

WORDS, SHAPES, AND OUR COMMON WORLD^{*/} (April 2021, 5,550 words)

INTRODUCTION to my book DISPUTING THE DELUGE: C21 Writings on Utopia, Narration, Horizons of Survival

Le peintre ne doit pas faire ce qui'il voit, mais ce qui sera vu

[The painter shouldn't render what he sees but what shall be seen]

Paul Valéry

0. An introduction should provide the reader with an overview of what the author believes are the salient points in the book and other matters helpful for approaching its text. Since this one is organised chronologically, I shall begin by grouping the chapters for our present interests. I shall proceed with second thoughts and special stresses arising from them.

The chapters may be assembled into four main groups, here summarily identified by their number: narratology enmeshed with epistemology and values: 1 + 10, 11, 22; the political context and prospects or potentialities of SF, Utopia/nism, and Fantasy: 3, 5, 18, then 2, 4, then 9, 14; and a culmination and revaluing of stance at length in extensive probes in and for these two last years: 22, 23, 24. Finally there are the more occasional (though in a nobler sense all the texts here are occasional) short incidentals or paralipomena: 6-8, 12-13, 15-17, 21. Though their importance may be gauged by a good part of them being my poems and my lone try at an apologue (16), I shall leave them to speak by themselves for their necessity in this book.

1. Words Shaping the World

I much regret there was no possibility in this book to systematise my narratological horizons and their reliance on a specific political epistemology, and will therefore attempt to fill a major gap or two here. This book is focussed – as most of my previous ones but perhaps more consciously so, forced by “the bitter disposition of the time” (Shakespeare) rubbing all our noses into further horrors and necessities – on the traffic and feedback between our common world and various authors (including myself) intervening into it by means of narrative positions and presuppositions, stories and comments. The only piece in the book exclusively devoted to narratology is “Kick-Off: An Introduction to Literary Genres with a View to SF,” which I have exceptionally lifted out of its chronological place in the middle and put as chapter 1 in order to clear up for myself what I was doing in my text analyses here, and not so incidentally to help the reader see on what presuppositions I was doing that. Any coherent book obeys a group of compatible presuppositions, most often implicitly – but it seemed after half a century of writing I should briefly indicate this set, that goes much beyond literary genres (though it continues to squint at them).

1.1. Art as Freedom and Knowledge

My first frame of determining sense and meaning is here the *epistemic regime*^{1/}, always consubstantial with an institutional framework, reigning or dreamed of. My general approach to epistemology, listed

at the end, commits to a “soft” skepticism: right and wrong persist, but the rightness must be created by human communities, with skill and responsibility, within contingent historical situations and durations (see Elgin, Goodman-Elgin, Prieto). It follows that rightness or wrongness is inescapably situated between the poles of knowledge used for wisdom furthering human *freedom* – as in the best of Greek, Hebrew, and some Asian traditions – and *Herrschaftswissen*, knowledge used for *domination*. Most significant concepts undergo therefore a polar splitting: this seems to me a central procedure of critical reason, dissatisfied with the present nominations and trying to insinuate opposed meanings under the same term (I applied it in ch. 20 to two notions of highest importance to me). It is accompanied by the rare invention of new concepts, e.g. Marx’s “labour force” or Brecht’s “estrangement.”

All modes of cognition – science, art, and others – are thus human constructions elucidating the human species’ traffic with aspects of the universe or nature. Up to ca. 1945 on (when one should date the advent of the capitalocene, see ch. 23-24) this traffic primarily pivoted on and was constricted by the available forces of production, after it the weight of relationships of production between various human classes grew decisive. All modes of cognition share some aspects, such as: a) a striving for understanding: literary knowledge, say, was posited by Auerbach as an attempt “to designate man’s place in the universe” (17); b) fundamental assessments that are epistemologically indispensable but not specifiable as a proposition or argument (and thus often, *faute de mieux*, called beautiful or esthetic); c) a sense of relevance, that includes awareness of topological *Gestalt* – say Kekulé’s dream of the benzene ring – and intuitive perception of form (cf. both Gendlin titles) within the fates of human communities, and today of the human species.

The arts occupy a special place in cognitive endeavours – though I can theorise with some confidence only about the language arts (poetry and narrative). Their understandings do not essentially refer back to general theories or principles but rely much more strongly on the specific epistemic regime and cognitive paradigm used. In other words, the indispensable role of ideological interests and practical human relationships, their weight and constriction, always in the fundamentals of all cognition in class society, is nearer to the foreground in arts; however, they are subjected to feedback with metaphorical systems, rooted in an imaginary sensual topology (see Suvin “On Metaphoricity”). In particular, poetry and fiction always imply a reader standing for a collective audience, ideally his/her whole community – this is foregrounded in plays – or at least one value-horizon out of a very few, usually two or three, available in a given sociopolitical spacetime. It was the accepted norm not only for ancient Greece but also for Leibniz or Kant that such creations in words reach some transmittable understanding of human relationships, so that Baumgarten called his foundational *Aesthetica* of 1750 the “science of sensual cognition.” Poetry and storytelling have often filled in the voids left by institutionalised science and institutionalised philosophy, and of course by most institutionalised politics, inimical to humanity because enmeshed in oppressive and exploitative class rule. All of them, including ruling politics as a most miserly example, use generalisation irremediably wedded to concepts, which cannot fully account for the relationship between people and nature, the finite and the infinite. Poetic creativity sutures conceptual thought to justification from recalled immediate sensual, bodily experience. As important is its ranging through richer time-horizons, recalled in Williams’s categories of the dominant, emergent, and residual in culture (121ff.): remembering supposed qualities within human relationships, absent today, in the past and expecting them in the future. The central meta-message of all significant poetry and storytelling is freedom as the possibility of things being otherwise. They carry a historically situated and political experience of the sensual, which is necessarily also a polemical swerve from and against the *doxa*, in favour of fresh

cognition. This freedom is intimately melded with knowledge or cognition. The story or the poem gives shape and voice to a previously uncognised, mute and non-articulated, category of being.

1.2. On Narrative Agents

As I instantiate in the essay on Orwell and *1984* (but see also chapter 9 “Starship”), narratological analysis classically consists of melding the accounts of the story’s flow (syntagmatics) and its underlying structure or model (paradigmatics). In a way, *narrative agents* are a privileged mediator between them, and I wish to present here a hypothesis about them I have held since the early 1980s but never developed at monograph length. It arose out of my work on dramaturgy where it is easier to detect – hence the stress on visualising – but I would defend its extension to all narration. To cut a long story short, I have condensed my findings in table form and ask the interested reader to look up the justifications and details in Suvin “Levels,” “Can,” and “Chronotope” (see much more also in the ch. 9, sections 4.1-4.2). The Table is organised with the depth agents downmost and rising toward the textual surface from 1. to 3.

TABLE OF NARRATIVE AGENTS

AGENTIAL LEVEL	PREDICATIVE ARTICULATION	NARRATOLOGICAL LOCUS	VERBAL STATUS; DEEP STRUCTURE	VISUALISING STATUS	DEFINITION	HISTORICAL DURATION
<u>3. CHARACTER</u> <i>personnage</i> or <i>personnage-personne</i> ; "round"; <u>presence not obligatory</u>	A great (though not unlimited) number of predicates/traits, at least two of them conflict	Always textual and a dramatis persona (when it exists)	<i>Proper name</i> ; deep str. = illusion of large number of not fully fixed attributes, only imperfectly retrievable from text + contexts	Necessarily figurative (depictable); necessarily individual	Individuality as presupposed by bourgeois practice (e.g. economics) and ideology (e.g. psychology)	Almost point-like, changeable for each different ensemble (interest group) of spectators or readers
<u>2.TYPE</u> <i>type</i> or <i>personnage-type</i> ; "flat", e.g. Vice, Pantalone, Miser, Father, Soubrette; <u>presence obligatory</u>	A small number, usually 2 to 6, of compatible predicates/traits	Metatextual or textual, according to whether level 3 exists or not	<i>Common or generic noun</i> , incl. proper name raised to that status; deep str. noun + one or a few attributes, nominal syntagm	Necessarily figurative; not necessarily individual	Societal type, by age + sex + profession, and/or social group, and/or temperament...	Middle historical duration: generations or centuries
<u>1. ACTANT</u> Protagonist, Antagonist, Value, Mandator or Arbiter, Beneficiary, and Satellite; <u>presence obligatory</u>	One predicate as common denominator of a bundle of semic predicates	Always metatextual; discrete appearance <i>dramatis persona</i>	<i>Common noun</i> ; deep str. = "force which does what is indicated by the noun"	Not necessarily figurative; necessarily not individual	Function narrative action	Long duration: epochs or millennia

2. The World Constricting Words and Shapes

2.1. The Sickness unto Death, and the Only Remedy

However, I speak of freedom in an unhappy epoch where millennial class society is breaking down yet redoubles its tenacious hold in its death throes (by repressive *intolerance*), while the truly free society of the associated producers cannot yet be born. Here, freedom can only come about as a suppression of non-freedom and anti-freedom. Every reading and interpretation is a denial and suppression of other readings, meanings, and values. Any positive act is also the negation of a negation; any truth a denial of opposed “untruths.” So what is today the active antagonist of collective human freedom, our supreme truth and Supreme Good? If every major epistemic act and regime are political in Aristotle’s sense of “affairs of the human community,” when does this spill over into politics in the miserable sense of daily newspapers and TV? When does history call into the foreground matters of political power and violence? Obviously, in times when human affairs are unable to go on as heretofore because of major breakdowns, which then lead either to revolution or to pre-emptive counter-revolution (fascism).

Such a historical moment for me began with 2001, in the twin outrages of Al Qaeda’s killing thousands of civilians in the USA and the US government’s adoption of an offensive defence posture by all means licit or illicit, eventually killing and torturing many more thousands. In this age, I see first of all the rise of a hi-tech Leviathan, more threatening to people’s freedom and survival than any other ruling class of history. Second, I see the response of a clash of competing monoalethists (from *alethé*, truth) – from monotheists to lay dogmatists (Fascists, Stalinists, and capitalist believers in the Invisible Hand of the Market) – who hold they have the Absolute Truth. A historically pernicious variant was the “weak thought” of Postmodernism, proclaiming that relativism is absolute; but for mass consumption, the mask efficiently donned by the new family of our half or threequarter-fascisms is, as a rule, nationalism. However, the latest depth form of this absolutism is the oppressive antiutopia to which I speak in the last two essays of this book, putting the State into the immediate service of the 1% of plutocrats. In between there is the straight gate of a stance, belief, and practice that would be both unshakeably liberatory, opposed to all forms of repressing humanity, and yet a severe way to our only possible salvation – ending class society. In my latest book *Communism, Poetry*, I call this force *communism*, in a generous historical sense that rejects social democracy, Bakunin, and Stalin but runs from Marx and Morris through Lenin and Gramsci to Brecht and much great poetry (see more in chapter 20 “Splitting”).

In this most dangerous interregnum of ours, the arts, and imagination in general, register deeply and durably both the disalienated horizons and the fullness of human alienations. As an extraordinary passage by Simmel has it, “the intellect is egalitarian and as it were communist,” for its contents are both generally communicable and, if correct, generally shareable “by every sufficiently educated mind (*Geist*) ... and the potential infinity of disseminating theoretical imaginations has no influence on their meaning, [so that] they exclude private property” (603); he is probably echoing, with more prudence in more complexly alienated times, Plato’s equally astounding proposition in *Meno* that any slave is capable of understanding geometry. Centrally, disseminated fiction’s contract with the reader is “not just egalitarian ... [but constitutive of] the story-teller’s art itself. The moral of the very act of fabulation was the equality of the intelligence” (Rancière 82). Such a striving for *freedom through*

understanding, assumed from Aristotle to Rousseau as a natural human right though often unnaturally suppressed, is here discussed within the “word art,” literature in the widest sense of all oral and written instances,

Franco Fortini, one of the 20th Century’s best Italian poets and critics – and an intimately epistemological and political one to boot – defined “the literary use of language” as a homology to “a formalised [that is, conscious and conscientious] use of life that is the end and goal of communism” (*Saggi* 184). This homology, which I take to be part annunciation-cum-denunciation and part prefiguration, necessarily transgresses the hegemonic discourse, in our times sadly clichéd; I would call it cognition constituted by memorable pleasure. It remembers the past, disputes the present “use of life into which we are forced by alienation of labour” (Fortini, *I confini* 35), and carries their lessons into projects of possible lives reaching for the future. What he means by form can be briefly characterised as an interpretation of the world by means of what word constellations both say and leave unsaid but suggest and give clues to, always suffused by firm if dynamic values shared by a societal class standing at that point in the vanguard of humanity.

2.2. Antiutopia: A Fake Political Ontology

As I just suggested, the final essays of this book culminate in the discussion of a new beast trudging toward Bethlehem, as Yeats put it: the Anti-utopia. The latter is what I meant as ensuring “bust,” for it is an active and far-reaching blockading of all SF and other utopianism in the most efficient guise of making it unthinkable, a perpetual taboo.

An earlier counterblast to the potentially liberating and therefore subversive horizon of SF and other utopianism were two genological novelties. The first was a well-orchestrated irruption of virulent militarist and war-mongering SF to which I shall return, but I speculate this reaches mainly youngsters of the White racist belt (there are no publicly available data on the sales of various sub-groups I deal with in this book). The second is a turn to the much more ancient Fantasy genre, which I discuss in ch. 2 and 4, my earlier brusque attempt to brush it off in MOSF having historically proved insufficient. This turn had the advantage of potentially appealing to the whole “precariate” generation under the boot of “austerity for the people” capitalism, but also a statistically small but important disadvantage: it had rich roots from the Gothic literature and the Romantics on (attempts to project this reaction to the bourgeois Enlightenment and revolutions into the past of Rabelais if not tribal tales or the depths of the human brain, as in a special 2002 issue of *Historical Materialism* devoted to the protean term “fantasy,” are obviously unhistorical and self-serving). These European roots, renewed by major US writers from Poe and Hawthorne down to Mark Twain, had a strong grounding in the impulse to escape the impasses and indignities of class history that kept growing and hurting. In the high-minded racists Lovecraft and Tolkien, who had overtly posited the Black Gods, they created veritable quasi-religious sects of fandom. These were small but the total collapse of the Welfare State by the mid-70s provided the ideal ground for proto-fascist massification, as proved by the US-centered Tolkien boom in books and finally movies. The problem was that the ever unreliable literary fiction and poetic imagination left open the possibility of not only Marx’s capitalists as vampires but even of feminist anarchism (as in Le Guin’s *Earthsea* series, discussed in ch. 11) and of overtly rebellious movements (as in Miéville’s *Iron Council* and some other works). Thus even the welcome rise of Fantasy did not quite preclude liberatory utopianism. Enter antiutopianism, raised from the feeble superman fantasies à la Ayn Rand to an extra-literary, culturally dominant, and existentially widespread stance and horizon that became the iron norm for all the *gleichgeschaltet* capitalist medias in much more efficient ways than Goebbels and the Gestapo. Itself a supreme ideologised fiction of Social-Darwinist human nature

reduced to nature red in tooth and claw (discussed in ch. 14 “Darwinism”), it no longer needed literary fiction.

I discuss such matters at length in the last two chapters of this book, which should ideally be factored in for what follows, but the subject is so new and so important that it will bear having a momentarily final capping. My thesis is that antiutopia as horizon and form is a major novelty, correlative to its original bearers being not only and not primarily professional intellectuals but professional politicians, the State apparatus of violence, and its embedded think-tanks. Anti-utopia is the latest crown of the ruling classes’ repressive tradition, evolving in my generation from the Welfare State pseudo-tolerance into intolerance. Intolerant repression was always the material truth of violent power. Lately, it ranges from refusal of money and careers for deviant thinkers, proclaimed unthinkably confused and/or dogmatic (!), to incarceration (probably the case for a great majority of officially assumed “terrorists,” if we are to judge from the US criminal justice as applied to the poor, beginning with the visible “others” of women, Blacks, and immigrants). It ends with assassinations, so frequently instanced in US politics by the Kennedys, the Black Panthers’ leadership, M.L. King, Malcolm X, and many humbler people under media radar. Antiutopia is the horizon of holding that all the central power and ideological pillars are untouchable, like Yahweh: I am that I am; but it is also the vector of intolerant repression in order to eternalise the ruling system as the best possible locus (see more in ch. 23). The ruthless saturation of imaginary space in an eternal present makes antiutopia’s grip powerful.

A very revealing light is thrown on the genesis and form of antiutopia, and on its rise to the age’s ruling common sense or indeed sense of destiny, by the new political ontology of the US ruling class – and to a degree all rulers of its allied and even enemy States – after 9/11/2001, as suggested above. In this oligarchic ontology imagination directly issues into factual states. Whether the US federal government really feared a worldwide “Islamist” insurrection or simply used this as a godsent opportunity to invoke “Homeland security,” creating in 2002 the titanic eponymous department, what it also excogitated and engaged upon was the evil novum of “a parallel ... extra-legal universe” (Scarry xviii-xix). This is an alternative, largely secret and hidden world obeying new procedures of violent power and creating new spaces for it: on the one hand “extraterritorial rendition networks, prison archipelagos, and secret >black site< facilities,” on the other, “indefinite detentions, military tribunals, and executive circumventions of national and international law” permitting planned kidnappings and killings of anybody the central security agencies deemed important enough (Saint-Amour). This parallel world in the interstices of our daily one ruthlessly jettisoned not only basic principles of international law but the whole of lay theory and practice of humanist-cum-liberal history and culture; that is, it jettisoned the revolutionary *citoyen* values in favour of a blend of slave-owning empires, colonial subjugation, the Holy Inquisition, and strictest World-War-type secrecy and disinformation. Its current culmination is Trumpism. It is the best empirical approximation to Lovecraft’s vague but malignantly powerful Dark Gods.

Two factors seem to me central here: first, the establishment of what Elaine Scarry calls an alternative universe with different permissibilities – “different bases for fact, standards of proof, evidentiary parameters, rights, procedures, penalties, guarantees, and expectations” (Saint-Amour). It fits well the passion of rulers in late capitalism for the state of exception or a *de facto* martial law, piecemeal applicable at will. This was theorised most clearly by the Nazi theoretician Carl Schmitt, undergoing a revival at those times, and observed also by Judith Butler within a critical Agambenian frame. However, Butler goes one important step further, noting that it is “a paralegal universe that goes by the name of law” (61). For the second defining factor of the existential antiutopia

systematically developed from within the nuclei of our ruling classes – and zealously followed by (sad to say) very many intellectuals right down to a tacitly new understanding of dystopia à la *A Game of Thrones* series – is that this new universe is not openly affirmed, as in its four historical predecessors identified above and their culmination in Nazis. On the contrary, it is occulted: it propositionally and axiologically splits off from the official universe, still ruled by publicly accessible contracts and remaining in force for the docile masses of the ruled (in the more affluent North, at least) insofar as they remain exploitable or otherwise usable. The secret world works by covertly yet systematically *infiltrating* the overt one, in which it is revealed first by macro-events that cannot be denied (but can be misnamed), such as the mass bombings from Afghanistan and Serbia to Syria or Libya, and then by the occasional courageous whistle-blower, who is made to pay dearly: from Frank Snepp, relating to CIA 1977, and Mordechai Vanunu, Israeli nuclear weapons 1986, to John Kiriakou, CIA 2007, Chelsea Manning, US Army 2010, Edward Snowden, NSA and so on 2013 (see the rich “List,” which strangely does not include the most famous one, Julian Assange of WikiLeaks).

Were there space, I would undertake to show that existential antiutopia is the left hand of darkness, whose right hand is the incessant murderous warfare of late capitalism that has never stopped from 1914 on. It is indeed warfare that in our capitalocene first clearly grew into the substitute for liberatory politics and unacknowledged economical pillar of the system (see more in my ch. 23 and 9). And the first offensive of the US Right within SF, detailed in ch. 9, was precisely one of "private-enterprise-riding-new-military-technology" SF (I'm adapting John Clute on “hard” SF 362-64, by adding “military”).

I concluded that antiutopia was a targeted and embattled ideologico-political use of a closed horizon to render unthinkable both the eutopia of a better possible world and the dystopia as awful warning about the writer's and readers' present tendencies. It stifles not only the right to dissent but primarily the imaginability of (and therefore the desire for) radical novelty – in brief, it dismantles any possibility of plebeian democracy. This was a world-historical novum by which the ideologico-political development of capitalism, that had all along produced fake novums galore, morphed by the beginning of 21st Century into this encompassing monster – the existential antiutopia as a super-weapon. One of its pillars was the Cold War misuse of 1984, whose ambiguities, weaknesses, and plain errors (see ch. 22) allowed its use for proving that any alternative to capitalism would be even worse. I think Orwell himself would be horrified by the horizon of a world where all people and human possibilities existed only as adjunct exploitable labour for profit – unless also as mercenary servants.

In the style of the *Communist Manifesto* and Brecht's question “What is the robbing of a bank compared to founding a bank?”, we could ask: within the production of human suffering, what are Attila, Gengis Khan, Stalin, and even the most horrible but short-lived Hitler State compared to agribusiness, Big Pharma, the Seven Sisters of oil, and the capillary grip of financial capital? And especially, adding insult to injury, when their values are blandly infiltrated as the new existential norm: antiutopia.

2.3. Ausklang: The World, the Story, and the Devil

Since this book may well be my final one on SF and utopia, it might be as well to risk a brief comment to the ancient Chinese story – beloved by Walter Benjamin, whose shade I invoke in this *Ausklang* – where the painter disappears finally into his painting. This is unavoidable after the author's death, when Mallarmé's Edgar Poe is “changed into himself” (that is, into the image given by his *Nachlass*, meaning both inheritance and reduction) “by eternity,” but it is always somehow properly anti-privatising. “Trust the tale not the teller,”

admonished D.H. Lawrence: though dialectically, we would know that without the teller the tale may not only have remained unactualised for new situations as a new variant but may have simply been inaccessible, non-existent for us.

However, I feel that today the painter can only decently reappear behind or in front of the painting in order to explain better what situation, personal but super-individual, led to just this painting, as a trace, testimony, and above all warning. The mega-situation is that we have to “once again begin to distinguish the forces of communism and fascism at work beneath the surface of [capitalist] world politics” (Jameson, *Benjamin* 207); the simple reason is that the hugely powerful ruling classes of our world have already jettisoned *citoyen* democracy and are reaching for the only remaining fix, some form of Fascism 2.0 (cf. an approach in my “To Explain”). The limited, though precious, “rule of people” looks now increasingly as a concession *ad evitanda mala maiora*, that is, to forestall by homeopathic doses the spectre of Leninist revolution, until the time when such concessions can be voided. The time arrived after 70 years, and what remains since is sterile shadow-boxing on the surface, eyewash and fossile façade. Therefore, as I have also argued elsewhere (say in “Prescience,” *Lessons*, and *Communism*), the only antagonist to centennial Iron Heel and repristinator of true plebeian democracy for the associated producers can be a libertarian communism. Given the high level of our production forces, all that prevents social justice or even survival for uncounted millions of people are the *relations of production*, pivoting on labour and knowledge but reaching into all spheres of life. A remarkably stark example of this is the capitalocene and then the “covidisation” I address in the last two chapters of this book.

Narratologically this means for me that, in the stories by which we explain the world and ourselves, the primacy of linear plot is to be spurned – as most High Modernism already did and Brecht best explained. This primacy, the second superweapon of Hollywood and mass-media kitsch alongside the character as three-dimensional interiority, should suffer the invasion of Sartrean and Benjaminian (and Harawayan) *situations*, and wherever possible get submerged by them. There is no need to deny a red thread can come about somewhere, but it is not only more like a ball of yarn or amoeba rhizomatically reaching here and there, it is uncertain and open – after every situation a new one opens, for the collective if not for the individual (who ends in death). A “well-made” story on the contrary leads the reader-victim to believe there are only two plots, both Social-Darwinist and mimetically transposable into empirical life: either the Great American Success Story (Horatio Alger) or its equally monochromatic obverse, gloom and murder (*The Game of Thrones*). Before our eyes, this has turned into a mega-lie and door opener to fascism in President Trump. Again it is Jameson, our Virgil among the gloomy shades, who has found the strategic formulation: instead of linear progressing, a train ride or air flight to known destinations, the truly new (the *Novum*) is by definition yet unknown, strange, and risky, while the prospects it opens may be uncertain or dangerous – like a love affair, a scientific investigation or a new poem, all fallible probes into potentiality. As against fake bourgeois progress, “the ‘new,’ on the contrary, is an experience of the present” (ibidem 216), a rearranging of the complex Darwinian embankment rather than the exemplary self-willed arrow already arrested by Zeno. The new embankment or biome may produce new flowers, predators or simply midden for coming generations, and for given interests it can be evaluated as progress or regress. But it is existentially itself – for the equanimous Ranke, every historical age was at the same distance from God.

True, there are momentous salvational exceptions, in which an age is nearer to the Benjaminian “divine” power because it harrows Hell. These are ages of *revolutions* that give, as Brecht said, the coolie several handfuls of rice per day instead of one and perhaps even a decent roof over his head and his family: but to do this, the wry Leninian added, he must destroy three empires. I had the historical privilege at the age of 13 to briefly witness the fringes of one – the Titoist People’s Liberation Struggle – on a sunny Dalmatian island. In my memoirs on that time, I cited the young Wordsworth’s poem *French Revolution*:

Oh! pleasant exercise of hope and joy!
 For mighty were the Auxiliars, which then stood
 Upon our side, we who were strong in love!
 Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
 But to be young was very heaven! ...

- - - - -
 Not in Utopia, subterraneous Fields,
 Or some secreted Island, heaven knows where!
 But in the very world, which is the world
 Of all of us, — the place where in the end
 We find our happiness, or not at all!

He was right.

P.S. Some Unavoidable Info, Acknowledgements, and Thanx

The title of this book arose from discussions with my late friend Dale Mullen, long ago, but alas not out of date. The major thanks for the whole of the text growing coherent go to the work and patience of Hugh O’Connell, without whom there would have been no book amid this coronisation, and any later one would have been much poorer. For the Introduction and a number of chapters I am very grateful for discussion with Fredric Jameson and much good counsel by Tom Moylan; also to Kasia Baran. Of course opinions and mistakes are mine.

The end is cut for this site.

Note

1/ Much more on epistemology can be seen in the essays in my *DBH* (such as chapters 10, 12, 15, and especially 16), and also in “Horizons,” “Approach,” and some further ones.

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