Maxim Shadurski, *Utopia as a World Model: The Boundaries and Borderlands of a Literary Phenomenon* (Siedlce: Wydawnictwo IKR[i]BL, 2016), 150 pp.

There are many assumptions about Russia, which, under closer investigation, turn out to be not only inaccurate but radically delusive. One presumption, for example, is the proverbial propensity for collectivism. Another is the saturation of Russian culture with utopian ideas, desires, and projects. This assumption is natural when we consider that the notion of utopia remained "in power" for several generations.[1] Very few words, therefore, are more negatively charged than the word "utopia" in Russian culture. Criticising utopianism as childish daydreaming is in vogue everywhere, but in Russia it is more significant. When I discussed the concept of utopia with a group of youngsters, they started laughing. Initially, I could not understand why they were laughing: for them, "utopia" sounded similar to the word "*utoplennik*," a drowned man. This vignette suggests the ominous coalescence of the imagery of danger, death, and ugliness of a disfigured human body in the semantics of utopia in Russia. Even for the vast majority of Russian academics, utopia evokes images of revolutionary chaos and totalitarianism.[2] At the same time, the versatile and vibrant tradition of Western Marxism[3] successfully rescued the spirit of utopia after the implosion of socialist regimes in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and inspired much of the present-day burgeoning utopian studies literature. Therefore, scholarly analyses of utopianism in international academia and in Russia failed to converge again, as this time the "East" went right, and the "West" went left.

In this context, the importance of the book by Maxim Shadurski cannot be overstated. It has been published in Russian with an extensive English preface by a Polish publishing house based in Siedlce. The author is a Belarusian-born scholar, who works in Poland and holds a PhD from the University of Edinburgh. The international background behind this work makes it a natural bridge between the post-Soviet and Anglo-Saxon traditions of studying utopianism. The book opens by featuring a comprehensive survey of the research literature, and includes key works by Ruth Levitas, Russell Jacoby, Fredric Jameson, Tom Moylan, Lyman T. Sargent, and others who are familiar to the Russian readership. In the subsequent three chapters, Shadurski focuses on the theoretical explications of his understanding of utopianism. The author then uses this prism to examine the classic utopias, and finally discusses two writers of the British modern utopias, Samuel Butler and Aldous Huxley.

Couched in language characteristic of critical utopian studies (as it has been shaped, among others, by the Ralahine Center for Utopian Studies at the University of Limerick), the book emphatically denies utopia as a fixed ideal of socio-political perfection. Instead, Shadurski sees it as a "process of articulation" of world models in various cultural products (p. 1). This understanding defines utopia as a moving tar-

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1 Cf. the title of the book by Mikhail Heller and Aleksandr Nekrich, *Utopia in Power: The History of the Soviet Union from 1917 to the Present* (New York: Summit Books, 1986).

2 Mikhail Suslov, "Vospitanie zhelaniia: Izuchenie utopii na Zapade posle 1989 goda i rossiiskoe issledovatel'skoe obshchestvo," in V. Shestakov, ed., *Russkaia utopiia v kontekste mirovoi kul'tury* (St Petersburg, 2013).

3 Cf. Marin Jay, *Marxism and Totality: The Adventures of a Concept from Lukacs to Habermas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

get, which sets the direction for a journey, but does not identify the final destination. The central concept here is the "world model," which helps Shadurski destabilize the borders of the genre and see utopias beyond the boundaries of genre as "cross-border" phenomena, manifested in various artifacts of culture: novels, visual art, political tracts, architecture, poems, etc. The "world model" could be defined as a historically specific modus of responding to and solving major societal problems such as social and economic justice, efficacy and transparency of government, prevention of war and ecological devastation, and human rights and gender equality.

At this point, one can ask how utopianism is different from the conservative approach, which likewise speaks to the urgent problems of society and not infrequently proposes radical methods. Take, for example, the (in)famous saying by nineteenth-century Russian conservative historian Nikolai Karamzin, who maintained that Russia did not need new laws but fifty upstanding governors who would not embezzle. This demand sounds (today, as well as in the nineteenth century) like "utopia." We need an additional qualifier for the definition of utopia, for example, the holistic view of society, within which fighting corruption is not about fifty honest officials, but about a sweeping overhaul of the whole system. The author addresses the issue of utopia's coherence later in the work when he discusses the socio-political arrangements in imaginary universes (p. 66).

In dealing with classic utopias in the second chapter, the author elaborates on very useful morphology, noting three aspects of utopianism: its spatial, normative and socio-political configurations ("toposphere," "ethosphere," and "teleosphere," respectively). In his discussion of "toposphere," Shadurski draws from Mikhail Bakhtin and Jameson to argue that the "world model" needs a precise geographical location and clear-cut boundaries which relate to the location of the narrator in his or her "real world." For example, there is a connection between the insular location of various modern-historical British utopias and the rise of Britain as a maritime empire with a broad global reach. Likewise, there is a correlation between ethical and socio-political visions in utopias and the ongoing theoretical and political debates on this matter. To cite just one example, *News from Nowhere* by William Morris, which aptly reflects on the Socialist agenda of the time, became a watershed separating the folkloric vision of utopia as a world of happy idleness and the attempts to imagine labor as a central part of the concept of "happiness" (p. 56).

The third chapter concentrates on Butler's *Erewhon* (1872) and *Erewhon Revisited* (1901), and Huxley's *Island* (1962). These novels are contextualized as attempts to produce a genuinely modern utopia, which would be dynamic, global, future-oriented, and practical oriented. Although these were good attempts, at the end of the day they failed, and Shadurski painstakingly examines their ideological and literary architecture in search of the cracks in the foundational structure. He argues that the utopian spirit in these works is reduced due to their slant towards anti-utopia and skepticism about the entire utopian endeavor. While Butler and Huxley successfully revamped the genre by breaking its boundaries, their models of the world are spatially isolated, morally esoteric, and ideologically particularistic, and this made them archaic and reactionary. The author insists that the fall of the utopian communities in Erewhon and Pala (in *Island*) testifies not to the deficiencies of utopianism but to the class limitations of their authors, who encapsulated their "designs within the borders of ideology, which caters to the needs of the capitalist system" (p. 125).

In spite of the canon of writing reviews, I must stress that the book is pronouncedly untimely. It would be an uncouth reading in Russia during Vladimir Putin's third term in power, as his administration has set its goal to become a beacon of conservatism and a paladin of "traditional values" and "spiritual bonds" in the world. The work is, however, all the more a necessary reading. When writers of fantastic literature spiral into the "samsara" of ironic language plays, the word of an academic strikes a note that reminds us of the eternal striving for an ideal encapsulated by the maxim "happiness for everybody, free, and nobody will go away unsatisfied."[4]

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4 Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, *Roadside Picnic* (London: Gollancz, 2007 [1972]), p. 145.