

# OF MONSTERS AND WOMEN: TWO FEMALE CHARACTERS AND TRANS/POSTHUMANISM IN HBO'S *LOVECRAFT COUNTRY*

Alejandro Batista Tejada  
*Universidad de Sevilla*

## ABSTRACT

There has been, in recent times, a resolution to make up for the traditional lack of prominent female representation in audiovisual popular culture. HBO's series *Lovecraft Country* (2020) constitutes one of such proposals. By focusing on a group of African American characters who must struggle with the terrifying reality of Jim Crow US as well as with magic and other-worldly creatures, the show constitutes a fascinating platform whence a powerful social criticism is proposed to the audience. Being the series a version of Matt Ruff's novel of the same name, it is my intention to analyze one of the trans-media alterations which took place in the adaptation process. The creators of *Lovecraft Country* deemed it necessary to gender-swap two of the characters from the novel, with the possibilities this change opened. The inclusion of two female characters in the series in detriment of their male counterparts in the novel is quite telling and has an underlying significance, for it points out to a strong determination to alter female representation in Science Fiction and the Gothic. Additionally, Christina Braithwhite and Dee Freeman are the only two characters to acquire a posthuman state. It is therefore this paper's main aim to provide an examination of their characters and their process of "transhumanization" through the lens of Transhumanism and Posthumanism. Both represent different trends of transhumanism and embody disparate stands to posthumanism, hence the necessary analysis of the latent subtexts which these two characters catalyze.

*Keywords:* Transhumanism, Posthumanism, *Lovecraft Country*, Science Fiction, African American.

---

Science Fiction has been an ever-growing field and a space for reconfiguring reality. Imagination is an uppermost part in the process of conceiving an alternative future and of commenting on a distant past through the lens of fantasy. Popular culture has experienced a rise in this type of narratives in which authors turn to controversial pasts to examine their flaws and imagine new possibilities. This reconstruction is crucial when it comes to introducing

contemporary concerns while, at the same time, picturing a different future. Afrofuturism, for instance, is an important example of this practice, for it constitutes a catalyst for an alternative envisioning of what life could be for Black people away from prejudices and color lines. Coined by Mark Dery in 1993 and fostered by cultural critics such as Greg Tate, Tricia Rose and Kodwo Eshun, this genre allowed authors to imagine “possible futures through a Black cultural lens” (LaFleur 00:01:16–00:01:19). The myriad alternatives which stemmed from this new cultural and aesthetic movement relied heavily on technoculture and speculative fiction and used these to envision black futures that stem from Afro-diasporic experiences (Yaszek 42). Ytasha L. Womack, on her part, defines Afrofuturism as “an intersection of imagination, technology, the future and liberation” (9). In her view, it is more than necessary because “it’s one thing when black people aren’t discussed in world history... But when, even in the imaginary future... people can’t fathom a person of non-Euro descent a hundred years into the future, a cosmic foot has to be put down” (7). However, Science Fiction had already been a genre in which black voices had been heard and where explorations of connected with African American experiences had been carried out. Lisa Yaszek, for example, argues that Ralph Ellison’s novel *Invisible Man* (1952) is an early piece of Science Fiction inasmuch as it “predicated upon both realist and speculative modes of storytelling” (41), which is very much what the series *Lovecraft Country* strove to do.

Drinking from elements of the Afrofuturist tradition, the case study analyzed in this paper, *Lovecraft Country* (2020), is a TV series aimed at examining a terrifying past for people of African descent during the Jim Crow period in the US while proposing other possibilities for this ethnic group through the alternatives which community, friendship, family, and technology afford. This series thus constitutes not only a pointing of fingers (or a “cosmic foot-step”) with regards to systemic racism in the US, but also an act of picturing a different scenario for black people in this country. Additionally, the series includes powerful images of gender transgressions as well as a criticism of patriarchal structures.

This paper’s intention is to analyze the role of two female characters in this HBO’s series and how both acquire a posthuman state following a process of transhumanization. The fact that they are the only characters to do so is revealing, but it is even more relevant when we realize that they did not appear in Matt Ruff’s original novel, *Lovecraft Country* (2016). The way in which the series challenges female representation in Science Fiction and the dichotomy between tradition and technology is also of interest to this paper. Considering the theoretical framework of transhumanism and posthumanism, this article explores how Christina Braithwhite (the daughter of an all-white all-men logia’s leader) and Dee Freeman (the protagonist of the series’ little cousin) transcend their human condition and how they do so.

The fact that the series gives these roles to female characters is noteworthy, for this allows it to touch on issues of gender and feminism but also because it responds to the lack of prominent female representation in genres like the Gothic or Science Fiction. As Alexis Lothian proposes, women’s roles “have been constrained by patriarchal social and familiar

structures" (70). However, since the late nineteenth century, "speculative visions of alternate futures, pasts, and elsewhere have provided individual and collective spaces in which to reimagine the workings of gender, sexuality, love, and desire in both political and personal worlds" (Lothian 70), and this is what we encounter in *Lovecraft Country*. In fact, the series draws from feminist dictums such as the ones proposed by Kate Millett in *Sexual Politics* (1969) or Germaine Greer's urgings to dismiss "the baggage of paternalistic society" and to choose "self-determination" (119).

Although Carol Margaret Davison conceives American fiction as a place "where the individual is vulnerable and damningly alone, even if married and specially if female" (491) and Helen Merrick, on her part, states that "[Science Fiction] has been considered a predominantly masculine field which, through its focus on science and technology, 'naturally' excludes women and by implication, considerations of gender" (241), *Lovecraft Country* builds on Lothian's ideas about reconfiguring notions of gender and race. Therefore, the prominent role female characters play in general, and the gender-swapping of these two characters in particular, speaks of the series' subversion of some traditional conventions of the Science Fiction genre.<sup>1</sup>

## I. SCIENCE FICTION, *LOVECRAFT COUNTRY* AND ITS SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Ever since the first inclusion of Science Fiction in the visual arts, there has been a constant and simultaneous development in popular culture and its representation of social and political concerns. As John Clute suggests, "a genre such as sf had rapidly to adjust its sights in order to apprehend the new, or its heart would die" (66). However, the essential tropes underlying this genre have mostly remained the same. In fact, *Lovecraft Country* is also filled with and influenced by prototypical science-fictional motifs (e.g., the time machine and the laboratory). Another influence can be appreciated in the scientific experiments whereby the Braithwhite family and the Sons of Adam logia obtain their power: a biotechnological magic. In the series, magic is, as it is inferred, an invisible power which permits the Caucasian members of the logia to control the wealth and the political sphere of Jim Crow America, as well as performing magic spells. Concerning its symbolism, Richard Gordon states that "from the very beginning, magic has been a term whose semantic implications can only be understood by close attention to context, to the values and claims that it is made to sustain" (162). In the series, magic is portrayed as a natural force only accessed and controlled by white men. Magic and social

---

<sup>1</sup> The most significant case is Letitia Lewis. Throughout the novel, she is a secondary character. In the series, though, she is from the beginning an active participant. She single-handedly spelled a malignant spirit from the house she buys in a white neighborhood and she drives the car as they escape from a racist town. Dee's mother Hippolyta and Ruby are other examples, for their stories suffer significant changes that enable them to become the catalyst for the exploration of important topics.

dominance thus go hand in hand if we extrapolate both ideas to the history of the United States.

In addition to Science Fiction tropes and imagery, the series repeatedly turns to H.P. Lovecraft as an inspiration both for intertextuality and to draw from the author's reprehensive views on racial superiority to build up its comment on racism in the United States. There is a powerful image in the extremely sci-fi opening of the series which explicitly addresses H.P. Lovecraft and his legacy. After a sequence amidst a cosmic landscape, a fictional Jackie Robinson bats off a giant Cthulhu-like monster, splitting its head in a million pieces. The characters smile relieved, only to find that the monster has wholly come back for them. Indeed, this sequence bears an important message. The characters stand for the minority groups which will be given a central position in the series' narrative, while the giant Cthulhu is a symbol of its creator and, at the same time, of every oppressive person and institution throughout the United States.

However, although a prototypical beast-like creature is shown, the true monsters in *Lovecraft Country* are white citizens and their monstrosity is enacted through what Maisha L. Wester terms as "a schizoid psyche" common to white people with regards to race and otherness (161). After all, as Jeffrey Weinstock proposes, "human beings define that which is monstrous in relation to themselves," being the monster "the other, the inhuman, the 'not me'" (48). Therefore, while Black people have been traditionally portrayed as "monstrous and unfathomable," if not as a degeneration of the white race through miscegenation, as H.P. Lovecraft imagined in his stories, Science Fiction has proved to have an "engagement with current political, social, and philosophical issues" (Geraghty 281) and consequently such neglected groups have become central to its narratives.

Another reference to the author is found in the name of the region where the protagonist's father is at the beginning. Atticus refers to that region as "Lovecraft Country." The village in which they were to find his father is Ardham (a clear reference to Arkham), in Massachusetts. This location is a well-known place in the Lovecraftian imagination, for it is the setting for many of the author's stories (e.g., "Herbert West: Reanimator" (1921-1922) or "The Dunwich Horror" (1929)), thus establishing a geographical reference to the writer. In fact, "'Lovecraft Country' [is] a metaphor for rural New England (if not the entire United States)" (Sanders). But not only does the series rely on Lovecraftian inspiration, for the influence of other prominent Science Fiction authors such as Philip K. Dick can also be appreciated in the narrative. For instance, Dick was tremendously interested "in the human consequences of any kind of future or imaginary change in social conditions" (Palmer 392), and *Lovecraft Country*, as we will see, strives to explore the human struggle for and the possible outcomes of social and gender reconfigurations.

The series also relies on intertextual references to artistic and intellectual productions by African American authors. There are abundant cases where a voice-over serves as a social critique. Significant instances of such intertextual additions are the spoken word poem

“Whitey on the Moon” (1970) by Gil Scott-Heron, James Baldwin’s speeches or Sonia Sanchez’s poem “Catch the Fire” (1995). By drawing from these, *Lovecraft Country* confronts the racist history of the United States. After all, as the director of the series Misha Green points out in the video-documentary *Crafting Lovecraft Country*: “There’s a lot of American history we aren’t taught in school. And I think that American history is an important story to tell” (Vena). The protagonists continuously face problems which depict horrible events of the United States’ history, such as sun-down towns, segregation or historical tragedies such as the Tulsa Massacre or Emmet Till’s murder. Therefore, as Green states, “our fictional world bleeds into reality.” After all, “many of the ideas, themes, and conventions of contemporary science fiction take their roots in a distinctly American cultural experience,” and therefore reflects “America’s hopes, desires, ambitions, and fears” (Link and Canavan 221). Peppetone, on his part, defined the early United States as “a collection of theocratic city-states consecrated to the God of Adam and burdened by a strong Calvinistic sense of sin and predestination” (50).

Drawing from these ideas, *Lovecraft Country* comments on the country’s underlying psyche “consecrated” to the God of Adam (significantly, the all-white all-men secta is called “the Sons of Adam”). After all, this is a country that modeled its social system after those representing the same Adam. The series therefore took the chance to build on these national ideological foundations to create a story focused on the African American community and on depicting prominent women in the series. Ellen E. Jones would say that the show’s mission is “to reclaim horror genre territory for black America and beyond.” Furthermore, the show also reclaimed a space for gendered figures in Science Fiction.

The series is therefore conceived as a catalyst to explore systemic racism using Science Fiction and the Gothic genre. By doing so, it defied the national psyche and uncovered some national guilts which were awaiting projection (Fiedler 130). After all, having been released in 2020, the series constitutes an attempt to tackle some of the most important issues of our current historical moment.<sup>2</sup> The series touches on crucial subjects such as racism and law enforcement abuse, gender configurations and queer otherness, for, as Michael J. Sanders correctly states:

The show does a great job of echoing these horrors back and forward into the American past and present. Alongside its realism, the show’s episodes also portray terrors of American racism and sexism through the tropes of horror, fantasy, and science fiction – monsters, magic, time travel, and yes, love of comic books – to an effect that starts off Lovecraftian and often ends closer to *Indiana Jones* and *Back to the Future*. (n.p.)

---

<sup>2</sup> In fact, the series was released shortly after the George Floyd incident and includes a subtle reference to this issue. When Dee is being cursed by the law enforcement officer, she whispers at one point: “I can’t breathe,” thus establishing a clear intertextual reference to what George Floyd was uttering a few moments before his murder.

*Lovecraft Country* represents a new proposal at challenging the boundaries between reality and fiction, between tradition and the most perturbing fears which still permeate our time. It also proposes new outlooks on the present and the future by giving voice and shape to contemporary preoccupations. In fact, the series does so by following one of Science Fiction's conventions as it "weave[s] in and out of the distant past in order to comment on the state of contemporary American culture" (Bruhm 259). In so doing, it showcases how the United States has always been a country where oppression (both to racial and gender Others) is sometimes more frightening than other-worldly elements. *Lovecraft Country* thus reveals that for many African Americans, reality within a racist and patriarchal system has been as horrible and gruesome as any fictional horror story. Therefore, despite the show being a mixture of different genres, the Gothic and Science Fiction permeate the whole series with multiple reality layers that speak of a horrible past and a promising future only attainable through community and sacrifice.

## II. TRANSHUMANISM AND POSTHUMANISM AS SEEN IN TWO FEMALE CHARACTERS

Before we delve into the process and significance of the characters' posthuman condition, the concepts of transhumanism and posthumanism should be explained. Mark O'Connell defines transhumanism as "a social movement which aims to use technology to push out the boundaries of the human condition," but concludes that, in short, it is "all about being immortal, really" (Words to That Effect 00:03:42–00:04:32). Benjamin Ross, in his book *The Philosophy of Transhumanism* (2020), observes that "it is possible to discern a variety of themes which continuously appear across transhumanist discourse." (2) Those themes consist of:

An attitude towards humanity as constantly evolving with no fixed nature, a preoccupation with biotechnological 'upgrades'... and a general view that impermanence, entropy, and the related suffering that they cause to humanity are technical glitches waiting to be edited out of the species. (2–3)

For José Luis Cordeiro, "the philosophy of Extropy and Transhumanism explore the boundless possibilities for future generations, while we approach a possible technological singularity" (69). Similarly, Joel Garreau would say that transhumanism is dedicated "to the enhancement of human intellectual, physical, and emotional capabilities, the elimination of disease and unnecessary suffering, and the dramatic extension of life span" (xiii), which directly addresses several of the problematics posed by *Lovecraft Country's* Christina and Dee.

Dee's life is enhanced, and her body healed, by transhuman means (i.e., technological improvements). Christina, on the contrary, strives for a dramatic extension of life span. Garreau goes on to say that "Transhuman is [the] description of those who are in the process of becoming posthuman." For N. Katherine Hayles, "the construction of the posthuman does not require the subject to be a literal cyborg," for its "defining characteristics involve the construction of subjectivity, not the presence of nonbiological components" (4). Both Christina

Braithwhite and Diana Freeman embody different ways of achieving these physical improvements and a reconfiguration of their own subjectivities, and both provide space for a deeper analysis of gender roles and transethnic relations in literature, film, and history in the United States.

For instance, we eventually witness how Christina performs magic to be both man and woman. Moreover, her main ambition is to achieve an immortal posthuman state through a long-lost spell, an ambition which directly affects the group of African American protagonists. Therefore, the decision to include these adaptational changes in these characters is highly significant, for as Jerrold E. Hogle explains: “the Gothic has long confronted the cultural problem of gender distinctions, including what they mean for western structures of power and how boundaries between the genders might be questioned to undermine those structures” (9). Not only has the series been described as an exposure of systemic racism in the US but, by introducing Christina as the seeker of immortality, it also involves a crucial alternative intention: commenting on patriarchy and on how women are normally denied equal opportunities in patriarchal spaces. After all, ever since the 1980s, small-screen Science-Fiction has been “a feast of innovation and transformation,” for it has “spoken about the most important issues of the day” (Redmond 141). Carol Margaret Davison argues that “while these innovations enhanced the representation of the supernatural, they also offered writers and directors daring new ways to express and explore character psychology” as well as directing these genres “toward greater social critique, becoming more nationally introspective in new, exciting, yet unsettling ways” (494).

### III. TRANSCENDING THE TEXT

As we can see, while the traditional image of women in the small screen has tended to be one of frailty and subordination, in *Lovecraft Country* female characters are the focal point of several of the ideas developed in the series. Specifically, the two characters who are analyzed here are even more relevant if we consider that in Matt Ruff’s novel *Lovecraft Country* these characters were male.

How these characters represent different ways of achieving a posthuman state and, in Dee’s case, how she does so by using a cyborg mechanism, are at the center of this discussion. Christina Braithwhite, from her privilege position as a white woman, strives to achieve an immortal state using biological scientific advancements based on a “Natural Science” which draws its powers from a so-called *Book of Names*, a tool her family has possessed from the dawn of American history to control the socio-political scheme. On the other hand, Dee turns to mechanical advancements to survive a curse put on her by a law enforcement officer. Both female characters go through a transhuman process and achieve a posthuman condition towards the end of the series for quite different reasons, and therefore both come to represent equidistant stances with regards to scientific and STEM developments.

It is now widely acknowledged that both the role and the representation of women in fiction had to be drastically changed. Ever since Hamlet uttered his famous words “Frailty, thy name is woman” (15), there has been a significant and constant shift in how female characters have been portrayed in literature and on screen. As Hollinger puts it, “feminist theories resist the ideological self-representations of the masculinist cultural text that traditionally offers itself as the universal expression of a homogeneous ‘human nature’” (125) and, consequently, we have frequently found in Science Fiction that “in the narratives of this subject, women have tended to play supporting roles as the ‘others’ to men” (125). However, as Dennis M. Lensing points out, “throughout the 20th century... American feminist authors have frequently found utopian fiction a highly useful literary mode in which to develop their various social visions” (87). Science fiction narratives are therefore interesting possibilities to explore the past and also the promising technologically-based futures with significantly different status for women.

*Lovecraft Country* then can be said to use Science Fiction as a medium where a social (and racial) conundrum is tackled. Donyae Coles proposed that “Afrofuturism creates stories that puts Blackness in a central role and deals with the reality of what that means in the cultures and societies that it creates.” In a similar fashion, this HBO’s series provides a story which sets a group of Black people with self-determined women in the spotlight, and which examines their place in Jim Crow society by means of exploring the multiple possibilities which science fiction allows. Bearing in mind the series’ multifaceted nature in terms of social criticism and the different genres it gets inspiration from, it is no wonder that its creators wanted to provide powerful representations of women in such a supernatural and, at times, technological context (being Episode 7 “I Am” one of the clearest examples, with Hippolyta’s time travel through multiple universes thanks to a high-tech time machine).<sup>3</sup>

The series’ aim to provide both women in general and black characters in particular with prominent roles is thus reflected in one of the decisions taken when adapting Matt Ruff’s novel. Regarding this idea, Misha Green, in *Crafting Lovecraft Country*, comments:

Yeah, we gender-swapped a lot of characters... Changing Horace from the book to Diana. We have been really seeing a conversation about violence being done against black boys and we hadn’t quite seen the conversation happening to the extent that it was for young black girls. (Vena)

---

<sup>3</sup> Hippolyta’s travel is highly significant as well because it is both a time travel and an initiation journey in which she realizes two things: that she had been deferring her dreams due to patriarchal constraints and that she is the only one who can give meaning to herself. That is, the only person to define herself by saying “I am.” After all, she comes back from this other-worldly trip with new wisdom and a redefined awareness of her role as a mother (that of taking care of her offspring and of passing a legacy of love and community onto their daughters).

She then goes on to touch on Christina's gender-swap: "Changing Caleb from the book to Christina... What happens when you have a daughter? Are there daughters of Adam?" (in reference to the patriarchal logia "Sons of Adam"). In fact, there is a scene where the protagonist, Atticus, discusses the changes made to the book with his father: "[The book]'s our family story. Some of the details are different. Christina's a man, Uncle George survives Ardham. And uh, Dee's a boy" (HBO). Out of the changes mentioned, two-thirds concern the female figures studied in this paper, which is telling of how the series puts women in the spotlight.

Christina Braithwhite and Dee Freeman therefore stand as ideal substitutes for their male counterparts, for they catalyze relevant messages in new and important ways. For instance, the fact that Christina can transform into a male version of herself is extremely transgressive, for her character thus challenges both patriarchal structures and defies gender configurations (most prominently with her relationship with Leti's sister, Ruby). By magically gender-swapping, she accesses places and environments she had previously been denied by patriarchal and moral constraints imposed by society. Christina is, for example, able to win Ruby over, thus creating an interracial and, unwittingly for the latter, non-heteronormative relationship. Christina is then the prompter of various explorations of contemporary themes, but she is in the end a perpetrator of traditionally problematic behaviors as well. Such faults include the using of the Black protagonists in her own interests or neglecting other people's—and consequently other women's—advancement in her quest for posthumanity.

The inclusion of Dee as a character in detriment of Cousin Horace also allows for interesting possibilities. In Dee, we see an innocent little Black girl who dreams about space and intergalactic travels. In opposition to Horace, Dee is both a message in herself and the catalyst for further discussion as well. She embodies violence (both physical and emotional) on innocent Black young people, for she is cursed by a police officer from the logia and haunted by the country's history as symbolized by Topsy and Bopsy (picaninny caricatures<sup>4</sup> popularized in the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*). Additionally, she is emotionally damaged in several ways, the most prominent being her friend Bobo's death. Regarding the scene in which Bobo's (Emmett Till's) funeral takes place, Heather Seelbach would correctly argue that:

The decaying corpse of Till stirs up trauma in Dee, which represents the real, that which cannot be signified... Lacan's three registers, the real, the imaginary and the symbolic, exist in an entanglement of the iconic photo, the racist society of America, and the miasma of death and decay present in the scene. (6)

In Dee, as opposed to Christina's process of becoming posthuman, we find that she is eventually forced to transcend her body due to the curse imposed on her. Even though the curse is

---

<sup>4</sup> This is a term which has its origin as a pidgin word, although it has derogatory connotations due to its use in relation to African American people's children and the picaninny caricatures which became famous in US advertising. See Cynthia Bailin's "From Picaninny to Savage Brute" (2014) or David Pilgrim's *Understanding Jim Crow* (2015).

reverted thanks to Atticus, Letitia and Hippolyta, Dee's decomposing body did not wholly recover, for an entire arm is left rot. However, the insight which time traveling gave Hippolyta grants her the right knowledge to save her daughter. Therefore, we appreciate how Christina and Dee are represented differs in this regard as well, for their posthumanity comes from poles-apart reasons. While Christina's is attained by using the Black protagonists for her own interest, Dee's posthuman state comes from overcoming racist physical violence and from a process in which community is fundamental for her survival in such a violent environment.

#### IV. PERSONAL TRANSHUMANISM AND IMMORTALITY: CHRISTINA BRAITHWHITE

The character of Christina embodies the prototypical female Gothic figure in its aesthetics, but one with quite contemporary subtexts and which responds to the need to challenge traditional portrayals of female characters.

The most significant scene in which Christina takes part is seen in the second episode, when Atticus is summoned to Samuel Braithwhite's laboratory. There, we find a painting he is observing, which is entitled "Genesis 2:19." Samuel asks if they know what this biblical verse is about, to which Christina replies by reciting it. Although quite long, the verse is worth citing as a whole because of its significance: "And out of the ground, the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air and brought them unto Adam, to see what he would call them. And whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof." She recites it from memory but does so with monotony and an ironic tone. Samuel Braithwhite then develops his point: "... this act of naming is more than a simple picking of labels. Adam is sharing in creation, assigning each creature its final form and its station in the hierarchy of nature... What does that mean Christina? What did Adam do?" Christina then stares at the floor with contempt and Atticus intervenes: "He put everything in its place."

Indeed, the idea of everything being "in its place" undoubtedly refers to the established status quo that placed white men over women and any other person or creature. As Samuel finally states, "at the dawn of time, everything was where and as it should be," a remark which is telling of how he and his logia strove to go back to that state of Nirvana where the hierarchy of nature was undisturbed. However, Christina picks up the argumentation and mockingly adds: "Then that stupid, meddlesome, troublemaking bitch Eve brought entropy and death. What was an elegant hierarchy became a mess of tribes and nations. Of course, it didn't really happen that way. Biblical literalism is for the simple." Christina is, right from the beginning, dissociating herself from that traditional conception of nature and of the patriarchal power system. And what is more, if we go back to a previous quote by Benjamin Ross, we observe that entropy is central to the transhuman discourse inasmuch as it needs to be "edited out of the species" (3). She does not conceive magic as a resource to go back to Nirvana, but a tool to defeat entropy at an individual level, only transforming herself in a posthuman entity.

Her attitude is thus significant with regards to her transhuman ambition of becoming immortal. She wants to use the Sons of Adam's magic power but at the same time rejects the logia's very ideological foundations. After all, Adam was the mortal representation of God, and as mortal, his existence was finite, as we see in this same episode when Samuel Braithwhite dies while performing the immortality spell. Christina's goal, on the contrary, is to achieve what no man (no Adam, that is) has ever achieved: a posthuman condition as an immortal being.

Just as social and gender configurations in Science Fiction, "species are not static entities but dynamic biological systems in constant evolution" (Cordeiro 70). Christina Braithwhite strives to take evolution a step further by becoming posthuman. According to transhuman thinking, "the human body is a good beginning, but we can certainly improve it, upgrade it, and transcend it," being traditional fiction-writing likewise improvable and "transcendable." Christina's character consequently shows a twofold symbolism. She embodies this transhuman ambition of transcending our mortal condition but also symbolizes the series' intention to transgress gender boundaries, for she uses her power both to become male whenever she needs to access male-dominated spaces and to achieve a posthuman state. In fact, according to transhumanist scholar Steven Lilley, there are three forms of transcendence: "cosmic, personal, and *civitas*" (14). The version of transcendence which would best fit the character of Christina is "Personal Transcendence," for it seeks "the bold application of enhancement technologies for *extropy*" or, as Max More would call it, "open-ended lifespan" (qtd. in Lilley 16). Max More defends, in Lilley's words, that "transcendence is primarily a personal experience, a process of self-transformation" (16). Indeed, what Christina Braithwhite strives for is an upgraded lifespan afforded by her access to the "enhancement technologies" which magic provides. However, the posthuman condition to which Christina turns herself is flawed, for this transcendence is achieved by means of an extremely traditional method in the fictional imaginary. Magic is therefore an old-fashioned form of achieving grander enterprises, as opposed to the more advanced stance which cyborg upgrading poses through the character of Dee.

In addition to such tragic flaw, the series implicitly channels another theme through the character of Christina. The extent to which her character challenges patriarchal systems by seeking female advancement is unquestionable, but at what cost? This idea of Christina's quest for achieving a posthuman condition despite patriarchal constraints is clearly a transgressive one, but it also mirrors a problematic which resembles second-wave feminism and the criticism it aroused, as Kevin Wong correctly points out: "It is a common criticism that third wave feminists lob at second wave feminists—that 'feminist' advocacy too often refers to the rights and privileges of white women exclusively, rather than women of color" (Wong). Similarly, "Science fictional feminist critiques have often focused intensively on gendered power relations as experienced by white, middle-class American women; other axes of oppression and difference remain marginal" (Lothian 73). In a similar fashion, Christina defies patriarchal institutions by showcasing that women could also achieve what the Sons of Adams

logia historically sought, but does so by neglecting women of color's rights for similar advancement. Therefore, both the use of old-fashioned technologies and the mistreatment of the series' Black community condemns Christina to a tragic end at the hands of Dee, thus deeming her efforts futile.

## V. CIVITAS TRANSHUMANISM AND CYBORG POSTHUMANISM: DEE FREEMAN

In Dee's case, the transhumanism she represents is, in Stephen Lilley's definition, *civitas* transhumanism. He argues that "because they are augmented by biotech, nanotech [or] neurotech, *cyborg citizens* will be more capable and energetic citizens and be able to contribute more to community and society" (17). In general terms, Dee's bionic and posthuman state is achieved by communal effort and maternal care. Her *civitas* posthumanism consequently has a twofold nature, for it stems from her community's resolution to save her and is used for the survival of her community as well. Therefore, against Christina's individualist stance with regards to posthumanism, Dee poses a more choral approach. And what is more, Dee's state is only made possible because of her mother's help.

As Lillian Osaki points out, "motherhood is important among African American communities because of the position that... mothers have assumed in the survival of black people, their history, and culture" (21). Similarly, Dee survives the curse thanks to Hippolyta's knowledge of a time travel machine which could recover the missing pages of the spell-book. In fact, when the characters are in Tulsa back in the 1921, it is Letitia who retrieves the original book from Atticus and Dee's family's house. Specifically, it is handed to Letitia by Atticus's grandmother, thus reaching a bit further in the ancestral genealogical tree of mother figures. The point here is that the first step towards her posthuman condition takes place because of her mother's urge to recover the spell which would save her life. However, even after successfully saving Dee's life, there still is a mark on her body reminding us of the previous violence exerted on her. Symbolically, instead of lamenting and tormenting over this new bodily state, Hippolyta takes advantage of her technological knowledge from the future to create new possibilities for her offspring, thus representing a different approach to facing a systemic hatred against their race. Alice Walker, in her essay on the artistic legacy of Black mothers, would say with regards to her mother: "She has handed down respect for the possibilities—and the will to grasp them" (408). Likewise, Dee inherits Hippolyta's resolution to turn a situation around by creating new hopes.

In fact, the way in which this situation is reversed is by turning Dee into a cyborg being, a posthuman condition stemming from her unintentional *civitas* transhumanism. Ground-breaking and technologically-advanced as this is in opposition to Christina's immortal state, Dee's condition additionally bears a powerful message. As Donna J. Haraway defines in *A Cyborg Manifesto* (2016), "the cyborg is resolutely committed to partiality, irony, intimacy, and perversity. It is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence. . . the cyborg defines

a technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relations,” to which she adds that, with the cyborg “nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other” (7). Referring to her ideas, Christina Cornea explains that Haraway uses the cyborg “to suggest how feminists might engage with contemporary technological society in a way that can be considered empowering” (278). This may be why, in the series, thanks to maternal love and bio-technological enhancements, Dee is eventually able to rework nature and culture, but also societal and ethnic hierarchies.

By drawing from the Afrofuturist tradition in this sense, the series “appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future” (Dery 180) to picture a utopian possible world. Although Dery proposes that Afrofuturism should be “sought in unlikely places, constellated from far-flung points” (182), the series uses the household of the US to launch its Afrofuturist stance against racism, white feminism and patriarchy through the character of Dee.

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

Resilience is not always sufficient when it comes to facing the different ordeals systemic racism entails, though. Christina Braithwhite is determined to attain immortality to prove that women (that is, white women) can also partake in political and social power and only collaborates with her black counterparts inasmuch as they can help in her undertaking. We therefore see that “despite her empathy for Ruby, and despite her understanding and identification with being a second-class citizen, she still aspires to the power of white men, even at the cost of black bodies” (Wong n.p.).

The final scene when Atticus’s sacrifice has been performed and Christina’s posthuman state has been achieved thus culminates a fictional journey of violence, horror and Science Fiction in which the audience has been moved, terrified, and enlightened to similar extents. The last bit of the series has, at least, a twofold interpretation. It constitutes the ultimate mockery on Lovecraft’s racist and misogynistic literature. After all, it includes one of his famous creations, the shoggoths, a white woman defeated by the race he abhorred, and a young Black girl with a robot arm (a fact which is doubly ironical considering his hatred of advancement and modernization). But it is also highly relevant if we consider the final clash between the two transhumanist approaches at stake here. Christina’s search for immortality stems from her personal quest for reclaiming a space for herself within the patriarchal socio-political circle whereas Dee’s cyborg posthuman condition is incidentally attained as a way of overcoming physical and mental violence posed by systemic racism.

It is no wonder then that, in the end, Christina fails to preserve her posthumanity due to the Black community’s efforts to defeat her. *Lovecraft Country* shows a world which is deeply rooted in our real world, but it is also a universe where magic and wizardry are real things that dictate the socio-political hierarchy. However, this universe is greatly science

fictional as well, for it has myriad possibilities to offer to the oppressed group fighting for survival. While magic stands for the status quo in America, community and technological advancements turn the situation around for Dee and her family. The final magical explosion ends up with Christina exclaiming: “You’ve bound me from magic!,” to which Letitia, another powerful black female in the series replies: “Not just you,” but “every white person in the world... Magic is ours now.”

As the title for the final episode of the series implies (‘Full Circle’), Dee’s process of transhumanization is part of the journey this group of African Americans had to take in order to revert the hierarchy imposed by white society. Additionally, by bounding Christina from magic and subsequently killing her, they close the circle for their community. The final sequence in which Dee crushes Christina’s neck with her black shoggoth companion is the cherry on the cake, for it depicts how it is the new generations who must continue the fight for their freedom.

Both characters embody quite different approaches to transhumanism and posthumanism, thus rendering similarly antagonistic messages. While Christina’s intention is transgressive as it offers an explicit criticism of patriarchal structures, she stands for an individualistic approach to transcendence. On the other hand, Dee’s posthumanism is the product of a process of healing and of overcoming violence, both physical and psychological. In general terms, the inclusion of these two female characters provided the series with some powerful possibilities, for they made possible the discussion of patriarchy, gender representation on the small screen, transhumanism and posthumanism.

## WORKS CITED

- Bruhm, Steven. “The Contemporary Gothic: why we need it.” *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, edited by Jerrold E. Hogle, Cambridge UP, 2006, pp. 259–76.
- Clute, John. “Science Fiction from 1980 to the Present.” *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Edward James, Cambridge UP, 2003, pp. 64–78.
- Coles, Donyae. “Afrofuturism Is The Sh\*t: A Brief History and Five Books to Get You Started.” *Afropunk*, 26 Oct. 2017, [afropunk.com/2017/10/afrofuturism-sht-brief-history-five-books-get-started/](https://afropunk.com/2017/10/afrofuturism-sht-brief-history-five-books-get-started/). Accessed 12 March 2022.
- Cordeiro, José Luis. “The Boundaries of the Human: From Humanism to Transhumanism.” *The Transhumanism Handbook*, edited by Newton Lee, Springer Nature, 2019, pp. 63–74.

- Davison, Carol Margaret. "The American Dream/The American Nightmare: American Gothic on the Small Screen." *A Companion to American Gothic*, edited by Charles L. Crow, John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2014, pp. 488–502.
- Dery, Mark, ed. *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*. Duke UP, 1994.
- Fiedler, Leslie. *Love and Death in the American Novel*. Stein and Day, 1960.
- Garreau, Joel. *Radical Evolution: The Promise and Peril of Enhancing Our Minds, Our Bodies—and What It Means to Be Human*. Random House, 2005.
- Geraghty, Lincoln. "Television Since 1980." *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Mark Bould, Andrew Butler, Adam Roberts and Sherryl Vint, Routledge, 2009, pp. 144–52.
- Gordon, Richard. "Imagining Greek and Roman Magic." *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greek and Rome*, edited by Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, University of Philadelphia Press, 1999.
- Greer, Germaine. *The Female Eunuch*. New York: Bantam, 1970.
- Hayles, N. Katherine. *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics*. The University of Chicago Press, 1999.
- Hogle, Jerrold E. "Introduction: The Gothic in Western Culture." *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction*, edited by Jerrold E. Hogle, Cambridge UP, 2002, pp. 1-20.
- Hollinger, Veronica. "Feminist Theory and Science Fiction." *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Edward James, Cambridge UP, 2003, pp. 125–36.
- Jones, Ellen E. "Lovecraft Country's Jonathan Majors: 'Jim Crow America is literally in my DNA'." *The Guardian*, 13 Oct. 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2020/oct/13/jonathan-majors-lovecraft-country-interview-hbo-horror-marvel-dna-jim-crow-america> Accessed 16 Feb 2022
- LaFleur, Ingrid. "Visual Aesthetics of Afrofuturism." *Youtube*, 25 Sept. 2011.
- Lensing, Dennis M. "The Fecund Androgyne: Gender and the Utopian/Dystopian Imagination of the 1970s." *Socialism and Democracy*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2006, pp. 87–103.
- Lilley, Steven. *Transhumanism and Society: The Social Debate over Human Enhancement*. Springer, 2013.
- O'Connell, Mark. "Episode 16: Transhumanism, Fiction, and Immortality." *Words to That Effect*, 12 March 2018, <https://wttepodcast.com/2018/03/12/transhumanism-fiction-immortality/>. Accessed 6 March 2022.
- Osaki, Lillian. "Redefining Motherhood in African American Neo-Slave Narratives: 'Beloved', Dessa 'Rose', and 'Corregidora.'" *Ahfad Journal*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2014, pp. 21–36.
- Palmer, Christopher. "Philip K. Dick." *A Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by David Seed, John Wiley & Sons, 2005, pp. 389–97.
- Pepetone, Gregory G. *Gothic Perspectives on the American Experience*. Peter Lang, 2003.
- Redmond, Sean. "Film since 1980." *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, edited by Mark Bould, Andrew Butler, Adam Roberts and Sherryl Vint, Routledge, 2009, pp. 134–43.
- Ross, Benjamin. *The Philosophy of Transhumanism: A Critical Analysis*. Emerald Publishing, 2020.

- Sanders, Michael J. "There is an unnamed horror in 'Lovecraft Country.'" *The Ampersand*, <https://artsci.wustl.edu/ampersand/there-unnamed-horror-%C2%A0'lovecraft-country'> Accessed 22 February 2022.
- Seelbach, Heather. "Lovecraft Country Goes Lacanian: Disrupting the White Gaze." 2020. Agnes Scott College, Master's thesis. [heatherseelbach.agnesscott.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Crit-comm-Final-Paper-Lovecraft-Country\\_-Disrupting-the-White-Gaze-2.pdf](https://heatherseelbach.agnesscott.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Crit-comm-Final-Paper-Lovecraft-Country_-Disrupting-the-White-Gaze-2.pdf)
- Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. Collectors Library, 2010.
- Vena, Damien. "Crafting Lovecraft Country." *Youtube*, 29 Oct. 2020.
- Walker, Alice. "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens." *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present*, edited by Angelyn Mitchell, Duke UP, 1994, pp. 401–09.
- Weinstock, Jeffrey A. "American Monsters." *A Companion to American Gothic*, edited by Charles L. Crow, John Wiley & Sons, 2013, 41–55.
- Wester, Maisha L. "The Gothic and the Politics of Race." *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern Gothic*, edited by Jerrold Hogle, Cambridge UP, 2014, pp. 157–73.
- Womack, Ytasha L. *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-fi and Fantasy Culture*. Lawrence Hill Books, 2013.
- Wong, Kevin. "Lovecraft Country Season 1 Finale: Easter Eggs and References in Episode 10, 'Full Circle.'" *Gamespot*, 19 Oct. 2020, [www.gamespot.com/gallery/lovecraft-country-season-1-finale-easter-eggs-and-references-in-episode-10-full-circle/2900-3605/](https://www.gamespot.com/gallery/lovecraft-country-season-1-finale-easter-eggs-and-references-in-episode-10-full-circle/2900-3605/). Accessed 4 May 2021.
- Yaszek, Lisa. "Afrofuturism, Science Fiction, and the History of the Future." *Socialism and Democracy*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2006, pp. 41–60.