Kristen Koopman, "'I Don't Know, But I'm Trying To Find Out, Okay?' Carlos as Scientist in *Welcome to Night Vale*." *Extrapolation* 62. 3 (2021): 287-307.

Welcome to Night Vale (WTNV) is a science fiction podcast series running from 2012 and written and produced by Jeffrey Cranor and Joseph Fink, with occasional collaborations with other writers. However, Cranor and Fink also credit Cecil Baldwin for significant contributions to the characterisation of the Night Vale reporter/podcast narrator Cecil Palmer, and Dylan Marron for adding to the buildout of Carlos, the co-protagonist of this science fiction and the focus of Kristen Koopman's analysis (289). Three script books have been published: *Mostly Void, Partially Stars* (2016), *The Great Glowing Coils of the Universe* (2016) and *The Buying of Lot 37* (2019). The audio drama WTNV had a follow-up through its spinoff novel, *It Devours!* (2017), over which Koopman builds most of her arguments, connecting it and comparing it with the podcast series.

Night Vale is a surreal city with a population divided between beliefs in absurd conspiracy theories and peculiar religions. Nevertheless, fictional 'facts' concerning happenings in town are narrated by the Community Radio speaker Cecil with a "straightforward reporting style" (288). Everything starts with the scientist Carlos, a gay Latino, coming to the town to study its peculiarities together with his team and eventually getting married to Cecil in later episodes. As Koopman points out, the character of "Carlos the Scientist" is multidimensional in terms of his queerness, ethnicity and his absolute rationality, which is in tension with his emotional evolution (300). But what appears most interesting to Koopman is that this character overlaps with the idea of Western technoscience. Technoscience is "black-boxed" in the way Science and Technology Studies (STS) conceives it, as it is seen as a way of producing knowledge where input is entered and the resulting output provides a solution, but how knowledge is produced, and on what values that knowledge is based, remains obscure (291). The authority of such knowledge production is linked to White-male figures and excludes non-White men and women in general. Thus, the irony used in WTNV to create this "black box" aligns with STS views (292).

Furthermore, Carlos is made from the fusion of two tropes featuring in science fiction: the heroic scientist and the mad scientist (299). These two figures strongly influence the United States' collective imagination about what science should or should not be. However, they are often opposed to one another (296-297). The fusion of the two appears, as explained by the Koopman, in the novel *It Devours!*. In an attempt to prevent people from being trapped in a desert otherworld (as happened to Carlos himself) Carlos starts new experiments that, inadvertently, open portals for monsters to enter Night Vale. His determination to solve the problem could be seen as heroic, but his refusal to stop his activity when faced with rational arguments by his collaborator places him in the role of the mad scientist (301).

The coexistence of these tropes resonates with the criticism of Western technoscience directed by feminist at STS. However, such a conflation also offers a solution, as the novel's plot shows. What stops Carlos from continuing the experiments and enables him to save the city, is the sharing of the "trauma" of the otherworld with Larry, a minor character, confined in the apocalyptic desert for most of the novel: "The viewpoint that gets through to Carlos isn't one that claims to be objective, but one that shares the particular subjectivity that is salient in this situation: being victimized by the desert otherworld" (303). This ending

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matches feminist approaches to new ideas of objectivity and knowledge production such as Donna Haraway's notion of situated knowledges which defy objective knowledge and, as Koopman asserts, "disassemble the power relations embedded in Western views of objectivity, and combat the privileging of White male viewpoints" (302). It also matches the 'feminist standpoint theory' proposed by Sandra Harding, which draws attention to the knowledge of marginalised groups (303). As Koopman highlights, rightfully quoting the novel, all these concepts can "be summed up by WTNV's description of the 'proper scientific method: (1) hypothesis; (2) argument; (3) fight; (4) cry; (5) hug'" (305).

Kristen Koopman offers, through the analysis of *Welcome to Night Vale* and its spinoff novel *It Devours!*, a clear overview of milestone concepts in Science and Technology Studies, beyond those mentioned in this review. As Koopman recognises, what remains to be considered is the analysis of sexuality in technoscience (305). However, this does not weaken her analysis, in fact it helps the reader to follow the article's main points. Pedagogically wise, this paper could be a fun and accessible introduction to STS and an effective way of bringing its notions into the fields of Cultural and Literature Studies.

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