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“LET THE RACE DIE OUT”:
A STRANGE CASE OF TRANS/POST-HUMANS
IN MARY BRADLEY LANE’S FEMINIST UTOPIA
MIZORA: A PROPHECY

A b s t r a c t. The prevailing criticism of Mary Bradley Lane’s *Mizora: A Prophecy*, a 19th-century utopia that entered the feminist literary canon after it was reissued by Greg Press in 1975, relatively unanimously assumes that the asexual subterranean race of the Mizorans represents *homo sapiens*. Perceived by the narrator—a visitor from Tsarist Russia and a friend to Polish insurrectionists—as *women* representing an advanced civilization, and only sporadically as fairies, the race of “blonde beauties” is believed to be typical of feminist utopias. Undermining genderification present in the narratorial as well as critical discourse, the article will claim that the status of Mizorans, the race spawned by scientists thousands of years ago, wavers between transhuman and posthuman.

Key words: feminist utopia; posthuman; *Mizora*.

The utopian dream is a wistful, fleeting flirtatious moment of pleasure, a wondrous jeu d’esprit. It flatters humanity: see what you can do!

(Gregory Claeys 7)

And there rose a vision in my mind—one of those day dreams when fancy upon the wing takes some definite course—and I saw in my own land a Temple of Learning rise, grand in proportion, complete in detail, with a broad gateway, over whose wide-open majestic portal was the significant inscription: “ENTER WHO WILL: NO WARDER STANDS WATCH AT THE GATE.”

(*Mizora* 37)

Transhumanists’ belief that “[h]umanity stands to be profoundly affected by science and technology in the future” has occasioned discussion of morphological freedom—“the right to modify and enhance one’s body, cogni-

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tion, and emotions” (Transhumanist Declaration 2012).¹ Looking towards a braver (viz. better) new world for the new ultra-(wo)man, transhumanism proposes technological intervention to achieve a happy, peaceful and productive co-existence of all species, races and sexes. Transhumans, as FM-2030 indicates, may boast of physical and mental augmentations; wide horizons and a tolerant, cosmopolitan outlook; a globetrotting lifestyle; androgyny; mediated reproduction (e.g. in vitro fertilization); absence or radical reduction of religious beliefs, and rejection or reformulation of traditional family values. Inseparable from their projection is also the intensive use of telecommunications. Important as technology is in transhumanist visions of the future, the key attributes defining the human are not overshadowed by bizarre qualities, skills, strengths or shapes displayed by uncanny posthuman races conceived in science fiction. Sensation, emotion and rationality, modified for the sake of better interpersonal communication, continue to play a vital role in artistic constructions of the “earliest manifestation of new evolutionary beings” (FM-2030)—the transhuman (viz. “transitional humans”).²

In one form or another, transhumanism has always accompanied utopian projects, whether socio-political or fictional. Literary utopias from all ages give us an inkling of how the extraordinary potential of ultra-males, ultra-females or ultra-intersexes could realize utopian goals. Amongst the texts that seem to best exemplify transhumanist ideas are feminist utopias, which, paraphrasing Mary Bradley Lane, author of *Mizora: A Prophecy* (1890),³ let the old race die out and, instead, produce the new brave human, recognized by those from the outer, more traditional world as female:

“[A]t the crisis, a prominent scientist proposed to let the race die out. Science had revealed the Secret of Life.” [...] She bade me look into a microscope that she designated, and tell her what I saw.

“An exquisitely minute cell in violent motion,” I answered.

“Daughter,” she said, solemnly, “you are now looking upon the germ of *all* Life, be it animal or vegetable, a flower or a human being, it has that one common beginning. We have advanced far enough in Science to control its development. Know that the MOTHER is the only important part of all life. In the lowest organisms no other sex is apparent.” (Lane 55)

“By what means have you reached so grand a development?” I asked. “By the careful study of, and adherence to, Nature’s laws. It was long years—I should say centuries—before the influence of the coarser nature of men was eliminated from the present race.” (Lane 56)

¹ For a discussion of morphological freedom see Sandberg.

² See Bostrom; Nyler 18.

³ *Mizora* was first serialized in the *Cincinnati Commercial* newspaper in 1880–81 and then published in book form in 1890.

In what follows, I will focus on the subterranean asexual race as presented in *Mizora*, a utopia representing the literature of first-wave feminism marked by a proliferation of utopian writings.⁴ Albeit introduced as *women* by the narrator-visitor, whose sojourn in the land of MOTHERS inspires the narrative, the people of Mizora may, in point of fact, constitute a new posthuman race indifferent to the genderification present in the narratorial discourse and sustained in the prevailing criticism. My contention is that *Mizora* depicts a genderless rather than a female-only utopian world,⁵ the latter reading resulting from the narrator’s and readers’ will to genderify. The tacit insertion of “female” and “male” into the interpretation of the original sentences “But at the crisis, a prominent [*female*] scientist proposed to let the [*male*] race die out. Science had revealed the Secret of Life”⁶ seems to distort the central ambiguity that Lane’s “feminist” utopia leads to, namely, the ambiguous status of the people of Mizora. Whether they are ultra-females (i.e. transhumans), as the narrator and the great majority of critics seem to suggest, or posthumans,⁷ which is, in my view, another viable interpretative option prompted by numerous “facts” emerging from the narrative, remains unresolved.

The opening of *Mizora* prepares readers for a Plato’s cave effect: what we will be shown, warns the story-teller, an adventurous young noblewoman from nineteenth-century Russia, who declares herself, modestly, to be untrained in the art of writing, is only a pale reflection of ideal lives lived by inhabitants of Mizora.

Having little knowledge of rhetorical art, and possessing but a limited imagination, it is only a strong sense of the duty I owe to Science and the progressive minds of the age, that induces me to come before the public in the character of an

⁴ Lyman Tower Sargent points out that “‘the woman question’ and the whole complex of issues centered around the role of women in society” are major themes in the nineteenth-century utopia. Science and technology are found among the most significant subsidiary themes of the epoch. See also Bruce 24. For a useful typology of utopias and a list of literary conventions deployed in the nineteenth-century utopia, see respectively Jean Pfaelzer, *The Utopian Novel in America 1886–1896* 7; Bartkowski 161; Kessler ix.

⁵ For a different interpretation, see, for example, Jean Pfaelzer, who opines that “[t]he Mizoran woman is the True Woman, [...] the feminized ideal of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority” (“Introduction” 318).

⁶ Cf. “In the middle of that crisis, however, one of the *female* scientists discovered the ‘Secret of Life’” (Bruce 27).

⁷ Cf. “[E]ntities warranting our concern with the posthuman could emerge via modified biological descent, recursive extension of AI technologies (involving human and/or nonhuman designers), quasi-biological descent from synthetic organisms, a convergence of the above, or via some technogenetic process yet to be envisaged!” (Roden 22–23).

author. [...] I have this consolation: whatever reception may be given my narrative by the public, I know that it has been written solely for its good. That wonderful civilization I met with in Mizora, I may not be able to more than faintly shadow forth here, yet from it, the present age may form some idea of that grand, that ideal life that is possible for our remote posterity. (5)⁸

Chapter I successfully fashions our attitude to the first-person narrator, Vera Zarovitch, a cosmopolitan, scientifically minded woman “born to a family of nobility, wealth, and political power.” Though Russian, her nationality does not make her blind to the vicissitudes of the nineteenth-century tsarist state:

While at school, I had become attached to a young and lovely Polish orphan, whose father had been killed at the battle of Grochow when she was an infant in her mother’s arms. My love for my friend, and sympathy for her oppressed people, finally drew me into serious trouble and caused my exile from my native land. (6)

A brief indirect characterization shows Vera, a wife to Alex and mother to an infant son, as an educated and daring female, who, having been arrested and tried for sharing anti-tsarist sentiments, is condemned to the mines of Siberia for life. Vera’s sympathies toward Americans and their political system (“I unconsciously acquired a knowledge and admiration for their form of government, and some revolutionary opinions in regard to my own” [6]) and toward Polish patriots and insurrectionists suffering from tsarist occupation, together with her apt observations and level-headed remarks concerning her own sex (“The tongue of woman has long been celebrated as an unruly member, and perhaps, in some of the domestic affairs of life, it has been unnecessarily active” [5]), position her among most reliable female narrators who shun excessive subjectivity of opinions or illogical siding with their own kind.

The figure of Vera, a model nineteenth-century woman “blessed with strong nerves” and high ideals, whose perspective we adopt, only enhances the admiration we are supposed to feel for “the wonderful and mysterious people” Vera discovers during her solitary sea journey that “no other of [her] sex has ever attempted” (5). Brave enough to survive horrid conditions in Siberia and to cope with a harsh life among the Esquimaux, Vera can hardly believe her eyes when she approaches Mizora: “I wondered if I had really drifted into an enchanted country, such as I had read about in the fairy books of my child-

⁸ As Frances Bartkowski puts it, feminist utopias “give evidence of the enabling mastery of writing, suggesting the feminist logos that could be set against the masculine logos quieted by these narratives” (161).

hood” (8). Since she does not want her readers to share her momentary ontological uncertainty, the description of this subterranean country—“bounded North and South by impassible oceans” (14) and occupying a rupture (“a hollow sphere”) in some unknown seas of the Arctic region across which “no white man’s foot has ever stepped” (7)—is preceded by the opening paragraph where the reader is told exactly what to expect. Mizora, she ascertains as if against her strong first impression, is *not* a magical world of super-fairies but a land of scientific minds who fashioned “the ideal life of exalted knowledge,”

who [...] dreamed that patient Science and practice could evolve for the living human race the ideal life of exalted knowledge: the life that I found in Mizora; that Science had made real and practicable. (5)

Only after Vera has assured the reader of the experiential dimension of her story is her original enchantment with the land and its goddess-like inhabitants revealed. Paradoxically, even many years later, when she is finally given answers to most probing questions concerning Mizorans, she keeps balancing between belief and disbelief in their genuinely human nature:

I trembled at the suggestion of my own thoughts. Was this an enchanted country? Were the lovely blonde women fairies—or some weird beings of different species, human only in form? Or was I dreaming? (51)

The description of Vera’s first encounter with Mizorans leaves no doubt as to the level of civilization represented by this race “of the highest type of blonde beauty” (9). Driving swift, glittering and unaccountably noiseless pleasure boats, dressed in “rich garments, adorned with rare and costly gems” (9), Mizorans dazzle their uninvited guest. A gesture Vera makes when approached by her gentle, graceful, courteous hostesses with “voices softer and sweeter than the strains of an eolian harp” (10) anticipates the position the dark-haired protagonist will occupy among the inhabitants of Mizora for the next fifteen years of her life: “I uncovered my head, shook down my long black hair, and falling upon my knees, lifted my hands in supplication. My plea was apparently understood [...]” (9). Struck by the beauty of their bodies and minds as well as the wisdom that allowed them to build a better society, Vera, a “barbarian” from Russia—a most backward part of the outer world, as Mary Bradley Lane, an American, would undoubtedly have believed—never stops feeling “like the genus of another race” (9), wanting “that charming skill that blends into perfect harmony the beautiful and useful in life” (45).

Once Vera Zarovitch is guided to the shore and climbs marble steps that lead to a mighty city, her enchantment assumes a more reasonable form; she no longer feels as if she has found herself in a fairy-tale world. On the contrary, young “women” she can see there look busy and accomplished rather than eerie and divine: “I supposed I had arrived at a female seminary,” she remarks. “Some were reading, some sketching, and some at various kinds of needlework” (9). Despite her instantaneous admiration of all persons spotted in Mizora, the lack of men turns out to be a significant and frequently reiterated deficit in the world of “ultra-women” as she presents it. Since Vera’s socialization makes her expect the subservience of women in any human society (as is subtly implied at the beginning of her narrative: “It does seem a little astonishing that a woman should have fallen by accident, and without intention or desire, upon a discovery that explorers and scientists had for years searched for in vain” [11]), the fact that “not a man, or the suggestion of one, was to be seen” (9) in Mizora will never stop perplexing her.

To Vera, Mizorans exhibit indescribable beauty of mind and physical charms that clearly cause an inferiority complex in the young Russian beauty: “I felt ill-formed and uncouth beside the perfect symmetry and grace of these lovely beings” (12). Pointing to their air of eternal youth and to “the divine fire of Thought that illumine[s] every feature” (12) of her hostesses, Vera finds them matchless—more beautiful and refined than ancient goddesses sculpted in marble. Wauna, a Mizoran guide assigned to Vera, affirms her first impression: “We are a more delicately organized race of beings than you are. Our intellects, and even sense that we possess, is of a higher and finer development” (44). With their brains of “a finer intellectual fiber” and of “a wider, grander, more majestic receptivity,” and with their imaginations “etherealized” (27), Mizorans far exceed human intellectual potential. “They absorbed ideas that passed over me like a cloud” (27), remarks Vera, who is immediately infatuated with the race, and for whom time only deepens the affection and romantic admiration she feels towards Wauna and her kind:

She was one of the most beautiful beings that it had been my lot to behold. Her eyes were dark, almost the purplish blue of a pansy, and her hair had a darker tinge than is common in Mizora, as if it had stolen the golden edge of a ripe chestnut. Her beauty was a constant charm to me. (14)

In Vera’s recapitulation of what she learned during her prolonged stay in Mizora, she admits with all modesty that she was aware of numerous “ideas that I could not receive, and sciences that I can find no words in my lan-

guage to represent” (27). As implied in Wauna’s assertion quoted above, transhuman enhancement in Mizorans involves not only intellect but also senses. A remarkable acuteness of vision enables Wauna and others to see the odors emanating from plants and to distinguish additional colours within the solar spectrum—colours invisible to Vera yet unanimously acknowledged by the Mizorans (44). Simultaneously their superacute sense of smell allows them to detect scents too refined for Vera’s nose. Mizorans can also boast of senses unknown to humans:

We have some senses that you do not possess, and are unable to comprehend their exquisite delicacy. One of them I shall endeavor to explain to you by describing it as impression. We possess it in a highly refined state, both mentally and physically. Our sensitiveness to changes of temperature, I have noticed, is more marked than yours. (44)

In the world of ordinary humans, emotions and feelings that Mizorans experience would be pronounced morbid on account of their intensity. The levels of empathy and intuition attained by Mizorans suggest that their mentality has been refined beyond human comprehension. And so have been some of their mental pleasures:

I could not appreciate their mental pleasures, any more than a savage could delight in a nocturne of Chopin. Yet one was the intellectual ecstasy of a sublime intelligence, and the other the harmonious rapture of a divinely melodious soul. (30)

To do good, to be approved by their own conscience, was their constant pleasure. (27)

The above-mentioned characteristics may render Vera speechless with admiration, but despite their transhuman dimension, they do not shatter her culturally ingrained model of the order of things. Blonde beauties, according to this model, can be blessed with angelic voices, exceptional intuition and sensitivity, kindness, tenderness, perfect manners, and even brains and scientific interests. What is disturbing, however, in this world of ultra-women is their inexplicable disregard for the *lack* Vera so intensely experiences for fifteen years of her life in Mizora:

I cannot explain why I hesitated to press my first inquiry as to where the men were. I had put the question to Wauna one day, but she professed never to have heard of such beings. It silenced me—for a time.

“Perhaps it is some extinct animal,” she added, naively. “We have so many new things to study and investigate, that we pay but little attention to ancient history.” (16)

I was astonished that young girls, with cheeks like the downy bloom of a ripe peach, should chatter and laugh merrily over every conversational topic but that of the lords

of society. The older and the wiser among women might acquire a depreciating idea of their worth, but innocent and inexperienced girlhood was apt to surround that name with a halo of romance and fancied nobility that the reality did not always possess. What, then, was my amazement to find *them* indifferent and wholly neglectful of that (to me) very important class of beings. (47–48)

The cognitive frames of the patriarchal cultures of nineteenth-century Europe and Russia, granting men all major roles, skills and talents, cause Vera to initially adopt a condescending attitude to female students and scholars as constituting, in her opinion, only a perfect background to man's paradise.⁹

Beauty and intellect, wealth and industry, splendor and careful economy, natures lofty and generous, gentle and loving—why has not Man claimed this for himself? (16)

It would be a paradise for man. (12)

Vera can hardly imagine serious business such as politics, law and justice, economy, industry, etc. without men:

Man, in my country, was a necessity of government, law, and protection. His importance (as I viewed it from inherited ideas) was incalculable. It *could* not be possible that he had no existence in a country so eminently adapted to his desires and ability. (46)

Moreover, as men seem to Vera the only natural addressees of all women's strivings and achievements, the absence of men as observers, evaluators and proprietors bothers Vera more than the absence of men as such. (If the latter absence were the cause, she would probably have attempted much sooner to leave Mizora and rejoin her husband and son.) The fact that there is not a single male to see, appreciate and claim the right to the beauty of the land, the amazing grace of its female inhabitants and the incredible advancement of its civilization seems to make the whole effort on the part of the "women" of Mizora less rewarding because unacknowledged.

The longer Vera stays in Mizora, the more convinced she becomes that "here was a nation of fair, exceedingly fair women doing without [men], and practising the arts and sciences far beyond the imagined pale of human knowledge and skill" (12). She realizes that Mizorans have succeeded in creating a better world—free of romance and elations, yet marked by social solidarity and an unappeased passion for education and personal development. Mizora, though said to be the country of mothers, for whom their

⁹ Lane's utopia can be classified as educational. For a discussion of the centrality of education in feminist utopian writing and in the eighteenth-century educational utopias that "offer plans for systematizing woman's learning" (2003: 9), see Alessa Johns.

daughters are an absolute priority (“The only intense feeling that I could discover among these people was the love between parent and child” /17/), is a civilization which—at least in its self-description—is based on science not in conflict with nature but improving it:¹⁰

The social organism did not need legislation to increase its benefits; it turned to Science, and, through Science, to Nature. The Laboratory of the Chemist was the focus that drew the attention of all minds. (35)

To Vera, a Russian Orthodox aristocrat strongly believing in social hierarchies and eternal souls, the function of science in Mizora goes beyond understanding—it not only determines a class system but also replaces religion. Her backwardness is commented on by her Mizoran guide and friend:

“Oh, daughter of the dark ages,” said Wauna, sadly, “turn to the benevolent and ever-willing Science. She is the goddess who has led us out of ignorance and superstition; out of degradation and disease, and every other wretchedness that superstitious, degraded humanity has known. She has lifted us above the low and the little, the narrow and mean in human thought and action, and has placed us in a broad, free, independent, noble, useful and grandly happy life.” (65)

“Its investigators and teachers are our only acknowledged superiors and leaders.” (35)

Science has indeed been the greatest benefactor of Wauna’s race. Mizorans’ technological achievements, eliminating—apart from the unwanted genotypes—health problems, poverty and drudgery (“Toil was unknown; the toil that we know, menial, degrading and harassing” /12/), include, among others, molecular nanotechnology that enables them to transform stones into bread; ecological heating factories:

The dense population made it impracticable to cultivate forests for fuel. Its rapid increase demanded of Science the discovery of a fuel that could be consumed without loss to them, both in the matter consumed and in the expense of procuring it. Nothing seemed to answer their purpose so admirably as water (32);

and hi-tech communication systems resembling mobile phones or three-dimensional holographic video-conferencing apparatus:

A wonderful discovery that the people of Mizora had made was the power to annihilate space as an impediment to conversation. [...] Public speakers made constant use of it, but in connection with another extraordinary apparatus which I re-

¹⁰ As Christine Mahady observes, “While the recognizable environmental damage [...] is erased within the narrative, it is significant to note that we learn that Mizorans had turned to science after the exhaustion of all of their natural resources and the extinction of all of their animals had taken place” (98).

gret my inability to perfectly describe. [...] But it had a wonderful function, for immediately in front of it, moving, speaking and gesturing, was the figure of a popular public lecturer, so life-like in appearance that I could scarcely be convinced that it was only a reflection. [...] It was no common thing for a lecturer to address a dozen or more audiences at the same time, scattered over an area of thousands of miles, and every one listening to and observing what appeared to be the real speaker. (42)

The utility of law, medicine, politics or other conflict-of-interest-provoking domains has been reduced to a bare minimum. The elevated moral character of the inhabitants of Mizora has made courts and legal proceedings pointless, as all legal issues are resolved in the Public Library where statute books are kept; proper nutrition has gradually eliminated the need for services of medics; and politics has stopped bothering ordinary citizens—“among an educated and highly enlightened people, the government will take care of itself” (38).

As to education, the utopian country of Mizora, the model of a better world (at least in its intention), appears unsurpassable. With free colleges, all the necessary “facilities for thorough instruction” and “[a]ll the expenses of a pupil, including board, clothing, and the necessary traveling fares [...] defrayed by the State,” and, moreover, with the salaries of teachers “larger than those of any other public position” (37), *Mizora: A Prophecy*, depicting this system, proposes a most desirable solution for the betterment of any society.

Vera’s disbelief that there can be a civilization without men makes her search for historical sources on the origins of the people of Mizora, yet she finds none: “No record of a more primitive race was to be found in all the Library, assiduously as I searched for it” (46). When she finally decides to inquire about this disturbing absence in the history of the land, she is shown by the Preceptress of the National College, the leading scientist of the country and Wauna’s mother, a forlorn portrait gallery displaying visages of distinguished men of the past—the main, if not sole, source of documentation of the inglorious ancient times, which bore a great similarity to the history of the United States:

“Any student,” said the Preceptress, “who desires to become conversant with our earliest history, can use this gallery. It is not a secret, for nothing in Mizora is concealed; but we do not parade its existence, nor urge upon students an investigation of its history. They are so far removed from the moral imbecility that dwarfed the nature of these people, that no lesson can be learned from their lives; and their time can be so much more profitably spent in scientific research and study.” (49)

Men, studied and judged by their appearance reflected in portraits—so utterly different from the feminine, graceful and divinely beautiful people of contemporary Mizora—cause in Mizorans anything but appreciation:

“Let us leave this place,” said the Preceptress presently. “It always has a depressing effect upon me.” “In what way?” I asked.^[11] “By the degradation of the human race that they force me to recall.” (50)

The male genotype, eliminated together with genotypes of criminals, the disabled and dark-haired and dark-skinned races (“We believe that the highest excellence of moral and mental character is alone attainable by a fair race. The elements of evil belong to the dark race” /50/),¹¹ proved unnecessary: the civilization of Mizora has remarkably developed without men’s brains and participation.

Mizorans, who, in the eye of the Russian beholder, look like women of enhanced physical, intellectual and emotional merits (viz. transhumans), can actually be reinterpreted as posthumans—a radically advanced species developed from primitive lifeforms and characterized by incredible longevity, “animal spirits, [...] strong supple frames, and the rich, red blood of perfect health, mantling their cheeks with its unsurpassable bloom” (46). In her constant bewilderment at the lack of the other sex, Vera keeps overlooking the fact that the “fairies” she has encountered in Mizora are not women who thousands of years ago seized the chance of perfecting themselves, but a technologically spawned, new race of pre-sex, parthenogenetic MOTHERS originating in “the germ of *all* Life, be it animal or vegetable, a flower or a human being” and, thereby, replacing not only both sexes but also animals, if not a tree leaf or a flower. “*We* are a people who have passed beyond the boundary of what was once called Natural Law,” announces the Preceptress, and further explicates, “But, more correctly, we have become mistresses of Nature’s peculiar processes. We influence or control them at will” (49).

If we part ways with the narratorial point of view, which can be tendentious after all, and if we disregard some latent forms in the (mis)translation of the Mizoran vocabulary, such as *woman* or *girl* (not once does Vera admit to a comprehension failure: “The grasp of my mind was not broad enough” /42/), our understanding of this feminist utopia will become broader. Engendered in the mind of some prominent scientist (male? female?) who sug-

¹¹ Focusing on the concepts of race and reproduction in *Mizora*, Katherine Broad asserts, “Given the race, class, and gender politics of Lane’s ‘feminist utopia,’ it is crucial for readers to recognize that Lane’s feminism relies on racism and her utopia on extermination” (260). Also, Bruce stresses that “the novel reads like a Nazi blueprint for an ideal society” (27).

gested that the old race of subterranean humans should die out, the actual people of Mizora, the race of MOTHERS whose genotype seems to be closer to that of prehistoric women rather than men,¹² know no limits or borders separating various forms of Life:

“*We* never graduate,” said Wauna. “There is my mamma’s mother, two centuries old, and still studying. I paid her a visit the other day and she took me into her laboratory. She is a manufacturer of lenses, and has been experimenting on microscopes. She has one now that possesses a truly wonderful power. The leaf of a pear tree, that she had allowed to become mouldy, was under the lens, and she told me to look.

“A panorama of life and activity spread out before me in such magnitude that I can only compare it to the feeling one must possess who could be suspended in air and look down upon our world for a cycle of time. [...]”

“Reflect! If the history of a single leaf is so vast and yet ephemeral, what may not be the history of a single world? What, after all, are we when such an infinitesimal space can contain such wonderful transactions in a second of time.” (36)

Apparently, the history of MOTHERS started not with an apocalypse but with a dynamic process, whose main stages may have involved, first, seizing political power by women,¹³ then dying out of the old race of men and women, due to the practical use and application of the scientific discovery of “the germ of *all* life,” and finally getting rid of all social, cultural and psychological effects of the former division into the stronger sex (“the lords of society”) and the weaker one (“beauties”). Hence, we can safely assume that the new race of MOTHERS, conceived in laboratories but probably born of women (it is not explicated in the Preceptress’s lecture on Mizoran history) and capable of conceiving and bearing children without sexual partners, was gladly adopted by original women who regarded the newly-begotten species as their improved, but otherwise “natural” descendants. Wauna’s total ignorance of the word *man* and the concept of *the other parent* implies that after 3000 years since the old race of men and women died out, gender identity is definitely not an issue among the people of Mizora.¹⁴ Wauna’s use of the words *woman*, *girl* and *daughter* is clearly equivalent to Vera’s use of the words *person*, *young person* and *child*.

¹² Hence, we can still claim that *Mizora* should be included among feminist utopias.

¹³ Interestingly, Victoria Claflin Woodhull, an American leader of the women’s suffrage movement and the first woman to run for President of the United States, declared, “We mean treason; we mean secession. [...] We are plotting revolution; we will overthrow this bogus republic, and plant a government of righteousness in its stead” (quoted in Kleiberg 194).

¹⁴ A different opinion is put forward by other critics, e.g. Pfaelzer: “In Lane’s androgynous society, then, sexual roles disappear, but sexual identity remains” (“A State of One’s Own” 319).

The posthuman rather than transhuman character of the race of MOTHERS in Mary Bradley Lane’s utopia can be read between the lines rather than from Vera’s openly stated views on Mizorans, whom she, despite her doubts and evident attraction to athletic, large-waisted Wauna (“They considered a large waist a mark of beauty, as it gave a greater capacity of lung power” /11/), takes for women.¹⁵ The question of Mizorans’ posthumanity is, in other words, too subtly ((or perhaps indecisively) introduced to resolve the textual ambiguity one way or the other. The ambiguity prevails in the closing part of the narrative, which describes Wauna’s unsuccessful and unfortunate mission in Europe and the United States. Sent from the interior of Earth, on Vera’s heartfelt plea, to spread Mizoran ideas among two-sex “barbarians”—ideas which, if implemented, could greatly improve life on the planet’s surface—Wauna fails. Her voice, though admired for unearthly harmony, is heard but not listened to: “The lofty ideal of humanity that she represented was smiled at or gently ignored” (79). Taken for “an impossible character” whose physical beauty and grace are all men can see and deem divine, Wauna surrenders and wants only to return underground, to her own civilization of MOTHERS, which, unfortunately, turns out to be impossible. As someone who briefly encounters her prophetically observes,

“She is too far above the common run of human nature [...]. I should not be surprised if her spirit were already pluming its wings for a heavenly flight. Such natures never stay long among us.” (79)

Wauna, whose name in the Mizoran language means “happiness,” passes away. With her—the only representative of the trans/post-human race of MOTHERS on the earth’s surface—die Vera’s hopes for quick educational reforms in Europe and/or America. Opening of a Temple of Learning to all who will try to enter, which Vera envisages in her prophecy, must be postponed to a certain time. And thus, Mary Bradley Lane’s utopia ends where it begins, in the world of humans, who, on the one hand, never stop imagining better worlds (“The future of the world, if it be grand and noble, will be the

¹⁵ Jean Pfaelzer indicates that lesbian romance as a theme “hovers around Vera at all times” (“Introduction” xxix). Katherine Broad argues that “the management of sexuality through universal celibacy does not necessarily preclude the expression of sexuality in other forms, as evidenced in the Mizoran’s displacement of romantic sexuality onto mother-daughter relationships” (253–254). Undoubtedly, the possibility of an erotic subtext behind Mizoran mother-daughter relationships or Vera’s infatuation with Wauna (and also with her Polish girlfriend) requires a more detailed study. However, it seems that the intended or unintended ambiguity of this subtext will prevail, regardless of critical efforts to clarify the issue.

result of UNIVERSAL EDUCATION, FREE AS THE GOD-GIVEN WATER WE DRINK”¹⁶) and, on the other, profess that “Life is a tragedy even under the most favourable conditions” (80).

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¹⁶ For an illuminating discussion of women’s (higher) education in the United States, 1865–1920, see S.J. Kleinberg 152–161.

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„NIECH WYMRZE RASA”: DZIWNY PRZYPADEK TRANS-/POSTLUDZI
W FEMINISTYCZNEJ UTOPII MARY BRADLEY LANE *MIZORA: PRZEPOWIEDNIA*

Streszczenie

Opracowania krytyczne dziewiętnastowiecznej utopii autorstwa Mary Bradley Lane, pt. *Mizora: A Prophecy*, która weszła do kanonu utopii feministycznych zaraz po jej wznowieniu w 1975 r., dość jednomyślnie zakładają, iż aseksualna podziemna rasa Mizoranek należy do gatunku *homo sapiens*. „Blond piękności” postrzegane przez narratorkę — gościa z carskiej Rosji i przyjaciółkę polskich powstańców — jako *kobiety* reprezentujące wyższą cywilizację, i tylko sporadycznie jako istoty baśniowe, uznawane są przez krytyków za typowe postaci feministycznych utopii. Poddając w wątpliwość genderyfikację obecną zarówno w narratorskim, jak i krytycznym dyskursie, artykuł stawia tezę, że status Mizoran(ek), poczętych w laboratoriach naukowych tysiące lat temu, jest niejasny i balansuje między transhumanistycznym a poshumanistycznym.

Słowa kluczowe: utopia feministyczna; postczłowiek; *Mizora*.

