Studi d'Italianistica nell'Africa Australe Vol 34 No 1 (2021)
Italian Studies in Southern Africa

ARTICLES / SAGGI

ITALIAN FEMALE SCIENCE FICTION IN A DOUBLE NO-MAN'S LAND: GILDA MUSA'S *ESPERIMENTO DONNA* AND URSULA K. LE GUIN'S *THE WORD FOR WORLD IS FOREST*

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Sommario
L'articolo discute della letteratura di fantascienza femminile italiana, argomento finora alquanto trascurato dalla critica accademica, adottando una prospettiva comparata. La fantascienza italiana si è sviluppata spesso in esplicito o implicito rapporto con la fantascienza estera, e più specificamente angloamericana. Il riferimento al contesto angloamericano, infatti, serve come specchio per comprendere la situazione italiana, sia per quanto riguarda le opere di fantascienza femminista sia per l'attenzione della critica per essa. Nell'articolo si indagano le somiglianze di fondo ma anche le divergenze, ed emerge il percorso diverso di questo genere letterario in Italia. La prima parte dimostra che la fantascienza femminile italiana è pressoché assente nella critica accademica, discute delle possibili ragioni per questa assenza e contestualizza i pochi riferimenti esistenti in articoli e libri sulla fantascienza italiana. Questa sezione non tratta solo gli anni Sessanta e Settanta, ma anche la scarsa presenza della fantascienza femminile nell'editoria italiana, e la mancata attenzione per la fantascienza femminile in riviste e libri accademici italiani e esteri. La seconda parte dell'articolo intende aprire uno spazio di discussione sulla fantascienza femminile attraverso una lettura comparata di due libri di fantascienza, The Word for World is Forest *(1972) della scrittrice americana Ursula K. Le Guin e* Esperimento donna *(1979) dell'italiana Gilda Musa. I due libri, apparsi durante la seconda ondata femminista, esplorano*

tematiche quali i ruoli di genere, la guerra e il colonialismo, e il rapporto dell'uomo con l'ambiente.

Keywords: Gilda Musa, Ursula K. Le Guin, fantascienza italiana, donne scrittrici, fantascienza femminista

'Italian science fiction' is an oxymoronic expression for most readers, both academic and non, even today. Although the international science fiction scene has welcomed non-Anglo-American science fiction writers in growing number, Italian science fiction tends to be overlooked, its existence often denied. Until recent years, the exceptions to this rule were preciously few, both within and outside of Italy. In the last ten years, starting with an important article of Arielle Saiber (2011), followed by a special issue of *Science Fiction Studies*, richly informative volumes by Giulia Iannuzzi (2014, 2015) and (most recently) two very insightful additions by Simone Brioni and Daniele Comberiati (2019, 2020), more attention has arisen for the field of science fiction. The putative no-man's land is starting to become populated by novels, stories and movies, by more and less well-known figures from Italy's past and present. There is, however, still very little attention being paid to female and feminist science fiction. In Anglo-American theory from the 1970s onwards, feminist science fiction is paid due attention, with many publications of fiction and criticism that have helped to shape a feminist countercanon, which redraws the boundaries of (golden age) science fiction. This feminist science fiction exists at "a point of intersection, or intertextuality, where the paradoxical conditions of its own existence enable the production of texts that address new and different issues and audiences" (Wolmark, 1993:3). At a moment in history when Second-wave feminism meets a literary scene in which boundaries between genres and between high and popular culture are reappraised, a different form of literature can respond to new societal voices and needs. The question is whether this was also the case in Italy.

This article investigates an important female author of the Italian science fiction scene of those years, Gilda Musa. Instead of looking at her work in an isolated manner, I adopt a comparative perspective that shows the interrelations between Italian narratives during Second-wave

feminism and American narratives of the same period. More specifically, Gilda Musa's *Terrestrizzazione* (1964) and especially *Esperimento donna* (1979) are compared to Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Word for World is Forest* (1972). Remarkable similarities emerge in the feminist and ecologist tropes in these narratives, but at the same time there are significant divergences in the precise deployment and development of these tropes. The article is divided into two parts: the first part addresses the question of whether Italian female science fiction exists, by tracing the sparse references to Italian female writers of science fiction in literary criticism. The answer to this question is anything but straightforward. In this section, I also propose a brief reflection on feminist speculative fiction and its function in the broader literary field and within society. This function is strongly tied to the utopian and dystopian modes of fiction, to the way fiction can provide for the necessary friction to open up new ways of thinking. The second part is reserved for a comparative analysis of Musa's and Le Guin's works that illustrates the possibilities and problems for women writers of Second-wave feminism in a male-dominated genre.

1. Is there a space of/for Italian female science fiction?

There is very little sustained reflection on Italian female science fiction within academic criticism. Several reasons can be pointed out for this absence. Italian science fiction is a genre that, since it is usually perceived as an imported product, has always had a somewhat problematic reputation, as a putative non-Italian genre that, moreover, does not really pertain to the field of high literature (Antonello, 2008; Baldi, 2020:129-160)[1]. Consequently, little attention has been paid to the genre within Italian Studies or Comparative Literature. There are necessary qualifications to this statement, however, which is true for more than one reason and needs to be seen in an international perspective for it not to become a mere truism. Italian science fiction has often stood in an overt or implicit relation to Anglo-American science fiction. It defined itself with respect to an established canon of science fiction, to the most widespread image of science fiction, which was circulated textually and paratextually through book series, journals

[1] For an important and nuanced response to this traditional view see Brioni, 2019b.

and (later) the Internet. The relatively low status of the genre in Italy meant that, within academic criticism, attention was predominantly directed outwards, not inwards. Carlo Pagetti, although a professor of English literature, early on has been one of the most attentive and active academics to suggest the existence of Italian science fiction, the relation between Anglo-American and Italian science fiction criticism, and the need for more in depth study of Italian science fiction (Pagetti, 1979)[2]. The attention remains directed mainly outwards, with rare exceptions of publications that focus specifically on, or even include, Italian science fiction[3]. Perhaps unsurprisingly, female-authored Italian science fiction is even harder to find in academic criticism. The *Mimesis* series on science fiction hardly includes female authors of science fiction. Specialists of feminist science fiction such as Oriana Palusci and Eleonora Federici discuss non-Italian works (Palusci, 1990a; Federici, 2015; Cf. 'Labirinti tecnologici', 1983; 'Aliene quotidiane', 1991; 'Sisters of the revolution', 2019). Similarly, important non-Italian works are made available by writers, academics, and translators such as Nicoletta Vallorani, Oriana Palusci, Raffaella Baccolini, Liana Borghi, Giulia Fabi, Vita Fortunati, Carla Sassi, Anna Scacchi, Simonetta Spinelli, Giulia Abbate, Elena di Fazio, Veronica Raimo and Claudia Durastanti, as can be seen from the recent translated anthology *Le visionarie* (which includes Le Guin), (Iannuzzi, 2018; Proietti, 2018; VanderMeer & VanderMeer, 2018). The cases of works by Italian female science fiction authors that are translated into English are very rare indeed and works by authors such as Nicoletta Vallorani that are translated are often precisely their non-science-fiction works (Vallorani, 2017; Campbell & Verso, 2018; Healey, 2019; Farris, 2020). This is of course in part related to the relative closeness of the Anglo-American book market for translations, and the hierarchy between a lingua franca and a relatively peripheral language on the international book market (France, 2000:81-88; 467-468). Nonetheless,

2 Nonetheless, both the hierarchy and the order of attention are clear even in his career: as a well-known scholar of international science fiction, he has been able to offer his pespective about Italian science fiction as well, and his attention is mostly directed to the bigger names on the Italian scene (such as Calvino and Buzzati).

3 Criticism on Italian science fiction can predominantly be found in journals such as *Robot*, book series such as that of *Mimesis*, and most importantly on the Internet, on websites, blogs and forums such as *Delos Science Fiction*, *Anarres*, *Future Shock*, *fantascienza.com*, *Lezioni sul domani*, *Nuove Vie*, *Andromeda*, *Carmilla* and *Fantascritture*, to name some examples.

the international science fiction scene includes many (female) authors that do not have English as their mother tongue (*Internazionale*, 2019).

The perceived absence of Italian female science fiction becomes clear as well if we look at (recent) publications on Italian women writers. The criticism on female-authored literature is rich and diverse, treating writers from different periods and genres. An important first step in broadening the scope of attention was Carol Lazzaro-Weis' *From Margins to Mainstream* (1993). Lazzaro-Weis opens her first chapter with the statement that "Feminist critics of many persuasions have generally regarded the concept of genre with suspicion, if not downright contempt" (Lazzaro-Weis, 1993:1; Marino, 2014). Genre theory, Lazzaro-Weis explains:

> is often perceived as a facile means to construct and maintain unequal social and literary hierarchies, because the works of women writers were either judged as second-rate imitations of a given example of the genre written by a male or classified under rubrics deemed inferior. (Lazzaro-Weis, 1993:1)

There is an underlying tension that can be found as well in all types of minor literature, which translates into a practice of writing against and striving to pertain to the canon at the same time. Alternatives to a canonical stance tend to form into countercanons, which are inevitably again exclusive, if only in the sense that, in order to form a recognisable whole, works that adopt a different strategy are generally left out (Gorak, 1990:76). Nevertheless, Weis' book convincingly argues for the productive use of genre writing by women writers. She adds a new range of possibilities via the exploration of (until then) understudied genres of women writing, but we do not find science fiction among the genres that are discussed. The label of an escapist genre probably has not helped science fiction gain attention from scholars of female-authored or feminist literature.

Danielle Hipkins' important book on Italian women writers and the fantastic, *Contemporary Italian Women Writers and Traces of the Fantastic: The Creation of Literary Space* (2007), takes a step towards science fiction, by including a range of fantastic literature that has not often been analysed. Although Hipkins is as open as possible in the

material that she includes, not wanting to restrict herself too narrowly to a genre, science fiction remains outside the frame of the book (Hipkins, 2007). Also in a more recent work that addresses *'(para)letteratura femminile'*, as the title shows, science fiction is not included (Fresu, 2016). Journals, special issues, edited volumes, anthologies and encyclopaedias that deal exclusively with literature of Italian women writers are not likely to mention (Italian) science fiction (De Nicola & Zannoni, 2010; Panizza & Wood, 2000; Ronchetti & Sapegno, 2007; Russell, 1994; Russell, 1997; Sambuco, 2015). *Women language literature in Italy* is a new journal that cannot be judged by the two issues in print so far, but also other journals such as *Altrelettere* (since 2012), *Gender/Sexuality/Italy* (since 2014) do not cover science fiction, with a single exception of an article on film (of a male director) (Tabanelli, 2015; cf. Baccolini, 2014). If female science fiction is covered in magazines, this is almost exclusively non-Italian science fiction (*Leggendaria*, 2017; *Internazionale*, 2019)[4]. Two important exceptions – in the form of anthologies – to the rule are cited by Simone Brioni (Farinella, 2005; Treanni, 2009) and three more recent anthologies can be added to the list (Pizzo, 2016; Valentini, 2017; Treves & Mortillaro, 2019)[5]. It is probably no coincidence that the title of the first, *Donne al futuro*, might be said to contain a reference to a well-known English language anthology, Pamela Sargent's *Women of Wonder: Science Fiction Stories By Women about Women* which was translated and published in 1979 as *Donne del futuro* (Sargent, 1979)[6].

The lack of references to female-authored science fiction is presumably also connected to the limited availability and visibility of these books on the book market; many initiatives exist to make female-

[4] *Leggendaria* 99 is dedicated to the works by Luce D'Eramo, but little attention is paid to science fiction (it is mostly mentioned in passing), (Crispino & D'Eramo, 2013).

[5] The covers of these anthologies though, as of Oriana Palusci's *Aliene, amazzoni, astronaute* (Palusci, 1990b), are still very much in line with the science fiction covers that prominently show scantily dressed women, which somewhat undermines their content (something similar happened with Vallorani's *Il cuore finto di DR* (cf. Caimi: n.p.). On the matter of anthologies of women writers, (cf. Di Fazio & Abbate, 2019) it is worth noting that these anthologies have been issued by small publishing houses specialising in genre fiction; an exception is the publisher Dario Flaccovio, which publishes technical and scholarly essays and does not accept science fiction anymore, as stated on the company's website.

[6] Le Guin's *Vaster Than Empires and More Slow* (originally published in 1971) was part of this anthology.

authored literature available to the reading public, through book series and publishing houses such as *Fuori margine* and *Le Sibille* (both Aracne imprints), *Soggetti rivelati. Ritratti, storie, scritture di donne* (Il Poligrafo), *Parole diverse* (Pacini) and *Rina edizioni*, but we do not find science fiction in these series. Therefore, science fiction books from the 1960s and 1970s, especially by women writers, need to be actively sought, instead of recovered through the (even marginal) book market. Nonetheless, the opposite may also be true: before academics turn their attention actively to an unexplored part of literature, the book market may not open up to this type of literature. Even recent articles or chapters that explicitly address unknown or understudied aspects of the Italian science fiction scene tend to reconfirm an exclusively male canon (Malvestio, 2018; Chiurato, 2019). Charlotte Ross has done a very important work in discussing unexplored Italian female-authored and feminist texts and is also an expert on (Italian) science fiction, but when turning the lens to Italian science fiction, the writers she discusses are all male or non-Italian (Ross, 2005; Ross, 2008; Ross, 2011), with the singular brief exception of Nicoletta Vallorani (Ross, 2007:166-167). Only with very recent publications, by Simone Brioni and Daniele Comberiati and especially Giuliana Misserville, more attention is paid to female authors and feminist instances within Italian science fiction (Brioni & Comberiati, 2019, Brioni & Comberiati, 2020; Misserville, 2020)[7].

A fundamental question arises at this point: does Italian female-authored science fiction exist? Or does the lack of attention indicate an actual absence? In spite of the scarce attention for this literature, there is some evidence to reassure us: especially Arielle Saiber, Giulia Iannuzzi, Simone Brioni and Daniele Comberiati have made suggestions as to where we can find this science fiction. Saiber's article on Italian science fiction is a very important and a diverse introduction to the Italian science fiction scene, its peculiarities and problems. Some of the peculiar features that Saiber (2011) points out – such as, the 'humanness', the 'explicit literariness' and the 'connection to the

[7] In the English volume by Brioni and Comberiati, some pages are dedicated to Gilda Musa, Daniela Piegai, Anna Rinonapoli, and especially to Luce d'Eramo in a specific chapter on intersectional perspectives written by Brioni. The references to these writers and to feminism are limited to this chapter. In the Italian volume, there are many references to feminism, but only one female author is discussed in detail: Laura Pugno. Misserville predominantly treats more modern Italian science fiction (from 1992 onwards).

academic humanities' of the Italian science fiction scene – are in line with the self-presentation of (parts of) the Italian science fiction in the 1960s and 1970s and have been confirmed by other critics (Iannuzzi, 2014:235-279). There is another, rather surprising, aspect that Saiber highlights. According to Saiber (2011:n.p.), "Italian SF [science fiction] narrative, perhaps because it began later than US SF, has had and continues to have a strong presence of women writers and characters". Saiber goes even further, by stating that: "Italy's strain of feminism […] may also have something to do with it, allowing women to write SF as they saw fit". This is a very interesting statement, which could change the image of Italian science fiction as a predominantly male-dominated and misogynistic genre, just as Anglo-American writers and critics have brought to public attention the feminist works of Ursula K. Le Guin, Marge Piercy, James Tiptree Jr, Anne McCaffrey, Margaret Atwood, Octavia E. Butler, Joanna Russ and many more. Unfortunately, the proof for this statement (itself without reference to sources) is a list of names, nine in total, most of whom started writing science fiction only from the late 1980s onwards. Saiber (2011:n.p.) writes that "Italian SF narrative […] is hardly free from the use of women as sexualized objects", that "certain strands of Italian SF revel in the gazing at, using, or abusing of sexualized forms" and she points to "horrific" and "highly disturbing" reads. These statements do not really indicate a special position of Italian science fiction, especially when compared to the rich existing strand of international feminist science fiction. Saiber closes this short section on female authors with the statement that "unnerving and revolting as many of these violent narratives are, *some* stand as important critiques of modern violence and gender/sexual inequality and identity" [emphasis mine]. This is a very vague statement that closes off a short section on Italian female-authored science fiction (and most of the authors named in the last paragraph are already male): this 'some' ought to be further detailed and explained in order to be convincing. Nonetheless, for Simone Brioni, "Saiber has demonstrated that the presence of women in Italian SF is 'remarkably strong' and it might be seen as part of a broader feminist fight for women's equality and a response to the use of women as sexualized objects in many works of the genre" (Brioni, 2019a:137).

If women were really allowed to "write SF as they saw fit" (Saiber, 2011:n.p.), one of the questions that arises is: why was there the need

for the widespread use of male pseudonyms in the early stages of Italian science fiction, as Saiber herself shows by providing a list of pseudonyms? Many women writers in this period thus became 'invisible presences' (Ciannella, 2018; Iannuzzi, 2014:68, 72-74). Gilda Musa was one of the important exceptions and her work has been studied by several scholars, most importantly by Giulia Iannuzzi, who, however, does not foreground feminist issues in her reading (Iannuzzi, 2015; Possiedi, 1984). There is another reason why Saiber's arguments fail to fully convince: they are not in dialogue with statements of Italian writers and critics who argue the opposite. Some years before Saiber's statements, Nicoletta Vallorani was very clear on the topic in an interview. She talks about a "campo che era quasi integralmente maschile, soprattutto in Italia". She goes on arguing that this "assenza quasi totale del femminile mi pesava un poco: pareva ancora […] che una donna non potesse scrivere fantascienza, né tantomeno farlo scrivendo una storia italiana come ambientazione, e con una protagonista donna" (Salvini & Sapegno, 2008b:127-128). This claim is similar to statements of other women writers of science fiction, such as Piegai, Dal Dan and Mortillaro (Piegai, 1980; Dal Dan, 2017; Treanni, 2019). Later in the interview, Vallorani confirms her idea that, both in the case of the readers and of the writers, Italian science fiction is a prevalently male niche (Salvini & Sapegno, 2008b:129; cf. Misserville, 2020, Chapter 1:26-7).

One may wonder why Vallorani does not mention *Un'ala*, the 'fanzine femminile' to which she herself collaborated in the 1980s. *Un'ala* started with a first number including five articles on women in science fiction, written by Italian women, and the following numbers of the magazine (short-lived, 1984-1987) contain stories by only women writers, illustrated predominantly by female illustrators (Braggion, 2019). Vallorani will mention this years later, although briefly, in a section of the special issue of *Science Fiction Studies* on Italian science fiction (Proietti & Saiber, 2015b:244). Nonetheless, her overall argument is confirmed by Giulia Iannuzzi, who presents figures that show how the number of women writers in the organisation of *Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America* has grown from 12% in 1974 to 40% in 2007 and who indicates that the winners of important science fiction prizes nowadays are more often female than before. In Italy, however, only 4 of the 53 books of Italian authors published by Urania

between 1952 and 2015 were written by a woman writer, and 88,4% of the readers of science fiction in Italy in a 2015 survey turned out to be male. This imbalance is, as Iannuzzi writes, "piuttosto eloquente nella sua macroscopica sproporzione", even if we take the presence of female writers of short stories or female translators into account (Iannuzzi, 2018:n.p.; Proietti, 2012). Moreover, the imbalance can also be seen in translation, as Diana Bianchi writes: "Even when, in the 1970s, female writers of SF increased in number and became more visible, few were published in the Urania series" (Bianchi, 2018:903; cf. Negretti, 1980). Although Bianchi states that the situation "slightly improved" when other publishers appeared on the market in the 1970s, some of the most important works of feminist science fiction were not translated and, even if they were, the growing attention for women writers "was not necessarily accompanied by a deep understanding of the issues at stake in these texts" (Bianchi, 2018:903-904; cf. Renisi, 1980:30). To claim a special position for women or feminism in the Italian science fiction scene seems therefore anything but evident and would need much more proof than we currently have. In 2015 a special issue of *Science Fiction Studies* was dedicated to Italian science fiction and in the introduction Arielle Saiber and Umberto Rossi reconfirmed the "notable presence of women writers in Italian sf [science fiction] since its inception" (Saiber & Rossi, 2015:7). Unfortunately, again, the matter is not explored in a detailed manner since the issue is almost fully dedicated to science fiction by male authors, and women are present mostly as (sexualised) objects of male-authored narratives, except for a short reference by Salvatore Proietti to women authors from the 1980s onwards (Proietti, 2015:124-125)[8]. The list of translated Italian science fiction available in English that is provided in the same issue provides a rather bleak panorama: only one woman, Anna Ferruglio Dal Dan, is included with two stories (Saiber & Proietti, 2015).

Numbers might not be the most important issue, though. Even if we can find female authors in the Italian science fiction domain, the more important question is if their work can actually be called emancipatory

[8] The same can be said for the issue on the Italian future and the future of Italian Studies in *California Italian Studies* (2011, Vol. 2, No.1): the future of science fiction is definitely male, judging by this issue. The exception is an article by Robert Rushing, who discusses *Sirene* by Laura Pugno, a book that has been analysed as well by Roberta Tabanelli and Valentina Fulginiti (Fulginiti, 2014; Rushing, 2011; Tabanelli, 2010).

or feminist in any way. Criticism about feminist science fiction strongly foregrounds the importance of what we might call 'paraspace', using a concept of Samuel Delany that Jennifer Wolmark adopts. Paraspace for Wolmark indicates the space in which feminist fiction exists, "a gendered space of 'troubling supplementarity'. It is a space in which subjectivity and experience, gender and identity, can be re-imagined in opposition to, and in recognition of, the dominant gendered discourses" (Wolmark, 1993:23), science fiction may offer such a 'paraspace' and most critics of feminist science fiction seem to agree on this function of the genre. Almost every work on feminist science fiction, each in its own way, introduces science fiction as a privileged tool for presenting alternatives to established discourses: some (like Brioni) indicate a possibility, others (like Federici) seem to consider the different space of science fiction as a given, a necessary premise (Brioni, 2019:138; Federici, 2015:9). Suggesting such a special place for science fiction is potentially problematic, since it is not simply a free space for imagination, but a genre with constants and patterns that cannot be easily disregarded. Like society, and like imagination itself, it presents underlying structures that are not so easily replaced, although they can be challenged. The gendered structure is one of them, as Ida Magli stated already in 1980, indicating that also in science fiction "dove sarebbe possibile in teoria spaziare con assoluta libertà, anche psicologica e affettiva, le strutture simboliche si prendono la loro rivincita e riproiettano le stesse immagini arcaiche, le stesse tipologie mitiche che da sempre accompagnano la 'femminilità'" (Magli, 1980:103; Wolmark, 1993:54). It remains important to turn a *possible* alternative space into an *actual* one, something that in practice is often not a straightforward process, but a tangle between the utopian and the dystopian that translates in complex ways to the texts, which exist in the "transitional space between the *no longer* and the *not yet*", the space that embodies a move from the traditional "what if" to a more utopian and political "if only" (Hipkins, 2007:87; Salvini, 2008:27). That is why "in narratives that employ utopia as a destabilising series of glimpses, or as a means of opening up a chink of light onto the unknown and unknowable beyond, we often find more interesting textual gaps, absences, lacunae; invitations that forbid as much as they instill desire" (Armitt, 2001:15). Rooted as it is in a "desidero ergo sum", to adopt the terms of Rosi Braidotti, feminist speculative fiction often centres

around a rewriting of the body, that is characterised by a "paradoxical mixture of simultaneous discursive overexposure and absence of consensus" (Braidotti, 1994:13, 46; Federici, 2015:15). As Hipkins indicates, feminist texts draw attention especially to the "function of the female body as site/sight of artistic objectification" (Hipkins, 2007:52).

In a canonical sense, feminist science fiction finds itself in the paradoxical position of working against an established canon and at the same time of claiming a place within that canon. This tension is most evident in the almost inevitable reference, in criticism on feminist science fiction, to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) as the starting point of the genre of science fiction. Whereas the incipience of science fiction as a genre is a hotly debated topic that has not engendered clear results, in criticism on feminist science fiction there is little doubt about the birth date and the mother of the genre and, more importantly, the reference is almost always explicitly included (Borghi, 2008: 134; Briose, 2008:36; Crispino & Neonato, 2019; Donawerth, 1997; Federici, 2015:21; Salvini, 2008:24; Salvini & Sapegno, 2008a:8; Misserville, 2020). The perceived need to claim this place at the beginning of the canon is of course ambivalent, but it certainly turns the tables on a genre that is often considered misogynistic and that maybe never really recognised its true mother, blinded by the search for fathers[9]. When one addresses single works the question however remains: does the work of women writers merely reconfirm stereotypes of the damsel in distress and women that need to be conquered and dominated, just as the (feminised) alien planets and presences? Or is there an alternative which deserves more attention, which allows women to be subjects and not mere objects? To begin to give a satisfactory answer to this question, the books of female authors during Second-wave feminism ought to be reread and reappraised. Rather than briefly touching upon many different books, this article proposes a more in-depth comparison between an Italian and an American narrative.

[9] There are, of course, important exceptions to the rule, such as Aldiss, 1973.

2. Gilda Musa and Ursula K. Le Guin: Ecologist and feminist perspectives

Ursula K. Le Guin has an outstanding reputation within the international field of science fiction. Also in Italy, it is not difficult to see her influence, ranging from her strong presence in critical volumes such as *Figurazioni del possible* and *Femminismi futuri*, to her frequent appearance in magazines such as *Delos Science Fiction* and *Anarres*. Eleonora Federici even calls Le Guin the "personificazione stessa della SF americana al femminile", "pronipote" of Mary Shelley and "madrina" of science fiction (Federici, 2018). This influence can be traced back to the years of her most well-known books, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and *The Dispossessed* (1974). This last book had the subtitle, *An Ambiguous Utopia*, which was adopted by an important collective (*Un'ambigua utopia*) in the 1970s in Italy, the publications of which have been reissued by Mimesis (Caronia & Spagnul, 2009). The aforementioned translation of Pamela Sargent's *Women of Wonder* into Italian had on the cover 'Ursula K. Le Guin e altre Donne del futuro'. Although the connection between Gilda Musa (1926) and Le Guin (1929) (who belong to the same generation) has, to my knowledge, never been explored, it can serve to illustrate the important similarities and differences in their approach to feminist and ecologist issues.

Although the relation of Musa and Le Guin to feminism is certainly not unproblematic or static, it should not be judged by the standards of contemporary feminism alone but appraised in a historical and transnational context; a lens such as that adopted by Maud Anne Bracke in her book on Italian feminism from 1968-1983 (Bracke, 2014). The developments in Le Guin's relationship to feminism have been amply investigated. This research has shown that her most widely read books are not necessarily the ones in which feminist thought is most subtly and fully articulated. This is also the reason why books such as *The Left Hand of Darkness* have met with criticism from writers of feminist science fiction such as Joanna Russ and Gwyneth Jones, as well as from Le Guin herself in later years (Clarke, 2010; Lothian, 2006; Pearson, 2007). Nevertheless, the influence of these books is undeniably strong, and they continue to find their audience also in Italy, perhaps more so than the later books of Le Guin (Proietti, 2012).

When *La bottega del fantastico* was released as a new science fiction magazine, the idea to provide a new and different perspective on (Italian) science fiction is, in the first number in 1980, immediately underlined by creating a special issue on female characters and writers in science fiction. Although it is not my intention to discuss the whole issue here, the message throughout is clear: there is not enough room for women in the (Italian) science fiction scene, both editorially and critically. Interestingly, in this number, Gilda Musa is interviewed together with her husband, Inìsero Cremaschi. The interview is not without contradictions, which makes it hard to properly unravel Musa's ideas on the female presence in science fiction. Her ideas on men and women are at times rather essentialist (such as her idea that women don't like reading about monsters that keep them awake at night and prefer a love story, whereas men are of a more adventurous nature), (Musa & Cremaschi, 1980:53-54). She thinks the modern American women writers are "molto impegnate, sia come idee sia come stile, e questo mi pare importante", but then concludes that "le potrei definire addirittura virili" (Musa, 1980:52). Although she says that she never had problems publishing, she acknowledges that her husband was of help in this respect and later contradicts this by saying that it is hard for anyone to publish science fiction in Italy. She adds, moreover, that "C'è purtroppo una certa prevenzione sul fatto che una donna possa essere in grado di scrivere fantascienza [...] Si pensa sempre che una donna non possa essere portata per la scienza" (49). Therefore, she claims that it's difficult for her to find an audience, but somewhat later she states that her books sell very well.

What mostly seems to emerge from the interview is an unease to talk about the topic of women in science fiction. Musa does not like to see herself as a feminist but reacts sharply at the suggestion that her works were not attuned to feminism. She chooses the story and novel which will be discussed below, *Terrestrizzazione* and *Esperimento donna*, to illustrate how already in 1964 she wrote stories with women as protagonists and that, in the novel 'tre tipi di sopraffazione' are discussed: "dell'uomo sulla donna, dello scienziato su di un' altra creatura umana, e della scienza sulla natura" (51). She concludes: "Io non ho mai affrontato il femminismo in senso stretto, però ho messo in luce, attraverso le donne dei miei racconti, problemi che sono sia delle donne, sia di tutta l'umanità di oggi" (51-52). Differentiating between

these experiences is clearly not of the foremost importance for Musa, who prefers a 'universal' message. At the same time, she is convinced that it is "importante per la donna di oggi non lasciarsi programmare dagli altri [...] La famosa liberazione della donna deve venire solo dalla donna, e non deve essere programmata dall'alto o dal di fuori" (52). Some questions later, however, it is Cremaschi who explains that "secondo Gilda Musa" the image of women in science fiction is not that of a mere object anymore, because of the "irruzione delle donne nella narrativa di fantascienza e non" (53). The interview is so full of contradictions and tensions that it feels both unresolved and open: the matter which is discussed seems part of an ongoing, conscious and unconscious, elaboration of opinions and thoughts around the role of women writers.

Both Le Guin and Musa were involved in the developments of feminism, but in their own manner and keeping (at first) a certain distance. Their responses to Second-wave feminism are translated indirectly in how they shape their fictional worlds. The book by Le Guin that makes for the most apt comparison with Musa's *Esperimento donna* is not one of the most famous, but it's from the same period: *The Word for World is Forest* (1972). The book has remained relatively understudied, arguably for a history of selective (mis)readings by important critics such as Darko Suvin and Frederic Jameson (Prettyman, 2014:60). The overly satirical aspects of the book have been criticised, as well as its too obvious relation to the Vietnam war, making the message potentially less universal and diverse (Clarke, 2010:59, 123, 154, 164; Disch, 2000:125-132; Prettyman, 2014:67-68). For the combined reason of the direct connection to the Vietnam war and the not too favorable reading that the book received from authoritative critics, the book has for a long time disappeared somewhat from the radar of critics. Illustrative is its absence in a 'critical companion' to Le Guin (Bernardo & Murphy, 2006).

With the rising interest in ecocriticism, the book has been reread from a different perspective that potentially broadens its scope from only a harsh critique of the Vietnam War to concerns about the nexus between science and domination, imperialism and exploitation, research and dehumanisation, cultural hegemony and the disavowal of difference (Latham, 2014; Pak, 2016:112-115; Prettyman, 2014). These aspects are also strongly foregrounded in Musa's *Terrestrizzazione*,

written already in 1964, and more importantly in the development of this short story into a novella, published in 1979 under the title *Esperimento donna*[10]. It is certainly conceivable that, when adapting *Terrestrizzazione*, Musa had read Le Guin's work. *The Word* was translated in Italian in 1977 by Riccardo Valla for Editrice Nord, the same publishing house that in those years published several of Musa's stories and novels and that paid significant attention to women writers (Tamisari, 2017; Iannuzzi, 2019:93-102). Both narratives contain most of the topoi of feminist utopian writings that Joanna Russ described: "Classless, without government, ecologically minded, with a strong feeling for the natural world, quasi-tribal in feeling and quasi-familial in structure, the societies of these stories are sexually permissive […]". According to Russ, "[…] the point of this permissiveness is not to break taboos but to separate sexuality from questions of ownership, reproduction, and social structure" (Russ, 1995:139).

The basic plot of *Terrestrizzazione* is about Roger, who comes from the Earth but is stuck on a different planet. He observes the people on that planet scientifically, deciphering their DNA, studying their nature. They do not know class distinctions, never fight and are even incapable of violence (Musa, 1964:190-191). They freely engage in sexual activity with whomever they want and anyone can take the initiative, man or woman (the scenario in which someone refuses is not explored), (188)[11]. This naturally promiscuous, classless society corresponds to the topoi of feminist science fiction as listed by Russ, but their utopian perfection is described rather negatively. The natives simply are not very interesting: indifferent, they lead a life of apathy, void, and nothingness, which seems excruciatingly boring to Roger. "Qui non esistono opposti […] tutto è niente, non esiste contrasto in alcun oggetto, in alcuna relazione privata o sociale, in alcun sentimento. Anzi, non hanno sentimenti, solo l'amicizia" (190). Their society is unchanging, deriving completely from their inborn nature:

[10] The story was also published in 1967 and 1968, respectively in *Fantasesso* and *Strategie*, presenting few variants with respect to the first publication. *Fantasesso* is an anthology of many authors and was published by Feltrinelli; the story was here entitled: *Su Libria: sesso senza amore*. *Strategie* is an anthology of Gilda Musa alone that was published by Cappelli.

[11] The treatment of promiscuity is thus arguably quite close to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), though without a regime that abuses its power to promote, reinforce and nurture promiscuity.

"perennemente così, segno di una civiltà unidimensionale, senza storia e senza esperienza [...] tutto si accetta perché appartiene alla natura e non può opporsi alla natura" (192-193).

When Roger starts to do scientific experiments on one of the female locals this is out of unrequited love, unrequited not because not accepted, but because accepted indifferently, as a natural rule and not as a romantic exception. He tries to turn her into a 'real woman', who is capable of loving, but also of jealousy, of any kind of proper emotion[12]. The experiment functions too well one might say, because she becomes more complex but also unstable, jealous and aggressive, a stereotypical 'madwoman', and, in the end, falls in love with someone else. Once she is able to choose, she chooses differently. The moral of the story can be found quite early on, when we read: "Nel corso di alcuni secoli l'umanità ha commesso centinaia di azioni violente, di colonizzazioni che quando non erano sanguinose erano subdole operazioni coercitive. Sempre violenze, anche quando erano giustificate dalla buona fede" (200).

The nucleus of this story forms the core of *Esperimento donna* as well and neither the action nor the moral changes significantly. However, *Esperimento donna* is a longer, and therefore more complex text, thus adding elements to the plot that may constitute a response to Le Guin's novel. Instead of one earthling we now have two, stranded on the planet of Ekram. They also have an android with them and, although he is outwardly indistinguishable from the two humans, he obeys to every order, true to his name: Untertan (subordinate/subject in German). The technological superiority of the human beings is evident, not only through the existence of Untertan, but also through the 'teletrasmittente', their helicopters, their weaponry. At first, this uneven situation with respect to the *ekramiani* does not present any real problems: only when the biologist, Manfred, wants to modify one of the ekramiani, Vila-Vila, in order for her to become more human and love him back, is the balance of the planet disrupted, an imbalance from which, in the end, violence ensues.

A similar technological superiority of the humans can be found in Le Guin's narrative and in this case the unevenness is aggressively exploited by part of the humans. Some of them – especially the

[12] Similar experiments can be found in Musa's *Fondazione ID* (1981).

unbearably macho, domineering, alpha-man Captain Davidson, a military man – despise the Athsheans, disparagingly calling them 'creechies'. The 'taming' of the planet is clearly connected with a colonial mindset: the local men need to be dominated, the women possessed and 'laid'. At the beginning of the book, there are clear references to slavery, which are however rebutted because 'Slaves are humans. When you raise cows, you call that slavery?' (Le Guin, 2015:17). The evident process of othering leads to a rationalisation of exploitative behaviour that was explained also theoretically by Le Guin in another context:

> If you deny any affinity with another person or kind of person, if you declare it to be wholly different from yourself – as men have done with women […] you may hate it or deify it; but in either case you have denied its spiritual equality and its human reality. You have made it into a thing, to which the only possible relationship is a power relationship. (Le Guin, 1979:99)

This mechanism is clear in the fatal adoration of Vila-Vila by Manfred in *Esperimento donna*, and the opposite loathing, using, and abusing by Captain Davidson in Le Guin's book, where men await a "new shipload of women" to procreate, but in the meantime take advantage of the local Athshean women (Le Guin, 2015:11). As in Musa's book, the Athsheans are unable to smile and do not seem to have any emotions: "they don't feel pain like humans […] Look, you've laid some of the females, you know how they don't seem to feel anything, no pleasure, no pain, they just lay there like mattresses no matter what you do" (17). The Athsheans do not fight and are described as slow, sullen and inept. In the derogatory description from a human perspective, they are explicitly feminised: "Don't look for good sense from women or creechies, ok!" (18). The life and world of the Athsheans is controlled and changed in a way that is not the case for the ekramiani. The forests which, as the title states, are the world that the Athsheans live in, are destroyed in order to create deserted plains for cities. The Athshean language is full of foresty expressions and metaphors, showing how the world they inhabit meaningfully connects to the way they think and express themselves (42-43). Their world is uprooted by people who

have lost touch with their own roots. As in *Terrestrizzazione*, the local society is described as "static, stable, uniform […] They have no history. Perfectly integrated, wholly unprogressive" (52). But, arguably, they do not lack complexity, as becomes clear at the occasions when the point of view changes from a human to an alien perspective, something which in Musa's story and novella does not really happen.

In both narratives, the alternative to human society seems, at least in the first instance, a straightforward regression to a more natural, arcadian state of living, unproblematic and simple. But both narratives propose other alternatives. Musa does so (if only in *Esperimento donna*) by presenting a different group of inhabitants of Ekram, the mythical 'Zut' or 'uomini neri', who live in another part of the planet. They are described as furry animals, able to climb with incredible ease, reminding one of a type of monkey. But it soon becomes clear that they know how to build complex structures and to cooperate in projecting and building them. At the same time, they are more attuned to their natural environment: by making circles that at first look like seances, they can create a sort of collective intelligence through bioelectric forces, with which they can for example foresee a change in weather and prepare themselves accordingly (Musa, 1979:84). They are thus shown to live in harmonious communities, completely in control of their living environment in ways that are both natural and cultural. Predictably, Manfred cannot control his 'scientific' urge to take two Zut, a mother and child, with him and put them in a cage. However, the Zut are clearly more intelligent beings than the ekramiani and, more importantly, can communicate through telepathy – a long-standing topos in feminist science fiction, also in the work of Le Guin (Federici, 2015:102; Ferrante, 2019). They communicate with Vila-Vila, the ekramiana on her way to becoming 'corrupted' with human-being, explain to her the threat that comes from the humans, the denaturalisation of the planet's inhabitants, the aggression that will inevitably arise from the human presence (the terms are not particularly enlightening and cannot help but evoke some disquieting echoes: "Guardati dallo straniero!"; Musa, 1979:94). They need to be stopped and, in the end, they are killed under different circumstances (Manfred kills Valdemaro and Manfred is himself killed by Vila-Vila). The only one to survive is actually the android, who, through a fortuitous accident, loses the chip in his head that had conditioned him into

believing that he is an android: he is actually a somewhat too rebellious zoologist from Milan, who had been punished by being programmed as wholly obedient and serving. He accepts the ekramian difference and acknowledges that it is he who should adapt, not they (Musa, 1979:115-117).

Where Musa creates two different species co-inhabiting on Ekram, on Athshea there is one species, although with vast internal differences. Smaller and with fur, they are again, from the perspective of the intruders from Earth, maybe more animal than human (Le Guin, 2015:78). But they are actually originally humans as well, coming from the same 'Hainish' stock, and they do recognise the similarity, calling the newcomers 'yumens'. Also the Athsheans have ways of knowing the world that we do not have (anymore), the most important one being dreaming. Athsheans dream often, their dreaming is not escapist but productive, it discloses a parallel level of reality that is not less real but instead has a pivotal importance for their decisions, for the way they structure their lives and societies. This dream language turns out to be more difficult to learn and master than the 'yumen' language. Athshean society revolves around dreams and the dreaming is done by men: the decisions and the politics, though, are in the hands of women. Although the intellect is still prevalently the man's, political power is explicitly female in the Athshean society (79).

There is another important factor in Athshean society that determines communication: touch (Remington, 1976). In contrast to Musa's narrative, Le Guin does not really refer to any form of sexual permissiveness; on the contrary, there is only the mention of rape of the Athshean women by men like Captain Davidson. Nonetheless, this does not mean that Le Guin does not address the topic. As stated, touch is very important in Athshean communication, "caress as signal and reassurance was as essential to them as it is to mother and child or to lover and lover; but its significance was social, not only maternal and sexual. It was part of their language" (76). This is however misconstrued by the 'yumens' who again discuss this touching communication in a belittling way:

> "They're always pawing each other," some of the colonists sneered, unable to see in these touch-exchanges anything but their own eroticism which, forced to concentrate itself

> exclusively on sex and then repressed and frustrated, invades and poisons every sensual pleasure, every humane response. (Le Guin, 2015:76)

Although this statement could be seen as too overtly moralistic, the change of perspective shows the value and possibility of the different form of communication that Athshean society embodies. In this way, the thought experiment becomes a body experiment as well, something that science fiction, an ontological genre *par excellence*, allows for but not always convincingly explores (Briose, 2008:36).

Le Guin's narrative seems to be open to the possibility that we can communicate with fundamentally different beings and find common ground. Captain Davidson's racism is clear even with respect to his fellow 'yumens', especially when coming from Asia, such as the 'good' Lyubov. Lyubov, not coincidentally, is an anthropologist (Le Guin was the daughter of a famous anthropologist), just as in Musa's story the 'good' one, the android who returns to his former human self, is a zoologist (and Manfred a biologist): the introduction of new sciences in science fiction can be part of the feminist rewriting of the relation between science and the study of the 'other' (Salvini & Sapegno, 2008a:10; Sinclair, 1979). In *The Word*, apart from Lyubov, no one is really attempting to find a common ground with the Athsheans, who are othered and kept at a safe distance that reconfirms human identity (and superiority) even far away from Earth. The irony is that it is the Athsheans who, at least in the first instance, recognise that also the yumens are human. The doubt arises only because of the concrete behaviour of these inhumane yumens: "They look like men and talk like men are they not men?" "I don't know. Do men kill men, except in madness? Does any beast kill its own kind? Only the insects. These yumens kill us as lightly as we kill snakes" (Le Guin, 2015:32-33). From this passage we can also see a crucial difference between *Esperimento donna* and *The Word*. The ekramiani are really incapable of violence, they do not know what it is, until it is introduced by the 'visitors'. The first step is hunting: "'A caccia? Come dire ammazzare?' […] 'Che c'è di strano? Le bestie sono esseri inferiori. Non parlano.' 'Però gridano, cantano, allevano i piccoli'" (Musa, 1979:81). The ekramiani do not eat meat and are not used to killing any living creature. But once violence is introduced it produces violence, no matter what

the species, as we are reminded at the end of the book (119). Musa foregrounds the problems inherent in speciecism and the accompanying feeling of superiority and shows first and foremost the precarious balance of any ecosystem. In the case of *The Word*, the Athsheans do kill and eat meat and thus know violence, they are not wholly incapable of it. This becomes problematic for the colonists once they are diagnosed as not really human, or humans estranged from their humanity, and therefore othered because of their own aggressive and strange behaviour (Le Guin, 2015:53). The mistake, also of the anthropologist, was to read the absence of violence as an impossibility to act violently, whereas the Athsheans simply found ways to sublimate violence: "the Athsheans use a kind of ritualized singing to replace physical combat" (51). Moreover, they have a code of non-violence that is very similar to that adopted by dogs, namely to lie down and expose the throat: this universal sign stops Athsheans from doing harm, as even Captain Davidson will experience to his relief (120-122). The total absence of violence in *Esperimento donna* is thus a cultured sublimation and codification of aggression in *The Word*.

A similar difference can be seen in the treatment of technology. In *Esperimento donna*, the teletransmitter, through which communication with Earth could be established, is broken. Manfred does not want it to be repaired, because he is fleeing prosecution on Earth, but Valdemaro orders the android to repair the machine in secret. This difference of opinion will lead Manfred to kill Valdemaro, but the perception of communication technology by the natives is more revelatory. The imprisoned Zut warn the ekramiana Vila-Vila telepathically that the machine ought to be destroyed: no good can come from communication with the Earth. There is thus no distinction between good (human) technology and bad technology, between weaponry and communication devices: all are equally dangerous, and evil seems the inevitable result of their use (Musa, 1979:94). The tele-transmitter is therefore destroyed, but the spiral of violence is certainly not stopped: it is Vila-Vila herself who commits or causes the last killings (and attempts suicide) (108-110). In *The Word*, there is a clear distinction between weaponry and communication technology: the communication that is established through the 'ansible' with The League of All Worlds does have a relatively positive effect, although it doesn't immediately stop the violence (Le Guin, 2015:45-65). According to Rob Latham, with

this choice Le Guin "resists the assumption, common to some New Wave texts, that Western techno-science itself has been irreparably contaminated by its conscription for technocratic-imperialist ends" (Latham, 2014: 91). Arguably this can be said for science in general in *The Word*: it is more subtly cooperative, not necessarily immediately corrupting or serving suppression, but at the same time unable to make its voice heard, to correct the all too static views on the Athsheans and avoid abuse and aggression. In *Esperimento donna* it is harder to find examples of positive science, there is no true equivalent of Lyubov (except maybe, at least potentially, for zoologist Damiano Markoni at the very end); the best seems to be to avoid the worst.

Musa shows two different species that inhabit one planet and, what is more important, these species are true others, not simply less evolved forms coming from the same basic 'Hainish' stock (as is the case in Le Guin). The question has been raised if Le Guin depicts true difference, since the 'aliens' in the end share our same genetic background (Barbour, 1974:170-171). In Musa we do have this 'true', biological difference, but it seems to come with a price: it is almost unbridgeable. Margaret Briose writes critically of the uneven binary reasoning in Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness*, a reasoning that erases fundamental contrasts that, according to Briose, create meaning: "Il suo mondo fantastico di Gethen o Winter/Inverno consiste di una società che, non capendo il pensiero binario, non fa la Guerra. Ma è una conclusione veramente logica? Potremmo dire che una cultura che non fa la Guerra può fare l'Amore?" (Briose, 2008:43).

This argument can be used also in the appraisal of Musa's book. The ekramiani are simply not interesting enough to present a convincing alternative to our way of life: their loving is banal, their absence of fighting is rooted in a broader absence of contrasts and they know no difference, progression or complexity (Barr, 1986). We learn very little of their language, their way of life or habits and the perspective of the story never shifts to them, instead the narrator and the focaliser remain human. This means that as readers it is hard not to at least partially agree with the judgment of the humans about the dullness and static nature of this society. Le Guin does allow her readers to adopt the Athshean view, to learn about their language and customs. In Le Guin's book, the humans are technologically superior and stronger, but they do not introduce much that enlightens the Athsheans. In Musa's narrative, the

humans bring both violence and complexity. At the end of *Esperimento donna,* we are told that Damiano Markoni stays on Ekram and will try to adapt to and adopt the ways of living of the ekramiani. Unfortunately, we have no sequel of *Esperimento donna* that tells us this story.

Concluding remarks

Le Guin's book, in spite of the strong satirical tone, is overall more nuanced and convincing as a feminist and ecologist critique of colonialism and of any race aiming at conquering 'empty space', whether on earth or in outer space. However, Musa's book adds interesting reflections on the dangers of speciesism and is but one response to Second-wave feminism, that includes other narratives as well (Kriscak, 2019). For example, the ecologist and feminist implications of *Giungla domestica* (Musa, 1975) deserve to be studied in detail, and the children's book *Marinella Super* (Musa, 1978) is an intriguing reflection on the possibility of cloning and the limits of the human. Others such as Anna Rinonapoli, not only in the story 'Metamorfosi cosmica' (1986) but also in the novel *Sfida al pianeta* (1973), respond in their own way to similar issues (Baldi, 2021). It is important to evaluate the work of these writers, the (often unknown, but mostly unread) precursors of writers as diverse as Nicoletta Vallorani, Laura Pugno and Nadia Tarantini[13].

The influence of Ursula K. Le Guin is suggested regularly in discussions on contemporary Italian science fiction, and *The Word* is no exception to this rule. Giuliana Misserville connects Vallorani's *Dream Box* (1997) to *The Word*, but she also suggests that this connection might extend to Laura Pugno, even if only through the title of Chapter 3 dedicated to Pugno: "La parola per mondo è foresta" (Misserville, 2020:9). This article shows that there are earlier instances in which Italian female science fiction has entertained a productive dialogue with Le Guin's fiction, and more specifically with the less well known *The Word*. Le Guin and Musa, in similar ways, though with undeniably different emphases, offer an important critique of

[13] One could even go back further and explore the works of Rosa Rosà, Enif Robert and others. Vallorani's is probably the best known women writer of science fiction in Italy, with her works ranging from the prize winning *Il cuore finto di DR* (1992) to *Avrai i miei occhi* (2020). Tarantini is known for her science fiction novel *Quando nascesti tu, stella lucente* (2017).

imperialism and abuse of power, and the hierarchical structures of racism and sexism that underlie them. Just like other female writers from the 1950s to the 1980s, Gilda Musa is more often mentioned than studied. Instead of dismissing her works for their undeniable contradictions and imperfections, my contention is that they ought to be studied in their historical context, to illustrate how they responded to developments in Italy but also to works such as Le Guin's. I want to argue that the books of Musa and many others, both mentioned and unmentioned in this article, deserve to be read and analysed in their cultural specificity, put into an intersectional context of feminism, ecologism and postcolonialism and, conceivably, posthumanism, gender and queer studies. This might allow for new voices to emerge, both within the context of Italian (female and feminist) writing, and within the science fiction scene. Much more (ad)venturing in this double no-man's land is required.

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