

Reviews

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The Development of Utopian Thought AUBREY ROSENBERG

Raymond Trousson. *Voyages aux pays de nulle part: Histoire littéraire de la pensée utopique*. Second revised edition
Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles 1979. xxvii, 298

This is a revised edition of a work that first appeared in 1975. The revisions are confined to a new preface in which the author deals with utopias not treated in the first edition, answers criticisms levelled in various reviews, and brings up to date the state of research in the field. Raymond Trousson's aim is to provide a chronological and comprehensive, but not exhaustive, history of the development of utopian thought in Western literature (mainly in England and France) from its earliest manifestations to the present day. His method is to provide a brief biography of each author and an analysis of his work, so as to demonstrate how the features now generally regarded as characteristic of literary utopias evolved and were modified over the centuries. He begins with the pre-Platonic Phaleas of Chalcedon, known only through the writings of Aristotle, and ends, in the revised preface, with Jacques Sternberg's *Mai 86* (Paris: Albin Michel 1978). All the major authors are treated, as well as a host of minor and obscure but noteworthy practitioners of the art. Finding no utopias written in the Middle Ages Trousson concludes that the classical models remained unexploited until they suddenly discovered their identity and achieved their apotheosis through the publication of More's *Utopia* (1516) which became the archetype. In More's work are embodied all those topographical, social, political, economic, educational, moral, and religious considerations destined to be endlessly repeated and varied in all subsequent attempts to construct an ideal society. The longest chapter of Trousson's book is devoted to the eighteenth century, which he describes as 'l'âge d'or de l'utopie.' It was towards the end of this century that there were produced, for the first time, utopias fixed in time and space, in a particular year in the future and in a specific country. This break with tradition heralds the modern era that leads, in the twentieth century, to a seeming preponderance of dystopias, although, as Trousson suggests in the revised preface, the most recent attempts indicate a return to a more positive approach.

The main criticisms of this work have been directed against Trousson's



definition of utopia. He has been accused of neglecting form for content, of misrepresenting the genre by adhering too closely to a chronological presentation, of ignoring utopian politics and aesthetics, and the like. In my opinion, however, Trousson has wisely chosen to delimit clearly his area of study. Whether his choice was the right one is another question, but it seems unreasonable to criticize him for not doing what he never intended. His stated aim is to deal solely with fictional portrayals of utopian societies. Thus, he rigorously excludes, for example, accounts of solitary existences on desert islands, evocations of Arcady, and so on, and restricts his discussion to those works in which, 'dans le cadre d'un récit (ce qui exclut les traités politiques), se trouve décrite une communauté (ce qui exclut la robinsonade), organisée selon certains principes politiques, économiques, moraux, restituant la complexité de l'existence sociale (ce qui exclut l'âge d'or et l'arcadie), qu'elle soit présentée comme idéal à réaliser (utopie constructive) ou comme la prévision d'un enfer (l'anti-utopie moderne), qu'elle soit située dans un espace réel, imaginaire, ou encore dans le temps, qu'elle soit enfin décrite au terme d'un voyage imaginaire vraisemblable ou non.'

Of all the earlier studies of utopia to which Trousson acknowledges a debt, none has been nearly as influential as Raymond Ruyer's seminal *L'Utopie et les utopies* (Paris: Les Presses universitaires de France 1950). Indeed, I believe it no exaggeration to say that Trousson's book is primarily an elaboration and commentary on Ruyer's study. This is in no way to belittle the work of Trousson, whose many significant contributions in this field and in numerous aspects of the history of ideas and eighteenth-century literature testify to his profundity and originality. Trousson has not only explicated and illustrated the basic principles of utopias enunciated by Ruyer, but has also expanded the application of those principles to a range of works far beyond the scope of Ruyer's thesis. Trousson's book, therefore, written in a lucid style free from jargon, and containing a mine of bibliographical information, is both an important work of reference and a major contribution to our understanding of the literary history of utopian thought.

A French Prose Classic of the Early Eighteenth Century

EUGÈNE JOLIAT

Journal d'un Voyage aux Indes, par Robert Challe, écrivain du Roi

Edited by Frédéric Deloffre and Melâhat Menemencioglu

Paris: Mercure de France 1978. 654

Robert Challe's journal, though apparently little noticed when it was first published anonymously in 1721, is a revelation; it proves, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that its author was one of the most vigorous minds of the age of Louis XIV. He is certainly the most cosmopolitan French writer of his period. At a time when