

Eduard Prugovecki. *Memoirs of the Future: A Futuristic Novel.* Notre Dame: Cross Cultural Publications, 2001. 483 pp. \$19.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-940121-67-6.



Reviewed by W. Warren Wagar

Published on H-Utopia (April, 2002)

Memoirs of the Future

The competition between utopian and dystopian visions in the past hundred years is typically scored a victory for dystopia. Zamyatin, Huxley, Orwell, and Burgess prevail over Wells, Skinner, Huxley himself (in *Island*), and Le Guin. Even in the realm of reality, as opposed to fiction, dystopia seems to win easily. Most of the great utopian experiments of the century now past, in which I include the Soviet Union of Joseph Stalin, the Third Reich of Adolf Hitler, the People's China of Mao Tse-tung, and the Kampuchea of Pol Pot, are remembered by their myriad victims as living hells. The late Afghanistan of Sheikh Muhammad Omar may or may not, as time passes, join their number. I have personally reserved a hallowed space for the "Shining City on the Hill" of Ronald Reagan.

But the utopian impulse has survived all its embarrassments and defeats. Two recent examples are my own *A Short History of the Future* (U. Chicago Press, 3rd ed., 1999) and now Eduard Prugovecki's remarkable *Memoirs of the Future* (2001). Both books highlight the competition be-

tween utopia and dystopia by offering, in substantial detail, images of good and evil societies alike. Both books bear witness to the ultimate triumph of utopia.

In *A Short History of the Future* dystopia is the product of the maturation of the capitalist world-system during the next half-century. Capital accumulates, democracy withers, exploitation intensifies, the environment decays, global misery proliferates, violence multiplies, and the world blows up. The survivors unite under the banner of an ambiguously utopian socialist world commonwealth, which after serving its purpose gives way to a congeries of diverse experiments in cooperative living.

Enter Eduard Prugovecki. A retired University of Toronto mathematical physicist, Prugovecki spent the first 24 years of his life (1937-1961) in Romania and Yugoslavia, where he had ample opportunity to observe--and reject--Soviet-style "utopianism" in daily practice. He earned a Ph.D. at Princeton and then moved to Canada. Since 1998 he has lived in Mexico.

His *Memoirs of the Future*, the fruit of many years of reflection and deep concern for the human predicament, is a novel in the classical tradition of utopography. The comparisons that most immediately spring to mind are with William Morris's *News from Nowhere* and Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia*. Philosophically, Prugovecki is an anarchist. He looks forward to a future in which age-old strivings for power and wealth are transcended. All people, linked by cyber-technology and conditioned to work together from infancy, share equally in the direction of human affairs. But not quite "all" people, because the Earth of Prugovecki's far future is also inhabited by the unhappy subjects of a rival polity, the so-called Free World Federation, or FWF. The conflict between the two, between an anarchist utopia and a capitalist dystopia, provides the dramatic interest of his novel.

The novel begins, conventionally enough, with the awakening of a sleeper. Philip Deron, a "playboy-scientist" of the late 20th Century, has used his family fortune and expertise to perfect a technique for achieving suspended animation. He programmed his equipment to revive him in one hundred years, unless radiation levels in the outside world exceeded a certain minimum, indicating the occurrence of a planetary nuclear holocaust before the hundred years had passed. When his atomic clock tells him that he was revived after 354 years instead, he concludes that such a holocaust had indeed taken place. He leaves the laboratory in the cavern where he was asleep all this time and eventually makes contact with the inhabitants of "Terra," the nation that arose in the irradiated ruins of the Northern Hemisphere. He learns that his surmise about a holocaust was correct. Today, fewer than 200 million people live where billions had once teemed. All are descendants of the scientific and technical personnel of the underground "war research laboratories" of various combatant countries who ignored the or-

ders of their military superiors and made peace after Doomsday.

At first, Deron suspects that Terra is an Orwellian dictatorship. Little by little, his skepticism melts away, as he learns from his host, the scientist Peter Onegin, how things are done in Terra. The Terran way of life is made possible by rigorous childhood education in cooperativeness and empathy and by CCC, the Coordinating Computer Complex, an immensely evolved descendant of the Internet, which houses complete records of all citizens and allows them to debate and vote on issues of local and global concern through a system perfected in part by Onegin himself and known as "cogdem," or Coordinated Group Decision Making. There is no other government in Terra and no capital or money. Following the Marxian formula, not mentioned by Prugovecki, each citizen spontaneously provides essential work and in turn orders whatever he or she needs from the common storehouse of socially produced wealth. Good manners and common decency, instilled from earliest years, prevent almost all citizens from withholding their labor or from taking more than they reasonably need. Procreation in artificial wombs from ova and sperm scientifically mated by Genetic Control Teams supplies an exceptionally handsome and talented citizenry.

The only fly in the ointment is the existence of another, much larger nation that arose in the Southern Hemisphere in the aftermath of the nuclear holocaust, the Free World Federation. Midway through the novel Deron is kidnapped by Free World agents, who fly him across the enormous radioactive desert separating the two worlds to Magnum City, their capital. The Free World Federation is a despotic state managed "democratically" by two virtually identical political parties in the thrall of monopolistic corporations. Its power-intoxicated leaders, almost all drawn from a microscopic elite of wealthy families, scorn Terra but cannot add it to their domains because the Terrans have deployed a mas-

sive defense system, including missile bases on the Moon, which the tyrants are unable to overcome. Here I am strongly reminded of the nuclear weapons secreted in cities of the United States by agents of *Ecotopia*, in the novel by Callenbach. In any case, the "Free World Federation" is clearly a caricature of the "Free World" nations of our own time, and above all a caricature of the United States itself.

After many hazardous adventures, Deron manages to escape back to Terra. He learns more about its advanced civilization, including its technology for extending life in good health to 180 years, and uses cogdem to persuade the Terrans to change their policy of not interfering in the internal affairs of FWF. Terra will now do what it can to promote democracy and social justice in the country with which it shares the Earth.

Memoirs of the Future, I should add, is written in idiomatic and thoroughly competent English prose, all the more remarkable for someone of Prugovecki's background as a physicist, not to mention a physicist born and raised outside the English-speaking world. He supplies enough action scenes and sensuous accounts of love-making for two or three Hollywood sci-fi spectacles, although I have to wonder if his hero, a martial arts adept as well as a scientist, together with the fabulously voluptuous women of Terra who succumb repeatedly to his charms, are not a little too good to be true. By the same token, the villainous potentates of FWF seem more like stage villains than real people.

But all that is largely beside the point. The point, for me, is that here is a richly imagined utopian novel. Working from the fundamental premises of democratic socialism and anarchism, Prugovecki projects a credible future in which technology makes possible their full implementation. Computer-mediated decision making—given the system of educational conditioning explored in the novel—might just work. I persist in believing that getting from here to there is not feasible

without an interregnum of world government to restore the environment, break the stranglehold of monopoly capital, redistribute wealth on a planetary scale, and bring ethnic and interstate conflict under firm control. Prugovecki sidesteps these issues by eradicating almost the entire population of the Northern Hemisphere and leaving only colonies of enlightened scientists to carry on. But utopias are fundamentally visions of a better world. Transitional strategies are not their forte. And I would certainly be delighted to live, and would gladly invite all my fellow men and women to live, in Prugovecki's Terra.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-utopia>

Citation: W. Warren Wagar. Review of Prugovecki, Eduard. *Memoirs of the Future: A Futuristic Novel*. H-Utopia, H-Net Reviews. April, 2002.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=6181>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.