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Inheriting Apocalypses:  
Representations of  
the Anthropocene in  
Contemporary Brazilian  
Literature

Abstract: Cultural productions that deal with the idea of the end of the world are a common phenomenon in Western imagination. However, it is not the human species as a whole or even the planet that is facing an end, but, rather, the unsustainable way of existence based on excessive accumulation and limitless exploitation of ecosystems, which puts humanity at risk of a real apocalypse due to climate change and the ecological crisis. Additionally, many other worlds have already undergone their demise or exist within a post-apocalyptic framework, as evidenced by the experiences of various Indigenous peoples. This article aims to examine the representations of the end of the world presented in three Brazilian novels, which employ a combination of satire and pessimism to portray dystopian scenarios threatened by the end. *Não verás país nenhum* [*And Still the Earth*] (1981), by Ignácio de Loyola Brandão, a critique of the process of re-democratization following the civil-military dictatorship in Brazil, set against the backdrop of the severe consequences of the ecological crisis; *A Morte e o Meteoro* (2019), by Joca Reiners Teron, addresses the extinction of an Indigenous people resulting from the devastation of the Amazon as a metaphor for recurrent colonial exploitation; *A Extinção das Abelhas* (2021), by Natalia Borges Polessso, a fragmented narrative that reflects the collapse of the world, from an urban center to an escape through solidarity. In light of the insights offered by thinkers such as Danowski, Ferdinand, and Viveiros de Castro, and in dialogue with the work *Metade cara, metade máscara* (2004) by the Indigenous writer

Eliane Potiguara, we argue for the need to broaden the conception of *single world* and *single end*, in order to transcend this colonial construct that is so unproductive regarding the challenges of the Anthropocene.

Keywords: ecocriticism, dystopia, contemporary Brazilian literature, apocalypse, Anthropocene.

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## Introduction

As reported by Berkeley Earth, an independent climate science research organization, 2024 was the warmest year since the pre-industrial era, and the second in which the annual average surpassed the 1.5°C threshold, reaching 1.62°C of average warming (Berkeley Earth 2025). Additionally, the calculations indicate that there is a 52% chance that 2025 will have an annual average above 1.5 °C. Indeed, the data for 2025 thus far indicate that the situation is unlikely to improve: January 2025 was the warmest January on record and March 2025 tied 2024 and 2023 for the warmest March on record. Furthermore, the extent of Arctic sea ice at its annual maximum was the lowest since satellite tracking began in 1979, largely due to the significant melting of glaciers.

This information demonstrates that we are currently residing within a new climate regime (Latour 2020, 17), necessitating the immediate implementation of mitigation strategies. Failure to implement such measures will result in the intensification of these effects on an annual basis, ultimately jeopardizing the sustainability of our society. As Lovelock (2010, 17) has observed, the Earth is increasingly at risk of changing to a sterile state in which few of us will be able to survive, a scenario that encompasses both humans and non-humans. Indeed, a considerable number of animal and plant species have become extinct in recent decades, which raises the possibility of the Sixth Great Extinction in planetary history (Kolbert 2015).

Information of this nature is undoubtedly important in terms of situating the seriousness of the crisis. However, there is a risk that it will result in an “information dump,” as Timothy Morton (2018, xviii) terms it, namely an excess of knowledge that is often divorced from a broader scientific context and transformed into factoids. This can hinder rather than facilitate awareness of the ecological problem. For Morton, the dump of information “is actually *inhibiting* a more genuine way of handling ecological knowledge. There are better ways of living all of this than we have now, and we don’t even *know* that we are living it right now” (Morton 2018, xxi). Within the ideas of the British thinker, it is important to observe the

spaces of possibility, in search of other premises for entrenched thoughts. In this sense, art appears as a way to speculate on new ways of living and making sense of the crisis, transforming numbers and scientific data into possibilities for thinking, feeling, and acting in the world: “Artwork is a sort of gate through which you can glimpse the unconditioned futurity that is a possibility condition for predictable futures” (Morton 2018, 78).

In the collective imagination of Western civilization, there is a scarcity of apocalyptic visions that depict the extinction of the human race in its entirety. Often there is an escape, as in the mythical example of the salvation of Noah’s Ark, where the patriarch would save himself and still be the selector of the chosen species. Caribbean intellectual Malcolm Ferdinand points out that boarding the ark marks an ideology in which the survival of certain humans and certain non-humans is naturalized based on a certain social and political organization, which legitimizes the violence of selection presupposed by boarding (Ferdinand 2022, 79). In the West, when the end of the world is imagined, artistic representations usually concern the end of a *very specific world*, and what is threatened is the mode of existence that has been widespread over the last few centuries, based on the quest for various forms of excessive accumulation that require limitless exploitation. There is an overproduction of goods, food, waste, and information, and the consequent exploitation of soils, waters, the atmosphere, fossil fuels, non-human beings, and even humans.

In the narratives that explore the end of *this kind of world*, humanity is not extinct; rather, it is forced to live in a very different way than what has been built by capitalist industrial civilization over the last few centuries. However, this is often perceived as a genuine apocalypse. As Australian researcher Claire Colebrook (2019, 43) states, these narratives depict “a post-apocalypse in which the urban conditions of Western hyper-consumption have vanished and we are reduced to mere life, or it is a horrifying return to stateless nomadism, such that ‘we’ are now living in conditions that we simply cannot call a world.” It is not coincidental that *this specific world* of excess and exploitation is the same one that has produced the planetary changes that threaten the continuity of human life as a species. In other words, “the very conditions that we mourn at the end of the world (such as an imminent end to hyper-consumption) are the cause of accelerated extinctions rates” (Colebrook 2019, 44).

Therefore, the world of excess that emerged in the mid-fifteenth century, when a series of transformations of landscape, class, territory, and technology occurred (Moore 2022, 23), resulting in both biospheric instability and the current situation of capital accumulation and social inequality, must end if humanity is to avoid extinction. If this world is maintained,

it will end along with the possibility of human life on Earth. Either way, the days of *this world* are numbered.

This forces us to acknowledge that, just as with the Anthropocene crisis, an apocalypse has disparate and localized perspectives and implications. There is a significant distinction between the end of *the world* and the end of a *world*. In this sense, the Brazilian scholars Danowski and Viveiros de Castro (2017, 37) posit that the concept of the “end of the world” can only be thought as possible if we simultaneously determine for whom this world that is ending is configured as a world, in other words, who is the worldling that defines this end: in essence, the world is an objective perspective. Indigenous literature written in Portuguese in Brazil often thematizes this violence. A twenty-year-old book, *Metade cara, metade máscara* ([*Half face, half mask*]2004),<sup>1</sup> by Eliane Potiguara, sews together fragments of non-fiction and poetry based on the defense of the visibility of displaced Indigenous peoples (‘without a world’ for our analysis)—people who, in the second half of the twentieth century, suffered not only the murder and loss of their lands, but also the destruction of their sacred cemeteries (2018, 23). Eliane Potiguara emphasizes that “the story told here is not an unusual case” (2018, 29). For the author, the difference between her autobiographical account of the violence of the British colonial endeavor, interwoven with a love story and poems, and the experience of other people, is that most of them cannot narrate this loss; the majority “remained silent, sick, mad, isolated in the surrounding society” (2018, 29), pointing to an additional layer of terror: the invisibility of the catastrophe to other eyes.

Ailton Krenak (2019, 71), an Indigenous intellectual, also notes that several other worlds have faced their end in earlier times, such as the various Indigenous peoples who were wiped out by the arrival of Europeans from the sixteenth century onwards in Abya Yala, as the Kuna people call the land that was named America after colonization. French scholar Bruno Latour supports this idea, going so far as to suggest that the Anthropocene could be said to have begun in 1610, when Europeans brought the plague to the Americas and decimated some 54 million Indigenous people by killing them by disease (2020, 291). Within this perspective, Colebrook reinforces this difference in the views of the end of the world:

Extinction, genocide, erasure of a way of life: when these occur elsewhere they are occasions for lament. But when the loss is contemplated of the humanity that forged itself as *the world* (by narrating and making sense of its others) *that amounts to the end of the world* (Colebrook 2019, 44).

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1 The English language titles of texts as well as various citations have been freely translated by the authors of this article.

And even this extinct world of Abya Yala cannot be considered a *single world*. Danowski and Viveiros de Castro point out that what Westerners generally call ‘the world’ means to Amazonian peoples a “multiplicity of intricately connected multiplicities” (Danowski and Viveiros de Castro 2017, 97). Amerindians thus believe that there are many more societies and humans between heaven and earth than Western anthropologies and philosophies dream of.

There are therefore as many or more ‘worlds’ as there are different modes of existence, and only one of them is the propagator of the only definitive end of the world, which puts all human beings in the same boat heading towards extinction; which is, specifically the boat called the Anthropocene, motorized by the idea of progress and of industrial capitalist civilization.

At the same time, if we think of the world as synonymous with the planet, the coming decades or centuries may be a period of transformation, but in no way will it lead to the end of the world. As scientist James Lovelock (2010, 31) points out, it’s not the Earth that needs saving. The planet will go on without *Homo sapiens*, just as it went on without the dinosaurs.

Several contemporary narratives denounce the fact that the world of industrial capitalist exploitation, based on progress that depends on the unlimited exploitation of nature, will lead us to a slow process of suffering that will first affect the most vulnerable sectors of the planetary population and whose consequence could be the total end of the human species. In addition to the aforementioned book by Eliane Potiguara, *Metade cara, metade máscara* (2004), we present three contemporary novels that address this theme within the context of fiction: *Não verás país nenhum* ([*And Still the Earth*] 1981), *A morte e o meteoro* ([*Death and the Meteor*] 2019) and *A extinção das abelhas* ([*The extinction of Bees*] 2021), by Natália Borges Polesso.

### ***Não verás país nenhum: An End-of-the-World Military Project***

Published in Brazil in 1981, Ignácio de Loyola Brandão’s novel *Não verás país nenhum* [*And Still the Earth*] reached readers at a time when, as Brazilianist Elizabeth Ginway (2005, 126) points out, Brazil had been under a civil-military dictatorship for seventeen years and the negative environmental consequences of the authoritarian government’s attempts at modernization and urbanization could no longer be completely hidden.

Born in the city of Araraquara (1936), the Brazilian author of the novel and journalist even experienced censorship of his works during the dictatorship. In fiction, this perception began to appear in the form of one of Brazil's first and rare twentieth-century ecological dystopias, the genre in which Ginway classifies Brandão's novel.

The work has a visionary approach in the way the narrative relates the possibility of a future environmental catastrophe to the consequences of human political and economic activity, a way of thinking that would only gain popularity in the 1990s. This makes *Não verás país nenhum* one of the pioneering novels in the depiction of the anthropogenic climate crisis, alongside works by authors such as Ursula Le Guin, Arthur Herzog and Richard Cowper. It is worth recalling that as early as 1900, the Brazilian writer Euclides da Cunha, while visiting the coffee plantations of southeastern Brazil, perfectly described human-induced climate change in a surprisingly contemporary vocabulary: "We have been a nefarious geological accident and an element of terribly barbaric antagonism to the nature that surrounds us" (Cunha 1967, 158). Perhaps this pioneering anthropocentric observation is most evident in regions of the world where the vision of colonial capitalist rupture cannot be hidden.

In fact, several of the problems that Brandão's fictional Brazil faces in the narrative derive from the colonial expedition and coincide with our reality today, more than forty years after its publication, such as heat waves, water shortages, and the threat of deforestation in the Amazon rainforest reaching a point of no return. It is as if the novel foreshadows a moment that will come to us now, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, reinforcing the idea that the present is itself historically dystopian (Moylan 2016, 15).

The book recounts the wanderings of Souza, a man in his fifties with arthritis in his knee. His job, formerly in education in the field of history, has been replaced by a bureaucratic and meaningless job. As a representative of the middle class, Souza has been married to Adelaide for 32 years and together they face food and water rationing, as well as the pressure to pay bribes to militiamen for a minimum of security. At one point, his nephew Dominginhos, a "militecno," ends up taking Souza's place in the house, with Adelaide's consent (a "militecno" is a fictitious army rank controlling the best posts in the country, from ministries to banks and multinational companies, a symbol of the metaphorical fusion between authoritarianism and private capital). So, with his marriage broken up, the protagonist decides to wander around a ruined São Paulo; in this way, Souza's wanderings move the narrative form to explain and detail this reality altered by fiction and the protagonist takes the reader on an immer-

sion into a territory devastated by a technocratic military and totalitarian government known as “Esquema,” whose machinations have caused widespread social, economic, and climate crises.

In this scenario, the ruling state bureaucracy slows down the simplest decisions, prevents people from moving and accessing basic resources, and ensures that information is manipulated or hidden by the official media. The Amazon rainforest became a desert, and without the rains provided by the moisture from its vegetation layer, hydroelectric power plants throughout the country were shut down. As a result, water became scarce and is controlled by tokens, which are also a currency for bribery and human trafficking; in Souza’s description of his condo, he explains that a janitor needs to do a bargain with the garbage collectors and to talk skillfully with official water suppliers, illustrating how organized crime has become part of daily bureaucracy. Human urine is turned into a resource in the novel, subjected to questionable purification, and returned as a potable liquid used in various applications. Without water, with the extreme heat and chemical contamination of the soil and rivers, there are practically no plants or non-human animals left, and food has become totally artificial. The aridity of the environment spreads dust over everything, and in certain hot wet bulbs that suddenly appear, the high temperature kills people in seconds:

There were other strange phenomena, like the heat pockets: areas of intense heat, impossible to stand in or even pass through. You’d be walking along and suddenly you were enveloped by incredible heat, you’d start to run, to try to escape, some of the heat pockets were small enough to come out the other side. In the beginning it was a sort of game. Dramatic, amusing—how all of a sudden someone in front of you would begin leaping about in confusion and run, screaming, back in your direction. Then everyone would hang back, aware that this behavior meant danger ahead. Later, when we went on our long trek, we saw that there were heat pockets everywhere. In certain regions they were immense, extending for kilometers. And then came the Period of Intolerable Weather. You just couldn’t be exposed to the sun at all anymore. You’d go out in the street, and in a matter of seconds your face was hairless, burnt, and peeling, twisted out of shape. The light cut like a laser. In time the danger of the heat pockets increased. Once inside, there was no way out. Sun like a drill, it would kill you instantly, for sure (Brandão 2013, 224).

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The severity of situations like the one in the passage above portrayed in the narrative of *Não verás país nenhum* reflects precisely how abnormal it would be to consolidate the ‘victory’ of Man over Nature, a dualism that has characterized Western thought for centuries. One of the hallmarks of this aspect of the narrative appears, for instance, in the celebration of the transformation of the Amazon into a desert by the country’s rulers and businessmen. This is a drastic event, but its origins are perfectly in line with the ideology of the Brazilian government in the 1970s, which Brandão lived through. In this regard, Eliane Brum (2021, 27) points out that the civil-military dictatorship that oppressed Brazil from 1964 to 1985 carried out the first major project for the massive destruction of the Amazon rainforest, and also spread and promoted the idea that progress should reach this territory through deforestation, extraction of resources, and domination of nature and all the beings present there, who were considered irrelevant from an ecological point of view and, in the case of the Indigenous peoples, not even part of humanity.

In the novel, Esquema’s government defends the destruction of the Amazon as a demonstration of progress. So, when the forest is finally transformed into a desert, the authorities publicize the fact as if it were a great event, the birth of the “Ninth Wonder”:

I’ll never forget the infamous afternoon our new Minister of Real Estate Transactions declared on national television that “we should be proud of this most recently completed conquest—a great act by a government which is always thinking of our future.” History, he said, would show how the System had created for our country one of the great marvels of the modern world. Now we, too, had a Sahara to be proud of—and our brand new desert would be photographed, filmed, painted. It would become a tourist attraction, a stage for glorious adventures. “As of today”—and he smiled rapturously—“we can boast a truly marvelous desert, hundreds of times larger than the Sahara, and even more beautiful. Utterly magnificent! We bestow on the world nothing less than the Ninth Wonder. Soon newsstands here and abroad will be flooded with images of our limitless plains, fantastically high dunes, singularly dry riverbeds” (Brandão 2013, 66).

This passage clearly shows the sadistic pleasure with which the destruction of the environment is celebrated, in exchange for a capitalization that favors only the ruling classes, although it drastically worsens the living conditions of all people, regardless of their economic power. The rulers and the super-rich—who in the narrative have no specific characteriza-

tion, being practically an inapprehensible entity—revel in their Ninth Wonder, unable to realize or accept that even they depend on the preservation of the biosphere to continue living, which exacerbates the separation between Nature and Culture. Economic progress is understood as exploitation and domination over all ecosystems, which are considered part of *another world*, archaic and problematic, separate from the *civilized world*. The ruling class in the novel don't realize that their quest to transform nature into commodities and profit will lead to their own demise, due to the environmental and climatic consequences of this process. In other words, these authorities and business people are incapable of seeing that these two worlds are interconnected, and in the height of their narcissism they don't accept that the *world of capital* is the most fragile in this relationship and that it depends on the *planetary world*. It's as if they would rather enjoy their privileges to the last drop and die in the process, than even think about a life of deprivation from excessive consumption.

At the same time as Brandão denounces this distorted view of the world on the part of those in power and explains the tragic ecological consequences of their actions, he creates, throughout the novel, countless situations as absurd as the one in the passage above—in which belly dancers dance over the remains of the Amazon rainforest—which make the reader alternate between despair and laughter. This satirical view of the ecological crisis, according to Morton, is a possible way out of the horror and melancholy that paralyze us, leaving a breach for desiring action. At some point, the horror becomes so absurd that it reaches the point of ridiculousness, leading to “Laughter inside tragedy. Comedy, the possibility space of which tragedy is a rare form. Comedy, the genre of coexistence” (Morton 2016, 119). This satirical approach thus allows us to deal with the horrors of the ecological crisis without sinking deeper into a depressive state, while also enabling the exploration of potential avenues for transformation. This utopian opening is confirmed at the end of the novel, when the smell of rain brought by the wind heralds a new moment, not the end of the world, but perhaps the chance for a new beginning.

Through a narrative that shows a nonconformist citizen going through various situations that range from the tragic to the absurd in the midst of a São Paulo devastated by the ecological crisis and the repression of a dictatorial government, *Não verás país nenhum* therefore speculates on the possibility of an ecological and climatic catastrophe caused not only by the decisions of a government, but also by the incessant search for modernization and progress based on the exploitation of nature, which is, in turn, seen merely as a source of resources. The novel thus highlights the view that there is only *one world* to be protected, that of the incessant

production of goods and the exaltation of technical progress, while the Earth itself is collapsing. It is a portrait of the implementation, to the last consequence, of the modern project of progress on a planet with finite resources, a fact that we can also call the Anthropocene. At the end of the story, however, there is the emergence of a utopian impulse, as the birth of a plant from the debris and the possibility that it will soon rain signal that perhaps *this world*, the planet, has not yet been completely destroyed.

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### ***A morte e o meteoro: End of the World and Cosmological Obliteration***

Another Brazilian work that deals with the theme of the end of different worlds is the novel *A morte e o meteoro* (2019) by Joca Reiners Terron, a Brazilian writer and translator born in the city of Cuiabá (1968). In this dystopia, we once again find ourselves in a virtually deserted Amazonian rainforest, reduced to a few dozen hectares of nearly desiccated trees, home to the fifty remaining individuals of the fictional Kaajapukugi people, the last isolated Indigenous community. Unable to continue in the inhospitable environment and hunted by miners, loggers, landowners, police, military and government officials, in yet another episode in the colonial plot of death and plunder that Terron's narrator (2019, 11) calls "colonial psychosis," the Indigenous people ask for political asylum. They are taken to Oaxaca, Mexico, through an articulation made by Boaventura, a Brazilian 'sertanista'— a title that refers to the explorers who, from the sixteenth century onwards, violently invaded Indigenous and quilombola territories, killing, enslaving, and extracting precious stones and other riches, and who became known as 'bandeirantes'— one who had dedicated his life to study and, contradictorily, to protect the community's way of life.

This was an attempt to save the world of the Kaajapukugi from the wider apocalypse that had been ravaging the Amazon since European colonization in the sixteenth century. However, the emigration of these remnants as political refugees proved to be only a temporary postponement of their end, as there were no women or children among them. They were already destined to disappear, and the whole process, according to the narrator, was just another "lie dictated by the victors" (Terron 2019, 11) that end up as "the truth whimpering from another defeat, now undoubtedly final" (2019, 11).

The nameless Mexican indigenist who narrates the novel becomes responsible for accompanying the emigration of the Kaajapukugi after

Bonaventura's sudden and mysterious death. If we think of this process as part of a migration caused by the ecological crisis, the removal of these Indigenous people from their land and their transport on an airplane to another country is an action that can be understood according to what Ferdinand (2022, 79) calls "Noah's ark's boarding politics," that is, a way of dealing with the problem of climate refugees that "creates people who are conceptually stripped of their respective cultural identities and historicities by reducing them to 'loss-bodies'. The ecology of Noah's ark implies the loss of the names, cultures, and subjectivities of those on board" (Ferdinand 2022, 79). In this kind of politics, there is no concern with saving communities, cosmologies, cultural practices, and modes of existence; the "cultural diversity of the world and the plurality of histories are erased in favor of a scene where only the number of loss-bodies to be saved is counted" (Ferdinand 2022, 80).

The Kaajapukugi can thus be understood as yet another commodity taken from the Amazon to be valued as a number elsewhere, a hypocritical salvage policy that counts only as a media spectacle. By doing so, Terron presents a metaphor for the colonial process of invading the so-called 'New World,' a place to be explored and treated as a source of resources since 1492, highlighting the modern ontological separation between Nature and Culture, which also places the various Indigenous worlds and the white-Western world in different positions: the latter can dominate and destroy the former. As Benatti (2023, 15) points out, there was an interest in taking from this New World everything that could be taken, all the material wealth, but in order to do so they also took away a large part of the cultural wealth.

In the novel, the *sertanista* Boaventura makes it clear that these indigenous people are no more than "dead people walking towards nowhere" (Terron 2019, 24), since along with the forest, their ecosystem had already been completely destroyed, including "their sacred medicinal plants, and even the poisons in which they soaked their arrows and the timbó vine they used to fish. The fish died, the rivers dried up. Everything disappeared, even the beetles from which they extracted tinsáanhán". The erasure was also cosmological, since "[w]ith the disappearance of the tinsáanhán, their upper world was also swallowed up, and with it their gods, their feasts, up to the three Heavens, where they would rest in the fields, happily hunt beetles and make love to their women" (2019, 24). In other words, their world had already come to an end, and now they would lose even the bal-last of their territory which would be, for them, a truly post-apocalyptic scenario, a terrible situation that finds echoes in the autobiographical account included in the aforementioned work by Eliane Potiguara (2018).

Joca Terron's narrative gains yet another layer of hypocrisy when we discover that Boaventura himself, an ardent defender of the Kaajapukugi, was responsible for a fundamental part of their world's end, since years earlier he had kidnapped, raped, and driven to death the last woman of this ethnic group, fulfilling his role as a *sertanista*, a satire which is also reinforced by his name, a surname typical of Portugal, the country that colonized Brazil, which also means 'good fortune.' The story represents the emptying of this Noah's Ark-like boarding politics. The fact is that for beings who do not experience the separation between Nature and Culture, like these Indigenous people, what the ecological crisis brings will always be *the end of their world*, because their cosmology and mode of existence are organically linked to the territory, the climate, the water, the forest, the soil, the farm.

It is no coincidence that the Kaajapukugi perform a ritual of self-sacrifice shortly after arriving at their assigned place in Oaxaca: suicide becomes a form of resistance for the entire Indigenous tribe against the process of colonization and exile imposed on them by the white man (Benatti 2023, 18). In Eliane Potiguara's nonfiction account, we find a tragically similar passage: "During the process of Indigenous slavery, many parents and families committed mass suicide against this form of oppression. They would jump off cliffs. It was an act of resistance" (Potiguara 2004, 23).

Without their land, their women, their children, and without the possibility of cosmological practices, the Indigenous community in Joca Terron's fiction was already living as undead people, and the actual passage to the world of the dead would be the only option to be reborn, according to their beliefs, in the "Third Heaven" (Terron 2019, 98).

At this point, the novel opens a breach for a possible utopian turn, as it is revealed that the practice of committing suicide was common among the Kaajapukugi in order to "continue in the Third Heaven, young and brave, and not as incapable old men" (Terron 2019, 98). In addition, their understanding of time is cyclical, as the world has a limit, and when it is reached, "Xijjè, the World, must repeat itself" (2019, 99), as a cycle of destruction and rebirth.

From this point of view, it is possible to see the exile of the Kaajapukugi not only as "a cunning political swindle disguised under the cloak of great humanitarian causes" (Terron 2019, 100), as Terron's narrator suspects, but also as a cosmological stratagem on the part of the Indigenous people aimed at renewing the planet as a whole. At the end of the narrative, while a plane is transporting the fifty dead bodies to Brazil, a meteor hits the Earth, causing complete destruction of the planet's surface, a

definitive *end of the world*. At that moment, one of the skiffs falls and opens, allowing the body to roll out: “He lifts his head and looks at me, stunned. [...] As if death were nothing more than the buzzing of an annoying fly” (Terron 2019, 115).

At the same time, throughout the novel, the narrator comments on moments of the space voyage of the Tiantáng I, a Chinese spacecraft bound for Mars “manned by a single couple whose arduous mission would be to fill Mars with little Chinese people” (Terron 2019, 65). Here, the inhabitants of a country on the other side of the planet, marked by racial and cultural otherness, simultaneously point to the exoticizing perspective of the narrative regarding Indigenous peoples and Chinese people, and also accentuate globalized relations. Curiously, the Chinese spacecraft displayed a symbol identical to the pictogram woven into the ceremonial costumes of the Kaajapukugi. Moreover, the Chinese astronaut and the last Indigenous woman abducted by Boaventura bore a disturbing resemblance: “they had the same corner-of-the-lip smile and Chinese ocelot eyes on the same round face” (Terron 2019, 104). The Chinese cosmodrome loses contact with the spacecraft shortly after launch, and a signal is not picked up until just before the meteor hits Earth. Thus, while the planet is destroyed in an explosion, the lost Chinese pilot of the Tiantáng I moves on to a “Third Heaven,” and the fifty “men/beetles” return to life, reenacting the Kaajapukugi cosmological cycle of world destruction and creation:

At the beginning of everything there was a great explosion in Di-yì-wài, the First Heaven, and Di-èr-wài, the Second Heaven where we now live, and this clash allowed Xikú-feixiguiuán, the Lost Pilot, to come from Di-sân-wài, the Third Heaven, inside Tinsáanhán, she said, the Great Beetle, from where came the black cloud of fifty smaller beetles, the Pilots, who defecated on Xéngjié-de-xuìmíán-dao, the Island of Sacred Sleep. By eating the feces of the fifty beetles, the Lost Pilot also defecated, and from his belly came the ancestors of the Kaajapukugi (Terron 2019, 80).

So it could be the end of almost the entire human species, but also a new beginning when the big beetle returns from Mars and gives birth to a new humanity. An end of the world that opens the door to a utopian new beginning. Or, as Brito states, “[i]f the ecological extinction of the Earth means the extinction of the human species, the spaceship to Mars will lead the Chinese Adam and Eve as the rebirth of the Kaajapukugi to a new environment” (Brito 2023, 61).

*A morte e o meteoro* thus appears as a great metaphor for the domination of peoples, violence against others, and greed that have been part of Brazilian history since colonization (Benatti 2023, 14), a process that repeats itself cyclically, leading us ever faster toward the dystopian future of ecological crisis and mass extinction depicted in the novel. Furthermore, the novel highlights the way in which there are *worlds that are already extinct* and peoples who already live in a post-apocalyptic scenario, and who, therefore, face the planetary crisis of the Anthropocene with a different perspective from those who still believe that survival of *the world of consumption* is sufficient for humanity.

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### ***A extinção das abelhas: the End of the World* Broadcast in Real Time**

The novel *A extinção das abelhas* (2021) by Natália Borges Polesso, a writer born in 1981 in the city of Bento Gonçalves, who is also an academic and has won awards for her short stories, was published in Brazil in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of the country's extreme right-wing government. Critic Júlia Braga Neves says that the novel, set in the near future, "deals precisely with the pessimism, collapse and lethargy of contemporary Brazil, even if one can imagine a utopian desire at the end of the narrative" (2023, 135).

The title alludes to a real danger within the Sixth Extinction panorama: the threat of the disappearance of bees. Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD), the disappearance of pollinating honeybees, has been reported since 1869 and has worsened in the last two decades. Because they are considered 'livestock' they are a rare example of an arthropod remembered in the evolution of extinction, within what Malcolm Ferdinand will criticize within the notion of animal fracture (2022), since some non-human animals are more revered in their deaths than others. Which insects would be invited on to Noah's Ark? In the Patriarch's logic of observing the usefulness of non-human animals, bees would certainly go because of their primary function of pollination and honey production. Without bees, there would be no fruit or other human food. This fear has been explored in contemporary works such as the Norwegian novel *The History of Bees: A Novel*, by Maja Lunde (2015) and the Brazilian novella *Bugônia* by Daniel Galera (2021)—from the same year as Polesso's novel—Galera even draws on Virgil's *Georgics* to recount the misfortunes of the shepherd Aristaeus, who inexplicably lost his bees, a use of classical literature that suggests the

longevity of this fear of the loss of honey, which was considered sacred in Virgil's time.

Despite its title, the novel by Polesso does not focus on the discussion of animality, but, rather on the process of decline and disintegration of civilization as we know it in the West, in a region of southern Brazil. During the apocalyptic narrative, there is a "collapsometer," described as a "planetary protection and security measure" (Polesso 2021, 25). At one point, the protagonist, Regina, realizes that the "end of the world" is very close: "I had arranged to go to the movies with Paula, a trivial thing, a little breath of fresh air. But the first thing she said when she saw me was that if the bees really died out, the world would end" (Polesso 2021, 26). Like Souza, the protagonist of *Não verás país nenhum*, Regina is an intellectual with health problems, whose knowledge no longer makes sense in this reality. Unemployed at the age of forty, hypertensive and diabetic, she has a master's degree in literary theory, but doesn't have a diploma because she got involved sentimentally with her advisor, a woman in her sixties.

In the novel, environmental degradation goes hand in hand the degradation of social and political institutions, especially democracy, and the decline in people's living conditions, in a similar vein to the stories of Loyola Brandão and Terron. Polesso also makes frequent use of humor, continuing this tradition of combining satire with dystopia, as if the sense of catastrophe that is always present in the landscapes of the Global South could only be narrated with the softness of laughter; otherwise, it would be too dark, given the similarity to reality. Satire here is constituted through language, for example, when explaining the precariousness of the world of work, using the slang term "*frila*," a Portuguese adaptation of the term 'freelance worker': "Maybe they'll call me to do some *frilas*. — *Frilas*? — That's what they said. Imagine me, sixty years old, having to do *frilas*." (2021, 283). Satire is also constituted through absurdity: for example the protagonist managing to make money by creating and uploading pornographic videos on the internet whilst wearing a gorilla mask. This absurdity alludes to a double layer of interpretation: citing a famous amusement park attraction of dubious taste in Latin America between 1970 and 1990 (the *Monga*); and, at the same time, citing the activism of the Guerrilla Girls, a group of anonymous artists who were formed in New York in 1985, with the mission of bringing to light gender and racial inequality within the artistic community. This fusion of popular and art references allows for a humorous but also critical effect, two characteristics of political satire.

The urban space of the novel, the city of Santiago, in the south of Brazil, suffers from the current Brazilian dictatorial regime, very much in the spirit of neoliberalism, which combines the exploitation of raw

materials with business conglomerates: “Agrotech, the whole bunch said that everything was ‘under control,’ that there were ‘other means,’ and that the function of technology was to ‘overcome nature’” (2021, 17). As with Brandão’s dystopia, the urban privileged classes hide behind walls, in privatized streets where life could still have some sense of normality, something that gradually crumbles in the novel, given the severe pollution, lack of products, and poisoning by pesticides (“You can’t fool around. Our neighbors there put poison on the apples. They look beautiful, Regina. But it’s death. Now they sell well in the supermarket” (2021, 33), suggesting that the local bourgeois way of life is no longer possible, even though people pretend not to notice the decay.

The first part of the novel consists of two interwoven narratives. Later, it is completed with collages of real news reports and third-person narratives, marking the accelerated pace of the collapse. If Eliane Potiguara had to stitch together literary species, from autobiography to poetry, to create *Metade cara, metade máscara*, then something similar happens in Polesso’s enjambment, as if the narrative is on the verge of unraveling, just as the world is tearing itself apart.

In the first-person section, the narrator is called Regina, “a queen’s name,” as the novel emphasizes. An academic with a master’s degree in literary theory, she speaks English, Spanish, French, and German, but she can’t get a decent job; she’s still unemployed and at risk of impoverishment, doing odd jobs that pay very little. In addition to her economic hardship, Regina also suffers from chronic health problems, as if the environmental disgrace has found an echo in her body. Finally, her problems still lie in her human relationships, her heart still broken by her last love, a university professor. In the face of general misery, in a world where religion and homophobia also threaten existences like hers, she decides to put on a gorilla mask and make a living making pornographic content for online clients: “So you’re a prostitute now? —I don’t know. Was I? I was” (2021, 103).

In the second narrative, alternating with Regina’s, we have the third-person narration of the past life of the narrator’s mother, Guadalupe or Lupe, who decided to give up everything, including her young daughter, to perform as a *Monga* in a circus. The showman defines her as a “gorilla woman,” although she prefers “wild woman” (2021, 63). As the epithet of a free woman, Lupe travels a lot, all over Brazil, the Americas, and other places of the world, joining two lovers and other loves, being wise to stay away from toxic relationships and trying to enjoy life in its deepest sense. She will lose a limb and become an amputee, although her sense of community will keep her active and as fulfilled as possible, in a world that was

still possible because the climate emergency was not so pronounced, present, and pressing.

There are some points that unite the narratives; in particular, the relationship between mother and daughter, when the protagonist of the first narrative receives from her father “that bizarre image in which my mother, embracing two boys, was half dressed as a gorilla, holding a hairy head under her arm” (2021, 71). It is from this image that Regina decides to put her own naked body on canvas, promoting a kind of revenge and arousing desire in people who didn’t want her before. In the plot, the far right is on the rise and Regina, like her mother Lupe, will depend on her community to survive: “and the government is trying to implement policies that don’t sound so racist, but we know they are. Have you heard about the ‘immigrant-free zones,’ the ‘gay-free zones,’ and the refugee camps?” (2021, 76).

As the decay of everything accelerates, Regina goes mad. The final narrative, however, sews together a utopia and points the way to collective thinking. Told in the third person, it shows the protagonist being rescued by Lu (with whom Regina had a brief relationship), who refuses to leave her friend behind. With eight other women, they flee—as the narrative takes on the feel of a road movie or a train western, using guerrilla techniques as well as Indigenous paths—to find a safe place. These women have been left to their own devices, without boarding passes for the neo-liberal Noah’s Ark.

Initially rejected, Regina begins to integrate and observes how the other women love and protect each other, taking a route similar to Lupe’s on the road to Santa Cruz de La Sierra. In the end, the women are reunited and decide to stay for a while (it is unsure how long) at the Balneario El Rincón, in an idyllic landscape with a dam, a small house, and a cornfield; spending their time naked in the water. The critic Júlia Braga Neves recalls, referring to Elena Gomel and Vered Kart Shemtov, that the term ‘apocalypse’ in its biblical origins is associated with revelations and prophecies (Neves 2023, 147), and what the author gives us in the end is a loving and inclusive place of resistance. If the bourgeois world has reached its end, it is possible to continue living in this refuge. Unlike Terron’s Kaajapukugi, who are doomed to end because only men of their ethnicity are left, Polesso’s women are a promise of the continuity of the species. We can assume that Polesso needed a fictional utopian relief to counter the overall sense of danger Brazilians felt due to the recent rise of the extreme right and continuous environmental destruction.

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## Final Words

Based on the works discussed here, we understand that contemporary Brazilian literature—at least that which adopts a more critical orientation—offers ways to represent and translate into personal feeling and experience the idea that there is not merely one world to be saved in the Anthropocene. These works emphasize that the notion of the end of a single world is a colonial construct, a worldview rooted in the belief that the Western world of progress and consumption is the only one that matters and, therefore, the only one worth preserving.

*Não verás país nenhum*, through the construction of a dystopian and tragic scenario of ecological destruction, explores what would occur if the drive to save this singular world of progress were taken to its extreme consequences. *A Morte e o Meteoro*, likewise, imagines a future of degradation, but places greater emphasis on the fact that many Indigenous peoples, particularly in Latin America, have experienced and continue to experience apocalyptic situations normalized by deforestation and the appropriation of ecosystems through colonial enterprises, such as the plantation system and other modern forms of environmental extraction and destruction. *A extinção das abelhas*, through its alternation of narrative perspectives and discursive modes, illustrates the parallel decline of democratic institutions and environmental degradation. The novel weaves together the voices of female characters, particularly those in homoerotic relationships, creating a multifaceted critique of contemporary climate crises. Ultimately, the narrative proposes that cultivating a renewed sense of community and strengthening bonds of solidarity might offer a viable path forward from these interconnected social and ecological challenges.

Although a pessimistic outlook and the memory of authoritarian regimes—ranging from the civil-military dictatorship to the rise of the Bolsonarist right—remain dominant themes in these narratives, all three works present moments of utopian openness and breath, pointing toward other possible worlds; especially shaped by the strength of communities and the enduring force of persistence. Thus, these narratives seek to connect different experiences of world-ending events, expanding the Western imaginary—which presumes the existence of *only one world* worth saving—to include fragmented perspectives on the *plurality of worlds* that exist and consider that *many worlds* have already been extinguished, while simultaneously underscoring the urgency of contemporary ecological issues.

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