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Gendered Cartographies in Melissa Scott's Science Fiction: Queering *Shadow Man* (1995)

Beatriz Hermida Ramos

Author:
Beatriz Hermida Ramos
University of Salamanca, Spain
bhermidaramos@usal.es
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1173-6406

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Abstract:
In her 1995 novel, *Shadow Man*, Melissa Scott explores an alternative future where humanity's sexual diversity has drastically increased after being exposed to the radiation and chemical drugs that surround space travel. In the text, Scott presents both a seemly all-inclusive place where different gender identities, sexual orientations and sex differences are recognized and accepted, as well as a second national space where the gender binary and heteronormativity are not only heavily endorsed but also seen as a prerequisite to belong and be recognized as human. In this article, I draw from different academic fields such as science fiction studies, space studies and feminist and queer studies to explore how the speculative elements of the novel influence the construal of gender identity, and I question whether Scott's narrative can be interpreted as a hopeful space for queer liberation in the face of hostility. I analyse how the economic relations between both spaces, Hara and the Concord worlds, shape the understanding of gender and sexuality, and I focus on how the friction between the two systems highlights the power of the nation-state to mark certain bodies as foreign, undesirable and abjected. Finally, I conclude that Scott's depiction of 'the wry-abled' and 'the odd-bodied' offers nuanced opportunities to interact with the sex-gender system through speculation while emphasizing how these categories are artificial social constructions.

Keywords: science fiction; speculative fiction; gender studies; queer studies; space studies; American literature; Melissa Scott; Shadow Man

1. Introduction

Since her narrative debut in 1984, American author Melissa Scott has published almost three dozen novels and multiple short stories, most of them—if not all—falling under the umbrella of fantasy and speculative and science fiction. Apart from her solo projects, Scott has also co-authored several texts over the years, such as an adventure pentalogy with Jo Graham, a Victorian duology with Amy Griswold and three other novels with her late partner, Lisa A. Barnett. She has also written for well-established fantasy franchises such as Star Wars and Star Trek. While Scott's works are easily recognizable for their humorous tone and their complex representations of queer identities, there is a novel that arguably stands out as her most politically engaged piece to date—that is, *Shadow Man*. *Shadow Man* was published in 1995 and won Scott her second Lambda Literary Award (1995) for its critical and poignant deconstruction of binary gender roles and its defence of body autonomy and queer self-determination.

The novel is set on an alternative future where human bodies have undergone physical mutations, such as new sexual characteristics and a higher rate of infertility and pregnancy-related complications due to the radiation and chemical drugs that surround the now standardized process of interplanetary travel (17). While the so-called Concord Worlds recognize that humans now have five sexes, the planet Hara refuses to acknowledge the increased diversity of sexes, gender identities and sexual orientations of the human population, and instead only recognizes 'female' and 'male' identities. Those whose sexual desires fall outside the rigid domain of normalcy are described as 'wry-abled' and must assimilate into binary sexual models, while the bodies that are seen as deviant by the Haran State are either forcefully made to pass or labelled 'odd-bodied' which leaves them ostracized and forced into sex-work, 'trade'[1], in order to survive—that is, those who are described as "mems"(301), "hems" (300), and "fems" (299); people whose experiences can be described as intersexual or trans*[2] and thus, defy the myth of the two-sexed body and the gender binary[3].

1 Trade is used to refer to both sex work and the sale of illegal passports and identity documents. Scott provides a glossary with definitions at the end of the novel and includes the most relevant ones at the end of each chapter. For the entry on this particular word, see pages 308-309.

2 This research paper uses 'trans*' as an umbrella term to refer to non-cisgender identities, that is, to describe people whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex at birth, including non-binary people. For an explanation on the popularization of trans* as an inclusive term, see Stryker 2017, 18.

3 In the glossary, Scott provides definitions for all of the different sexual orientations, gender identities, and sexual identities, often including information about chromosomes,

It is in this context of state-fuelled violence, economic tensions, and social instability that Scott introduces her two main characters: Warreven[4], a Haran herm lawyer whose clients have been accused of participating in trade; and Tatian, an 'off-worlder' who is extremely critical of Haran social customs and constructions of gender. The novel explores their relationships, whether it is with their own bodies, with the sex-gender Haran system or with each other, and focuses on Warreven's quest for legal protection and recognition for trans*, intersex and queer people. As Scott's text progresses, the extreme prevalence of gender essentialism in Haran society becomes even more obvious, and eventually the readers learn that conforming to artificial and cis-normative Haran expectations is a prerequisite not only to be considered a citizen and part of Haran society, but to be seen as human at all.

The novel reaches its climax as Warreven and Haliday, another intersex person, are physically assaulted and beaten in a transphobic attack (237). After the incident, Warreven publicly pushes for legal reforms and incites a civil uprising. While in the end, both Warreven and Tatian are forced to flee the planet for political reasons as well as their own safety, Warreven's words on trans* liberation and self-determination leave the novel with an ambiguous yet somewhat hopeful ending, and the question of whether social change is possible.

While it is true that *Shadow Man* has been a publicly acclaimed novel, and it is arguably part of a twentieth century canon of feminist science fiction, the novel has not received as much critical attention as some of its contemporaries. While there is some scholarship that deals with gender embodiment and trans* futurity in Scott's novel (Melzer 2006, 219-258), the number of academic works that explore the representation of gender and queerness in *Shadow Man* is quite small.

Science fiction has been theorized as a genre that has the potential to criticize and reimagine social relations and identities, and draws from the work of scholars such as Kennon (2011), Haslam (2015), Lothian (2019), and Yaszek

sexual characteristics and genitalia, social standing, and pronoun use. For instance, Scott describes the term "herm" as a "human being possessing testes and ovaries and some aspects of male and female genitalia; he, her, him, himself" (300). Perhaps the most useful definitions for readers may be those of "wrangwys"—"literally, wrong way, generally used to refer to herms, mems, and fems, and anyone whose sexual preferences don't match the female /male model; has been adopted by that group as a self-referential term and is not insulting within the group" (309) —and "odd-bodied"—"colloquial generic term for herms, mems, and fems" (307).

4 Throughout the novel, Warreven oscillates between 'he' and 'he' pronouns. As the language he uses to refer to himself is a key element in Warreven's journey towards self-acceptance and self-determination, this paper will use both pronouns to the refer to the character, although it will prioritize the use of 'he' to better reflect Warreven's gender identity.

et al. (2023), who not only explore science and speculative fiction as a space for reconfiguring our social world, but also examine the queer and feminist history of the genre[5]. By looking at this mode of storytelling as having the ability to "thematiz[e] the unstable relationship between assigned genders, sexualities, and identities and reconceptualize[e] feminist strategies against gender oppression" (Melzer 2006, 220), science fiction is revealed as a narrative space that sheds light over and helps to problematize the social and artificial nature of gender and sexuality. With their ability to rewrite the fabric of society, these narratives offer radical possibilities for (re)conceptualizing identity, and thus, can be considered as productive spaces from which to study gender, sexuality and what it means to be (considered) human. [6]

In regard to gender, this article considers essentialist understandings of gender—specifically, those that equate it to sex and that view it as fixed, predetermined and binary—as outdated, reductionist and openly harmful. Instead, the approach followed in this paper is based on Butler's seminal work on gender (1990, 2004, 2024), and trans-feminist and trans-inclusive radical texts (Solá and Urko 2018, Serano 2020, Duval 2021). These scholars consider gender

5 The presence of feminist and queer preoccupations in the context of science and speculative fiction is well documented, with its popularity rising with 1960s and 1970s feminist utopias that "seem[ed] to reimagine gender relations most radically" (Melzer 2006, 1-2). The concern with the intersections of gender, sexuality and science fiction is also present in critical and feminist science fiction scholarship, such as LeFanu's 1988 seminal work on feminist science fiction; Russ' work on speculative women writers and their critical reception (1995), or Pearson's 2008 research regarding the queer potentiality of the genre. I also want to point out that in this article, I draw from scholars who focus on science fiction, speculative fiction and fantasy, and argue for the transformative and critical potentiality of these genres. My intention here is not to position Scott's work, or *Shadow Man* in particular, within the rigid confines of one of these categories, particularly when I believe that arguments could be made to read the text in different ways, but rather, to emphasize how studies of the non-mimetic as a useful academic framework from where to understand the literary, artistic and political contributions of *Shadow Man*, and how queerness itself is embedded in the history of these field of study. Hence why use the terms speculative fiction and science fiction interchangeably, even though they are not synonyms. For a discussion on the differences and traditions of these genres, see Suvin 1979 and Roberts 2006.

6 I understand science and speculative fiction as having "the potential to effect a radical destabilization of conservative ways of knowing, performing, and regulating identity while suggesting alternative discourses of identity and power relations". (Kennon 2011, 145)—which does not necessarily mean that all speculative and science fiction is inherently feminist or that always casts queerness and marginalized identities in a positive light. Rather, I argue that these texts, with their ability to blur the lines of the possible, the normal, the imaginable, are a fruitful space for interrogating both gender and sexual dissidence and its narrative portrayal.

as a mutable, performative and fluid social construction, one that is culturally and geographically bound, instead of being a fixed notion across time and space—as well as part of a wide spectrum, rather than a binary of opposites. These particular authors also note that sex, while a biological feature, still influences the ways in which gendered bodies are interpreted, seen and conceptualized in patriarchal spaces that uphold colonial and binary understandings of gender (see also Mendoza 2015, Icaza 2018). Since sex and the physical body are "that which qualifies a body for life within the domain of cultural intelligibility" (Butler 2011, xii), they become crucial in answering the question of who, or perhaps whose bodies, are seen as human, as easily understandable and categorizable. This article also pays close attention to the ways in which gender "requires and institutes its own distinctive regulatory and disciplinary regime" (Butler 2004, 41), thus creating a set of norms against which certain bodies are measured against and marked as othered, as deviant and as non-human.

Similarly, sexuality is understood as inherently political and as connected to other social constructions such as gender, class, ethnicity… (see Crenshaw 1989 and Nash 2020 for discussions on intersectionality). In other words, sexuality, and queerness in particular, are not understood as a set of bodily practices or as an individual or private matter, but rather, as a site of dissidence and power—here it might be useful to remember bell hooks' description of queerness as "not as in being about who you're having sex with—that can be a dimension of it—but queer as it being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live" (2014, n.p.), which, again, furthers the view of queerness as a site of dissidence.

It is through this lens that I explore science fiction and speculative fiction as narrative genres that explore the kind of bodies, social relationships and worlds that can be imagined and put into words. My aim is to examine how the speculative elements of the novel influence the construal of new gendered possibilities of being, and whether Scott's narrative can be interpreted as a hopeful[7] space for queer liberation.

These questions can be better understood by examining three different tensions that persist all through the book—tensions that are used to articulate the different sections in this article. The first section focuses on the tensions between Hara and the Concord worlds, paying particular attention to how the depiction of economic friction between the two systems illustrates the power of the nation-state over the construction of gender—as well as its capacity to mark certain bodies as foreign, undesirable and un-human (see Rojo del Arcoíris 2022). After examining the relationship between these two spaces, I move onto

7 For a critical discussion on hope, see Giroux 2004, and Thaler 2018.

the tensions between Concord ideas of gender and the Haran two-sexed system. This section looks closely at the ways in which the science fiction elements of the novel are not only essential to but also further the discussion of feminist and queer possibilities of emancipation in hostile spaces such as Haran society. Finally, I take a closer look at the ways in which the journey of the two main characters, Warreven and Tatian, poses the questions of whether it is possible to reform patriarchal and cis-heteronormative spaces to move closer to freedom, as well as whether speculative and science fiction allow for us to reimagine and to critically engage with gender, queerness and gendered spaces.

2. Gendered Economies and Interplanetary Tensions

One of the most subversive elements of Scott's novel is its treatment of sexed bodies, queer desire and gender(ed) identities. While Hara only recognizes two cis-gender identities—'men' and 'women'—, Concord societies distinguish between nine sexual orientations and acknowledge that humans now have five different sexes. However, Concord societies, while being initially described as inclusive for queer and trans* people, engage in reductionist and essentialist practices that equate gender identity and the sexed body—regardless of the fact that their transphobic logic affects all five sexes and not only those that are seen as binary by current Westen standards. Readers also see that there are some families in Tatian's world that seem to be organized according to matrilineal lines (59), while Haran society is mostly patriarchal and its social system is much more rigid than that of the Concord Worlds[8].

The planet Hara seems to be reproducing the same power dynamics it was founded—colonized— upon through its rigid social structure. From the beginning of the novel, readers are made aware of the differences between Haran and Concord societies. They learn that the "basic unit of (traditional) Haran society" (6) is called a 'mesnie', which is a group of (seemingly) heterosexual and nuclear families that usually live and work together. They are tightly bound, and marriage or sex between two or more members of a 'mesnie' is severely frowned upon. The next unit of social organization is that of a 'clan'. Clans are usually defined as "different political, social and familial groupings" (6) and are associated with "one of the original fourteen founders" (6) of the planet. Finally, the largest social divisions are called 'watches', and are "based on the original divisions that brought the first colonies to Hara" (6). Different watches tend to

8 While there are some matrilineal lines in some Haran, it is quite uncommon. The majority of mesnies, including those that are seen as quite powerful and influential, such as that of Warreven, are patriarchal.

specialize in different jobs, ranging from medicine and first aid to land or ocean researching jobs. Scott also specifies that, while all members of a mesnie belong to the same clan, clan communities are usually evenly split into the five watches so as to "keep the genetic mix stable" (6) and avoid congenic malformations. Throughout the novel, we see that these close-knit and closed off groups, which are connected to the colonial order, serve to maintain a vertical hierarchy that deliberately benefits the economic elite and helps to maintain an imperialist system that creates powerful, almost revered figures—such as The Most Important Man, one of the direct descendants of one of the planet's 'founders' (11).

While Haran society is aggressively cis-heterosexual and it is built-upon ideas of monosexism[9], heterosexuality and cisnormativity, it also relies openly on biotechnology to perpetuate itself and its economic and political order. For instance, we see that, in order to concert profitable marriages, Harans accept and openly discuss the possibility of having sexual reassignment surgery as long as the people undergoing their surgery are seeing as 'transitioning' towards a binary identity that is socially acceptable—that of man or woman (12). The novel also denounces instances of intersexed children, and even adults, being forcefully subjected to similar surgeries to conform to binary ideas of identity. For instance, regarding the former example, we learn that Warreven, who has grown in quite an influential clan, is offered the possibility of marrying Tendlathe, the son of The Most Important Man—but the proposal is "contingent on a change of Warreven legal gender, *of course*" (11, my emphasis). This sarcastic "of course" is a direct acknowledgment of the ironic and violent control of the economic elite over both Haran bodies and the conditions in which self-determination is seen as a respectable option. In this context, it might be useful to return to Melzer, who argues that because "the odd-bodied threaten the heterosexual economy and its gendered power—the ultimate threat of the intersexed body—their existence must be denied" (2016, 248), which only reinforces the connection between gender, social control and economic power that the novel deliberately centres and thematizes.

Here, the sexed body is treated as a site of meaning-making and meaning negotiation, rather than a static or apolitical physical attribute. These examples do not only serve to contextualize and describe Scott's imaginary worlds, but they also establish early on the novel's political commitment to highlight queer, intersex and trans* people as vulnerable communities. One of the clearest ways in which readers see that the socioeconomic system of Hara influences the treatment of gender is with the existence of 'trade', which, again, is used to designate both sex work and the practice of falsifying passports and other

9 See Coll Blanco 2021 for an exploration of monosexism.

residency or nationality related documents. As it has already been established, most of the 'odd-bodied' and the 'wry-abled' that cannot integrate into Haran narrow views of identity—or that refuse to do so—are forced to go into sex work as a way to survive. While trade is not exclusive to the context of Hara, Haran society systematically relies on it as a strategy of social exclusion, as sex work is both criminalized and severely persecuted. Scott gives readers further nuance on the idea of trade in the following fragment:

> Trade existed everywhere in the Concord Worlds, of course; in the Concord, it was more a matter of how much space each world allowed it, and how much the players were looked down on, how much they had to hide their tastes. (22)

In this way, queer, intersex and trans* people who refuse to assimilate into the system—or who do not pass—, are forced into precarity, as failing to perform normative identities (see Butler 1990) directly results in political and legal prosecution. Queerness and prostitution have become so intertwined that they are almost synonymous, and even the herms, mems and fems who 'pass' and are not 'out' as queer are in a constant state of hypervigilance. In this context, being 'outted' as intersex and/or trans* automatically implies that one will become suspect of participating in trade. Thus, Hara's economic regimen not only determines the social and economic order, but, in forcing queer bodies into precarity, it marks them as vulnerable, unnatural and unhuman, and has the potential to exclude them not only from public space, but from the body of the nation and the idea of the nation itself. That is, Hara's national space is directly founded and sustained by ideas of sexual and gender normalcy, and one's inclusion in this particular context requires participating, or convincedly performing cisnormativity and heterosexuality. This both echoes Butler's work on the 'the public dimension of the body' (Butler 2004, 26) and Holly Lewis writing on the relationship between queer identities and colonial and capitalist violence (2015). Because, as Lewis explains, people "are not merely carved up into nations and cultures within capitalist social relations, they also inhabit complex bodies that are collectively coded into different functions, functions that operate within the context of nation, culture, and class" (20), these social dynamics are not only very clearly gendered—as well as a constituent of gender in this fictional world—but also serve to constitute a particular idea of the nation that is extrinsic of queer, intersex and trans* people, and queerness as a whole.

It is in this particular context that I argue that Hara functions as a space of patriarchal violence and forced exclusion. Following what Jameson (1991) has described as the "spatial turn" (154), there has been a large interest in the last

decades in examining spaces as "never neutral in social affairs" and as "more often than not the focus of intense social struggle (Harvey 1989, 239) –that is, as inherently having a social and political quality to it. Through this lens, it is possible to critically engage with the social cartographies of Hara, and to examine how queer people and those whose identities and desires are not aligned with Haran national ideals, are excluded and pushed to the margins of society. Here queerness is conceived as having political weight (Eckhert 2016), and as being embedded in complex systems of power and oppression. Specifically, the notion of space is particularly relevant when discussing trans* and intersex sex workers in Hara, since they are violently placed at the edges of society, both literally and figurately. In an attempt to create a semblance of community, the 'wry-abled' and the 'odd-bodied' are forced to go to clandestine bars and dance clubs, which are the only physical spaces of resistance and mutual solidarity that queer people can access on Hara. In the extract below, Scott clarifies that:

> Trade was the quickest way for the odd-bodied to earn a decent living in Bonemarche; the *wrangwys* bars and dance houses where trade was played were also the places where the wry-able found each other. (66)

Because of the vulnerable position of queer people in Hara, Haran anti-sex work policies are anti-trans*, as these communities rely on sex-work and trade to survive. In fact, Harans seem to think that "if they could just get rid of trade, all the herms, mems, and fems would just-disappear" (171), which strengthens this connection. In a similar fashion, its harsh (anti-)immigration policies that systematically reject 'herms', 'fems' and 'mems' serve to consolidate and protect a violent state whose national identities are rooted in the gender binary and exclusionist and transphobic praxis. Drawing from Lefebvre (1991) and his idea that nation-states are built on a "founding violence" that "needs to be periodically exercised" (2014, 10), Manzanas and Benito argue that:

> Such are the hallmarks of the state; such is the imprint of the national. The nation-state may exercise this violence in different ways. It may expel those deemed irrevocably different or removable from the body politic, or it may expel and coerce within the alleged realm of the domestic (2014, 10).

It seems that both the idea of the nation and its spatial mapping serve as tools of social, political and economic exclusion, as Hara actively attempts to extricate any semblance of queerness from within itself through precarity, social ostracization, and political persecution. Hara is founded and sustained

by patriarchal and transphobic practices, and its interplanetary and economic tensions with the Concord Worlds highlight the power of the state to demonize and render certain bodies inhuman and separated from the body of the nation[10]. Scott's depiction of these practices of violence and deliberate exclusion through the speculative elements of the novel highlights the political dimension of space and the social and fluid nature of gender.

3. Sexual Imaginaries and Othered Realities

In this section of the article, I focus on the cultural differences between Haran and Concord understandings of gender in Scott's novel and look closely at the essentialist rhetoric that seem to be commonplace in the planet Hara. Both spaces are inhabited by people with the same physical characteristics, yet in Hara "law and custom admitted only two [genders]" (12). The Concord Worlds, on the other hand, recognize and are seemingly accepting of queerness—even though their understanding of gender is revealed to be quite essentialist later on in the novel. I am particularly interested in exploring these cultural differences and in analysing how this failure to acknowledge other(ed) identities that cannot be reduced to that of male and female is symptomatic of a deeply patriarchal and oppressive system—one that Scott seeks to denounce through speculation.

Throughout the novel, both sex and gender are embedded in larger discourses of normalcy and national belonging. Through the eyes of the narrators, the readers witness a cultural clash between Hara and the Concord Worlds, as the novel explores and questions what is deemed as normal in these national spaces and what can be expected when meeting someone from another world. As the novel progresses, it seems that there is a common narrative inside Hara that describes intersex and trans* people as not only different to Haran citizens, but as antithetical to the history and the cultural values of the planet. This idea, which is not only incredibly widespread but also reproduced by the cultural elites, marks trans* and queer bodies as outsiders, as threats to the idea of the Haran nation. There is a clear 'us vs them' nation-wide discourse that separates cisgender heterosexual communities (or those who are read as such) and those bodies that are seen as deviant from the idea of Hara. One Haran character even claims that:

> We aren't like them, and we can't afford to become like them. We're all that's left of what people, human beings, are supposed to be, and if we changed, that's lost forever. (27)

10 See Bell and Gill 1995 and Browning 1996 for a spatial exploration of queerness.

Again, this narrative is rooted in the symptoms that accompany space travel. This point in time marks a before and after in the development of the human population, and creates an idealized, nostalgic past that the Haran elite longs for—even if this past is completely fictional, as trans* and intersex people have always existed (see Fausto-Sterling 2000, Gómez 2023). This is one element that causes friction between Hara and the Concord Worlds, as the Concord Worlds' seemingly progressive position endangers Hara's idealized national narrative and challenges the naturalization of the gender binary and the two-sexed model.

The arguments from the extract above grow more and more transphobic as the story develops, illustrating the deeply discriminatory core of Haran society. After Warreven, one of our protagonists argues that "We're human, they're human, we all come from the same stock, we've all been exposed to hyperlumin" (28) in an attempt to render the similarities between Hara and the Concord Worlds visible, he receives the following answer:

> They've let it take over. [….] Kids shouldn't be taught this, not the way we were […]. We need to be very careful that we understand the difference between fact and truth, and I'm not having a child of mine exposed to that. (28)

This rhetoric very clearly echoes contemporary transphobic narratives, such as the idea that the existence of queer and trans* people can be treated as part of an intellectual debate, or the idea that queer people are depraved, corrupted and dangerous and should be kept away from children less they put heterosexual futures in danger (see Wilkinson 2019). Not only that, but the (future of the) nation is once again portrayed as not only completely separate from but also incompatible with the belonging of queer, trans* and intersex people. The character of Tatian presents these ideas quite openly in the following paragraph:

> He [Tatian] still had trouble understanding how Harans could deny the existence of three of the sexes, when mems, fems and herms walked past them every day, a full quarter of the population. But then, he'd once had a polite, slightly mad conversation with an old *vieuvant,* who had told him quite sincerely that the story about the five sexes being the result of hyperlumin-induced mutation was a lie, or at best a misperception, and that all that was really required to bring humanity back to its *proper* two-gendered state was to stop coddling *these people* and force them to make up their minds what they *really* were (171, my emphasis).

In this extract, it is quite clear that the Concord Worlds conceive themselves in opposition to Hara and to Haran as binary ideas of gender, sexuality and identity. However, it is necessary to remember that the Concord's Worlds self-

perception of itself as accepting and as a space that is hospitable for queer people is very much challenged by its tendency to assume people's gender based on their physical body and their secondary sexual characteristics.

Apart from having examples of rhetoric violence, readers also see the Haran state condemning and shutting down any attempt of individual self-determination—while still allowing gender-affirming surgeries and sexual reassignment surgery if it serves the possibility of maintaining influential watches. As the novel progresses, Scott introduces the character of Haliday Stiller, a herm who attempts to be socially and legally recognized as such, openly challenging Haran's binary laws and exposing the 'uncomfortable' reality that queer people are part of the fabric of society of the planet. However, Haliday's attempts are not only shut down but punished, as her gender is changed to that of a woman in retribution. Scott renders this idea quite clear in the following passage:

> Haliday Stiller had demanded the right to call himself a herm on legal documents, and the Watch council, officially the highest indigenous authority, and Temelathe's puppet, had not only refused to allow it, but, for good measure, had reassigned Haliday's legal gender, decreeing that, since he wouldn't choose, the proverbial "reasonable man" would see him as a woman. (51)

In this situation, the only form of resistance Haliday is able to enact is to "refus[e] to answer any pronouns but her own" (51). Here, discourse seems to be the only form of resistance for those who lack the material circumstances to either protect themselves or to enact change, while still casting light over the fact gender is often enacted, negotiated and challenged through language and narrative (see Lazar 2014).

As it has been already mentioned, there are instances of physical violence and assault in Scott's novel, as well as that of rhetoric and linguistic violence. Near the end of the novel, there is a scene of a transphobic assault where both Haliday and Warreven are asked about their sexual characteristics and their gender identity. When both herms advocate for themselves and describe their identity as queer, they are harassed and badly beaten up and left on the verge of death. The state is also complicit in this attack, as the police have been bribed so as not to intervene (241).

After waking up, Warreven quickly asks where Haliday is, frantically explaining that [he] "want[s] to get him into the off-world hospital, where they know how to deal with herms" (238) and that he doesn't know if the doctors here will treat him right" (239) because of his anatomy and the prejudice against intersex and trans* people.

This instance, which is very much reminiscent of trans* people's lived experience in the medical world, is accompanied by explicit mentions of intersex

people being subjected to sexual reassignment surgeries without their knowledge or consent. Since these bodies are seen as a mistake that needs to or should be fixed, these procedures are almost common in Hara and seen as somewhat of a moral imperative. As Tatian states:

> It was one thing not to know how to treat herms' complex bodies, entirely another to surgically alter them to conform to Haran prejudice-but then, on a world that didn't admit herms existed, there would always be the temptation to "correct" the "defect" rather than go to the effort to restore Haliday to her natural condition. (244)

It is in this context that the tensions between the Concord Worlds and Hara become most apparent. By denouncing Hara's social order, Scott focuses on the politics and the social weight of the body and the right to self-determination through the speculative elements of the novel. When analysing the constructions of the Concord Worlds, it seems that this space reproduces essentialist logics that assume that one sexed body is linked to one specific gender identity; just that instead of the binary female-male, it extends to five different models. Thus, both national spaces question and problematize queer identities and liberation while exemplifying the capacity of science fiction to imagine new—albeit imperfect—worlds that offer space for queer possibility.

4. Queer Lives, Hopeful Futures?

This final analysis section is concerned with the personal journey of the characters of Tatian and Warreven, as I believe their experiences help to both narrow down and to extrapolate how transphobic and gender essentialist ideologies, as well as ideas of the gendered nation, interact with and impact queer people, their lived experiences and their bodies. Once again, I am interested in the ways the protagonists of Melissa Scott's novel and their narrative representation allow for as to explore the transformative and political potential of science fiction and speculative fiction as a whole. These ideas also interact with the questions of whether social reform and social revolution are possible, as well as the role speculative narratives play in the construction of these possible futures, and, overall, whether *Shadow Man* can be seen as a hopeful space.

From the moment he is introduced, Tatian seems to represent and embody Concord ideas about identity; he acknowledges all of the five sexes and seems constantly perplexed by Hara's binary thinking. In fact, he seems to have recurring difficulties with how this binarism is reproduced through language, since, while in the Concord Worlds, herms, mems and fems each use specific

sets of pronouns to refer to themselves and there are neologisms to discuss non-hegemonic/sexualities that are related to these gendered identities. As Tatian is destined to Hara to close a business transaction as part of his Concord job, we read that he "wasn't completely used to the system, found himself insisting on the gendered words as it that would help him understand [their conception of gender]" (17). Since Tatian sees Haran ideas of gender as an outdated social construction, he usually pays close attention to the body of the Haran population, in an attempt to 'discover' people's sex, and thus, their Concordian pronouns. It seems that "[i]t had taken him most of the first year to learn to look not at bodies when he met an indigene but at the clothing that signified "real gender" (21), yet there are multiple instances in which Tatian looks at Haran bodies to discern that he believes to be their 'true' or Concordian gender.

While at times, the Concord Worlds are presented to the reader as the more progressive environment, one that velates for queer and feminist concerns, Tatian's struggles to adapt to Hara and his behaviour when confronted with the male/female model show an unexpected yet ugly truth about the Concord Worlds. While it is true that Concord spaces recognize the five different sexes, they participate in their own model of gender essentialism. Tatian assumes that knowing one's body implies knowing one's gender identity and one's sets of pronouns, and is often described as unable to "see beyond the physical body" (196). When looking at Warreven, Tatian focuses on her sexual secondary characteristics, her chest, hips, width of the shoulders… and adjusts his language accordingly: "she–or he? he could be a herm" (39). While Tatian helps to highlight and denounce the reductionist nature of Hara, he also shows that Concord ideas are anything but natural. Tatian seems to reproduce gender essentialist behaviours at a pentagonal scale instead of a binary one. For instance, he struggles with gendered stereotypes about fems and women in the following line, "She was more like a mem that most women, certainly more so that the fem he had briefly suspected she might be, stolid and quietly competent in her work-but that was an old stereotype, and just as untrue as all the less flattering ones. (93) and "[s]he certainly bargained like a fem" (94). He also describes sexuality as something that is static, rather than fluid, and something that is tied to specific sexual practices, rather than to desire. In this way, the view of the Concord worlds as a progressive, welcoming nation is shattered.

While Tatian's character invites the readers to question the artificial nature of gender, Warreven's journey challenges Hara's patriarchal foundation, and opens up a discussion for constructing queer spaces in hostile environments. Throughout the book, Warreven reflects about his own gender and the limitations of Haran society, as he sees how the economic elites use the wryways's queerness to reject their petitions of asylum and residence, marking them as an "other" that

cannot access the body of the nation –since, once again, cisheteronormativity is a prerequisite to obtain citizenship and have one's identity recognized. As Warreven's inner journey progresses, so does the political radicalization of the planet. Transphobic violence is on the rise, and both Warreven and Haliday are beaten up when they are read as intersex people. Their attackers ask them: "Dressed like a boy, yells like a girl. So which are you, *swetemetes*?" (252), and when they describe themselves as herms, they are brutally beaten. Here, the trans*, the intersex, the queer body, the hyper visible body, the body that has been physically injured, the body that has been publicly marked as vulnerable becomes a symbol of rebellion, for after this moment Warreven starts a legal campaign for legal self-determination in Hara.

After a poignant conversation about the politics of passing, Warreven claims that "I exist, people like me exist, and we're not wrangwys, not anymore. We are people, and we want a proper name, in law" (275), and demands social and legal recognition for his community. Here discourse is central in the denouncement of symbolic and epistemic violence, as language is a vehicle for identity negotiation. When discussing the intersection between class, identity and queerness, Lewis explains that "because systemic violence is entirely ideological, choosing appropriate terminology becomes a political act. The reverse of this is that using the wrong terminology becomes an act of ideological violence" (2015, 21). Similarly to how discourse can be used as a strategy for social cohesion and control against queer people, it can also be weaponized as a form of resistance. It is through this lens that Warreven denounces Hara's bigotry, and explicitly names the exclusionary and transphobic nature of the planet:

> Treat it like it is my fault for being born. But I do exist, we exist, *halvings*-" he broke off, angry that he had used the old word, substituted the creole terms, awkward on the tongue. "-herms, mems, fems, and we've existed since our people left Earth. You can't possibly believe it's sin, unresisted entropy, whatever the *vieuvants* are calling it these days. Hyperalumin is mutagenic, it made us-space travel made us, you can't go FTL without the drug (225)

Shortly after Warreven's speech, the last chapters show a domestic terrorist attack where one of the most important watches in Hara attempts to harm Warreven to shut down his cause. To protect himself, he is forced to hide during the social uprisings that take place after the incident. Not only that, but, at the end of the novel, Warreven is forced to leave Hara to guarantee his safety in a scene that pointedly exemplifies the efforts of Hara to strip queerness out of its national body. As Warreven becomes a runway, the revolution is put to a halt, and the progress that had been achieved during the uprising becomes diluted,

yet somehow remains, for the Harans have listened to Warreven's words, have been transformed by them.

In regard to this ambiguous ending, Melzer argues that "instead of relegating one individual figure to the symbolic task of challenging and overcoming a discriminatory system, Scott places her protagonist in the context of collective resistance and challenges the necessity for agency outside a social context" (2006, 243), describing this choice as a sign of collective yet slow liberation. This interpretation allows for a hopeful yet critical reading of the novel, one that holds close the possibility of social change and of queer liberation, and marks it as a collective struggle rather than as the journey of an individual. In fact, this ending both acknowledges the difficulties of dismantling systems of oppression while still offering glimpses of a better world for queer, trans* and intersex people. Through the development of these two characters, Tatian and Warreven, readers learn that neither place is what it seems: the Concord Worlds are not the progressive inclusive land they might have been presented as when in opposition to Hara, and Hara might hold the possibility of liberation and self-determination at its core. It is perhaps in this ambiguity, this liminality that does not give space to essentialism, where one might find the potential for change.

5. Conclusion

In this article, I have explored the representations of gender, queerness and otherness in the context of Melissa Scott's science fiction classic *Shadow Man*. Drawing from critical and feminist scholarship on speculative fiction and science fiction, I have looked at three different yet intertwined points of tension in the novel: the economic tension between Hara and the Concord Worlds and how they mark certain identities as outside of the national body and present cisheteronormativity as an essential condition for Haran citizenship, belonging and inclusion; the social tensions between Haran and Concordian ideas of gender and how these spaces reproduce essentialist and transphobic logic; and the characterization of the two main characters and how their journey reflects the queerphobic violence trans* and intersex people are subjected to in the novel in both Hara and the Concord Worlds.

Through this analysis, I have posed the question of whether it is possible for these speculative spaces to move from violence to freedom, and it interrogated whether it is possible to describe this novel as a hopeful narrative for queer people. By closely looking at the science fiction affordances of Scott's text and its depiction of gendered spaced, I have concluded that *Shadow Man* not only offers nuanced opportunities to interact with gender, sexuality and queerness, but it also highlights the fluid and social nature of gender, identity and space and

remind us of the role of spatiality in in constructing and exploring queerness. With its use of speculation, Scott reminds us of the power of literature to question the status quo and allows us to imagine different futures that nevertheless mirror our current struggles.

Not only that, but Scott's science fictional reflections on how the nation state actively reproduces queerphobic violence and renders the lives of trans*, intersex and queer people almost virtually unliveable echoes our current reality, where through hostile legislation impact the lives of those that are seen as outside the bonds of cisnormativity and heterosexuality (American Civil Liberties Union 2023, Robinson 2023, Yurcaba 2023). In this way, Scott's work may be more relevant than ever, and her insistence that queer liberation is a collective struggle may help construct different presents through speculation and mutual solidarity.

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