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After the Apocalypse comes Utopia? Ivan Kmínek's *Utopia, the Best Version*

Czy po apokalipsie nadchodzi utopia? *Utopie, nejlepsi verze* Ivana Kmínka

"The Legend of the Minute Eyes Boiled"
In the time before the Project several billion people inhabited the large planet Earth. Their civilization was not a mere machine for creating happiness. No one programmed them. They considered that good.
Their civilization thrashed about on the violent waves of Freedom until the Fires suddenly flared up.
In that minute, the vitreous body boiled in the eyes of the Free while their burning nails sprang from their beds as their burnt tongs stuck out from their crumbling blackened lips. In this minute, embryos were fried in their mothers' wombs and the fetuses fell from the ruptured, smoking stomaches. And while the last lips cried for Freedom even before sublimation, the Fires continued to burn.
Those who managed to save themselves deep under ground turned into giant blisters after a few days and poured over the floor of the bunkers like thick yogurt.
Only one city was spared[1].

These words of legend are the sole account of the history of the fictional world of Ivan Kmínek's novel, *Utopia, the Best Version* [*Utopie, nejlepší verze*], before the Project. The "Legend of the Minute Eyes Boiled" shows the novel, written in 1987 and circulated in samizdat until being first published in 1990, when the fanzine Intercom proclaimed it to be one of the three best works of Czech science fiction[2], to be post-apocalyptic in the truest sense of the word, beginning the nar-

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[1] I. Kmínek, *Utopie, nejlepší verze. Zábavné panoptikum teamticky zaměřené na odvěký boj dobra proti dobru*, Praha 2006, p. 152. All translations from Czech by K. H.
[2] Z. Rampas, *Zatím jen třikrát nic*, „Interkom" 1990, no 27, p. 27.

rative of the establishment of a new society after a cleansing inferno, the complete destruction of the former world in wording reminiscent of the apocalypse. Invoking the pathos of hell fire, the passage juxtaposes the happiness and plan of the novel's present and that of the freedom of the past, explicitly linking the latter to the former civilization's destruction. Although the novel's protagonist may yet know nothing of the legend hailing in the dawn of a new era, the tale will prove important in his developing view of utopia and the readers' understanding of society and utopianism itself. Thus the apocalypse in Kmínek's novel takes on its original meaning derived from the Greek *apokaluptein* **'uncover, reveal'**, from *apo-* **'un-'** + *kaluptein* **'to cover'**, revealing the basic difficulties of utopia and the fictional society.

The accentuation of fundamental utopian concerns reverberates further in the novel's subtitle, "An entertaining panopticon dedicated to the theme of the eternal struggle of good against good," even as the title flirts with humor, replacing the common battle of good and evil with a new battle of good against good. The title thus playfully indicates the novel's chief concern, exploring conflict in an established utopian society. One may therefore view *Utopia, the Best Version* as a distant cousin of H.G. Wells's future histories of the world, such as *The World Set Free* and *The Things to Come,* at the heart of which is Wells's vision of a better, utopian future after a world war. In comparison, Kmínek significantly abridges the survey of the old world's destruction to concentrate on how the new order was created and, unlike Wells's unequivocal endorsement of the future in a domineering narrator and promising titles, Kmínek's title suggests an ambiguous treatment of utopia. For while it clearly speaks of utopia, it is merely the best version of utopia, a caveat suggesting both other utopias exist and introducing utopia as a relative good, thus adhering to the definition of utopia as a better, not a perfect place[3]. At the same time, the title's suggestion of a multiplicity of goods warns the reader to expect compromise and conflict within utopia, departing from notions of utopia's perfection and static narratives.

This expectation is met on the turn to the novel's first page. Despite the title, the novel does not follow eutopian literary conventions of the protagonist's voyage and trials to cross the hindrances of borders, time or distance to reach utopia, but, rather as typical of dystopian texts, begins in media res with the inner thoughts of a member of the alternative society. Yet unlike a common dystopia, the first person narrator, Viktor Kamensky, does not end, but rather opens the novel in questioning and despair as he cries out into the abyss on the last remaining city's outskirts: "'World, why are you the way you are?' Only the wind answered. A black wind which slithered on the black ground"[4]. Viktor's forsaken-

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[3] L. T. Sargent, *The Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited*, „Utopian Studies" 1994, no 1, p. 9.

[4] I. Kminek, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

ness and gloom, accentuated in his reference to Hades's ferryman Charon, reach a pinnacle when he tries to hang himself from a birch tree. Fortunately for him and the curious reader, his suicide is foiled by a well-placed shot through the rope by a stranger, Martin Larden, whose enquiries into Viktor's past reveal more than the reasons for his death-wish.

Martin's probing questions reveal that in this closed, sole-surviving city after an atomic war, where all encounter happiness and success, Viktor has experienced unbelievable failures both personally and professionally. He relates his first love story as a fiasco in which he gave his beloved his pet rat, which she then fed to her cat, his adolescence as a time of Byronesque spleen, in which he professes peoples' happiness and contentedness is a mere facade, until he finds his only true happiness in his felt life-calling – selling insurance, which also ends in debacle. Viktor is an outsider, a typical protagonist in a dystopia, who is, in Martin's words, "not as blind as other people"[5]. Struck by Viktor's unbelievable misfortune, Martin encourages his former adolescent musings and views his life as inauthentic: "Somebody is playing with you in a bad way. Your life is obviously inauthentic"[6]. Viktor's inauthenticity is indeed suggested by his very surname, Kaminsky, differing from the standard and expected Czech surname Kaminský. The missing diacritic graphically suggests he is somehow deviant, lacking, even artificial, an idea that shall be explored throughout the text. Martin, a fellow outsider, succeeds in raising doubt in Viktor's mind and convinces him to dedicate himself to unravelling the mystery behind his and the city's life, which Martin has begun after retrieving an encrypted book from the bottom of the abyss at the city's outskirts.

The secret book invokes the early utopianism of the eighteenth century English lawyer and philosopher Jeremy Bentham in its very title, Project Bentham, as well as the conflict arising in the search for the greater good. For while Bentham's doctrine of utilitarianism and his principle of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number," a principle often quoted by Kmínek's utopian society, seems quite positive, Bentham also coined the term panopticon in 1787 for an efficient, modern prison, also raising the fear of dystopian police states. Prisoners would be according to Bentham's plans visible from a central point, but unaware if they were being watched, the advantage being: "the apparent omnipresence of the inspector. . ., combined with the extreme facility of his real presence"[7]. This meaning and design is reflected in Kmínek's "panopticon" as Viktor comments he often felt he was being watched and in the Project's surveillance of their programmed subjects[8]. In this way, *Utopia, the Best Version* simultaneously addresses the good

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[5] *Ibidem*, p. 11.

[6] *Ibidem*, p. 31.

[7] J. Bentham, *The Panopticon Writings,* ed. M. Bozovic, London 1995, (6th Letter). http://cartome.org/panopticon2.htm#VI [data dostępu: 12.06.2016].

[8] I. Kminek, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

intentions of planning and its closeness to a police state, reflecting Popper's criticism of utopianism.

Martin's gradual decoding of the secret book and Viktor's literal digestion of its contents in the form of informational bonbons slowly reveal as in a detective story how a new, more perfectly organized society was created after the apocalypse. Each "treat" appears to the reader as an assortment of fictional documents, ranging from official protocols, video transcripts, correspondence between project engineers and letters from the general public. These false documents not only create verisimilitude, characteristic for utopian science fiction, but more importantly enrich the novel aesthetically by the multiplicity of forms and speakers. Unlike both the classical visitor to utopia, who is instructed in the ways of the alternative society by a guide, and such modern utopias as those of Wells in which an omniscient narrator summarizes the changes in a monologue, Viktor and readers experience the project of world building as one of multiple actors with often conflicting viewpoints and unanticipated setbacks, reminding one of the collage method of his predecessor Karel Čapek in *War with the Newts*. There is, however, a decided difference. This is not a record of events but a testimony to an active, intentional shaping of humanity.

After the near eradication of humanity, the Bentham Project's founders embarked on a course which Viktor comes to see as an attempt "to protect civilization from itself"[9] and a utopia that follows Bentham's principle of the greatest good for the greatest number. In a commentary on previous attempts at creating utopia, the new planners blame their failure on a reliance on the naturally flawed individual and recourse to inadequate existing forms of socialization, i.e. the family, reflecting a frequent criticism of the lack of creativity of literary utopias. In contrast, the project seeks from its beginning to improve the building blocks of any human society, the human being, by itself by programming. Programming evokes the specter of dystopia, but unlike typical dystopian attempts at a better society, which prescribe rigid norms, subjugation of the individual and forced conditioning, the Bentham Project defines the ideal human and its goals humanistically. It desires to promote humans' desire to learn and to think for themselves, build on their moral fibre and values humans' sense of humor and capability to love. Certainly, it does envision an ideal individual whose love of work and love of others makes him completely compatible with society and even foresees planning individuals' life goals and opinions. However, the Project also attempts to navigate between the extremes. It is explicitly argued "the guide for normalcy may not be misused as a simple stamp," but rather "it must be unconditionally guaranteed that humanity continue to be a dynamic group of diverse individuals, reflecting the world in

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[9] *Ibidem*, p. 203–204.

all its complexity, and not merely a collective of uniform beings"[10]. Indeed, the notion of the human as a robot is explicitly rejected. Three operating systems, whose names clearly invoke computer languages and a range of complexity from the most simple and harmonious to the irrational, are created as the basis for human thought: "Human Basic," "Human Pascal" and "Human Nonconform". The effects of this betterment of humans and planning are to be the elimination of all conflict between the individual and society, personal conflicts, the eradication of all forms of social, racial and psychological inequality and injustice, as well as the elimination of depression, revenge, suffering, egotism and avarice[11]. Is this not an enlightened goal and a foundation for a positive utopia?

For most readers, it is not: the first two operating systems readily remind one of an attempt to create a classist, static structure society as Huxley's *Brave New World* of alphas, betas, deltas and gammas, in which everyone is happy with her position in society, no matter what that may be, and the project's reference to plurality seem little more than a charade in a set master plan. But unlike many utopias, the Bentham Project offers unprecedented insight into the project's struggles and decision-making which amend the former view. The decoded book's protocols reveal both that first attempts at programming failed, sometimes leading to compulsive neurotic behavior, as well as dissent within the project itself on the curtailing of free will. The Project's plurality and often banality of views on the ideal human being is reflected in a contest for the best proposal for the new person, in which such divergent views appear as humans should be athletic, want children to love the opposite sex and not have stinky feet[12]. Even after the complete programing of society, this utopia is not unchanging, requiring constant adjustment via the *harmonogram*, a word play on harmony, to harmonize citizens and thus foresees change. The operating system Human Non-Conform is given to artists, philosophers and writers to create dissent, proclaimed by the Project's experts to be "an enrichment of civilization"[13] and thus attempts to avoid the stagnation typical of positive utopias. Finally, in this planned society, even outsiders such as Viktor have a voice: They must consent – without coercion – before they are reprogrammed.

The ambivalence of the society's desirability may cause readers to see a dystopia, but turning to the novel's protagonist and his changing view of his world lead to a more nuanced interpretation. In both traditional utopian or dystopian narratives, the protagonist is found at odds with the fictional society encountered. While the former gradually comes to accept and wishes to emulate the new society,

[10] *Ibidem*, p. 67.
[11] *Ibidem*, p. 67–68.
[12] *Ibidem*, p. 77–79.
[13] *Ibidem*, p. 122.

choosing it over the status quo, the latter rejects "utopia" and escapes, is coerced into assimilation or is killed. Viktor's path combines elements of both these narratives. His attempted suicide is not a dystopian rejection of society, but the result of his despair of not being part of the society he comes to know as the Bentham Project. He is not a simple renegade who opposes the plan, noting "Everywhere people worked hard and found fulfillment by their engagement in life. Only I was different. Only I didn't conform to the central schedule"[14]. In his longing for authentic life and love as well as criticism of the project's artificiality, Viktor admits he wants to find automatons instead of people to confirm his rejection, yet instead, he finds simple workers and daycare teachers enjoying their professions[15]. Viktor, nevertheless, refuses programmed happiness as does his fellow outsider out of principle: "I don't want to be happy like everyone else"[16]. Yet, unlike a typical dystopian protagonist, whose concerns seem valid, Viktor's desire for an abstract authenticity is itself suspect and misunderstood as his conversation with a grocer illustrates: "Madame, may I enquire, whether you lead an authentic, full-blooded life?" "What business is it of yours, you pig?"[17]. Viktor's lofty, academic concerns find no resonance with others.

In a use of romance typical to literary utopias, both positive and negative, love should win not only Viktor's heart, but also his support of the alternative world order. The beautiful Olga, a member of the Insurance Company, the succesor to the Bentham Project, approaches Viktor in an attempt to persuade him to be reprogrammed. Though unable to kindle his interest in planned happiness, she awakes his passion. Olga's rejection of his advances cause him pain, yet paradoxically, he relishes the romantic anguish of unrequited love as authentic love, a point made more clear when Olga has herself reprogrammed to love Viktor in exchange for his consent. Viktor rejects her offer, both as a reaction to being romantically manipulated and because he cannot accept an Olga programmed to love him, since love is to his mind something sacred. This decision is, however, filled with uncertainty in Viktor's mind: "If I could only have been there with Olga,... she would have embraced me. As long as I was myself, that was impossible. Or was it? It was. Definitely"[18]. Viktor reconsiders after he begins living with the reprogrammed Martin, now a fanatic mushroom-loving hobbyist instead of a conspiracy theorist, and enduring Martin's turtledove conversations and nights with his lover, Olga. Viktor finally succumbs to Olga's charms and agrees to be reprogrammed in exchange for a night of lovemaking, completing the romantic motif of conviction in the alternative order.

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[14] *Ibidem*, p. 84.
[15] *Ibidem*, p. 83.
[16] *Ibidem*, p. 82.
[17] *Ibidem*, p. 111.
[18] *Ibidem*, p. 45.

Viktor reneges, however, and resumes his fight: "They think they can allow themselves everything. That we are just some helpless playthings. But they are seriously mistaken"[19]. Viktor first organizes a demonstration, but no one listens to him as he is drowned out by offers for hot dogs and beer from a refreshment stand. As Martin later notes: "People get enough to eat, like their work, their TV works, why should they give a damn..."[20]. In a last effort, Viktor enlists society's most destructive element, the Angels of the Void, a motorcycle gang, which had previously taken him captive, resembling the Hell's Angels. Always ready to pummel average citizens and spouting phrases such as "Nothing is important" and "We Angels of the Void know that nothing in the world has any point"[21], Viktor easily persuades them to brawl with his apathetic peers. Indeed, the Angel's destructive nihilism is a heightened, brutal form of Victor's own rejection of the facade created by the Project, the void of his own lack of belief. The revolutionary bloodshed he first embraces, however, quickly appalls and turns on him when he finds compassion for the Angels' victims and is moved to help them, differing him from the nihilists. Viktor must be saved by the very utopian leaders he opposes.

The Project's leaders reveal to Viktor that he is the victim of an intrigue and is in fact the son of the president of the Insurance Company. Viktor accepts his new role, wishing to lead the utopian company to new heights by completing the project "Victory," a space ship to colonize the planet Dor and provide society with a new life on an untainted world. What seems a noble undertaking, proves otherwise when the spaceship's pilot, Martin, discovers that Dor is already inhabited by humans who escaped the atomic war. The Company demands their extermination: "As a utopia, a civilization that has truth and order on its side, we have certain rights. We shall unfurl our thought as a flag across the universe"[22]. These words cause Viktor to disavow the Company, recognizing the difference between good and evil, and "mind boggling evil comes from the deathly dangerous idea, we had created the best of all worlds"[23]. Viktor instructs Martin to destroy the rocket, saving Dor, and condemns the Insurance Company for bringing evil into the world: "Do you even understand where evil comes from, you flock of sheep? From the good doers of all systems who go to spread their tremendous ideas by fire and the sword"[24]. After awakening from a blow to a head, Viktor finds himself a simple construction worker with two left hands, troubled by memories of his past, and still attempting to reveal the true nature of the Insurance Company to his friends. Doubt, however, plagues his endeavors. Viktor feels he isn't lacking anything: he

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[19] *Ibidem*, p. 178.
[20] *Ibidem*, p. 188.
[21] *Ibidem*, p. 89.
[22] *Ibidem*, p. 266.
[23] *Ibidem*.
[24] *Ibidem*, p. 271.

has his health and good friends; he only yearns for Olga. In the end, the protagonist is still on the fence of the virtues of a utopian society.

The penultimate event again reveals the novel's intertextuality, the spaceship "Victory" referring to Evgenii Zamyatin's *We* [*Мы*]. Just as Viktor leads the "Victory" project, Zamyatin's protagonist D-503 is the chief engineer for the spaceship "Integral". Although the first "Integral" is not built to eradicate rebels, its greater mission is identical to "Victory's": to carry the one truth to others and make them accept reason even against their will: "It is our duty to force them to be happy. Before we use weapons, we'll try words"[25]. When talking of the perfectly organized society prevailing over its opponents, D-503 makes repeated use of the word "victory [победить]", verbally tying *We* to the spaceship "Victory" in Kmínek's Utopia[26]. In addition, both novels reflect the technological stagnation of harmonious societies, despite the Insurance Company's attempts to overcome this through planned different thinkers. The world of *We* is stuck in Euclidian geometry and abhors irrational numbers, the three hundred years since the apocalypse find Bentham's city using "generators which are from the time before the Projekt, just like the majority of other technologies"[27], lending credence to Viktor's remark "Doesn't it sometimes seem like a civilization that can do anything with itself, can't really do anything. Nothing at all"[28]. Programmed harmony seems to preclude technological innovation and denies other models the right to exist. The desirability of Kmínek's alternative society is not only questioned by its violent nature and hegemony, but also by its inability to instill belief in its better way. The "Legend of the Boiling Eyes", with which this study begins, echoes the eternal struggle between freedom and happiness in utopian writings from Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor to Huxley's Mustapha Mond to legitimize the Project's existence as a surrogate religion. Viktor's first encounter with it is indeed a figurative and literal cleansing deluge – his apartment is flooded by a burst pipe – after which he sees the positive in the project: "Suddenly I knew that even if I didn't live in the best of all possible worlds, I certainly didn't live in the worst. I knew that suddenly with such certainty..." and bursts out in tears[29]. Yet skepticism lingers as the protagonist reflects after watching a soap opera: "All of our lives are just a barrel organ, whose crank some laughing head programer is turning for us. But is that a reason to run out onto the stone plain and hang oneself on a birch tree? No way!"[30]. The legend of creation is believed, but the means to achieve happiness challenged. Indeed, when the means include the destruction of others, a second cleansing deluge is released and Viktor condemns the project.

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[25] E. I. Zamyatin, *My*, „Sochinenia" 1986, vol. 3, p. 133.

[26] *Ibidem*, p. 263.

[27] I. Kminek, *op. cit.*, p. 235.

[28] *Ibidem*, p. 133.

[29] *Ibidem*, p. 154.

[30] *Ibidem*, p. 159.

The question of belief is not only specific to Viktor, as the experimental doctor, who confuses Viktor for an inspector and lets him into his secret lab, reveals: "The Models programmed with Human Pascal come with the beautiful idea that one should believe in something grand…"[31]. The different nonconformist humans believe in God, the good in people and a mysterious world. What seems as merely a throw back to Gogol's *Inspector*, proves be a deeper concern. In an attempt to create societal cohesion and common belief, the Insurance Company considered propagating the legend of a new beginning or creating a shared cultural experience as a foundation of belief. The raging Angels of the Void, rather than some aberration of the *harmonogram*, were in reality to have played a role in the latter, when common citizens were to rise up and defeat them in an act of civil courage. In his new role as acting leader, Viktor chooses to continue efforts to instill a belief in the Insurance Company as a deity of salvation, renaming it Universe, doubtlessly drawing on the limited effects of the "Legend" on himself. Since a belief can only come as a result of suffering, the perfectly programmed harmony is disrupted in a first phase, "Temptation", by individuals programmed in Human Nonconform such as hippies playing guitars and singing protest songs and prophets questioning the meaning of human existence. In the second phase, "revelation", the project introduces itself amongst a fanfare of trumpets and the shine of an artificial sun as a new religion with Viktor as the voice of God. This extension of a utilitarian project to the realm of absolute truth, usurping religion, suggests the limits of secular, rational utopianism, an inability to satisty the human desire for belief, and echoes those of national and socialist states to provide surrogate institutions for religion. As in the earlier attempt, Universe fails, sabotaged by the project's opponents, and Viktor returns to the simple programing of harmony. The one surviving city is left a simple belief that it is better than other options, such as that of the freedom of the apocalypse, rather than given a belief in an absolute. The alternative society thus continues to have a place for the Angels of the Void.

The novel presents an ambiguous view on programming people to create a more perfect society. While a reader may take this as clearly dystopian, i.e. a negative utopia, a less perfect society, the view of the protagonist does not allow for such an either/or decision. The wavering between wanting to be part of it and opposing it makes the judgment on the Bentham Project ambiguous. Moreover, the society avoids the typical means of repression and coercion of classical utopias. Indeed, even reprogramming requires the individual's agreement and signature. Dystopian – from the protagonist's perspective – is the absolute claim to truth. Although desiring some dynamics and individuality within, the new society claims privilege to the only truth and order and hence the right to destroy others civilizations. One must suspect that it may be responsible for the cataclysm

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[31] *Ibidem*, p. 129.

on earth in an attempt to eradicate those favoring freedom, just as it strives for interstellar travel to eliminate the survivors on Dor and thus leave its doctrine unchallenged. Kmínek's novel navigates between the positive and negative in the conflict of freedom and security, the individual vs. society, and the danger of absolute convictions that comprise utopian thought.

Kmínek's novel may not, however, be reduced to its utopian philosophical musing. Not only the aforementioned aspects of both detective and romance story, but also the novel's ironic, often comical tone, and play with conventions prohibit this just as they prohibit the reduction to mere allegory. Flushing a toilet to open the secret passage into the Insurance company headquarters, swallowing bonbons to "read" the project's history: these items tax SF's probability, resulting in comic effect, as does the fanatical mushroom collector as a hyperbole of Czechoslovakian reality. The utopian discourse of security versus freedom itself receives a dose of comedy when the utopian elite is named an insurance company. Similarly, the believability of the pseudo-documents embedded in the text become suspect by references to Asimov's laws, an allusion to a literary fiction.

Utopia, the Best Version's may offer a refreshingly thought-provoking, experimental and humorous fusion of dystopian and utopian modes and shares universal themes with more renowned international literature, such as Zamyatin's *We,* yet this is not how it has been reviewed in the Czech Republic. A handful of critics limit their reviews to the novel's reflection of life in former socialist Czechoslovakia. Andrej Halada's review is typical in regards to literary utopias' reception as allegory. Halada states Kmínek was forced to write science fiction since "for very prosaic reasons it was impossible [under socialism] to call things by name"[32]. Halada considers the society portrayed in the novel to be a camouflaged attack on Czechoslovakian socialism: "In short, when one removes the trappings of science fiction, we find real socialism"[33]. His only acknowledgement of aesthetics is a comment that it honors the author that all the absurdity and stupidity have been somewhat exaggerated, and everything takes on a grotesque form. Due to this positivistic reading, it comes as no surprise that the critic regards Kmínek's utopia as somewhat passé, although it may serve as a useful warning of "what we do not wish to return to"[34]. A similar historical reading causes Karel Vik to recommend that those younger than fifteen shouldn't even pick up the book since it is a reaction to the situation before 1989, which they did not experience[35].

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[32] A. Halada, *Absurdita, Ironie a Zábava: Ivan Kmínek Utopie, nejlepší Verze, Próza*, „Tvar" 1991, no 14, p. 14.

[33] *Ibidem*.

[34] *Ibidem*.

[35] K. S. Vik, *Utopie, nejlepší verze – Kmínek Ivan | Karel Stirius Vik | FantasyPlanet.cz | vše o fantasy, sci-fi, horror | recenze, knihy, komiksy, spisovatelé | Tolkien, Sapkowski, Gemmell, Goodkind, Jordan,* N.p., 24 Jan. 2007, http://www.fantasyplanet.cz/clanek/utopie-nejlepsi-verze-kminek-ivan [data dostępu: 17.11.2010].

Eva Hauserová similarly concludes in her review that Kmínek reminds readers of their own mental state during Husák's regime, when they reflected that they truly were not that bad off if only they wouldn't reflect on it[36]. She argues it is a work about this historical complicity in totalitarianism. The only literary study of *Utopia, the Best Version*, Joanna Czaplińska's *Dziedzictwo robota*, treats the novel as a dystopia and arrives at a similar conclusion: the novel is an indictment of real socialism[37]. Only Aleš Langer comments intuitively that Kmínek does not succumb to mere allegory packaged as science fiction but rather creates a fictional world for reflection[38].

There is, nonetheless, no denying that there are resemblances to Czechoslovakian totalitarianism. The reprogrammed Martin's passion for collecting, cooking and growing mushrooms reminds one of a favorite Czech national past time, the Czechs even coining the word "houbář" for such a passionate hobbyist. One may even consider the individuals programmed in "Human Nonconform" to represent the small outlet provided for artistic expression and individualism in Czechoslovakia, indeed singing the very same songs of the cultural revolution of the sixties. Yet an interpretation of the novel as a whole based on these few elements is not an adequate reading. Czech realia, irony and humor enrich Kmínek's Utopia, making it both open utopian speculation and entertaining literature, i.e. an entertaining panopticon as the subtitle suggests. While many read it as an allegory of Czechoslovakian totalitarianism, it has far wider reaching implications that concern any attempt at a brave new world. The utopian society is not condemned, as one expects from dystopia, but rather one sees skepticism, the tradition of relativism and abhorrence of any single truth, making Kmínek a protégé of Karel Čapek. Yet Kmínek does not stand merely in Čapek's shadow, for unlike Čapek, whose science fiction tales end with the apocalypse to foreground the value of present humanity, *Utopia, the Best Version* freely explores an alternative society in a dialogue of advantages and disadvantages as a possibly better world, one not ending in eternal flames, but surviving it to be truly post-apocalyptic and new.

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[36] J. Czaplińska, *Dziedzictwo robota. Współczesna czeska fantastyka naukowa*, Szczecin 2001, p. 149.

[37] *Ibidem*, p. 148.

[38] A. Langer, *Průvodce paralelními světy*, Praha 2006. p. 109.

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STRESZCZENIE

Autor w swoim artykule zajmuje się różnymi aspektami jednej z najlepszych powieści czeskiego pisarza *science fiction* Ivana Kminka, koncentrując się na utopijnej wizji społeczeństwa i porównując ją do obrazów innych autorów fantastycznych. Zadaje pytanie o to, czy osiągnięcie celów utopijnej społeczności, jaka została ukazana w powieści, rzeczywiście jest podstawą pozytywnej utopii. Wyjaśnia, jakie motywy fantastyczne są użyte do konstruowania świata przedstawionego, a które są odejściem od kanonu. Autor analizuje także antyutopijne aspekty powieści Kminka (tj. romans, powieść detektywistyczna, komedia) oraz stopień, w jakim jest ona oparta na alegorii.

Słowa klucze: postapokalipsa, Ivan Kminek, science-fiction, utopia

SUMMARY

In his article, "After the Apocalypse comes Utopia? Ivan Kmínek's *Utopia, the Best Version*" Kenneth Hanshew examines the various aspects of one of the three best works of Czech post-apocalyptic science fiction. He focuses on the following: the revelation of the utopian society as problematic, humorous accents regarding the title, exploration of the conflicts in the established utopian society, comparison with the concept of future as presented by other science-fiction authors, departure of Kminek's world from the notions of utopia's perfection and eutopian literary conventions, examination of the psychology and siginficance of the narrator and characters, as well as the analysis of the structure, motifs, tropes and themes used in the story itself. It is questioned whether the achieved goals of a utopian society as portrayed in the novel genuinely are foundations for a positive utopia. Hanshew continues to compare and contrast Kminek's ideas with other authors, as well as reveal the eliterary allusions conveyed within the work. It is explained which science-fiction themes are used in the construction of the presented world and how they depart from the canon. Finally, the author observes and evaluates the non-dystopian aspects of Kminek's novel (i.e. romance, detective novel, comedy) and the extent to which it is based on allegory.

Keywords: post-apocalypse, Ivan Kmínek, science fiction, utopy