JOURNAL FOR TRANSCULTURAL PRESENCES &
DIACHRONIC IDENTITIES FROM ANTIQUITY TO DATE

thersites

19/2024

Matthias Heinemann,
Adrian Weiß & Christine Walde (eds.)

Fantastic antiquities and where to find them: ancient worlds in (post-)modern novels

www.thersites-journal.de

Imprint

Universität Potsdam 2024
Historisches Institut, Professur Geschichte des Altertums
Am Neuen Palais 10, 14469 Potsdam (Germany)
https://www.thersites-journal.de/

ISSN 2364-7612

Contact
Principal Contact
Prof. Dr. Filippo Carlà-Uhink
Email: thersitesjournal@uni-potsdam.de
Support Contact
PD Dr. Christian Rollinger
Email: thersitesjournal@uni-potsdam.de

Layout and Typesetting
text plus form, Dresden

Cover pictures:
Left – Created with Microsoft Designer (DALL-E 3)
Right – Created with ChatGPT-4 (DALL-E 3)

Published online at:
https://doi.org/10.34679/thersites.vol19

JOURNAL FOR TRANSCULTURAL PRESENCES &
DIACHRONIC IDENTITIES FROM ANTIQUITY TO DATE

thersites

19/2024 | pp. 257–284

SONSOLES COSTERO-QUIROGA &
MARINA DÍAZ BOURGEAL
(Complutense University of Madrid)

Women philosophers and enslaved robots: automation fantasies and consent in Jo Walton's *The Just City*

Abstract When Athena and Apollo decide to gather children and intellectuals (including a good number of women) from different eras to put into practice Plato's proposal of an ideal politeia, everything seems to be going just fine. However, problems soon disrupt the harmony of this quest for individual and social excellence. Through the literary depiction of interactions between various historical figures and schools of thought, Jo Walton's *The Just City* raises a series of questions on topics of great relevance for our own world, especially those related to debates on fairer socio-economic ways of organisation and the struggle for social justice and freedom. This paper will analyse how gender, sexuality and social hierarchies are presented in this literary realisation of Plato's Republic as well as the way Walton imagines ancient thought would deal with modern issues such as invisible and devalued labour performed by marginalised collectives such as, in this case, women and robots.

Keywords Plato, robots, women, philosophers, Socrates, Jo Walton, utopia

URL https://thersites-journal.de
DOI https://doi.org/10.34679/thersites.vol19.281

INTRODUCTION

Jo Walton's *The Just City* is the first volume of a trilogy of novels, called *Thessaly*, which explores a possible fantastic implementation of Plato's ideal city or state (*politeia*) from his dialogue *Republic*.[1] First published in 2015, *The Just City* was quickly followed by *The Philosopher Kings* (2015) and *Necessity* (2016), in which the story of the protagonists of *The Just City* is developed further. The main plot is presented through a conversation between the gods Apollo and Athene in which brother and sister discuss the former's astonishment at the nymph Daphne's preference to turn into a tree to mating with him.[2] In their dialogue, Athene introduces her brother to the notion of "consensuality" and Apollo learns about "volition" and "equal significance",[3] thus introducing one of the main topics of the novel: consent. Then, as a direct consequence of his desire to learn more "things about equal significance and volition",[4] Apollo announces his intention of becoming a mortal for some time. His divine sister offers him the perfect environment for his human experience: a place, in the island of Kallisti ("Thera before it erupted"),[5] where some people are setting up Plato's Republic, led by Neoplatonists from all times who had prayed to Athene for this to happen. In this experiment playfully orchestrated by Athene, 10.000 children ("orphans, slaves, abandoned children and volunteers")[6] from throughout history will be instructed by a group of three hundred followers of Plato (among which we find Cicero, Plotinus, Boethius, Marsilio Ficino, Lucrezia Borgia or Ellen Francis Mason). All of them will be taken care of by a group of apparently emotionless

1 The authors would like to express their gratitude to the editors of Duermevela Ediciones, the Spanish publishers of the trilogy (who have already published its two first tomes, *La ciudad justa* (2021) and *Los reyes filósofos* (2023)), thanks to whom this book series became first known to them, for making Walton's works available to Spanish-speaking audiences and for bringing the readers closer to a more diverse range of fantasy and science fiction authors.

2 Walton (2015), 13–19. We follow the spelling of Greek names used by the author (Athene, Sokrates, etc), except when referring to Plato's Socrates. In such instances, the spelling will be "Socrates".

3 Walton (2015), 15–16.

4 Walton (2015), 282.

5 Walton (2015), 17.

6 Walton (2015), 18.

and mindless robots.[7] Athene's preference of robots rather than slaves introduces another key theme in the book, the invisible and devalued work which often sustains human societies.

From this point on, the story unfolds through the alternating points of view of three characters: Apollo, who takes on the shape of a young boy called Pytheas; Simmea (originally called Lucia), the 11 years old daughter of a farmer from near Alexandria, who was enslaved shortly before she was bought in Smyrna by the masters of the Just City; and Maia (formerly called Ethel), a Victorian woman with a solid knowledge of classical history and languages who becomes one of the city's founders and masters. These three protagonists provide us with different perspectives of the story and are joined by a cohort of characters which include other children and masters, such as Sokrates, who will act as a catalyst in the story, and of course the goddess Athene. The scholars divide the children into different houses and set up different committees to run the city, "sleeping houses" and other buildings are built, robots (euphemistically called "the Workers") perform the basic caregiving tasks and work the land and the children begin their training in different subjects which will help them to eventually become true Philosopher Kings.

The Just City's genre is difficult to determine. The complete trilogy of *Thessaly* was nominated in 2017 by the Mythopoeic Society for its Fantasy Awards, while the novel considered in this contribution was nominated in 2017 for the Prometheus Award to the best libertarian science fiction novel given by the Libertarian Futurist Society.[8] Jo Walton herself has stated in an interview given in 2016 that this trilogy was different from anything she had written before and that a story which mixes magic, gods and robots and is set in a "metaphysical world that is reasonably Neoplatonic" can be understood as something on the crossroads between fantasy and science fiction,[9] both very popular genres to think about the world in the last seventy years, but that at the same time with very deep roots in

7 Walton (2015), 16–19.

8 Here the term "libertarian" must be understood as a synonym of "anarchist" rather than referring to the contemporary conservative political current that advocates a radical neoliberal version of *laissez-faire* capitalism. The Wikipedia entry for this award specifies that it rewards "The best science fiction or fantasy fiction promoting individual freedom and human rights, or critiquing tyranny, slavery, war and other abuses of government power" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prometheus_Award, 05/02/2024), a consideration to bear in mind in our study of the novel.

9 Fast Forward (2017).

the past.[10] As stated by Walton as well, Thessaly can be understood as a "generational saga", by the end of which replicating Plato's *Republic* is something normal for a part of humanity.[11] In the version of reality in which *The Just City* is set, temporality and space seem to be especially relative if the gods intervene. For example, Athene affirms that her experiment is going to take place in "Thera before it erupted" (referring to the volcanic eruption that destroyed part of the island at the height of Minoan civilization), which implies that the Republic will be implemented before the actual Platonic dialogue was written in the 4th century BCE, while the masters and children brought to the island come from very different chronological contexts, from ancient Athens to 19th century USA and Renaissance Florence. Walton's immersive world-building in a novel that is constructed basically as the narration of quasi philosophical dialogues, with almost no action, reminds readers sometimes of Mary Renault's *The Last of the Wine* (first published in 1956), a very suggestive quotation of which is included at the beginning of Walton's oeuvre. This coherent recreation of how this attempt to set the Platonic Republic would have come out together with the use of certain literary devices,[12] or the places chosen by Apollo for his human experiment ("Periclean Athens? Cicero's Rome? Lorenzo di Medici's Florence?"),[13] betray the author's training in Classics and Ancient History[14] and her familiarity with and fondness of Greek and Roman culture and literature and especially with the Platonic dialogues. As hinted by Liz Bourke, herself a Classicist and scholar of fantasy and science-fiction literature, in her interview to Walton in the speculative fiction online magazine *Strange Horizons, The Just City* is not the first time in which she sets the action of her novels in a historical background. In Walton's own words, she is interested in the lives "hidden in the margins, overlooked, or

10 Rogers and Eldon Stevens (2018), 1–2.

11 Fast Forward (2017).

12 For example, the use of one of the most common epithets to refer to Athene in Homer's Odyssey, "grey-eyed" (γλαυκῶπις), which sometimes translates as well as "owl-eyed" or "bright-eyed". See, among other occurrences, Walton (2015), 16. Later on, in page 18, Apollo compliments Athene for the recursiveness of "doing Plato's Republic on Atlantis", a direct reference to Critias' account on Atlantis in Plato's dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias* (Plat. *Tim.* 24e–25a and *Criti.* 113a–120d). On Plato's Atlantis, see Pérez Martel (2010).

13 Walton (2015), 16.

14 Bourke (2015).

completely forgotten" and, borrowing J. R. R. Tolkien's words, conceives fantasy as "history true or feigned, or both together" and fundamentally linked with time and the past.[15]

We could therefore envisage *The Just City* as a suggestive re-reading of the possibilities of Plato's Republic as well as of various historical figures together with some other "forgotten" people whose voice is brought to the front in this narrative. Its main concern is with the viability of the Platonic project, or of utopias in general, when put in practice by real human beings (although with divine help). The novel presents an exploration of what would happen if a group of humans (many of which were taken against their will) guided by a cohort of devote Platonists would try, theoretically under the perfect conditions, to put in practice the utopian form of communal life advocated by Plato, focusing especially on his idea of justice. The dialogues presented along throughout the novel confront the readers with a series of questions on topics of great concern in the present world, set in a fantastic world and framed in the terms Walton imagines Plato or his followers would have approached them. Some of these topics include gender equality, economic equality, the possibilities of automation and its moral dilemmas, labour conditions, human rights, consent and universal and free access to education. In a similar way to the city depicted in Ursula K. Le Guin's short story *The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas* (1973), Athene's time-travel Platonic experiment in Walton's novel seems to rest on invisible and devalued work, featuring a society where hierarchical power relations still operate. In the following pages, this contribution will delve into Walton's proposal of how gender and social hierarchies could develop in her fantastic implementation of the Platonic πολιτεία on top of the invisible and devalued work of other collectives and in ways she imagines ancient thought would deal with the automation fantasies upon which Athene's Just City is built.

15 Bourke (2015).

THE "JUST" CITY? GENDER, SEXUALITY, AND HIERARCHIES

Recently there has been a growing interest in the study of the feminine presence within the philosophical field in Antiquity.[16] In this sense, special attention has been paid to the figure of Plato, even considering him one of the precursors of feminism because of his idea that sex should not be a determining factor in the search and acquisition of knowledge.[17] Plato emphasizes the importance of an adequate disposition of the soul as an essential requirement to approach knowledge. Only the rational part of the soul can achieve *logos,* while the body is linked to the corporeal sphere and in turn to elements that impede knowledge, such as vices, passions, corruption, or temporality. Although Plato recognizes that the soul benefits from the individual dispositions of each person, he also argues that sex should not constitute an obstacle to the learning process, since the *logos* is independent of the physical characteristics.[18] This Platonic theory sets up the discursive basis of *The Just City*'s narrative on women and it highlights the initial surprise of both the girls and the female guardians as they actively participate in the foundation of a utopian city where their voice is equal to that of men. In fact, one of the characters (Maia) is astonished when she declares that:

> Plato's ideas about all these things were fascinating and thought-provoking, and I read on, longing to talk about them with somebody else who cared. Then, in Book Five, I found the passage where he talks about the education of women, indeed about the equality of women. I read it over and over again. I could hardly believe it. Plato would have allowed me into the conversation from which my sex excluded me. He would have let me be a guardian, limited only by my own ability to achieve excellence.[19]

---

16 Some examples are Coon (1997), 28–51; Taylor (2012), 75–87; MacLachlan (2013); Denzey Lewis (2014), 274–297; Schultz & Wilberding, (2022).

17 There are multiple references to gender equality in Plat. *Rep.* 452a; *Leg.* 770c–d, 796c, 804d–e, 813e–814c; *Tim.* 18c. See also Garside Allen (1975), 135.

18 Addey (2018), 412. In fact, "the soul is immaterial, eternal and gender-less; only human bodies are different". The topic of women in Plato's work is also considered in the novel, for example when Maia and Ikaros discuss the case of Axiothea, see Walton (2015), 91.

19 Walton (2015), 32.

This enthusiasm becomes clear through continuous allusions to the unusual phenomenon represented by Maia's presence in Kallisti, as when she thinks "Father said I had the wits of a man, and it was a shame I could not go to Oxford too, as I would get more benefit from it",[20] or when Septima, one of the girls that arrived to the island as a student, considers the presence of all the female guardians in the following terms:

> "I talked to Krito once about why most of the male masters here were old when most of the women were young. It seems it's because men achieve so much more in their lives, and they couldn't be missed from them until they were near to death, whereas most women might as well not exist for all the individual contribution most of us get to make to history".[21]

In this sense, Walton seeks to mirror the revolution that Plato advocates by suggesting that women can actively participate in the public sphere and in the decision-making processes.[22] At the same time, she highlights the contrast with the gender constraints these characters suffered before arriving in the ideal city.[23] Although it is true that the masters in the Just City come from different historical periods, they share two common characteristics. The first is their desire to see realized and to participate in the πολιτεία proposed by Socrates in the Platonic dialogue. The second trait, common only to the female characters, is having been marginalized due to their gender regardless of their origins.[24] This tension is

---

20 Walton (2015), 29.

21 Walton (2015), 158.

22 Maia alludes to this in Walton (2015), 33: "In Plato's Republic, as never in all of the history, my sex would have been no impediment. I could have been an equal to anyone. I could have exercised freely, and learned philosophy. I wished fiercely that it existed and that I had been born there. He had written two thousand three hundred years ago, and never in all that time had anyone paid any attention. How many women had led stupid, wasted, unnecessary lives because nobody listened to Plato?".

23 Athene points out in Walton (2015), 72 how the most progressive guardians in the city are actually women.

24 Maia hints at this when she says: "had never before met another woman who cared about scholarship. Now I did, and it was wonderful. Before long I realised that most of the women were much like me, young, and fortunate enough to obtain enough education to make their possible lives unsatisfactory. I met young women from every century, including several from my own and the century after". Later, she adds in Walton (2015), 45: "For most of the his-

evident in Maia's declarations: "I was a woman, a young lady, and this constrained me in everything. My choices were so unbearably narrow. If I wanted a life of the mind I could work at nothing but as a governess, or a teacher in a girls' school [...].[25] Due to this fact, the women in the Just City relied on orally transmitted knowledge to fill this educational void that all of them have suffered throughout history. That is why they use knowledge such as the use of the sylphium root to prevent conception, experiences during pregnancy and postpartum or sorority and female companionship to prevent a possible rape.[26]

It is worth mentioning that most current issues are treated in the novel by feminine characters.[27] The omission of questions related to women's intimacy in Plato's dialogues is glaringly obvious in the upbringing of children in the city. Walton chooses to highlight this by addressing the education of girls in relation to their personal hygiene, in the episode where the students reach puberty and the female patrons have to teach them all about menstruation. All of them (both adult guardians and young students) benefit from the knowledge that Kreusa, a former 1st century CE Corinthian *hetaira,* transmits a knowledge acquired from other *hetairai* who used menstrual sponges.[28] Important feminine wisdoms are therefore learned only by the women in the community that aspires to become Plato's Just City, conveying current concerns about male disinterest about specific needs of women (perhaps due to cultural inertia, perhaps the perception that these issues are inextricably related to the female body) and about the centrality of male bias in most aspects of human life, both currently and in the

tory it was really unusual for women to be taught to read," I said. "Nobody except Plato had seen that we were human. It still made me angry to think of all those wasted lives" (Walton (2015), 186). Lastly, when speaking with Sokrates, she declares in Walton (2015), 338, referring to Plato: "If it wasn't for his wanting women to be philosophers, I'd imagine that he thought wives were a fungible resource".

25 Walton (2015), 33.

26 On the sharing of knowledge about contraceptive methods, see Walton (2015), 50. For an updated and complete overview of abortion and contraceptive methods in Antiquity, with a focus on Rome, see González Gutiérrez (2015). Pregnancy is discussed through the nausea that prevents Auge from painting and sculpting: Walton (2015), 182–183. For other examples of these feminine shared knowledges, see Walton (2015), 212, 229, 241–244, 253, 284–285. Rape will be discussed later in this contribution.

27 This is the case, for example, of consent, which we will address later in the contribution.

28 Walton (2015), 50, 59–61.

society imagined by Walton.[29] This leads to a discrediting of this type of knowledge as unimportant because, in Maia's words, "we knew the men wouldn't recognize or care about their significance".[30] Walton presents in her work an oral transmission of practices among an exclusively female community that does not permeate to their male colleagues, maybe out of disinterest – as it belongs to the female sphere – or because of a conscious act of non-transmission. In the novel, the female guardians take a conscious decision not to such issues with their male colleagues.

Indeed, examples from Antiquity demonstrated instances of women instructing other women. For instance, within the Pythagorean school, female members such as Theano, Arignote, and Myia were known to show their wisdom to their peers. Theano, Pythagoras' wife, distinguished herself as a philosopher who wrote to different correspondents, mostly, however, women. Also, her daughters Arignote and Myia were relevant intellectuals.[31] Myia, in particular, is documented to have written a letter, although it is now lost, focusing on child-rearing, indicating a tradition of women sharing expertise in matters such as pregnancy, abortion, delivery, and child-care.[32] These topics were often associated with midwives, who frequently held roles as priestesses. Notable examples include Phaenarete, the mother of Socrates, and Diotima of Mantinea, a prophetess in Delphi renowned for her teachings to Socrates on matters of love (*eros*).[33]

While there have been numerous cases of intellectual female authors, women have historically faced relegation and unequal opportunities compared to men. The novel addresses this issue with examples of capable intellectuals that decided to undercover as men, such as Axiothea of Phlius,[34] or Aristomache, a character inspired by Ellen Francis Mason, a 19th century translator of Plato's

---

29 This topic has been recently addressed from a manifold perspective in Criado Pérez (2019).

30 Walton (2015), 50.

31 These examples all revolve around individuals closely associated with Pythagoras but who also stood out in their own right. See Addey (2018), 418; Brisson (2022), 73.

32 These characters were mention in Porph. *VP.* 4: Iambl. *VP.* 30, 36. On the Myia's letter, see Plant (2004), 79.

33 In Plat. *Tht.* 149a, Socrates compares his role as a philosopher with her mother's job as *maia* or midwife. Diotima is mentioned in Plat. *Symp.* 201d–2.

34 With an ironic undertone, Walton (2015), 91 envisions the role of Axiothea of Phlius, the disciple of Plato's Academy who came with men clothes in order to be admitted as a man, exposing the inequalities that women have suffered in the past: "The woman who came to

works. Mason published her translations anonymously, a strategy employed to circumvent societal biases against female scholars.[35] Notwithstanding Plato's consideration for women and the fact that girls learn with boys on equal terms,[36] Walton's *The Just City* features clear gender inequalities that start with the very different origin situations from which female and male masters came to the city, as acknowledged by Athene herself.[37] The goddess notes, though, that from the Enlightenment onwards, most of the humans who pray to her and care about progress, education and equality.[38] But in the Just City some gender roles still persist, and boys and girls are not considered entirely equal, as Maia notices when she sees Simmea arguing with Ficino.[39] This inequality is evident in all levels, from the children who populate this utopia to the masters who continue to show gender biases that they had in their previous lives. In this sense, Simmea claims that a city in which there are fifty percent men and fifty percent women does not imply that gender inequalities have been overcome. Simmea states that "though we had nominal equality, there were always those like Tullius who would not accept us as equals".[40] This is also tied in with unbalanced power situations, as power is also not equally divided, since most of the masters are old men coming from societies were they already held power and, as Klio observes, "they're not going to want to give that up, even to Philosopher Kings".[41] On the other hand, it is repeatedly established during the novel that most of the burden

him [Plato] in disguise as a youth and was admitted into the Academy? Perhaps she made him realise it's souls that matter". This anecdote is mentioned by Diog. Laert. 3.46.

35 Walton (2015), 158 mentions her important role in the transmission of Plato's opera: "She published it anonymously. Nobody in her time would have trusted a woman as a scholar. But her translation helped a lot of young people discover philosophy. She couldn't come until she'd finished it, and until after a friend of hers had written a poem to her".

36 As expressed by Simmea, Walton (2015), 58: "I had friends. And best of all, I had music, mathematics, and books to stretch my mind. I learned from Maia and Ficino, from Axiothea and Atticus of Delphi, from Ikaros and Lucina of Ferrara, and from time to time from other masters. […]I could almost feel my mind growing and developing as I listened to them.".

37 Walton (2015), 72.

38 Walton (2015), 72.

39 Walton (2015), 188.

40 Walton (2015), 48.

41 Walton (2015), 162.

of basic tasks falls on women.[42] Traditionally, these tasks have been labelled as feminine under a series of premises that are related to the dynamics of gender inequalities. In this sense, the features attributed to women's character are extrapolated to all aspects of their lives, including work. Simmea emphasises this when she declares that "there's a tendency in most places to think that women are soft and gentle and good at nurturing, that by nature they should be protected".[43] In addressing gender inequality, the female characters in the Just City perceive these disparities not as inherent attributes of their sex, but rather as societal constructs lacking practical foundations. Walton draws upon Plato's tripartition of the soul to emphasize that there is no inherent distinction between individuals regarding their elevated part of the being, that is, the soul: "our souls have parts in different balances – maybe she doesn't have as much passion, and perhaps not everyone has it in them to stand in the line of battle [...] Every example of a coward we've ever heard about who was shamefully wounded in the back has been a man. And plenty of those who are brave and would stand firm are women".[44] Once again, Walton references virtues as the most important feature in the human being, according to the philosophical ideals in Antiquity. But she underscores the absurdity of associating socially constructed masculine attributes like bravery and heroism in the battlefield as positive and juxtaposed them with feminine attributes of weakness and subtlety. In the context of a city characterized by peace, absence of war, and fully populated by scholars, these gender-based attributions are revealed to be inefficient. The criteria for usefulness in such a society are not tied to gender but rather to their skills and previous life experiences, challenging traditional notions of utility based on gender roles. After all, even the intellectuals lack basic survival skills such as hunting or food provision.

---

42 A clear claim in Walton (2015), 249, which denounce the situation toward invisibilization of women's work: "'Even here and now, more of the burden falls on women,' Maia went on. 'I'm in here helping you right now, not in my room reading or thinking, where the male masters are. And you're giving birth while whoever the father is sleeps peacefully. But you won't be here helping the next generation through labor and wiping up the blood. You'll be organizing which of the iron girls do that work'". One of the most difficult tasks which is entirely entrusted exclusively to women is the decision on what to do with "defective babies": Walton (2015), 207.

43 Walton (2015), 83.

44 Walton (2015), 84.

JUSTICE WITHOUT CONSENT?

Walton has explained in several interviews that she first had the idea for the Thessaly trilogy when she was looking at Lorenzo Bernini's sculpture *Apollo and Daphne* in Rome's Galleria Borghese (Florence, Italy).[45] Bernini's work captures the precise moment in which the god has finally reached the nymph who is already transforming in a laurel tree, as recounted by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses.*[46] This is also the situation that impresses Apollo and leads subsequently to his conversation with his sister at the beginning of the novel. It seems like an appropriate image with which to commence a piece of speculative fiction which explores the notion of consent in several contexts. Its protagonists end up questioning the possibilities of real justice without consent.[47] In her interview by Liz Bourke, that in *The Just City* she wanted to explore whether Greek gods, perceived as super-powerful human beings, can learn lessons, as Athene invites his brother to do.[48]

In *The Just City,* consent is essentially discussed in the two ways Western thought has approached it, according to David Johnston: in relations among persons and in "discussions of the relationship between governments and the collectivities over which they rule".[49] In an especially uncanny scene, master Ikaros (the Italian humanist Pico della Mirandola), rapes his colleague Maia. We witness the rape from the point of view of Maia, who states, in very Platonic terms, that her body "unquestionably enjoyed it" but her "mind and soul remained entirely unconsenting".[50] Later on in the book, Maia is shocked when she learns

45 Bourke (2015); Fast Forward (2017).

46 Ov. *Met.* 1. 547–555.

47 Sokrates includes this as one of the problems that needs to be solved for the city to be truly just. See Walton (2015), 362.

48 Bourke (2015). The process of Apollo learning about consent is indeed an important thread in the book, including his considerations on his father's tendency towards rape and his own enjoying of the chase of nymphs, as well as on the way he intentionally chose to forget about Daphne's lack of consent (Walton (2015), 177–178).

49 Johnston (2009), 25. See also 28–29 for Plato's criticism of the idea of consent as a fundament for the legitimacy of government and 38–40 for his criticism of individual consent as a driving force of human actions.

50 Walton (2015), 91–92. The twisted logic through which he pressures her into having sex is also to be considered: "'It doesn't mean I don't see you as a person,' Ikaros said; 'that

that Ikaros appears to have dismissed the rape incident from his mind, focusing solely on their earlier conversation, almost as if he has forgotten it.[51] Subsequently, it is this female character who observes how Ikaros recreates the role of Alkibiades publicly with Plotinus, who personifies the wise old man who teaches the young according to propaedeutic "pederasty".[52] Maia thinks about Ikaros that:

> He was conducting a spectacular public Platonic relationship with old Plotinus, the leader of the Neoplatonists. Plotinus was much older than Ikaros, but still handsome, very dignified with his white beard and flowing hair. They acted as if they were Sokrates and Alkibiades in the Symposium, at least in public, and Ikaros seemed happy. Atticus asked me whether I thought they were as Platonic in private as in.[53]

After fleeing Ikaros, Klio (Kylee, a woman coming from the 20th century) advises Maia not to tell anybody because of what the rest of the community would say.[54] Here, Walton seems to invite us to consider how the negative behaviours of certain members, though widely known, are silently tolerated, granting disproportionate power to those responsible. As readers, we are contemplating the dynamics of complicity and the implications of turning a blind eye to wrongdoing within a community.

While consent is obviously absent in the first steps of the construction of the community as outlined by Athene and a very exclusive group of the masters, particularly in personal relations as the one just described, we do find consent

---

I want to copulate with you. Latin is an impossible language for this, and you don't know Italian. Let's speak Greek'".

51 Walton (2015), 213.

52 On the idea of propaedeutic "pederasty", see Calame (1999), 91–109. This idea is also reflected by female characters in the novel that ask themselves how Plato could think about equality when the romantic relations between men and women are unbalanced. In this regard, see Walton (2015), 90: "What he says about *agape* between men with no thought of love between men and women being like that makes me think he didn't know any women who were capable of being seen as equals" and "But… if he didn't know-any women who were people, how could he have written about women being philosophers the way he did in the *Republic*. It's in the *Laws* too".

53 Walton (2015), 101.

54 Walton (2015), 93.

in the relations between women. In the context of "sorority" or, at least, of a feminine community in which certain wisdoms are transmitted orally agreement and authority are discussed. After a certain point, issues in relation with consent, especially in the sexual sphere, are openly considered.[55] In that sense, while the Just City creates the conditions for the construction of an unequal polity, it also creates the opportunity to build safe spaces, in the context of the "sleeping houses" in which the city is organized, where women's willingness to discuss certain topics, such as forced pregnancy, is clearly shown.[56] Thus, a project initially designed to bring together masters and students in order to create the perfect society, but based on clearly unequal structures, also makes possible a context in which not only cultured women are able to meet other women with similar intellectual pursuits, but also discuss topics which are normally unspoken and transmit important wisdoms to a younger generation.

Throughout the novel, it becomes evident that both the children and the robots were not given a genuine choice regarding their residence in Kallisti or the conditions of life within this version of Plato's Republic; they were simply brought there.[57] The god Apollo, which arrives at the island disguised as a young man, is shocked at this lack of choice.[58] Towards the end of the novel, this theme

---

55 For example, Simmea speaks openly to Klymene about her nervousness regarding the Hera festivals because she had witnessed the rapes of both her mother and other women when she was enslaved: Walton (2015), 167: "'I suppose ifs just because this is the first time and I don't know enough about it. I saw my mother raped, and then more women were raped on the slave ship.' That had been the stuff of nightmare for years. 'So I have some uncomfortable feelings'". Also, Laodike and Simmea speak openly about copulation while pregnancy as a normal topic in Walton (2015), 181. Finally, in the book there is a clear contrast between sex as a curious topic for the children and the taboo that adults have with it, not even considering it as an important matter in the Chamber: "We never discussed the personal sexual morality of the masters in Chamber, though the children's was a constant topic of debate." (Walton (2015), 107).

56 Walton (2015), 318. This topic is often debated within close communities ("sleeping houses") but remains largely unaddressed in the Chamber, as it is perceived as belonging exclusively to the female sphere and therefore lacks importance in the eyes of the whole community.

57 At the beginning of the novel Simmea notes, for example: "I was twelve years old. I still missed my parents and my brothers, sometimes, when something recalled them to me. But little did. My life was so different now. Sometimes it truly felt as if I had slept beneath the soil until I awakened in the City" (Walton (2015), 58).

58 Walton (2015), 68–74.

resurfaces in discussions once more.[59] At first, none of the groups realize their lack of freedom and simply accept their destiny,[60] a situation that will start to change when the children grow up and are expected to procreate and when Sokrates arrives to the Just City, also without consenting to it.[61] Among the children, the case of Klymene, one of Simmea's closes friends, is especially interesting. Halfway through the book, it's revealed that unlike the others, she was born a slave. Despite gaining freedom during her time in the Just City, she still thought "like a slave", wanting to please the masters instead of truly striving for personal excellence. This realization burdens her with guilt, leading her to confess to the master Maia when she gets pregnant. Klymene feels she has deceived the inhabitants of the Just City, therefore perpetuating injustice with this "slave mentality".[62] Her confession horrifies Maia, whose previous upbringing in a well-off 19th century British family made her find slavery (theoretically) unacceptable. Klymene's case poses a problematic dilemma for a community which claims to be based on the idea of justice. Despite its noble ideals, the city's actions are fraught with ambiguity, which highlights the ethical implications of their actions.[63] In this case, a slave girl is brought without asking her (as well as the rest of the children), to an unfamiliar environment where she is expected to be raised in a Platonic way, so that she will become the best version of herself. However, her efforts are driven, at least initially, not by personal excellence and autonomy, but by a desire to please her new masters. This scenario highlights the complex interplay between idealistic principles and practical realities that the novel proposes.

---

59 For their lack of choice when coming to Kallisti, see also Sokrates' final debate with Athene, who insists that, if they had not come to the island, the workers might have never developed a soul at all: Walton (2015), 357.

60 With the eloquent exception of Kebes: see Walton (2015), 363. Their destiny includes the ban of leaving Kallisti under the threat of punishment, as in Kebes' and Glaukon's cases (Walton (2015), 358).

61 Walton (2015), 99: "I should have been dead, but for my friend Krito, who thought it good to overrule my own wishes and the will of my daemon and drag me off here, for whatever good I might do. What would I do in Thessaly? I asked him, and yet here I am, will I or not."

62 Walton (2015), 184–189.

63 Maia and Aristomache, for example, confess at the end of the novel that they feel bad for having brought the children to the Just City, based on principles designed by a sage who was no "expert in the education of younger people": see Walton (2015), 350–351.

ROBOTS, INVISIBLE WORK AND SLAVERY

The hardest works in the Just City are done by robots, which are called "the Workers" by the members of the polity. Ancient Greek and Roman mythology and literature are rich in examples of these devices, robotic servants, living statues and other types of artificial intelligence that appear in the tales of characters like Dedalus, Hephaestus or Medea.[64] We also have hints of the design of different types of *artifices* and *automata* in places like Alexandria.[65] As pointed by Adrienne Mayor, the relief of humanity of manual labour is one of the main motivations of the creation of robots and other machines, and so is discussed in Aristotle's *Politics* as a part of his defence of slavery.[66] Labour is a central issue in political debates in our current late capitalist societies, where it has been gradually devaluated, especially in the case of jobs related to the caring sector.[67] But in Walton's novel, the robots do not only work as *de facto* slaves, but are also initially denied even consciousness,[68] connecting with the Aristotelian justification of slavery, according to which some people are naturally suited to be slaves, a notion that has been used for centuries to enslave different peoples.[69] Most of the masters come from historical times in which slavery was a perfectly accepted social institution, and although slavery is sometimes a matter of debate between them, we sometimes find clearly pro-slavery attitudes, such as when Tullius (Cicero) refers to the robots: "And if there ever were natural slaves, the workers are clearly that".[70] This understanding of the nature of "the Workers" radically changes when Sokrates arrives to the City.[71] He teachers Simmea, Pytheas and

64 Mayor (2018).

65 Mayor (2018), 179–212.

66 Mayor (2018), 152; Costero-Quiroga (2024).

67 Graeber (2018), 207–220, 265–269. Graeber speaks of the necessity of a "revolt of the caring classes" (265).

68 On the idea in ancient thought of robots as "made, not born", see Mayor's introduction to her monography on robots in Antiquity: Mayor (2018), 1–6.

69 Dihal (2020), 201. Arist. *Pol.* 1.4–5.

70 Walton (2015), 255.

71 With a rather dramatic entrance the first time we hear of him: "You can't trust everything that ass Plato wrote" (Walton (2015), 99).

the other children to question the decisions of the masters and Athene, by instructing them to ask for a choice in the way they lead their lives. Maieutics is also crucial in the discovery of the sentient nature of the robots (carried out through the Socratic method) because it encourages them to defeat the *status quo* and ask for their basic rights.

Although slaves were a fundamental part of Plato's *Republic,*[72] due to Apollo and Athene's uneasiness about slavery, they decide to substitute them with slaves imported from the future.[73] However, at some point Apollo himself doubts about their nature, wondering if they were sentient and what would have been the point of having them instead of slaves if they were and thinking that his sister may have chosen the ones that were not.[74] Sokrates is the first to take seriously this possibility, proposing that "the Workers" may not only be clever tools, but also have "self-will and desires" and be "very interesting to talk to".[75] After several attempts to communicate with them, Sokrates manages to, and when asked if it likes their job, one of them answers "no" by arranging the bulbs it is planting.[76] In their first full conversation, Sokrates names this robot "Crocus"; he will be one of the only two who remain on the island after Athene's monumental anger in the novel's finale.[77] This process of naming them turns them from mere objects into individuals.[78] Sokrates grants them personhood and individu-

---

72 This is still a very much open debate in scholarship. Gregory Vlastos (1941, 1968) argues for Plato's acceptance of slavery in his *Politeia,* while other authors, such as Brian Calvert (1987) consider that such a fair society would not accept slavery. See also Levinson (1953), 163.

73 Walton (2015), 47. It is interesting to note that Athene and Apollo consider the robots something else but not slaves, showing repulsion towards the idea of slavery: "'Robots?' I asked, surprised. 'Would you rather have slaves?' 'Point,' I said. Athene and I have always felt deeply uneasy about slaves. Always" (Walton (2015), 17).

74 Walton (2015), 230.

75 Walton (2015), 190.

76 Walton (2015), 192.

77 Walton (2015), 267–269, 362.

78 Dihal (2020), 204. This reminds us of the "Lord–bondsman dialectic", where Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* asserts that when an individual attains self-consciousness, thus this being cannot be enslaved. Furthermore self-consciousness is seen as a triumph that is produced not by the subject, but rather it is understood as a social phenomenon: see Hegel (1977), 111.

ality: "'Those who are aware can choose the good, and therefore they have souls,' Sokrates said. 'Whether they are of the same kind I do not know'".[79]

As pointed out by Kanta Dihal, the Just City's resistance to manumit the robots even when their conscience is discovered reminds us of Aristotle's preference to intelligent machines instead of slaves, an ancient version of some of the automation fantasies we find in present political debates. Even in a utopia such as the one developed by Athene and the masters, manumission is perceived as threat to those "who had been relying on the labour of enslaved intelligent machines".[80] Once they rise up against the conditions they have been living under, it is revealed that their absence would be a threat to the Just City, due to the fact that the citizens were highly depend on their – until then invisible – work, as stated by Klio, one of the masters: "But we need the workers. We've been saying for years that we have to reduce our dependence on them, but nobody's ever willing to do it. They do so much, and some of it we can't do. We can't manage if they just sit in their feeding stations and feed and don't work".[81] Later on, she will remind the other masters that "[…] all our comfort rests on them".[82] In Dihal's words, "the masters of the Just City are torn between maintaining their standard of living and acknowledging the sentience of the Workers", because admitting their sentiency would imply to redistribute the labour they had been doing between the rest of the members of the Just City (therefore belittling the time devoted to philosophy) and that Plato's project cannot be achieved without slavery.[83] This consideration of the invisibility and devaluation of these tasks, this essential reproductive work, key for the survival of any society, is especially eloquent in a novel produced in a historical time in which, as said before, work is being gradually devalued, especially the caring tasks, traditionally considered as an inherently feminine labour and therefore part of the roles of women. This fact is represented even in the Committee that deals with the functioning of the robots. This Committee consisted mainly of women (with the exception of one man, Ikaros). Also the duties of the Committee are imperceptible for the other members of the community, and so, in Maia's words, "Somehow, imperceptibly,

79 Walton (2015), 316.

80 Dihal (2020), 201–202.

81 Walton (2015), 206.

82 Walton (2015), 323.

83 Dihal (2020), 203–204. See also note 73 in this contribution.

because of this, technology came to be seen among the masters as feminine and unimportant".[84] In addition to this, to the eyes of the masters robots seem to have been placed in the city by some sort of magic. Most of the citizens come from historical periods robotics was not as developed, and thus they consider the robots as beings sent by Athene, relating to the realm of the divine and the magical. Hence, as they do not belong to the domain of rationality, the masters show disinterest towards these beings. It is also remarkable that most of the citizens who start to realise the personhood of "the Workers" are women. Indeed, Aristomache joins Sokrates in his exploration of the robots' nature, to communicate their discovery to the Chamber and to defend them in a passionate speech which ultimately leads to their manumission.[85]

At a certain point, the robots begin a nonviolent uprising against the Just City, with the help of Sokrates and some of the children, and go on some kind of strike, not leaving their "feeding stations".[86] At first, the masters resort to a rather cruel solution, "taking out the piece of them that makes decisions and replacing it", which, in Pytheas/Apollo's words amounts to "cutting out their minds".[87] Finally, Sokrates calls on for a vote to free the workers and they are manumitted.[88] It is agreed that they will continue working, and this implies that the masters have to accept that they need to negotiate with them. But a debate follows on their new status in the city and on whether they will become citizens, finishing with the assurance that some of them want to learn as the children have.[89] At the end of the novel, Athene's decision of making the robots disappear (except for Crocus and Sixty-One) forces masters and students to depend on their own work for the foreseeable future.[90] The next two parts of the trilogy show how the different communities emerged from the original Just City have dealt with fundamental maintenance tasks, some of them resorting to actual slavery.

---

84 Walton (2015), 48.

85 Walton (2015), 252–255, 301–305.

86 Walton (2015), 203–204,

87 Walton (2015), 205–206.

88 Walton (2015), 303–304.

89 Walton (2015), 307–316. There is also a debate on what consequences grating them personhood and manumit them would bring, since that would imply for the labour to be redistributed among all the members of the community: Walton (2015), 322–324.

90 Walton (2015), 362–364.

CONCLUSIONS: THE PROBLEMS OF UTOPIA

We live in passionately anti-utopian times. In late capitalist societies, where Margaret Thatcher's "There is no alternative" has become part of common sense and is deeply ingrained in the ways politics is understood, utopia has bad press.[91] Capitalist realism has cancelled the future. It seems impossible for the late twentieth and early twenty first century societies to imagine worlds in which the attempts of reaching a fairer, more democratic, and redistributive political systems do not lead us to some kind of extremely authoritarian regime that worsens the current state of affairs. The prevailing view in a good number of speculative science-fiction works from the last sixty years is that it is better to stay as we are now, with dystopia acting as an effective legitimation of the current order.[92]

Walton's thought-provoking *The Just City* certainly presents a number of criticisms to the way Athene and the masters have organized their own version of a work that could be framed as a utopian proposal: Plato's *Republic*.[93] It encourages the reader to critically think, using philosophical teachings, about real, daily life problems. In the final chapter of the novel, we witness a formidable debate among Sokrates and Athene, nonetheless. With the help of some of the masters, former children and robots, Sokrates unveils the numerous contradictions of the Just City and the unhappiness they have provoked, finally blurting out that, as a goddess, she should know better than mortals but "you choose to take our lives and meddle to amuse yourself, doing what you please with them, against our will and in ignorance of whether the outcome is good or evil".[94]

---

91 Martorell Campos (2019), 11–13.

92 For a thorough study of the reasons that explain this process, see Martorell Campos (2021), 105–192; see also Martínez (2020), 121–142. Martorell Campos has also researched the recent peak of dystopia in relation with the gradual decline of utopia in fiction in Martorell Campos (2019). A prominent exception to that trend are the works of Ursula K. Le Guin, which feature numerous debates on the possibilities of utopian organizations, sometimes based in mutual aid, such as *The Dispossessed: an Ambiguous Utopia* (1974).

93 See, for example, Apollo's criticism of the almost dystopian way in which the matchmaking and upbringing arrangements of the City were working: Walton (2015), 229. See also Walton (2015), 248, for the suffering that the separation of the new-born children from their mothers in the interest of overcoming personal bonds causes in the community.

94 Walton (2015), 362. Apollo reflects frivolously on this same topic earlier in the story, in Walton (2015), 123: "What was interesting was seeing how much of it could work, how much it really would maximize justice, and how it was going to fail". The god also notes the corrup-

The philosopher directly accuses her of not letting the children to consciously choose their destiny and criticizes the Chamber's will to ignore the injustice and malfunctioning of the matches during the festivals of Hera as well as the free will and intelligence of the robots; the way personal relations and the breeding practices are handled; the fact that Athene decided to set the Just City in an isolated place (unlike Plato's *Republic*) that will eventually be destroyed and can therefore not affect any other group of human being.[95] Athene takes her inspiration from the island of Atlantis to set her project in a non-location (literally *u-topia,* no place),[96] whose basic ideals are unrealisable, making even a utopia that attempts to achieve equality of the sexes doomed to failure. The utopia, unfortunately, becomes a dystopia from its initial basis. Even when at the beginning of the play, Apollo converses with Athena and states that the basis of the city that will be created is:

> The Good with capital letters, the Truth, the one unchanging Excellence that stays the same forever. Once that's established, the system goes on the same in ideal stasis for as long as it can continue to do so, with everyone agreeing on what is Good, what is Virtue, what is Justice, and what is Excellence. For the first time in the En-

tion of the masters, who really only wanted for somebody else to make it work "and for them to have been born there. The masters were always envious of the children".

95 Walton (2015), 96: "It may already have gone there, in the far future that they won't tell us about. But we've been deliberately brought into a sterile back-water of history where nothing we do can achieve anything". See also Walton (2015), 356, on how Plato's plan is changed to Athene's taste.

96 The relationship between myth and the creation of a city is referred by mentioning Rome, Walton (2015), 116: "In his time, Rome had been no more than a little village, founded by Romulus and Remus only a few centuries before, unheard-of away from Italy. Then Rome had grown great and spread civilization over the world, so that even when she fell, her language had preserved it in human minds, so that now – except that now in this moment Rome did not even exist. Aeneas, if he had even been born, had not yet sailed from Troy. It's like looking through the wrong end of a telescope". Athene's utopian Just City is framed almost as a scientific experiment, set in an untraceable place, reminding us of Plato's handling of the myth of Atlantis in his *Timaeus* and *Critias*: see Walton (2015), 45. This also brings a nice parallelism with the fact that, unlike in the Platonic dialogues, the chronological setting of *The Just City* is not specified by its author. The Just City will only be remembered as the legend of an ideal society, because all material trace of it will be lost.

> lightenment, they had the idea of progress, the idea that each generation will find its own truth, that things will keep on changing and getting better.[97]

Furthermore, Sokrates also denounces the fact that the children are forbidden to read Plato's *Republic* until they are fifty years old[98] and therefore have no real say in the functioning of the city. Finally he wonders how it would be possible to conduct a Good Life (*eudamonia*) if divine intervention is continuously required.[99]

Walton's election of a multitemporal set of characters allows her to discuss the main topics from very different points of view adjusted to the historical conditions of each character. In that sense, it is noteworthy that the most modern and progressive perspectives tend to be adopted by feminine characters, one of the most affected groups by the flaws of the Platonic utopia formulated by Athene. We have already seen the evident gender inequalities at work in the Just City, and thus the novel suggests that the Platonic theory would be inefficient when dealing with issues related to women, leaving only Diotima to talk about love and not considering in detail a series of important problems discussed in the novel, such as menstruation, the constant endeavour for pregnancy or the suggestion of separating the newborn babies from their families and preventing the formation of individual attachments as the only possible criticism to the notion of family and the only way of preventing factionalism.[100] Walton therefore poses a profound critique of some of the foundations on which the Platonic project rests, suggesting that a city inhabited only by the best invokes unsettling parallelisms and entails a set of conditions that would bring unhappiness to their inhabitants and make justice impossible. Again, these are issues that specifically (but not only) affect women and raise the question whether Plato really intended

---

97 Walton (2015), 71. A recurring topic is the pursuit of excellence, as for example in Walton (2015), 142: "'That brings us back to what is best,' Sokrates said. 'The pursuit of excellence, as Pytheas said just now. When we first came here, Ficino said that he wanted each of us to become our best self,' I said. 'That seems to me an admirable goal.' 'And that has been your constant pursuit since you were ten years old,' Sokrates said".

98 This is also stated in Walton (2015), 102, 172, 341.

99 Walton (2015), 347–362.

100 Walton (2015), 352–353. On the separation of new-borns from their mothers, see also Walton (2015), 248.

to carry out the project of the *Republic* in practice, or whether he had not adequately considered essential gender-related details. What is certain is that Plato advocated gender equality in the intellectual realm, but he did not fully understand female experiences and vicissitudes.

Notwithstanding Walton's fine criticisms to the contradictions that would rise from the realisation of the Platonic *Politeia*,[101] the critique she puts in the mouth of Sokrates, Simmea, Maia and other characters is not at all demobilizing.[102] While the reaction of Athene, ultimate target of Sokrates' criticism, is initially devastating, it leads to a number of different projects of Good Life in the following books, some of which do not necessarily imply giving up all the ideals of the Just City, but some of the ways in which they had been implemented.

Walton's novel encourages the reader to think about the importance of understanding human nature, something feasible only by experiencing life as a human being, as Apollo tries to do. As the god finally understands, the key to a fair and good life would be to understand each other's needs, possibilities and limitations and to accept them without prejudice. Women and men being taught about their bodies and living egalitarian relations is one important aspect, sentient robots becoming free and accepted members of the just society, another. The gods, particularly Athene, find difficult to understand human nature with its unending possibilities, contradictions and manifold shortcomings. A hyper-rational approach, as the one represented by Athene, will thereby not necessarily lead to success because it misses radical parts of what it means to be human: feelings, empathy, and irrationality. The novel leads to a clear moral: it seems more promising to follow Apollo's way of becoming human and subsequently also suffer for some time to develop a sense of empathy and compassion which again leads to

101 In which there is an implicit criticism to many of the structures of the society in which the Republic was produced, such as slavery or the so-called "noble lie" upon which the metal division of the citizens is built in the Platonic dialogue (Plat. Rep. 3.414e–415d): "'The difficult thing is deciding who's iron and who's bronze, when Plato gives no guidelines there at all,' Kreusa said. 'And it's hard to assess exactly what work each child has an aptitude for and ought to be trained for. Not to mention what work we need done. And who can train them for it'" (Walton (2015), 150–151).

102 In this sense, Sokrates aims at improving the City even if it implies dismantling it: "You don't believe rhetoric could harm the city?" Sokrates asked. "If rhetoric could harm it then it isn't the Just City and it deserves it," she said" (Walton (2015), 127).

forgiveness and the opportunity to learn and become better.[103] This could also be a way for the gods to improve and reach real justice, only if they are willing to become more human in the process. In that sense, some of Pytheas/Apollo's last thoughts on the Delphic maxim ("Know Thyself") are especially treasurable and they will be returned upon in the following novels:

> Be aware that other people have equal significance. Give them the space to make their own choices, and let their choices count as you want them to let your choices count. Remember that excellence has no stopping point and keep on pursuing it. Make art that can last and that says something nobody else can say. Live the best life you can, and become the best self you can. You cannot know which of your actions is the lever that will move worlds. Not even Necessity knows all ends.[104]

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Addey (2018) – Crystal Addey, Plato's Women Readers, in: Harold Tarrant, Danielle A. Layne, Dirk Baltzly, and François Renaud (eds.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Plato in Antiquity* (Leiden-Boston: Brill 2018), pp. 411–432.

Bourke (2015) – Liz Bourke, Fractal History: an interview with Jo Walton, Strange Horizons (26 January 2015), http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/articles/fractal-history-an-interview-with-jo-walton/ (access date: 08/02/2024).

Brisson (2022) – Luc Brisson, Marcella and Porphyry, in: Jana Schultz, and James Wilberding (eds.), *Women and the Female in Neoplatonism* (Leiden-Boston: Brill 2022), pp. 64–78.

Brisson and Segonds (2011) – *Jamblique. Vie de Pythagore,* ed. and tr. Luc Brisson – Alain Philippe Segonds (Paris: Les Belles Lettres 2011).

103 In fact, Apollo's main learnings in the story come from experiencing life as a human and from contact with another human being, Simmea (and also with Sokrates): see Walton (2015), 63–66 and especially 226–234 for his thoughts on the nature of *agape.*

104 Walton (2015), 364. A nice reminiscence of the myth of Er at the end of Plat. *Rep.* 10.614a–621b, in which Necessity is present but it is not a determining factor on the human decision-making.

Calame (1999) – Claude Calame, *The Poetics of Eros in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1999).

Calvert (1987) – Brian Calvert, Slavery in Plato's Republic, in: *The Classical Quarterly,* 37(2), pp. 367–372, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009838800030561.

Coon (1997) – Lynda L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1997), DOI: https://doi.org/10.17077/1054-1004.1702.

Cooper and Hutchinson (1997) – *Plato: Complete Works,* ed. and tr. J. M. Cooper – D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis-Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company 1997).

Costero-Quiroga (2024) – Sonsoles Costero-Quiroga, Los Autómatas de Hefesto: la Inteligencia Artificial en la mitología griega, in: *La Razón* (20 February 2024), https://www.larazon.es/cultura/historia/automatas-hefesto-inteligencia-artificial-mitologia-griega_2024022065d459f7344c980001affa72.html (access date: 20/02/2024).

Criado Pérez (2019) – Caroline Criado Pérez, *Invisible Women. Exposing data bias in a world designed for men* (London: Random House 2019), DOI: https://doi.org/10.7196/SAMJ.2020.v110i9.15131.

Denzey Lewis (2014) – Nicola Denzey Lewis, Living Images of the Divine: Female Theurgists in Late Antiquity, in: Dayna S. Kalleres and Kimberly B. Stratton (eds.), *Daughters of Hecate: Women and Magic in the Ancient World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2014), pp. 274–297.

Des Places and Segonds (2003) – *Porphyre. Vie de Pythagore; Lettre à Marcella,* ed. Alain Philippe Segonds, tr. Edouard Des Places (Paris: Les Belles Lettres 2003).

Dihal (2020) – Kanta Dihal, Enslaved Minds. Artificial Intelligence, Slavery and Revolt, in: Stephen Cave, Kanta Dihal and Sarah Dillon (eds.), *AI Narratives: A History of Imaginative Thinking about Intelligent Machines* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2020) pp. 189–212.

Fast Forward (2017) – Fast Forward: Contemporary Science Fiction, Jo Walton interview – the Thessaly trilogy [video], (07/02/2024). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8xbLkA80jpE.

Fisher (2009) – Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (Winchester: Zero Books 2009).

Garside Allen (1975) – Christine Garside Allen, Plato on Women, in: *Feminist Studies* 2, pp. 131–138.

González Gutiérrez (2015) – Patricia González Gutiérrez, *El vientre controlado: anticoncepción y aborto en la sociedad romana* (Oviedo: KRK Ediciones 2015).

Graeber (2018) – David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs. The rise of pointless work and what we can do about it* (London: Penguin Books 2018).

Hegel (1977) – Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit,* tr. Arnold Vincent Miller and John Niemeyer Findlay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

Johnston (2015) – David Johnston, A History of Consent in Western Thought, in: Franklin Miller and Alan Wertheimer (eds.), *The Ethics of Consent: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2009) pp. 25–54, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195335149.003.0002.

Le Guin (1974) – Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Dispossessed: an Ambiguous Utopia* (New York: Harper & Row 1974).

Le Guin (1975 [1973]) – Ursula K. Le Guin, The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas, in: Ursula K. Le Guin, *The Wind's Twelve Quarters: Short Stories* (New York: Harper & Row 1975) pp. 251–259.

Levinson (1968) – Ronald B. Levinson, *In Defense of Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1968).

MacLachlan (2013) – Bonnie MacLachlan, *Women in Ancient Rome: a Sourcebook* (London-New York: Bloomsbury 2013).

Martínez (2020) – Layla Martínez, *Utopía no es una isla. Catálogo de mundos mejores* (Madrid: Episkaia 2020).

Martorell Campos (2019) – Francisco Martorell Campos, *Soñar de otro modo: cómo perdimos la utopía y de qué forma recuperarla* (Valencia: La Caja Books 2019).

Martorell Campos (2021) – Francisco Martorell Campos, *Contra la distopía: La cara B de un género de masas* (Valencia: La Caja Books 2021).

Mayor (2018) – Adrienne Mayor, *Gods and Robots: Myths, Machines, and Ancient Dreams of Technology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2018).

Plant (2004) – Ian Michael Plant, *Women Writers of Ancient Greece and Rome: an Anthology* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press 2004).

Pérez Martel (2010) – José María Pérez Martel, La Atlántida en *Timeo* y *Critias:* exégesis de un mito platónico, in: *Fortunatae* 21 (2010), pp. 127–145.

Renault (2015) – Mary Renault, *The Last of the Wine* (London: Virago 2015 [1956]).

Roger and Stevens (2018) – Brett M. Rogers and Benjamin Eldon Stevens, Introduction, in: Brett M. Rogers and Benjamin Eldon Stevens (eds.), *Once and Future Antiquities in Science Fiction and Fantasy* (London: Bloomsbury 2018), pp. 1–5.

Schultz and Wilberding (2022) – Jana Schulz and James Wilberding, *Women and the Female in Neoplatonism* (Leiden-Boston: Brill 2022).

Tarrant (2008) – *Ovid, Ovidi Nasonis: Metamorphoses,* ed. Richard J. Tarrant (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004), DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198146667.book.1.

Taylor (2012) – Christopher Charles Whiston Taylor, The Role Of Women In Plato's Republic, in: Rachana Kamtekar (ed.), *Virtue and Happiness: Essays in Honour of Julia Annas, Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012), pp. 75–87, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199646043.003.0005.

Vlastos (1941) – Gregory Vlastos, Slavery in Plato's Thought, in: *The Philosophical Review,* 50(3), pp. 289–304, DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/2180538.

Vlastos (1968) – Gregory Vlastos, Does Slavery Exist in Plato's Republic?, in: *Classical Philology,* 63(4), pp. 291–295.

Walton (2015a) – Jo Walton, *The Just City* (New York: Tor Books 2015).

Walton (2015b) – Jo Walton, *The Philosopher Kings* (New York: Tor Books 2015).

Walton (2016) – Jo Walton, *Necessity* (New York: Tor Books 2016).

Walton (2021) – Jo Walton, *La ciudad justa* (Gijón: Duermevela 2021).

Dr. Sonsoles Costero-Quiroga
Complutense University of Madrid
Faculty of Philosophy (Depto. de Filosofía y Sociedad)
Despacho A-01
Plaza Menéndez Pelayo s/n
University Complutense of Madrid. Ciudad Universitaria
28040 Madrid. Spain
s.costero.quiroga@ucm.es.

Marina Díaz Bourgeal
Complutense University de Madrid.
Calle Profesor Aranguren, s/n
Ciudad Universitaria
28040 Madrid. Spain
mardia11@ucm.es.

Suggested citation
Costero-Quiroga, Sonsoles and Díaz Bourgeal, Marina: Women philosophers and enslaved robots: automation fantasies and consent in Jo Walton's *The Just City*. In: thersites 19 (2024): Fantastic antiquities and where to find them. Ancient worlds in (post-)modern novels, pp. 257–284. https://doi.org/10.34679/thersites.vol19.281