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The Forgotten Queer Utopia

Queer utopianism, Queer identities, and Queer communities in Irene Clyde's *Beatrice the Sixteenth*

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## Abstract

Queerness is inherently utopian, just as the concept of utopia is inherently queer. Both utopia and queerness are a result of stepping out of a restrictive and oppressive space-time framing, hence why the need of creating worlds or realities that are outside the area of influence of majoritarian forces. The possibility of escaping and resisting a hierarchical and oppressive system allows the rise of new, queer identities.

This thesis will analyse queerness and utopianism in the context of Irene Clyde's *Beatrice the Sixteenth*. The novel, first published in 1909 and republished for the first time in 2023, sold little to no copies and has been omitted from almost every utopian or queer bibliography. *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, a post-gender novel, was written by Irene Clyde, a transgender British activist and international lawyer, and it represents the ideal world that she imagined. The world of Armeria presents ideas that were ahead of their time by decades.

The Armerian kingdom, the main setting of *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, is a representation of resistance to chrononormativity, compulsory heterosexuality, and gender stereotypes. Armeria is a queer reality that can be interpreted either as a refuge and a possibility in the future for queer identities to not be oppressed, or as a place where to embrace queer jouissance and the death drive.

The genderless Armerian people not only represent a counterargument to binary hierarchical systems, but also to the Modernist trans feminine allegory. The Armerians also pose as prototypes of post-gender queer identities that were theorised only decades after the publication of the novel. However, Armerians arguably present some flaws in the way they are depicted—their genderlessness is disputable and the Armerian society is not completely egalitarian.

Through a close reading of *Beatrice the Sixteenth* and the analysis on multiple layers and from multiple perspectives, I will show how innovative and revolutionary Irene Clyde's ideas were, while also demonstrating how important *Beatrice the Sixteenth* is and should have been in the world of utopian and queer literature.

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## 1 Introduction

Irene Clyde's *Beatrice the Sixteenth* is a queer utopian novel published in 1909, written by a transgender woman born in 1869. As a queer non-binary person who reads mostly queer literature—meaning books written by queer people with queer representation in them—I had never heard of this novel, not even heard it mentioned, despite years of research of past examples of gender non-conforming literature. One of my biggest interests has always been researching and discovering queer books, especially ones that are not contemporary, because of how important historical representation is. Needless to say, Clyde's novel seemed to merit immediate investigation.

The first challenge, however, was that *Beatrice the Sixteenth* was apparently impossible to retrieve. The novel had never been republished, and copies of it were unavailable in most libraries. Luckily a new edition of *Beatrice the Sixteenth* was on its way in 2023—the first one since its original publication—and when I finally managed to read it, my surprise grew even more. The ideas present in this book, written in 1909, anticipate by decades and decades several theoretical concepts discussed in queer theory. Even though some aspects give away the fact that the novel was published in the beginning of the last century, its style and its ideas are definitely different from other books of the time, even queer ones, such as Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928) or Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915). *Beatrice the Sixteenth* is a queer utopia that transcends genres and speaks directly to contemporary debates about queer identity, sexuality, family, community, and political futures.

The comparison to Gilman's novel—a feminist utopian novel written around the same time as *Beatrice the Sixteenth* and dealing, in some way, with a similar central theme—seems the most natural, since both novels begin in the same pattern. *Herland*, although dealing with a niche theme for its time, follows the canonical structure of the utopian genre: the three male American protagonists form an expedition to a mysterious land said to be inhabited exclusively by women. Once they reach their destination, they talk to the people of Herland—a name coined by the male protagonist of the novel—and they learn about their customs and traditions, their ideas, their history, and every aspect of their society. For instance, they learn that the women of Herland have “evolved” so that those who are considered worthy reproduce via parthenogenesis—asexual reproduction—which serves as a way of critiquing the home country of the author/protagonists while presenting ideal and utopian ideas and possibilities.

The novel, following the utopian genre structure, concludes with the protagonists going back to their country with a renewed knowledge of a possible, better society that could be achievable. *Beatrice the Sixteenth* starts on this path. Mary Hatherley, a British physician and geographer, after losing her senses while travelling through a desert in Southwest Asia, awakens in a similar but at the same time different place, where she is rescued by the people of the kingdom of Armeria, who bring her to their capital of Alzôna. In the first chapters of the novel, Mary gets to know many Armerians and she learns about their society: work is a secondary practice in one's life and comes after leisure and socio-political activities, the consumption of meat is considered barbaric, the language spoken is a mixture of Greek and Latin, religion is a personal and private affair and the Armerian pantheon derives from Greek mythology. However, not everything is utopian and the Armerian civilization is far from being perfect. The society in the Armerian kingdom functions also through slavery and a controversial system of adoption based on exchanging children for goods with a nearby tribe seems to be the way in which new citizens/slaves come to Armeria. The most notable characteristic of the Armerians is that they do not recognise any distinction between genders: in fact, the entire society seems to be completely genderless. This aspect implies a lack of gender binarism or gendered declension in the language, but also a lack of gender stereotypes and patriarchal cis-heterosexual expectations, a lack of social restrictions on types of attraction between genders.

While *Beatrice the Sixteenth* follows the canonical utopian novel's structure in the first chapters, with a constant back-and-forth discussion on the differences between British and Armerian society—which serves the purpose of highlighting the flaws perceived by Clyde in her society while proposing or presenting changes and idealistic possibilities—the novel soon begins to change genres. First, it becomes a political thriller, with conspiracies and betrayals due to the war between Armeria and the nearby kingdom of Uras. Then it transforms into an adventurous novel with Mary travelling through the military camps in order to be reunited with Ilex, an Armerian citizen for whom she develops romantic feelings. The novel culminates, after the war ends, with Mary and Ilex marrying, and Mary—in a reversal of the expected outcome typical of utopian novel, in which the protagonist decides to go back to their own country—deciding to remain, after having found a place where she feels comfortable with and at ease.

The purpose of this thesis is then to show the importance and the potential that Irene Clyde's ideas and works had and still hold to this day, as well as how important *Beatrice the Sixteenth* is in the context of utopian and queer literature. The life of Clyde combined with the story of Mary and the kingdom of Armeria allow a profound analysis and reflection on queer utopianism and on queer communities and identities, consequently showing how important and revolutionary Clyde was.

## 1.1 No trace of Irene

Deciding to learn more about this book, I soon found two impervious challenges: the amount of academic research on *Beatrice the Sixteenth* is next to none, and important works on gender written by Clyde are unavailable. There are only a few articles and a few analyses en passant on *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, most notably Daphne Patai and Angela Ingram's analysis in *Rediscovering Forgotten Radicals*, one of the few books dealing with the novel and Irene Clyde's life. Even in theoretical books on feminist and/or modernist utopias or queer literature, the book is seldom even referenced. Two of Clyde's other books—her memoir *Alone in Japan* (1959) and her collection of essays on gender *Eve's Sour Apples* (1934)—are out of print and have not been digitised. Copies of the journal *Urania* are unavailable both online and in physical format. The only copies I could find of these books by Clyde are kept at the British Library in London, and they can only be consulted by going there. In contrast, Clyde's books on international law, especially those written before moving to Japan, are easier to come across. The reason for this, as argued by Ingram and Patai, is in part that Irene Clyde was a pseudonym: “nowhere in the English-speaking world were there public records that pointed to the existence of an ‘Irene Clyde’” (Ingram and Patai 272). As said above, Irene Clyde was a transgender woman; therefore most of the records on her life were hidden under the name given her at birth which, for her sake and out of respect, I will not use. The little information that we have on her life, together with the inherent paradox of having a very public persona—that of the renowned international lawyer—and her private persona—that of a transgender feminist activist—plays an important role in the analysis of *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, but also, it explains why the book has been ignored for well over a century.

Irene Clyde was born in 1869 in Stanwix, a district of Carlisle, in North West England. She was a gifted person who won two scholarships, which allowed her to attend both Cambridge University and Oxford University, getting a Doctor of Law degree in both of them. She became a barrister in 1898 and, thanks also to her position of Honorary Secretary of the International Law Association, became an internationally recognised publicist and scholar, publishing a number of books and articles on international law. She published *Beatrice the Sixteenth* in 1909 and after the end of World War I, in 1916, she moved to Japan, where she worked “as the legal adviser to the Japanese Foreign Office in Tokyo, only to be branded a traitor by the British during World War II and thus after the war stripped of British citizenship” (Ingram and Patai 275). Because of this, she was not allowed to go back to England, so she spent the rest of her days in Japan, where she died in 1954 from a cerebral haemorrhage. The Emperor of Japan and many other Japanese political figures sent floral tributes to her funeral to commemorate her work.

## **1.2 A group of bomb-carrying revolutionary feminists**

Aside from her public role as adviser and expert on international law, Clyde was a fierce radical feminist who collaborated with English and Irish suffragists like Eva Gore-Booth, Jesse Wade, Esther Roper, and Dorothy Cornish, with whom she founded the *Urania* journal. The journal, published between 1916 and 1940, contained essays, poetry, short stories, and drama on gender and sex, as well as accounts of individuals from around the world defying gender expectations and stereotypes, with the purpose of demonstrating that gender is a social construct. The choice of the name was not casual: the term Uranian, used by sexologists and advocates of homosexual emancipation in the past few centuries to describe homosexual men, derives from the Greek myth of Aphrodite Urania, the goddess of celestial and non-corporeal love—opposed to a more physical and lustful one—born without a mother from the castrated genitals of the god Uranus. According to Sonja Tiernan, “this description evokes the notion of the fluidity of biological sex and surgical sex re-assignment, Uranus assumes the biological abilities of the female sex by losing his male genitalia and reproducing new life.” (Tiernan 57). This myth, together with the idea of Aphrodite Urania as the embodiment of a superior form of love, fully represent the journal. The main idea expressed in it, further highlighted by the header present in every issue “There are no ‘men’ or ‘women’



in *Urania*” (qtd. in Hamer 69), was that society as it was—and still is—limits individuals by forcing masculinity on men and femininity on women, thus creating a toxic environment of social expectations and hierarchical structure that are some of the main tenets of a patriarchal cis-heterosexual society. Gender binarism organises humanity in a way that results “in the formation of two warped and imperfect types” and the only way to escape from this burden, as argued by Clyde herself, is “to see sweetness and independence combined in the same individual” so that “*all* recognition of that duality must be given up.” (qtd. in Ingram and Patai 272). Heterosexual expectations were also a topic harshly criticised in *Urania* and by Clyde, who considered sex and marriage as a barrier between men and women, rejecting the idea of two halves creating a whole being, an idea on which cis-heterosexuality is based, and embracing a view and a wish for the most admirable aspects of women to be found in men and vice versa (Ingram and Patai 281). This idea is clearly visible in *Beatrice the Sixteenth* in the way romantic relationships between Armerians are presented because in their society gender does not exist.

Before *Urania*, Clyde formed the Aëthnic Union, a feminist club born in 1911 or 1912, and it was described by Clyde herself as recognising that “upon the fact of sex there has been built up a gigantic superstructure of artificial convention which urgently needs to be swept away. And it does not see how it is to be swept away unless sex is resolutely ignored” (qtd. in Ingram and Patai 280). This group obviously shared the ideas advocated by Clyde and later present in the *Urania* journal, claiming that gender binarism is degrading and an obstacle on the way of achieving, or at least approaching, liberation and perfection. Discussions and information on the Aëthnic Union are almost non-existent due to the short life of the group and the historical invisibilisation of feminist groups and ideologies. What we know is that the Union lasted only for a few months and that some of its supporters were Eva Gore-Booth and Esther Roper, both of whom will later vastly contribute to the *Urania* journal with Clyde. Emily Hamer argues that the reason for the group’s short existence is that Clyde championed its main purpose when she introduced it to Millicent Garret Fawcett (1847-1929), the leader of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). Clyde asked Garret Fawcett: “if the NUWSS would adopt the elimination of gender distinctions as one of its aims” (Hamer 67). The request was refused, and the Aëthnic Union was dissolved.

Considering this context makes it easier to understand how *Beatrice the Sixteenth* came into being. Irene Clyde actively advocated for the abolition of gender binarism, hoping for a society in which distinctions based on sex and gender do not exist and, thus, do not hinder human's evolution and social progress. The world described in *Beatrice the Sixteenth* was probably what Clyde had envisioned or dreamed her world to be: a refuge from a society deeply shaped by patriarchal and cis-heterosexual expectations and rules, a world in which most human beings live peacefully among themselves—aside from the danger represented by the Uras kingdom and considering the institution of slavery present in Armeria—and the purest form of romantic relationship is achievable because relationships are unburdened by gender, and thus gendered stereotypical expectations and stereotyped roles. The kingdom of Armeria, as I will argue in this thesis, represented to Clyde an ideal possibility which she worked hard to achieve, a land of dreams so close yet so far. In other words, Armeria was Clyde's utopia, a fictional place where she would have found refuge. At the same time, the novel could be said to embrace jouissance and its inherent motion towards death and destruction—what is known as the death drive—considering that Mary, unlike the typical protagonist of a utopian novel, chooses to stay in Armeria. Mary does not go back to her country with a renewed knowledge of how some aspects of society could be improved, but decides to remain and bid farewell to England, refusing to go back, literally and symbolically, to that 'straight temporality' present in the patriarchal cis-heterosexual British society, thus embracing the jouissance of living her life with Ilex.

Just as the ideas discussed by Clyde anticipated by decades and decades those presented by queer and feminist theorists on gender, her novel was a novelty in the way it discussed its themes and the way the plot shapes up to be, but it was also ignored and unknown to most. For example, "as recently as 1991, Fredric Jameson (like many other critics before him) credited [Ursula] Le Guin for her inventiveness in attempting to go beyond gender in *The Left Hand of Darkness*" (qtd. in Ingram and Patai 268), which shows how *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, just like arguably Irene Clyde, was ahead of their time, hence probably why the novel disappeared from the bibliographies of utopian and queer fiction and Irene Clyde is a widely unknown.

To analyse *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, whether it can be defined as a queer utopian novel or can be said to embrace queer negativity, it is important to first discuss the genre of utopia.

Furthermore, the etymology of the word and the changes undergone by the genre itself, as I will discuss in more detail later, can be linked to the concept of queer temporality and space.

### 1.3 A brief history of utopian literature

The story of utopia as an idea can be said to have been born in 1516, when English philosopher Thomas More (1478-1535) published the socio-political satirical work *Utopia*, in which the fictional Portuguese traveller Raphael Hythloday tells More about the island of Utopia, a fictional island in the New World which seems to be an idealistic Eden on Earth. More coined the word ‘utopia’ by mixing two Greek words: *οὐ* (meaning *not*, reduced to the single letter *u*) and *τόπος* (*topos*, meaning place), to which he added the suffix *-ia*, thus indicating that it is a place. Utopia, etymologically, means non-place. Therefore, it is at the same time an affirmation, for it exists, and a negation, because it is a non-place. To further complicate things, More himself, in the poem published at the end of *Utopia*, creates a second neologism playing on the similarity between *utopia* and *eutopia* (where *εὖ* means ‘good’), thus symbolising how this place is simultaneously (non)existent and intrinsically good. This similarity between the two words, further highlighted by the fact that they are pronounced in the same way, has created a tension and a link between the two that has survived throughout the centuries and has influenced works prior to that of More. By using the word both as the title of his book and as the island described by Raphael, the word utopia has come to represent both an ideal, imaginary place and a narrative genre known as utopian literature.

Utopian literature has been deeply shaped by socio-political and historical ideas and events throughout the centuries, just like other genres—arguably, even more. More’s idea of utopia, being himself a Renaissance humanist, is shaped by the idea that human beings are masters of their destiny and, therefore, they are able to construct and shape their future. Furthermore, considering the geographical and colonial expansion of the time, this non-place was obviously located in an ‘Other’ space that could be modelled at one’s will, especially in contrast to European societies. It is thus no surprise that utopian literature flourished in colonialist countries like England and France, but also in Italy, and later, in the United States.

The utopian genre has always been shaped by a rigid narrative structure: a person travels, intentionally or not, to an unknown place. Once there, “the utopian traveller is usually offered a guided tour of the society, and given an explanation of its social, political, economic, and religious organization” (Vieira 7), which serves the purpose of showing the differences between this non-existent ideal society and the one from which the traveller comes. In this way, it is possible for the author to discuss the perfectible or negative aspects of the society in which they live. This narrative structure is reproduced in the fictional work by the fact that “this journey typically implies the return of the utopian traveller to his or her own country, in order to take back the message that there are alternative and better ways of organizing society” (Vieira 7), which is the main point behind the idea of utopia: bringing forth a subversive critique of one’s society, especially to certain aspects of it, and relying on the idea that in the future and with the right knowledge, a better world is possible. In summary, it could be said that the principal energy of utopia is that of hope, a desire to challenge the norms and standards of the present by imagining better alternatives.

The shift towards the importance of hope, and thus the fact that utopias are non-places situated in a possible future—or, as I will argue later, they are positioned in the horizon—happens with a shift “from eu/utopia, the good/non-place, [...] to euchronia, the good place in the future” (Vieira 9), a product of the Enlightenment belief that not only was the future shapeable according to human volition—as it was during the Renaissance—but human perfection was attainable through constant improvement. In this way, utopias were no longer places fixed in time and space but rather dynamic settings acting as guiding lights. This idea of utopia as a dynamic site situated in the future became even more evident during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, particularly in England, because of the Industrial Revolution and the influence of Marxism, with the idea that “the birth of the new man would only take place after the economic situation of society had changed.” (Vieira 15). Utopias, being a product born in response to the flaws of society and one’s dissatisfaction with them, became concerned with the idea and the fear of the future, hence the shift from setting them elsewhere—in an unknown, unexplored region or island which had not yet been colonised—to setting them in the future.

The idea that utopia is not a fixed, already complete and perfect *eutopia*, but rather a dynamic, desirable non-place, “characterizes a large part of feminist utopian writing

beginning in the late middle ages and continuing to today and it appears emphatically in Enlightenment Britain: that is, *before* what is considered the modern women's movement" (Johns 174). Since a utopia is a critique based on the flaws of one's society, one constant limiting and oppressive force that has deeply permeated European societies is misogyny and its patriarchal essence, which has contributed to the creation of cis-heterosexual domination, enforced and stereotypical gender binarism, and the suppression of every aspect of a person's life which does not conform to the standard. It is because of this that American academic Anne K. Mellor argues that "[f]eminist theory is inherently utopian" and continues by saying that it "is grounded on the assumption that gender equality, a social equality between the sexes which has never existed in the historical past" (Mellor 243). Therefore a hope for the future, united with an opposition to the present and the past, typical of utopian literature and thinking, is perfectly suited for feminist and, as I will further argue later, queer literature. Feminist utopias, in general, are based on five features:

(1) [...] education and intellectual development as central to the individual and to women's empowerment; (2) they embrace a view of human nature as malleable and social rather than determined, fallen, and individualist; (3) they favour a gradualist approach to change, a cumulative approach to history and a shared approach to power; (4) they view the non-human natural world as dynamic rather than as inert receiver of human impulses; and (5) they are usually pragmatic. (Johns 177-178)

Thanks to these tenets, feminist utopias, but also arguably queer utopias, allow women to be written as whole beings, and not in relation—whether oppositional or complementary—to men, thus transcending Plato's myth of the Androgyne. In this way, they are exonerated from undertaking the stereotypical roles of Madonnas or whores, but rather they function independently and with a new spirit, thus allowing the exploration of several possibilities, as also argued by Mellor: "feminist writers have explored three paradigms of a gender-free society: an all-female society, a society of biological androgynes, and a genuinely egalitarian two-sex society" (Mellor 243). This discourse can be extended to include queer identities by creating a possibility that does not rely on gender binary opposites and everything that it entails.

## 1.4 Is the utopian queer or is queerness utopian?

Considering that gender non-conforming identities and socially unaccepted types of attraction have always been marginalised and oppressed in the West, it is natural that queer people and queer theorists have taken an interest in a genre that looks at the future with so much hope. At the same time, the idea itself of time in relation to queerness has always been complicated and under scrutiny, hence why many queer theorists look at the future—and therefore at the idea of utopia—as not belonging to queerness. The concept of utopia, a non-existent good place, symbolises a way out of an oppressive present and past, a way to explore alternative possibilities and possible realities which are not here yet. Utopian literature is also one of the best ways to implicitly criticise majoritarian forces and the status quo, due to the constant back and forth between the utopian society and the explorer's reality. However, utopian thinking is not always seen in a positive way.

First and foremost, as argued by the German philosopher Ernst Bloch, we can distinguish between concrete and abstract utopias. The main distinction between them is the fact that the former is grounded in historical-political struggles, while the latter is more concerned with “abstract utopian dreaminess” (Bloch 146). By being concerned with the future, but by also knowing about the past and the present, concrete utopian thinking informs a critique of the superstructure and of oppressive majoritarian forces. If we consider the fact that the “point of contact between dreams and life, without which dreams only yield abstract utopia” (Bloch 145-146) is what characterise abstract utopias—which is therefore futile dreaming without keeping in mind the socio-historical aspects of reality—then we can understand how important the concept of horizon is because “[c]oncrete utopia stands on the horizon of every reality” (italics in original) (Bloch 223), meaning that a transformation from abstract utopian thinking to concrete utopian thinking is always possible.

In Queer Theory however, concrete utopian thinking and therefore a critique of majoritarian forces and of an oppressive society are not always considered enough, especially in the field of Queer Theory. The second half of the last century saw the rise of what is commonly defined as anti-social queer theory, which rejects futurity and advocates for negating and discarding the possibility of a future—especially one dominated by cis-heterosexual ideologies and dogmas—in favour of embracing the death drive and rejecting hope. It is in this context of two polar opposite views of the present and the future that I will

analyse Clyde's *Beatrice the Sixteenth*. Many aspects of the novel and especially its conclusion—which is not the typical ending of utopian novels—lend themselves to multiple interpretations of *Beatrice* as either a novel which looks at the utopian horizon with hope or as a novel which symbolises accepting negativity and a rejection of the future.

In 2009, Cuban-American academic José Esteban Muñoz published *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, a queer theory book specifically on the idea of queerness, utopia, and performativity. In the book, Muñoz, whose analysis is focused mainly in the context of the US in the 20th century, argues that queerness is an ideality. According to Muñoz, for us queer people, queerness is something that we know exists; it can be felt and experienced, but not on an immediate, present level. Queerness can be perceived only as a possibility shaped by what we know of the past and the present. Due to the relevancy and standards imposed by cis-heterosexuality, gender binarism, patriarchal dogmas, and the commodification of bodies present in Western societies past and present—which have been expanded to the rest of the world through the process of colonisation—"the here and now is a prison house" (Muñoz 1). In the present, marginalised identities are forced into hiding or are considered deviants and there is no escape or way to break through, since the majoritarian identities are the dominating ones, and they are the ones structuring and dictating this prison house.

At the same time, since our knowledge and our lives as queer people are shaped by the dichotomy between the patriarchal cis-heterosexual reality, past and present, which pervades the world, and our personal identity and sense of belonging to a community, the possibility of queerness exists as a desire that moves us forwards toward a possible future. For Muñoz, queerness is "about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence of potentiality or concrete possibility for another world." (Muñoz 1) or, in other words, being queer is about analysing and critiquing the present and the past, their structure and their dogmas, and by questioning and rejecting every norm that aims at marginalising other identities, it becomes possible to plan for a future where those same identities are not demonised.

Key to understanding Muñoz's discourse on utopia and queerness is a distinction between two forces that have structured the binarism of Western metaphysics: potentiality and actuality. These concepts are analysed and theorised by Aristotle in many of his works,

especially in the *Physics* and in the *De Anima*, and linked to utopia by Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. Potentiality in this case is not meant in a “genetic sense” but rather as something “that belongs to someone who, for example, has knowledge or an ability” (Agamben 179), something which is not just a “possibility, a thing that simply might happen” (Muñoz 9), a potential thing which is present but also “not actually existing in the present tense” (Muñoz 9). Because of its nature however, potentiality is capable “both of being and of not being” (Agamben 182). Actuality, on the other hand, is motion towards the fulfilment of that possibility, or rather, the “nothing other than the self-suspension of potentiality, the mode in which Being can *not* not be” (Agamben 21). It is under this perspective that we can think of queerness as existing and present, but only in an ideological, non-concrete way, as also argued by Muñoz.

This distinction is key to understanding Muñoz’s theory on queer utopia because, unlike other queer theorists like Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman, Muñoz sees queerness and therefore that futurity in which it becomes tangible—a future which is arguably utopian—as possible. Bersani and Edelman adopt an antirelational approach to queer theory which can be seen as a romance of the negative and a rejection of the future or of the possibility of a future. Edelman, in his seminal work *No Future* (2004), argues that the future is the reign of the Child, which “embodies the citizen as an ideal, entitled to claim full rights to its future share in the nation’s good” (Edelman 11), by which he means that the only force that moves society forward is that of procreating and therefore perpetuating the current status quo of patriarchal cis-heterosexuality. Seeing the future in this way, Edelman believes that queer people are excluded from the reign of the future because the Child is seen as “the preeminent emblem of the motivating end” (Edelman 13); therefore, queer people can only obtain meaning in this world by opposing the present and embracing the death drive, negativity, and jouissance. Edelman sees the acceptance of the dominant order’s and the consequent death drive as necessary for the survival of queer people, who should “insist on disturbing, on queering, social organisation as such” (Edelman 17) and therefore remaining in a constant state of negation. The idea of negativity proposed by Edelman, and Bersani as well, relies on the aforementioned idea of refusing to cooperate and resisting the political order enforced by the cult of the Child.



At the same time, both Muñoz and Edelman seem to find some common ground regarding the concept of negativity. As argued by the Italian philosopher Paolo Virno in his *Multitude* (2008), there is potentiality in the negative because it can be made to work in service of enacting a mode of critical possibility, which is then defined as a negation of negation. This negation of negation means constantly negating and opposing existing forms of power and authority. Therefore, the negation of negation is not about reaching a final definite resolution; it is about constantly challenging established norms and structures—in this case, patriarchal cis-heterosexual societal norms, which both Muñoz and Edelman firmly oppose, although in different ways. Muñoz, however, argues that Edelman—like other antirelation Queer theorists—celebrates negation in what “can only be seen as a binary logic of opposition” (Muñoz 13), meaning a commitment to a negative or positive option. Muñoz, building on Virno and Shoshana Felman’s theory of radical negativity, argues that viewing the negation of negation not in a binaristic way but as having the potential of opening new utopian alternatives, is fundamental in understanding the opposition to the status quo. Edelman, on the other hand, can be argued to support a negative approach which is inherently oppositional and thus sees the world as allowing only two outcomes: with—and for—the hegemonic figure of the Child, or against it.

Opposing Edelman’s negative and anti-utopian approach, Muñoz argues that queerness, by being a potentiality and thus, always being on the horizon, is primarily and inherently linked to futurity and hope—not meant as in the actual future, but rather a potential, accessible but not-there-yet future. Muñoz’s ideas on queer utopianism and his theory of queerness as being on the horizon, as well as his critique of majoritarian forces and of the hegemony are therefore not to be easily dismissed, regardless of the opposition to it moved by antirelational queer theorists. Muñoz’s theory represents what Ernst Bloch would have defined as a concrete utopia, not just a mere wishful thinking of a different reality, but an actual movement towards the realisation of that educated hope—or *docta spes*, as Bloch would define it—which is the opposite of said wishful thinking, since it is concrete, resolute, and firm, while at the same time open to the changes needed for that utopia to become a reality.

The idea of futurity and utopia are therefore based on the fact that the past and the present are not enough for whoever does not fit into the category of being white, cisgender,

heterosexual, able-bodied, neurotypical, male, and financially stable, and therefore does not enjoy the privilege of majoritarian belongings and does not respect social expectations.

## 1.5 No future for us

Edelman argues that the problem with futurity is that, in this society—the one that has set the standards and the norms by which one has to abide—the future can be said to belong only to white cis-heterosexual people who abide to the notion of ‘reproductive futurism’ (Edelman 2). Reproductive futurism is the concept that people value the future of heterosexual reproduction over the marginalisation from society of whoever can threaten the figure of the Child—and therefore the possibility of a continuum of the present into the future—so the status quo can be maintained. Queer people, in this view, live in a present by conforming to what Lauren Berlant refers to as the ‘dead citizenship’ of heterosexuality. According to Berlant, in a cis-heteronormative society, “citizens aspire to dead identities”—by ‘dead’ they do not mean biologically dead but symbolically dead, as in incapable of representing something anymore—thus becoming “dead, frozen, fixed, or at rest” (Berlant 60). The concept of ‘dead citizenship’ is considered by Muñoz as a “modality of citizenship that is predicated on negation of liveness or presentness on behalf of a routinized investment in futurity” (Muñoz 399), a sacrifice of the present in favour of the future. By negating one’s own identity for the sake of reproduction, dead citizens recreate and reinforce a binary distinction between present and future in which the latter is a fantasy of heterosexual reproduction.

To escape the need of self-sacrifice in order to consolidate the figure of the Child, Edelman proposes to embrace *jouissance*—a French term roughly meaning ‘enjoyment’. *Jouissance*, as theorised by the French philosopher Jacques Lacan, is a concept different from the idea of pleasure, because it entails a movement that goes beyond pleasure and pain, a transgression which moves beyond identity and meaning. *Jouissance* is therefore “the suffering that [the subject] derives from his own satisfaction” (Evans 93). This suffering derives from the fact that in a patriarchal cis-heteronormative society, personal desire is demonised and sacrificed in favour of a collective future which reinforces societal norms and expectations. The pursuit and acceptance of an enjoyment that goes beyond pleasure, which is

fundamentally transgressive per se, results in the mortification or negation of one's given identity and duties imposed in a cis-heteronormative societal framework. This desire of transgressing the prohibitions imposed by the hegemony is strictly linked to the death drive, a tendency of destruction and self-destruction directly opposed to the tendency of survival and reproduction. The death drive symbolises a radical opposition to the values of reproduction and continuity, hence why it represents a danger that underpins the patriarchal cis-heteronormative order. The embrace of jouissance and of the death drive not only implies an act of resistance against these oppressive values, but also disrupts the privileged figure of the Child seen as the emblem of the future. Building on these notions, Edelman claims that only through a rethinking of the way in which desire, enjoyment, self-destruction, and pain intersect it becomes possible to understand the transgressive potential of jouissance as a means of subverting and challenging cis-heteronormative societal norms.

Muñoz, adverse to the idea that queerness comes only from the research of jouissance and the escape from meaning, argues that in certain areas and settings, there is a space for performances of queer citizens which create an anticipatory illumination of a queer world, in which it becomes possible to see a glimpse of queer reality. These performances, which can be referred to as minoritarian performances—since they are performed by minoritarian citizens, those who are antagonists to the majoritarian standards by race, gender, class, sexuality, etc.—allow the creation of a temporality that bridges present and future. Furthermore, they allow access to the minoritarian lifeworlds in which it is possible to blur the distinction in the dichotomy between present and future since they overlap one another.

Edelman, on the other hand, argues against that bridging temporality between present and future. While he might agree to some extent to the possibilities of existence of minoritarian worlds, the way those would be shaped according to his philosophy is inherently different and opposite to that of Muñoz. While the queer world theorised by Muñoz is accessible through one's own queerness—which allows going back and forth between the cis-heteronormative society and a queer one—for Edelman the only way to access any sort of socio-political setting is by renouncing queerness and not identifying with the negativity of jouissance and the death drive. The reason for this is that Edelman correlates queerness's existence with an insistence on stopping the future from happening.

Edelman introduces the term “sinthomosexual” to characterise a figure that rejects both the future and conformity to societal standards. The term is a neologism which stems from the Lacanian concept of the *sinthome*, introduced in the seminar *Le Sinthome* (1975-1976). Jacques Lacan, building on Freud’s idea of the symptom intended as a sign of an instinctual satisfaction which has remained in abeyance, argues that the *sinthome* is the process of the idiosyncratic *jouissance* of a particular subject; by this he means that one’s enjoyment is possible through the identification with the symptom. The *sinthome* operates outside conventional frameworks of desire and thus refuses meaning, finding *jouissance* in this. To this concept, Edelman attaches the word ‘homosexuality’, resulting in the neologism *sinthomosexuality*, which represents “the site where the fantasy of futurism confronts the insistence of a *jouissance* that rends it precisely by *rendering* it in relation to that drive” (Edelman 38), meaning that it is the intersection where the aspiration for a futuristic fantasy clashes with the insistent pursuit of pleasure, tearing apart the conventional understanding of desire and oscillating between the lingering death drive and futurity. The *sinthomosexual* refuses a cis-heteronormative future in favour of an idea of queer joy and spite of the system. As I will argue later in this thesis, the character of Mary possibly adheres to this idea by refusing to go back to England, relinquishing her future and her plans, in favour of maintaining a relationship with her partner.

## 1.6 Queer time and space

Deeply intertwined with both theories are two key concepts which bind Muñoz’s queer utopia and Edelman’s rejection of the future: ‘queer time’ and ‘queer space’. These two concepts are analysed by Jack J. Halberstam in their book *In a Queer Time and Space*. According to their theory, “queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institution of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction” (Halberstam 1), by which they mean that in a patriarchal cis-heterosexual society, queer people move on a time-space line that is different to that of cis-straight people due to the different societal expectations. Personal events such as coming out, exploring one’s sexuality and gender identity/expression, or generational tragedies, such as the AIDS epidemic, are defining moments in the life of a queer person but also in the LGBTQ+ community as a whole.

One of the examples provided by Halberstam is that of the time of reproduction, which “is ruled by a biological clock for women and by strict bourgeois rules of respectability and scheduling for married couples” (Halberstam 5), an idea that in many ways resonates with Edelman's reproductive futurism because both deal with the societal expectation of heteronormative relationships as a way to procreate and maintain the status quo, demonising jouissance or the death drive, and favouring a bourgeois-capitalist way of living. On the other hand, ‘queer space’ is intended as “the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage and it also describes the new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics” (Halberstam 6). Queer space relates to the division between the private and the public, which became even more evident from the eighteenth and nineteenth century as a result of the rise of capitalism, and that resulted in the confinement of women to the home and the family, while white men had free reign over politics and commerce. This division, based on the logic of capitalism, creates spaces—both physical and metaphysical—where production, reproduction, and consumption are not a priority; these spaces are thus inhabited by those cast off from society, like queer people. Furthermore, Halberstam argues that “for some queer subjects, time and space are limned by risks they are willing to take” (Halberstam 10), meaning that in a society that relies so much on demonising and marginalising whoever steps out of line and subverts and antagonises expectations and norms, queer people who do not abide to societal rules live “outside the organizations of time and space that have been established for the purposes of protecting the rich few from everyone else” (Halberstam 10) or, in other words, they threaten, as argued by Edelman, the status quo and the figure of the Child.

It is in this analysis of queer space and time that both Muñoz and Edelman's theories become clearer. It also becomes possible to understand the need of creating a novel like *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, an alternate reality under a new light. Queer utopias, in this way, can be considered an allegory: a stepping out of this straight temporality, and therefore aimed towards a different time and space that is not there but lies on the horizon or underground. Due to the fact that stepping out of line is frowned upon and challenges the path set by the status quo and feeding the superstructure, queer orientations and following a queer path make us—literally and figuratively—deviants. According to Sara Ahmed, in a patriarchal cis-heterosexual society the time frame imposed by said society limits and constricts the body and the space surrounding it. Ahmed imagines this as constructed by two axes: the normative

axis and the vertical one. The former is the effect of the repetition of bodily actions through time, which creates “a space for action, *which puts some objects and not others in reach*” (emphasis in original)(Ahmed 66) by which Ahmed means the space surrounding a body that is cis-heterosexual and conforming to societal standards. This body, following the actions present on the normative axis, is a straight body which appears in line and, therefore, since the path followed and the objects in reach are predetermined and dictated by the superstructure, aligns to every other straight line following the same path. The vertical axis is a consequential effect of this process of alignment, and it is on this axis that it becomes possible to see whoever steps out of the normative line and does not conform.

## 1.7 Queer cyborgs

The body that does not conform to this set of expected actions is a deviant one: it is queer, intended both as not being cis-heterosexual and as being odd. The identity of this body is one that contravenes societal standards and that breaks the boundaries set by society. As well as being personal and immediate, these breaks from patriarchal and cis-heterosexual standards are also historical and social, by which I mean that throughout history a number of events have marked a clean break and a resistance against the norm, thus creating—or rather, putting on the map—new identities or ideas regarding identities. It is under this light that we can better understand the figure of the cyborg as intended by Donna Haraway in her *A Cyborg Manifesto*. In this essay, Haraway describes the cyborg as “a creature in a post-gender world” that is oblivious to “pre-oedipal symbiosis, unalienated labour, or other seductions to organic wholeness” (Haraway 150), which come as a result of both militaristic and patriarchal capitalism—although it does not conform or obeys to them. The cyborg is born also as the result of the breakdown of three boundaries in human history. The first one is that between human beings and animals, a belief fundamental in the idea of humans as superior beings. This idea was disputed in the 19th century by Charles Darwin and his *On the Origin of the Species*, which also introduced the idea of evolution as necessary and fundamental for every being's existence and future. The cyborg emerges in this “breach of nature and culture” (Haraway 152), where every organism, whether human or not, is considered as a potential object of knowledge.

The second boundary is that between machines and organisms, which was broken in the twentieth-century with the advancement of technology and machines becoming more autonomous. With this came the fact that machines have become an integral and inseparable part of human life, blurring the line between animal-human and them, having made “thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and externally designed” (Haraway 152). Many features and qualities that used to be limited only to animals and human beings have started to become part of machines due to technological development, which has resulted in them almost coming to life. What this means—in the context of literature—is that “the certainty of what counts as nature—a source of insight and promise of innocence—is undermined, probably fatally” (Haraway 152-153), a direct result of this breakdown which entails the fact that a distinction between artificial and natural is lost forever in this society. The third breakdown is a direct consequence of the second one, and it regards the distinction between physical and non-physical: due to the constant development of new technologies, such as softwares and nanotechnologies, machines have become invisible and at the same time, more central and ingrained in human beings’ life. It has thus become impossible to discern where the human ends and the machine starts. In this way, machines have become “an irreverent upstart god, mocking the Father’s ubiquity and spirituality (Haraway 153), which has also marked an inescapable intrusion of technology into nature. Cyborgs are thus a product of transgressed boundaries, of future possibilities, they are “not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints” (Haraway 154) because, unlike ‘classic’ human beings, they are a product of the breakdown of human and animal, natural and artificial, physical and non-physical. While human beings have to deal with these changes which have undermined their status quo and their beliefs, cyborgs thrive because they are a product of it, they do not know of the garden of Eden, and therefore do not possess a lingering feeling of divine right towards everything. Being born from these breakdowns, the cyborg also does not know of pre-existing and man-made hierarchical structures of power, of gender binarism, and other systems of dualism perpetrated in Western history, like between slave and master, body and mind, nature and culture. Whereas all these binary oppositions have maintained a setting of dominance towards racialized people, women, gender non-conforming identities, the working class, animals, the cyborg—a new, high-tech being—is hybrid, whole but always reassembling and linking—or destroying the links—with machines, identities, other beings, environments.

## 1.8 The Modernist 'New (trans)Woman'

The people of Armeria described by Irene Clyde seem to resemble the cyborg figure theorised by Donna Haraway, like in the way they to subvert or eradicate binary oppositions, differences between human and animal, and between organism and machines, but it is important to remember that the novel was published in 1909, when technology was already advancing at a high-pace but microelectronics, for example, were not even remotely in sight. As I will argue later in this thesis, the Armerians—and arguably, the 'perfectly' human Mary Hatherley—can be considered a prototype of these ideas which, as with every prototype, are not fully formed. What I mean by this is that, even though the people of Armeria are genderless and do not possess any distinction between genders, it can be argued that their presentation is more feminine. For example, one argument could be made in favour of the fact that in reality it is still possible to see 'traces' of gender in many characters of *Beatrice the Sixteenth*. For instance, Irene Clyde uses the pronouns "he/him" and more stereotypically masculine traits when describing negative or less favourable characters, while dotting more stereotypically feminine traits to the rest of the characters. The reason for this can be two-fold: my understanding of Clyde's ideas through the researches conducted by Daphne Patai and Angela Ingram, but also the rise of the allegorical trans-feminine figure between the ending of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, as argued by Emma Heaney in *The New Woman*. According to Heaney, the use of the trans feminine as an allegorical figure begins at the end of the 19th century, when sexologists and psychologists became more interested in transgenderism—especially trans-femininity—and the idea of an intermediate sex. The challenges stemming from the diverse experiences of transgender people, especially trans women, towards a more conventional thinking of gender and sex, are a result of the lived experiences of transgender people themselves, not only of the aid from the medical advancements in hormone treatments or surgeries. It is in this case that Heaney introduces the idea of the 'trans feminine allegory', which "reinserts trans women into a cis understanding of sex as that understanding is adjusted to account for historical change." (Heaney 5-6), a product of the link between concrete physical aspects—like actual castration—and imaginative narratives—like stories of treacherous crossing. Writers, by telling stories using this allegory, can sidestep "the actual provocation of trans femininity" (Heaney 6) which is



the fact that physical characteristics traditionally associated with gender, like genitals, do not determine gender identity as is widely believed, emphasising how all bodies can be vulnerable to societal expectations of femininity, regardless of their gender identity. This came at a time, the early twentieth century, during which Modernist novelists, due to the influence of sexologists, studies on homosexuality, and feminist movements redefining women's roles, started dealing more than before with themes like gender and sexuality. The emergence of the figure of the New Woman, a term introduced in 1894 by English feminist writer Sarah Grand to define independent women breaking free from being traditional wives to individuals with their own agency, sexuality, careers, and educational opportunities, aided this shift towards a new and better understanding of socially non-conventional identities and modes of expression. The Modernist trans feminine figure was influenced by Sigmund Freud's ideas on trans femininity and sex identity together with trans women's crescent presence in public and in theatre stages of cities, becoming a way "to explain modern gender with vernacular trans femininity of the street and stage", thus positioning the New Woman and the literary trans feminine figure as allegories representing an absolute, modern otherness but also as a way to embody "the expert diagnosis of trans womanhood" and a better understanding of cisgenderism.

Before moving to a more in-detail discussion on gender however, I believe that it is fundamental to contextualise *Beatrice the Sixteenth* and Irene Clyde's philosophy through the framework of utopian and queer notions of space and time, which are fundamentally intertwined with both utopian thinking and queerness. The first analytic chapter of this thesis will be centred around the idea of what is considerable utopian—here the experience of Irene Clyde herself, being a transgender feminist activist, will be extremely relevant and will help start the discussion. Vital to understanding queerness and utopia as inextricably bound together are also the concepts of queer time and space as presented by J. Halberstam, since both are connected to the themes of defamiliarization and disorientation—two fundamental aspects of utopian literature. The juxtaposition between queer and cis-heteronormative temporality will then shape the analysis of the family structure in the kingdom of Armeria, which will in turn introduce the fundamental argument of the following chapter: is *Beatrice the Sixteenth* a novel which looks at the future with hope or is it a novel which embraces the death drive? The reading of Irene Clyde's work through the theories of both José Esteban Muñoz and Lee Edelman, two academics so similar yet so different, will allow an extensive

analysis of *Beatrice the Sixteenth* and Irene Clyde's vision of the present and, most importantly, of the future. If we believe *Beatrice the Sixteenth* to be not just a work of fiction, but a materialisation on paper of a reality in which Irene Clyde herself would have wished to find herself, identifying with the figure of Mary, and being welcomed in a post-gender utopian society, then the novel can be interpreted through both theorists' ideas. *Beatrice* can be seen both as a novel which advocates for that educated hope and the realisation of a concrete utopia, especially if we keep in mind Clyde's work as an activist, thus focusing on a horizon which is not-yet reachable, but that is there, its presence can be perceived and the motion towards it is possible. Mary's journey to a place that is both there and nowhere encapsulates the way in which Muñoz views queer realities as being hidden, ostracised yet present, while also representing a hopeful place in which one can find solace. At the same time, considering Clyde's journey to Japan, the failed attempt of the Aethnic Union at promoting the abolition of gender to the leader of the Suffragette movement, and most importantly, the decision of Mary in the novel to refuse to go back to England and to the deeply flawed society which she has left, in order to remain with her lover, can be interpreted as her decision to embrace the *jouissance* and the death drive that Edelman advocates as being necessary in order to survive as queer people and contrast majoritarian forces and the figure of the Child.

The broader analysis of the next chapter will allow a more detailed discussion in the third chapter of this thesis, which will focus on gender and the way it is presented in *Beatrice the Sixteenth*. As well as being a perfect vessel for interpretation through theories such as those of Halberstam, Muñoz, and Edelman, despite being written decades before, Irene Clyde anticipated theories proposed in the second half of the last century by feminist and Queer theorists like Braidotti and Haraway. The way gender is portrayed in *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, considering what we know of Clyde's ideas as proposed in the *Urania* journal and through her work with the Aethnic Union, together with the idea of the Armerians as genderless—or, at least, genderless to a certain extent, as I will discuss more in detail later—and the way love and relationships are described in the novel allow an in-depth reading of what must have been a groundbreaking novel at the time of its publication.

## 2 Looking for Armeria

### 2.1 Disorienting and defamiliarizing

The concept of utopia, as previously stated, originally had two meanings—namely, a ‘non-place’ and a ‘good place’, a semantic duality originating from Thomas More’s play on the word. The double meaning serves to convey a symbol of a place alien to society due to its inherent virtuosity and perfection, while at the same time, describing a position outside of conventional notions of time and space. Similar to More, Irene Clyde plays in multiple ways with the two-fold meaning of utopia. Clyde employs the concept mainly to articulate Mary’s feeling of defamiliarization and disorientation when she wakes up in a new reality—a new place which is nothing like what she has ever seen before, in a time-frame that is indecipherable, and a set of societal norms, rules, operating organisms, and customs that is completely different to her England, and in almost all ways, better. However, there are some negative aspects present in the Armerian society and fundamental to its functioning which I will analyse more in-detail later on in this thesis. For example, slavery still exists in Queen Beatrice’s kingdom; an argument could be made that the way the institution of slavery, as well as some of the other negative aspects of the novel are portrayed serve, in some way, to further criticise England and create a major sense of defamiliarization.

The feeling of disorientation in *Beatrice the Sixteenth* serves two purposes: signifying that this utopian place is a non-place, but also, as I will argue later, creating a setting that is outside of a straight temporal and spatial line. In this way, Armeria can be said to be situated in what Halberstam would call ‘queer time’ and ‘queer space’. Both of these indicate a temporal-spatial frame situated outside the reign of cis-heterosexual, patriarchal, and bourgeois expectations of “reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance” (Halberstam 6), consequently creating “new understandings of space enabled by the production of queer counterpublics” (Halberstam 6). This means that queer lives escape from the set expectations imposed by said cis-heterosexual society of an inescapable schedule of birth, marriage, reproduction, work, and death, by creating, entering, and occupying spaces outside of it.

The kingdom of Armeria, as described by Clyde, can be interpreted as representing a queer time and space for a number of reasons, most importantly because it escapes from patriarchal cis-heteronormative societal expectations. The setting of *Beatrice the Sixteenth* accomplishes this by being oriented in a direction opposite of that imposed by a patriarchal cis-heterosexual society. This is because, as argued by British-Australian scholar Sara Ahmed in *Queer Phenomenology* and building on Halberstam's ideas on temporality and space, "the concept of 'orientation' allows us to expose how life gets directed in some way rather than others" (Ahmed 21). It is in this case that we can better understand the feelings of Mary, of being lost—and therefore disoriented—in a world and a society which is directed towards a direction—one which goes against the bourgeois British hegemony of production and reproduction—in which she grew up. According to Ahmed, the "objects that are given to us by heterosexual culture" (Ahmed 21) orient us toward a straight temporal line of achieving certain socially demanded goals—namely, adulthood, marriage, reproduction, and other expected and enforced 'life goals'. Striving away from this line of expectations creates a dissonance with the status quo, which is further highlighted by a sense of disorientation and defamiliarization. Some of the main examples present in the novel regarding the feeling of disorientation and defamiliarization are related to the institution family—and thus, by extension, to the household and to the concept of heredity. Clyde accomplishes this by taking those said objects of the heterosexual culture—like expectations of reproduction, of constructing a nuclear family, of producing capital for the sake of the capital itself—and modifies their purpose or their functionality in a way that seems minor at first, but becomes considerable when further analysed. Every Armerian child is adopted, thus contrasting cis-heteronormative expectations of reproduction; the households are composed by friends and 'relatives' and people who just want to be in a communal setting, and their staying is not dictated by an exchange of capital but rather by mutual aid and simply enjoying the presence of one another; work for the Armerian is a secondary practice, and does not revolve around the production of goods and the exchange of capital—as we can see in Chapter 2, when Mary is impressed by the fine work of a metal coffee pot, with Brytas claiming that if Mary wants one "the metal-worker will ask you to take it as a present" (Clyde 20).

In this way, Clyde manages to move these objects to a space-time framework that is different from the hegemonic one, for it is in a non-space, since it is utopian, and does not follow the expectations set by a straight temporality.

The ideas of a non-space and non-straight temporal line are fundamental to understanding the kingdom of Armeria as being inherently queer. The rest of the following chapter will analyse more in-depth the social fabric and its queerness in *Beatrice the Sixteenth* through a close examination of the structure of the Armerian families, the way new citizens are acquired and bought into the kingdom, the fact that working is considered a secondary practice, and ultimately, how production and reproduction are not the ultimate objective of the Armerian society.

## 2.2 New ways of “giving birth”

In Chapter VII, Mary and Ilex embark on an expedition. They travel up the river skirting the realm of the rival nation of Uras towards the mountain territory of an unnamed civilisation said to be composed of what the Armerians define as barbarians. Once there, Mary finally discovers how a seemingly genderless population such as the Armerians manages to reproduce. By exchanging goods such as carpets and tissues, the Armerian kingdom receives a weekly supply of young citizens from the barbarians, who “are glad to be relieved of them” (Clyde 108). According to Ilex, this allows the children to “have a better life with us than [they] will here” (Clyde 109). This revelation is important for multiple reasons: first, it shows how the Armerian society works and persists across generations; secondly, it consolidates the idea of the Armerians as genderless; thirdly, it opens up a potential discussion on the exchange of bodies for goods; and finally, it puts into discussion notions such as the law of heredity and the social structure of the Armerians. This posits *Beatrice the Sixteenth* as an anomaly and a more than unique literary work compared to similar novels. Usually, in feminist and queer utopias in which men are not present, the question of reproduction is solved by either changing biology or conforming to gender stereotypes. For instance, it can be solved through “a ‘miraculous’ advent of parthenogenesis, the ability to produce and fertilize a single egg” (Mellor 249), as in the case of Gilman’s *Herland*; or one person assumes more stereotypical traits, as in the case of *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), by Ursula K. LeGuin, a feminist sci-fi novel in which the ‘ambisexual’ people of Gethen are able to reproduce because one person increments their hormonal production and assumes gendered characteristics more evident, thus recreating a situation of opposite gendered reproduction. Clyde’s different way of approaching reproduction is crucial

for highlighting how she managed to circumvent gender stereotypes, thus making *Beatrice the Sixteenth* an “early fictional experiment with the abolition of gender” (Ingram and Patai 266). Compared to other novels, Clyde’s experiment can be called, if not successful—for reasons which will be explored more in-depth later on in this thesis—at least innovative in a way which has not been replicated, managing to avoid falling into gendered stereotypes or into a eugenics discourse, like in the case of *Beatrice the Sixteenth*’s contemporary, *Herland*, but still not managing to be completely unproblematic and ethical.

The revelation of the Armerian way of reproduction is also important because, going back to the sense of defamiliarization and disorientation, Mary is visibly shocked by this discovery. Contrary to her known mode of reproduction and her ideas on barbarians and savages, the “cultured, well-balanced, kind-hearted people—fair-minded, high-principled” (Clyde 110) of Armeria are the descendants of people that she deems inferior a priori. This feeling is further symbolised by the fact that the moment Mary and her company enter the territory of the mountain tribe, the tone of the novel becomes more exoticist and similar to that of colonial novels, a shift that is further cemented by Mary’s proposal of colonising this territory and becoming “the most powerful monarch in the world!” (Clyde 107). Mary’s reaction however, is not shared by Ilex and the rest of the company—hence why it could be argued that Clyde used this moment, as well as the whole discussion on the law of heredity and the origins of the Armerian people, with the intent of criticising English imperialism, especially considering the fact that both systems—imperialism/colonialism and patriarchy—are deeply intertwined. Aside from being both systems of oppression and marginalisation, European and English imperialism has served throughout history to impose patriarchal norms of colonised populations as “important symbolic and rhetorical resources for constructing racialized, sexualized imperial and colonial hierarchies outside the borders of those politics” (Patil 848).

The Armerians are dumbfounded by Mary’s assertion and thirst for power, mostly because they do not understand how she could claim ownership over a land that is already inhabited, and they believe that her attempt would result in “squashing [the barbarians] down” (Clyde 108). This scene, aside from being important to show the difference in spirit between Mary, a product of a patriarchal colonialist country, and the people of Armeria, serves another purpose, vital to the discussion of queerness and queer time. Mary, knowing that the people

for whom she has so much respect and whose culture resembles the Classical and noble culture of Ancient Greece and Rome, is shocked by the realisation that her beloved Ilex herself is “descended from a savage” (Clyde 110). The Armerian, noticing Mary’s almost horrified reaction, tries to console her by arguing that there is next to no information on the barbarian tribes. They do know, however, that “sometimes [they] get supplies of children from civilised states far away” (Clyde 111), which still leaves Mary—and the reader—uncertain, as the geography of the area is unknown and kept well-hidden and mysterious by Clyde. This mysteriousness raises more questions about how universal the Armerian lack of gender is: if it is just an isolated case or if every society present in this reality declines to distinguish between genders. What this aura of mystery accomplishes is the feeling of defamiliarization crucial to utopian novels, which becomes even more relevant in a novel like *Beatrice the Sixteenth* because “defamiliarization functions as a discovery through the reader’s imaginative participation in the world created by the text” (Patai 67). In Clyde’s novel, the significance of this sense of losing familiarity is two-fold: it is first shown in Mary’s reaction to new, possible, societal expectations and realities—which are obviously needed to create a comparison between Britain and Armeria—and, at the same time, it accomplishes the double duty of evolving both the protagonist of the novel and the reader in making these considerations on possible futures and eventual consideration on the social constructedness of gender, gender stereotypes, and prejudices. . Undoubtedly, Mary’s first reaction at seeing the territories of the mountain tribes and her impulsive urge of colonising them are a product of her socio-cultural connection. If we consider the connection between colonialism, misogyny, and patriarchy, but also the way Mary internally grows by learning that her ideas are built upon xenophobic and imperialistic prejudices, we can start to question if Mary’s background and education are preventing her from realising and accepting her queerness, a topic which I will explore more in detail later on, and maybe the journey to the mountain tribes’ territories was a metaphorical journey used by Clyde to symbolise part of Mary’s internal journey.

When Mary learns about Armerian reproduction, she is forced to reconsider her prejudices towards those who are called barbarian and savage tribes. She is forced to acknowledge that the law of heredity is not universal. Moreover, this scene highlights the idea that one’s destiny and persona is not predetermined by their origins nor by definition belonging to antiquated Classical ideas, which undoubtedly influence Mary into considering

the mountain tribes inferior while knowing little to nothing about them. The acquisition of children from an exterior tribe has radical implications for the structure of the family in Armeria, but also, it suggests an attitude of White Saviorism in the Armerians. The mountain tribe people are described both as “innocent children of Nature” (Clyde 108) and as territorial and diffident toward foreigners, especially regarding their customs and their religion. Since they are conceived as barbarians—originally, an antonym of ‘citizen’, thus etymologically meaning someone considered uncivilised—they can be used for trading human lives for goods, thus allowing the proliferation of Armerian citizen while ‘saving’ said children from a ‘barbaric’ life.

### **2.3 Against families and chrononormativity**

The families in Alzōna, it can be argued, directly challenge the notion of nuclear family which is central in patriarchal cis-heterosexual societies, and which sees the household as composed by a pair of parents of different gender and their socially recognised children. In *Beatrice the Sixteenth* this structure does not occur, first and foremost because there is no gender distinction between people, but also because the children are not direct offspring of their parents. One of the traits of feminist utopias, as argued by Carol Pearson, is that “[t]he dissolution of the nuclear family and the de-emphasis on the biological link between mother and child leads to a redefinition of the parent-child relationship” (56). By creating an alternative household free from a hierarchical and gendered order, it becomes possible to analyse these relationships under a different light, while also escaping from bourgeois and patriarchal ideas of family structure. The alternative households in *Beatrice the Sixteenth* allow an analysis of social hierarchies, while also confronting Mary with a possible reality—one without the law of heredity—in which children are treated as peers by the adults of the household and not as the symbolic figure of the Child. This comes as a result of the elimination of the aforementioned hierarchies, with a renewed “ability to see even the natural world as profoundly equal and similar to the human world” (Pearson 58), thus allowing a reevaluation—and devaluation—of anthropocentric hierarchical structures.

As many other aspects of the novel, what we know of the ‘familiar’ relationships between people in the Armerian society is hidden in the details and more often than not, not



fully explained by Clyde. What we do know, however, based on what Ilex tells Mary, is that the Armerian society does not function in a patrilineal or matrilineal way both because of the lack of gender binarism and because, as stated by Ilex: “I’m not acquainted [...] with what you call the law of heredity” (Clyde 110). In this way, the children in the novel are not subject to age or gender privilege; nor is the future of the household depending entirely on those who show the most socially acceptable criteria of continuation of the family’s name—like, for example, being able-bodied, neurotypical, fertile, of the dominant gender. Furthermore, considering that the children are brought to Armeria from the mountain tribes, we can deduce that the hierarchical order between them, but also, the way they are treated by the members of the household is completely different from the one present in our and Clyde’s reality.

The reason why I refer to the Armerian’s household as such and not as ‘family’ is because, due to the lack of gender binarism, law of heredity, and also as a consequence of Clyde’s love for Ancient Greek and Classical societies and values, the households in Armeria, compared to the structure of the bourgeois post-industrial revolution family structure in Britain, does not correspond to a classical idea of nuclear family; instead, it seems to follow the law of Xenia in some way, meaning an accentuation on hospitality towards guests and relatives. We can see this in Chapter IV when Ilex gives Mary a tour of her house and is greeted by “no less than twenty people” (Clyde 55), entertaining themselves, playing music, and dialoguing. Amongst those, we see for example Vera and Arix, both busy playing chess, who Ilex says are not her relatives; however, she continues, “we like to have them, and they like to be here” (Clyde 58). This is an idea alien to modern nuclear families. The reason for the great number of guests present inside Ilex’s house is that they “are here on the understanding that I provide their entertainment, and they give me the pleasure of their presence” (Clyde 58). This demonstrates a sense of community which is not based on a system of exchange of money and immediate family exclusivity and privacy. The households in Armeria are mostly grounded on enjoying each other’s presence and, most importantly, on mutual aid—which has always been key in queer and other marginalised communities—meant as the “collective coordination to meet each other’s needs, usually from an awareness that the systems [...] in place are not going to meet them” (Spade 1). This concept is further highlighted by Ilex’s question about her status as a person if she was to not help and provide for her friends (Clyde 59). These relationships are not one-sided but rather about communal help and sharing. However, it is still important to keep in mind that slavery remains in place

in Armeria, and the slaves are part of the household. Although the living conditions and treatment of the slaves in Armeria is different from the slavery institution in Europe and North America, the argument about mutual aid and collectivism in *Beatrice the Sixteenth* applies almost exclusively to the free citizens.

The relationships between free citizens and, specifically, the inner relationships in the Armerian household are a clear challenge to what Elizabeth Freeman defined as ‘chrononormativity’ in *Time Binds*: “the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity” (3). In Armeria, the organisation of the individuals in the household does not depend on a strict schedule of what Halberstam had called straight temporality, on a system of production and reproduction, which are two of the most important aspects in a bourgeois patriarchal cis-heterosexual society. Production and reproduction are fundamental aspects of marriage, child rearing, and death. The idea of chrononormativity, which builds on “forms of temporal experience that seem natural to those whom they privilege” (Freeman 3) is disrupted by Armeria’s genderlessness and structure of society. Clear examples of this are the challenge to the nuclear family, the way Armerians spend time in the households to entertain each other and enjoy each other’s presence, the non-capitalistic re-evaluation of time, and the modes of reproduction and child rearing. All these features create a community which is outside the chronobiological society and directly challenges said society.

Central to the difference between the European nuclear family and the Armerian structure of the household is also the treatment of the children, which has two principal characteristics: a challenge to the notion of ‘straight time’ and expectations on maturity, and a view that children are equal to adults and not subordinated to an ageist hierarchy. Mary, by observing the uses of the house in which she resides, discovers that children receive the same treatment as their adult counterparts. They are not treated with condescension or with privilege. In Armeria, apparently, there is no school system, so the children learn through games and moments of gathering in reading and hearing stories from the adults and, most importantly, they partake in the daily life of the household by being “allowed to take some small part in whatever was going on” (Clyde 61), a practice which allows them to attain their majority at twelve years of age. In this way, the novel challenges the “emergence of the adult from the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence as a desired process of maturation”

(Halberstam 4-5) which is crucial to upholding a bourgeois logic of reproductive temporality. The Armerian children, as far as we can see in *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, are not reprimanded for their lively spirit and, at the same time, they implement moments—or “very elaborate and serious imitations of real life” (Clyde 61)—of adulthood in their daily activities through plays and performances. The idea of the children’s playtime as being composed of a staged performance of adulthood life reminds, or rather precedes, Judith Butler’s idea of gender as a performance and thus, as argued by the American scholar, of gender’s social constructedness. Furthermore, adults do not seem to lose the lively spirit of childhood since they are an active part of the children’s lives, considering how the older children learn directly from the adults, who are also constantly joining them in their plays and in their games.

Regarding the education and the development of the children, Ingram and Patai propose a reading of the novel which is worth mentioning: the transition from ‘barbarians’ to citizens of Armeria, a “natural growth” (Clyde 62) which allows them to become part of the Armerian kingdom through observing adults and imitating real life in order to become more responsible, “means maturing from ‘barbaric’ origins into a nongendered environment” (Ingram and Patai 279). The idea of the mountain tribes—from which the Armerian children come—and of the neighbouring countries as still built on the idea of gender binarism is completely plausible, as I will also argue in the third chapter of the thesis. Armeria can thus definitely be read as a queer place where children, through community building and performativity, lose their internalised ideas on gender and accept a possible reality, one which was just “a fantasy in the world [Irene Clyde] had to inhabit” (Ingram and Patai 279).

## 2.4 Between here and nowhere

The moment in the novel which further consolidates the idea that Armeria is in a queer place and time, in the Halberstam’s sense, occurs in Chapter VI, when Mary goes to visit the Royal Astrologer. The Royal Astrologer is supposed to be able to tell Mary how she can go back to her reality. After introducing themselves to one another, Mary asks where Arabia is, to which the Astrologer replies “Here” (Clyde 94). This answer might mean that Mary is actually delusional or that she might have travelled back in time. But right after, when asked where the road to Aleppo is, the Astrologer firmly responds: “There is none” (Clyde 94)—but

that there might be a way of arriving there. Noticing Mary's confusion, the Astrologer explains that the only real answer to the questions of where Arabia and Aleppo are, is 'here'; however, there is no road to reach them because "you might float through all space, from star to star; and beyond the bounds of this star-system you can see, from one universe to another, and never find them" (Clyde 94). Although they are there, "so far as space reaches, they are nowhere!" (Clyde 94). The reason for Arabia and Aleppo—and therefore, every place belonging to Mary's reality—being both 'here' and 'nowhere' is that "[s]pace is penetrated through and through by spirit. In the nature of things there are more realms of space than one, and these realms penetrate and coexist with one another, though remaining perfectly independent" (Clyde 94). Clyde's way of creating an arguably utopian society is fundamentally different from the typical utopian novel: she sets Armeria in an alternative reality which is inherently queer, and she accomplishes this by introducing the concept of alternate reality, which at the time of the publication of the novel (1909) was not as popular as it is today. It had especially not been explored in relation to queerness.

After briefly explaining to Mary how parallel universes work, the Royal Astrologer says that the reason for Mary's presence in this reality is the camel kick that she received while travelling in the desert. At the same time, the Astrologer suggests that Mary should "[t]hink how different the same scenes appear to us at different times in ordinary life!" (Clyde 95). This is a deeper explanation offered both to Mary and the reader, and it is crucial to my argument that Armeria is situated in queer time and space. The Astrologer's observation can be interpreted in the light of how queer time and space work in real life. As Halberstam envisioned these concepts, they are not an actual alternate reality, but a parallel one—and, arguably, one hidden in the shadows by a patriarchal cis-heterosexual hegemony. As a result, it is all a matter of perspective and there are instances in ordinary life that can be seen to enter queer time and space, stepping outside societal standards, like queer bars or, for example, theatre stages, which are inherently places of performance and therefore represent the perfect place to show the dissonance between the patriarchal cis-heterosexual system in power and the performative acts which aim at surviving and challenging said system.

To further cement my argument, it is worth analysing some of the other responses by the Astrologer. First, it is presented as puzzling that Mary retains her physical appearance, since the journey between realities should be ethereal and non-corporeal. The Royal

Astrologer considers that this is likely connected with Mary's "strength of will" (Clyde 96). This can be interpreted as Mary's lingering queerness being the reason for her presence in the Armerian kingdom, since her queerness suits the society in which she finds herself. Furthermore, Mary's strength of will and how she maintains her appearance despite the interdimensional travel, can be linked to the concept of being lost intended in a queer sense. Building on Ahmed and Muñoz's idea of disorientation and of being lost, understood as "to relinquish one's role (and subsequent privilege) in the heteronormative order" (Muñoz 73), we can understand Mary's ability to remain herself and keep both her appearance and her consciousness.

Mary's open-mindedness towards the alien aspects of the Armerian society, her seemingly unfazed reaction when confronted with the idea that gender is a social construct, hint towards Mary finding her own place in a non-place, outside of the reality in which she grew up, "the space of heteronormativity" (Muñoz 72), which comes as a consequence of her lingering and unknowing willingness to be lost and finding said outside, hidden place. It is in this way that Mary's own body becomes a "site of contradictions that embodies the idea of futurity [...] intended as a motion of becoming and of possibilities" (Nirta 19). Mary's experience, her strength of will, and her possible lingering queerness—symbolised by her relationship with Ilex, which I will explore more in-depth later on—all together come to symbolise a challenge to the patriarchal cis-heterosexual system, while also presenting a possibility located in the future.

One way to analyse the scene with the Astrologer is to imagine Armeria as being a queer reality present in real life, in areas overlooked or purposely shadowed—or hindered—by majoritarian forces, thus creating a grey zone of acceptance as long as one decides to withstand the conditions set by the hegemonic bourgeois cis-heterosexuality, but also traversable once one knows about the existence of these minoritarian settings. This reading is supported by the Royal Astrologer's observation that Mary might be able to return to her reality by visiting a certain person in a town at the limits of the Western Ocean and that, since she has moved between realities once before, she will have no problem going back; furthermore, Mary would be able to bring back with her someone that has become attached to her, meaning not only that the two realities are interconnected, but also that they are accessible—with good or bad intention—to those who know about them and about the

differences between them, whether majoritarian or minoritarian. What I mean by this can be understood if we briefly analyse the conflict between Armeria and Uras, which represent respectively minoritarian and majoritarian forces: the kingdom of Armeria, as a queer, post-gender society, defending itself against the aggressive kingdom of Uras, which is apparently still trapped in gender binarism—a theory which I will explore more in detail later on in this thesis. Hence why Armeria—and therefore queer places—are both present and not-present, hidden but visible to queer people and to minorities who have to withstand the impositions and the discriminations imposed by the hegemonic structure, but also capable of dreaming, hoping, and fighting for a different reality.

According to the words of the Royal Astrologer, Armeria is both here and nowhere, thus consolidating my thesis that Armeria is actually a queer place situated in queer time. For the reasons above, we can argue that the world created by Clyde in the novel mirrors the concepts of queer time and space analysed by Halberstam. Consequently, the words of the Astrologer are both literal—as in, due to the way parallel universes work, Armeria is in the area nearby where Mary lost her consciousness and thus here, but also nowhere because it is located on another plane of existence—and also symbolic of queer spaces in reality: present but hidden. Having now demonstrated the inherent queerness of Armeria and its society, my question is: is Armeria a queer utopia, which demonstrates the possibility and power of hope and resistance, or is it a queer dead end, where one can just enjoy the *jouissance* of the moment before facing a certain final death enforced by a superstructure which has stolen its future?

Utopian thinking is inherently aimed at the future, it is “a strategy for the questioning of reality and of the present” (Vieira 23). Whether set in the past, in an elsewhere, or on the horizon, utopias come into being out of desire and social changes. What Ernst Boch described as ‘concrete’ utopias, meaning those ideas that have a practical social purpose, pose a critique of the present and some, if not all, aspects of said society. At the same time, these ideas offer a renovated view on the changes of these aspects which would ameliorate the present situation while looking at the future. The Armerian society, although set in a past or alternative reality compared to Mary’s Britain, definitely represents a point on the horizon envisioned by Irene Clyde. Simultaneously, Armeria and the world of *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, with the aspects described by Clyde, constitute a way to criticise and thus propose changes in the flawed

aspects of British society. Before analysing whether *Beatrice the Sixteenth* is a queer utopia in the Muñoz sense or a dead end in the Edelman sense, I believe it is important to present two instances in the novel which clearly demonstrates that Clyde's work can be defined as utopian, at least theoretically, and according to the definition of what constitutes a novel as such, meaning a "reaction to an undesirable present and an aspiration to overcome all difficulties by the imagination of possible alternatives" (Vieira 6-7). It is important to address one societal aspect in *Beatrice the Sixteenth* which is definitely not utopian—understood as desirable and hopeful—but recalls one element also present in More's *Utopia*: the institution of slavery. The existence of slavery in the Armerian society, as well as the way children are acquired through an exchange for goods, is clearly a controversial and definitely non-utopian aspect of *Beatrice the Sixteenth* if we understand utopia as being a good place. However, an argument could be made in favour of the fact that More's original *Utopia* also presented slaves as a part of a utopian society; furthermore, in Clyde's novel, both slavery and the acquisition of children are presented as being neither positive nor negative, but rather they represent a twisted manner of criticising some aspects of British society in a way which falls in line with the use of utopian literature as a mean of social critique.

In the second chapter of the novel, while visiting the capital city of Alzôna, Mary asks Cydonia why there are no shops that sell meat, to which the Armerian replies "My good friend, we are not cannibals! You surely don't expect to see us grinding each other's bones and sucking each other's blood?" (Clyde 35). This is a reply that might seem absurd and over the top at first. The reality is that, in Armeria, as is soon explained by Cydonia, the consumption of meat is seen as barbaric: an act that would be performed only by "desperately uncivilised" (Clyde 35) people. The importance of this apparently trivial moment lies in the fact that Clyde was a strict vegetarian since the age of nineteen and would later become the "vice-president of the Vegetarian Society, a British organization" (Murase 320-321). This exchange—arguably minor if compared to the discussions on the differences between the judiciary system between Armeria and England, and a fervid argument on whether one's faith should be private or public—if analysed under this lens, gives a first tangible glimpse of the way Clyde built and presented Armeria as her ideal reality.

## 2.5 ‘There are no “men” or “women” in Urania’

In the third chapter of *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, while Mary is visiting Ilex’s house, we can find arguably the most important revelation of the novel. Confused by Parisôn’s name, Mary asks Ilex and Brytas “[i]s that a lady?”, since to her it seemed like “it might have been a man’s name” (Clyde 51). Ilex, confused, asks her guest “Where is the difference?” (Clyde 51) which causes a linguistic discussion. Thinking that this misconception could be caused by a linguistic barrier, Mary starts to think that maybe, in the Armerian language, *kyné* and *anra* (two words which resemble the Ancient Greek *γυνή* [*gynē*], woman, and *άνήρ* [*anēr*], man) could both possibly mean ‘person’—we have to remember that Mary communicates with the Armerian through their language, which is a mix of Latin and Greek, hence her confusion and the difficulties in being understood. Mary, obviously used to gender distinctions and enforced binarism, but also interested in understanding how language works, asks if maybe the Armerians use the words *femina* and *vir*—respectively, woman and man in Latin—or *mulier* and *homo*—wife and husband—to which Brytas replies that *homo*, *kynē* and *anra* all mean the same thing, while they have never heard of words such as *femina*, *vir*, or *bir*. Ilex intervenes by saying that in Armeria they use the word *persona* (human being), which might be the word that Mary is looking for. This reply promptly makes Mary ask her saviours: “How *do* you distinguish [...] between the people who—who fight and wear whiskers and moustaches?” (italics in original)(Clyde 51), which makes her suddenly realise that, in all her time in Armeria, she has not seen anyone presenting those features. Mary, dumbfounded by this realisation, asks “Do you mean to say, then, that you do not recognise any division of people into two classes?” (Clyde 51). It is in this topical scene that she finds out that the only real social distinction present between the Armerian people is that between free people and slaves. Mary, at her wits end due to the incapacity of managing to explain the possible differences between man and woman, says that her confusion and the type of distinction that she is inquiring about regards “[t]wo complementary divisions, each finding its perfection in the other” (Clyde 51). Mary’s expression clearly recalls the myth of Androgyne from Plato’s *Symposium*, in which humans once used to be spherical creatures formed by two bodies, a male part and a female part. After a failed attempt at conquering the gods, the spherical creatures are split in half by Zeus, thus breaking their perfect unity which can be obtained only by becoming whole again—which can be interpreted as meaning through a heterosexual relationship.



The argument between the different parties is concluded by Ilex who says, in one of the most important sentences in the whole novel, “[f]or my part, I cannot see how perfection is to be attained, except in one’s own spirit” (Clyde 51). This is a statement which contravenes the Classic idea of finding wholeness in unity, but also directly challenges patriarchal cis-heterosexual expectations of realising one’s life only by partaking in marriage and building a nuclear family. Simultaneously, the “cultural, and linguistic dislocation”—typical of utopian literature—which cause in Mary “a sense of confusion and loss of identity” (Ingram and Patai 268), functions as a way of creating a feeling of estrangement in the protagonist and the reader, but also, it accomplishes one important task: to show the co-dependency between language and gender, and how they are both social constructs.

Finally, this scene is followed by the final sentence of the chapter—one of the most crucial in the entire novel—with Mary finding solace in the embrace of Ilex, an embrace which the protagonist feels still “consolatory”, regardless of if Ilex is a “he or she” (Clyde 52). With these words, we can see how it takes Mary no time to understand and embrace the way Armerians do not recognise the existence of gender binarism, which is intertwined with my previous argument on Mary’s lingering queerness. At the same time, Mary’s joy in embracing Ilex, regardless of her gender, opens up an important discussion on the modes of relationship in Armeria as it is crucial for determining whether Armeria is a queer utopia with a possible future or a place with no future and just jouissance.

This relatively small scene is full of incredibly important aspects which are fundamental to my analysis of the novel and, most importantly, to the discussion regarding Armeria as a queer utopia. To start with, both the linguistic discussion on the terms used to differentiate between gender and the fact that the Armerians do not distinguish between gender demonstrates its social constructedness. By this I mean that gender does not correspond to one’s biological sex but rather, it is an activity, a performance of repeated stereotypes and beliefs based on what is historically and socially considered feminine and masculine, hence why it is a social construct.

A direct consequence of the Armerians’ view on gender is also the way romantic relationships work in said society. Soon after discovering that there is no gender distinction between Armerians, Mary asks Ilex what then the term is to define people partaking in

marriage. She finds out that the term is *conjux* (a word almost identical to the Latin *coniux*, spouse), a universal word that does not distinguish between husband and wife—or, as Mary asks, *uxor* (wife in Latin) and *posis* (πόσις, Ancient Greek for husband)—and means, as explained by Ilex, ““a joined person”” (Clyde 53). Marriage in the Armerian culture is defined as ““the community between two persons of all human circumstances.”” (Clyde 53). Aside from the fact that it is astonishing that a novel published in 1909 managed to talk about the social constructedness of gender, non-binarism, and queer relationships, it is even more surprising to see Mary acknowledging and never disputing this reality. She only suffers a brief shock which is arguably more related to linguistics and the lack of terms than to the idea that gender binarism is not universal.

Mary soon starts developing feelings for Ilex, finding comfort in her embrace and in her company, and becoming so attached to her that, when the war between the kingdoms of Armeria and Uras begins and Ilex is sent to the front, she decides to embark on a quest to be with her. Mary, adventuring into unknown lands, manages to finally reach Ilex who, caring about Mary’s safety, welcomes her but at the same time urges her to go back to Alzôna and wait for her there. Mary, however, realises that she is possessed by “a curious feeling” (Clyde 185) and refuses to depart from Ilex; she then finds herself reflecting on the risks she is willing to take: “life, liberty, the possibility of restoration to Europe (or to my senses)—for a being who was, for all I could tell, a phantom of the brain?” (Clyde 185). Mary then proceeds to—silently—confess her feelings to Ilex, in a way which shocks the Armerian, Mary herself, and the reader too. The chapter concludes with Ilex confessing her love to Mary, explaining that she has never seen someone like her, nor has ever developed this kind of feelings for anyone, and concludes by telling Mary: “I must love you!” (Clyde 186). After the war is concluded, the Armerians return safely to Alzôna, where Mary is able to marry her beloved Ilex. Once the celebration moves back to Ilex’s house, Queen Beatrice wonders how “a foreigner could go through [the ceremony] half so well” (Clyde 205), to which Ilex replies that “[s]he isn’t a foreigner any longer” (Clyde 205), symbolising how Mary has adapted perfectly to this new society and possibly how she has found a place where to express her queerness freely. The novel ends with Mary confessing that she does not think of going back to Europe, mainly because Ilex is against the idea of travelling to a new dimension, and Mary herself is “not going to try the experiment alone” (Clyde 206). She is now settled in Armeria,

has no real reason to go back to England and, most importantly, she does not want to leave her beloved Ilex. (Clyde 206).

Mary's final decision, that of not travelling back to her own original reality, is unconventional for utopian novels. That is because, by going back to one's place of origin, it becomes possible to bring forth a change for the better, for a way to ameliorate the flawed society by working on the aspects improved or perfected by the utopian society. This aspect is arguably the most important of the genre since it locates the utopia not just in an elsewhere or in a non-place, "at the boundary between reality and fiction" (Vieira 8). It is on a horizon, a reachable future that is not-yet here but, with the right tools—which require the knowledge carried by the protagonist and their experience in the utopian realm—it can become present in the here and now.

The 'not-yet' aspect of utopia—and therefore of Armeria—can be seen in a positive way as a "promise, an event that will hopefully occur" (Nirta 3). It can be seen as a proactive push towards the realisation of said utopian promise; but it can also be "a deterrent that depotentialises its active transformative force because it opens up a space of 'not-yet' that probably will never be" (Nirta 3). There are multiple reasons why this potential future might not happen, but two are most important in my analysis; first, even if realisable, the progress in the original society might never match the utopian expectations set and therefore be a failure—a concept strictly linked to queerness and utopianism according to Muñoz. The second reason is that the change might not happen because the superstructure of the original society will never change nor accommodate changes—and, if so, identities and cultures that do not abide by societal expectations should not even attempt to be accepted by the hegemonic society. It is in this frame, between these two potential reasons for the failure of the realisation of utopia—two arguments based mostly on the theories of Muñoz and Edelman—that my analysis of *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, especially the last scenes, will move forward.

## 2.6 Hoping for a queer future or...

According to José Esteban Muñoz, “queerness is utopian, and there is something queer about the utopian” (Muñoz 26). This explains the interconnectedness between future, utopia, queerness, and hope. We have to understand queerness as not yet being present on a tangible level—since, according to the Cuban-American scholar, it “is an ideality” (Muñoz 1)—thus it is similar to the concept of utopia as a non-place; at the same time, queerness is also “that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough” (Muñoz 1), hence the similarity with the good place that is eutopia. In other words, both queerness and utopia are a hopeful glance at a future that sits on the horizon.

Connecting this to Halberstam’s theory of queer time and to the way I have analysed Armeria as being situated on a parallel plane of existence which is inherently queer (elsewhere and there), we can read Muñoz’s assertion as meaning that both utopia and queerness are idealities, two concepts situated in the future. In order to do so, considering that we live in a straight time—just like Clyde did, and Mary did too before the start of the novel—we “ask for, desire, and imagine another time and place” (Muñoz 26) which represents “a desire that is both utopian and queer” (Muñoz 26). Meta-textually, Armeria is arguably a place of hope, a desire for a utopian yet not-here place for Clyde, a “trapping of fantasy fiction to create an ‘elsewhere’” (Ingram and Patai 265). This is because Clyde, being transgender and an advocate for the abolition of gender with all its associated expectations, needed—and thus created—a place in which a possible reality is indeed possible. Clyde created a hope for change in her own Britain—where she was still living, at the time of the publishing of the novel—which is a reflection of her work as an activist with the Aethnic Union and the *Urania* journal, possibly trying to influence European thinking stuck in gender binarism and cis-heteronormative expectations.

The reason for this hopeful place is also linked to the concept of utopia because, as argued by Muñoz, “[t]he present is not enough. It is impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not feel the privilege of majoritarian belonging, normative tastes, and ‘rational’ expectations.” (Muñoz 27). If the present is not enough, if it is toxic and oppressive, a way out is not just desirable but vital. For Clyde, that way out was writing *Beatrice the Sixteenth* while simultaneously working in real life for the abolition of gender. For Mary, the protagonist of her novel, the fight against these majoritarian forces and patriarchal cis-

heterosexual expectations is something that builds up slowly: the more she learns about the customs of the Armerian society, the more she realises the flaws in how her reality and British/European society work: she learns that gender is a social construct, that she has a racialised and classist view on ‘barbarians’, that a house can be a place for an entire group of non-related people who just enjoy each other’s presence and one takes care of the other without expecting much in return, that production and reproduction are not the definitive goals of one’s life, and that romantic relationships should not be dictated by gender and societal norms. Confronted by all these aspects, Mary is pushed towards realising the toxicity and the oppressiveness of the system in which she was born. Slowly but surely, she questions her knowledge and her prejudices, she accepts the difference between the two worlds, and finally she becomes a part of her new reality. Together with the reader, she becomes more aware of the way societal standards and expectations force the individual into conforming to them.

By “stepping out of the linearity of straight time” and moving towards “queerness’s ecstatic and horizontal temporality” (Muñoz 25), Mary becomes more in touch with her lingering queerness. She explores a potential future and reality which would welcome her with open arms and in which she would be completely free to express herself. Mary’s feelings for Ilex, their subsequent union in marriage, and the protagonist’s decision to stay in Armeria—bidding goodbye to her previous life in the cis-heteronormative world in favour of a queer future—can be seen as a definitive and concrete stepping out of straight time. Mary is embracing the futurity and moving towards “a spatial and temporal destination” (Muñoz 185). In this way, Mary fully embraces her queerness and her sexuality, rejects the norms of British and European patriarchal cis-heterosexual societies, and “give[s] in to [potentiality’s] propulsion, its status as a destination” (Muñoz 185). Mary’s decision to stay in Armeria with her Ilex can be seen as a propulsion towards that point on the horizon where queerness lies, a fulfilment of the “desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present” (Muñoz 1).

Mary, by embracing Armerian customs and views, and by becoming Ilex’s *conjux*, becomes fully accepted by the Armerian society. This acceptance is highlighted in one of the last scenes in which Enschîna, one of the oldest members of Ilex’s households, tells Mary: “[n]ow we have a right to call you one of our kin” (Clyde 206). This moment might signify

Mary's moving from the here and now of the patriarchal cis-heterosexual society to the then and there of the queerness domain. This movement towards queerness, which Muñoz claims exists only "as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future" (1), was unfortunately impossible for Clyde herself. In her novel, however, she was finally able to make Mary reach queerness through a movement in the "world of the ethereal, [...] in the realm of a possibility that is located outside of the subject's faculty, of something that is [...] not here and it is not now" (Nirta 3-4). Mary, in this way, has transcended and finally stepped out of straight time. She has refused to conform to patriarchal cis-heterosexual expectations, and has ultimately decided that a better future is possible, but it is not fully yet there.

Reaching this future—a queer future that is—is now possible, after having experienced and learned of the constructedness of gender; however, realising it in the present and thus moving it away from the horizon might result in a failure. Mary's expectations—and thus so does Clyde—to make queerness real and tangible, but also her decision to remain in Armeria, open up "a space of 'not-yet' that probably will never be" (Nirta 3). After having seen the differences between England and Armeria, getting to know Ilex and falling in love with her, Mary acknowledges that her beloved would feel "an invincible repugnance to embarking on a new sphere of existence" and she does "not blame her" (Clyde 206). The possibility for queerness has become tangible for Mary as long as she remains in Armeria, but the moment she decides to return to England—if she ever decides so—there is a concrete possibility that she will fail to reach queerness, on a widespread social level.

## **2.7 embracing the death drive?**

Mary's decision of not going back to England can also be analysed as an embrace of the death drive and of queer jouissance, as conceptualised by Lee Edelman. According to Edelman, and in complete opposition to Muñoz, the future is not the realm of queerness. The future, just like the present, is structured and depends exclusively on the figure of the Child, thus it is its reign. The Child represents "the telos of the social order and [...] the one for whom that order is held in perpetual trust" (Edelman 11), meaning that the end-all of human existence is upholding and maintaining by any means necessary the figure of the perfect Child—one that follows and perpetuates majoritarian forces. In other words, the hegemonic

patriarchal cis-heterosexual system is able to maintain itself in power also through the perpetration of the figure of the Child as the ultimate goal of society: a product of heterosexual relationships which will continue reproducing in heterosexual relationships and abiding by capitalist patriarchal expectations like productivity, marriage, and reproduction. This process creates an endless loop which, like an ouroboros, feeds itself off itself, an eternal cycle of destruction and reproduction.

Edelman argues that both the present and the future of societies which uphold the figure of the Child as the most important figure possible are inhospitable places for queer people, whose only resort is to resist the “Symbolic reality that only ever invests [them] as subjects insofar as [they] invest [themselves] in it, clinging to its governing fictions, its persistent sublimations, as reality itself” (Edelman 18). The means of survival is to either embrace the death drive, accepting that this world is hopelessly not made for queer people and thus it is better to just enjoy oneself, thus disregarding the future. Clyde’s *Beatrice the Sixteenth* can be analysed under this light and, inasmuch as Mary’s adventure can be read as following, or rather, preceding, Muñoz’s theory of the future as a hopeful place, the novel can also be understood as representing Edelman’s *No Future* and his theory on ‘reproductive futurism’. If queer people can find an escape from the Child’s realm in the present and future only through refusing that same reality through jouissance and embracing the death drive, Mary’s final decision of abandoning her past and refusing to return to England can be understood through Edelman’s ideas.

Edelman’s antisocial thesis of ‘queer negativity’, the opposition “to every form of social viability” (Edelman 9) conformed to secure a stable heteronormative future through reproduction, can become a way of reading *Beatrice the Sixteenth*. One example is the structure of the household in Armeria and the way children are obtained. Instead of proposing a biological evolution—as in the case of Gilman’s *Herland*, for example—Clyde circumvents the questions regarding how a genderless society is able to continue existing. By doing so, Clyde manages to criticise the law of heredity—which is fundamental in a patriarchal cis-heterosexual society. At the same time, she opens a possible discussion on how children in Armeria are not the sole *raison d’être* for the whole society, at least not in a cis-heterosexual way. Romantic and sexual relationships in the kingdom of Armeria do not have the aim of reproducing and maintaining the name of the household alive, as well as the fact that children

are considered peers who become an integral part of the household—not by being the focal point of the adults, but as an active part of it. The acquisition of children through the exchange of goods also opens up a discussion on the possibilities of what would happen if the trades between the mountain tribes and Armeria would stop, for any reason possible—whether economic or due to a conflict. One hypothetical question which could be asked is: what would happen to the Armerian society if the weekly exchanges would stop? Is this possibility something that the Armerians have taken into account? We can only imagine that the Armerians would find a new way of acquiring new citizens by coming into contact with some of the unnamed civilizations that are hinted at by Ilex and the other Armerians. The point however, is that because of the uncertainty of a possible continuation of the entire kingdom, even though it is an incredibly small possibility, we can read the whole kingdom of Armeria as having embraced the death drive of this queer utopian society.

Furthermore, Mary's decision of not travelling back to England, thus remaining in Armeria, can also be read as accepting queer negativity and as a challenge to reproductive futurism. Mary's "queer negativity", her "drivelike resistance to the violence [...] effected [...]" by "the all-subjugating identity principle" (Caserio 822) is a refusal of conforming and accepting the dogmas imposed by a patriarchal cis-heterosexual society. Whether her decision is one that will pay off or not, whether accepting that there is no future in her Britain is better than not knowing if there is a future at all in Armeria, we must imagine Mary happy and hopeful.

## **2.8 Queerness is bound to fail, but that means nothing**

This is not to say that there is no hope, or that Mary's decision of remaining is a coward move or a way of giving up on a better future, or on improving her original reality. In fact, queerness, hope, and utopian thinking are all interconnected, as also argued by Muñoz: "hope and disappointment operate within a dialectical tension in this notion of queer utopia. Queerness's failure is temporal and [...] potentially utopian" (Muñoz 155). Queerness's failure—the one which Mary and Ilex would arguably face by travelling to Britain—is not to be understood in a completely negative, fatalistic meaning. We have to understand the concept of failure as meaning a rejection of "normative ideas of value" (Muñoz 173), of not



conforming to patriarchal societal expectations. Success, especially in a patriarchal capitalist cis-heterosexual society, “equates too easily to specific forms of reproductive maturity combined with wealth accumulation” (Halberstam 2). Queerness is bound to fail. However, this failure is irrelevant if we consider the power of stepping out of straight time and embracing queer time, creating spaces that challenge patriarchal cis-heterosexual standards. All these instances are parallel to Mary’s journey to another dimension and her discovery of a tangible queerness, from which she—and we—can learn. Failure is not to be understood in a negative way, despite the fact that we perceive the word ‘failure’ as such because “[f]ailure preserves some of the wondrous anarchy of childhood and disturbs the supposedly clean boundaries between adults and children, winners and losers” (Halberstam 3). The real failure would be remaining in the straight temporal line and giving up. Mary moves away from the straight timeline and embraces both her personal queerness and the queerness surrounding herself. By remaining and learning more about the Armerian society, by not surrendering her love for Ilex, Mary shows herself to be defiantly queer and optimistic for a future.

Having now examined the setting of *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, having established that the novel is indeed a utopian novel and, most importantly, a queer utopian novel, the discourse in the next chapter will move on to analyse more in depth the different ways in which we can interpret the identities of the Armerians. The way in which Irene Clyde managed to anticipate ideas proposed by Queer theorists decades later is not limited to her work on queer space and time, or utopian thinking—whether one chooses to interpret the novel through Muñoz or Edelman’s ideas—but it is extended to the whole discourse on queerness and on the way Clyde described gender non-conforming identities.

### 3 Queer identities

#### 3.1 What happened to the pronouns?

While rereading *Beatrice the Sixteenth* for the second time, I noticed something peculiar: throughout the whole first chapter and until almost half the way through the second chapter of the novel, Irene Clyde never uses a singular third-person pronoun. It is not until Ilex tells Mary that she will go on a tour of the city of Alzôna guided by Cydonia that Clyde decides to use the pronoun ‘she’; before this occurrence, Clyde either uses people’s name or gender-neutral terms to refer to a third person. In the same way as Mary is rescued and introduced to a new reality, Irene Clyde manages to quietly, in a nearly unnoticeable way, avoid using a single third-person pronoun, using gender-neutral words such as “figures” (Clyde 7), “clean-shaved, fair, smiling people” (Clyde 7), and as “remarkable personages” (Clyde 9), to describe the saviours of Mary. One of the most striking aspects of the novel is exactly this, how Clyde manages to subvert the reader’s expectations and conceal an aspect—both literary and social—that we take for granted and that, especially in literature, is fundamental in envisioning the world we are reading about. Clyde conceals the use of pronouns and the genderlessness of the Armerians in a way which is subtle at first, and then becomes incredibly striking and peculiar. One aspect of the novel to consider and relevant to the discussion on language and pronouns is that, like other utopian novels, *Beatrice* is basically a manuscript written by Mary Clyde herself and Irene Clyde is the one who “*has been good enough to make the necessary arrangement for the press*” (italics in original)(Clyde 206). Through this justification, aside from being typical of utopian novels, serves multiple purposes: first, considering the socio-political climate of the time, the homophobia and the medicalization of LGBTQ+ individuals, the trial of Oscar Wilde for gross indecency in 1895 and the trial—and subsequent ban—of Radclyffe Hall’s lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928, Clyde could circumvent British laws—in a similar way as Virginia Woolf would do year later with *Orlando*—by claiming that *Beatrice the Sixteenth* was a work of fiction, set in an alternative reality, written by someone else. Secondly, instead of presenting the novel as being written by an omniscient narrator who knows the Armerian language and can thus perfectly translate it to English by conveying every nuance and every aspect of it, it is the story as written by Mary herself—hence also the spelling mistakes and

the grammatical errors. Because of this, the pronouns used in *Beatrice the Sixteenth* are not fully determined by Clyde's ideas and world-building but are also heavily influenced by Mary's experience and knowledge, as well as her limitations in conveying something so new to her—the possibility of existence beyond the gender binary—in a language, English, that is heavily influenced by gender binarism. Despite the linguistic limitations, Mary's manuscript manages to perfectly convey the social aspects and nuances of the Armerian society.

Clyde/Mary sets the mood for the rest of the novel in an incredible way by maintaining a gender-neutral tone and by not presenting the different characters with stereotypically gendered characteristics or adjectives; even in the case of characters that are described as being beautiful or as hideous, the description is always vague and never suggest any physical characteristic. This choice is connected to another striking aspect of *Beatrice the Sixteenth*: compared to the constant description of architecture and of the surroundings, for example, there is an almost complete lack of depiction of the physical appearance of the different characters. The lack of information on the body aesthetic of the characters, together with the lack of gendered pronouns—or, at least, of correct gendered pronouns—creates a sense of defamiliarization and disorientation in the reader. Clyde is thus able to circumvent falling into gendered stereotypes while, at the same time, challenging the reader to imagine what the citizens of Armeria, the mountain tribes, and the enemies from Uras look like without falling into stereotyped ideas. By doing so, Clyde causes “an extraordinary effect on the reader's imagination, straining to place these beings within social paradigms which absolutely require gender specification” (Patai 66), creating this feeling of defamiliarization and disorientation due to the lack of social tenets such as gender and gender expectations. What this accomplishes is a reevaluation of societal standards and gendered expectations, a “challenge to the definition of reality provided by [Irene Clyde's] society—and ours” (Patai 67), which are subsequently influenced and shaped by the socio-historical context. What I mean by this is that the way in which we imagine the characters present in *Beatrice the Sixteenth*—or any other novel—is deeply influenced by the linguistic and socio-historical context in which we live; i.e. ‘Western’ capitalism and binary oppositions, which are deeply intertwined with ideas of gender, sexuality, race, and productivity. Striving away from these expectations and breaking the boundaries set by society allows the birth of new, odd, identities.

### 3.2 Against cis-heteronormativity

Between the 19th and the 20th century in Europe, due to the influence of the works of Sigmund Freud and Karl Ulrichs, sexologists and psychoanalysts—more than ever before—began analysing and questioning the links between sex and gender. While transgender and gender non-conforming identities have always existed—in spite of the attempts made by the hegemony of erasing or rewriting them—the clinical attention and the Western, patriarchal need of labelling and constricting these identities into boxes and hierarchical binaries became more prominent at this time.

At the turn of the century, the figure of the transgender woman—together with that of the effeminate homosexual man and of the feminist woman—emerged as a mysterious subject of studies and analysis, a conundrum that needed to be solved by looking at it through the lenses of patriarchal cis-heterosexual standards. As a result, as Emma Heaney argues in *The New Woman*, sexologists limited and condensed “the variety of trans feminine experience” in a singular idea of “the woman trapped in a male body” (5). Considering the literary framework of the time—that of Modernism—revolving around a clear break with the tradition, full of curiosity towards new identities and emerging experiences, the idea of the New Woman became the perfect figure to encapsulate “the fictional and theoretical narratives about gender, desire, and historical change” (Heaney 5), thus creating the ‘trans feminine allegory’. What Heaney defines as the “trans feminine allegory” aims at reinserting “trans women into a cis understanding of sex” (Heaney 5), an “extreme invert [...] distinct from cis women and gay men” (Heaney 7) that allowed the medicalization and the binaristic categorization of transgender identities, especially transgender women, both in real life and in literature. Transgender women are thus forcefully inserted into a cis-heterosexual and binary understanding of sex and sex only, with a clear dismissal of gender and its social constructedness.

This idea of the trans feminine allegory suggests that the experience of transgender women can be analysed through two instances of crossing/changing: one, as having a physical grounding for their identity—like physical changes (i.e. gender affirming surgery, or in the case of the time, castration) which corresponds to a theoretical crossing of one’s biological identity, but also as being the perfect vessel for Modernist writers for any kind of representation of body modification; two, as having a story or narrative about their journey—

what Heaney defines as “a story of treacherous crossing” (6), a refusal of one’s identity that can be described as a personal and psychological odyssey. In this way, Modernist writers were able to avoid confronting the idea that gender is a social construct and therefore it is neither absolute nor necessarily permanent. Instead, transgender identities became an allegory, a literary vessel to convey stories in an innovative way, without having to deal with the real aspects and social difficulties of life that transgender individuals had to face. Because of this, “[s]exologists, psychoanalysts and Modernist novelists have refashioned trans femininity as a figure that holds explanatory power regarding the sex and sexuality of cis people.” (Heaney 6). In the mainstream Modernist world, transgender identities became a way to explain and further cement ideas of being cisgender, while ignoring the experience of trans and gender non-conforming people, because the “transgendered narrative”, in order to be understood by the hegemonic society, “needed to become diagnosable” (Prosser 139). The trans feminine allegory, a cis-heterocentric framed experience which served the purpose of explaining and exploring cisgender identities, was thus at the core of Modernist writing.

Irene Clyde, being a transgender woman herself and a fierce activist, challenged this narrative both in her real life and in her literary work. She accomplished this by framing the experience of transgender and gender non-conforming identities not through the standards set by a cis-gender view, nor through the trans feminine allegory, but rather, through her personal experience as a transgender activist and feminist, which in turn is reflected in the *Urania* journal, *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, and to *Eve’s Sour Apples*. This going against the grain and against the vast majority of what was the envisioned idea of transgender identities is possibly one of the reasons why Irene Clyde’s private life and her works of literature under this name have been ignored for so long, why *Beatrice the Sixteenth* did not sell many copies, and why it has finally been republished only more than a century after its original publication. Her work in the *Urania* journal, in which she was the main contributor for most of its publication, dealt with themes similar to that of the sexologists of the time: gender and sex. Compared to the work of Clyde’s contemporary sexologists and psychoanalysis however, the “*Urania*’s project was fundamentally different: it aimed to *resist* exactly those categories of sex and sexuality which the sexologists were busy establishing” (Oram 219). While on a mainstream level sex was considered a defining, predetermined factor in one’s life, Clyde and the contributors of the *Urania* journal argued that ‘sex is an accident’, a quote attributed to Eva Gore-Booth and present in almost every issue of the journal, to symbolise that gender is a

social construct that “works against the true realization of an individual’s potential” (Hamer 68) and that the stereotyped binary opposition between male and female “has resulted in the formation of two warped and imperfect types” (Oram 215). Clyde advocated for the accidentality of biological sex in *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, as well as in her proposal to Millicent Garrett Fawcett to abolish gender, through the way the Armerians are portrayed and in many of the aspects of Armerian society.

### 3.3 The prototype of a Cyborg

The obstacles presented by this distinction are clearly shown in the way gender—or rather, the absence of it—is portrayed in Armeria. When Ilex and Cydonia explain to Mary that the Armerians do not distinguish between male and female, and that perfection cannot be obtained in their union—as in the myth of Androgyne—but rather, it can be found “in one’s own spirit” (Clyde 51), we can clearly see Clyde’s portrayal of the ideas upheld in the *Urania* journal as well as in her essays. Clyde thus manages to create a new identity which escapes from the trans feminine allegory’s duty of having to explain being cisgender to cisgender people, it escapes from a hierarchical binary system of oppositions, and, most importantly, it escapes from gendered stereotypes and expectations, in a way which allows the creation of a new identity.

This new identity, which escapes from the standards and limits imposed by a white cis-heterosexual hegemonic society, directly challenges the assumption—fundamental in said society—of binary opposition. By distinguishing between sex (arguably natural) and gender (socio-cultural), Clyde displaces the “boundaries between the categories of the natural and the cultural” (Braidotti 15). This boundary, which shackles the human figure into “the binary logic of identity and otherness” (Braidotti 15), clearly hinders the possibilities of gender equality or, in the case of *Beatrice* and Clyde, the possibility of a post-human and post-gender utopia. However, Clyde still manages to set the ground for new identities theorised only decades and decades after the publication of *Beatrice*. For example, one prominent posthumanist identity that dissolves gender binarism which shares some similarities with the Armerians is presented by Donna Haraway in *A Cyborg Manifesto*. The figure of the Cyborg is born as a result of the breakdown of historical, social, and gendered boundaries. The

Cyborg “is a hybrid creature, composed of organism and machine” (Haraway 1) which is born following the technological discoveries of the second half of the twentieth century. The Cyborg is a result of the dissolution of three political-scientific boundaries: that between humans and animals, that between machines and organisms, and finally, that between the physical and non-physical. As a consequence of the re-evaluation of what have been the mainstays of Western culture—the human being as a perfect and superior organism, the machine as hollow and lacking subjectivity, the non-physical as non-existent—there is a challenge to the idea of a fixed, immutable, and whole identity. This leads to a figure, that of the Cyborg, which is partial and fluid and constantly changing.

The breach of the first boundary came as a result not just of Darwinism—with its refusal of anthropocentrism and of humanity’s unique position as object of knowledge—but also of “[m]ovements for animal rights” which “are not irrational denials of human uniqueness”, but rather, “a clear-sighted recognition of connection across the discredited breach of nature and culture” (Haraway 152). A clear parallelism which can be seen in *Beatrice the Sixteenth* is the way in which the Armerians consider the consumption of meat something inappropriate even to the “desperately uncivilised” (Clyde 35). A consequence of the blurring of the dividing line between living organisms and machines is the loss of distinction between what is considered natural and what is considered artificial, with the machines potentially becoming independent. This idea can be further extended beyond traditional notions of technology, in order to include artificial constructs and a reevaluation of identities which have been historically considered sub-humans and mere machines to help produce goods and necessities for the hegemonic class.

According to Haraway, the Cyborg “is oppositional, utopian, and completely without innocence” (151). Since it is a product of the loss of boundaries between the natural and artificial, the physical and non-physical, it is “resolutely committed to partiality” (Haraway 151). The Cyborg does not see incompleteness as a sign of weakness, it does not possess a sense of origin, of lost unity which can be reattained. Just as Cydonia and Ilex explain to Mary that Armerians do not pursue union with another human being to become ‘whole’, Haraway’s Cyborg has no interest in returning to that sense “of original unity, of identification with nature in the Western sense” (Haraway 151). Another way in which this unconcern for origins can be connected to *Beatrice* is that the Armerian citizens are all

originally from the mountain and seem to not have any sort of desire of reconnecting with the tribes from which they are originally from. What this means, in both Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* and Clyde's *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, is a society which is not based "on the model of the organic family" (Haraway 151) because this concept is strictly linked to oedipal concepts due to its historical origins which see the Oedipus complex based on a nuclear family configuration with heterosexuality as the desired outcome of the children development into adult life; hence Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze critique of the universality of the Oedipal context in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) and the argument that much like the bourgeois nuclear family, the Oedipal complex is a product of colonisation—both because of its socio-historical origins and because of its attempt to repress and punish.

The Cyborg, a product of patriarchal capitalism and militarism, does not seek the connection to its parental figures, nor does the Cyborg see them as necessary to form its identity. The refusal of reconnecting and reforming the organic family thus symbolises the unwillingness of forfeiting the pursuit of wholeness through unity. At the same time, we see this in the way the community in *Alzôna*—and subsequently, we can imagine, in the whole kingdom of *Armeria*—is formed and maintained, resembling in a clear-cut way the "technological polis based partly on a revolution of social relation in the *oikos*, the household" (Haraway 151). In *Beatrice the Sixteenth* the hierarchical and gendered structures stereotypical of the family are overthrown and replaced by an almost egalitarian system of community, as I have demonstrated in the first chapter of my thesis.

### **3.4 A prototype is bound to have flaws**

It is important to address a possible counterargument to my idea of the *Armerians* as prototypes of the post-human or of the Cyborg. As we can see in the novel, multiple artificial and hierarchical structures are still present in *Beatrice's* kingdom, with the first example being the fact that a monarchic system is still in place. The second example, which is arguably the most striking one to be found in a utopian and seemingly so peaceful and advanced society, is the presence of slavery in *Armeria*.



Regarding the first example, the portrayal of Queen Beatrice is incredibly positive throughout the whole novel, showing her to be a figure of power deeply involved with the citizens of her kingdom, which she seems to treat like her peers, as well as the fact that she does not seem to abuse her power, but rather prefers making sure that there are no personal conflicts between the ones most close to her, or even to Mary, who is just a foreigner in her kingdom. At the same time however, it is arguably controversial to still find a post-gender post-capitalistic society such as the Armerian, a society which is completely stranger to the notion of heredity, still governed by a system which is archaic and entirely based on a system of heredity and overimposed power. One possible argument in favour of the presence of monarchy in Armeria, compared to any other form of government, is to portray another parallelism between the Armerian kingdom and Clyde's United Kingdom. The institution of monarchy in Armeria raises another question which will probably never be answered: if the Armerians do not reproduce but rather, they acquire new citizens through the exchange of goods, how does the royal family maintain their line, especially considering that at the end of the novel we learn that "the Queen of Armeria is always single... She is the people's alone" (Clyde 206)? One possible explanation could be that the term Queen is gendered, and that we know that it was the "royal family of Uras [that] first gave [the Armerian kingdom] a sovereign" (Clyde 13) more than seven hundred years before the events of the novel, meaning that maybe the Queen occupies a special position not just because she is the queen but because she comes from the Uras kingdom which, as I will argue later in this chapter, is peculiar itself and could represent a society that is still trapped in gender binarism.

Irene Clyde's portrayal of slavery in Armeria, as we have seen so far, is peculiar to say the least. First of all, the Armerians seem to understand that the presence of slaves in the kingdom might be seen as negative by Mary, thus implying that they know that slavery is itself a negative institution and that they have possibly interacted with another civilisation without slaves or that has abolished the institution of slavery, and therefore the Armerians know that for a foreigner, seeing slaves might leave the wrong impression. Secondly, the slaves are presented either as dull and in a state of apathy, or as incredibly loyal, respectful, and almost a part of the household on par with the free citizens, while at the same time, acknowledging their minoritarian position.

The difference between free people and slaves in Armeria seems to be the only real distinction between two social classes, as we can deduce from Brytas's question to Mary when asked about the "division of people into two classes" (Clyde 51) in the Armerian kingdom. Realising that it still exists comes as a shock to Mary, who—despite having only recently arrived—has already had the chance to see and discuss many of the perks—and flaws—of the Armerian's society. In the novel it is never clearly explained what the process of distinguishing between slaves and free citizens is, even though we know that both are former children of the mountain tribes. Whether this distinction happens before or during the acquisition of new citizens (i.e., the tribes already have a distinction between those who will be free citizens and those destined to become slaves), or because of the provenance of the children (i.e. the exchange of goods for human beings varies from mountain tribe to mountain tribe, with some designed to provide free citizens while others exchange slaves for goods), we do not know and we can only make hypothesis which, regardless, will not change the fact that an utopian society and a novel dealing with the commodification of bodies—one consequence of a cis-heterosexual patriarchal society, the object of critique of *Beatrice the Sixteenth*—still present the institutions of slavery as present and possibly utopian. What we know, thanks to Opanthë's explanation, is that "the barbarian children destined to become slaves were brought, on attaining a certain age, to the palace, where they lodged for a longer or short time, until disposed of to suitable applicants" (Clyde 44). We also know that slavery is not limited to the kingdom of Armeria, but it exists also in neighbouring countries, as we can interpret from Kisêna's confession to Mary that the slaves in Alzôna have recently appeared in a state of disquiet which is "unheard of [...] in [Armeria] or any other country" (Clyde 49). Mary soon discovers that the slaves are not auctioned for money, as clarified by Chloris, but are rather chosen personally by their future owners.

When Mary first visits the Royal Palace, after having inquired about the slaves, we can notice how the Armerians are aware that this system might cause a bad impression on her. Therefore, they make an exception—since no one, aside from the slaves' guardians and their potential masters, is allowed to see them while they are in custody—just so Mary may "not go home with wrong impressions" (Clyde 44) about the Armerians. When Mary visits the slaves' quarters at the Royal Palace, she notices that they appear in a state of "depressed spiritlessness", but not "unhappy or sunk in despondent wretchedness" (Clyde 45). An argument could be made in favour of the fact that Clyde's decision of portraying the

Armerian kingdom as still relying on slavery is a way of drawing parallelism with British workers under capitalism and industrialisation. If we consider the consequences of the Industrial Revolution and the state of the workers in England right after that and before the World War I, with the increase of mortality from diseases, the low wages, the lack of workers' rights and all the consequences stemming from the oppression of the working class, together with the way work is portrayed in *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, this parallelism becomes clear. Another element present both in the abysmal working conditions in England and the inhuman institution of slavery in Armeria is the fact that these conditions start from childhood, with the children used as capital or as a way to produce capital. The diverging point between the two is the conditions of workers and slaves later in their life. Both English proletarians and Armerian slaves work almost all day, as we can see in the case of Níia and Lyx, two of Ilex's slaves, having to sleep in turns in order to watch over Mary sleeping or, in case she would be awake at night—and apparently it is a customary service for every other free citizen—they would have to do whatever would be ordered of them.

We also learn that in the case of a slave refusing to follow their master's orders, the penalties would not include physical punishment but rather, discussing it first with the slave and then with the owner of the household, and if that fails too, in the worst possible scenario, the master “would apply to the Government to transfer her to someother [sic] house” (Clyde 63). This can happen up to three times before the slave is transferred “to the State *ergastula*” (Clyde 63, italics in original), which, I assume, refers to the Ancient Roman ‘ergastulum’, a workhouse building—typically underground—used to punish slaves, which were held there in chains. To some degree, a master appears to be able to hold a disruptive slave in isolation. However, just like in the case of a slave being physically or verbally abused by their master, the slave could be transferred to another family either via intervention of the chief of the district—whose role is also inquiring “periodically into the treatment of the slaves” (Clyde 63)—or through the slave's own “right to demand a transfer to another household” (Clyde 63).

In this case, the institution of slavery “seems deliberately presented as an improvement of the British system, in which working-class children were usually destined for lives of ill-paid and drudging work” (Ingram and Patai 266). As we can see in Chapter II of *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, work is considered a secondary activity by the Armerians, since “a day is wasted

which is spent in unremitting labour till the evening comes—or if not wasted, regrettably monotonous” (Clyde 31). In Chapter IV, when Mary is observing the city watch doing its rounds, she notices that they are all together in one group and not scattered to cover more ground. The reason for this, Ilex explains, is that they would get “extremely lonely and stupid” and “[n]obody would undertake the work” (Clyde 54). The clear parallelism that can be drawn here is between slavery in Armeria and work under capitalism in Europe.

When Mary and Nîa, a slave of Ilex’s household, are travelling through Armeria to reach the front of the battle with Uras, we discover that there is a possibility for slaves to become free. Nîa explains to Mary that they can be free only if slaves “are as good as [free people]—as fine, I mean, you know; and as dignified” (Clyde 164), but even in that case, it is only fifty or sixty “every year—out of thousands and millions” (Clyde 164). The comparison between the working system of Britain—especially considering the abuse of child workers—and the institution of slavery in Armeria is further pursued by Clyde in a satiric way by having Mary tell Nîa that in Britain they “hate the idea of slavery, and keeping people in a class apart” (Clyde 179). Nîa then assumes that “nobody looks down on anybody else there! And nobody’s forced to work. And everybody understands one another” (Clyde 179), with Mary quickly embarrassed by Nîa’s assertion. We learn that slaves have to attend some sort of school while in the barracks so they can receive a training in order for them to “be cooks, or weavers, or attendants” even though the masters will not then “let them choose” but rather, see if “they show themselves likely for it” (Clyde 164). As also argued by Ingram and Patai, these “descriptions of the Armerian ‘slave school’ call to mind the rules and regulations of ordinary English schools” (Ingram and Patai 278).

At the same time, despite the (e)utopian characteristics of Armeria, the way work is a secondary practice and the widespreadness of mutual aid, among other aspects, and the possible satirical use of slavery as a way of critiquing the conditions of worker in England under capitalism and industrialisation, the presence of the institution of slavery itself is not to be easily dismissed and diminished to a simple mean of critique. Furthermore, as we have seen, it leads to some interesting analysis of the novel. The presence of a hierarchical, oppressive, and dehumanising system such as the institution of slavery present in *Beatrice the Sixteenth* perpetuates “the structures and modes of reproduction of ‘Western’ identity” (Haraway 176). These elements, which consolidate a hierarchical and majoritarian system of

oppression and of binary opposition, are directly opposed to the figure of the post-human, the Cyborg, or to new possible queer identities. As long as these structures and modes of reproduction of elements of oppression that are the pillars of Western cis-heterosexual patriarchy and imperialism exist, the possibility of an emerging subversive identity remains shackled and far on the horizon.

### 3.5 Masculinity and ‘old brutality’

As we can see in the novel, abusing the slaves—whether physically or verbally—is frowned upon in the Armerian society. The slaves can be transferred to another household in case they are treated badly by their master. However, there is a character who is seemingly known by everyone for his bad treatment of the slaves, but because of his position of power, he seems to not suffer any repercussions: the Grand Steward Galêsa. Galêsa is the second character introduced in *Beatrice the Sixteenth* who is referred to with ‘he/him’ pronouns, however he is the first one with clearly despicable and less favourable characteristics—although the first character for whom he/him is used, the doctor Athroës, is presented as being “negligent in toilet” and he “did not carry out [Mary’s] preconceived ideas of the venerable *hakim*” (Clyde 24, italics in original). Galêsa is presented as being unpopular among the people of Alzôna, and as having “no more manners than a centipede” (Clyde 28). One of his favourite pastimes, according to Cydonia, is to “call a few of his slaves together, and to insult them elaborately and with every variety of ingenious degradation for two hours at a time” (Clyde 28).

But how is this relevant in the scope of my thesis? As I said previously, Clyde cleverly uses both pronouns and (non) physical descriptions of the characters so they can maintain some sort of androgyny, or at least not fall into gendered stereotypes. At the same time, however, “she does not hesitate to set the feminine as the highest standard for the human—in opposition to the prevalent view of the male as the model for the human form” (Patai 67). We can see this in how disproportionate the use of ‘he’ or ‘him’ is—both in the number of characters which are referred to with this set of pronouns and in the number of occurrences in the whole novel—compared to ‘she’ and ‘her’. In the world of *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, the pronouns ‘he’ and ‘him’ usually refer to characters which are in some way despicable. In

Chapter X, for example, Mary and the slave Nîa, while travelling towards the Armerian camp near the border with Uras, stumble upon a “square-set, sullen-browed figure, [...] a powerfully-built peasant” (Clyde 177) who assaults Nîa. Both Nîa and Mary refer to him with ‘he/him’ pronouns. Just like the Grand Steward Galêsa, the villager considers the slaves as inferior and sub-humans, and that is why the punishment inflicted to him by Mary—kissing the sandals of Nîa—is a penalty comparable to having “his hair and eyebrows cut off and his nose slit” (Clyde 178). Furthermore, as affirmed by Nîa, the villagers like the brute are apparently “the worst class of country people” because they “entertain a peculiar prejudice against slaves” (Clyde 178). The people from Uras, as well as the villagers from the countryside, seem to still be trapped in a cis-heteronormative and binaristic hierarchical system.

A further argument could be made if we consider that the Court Surgeon tells Mary that Galêsa possesses “a strain on old brutality in the city, which gets less and less, [...] but which shows itself here and there” (Clyde 131). Moreover, the children adopted by Galêsa in his household are also described as being far from positive characters, hence why the Surgeon asks Mary “what could you expect of the people brought up by Galêsa?” (Clyde 132). Clyde does not fully explain some of the aspects introduced in the novel, but in this case, an argument could be made that this ‘old brutality’, which is not a common occurrence in Alzôna, is a reminiscence of gendered distinction and stereotypes. This idea is supported by the fact that Galêsa is an infiltrator in the Armeria society, since he works in the interests of the Uras kingdom. Galêsa’s allegiance to Uras is especially telling if we consider that the kingdom of Armeria came into being after “the royal family of Uras gave [Armeria] a sovereign” (Clyde 13) and that now the two kingdoms are at war. An argument could then be made that one of the reasons for the splitting of Armeria from Uras and the consequent animosity between the two is dictated by the Armerian kingdom developing from a gendered society to post-gender one, which would explain what the Surgeon means by talking about this ‘old brutality’.

If we go back to the way Irene Clyde and the contributors of the *Urania* journal thought about gender, we might find some more confirmation for my thesis. As we have seen previously, even though Clyde advocated for the abolition of gender binarism, she also “emphasized those typically gendered as feminine as being most desirable” (Oram 217).

Clyde consistently wished that the working class could “develop beyond their ‘masculine’ nature” (Ingram and Patai 279). It is important to remember that one of Clyde’s ideas—shared by Eva Gore-Booth and Esther Rope—is that society limits people’s development “by inculcating femininity in women and masculinity in men” (Hamer 68), thus maintaining an oppositional binarism. The only way to escape is for “men [to] develop feminine virtues” because “the feminine character type [...] is preferable to the masculine” (Ingram and Patai 269). The reason why the feminine character is preferable to the masculine, according to Clyde, is that the education of boys leads “to war and violence” (Oram 217), an idea which is further highlighted by Clyde’s own statement in *Eve’s Sour Apples* that “War is a male thing” (qtd. in Ingram and Patai 272). The reason for Irene’s assumption is that “boys are taught to fight and to domineer” hence why “it is impossible to hope that war can ever be eliminated” (qtd. in Ingram and Patai 272). Considering the way in which Galêsa treats his slaves, and considering that the people of Uras are the ones instigating war with the kingdom of Armeria, we can conclude that the ‘old brutality’ attributed to Galêsa is a form of toxic masculinity, with the kingdom of Uras representing a society still trapped by gender binarism. Galêsa and Uras thus represent a trace of the old, gendered identities which stride in contrast with the new identity of the Armerian people; the way the Surgeon talks about the children of Galêsa and their viciousness also seem to hint at a lack the communal love which we can find in the other Armerian households. *Beatrice the Sixteenth* however, is not just about communal love and mutual aid between members of the same household or about the camaraderie between different households. The novel is full of romantic love between characters, with a tenderness and a subtlety that fits perfectly with the story in the way it is presented.

### 3.6 Queer love

A consequence of the birth of new identities, like the ones in Armeria, and an integral part of both Clyde’s and *Urania’s* ideas is the birth of new modes of relationship. Clyde and the other contributors of the journal viewed both heterosexual sex and marriage as a major hindrance to women, “since it enforced gender differentiation” and was “a means of dominating women” (Oram 217). This idea, which is strictly linked to what Adrienne Rich in 1980 defined as ‘compulsive heterosexuality’ in the essay *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*, is based on the social influence imposed by a cis-heteronormative and

patriarchal society, especially on women, to partake in romantic and sexual relationships with men for the sake of production and reproduction. Decades before Rich, Clyde claimed that “[t]he domination of women by men in conventional sexual union [...] results in women’s moral degradation” (Ingram and Patai 270). According to the contributors of *Urania*, once a society escapes from the limits imposed by gendered oppositions and gender binarism, “heterosexual relationships would no longer be prioritized over same-sex relationships” (Hamer 68-69). In *Beatrice the Sixteenth* we see a clear example of this. Since the Armerian society is a genderless one—to some degree, as we have seen—the modes of relationship are inherently queer, and they contravene “the prevailing ideology of passion as a male characteristic” while also daring “to imagine a sexuality that is not male-centered” (Ingram and Patai 267). The most relevant examples are two of the most interesting relationships in the novel: that between Mary and Ilex, and that between Queen Beatrice and the artist Thekla.

Mary’s romantic interest towards Ilex is hinted at the end of the third chapter, after Mary finds out about the genderlessness of the Armerians and finds pleasure in the embrace of Ilex because “[h]e or she, it was consolatory all the same!” (Clyde 52). The growing feelings of Mary towards Ilex appear constantly but subtly in *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, with the protagonist finding herself always looking for Ilex and clinging to each of her words, while at the same time showing interest towards what she likes and the uses of her culture. The moment in which Mary decides to embark on a journey into the battlefield, fearing for Ilex’s safety and longing to be with her, is an inherently queer moment if we consider that throughout history and in novels as well, battle have been fought almost exclusively by men, and thus the story of reconciliation and putting oneself at risk to be reunited with the beloved one does not suit in a patriarchal and cis-heterosexual understanding of plot the idea of the female heroine putting her life in danger for the love of a genderless—or feminine—character. This is especially true if we consider Mary’s self-doubt of her actions and the risks she is willing to take considering that she is risking “everything—life, liberty, the possibility of restoration to Europe (or to my senses)—for a being who was [...] a phantom of the brain” (Clyde 185). Ilex’s reaction to Mary’s journey, being struck by this strange foreigner from another reality, is also important to analyse, since Ilex understands the risk of the battlefield but also the rash of passion of Mary, and thus urges her to stop thinking of the present and think of her future, a future that would see Mary “go back to [her] friends—and live happily” (Clyde 185), fighting her own feelings and her own romantic passion for the safety of Mary.



In this instance too both Mary and Ilex do not assume stereotypically gendered attitudes which are common in literature (for example, the male hero being conflicted between his honour and having to provide masculine safety to his love interest, and the female love interest being weak but willing to risk it all for the possibility of building a nuclear family), but maintain their queer sweetness and contravening gendered expectations.

The relationship between Beatrice and Thekla is a peculiar one. In the novel we learn that it is customary for “the Queen of Armeria” to be “always single” because “[s]he is the people’s alone” (Clyde 206). However, despite this tradition, it is noticeable throughout the whole novel that Queen Beatrice has feelings for Thekla. We can see this in the queen’s reaction to the news of Thekla’s abduction by Uras, at the end of Chapter V. Furthermore, it is revealed implicitly by Princess Opanthe, who “as a cousin of Beatrice’s” knows “more than many people what Thekla was to her” (Clyde 120). Queen Beatrice, despite having to “keep up her dignity” (Clyde 120), clearly showed signs of affection and romantic interest towards Thekla. The reason why Beatrice falls in love with Thekla is because of the artist’s genius, which “made it easy and possible” for the Queen to fall in love with her. And even if the novel ends with Beatrice and Thekla walking off together, clearly in love, but still having to confront traditions and customs, we can see some hope in their relationship too. One peculiar aspect of this relationship is tied to the fact that—aside from the institution of slavery—there is no real class distinction in Armeria. Compared to Europe, where royal marriages to commoners have historically been uncommon, the relationship between Beatrice and Thekla is perfectly in line with the world built by Clyde, and most importantly, it can be argued to reflect the “celebration of love between women” which was a central theme for *Urania* and Clyde, since “it put forward as a template for love and passion in an ideal society which had transcended sexual intercourse and gender identity” (Oram 225). Both the relationships analysed are a clear celebration of queer, arguably sapphic, love; both of them oppose gendered and patriarchal expectations of love: in the case of Ilex and Mary, despite their love being revealed and culminating in the adventurous part of the novel, there is no knight in a shining armour who saves the damsel in distress, there is no sacrifice for the sake of building a future nuclear family and maintain the name of the household, but rather, there is tenderness, trust in each other’s, and knowing that despite the fact that Mary is new to this world, her feelings are valid. Beatrice and Thekla subvert expectations of love between a regent and someone without a royal heritage; while Beatrice’s interest in Thekla, a ‘mere’

artist, could be seen as a regent falling in love with an artistic civilian to show how good and not haughty, the fact that Beatrice apparently decides not to use her position of power to consolidate their relationship but rather keep it vague is a subversion of expectations.

### 3.7 Conclusion

As we have seen in this chapter of my thesis, Clyde's mastery with words and storytelling allowed her to explore different themes and possible ideas regarding gender identity. The careful use of pronouns, with 'she/her' becoming the standard and the preferred pronouns of most characters present in the novel, while the pronouns 'he/him' are used almost exclusively for despicable characters, set the tone for the whole discussion of this chapter, but also for analysing the Armerians and how they are portrayed. Irene Clyde, as we have seen multiple times already, fought back against the system. While the sexologists and the psychoanalysts at the turn of the century were trying to establish immutable categories to frame every possible identity, Clyde, the Aethnic Union and the contributors of the *Urania* journal were resisting those same categories. And Clyde fought not only in real life, with her contributions and her work as an activist, but also in her literary work. The Armerians are a clear example of gender non-conforming identities that escape a patriarchal cis-heterosexual narrative for a cis-heterosexual audience. And this is why the Armerians can be considered as a prototype of the post-human or of the Cyborg. Despite the fact that Haraway's work is a product of and a response to a socio-political and economical world that is almost completely different than the one in which Clyde lived, the Armerians are fundamentally similar to the figure of the Cyborg, despite their flaws.

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## 4 Conclusion

I do not really know how to describe how I felt the first time I read *Beatrice the Sixteenth*. Not only was this book beautiful and tender in the way it portrayed queerness and queer love, but it felt like being seen, an actual proof of queer theory and identity beyond gender dating back to 1909 in Europe. And when I started looking for more information, researching Irene Clyde—finding next to nothing on her—the book itself and everything concerning it, I felt the sense of sadness which us queer people know too well, that of knowing that our history, especially that of transgender and gender non-conforming people is a history that has always been brutally erased or hidden. Considering that it took more than a century for this book to be reprinted for the first time and that the figure of Irene Clyde has been ignored for so long—it even by scholars who did not acknowledge her name or gender—made me think of all the other queer lives, queer authors, and queer works who have suffered the curse of oblivion. At the same time, I felt happy about the very existence of this book. And more than anything, I decided to take up a challenge: to analyse this book and try to start a conversation—which some academics have already done, like Ingram and Patai—in order for Irene Clyde to not be forgotten, as she has been for the past decades, and for *Beatrice the Sixteenth* to be appreciated and considered as a pioneer work in its genre and in its themes.

So when I decided to analyse this book for my thesis I thought that the best direction was to discuss it by proposing different possible readings of it, with a clear objective in mind: showing how ahead of her time Irene Clyde was, and how some of the ideas presented in *Beatrice the Sixteenth* were actually revolutionary and preceding by decades the work of acclaimed scholars in the field of Queer Studies. The first challenge was to find a frame for the analysis of *Beatrice* due to its multiple styles and the way in which it switches from genre to genre. Considering the origins and the etymology of the word utopia—the question of linguistics has been a constant in my analysis of the novel and Clyde has played a lot with it—Clyde seems to have been able to fit the kingdom of Armeria in a time-space frame that works on every possible level. The setting of *Beatrice* is utopian (intended as a non-place), for it does not exist in the original dimensional plane of existence of Mary, and it is also eutopian (intended as a good place), since, as in the case of most utopian novels, it shows an improved

society which is inherently good. But it is also euchronian, for it is a “good place in the future” (Vieira 9), as we have seen by reading the novel through the lens of Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia*, and a perfect encapsulation of what is widely considered feminist and queer utopianism. If we consider what Alessa Johns calls the five features of feminist utopias, as listed in the introduction of my thesis, we see how *Beatrice the Sixteenth* perfectly falls under this definition, since it rejects a predetermined vision of human nature, it is centred on (arguably) women’s empowerment, it is pragmatic in the way it proposes actual changes in the British system, it views the non-natural world as dynamic and not anthropocentric, and, most importantly, it embraces the idea of identity as fluid.

Clyde accomplished all of this by deconstructing gender stereotypes and by challenging the tenets of capitalistic cis-heterosexual society, like the nuclear family, the idea of chrononormativity, and the law of heredity. The households of Armeria are inspired by Ancient Greek rules of hospitality, but at the same time, they reconsider the entire hierarchical structure present in the cis-heterosexual household while also challenging capitalist notion of production and reproduction. Clyde creates a society in which community is upheld as necessary and not aimed at giving/receiving goods, a society in which time is re-evaluated in a non-capitalistic way, and children are not treated as human beings who need to be taught to be adults as fast as possible just so they can be inserted in the mechanism of production and reproduction. Instead, Armerians put emphasis on leisure time, on mutual aid—a key concept in queer communities—and on allowing children to not partake in bourgeois logics of reproductive temporality. In this way, Clyde was able to create a precursor of the queer realities that will spring into the world in the upcoming decades, communities based on the ideas aforementioned and that share with Armeria—in this case, through the experience of Mary—the idea of a grey zone in a world dominated by white, cis-heterosexual and capitalist standard, a zone that can be traversed by minoritarian identities.

Obviously, the most important part of *Beatrice the Sixteenth* which tells us that it is a queer novel, is the revelation that the Armerians do not really possess an idea of gender; people are not divided in a binary opposition hierarchical structure based on biological aspects, gendered stereotypes, or socio-historical gendered expectations. The Armerians, who embody the ideas that Clyde had of gender, are human beings that do not even consider the possible differences of gender. Decades before the idea of gender as a social construct became

more accepted in academia, Irene Clyde had already written about a population which had deconstructed its gendered identity to a certain extent, as I have argued in this thesis. Having established that *Beatrice the Sixteenth* is indeed a queer utopia, the discussion moved to a crossroads with two main ideas on opposite sides: José Esteban Muñoz's idea of queerness as utopian and hopeful, and Lee Edelman's antisocial thesis and queer negativity. Both theories are well established in the field of Queer Studies, but both of them deal with aspects of queerness and queer life that are not necessarily always relevant for Irene Clyde and *Beatrice the Sixteenth*. At the same time, due to Clyde's talent and clairvoyance, I found it worth it to analyse the utopian aspects of the novel—both intertextual and extratextual—through these two similar yet different approaches. Although ultimately I believe that *Beatrice the Sixteenth* and Armeria represent a hopeful and utopian place that is not necessarily here—and possibly will never be here—as Muñoz would argue, the novel lends itself perfectly to an interpretation through Edelman's idea of queer negativity due to the way children are acquired, for example, or the way the ending could be interpreted as a refusal by Mary to partake in a reality—the British reality that she decides to not return to—that is inhospitable to her and to the person that she loves. At the same time, I fully believe that, considering Clyde's own battles for the abolition of gender, her experiences as a transgender woman, and the way the novel leaves the possibility of a return open to Mary—in a way that would mean a change of her original society, as that is the usual conclusion of utopian novels—*Beatrice the Sixteenth* is inherently a hopeful novel, one written by a person who looked at the future with so much hope and who fought for so long for its realisation.

My analysis of *Beatrice the Sixteenth* in this thesis then shifted from a broader one about genre and society as a whole to one with a detailed focus on ideas of gender. The main idea for the second chapter of my thesis was to create a framework for understanding the Armerians through ideas of gender identity that were contemporaneous to Clyde, but also through concepts of identity and gender that came into being several decades after the publication of the novel. One of the most important aspects of *Beatrice the Sixteenth* is that it provides an actual telling of an imaginary queer society told from the perspective of a queer person. The discourse around ideas of sex and gender became more popular at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century the discourse on gender non-conforming identities, due to the influence and the interest of psychoanalysts and sexologists. The work of these scientists inevitably influenced the literary ideas of the time, hence why Modernism saw

the rise of the New Woman. White cis-heterosexual Modernist writers saw the figure of transgender women as allegorical, in the sense that it would help explain the sex, gender and sexuality of cisgender people. Irene Clyde, as well as the other contributors of the *Urania* journal, managed to challenge this narrative and propose a figure, that symbolised by the Armerians, which did not have to conform to cisgender standards, nor did it have to appeal to cisgender people.

The figure of the Armerian, as we have seen, can be considered a prototype of identities theorised decades later, like Braidotti's post-human and Haraway's Cyborg. Clyde was able to anticipate these theories by rejecting the law of heredity, challenging the notion of nuclear family, refusing the idea of Platonic completeness as necessary, reconsidering anthropocentrism and, most importantly, presenting a society in which gender is non-existent and it is implicitly considered artificial and a social construct. However, the Armerian society is not completely flawless, as we have seen through its institution of slavery. The discourse on slavery has then brought my analysis back to the idea of gender, especially as thought by Clyde herself and the contributors of *Urania*. The institution of slavery in the novel serves both to criticise the working conditions in Britain and, to some extent, to discuss in detail aspects of toxic masculinity that Clyde has always criticised.

Despite embracing genderlessness and advocating for the abolition of gender, Clyde firmly believed that feminine traits were the most desirable, especially if compared to masculinity. In this way, Clyde was able to create an identity which could simultaneously free the allegorical trans feminine figure from its cisgendered framing, pave the way towards abolishing gender by challenging toxic masculinity and, finally, provide the groundwork for an identity similar to that of the Cyborg.

As in the case of utopian thinking—and this argument could be extended to all her life—Irene Clyde was ahead of her time. She was ahead of her time in the presentation of gender, in the multiple facets through which she presented the Armerian society, and in the way she showed it influencing Mary. *Beatrice the Sixteenth* has proven to be a remarkable book that needs to be analysed through and through, possibly with the aid of other sources written by Irene Clyde—such as *Eve's Sour Apples*, her memoir, and her contributions to *Urania*—which were to an extent unavailable to me. A remarkable person like Irene Clyde,

with all her work as a transgender activist and her incredibly tender and prescient book *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, cannot fall into oblivion again. Irene Clyde spent almost half of her life in Japan with no possibility of going back to England, and the title of her memoir, *Alone in Japan*, is heartbreaking. I hope that with the re-publishing of *Beatrice the Sixteenth*, a conversation will spark around it, because despite its flaws, Clyde's novel is worthy of being read, enjoyed, and analysed, not excluded anymore from bibliographies of utopian or queer literary works. And Irene Clyde shall not be alone anymore.

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