

Future Worlds

David McCooey

1.

It is not surprising, given the state of the world, that dystopian pessimism should be trumping utopian optimism. In fiction, on television, in films, and in poetry we find hellish future worlds: worlds of totalitarian gender warfare, human-made apocalypse, and vestigial life after climate collapse. It is little surprise that 'future worlds' might be imagined this way: the current state of the world calls for it.

Meanwhile, the past offers numerous warnings against those who seek to be architects of future worlds. The Nazis and the Khmer Rouge imagined and partly delivered their versions of a future world. Year One in the revolutionary calendar usually signals the beginning of a bloody epoch. Closer to home, indeed on the very ground upon which this building stands, there is also evidence of the bloody realities that imagined future worlds can produce. The sovereignty of this continent's land was never ceded to those who were looking for a new world, which, in fact, began as a penal colony. New worlds, penal colonies, and detention centres have close ties.

Future worlds are large, serious things. What could be more important than the making of a new world? How can literature, not to mention my own poems, have anything to say about future worlds, revolutionary or otherwise, utopian or otherwise? I must admit to a certain embarrassment in trying to make the connection.

2.

Embarrassment, this time linked to my own personal future, was something I felt some years ago when I found myself in hospital after experiencing a 'cardiac event'. A hospital, as both literary trope and literal thing, is a kind of world that has a precarious hold on the notion of futurity. I occupied a ward in one of those literal hospitals five times during that period of my life. In that time, I was acutely aware that the hospital I was in was the product of other people's vision of a future world, one in which universal health care could save people's lives.

When, with all the opportunism of a poet, I came to write about my experiences in that hospital, I had nothing to say about the health system that allowed that hospital, and others like it, to function as it did. What did these poems of mine have to say about future worlds? Only, I think, the obvious insight that the future should not be taken for granted, and that all experiences—even life-threatening ones—can be the stuff of poetry.

Having said that, the concept of the future is explicitly thematised in one of the poems from this time. In a poem called 'One Way or Another' there is a reference to insects swarming outside my house at night, 'free of consciousness / and futurity'. Later in the poem an ambulance helicopter is described as taking off in the night air, 'heavy, and unhurried, / towards some unseen future'. It is only now that I see the parallelism between the minute flying insects and the gigantic helicopter. The belatedness of this insight suggests that poems are tiny worlds that contain fragments of the future.

3.

The book this poem appears in is called *Star Struck*. To be star struck is to be overly fascinated with famous people, especially actors. I have myself been star struck, but literal stars, which occupy the futuristic worlds of outer space and science fiction, have also made their mark on me.

In the early 1970s, when I started school, I was asked what I wanted to be when I grew up. I replied, 'an astronaut'. Interest in the space age was waning in these years after the moon landing (another moment that prompted much speculation about future worlds), but its remnants could still be found in songs such as Elton John's 'Rocket Man' and the continued ubiquity of the opening fanfare of Richard Strauss's 'Also Sprach Zarathustra' on Australian televisions in the wake of its use in Stanley Kubrick's film, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). I was a child, quite literally, of science fiction.

4.

These autobiographical reflections on past 'future worlds' find me at a dead end, perhaps appropriately so, given the history of the future that I sketched out in my opening comments. So: let me begin again. Listening to an audio book yesterday, I heard the words 'It is too late to begin again.' One reaches an age where this sentiment becomes particularly poignant. But in the world of politics and religion, demagogues and cult leaders will never cease from promising new beginnings. Given the results of their projects, we may once again, be justly suspicious of such promises.

But in daily life, and the daily life of writing, we continue to attempt new beginnings, and seek out new worlds. We write new poems; new novels; new plays. Beginning again is what these creative practices offer us; the chance to make something new. On the one hand, this ability to begin again, to imagine future worlds, could be seen as a form of power; on the other, it could be seen as a way of avoiding action in the material world.

5.

Since completing *Star Struck*, a little over three years ago, I have written little poetry. Initially, I thought this lack of new work was simply the inevitable fallow time after being productive. But I have come to feel increasingly unable to write in the 'future world' we have found ourselves in. How can I write as if nothing is happening? But, then, how can I write about 'what is happening' without losing the freedom of creative play? This is perhaps a question that only the very privileged can ask, but I am not so sure.

6.

Recently I came across *Palestine + 100: Stories from a Century After the Nakba*, an anthology (almost-certainly the first) of Palestinian science fiction, in which twelve Palestinian writers offer their responses to the question ‘what might your country look like in the year 2048?’ That chosen year, 2048, is a century after the Nakba, or the exodus and expulsion of over 700,000 Palestinian Arabs from their homes in 1948 during the Palestinian War, the first war of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In her introduction to *Palestine + 100*, the editor and translator, Basma Ghalayini, describes science fiction as something that could be considered ‘a luxury’, one that Palestinians—so burdened by the oppressive realities of the past and present—can’t afford to escape to. But as her anthology shows, already living in a real-life dystopia, Palestinian writers are in fact well-placed to imagine future worlds. And as the anthology also shows, the space of fiction allows Palestinian writers the freedom to imagine future worlds in playful, radical, and liberating ways. Imagining future worlds in such awful circumstances, they show how literary writing can overcome the most oppressive demands of compliance.

Finding an answer to the question ‘How do we write now?’ offers a moment of hope, a light in the darkness. And since the effects of any work of imaginative writing is unpredictable, then it’s possible that such writing can be felt in some future world. For some, though, the possibility of a wished-for future world is profoundly, and tragically, distant. As *Palestine + 100* shows, to imagine a future world should not be considered a privilege. Perhaps, in fact, it is a right; the final right to be taken away from those who are profoundly oppressed.

未来世界

David McCooey

1.

考虑到目前世界的情势，今天反乌托邦式的悲观主义胜过乌托邦式的乐观主义，这样的情况并不令人惊讶。我们在小说、电视节目、电影、诗歌中都看到有关未来的各种惊悚的描述：充满集权主义的两性战争、有人类造成的世界性毁灭、极端气候导致人类物种的退化等等。人们以这种方式想象‘未来世界’并不令人惊讶，因为目前世界的情况让人大有理由做出这种预测。

如果我们以史为鉴，历史对想创造或改变未来世界的人提出警告。纳粹和赤柬政权都曾幻想过，甚至还采取了实际行动试图实现他们理想的未来世界。革命的第一年往往标识着往后血腥的岁月。对于澳大利亚来说，我们也能从目前身处的这栋建筑物寻得证据，试图改造未来世界确实有可能引发血腥杀戮。澳大利亚大陆的主权从没被割让给寻找新世界的殖民主义者。澳大利亚的殖民史以罪犯的流放地揭开序幕。新世界、罪犯流放地、拘留中心彼此之间关系紧密。

未来世界是远大、严肃的事。有什么事比创造新世界更重要呢？无论未来世界是否是革命性的，是否是乌托邦，文学和我自己的诗歌创作对未来世界这个话题做出什么贡献呢？关于这点，我必须承认一件令我难堪的事。

2.

我所谓的难堪，是跟我自己的未来有关的。几年前，我因心脏不适而送医治疗。‘未来’这个概念在实际的和比喻性的医院来说都很不稳定。在那段期间，我五次住进了医院，而当时我也清楚地意识到那家医院其实也代表一些人对未来世界所怀有的愿景，这些人主张全民医疗保险能拯救人的生命。

当我满怀着诗人的机会主义打算撰写我在医院经历的种种事迹时，我却发现自己对于支持医院运作的医疗制度全然无知。针对‘未来世界’这个主题，我的诗歌能说些什么呢？除了众人皆知的那句‘无人能预知未来’以及人生的无常能成为写诗的题材之外，就没有什么能说的了。

不过，未来这个观念却在这次成为其中一首诗的主题。一首名为《无论如何》的诗提及我家门口到了晚上昆虫成群的景象。这些昆虫‘完全没有意识，对外来全无概念。’这首诗后来还提到救护直升机在夜空中起飞，‘沉重、不慌不忙地/ 飞向无法看见的未来。’直到现在我才发现在空中飞舞的小昆虫和巨大的直升机之间的强烈对比。我对这点的后知后觉显示诗歌本身就是个微小的世界，其中包含着反映出未来世界的一些碎片。

3.

这首诗收录于《星迷》一书中。我所谓“星迷”，是指对明星过度的痴迷，尤其是对演员极度着迷。我就曾经‘星迷’过，而实际的星星，悬挂在有如科幻小说和未来世界般的外太空的星星，也曾经让我痴心着迷。

我在20世纪70年代初期刚上小学的时候，有人问我长大后想当什么。我说‘航天员’。在人类登陆月球后不久，人们对太空的兴趣逐渐减退（人类登陆月球的那一刻引起了许多人对未来世界做出了种种的猜测），不过我们从例如埃尔顿·强（Elton John）的‘火箭人’（*Rocket Man*）这首曲子中仍可看出人们对太空依旧留有一丝好奇和留恋。此外，史丹利·库巴里克（Stanley Kubrick）的电影《2001：太空历险记》（*2001: A Space Odyssey*）提到了理查·史卓思（Richard Strauss）的诗歌《查拉图斯特拉也说了》（*Also Sprach Zarathustra*）后，澳大利亚的电视就不断播放这首诗的开头片段；我们从中也能看出人们对太空多少仍感兴趣。我的童年确实就是在科幻故事中度过的。

4.

当我回忆从前就‘未来世界’做出的预测时，我并没有得出任何结论，原因大概就是我在一开头的时候提到的那样。

那么让我再从头说一次。昨天我在听一本有声书的时候听到这句话，“来不及了，无法从头再来过了。”人活到了一定的岁数时，这样的感觉会变得特别强烈。但是在政治界和宗教界，游说家和邪教领袖还是会继续向人保证一切都能重新来过。对于这些所谓的保证，一旦考虑到这些人以往的成绩单和记录，就让我们有正当的理由对他们提出的保证持怀疑的态度。

但是在日常生活中以及在日常写作时，我们还是会尝试新的开始，试着追求新世界。写新的诗歌、新的小说、新的戏剧。一方面，当人可以决定从头来过、决定想象未来世界会如何，这种能力可以被视为权力的一种形式。但是另一方面，这种能力也可能被视为人避免在现实世界中采取行动的借口。

5.

我自从三年多前完成《星迷》之后，就很少写诗了。起先我以为创作之所以减少了，是因为努力完成作品后自然会休息一段时间。但是我发现自己越来越不容易在现在这个‘未来世界’中创作。我怎么能够当做什么都没发生，就径自创作呢？不过，我又怎么有办法在描写‘目前正在发生的事’的同时，又不失去从事趣味创作的自由呢？这个问题或许只有家境优渥的人能问，但是我倒不敢这么说。

6.

最近我看了一本书，书名是《巴勒斯坦+ 100：灾难日百年后的故事》，这（几乎可以肯定是第一部）巴勒斯坦科幻故事选集。这本选集收录了12位巴勒斯坦作家就‘你的国家在2048年会是怎么的情况？’这个问题作出的回复。公元2048年就是灾难日的百年纪念，也就是1948年超过70万巴勒斯坦人被迫离开家园的那场以色列-巴勒斯坦首次战争。《巴勒斯坦+ 100》的编辑兼译者芭丝玛·卡拉依妮（Basma Ghalayini）在书的简介中将科幻小说描述为‘奢侈品’，是以往和现在均受到极大压迫的巴勒斯坦人难以妄想的。但是正如她编辑的科幻故事选集所显示的一般，巴勒斯坦的作家既然已经生活在真实的反乌托邦中，他们其实非常适合想象未来的世界会变成怎样。故事选集也表示，小说创作容许巴勒斯坦作家以幽默、激进和令人重获生机的方式自由地想象未来的世界。这些作家在如此恶劣的环境下想象未来的世界，由此表明文学创作能超越甚至是最强大的压迫和限制。

努力寻找‘我们现在应该如何写作？’这个问题的答案能给予我们一丝希望、一线曙光。既然我们无法预估想象性创作能产生什么影响，这就意味着人在未来有可能会感受到想象性创作发挥的影响力。但是令人遗憾的是，对一些人来说，要实现想象的未来世界几乎是不可能的事。正如《巴勒斯坦+ 100》表示，想象未来的世界不应该只是少数人的特权；或许人人都有权想象未来的世界，甚至是那些遭到极度压迫、已无其他权利的人都能享有的最后一项权利。