

# Dictionary of Literary Utopias

Edited by  
Vita Fortunati and Raymond Trousson



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the answer to his quest cannot be found among men: therefore he asks questions to Science represented by engineer Prushevskij, a dreamer-scientist. But even the engineer is unable to give any answer because Science has only explained "a small part... not the whole." As a consequence, the *radiant morning* will never rise. The symbolic girl who had been saved from her past will never see her own future, which means that the enterprise has failed. Therefore Voshchev starts another journey because he does not want to partake in the end of the common dream, the dream of finding the Meaning of life.

**Analysis:** Kotlov presents all elements of Russian literary utopia\*: science\* limits, the search for Truth; popular traditions; Man's resurrection; the search for paradise\* on earth. Many are the possible interpretations of this text and this is why its definition depends on the kind of reading we make. The most important elements are the transition journey towards another place; the dream of a perfect civilisation with pre-determined rules; the use of a new language in which the de-constructed word marks a deep link between life and literature and finally anti-utopia\*, that is, the impossibility for any utopia to be actually realised. The novelty of the story is the coincidence between the chronological dates of writing (end of 1929, beginning of 1930) and narration. The time of narration is, in fact, completely altered; the past is forgotten whereas future substitutes present. All characters are a metaphorical representation of humanity during the forced industrialisation\* and collectivisation of Russia and the destruction of the rural economy of proletarian peasants in 1928-32). The impossibility of building the house of dream is soon clear, because the building of future humanity is a negation of the perfect City\* for a humanity which respects the rights of the community and of the individual. The house of dream in Kotlov is exactly the same as the crystal palace in Dostoevsky, the star city in Bryusov, the unique state in Zamyatin, the edenic places of ancient Russian culture. The author was a project engineer and at first he was enthusiastic about the socialist project of a right society for all. He even participated to the building of the electric line, but was very soon isolated because of his writings. His most important works were published some decades after his death. Voshchev, reminding the Russian tradition of all *pravdoiskateli* (truth searchers) will continue his journey, conscious of the impossibility of realising his own as well as others' utopia. (see Chevegur\*)

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[H. Pessina Longo]

#### *KRASNAYA ZVEZDA [RED STAR]*

Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Bogdanov – pseudonym for Malinovskij (1873-1928, RUS)

**Dates:** Published in 1908 by *Tovarishchestvo khudozhnikov pečati* (Print Artist's Society) in Saint Petersburg. A second edition was published by the Petersburg Council of Workers' Deputies and Red Army Soldiers.

**Summary:** The novel describes a future society based on Communist principles which the protagonist, a revolutionary by profession, discovers on the Planet Mars. Red is the colour of the Martian flora – a symbolic "socialist\* flora." Society on that planet, in many respects similar to that of the Earth, is, however, superior in terms of development. In its past Mars has experienced a succession of tribal, feudal and finally capitalistic societies, later followed by a peaceful social revolution\*. When Leonid, the protagonist, arrives on Mars the Communist society has already been developed. This rational Martian world is very near to an ideal society. High scientific and technical levels have been reached on Mars. Martians have learned how to separate and synthetise all chemical elements, they have built shipcrafts which can move with energy deriving from decomposing radioactive materials. In the novel Bogdanov anticipates some interesting technical ideas such as the possibility to control gravity, stereoscope cinematography, the projection of images at a distance, telematic conferences, artificial egg's yoke, and finally blood transfusions to make people young again. The system of work organisation is also perfectly described. Each hour Martian statistics report information on the necessary quantity of product to be realised and the numbers of hours needed to produce it. At the same time, the work force is redistributed on a voluntary basis, because in this society work is a natural need for each individual. In Martian Communism\*, education\* is public. Children are educated in "Houses for Children" where there are special areas for learning and playing. From the very beginning children are taught their society's history\*, that is, the history of communism. But unfortunately Martians have to face a problem of overcrowding and they start thinking of moving to another planet. Sterli, a famous scientist, proposes to eliminate the Earth's population in order to preserve his own race. For this reason Leonid kills him. Nonetheless the chemist Letta gives his own life to save Terrestrial man. According to Bog-



danov each member of the Martian society has the right to suicide. The author also pays homage to the theories of the so called "free love." There is a relevant part of the novel dedicated to the advantages of polygamy. Even Leonid in the beginning supports such a theory, but changes his mind after a series of personal problems.

**Analysis:** Bogdanov is the author of two utopian novels: *Red Star* (1908) and its sequel *Menni the Engineer* (1911). *Red Star* is a milestone in the history of Russian utopian literature. Bogdanov is the first of a utopian generation of Russian writers, who combines a particular utopian technique with Communist scientific idea and the idea of social revolution. The transfer of a utopian society from Earth to Mars is a real innovation. Before Bogdanov, authors would normally choose some distant island\* in the oceans or a remote place in the future for such purposes.

Moreover Bogdanov does not idealise the Communist society but rather underlines its difficulties, namely ecological\* problems, energy resources etc. Martian society also presents primitive elements of equalitarian communism. For example there is neither personality nor individuality. The Martian model of a Communist society should not be considered as a dogma. Terrestrials should refer to such a model so as to build a future very near to it, but much more irrational, lively and brilliant.

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[N. Malinin]