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Greg Kerr, *Dream Cities: Utopia and Prose by Poets in Nineteenth-Century France*. London: Legenda, 2013. ix + 250 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$89.50 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-907975-53-0.

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An ambitious inquiry into key structural and thematic aspects of poetic prose in nineteenth-century France, Greg Kerr's *Dream Cities: Utopia and Prose by Poets in Nineteenth-Century France* combines a diverse array of primary sources and theoretical frameworks. In doing so, Kerr proposes the possible impact of social, spiritual, and aesthetic explorations by Saint-Simonian thinkers of the July Monarchy on later prose innovations by French poets immersed in the urban milieu of mid- and late-nineteenth century. Centered on analyses of selections from Théophile Gautier's journalistic prose, Charles Baudelaire's prose poems and aesthetic essays, and Arthur Rimbaud's prose works, Kerr's discussion joins recent poetic analysis with urban studies. It also folds into its theoretical framework aesthetic and philosophical considerations on the construct of utopia in the modern context, most notably in works by Jacques Rancière and Paul Ricœur.^[1] This interdisciplinary approach to understanding the rise of poetic prose in mid-nineteenth-century France enables Kerr to consider the ways in which the modern city incited the poetic imaginary to reinvent forms and language capable of reflecting the dynamism, accelerated rhythms, heterogeneity, and multiple identities and spaces of mid- and late-nineteenth-century Paris and, to a more limited extent, London. Thus, as Kerr ultimately posits, the city becomes a site of poetic invention in which a utopian current, and with it, an emphasis on sensory experience, formal experimentation, a reimagining of social and urban architectures, transformed perception, and prophetic vision, come to animate the poetic prose of Gautier, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud.

To readers working in nineteenth-century urban studies, French panoramic literature, Baudelaire studies, and cultural studies relating to French journalism, Kerr's analysis will present a familiar line of inquiry. But of particular interest in this book is Kerr's attention to textual innovations pursued by several Saint-Simonian writers, including Barthélémy-Prospér Enfantin, Michel Chevalier, Charles Duveyrier, and Emile Barrault. Concentration on the poetic dimensions of works by these writers is an aspect of Saint-Simonian studies, and indeed of literary analysis, that has received relatively little critical attention. And yet, as Kerr shows, in various works by these authors, experimentation with the communicative force of form in written expression was clearly considered and pursued in a number of Saint-Simonian tracts, essays, poems, and private correspondences.

This becomes apparent in the Saint-Simonian texts that Kerr considers. In them, he discovers innovations in typographical manipulation, textual fragmentation, novel applications of punctuation (particularly the rhythmic space opened by the "em" dash), spatial play in the disposition of words, and a concerted attempt at "a reconfiguration" of French poetic prosody toward the more elastic aspects of prose (p. 43). Collectively, these textual transformations tend to anticipate developments in poetic prose and prose poetry most associated with fin-de-siècle writers. This suggests that Saint-Simonian textual experimentation may represent an instance of poetic invention that is aligned with the "broader concern with the emergence of the prose poem" in nineteenth-century France (p. 44).

These are interesting discoveries that Kerr supports with solid textual analyses of a diverse range of works by Saint-Simonian writers. Further, his contextualization of Saint-Simonian thought, scientific precepts, and aesthetic aspirations in relation to these more experimental writings provides an inviting foundation for further study not only of the poetic dimensions of utopian Saint-Simonian writing, but more particularly in relation to an awareness among these writers of the power of prose forms to convey ideological convictions. Indeed, Kerr's analysis suggests that attention to the formal dimensions of poetic prose among these lesser-known writers of the July Monarchy adds a new point of interest for scholars working on the origins of the prose poem.

However, the force of this line of argumentation is somewhat attenuated by Kerr's acknowledgement that the Saint-Simonian writers began to experiment with more expressive prose forms not because of an abiding interest in literary innovation, but to attract a broader readership to their cause. Similarly, the suggestion that the prose poem owes, to some degree, its initial impetus to utopian textual experimentation would carry more force if Kerr had considered Saint-Simonian innovations relative to the broader sphere of literary exploration in prose and poetic forms during the July Monarchy. He does not, for example, consider similar patterns of textual experimentation that were taking place in journalism during the early 1830s outside of the Saint-Simonian context, in works of the fantasy and fantastic genres. As Bernard Vouilloux proposes, in reviews such as *La Caricature* and *La Silhouette* (ca. 1830-1831), texts and images were often juxtaposed in these publications to instantiate a new "form of communication" that lay not in reading the two elements in succession, but in the space suggested "between" them. Similarly, authors introduced ellipses and dashes into their prose to create rhythmic variations in reading which were translated onto the visual plane; and in a single issue, multiple caricatures would cut across various discursive lines and social phenomena to target "moral, religious, political, literary" and "theatrical" topics, all of which emphasized the hybrid, mobile, and panoramic character of modernity (p. 10).^[2]

This work is entirely in the manner of satire, with its long tradition of creating mixed forms, or "satura," in which human foibles are effectively staged for comic and critical effect: hybridity, fragmentation, and jumble are all at play. Other instances of a cultivation of poetic prose animate Théophile Gautier's fantastic novella *Onuphrius* (1832), in which a ball-scene, captured in prose, takes place near a conservatory. Its style employs distinctly poetic registers, including fragmentation, emphasis on passing impressions and sensory experience, to accentuate the unstable and hybrid nature underlying seemingly ordinary phenomena, such as dancers dancing at a ball. Similarly, in Aloysius Bertrand's poetic-prose *Gaspard de la nuit: Fantaisies à la manière de Rembrandt et de Callot* (written in 1836, but published posthumously in 1842), Bertrand's prose blends images and text, exploits textual and perceptual fragmentation, and integrates into the narrative a disintegration of temporal and spatial moorings to create poetic effects of imagination and fantasy, et cetera. Indeed, Michel Brix observes that the genre of *fantaisie*, to which these texts belong and for which Gautier's aesthetics manifest a marked "predilection," emphasizes "personal impressions" that are refracted through "fragmentary vision that everyone experiences in the real world," but that "the artist" cultivates to create poetic effects (p. vii).^[3]

Many of the elements that Kerr's analysis associates with utopian writing, such as spatial and temporal ambiguity, fragmentation, and even a kind of ecstatic experiential incantation instantiated through formal and rhythmic experimentation, are at play in the work of contemporaneous writers, such as Balzac, Gautier, and Bertrand, who wrote outside the Saint-Simonian group. This is significant because so much of the argumentation that Kerr develops in later chapters of this book is to a considerable extent predicated on his identification of utopian textual innovations (and the lines of thought that such formal exploration intended to reify in Saint-Simonian works), which he subsequently finds suggested in later works by Gautier, Baudelaire, and Rimbaud. Additionally, Kerr posits possible links between utopian writing and the rise of the prose poem, but the relationship that he asserts never rises above suggestion: a point that he reiterates in his conclusion.

This connection is particularly evident in his chapter on Gautier's journalistic writing (chapter two), a version of which was first published in *Aesthetics of Dislocation in French and Francophone Literature and Art*.^[4] Here, Kerr suggests that Gautier's prose style undergoes a poetic transformation because he must write at speed to meet the demands of the press, and adapt his writing to reflect the rhythms, sights, and perceptual potentialities opened by the modern metropolis. Kerr posits that this inclines Gautier to emphasize sensory perception, cultivate fragmentary forms in his prose, and in the case of the essay "Paris futur" (1851), accentuate perceptual hybridity born of the heteroclitite nature of an imagined future metropolis. Kerr proposes that this exemplifies a utopian influence in Gautier's work insofar as these poetic-prose techniques "reveal awareness on Gautier's part of contemporary utopianism's aspiration to enhance emotive and sensuous impact on the spectator through amplification and incandescent colour" (p. 107). These are, however, elements that are quite clearly at play in Gautier's fantastic novellas and his penchant for *fantaisie* during the 1830s, well before he was obliged to supplement his income by writing for the press.

It must be said, however, that Kerr's analysis of Baudelaire's prose poems in chapter three, and in relation to Kerr's interpretation of a "rhapsodic" inclination in Baudelaire's prose writing (p. 121), is particularly engaging, most notably for its contribution to studies of the long-recognized musicality of Baudelaire's work, which Kerr combines in this instance with an ecstatic, prophetic mode of expression. Kerr also considers these aspects of Baudelaire's poetics in relation to oppositional categories of aesthetic experience and perception, aligning them neither with irony nor with melancholy, as Sonya Stephens and Ross Chambers have so fruitfully proposed, but with a utopian stance that is anchored in the experience of the metropolis and that defines itself in relation to urban and aesthetic phenomena of disharmony and ecstatic pleasure, volatility and calm, the desire for solitude and the pleasures of the multitude (pp. 127-152).^[5]

Similarly, Kerr's analysis in chapter four of Rimbaud's poetics of boundary erosion in the domains of poetic prosody, perception, and notions of fluid and hybrid community identity in the urban milieu, is provocative and well-articulated, although, with respect to all three of the major poets analyzed by Kerr, the utopian thesis obtains largely within the confines of each writer's poetics. This is to say that its relationship to the broader evolution of prose poetry and poetic prose over the nineteenth century, and across the works of these poets, remains somewhat tenuous for the reasons articulated above. Nevertheless, in the prose works of Saint-Simonian writers, Kerr brings forward a body of texts and an area of literary experimentation that merit further investigation. He also succeeds in showing the degree to which the modern city becomes "a privileged terrain for" poetic invention, reflection, and a re-imagination of spatial and social structures in the works of the authors considered here (p. 205).

NOTES

[1] Paul Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. by George H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Jacques Rancière, "Sens et usages de l'utopie," *L'Utopie en questions*, ed. by Michèle Riot-Sarcey (Saint-Denis: Presses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2001), pp. 65-78.

[2] Bernard Vouilloux, "Les fantaisies journalistiques de Balzac," *L'Année balzacienne: Balzac, fantastique fantaisite?* (2012), pp. 7-24.

[3] Michel Brix, "Introduction," *Théophile Gautier: Œuvres poétiques complètes* (Paris: Bartillat, 2004): i-xlix.

[4] Daisy Connon, Gillian Jein, and Greg Kerr, eds., *Aesthetics of Dislocation in French and Francophone Literature and Art: Strategies of Representation* (Lampeter, U.K.: Edwin Mellen, 2009), pp. 165-82.

[5] Sonya Stephens, *Baudelaire's Prose Poems: The Practice and Politics of Irony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Ross Chambers, *The Writing of Melancholy: Modes of Opposition in Early French Modernism*, trans. by Mary Seidman Trouille (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

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