

# Dictionary of Literary Utopias

Edited by  
Vita Fortunati and Raymond Trousson



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cise of writing with the aim of balancing creative imagination and a vast cultural, philosophical and philological knowledge, to lead a determined fight against any totalitarian dogmatism and ideology – right or left wing. His first dystopias undoubtedly indicate a trend in the history of German utopia, after the end of Second World War and during the first years of the reconstruction up to present time, shared by authors like Ernst Jünger (1895-1997) and Arno Schmidt (1914-1979). It is the reaction to flattening, to standardisation, to the sophisticated processes of alienation in an epoch when computer science is spreading and advertising language prevails, in short to a subtle and pervasive homogenisation, which might annihilate the value of intelligence and authentic individual creativity. In Jens' novel, such a standardisation takes place through judicial features, as the author highlights the risks hidden in a power exercised as a perverted mechanism that smashes the individual, reduced to a repetitive series of procedures, performed with no awareness and totally indifferent to the natural environment\*. In Jünger, distrust of technology\* is turned into an elitist conception of society, that drives him to cherish, against the dystopias produced by technology itself, a simple and original lifestyle. Arno Schmidt, finally, appeals to Valentinian gnosis in order to lay the blame of the world's misery on an evil demiurge, responsible for the mistakes in man's history. In his anti-utopian novels, the continuous recourse to classical utopia and to the "Robinsonaden\*" reverses the meaning implied in the generation of "other" worlds, reducing them to "Wortwelten," word-worlds, according to G. Müller. Dystopia is subjectivised and therefore becomes an exquisite literary device, as the author is not interested in modifying the world, not even in the utopian-dystopian dimension, in other words he is not interested in giving explanations to the fact that man tends always to move towards a place where he is not. Jens' research is completely different in nature. His dystopian parable, described in the novel and represented in particular by the character Walter Sturm, is set in a world that fiercely rejects solidarity and respect for the environment\*, but also refuses permanent criticism of institutions within a rational perspective, typical of the Enlightenment. In such a scenario, then, the parable places its trust in the instrument itself of literary invention, the novel, literature, giving it the function of being a "place of resistance," "Hort der Widersetzlichkeit," as it has been defined by M. Lauffs. The main character is in fact a university teacher and a writer, who says "no" to the disappearance of imagination and critical judgement, that means saying "no" to totalitarian conceptions, both ideological ones which

have occurred in the recent past, or those related to the standardisation of language that we find in the present.

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[G. Scimonello]

**NEOBYCHAJNYE POCHOZHDENIYA CHULIO CHURENITO [THE EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE OF JULIO JURENITO]**

Il'ja Grigor'evich Erenburg (1891-1967, **RUS**)

**Dates:** This novel was written and published in 1922 in Moscow and Berlin. A second edition was published in Moscow in 1923.

**Summary:** *Neobychajnye pochozhdeniya Chulio Churenito* presents the mysterious personality of Julio Jurenito defined by the author as "the Great Provocator." The author travels across the European Countries together with Julio and his disciples. According to Julio, freedom is only an abstraction. Communists have destroyed and substituted it with a single and precise organisation of Humanity. Some leaders have conceived fantastic plans of distribution of the population in the territory of the State according to different jobs, training programs for a certain number of specialists and even special programs of birth control. They also agree in eliminating the Family\* Institution\*. Children\* therefore have to grow up in special centres or in schools and in colonies. People must learn how to live together, meals must be taken in common halls, enjoyment and sexual excesses must be limited. All this represents the new Communist society. Erenburg's sarcasm is not completely cynical because it hides a sympathetic attitude for human pain. In the chapter entitled "The Great Inquisitor out of Legend" Julio Jurenito meets a Communist in the Kremlin. Here, the author expresses his doubts about the humanitarian character of the Communist Ideal. In the end the protagonist kisses the Communist on his forehead and blesses him. This benediction does not come from Christ as in *The Karamazov Brothers*, but from the "Great Provocator."



**Analysis:** I.G. Erenburg was a writer, a dramatist, a poet and a translator, but also a journalist and a war-reporter.

Julio Jurenito takes place in three different times and spaces. First of all the novel takes place in Paris in 1916 (during World War First), then in Kiev in 1919 and finally in Moscow between 1920 and 1921. The author satirically describes all the different countries that are involved in the war and the reader realises to what extent the massacre has spread. Erenburg's satire is directed against the monstrous industry\* of the war\* and against nationalism. In 1919 Kiev was the epicentre of the war; there was a continuous succession of governments, "each new government claiming to be better than the previous one." In the final parts of the novel the writer deals with themes such as the Russian Revolution\*, the Civil War\*, Post-Revolutionary life in the Soviet Union. By refusing the capitalistic order, Erenburg appears to be a heretic and while he tells about the Russian revolution he makes fun of its incoherence. He uses sarcastic words to condemn the French democracy and the Pope's power as well as the Italian unruly character, the obedience of the Germans, the morbidity of the Russian intellectuals, the pragmatism of Americans, the rhetoric of the socialist parties that are blind with respect to the bursting of nationalism and the advance of the middle class.

Erenburg, who is against all kinds of clichés and stereotypes, can be considered one of the most perspicacious prophets of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and one of the first to understand to possibility of an internal failure of revolution.

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[N. Malinin]

#### NEUROMANCER

William Gibson (1948-, USA)

**Dates:** *Neuromancer* was published in New York in 1984, *Burning Chrome* in New York in 1987.

**Summary:** In this classic noir caper, Case is recruited by a mysterious employer, and along with Molly – the hired muscle – they go "up the well" to Freeside, a resort in the L-5 "archipelago" orbiting the Earth. By this time Case has discovered that they are working for an AI (Artificial Intelligence) named Wintermute

(belonging to the Tessier-Ashpool family) which is trying to out-manoeuvre the restrictions placed on AI's to keep them under control: to "free itself and grow". With the success of the mission the Wintermute AI is able to join with its sister AI, Neuromancer, to form a new post-human entity in cyberspace.

**Analysis:** *Neuromancer* is often mentioned in discussions of recent science fiction\* as the paradigm of dystopian visions of a near future very much like the present (and it has generated at least one explicitly utopian response: Marge Piercy's novel *He, She and It*, 1991, as well as a dystopian parody, Kathy Acker's *Empire of the Senseless\**, 1988). Yet Gibson's fiction breaks with the established SF dichotomy between utopian and dystopian attitudes. Certainly the representation of the future no longer corresponds to the wonderful modernist vision of classic science fiction, represented by the gleaming spires and flying machines of the Chicago World's Fair so prominent on magazine covers of the 30s and 40s – a vision satirised in Gibson's story, "The Gernsback Continuum" (*Burning Chrome*). Yet this future does not really correspond to the dystopian nightmares of so much recent SF either. Although, this future may be objectively worse than the present, it is not foregrounded in a cautionary or dystopian way, as for instance, in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale\**. (For a discussion of the dystopian aspects of Gibson's trilogy, see the texts of Moylan, Nixon, and Ross.)

Thus the future of Gibson's fiction is not so much "about" what lies in store for us, as it is a figure for our experience of the present (analogous to the vision of the city\* to come in the film *Blade Runner*). Most people live in an urban mix of decaying inner cities (where living conditions approximate our ideas of some Third World city), alongside heavily guarded corporate towers and apartment buildings – a vision summed up in the "Boston-Atlanta Metropolitan Axis," better known as the "Sprawl." In the decaying margins of the corporate domains we can occasionally glimpse small sub-cultures and communes (e.g. the Rastafarians of the Zion Cluster), which hint at a utopian alternative, however limited, for surviving the impoverishing and homogenising effects of globalization.

However, the novel's significance in utopian terms lies elsewhere, in the author's imagination of "the consensual hallucination of cyberspace" – "A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system" – and the enthusiasm of some of Gibson's readers, who have seized on the concepts of cyberspace and virtual reality as figures for the empowering possibilities of the new electronic technologies.