

Francesco Aloe's Climate Fiction: Ruins, Bodies and Memories from the Future in *L'ultima bambina d'Europa*

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Abstract

L'ultima bambina d'Europa (*The Last Girl of Europe*), written by Francesco Aloe, is a captivating example of Italian cli-fi. Inspired by Pulitzer-prizewinning American novel *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, *L'ultima bambina d'Europa* narrates the story of a young Italian family traveling southbound in an exhausting voyage toward Africa, where, they presume the sun is still visible, the wind is softly blowing, and water and food supplies have not run out, at least, not yet. In this article, I will analyze some of the novel's main cli-fi *topoi* and connect them to the narrative and rhetorical construction employed by the author. Specifically, I will focus on the effect of estrangement, by which the novel engages readers in a non-anthropocentric gaze. I show how the perspectives of the main protagonists—mother, father and their daughter Sofia—might potentially enhance readers' awareness of the gluttonous nature of capitalism that functions only for a few. On their journey, these three characters traverse a barren and devastated landscape void of temporal and spatial references. However, in this unspecified gloomy future scenario, readers will recognize the ruins of our current society and of our petroculture, heavily influenced by the American model of consumerism. Sofia's parents seem to suffer from "petro-melancholia" (LeMenager, *Living Oil* 102), as they recollect nostalgically the petrochemical culture in which they grew up. This is in stark contrast to the perspective of Sofia, who has no recollection of a capitalist society. Finally, this analysis will underscore Aloe's prowess in situating death among the living, where its visibility reminds the reader the place where it rightfully belongs.

Keywords: Italian cli-fi, Anthropocene, estrangement effect, corporeality, petroculture, collapse.

Resumen

L'ultima bambina d'Europa (*La última niña de Europa*), escrito por Francesco Aloe, es un cautivador ejemplo de ficción climática italiana. Inspirada en la novela americana ganadora de un premio Pulitzer *The Road* de Cormac McCarthy, *L'última bambina d'Europa* narra la historia de una joven familia italiana rumbo al sur en un extenuante viaje hacia África. Supuestamente el sol todavía es visible, la brisa sopla suave, y el agua y las reservas de comida no se han agotado, por lo menos aún. En este artículo, analizaré algunos de los principales *topoi* de la ficción climática y los conectaré con la narrativa y la construcción retórica del autor. Me centraré, concretamente, en el efecto de distanciamiento mediante el que la novela anima a los lectores a aceptar una mirada menos antropocéntrica. A través de la perspectiva de los personajes principales—madre, padre y la hija de ambos, Sofía—los lectores pueden tomar conciencia de la naturaleza codiciosa del capitalismo que funciona exclusivamente para unos pocos. En su viaje, los personajes atraviesan un paisaje árido y devastado carente de referencias temporales y espaciales. Sin embargo, en este sombrío futuro escenario no especificado, los lectores reconocerán fácilmente las ruinas de nuestra sociedad actual y nuestra cultura del petróleo fuertemente influenciada por el modelo de consumo americano. Los padres de Sofía, quienes parecen sufrir de "petro-melancolía" (LeMenager, *Living Oil* 102), en ocasiones recuerdan con nostalgia nuestra cultura petroquímica en la que crecieron. Esto contrasta con la perspectiva de Sofía, ya que ella no tiene recuerdos de una sociedad capitalista. Además, este análisis hará hincapié en la destreza de Aloe para traer la muerte al lugar que le corresponde, entre los vivos.

Palabras clave: Ficción climática italiana, antropoceno, efecto de distanciamiento, corporalidad, petrocultura

Introduction

In the summer of 2016, Italian journalist and writer Bruno Arpaia published *Qualcosa, là fuori* (*Something, out there*). It was positively received by the Italian press and labeled as the first Italian cli-fi novel.¹ While this designation is not entirely accurate since authors such as Alessandra Montrucchio, Tommaso Pincio, and Antonio Scurati wrote cli-fi prior to 2016, Arpaia's novel definitely marks a new enthusiasm for cli-fi among Italian readers and reviewers.² In fact, after the publication of *Qualcosa, là fuori* other Italian novelists have been expressing their deep concern about climate change in the Anthropocene.³ *L'ultima bambina d'Europa* (*The Last Girl of Europe*), written by Francesco Aloe in 2017, is a captivating example of Italian cli-fi.⁴ Inspired by Pulitzer-prizewinning American novel *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy,⁵ this novel narrates the story of a young Italian family traveling southbound on an exhausting journey toward Africa; there, they presume, the sun is still visible, the wind is softly blowing, and water and food supplies have not run out, at least, not yet. Italians⁶ become travelers treading hundreds of miles towards the south; with no ID or Visa, they attempt to enter the African continent in order to save themselves. The main protagonists—mother, father and their daughter Sofia, the last existing little girl of Europe—are indeed referred to as “three immigrants” (42),

¹ Cf. Sabina Minardi, Carlo Rovelli and Redazione, *Il Libraio*.

² Online, numerous reviews in Italian discuss popular foreign climate fiction. The most addressed foreign authors include Amitav Ghosh, Margaret Atwood, Kim Stanley Robinson, Ian McEwan, James Bradley, and Cormac McCarthy. In Italy, the debate around cli-fi is strongly based upon foreign authors and their novels. Cf. Jolanda Di Virgilio, Marco Dotti, Sabina Minardi, and Emanuela Valentini.

³ Noteworthy writers utilizing the medium of fiction to express such concerns include Moira Dal Sito, Chiara Mezzalama, and Sara Segantin. Telmo Pievani and Mauro Varotto have written an engaging “unidentified narrative object” (Wu Ming 11) that spans between fiction and non-fiction, fiction and geography.

⁴ In Italy, bloggers and reviewers use interchangeably terms like “cli-fi”, “fantascienza climatica” (climate sci-fi), “narrativa ambientale” (environmental narrative), and “fantaecologia” (eco-sci-fi). Here I will use the term cli-fi to refer to a type of literature that deals with anthropogenic climate change and urges readers to reflect upon the social, political, and ethical repercussions of global warming.

⁵ At the end of the book, Aloe pays tribute to Cormac McCarthy and to *The Road*, a “masterpiece that encouraged me and that I have freely quoted throughout this book” (“capolavoro che mi ha spronato e che ho liberamente citato in questo libro”; 175). Further research could lead to an insightful discussion on quotations, allusions, and, in general, on the evident intertextuality between these two novels, *The Road* and *L'ultima bambina d'Europa*. Although this is not the scope of the present essay, I would like to acknowledge such a stimulating possibility. All translations from original Italian texts are my own.

⁶ With the term Italians, here I would like to include both Italian citizens and any other resident in Italy, independently of their legal status. I also want to acknowledge the feeble possibility that people from Northern Europe may be traversing Italy; however, due to the strenuous voyage, the constant perils and militarized closed borders, it is very unlikely that inhabitants of Northern countries succeed in reaching the Italian peninsula.

"refugees" (56) and "travelers" (104)⁷ in search of salvation. They are eco-refugees fleeing a devastated *Bel Paese* and hoping to set foot on an unknown better continent.⁸

The woman, the man, and their daughter Sofia are walking downward, from North to South, along the peninsula in order to reach Sicily where they plan to board a decrepit boat sailing off toward Africa. Europe has been ravaged by anthropogenic climate change and is by now deserted and uninhabitable. While the major events unfold on Italian soil, Sofia's father also relates stories about Northern European countries; these territories have been swept away by pollution and unimaginable disruption. Likewise, Italy is depicted as a wasteland where very few survivors, mainly male adults, fight daily for their lives while facing environmental threats, persistent lack of supplies, the Green Regiment soldiers' brutality and, overall, the savagery of any other remaining human being. In this post-collapse scenario, all social institutions have disintegrated. In reality, the main protagonists are not simply facing an environmental crisis, but a social one as well; indeed, they are enduring a socioecological meltdown that is intimately affecting their bodies and their lives. By now, all surviving humans are scavengers; some others are even rumored to be cannibals. Talking with her husband, the woman states that "[t]he entire world is dead or dying' [...] 'not only the humankind, but everything else [...]'" (13).⁹ In this *via crucis*, our protagonists witness unspeakable cruelties. The mother, far advanced into her pregnancy, drowns while traversing the short stretch of water separating the region of Calabria from that of Sicily. Father and daughter arrive miraculously on Tunisian shores where they are transferred immediately to Libya. In Libya, Sofia can see birds flying in the sky and a large gamut of colors for the very first time in her life. Only at the end of the novel, readers comprehend that in accompanying these three eco-refugees in their journey, they have actually been walking and heading toward our present civilization and lifestyle. The happy and peaceful conclusion that spares Sofia's and her father's life is, in fact, tainted with gloom and doom as there is no longer any safe place on earth; "in the era of global warming, nothing is really far away; there is no place where the orderly expectations of bourgeois life hold unchallenged sway" (Ghosh 26).¹⁰ Hence, no firm comforting binary opposition exists that can safeguard Western civilization, its lifestyle and its beneficiaries; through careful parsing, readers are encouraged to

⁷ "[T]re migranti," "profughi," and "viaggiatori."

⁸ On the last page of the book, Aloe explains what inspired him to write this novel: a picture of a little frail immigrant girl holding her teddy bear. Together with other 716 desperate human beings, she had traveled from Sierra Leone to Sicily in the summer of 2015. She was rescued with her father in Palermo. Like Sofia, the protagonist of the novel, this girl had seen her mother drown in the sea.

⁹ "Il mondo intorno a noi sta morendo' [...] 'non solo il genere umano, ma anche tutto il resto [...]'"

¹⁰ In his article "Of the Titanic, the Bounty, and Other Shipwrecks", Marco Armiero makes a valid point underlining that in the Anthropocene, class matters. The weakest in the world, i.e. the poor, will be affected more deeply than the rich. Referencing the shipwreck of the Titanic, he highlights that "75% of the first class passengers survived while only 25% of the passengers in third class made it out of the disaster" (52). Through this metaphor, Armiero argues that well-off people will have access to better options to cope with the challenges brought about by global warming. Unquestionably, this holds true. However, also in a relatively wealthy and industrialized country like Italy, climate change effects are becoming more palpable and visible for all. For instance, in July 2022, they recorded an excess of mortality among the population; due to continuous heat waves, the death rate increased by 21% ("Caldo, ministero della salute"). In the near future, as a result of climate change, human beings may face debilitating social divides within the same nation and that could lead to alarming social unrest.

challenge and dismantle obsolete and dominant dichotomies, such as human/inhuman, civilized/uncivilized, nature/culture, and native/foreigner.

In this essay, the main cli-fi *topoi* traceable in Francesco Aloe's novel will not be tackled exclusively; rather, these literary themes will be investigated in relation to the narrative and rhetorical constructions employed by the author. As Adam Trexler writes, "[c]limate change is not just a 'theme' in fiction. It remakes basic narrative operations" (233). In particular, I will focus on the estrangement effect, which, in this novel, is often prompted by temporal displacement. Through the estrangement effect, readers can adopt an "oblique gaze" (Wu Ming 26), i.e. a fresh unusual perspective that may foster critical insight into late capitalism or into consumerism more broadly. *L'ultima bambina d'Europa* encourages readers to embrace both a less anthropocentric and a less Eurocentric gaze in order to begin grasping the drastic ramifications of global warming and human impact on the environment. Accordingly, global warming is to be viewed as a hyperobject, an object "massively distributed in time and space relative to humans" (Morton 1). While an account of the various categories of "end-of-the-world fiction" lies beyond the scope of this article, an analysis of key tropes of Italian cli-fi is crucial to the present analysis. Italian cli-fi often challenges any linear notion of progress based primarily on mere economic factors, and instead induces readers to reflect on the gluttonous, schizophrenic nature of (late) capitalism that functions particularly for the few as "the patterns of life that modernity engenders can only be practiced by a small minority of the world's population" (Ghosh 92). What happens when we fall outside that small minority and are plummeted into dire destitution? Francesco Aloe's novel tells us in gruesome detail.

Ruins from the Future and Lingering Nostalgia

The narration takes place in an unspecified future; no specific dates, however, are ever provided throughout the novel. The father of this family often reminisces about a better past when food and drinks were bountiful. Within climate fiction, narrating from near, middle or far futures is a widely adopted literary device, a useful creative technique that promotes critical distance by transforming our present in an object of history. As Richard Crownshaw asserts, "[w]hat is remembered is an aetiology of the conditions that are imagined in the future but which are unfolding in the present of this literature's production and consumption" (890). By looking back on the present time, readers may recognize the drawbacks of late capitalism. Thus, climate change fiction is often preoccupied with "anticipated memory" (Craps 486), which is a memory oriented toward fictional future histories; according to Craps, "[m]aking sense of our existence in this day and age requires that we adopt a posthumous stance from which we can look back on our impending extinction as a species" (486). Therefore, a posthumous perspective promotes a well anticipated mourning; readers begin to mourn a lost civilization and the extinction of species, at times even the annihilation of *homo sapiens*.

The ruins of contemporary Western society and the debris of so-called progress prevail in the bleak and hostile landscape depicted in the novel: we read of houses that are falling apart, hotels and hospitals in disuse, rusted weathered bridges, burnt-down

gas stations and entire ghost towns of which, we are constantly reminded, it is better to steer clear. Traveling southbound, this fleeing family encounters the remains of our abundant and exuberant society based predominantly on rampant capitalism: a rusted shopping cart, discolored signs, an empty chip bag, broken strollers, Fiat, Renault and Toyota cars, non-functioning neon lights, useless lamps, a Coke ad sign, worthless electric flashlights and even a Boeing aircraft smashed on the ground. This airplane, also depicted on the book cover, epitomises humans' restless urge to overcome their own limits. It also reminds readers of the mythological figure of Icarus who, out of hubris, flew too close to the sun and drowned in the sea. Likewise, humans have recklessly pursued economic and material progress without taking the repercussions of their behaviors and forms of life into consideration. All the depicted debris are the remains of a lost civilization influenced by American culture and its model of consumerism. These are the vestiges of our current form of collective life. Through the estrangement process, which fosters an "unusual 'vision'" (Velotti 285), readers can look at these ruins and widespread waste and recognize in them our present shining buildings and glittering goods; in fact, these items require constant care in order not to decay and not to turn into trash. Waste, according to Greg Kennedy, "embarrasses and shames us because it confronts us with a reflection of our own shortcomings" (4); waste exposes our inability to care. A ravaged landscape thus proves how little we cared.

A consumer culture can prosper and flourish only if there is constant access to a cheap reliable and efficient power such as oil. However, as Buell argues, a fossil-fueled culture can be described as "an age of exuberance [...] haunted by catastrophe" ("A Short History", 176). In fact, due to Earth's finite resources, this culture is doomed to vacillate as soon as its oil reservoir dwindles. This is exactly what happens in Francesco Aloe's novel. The father is always looking for oil or gasoline, but he cannot find any: in proximity of a car accident, "[h]e bent over the fuel tank and smelled. Then he walked off" (31).¹¹ On their journey, these three pilgrims run into stacks of immobile cars; some of them are burned-out carcasses, some are crashed piles of metal sheets, some others, instead, are intact, but cannot function on an empty tank. Sofia is fascinated by her father's search for a running vehicle; at the same time, she cannot comprehend what cars are for. It is through Sofia's eyes that readers experience an acute sense of estrangement. As she struggles to understand her parents' past lifestyle, her innocent and fresh perspective helps to uncover our own faults. Hence, the father has to explain to her that, just a few years before, cars allowed people "[t]o move faster from one place to the other" (32).¹² Her mother steps in the conversation to underscore that this was possible "[...] without any toil' [...]" (32).¹³ Cheap oil replaced hard labor; therefore, it freed human beings from their ties to nature and warded off their physical exhaustion. Among these three eco-refugees, Sofia is the only one who cannot recollect ever being inside a car. In reality, as a toddler, she moved around in a car and even had her own seat. Her mind, though, cannot bring back such memories. Therefore, she cannot miss traveling by car. Despite being a young eight-

¹¹ "Si chinava all'altezza del bocchettone della benzina e annusava. Poi passava oltre."

¹² "Ad andare più veloci da un posto a un altro'."

¹³ "[...] senza far fatica' [...]."

year old and extremely frail girl, she keeps moving and treading mile after mile. On this tiring journey, Sofia takes care first of her feverish mother and then of her delirious father; she keeps walking in search of food and medication. Both her parents have to lean physically on her at times. When her father gets sick, for example, she cares for him for over twenty-one days. Here, roles are inverted and Sofia becomes her parents' caring guardian. Within the narrative, cars have become prosthetic extensions of human bodies; without them, walking takes a real toll on human beings, who have become inured to moving quickly and with little effort between destinations. Sofia appears to be the least affected by the lack of transportation. Sofia's mother often wishes for a car and when one arrives, they all ride in it; with George in the driver seat, "[t]he woman looked out the car window. [...] Despite the monotony of grey landscape, it was pleasant to see the road passing by while your feet stood still" (66).¹⁴

This future memory stimulates a deeper understanding of our times; however, ironically, it may also engender a persistent, subtle tension between repulsion toward and mourning for these times as bygone ways of life. Our petrochemical culture is allegedly one of the fundamental causes of global warming; nevertheless, in this novel, our forever-lost Western lifestyle, fueled by oil, is recollected nostalgically at times, especially by Sofia's parents. Walking on a deserted highway, the father realizes how, just a few years before, everything seemed and felt smaller:

Italy was a country you could cross in a few hours, on a highway exactly like that one, seated comfortably in a *Punto* car with the air conditioning against your legs. He had the impression of still tasting the flavor of coffee at the Autogrill [...]. Back then he hated the traffic, the sound of horns, the line of cars at the toll booth. (15-16)¹⁵

Now even traffic is mentioned with sorrowful melancholy. In fact, this "petromelancholia" engenders "the conditions of grief as conventional oil resources dwindle" (LeMenager, *Living Oil* 102). Likewise, as previously mentioned, Sofia's mother feels good while she is riding inside a car and sees the road passing by without her walking. Finally, after discovering an untouched package of chewing gum, the father, mother and girl take one piece each and start chewing: "They laughed, chewing with their eyes closed [...]" (17).¹⁶ All these recollections are highly mediated by the protagonists' strong dependence on fossilized fuels; the past is indeed commemorated through "libidinal attachments to carbon economies (and the life they fuel)" (Stef Craps e Rich Crownshaw 5). However, Sofia's perspective is essential to seeing our habits in a different light. Let's analyze one example in more detail. When Sofia's mother finds the intact chewing gum package, Sofia asks for an explanation since she has never seen such an object. Her mother tells her, adopting the American term, that it is "chewing gum" (16); immediately after, in an attempt to clarify, she states that it is "[g]um that can be chewed" (16).¹⁷ Promptly the

¹⁴ "La donna guardava oltre il finestrino. [...] Nonostante la monotonia del grigiore, era piacevole vedere la strada scorrere mentre i piedi rimanevano fermi."

¹⁵ L'Italia era un Paese che si poteva attraversare in poche ore, proprio su un'autostrada come quella, seduti comodamente su una *Punto* con l'aria condizionata tra le gambe. Gli sembrava ancora di percepire il gusto del caffè degli Autogrill [...]. Allora odiava il traffico, il suono dei clacson, le file al casello.

¹⁶ "Riserò, masticando con gli occhi chiusi [...]."

¹⁷ "Gomma da masticare'."

little girl affirms that it is not possible to chew rubber. Through a process of estrangement, readers can look at a very familiar object, such as a piece of chewing gum, with critical eyes. This is, after all, a piece of rubber, synthetic plastics, derived from petroleum. Our petrochemical culture extends its tentacles literally within our bodies, turning us into oily matter. Despite her unusual gaze, Sofia is also conquered by this piece of chewing gum and, inebriated, she rejoices at its sweet odor, which fills her nostrils (17). In her article, Serenella Iovino underscores the ubiquity and resistance of this “geologic agent” (241); in fact, the chewing gum becomes “the symbol of the resistance of matter” (242)¹⁸ within the Anthropocene. That an intact package of chewing gum is still present in this post-catastrophe scenario is perhaps unsurprising.

Throughout the entire novel, readers can grasp a persistent tension between love for and repugnance of our petrochemical civilization. As stated previously, Sofia's father is eager to find a functioning car and some gasoline; at the same time, he is repelled when he encounters a massive car accident where human corpses are entangled forever with metal plates. According to Mimi Sheller, we entertain a complicated affective relationship with cars that “is not only about pleasure-seeking, but also feeds into our deepest fears, anxieties and frustrations” (224). Indeed, cars can evoke both positive and negative emotions, such as a longing for velocity and a dread of death: “The stomach-turning feeling of witnessing a car crash or the terrors and permanent anxiety produced by being in an accident are the dark underside of ‘auto-freedom’” (Sheller 224). While speed symbolizes the victory of human beings over their own physical limits, a car accident embodies utter failure. In *L'ultima bambina d'Europa* no car accident is ever cleared; no ambulances or firefighters arrive swiftly to clean up the scene and thus to conceal our errors. On the contrary, bodies and cars are suspended in an eternal crash that exposes our faults and incapacities to handle technical progress. In fact, some collisions are caused by the drivers' lack of skills: “Desperate people fleeing stole whatever they could find and often it was buses, too difficult to handle” (30).¹⁹

Life is harder at a time when all social structures have collapsed. When the fabric of society crumbles, its physical infrastructures are exposed and left to decay as well. In Aloe's novel, houses, bridges, streets, tunnels and aqueducts are falling apart, wires hang exposed, running water is nonexistent and electricity is gone. Infrastructures symbolize progress and they are often taken for granted in Western society. According to Rubenstein, “[i]nfrastructure is supposed to go unnoticed when it's in fine working order” (576). Infrastructures propel our lifestyles; for example, they allow transportation of people and goods, they carry water, and they conduct electricity. At the same time, they conceal our strong dependency upon the nation-state and our deep entanglement with oil; thus, infrastructures cover up the ubiquity of petroleum in our society. However, when infrastructures fail, human beings' reliance on the state and its hypertrophic economic system is brutally exposed and humans' corporeality comes back impetuously to the foreground. Through oil, the modern state has subtly penetrated the life of all its subjects.

¹⁸ “[I] simbolo della resistenza della materia.”

¹⁹ “Gente disperata che durante la fuga rubava quello che trovava e spesso erano autobus di linea, difficili da governare.”

Consequently, humans have outsourced most of their subsistence to others and have not acquired basic survival skills; that is why, in a post-state and post-collapse scenario, most of them are depicted as succumbing slowly, even if they switch into survival mode.

This barren and ravaged scenario may prefigure a world with no humans, in which nature nonetheless triumphs by forming a favorable habitat for non-human beings, both flora and fauna. In the following passage, we can see how the novel portrays a ghost town: "The town was a swampland. Millions of liters of water prevailed over aqueducts. Once upon a time, the porous soil was rich with living roots that would pump rain into the trees, the flowers, every stem of grass" (43).²⁰ Despite this sketch, the hope for a new thriving world void of humans, but repossessed by plants and animals soon vanishes. In fact, a few lines later, we read that "[s]ince vegetation had perished water stayed there, the sun too pale to be able to absorb it and the rain leaked into the strata, filled sewers, sweeping away the cement" (43-44).²¹ Moreover, "[t]here had been a time when plants had begun to consume humans' construction. Then, something had killed the vegetation as well" (44).²² In his article, Ben De Bruyn reminds us that in post-apocalyptic literature nature often reconquers those spaces once occupied by human beings: "the earth will quickly reclaim the spaces our worlds have vacated" (779). This, however, does not happen in *L'ultima bambina d'Europa*, a novel that keeps representing a desolate and fragmented world where not only objects and buildings are falling apart but so too are human bodies, vulnerable, and made of flesh. After a diffuse meltdown, we are not returned to a soothing prelapsarian past of plenitude.

Decomposed Corpses and Perishing Bodies

In addition to ruins and arid landscapes, the three travelers daily run into decomposed bodies. Everywhere, putrefied human bodies lie unattended; mummified women rest in hospitals with their newborns' corpses "by now reduced to fossils of a world without salvation" (46)²³ and entire families are trapped in an eternal escape in their SUVs or RVs. The entire novel is filled with images of butchered and tortured bodies: mass graves, decapitated men and women, and even "a crucified body upside down" (81).²⁴ Through Aloe's clever use of the estrangement effect, readers obtain a cosmic perspective (Ginzburg 19) that prompts them to ponder their final hour: after all, as Ginzburg writes, "[e]verything, our death included, must be viewed like a general process of transformation and change" (19).²⁵ These corpses are often deprived of a proper resting place and lie abandoned, forgotten or disgraced. Hence, readers can look at them

²⁰ "La città era una palude. Milioni di litri d'acqua avevano avuto la meglio sugli acquedotti. Un tempo il terreno poroso era ricco di radici vive che pompavano la pioggia negli alberi, nei fiori, in ogni stelo d'erba."

²¹ "Da quando anche la vegetazione era morta l'acqua restava lì, il sole troppo pallido per poterla asciugare e la pioggia filtrava nelle falde, riempiva le fognature, spazzava via il cemento."

²² "C'era stato un periodo in cui le piante avevano cominciato a divorare l'opera degli umani. Poi, qualcosa aveva ucciso anche la vegetazione."

²³ "[O]rmai ridotti a fossili di un mondo senza scampo."

²⁴ "[U]n corpo crocefisso al contrario."

²⁵ "Tutto, compresa la nostra morte, dev'essere visto come parte di un processo generale di trasformazione e di mutamento."

and perceive their own corporeality. Overwhelmed by all these putrefied bodies and unaccustomed to such a stark perspective, Sofia's father expresses the desire to be buried in the ground if he dies before his wife or his daughter. Whenever possible, *en route* toward Africa, he even covers these deceased bodies with a sheet or blanket. For a Western person, all these exposed corpses appear to be in the wrong place, not hidden far away; in some instances, they are also perceived as contaminating, sticky and viscous waste. These corpses should belong to graves in cemeteries. Otherwise, they are looked on as "matter out of place" (Douglas 44) and therefore, according to Douglas' popular definition, as dirt. Thus, the father strives to accord dignity to some of the bodies encountered on his path. At the same time, he wishes to be treated similarly and to be assigned an appropriate eternal resting spot.

A few steps before entering a tunnel, the family has to climb over dozens and dozens of vehicles around and inside which there are corpses upon corpses. The three pilgrims stand in front of a "slaughterhouse of flesh and car plates" (33),²⁶ one the prosthesis of the other. At the entrance of the tunnel, they can smell a dense "stench of putrefaction" (34).²⁷ Once in the mountain's interior, the family has to trample on foul-smelling and decaying bodies: "The woman put one foot on a chest that opened up like a rotten melon. Black blood enveloped her ankle. The man and the child sank for a few seconds in the liquefied entrails of someone. A splatter of gas and pus reached them" (40).²⁸ At some point, due to the gasoline present in the gallery and a spark from a lighter in the hands of the man, these putrid bodies catch fire just "like flesh matches" (40)²⁹ and begin emanating "a strange azure flame. Corporeal gases flow in the air" (40).³⁰ The stench and the gas produced by these corpses is similar to the one that leaves the father breathless and gasping for air once, a few pages later, he opens the door of a refrigeration room in a hotel: here "a penetrating stench hit him like a brick in his face. His eyes filled with tears, he shut the door and threw up. [...] Kilograms of rotten meat" (50).³¹ Similarly, in Sicily father and daughter are barely capable of breathing because of "the malodorous gases in the air" (140).³² The entire novel overflows with pungent sensory cues that underscore the perishable essence of human beings. Odors morbidly prompt us to acknowledge that we are edible as well. After escaping from an execution, the three pilgrims can detect in the air "the smell of burned meat" (70);³³ this is indeed the smell of human flesh, since there are no other animals around that can be butchered and roasted.

Readers regularly witness brutal executions and bloodshed that reveal how quickly human beings can die. For example, George, originally from Africa, is now a

²⁶ "[M]acello di carne e lamiera."

²⁷ "[F]etore della putrefazione."

²⁸ La donna mise un piede su un torace che si aprì come un melone marcio. Sangue nero le avvolse la caviglia. L'uomo e la bambina sprofondarono per qualche secondo nelle viscere liquefatte di qualcuno. Li sfiorò uno schizzo di gas e pus.

²⁹ "[C]ome fiammiferi di carne."

³⁰ "[U]na fiamma azzurra. Gas corporei fluttuanti nell'aria."

³¹ "[U]n tanfo penetrante lo investì come un mattone in faccia. Gli occhi si riempirono di lacrime, chiuse la porta e vomitò. [...] Chili di carne andata a male."

³² "[G]as maleodoranti nell'aria."

³³ "[L]'odore della carne bruciata."

refugee running away from Rome. In the attempt to save the last girl of Europe, he bravely sacrifices himself. When he spots the soldiers of the Green Regiment approaching, he urges the family to run away immediately and hide. He instead charges his car against the soldiers and runs over three of them. Once in their hands, the soldiers brutally murder him with an ax. Hidden in a ditch with his family, the father is able to see “[a]n explosion of cerebral material and blood” (69).³⁴ Similarly, Sofia’s father shoots a man in the head and in a split second, half of his skull “exploded in a reddish cloud and pieces of cerebral matter and blood landed among puddles on the ground and other pieces fell onto the woman [...]” (106),³⁵ his wife.

Not only do we encounter corpses, but also human beings who are so fragile, vulnerable and suffering that we must ask how they can still breathe and be alive. Just a few pages into the novel, an old ragged man approaches the young family; he is “as thin as a dead one exhumed by the devil” (27).³⁶ The mother and daughter as well are extremely emaciated; at night the male protagonist makes sure that they are still breathing by listening to their feeble breath or by laying his hands on their rib cage. The mother’s face is hollowed (49) and her limbs are like “willow branches, straight and thin” (49).³⁷ The daughter Sofia is as light as “[a] feather that, bouncing off on the mattress, did not even mess up the blankets” (49).³⁸ With no supplies left, this family ends up ingesting cat food in order to survive. In *L'ultima bambina d'Europa*, bodies holding tenaciously onto life despite hunger, illness and wounds are effectively foregrounded. After all, as Stephanie LeMenager reminds us, “[t]he project of the Anthropocene novel is at best a project of paying close attention to what it means to live through climate shift, moment by moment, in individual, fragile bodies” (“Climate Change” 225). As the three characters struggle to meet their physical needs, readers may begin to consider their own bodies, and their physical needs as well. All these fragile bodies promote a reflection on our own materiality and subsequent and inevitable decay. In fact, we are all embodied and affected by the milieu in which we dwell. Human beings die and rot away just like any other living creature on earth. In the Anthropocene, “[t]he privilege of not thinking of oneself embodied, as matter overwritten and writing history, is a privilege lost to all humans, including those imagined to be white, in the era of climate change” (LeMenager, “Climate Change” 229). *L'ultima bambina d'Europa* slams death in our face. Since the 1930s of the last century, Alberto Maggi argues, death has been concealed away in hospitals and hospices (15); therefore, for decades, we have been neglecting the *ars morendi* and deluded ourselves into believing we are indestructible. Dwelling in the Anthropocene has made it both unthinkable and impossible to continue to overlook mortality, and Aloe’s novel embraces the challenge of bringing death back precisely to where it belongs, among the living.

³⁴ “Un’esplosione di materia cerebrale e sangue.”

³⁵ “[E]splose in una nuvola rossastra e pezzi di materia cerebrale e sangue finirono tra le pozzanghere del terreno e altri pezzi caddero sulla donna.”

³⁶ “[M]agro come un morto riesumato dal diavolo.”

³⁷ “[R]ami di salice, dritti e sottili.”

³⁸ “Una piuma che, rimbalzando sul materasso, non scompigliò neanche le coperte.”

Scattered Memories and Scant Words

Among all these fragmented buildings, broken objects, and putrefied bodies, Sofia's father struggles to keep his memories alive; in fact, the sight of a fractured world will challenge the self that is sustained by remembrance. Indeed, memories require objects if they are to persist. At the beginning of the narration, the wife often reprimands her husband for thinking about the past. In one instance, she affirms: "Your mind is not here with us. You are always thinking about how it used to be [...]" (11).³⁹ In fact, he often does. Caressing his wife's hair, for example, he smells it "remembering vaguely its old scent" (14).⁴⁰ Likewise, after sipping some wine, he feels a bit disoriented with his "palate sweetened, the mind escaping toward a perished world" (52).⁴¹ As the story proceeds, though, his memories become more and more feeble. Aware of this, he painfully urges himself: "*You cannot forget, he thought, focus. How was it? Say it to the child, how it was. Every day, from today on until the end of the days remaining to you*" (142; emphasis in original).⁴² His yearning to remember and narrate to Sofia underscores a stark chasm between father and daughter, which extends beyond the generation gap inevitably associated with parenthood; in fact, this father appears to be an alien in his daughter's world. His world does not exist anymore and, at times, he struggles to recover the words necessary to describe it. Sofia's father is living in survivalist mode; not only is his body physiologically changing in order to adapt to exterior stressors, but his mind too needs to recollect in order for him not to succumb. After all, as Scranton affirms, throughout the centuries, we carried and preserved "[o]ur greatest treasure and most potent adaptive technology, the only thing that might save us in the Anthropocene, because it is the only thing that can save those who are already dead: memory" (95). However, the father's memories are fragile and exposed to the same decay as the world he now inhabits.

Similar to memories, language also resists disappearance through an effort to avoid dissolution into aphasia. In fact, a crumbled world also produces devastating linguistic effects on its inhabitants. Throughout the entire novel, there are numerous dialogues; all of them are very short, follow a paratactic style and employ elementary grammar. Exhausted, this family can barely find the strength to converse and their exchanges are kept to the bare minimum, both in regard to syntax and vocabulary. It is worth noting that the narrator as well appears to experience challenges while giving voice to quiet characters and depicting a denatured world. Not surprisingly, even proper names begin to disappear; in fact, both Sofia's parents are unnamed throughout the narration. Unable to find adequate words to convey images of such unthinkable desolation, the narrator has to resort to metaphors or similes. That is why, just to provide a few examples, the stench is as heavy as a brick (50), Sofia's and her mother's eyes shine "like stars of a

³⁹ "La tua mente non è qui con noi. Pensi sempre a com'era prima [...]."

⁴⁰ "[R]icordandone appena il vecchio profumo."

⁴¹ "[P]alato addolcito, la mente in fuga verso un mondo scomparso."

⁴² "*Non puoi dimenticare, pensava, concentrati. Com'era. Dillo alla bambina, com'era. Ogni giorno, da oggi fino alla fine dei giorni che ti restano.*"

welcoming galaxy" (52),⁴³ the grayness of the sky is "like an incurable hematoma" (79)⁴⁴ and the husband sits down trembling "like an abandoned puppy under the snow" (119).⁴⁵ Moreover, the rain is "tears from the sky" (5),⁴⁶ the blowing wind is a lament (43) and the hospital is a gigantic coffin (55) made of cement. Nobody has ever witnessed such a devastation; therefore, human beings are missing the proper language to portray it effectively. This prompts readers to ponder whether a new vocabulary may be needed in the Anthropocene. For example, are the water drops falling from the atmosphere still rain? In an attempt to narrate the unimaginable, Francesco Aloe chooses to use ample similes and metaphors, since "metaphorical projection involves understanding one kind of thing in terms of another kind of thing" (Lakoff and Johnson 171). Therefore, we can approach and grasp the unthinkable through these figures of speech. Furthermore, the persistent use of metaphors and similes highlights the hybridity of the world, with all its human and non-human vagrant creatures, with all its agentic vibrant matter;⁴⁷ throughout the narration, all illusionary divides between human and non-human, living and non-living beings are erased. Hence, a tree begs for mercy (10), entangled wires are exposed like veins (36), Mount Pollicino, covered in snow, resembles a piece of plastic, and embers are the Earth's open wounds (84). Finally, the portrayed desolation seems to affect the novel's narrative structure as well. If we exclude the final voyage toward Africa on a decrepit raft, everything that happens before can easily be re-ordered and arranged differently. Readers are provided with sketch after sketch devoid of strong temporal and causal connections; it really does not matter, for example, when this family meets George, Enea or the rugged beggar. Hence, it can be stated that the depicted fragmented world affects and seeps into both the sparse language and the structural framework of the novel.

Causes of Disaster: Time and Space in a Post-catastrophe Scenario

While Italy is portrayed as an impoverished wasteland, the novel's protagonists are unable to identify and to understand the triggering cause of this utter desolation. As already noted, Sofia's father often brings up memories that evoke a pleasant happier past when a simple croissant and cappuccino (7) would bring him joy. However, no clear elucidation is provided to explain the current widespread misfortune. In fact, in *L'ultima bambina d'Europa* there is no mention of any specific environmental catastrophe. There has not been any flood, earthquake, tornado or plague. Moreover, no atomic bomb has been dropped on Europe and there is no evidence of a possible nuclear accident similar to Chernobyl. Finally, no meteoroid has crashed on the earth. There is only one clear certainty: something has been lost, an entire civilization has crumbled and has vanished. Eight years before, when Sofia was born, Italy was still a beautiful and colorful country with a pleasant wind and with an enjoyable warm sun. Now, amidst material plights, the

⁴³ "[C]ome stelle di una galassia accogliente."

⁴⁴ "[C]ome un ematoma incurabile."

⁴⁵ "[C]ome un cucciolo abbandonato sotto la neve."

⁴⁶ "[L]acrime dal cielo."

⁴⁷ I am referring here to the vastly known work of Jane Bennett where she urges readers to perceive an energetic vitality within everything.

characters are also facing an epistemological puzzle. Who knows the truth and which information has been passed down to the population? It appears that the nation-state has shared little or no knowledge with its inhabitants. To her daughter's question "What happened to the world?" (148),⁴⁸ the father can only pronounce a confused and disheartening "I don't know" (148).⁴⁹ Likewise, also Enea, another eco-traveler in search of salvation with his family, states: "I have not yet understood what happened to the world [...]" (115).⁵⁰ Verily, our contemporary society is founded upon and embedded in numerous large-scale complex systems that "can no longer be easily understood or controlled" (Heise 145); therefore, it is extremely difficult to understand, foresee, and manage risks and outcomes affecting the socioecological milieu. This is even truer for common people, non-experts, such as Sofia's father and Enea. According to Antonia Mehnert, climate change creates "a crisis of thinking or imagining that distinguishes it from other environmental problems. While the effects of former eco-catastrophes were often clearly visible locally [...] the effects of global warming seem hard to grasp" (28). On the same note, Trexler writes that "[t]he very scale of climate change challenges people's capacity to understand it" (75). It is for these very reasons that readers, like Sofia's father, limp vicariously along searching for one unambiguous explanation that, in reality, does not exist. For example: one is left wondering what happened to the atmosphere. Everything is grey, no colors can be discerned, the sun does not shine any longer and the world appears clouded at all times. All the protagonists are powerless in front of what Rob Nixon has famously defined "slow violence" (2), i.e. a violence that "occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space" (2). In Aloe's novel, imperceptible slow violence is now visible to the naked eye; readers are witnessing the aftermath of a crucial tipping point, when environmental pollution actually becomes tangible, detectable and irreversible both locally and transnationally.

Just as it is difficult to identify the concurrent causes of this collapse, similarly, readers are unable to distinguish the exact time when the narration is unfolding. As already argued, the narrated events are clearly set in a near future in order to overcome "the imaginative difficulties created by the vast dimensions and enormous complexity of climate change, making this elusive phenomenon visible, tangible, legible, and morally salient" (Craps 484). Moreover, it is relevant to underscore that this is an unspecified future; in fact, no specific date is ever mentioned. Hence, the misfortunes of this family become the potential sorrows and tribulations of all humankind, and they acquire a universal value; with such uncertainty, the possible world here created subtly hints at a boundless time void of humans. The father feels "smashed by the enormity of time, by its indifferent and ceaseless flowing" (11).⁵¹ Moreover, the entire narration is punctuated by the daughter's persistent questions that convey timelessness through a repetitive rhythm. Throughout the novel, there are very few events husband and wife hold on to desperately in the attempt not to slide into the monotonous flowing of time: these are their wedding

⁴⁸ "Cos'è successo al mondo?"

⁴⁹ "Non lo so'."

⁵⁰ "Non ho ancora capito cosa è successo al mondo [...]."

⁵¹ "[S]chiacciato dall'enormità del tempo, dal suo scorrere indifferente e incessante."

and the birth of their daughter. They both occurred, more or less, seven years before their pilgrimage. The narrator warns readers that the world “started going crazy when [the girl] had not yet turned four [...]” (85).⁵² The main characters did not leave their home right away; instead, they departed for Africa only six or seven months prior to conceiving their second and never-born child (125). In sum, at the time of narration, these three pilgrims have been traveling southbound for six or seven months. These episodes, however, are by now quite loose anchors in their lives, as they witness the disappearance of objects, landscapes, and forms of life dear to them. These weak time referents do little to assist readers in navigating an uncertain and unspecified future. The mother suggests her husband and daughter eat her when she dies. She explains she had seen this in a movie a few years ago; there was an airplane crash in the Andes and “[t]here were survivors but the rescue troops could not find them. They remained stuck for weeks [...]. They were able to survive because they ate the bodies of those who had died in the crash” (84).⁵³ The mother seems to be referring to a real accident that happened on October 13, 1972. An American movie *Alive* from 1993 retells the gruesome story, makes it known, and brings cannibalism and hence our own materiality into our living rooms; this movie was also broadcast in Italy. Here we have a feeble temporal reference. Although in the entire novel there are no dates, this detail can help readers orient themselves and cope with the sinister foreboding that all this is indeed taking place in a disturbingly near future. If so, the narration is suggesting that a global cataclysm has already begun. As Frederick Buell argues convincingly, nowadays:

[e]nvironmental crisis is no longer an apocalypse rushing toward a herd of sheep that a few prophets are trying to rouse. It is not a matter of the imminent future but a feature of the present. Environmental crisis is, in short, a process within which individual and society today dwell [...]. (*From Apocalypse* 76)

As already noted, the ruins of the world depicted in the novel are in fact the images of our current lifestyle: streets, cars, traffic signs, dangling store signs, abandoned gas stations and useless light switches. What has collapsed is in reality our own abundant society and not a wildly futuristic, ultra high-tech, socioeconomic community. While the novel presents our civilization as crumbled, there is still something else, however, that holds fast:

The vaulted domes of Renaissance churches were intact. The palaces from the eighteen hundreds, cold but whole. Ancient medieval villages, indifferent to the devastation surrounding them. The man realized that mainly modern buildings were falling down. The past endured. (43)⁵⁴

Similar to time, space often lacks specificity in *L'ultima bambina d'Europa*. We know that this young family comes from northern Italy and is headed southward to Sicily

⁵² “[E]ra cominciato a impazzire quando non aveva ancora compiuto quattro anni [...]”

⁵³ “Ci furono dei sopravvissuti ma i soccorsi non li trovarono. Rimasero bloccati per settimane [...]. Riuscirono a salvarsi perché mangiarono i corpi di quelli che erano morti nell’impatto.”

⁵⁴ “Le cupole a volta delle chiese rinascimentali erano intatte. I palazzi dell’Ottocento, freddi ma integri. Antichi borghi medievali, indifferenti alla distruzione che li circondava. L’uomo notò che a venire giù erano soprattutto gli edifici moderni. Il passato resisteva.” It is worth noting that this is the only passage in the entire novel where readers can briefly encounter enduring historic buildings from the past.

through the regions of Puglia and Basilicata. Often they walk along the Mediterranean shores or in the middle of deserted roads. Occasionally, on the remaining street signs we can read the name of a town, the name of a tunnel or of a mountain. By now, these names are empty as they lack a referent; indeed, none of these places were able to preserve their distinctive features. In fact, the cities have turned into abandoned ghost towns suspended in time and serve to symbolize the failure of Western civilization. The family crosses various territories throughout Italy, all of which exhibit the same traits: cold and bare lands, desolate vineyards and olive tree groves, fires, a dull grey and oppressive sky, a landscape with no color, never-ending and unchangeable devastation. Only in the proximity of the Aspromonte, we read that “[t]he landscape was changing” (99);⁵⁵ here there are hollies, butcher’s brooms, eucalyptus, and agave. Despite the different flora, everything is dead or rotten, just like anywhere else. This barren scenario is indeed invariable. That is why the family appears to be going nowhere despite treading mile after many mile. Italy, a country well known for overflowing with ancient history, has lost its roots, turning itself into a “non-place” with no distinctive peculiarities. Not surprisingly, this family often stops and rests at sites that Marc Augé would label as “non-places”, i.e. places that “cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity [...]” (78-79). These are mainly the transit areas of our postmodernity and petromodernity, such as highways, hotels and gas stations. There, in fact, we often see the protagonists of the novel. According to Inger-Anne Sjøfting, in post-apocalyptic cli-fi:

place is no longer a vehicle of cultural specificity; there is no diversity, neither in terms of culture nor in terms of natural variation, to stamp its identity on the landscape; everywhere is the same. North and south, east and west, once ideologically laden concepts and important cardinal points, have ceased to matter. (706)

Wherever this family travels, it is more or less the same: a place of no escape or relief. As already noted, Sofia and her parents often walk along devastated roads filled with debris, remains of cars and corpses. Far from the ideals of freedom, roads become perilous sites of exposure; here, these three pilgrims can encounter zombie-like human beings that are striving to stay alive, one step after the other. Rapes, executions and cannibalism become ordinary acts in this post-catastrophe scenario. All this prompts persistent ontological questions about what it means to be human and what constitutes humanness.

This minimal temporal and spatial specificity, along with a cyclical repetition of almost identical events and places, conveys a universal and epic tone to the narration. The vicissitudes faced by this young Italian family become those experienced anywhere in Europe or across the globe where a widespread socio-economic and ecological collapse has occurred. At the same time, they can also compare to the distressing wanderings of entire populations throughout the centuries. In sum, this unspecified bare future may also resemble our deep past, when millions of people were forced out of their homes due to wars, droughts and starvation; likewise, it mirrors our present with thousands of eco-refugees pressing on the policed borders of the Western world. By the middle of the twenty-first century, the number of displaced people due to the dire effects of global

⁵⁵ “Il paesaggio stava cambiando.”

warming could reach two hundred million (Bell 136) and this prospect must promote transnational discussions about the duties of industrialized countries toward eco-refugees. The reversal of the more classic migration path from South to North is successfully employed by Francesco Aloe in order to encourage readers to cope vicariously with the plights and threats faced by eco-migrants. It is finally noteworthy to underscore the author's ironic and witty choice to have his two characters find a welcoming and rescue place in Libya. In fact, Amnesty International has repeatedly denounced that in Libya environmental migrants are trapped in "a litany of abuses", such as ill-treatment, killings, and enforced disappearances.⁵⁶

In the last pages of the book, the father and his daughter Sofia arrive in Tunisia. While traversing onto the African continent, the man is delirious due to a very high fever. Just before losing consciousness, he manages to recognize in the sky the constellation of the Big Dipper and to see "[c]olors and shades whose existence he had forgotten" (171).⁵⁷ Immediately transferred to Libya, the father rests unconscious for five days in a hospital bed. As soon as he wakes up and opens his eyes again, he scans his surroundings; he is attached to a heart-monitor. With a remote controller, a polite nurse changes the incline of his bed. Here, in Libya, his young daughter Sofia encounters, for the first time ever, a prosperous society that appears to be promising a better future for them both. Barefoot and clean, with a green dress and a necklace of pearls (172), Sofia takes her father outside to the hospital courtyard, and shows him a better and wealthier country toward which they have been traveling for months without ever losing hope. In this sought-after country, the sun is emanating a strong but pleasant light. Outside it is sunny and there are green healthy trees. Sofia is extremely happy and wants her father to see a flock of birds. At this point, we stop and perceive what is concealed beneath this reassuring scenario. In the hospital courtyard, in fact, Sofia's father recognizes grass and its green color; unlike Sofia, however, he also detects the traffic on the street (173). The cars on the street remind us of our rampant petrochemical culture and urge us to ponder whether it is indeed possible to find an uncontaminated safe place in the Anthropocene. In Africa, where Sofia is actually rejoicing, we can identify the tentacles of petroculture.

Conclusion

According to Scranton, in order to survive, humanity needs "to learn to live with and through the end of our current civilization" (22). Skillfully, Francesco Aloe prompts his readers to ponder what it means to dwell in the Anthrop-o(b)scene and, consequently, to die as individuals and, above all, as a civilization. *L'ultima bambina d'Europa* is a compelling novel that carefully discloses the shortcomings of Western culture and its own contradictions. It questions the deceptive notion of linear progress that, like a shot arrow, moves forward *ad infinitum* toward an imagined cornucopian abundance; instead, the

⁵⁶ *L'ultima bambina d'Europa* could also spur an interesting analysis about the persistent pathologization of human mobility within the Anthropocene. Although this is beyond the scope of the present article, I would like to acknowledge such an engaging possibility.

⁵⁷ "Colori e sfumature di cui aveva dimenticato l'esistenza."

prosperity of a few post-industrial countries is achieved through the exploitation of the poorest ones. This novel skillfully underscores the massive scale of global warming, which extends through time and space. Moreover, it brings to the foreground its deeply intertwined cultural and material origins; in fact, a culture with its dominant lifestyle affects the environment in which it flourishes. In global modernity, a culture can expand beyond its national borders and have an impact elsewhere. Above all, this engrossing cli-fi novel dismantles obsolete dichotomies on which Western thought is strongly based, such as human/nature, human/inhuman and even here/there. Finally, it challenges national borders and the concept of nation-state; in fact, despite militarized borders, European countries have not been able to protect themselves and to prevent this collapse. Consequently, this novel reiterates that global warming demands solutions addressing local, national and transnational agencies. *L'ultima bambina d'Europa* fits nicely into the current vigorous debate around climate change that has been unfolding in Italy; for example, recently, scientists have addressed a petition to Italian politicians to create a political agenda that incites ecological conscience, protects future generations, and aims at implementing equal and sustainable developments for all (Nadotti). Among the many signees, there are also artists and writers. Upon signing, the actor Stefano Accorsi stated that he wants to bring together global warming and scientists on a theatre stage (Cupellaro). This fermenting *milieu* proves not only the urge to address such global issues, but also, above all, the pressing need to include the humanities in such a debate, bringing down the sharp divide among disciplines, in order to foster well-informed and widely-spread resistance within the Anthropocene. Therefore, Francesco Aloe's *L'ultima bambina d'Europa* is a novel that must be read, taught and discussed to bring on such change.⁵⁸

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⁵⁸ In fact, the publisher of *L'ultima bambina d'Europa* would like to expand the readership of this novel; that is why Alter Ego Edizioni has been planning a potential graphic novel inspired by it (Bultrini).

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