

## Three undiscovered utopias in German-language literature from the Czech periphery: Moravian Wallachia and Zlín

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If we distill the concept of utopia simply to the human dream of a better society, we can easily come to the realization that utopian thinking is as old as humanity itself, especially viewed through the lens of political and cultural history. The symbolic beginning of utopia and a foreshadowing of things to come can perhaps be seen at the moment of the loss of biblical paradise as well as in man's age-old desire to end great narratives with the subjective equilibrium of a happy ending. This is largely logical, but utopia also entails a kind of dreaming along with a hidden desire to recreate the world, or at least the state of the human mind. We find the imprint of utopian thinking not only in social theories (hence the "heaven on earth" of communism) or in social practice (for example, the legendary social experiments of Robert Owen, 1771–1858), but also in poetic form, that is, in a wide variety of literary texts.

It is difficult to imagine a study on literary utopia that does not reference the Latin work of the humanist Thomas More (1478–1535) *On the Best State of a Republic and on the New Island of Utopia* (*De optimo rei publicae statu deque nova insula Utopia*; Eng. trans. 1995), published in 1516. This satirical fiction imprinted a specific form on the phenomenon of utopia as a specific literary genre, including the name itself. It is appropriate in any consideration of utopia to keep in mind that the original notion of a community of people with an alternative approach to ethics and metaphysics which forms the basis of a new organization of society and economy was first introduced in More's foundational Plague Utopia. Although the work was conceived 500 years ago in widely different circumstances, More's "new island" which arose out of the Black Death remains extremely useful for mapping the path that utopia has taken over the centuries, through countless variations by authors who have emphasized distinct aspects of More's concept and taken it into uncharted territory.

The paradigm of utopia has undergone many changes since the time of Thomas More, with the textual responses providing an unprecedented number of often conflicting interpretations. This is due in part to the fact that literary utopia already suffers in its essence from one significant imperfection, namely the uncertain limits of its own fictionality and the tendency towards documentary, an aspect that its interpreters must also deal with in some way. The more convincing and informative is the tale of dream islands, enlightened communities or harmonious times, the more difficult it is for the author to maintain the necessary degree of fictionality expected from a literary text.

In other words, getting caught up in too many abstruse details at the expense of telling a good story can lead the text toward the monotonous documentation of an abstract wonderland or a cold critical description of the ills of contemporary society.

## FROM CENTER TO PERIPHERY – TRACES OF UTOPIA IN GERMAN-LANGUAGE LITERATURE

The authors of the analyzed texts dealt with all this knowingly and, at times, seemingly inadvertently. The goal in this article is to show the diversity of utopian forms and utopian thinking, particularly in the 20th century, based on works by selected authors of German literature from the margins. I deliberately avoid foregrounding the designation of literary utopia, as these authors treated utopian ideas as connected to fiction quite arbitrarily. Furthermore, it is necessary to take into account the fact that the texts explored below were created in the conditions of the literary periphery, both in terms of geography, i.e. the birthplace of the authors and where their works were created (in regions of Moravia versus Vienna or Paris), as well as contemporary reception, the scope and nature of which can be described as marginal at best. Nevertheless, even the limited response to such works on initial publication does not diminish their cultural-historical significance, nor does it reduce at all the potentially valuable possibilities of their contextualization, quite the contrary.

In his study of the history of utopia, Thomas Schölderle (2017) discusses the development of the genre in the European context following More's tour de force as well as several German utopian texts that can be considered paradigmatic, as alluded to above. Among these texts we find, for example, the *Prague Manifesto* (*Prager Manifest*, 1521), a utopian contextualization of the revolutionary chiliastic teachings of the disciple of Martin Luther and fellow reformer Thomas Müntzer (1489–1525). The German theologian and writer Johannes Valentinus Andreae (1586–1654) also contributed to the development of the genre with his Protestant utopia *Description of the Republic of Christianopolis* (*Reipublicae Christianopolitanae descriptio*, 1619). A classic literary example of German utopia is Johann Gottfried Schnabel's four-part Robinsonade-based novel *The Miraculous Fate of Several Sailors, Particularly of Albert Julius, a Native of Saxony* (*Wunderliche Fata einiger See-Fahrer, absonderlich Alberti Julii, eines gebohrnen Sachsens*, 1731), best known in an 1828 abridged version by Ludwig Tieck as *Palisades Island* (*Insel Felsenburg*, 1731; Eng. trans. 2017).

Nevertheless, while German literature provides a number of remarkable utopian texts, the representation of utopian thinking is highly differentiated among them. This is confirmed, for instance, by results of my research since 2016 specifically focused on German-language literature from Moravian Wallachia, with the first results published in 2018 (Marek 2018a; 2018b). It should be emphasized that this is not primarily local or even ethnographically colored literature nor are the works exclusively focused on the region itself. These are texts by German-speaking authors who originated from this Czech, or rather Moravian, region or worked here in the period 1848–1948, particularly in the last decades of the existence of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, and who in varying degrees thematized this region in many of their works. These are marginal authors who generally tried to adapt to contemporary literary

trends (from realism through naturalism and modernity to the New Objectivity) and at the same time sought to establish themselves in the metropolises of the German-speaking world, especially in Vienna and Berlin.<sup>1</sup>

Moravian Wallachia must therefore be understood, despite its peripheral character, as a multicultural, not as a monocultural or ethnographic entity (cf. Brouček and Jeřábek 2007, 1 100), in which Czech and German culture coexisted alongside Jewish culture, a diversity which was naturally reflected in the literature. This finding alone is beneficial, especially with regard to the limited amount of research into German literature from the region. The variegation of and often liminality among cultures of the region allows for the postulation of the literary-historical construct of Wallachian literature in German as a separate object of research, from which further, more specific investigations can be derived. It is worth noting not only the topographical, but also the cultural and spiritual grounding of this literature, which is relevant in general to the Central European space, both including and beyond the historical experience of *Mitteleuropa*, and not only exclusively to the Austrian or German (or German-language) environment.

The subject of the analysis is therefore three sets of texts representing German literature from Wallachia which contain elements of utopia or at least traces of the utopian thought of the authors: the dramatic cycle *City of People: A Tragedy in Four Parts with a Cultic Prologue and Epilogue* (*Die Stadt der Menschen: Tragödie in vier Teilen mit einem kultischen Vor- und Nachspiel*, 1913–1917) by philosopher, visionary and mystic Susanne Schmida (1894–1981)<sup>2</sup>, the novel *The Imperial City* (*Die Kaiserstadt*, 1923) by Austrian diplomat and journalist Paul Zifferer (1879–1929), as well as a fictional text, Walter Seidl's "The City of the Future" ("Die Stadt des Kommenden", 1936), reflecting the industrial and social experiments of the world-renowned shoe manufacturer and businessman Tomáš Baťa conducted in (but certainly not only in) the Moravian city of Zlín.

### SUSANNE SCHMIDA'S *CITY OF PEOPLE*: BETWEEN THE DEMON OF POWER AND RADICAL SPIRITUALITY

The now largely unknown writer Susanne Schmida placed the utopia in her dramatic cycle *City of People: A Tragedy in Four Parts with a Cultic Prologue and Epilogue* into an abstract apocalyptic landscape, which subsequently transforms into a technical dystopia. The series of works was created between 1913 and 1917 (Schmida 1964, 18), with the first play titled *The Hopeless* (*Die Rettungslosen*, written [but unpublished] in 1913 and 1914), the second drama *Urtig the Builder* (*Urtig der Bauherr*, 1915), the third installment *The Bleeding City* (*Die blutende Stadt*, 1916), while the fourth part from 1917 remains lost. No part of the cycle has ever been staged, probably due to its peculiarity, one might say even a kind of illegibility, as she admits in her own autobiography (Schmida 1964, 18). A similar fate befell other works included in the literary estate of Susanne Schmida (1964, 1967, 1913–1917). In addition to dramas, poetry, memoirs, poetic fragments, ritual and esoteric texts, one can find reflective texts, treatises, lectures, notes, excerpts, dance matinees, correspondence, texts on spiritual and physical exercises and dance, formal documents, as well as organizational and official

communications. Schmida's philosophical and poetological treatises received a much warmer reception in terms of literary publication, such as her pivotal philosophical work *Perspectives of Being* (*Perspektiven des Seins*), originally released in 1968, with additional volumes published in 1970, 1973 and 1976.

In *City of People*, numerous compositional elements fall outside the literary tradition, with the main anomaly concerning form. In contrast to most literary utopias, this work has a dramatic character, which in this case seems to be an advantage, as this form conforms to the expressionist style and serves the generally high intensity of the ecstatic elements within the work. The dramatic form also contributes to the discursive nature of utopia, which is not uncommon in literary history (e.g. dialogues in plague writings). The only explicitly epic element is the almost naturalistically extensive stage and director's notes to guide production and performance.

As Schmida notes, the story takes place "in a fictional present time"<sup>3</sup> (Schmida 1964, 18) and can be summarized very briefly as follows: the former builder and urban planner Urtig spends his days in mystical and spiritual practice as a monk in a place with a touch of the distant past in a cloister in the monastic republic of Athos. He will not be released from the timeless monastery until he has completed a special messianic mission far away. After being chosen in a ritual conducted by the abbot of the hermitage that reveals the will of the god of time, he travels through space and time into a geographically indeterminate and highly abstract space within the world of ordinary people. Here, as a charismatic leader, he will lead a city of savage and depraved human beings who have survived natural disasters and war. Death is ubiquitous in this place and moral principles have collapsed. The people attribute almost demonic abilities to Urtig, gradually coming to believe in his saving visions and joining with him, with Urtig even marrying Jona, the daughter of the blind watchmaker Anton Hilger. In the eschatological atmosphere of a collapsed civilization, Urtig organizes an unprecedented exodus. He will lead a confused and hostile people to a new country in which he will create an alternative to the old civilization, with a new, futuristically conceived city at its center. The only specific geographical allusion in the work is to southern Italy, where one of the characters, Hilda, dies during the exodus. In the new center of power, everything is fully subordinated to Urtig's visions of technology and construction, the essence of which is set to be a complete spiritual renewal of life. All the machinations, however, gradually lead to the enslavement of people and eventually result in a tragedy in Urtig's personal life. Despite the ingenious organization and progressive urban arrangements, 17 years after the exodus it turns out that the city is inherently inhumane and the people within it have become mere victims of Urtig's experiments, with individual freedom and dignity deteriorating the most. Individuals are slowly transformed into mere instruments of work production, which the regime disposes of as worthless objects after they are no longer of use, i.e. when they die. Death is a mass phenomenon in this patriarchal society, with women and children in particular perishing in huge numbers. There are no celebrations or holidays. As the symbol of the City of People, a grandiose tower is erected which, in line with its pompous monumentality and semblance to the Tower of Babel, is in danger of collapsing. Fear is spreading

throughout the city; for some reason the inhabitants are dying en masse, and no one can understand or determine why. Urtig's city is finally completed after many tribulations, but the atmosphere within it is anxious and strained, with social unrest beginning to resonate. A revolt erupts against the generation of founders, during which the city is engulfed in flames; this grows into a huge conflagration, with mass orgies erupting in the midst of the inferno. Nevertheless, the clique of fanatical supporters of Urtig continue to suppress the population and compel their obedience. Urtig's son Froher flees with Jona to the opposition camp, where she and Froher will eventually fall victim to the turmoil. Froher was never to know that Jona was actually his mother, as her position in the hierarchy is regimented solely as the wife of Urtig in the mythical role of matriarch of the city, not as an individual mother with her own family. At the end of the third work in the series, *Dedication of the Temple* (*Die Weihe des Tempels*), Urtig survives all the protests, although one can only speculate about his fate in the fourth, undiscovered drama. However, even without this continuation of the story, it is evident that Urtig's mission was successful, at least viewed in a timeless perspective. In the epilogue of *Dedication*, after his return from the world of people Urtig is elected the new abbot in the grand hall of the monastery in Athos.

As the name of the work suggests, the scene of utopia is the eponymous City of People, the dominant symbol of which becomes as the years pass the phenomenal tower of the local temple. In addition to the symbolic significance of the tower itself, however, the toil exerted in its construction as well as other urban planning aspects of this utopia also play an important role. As Urtig was originally an architect and builder, he increasingly becomes a social engineer. The pride associated with the temple tower (and the imaginary link between the City of People and the spiritual world of the Athos monastery), serves several functions in terms of textual immanence. Above all, the imagery communicated in the tower contributes to the aesthetic coherence of the work through figurative expression (Kuon 1986, 4), in addition to the way the structure is described, using highly poetic language and stylization in the form of ancient tragedy, including the use of commentary from a Greek chorus. The tower represents a recurrent image connecting the timeless framework of the prologue and the epilogue (in which the primary task of the monk Urtig is to complete the construction of the temple in Athos) with its earthly historical counterpart the City of People. The metaphysical subtext implicit in this symbolic figure is unmistakable. Even a utopian community must live *sub specie aeternitatis*, thus the tower points to a higher, spiritual world from which the human world is derived and to which in some form all individuals return. On a secular level, however, here lies one of the greatest paradoxes of the work: the perfect geometry of building forms embodies the absolute, good and eternity, but at the same time it functions as a demonstration of Urtig's temporal power. This contradiction fundamentally shapes the intricately constructed character of Urtig, the ambivalent nature of which develops through his journey from unworldly monk to all-too-worldly tyrant.

A biographical approach to the text can help to clarify this antinomy. A likely reason Schmida approached the genre of utopia is her affinity for the most eccentrically diverse thought and spiritual experiments. At the same time and more uni-

versally, however, it cannot be overlooked that in its conception utopia becomes a parody of the technological development of civilization, which in the early 20th century often bordered on absurdity and the grotesque. Often including challenging elements of parody (16), utopia by its very nature is not meant to be appealing and does not call for imitation or adherence. As Susanne Schmida performs utopia, it is unique and absolute, only designated for the chosen few. Does this approach correspond to Susanne Schmida's critical view of the development of technology and the industrialization of a deformed civilization in the early 20th century? Apparently yes, or at least we can say that the author's thinking and work fit into this logical pattern. Schmida speaks, somewhat awkwardly, as a critic of the technical world and as a spiritual revivalist. This voice can be heard in a period generally perceived as a turning point or crisis for European civilization (the cycle was created in 1913–1917). Seen in retrospect, Schmida's poetic vision captured the essence of the disastrous development of civilization, while also showing a possible way out. I would even say that the poetic vision of *City of People* foreshadows some of the practices Susanne Schmida would begin 20 years later in her civic and spiritual life. Together with Hilda Hager (1888–1952), one of her lovers, in 1934 she founded the Society for New Life Forms, a spiritually-oriented community as a center for meditation, yoga, expressive dance, gymnastics and rhetoric which later became the Dr. Susanne Schmida Institute, still in operation today. Based on Hindu and Buddhist spirituality, Schmida and her devotees practiced cult rituals accompanied by meditation and dance under the mantle of the institute. These ventures led the chosen individuals to an enclosed spiritual space, a utopian island located within an ordinary house on Lehárgasse 1 in central Vienna, surrounded by a sea of urban pragmatism in the 1930s Austrian Ständestaat. The cult of Susanne Schmida, as well as its institutionalized form the Schmida Institute, survive to this day. The ritual texts preserved in the author's literary estate testify to her tenacious effort to bring about the spiritual transformation of the chosen individuals, as this extract from one of the documents shows:

IV. I connect you and us into one. The power flowing through our community will strengthen and elevate us. For if 2 or 3 or 6 or 12 are together in the same rhythm, a higher self brings itself into being. What is more, we surround all beings and life forms with immeasurable love and infinite mercy.

V. Standing and taking a position of prayer:

Oh my will, the averter of all despair,

My redeemer!

Yes, something invulnerable abounds in me, something indestructible...

[...]

IX. Admission to the circle:

I enter a circle whose center is formless; within this circle comes once for each of us an hour which assumes an image of eternity<sup>4</sup> (Schmida 1967).

The names of the characters can also provide insights into the work. Urtig is not a very common name in German-speaking areas; one possible explanation of its

significance is a connection with the German prefix *ur-* (which might be rendered in English as *pre-* or *ante-*), i.e. something old, primitive or original. There are also a number of spoken names based on the appellative semantics of the root of the word: the worker Willibald Trost (consolation) or the strikebreaker Peter Fälscher (forger). A specific role is played by Urtig's son Froher (cheerful, joyful) and his girlfriend Freua (derived from *sich freuen* – rejoice or be pleased). Paradoxically, both of these young people die a violent death, although (or precisely because) they bring a humane dimension to the powerfully sinister and technically dark atmosphere of the City of People.

But what exactly characterizes the city as the foundation of literary utopia as portrayed by Susanne Schmida? First of all, this urban planning project is identified with the emptiness of the values of modern civilization as embodied in Urtig's megalomaniacal plans:

To the left is a plain, green, fertile, interwoven with railways and streets. Around the village, fields. The city is newly built, the houses are tall, with large windows, surrounded by gardens, of white or reddish stone with domes and towers. Copper roofs. The space is uniformly arranged according to a great architectural idea. A street paved in white, rails, fountains, viaducts, etc. The overall impression is of a fairytale city, a feeling made all the more stronger by the fact that it remains completely uninhabited. Heaven knows no bounds<sup>5</sup> (Schmida 1916, 1–2).

It is certainly reasonable to ask the extent to which this is really a utopia, that is, a constructive counter-image (Schölderle 2017, 7), or simply the vision of an ideal community setting which might exist in reality (22). To address the distinction between these two descriptions, it is necessary to illuminate the form, content and function of this particular utopia. To begin with, this is a spatial utopia with synchronous features but without geographical localization, even without the specific geographical features of a fictional world. Further, Schmida imprinted a procedural character on this utopia: the inhabitants of the city are also its builders, which after more than 18 struggle-filled years of building is the cause of all the conflicts in the narrative. The basic characteristic elements of this world are its isolation and insularity. No mention is made of contacts with other civilizations, even of their potential existence. The economic system of the city is not described at all, a fact which is certainly related to its radical mission in the spiritual sphere, not the earthly realm. Clearly, close ties can be observed between people, communal solidarity, the power of a fateful connection as well as the growth of family and community structures. The City of People is not static; it shows a high degree of dynamism, in fact even revolutionary potential.

In accordance with the notions of utopia is also the motive of wandering and travelers (in space and time). The scene in which the monk initiating Urtig into the tasks associated with his mission in the world holds a hammer and a sickle on his chest is somewhat provocative and almost prophetic (Schmida 1913–1914a, 16). Certainly this is not a foreshadowing of a communist utopia, as communism was not yet associated with this symbolism at the time the drama cycle was created. The objects can be conceived as religious symbols, i.e. a hammer as an encrypted cross and a sickle

as a crescent, which would not be an unusual combination of Western and Eastern conceptions of faith in the syncretic belief systems that Schmida was inclined to. These images may also signify the received gender binary, with the hammer as a masculine symbol of strength and the sickle as feminine intuition. The City of People offers both utilitarian and symbolic buildings, including houses for workers, but also a dome by the sculptor Arndt which artistically sanctifies the otherwise dehumanized Urtig Tower. Apropos of the artist's revulsion, he curses the City of People as Urtig's project: "To build such a work is a crime, a crime, I must shout out!"<sup>6</sup> (Schmida 1915, 42)

*City of People* does not provide much space for fleshing out the abstract notions and presuppositions on which the utopian concept is based, nor does it describe a physical utopian space, i.e. everyday life in the promised city (Kuon 1986, 4). The text is not a plan for the realization of a perfect society through material or utilitarian means. Rather, the play cycle creates opportunities to put forth esoteric impressions regarding the religious legitimacy of truth and knowledge which are not directly communicable through language, but must be revealed and felt (Schmida 1913–1914b, 10). The work calls for interpretation in the spirit of *sensus moralis* and *sensus allegoricus*. For the humans reading this series of dramas (or watching a production), it represents an escape from a corrupt world into a world of the morally pure, which will soon prove to be no less morally dubious. For Urtig, the journey is a transition from a morally pure world into the moral quagmire of power and corporeality, and back again. An allegorical reading can bring forth Schmida's vision of a divine land based on a polytheistic-pantheistic devotion to a number of god figures, including Urtig and the monks in an Athos monastery.

Time as a subject of poetic playfulness is an unmistakable trope that forms the framework of the entire dramatic cycle. Urtig travels from the spiritually tuned timelessness of the monastery to an expressionistically abstract, apocalyptic landscape, then moves into a constructivistically conceived urban space populated by technical surrogates of the spirit. It is thus an embodiment of the paradox of modern man – caught between spirit and matter. All this takes place within one life cycle beginning and ending in the world of *supra mundi* (the monastery in Athos) based on prestabilized harmony, proceeding through the hell of civilization (the original city and the City of People), finally reaching redemption in the afterlife (the return to the monastery). In her utopia, as in her spiritual practice, Schmida expresses hope for the spiritual revival of the world. This wish, however, is not so simple.

Indeed all the evidence points to the broad oscillation of the City of People between utopia and dystopia, largely due to the internal (i.e. power-political), not external (i.e. in this case, metaphysical) conditions of its development. Darko Suvin defines utopia as "[a] construction of a particular community where socio-political institutions, norms, and relationships between people are organized according to a radically different principle than in the author's community" (2003, 188). The driving force of utopia is therefore a certain deficit latently running through society along

with the effort to eliminate this deficit. Elena Zeißler, however, points to the significant dominance of dystopia in the 20th century (2008, 9) in narratives largely intended to serve as a warning against certain trajectories in society and to show what might occur if the momentum along these tracks continues unabated. The City of People is indeed transformed into a self-sustaining entity in which the freedom of the individual is suspended, as evidenced by the symbolism of the tower as well as other tropes. The space can be profiled politically as a strongly patriarchal state based on the principle of unitary leadership in which Urtig is something of an enlightened monarch with constructivist leanings, surrounded by a scientific-technical and artistic elite and pursuing a strongly restrictive policy. Nevertheless, the cautionary and deterrent function of dystopia is largely absent. Surprisingly, the processes glorifying the city continue, paradoxically, even after the tragic death of Froher and Freua. Nevertheless, since the real conclusion of the story in fact remains hidden due to the fourth part of the cycle remaining lost, the above conclusion must be seen as partial, and therefore relative.

So what is the dystopia based on in *City of People*? In this context, Hiltrud Gnüg describes dystopia as a set of erroneous laws that run counter to human happiness (1999, 9), yet still maintain a certain appeal (18). For ordinary people, the City of People has ceased to be the Promised Land to which Urtig leads them from a place of scarcity and hardship. The voluntariness and enthusiasm typical of utopia are replaced by injustice and tyranny under the baton of official power. Urtig's system is highly directorial. The past has been either manipulated or deleted completely. The only permissible identity of the inhabitants is tied to belonging to the city. Interestingly, no national feeling is expressed in this identity, as all belief has been reduced to the deification of technology, all family relationships the subject of the system's power experiments. In the third part of the cycle, however, Schmida introduces a possible escape from the tyrannical power structure in the figure of Urtig's son Froher, who represents an enlightened elite. The soulful Froher instigates a rebellion against the whole system, but necessarily ends tragically as a victim. Still, this tragic ending is not the main thrust of the text, nor is it meant to be engaging or melodramatic. Paradoxically, dystopia does not serve to extrapolate events to the future or to warn us, but rather shows irrational nooks and crannies of human nature through inevitable stages in the development of both the individual and society.

Viewed through the prism of literary history, Urtig's story seems to draw on the Faust myth of the fall of man, the desire for knowledge and creation, love, unusual experiences, the contradiction between ideal and reality, the necessary pact with evil and guilt, falling into the abyss and, ultimately, about the salvation of man. The foundation is therefore essentially Christian, yet good and evil can be separated globally only in the supporting characters. Both good and evil, a type of utopia and dystopia, are wholly embedded with the maximum possible degree of universality solely within the character of Urtig. These themes and ideas give *City of People* the potency of a timeless work, one perhaps even more relevant for today than at the time of its authorship.

## PAUL ZIFFERER'S *THE IMPERIAL CITY*: UTOPIA AS THE RESURRECTION OF A STOLEN PAST

Topoi of utopian literature are also evident in the novel *The Imperial City* (*Die Kaiserstadt*, 1923) by Paul Zifferer (1879–1929), an Austrian diplomat and journalist who, like Susanne Schmida, hailed from the Moravian town of Bystřice pod Hostýnem. Comparatively little-read today, Zifferer's work falls into largely unexplored chapters of German literary history. Perhaps because of his official position as an envoy, today Zifferer's name and work are slightly more well-known in the English-speaking world than is that of Schmida, who remained throughout her long life largely within the esoteric peripheries of (literary) society. In 1983, Hilde Burger published Zifferer's correspondence with Hugo von Hofmannsthal from 1910–1928 (Burger 1983). The letters collected here embrace many intriguing themes, and upon careful examination a potentially fruitful possible direction for future research into Zifferer's work can be delineated: analyses in the context of aesthetic modernity. As is also clear from this correspondence, Zifferer sought to make a name for himself within the Jung Wien circle of writers.

Paul Zifferer came from a wealthy Jewish family that gradually settled in Bystřice pod Hostýnem over the period of 1718–1778. Throughout the mid-19th and well into the early 20th century, the Zifferer house was the center of German cultural life in the region (Doláková and Hosák 1980, 221). After completing his studies in law and philosophy in Vienna and Paris, Zifferer worked as a journalist until in 1919, when he was appointed by the Austrian government as the press and cultural attaché in Paris. Zifferer translated French literature, particularly works by Gustave Flaubert, into German. His own work encompasses prose, poetry and, to a lesser extent, drama, with his most extensive works including three novels: *The Strange Woman* (*Die fremde Frau*, 1916), *The Imperial City* (*Die Kaiserstadt*, 1923) and *The Leap into the Uncertain* (*Der Sprung ins Ungewisse*, 1927), all of which show an affinity for Viennese modernism. After serving in Paris for ten years, Paul Zifferer died on February 14, 1929 in Vienna.

In the novel *The Imperial City*, Zifferer describes the painful integration of the individual into the social system against the background of a crisis among political and social elites. In this prose sketch, Zifferer managed to break free from the naturalism that had marked his previous novel *The Strange Woman*, moving slightly toward an expressionist approach. This difference in Zifferer's style, as in the case with the expressionism of Susanne Schmida, is not marked by a vehement exaltation or foreboding, but rather by a subtle visionary elegance. At the heart of the action is the typical "good man" of expressionism, an individual lost within a tangle of individual and collective, the personal and the social, regional and global problems. The language of the novel is simple, factual and surprisingly non-expressive. The causality of events is quite loose, with frequently changing perspectives in the way social incidents are depicted. The reader may find this style challenging, even at times confusing, but for Zifferer the mediation of this confusion is precisely the point. The reader is faced with an extensive and diffuse social novel which deals with how the thinking and actions of individuals change at a time when, after hun-

dreds of years of existence, the nation in which they live begins to turn to the past. A by-product of these historical processes is also the emergence of disparate utopian ideas, which seem to represent a kind of surrogate for the declining state. It also follows from the above-mentioned correspondence between Zifferer and Hofmannsthal that it was precisely this novel that became the main point of disagreement between the two authors, even arguably disrupting permanently their long term close relationship. Although Zifferer continued to show his admiration for Hofmannsthal for years, expressing artistic sympathies for Hofmannsthal's work, in a letter dated December 29, 1923 Zifferer expressed deep displeasure with Hofmannsthal's harsh critique of *The Imperial City*: "Your negative assessment of my book, more specifically, your disapproval has caused me more pain than I can convey, deeper than I would like to express"<sup>7</sup> (Burger 1983, 160).

The story of the novel begins in 1916 in Vienna and closes at the end of World War I. The main protagonist Dr. Toni Muhr is a melancholic intellectual, scientist, chemist and technical manager of an ammunition factory belonging to the Ratlein brothers. Muhr returns from the turmoil of war at the symbolic moment when Emperor Franz Joseph I is being buried, and with him the old Austria-Hungary. Thus something approaching the end of time has come: not only is the long reign of the old monarch ending (1848–1916), but in a way an entire world is collapsing. Seen from the point of view of the chemist Muhr, chaos is ensuing in which various attractive and repulsive forces are being manifested. A separate chapter tells the story of the women who strongly influence Muhr. Though these characters are portrayed as almost demonic in nature, Muhr expects both women to aid in his efforts to preserve both the past and his morals. The central woman in his life is the unsophisticated girl Lauretta, who serves as Muhr's femme fatale. Princess Lubecka, a mediator of political contacts, is also prominent in the plot. Muhr has no idea that Lauretta is in fact being exploited by Muhr's employers the Ratlein brothers, outspoken businessmen and representatives of predatory capitalism. Lauretta is enlisted to influence Muhr so that he does not expose the unfair practices of the company. From Princess Lubecka, Muhr is promised easier access to political elites to help him combat the fraud and immoral plans of the Ratlein brothers. Lubecka, however, only intends to use Muhr as a young lover. The characteristics of both relationships show to a considerable degree alienation, expediency and the reduction of relationships to bodily love. An explosion occurs in the Ratlein factory which claims many victims, with the resulting fire emerging as a symbolic expression of the end of the ages as well as a foreshadowing of the social unrest that will soon break out in the company. Muhr proves to be an excellent manager and organizer of the rescue work, after which a new stage begins in his life. He forgoes all his messianic thoughts and devotes himself to his family – Lauretta and his daughter Christiane. After the death of the seriously ill Lauretta, Muhr takes over the administration of the company. Suddenly he is part of a hierarchy, contemplating future success, wealth and a career after the war. As with Schmid's Urtig, Muhr's journey can be associated with the Faustian myth of the desire for knowledge and the necessary covenant with evil, but in this case, unlike Urtig, without a hint of salvation.

While in this complex story, Toni Muhr is finally overcome and overrun by the ethos of success, one important stage in his development which cannot be overlooked. Zifferer sows the seeds of an alternative living and existential space in the chaos of the collapsing system, accomplishing this not only with regard to the expressionist obsession with the urban landscape. This transformed *materia prima* that cannot rid itself of ambivalence is embodied in the city of Vienna itself. As an imperial city, Vienna remains a symbol of *force majeure*. At the same time, Zifferer portrays the city as a site of the disintegration of traditional values and institutions, e.g. marriage, as well as a place of cheap erotic seduction, the decline of human communication and the rule of money; the danger is that Vienna, and by proxy the contemporary world, is coming to be ruled by a decadent aristocracy and amoral corporations through debased mass culture and advertising filtered through an arrogant, deceptive media.

Seen thusly, Zifferer's latent critique of civilization itself is considerably close to the critical view of the modern world presented by Susanne Schmida in *City of People*. However, while Schmida finds a solution in the radical spiritualization of the world, Zifferer desperately tries to preserve the maximum from the idealized past in this new future, thus coming closer to the political and ethical ideas of the Viennese modernists (Hofmannsthal 1980, 24). To this end, Vienna, but not the whole of Austria, is postulated as an identificatory and meaningful entity, as "many who identified with Vienna and belonged to this city in their own way did not even want to hear about the rest of Austria"<sup>8</sup> (Zifferer 1923, 146). The streets and alleys of Zifferer's Vienna teem with figures from various regions of the monarchy. The city is felt as an extract of a dying multinational entity which remains for now a place where it is still possible for all people from around the world to come together. This dreamy look into the past offers a Kafkaesque world of mythical characters. One of the symbols of this utopia is Dr. Hengel, a strange man who oscillates between an infernal device and a Christ-like figure who brings forth messianic messages as well as a chiliastic dimension to this utopia:

Suddenly he was here. No one saw him coming, and now he was standing in the doorway [...]. [...] His Christ-grieved face was tilted to one side, his eyelids closed; when he opened them, the crowd was moved by his faraway stare. And then Dr. Hengel began to speak. He had no firm plan; it was as if from many sides at once his speech burst out in fits and starts channeled towards an invisible center; there was no intention in it. [...] "Woe to him who sins against the spirit! We are all guilty; we have lived in a house of cards, and now it is collapsing. So at last, seize your new rights! You cannot do this without a fight, you cannot do it without raised fists. You must want life, or you have already fallen forever into death"<sup>9</sup> (317–319).

In regard to contexts such as this, Zygmunt Bauman speaks of *retrotopia*, i.e. a reflection of a lost or stolen but in no way dead past (2018, 13). As with classical utopias, a clear link exists between utopian plans and a real (or realistically-described) territory (17). As More places his narrative in the New World, Zifferer cites Vienna as a metropolis which represents the decomposing Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Along this trajectory of disintegration, an unavoidable tendency towards nostalgia emanates, with the past continuously looming in the background. A connection can

be made here with the revolutionary change of territorial organization after World War I in Central Europe, especially with regard to the disintegration of the Habsburg monarchy (18). Zifferer's appointment as literary attaché in 1919 placed him in Paris just as diplomatic relations were being reestablished between Austria and France. The period and the novel represent the transferal of constructs of the past into the present, more precisely a utopian rescue and reconstruction of the imperial past of the multinational Austrian monarchy after its collapse in 1918 along with a general resurrection of Austrian thought on a spiritual basis, albeit with clear traces of colonial discourse. At the same time, the reader can observe through Muhr the transformation of utopia from external realities into the interior of man (Kuon 1986, 270).

### WALTER SEIDL: ZLÍN AS THE CITY OF THE FUTURE

Our third text brings us to the Moravian city of Zlín and German-language literature reflecting this topos. In German fictional texts of the first decades of the 20th century, Zlín often appears as a putative utopia with real-life social elements realized in a model city of modernity based on the results of the industrial and managerial experiments of Tomáš Baťa. These utopian texts represent attempts to portray the collective identity of Baťa's employees, including Germans, as a unique community enveloped within the empowering aura of work. The paradox of history is that in terms of real sociopolitical conditions this utopia came to be perverted into the germ of a totalitarian system within a few decades of its establishment.

In the 1920s, a process of massive industrialization can be observed in Eastern Moravia which had no equivalent in the First Czechoslovak Republic. This phenomenon is well-represented in the Moravian city of Zlín. Germans had been almost non-existent in Zlín, a village with four and a half thousand inhabitants in 1920, when Vladimír Nekuda states only eight citizens of German nationality were living there (1995, 666). This changed during the 1920s and 1930s in connection with the emergence of a specific intercultural atmosphere created by the world-famous shoe empire Baťa. By 1930 over three hundred Germans were residing in Zlín out of an overall population which had increased to twenty thousand inhabitants (Baťa, 1936–1938).

By far the most successful Czechoslovak industrialist of the interwar period, Zlín shoemaker and builder Tomáš Baťa (1876–1932) carried out in the region a unique and ambitious project consisting not only of industrialization, but also urbanization, internationalization and acculturation. Through this project, Zlín became the embodiment of the paradox of modernity in Wallachia (Nerdinger 2009). Tomáš Baťa and his half-brother Jan Antonín Baťa (1898–1965), who took over management of the concern after the death of Tomáš in 1932, realized their common vision of utopia in “the unity of (industrial) production with respect to work and city life”<sup>10</sup> (Pribersky 2011, 117). This extraordinary venture had tremendous effects on the socio-political and economic conditions of life in Zlín, with its goal right from the outset the establishment of a modern and technically oriented society based on the rational principles of automation, internationalization, growth and profit.

The Baťa system provided comprehensive care in all areas of life for each individual employee, including employment, housing, education, cultural and leisure activi-

ties as well as medical care. The project embodied a eugenic approach to man. The individual man or woman was to be shaped to become one with a mass of like-minded fellow travelers. All would share in the same spirit and any individual identity would be flattened out. The role of man was to serve as a cog in a perfectly functioning machine. Despite the rhetoric of worker equality, however, this system also generated elites, who came to see themselves as an example of the fulfillment of the American dream of self-improvement. The harmony between rationality and nature, between standardization and diversity, can still be seen in the architecture of Zlín, the buildings of which generally encompass a geometrically-severe functionalist division of space (Vercelloni 1994).

The center of literary and journalistic events was the publishing company Tisk Zlín (Zlín Press), which published a wide range of newspapers and magazines. Notable personalities of not only Czech but also German nationality were gathered in this publishing house, including Josef Vaňhara and Anton Cekota, who worked with the German members of the editorial team Bruno Wolf, Benno Stefan and Karl Klaudy. All traces of the German members of the staff disappeared from Zlín as World War II approached or in its immediate aftermath. Bruno Wolf, an Imperial German who also worked for the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, fled to Western Europe in November 1939. Benno Stefan left for Austria after the Munich Agreement was signed in 1938. After the war the Prague German Karl Klaudy, a poet and translator, was lynched and nearly killed in Zlín due to his sympathies with the Nazi regime and was subsequently expelled from Czechoslovakia, following which he resided in Vienna.

The textual basis for German Zlín utopia is the text by Walter Seidl “The City of the Future” (“Die Stadt des Kommenden”, 1936). “The City of the Future” is a chapter taken from the autobiographical novel by the Prague German writer Walter Seidl *The Mountain of the Lovers: Experiences of a Young German (Der Berg der Liebenden: Erlebnisse eines jungen Deutschen)*, first published in 1936. The main protagonist of the novel, Hermann Kessler, lives at first in an ethnically homogeneous community, then in a heterogeneous environment in which he feels the non-German environment as hostile. The national conflict between Czechs and Germans in the new Czechoslovak Republic after the disintegration of Austria-Hungary has raised deep concerns in him. After a study stay in Grenoble, Hermann returns to Czechoslovakia and remains for a while in the shoemaking metropolis of Zlín. The whole text is infused with the metaphor of the journey (a journey into modern times, a journey to modern architecture and the modern way of living). Kessler is first captivated by the special rhythm of this city, the utopian perfection of the Baťa system and its organization of work and life. Seidl shows the connection between the individual and the production process, but not wholly uncritically:

The ground Hermann walked upon trembled with the pulse of the feverishly quickened blood circulating through the machine city. As if enchanted, he listened to the incredibly evocative noises of the buzzing, thumping, rumbling, screaming of the workshops and – the silence of the people who worked in them. Muffled from inside the buildings, here and there a barely audible but nerve-racking cry escaped – the groan of a prehistoric creature transmogrified into an animal-machine<sup>11</sup> (1936, 361).

Seidl's fiction is a direct witness to the apotheosis of modernity. The text recalls contemporary accounts of how the provincial city was being transformed into a modern metropolis with the core values of profit, economy, coherence, efficiency, and pragmatism. The young generation is also brought up and educated in this spirit of technical materiality. Soon, however, Kessler becomes intimidated by this cultivated collective identity and retreats back to his sense of individualism, clinging tightly to it. The reader thus observes the tension between the glorification of and skepticism towards the Baťa system, an ambivalence which can also be considered a prime manifestation of modernity and modern man. In comparison with his previous experience of ethnic intolerance, the international flair of the city of Zlín exerts a positive effect on Hermann. With the presence of so many foreigners, national and cultural differences seem to have been overcome. The figure of Hermann Kessler is thus a kind of corrective element in the entire utopian system of perfect unity and harmony of the workers in Baťa's Zlín. At the same time, the character embodies a rapprochement between Germans and Czechs.

Seidl puts forward both a factual as well as analytical view of the political and social reality of the Zlín utopia and devotes particular attention to certain contrasts, e.g. on the one hand, a progressive, even Americanizing, technical civilization, on the other, the rudiments of rural, even pastoral, life. Kessler even toys with the idea of becoming a participant in this perfectly organized mass, but in the end he finds it ridiculous in many ways, so he persists in his life of freedom and disorganization.

## CONCLUSION

In all three texts, more precisely the sets of texts, traces of utopian thinking along with the incorporation of the urban landscape model are clearly evident, albeit in diverse ways. The dramatic cycle *City of People* by Susanne Schmida offers a prototype of an abstract futuristic city as an arena for the radical spiritualization of the world. In his novel *The Imperial City*, Paul Zifferer utopically reconstructs the past of the Austrian monarchy after its collapse in 1918, transferring its remnants to the present in an effort to save it. Walter Seidl's "The City of the Future" captures a realized social utopia against the background of the industrial expansion of Zlín as a place of mechanically formed collective identity.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Here is a representative list of authors from Moravian Wallachia who worked in the region or thematized Wallachia in their works: Paul Zifferer (1879–1929), Susanne Schmida (1894–1981), Ida Waldek (1880–1942), Heinrich Herbatschek (1877–1956), Ludwig Kurowski (1866–1912), Karl-Wilhelm Gawalowski (1861–1945), August Benesch (1829–1911), Marianne Bohrmann (1849–1916), Rudolf Hirsch (1816–1872), Johann Karl Ratzer (1802–1863), Karl Klaudy (1906–?), Georg Simanitsch (1836–?).

<sup>2</sup> The author used variants of her first and last name in different stages of her life: e.g. Susanne Schmida (the form used in this article), Susanna Schmida-Wöllersdorfer (Wöllersdorfer was the maiden name of the author's mother) or Susanne Schmida-Brod (Brod being the surname of her husband Viktor).

- <sup>3</sup> “in einer phantasierten Gegenwart”; all translations from the German are by the present author unless otherwise noted.
- <sup>4</sup> “IV. Ich verbinde euch und uns zu einer Einheit. Der Strom der durch unsere Kette flutenden Kraft wird uns alle stärken und erhöhen. Denn wenn 2 oder 3 oder 6 oder 12 im gleichen Rhythmus beisammen sind, bildet sich von selbst ein höheres Ich. Darüber hinaus umgeben wir alle Wesen und alle Formen des Lebens mit unbegrenzter Liebe und grenzenloser Barmherzigkeit.  
V. Stehend mit der Gebetsgeste:  
O mein Wille, Wende aller Not,  
Meine Notwendigkeit!  
Ja, ein Unverwundbares ist in mir, ein Unbegrabbares...  
[...]
- IX. Aufnahme in den Kreis:  
Ich trete ein in den Kreis, dessen Mitte gestaltlos ist, und in dem für jeden von uns einmal die Stunde kommt, in der er selbst zum Bildnis des Ewigen wird.”  
This and all subsequent translations from the German (unless otherwise noted) are by the present author.
- <sup>5</sup> “Von rechts zu ist das Land flach, grün, fruchtbar, von Eisenbahnen und Strassen durchgezogen. Im Umkreis ferne Dörfer, Felder. Die Stadt ist neuerbaut, die Häuser sind hoch, grossfenstrig, von Gärten umgeben, aus weissem oder rötlichem Stein, mit Kuppeln und Türmen. Die Dächer aus Kupfer. Die Anlage einheitlich nach einer grossen architektonischen Idee. Die Strassen mit weissen Fliesen gepflastert, Schienen, Brunnen, Viadukte etc. Das Ganze macht irgendwie den Eindruck einer Märchenstadt, welcher Eindruck dadurch vertieft wird, dass sie noch vollkommen unbewohnt ist. Der Himmel ist unbegrenzt.”
- <sup>6</sup> “Ein solches Werk zu bauen, ist Frevel, schrei ich.”
- <sup>7</sup> “Ihr Urteil über mein Buch oder besser Ihr Nicht-Urteil hat mir einen Schmerz verursacht, größer als ich sagen kann, tiefer als ich aussprechen möchte.”
- <sup>8</sup> “Von Österreich wollten viele nichts wissen, die sich doch zu Wien bekannten und der Stadt anhängen, jeder in seiner Art.”
- <sup>9</sup> “Mit einem Male war er da. Man hatte ihn nicht kommen sehen, doch nun stand er im Türrahmen, [...] Sein abgehärmtes Christusgesicht lag schief zur Seite geneigt, die Lider waren geschlossen; als sie sich auftaten, ging ein fremder Blick über die Menge. Und so begann Dr. Hengel zu sprechen. Er hatte keinen festen Plan, von vielen Seiten zugleich strebte seine gehetzte und stoßweise Rede einem unsichtbaren Mittelpunkt zu; keine Absicht war in ihr. [...] ‘Wehe dem Sünder wider den Geist! Mitschuldig sind wir alle, in einem Kartenaus haben wir gelebt, nun stürzt es zusammen. So holt euch doch endlich euer neues Recht! Ohne Kampf geht es nicht, ohne Aufrecken der Fäuste geht es nicht. Ihr müßt das Leben wollen, sonst seid ihr für ewig dem Tode verfallen’.”
- <sup>10</sup> “Einheit von (industrieller) Produktion bzw. Arbeit und urbanem Leben”
- <sup>11</sup> “Der Boden, über den Hermann hinschritt, zitterte unter den Pulsschlägen des fiebrig beschleunigten Blutkreislaufs der Maschinenstadt. Gebannt mußte er auf ein unheimlich suggestives Geräusch lauschen, zu dem sich das Surren, Stampfen, Tosen, Kreischen der Werkstätten und – das Schweigen der dort arbeitenden Menschen verbanden. Dumpf drang es aus den Gebäuden, dann und wann übertönt von einem nervenbeklemmenden Aufheulen – dem Ächzen eines zum Maschinentier der Zukunft gewandelten Urwelttiers.”

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### Three undiscovered utopias in German-language literature from the Czech periphery: Moravian Wallachia and Zlín

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Utopia. Dystopia. Susanne Schmida. Paul Zifferer. Walter Seidl. Zlín. Moravian Wallachia. Moravian-German Literature.

This study examines three literary utopias from the margins of German literature, namely German-language literature from Eastern Moravia. The works chosen for analysis are the dramatic cycle *The City of People* (*Die Stadt der Menschen*) by Moravian-born Austrian writer and visionary Susanne Schmida (1894–1981), the novel *The Imperial City* (*Die Kaiserstadt*) by the Austrian writer and diplomat Paul Zifferer (1879–1929), and the text “The City of the Future” (“Die Stadt des Kommenden”) by the German-speaking Czechoslovak author Walter Seidl. In all the texts examined, the model of urban landscape is used as the location of utopia: the prototype of an abstract futuristic city (Schmida), Vienna as an exemplar of political utopia (Zifferer), and Zlín as a fully realized social utopia (Seidl). These three sites show a complementary gradation in the sense of the (potential) realization of utopian ideas, i.e. the belief that, put simply, “it was once good” (Zifferer), “it is good” (Seidl), and “it will be good” (Schmida).

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