

# Future

Guillermo Valencia

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Thanks to the discoveries in geology and astronomy, as well as the Theory of Evolution, in the nineteenth century the idea spread that neither the Earth nor the Universe were immutable entities whose destruction was only possible through divine agency. As opposed to a static view of the world and humankind, knowledge had it that everything was bound to meet an inert destiny due to entropy, the universal law discovered in and studied since the 1850s. Scientists inferred from this law and other cosmological research the depletion of the fuel keeping the Sun alight and the subsequent cooling thereof, which would lead inevitably to the absolute disappearance of all forms of life in the solar system, Earth included. Such a future was not presented as something one could believe or not, but rather as a materially unavoidable reality, even if millennia away. It was a secular ending, based on science. This can be seen in the attempts of different writers to emulate Lord Byron's masterful poem "Darkness" (1816), speculating on the demise of terrestrial humankind or their extra-terrestrial counterparts. These poetic speculations were, indeed, scientific fictions. They are fictions because they are not presented as reasoned hypotheses based on solid science, but as visions of imaginary worlds developed with the means available to science's teachings. Although the elements of these worlds were scientifically plausible, their description served literary, and not educational, purposes.

This could be seen in the fact that these literary apocalypses of a scientific nature were usually written in verse, which denotes their literariness and, by association, their

fictionality. In the same vein, we can see the difference between, for example, the essay fragment in *Le jardin d'Épicure* (1894/1921) by Anatole France (1844-1924) where he speculates on the entropic end of the world and the cultural degeneration of humankind that would precede it, and the poem originally in verse "Futuro" (1899; *Ritos*, 1914) by Guillermo Valencia (1873-1943). This Colombian writer turns that fragment into an imaginary world whose fictional existence is highlighted by the plethora of specific details that are way beyond what could be hypothesised with the help of science alone. This future is not presented as speculation, but as a reality. In Valencia's poem, reality merges the sublime with a poignant sense of loss. The sublime comes from the vision of a cold and dark universe resulting from the Sun's cooling, leading to decline and final disappearance of life. Earth ends up being an inert, dismal sphere with no living creature capable of remembering it. The sadness of humanity being lost, now buried and forgotten, is made noticeable by the implicit comparison between the cultural greatness of the classical past and the wretched cave-dwellers of limited intelligence living after the fashion of our humanoid ancestors, thus bringing to an end the cycle of creation: both Earth and humans have similar beginning and end. Valencia's apocalyptic vision is a pessimistic kind of eternal return. Universal death rejects the Nietzschean reveries in this beautifully written poem using the best Parnassian rhetoric. This lends intensity to the expressivity of the language, generating a feeling of realism without neglecting the symbolic dimension.

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## Future

By the end of its race, the sun shall refuse its light to the dark vault in a dying day, and over the surface of its decrepit sphere shall wave its exhausted gleams as if it were a greyed mane. The singers, stiff with cold, with their vivid plumage faded, shall fall from the trees, and, within bare forests, the melodies of the river shall no longer celebrate wild love's red idyll. Then the last couples shall shiver by the fire, laden with untamed pain and melancholy eyes, and, on the bleak hill, the pine tree shall only bow its upright crown for the kisses of the wet wind from the southwest.

Silent and huge, resembling a snow-covered horde of ghosts, floating on the lakes where Europe sleeps, the wandering ice floes shall bury, like a tribe of barbarian giants, the defiled grounds of a thousand formerly swarming cities, where the illusions of love and joy like fireflies in the sky illumined nights of sleeplessness...

Offspring of the foolish creature and the crazy Adam, the last humans, whose brows sorrow does not darken, shall ramble on a carpet of snow and lichen, their languid figures avoiding the withered shade. They shall defend their lives with their hairy hands as if they were the last veterans of a stabbed battalion, or, within lugubrious lairs, clad in rustling leather, shall collect their stupefied soul.

The moaning auras' echoes shall lull their hungry children in the icy dawnless nights. From the rigid dens, their hirsute women, with fear and their eyes fixed on the grey vault, shall stare at the white stars hanging on the silent heights at midday and a fateful sun that shines not, while the formidable roars of the shaggy bellowing bears fills up the deaf and immense void...

The final dwellers shall pass, from the artless caves, without sentience, fed with the bread of pain, knowing neither our faith nor our science, a trembling flame of intelligence dwindling away under coarse skulls, their only yearning to conquer beast and gather tasteless roots or bitter fruit from the ungrateful soil.

Without hatred, love or witness, a sick being, with flat head, a forest of hair for his coat and eyes betraying the beast inside – pupils fixed on the hostile ether, seeking the East –, shall lay the sweaty forehead on the earth and sink silent in the funereal stagnant gulf.

At the gust of an unchained hurricane, the Earth shall move through the infinite deep like a bloodied spectre. In the lifeless peace and with a muffled scream the sad animals of our race shall not evoke the pale Crime... As the immortal pieces by Homer, Phidias, Virgil and Horace, rubble of a chimerical palace, sleep under the yellow sandy flats, the world shall drift in space as a lost bird in the desert: blackened, forgotten, dead!