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### Introduction

As elsewhere in the Western world, Czech science fiction began to expand in the prewar and interwar eras through works that featured interplanetary journeys, fantastic technological inventions and time travel. Although the genre was referred to as “utopian literature”, only a small fraction was dedicated to imagining better worlds. The utopian impulse may be felt for example in the work of Svatopluk Čech, who started his writing career at the close of Alexander von Bach’s absolutism and whose works, “dedicated to the future of the Czech nation and the liberation of the poorest classes” (Adamovič, 2010b: 11),<sup>1</sup> gained popularity with the reading public. In Čech’s *Sketches from the Year 2070 (Náčrtky z r. 2070, 1870)*, the protagonist wakes up in twenty-first-century Prague to learn that winged humans graciously fly over an industrialized albeit polluted city, and that women speak Czech (not German), although they are too emancipated for his taste. While *Sketches* contains both utopian and dystopian features, Čech’s later publication, *Songs of the Slave (Písňe otroka, 1895)*, includes “an idyllic vision about a land of equality, freedom and brotherhood” (Adamovič, 2010b: 11).

Only in the interwar period, however, did Czech science fiction flourish and an unprecedented number of writers turn to speculative literature. As the poet and critic A. M. Píša observed in his essay titled “The Utopian Wave” (1927), the uncertainties and tensions of the age – industrial and technological growth, the horrors of war, and rises and crises of the socialist movement – filled both drama and prose with utopian themes (Píša, 1927: 142). Píša’s definition of “utopia” nevertheless continued to signify all science fiction; thus he

concluded that “the more remarkable characteristic of contemporary utopian fiction is its pessimism regarding civilization” (Přša, 1927: 146). The critic’s own examples included the well-known work of Karel Čapek, which is critical of dehumanizing rationalism, materialism and the fanatical thirst for power, and the less-known work of Emil Vachek, namely *The Master of the World* (*Pán světa*, 1925), which reflects contemporary fears of dictatorship. He might also have added Jiří Haussmann’s satirical story “A Trip” (“Výlet”, 1921). Living in an imaginary Czechoslovak Soviet Republic, housed in the Central Building of Lyrical Poets, the protagonist – who is named “No. 28 594, series H, category IV” – is forced to write a celebratory poem about the Prime Minister. When he fails to finish on time, the last word of the poem, “oslavenec”, turns into “osla” (the Czech for an “ass”), and the “honoree” is less than honored. Fortunately the poet is allowed to recite the entire poem on death row and the forced sound of his verses annihilates his opponents. Haussmann’s story expresses similar anxieties as Zamyatin’s *We*, which was completed around the same time but was banned in Russia (in Czech, it was published in 1927).<sup>2</sup>

In spite of this overwhelmingly dystopian climate, utopias (i.e. “eutopias”) appeared. Jakub Machek, in his recent overview of interwar Czech utopian fiction, included as many as thirty-eight texts.<sup>3</sup> Some of them emerged in dialogue with their foreign counterparts. As Bohuslav Mánek pointed out, translations in general “provided information about trends in foreign literatures and also filled the gaps in the range of genres available in the Czech territories; indeed, new translations occasionally acted as inspirations for original Czech works” (Mánek, 2005: 165). Yet the old idea of translators as traitors has relevance here. In addition to inevitable untranslatabilities that arise during any translation process, Czech translations of utopias were at times intentionally unfaithful; moreover, they were usually framed by interpretative prefaces and afterwords which affected the meaning of the original. This trend, as the following pages illustrate, continued throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century.

### **Prewar and Interwar Years**

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, a number of foreign utopias were translated into Czech. Edward Bellamy’s *Looking Backward 2000-1887* and *Equality*, Alexander Bogdanov’s *Red Star: The First Bolshevik Utopia*, and William Morris’s *News*

*from Nowhere* all appeared before World War I. Thomas More's *Utopia* was translated twice at the beginning of the century, and other works followed in the 1920s and 1930s. Translations of foreign utopias were often framed by blurbs that related these utopias to revolutionary events in Russia. When Morris's *News from Nowhere* was published in 1926, for example, the author of the introduction, František Sedláček, positioned Morris's utopia against capitalism and Soviet socialism. According to the Czech translator and critic, Morris believed in communism yet he "never loved extremists and revolutionaries" (Sedláček, 1926: 11) and "although he longed for a revolution that would bring justice to everybody, it was not a revolution of blood and fire" (Sedláček, 1926: 12). Thus disregarding the chapter "How the Change Came", which portrays a violent revolution necessary for the emergence of Morris's utopia, Sedláček emphasized the Englishman's disbelief in "political and economic materialism of Marxism" (Sedláček, 1926: 12). This Czech pragmatist, rationalist and pacifist view avoided violent action and emphasized Morris's value of non-alienated work; his utopia appeared to stimulate hope but not "Soviet-style" revolution.

The story of H. G. Wells in the Czech lands also began in these decades. Bohuslav Mánek's wrote that

[i]n the first half of the twentieth century, Wells (...) was one of the most widely translated and discussed living English writers (...). Of particular interest and influence were Wells's beliefs in evolution, progress and socialism, his projects of rational social organization and, later, his worries about the future of civilization and his warnings against war and the potential abuse of science. He was also a man of public affairs and so it is no surprise that his reception was connected with the political development of the country. (Mánek, 2005: 165)

As Mánek highlighted, the Czech audience was intrigued by Wells, and not merely by the fantastic side of his science-fictional writing. In 1921, *Russia in the Shadows* was translated, and during the following year both *A Modern Utopia* and sections from *An Englishman Looks at the World* appeared. How suitable Wells's type of utopianism could be for the Czechs, however, remained a subject of dispute. Several members of the Prague Linguistic Circle – among them Vilém Mathesius, Otakar Vočadlo and Zdeněk Vančura – devoted themselves to the Englishman's work and their reactions were largely appreciative. In the introduction to *A Modern Utopia*, for example, Otakar Vočadlo (as Mánek also noted) largely praised Wells's pragmatic, thorough and efficient vision, although he also admitted that perhaps it did not please the "Slavic heart" (Vočadlo, 1922: 7). Vančura, too, approved

of Wells's collectivism, humanitarianism and social dedication while nevertheless rejecting the English writer's anthropocentrism and Darwinist evolutionarism.

The impact of translated utopias in general, and of Wells's work in particular, was strong during this period also in the field of "original" Czech fiction. Mánek has gone as far as to argue that "Wells's 'social fables' have substantially (...) underpinned" the development of Czech science fiction, which did not present merely "playful or thrilling fantasy" but rather focused on "the social consequences of scientific and technological advance, particularly on their moral and psychological aspects" (Mánek, 2005: 166). Karel Čapek's admiration of Wells, for example, has been documented. A less-known author, Ervín Neuman, wrote a novel that shares many features with Wells's work (as Machek also noted). In the first chapter of Neuman's *With a Fist of Steel* (*Ocelovou Pěstí*, 1930), for example, the protagonist highlights the dynamic and unfinished nature of his vision: "I don't believe and I don't want to believe that any future social organization could be definitive. Nothing is permanent and stable in the order of nature" (Neuman, 1930: 8-9). The protagonist visits the future utopian society of the United States of the World and laments (somewhat like Wells in *Men like Gods*) that his generation had betrayed socialist ideals as "the workers' state has not proven to realize the dreams of those who long for true justice for everybody" (Neuman, 1930: 18). However, the world fortunately changed as a result of massive decolonization struggles. Internationalist in character, Neuman's utopia depicts nations and races living in harmony, although the bias towards Western values and the white race is strong, just as in *A Modern Utopia*. Neuman's belief in a healthy and pure body even allows for the killing of unhealthy infants and expelling unsuitable adults from his ideal world of nudity and metal to the Island of the Sick – somewhat reminiscent of Wells's Island of Incurable Cheats.<sup>4</sup>

### **Postwar Ups and Downs**

The year 1948 introduced significant changes in the Czech publishing industry, which was until 1989 nationalized, centrally-controlled and marked by censorship. As Pavel Janáček documented, science fiction was included among suspicious popular genres, along with adventure stories and detective fiction. Yet, just as in the Soviet Union, with the fall of Stalin and the rise of Sputnik, science fiction was published again, and in the 1960s, it

included dystopian and satirical visions, “bad things” happening to “bad Others”. Thus, for example, there were fears of nuclear annihilation, but in socialist societies catastrophes did not happen and atomic energy was used responsibly to positive, exploratory ends.

Regarding translations of utopias, initially only classic works appeared for the most part. Between 1949 and 1953, the government published More’s *Utopia* (1950), Francis Bacon’s *New Atlantis* (1952), Tommaso Campanella’s *The City of the Sun* (1951), Etienne Cabet’s *Voyage to Icarie* (1950), Bernard Bolzano’s *On the Best State* (1949 and 1952), and at least four editions of *Iron Heel* (1949, 1951, 1953 twice – in Czech and in Slovak). (And that is in addition to at least three editions that came out in the early 1920s. Jack London remained a favorite of the regime: *White Fang*, for instance, was published at least 19 times between 1948 and 1989, and there were at least three further editions of *Iron Heel*.)

Selected ideals from classic utopias met with approval – but they were considered either as already having been realized by the socialist government, or nearly so. Bolzano’s text, for example, included a preface by the philosopher Ludvík Svoboda, who mentioned Bolzano’s criticism of private property and inequality of the sexes, the struggle with his persecutors, and even his mathematical abilities that apparently almost reached the height of the Russian genius Lobachevsky (Svoboda, 1949: 15). Svoboda however also noted that Bolzano was still unaware of the methods of historical materialism that now allow these utopias to become reality. Campanella’s *The City of the Sun* was also considered an important predecessor for the contemporary socialist regime. When the text was translated in 1934, it was introduced as an interesting oddity that was over-reliant on irrationalism, superstition and an “excessive belief in a natural and unconstrained human being” (Ryšánek, 1934: 106). The 1951 Czech translation of Campanella’s text, which was translated from the Russian version, was introduced by a blurb titled “Campanella’s Communist Utopia”. Its author, the Soviet critic V. P. Volgin, praised *The City of the Sun* for “the dissemination of communist ideas” (Volgin, 1951: 7) such as “abolishing private property, introducing the obligation to work, which is considered honorable, social organization of production and distribution, [and] productive education of the citizens” (Volgin, 1951: 8). The introduction did not mention, for example, the dubious reproductive practices of Campanella’s utopians (their meticulous pairing of suitable bodies and natures; their reliance on astrology), although those parts were not left out, as they were for decades in the English translation.

Finally the vision of the “forefather of English materialism” (No author, 1953: 8), Bacon – whose emphasis on miracles and religiosity in *New Atlantis* was interpreted by his Czech critics as a tactical manoeuvre – was apparently worth reading in order to confirm that scientific socialism had already dominated nature in the manner that Bacon thought desirable. These classical utopias of Campanella, Bolzano and Bacon thus lost their critical potential for the present as they merely confirmed the achievements of the dominant ideology. In other words, utopia had arrived.

Only in the more relaxed climate of the 1960s could certain dystopias be published. Fragments of contemporary Anglo-American science fiction found their way into Czech; some through children’s and young adult magazines such as *ABC* and *Pionýr*, others in book form. Examples include selected texts of Frederik Pohl and Cyril M. Kornbluth, William S. Burroughs, Arthur C. Clarke, and Ray Bradbury. *Fahrenheit 451* was published as early as 1957, but it was interpreted as a critique of capitalism. Then, two years after the arrival of Soviet tanks in Czechoslovakia in 1968, Huxley’s *Brave New World* appeared in translation. The introduction curiously interpreted Huxley’s world as a near-utopia rather than a dystopia. Despite admitting that there were negative sides to technological progress, the author of the preface, Miroslav Holub, viewed the modern growth of civilization in overwhelmingly optimistic terms. “To a non-sentimental reader”, Holub concluded,

some principles [of *Brave New World*] do not seem condemnable. Let us admit that only Christian tradition and dogma, rather than scientific reason, object to the production of human beings in test-tubes. Let us admit that we already condition the psyche, habits and human motivation as such, although we do not yet do so as scientifically and effectively as we should. The principle is not objectionable – it is merely the aim that a particular social formation sets up for itself. (Holub, 1970: 190)

By implication, “we” have proudly made even *Brave New World* a reality. The attempt to reintroduce Zamyatin to the Czech public, however, was less successful. In 1969, the novel was prepared and prefaced by Miroslav Drozda, who characterized Zamyatin as skeptical and biased, but who also drew parallels with the present: “Zamyatin’s attack on conformism is directed equally against today’s petit-bourgeoisie from the USA as against the petit-bourgeoisie from Czechoslovakia” (Drozda, 1969: 21). *We* made it to the printing-works but the books were afterwards pulped.

Wells's fate during the first two decades of "real socialism" was equally fascinating. A few editions of the Englishman's debate with Stalin were published, and in 1960, *Russia in the Shadows* was reprinted, but accompanied by Lenin's notes and criticism. As Mánek also pointed out, Wells was praised as a critic of capitalism and condemned for his failure to recognize the power of Marxism. An effort was also made to turn Wells into a Marxist, as in the 1964 translation of *Men like Gods*, which described Wells as a poverty-stricken boy who became a Marxist at the age of fourteen. The novel, written after Wells's disillusioning visit of the Soviet Union and critical of Marxism, was interpreted as his inaccurate yet short-lived estimation of the Soviet Union's potentials. Eventually, the author of the introduction, Libuše Bubeníková, concluded, Wells changed his opinion after he visited the Soviet Union again and shortly before his death, when he landed on the correct shore and voted for the British Communist Party (Bubeníková, 1964: 257). Moreover, the translation of *Men like Gods* was produced in this spirit. Towards the end of the novel, when Mr. Barnstaple criticizes the Marxists and the Bolsheviks for having pushed Utopia further away from us rather than the opposite, the Czech translation is loose. A sentence which in the original claims that in Russia socialism was marked by "its ability to overthrow and its inability to plan or build" (Wells, 1922: 227-8) is translated into Czech as: in Russia socialism "was able to overthrow the old order, but in 1921 it still could not plan or build" (Wells, 1964: 239). Elsewhere the original has: "[t]he Marxist had wasted the forces of revolution for fifty years; he had had no vision; he had had only a condemnation for established things" (Wells, 1922: 228); and in the Czech translation: "Marxists had absorbed revolutionary forces of the past fifty years; they had no vision; in 1921, they temporarily merely condemned the established order of things" (Wells, 1964: 240). "Bolshevik failure" (Wells, 1922: 228) is translated as "Bolshevik difficulties" (Wells, 1964: 239), and "the dreary spectacle of a proletarian dictatorship" (Wells, 1922: 228) changes into "strict manifestations of the dictatorship of the proletariat" (Wells, 1964: 240).

Wells maintained an influential position in post-war Czech science fiction; Mánek noted references to his work for example in Josef Nesvadba's *The Second Island of Dr. Moreau* (*Druhý ostrov doktora Moreau*, 1964). Nevertheless, two major Czech utopias published in the 1950s, Vladimír Babula's *Signals from the Cosmos* (*Signály z vesmíru*, 1955) and František Běhounek's *Action L* (*Akce L*, 1956), extend predominantly the

Vernean tradition of science fiction. Both critique the present and both depict far futures in which technological and scientific miracles enable humans to live in harmony and to further explore (and colonize) their own planet as well as the cosmos. In *Action L*, humans live united as a result of technological improvements. They speak two languages (their native language and the world language liu), work for 20 hours a week (or more if they want to) and live to 150 years. In order to nourish their growing population, the inhabitants of Běhounek's future control the weather, melt the icecap, dry up the ocean, and raise dinosaurs as cattle. There are hierarchies, gender divisions, minor frictions and tragic accidents, but the society is fundamentally cooperative. Babula's *Signals from the Cosmos* likewise imagines a future utopian world which is unified, clean, fertile and dominated by inventions such as wheat with six spikes. The visitor Severson comes to this utopia from the past – yet not from the present made into the past by the future utopian vision, but rather from the 1920s. The achievements of Babula's utopian world are thus contrasted with the dystopian 1920s, ravaged by the war, disease and social injustice, and any critique or even a simple depiction of the real present is missing. Unlike Běhounek, Babula considered individuals who thirst for power, private property and racial domination, but they are defeated. Finally, while both Běhounek and Babula wrote texts comparable with Ivan Yefremov's *Andromeda* (which was translated into Czech in 1950, four years after its publication), a somewhat different work from this period is Jan Weiss's *The Land of Our Grandsons* (*Země vnuků*, 1960), which consists of several sketches that depict the transformation of an individual. The protagonist, as the author himself wrote, is “the miraculous human heart, not a miraculous machine” (Weiss, 1960: 136).

### **The Normalization Era**

While public critique of the Czechoslovak regime was inadmissible after the Warsaw Pact invasion of 1968, neither were there joyous paeans to the brighter, better tomorrows that socialism would provide. Several critics have argued that “[a]fter 1968, only a few could have illusions about the future. (...) Despite planned economy and astronaut greetings from the cosmos, there was practically no vision of the future” (Pospiszyl, 2010: 25). Much Czech science fiction in the 1970s and 1980s adopted a dystopian outlook and featured the sterility of an automated world, conflicts with extraterrestrial civilizations, negative

consequences of scientific experiments, and even ecological disasters. The source of negativity continued to be the West (thus many works have Western settings or their protagonists have English names), so Miroslava Genčiarová, who in 1980 published the first book-length study of Czech science fiction, could characterize the genre with Stanisław Lem's words as a "fairy-tale of the atomic age". Genčiarová emphasized, for example, that encounters with the unknown, alien and foreign in socialist science fiction are portrayed in a positive light: "A meeting with the extraordinary, mysterious and enigmatic serves here one end only: to show the greatness of man in his struggle, the strength of his reason, and his victory" (Genčiarová, 1980: 97). At the same time, irony and allegory became so characteristic of science fiction that especially at present, some critics emphasize that "what made our science fiction so popular was its stance skillfully hidden in the fictitious reality" (Langer, 2006: 25, 38). In other words, critique of the West was apparently intended and interpreted by readers as a critique of socialist reality. Nevertheless, it continued being possible to read science fiction from this period also "officially", i.e. as a critique of the West. Consequently, although at present the tendency is to emphasize the hidden critical stance of Czech normalization science fiction, the truth is that it hardly features any "heroic warriors with bolshevism", as Ondřej Neff pointed out (Neff, 1995: 9). Instead, we find works that can be read as either critique or conformity, depending on what way you turn them in the light.

A good illustration of this ambivalence is Karel Honzík's *Mr. Stopa in the Cosmos* (*Stopa ve vesmíru*, 1970), which could be paired with post-sixties critical utopias from the West. Honzík's novel features technologically advanced, communist societies of squirrel-like creatures who live on the distant planet Gh6n. Although the text is partly an adventure story, it includes detailed description of various classless, decentralized, weapons-free and vegetarian societies of Gh6n. Yet the protagonist Stopa distances himself from the "static" utopias of More, Campanella, Plato, Cabet, Fourier and Paul Adam: "In all these blueprints of ideal societies, there is something... something rigid. They are so finished and so perfect that they smell of museum plaster. These people are somehow dead. Compared to them, the inhabitants of Gh6n are full of life. All the time, it's yes and no! Yes and no!" (Honzík, 1970: 116). On the whole, the planet Gh6n appears as a good alternative to the originary world of the protagonist. Notwithstanding, the squirrel-like creatures cannot help appearing

grotesque; Stopa does not find fulfillment in the utopian world (somewhat like Bron in Samuel Delany's *Triton*) and he returns to Earth; moreover, the utopian world remains as evanescent as that of Connie in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, because Stopa's vision is ultimately subject to investigation by both astronomers and psychiatrists. Honzík's utopia never narrows to a sharp dystopian edge, but neither does it represent a consistently desirable and possible alternative for the planet of hehes (as the inhabitants of Ghón call the Earthlings). It is therefore a good example of the ambivalence of Czech normalization science fiction.

In terms of translations, besides further works from the socialist bloc (Aleksey Tolstoy, Anatoly Kim, Vladimir Odoevsky, Osip Senkovsky, the Strugatsky brothers, Lem), and besides more *Iron Heel*, the era of normalization allowed for the emergence of another round of the classics: Campanella, More, Bacon and Bolzano. There was an attempt to incorporate them into the Czech fabric in a similar manner as before: as precursors of socialism whose material conditions still had not allowed for their visions to become reality. In accordance with the era's growing appreciation of affluence and "socialist consumerism", there was nevertheless less emphasis on the abolition of private property and on the redemptive powers of labor. The classics could be even criticized for their modesty. Rudolf Kučera, who introduced *The City of the Sun*, for example, went as far as to argue that Campanella's utopia was backward-looking in its dogmatic emphasis on equality, state-control and poverty. Among other things, the critic complained that in the City of the Sun women were punished for wearing high-heels. "Equality in this utopia is not the equality of property-holders, which is the case of utopian socialism and communism, but it is the absolute equality of all members of the community whose needs remain equally undeveloped. The ideal is the minimum – poverty" (Kučera, 1979: 90). More was criticized along similar lines. Although Petr Křivský in the afterword to the 1978 translation of *Utopia* emphasized that More belongs to the "ideological predecessors of Marxism" (Křivský, 1978: 141), he mentioned that the Englishman "could not be aware of the massive expansion of productive forces caused by technological development, and thus he had to choose between higher productivity and more free time. He chose more free time, but was thus able to satisfy all basic human needs, if nothing beyond that" (Křivský, 1978: 131). It is implied, however, that while the "suffering and hungry masses of English vagabonds"

(*ibidem*) could not wish for anything better, for “real socialism” such scarcity was not necessary. Křivský, however, noted that More’s Utopia was “wisely governed” by the merchants. In some ways, these 1970s blurbs about the classics anticipated the afterword that accompanied a 1985 translation of James Harrington’s *Oceana*, in which Jan Kumpere neither openly defended private land ownership and hierarchic social arrangements, nor did he critique Harrington’s values with Marxist theory.

During the normalization era, further western science fiction was translated, both in periodicals such as *Světová literatura* and in book form. An example includes the anxiety-ridden *The Day of the Triffids* (translation 1972) by John Wyndham, which nevertheless was published with “corrections”: Adamovič noticed that while in the original, the Russians invent a machine that blinds humanity, in the Czech translation, those responsible for the invention of the infernal device are the Chinese (Adamovič, 2010a: 49). Selected short stories by Robert A. Heinlein, Isaac Asimov and others appeared in anthologies, and Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* was translated in 1973 – although, as Neff observed, Vonnegut was translated because he could pass for “a progressive writer from East Germany, since his name was Kurt and he wrote about the barbarian American bombing of Dresden” (Neff, 1995: 12). The regime’s treatment of Orwell crowns such absurdities and indicates that, even in the 1980s, struggles with censorship continued. While *Nineteen Eighty-Four* officially did not exist in Czech, a critical study of Orwell’s dystopia came out in 1985.<sup>5</sup> The study was written by Josef Skála, who demonstrated not only that “the sad heroes of this anti-utopia barely survive in London” (Skála, 1985: 5), but the vision of the “sullen and gloomy fantasist” Orwell (Skála, 1985: 19) applies to the contemporary United States. To prove his point, Skála reproduced extracts from an application for unemployment benefits in South Dakota, which he found in an “immensely popular” American publication *Big Brother’s Collected Writings*. This South Dakotan application, Skála wrote, included questions such as, “When and where did you have your first sexual encounter? How often and for how long did you practice sexual intercourse? Was anyone else present? If so, list their name, surname, date of birth and address” (Skála, 1985: 27).

## Conclusion

Skála's study was a swan-song of pro-Soviet criticism, and soon after the world of Czech science fiction turned fully dystopian. In the 1990s, in a climate that Adamovič described as "a trash-heap of utopia, the sale of unfulfilled dreams" (Adamovič, 2004: 2), there appeared texts previously published abroad or in samizdat as well as new works that reflected the era's spirit of revenge against the previous system, disillusionment with human nature, and fears of ecological disasters, genetic deformations and psychological mutations. "With some exceptions which derive from the socialist era (e.g. Eduard Martin)", as Aleš Langer wrote, "Czech authors [of science fiction] regard the future of humanity with skepticism" (Langer, 2006: 18). Several women made themselves visible in the genre, but with titles that illustrate the mood of their authors: "Our Home in Agonia" (Eva Hauserová, "U nás v Agonii"); *Magoria* (Alexandra Berková, *Magorie*); *Madwoman* (Eva Hauserová, *Cvokyně*); and *There Will Be Darkness* (Vilma Kadlečková, *Jednou bude tma*). Male writers are equally "sullen and gloomy": in Ladislav Řezníček's "The Community of Bliss" ("Společenství blaha", 1991), the protagonist's refuge is a public toilet, and Ivan Kmínek published a satirical *Utopia – the Best Version* (*Utopie, nejlepší verze*, 1990). One exception may be *The Golden Age* by Michal Ajvaz (*Zlatý věk*, 2011), but the fairy-tale, misty island it depicts is far removed from the social visions of H. G. Wells.

A comparable tendency has marked post-89 translations. "Catching up with the West" in the field of science fiction has meant catching up with dystopias and fantasy. Taking a cynical view, one may remark that Huxley, Orwell and Burgess have reached the status of London: while *A Clockwork Orange* was not issued before 1989, five editions have appeared since 1989; Huxley's *Brave New World* was published four times and so was Orwell's *Animal Farm*. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was published five times (Orwell is now standard high-school reading). Zamyatin's *We*, too, got published six times. New translations of utopias include Ayn Rand's work, whose *The Fountainhead* was translated into Czech in 2000. A recent publication about Rand includes a preface by the former President Václav Klaus as well as extracts from *Atlas Shrugged*, which is cited as the second most influential text in the United States after the Bible (Hynst, 2005: 38). The optimism of those who admire Rand's "virtue of selfishness" is undeniable: Vavřinec Kryzánek boasts in the collection that

the strength and vitality of capitalism are the reasons why Islamic fundamentalists hate America. They know that in a world where information is relatively accessible, their primitive religious culture, binding traditions and lack of freedom cannot in the long run compete with the possibilities offered by America. (Kryzánek, 2005: 21)

Other utopias beyond those of capitalism that were translated after 1989 in the present-day Czech Republic were religious texts or works with escapist, mystical leanings. C. S. Lewis is popular, and other newly translated texts include Walter M. Miller's *Canticle for Leibowitz*, Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, and Huxley's *Island*. Most utopias from the 1960s and 1970s, however, remain untranslated: besides Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* and two parts of Kim Stanley Robinson's Mars trilogy (1999, 2006), there is virtually nothing: no utopias by Ernest Callenbach, Dorothy Bryant, Joanna Russ, Marge Piercy, Samuel Delany or Octavia Butler; in Czech, there is no Sally Miller Gearhart, Suzette Haden Elgin, Joan Slonczewski, Sheri Tepper or James Tiptree. Utopia, understood as a better society possible in this world, has been pushed to the margins (unless we accept the aforementioned capitalist version). A nice illustration is the transformation of Thomas More from a "great ideological predecessor (...) of Marxism" (Křivský, 1978: 141) who "[i]n his happy moments (...) dreamed of the communist future" (Šimečka, 1963: 40) into a martyr, whose *Utopia* is on the one hand a critique of the social and moral values of his era but on the other hand a "testimony of the author's unrelenting faith, the power of penitence, the seriousness with which More considered the sacred ceremonies of the Church, and the distaste he felt towards religious reformers, whom we nowadays would unhesitatingly call the moderns" (Vokoun, 2001: 7-8).

Glancing now at this history of translating utopias in the Czech lands, one is struck by the disparate ways in which the same text has been incorporated into the Czech context depending on the ideological climate. Above all it seems that the utopian impulse behind these works has been largely lost in translation. If, in their original context, utopias were written to challenge the status quo, to stimulate hope and to think about alternatives, only a fraction of that impulse has survived when these utopias were transferred to the Czech context, where foreign utopias were introduced in order to warn against revolutionary violence and irrationalism (1920s), to boast about what had already been made a reality (1950s-1980s), and to warn against attempts to reform the present world (1990s-2010s).<sup>6</sup>

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> All quotations from Czech articles as well as fictional works are my translations, with the exception of quotations from Bohuslav Mánek's essay, which appeared in English.

<sup>2</sup> The Soviet Union figured as a model for other Czech dystopian works of the era, most notably Jan Barda's *The Re-educated* (*Převychování*, 1930), where fears of Stalinism and Nazism blend into a text that some critics have ranked with the dystopias of Zamyatin, George Orwell, and Aldous Huxley.

<sup>3</sup> Machek's definition of utopia is contemporary yet it remains rather broad as he includes works in which the description of the imaginary good world is marginal as well as works that culminate with a potentially utopian transformation.

<sup>4</sup> Worth mentioning in this context is J. M. Troska (pseudonym of Jan Matzal), particularly his trilogies *Captain Nemo* (*Kapitán Nemo*, 1939) and *Fighting Heaven* (*Zápas s nebem*, 1940), which depict an underground technological utopia. Although Troska's texts look back to Jules Verne, they also engage with Wells's science fiction, particularly *The Time Machine* and *The First Men in the Moon*. The trilogies, marked by the ideological climate of the interwar and war years, were republished in the 1960s in a purged form, without pro-German and anti-Semitic passages for example.

<sup>5</sup> A Czech translation of Orwell's dystopia was published in 1984 by Index in Cologne and it circulated in the underground. Skála's study was likely a delayed attempt to disarm the "non-existent" Czech translation.

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