Tom Moylan, *Demand the Impossible.* Science Fiction and the Utopian Imagination. 1986: New York and London. Methuen.

According to legend "demand the impossible!" was a graffito smeared on the allegorical walls of Paris in May 1968. Is it a revolutionary slogan, though? The very semantics of "demand" would seem to affirm the giver's authority. Here is an ambiguity that lies at the very core of Moylan's study and threatens to decenter it in unintended ways.

In four chapters Moylan discusses Joanna Russ' *The Female Man,* LeGuin's *The Dispossessed,* Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time,* and Samuel Delany's *Triton* as examples of the "critical utopia." In terms of politics they articulate the concerns of the counter-cultural gestures of the late 1960's and early 70's; in terms of genre they rework the "traditional" utopia which Moylan makes into a totalitarian, or closed, structure. This opposition between the closed and the open text is familiar from the critical debate of recent years. Moylan is, of course, in favor of the "open" and the "critical" text. (Who wouldn't be?) But it should by now be clear to everybody that "open" and "closed" are not attributes of texts but qualifications of specific ways of reading. Thus it would not be too difficult to turn a "traditional," and therefore "closed," utopian text like More's *Utopia* into an open and heterogeneous one. After all, the utopia is a satirical genre and therefore intertextuality is inherent in the very constitution of the genre.

Take Moylan's discussion of *Woman on the Edge of Time*. Moylan argues that science fictional and utopian "mechanisms" of alternative reality and "willed transformation" subvert the realist mode in which Connie's existence as woman and chicana is heavily circumscribed and controlled by others. Moylan wants to argue that the utopia of Mattapoisett subverts the deterministic structure of the ghetto. But Mattapoisett is not a particularly open society. Piercy notes that there is opposition and debate inside this future community, but such heterogeneity is never given its own voice but only indicated by the dominating voice of Luciente, Connie's utopian cicerone. Or consider Moylan's unqualified enthusiasm for Delany's utopia, Triton. The openness of Triton consists in licensed zoning – an idea that does not strike the visitor to contemporary Manhattan or the Bahamas as particularly alien. In other words, if you think the U.S. is an open society you will have no trouble domesticating yourself in Delany's science fiction universe. The old questions remain: who has the authority to do the licensing? The zoning?

Moylan's book is the first one to put the remarkable resurgence of the "utopian imagination" in American fiction in the 1970's on to the map of the literary history of that period. But given Moylan's passionate belief in the continued vitality of the cultural and political pluralism of the so-called counter-culture, and given his silence on Reaganism – his book inevitably raises doubts about the nature of the utopian project. These doubts are not only raised by current political facts but by the history of the genre itself. Michael Kammen and others have pointed out that the utopian imagination longs for closure, for harmony and order against the perceived ravages of "really existing" capitalism and now also socialism. The "rage" for natural human relationships is obvious in *Woman on the Edge of Time* and *The Dispossessed*. Moylan prefers the unrestrained and less obviously structured texts of Russ and Delany that seem to follow an uninhibited libidinous path. But a more suspicious reading of these two than he allows would argue that their ambition to naturalize everything strange, new or perverse has its material equivalents in the women's fora closed to men and in the red light districts closed to those without the wherewithal to buy their services.

Moylan's study raises the right questions about the relationship between politics and literature but his answers seem insufficiently related to current political realities.

Christen Kold Thomsen Odense University