

Supervisor's Report on the MA thesis of **Erik Fabián**
Visual Utopianism in Victorian England: William Morris and His "Teachers"

This thesis contains an expanded treatment of William Morris's utopianism focusing on *News from Nowhere*. Its contribution can be summarized in the following way:

1. Discussing Morris in a wider context and demonstrating how his visual utopianism develops from the late Romantic thought of Thomas Carlyle and John Ruskin. The emphasis on the critique of dandyism as the nullification of egoism and on the importance of work (no longer in terms of Protestant ethics as explained by Max Weber, but as the practical expression of the connection between labour and spirituality as the orientation of life toward hope) are the two most important features of the Carlylean legacy. Ruskin's development of Romantic theory of imagination as a specific creative form of visibility as well as his expansion of Romantic organicism to a principle of social relations are also very important shaping forces of Morris's utopianism.
2. The emphasis on visual nature of Morris's utopianism and a detailed account of the merging of aspects of the subjective vision of Romantic imagination (Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, Keats) and the objectivism connected with visibility in the Victorian age. A very important aspect in this process is the intervention of perspectivism (Nietzsche) which subverts nineteenth-century notions of scientific objectivism.
3. The understanding of utopianism itself – no longer as a rational design or a project of an 'ideal' society, but, in the context of Ernst Bloch's approach to utopia, as "any form of human activity ranging from architecture to dreaming". This approach does not unify in the same way as industrial or engineering projects do, namely by optimization and standardization, but by taking into account individual differences and seeing the future as the result of aggregate possibilities of individuals. The impact of this type of utopia based on the "principle of hope" is traced in Philip Wegner's concept of "imaginary community" as well as in Simon Schama's thought of landscape, important for the understanding of the representation of landscape and cityscape in Morris's utopia.

The thesis is structurally consistent and clearly formulated and its major contribution can be seen in the cogent interpretation of Morris's thought supported by a thorough study of its diverse historical and theoretical contexts as outlined above.

I do not have any critical comments, only some suggestions which may be helpful during the development of the thesis into an academic book.

Discussing Romantic approaches to vision, one should not omit William Blake, whose principles of vision were thoroughly explained in the commentary to the three-volume edition by William Butler Yeats and E.J. Ellis which appeared only three years after the publication of *News from Nowhere*. Blake's influence on Yeats's understanding of vision is well-known and so is his impact on the Pre-Raphaelites. It has also been pointed out that Blake influenced Morris's typographic art. Another Romantic who should not be omitted is P.B. Shelley, especially because of his utopianism in *Prometheus Unbound* and "A Defence of Poetry".

Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* is a highly ironic work influenced by the author's knowledge of Jean Paul (discussed by Paul de Vijn whose book is included in the bibliography) and other German Romantics. It would be useful to discuss how the Romantic irony prominent in German Romanticism gets absorbed and transformed in the work of the Victorians, especially Morris. Can Romantic irony coexist with Bloch's notion of utopia?

The thesis markedly surpasses the standards of MA theses defended at our department. I recommend it for the defence and propose to grade it "výborně"/ "excellent".

Prague, 23 August 2017

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