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## IMAGINARIES OF THE FUTURE 02: POLITICS, POETICS, PLACE

# Poetry in Utopian Prose

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In 'Politics and Passions: The Stakes of Democracy', Chantal Mouffe has argued that passions, rather than merely reason and interests, motivate people to act in politics and the only way to confront the mobilization of passions towards non-democratic ends by the Right is to mobilize passions towards democratic visions. Although poetry does not hold central stage in contemporary cultural production, it continues to mobilize various passions. Therefore it comes as no surprise that in the world of real politics, poems (or strategically selected poetic fragments) serve to mobilize negative as well as positive passions, towards democratic as well as non-democratic ends. But what passions does poetry animate in imaginary utopian societies? And why is it featured there at all? These and other questions are probed in the pages below; and I conclude that poetry in utopian prose may open up spaces of negativity that contradict positive utopian designs.

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## Article

Although in contemporary Western society poetry may appear outdated compared to television programs, films and music, it continues to appear in various contexts, evoking negative as well as positive passions, towards democratic as well as non-democratic ends. But what about poetry in imaginary utopian societies? What passions does it animate and why is it featured there at all? After a brief discussion of poetry in the real world, the following article examines poetry's position in selected Anglophone utopian prose, ranging from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century works, such as 'Three Hundred Years Hence' (1836) by Mary Griffith, *A Modern Utopia* (1905) by H. G. Wells and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915), to later utopias such as Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) and Samuel R. Delany's *Triton* (1976). I argue that poetry may open utopian works to a critical negativity that is in tension with the positive designs embedded within the prose. Thus, I conclude, when considering the politics and ethics of utopian writing we need also to bear in mind its poetics.

## Politics As Passion, Politics As Poetry

In 'Politics and Passions: The Stakes of Democracy', Chantal Mouffe has argued that passions, rather than merely reason and interests, motivate people to act in politics and thus the only way to confront the mobilization of passions towards non-democratic ends by the Right is to mobilize passions towards democratic visions. 'The prime task of democratic politics', Mouffe writes, 'is neither to eliminate passions nor to relegate them to the private sphere in order to establish a rational consensus in the public sphere; it is, rather, to "tame" these passions by mobilizing them for democratic ends and by creating collective forms of identification around democratic objectives' (Mouffe, 2000: 149). In other words, as Lynn Worsham and Gary A. Olson summarized Mouffe's approach, '[w]hereas other political theorists maintain that people act in politics to maximize their interests, or act according to reason and rationality, Mouffe suggests that political passions—for example, outrage, anger, empathy, and sympathy—are a basis for constructing a collective form of identification' (Worsham and Olson, 1999: 166).

There is little to dispute in Mouffe's argument besides her vocabulary of reason vs. passion—vocabulary that reflects a dualism which has persisted in Western cultures for centuries but which could be deconstructed. In contemporary Western society, just about the worst passions get executed in the name of reason. As Herbert Marcuse wrote in *Negations* (1969), although a society in which 'basic institutions and relations, its structure, are such that they do not permit the use of the available material and intellectual resources for the optimal development and satisfaction of individual needs' (Marcuse, 1969: 251) may call itself healthy, it is sick. Viewed from Marcuse's perspective, contemporary Western society is governed by concealed passions such as greed, revenge and desire to dominate, and the aggression of its supposedly 'reasonable' citizens is mobilized for the sake of unjust, allegedly 'reasonable' wars, for example. So not only is there a place for passions in politics, as Mouffe argues, but passions drive politics. The question is to recognize *what* passions drive politics.

Passions in contemporary Western society are animated through various cultural forms, the least significant of which might seem to be poetry. Its position in the cultural fabric has undeniably changed. As Terry Eagleton observed in *Marxism and Literary Criticism* (2007), throughout antiquity, when poetry was a sub-branch of rhetoric, it held a central position among other cultural forms as it was openly intertwined with political and religious institutions (Eagleton, 2007: 10). The situation changed in the Middle Ages, when rhetoric turned into a scholastic enterprise, and then again with the advent of the Enlightenment and its emphasis on verbal lucidity. During Romanticism poetry once again assumed a political role, but it aimed to 'speak a language altogether different from commerce, science and politics' (Eagleton, 2007: 12). Poetry, it was believed at that time:

could conjure up enthralling new possibilities of social existence; or it could insist upon the contrast between its own sublime energies and a drably mechanistic social order. Poetry could model a type of human creativity, along with "organic" rather than instrumental relationships, which were less and less to be found in industrial society as a whole. (Eagleton, 2007: 14)

Shelley's well-known conclusion of his essay 'A Defense of Poetry' (1840) is exemplary in this respect (although Shelley's definition of poetry was broader than it is generally understood nowadays):

Poets are the hierophants of an unapprehended inspiration, the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present, the words which express what they understand not; the trumpets which sing to battle, and feel not what they inspire: the influence which is moved not, but moves. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the World. (Shelley, 1890: 46)

Returning to Eagleton's argument above, and Shelley's assertion of the importance of poets notwithstanding, poetry largely lost this position in the Victorian era as the novel took its place. While the novel came to be seen as a weighty form 'dealing in ideas and institutions, [...] poetry had become the preserve of personal feeling' (Eagleton, 2007: 14).

At the same time, there have remained poets and critics in the twentieth century who believed in poetry's potentials and sought to maximize them, for both democratic and non-democratic ends. A poem, Muriel Rukeyser wrote:

... invites you to feel. More than that: it invites you to respond. And better than that: a poem invites a total response. This response is total, but it is reached through the emotions. A fine poem will seize your imagination intellectually—that is, when you reach it, you will reach it intellectually too—but the way is through emotion, through what we call feeling. (Rukeyser, 1996: 11)

The Marxist critic Christopher Caudwell in *Illusion and Reality* (1937) characterized poetry as a '*directed feeling*' (Caudwell, 1937: n. pag., original emphasis). In poetry, Caudwell wrote, 'feeling is fashioned into a social form by being made to live in the common world of perceptual reality. Poetry externalises emotion. The self is *expressed* – forcibly squeezed out. Emotion is minted – made current coin. Feelings are given social value. Work is done' (Caudwell, 1937: n. pag., original emphasis). Although as

Eagleton pointed out, one can see the closeness of this functionalist view of art to that advanced during the Soviet Writers' Congress in 1934, where Andrei Zhdanov embraced Joseph Stalin's now infamous proclamation that writers are the 'engineers of human souls' (Eagleton, 1976: 54), the political role of poetry does not need to be understood merely as channeling the passions towards the crop production (which was Caudwell's example). Marcuse emphasized the oppositional role of love poetry; as Malcolm Miles has highlighted: in conditions of extreme oppression freedom may be located 'in a literature of intimacy, not in political literature or propaganda' (Miles, 2011: 4) because, to use the words of Douglas Kellner, only a literature of intimacy such as love poetry may 'produce an alternative reality completely at odds with an oppressive reality [... and] this difference can help reveal the horror of the totalitarian life and the need to make a break with it' (Kellner, 1998: 29). Meanwhile, concrete examples of poetry in modern politics could range from poems written on the walls of the Chinese detention barracks on Angel Island and poems written to advance black rights during the Harlem Renaissance, to poetry that responded to events such as 9/11 (with both democratic and non-democratic objectives) and poetry that mobilized those who participated in Occupy Wall Street (see, for example: Lai, Lim and Yung [1980]; Boyer, Marinovich and the People of OWS [2011]; and Honey [2006]).

In the real world, therefore, poetry may not play as powerful a role as other cultural forms, yet it has not vanished. So what about its role within the utopian societies imagined by speculative literature?

### **Poetry and Utopia**

Before addressing this question, a few clarifications are required to establish the boundaries of my analysis. First, I have not yet considered the question of defining poetry; however, this will not be necessary here because with the exception of radically formally experimental works, poetry in utopian prose is clearly identifiable. Second, despite the well-known banishment of the poets from Plato's ideal state, many subsequent utopian visions have taken the form of poetry – however, these utopian poetical works will not be my concern in this article, either. Rather, I will

focus on *prosaic works that cite poetry*. Third, I use the term 'utopian prose' because the works addressed in this article are not merely fiction. I do not mean that they would not be—to remember two most well-known definitions of utopia—'non-existent societ[ies] described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived' (Sargent, 2010: 6) and 'verbal construction[s] of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community, th[ese] construction[s] being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis' (Suvin, 1973: 132). Rather, I mean that the utopias discussed below are discursive constructions that contain strong elements of realizability and 'their vision of a good society located in the future may act as an agent of change' (Levitas, 1993: 257). In other words, they offer a mixture of unrealizable fantasy with realistic analysis of modern disciplines such as political and social theory, history and philosophy. Thus I have chosen to use the term 'utopian prose', rather than 'utopian fiction'. Finally, over the course of history, imaginary worlds that are, as Suvin reminds us 'more perfect' (Suvin, 1988: 36) have appeared in various cultural forms, including painting, architecture, music, film and writing. In this article, however, my focus will be on written texts, particularly the novel, and the fragments of poetry that are often cited within utopian prose.

The literary form of the novel, as Ian Watt and others have shown, is a modern invention, but poetry has appeared in utopian prose even before the rise of the novel. Even in Thomas More's foundational text, *Utopia* (1516), we can find several poems and his Utopians are supposedly voracious readers of poetry: 'Of the poets they have Aristophanes, Homer, Euripides, and a copy of Sophocles in Aldus's pocket-book format' (More, 1999: 126). Several early-modern texts merely refer to poetry in passing. In the imaginary world depicted in Francis Bacon's *The New Atlantis* (1626), readers are informed of the utopian society's 'excellent poesy' and its poetry performances, as, for instance, after dinner in Solomon's house when 'there is a hymn sung, varied according to the invention of him that composeth it' (Bacon,

1980: 62). Other texts of this period begin with a poem dedicated to the utopian work itself, as exemplified in Margaret Cavendish's *The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World* (1666), which opens with verses authored by Cavendish's husband, William Newcastle. Meanwhile, numerous prosaic texts cite poems merely as epigraphs, e.g. Ebenezer Howard's *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (1898), where an extract from William Blake's 'Jerusalem' is quoted. Nevertheless, many utopias in prose include fragments of poems or even entire pieces within the text itself. This happens in a number of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Anglophone utopias discussed below, namely: Mary Griffith's 'Three Hundred Years Hence', Mary E. Bradley Lane's *Mizora: A World of Women* (1880), *The Altrurian Romances* (1894, 1907) by William Dean Howells, *A Modern Utopia* by H. G. Wells and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*. Poetry is featured also in later twentieth-century works, of which I will mention Dorothy Bryant's *The Kin of Ata Are Waiting for You* (1971), Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* and Samuel R. Delany's *Triton* (also referred to by its full title, *Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia*). My choice of these works is idiosyncratic: I have tried to choose several of the most frequently discussed modern Anglophone utopias. Other works, from Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward 2000–1887* (1888) and William Morris's *News from Nowhere: Some Chapters from a Utopian Romance* (1890) to Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) and Kim Stanley Robinson's *Red Mars*, *Green Mars* and *Blue Mars* trilogy (1993–9), could have been discussed as well, and some of these I address in my research elsewhere.

In the works discussed below, poetry is sometimes cited disapprovingly; at other times, an attempt is made to incorporate it into the utopian world. Many texts feature original poetry. Almost always, however, poetry here creates spaces of critical negativity. That is to say, spaces in which a range of seemingly 'non-utopian' passions are animated, including anger, bitterness, despair, fear and sadness, often in the face of death. At best, utopian prose includes poetry of encouragement and agitation, and mystical poetry that celebrates (or rather accepts) the uncontrollable course of nature and the universe constructed within these utopian texts. Poetry thus remains largely at odds with the dominant positive utopian design of the prose works under discussion—questioning it or adding a new, often contradictory, dimension.

Returning now to Mouffe's appeal to mobilize the passions towards democratic ends, we could argue that whilst the prose of these utopian novels mobilizes positive passions such as empathy and sympathy, their poetry allows a critical textual space for articulating passions such as anger, sadness and fear. As such, the inclusion of poetic works enables utopian prose to contain its own self-reflexive critique via the channeling of strong passions that are no longer mobilized in these works for destructive ends (as they often are in the real world) but which nevertheless do not simply disappear. Authors, as well as readers, of poetry in utopian prose may thus experience, acknowledge and move through a whole range of negative passions without these passions ultimately negating the overall utopian design imagined in these texts.

### Poetry as the Past

Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Anglophone utopias often featured poetry authored by a range of white male writers from the literary past and, less commonly, the present: William Blake, William Shakespeare, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Wordsworth, Gordon Byron, Edgar Allan Poe, Alfred Tennyson, and others. Their poetry was sometimes cited as a deterrent sample of outdated art. In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland*, three male characters—Van, Jeff and Terry—travel to an all-female society. In the course of the novel, each is enhanced by a reference to a poem, through which they attempt to understand Herlandian realities. But the poetry that Gilman's male characters bring along with them from their originary world provides them with a distorted picture of the utopian world, animating archaic passions that the Herlanders have rendered obsolete. First, Van describes the three men's attempt to escape Herland in the following way:

There wasn't much talking done. At night we had our Marathon-obstacle race; we "stayed not for brake and we stopped not for stone", and swam whatever water was too deep to wade and could not be got around; but that was only necessary twice. (Gilman, 1999: 40–1)

The line cited by Van above comes from Walter Scott's 'Lochinvar', in which the knight Lochinvar kidnaps his beloved from the wedding that her family had arranged for her. Scott's versification of a popular ballad tells a romantic story of male bravery and

female passivity, which is at odds with the reality of Van, Jeff and Terry in Gilman's text, as they try to escape Herland and come to learn of their male impotence in a world of strong and capable women.

Jeff, just like Van, tries to understand the utopian realities of Herland through a poem: 'Damelus' Song to His Diaphenia' by the sixteenth-century English poet Henry Constable, known among other things for his sonnets and courtly love poetry. Jeff quotes the following lines in order to explain to himself and to Terry that women know how to cooperate: 'As the birds do love the Spring/or the bees their careful king' (Gilman, 1999: 68). These lines are ridiculous on their own, given that the bee hive is presided over by a queen rather than a king, but the message of Constable's poem is, above all, the poet's idolization of a woman called Diaphenia, whose submission he desires. As we can see from the poem's last stanza:

Diaphenia, like to all things blessed,  
When all thy praises are expressed,  
Deare Joy, how I doo love thee!  
As the Birds doo love the spring,  
Or the Bees their carefull King:  
Then in requite, sweet Virgin, love me. (Constable, 1897: 9)

'Damelus' Song to His Diaphenia' thus clearly fails to speak to the Herlandian realities of women's cooperation that Jeff, Van and Terry encounter—rather, Jeff's citation of the poem functions to emphasize the Herlanders' progress beyond the language of patriarchal passion and domination, echoing affects that are no longer desirable in this utopian world.

Finally, poetry incites passions that are outdated in Gilman's novel also when the third male visitor of Herland, Terry, cites a fragment of Rudyard Kipling's 'The Ladies', ironically the most contemporary of the poems:

I've taken my fun where I found it.  
I've rogued and I've ranged in my time, and  
The things that I learned from the yellow and black,  
They 'ave helped me a 'eap with the white. (Gilman, 1999: 129)

Although Kipling's misogynist and Orientalist poem ends with a bitter reference to women's resistance, once again it animates passions that no longer have any place in an all-female utopia. Terry, instructed by Kipling's poem, misunderstands Herlandian realities and attempts to rape Alima, as a consequence of which he is expelled.

In Gilman's novel, poems by Scott, Constable and Kipling represent outdated male poetic tradition. They mobilize a desire for domination of women and outright misogyny. Brief fragments of these poems are reproduced and clearly Gilman opposed the feelings they inspired. Interestingly, however, not only did Gilman evoke these passions but she did not include any poetry that would animate democratic passions in her utopia, although she was an outspoken feminist poet herself. All poetry in *Herland* is at odds with her vision of an all-female cooperative society. Moreover, in the sequel, *With Her in Ourland* (1916), there is no poetry and Gilman's earlier utopia, *Moving the Mountain* (1911), cites two lines from Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'To a Skylark' although supposedly the society has 'good music, good architecture, good sculpture, good painting, good drama, good dancing, [and] good literature' (Gilman, 1911: 228).

Another example of utopian prose that uses poetry in this manner could be *The Altrurian Romances*. The series in which William Dean Howells contrasts the utopian society on the island Altruria with the United States is richly intertextual: there are allusions that range from the Bible, Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) and Shakespeare's plays (*Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Macbeth*, among others) to utopian works such as Tommaso Campanella's *The City of the Sun* and William Morris's *News from Nowhere*. On several occasions, poetry enhances vain and unsympathetic American characters, such as when the narrator of *A Traveler from Altruria* invites the Altrurian visitor Mr. Homos to dinner with the following words from Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner': 'The feast is set, the guests are met, / Mayst hear the merry din' (Howells, 1968: 28). Or, another character asserts that 'poverty is the highest incentive that a man can have' because '[i]f it were not for that and all the other hardships that literary men undergo—Toil, envy, want, the patron and the jail—his novels probably wouldn't be worth reading' (Howells, 1968: 50). The

line 'toil, envy, want, the patron and the jail' comes from Samuel Johnson's 'The Vanity of Human Wishes'. Although this will be a gross generalization about poems that come from different contexts, both Coleridge and Johnson present skeptical views of worldly affairs and realities, contrasting the corruption and powerlessness of humans with the power of God. Moreover, when the narrator quotes from 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', he casts Homos into the role of the sailor who in Coleridge's poem returns from his sea voyage with a horrifying account of the destruction of his ship, thus subverting the role of Homos as a utopian messenger. With one exception to which I return below, poetry cited in Howell's novels enforces dreary realities of the United States; no Altrurian poetry is included.

An example of a more contemporary novel where poetry represents outdated art is Delany's *Triton*. Set in 2112, the novel focuses on the inability of the protagonist Bron to fit into the utopian society on Triton. Being from the 1970s, the text is more formally dense and experimental than the older works of Gilman and Howells—besides citing extracts from Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophische Grammatik* [*Philosophical Grammar*] (1969), Karl Popper's *Objective Knowledge* (1972) and G. Spencer Brown's *The Laws of Form* (1969), it includes a mathematical formula, for example. But there is no Tritonian poetry. Instead, once again, there is 'old' poetry. At the site of archaeological diggings in Mongolia, Bron encounters his fellow Tritonians performing a very 'highbrow' and 'classical' (Delany, 1990: 172) program for the Earthlings: Jackson Mac Low's *Asymmetries*. 'Really', Bron is told by one of the performers, Mindy, 'this planet must have the most conservative audience in the system' (Delany, 1990: 172). Here is an extract of the poetry that the Earthlings are animated by:

Hear the city's singin' like a siren choir.  
 Some fool's tried to set the sun on fire.  
 TV preacher screamin', "Come on Along!"  
 I feel like Fay Wray face-to-face with King Kong.  
 But Momma just wants to barrelhouse all night long...

[...]

Sometimes I wonder what I am.

Feels like I'm living in a hologram.

It doesn't seem to matter what's right or wrong.

Everybody's grabbin' and comin' on strong.

But Momma just wants to barrelhouse all night long. (Delany, 1990:  
171, 173)

Jackson Mac Low was an avant-garde poet and performance artist, active at the time when Delany wrote the novel. He was known for his experimental compositional methods and an exploration of indeterminacy and randomness. The fact that Delany chose Mac Low to represent outdated poetry playfully implies that the avant-garde of the present is not the avant-garde of the future as its poetry animates passions unfitting for utopian futures, such as resignation, bitterness and a self-centered sense of confusion. But what is Tritonian poetry like? This question is not answered. Once again, only old-world poetry, evoking supposedly outdated passions, is present.

### **Poetry of the Past as Poetry of the Future**

Notwithstanding, utopian prose does not feature poetry merely as a voice of the past; works such as the aforementioned *Altrurian Romances*, H. G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia* and Mary Griffith's 'Three Hundred Years Hence' cite existing poetry as a sample of utopian art. However, even here, poetry creates spaces of negativity. In *The Altrurian Romances*, Mrs. Strange—a sympathetic character who eventually leaves for Altruria—reads from 'The Challenge' by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Although the first five stanzas of 'The Challenge' are left out, the fragment is the longest in the trilogy:

There is a greater army,  
That besets us round with strife,  
A starving, numberless army,  
At all the gates of life.

The poverty-stricken millions  
    Who challenge our wine and bread,  
And impeach us all as traitors,  
    Both the living and the dead.

And whenever I sit at the banquet,  
    Where the feast and song are high,  
Amid the mirth and the music  
    I can hear that fearful cry.

And hollow and haggard faces  
    Look into the lighted hall,  
And wasted hands are extended  
    To catch the crumbs that fall.

For within there is light and plenty,  
    And odors fill the air;  
But without there is cold and darkness,  
    And hunger and despair.

And there in the camp of famine,  
    In wind and cold and rain,  
Christ, the great Lord of the army,  
    Lies dead upon the plain! (Howells, 1968: 325)

Robert L. Gale has argued that 'The Challenge' is 'possibly a rare instance in which Longfellow protests against selfish materialism and advocates social democracy' (Gale, 2003: 24) and that Howells was moved by the poem, considering it a proof that 'the poet's heart was open to all the homelessness of the world' (Gale, 2003: 113). However, the first five stanzas Howells that omitted would change the meaning of the poem substantially. They concern an old Spanish legend according to which the 'brave King Sanchez' and his 'great besieging army' are defeated, in response to

which one of Sanchez's kinsmen calls for popular resistance of the poor. The uprising thus takes place in the context of Sanchez's effort to conquer Zamora, which Howells left out, focusing instead on stanzas that dramatize injustice, insurrection and defeat. Even so, what remains of 'The Challenge' is at odds with the utopian vision of *The Altrurian Romances* as it is a poem of mobilization and protest with no promise of success.

While 'The Challenge' is cited in reference to the realities of the United States, which offers itself as an explanation of the poem's anger and emphasis on protest, in H. G. Wells's *A Modern Utopia*, poetry is featured in the utopian society itself. While discussing the literature of 'modern utopia', the narrator's double mentions William Ernest Henley, who was supposedly 'on the Committee that revised [the utopian] Canon' (Wells, 1967: 284). The following fragment of Henley's poem is reproduced:

Out of the night that covers me,  
     Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
 I thank whatever Gods may be,  
     For my unconquerable soul. (Wells, 1967: 284)

The stanza comes from Henley's untitled poem addressed to R. T. H. B. that was posthumously called 'Invictus'. The rest runs as follows:

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
 I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
 Under the bludgeonings of chance  
     My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
 Out of the night that covers me,  
 Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
 And yet the menace of the years  
     Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate,  
I am the captain of my soul. (Henley, 1893: 56)

It is interesting that Wells considered 'Invictus' an instance of utopian art as it is permeated with images of darkness, menace, horror, suffering and perseverance in conditions of powerlessness. Moreover, Henley (just like Longfellow) may seem like a strange choice for a poet canonized in Wells's utopia as he was politically rather errant (at one time he edited the conservative *Scots Observer*). More interestingly, Henley was disabled from early youth and his entire life he struggled with various illnesses. In fact, he composed 'Invictus' while in hospital, after losing one of his legs as a result of tubercular arthritis. Yet, the inhabitants of Wells's utopia unfortunately conform to rather classical standards of beauty and health, as the following quote illustrates:

The general effect of a Utopian population is vigour. Everyone one meets seems to be not only in good health but in training; one rarely meets fat people, bald people, or bent or grey. People who would be obese or bent and obviously aged on earth are here in good repair, and as a consequence the whole effect of a crowd is livelier and more invigorating than on earth. (Wells, 1967: 226)

Why then did Wells choose, as a sample of utopian art, a dark poem of stoic suffering; moreover, authored by a man who theoretically does not belong in his utopian construct? Yet, ultimately, this is not surprising. Henley's poem stands in tension with the prose of *A Modern Utopia*, vocalizing issues suppressed otherwise. Through it, Wells attempted to redeem the otherness he cast out in the prose and the poem disturbs rather than enforces his utopian design.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The fact that in the twentieth century, as David McCooey pointed out, 'Invictus' was mobilized by disparate personalities ranging from Nelson Mandela and Barack Obama to the Oklahoma City bomber, Timothy McVeigh, who left a hand-written copy as a final statement before his execution, perhaps adds to this poem's discomfiting ineffability (McCooey, 2012).

Finally, the inhabitants of the utopian society depicted in Mary Griffith's 'Three Hundred Years Hence' care about the arts, although in their idiosyncratic ways: they attempt to 'purify' literature of colloquialisms and vernacular language to such an extent that they 'expunge [...] all the low and indelicate passages' (Griffith, 1836: 79) from Shakespeare's plays and Scott's novels. The poem that Griffith reproduces conforms to these formal standards—yet it concerns an issue that disturbs the utopian future, namely the mistreatment of Native Americans. When the protagonist of 'Three Hundred Years Hence' asks what became of Native Americans, his guide answers:

I am sorry you ask that question,—for it is one on which I do not like to converse—but  
 The Indians have departed—gone is their hunting ground,  
 And the twanging of their bow-string is a forgotten sound.  
 Where dwelleth yesterday—and where is echo's cell?  
 Where hath the rainbow vanished—there doth the Indian dwell! (Griffith, 1836: 90)

The guide then changes the subject to the fate of the blacks: 'When our own minds were sufficiently enlightened, when our hearts were sufficiently inspired by the human principle of the Christian religion, we emancipated the blacks. What demon has closed up the springs of tender mercy when Indian rights were in question I know not?—but I must not speak of it!' (Griffith, 1863: 90)

The fragment comes from 'Sachem's Hill', a ten-stanza poem by an early nineteenth-century abolitionist Eliza Lee Cabot Follen. It indeed confronts the history of the Native Americans. The poem is evasive in its depiction of colonization, which is described in the following way: 'the white man came with power; like brethren they met; / But the Indian powers went out, and the Indian sun has set' (ll. 7–8). Other stereotypes abound as well; for example, the author supposes that if Native Americans, Christianized in 'the land of spirits', returned to the Earth, they would appreciate the 'stately domes' and 'happy homes' in their former homeland. However, as they are supposedly exterminated, the conclusion is that 'all the treasures of their

souls, shall be with us forever' (l. 40). Despite such ideological limitations, Follen's poem draws attention to the suffering of the Native Americans, with whom the author tries to be sympathetic, and the fact that it is remembered in 'Three Hundred Years Hence' suggests that Griffith could not imagine a seamless future in which the story of the Native Americans would not burn. Once again, poetry created space for evoking this critical sadness.

### Poetry of the Future

So far we have seen that when poetry of the past spoke in the future, it evoked negativity that contradicted positive constructs of the prose. Could this be explained by the fact that existing poetry was utilized? Let me finally glance at another nineteenth-century text, Mary E. Bradley Lane's *Mizora*, as well as two recent utopias, Dorothy Bryant's *The Kin of Ata Are Waiting for You* and Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, which include original poetry. Although most utopias published around the turn of the twentieth century included existing poetry, *Mizora* is possibly one exception.<sup>2</sup> Its protagonist, Vera, learns that in *Mizora*, poetry is recited on various occasions and that it is 'just as common an occurrence for a poem to be read and commented on by its author, as to hear it done by another' (Bradley Lane, 1999: 27). There are two *Mizoran* poems cited in the text and they both concern nature. 'But have you no building devoted to divine worship; no temple that belongs specially to your Deity; to the Being that created you, and to whom you owe eternal gratitude and homage?' (Bradley Lane, 1999: 120), Vera asks and her utopian guide, Wauna, answers with 'a majestic wave of her hand' (Bradley Lane, 1999: 120):

This vast cathedral, boundless as our wonder;  
 Whose shining lamps yon brilliant mists supply;  
 Its choir the winds, and waves; its organ thunder;  
 Its dome the sky. (Bradley Lane, 1999: 120)

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<sup>2</sup> I say 'possibly' because perhaps poetry in *Mizora* is not original even though I have not found any evidence to the contrary. This applies to the poetry in Bryant's and Le Guin's novels as well.

The second poem is reproduced during a funeral, when Mizoran women gather around the grave of a young dead companion and chant a dirge cited below. 'The melody', we learn from Vera, 'sounded like a chorus of birds chanting, in perfect unison, a weird requiem over some dead companion' (Bradley Lane, 1999: 126):

She came like the Spring in its gladness.  
 We received her with joy—we rejoiced in her promise.  
 Sweet was her song as the bird's;  
 Her smile was as dew to the thirsty rose.  
 But the end came ere morning awakened;  
 While Dawn yet blushed in its bridal veil,  
 The leafy music of the woods was hushed in snowy shrouds.  
 Spring withered with the perfume in her hands;  
 A winter sleet has fallen upon the buds of June;  
 The ice-winds blow where yesterday zephyrs disported:  
 Life is not consummated.  
 The rose has not blossomed, the fruit has perished in the flower,  
 The bird lies frozen under its mother's breast.  
 Youth sleeps in round loveliness when age should lie withered and weary,  
 and full of honor.  
 Then the grave would be welcome, and our tears would fall not.  
 The grave is not for the roses of youth;  
 We mourn the early departed.  
 Youth sleeps without dreams—  
 Without an awakening. (Bradley Lane, 1999: 126–7)

Wauna explains that in Mizora, death is accepted stoically because 'whatever sorrow we feel, [...] we deeply realize how useless it is to repine. We place implicit faith in the revelations of Nature, and in no circumstances does she bid us expect a life beyond that of the body' (Bradley Lane, 1999: 128). To Vera, this is shocking. 'How much more consoling is the belief of my people', she replies and continues: 'Their belief in a future reunion would sustain them through the sorrow of parting in this. [...]

The belief that we have in a future life has often furnished a theme for the poets of my own and other countries. And sometimes a quaint and pretty sentiment is introduced into poetry to express it' (Bradley Lane, 1999: 129). When Wauna asks Vera to recite such a poem, Vera consents:

That face and form, have long since gone  
 Beyond where the day was lifted;  
 But the beckoning song still lingers on,  
 An angel's earthward drifted.

And when death's waters, around me roar  
 And cares, like the birds, are winging;  
 If I steer my bark to Heaven's shore  
 'Twill be by an angel's singing. (Bradley Lane, 1999: 130)

Although from a present-day perspective Mizoran society is problematic in many respects, its poetry is close in its form and content to original poetry in later utopian novels (such as Bryant's and Le Guin's utopias discussed below). The contrast is between ornamental, rhymed, sentimental religious poetry of the old world and utopian free verse, which both celebrates nature and accepts its course. Once again, however, particularly in the second Mizoran poem, negativity emerges as the text is permeated with imagery of darkness, death and mourning: flowers wither, birds freeze, snow covers everything. And even the first poem mentions mists, winds, waves and thunder—albeit rhymed with boundless wonder. In other words, nature in Mizoran poetry is more than sun, light and blossoming trees.

A later utopian novel, Dorothy Bryant's *The Kin of Ata Are Waiting for You*, includes the following 'survival song':

Already far from Home  
 Far from the source of life  
 We have strayed further  
 To the deepest dark.

Now turn, turn, turn  
 We now turn back  
 Turn, turn, turn  
 Back to the light of life.

Rejoice in the darkest night  
 Dark night brings deep dreams  
 The farther we go  
 The closer to our Home.

So turn, turn, turn  
 We now turn back  
 Turn, Turn, Turn  
 Back to the light of life. (Bryant, 1971: 126)

Similarly, the theme of poetry cited in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* is the struggle with nature and death: Gimar sings while working in a settlement camp, surrounded with dust: 'She brings the green leaf from the stone, / From heart of rock clear water running' (Le Guin, 1994: 47); on Odo's tomb, 'in the great old willows, looking at the plain', there is an inscription: 'To be whole is to be part/true voyage is return' (Le Guin, 1994: 84). In addition, the following longer verses are cited:

O child Anarchia, infinite promise  
 infinite carefulness  
 I listen, listen in the night  
 by the cradle deep as the night  
 is it well with the child (Le Guin, 1994: 96)

And:

O eastern light, awaken  
 Those who have slept!  
 The darkness will be broken,  
 The promise kept. (Le Guin, 1994: 299)

The first fragment is remembered in the context of Odonian fears of centralization; the second is sung during an insurrection on Anarres. (Neither is supposedly good as ‘Odonians’ first efforts to make their new language, their new world, into poetry, were stiff, ungainly, moving’ (Le Guin [1994: 96]), but no other utopian poetry appears in *The Dispossessed*.) In both the poems, there is a sense of hope conveyed through references to the child, the promise and eastern light, but there is also mystery (the evocation of infinity and eternity) and passivity: in the first poem, the speaker listens; in the second one, s/he wishes for the light to awaken the sleepers. The background of both these poems is darkness in which hope originates—conveyed best, perhaps, through the image of ‘the cradle deep as the night’.

### Conclusion

As Adrienne Rich has noted, poetry does not require anything but language and it is, in principle, a democratic form. Although in real life, it no longer holds central stage in animating passions (whether for democratic or undemocratic ends), it has not entirely vanished. Nor has it vanished from utopian prose. It has been commonly argued that utopias—both in the sense of literary texts and imaginary societies—use poetry merely as propaganda. In one unfavorable response to Bellamy’s *Looking Backward 2000–1887*, for example, we can read that ‘[t]he doors of poetry and art were barred against everything beautiful, magnificent, sublime, and elevated, while they tenderly fostered the ugly, loathsome, and detestable’ (Wilbrandt, 1891: 75). Or, in the society depicted in Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), which has stood in the twentieth century as a symbol of thwarted utopias, rhymed ‘Solidarity Hymns’ are used for emotional engineering and propaganda. In the utopian prose I have looked at, however, there is no such poetry. Clearly, I have considered only a few, primarily classic works. As has been mentioned already, others could have been discussed, including the aforementioned novel by Bellamy as well as the sequel *Equality* (1897), Ignatius Donnelly’s *Caesar’s Column* (1890) and Jack London’s *The Iron Heel* (1908). More recent texts that cite poetry are Aldous Huxley’s *Island* (1962), Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia: The Notebooks and Reports of William Weston* (1975) and its prequel, *Ecotopia Emerging* (1981), alongside more formally experimental works such as Joanna Russ’s *The Female Man* (1975), Le Guin’s *Always Coming*

*Home* (1985), and the utopias of Octavia Butler and Kim Stanley Robinson. Even so, poems and fragments of poems cited in the above works by Griffith, Bradley Lane, Wells, Howells, Gilman, Bryant, Delany and Le Guin illustrate that poetry has had an important role in utopian prose: if the latter drew consoling pictures of happier futures, the former revealed blind spots in these designs. Translated into Chantal Mouffe's language of political passions, it may be argued that these utopian novels mobilize sympathy, love and desire for justice without canceling out negative passions such as anger, resignation, bitterness, sadness and fear. While the latter passions are not exactly directed here towards democratic ends (could they ever be?), they nevertheless generate moments of negativity that both authors and readers of these utopian narratives must experience and move through. And poetry—in a utopian echo of the much quoted words of W. H. Auden—'makes this happen'.

### Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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