

“THE MOVING HORIZON OF CLASSLESS HARMONIES” IN DARKO SUVIN’S POETRY

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses selected poetry by Darko Suvin against the background of his theoretical writings about science fiction, utopia and poetry. It argues that Suvin’s poetry estranges the ideological view of the present and history as an inevitable reproduction of injustice and alienation. The focus is on several poems included in the collections *The Long March: Notes on the Way 1981–1984* (1987) and *Defined by a Hollow: Essays on Utopia, Science Fiction, and Political Epistemology* (2010), as well as in “Three Long Poems 2000–2016” (2016) and “Poems of Old Age (2002–17)” (2017) available on the author’s website.¹

Keywords: utopia; science fiction; poetry; communism; Darko Suvin

the poems are the best me
& the best i can say for myself is
i kept the faith comrades
In this sad & wondrous time.
(Suvin, “Autobiography 2004: De Darci Natura”)

As founding editor (together with R. D. Mullen) of the journal *Science-Fiction Studies* and author of various articles and monographs, from the critically-acclaimed *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction: On the Poetics and History of a Literary Genre* (1979) to the recent *Disputing the Deluge: Collected 21st-century Writings on Utopia, Narration, and Survival* (2021), Darko Suvin is frequently cited for his definition of science fiction as literature of cognitive estrangement, and appreciated for his criticism of Anglophone, Francophone and Russian science fiction and utopia. In addition, he has contributed to theatre studies, philosophy and political theory, with subjects that extend from Bertolt Brecht’s dramaturgy to the history of former Yugoslavia. What is perhaps less known is

¹ The article emerged from a revised presentation delivered at the symposium of the Leverhulme International Research Network “Imaginaries of the Future” that took place in 2016 at the University of Regensburg, Germany. I hereby thank the organisers for accepting my contribution and for their continual support. Special thanks to Darko Suvin for his suggestions and comments on earlier versions. “The moving horizon of classless harmonies” is a quotation from the poem “A Letter to My Friend, Disenchanted After 1968”.

that Suvin is also a poet. He has published poetry in Croatoserbian as well as English, in journals ranging from the Croatian *Novi Plamen* and the Japanese *Abiko Quarterly* to several Anglophone journals including *Foundation*, *Femspec*, *Frogpond*, and *Socialism and Democracy*. His verse has appeared in his critical monographs, such as *Lessons of Japan* (1996) and *For Lack of Knowledge: On the Epistemology of Politics as Salvation* (2001), and in two stand-alone collections, *The Long March: Notes on the Way 1981–1984* (1987) and *Armirana Arkadija [An Armoured Arcadia]* (1990).² Suvin's view of poetry has remained sympathetic: already in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, he discussed the poems of William Blake and Percy Bysshe Shelley, and over two decades later he commended poetry (and art in general) for example in his essay to Marc Angenot in the following way:

In poetry's (art's) utopian glimmer, probe, & epitome, alternatives for humanity can be – cheaply! – rehearsed. It is at its best, in its horizons, a perennial playful childhood of human kind. [...] Poetry (artistic production) is then potentially a privileged form for conveying & constituting cognition, for humanizing it by means of figures & events recalling but also modifying the life-world, & for understanding what cognition is & may be. [...] We need to realize that there is no poetry without communism, & no communism without poetry. (2004, 308–309)

Despite Suvin's appreciative view of poetry, and despite his own poetic output, there is relatively little criticism; with exceptions such as a recent article in *Utopian Studies* by Zorica Đergović-Joksimović, an essay in Italian by Daniela Marcheschi about the poem “You, Giacomo Leopardi” and Tom Moylan's discussion of the journey from denunciation to annunciation in “Growing Old Without Yugoslavia”, there are Phillip E. Wegner's forewords in *Darko Suvin: A Life in Letters* (2011) and *Defined by a Hollow: Essays on Utopia, Science Fiction, and Political Epistemology* (2010), which describe Suvin's poetry as “a deeply affective, self-reflective counterpoint to the essay's more analytic turns, while underscoring the emotional shifts and swerves that are a crucial part of the essays' context” (Wegner 2010, xxiv). My objective in the following pages is to contribute to these studies by first reviewing some of Suvin's thoughts about poetry, science fiction and utopia, and subsequently to discuss several poems. In the next section, I briefly recall the notions of cognitive estrangement and the novum as introduced in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* but also in Suvin's later works, specifically the essays “Locus, Horizon, and Orientation: The Concept of Possible Worlds as a Key to Utopian Studies” (1990), “Parables and Uses of a Stumbling Stone” (2017) and “On Communism, Science Fiction and Utopia: The Blagoevgrad Theses” (2019). The critic's reflections about poetry in his monograph *Communism, Poetry: Communicating Vessels (Insubordinate Writings 1999–2018)* (2020) constitute departure points for my subsequent discussion of his poems. These are chosen thematically rather than chronologically, as despite the development of Suvin's writings from prevalently sensuous, lyrical poetry, through angrier and more disillusioned verse of the 1990s, to the tentatively hopeful texts of the past two decades,³

² A selection of Suvin's writing is available at <http://www.darkosuvin.com>.

³ Commenting on his writing in *Defined by a Hollow*, Suvin observed “a break in time, and perhaps even more in tone” (2010, 2) that came after 1989 and the NATO bombing of Belgrade in the 1990s. His early poetry, “while facing the personal price to be paid by an émigré, still held to the larger framework of Blochian hope, which indeed culminated in the utopian ‘soft primitivism’ of ‘Visions off Yamada’

his poetry has been underwritten by what is also a central focus of this essay: a concern with disalienation, justice and “classless harmonies”.

As Carl Freedman wrote in a review of *Defined by a Hollow*, “[t]o read Suvin seriously is to appreciate that the various genres he has mastered are for him ultimately means towards a single end that is manifest in nearly everything he writes: namely, the project of fully facing the horrors of the world we inhabit while imagining – and striving to attain – a world radically more humane, a world more fit for human life” (2011, 110). His poetry, as the following pages propose, insists on a historical movement (orientation) towards a classless world of justice and disalienation (horizon), with utopia as a spacio-temporally bordered moment (locus) of critically hopeful estrangement from the horrors of history and a reminder of its utopian horizon. Specifically, there is a recurrent motif of rivers, seas and oceans, which are linked with the movement of history: sublime, terrible, overwhelming, “[m]uttering [and] overflowing” (Suvin 2017, “Ah! God...”) yet also streamed with warm currents of resistance, hope and affection. Utopia appears in the poems as a challenging enclosure akin to Fredric Jameson’s conceptualisation of it in *Archeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005) as “an imaginary enclave within real social space”, “an aberrant by-product [whose] possibility is dependent on the momentary formation of a kind of eddy or self-contained backwater within the general differentiation process and its seemingly irreversible forward momentum” (2005, 15), which may be destroyed like former Yugoslavia but not without surviving and affecting history’s movement towards the utopian horizon.

(Suvin) On Science Fiction, Utopia and Poetry

Organised or articulated communism can be a locus,
an orientation for a movement,
and a horizon.

(Suvin, *Communism, Poetry*)

Although delving deeper into the notions of cognitive estrangement and the novum, instrumental for Suvin’s consideration of science fiction and utopia, is outside the scope of this article, to set the grounds for the following discussion of his thoughts about poetry, it is good to emphasise that crucial for the definition of cognitive estrangement and the novum is the distinction between what Suvin has called “critical” and “mythical” (or “nihilist”) estrangement, and between a liberating, life-dealing novum and a fake, death-dealing one. While the difference between “critical” and “mythical” estrangement may appear only implicit in the 1972 article “On the Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre”, where drawing on lectures he gave in the late 1960s and early 1970s Suvin introduced the concept of cognitive estrangement in his definition of science fiction, later he criticised for example Lee Baxandall’s work on happenings as nihilist estrangement centred on

and other similar poems of a more intimate nature”, whereas the poems written during and after the disintegration of Yugoslavia “culminate to [his] mind in the cosmic desolation of ‘Imagine a Fish’, a hyperbole for the dystopian period [he] grappled with after the mid-1990s” (Suvin 2010a, 2–3). Nevertheless, in his more recent poems “the horizon of a history that has no end is not forgotten, it lives [...] as the value stance from which all is judged and at times even surfaces” (Suvin 2010a, 3).

a mere “renewal of sensual perception without cognitive values”, as Sezgin Boynik put it (2015, 30). Likewise, in “Parables and Uses of a Stumbling Stone”, Suvin emphasised that “estrangement as a formal device which doubts the present norms is ideologico-politically ambiguous: in the Brecht or Marxist wing it is ‘critical’, but in other hands it may be ‘mythical’: Hamsun, Jünger, Pound, and the Iranian *Ta’ziyeh* play use it with a lay or religious proto-fascist horizon” (2017, 271).

“Mythical/nihilist” estrangement therefore differs from cognitive estrangement even though both are critical of the status quo (Ezra Pound’s rejection of “usury” in *The Cantos* is one of Suvin’s examples). In places, the distinction seems to be conceptualised in terms of the doctrinal closure of “mythical/nihilist” estrangement (for example in a doctrinal belief in the superiority of one nation, patriarchy, racism and Social Darwinism), but an even clearer difference is the horizon and the locus from which the present world and its continuum are estranged. The orienting horizon in Suvin’s work is the communist horizon: “the future Earthly Paradise of a classless society, a society of equals: possessing equal right to define and participate in common collective projects for well-being and happiness” (Suvin 2020, 20). “[O]rienting, often inspiring, and always unattainable” (Suvin 2020, 20), this horizon is not a doctrine; nevertheless, it is not empty and differs from a proto-fascist horizon of injustice, racism and ethnic bigotry.

Although “Locus, Horizon and Orientation” mentions abstract blueprints and utopian programmes as instances of utopian horizons, it is through concrete utopian loci that the difference between “critical” and “mythical/nihilist” estrangement may be elucidated. While many texts represent a locus, a science-fiction text represents a locus in which the novum is hegemonic (“*SF is distinguished by the narrative dominance or hegemony of a fictional novum (novelty, innovation) validated by cognitive logic*” [Suvin 1979, 79; original emphasis]) and a utopian (or eutopian) text represents a locus in which the novum is envisioned by the author as “more perfect”. Suvin’s now classic definitions therefore represent utopia as “the *sociopolitical subgenre of science fiction*” (1979, 61; original emphasis), a Blochian “imaginative experiment or ‘a methodical organ for the New’” (1979, 66; cf. Bloch 1996, 157), and “the verbal construction 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, this construction being based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis” (1979, 49). Through distinguishing between a “fake” novum and a “radically liberating”⁴ one, or through a later addition to the above definition of utopia as constructed by “discontented social classes interested in otherness and change” (2010b, 383),⁵ Suvin

⁴ “Radically liberating” in the sense that it stands “in critical opposition to degrading relationships between people as well as to the commodification of human and surrounding nature, and in fertile relation to memories of a humanized past [...] I mean also a novelty enabling us to understand whence comes the rising tide of racism and fascism 2.0, and crucially that it is fed by central commandment of capitalism: profit now, more and more profit, and let the stragglers of hundreds of millions be eaten by wolves” (Suvin 2019, 146).

⁵ In an interview with Boynik, Suvin explained that the initial definition lacked the social anchoring in “discontented class” and that “[i]t is not enough to say simply a discontented group, then you can have reactionary utopias as well. I read a number of them by Russian White émigrés, for they too can be discontented. It must be a sufficiently important social class to produce a viable ideology. In other words if we accept a socio-formalist vocabulary, I lacked the social part in first definition” (Boynik and Suvin 2015, 35).

differentiates between specific utopian loci while also keeping in mind that a locus (of any political orientation) becomes dogmatic and static without a horizon. A dynamic, open utopian text represents a spacio-temporal arrangement oriented towards a horizon; it is characterised by “*the dominance of Horizon over Locus*” (1990, 79; original emphasis).

In the next three sections, Suvin’s poems are selected to illustrate how the estranging utopian locus emerges under the moving horizon of justice and disalienation. Poetry, according to Suvin, can open ideological closures via estrangement from the prevailing worldview and its continuum. In *Communism, Poetry*, Suvin argues that verse enables counter-hegemonic cognition as it is “not only in strong opposition to the stifling superficial babbling of the reigning, totally ideologised doxa of the capitalist media or brain-washed common sense, but its main reason for existing is to be a ‘stumbling block’ for the hegemonic babble” (2020, 69). Referring to Franco Fortini’s observation that “the literary use of language may lead the writer and reader to a knowledge of relationships between people different from the knowledge brought by a practical or scientific use of language” (Fortini 2003, 1796; qtd in Suvin 2020, 199), Suvin points out that in poetry where the subject and the addressee are present and presupposed, rational discourse is “never sundered from possibly discreet or hardboiled but always strong emotion” (2020, 70). However, even though the critic links all poetry here to communism, considering the two as communicating vessels, what transpires from his above-mentioned essays about science fiction and utopia is that poetic novums may induce “critical” as well as “mythical/nihilist” estrangements, and that only certain poetry could be considered science fiction, as “no doubt, each and every poetic metaphor is a novum [and] valid SF has deep affinities with poetry but its [SF’s] novelty is ‘totalizing’ in the sense that it entails a change of the whole universe of the tale, or at least of crucially important aspects thereof” (Suvin 1979, 64), and that only certain poetry presents open-ended, life-dealing utopias.

Let me now turn to several poems from the collections *The Long March* and *Defined by a Hollow* (which includes a selection of poetry written between 1983 and 2008) as well as two compilations available on Suvin’s website: “Three Long Poems 2000–2016” (2016) and “Poems of Old Age (2002–17)” (2017). I propose that through water imagery Suvin’s poems create a fictional world that moves under the sign of the communist “horizon of classless harmonies”. While some of these texts present a utopian locus, a specific “counter-project” (to use Suvin’s expression), it remains dynamic in that it “constantly tends toward and yet never fuses with horizon” (Suvin 1990, 82).

Rivers, Seas and Oceans

Still, the poetry of knowledge remains my joy:
And I would not want to be like a tree
Mirroring one’s leaves in the river’s fluid flow
In vegetable love year after mindless year.
(Suvin, “Counter-Projects [in Han-Shan’s style]”)

As Wegner wrote, “[i]t is in its myriad forms of border crossings – and in its openness to diverse perspectives, the connections it draws across various fields, disciplines, and cultures, and the depth of its political commitments – that the real importance of

Yet there is also hope for scorched lands and polluted waters, in the form of streams of “[c]lear water [...] heard in the rustle of leaves” (2016, “Ode in the Guise”). Oceans, seas and rivers remain historical and sublime; they are associated with cruelty, horror, destruction and waste beyond human understanding yet also with streams of resistance, hope and care which affect the movement towards the utopian horizon. This association of the planet’s moving waters with resistance, both past and present, is evident especially in *The Long March* collection in poems such as “The Present Past” (1987), dedicated to Walter Benjamin, in which the dead “are what shatters us as a shockwave flood”, or in “Be Still in Peace: A Valedictory Forbidding Mourning (Third Anniversary)” (1987), where the ocean is described as an unfathomable reservoir of the planet’s past: “the bitter tears (I see now) / contain the same salts as the Pacific / In the last million years people have spilt several Pacifics”. In several other poems, the speaker finds comfort in a retreat into oceanic depths; in “A Self Enlightened (In the Manner of Ching Shen-tan)” (1987), for example, he likens books to whales “on whose back [he] may cross the wide ocean of history”.

Water bodies as reservoirs of resistance are featured in more recent poetry as well. In “The Return of the Ancestors (End of March)” (2010), drought and stultifying, polluted waters parallel clogged veins of rulers who live in mansions on hills, who kill and “extort blood in peacetime”. The dead return, and in the final stanza they reproach their sons and grandchildren thus:

O sons, O grandchildren, look how fat you are,
 Look how hard your women must work, where’s
 Your powerful sisterhood & brotherhood? Pay
 Your ingent debts, to us, to yourselves, flow
 Over the banks: unclog your veins, have pity
 On us, on yourselves.

The ancestors, met at the outset with a lit fire and lit lanterns, dampen the fire and make the lanterns gutter. In the dystopian world of their successors, as their dams collapse, the only hope is in tides of sisterhood and brotherhood. In “Le Ceneri di Tito (Berlin Day, End of C20)” (2010), as blood silts up rivers and oceans, the speaker “burrow[s] into sleep quietly on morning islands / At the bottom of the ocean”, along with the ashes of Tito, “peasants [...] burned out of their villages / City people bombed out of their homes”, and “[o]ne million & three quarters dead in the partizan war”. Never becoming calm entombments of the past, rivers, seas and oceans continue to subvert the shore; in “I’m Into Your World” (2010), alienated from “the coil of writhing serpentine lies” and “[h] issuing with laid-on charm from TV & PC monitors”, the speaker awaits “the dove / Of a differing Flood”, and in the aforementioned “Thus Spake the Bitter Muse”, it is suggested that unless people change, “fires and floods [will rise] against them”.

While there is a redemptive dimension in the history conveyed through water imagery, there is no denial or acceptance of its horrors. On the contrary, the dystopian world in Suvin’s poems is unrelentingly depicted as disturbing, unjust and alienating, albeit streamed with resistance and affection – for instance, the “warm Kuroshio current” (“A Self Enlightened”) offers “permanent warm / Currents, a permanently creative revo-

lution” (2010, “Shipwreck in Pannonia: A Sonnet with a Tail”), and “the water of life” is equated with “[t]he water of pleasure” (2010, “Pillaging the Gnostics”). The movement is oriented towards a utopian horizon on which the horrors of the past and the present would not be perpetuated. Before moving on to suggesting how this orienting horizon emerges, let us consider several of the poems’ utopian loci.

Bridges, Boats and Islands

Once, enfolded lovingly in the fastness of our arms,
I thought the river had stopped still.
(Suvin, “To Her Hasty Lover [Ballad of Mo-Chou’s Daughter]”)

Zorica Đergović-Joksimović asks in her article on the poetics of estrangement “whether Suvin’s own definition of utopia is applicable to his own poetry” (2017, 47), and draws attention to the critic’s frequent references to the tradition of utopian thought, specific authors of utopias (such as William Morris, H. G. Wells and Ursula K. Le Guin) and utopian locations from both Western and Eastern cultures. She argues that “the appropriation of ancient, foreign, or exotic utopian forms, along with a whole catalog of references to various utopian authors, thinkers, philosophers, revolutionaries, and concepts/topoi, is not what makes any given poetry collection a truly utopian one” but “it does help create the necessary intertextual background to Suvin’s poems, which casts a new – and critical, at that – light upon the utopian tradition” (2017, 51). This seems right and perhaps one need not see the utopian references as mere background but rather as a fictional world of utopian verbal constructions, a literary and philosophical counter-history, or, to put it more lightly, a school of book whales that may be glossed and read “aright for the blessed classless future, / For the great creativity, in order to survive, surely” (“A Self Enlightened”).

Yet keeping in mind Suvin’s own definition of utopia, only a handful of his poems could be included in this (sub)genre. Many quite realistically convey and condemn the horrors of the world we live in and estrange the reader from the ideological view of reality. Some poems gesture towards, rather than depict in detail, an alternative or oppositional locus. For example, the very first poem in *The Long March*, “Crossing on the Left (Sonnet in Southern Sung Manner)” (1987), opens with the following lines:

This flimsy hanging bridge frightens me badly.
I wish there were any other way out of the petrified desert.
If it founders, I will surely drown; yet without it,
The raging river would have closed over us already.

In the remainder of the poem, this uncertain bridge represents the alternative space to carry the speaker and others over the watery abyss with stony grounds below. A similar theme appears in “A Matter of Life and Death” (1987), which depicts the relationship of the party and the people as that of ice and water. Several other poems from *The Long March* mention more modest, personal spaces, which are nevertheless equally uncertain and temporary. In “A la Recherche du Temps Perdu: In Tsao’s style” from the sequence

“Seven Songs of Our Times in Classical Chinese Styles” (1987), as “a flute locks emptiness into [the] room”, the utopian vision “fades in the gloom”. Similarly, in “Metacommentaries (Han-Shan style)” (1987), a wanderer, who momentarily finds peace afloat in a river, must return to the reality of the land:

Wonderfully afloat on the smooth clear river,
Delighted I forget how late it grows.
Beneath the evening wind, sitting in my boat,
Associations come and go in endless streams.
My mind is like the small full Moon of Autumn
Letting a shining ladder down to a midnight sea.
What am I doing here? Why don't I go home?
I am bound by the evergreen cinnamon trees!

Boats, islands, oases, and bridges figure as momentary utopian spaces also in several later poems, from the aforementioned crowded fishing boat in which the speaker remembers crossing the narrow sea “from occupation / To liberation” (“Autobiography 2004”) to a longed-for “oasis, a caravanserai for the weary” where the speaker of “Thus Spake the Bitter Muse” might “cultivate a little garden / & not be afraid”.

Two 1980s poems present more detailed accounts of communities “organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author’s community” and “based on estrangement arising out of an alternative historical hypothesis” (Suvín 1979, 49). The first of these, “Eo Rus, with a Catch” (1987), depicts a sunny village – perhaps Mediterranean, Caribbean or Malayan – inhabited by straightforward and silent people who live in hamlets and small stone houses, grow vegetables and cultivate fruit trees, stroll, meet and read “rare writings”. Peaceful and affirmative, the vision nevertheless wavers in the last lines, in a similar manner as it does in the above poems “Seven Songs” and “Metacommentaries”:

Alas! all of this presupposes the great millenary operation
Shifting of the Golden Age from past to palpable future,
The Revolution righting the reversed, topsy-turvy world:
But I shall not live to taste the tea-scented ocean.

Another detailed utopian community appears also in “Visions Off Yamada” (2010), a sequence that Suvín himself considered representative of his mid-eighties’ utopianism. It begins with the motif of building a bridge. Here is the opening stanza of “In Praise of a Wonderful Sight”, the first poem of the sequence:

Come see this bridge.
How can we build it?
Cross it this way & that?
Get there, across the bridge?

Further on, before the reader glimpses the utopian community of spacious houses designed and built by skilled carpenters, before s/he sees the Hall of the Commune, the acid-free springs, and the rosy-cheeked children, s/he passes through gates and doors:

Come see this main gate.
It is made of solid red wood
It is an auspicious wide gate

Push open the doors, look:
What a wonderful age,
There, behind the straight gate!

I wish i could come
See & push open the gate,
Enter the wonderful age.

According to Đergović-Joksimović, one utopian model detectable in Suvin's poetry is "a Rousseauian escapist withdrawal from our high-tech civilization into more secluded, rural landscapes" (2017, 52); "Eo Rus" and "Visions off Yamada" then in her view demonstrate "[t]he Rousseauian drive to escape into the peaceful, simple, and natural life of rural communities" (2017, 52). Nevertheless, as Đergović-Joksimović herself emphasises, "to claim that this kind of Suvin's utopia is plainly pastoral would be partially misleading" (2017, 56). Both poems envision spaces in which people live simply, in harmony with nature and with one another, but the novum from the perspective of which the status quo is estranged here is not based on any mythical belief in the purity of nature and the superiority of one race, ethnicity or gender (Đergović-Joksimović aptly draws attention to the intercultural setting of both poems, for example). Nor is the novum here a doctrine: as Đergović-Joksimović also points out, one of the foundations of "Visions off Yamada" is a Japanese chimera. In addition, the unreachability of this poem's utopian vision is underscored by the opening lines concerning the necessity of bridge-building and door-opening, which indicate in terms of space the same gap that the concluding lines of "Eo Rus" indicate in terms of time. In both poems, the reader is reminded, the vision is fiction – an oriented but not doctrinal utopian "verbal construction" of a harmonious, classless locus from which the present is estranged.

In Conclusion, Moving Horizons

Study the familiar to penetrate the sublime.
(Suvin, "Seven Songs of Our Times in Classical Chinese Styles")

The previous section has considered different spaces – some depicted in more detail, others in less – from which the present-day historical continuum is critiqued: the bridge of organised political survival and resistance in "Crossing on the Left" and "A Matter of Life and Death", more private and erotic visions in "Seven Songs" and "Metacommentaries", the refugee boat in "Autobiography 2004", and the eco-settlements of "Eo Rus" and "Visions off Yamada". It has been suggested that these spacio-temporal loci are temporary, which, however, does not mean that they become ends in themselves but rather that they are situated as utopian spaces in the historical movement that develops under the dominance of the horizon of justice, disalienation and happiness.

As has we saw in “Rivers, Seas and Ocean”, attentive to the horrors of our world, Suvin’s poems address alienation, defeat and loss as well as resistance and affection. While utopian loci may be shaky and temporary, the orienting horizon persists, and the poetry strives to embody the plea of the speaker of “A Letter to My Friend, Disenchanted After 1968” (2010), who warns that although it is crucial to recognise and accept the limitations of one’s ideals and the envisioned “more perfect” horizons, “[i]t is equally perilous to know one’s misery & forget / The moving horizon of classless harmonies”. Before 1989 and the bloodshed in former Yugoslavia, in the more tender and sensuous verses of *The Long March*, disappointment is countered with hope in poems such as “Counter-Projects”, the fourth part of which depicts a dying landscape: not a single man of “the Great Revolution” survives, peach blossoms are blown away, morning flowers fade and fall, “[t]heir shadow trembles under the hand that picks them”. Yet, the poem goes on, “[t]his huge monotone desert of whirling sand / In times gone by was a sea of haunting azure” and “in times to come mighty green waters / Will again murmur through fields, turn the joyous water-wheel, / Peaches bloom once more, pollen spread / Intoxicating waves through expanse of poppy and wheat”. This horizon of “the blessed classless time” gives hope to the poem’s “you and me, love, briefer than the turtle”, caught in the desolate landscape of the lost utopian locus. More recent works such as “Le Ceneri di Tito” and “Shipwreck in Pannonia”, in which “comrades of my / Generation are dying out one by one”, lament the trajectory and destruction of socialist potentialities in Russia and Eastern Europe, while other poems on a similar theme, such as “In the Ruins of Leningrad: A Medieval Allegory” (2010), gesture towards the possibility of renewal: “What Hope had built, cruel Greed has spilled [...] But what Greed’s unbuilt, Hope can rebuild”.

That the renewal and rebuilding are not nostalgic returns to a glorified or idealised past is evident, for example, in “Ah! God...”, a poem which begins in the following manner:

Ah! god of the ocean-going rivers
 Enlighten me
 Into the wisdom of the flow
 Its little vortices & eddies
 Its central calm current
 Which will get there somehow
 Muttering overflowing
 finally
 One with the banks
 The Earth gave it.
 To the gods indeed belongs
 The end, O Alcman. People are not
 Yet fit.

Here the movement of history – its flow, little vortices and eddies, the central current – appears beyond human power; it remains “one with the banks” and in the hands and heads of the “gods”. The second and third parts then introduce Calliope, the “sweet silken Muse of many songs”, who sings of the happiness that comes from remembrance “without too much unneeded regret”, from sweet desire and love offered and received, and the realisation that “the gods give us all this brief stay together / This now this here this moment”.

These lines suggest that in “this moment we may call / History [...] something of one / May live on in other flesh or stone, or / Die utterly, born in vain”, forgotten in the history books written by the winners, lost in the “strident strife”. The fourth part mentions the heart-breaking disintegration of former Yugoslavia “swallowed by the gargantuan throat of Greed” and “gone the way of Atlantis”. What until now may have seemed like a lyric poem about a destroyed counter space of intimacy acquires another dimension, as the speaker is located not only in personal relations but also in social ones, in the “[s]hining moment, tolerant cradle of many tongues, / Where Law was a-building, & Justice had a chance, / & Peace ruled, three sisters nourished at the same breast”. This, however, is too torn apart in combat, “not loving & giving” but “hating & taking, perverse & sterile”.

In the fifth and final part, the specific locus of love and Yugoslavia seems to have vanished altogether and the only hope appears in withdrawal from the misery of history’s whirlwinds and hurricanes:

Better to have been a bird
 Who wings it on the flower of the wave, with halcyons,
 From the heart, holy bird purple-coloured as the sea
 Wounding itself but no others...

Nevertheless, there is a change at the end of the poem. Even though the active, annunciatory turn towards “the Islands of the Blessed / From whom the gods keep insoluble worries away” where “[h]oney-voiced may approve of me the sister Muses”, may initially seem like an escapist fantasy, through the tradition of utopianism it references and particularly the final repetition of “[s]oon, soon” and “[t]here, there”, which echoes the previous repetitions of “happy”, “peace of love” and “for a time, for a time”, the ending evokes an earthly utopian horizon that emerges through but also transcends the actual intimate and social locus recalled earlier in the poem. Just as “Counter-Projects”, “In the Ruins of Leningrad”, and also “Growing Old Without Yugoslavia”, as discussed by Tom Moylan (2021, 100–103), “Ah! God...” denounces injustice and greed while announcing the harmonious horizon.

Perhaps echoing Suvin’s own description of his poetry as “a bridge to a blessed land” (1987, 106), Wegner wrote that “Suvin’s work becomes a bridge, resonant of Benjamin’s lightning arc, linking the legacies of a past utopian radicalism with what still remains the world ‘always coming’” (2010, xxx–xxx). Through past, present and future oppositional and alternative loci – contingent “Floating Islands” (to use the title of a poem in the sequence “You, Giacomo Leopardi” [2016]) that may shake “like a baby carriage” and “perish in the end” – the horizon continues to survive, motivating humans to act. As Suvin put it in “Locus, Horizon, and Orientation”,

we should hold a steadfast orientation toward the open ocean of possibility that surrounds the actual and that is so immeasurably larger than the actuality. True, terrors lurk in that ocean: but those terrors are primarily and centrally not (as the utopophobes want to persuade us) the terrors of the not-yet-existing, but on the contrary simple extrapolations of the existing actuality of war, hunger, degradation, and exploitation of people and planets. On the other hand, “there exists a process and we people are at the advanced front-line of this world-process; it is given unto our hands to nurture the possibilities already pending. ... The

seventh day of creation is still before us, the seventh day of which Augustine said: “dies septima ipsi erimus, we ourselves shall be the seventh day...” (1990, 82; quoting Bloch 1980, 63)

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RESUMÉ:

„HYBNÝ OBZOR BEZTRÍDNÍCH HARMONIÍ“ V POEZII DARKO SUVINA

Článek se věnuje vybrané poezii Darko Suvina na pozadí jeho teorií o vědecké fantastice, utopii a poezii. Ukazuje, jak Suvinova poezie kriticky ozvláštňuje ideologické pojetí přítomnosti a dějin jako nevyhnutelné reprodukce nespravedlnosti a odcizení. Zaobírá se několika básněmi ze sbírky *The Long March: Notes on the Way 1981–1984* (1987) z knihy *Defined by a Hollow: Essays on Utopia, Science Fiction, and Political Epistemology* (2010). Dále vychází ze dvou básnických publikací na webových stránkách autora: „Three Long Poems 2000–2016“ (2016) a „Poems of Old Age (2002–17)“ (2017).

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