

## Utopian Horizons in Hungary

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**Czigányik, Zsolt, ed. *Utopian Horizons: Ideology, Politics, Literature*. Budapest, New York: Central European UP, 2017. viii + 256 pages. ISBN 978-963-386-181-3. Hb. Npr.**

This book is the outcome of a workshop on utopia and ideology organized in Budapest under the auspices of the Central European University's Institute for Advanced Study in cooperation with the Humanities Initiative in 2014. As the editor states in his Introduction it can also be regarded as a late contribution to the 2016 quincentenary of the publication of Thomas More's classic *Utopia* (1).

As is often the case with such workshop or conference volumes, it combines articles specifically produced within the context of utopian studies and referencing classic works in the field with others in which the notion of utopia, or indeed a pre-scientific, if not popular, understanding of the term, is little more than incidental for work produced in other contexts, with the latter not always engaging in any meaningful way with utopian scholarship. The editor's attempt at trying to pull together the disparate contributions, in this case both in an Introduction and an Afterword, often results in rather general statements about the value of utopian thinking for society in general. All editors, including the present reviewer, have struggled with this intractable problem. The articles here are classified into the two main sections of the book entitled "utopia with a political focus" and "utopia with a literary focus." The Introduction and Afterword apart, the eleven contributions fall into three groups which will be discussed separately here.

Three articles by established utopian scholars, Lyman Tower Sargent, Gregory Claeys, and Fátima Viera, all of them for many years active in the two major utopian studies organizations in Europe and the US, tackle key issues in utopian studies. The three had already come together in the *Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (2010), edited by Claeys. The main purpose of the three articles is to bring contemporary utopian scholarship to new audiences, in this case in Central Europe. This would explain the frequent references to Stalinism, Eastern Europe, Hungary, or the fall of the Berlin Wall in all of them and the recurring theme of utopianism's relationship with totalitarianism.

Sargent revisits Karl Mannheim's classic *Ideology and Utopia* (1936) and compares it to Paul Ricoeur's work on the same dichotomy; both recognize the dialectical relationship between the two concepts: "There is a utopia at the

heart of every ideology, and belief can turn a utopia into an ideology” (33). While Mannheim, based on personal experience of Nazi exile, argues that we “might be better off without ideologies,” Ricoeur “always maintained that ideologies had positive functions” (33). In his concluding section, Sargent highlights the existence of right-wing utopianism and the totalitarianism inherent in much of utopian literature. This is a theme Gregory Claeys, describing himself as a “skeptical ally of utopia” (41), develops further. His article contains a particularly useful list of thirteen distinct, if overlapping, types of utopias (45-47). The author assigns a totalitarian quality to dystopias: “If utopias build walls to keep others out, dystopias build them to keep their members in” (47). This may be too bold a statement, as one person’s utopia may be another’s dystopia (see also Tom Moylan’s more nuanced view of dystopias in *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* [Westview Press, 2000]). Ernst Bloch had distinguished between utopias of order and utopias of freedom but the engagement with Bloch is generally somewhat underdeveloped in the whole book. Neither would everyone follow Claeys’s assertion that “communism, with its messiahs, promise of earthly salvation, ‘revelation’ of sacred texts, and ceremonies of worship” is nothing but a “political religion” (56), its strong element of millenarianism making it “perhaps . . . [the] most dangerous yet compelling incarnation” of utopianism. (57) This may go down well in the former Eastern Bloc countries, but “communism” is hardly one monolithic concept (Rosa Luxemburg, Stalin, and Dubček did not exactly inhabit the same ideological space), and the equation of communism with Stalinism may not be less simplistic than Claeys accuses “those friendly to utopia” (419) like Ruth Levitas to be. Fátima Vieira’s contribution on political utopia introduces us to some little-known Latin American and Portuguese contributors to worldwide utopian scholarship, broadening our perspective beyond the Anglophone world.

This widening of the debate is also the very welcome contribution the second group of articles makes, arguably the most interesting and exciting in the book: they deal with utopianism in Eastern Europe. András Bozóki and Miklós Sükösd discuss “Third Way Utopianism: Anarcho-Democratic and Liberal Socialist Ideas in Central Europe” of the early decades of the twentieth century. In Dmitry Halavach’s work on the Orwell reception in the Soviet Union, the reader less familiar with “Soviet subjectivity literature” would have liked a few more chronological signposts to guide him/her through this lesser-known field and locate it in both Soviet political and intellectual history. Ákos Farkas writes knowledgeably on the reception of a 1936 pamphlet by Aldous Huxley in Hungary. The most fascinating study for utopian scholars is the editor’s own work on a Hungarian utopian classic, Sándor Szathmári’s

*Kazobinia*, first published in 1941, a sequel to Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (162). Opening up these relatively unknown chapters of utopian writing is what we would like to see more of; it makes us look forward to the monograph on Hungarian utopianism Czigányik is currently preparing.

The other articles of the third group are by Hungarian English and American Studies scholars; English Studies tends to dominate continental books in utopian studies in English. This is no judgment on their quality as the examples here are well-researched and succinctly argued studies in their own right. Eglantina Rempert explores the relationship between William Morris and the two Irish dramatists W. B. Yeats and George Bernard Shaw between 1884 and 1904, while Károly Pintér explores civil religion in H. G. Wells. Vera Benczik discusses cinematic representations of post-9/11 New York in *I am Legend* (dir. Francis Lawrence, 2007) and *Cloverfield* (dir. Matt Reeves, 2008), both "monuments to the pleasure of destruction and memorials to the catastrophe of 9/11" (217) while Zoltán Gábor Szűcs contributes a utopian reading of George R. R. Martin's fantasy book series *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996-).

In his Afterword, Czigányik states that "utopia became suspicious in the second half of the twentieth century" (241), a problematic generalization which ignores the revival of utopian dynamism, whether it used the term or not, in the context of the 1968 student rebellion in the West, including the productive reception of Ernst Bloch's "konkrete Utopie" in West Germany or the rise of the literary "critical utopia" in Anglo-American literature in particular. The rise and fall, the successive booms and busts, of the utopian "education of desire," as Ruth Levitas has termed it, is what is most fascinating about this period, as it is about the one we live in now, most recently evidenced by a resurgence of utopian reflections on the "future of Europe" in an EU context. The complete silence on these developments in *Utopian Horizons*, one surmises, also reflects the current political and intellectual climate in Hungary.

The editor also makes the case for bringing literature into the social sciences. In the case of utopian scholarship, this is hardly a novel idea, in fact from a German perspective it is a return to its roots: the first serious study of literary utopianism was actually that of the Tübingen professor of political science Robert von Mohl, who coined the German term for the genre of utopian novels, *Staatsroman*, in his seminal study of 1845. This highlights that much could be gained in Central Europe from a more active reception of continental European utopian traditions and scholarship, until 1914 mediated via the Habsburg Empire, which are much closer to hand than the UK and the US and possibly more influential in Hungary than Huxley and Orwell.

That the works of the anarchist Jenő Henrik Schmitt, the key figure in Bozóki and Sükösd's study, were written in German, appeared in Leipzig, and are evidently part of a German intellectual context is hardly a coincidence. Perhaps the most striking silence in the book is its lack of engagement with fellow Hungarian György Lukács, who had a profound influence on aesthetic theory in the post-student rebellion era in Western Europe, if only to explore his ambivalent, and often critical, attitude towards utopianism. Bloch's reading of Lukács in *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (published in three volumes in 1954, 1955, and 1959) deserves reflection. Is it possible that the rather short shrift Claeys gives to the intellectual products of the communist era has impacted on the work of younger Eastern and Central European utopian scholars?

In his Afterword, Czigányik highlights the unquestionable need for interdisciplinarity in utopian studies. It is the inevitable outcome of such collections that their contributions stand relatively unrelated next to each other and the attempt to bring them into some sort of collective endeavor has something contrived about it; they are thus the outcome of a multi- rather than inter-disciplinary understanding of scholarship. This approach stands in stark contrast to some truly interdisciplinary work of collectives in volumes produced in pre-1989 Eastern Europe; many literary classics emanating from the erstwhile German Democratic Republic are testimony to the value of an approach that deliberately transcends the individual and individualist scholarship to which world-wide academia has happily returned after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Perhaps this collective interdisciplinarity is the kind of work future utopian studies might consider to undertake.

These, however, are extraneous reflections beyond the scope of this book. They are not to take away from its achievements, which is to continue the productive dialogue between post-1989 Eastern Europe and world utopian scholarship. The book is handsomely produced and, bar very few minor misprints, excellently edited; it is accompanied by a useful and comprehensive Index. In his concluding remarks, the editor expresses his hope that the book may ultimately lead its readers "to maintaining the possibility of human civilization in the next five hundred years" (247). This can be read as an encouraging sign that news on the "principle of hope's" demise, as Mark Twain's at the time, is wildly exaggerated; it also makes the reader wonder whether the unbounded utopianism at work in some of the texts discussed in this collection, their enjoyable disregard of a sense of proportion and self-limitation, may have rubbed off on Zsolt Czigányik's judgment and scholarship. No harm in that.

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