Guin's collection encourage the reader to vicariously experience the non-man side of Plumwood's list of binary oppositions. The novella "Buffalo gals, won't you come out tonight", for instance, adopts the style of a Native-American myth, depicting Myra, a little girl who falls from a crashing airplane into the world of Old People, the realm of talking animals such as the trickster Coyote and the matriarch Grandmother Spider. There Myra learns how Old People were forced to live in hiding, banned from the New People's (humans') dimension. "Mazes" is a little masterpiece on ambiguity: the protagonist, who can be construed by the reader either as a laboratory mouse or a human, and who is being held in a maze as the subject of a scientific experiment, reflects on the pointless behaviour of his captor

(human being or alien?) and the lack of communication that leads to the protagonist's death. "The wife's story" reverses the werewolf myth by showing the predicament of a wolf family whose father starts to display human traits. "The direction of the road" is a philosophical/environmental tale about relativity, from the point of view of a large oak tree, who, during her long life, witnesses the transformations around her, observing vehicles that come and go, while she must be watchful and make herself shrink or grow to allow the traffic to move. It is with "She unnames them", however, that several environmental and feminist themes come together, such as the dualism "Man vs. Nature", the shared alterity of women and animals, and the proposal of a reaction against patriarchal oppression.

A crucial aspect to be considered in "She unnames them" is that Eve's approach to the act of unnaming is not a simplistic inversion of God/Adam's original naming expedient. In the Genesis hypotext, the act of naming is characterized by enforcement and intransience: "whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof" (Gn 2,19). In Le Guin's version, even though the unnaming proposition seems to have come from Eve, it becomes evident that she has not inflicted her human and rational will on the animals. The groups are given time to reflect, discuss and mature their ideas, and while some of them make an instant choice, others hold long debates to reach a decision; effective communication and the reassurance of the voluntariness of unnaming are able to solve eventual disagreements, such as in the case of domestic companion animals:

> It was with the dogs, and with some parrots, lovebirds, ravens, and mynahs that the trouble arose. These verbally talented individuals insisted that their names were important to them, and flatly refused to part with them. But as soon as they understood that the issue was precisely one of individual choice, and that anybody who wanted to be called Rover, or Froufrou, or Polly, or even Birdie in the personal sense, was perfectly free to do so, not one of them had the least objection to parting with the lower case (or, as regards German creatures, uppercase) generic appellations poodle, parrot, dog, or bird [...]. (LE GUIN, 1988, p. 195).

The removal of names is akin to the destruction of the barriers/dualisms between the species, and the resulting closer (physical and psychological) interaction and better understanding of differences conduce to the reversal of the homogenizing process that has caused "all sentient life [to be] lumped together in the category 'animal' in contradistinction to the category 'human'" (MATTHEWS, 2017, p. 58). Eve does not assume a condescending position in relation to animals, placing herself "with" nature, not above it, very much in the spirit preconized by Plumwood:

> None were left now to unname, and yet how close I felt to them when I saw one of them swim or fly or trot or crawl across my way or over my skin, or stalk me in the night, or go along beside me for a while in the day. They seemed far closer than when their names had stood between myself and them like a clear barrier: so close that my fear of them and their fear of me became one same fear. And the attraction that many of us felt, the desire to smell one another's smells, feel or rub or caress one another's scales or skin or feathers or fur, taste one another's blood or flesh, keep one another warm—that attraction was now all one with the fear, and the hunter could not be told from the hunted, nor the eater from the food. (LE GUIN, 1988, p. 195-96).

When Eve completes the process of approximation (a process that is pleasurable and risky at once), by returning her own name, she undoes the last hierarchical distinctions between herself and the non-humans, challenging the anthropocentric dynamics established by God/Adam.

In Le Guin's version of *Genesis,* the woman's act of rebellion cancels the backgrounding phenomenon that had characterized the depiction of both women and non-humans in the hypotext. Indeed, the first three chapters of *Genesis* bring little information about the role of animals, who, apart from the villainous serpent, are mostly taken for granted. Likewise, except for the first woman's fateful wrongdoing, information about Eve or about Eve and Adam's relationship as a couple is scarce. Le Guin's version, on the other hand, allows Eve's and the animals' protagonisms to develop on a positive note. There is no treacherous serpent (or any other vile animal, for that matter), no forbidden fruit, no expulsion. What we have is a last gentle (and frustrated) attempt at dialogue with her husband, even though Eve's decision has already been made:

> One of my reasons for doing what I did was that talk was getting us nowhere; but all the same I felt a little let down. I had been prepared to defend my decision. And I thought that perhaps when he did notice he might be upset and want to talk. I put some things away and fiddled around a little, but he continued to do what he was doing and to take no notice of anything else. At last I said, "Well, good-bye, dear. I hope the garden key turns up."
>
> He was fitting parts together, and said without looking around, "OK, fine, dear. When's dinner?"
>
> "I'm not sure," I said. "I'm going now. With the – " I hesitated, and finally said, "With them, you know," and went on. (LE GUIN, 1988, p. 196).

Adam's indifference to Eve's actions – or to the existence and worth of the non-humans around him – demonstrates his homogenizing view of them, and their place, in his cosmology, on the right-side of Plumwood's binomials – the place of the body, primitiveness, reproduction, reification, etc.

In fact, for man's paradise to exist, a world in which he is master, landowner, fixer of problems, protector, provider and thinker, the woman and the non-humans must play accessory roles. Eve dismantles that world view, not by direct confrontation, but by quietly and democratically

undoing dichotomies and hierarchical distinction, and building strong alliances with non-humans before leaving. By unlocking the gates of the garden and making the key disappear (an act that is not even noticed by Adam, in his self-absorbedness), the woman not only gets ready to free herself, but also opens that possibility to anyone who wants to follow. It is a courageous move: the world outside the "paradise" created by God, the primordial patriarch, is new and unknown, and analogies with women's demands and anxieties in the 1980s feminist movement, which Le Guin was experiencing and supporting at the time of the story's composition, are inevitable:

> In fact I had only just then realized how hard it would have been to explain myself. I could not chatter away as I used to do, taking it all for granted. My words now must be as slow, as new, as single, as tentative as the steps I took going down the path away from the house, between the dark-branched, tall dancers motionless against the winter shining. (LE GUIN, 1988, p. 196).

With "She unnames them", Le Guin, in Marian Scholtmeijer's words, "takes the ingrained cultural negation of the animal, most firmly authorized in language and naming, and turns it to her own account" (SCHOLTMEIJER, 1995, p. 284). Even though "the animals and the woman achieve a victimless insurrection" (SCHOLTMEIJER, 1995, p. 283), this last paragraph does not revert to the "and then they lived happily ever after" formula. Le Guin's description of the path that leads away from the domestic sphere and the gilded cage of patriarchal institutions is at once exciting and bleak. Like feminism, the joint venture woman/animal carries risks, requires courage, has an uncertain outcome and a long way ahead before success.

Although it does not seem to lead to gender and species utopia, it is a path well worth taking.

Post-colonial ecocritical "writing back"

Plumwood' theory of binarism concludes that the preoccupations of feminism, environmentalism and post-colonialism converge in several aspects and are closely woven together. The author calls for "[…] a common, integrated framework for the critique of both human domination and the domination of nature – integrating nature as a fourth category of analysis into the framework of an extended feminist theory which employs a race, class and gender analysis" (PLUMWOOD, 1993, p. 1-2). Conversely, post-colonial studies, as a highly transdisciplinary field, has come to similar conclusions in relation to the overlapping of colonial domination and race, gender, class and environment issues. Plumwood (2003, p. 52) puts it like this: "the concept of colonization can be applied directly to non-human nature itself, and […] the relationship between humans, or certain groups of them, and the more-than-human world might be aptly characterized as one of colonization". The rise

of sub-disciplines, such as post-colonial feminism and post-colonial ecocriticism, spheres that are in constant dialogical relations and are not easily separable, attests to that growing sense of interconnection.

The 1980s and 90s brought those connections into the limelight. In 1986, Alfred W. Crosby, one of the first theorists to formally associate post-colonialism with ecocriticism, denounced the irreversible ecological imbalances that had been generated by the masses of Europeans settlers leaving the old continent to populate the "the Neo-Europes", bringing new species and extinguishing others, thus breaking the original environmental balance:

> The regions that today export more foodstuffs of European provenance—grains and meats—than any other lands on earth had no wheat, barley, rye, cattle, pigs, sheep, or goats whatsoever five hundred years ago. [...] On the pampa, Iberian horses and cattle have driven back the guanaco and rhea; in North America, speakers of Indo-European languages have overwhelmed speakers of Algonkin and Muskhogean and other Amerindian languages; in the antipodes, the dandelions and house cats of the Old World have marched forward, and kangaroo grass and Kiwis have retreated. Why? Perhaps European humans have triumphed because of their superiority in arms, organization, and fanaticism, but what in heaven's name is the reason that the sun never sets on the empire of the dandelion? Perhaps the success of European imperialism has a biological, an ecological, component. (CROSBY, 2003, p. 420-421).

Besides that direct biological/ecological intrusion in the colonized environments, the success of European imperialism has relied heavily on discursive strategies. The use of animal images to reinforce imperial dominance is one of those strategies. Antoinette Burton and Renisa Mawani (2020, p. 6) remind us that the British empire enthusiastically "drew on animals – as symbols, companions, and machines – to advance projects of would-be imperial extension and consolidation through fictions and fantasies of racial, cultural, and species supremacy". The lion, for instance, was appropriated by the British to emphasize their own "interspecies birthright"; the racoon was used as a symbol of masculine "frontier wilderness" in the violent battles between settlers and indigenous people (and, later on, racoons became a token of North-American anti-imperialism); mosquitoes, in tropical regions, from a negative perspective, were seen as a colonial enemy that settlers had to face with inordinate auto-proclaimed bravery (BURTON; MAWANI, 2020, p. 6).

The discursive strategy of "naming" has been widely studied in the field of colonialism. Paul Carter (2003, p. 377) discusses the crucial role of naming in colonial dominance, as "by the act of place-naming, space is transformed symbolically into a place, that is, a space with a history", or, more specifically, a space inscribed by the colonial presence, as Ashcroft (2001, p. 155) reminds us. In the case of European colonialism, the "history" ascribed to places by Europeans systematically erases 'other'

previously existing histories. In his book on the representation of non-Europeans in the so-called "Age of Discovery", Stephen Greenblatt (1992, p. 82-83) examines the articulation between Christianity and colonialism as a propelling force to that erasure. When discussing Christopher Columbus's attitudes to renaming lands, for instance, Greenblatt (1992 p. 83) argues that, by mirroring the "Savior's marvelous gift" of Christening, colonizers promoted "the founding action of Christian imperialism", by cancelling native (pagan and evil) identity, in a movement that intended to shift the status of the colonized individuals from "ignorance" to "knowledge". Post-colonial basic premise is that the acts of naming and renaming become, in Bill Ashcroft's (2001, p. 134) words, strategies to linguistically "appropriate", "define" and "capture" a colonized place (and, consequently, all the sentient and insentient components of that place), reinforcing the colonizer's possession of and hegemonic power over those spaces and its constituents.

Naming, dominance (by metaphysical and secular entities) and hierarchization are closely connected in Western culture and go back to classical antiquity. The Greek philosophers' development of cosmological models attests to that tradition. This is the case of the *Scala Naturae*, also known as "The Great Chain of Being", an influential theory, which Arthur Lovejoy (2001) traces back to Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus. As Page Du Bois (1991) reminds us, gender, ethnicity and social class were already a central point at the inception of the *Scala Naturae*, if we take into account that the 4th century social unrest in Athens and greater dependence on slavery made Plato "generalize the metaphor of slavery to include all relationships" (DU BOIS, 1991, p. 140) in his classificatory approach:

> Difference had invaded and disrupted the city, and was acknowledged and almost despaired of by Euripides. Plato's response to the presence of difference was to look even more deeply inward and to justify the differences within the city in terms of an attribute of the citizen, logos. The Greek male human being thus reconstructed his notion of the world; the dominance of the citizen, the philosopher, was justified not in terms of *autarkeia*, but rather in terms of inevitable and natural superiority. The contradictory position of women, in which they were both objects of exchange necessary for the reproduction of the city, and outsiders, bestial and irrational, was also rationalized in a new way. Women were associated with the body, which was inferior to the mind; thus they, like the body, served the soul, the head, the philosopher, the male. (DU BOIS, 1991, p. 140).

Along the millennia, the Greek prototype of the *Scala Naturae* has been appropriated and reinterpreted by successions of philosophers and naturalists and has come to encompass a variety of systematized and detailed inventories of beings, attempting, as Matin Wieser (2017, p. 3) maintains, to "reconcile and systematize Plato's theory of ideas, Aristotle's zoological and psychological writings, and the *Bible*". Representations of the Chain in different periods invariably support the superiority

of "otherworldliness" over "this-worldliness", as Lovejoy (2001, p. 24-25) famously put it. Medieval Christianity maintained that the Chain was ordained by God himself, with man placed "in the traditional cosmic setting between the angels and the beasts", a view extended to Renaissance (TILLYARD, 2017, p. 3-4). A notorious example from the Renaissance period is Diego Valadés's copperplate engraving of The Great Chain of Being (Fig. 2), published in 1579 in *Rhetorica Christiana*, the first text to describe the Christianization of indigenous peoples in America and the first book published by a *mestizo*, since Valadés was a Franciscan artist born in Mexico to an indigenous mother (KILROY-EWBANK, 2019). In Valadés's depiction of the *Scala Naturae,* the figure of the Chain is a powerful metaphor that holds "everything [...] in its proper

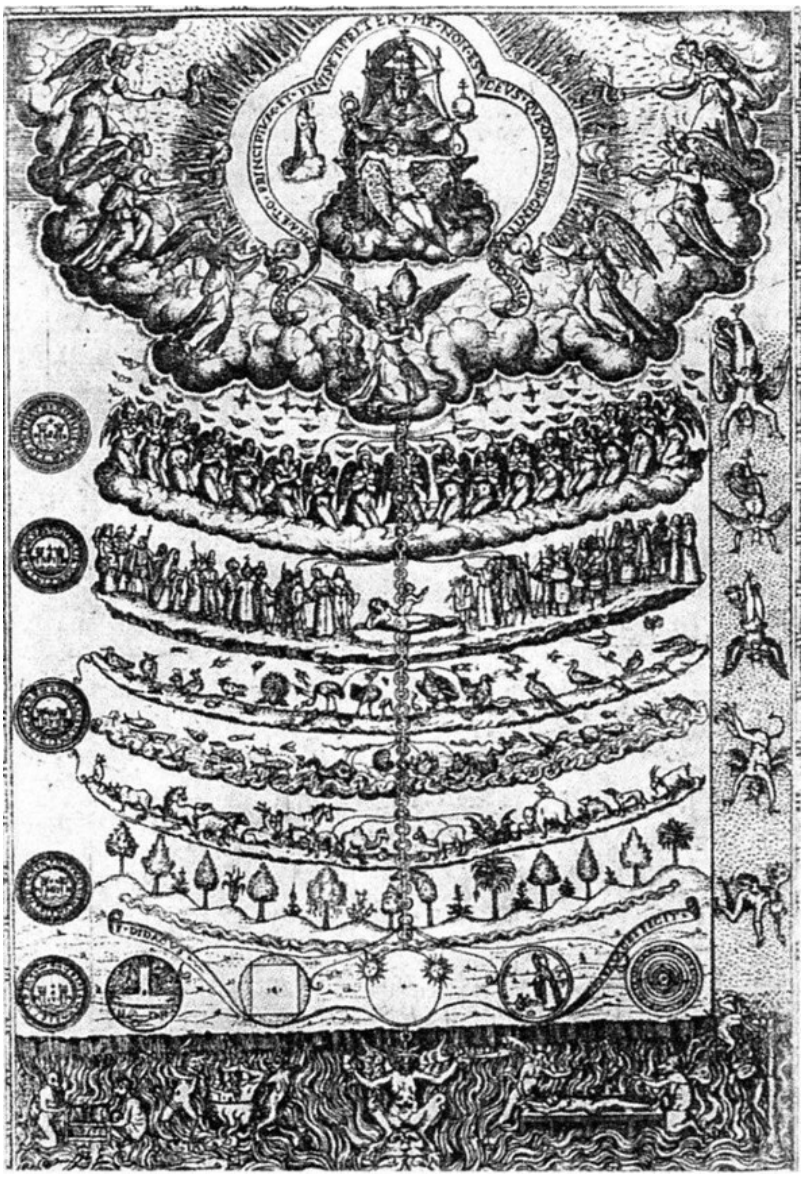

Figure 2 – *Rhetorica Christiana*.
Source: Diego Valadés, Perugia, Italy *apud* Petrumiacobum Petrutium.1579[4]

[4] Available from: https://archive.org/details/rhetoricachristi00vala/page/n259/mode/2up. Accessed: 20 Sep. 2022.

place" reaching from the celestial realm to "pure matter" and reaching down to Hell (WIESER, 2017, p. 3).

The era of Enlightenment also customized The Great Chain to its own preference, as 17th and 18th century natural philosophers attempted to rationalize the relations of dominance that, they maintained, should organize society. An example is Swiss naturalist Charles Bonnet's scheme, presented in his 1746 book, *Contemplation de la Nature*. In a famous illustration, Bonnet depicts a stairway, placing special emphasis on the "superior" beings on each step: below man, "[…] whose head is stuck in the clouds to symbolize his second home in the spiritual realm" (WIESER, 2017, p. 7), are the higher-ranking mammals: monkey, dog and lion, and the king of birds, the eagle. It was with Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus's *Systema Naturae,* first published in 1735, however, that Enlightenment's obsession with classification would prove remarkably effective. To this day, the three principles defended by Linnaeus remain internationally valid: (i) The adoption of the genus and species binomen to all organisms; (ii) the prevalence of the first name given to an organism over subsequent ones and (iii) the standard taxonomic hierarchy, in which taxonomic ranks follow the order: species – genus – family – order – class – phylum and kingdom (BENTON, 2000, p. 634).

A key achievement of the Linnaean nomenclature system to Western global hegemony was what Mary Louise Pratt has termed "European planetary consciousness", a means by which "European citizenries made, and made sense of, their place on the planet" (PRATT, 2008, p. 24). Linnaeus's original project intended to organize what he and his contemporaries saw as the "chaos" of botany by categorizing and naming all plants on the planet, even those not known to Europeans, according to surprisingly simple and few guidelines, and using Latin, a purportedly nationless, neutral language. Similar systems were developed for animals and minerals and, in a short time, a classificatory frenzy took over the world, from China to South Africa, from Persia to Mexico, from Surinam to Australia. Linnaeus's methods were so successful that they were respected even by his detractors. Students and followers – "ambassadors of empire" as Pratt (2008, p. 26) calls them – multiplied, disseminating Linnaean theories and techniques regarding the proper collection, measurement, preservation and recording of specimens. Botanical gardens and natural history museums also appeared all over Europe.

With Linnaean taxonomy, a new style of conquest narrative emerged. On the one hand, "[…] what is told is a story of urbanizing, industrializing Europeans fanning out in search of non-exploitive relations to nature, even as they were destroying such relations in their own centers of power" (PRATT, 2008, p. 28). What naturalists were accomplishing behind the façade of "anti-conquest", however, was "naturaliz[ing] the bourgeois European's own global presence and authority", a "totalizing classificatory project" that contributed to 19th century colonial exploration and remains valid to date (PRATT, 2008,

p. 28). The "lettered, male European eye" controlled the system and "could familiarize ('naturalize') new sites/sights immediately upon contact, by incorporating them into the language of the system" (PRATT, 2008, p. 31).

While the 18th century passion for natural science resembled religious faith, with Linnaeus's followers even calling themselves his "disciples" (PRATT, 2008, p. 25), Linnaeus's work has been associated with that of God /Adam in the Garden of Eden, as Pratt, quoting the historian Daniel Boorsting, observes:

> For Linnaeus, says Daniel Boorstin, "nature was an immense collection of natural objects which he himself walked around as superintendent, sticking on labels. He had a forerunner in this arduous task: Adam in Paradise." While invoking the image of primordial innocence, Boorstin, like many other commentators, does not question it. Questioning it, one can see why from the very beginning, human beings, especially European ones, posed a problem to the systematizers: could Adam name and classify himself? If so, was the naturalist supplanting God? Linnaeus early in the game seems to have answered yes – he is once supposed to have said that God had "suffered him to peep into His secret cabinet." To the acute discomfort of many, including the Pope, he eventually included people in his classification of animals (the label *homo sapiens* is his). (PRATT, 2008, p. 31-32).

Greenblatt (2017, p. 18) reinforces that comparison when he remarks that the holotype "of our own species, *Homo sapiens*, is none other than Linnaeus himself", as *Homo sapiens* is a nomenclature suggested by Linnaeus, followed by his own description and classification of humans. A holotype, Greenblatt explains, is the first preserved specimen (or pictorial representation of a specimen) published in a scientific paper, following specific criteria. For their uniqueness, holotypes are precious possessions, usually held by museums or collectors. Above all, they are acknowledged by scientific authorities as the official representatives of a specimen and the person who describes a species for the first time is said to "have authored the species". Greenblatt observes how this resembles God/Adam's authority:

> The *Genesis* story imagines that God brought each beast of the field and fowl of the air one-by-one before Adam to receive its name, in something of the way that scientists assign names to their holotypes. The human of the first chapter of *Genesis* is in effect the holotype of humanity. God authored this creature and carefully introduced him—naked, of course—on earth as the type specimen. When you contemplate Adam, you contemplate both a particular, individual figure and the entirety of humankind. In Adam, the *Bible* story affirmed, you encounter not only the representative but also the very earliest instance of the species, the progenitor of all those who followed. (GREENBLATT, 2017, p. 18).

The partnership between Christianity and natural science, in both Pratt's and Greenblatt's assessments, points to the influence of taxonomy on the way Europeans elites saw themselves in relation to the rest of

the world, enhancing the scope and power of anthropocentric and Eurocentric beliefs and the justification of speciesism and colonialism.

In a single and apparently casual mention to Linnaeus in "She unnames them", Le Guin's ingeniously brings forth those connections, challenging, at once, Judeo-Christian, Anthropocentric and Eurocentric assumptions about relations between humans and animals: "not one of them had the least objection to parting with the lower case (or, as regards German creatures, uppercase) generic appellations poodle, parrot, dog, or bird, and all the Linnaean qualifiers that had trailed along behind them for two hundred years like tin cans tied to a tail" (LE GUIN, 1988, p. 195). Mirroring God/Adam's attitude, Linnaeus's imposition of names on animals is here conveyed as a life sentence of torture, as creatures are condemned to perpetually drag their European, binomial "qualifiers", as if they were wearing ball and chains.

"She unnames them" also questions the idea of separateness that fosters hierarchical distinctions between species. In 1763, the French botanist Michel Adanson, who proposed an alternative taxonomy to that of Linnaeus, complained about the "chaos" of the natural world without science's mediation. Diverging by far from the notion of ecosystems that we have today, Adanson objected to the fact that, without proper systematic human intervention and categorization, nature was just

> […] a confused mingling of beings that seem to have been brought together by chance: here, gold is mixed with another metal, with stone, with earth; there the violet grows side by side with an oak. Among these plants, too, wander the quadruped, the reptile, and the insect; the fishes are confused, one might say, with the aqueous element in which they swim, and with the plants grow [sic] in the depths of the waters. […] This mixture is indeed so general and so multifarious that it appears to be one of nature's laws. (ADANSON *apud* PRATT, 2008, p. 30).

Le Guin's Eve's unnaming intervention, on the other hand, produces exactly the opposite result: a remingling of animals and nature and of the human and non-human spheres, in a virtuous, poetic and "unscientific" movement towards confusion and disorder. This disordered interchange involves sensations, sounds and the physical elements themselves:

> The insects parted with their names in vast clouds and swarms of ephemeral syllables buzzing and stinging and humming and flitting and crawling and tunneling away.
>
> As for the fish of the sea, their names dispersed from them in silence throughout the oceans like faint, dark blurs of cuttlefish ink, and drifted off on the currents without a trace.
>
> None were left now to unname, and yet how close I felt to them when I saw one of them swim or fly or trot or crawl across my way or over my skin, or stalk me in the night, or go along beside me for a while in the day. They seemed far closer than when their names had stood between myself and them like a clear barrier: so close that my fear of them and their fear of me became one same fear. And the attraction that many of us felt, the desire to smell one another's smells, feel or rub or caress

> one another's scales or skin or feathers or fur, taste one another's blood or flesh, keep one another warm—that attraction was now all one with the fear, and the hunter could not be told from the hunted, nor the eater from the food.
>
> This was more or less the effect I had been after. (LE GUIN, 1988, p. 195).

In post-colonial ecological terms, the effect that Le Guin "has been after" with "She unnames them" can be said to be threefold: i) the undoing of the historical hierarchical "chaining" of beings; ii) the withdrawal of the power of naming from the hands of God/man/Empire and iii) the revoking of "species boundaries", which, in post-colonial ecological theory, can be defined as "the discursive construction of a strict dividing line between 'human' and 'animal' in terms of the possession (or lack thereof) of traits such as speech, consciousness, self-consciousness, tool use and so on" (HUGGAN; TIFFIN, 2015, p. 139). In short, through her repaginated Eve, Le Guin is claiming environmental justice, with humans "with", instead of "above" nature, in accordance with Plumwood's principles.

Conclusion: A feminist Post-colonial Ecocritical Reading of "She Unnames them"

For centuries since the composition of the *Book of Genesis*, Eve has been a central focus of attention in the Judeo-Christian world, albeit for misogynous reasons. Along her trajectory in the Western imagination, she has been depicted either as a ruthless temptress, as in the Baldung painting reproduced in this article, as a cunning and unruly wife, in the judgement of many ascetic Church fathers and their followers or, at best, from the point of view of some of her sympathizers, as a victim of the absence of free will, such as Isotta Nogarolla's interpretation. Without abiding by the "sacredness" of the scriptures or the canonical power of the text, feminist authors felt free to rebel against *Genesis* and produce alternative versions. "She unnames them", written in the fervor of the 1980s, is one of such disobedient narratives.

This article has attempted to show that Le Guin's story is a prodigy of concision that has far-reaching reverberations. By giving voice to non-humans, shifting the protagonism of the narrative and wittily playing with time, Le Guin's fantasy writes back to its hypotext, filling in its gaps and challenging its biases. But far from being a caprice or the result of the first woman's selfish interests, Eve's act of removing names becomes her statement for the equality of all beings and points to the articulation between environment, gender and colonialism. By undoing the binary power relationships installed by the male authority of God/Adam, Eve initiates the undoing of the dualisms that Val Plumwood claims to be the source of the problematic relations between men and nature in Western cultures. And while Adam's act of naming assumes, simultaneously, postcolonial and patriarchal functions, Eve's unnaming becomes a

subversive act towards the decolonization and depatriarchalization of female history. Le Guin's story becomes an allegory for battles to be fought on those three fronts – environmentalism, feminism and post-colonialism – as she imagines a more equal (but not utopic, as the "tentativeness" implied in the last line suggests) future, with Eve walking away from paradise.

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Retrucando a *Bíblia*: ecocrítica feminista e pós-colonial em "She Unnames Them", de Ursula Le Guin

Resumo

Ao propor que as ações da primeira mulher foram o gatilho para que a humanidade caísse em desgraça perante Deus, o que gerou visões pejorativas e misóginas do papel da mulher na sociedade, a narrativa bíblica de Adão e Eva tornou-se um dos textos mais influentes na história das mulheres no ocidente. A autoridade do texto bíblico de Gênesis para ditar o status quo das mulheres tem sido frequentemente questionada ao longo dos séculos, mas foi com o advento do Feminismo que o movimento da reescrita da Bíblia se intensificou. Este artigo examina os modos pelos quais, ao fazer uso de estratégias próprias à fantasia na literatura, o conto de Ursula Le Guin, "She unnames them", reescreve o texto bíblico. A narrativa confere protagonismo a Eva que, por meio da iniciativa contestadora de desnomear, cria uma conexão significativa entre ela e os animais que povoam o Jardim do Éden. O objetivo específico é explorar as articulações entre feminismo, pós-colonialismo e ecocrítica no conto de Le Guin, ligando a estratégia da reescrita contestadora ao ecofeminismo, por meio das conclusões de Val Plumwood sobre binarismo, como também à ecocrítica pós-colonial, com o conceito de "consciência planetária eurocentrada" de Mary Louise Pratt, entre outras teorias que ajudam a explicar as relações de poder entre as esferas humanas e não humanas.

Palavras-chave: *Ecofeminismo. Ecocrítica Pós-colonial. Ursula Le Guin. "She unnames them". Reescrita.*

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