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Tocquevillean Poetics: Political Science, the Nation, and Humanity

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We know that the secret of the world is profound, but who or what shall be our interpreter, we know not.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet"

No one seriously believes that an author, dead for more than a century, can say anything to us about the novelties that we face, that he can explain us to ourselves. This is precisely what Tocqueville accomplishes.
—Pierre Manent, *Tocqueville and the Nature of Democracy*

Poetry and the Form of Community

Poetry and the arts were once considered an essential problem for political reflection. Examining the place and presentation of poetry in a regime was not simply a matter of discerning better or worse forms of adornment, or an assessment of style; rather, so much cut to the heart of an inquiry into educating citizens and legislators. At least part of the concern was that poetry's production of images could send individuals down the road of falsehood. Its moral status was therefore questioned for encouraging the "license of desire." As Stanley Rosen writes, "The quarrel between philosophy and poetry is in the first instance political or moral . . . [T]he quarrel amounts to this: poetry encourages desire, and hence the will."[1] Poetry produces attractive models individuals may imitate in

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moral and political life, which the ancients well understood, and is why it formed the core of a civic education. However, as Carnes Lord argues, "To speak of a political role for literature and the arts is to speak a language that is no longer congenial or even completely intelligible to modern man, at least in the West."[2] Even if it is the case that, according to Sheldon Wolin, we "can easily dispose of the possibility that political theorists were unaware that they were injecting imagination or fancy into their theories," it may nonetheless be true that "much of modern philosophy certainly seems to take no account of poetry."[3] The arts in general, Allan Bloom claims, is "a theme which had begun to disappear from the discussion of political theory, a theme which for older thinkers had been central to any study of politics and which revealed the ambiguities of politics better than any other."[4] Indeed, through the eighteenth and nineteenth century "the war between poetry and philosophy" was alive and well, according to Judith Shklar; however, with the growth of "aesthetic idealism" among the romantics, she writes, most of them "simply vented their spleen upon philosophy, and made unsystematic claims for poetry."[5] Based on these assessments from a range of contemporary analysts and scholars, a considered relationship between poetics and politics seems to be anything but widespread in late modern thought.

By contrast, I argue that Alexis de Tocqueville's work acutely reminds us of the significance of political reflection on poetry and of poetry's role in political life. And while there are other exceptions to this general trend of diminishing attention to poetry by serious observers of politics, Tocqueville's approach is of especial relevance for our times. It is Tocqueville's view that the *nature* of poetry does not change, but that it finds new sources under different social states, and that in a democratic age poetry takes on greater political orientation. Tocqueville foresaw a dispute among democratic poets that was of more than literary concern. In what François Furet has rightly called Tocqueville's "exploration of *all* the consequences of the concept of democracy,"[6] a consequence of great significance is that democratic poetry culminates in a series of images of human community with an increasing level of abstraction

to each: the democratic imagination draws inspiration from the nation before turning toward humanity at large. While this trajectory cannot be altogether reversed, Tocqueville ultimately teaches that as in the case of so many democratic "instincts," it must be instructed. Mitigating the tendency to imagine political life solely—or ultimately—in universalist, or globalist, terms is something Tocqueville's political science sought to address.

Because Tocqueville considered poetry an essential part of human life, poetry is not just an object examined *by* his "new political science" but is also a component *of* it. There is much scholarly dispute about what Tocqueville's "new political science" entails, and it is my intention, not to revisit this rich debate, but to suggest that poetics makes up some part of it, given Tocqueville's general understanding of poetry and his insight into the politicization of the democratic imagination. Poetry expresses and represents the mores of a people; it constitutes what Tocqueville refers to as "the whole moral and intellectual state of a people."[7] This is made clear once we see just how broadly Tocqueville defines poetry, for it is emphatically *not* simply a matter of written verse, which he likens to "the beautiful ideal of language" (458). Scribed stanzas are indeed a kind of poetry, but verses "by themselves . . . will not constitute poetry." The fine arts do not exhaust the poetic. Poetry is, Tocqueville says quite simply, "the search for and depiction of the ideal" (458). As we shall see, it is for Tocqueville a distinctly human capacity that contributes to ways of thinking and feeling, which thereby influence modes of living and acting. So much is consistent with his view that there are "two parts of politics," namely, that of science and of art, "one fixed and the other in motion."[8] Closer examination of Tocqueville's discussion of poetry, alongside consideration of his appeals to the imagination, illustrates it is of especial political consequence.[9]

Tocqueville's key statement about the need to "instruct democracy" (7) is intimately connected to his desire to seek "an image of democracy itself" in America (13)—an image that combines both science and art, that captures something of both what is fixed and is ever in motion. In providing an image, or painting a portrait, of

democracy, Tocqueville draws our own imaginations toward certain ideals as much as he discusses the various ideals of democratic peoples. For Tocqueville's own aim was not only to "advance theoretical knowledge" about democracy. But as Ewa Atanassow rightly suggests, he had another "practical" or "patriotic objective" in his work, namely, to help restore and maintain a "civic bond."[10] Imagery for the purpose of instruction is an important part of this objective. After all, Tocqueville underlines that life is never without poetry, and that poetry ineluctably shapes life.[11] As he once noted, "It is not sufficiently understood that men cannot do without poetry."[12] This follows from his emphatic rejection of a reductionistic understanding of the human being, underlined in an 1832 letter to his friend Gustave de Beaumont, reflecting a conviction that he was more than "a human machine."[13] The human being is, according to Tocqueville, a poetic being, no matter the social state.

But the social state's influence on poetry is not incidental: "poets who live in democratic ages will depict passions and ideas rather than persons and deeds" (462). Getting poetry right, or being rightly oriented by poetics, may matter all the more in a democratic age, for the effect on our politics through poetic inflammation of passions and ideas is no small issue. Understanding why might help to mitigate present cleavages, given the way our contemporary imaginations are politically charged. Thus, to be clear, my purpose in this essay is twofold: first, to show how and why Tocqueville foresaw an unfolding development toward nationalist and then humanitarian poetry, or ideals, and second, to discuss his cautioning against unmitigated universalism, or humanitarianism, and some of his guidance in this regard. Anticipating the conflict between nationalist and globalist ideals, he instructs that the ideal of universal humanity must remain tethered to the particularity of a national ideal, while the poetry of the nation cannot ignore humanity once having been seen in its fullness.

A number of commentators have examined Tocqueville's analysis of poetry and literature; however, the connections to Tocqueville's own instructive endeavor are not always drawn. For example, scholars of literature have discussed Tocqueville's

attention to the literary works and debates of his day. Indeed, Tocqueville "conceived of literature as an inseparable element of a modern society," and even "a key to its civilization." Nevertheless, these discussions often remain confined to the "historical context" in which Tocqueville was writing, and they neither draw out the political significance of poetry nor the consequences of the politicization of the democratic imagination.[14] Others, however, have noted poetry's connection with political phenomena, albeit with different emphasis than my own. Peter Augustine Lawler's study argues that what makes humans distinct—the ground of possibility for human greatness and freedom—is found in the restlessness of the human mind. And for Lawler, Tocqueville's discussion of poetry is a window into the history of idealism, which clarifies the fact that every theory depends upon poetry absent which the human perception of order eventually decays: "All theory has an imaginative component, and imaginative productions depend upon theoretical presuppositions." Lawler's interpretation rests on connecting Tocqueville's thought with that of Rousseau and Pascal "to differentiate Tocqueville's liberalism from that of the philosophers, ancient and modern."[15] Ralph Hancock relatedly argues that for Tocqueville democratic theory "is explained and governed by its poetry," which is a "poetic or idealistic materialism that Tocqueville must defeat in order to save the democratic soul from degradation."[16] Benjamin Storey reads Tocqueville's account of poetry to better grasp American self-understanding as technological. Democratic poetry is a poetry of technology that celebrates going beyond limits that were hitherto believed to be natural and intractable, and in response to the technological imaginary Tocqueville offers a revised or alternate poetry more open to human freedom, dignity, and flourishing.[17] Tracy Strong looks to what Tocqueville says about poetry in order to better appreciate the sentiment of the same, or the psychology of equality, insofar as democratic poetry reflects the self as every other self.[18] Finally, Alan Kahan has considered democratic poetry in relation to religion, and he discusses how it may be a check on the tendency toward materialism in modern democratic societies.[19] However, no analyst has

drawn out Tocqueville's insight regarding the politicization of poetry and the poeticization of politics with respect to the democratic forms of community or community formation, which I elaborate herein[20]—a Tocquevillean insight of even greater salience in our globalist-nationalist moment.

Much of what polarizes individuals and parties today can be traced to opposing visions of the future, especially regarding ideals about the scale on which to organize and order our lives with others. Contemporary cleavages derive from disputes about who belongs to given communities—to what extent and by what criteria—which is to say around questions regarding the political "we."[21] This translates into disagreement over whether people are better off divided between national states or ought to seek some variety of internationalist arrangement.[22] So much is what we now refer to as the globalist-nationalist divide, which is said to be "*the* faultline that has been uncovered at the heart of Western public life [and] is not going away."[23] Debate abounds over concepts like sovereignty and governance, as well as over policies regarding alliances, trade partnerships, and memberships in international organizations.[24] However, partisan differences follow from passions, sentiments, and identities, which is to say technical or rationalist solutions alone will not satisfy the plaints of pride and imaginative longing. After all, to a degree both a nation or national state and humanity or a global state are "imagined communities," as Benedict Anderson's oft-quoted titular phrase has it.[25]

It was Tocqueville's deep insight that as the democratic revolution spread and peoples moved from aristocratic to democratic social conditions what they held as ideal would become increasingly political—that their poetry would itself be shaped by, and in turn shape, political aspirations. Even as sentiments like "individualism" would likely grow, Tocqueville illustrates, the democratic imagination would be drawn to and inspired by alternate visions of communities national and global. Thus, he reminds readers that our political reflections must be attentive to the poetic side of our experience and to our imaginative depictions of community, not least as he anticipates the clash of visions regarding forms of

communities in their differences of scale and scope. This tension between universal and particular political aspirations, or visions of community, is perhaps inherent to political reality.[26] For antiquity well knew struggles between *poleis* and empires, and the medieval world witnessed alternatives as universal church and empire alongside competing kingdoms and fiefdoms.[27] But in the democratic world—in a "world altogether new" (7)—this antinomy takes new shape, which Tocqueville foresaw with great prescience, and which we are now witnessing in full in the contest between globalists and nationalists. Today's debate is clearly not only a matter of whether or how to improve markets and the means of distributing material goods; it is about how we *see* the future and what political form(s) it may take.[28] To better grasp Tocqueville's instructive wisdom on the issue, we must first address what he means by poetry.

Poetry and Its Origins

Among the longest chapters in Volume II of *Democracy in America*, the seventeenth chapter of Part 1 is titled "On Some Sources of Poetry in Democratic Nations." Tocqueville begins by acknowledging that "poetry" can mean many different things. But for him, as mentioned, it is *not* reducible to written verse. Definitions of poetry abound, and many thoughtful individuals have debated its essence. Setting these disputes aside, Tocqueville provides his own pithy yet capacious definition: "the search for and depiction [*peinture*] of the ideal" (458). Poetry does not, he adds, "have for its goal to represent the true, but to adorn it, and to offer a superior image [*image supérieur*] to the mind."

Tocqueville distinguishes among three methods by which poets depict the ideal, or reconfigure the real: by removing what readily appears or is immediately apparent; by adding what is not immediately present, or not presently real; and by combining things that do not ordinarily appear together or are otherwise separated by experience. Poetry, Tocqueville writes, thereby "completes and enlarges nature [*complète, agrandit la nature*]."[29] Without poetry nature appears to man as incomplete; the apparent truth of nature, therefore, is its incompletion. So much is what

makes nature *real*. Consequently, we are led to search for the *ideal*, and the fruit of the poet's activity in subtracting, adding, and reconfiguring things, is nature's reappearance in poetic form.[30] The poetic image is thus *superior* in the double sense that it is greater or grander; it is better or bigger. It may in fact be one or the other, if not sometimes both, and the very ambiguity in the meaning of "superior" hints at the differences between aristocratic and democratic poetry. The former is drawn to depicting the great who are distinguished but few in number: "In aristocratic peoples, there exist a certain number of privileged individuals whose existence is so to speak outside and above the human condition" (459). In contrast, democratic poetry illustrates the many who are not distinguished but are great in number: "In democratic societies where men are all very small and very much alike, each one, while viewing himself, sees all the others at that instant. Poets who live in democratic centuries cannot therefore ever take one man in particular for the subject of their picture" (460).[31] Thus, poets of aristocratic and democratic periods share similar methods even as their sources vary. But this says nothing about poetry's deeper cause.

Toward the chapter's end Tocqueville waxes poetic about *why* poetry is an inescapable part of human life; something of and for man, simply. So much has less to do with our social and political circumstances, our time or period in history, but is a consequence of what he calls "the general and permanent condition of humanity."[32] He writes:

> I have no need to travel through heaven and earth to find a marvelous subject full of contrast, of grandeur and infinite pettiness, of profound obscurities and singular clarity, capable at the same time of giving birth to pity, admiration, contempt, terror. I have only to consider myself. Man comes out of nothing, passes through time, and goes to disappear forever into the bosom of God. You see him only for a moment wandering at the edge of the two abysses where he gets lost.

> If man were completely unaware of himself, he would not be poetic; for what you have no idea about you cannot portray. If he saw himself clearly, his imagination would remain dormant and would have nothing to add to the picture. But man is revealed enough for him to see something of himself, and hidden enough for the rest to disappear into impenetrable shadows, into which he plunges constantly and always in vain, in order finally to understand himself. (462)

The reason for poetry is deeply anthropological, even metaphysical. Tocqueville need only turn to himself and travel interiorly "to find a marvelous subject," and on the basis of this inward exploration he can speak generally about "man." Ultimately, any complete depiction of man must be poetic to some degree, considering he is a being who "comes out of nothing, passes through time, and goes to disappear forever into the bosom of God." It is between these "two abysses" where we "see him"—man *appears* as real between two ideal, or unknown, abysses, from which he comes and to which he goes that only imagination can represent. Because man is *naturally* incomplete, poetry is necessary in the quest for completion. And while this aspiration toward completion may take various forms (insofar as poetry has numerous possible sources), its fulfillment is ultimately impossible, for man sees only "something" of himself, as opposed to everything—what is "revealed" is just enough to show there is much that remains "hidden" in the "impenetrable shadows." Man desires to know, but man also knows he cannot fulfill this desire.[33] The poetic activity of addition, subtraction, and recombination has no final terminus—it cannot paint a *complete* picture; rather, it can "offer" only a portrait—for neither the beginning nor the end of man can be grasped. In the meantime, however, man "gets lost." Poetry can therefore be a guide in helping man find his way—to assist his understanding and self-understanding—while "wandering at the edge of two abysses." Poetry is a consequence of man's in-between position and helps orient him with ideal images, including moral depictions of divinity and suggestions of how to organize, or order, his life in collection with others.

By establishing that poetry is no mere matter of disinterested aesthetics or superfluous beauty but helps to orient the human heart and mind, Tocqueville makes evident its importance to him. And in the democratic age, two guiding images of political import emerge as great contenders, namely, the nation and humanity at large. This is a new development in human history, according to Tocqueville, and once such ideals emerge they cannot but become attractive. As the democratic age is the age of equality, its logic is one of growing similitude and generality: men appear to be ever more alike, and their ideas of likeness become increasingly generalized. Particular delineations and differences or distinctions appear first as remarkably stark and vivid, only to then become increasingly arbitrary. A vision of the world divided into large collections of distinct peoples emerges followed by a view of the world where distinctions slowly fade when particularities are deemed contingent. But as Tocqueville instructs, the challenge remains one of preserving distinctions for the sake of liberty while not losing sight of the concerns of humanity. The image of the nation inspires because of its distinctiveness and depth, as the image of humanity inspires because of its unity and breadth. While the national image captured imaginations in the early centuries of the democratic age, the saliency of the humanitarian image has grown as democracy continues apace. Neither image can be imagined away as each inspires the endeavor of peoples to organize themselves. Let us discuss these competing sources in greater detail.

Sources and Subjects of Democratic Poetry

Tocqueville says his intention is to "inquire whether among the actions, sentiments, and ideas of democratic peoples, some are not encountered that lend themselves to the imagination of the ideal, and that one ought to consider for this reason as natural sources of poetry" (458). His initial concern is not only that equality "diverts men from depiction of the ideal" but that "it diminishes the number of objects to depict" (459). As equality advances, democracy may find itself void of poetry. For in aristocratic nations, "the people themselves often display poetic tastes and their spirits sometimes

soar beyond and above what surrounds them," whereas the democratic imagination "is given over almost exclusively to conceiving the useful and representing the real." The democratic soul finds itself largely unable to take a course other than one dictated by "the love of material enjoyments, the idea of the better, the competition, and the imminent charm of success" (458). One might therefore wonder at the prospects for democratic poetry at all.

Aristocratic snobbery, however, does not lead Tocqueville to prophesy its demise, for as we have seen, there is something fundamental about poetry. While the democratic imagination "is given over almost exclusively to conceiving the useful and representing the real," it remains poetic—it could not be otherwise. Rather than an assessment of poetic quality per se, Tocqueville's examination attends to the changed sources of poetry. Tocqueville's contrasting account of aristocratic and democratic sources of poetry focuses on religion, history, and classes of individuals to illustrate that on all three fronts, whereas the aristocratic imagination finds "a thousand diverse subjects to depict," the democratic imagination finds little (459). Regarding the first subject of religion, the aristocratic mind, situated in a society with stable religious and political institutions, is free of overwhelming intellectual doubt and settles in faith, a particular faith that is "inclined to place intermediary powers between God and man" and is of course "very favorable to poetry." So far as history is concerned, the aristocratic soul is naturally led to contemplate the past, which is likewise "more favorable to poetry" (459). Finally, given the remarkable excesses, or inequalities, that set the different classes apart from one another—through title, great privilege and distinction, or the lack thereof—the imagination operates in this space between the classes.

These traditional sources of poetry fail to inspire the democratic imagination for reasons inherent to the democratic social state. Religious beliefs are in flux, and doubt ultimately "brings the imagination of poets back to earth and confines them to the visible and real world." At most, the space between God and man is collapsed, and attention is brought to bear only on "the sovereign master." Democratic religious poetry is protestant, or expressive of an

unmediated relationship, and so one without "secondary agents." As Tocqueville remarks in a previous chapter on religion, "[N]othing revolts the human mind more in times of equality than the idea of submitting to forms" (421). Regarding history, democrats have "a sort of instinctive distaste for what is old."[34] And last, with classes having passed away, alongside growing contempt for perceived inequalities, social distinctions carry no poetic appeal. Thus, as a sort of summary of the consequences of equality for poetry, Tocqueville writes: "In democratic societies where men are all very small and very much alike, each one, while viewing himself, sees all the others at that instant. Poets who live in democratic centuries can therefore never take one man in particular for the subject of their picture; for an object of mediocre size that is perceived distinctly from all sides will never lend itself to the ideal" (460). To see oneself is at once to see everyone else, for there is nothing to effectually distinguish one individual from another; no distinctive marker for the poet's eye, no gap between classes or individuals with which the imagination may play. The reality of the democratic *individual* is utterly unideal; however, the very fact of wholescale similitude is pregnant with possibilities for a new kind of poetry, which follows from this gaze of one and all. The democratic poet enlarges and completes nature by depicting democratic *collectivities*.

After illustrating how equality "dries up most of the old sources of poetry," Tocqueville then turns to demonstrate "how it uncovers new ones." He traces the trajectory of poetic imaginings from "depopulated Heaven" to "inanimate nature." Turning from beings divine and heroic, democratic poets draw inspiration from nature's majesty in its vast landscapes of mountains and rivers. If a naturalist poetry—one "preeminently descriptive"—seemed the logical conclusion for democratic poetry, Tocqueville suggests this is but "a passing phase." Consistent with democratic materialism, he finds that "in the long term democracy turns the imagination away from all that is external to man to fix it only on man." The outward gaze toward nature turns back upon the gazer, who looks inward—from nature to human nature. So, Tocqueville poignantly adds: "Democratic peoples can amuse themselves well for a moment in considering nature; but

they only become really animated at the sight of themselves."[35] Democratic poetry culminates in self-referential depictions, for "each man . . . turns all his sentiments toward himself alone" (482).

The genuine source of democratic poetry is that of unmediated man—of individual and everyman; of the one and the many or all. Inwardness is followed by aggregation. Turning back upon himself, and drawn toward what is alike, the democratic poet looks first to others—equal individuals—found in the same nation, and then to the members of humanity at large. This connection between the individual and the general, according to the logic of similitude, is one that Tocqueville sees operating in both the democratic heart and the democratic mind.[36] For

> the man who inhabits democratic countries finds near to him only beings who are almost the same; he therefore cannot consider any part whatsoever of the human species without having his thought enlarge and dilate to embrace the sum. All the truths applicable to himself appear to him to apply equally and in the same manner to each of his fellow citizens and to those like him." (412–13)

It is therefore unsurprising that the nation becomes an object of poetic inspiration. When thought is less inclined to rest with particulars but seeks "the sum," democratic poets are moved by the sight of the nation:

> All citizens who compose a democratic society being almost equal and alike, poetry cannot apply itself to any one of them; but the nation offers itself to the brush. The similarity of all individuals that renders each of them separately unsuitable to become the object of poetry permits poets to include all of them in the same image and finally to consider the people itself. Democratic nations perceive more clearly than all others their own shape [*leur propre figure*], and that great shape [*cette grande figure*] lends itself marvelously to the depiction of the ideal. (460)

The similitude of individuals in a democratic society suggests that none quite stand out for the poet in their singularity, but all together—indeed, as *a people*—they come into focus. In fact, clarity about "their own shape" as a nation is all the greater for democratic peoples, and so much is illustrated by the coeval development of democracy and nationalism over the last two centuries.[37] As one scholar writes, "National poetry is part of the most profound, tragic and incomprehensible metamorphosis in the history of civilization, from Sándor Petőfi's idealistic declaration in 1847, 'Liberty and Love,/ these are the two for me'. . . to Stefan George's prophecy of mass slaughter in *The Star of the Covenant* (1913): 'Ten thousand must the holy madness strike.'"[38] The history of nationalist poetry mirrors the poetry of nationalist history, as the nation, like all ambivalent instruments of politics, has been used and abused. For our purposes let us recall Tocqueville's understanding of poetry, which he applies to uncover the ideal peoples hold more broadly—objects of the general imagination at a given moment.[39]

Tocqueville himself holds the nation to be an ideal way of ordering human life and is a vehicle for people's honor, as we shall see. He speaks of "the spirit of the city" and the need "of interesting men in the fate of their native country," which is perhaps best achieved by "mak[ing] them participate in its government" (226).[40] Participation in politics at many levels, whether local, state, or national, is an important way to remedy individualism; a particular attachment, or love of one's own, is therefore something Tocqueville encourages. In this respect, the poets' image of the nation may assist in cultivating this civic spirit. Nevertheless, Tocqueville follows out the very logic that begat the nation as an ideal. Nationalist poetry points beyond itself. The effectual truth of equality is to override any and all differences or distinctions. On this basis, the mind may be led to believe that national borders, cultural differences, regime distinctions, and the like are arbitrary or insignificant and mere accidents of history that can, or should, be supplanted. Moreover, as democratic centuries are constituted by "the extreme mobility of men and their impatient desires make them change place constantly," it follows that "the inhabitants of

different countries mix with each other, see each other, listen to each other, and borrow from each other" (461). One could hardly find a better summary of what we now call globalization, and "the boundary-crossing (and boundary-disrespecting) nature of democratization" is an important part of his overall analysis.[41]

Similitude not only is sensed but is daily experienced, both within and beyond the nation as many erstwhile boundaries of life are blurred. So far as passions go, Tocqueville notes that democratic people "have many . . . but most of their passions end in love of wealth or issue from it," for the importance of money only grows in democratic ages (587). Tocqueville refers to the "perpetual return of the same passion [as] monotonous" and remarks, "Variety is disappearing from within the human species; the same manner of acting, thinking, and feeling is found in all the corners of the world" (588). "This comes," he adds,

> not only from the fact that all peoples deal with each other more and copy each other more faithfully, but from the fact that in each country, men diverge further and further from the particular ideas and sentiments of a caste, a profession, or a family and simultaneously arrive at what depends more nearly on the constitution of man, which is everywhere the same. They thus become alike even though they have not imitated each other. (588)

Homogeneity and similitude are facts of human nature now fully coming to light, no longer mediated by things of the past, like castes, professions, or families, which were really the product of misguided aristocratic fancy to which individuals granted excessive importance that obscured what was otherwise common. Tocqueville goes on, poetically, and it is worth quoting at length:

> They are like travelers dispersed in a great forest in which all the paths end at the same point. If all perceive the central point at once and direct their steps in this direction, they are insensibly brought nearer to one another without

> seeking each other, without perceiving and without knowing each other, and they will finally be surprised to see themselves gathered in the same place. All peoples who take for the object of their studies and imitation, not such and such a man, but man himself, will in the end encounter each other in the same mores, like these travelers at the center. (588)

As ideas become generalized, so too do inquiries grow in generalization, and the imagination is consequently drawn toward increasingly general ideals, almost unintentionally—like wandering travelers who are "surprised" by their common arrival. Diminished is any sensitivity to particularity, at least for those so drawn to consider "man himself." And as Tocqueville notes elsewhere, "there is nothing more unproductive for the human mind than an abstract idea" (590).[42] Nevertheless, as imagination perceives and therefore depicts only similitude, it paints humanity with a broad brush. For "not only do members of the same nation become alike; nations themselves are assimilated, and *in the eye of the spectator* all together form nothing more than a vast democracy of which each citizen is a people. That puts *the shape of the human race* in broad daylight for *the first time*" (461, emphasis added). And as if to illustrate Tocqueville's point, recent politics, philosophy, and jurisprudence have worked at bringing clearer shape to the human race, through elaboration of universal human rights, international laws and norms, and doctrines of humanitarianism.

Humanity and Nation, God and Honor

One cannot help but be struck by Tocqueville's statement that suddenly—for the *first time*—humanity is seen in full light, with its "shape" manifest to the democratic imagination. Slowly, Tocqueville writes, each is more inclined to "rais[e] his eyes above his country, [and] finally begins to perceive humanity itself." This looking outward to perceive the bulk of humanity to which one belongs is a remarkable development. By comparison, Tocqueville says that for aristocratic peoples "each caste has its own opinions, sentiments,

rights, mores, and *separate existence*. Thus the men who compose it do not resemble everyone else; they do not have the same manner of thinking or of feeling, and *they scarcely believe themselves to be a part of the same humanity*" (535, emphasis added). Older distinctions so bred differences that it was possible to believe in multiple humanities. One no longer has to fight such a belief of lying eyes, for these things are no longer seen. And for this, Tocqueville suggests, we can at least in part thank God.

The growing reality of equality and perception of a single humanity carries providential weight, according to Tocqueville, as this emergent shape of humanity—the perception of *humanity itself*—is coterminous with the impression of God's manifestation. While any sense of divinity's hand is vague, in being "disposed to conceive a much vaster idea of divinity itself," democratic peoples "easily conceive that one same design presides over its destiny" (462)—that is, that there is one destiny for all of humanity. After all, social scientists examine the world in terms of "global values" and assess "global opinion" in search of patterns and convergence, whereas historians write in light of "universal history"—indeed, presenting it as an ideal.[43] The happy consequence of this is, as Tocqueville himself suggested in the title of Chapter 1 from Volume II, Part 3, that "mores become milder as conditions are equalized." It is not incidental that humanitarianism should emerge as an ideal of justice when "the shape of the human race" sees the light of day.[44]

It is worth recalling that early in the introduction, Tocqueville refers to the "gradual development of equality of conditions" as "a providential fact," largely as a result of its universality and endurance (6). This fact of providence, however, comes to be perceived by the imagination and depicted as an ideal in a manner that excises or abstracts individuals from the particularities of their lives: "Human destinies, man, taken apart from his time and his country and placed before nature and God with his passions, his doubts, his unheard-of prosperity, and his incomprehensible miseries, will become the principal and almost unique object of poetry for these peoples" (463). The poet's quest for the enlargement and

completion of nature consists in this case of adding the entirety of humanity but subtracting the uniqueness of individuality. While this new extension of sensitivity and compassion through softened mores extending to an increasing number of people is surely desired by God, no single image of a poet can possibly capture the fullness of God's justice or the divine ideal. In other words, even in the move toward reconfiguring the ideal as the whole of humanity, the poet cannot fail to leave something out. Taking not "such and such a man, but man himself," this generalized notion gives the impression of a superior image, but as with all "general ideas . . . they never provide [the human mind] with anything but incomplete notions, and they always make it lose in exactness what they give it in extent" (411).

General ideas, Tocqueville points out, "do not attest to the strength of human intelligence, but rather to its insufficiency, because," ultimately, "there are no beings in nature exactly alike: no identical facts, no rules indiscriminately applicable in the same manner to several objects at once" (411). For all the perception of similitude and the image of humanity gathered as one, even as part of God's plan, it cannot be the plenitude of providence. Consequently, the poetry of humanity does not exhaust divine truth and cannot therefore be an exclusive ideal even for the democratic mind. After all, "God does not ponder the human race in general." He does not have recourse to general ideas. Instead, "[a]t a single glance he sees separately all of the beings of which humanity is composed, and he perceives each of them *with the similarities* that bring [each one] close to all *and the differences* that isolate [each one] from [everyone else]" (411, emphasis added). In the democratic age "the human mind loves to embrace a host of diverse objects at once" and "constantly aspires to be able to link a multitude of consequences to a single cause." The risk is that "one forgets individuals so as to think only of the species" (426). Tocqueville warns that "the idea of unity obsesses [the mind]" and that such unity contains "secret charms for men who live in democracy," but that "all who remain enamored of the genuine greatness of man should unite and do combat against" the overwhelming

tendency to neglect "human individuality" in thinking (426). After all, ultimate or divine truth suggests real distinctions between individuals, and as inspiring as the depiction of humanity may be, it does not satisfy the human desire for self-knowledge. Even enlarged to the greatest extent possible, man remains "covered enough to perceive something of himself and veiled enough so that the rest is sunk in impenetrable darkness," and vain remains the plunge in seeking to grasp himself. Alternative varieties of poetry are therefore necessary.

Having the shape of the human race exposed and depicted as an ideal, there is no denying its imaginative and political import. What is gained in breadth, however, is lost in depth, and there remains no shortage of ambiguity in how best to depict "man." It is anything but self-evident, given both the mystery of man's being and the manifold ways to consider him: as an individual or as a larger group? If as a larger group, then how large? If all of humanity, then only living humanity, or ought past humanity be included? What about future humanity? Why not a continent or region rather than a nation? Why not a neighborhood or a state instead of a nation? Or, why not a nation, after all? This series of questions summarizes but a range of difficulties, which persist at the heart of any endeavor to depict man in ideal form—that is, poetically. The focus on man that so drives the poetry of humanity and the poetry of the nation will continue to manifest as competing alternatives; but in many ways, this is for the better. Nationalists can as much benefit from more poetry of humanity as humanitarians can from more poetry of the nation.

The limited satisfaction that democratic poetry provides means that individuals will still seek to distinguish themselves: "where citizens never differ much from one another and naturally find themselves so close that at each instant all can come to be intermingled in a common mass, a multitude of artificial and arbitrary classifications are created, with the aid of which each seeks to set himself apart, out of fear of being carried away into the crowd despite himself" (578). Tocqueville adds, this "can *never fail to be so*; for one can change human institutions, but not man:

whatever may be the general effort of a society to render citizens equal and alike, *the particular pride of individuals* will always seek to escape the [common] level and wish to form an inequality somewhere from which it profits" (578, emphasis added). If individuals inevitably strive to set themselves apart, then the ideal of humanity carries only a certain amount of weight, for the imagination seeks unity while nonetheless creating new "artificial and arbitrary classifications." Today's situation demonstrates as much in a globalized world replete with humanitarian pursuits that has nonetheless birthed new "artificial and arbitrary classifications" of the kind found in the identity politics of left and right.[45] What is more, the manifestation of pride in the pursuit of profit has led to the continued effort of individuals to distinguish themselves according to industry, wealth, and status, and the new "tech oligarchs" display much of this, as well as do others who have benefited from globalization.[46]

Whatever the mixed news in the present, all this illustrates Tocqueville's point about the manifest ambition to "escape the common level" in one way or another. For Tocqueville himself "doubt[s] that men were more virtuous in aristocratic centuries than in others" (500–501). While democratic peoples are often motivated by self-interest, properly cultivated as a "doctrine" that is "well understood," the pursuit of self-interest may "not produce great devotion" but can suggest "little sacrifices each day." It thereby helps to "form citizens"—that is, citizens of particular nations who are nonetheless open to the common concerns of humanity. Alas, the desire for distinction bears the seeds of a corrective to the individualism that leads many to "willingly abandon society at large to itself" when "the bond of human affections is extended and loosened" (482–83)—when focus is either exclusively on the "species" or the "self," and not mitigated by alternate images in between. Therefore, Tocqueville guides the democratic imagination toward a balance between idealizing what is common and unified to the greatest extent, on the one hand, and the proud urge for distinctiveness and difference, on the other—for both individuals and larger associations. For Tocqueville argues that

while providence "traces a fatal circle around each man that he cannot leave"—this being consistent with the providential fact of the equality of conditions—nevertheless, "within its vast limits man is powerful and free; *so too with peoples*" (676, emphasis added). The ideal of distinction is itself part of God's plan. Tocqueville thereby presents an image of honor that holds humanity and the nation together, not so much as to reconcile them in perfect harmony, which is unlikely, but in a way that better satisfies the desire for "completion" that neither image can independently provide.

In his examination of honor in America, Tocqueville discusses specific loves and virtues that serve to maintain and contribute to the prosperity of "the American association" (595). He writes, "[E]very time men are gathered in a particular society, an honor is immediately established among them, that is to say, a set of their own opinions about what one ought to praise and blame; and these particular rules always have their source in the special habits and special interests of the associations" (593). Democratic individuals derive their sense of distinction in and through the associations to which they belong. As paradoxical as this sounds, one must belong to a particular community in order to distinguish oneself from it: the form or shape of a community provides one with the very sense of honor that so leads one to stand out from, even perhaps apart from, it. And while the sense of honor may be rather "ill-defined" in democratic nations, and therefore "less powerful," it is not absent. For "that vague instinct of the native country . . . never abandons the heart of man" (89). As Tocqueville himself once wrote, "I am convinced that the interests of the human race are better served by giving every man a particular fatherland than by trying to inflame his passions for the whole of humanity."[47] The nation, and therefore the national poetry that supports it, is as important for the individual to find a place of both belonging and distinction as humanity and the poetry of humanity are necessary for the nation to make its own distinctive mark.[48] For each nation is a particular endeavor to manifest universal humanity.

> A nation places itself apart in the human race. It has its particular interests and needs independent of certain general needs inherent in the human species. It immediately establishes within it certain opinions that are its own, in matters of blame and praise, and that its citizens call honor. (598)

The inextricable relationship between "particular interests and needs" of nations and the "general needs inherent in the human species"—that is, the nexus between national and humanitarian ideals—is ever fertile for the poetic imagination. It is up to professional poets and citizens alike to hold both ideals in their minds for the sake of individual and collective honor, which is a necessary ingredient in preserving democratic liberty.[49]

Conclusion

To instruct democracy truly, Tocqueville offers not only an image of democracy but a multitude of images, as well as an examination of the images found in democracy, of life lived in common, so as to help guide individuals "wandering at the edge of the two abysses"—with the aim of assisting them to avoid getting "lost." The images offered must encourage the "particular pride of individuals"; these images or ideals of human communities that can provide form and shape to both act on "the general compassion for all members of the human species" each feels (538), while also providing "escape [from] the [common] level" that saps one's pride. The variety of democratic poetries is therefore something to be encouraged so that poets proliferate portraits of the levels or layers of human collectivities to inspire the democratic imagination and thereby correct the tendencies of individualism and of abstraction. My focus here on the nation and humanity should be supplemented with Tocqueville's well-known appreciation and account of local institutions—indeed, the poetic portrait he paints of the American township and related forms of self-government form part of the broader collection of images to which the democratic imagination ought likewise to turn.[50] As the whole range of communities can

now be imagined, even seen, from the smallest of local gatherings through to the largest collection of humanity on the whole, the imagination must be instructed not to settle in depicting only one, least of all the most abstract one of humanity, even as this image becomes easier to perceive. As a modern Tocquevillean suggests about contemporary America: "We are now a highly diverse and multifarious society defined by its profusion more than its solidity. That means we are fractured and divided, and always pulling ourselves apart. But it also means that we are a layered, varied, and dynamic society that ought to use its sheer multiplicity as an instrument of problem solving."[51] Poetics can be part of this solution by drawing from the natural sources of democratic poetry in providing images of community that ennoble the passions and ideas of the age through appeals to a democratic sense of both honor and compassion.

Tocqueville's political science very consciously attends to the multitude of social or political units and layers or levels of democratic life, addressing in turn the individual, familial, local, state, national, regional, international, and global—providing portraits of each along the way. Ultimately, the love in and of different associations he depicts serves to illustrate and encourage drawing individuals out from themselves toward a fullness found in association with others, which theory, doctrine, or reason fails to do without the help of poetry. So much makes up what might be called Tocquevillean poetics and the restoration of a proper appreciation of poetry's importance in our globalist-nationalist age.

Notes

1. Stanley Rosen, "The Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry," in *The Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry: Studies in Ancient Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 1, 13.
2 Cf. Carnes Lord, *Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982), 17–19; cf. Raymond Barfield, *The Ancient Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
3. Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,

2016), 18. Consider in this light Martha Nussbaum's charge that today, "the emotions and their contribution to public rationality . . . badly need defending." Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 54.

4. Allan Bloom, "Introduction," in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Letter to M. D'Alembert," in *Politics and the Arts*, trans. Allan Bloom (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1960), xxi.
5. Judith N. Shklar, *After Utopia: The Decline of Political Faith* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 45–46.
6. François Furet, "The Intellectual Origins of Tocqueville's Thought," *The Tocqueville Review/La Revue Tocqueville* 7 (1985–1986): 122 (emphasis added).
7. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 274–75. All future references to this work will be to this edition (unless otherwise noted), referenced in the essay parenthetically by page number. I have also consulted Nolla's Critical Edition and the French GF-Flammarion edition.
8. See, e.g., Tocqueville's "Speech Given to the Annual Public Meeting of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences on April 3, 1852," in *Alexis de Tocqueville and the Art of Democratic Statesmanship*, ed. Brian Danoff and L. Joseph Herbert Jr. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 17–30.
9. For Tocqueville's reflections on how the imagination can cast itself both backward into the past and forward into the future, see Tocqueville, *A Fortnight in the Wilderness* (Delray Beach, FL: Levenger Press, 2003), 80–83 et passim.
10. Ewa Atanassow, "Patriotism in Democracy: What We Can Learn from Tocqueville," in *Tocquevillian Ideas: Contemporary European Perspectives*, ed. Zbigniew Rau and Marek Tracz-Tryniecki (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2014), 39–58. James Ceaser similarly argues, "Tocqueville held that political science could not remain aloof or detached, but had to become an active force in history," some of which on his part entailed offering "a truer picture of reality that was intended to help his contemporaries make responsible choices about their future." Ceaser, "Alexis de Tocqueville on Political Science, Political Culture, and the Role of the Intellectual," *American Political Science Review* 79, no. 3 (1985): 656–72. My argument builds on these claims by arguing that attention to poetry helps both to provide "a truer picture of reality" and to advance the objectives of Tocqueville's "active" and "patriotic" political science.

11. Matthew Maguire writes that Tocqueville's "account of human experience decisively favors . . . a sustained and varied effort to variously analyze, inspire, restrain, or call upon the imagination and its assumed powers." Matthew W. Maguire, *The Conversion of Imagination: From Pascal through Rousseau to Tocqueville* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 8.
12. Marginal note in the Nolla edition of *Democracy in America*, 831, 17b.
13. Letter dated April 4, 1832, in *Selected Letters on Politics and Society*, ed. Roger Boesche (Berkley: University of California Press, 1985), 77. The reference is clearly to the famous 1747 materialist work by La Mettrie, *L'homme machine*.
14. Reino Virtanen, "Tocqueville and the Romantics," *Foreign Languages and Literature* 13, no. 2 (Fall 1959): 167–85. Cf. Gisela Schlüter, "Democratic Literature: Tocqueville's Poetological Reflections and Dreams," in *Liberty, Equality, Democracy*, ed. Eduardo Nolla (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 153–64, offers a treatment of Tocqueville's discussion of poetry in the context of literature, using an imagined dialogue between a Tocqueville scholar and a literary scholar, which similarly neglects broader political discussion. Cf. Andre Jardin, *Tocqueville: A Biography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 256ff. Lucien Jaume, *Tocqueville: The Aristocratic Sources of Liberty*, trans., Arthur Goldhammer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 226–47, who situates Tocqueville's discussion in the contemporary debate about literature and society, although Jaume's conclusions have more to do with Tocqueville's own style. Pamela A. Mason, "The Romance of the Inland Isle: Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* and the Landscape of Providence," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 29, no. 3 (2012): 247–66, argues that Tocqueville's poetic account of the American landscape contains powerful romantic impulses, which have contributed to the work's continued appeal and helped shape an imaginary geography to inspire a cultural identity. Cf. James T. Schleifer, *The Making of Tocqueville's* Democracy in America (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2000), 49–81.
15. Peter Augustine Lawler, *The Restless Mind: Alexis de Tocqueville on the Origin and Perpetuation of Human Liberty* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1993), 51, 7.
16. Ralph C. Hancock, "The Uses and Hazards of Christianity in Tocqueville's Attempt to Save Democratic Sous," in *Interpreting Tocqueville's* Democracy in America," ed. Ken Masugi (Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1991), 365–66.

17. Benjamin Storey, "Tocqueville on Technology," *The New Atlantis* (Fall 2013): 48–71.
18. Tracy B. Strong, "Seeing Differently and Seeing Further: Rousseau and Tocqueville," in *Friends and Citizens: Essays in Honor of Wilson Carey McWilliams*, ed. P. D. Bathory and N. L. Schwartz (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001), 97–122; cf. Strong, "Politics and Transparency," in *Liberal Modernism and Democratic Individuality: George Kateb and the Practices of Politics*, ed. Austin Sarat and Dana R. Villa (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 97–111. As Strong illustrates, "what Tocqueville pointed at in his discussion of the poetry of the democratic polity finds its realization in the poetry of Whitman and the writing of Emerson" (ibid., 99).
19. Alan S. Kahan, *Tocqueville, Democracy, and Religion: Checks and Balances for Democratic Souls* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), esp. 94–114. Kahan sees the importance of poetry in democratic society but downplays its importance in Tocqueville's own analysis, writing, "The muses might tempt democracy to higher things, but they remained lesser agents in Tocqueville's moral science" (98).
20. Richard Avramenko builds on Tocqueville's insight that "[t]he bond of language is perhaps the strongest and most lasting that can unite men" (29) to disclose the mutual influence on the order of language and that of society, as well as diagnose and offer some Tocquevillean remedies to the democratic tendency to destabilize language and engage in greater abstractions. Avramenko, "The Grammar of Indifference: Tocqueville and the Language of Democracy," *Political Theory* 45, no. 4 (2017): 495–523.
21. See, Samuel Huntington, *Who Are We: The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), who speaks of the "salience" of the "we" question and the matter of its "substance." Mark Lilla argues that "there can be no liberal politics without a sense of *we*—of what we are as citizens and what we owe each other. . . . There is no long-term future for liberalism without [we]. . . . *We* is where everything begins." Lilla, *The Once and Future Liberal: After Identity Politics* (New York: HarperCollins, 2017), 14, 119–20.
22. Consider Strobe Talbott, *The Great Experiment: The Story of Ancient Empires, Modern States, and the Quest for a Global Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), who argues that "mega-threats can be held at bay in the crucial years immediately ahead only through multilateralism on a scale far beyond anything the world has achieved to date" (395); cf. John Fonte, *Sovereignty or Submission: Will Americans Rule Themselves*

or Be Ruled by Others? (New York: Encounter Books, 2011), who has documented and critiqued "transnational progressives," suggesting their "goal . . . is to turn the United States into a postmodern state whose elites agree to 'pool' or 'share' national sovereignty in order to establish a supranational political authority" (176–77 et passim).

23. Yoram Hazony, *The Virtue of Nationalism* (New York: Basic Books, 2018), 5, 12 (emphasis added). Cf. Rich Lowry, *The Case for Nationalism: How It Made Us Powerful, United, and Free* (New York: Broadside Books, 2019), who see the great clash between nationalists and anti-nationalists as the core divide in American politics. Conservatives like Hazony and Lowry agree with liberals like Jill Lepore and Yael Tamir that the most significant debate in modern liberal democracies today is about the nation. Lepore argues that the disavowal of national history by scholars has allowed "less scrupulous people" and "demagogues" to fill the vacuum; and in suggesting that it's "no use pretending people don't live in nations or that the age of the nation-state is over, or about to end," she suggests that "whether nations can remain liberal actually depends on the recovery of the many ways of understanding what it means to belong to a nation, and even to love a nation, the place, the people, and the idea itself." Lepore, *This America: The Case for the Nation* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2019), 19, 131. Tamir claims it is now "clear that globalization embodies a threat to a wide range of social classes" and "no one [can] be assured of remaining on the winning side of globalism." The greater threat, however, is that "the globalism-nationalism continuum is in the process of being replaced with a new one that stretches between world oligarchy and state patriotism." She thus makes a case for "a new and caring nationalism." Tamir, *Why Nationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 111, 178.
24. For discussion of sovereignty's importance for constitutional government, see, Jeremy A. Rabkin, *Law without Nations?: Why Constitutional Government Requires Sovereign States* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); cf. Stewart Patrick, *The Sovereignty Wars: Reconciling America with the World* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2018). For an argument defending world government based on "political imagination," see, Thomas G. Weiss, "What Happened to the Idea of World Government," *International Studies Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (2009): 253–71.
25. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso Books, 2006).

26. Many observers identify the tensional or conflictual—even tragic—elements of Tocqueville's view of the human condition and the democratic world. As Hayden White writes, "For [Tocqueville], the future held little prospect for the reconciliation of man with man *in society*. The forces at play in history, which make it an arena of irremissible conflict, are not reconcilable, either in society or in the heart of man himself." White, *Metahistory: The Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 193 (emphasis in original). That said, irreconcilability can be fruitful for Tocqueville insofar as some tensions help to preserve liberty so long as they are properly mediated. As White notes, Tocqueville's self-understanding is that of "a mediator" (195).
27. See, Pierre Manent, *Metamorphosis of the City: On the Western Dynamic*, trans. Marc LePain (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).
28. Invocations of imagination and vision among observers is common enough. Former Canadian prime minister Stephen Harper, e.g., writes to provide "a positive *vision* for reformed democratic capitalism, with renewed working-class opportunity and greater community cohesion" (emphasis added), in *Right Here, Right Now: Politics and Leadership in the Age of Disruption* (Toronto: McClellan & Stewart, 2018), 7. William A. Galston, *Antipluralism: The Populist Threat to Liberal Democracy* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018) writes, "[T]he tension between politics and markets calls for the most *creativity*" and "requires a thorough reexamination of long-held beliefs along with an *expanded social imagination*" (136, emphasis added); cf. Ian Bremmer, *Us vs. Them: The Failure of Globalism* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018), concludes by saying that among the strategies of building walls and rewriting social contracts in an us-versus-them world, "survival requires that we *invent* new ways to live together" (167, emphasis added).
29. It is difficult not to think here of Socrates's enlarging of the soul into the city to poetically depict justice, which of course he does with qualifications, and he even doubts this "method" will "ever grasp the matter precisely." *Republic*, 368c–e, 434d–e, 435c–e; cf. 443c–e.
30. One might suggest that poetry presents nature as spiritualized or as "super-nature." Clearly, for Tocqueville poetry and religion have a connection, as the chapter bears out, which was not uncommon for romantic thinkers like Chateaubriand who influenced Tocqueville in this regard. See Kahan, *Tocqueville, Democracy, and Religion*, 45, 95–98; cf. Joshua Mitchell, *The Fragility of Freedom: Tocqueville on*

Religion, Democracy, and the American Future (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 88–89, 162–214. My focus is on democratic poetry's *political* turn; this does not preclude Tocqueville's well-known encouragement of religion for instructing democracy, which cannot be elaborated herein.

31. Tocqueville distinguished between a "poetry [that] aims for the gigantesque rather than for grandeur" in a discarded note. "Rubbish of These Chapters," *Rubish*, 1, Nolla edition, 837, note o.
32. "Speech Given to the Annual Public Meeting of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences," 18.
33. In II.1.5, "How, in the United States, Religion Knows How to Make Use of Democratic Instincts," Tocqueville likewise underlines the limitations of the human mind and the difficulties men have in arriving at ideas of God, which turns out to be among the most important ideas in shaping man's "relations with the human race, of the nature of their souls, and of their duties toward those like them." This is no less true for philosophers, who "are almost always surrounded by uncertainties" (417).
34. So much is consistent with what Tocqueville writes about democratic historians, who are less interested in the details of the past than they are in constructing "systems" that demonstrate "a sort of blind fatality." Democratic historians are more theorists who "take pleasure in making one see that [history] could not have happened otherwise" than they are historians who seek to represent and narrate the past (471–72).
35. One could hardly find a better shorthand explanation for the great success of social media platforms and sites like YouTube that offer individuals an outlet for self-presentation and -observation, to say nothing of Facebook, SnapChat, Instagram, and so on.
36. Consider Tocqueville's discussion of "general ideas" (411–16), which is an epistemological phenomenon not unrelated to poetry, but just as influenced by the social state of equality, whereby the inclination toward generalization only grows.
37. See, e.g., Ghia Nodia, "Nationalism and Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 3, no. 4 (1992): 3–22.
38. David Aberbach, "The Poetry of Nationalism," *Nations and Nationalism* 9, no. 2 (2003): 255–75.
39. Tocqueville is surprisingly silent on music in *Democracy in America*, which John von Heyking pointed out to me. The connection between nationalism and music has been much explored. See, e.g., Benjamin Curtis, *Music Makes the Nation: Nationalist Composers and Nation Building in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Amherst, MA: Cambria Press,

2008), and, Matthew Riley and Anthony D. Smith, *Nation and Classical Music: From Handel to Copland* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK: Boydell Press, 2018). Jardin remarks, "[I]t would be a mistake to conclude . . . that Tocqueville did not care for music," even if he did not elaborate its political import. Jardin, *Tocqueville,* 257.

40. As Atanassow illustrates, Tocqueville's analysis of America reveals "a virtuous circle: love of country elevates the citizens' self-esteem thereby facilitating effective civic action. This in turn helps sustain the people's commitment to the institutional arrangement and their view of themselves as being in charge. A vital element of civic virtue, the Americans' prideful love for their country is instrumental in sustaining the democratic order." Atanassow, "Patriotism in Democracy," 56. Cf. Françoise Mélonio, "Nations et Nationalisme," *La Revue Tocqueville/The Tocqueville Review* 26, no. 1 (2005): 337–56, and Mélonio, "L'idée de Nation et Idée de Démocratie Chez Tocqueville." *Littérature et Nation* 7 (1991): 5–24; Stéphane Dion, "La Conciliation du Libéralisme et du Nationalisme chez Tocuqeville," *La Revue Tocqueville/The Tocqueville Review* 16, no. 1 (1995): 219–27.
41. Susan McWilliams, "Tocqueville and the Unsettled Global Village," in *Tocqueville and the Frontiers of Democracy*, ed. Ewa Atanassow and Richard Boyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 157.
42. In *The Old Regime and the Revolution*, trans. Alan Kahan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Tocqueville criticizes "abstract and literary politics," which is driven by a "single idea," namely, to think it best to replace "the complicated and traditional customs which ruled society" with "basic and simple principles" (195–96). This singularity and simplicity of vision is very much an example of misguided poetics; of imagination not properly instructed as Tocqueville proposes.
43. The "World Values Survey" (WVS) exemplifies this emphasis on global opinion, available at http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org. Bruce Mazlish represents the trend among scholars who analyze "global history" with an effort toward the "construction of Humanity." Mazlish, *The Idea of Humanity in a Global Era* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 28–29.
44. In II.3.1 Tocqueville writes that "our sensitivity bears on more objects." With the equalizing of ranks and the homogeneity of thoughts and sentiments, "each [man] can judge the sensations of all the others in a moment: he casts a rapid glance at himself; that is enough for him. . . . It makes no difference whether it is a question of strangers or enemies: imagination immediately puts him in their place. . . . In democratic centuries, men rarely devote themselves to one another; but they show a general compassion for all members of the human species" (538).

45. See, Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: The Demand for Dignity and the Politics of Resentment* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018). For Fukuyama, the "remedy" to the identity politics challenge is "to define larger and more integrative national identities that take account of the de facto diversity of existing liberal democratic societies" (122–23).
46. See, Joel Kotkin, *The New Class Conflict* (New York: Telos Press, 2014).
47. Tocqueville, *The European Revolution and Correspondence with Gobineau*, 170, quoted in Roger Boesche, *The Strange Liberalism of Alexis de Tocqueville* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 215.
48. "[J]ust as individuals distinguish themselves by a code of honor, so do nations," for Tocqueville. Boesche, *Strange Liberalism*, 217.
49. The degree to which the nation provides honor to individuals and groups is common in the literature. See, e.g., Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York: MacMillan, 1944), 27; cf. Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: A Short History* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2019), who writes, "The appeal of national consciousness lies in the dignity with which it endows the personal identity of every one of its carriers" (133).
50. See, Ralph C. Hancock, "Tocqueville on the Good of American Federalism" *Publius* 20, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 89–108. Hancock writes, "The value of vigorous local institutions is of course one of the most consistent themes of Tocqueville's appreciation of democracy in America" (96).
51. Yuval Levin, *The Fractured Republic: Renewing America's Social Contract in the Age of Individualism* (New York: Basic Books, 2016), 186.