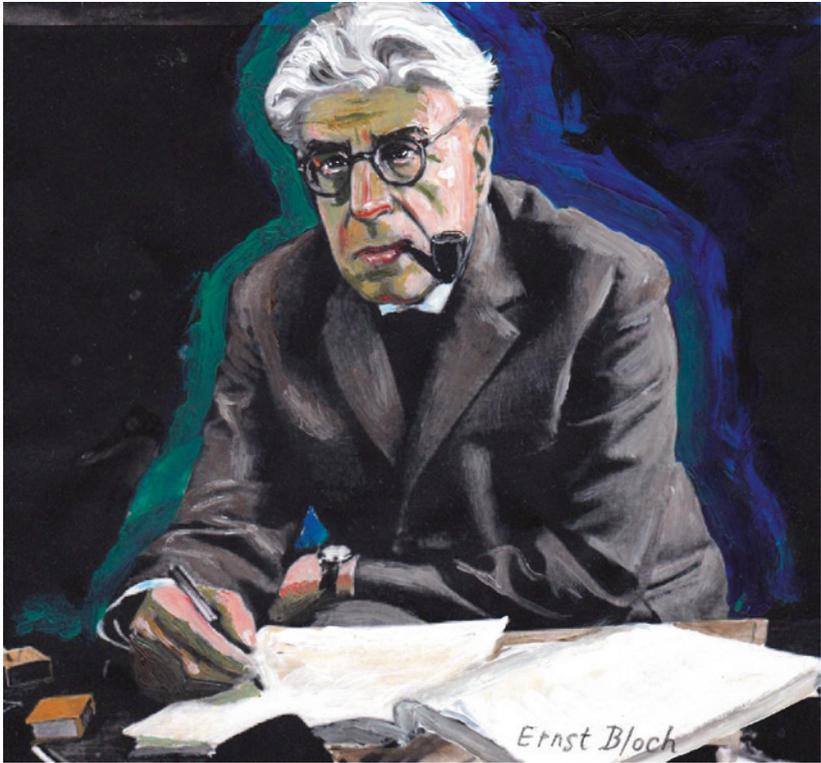


Ernst Bloch

“As Jack Zipes points out in this excellent study, Ernst Bloch was a philosopher who was always out of step: A Marxist who disagreed with most Marxists, an atheist theologian, a utopian thinker who disagreed with most utopian thinking, a man who believed in hope as our “invariant of direction” and yet who lived through the horrors of fascism, war and Stalinism. This much neglected thinker has been done a great service by this study.”

—Peter Thompson, *Professor, Director of Ernst Bloch Studies,
University of Sheffield*



Jack Zipes

Ernst Bloch

The Pugnacious Philosopher of Hope

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Minneapolis, MN, USA

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In Memory of Anna Donzelli

PREFACE

OUT OF STEP

Ernst Bloch was, is, and will always be out of step. He was a bad dancer with the times. He stumbled while numerous politicians and thinkers waltzed over the bodies of little people in step to the same music. Monotonous militant music. Bloch tried to add some color and bounce to the music, and in the process, he alienated many people including himself. Banged about from country to country by wars, betrayed by vile rulers of the world and the perverse conditions of his times, he fought with bare knuckles to survive while endeavoring to save what was vital in the remnants of civilizing processes that had gone awry. He stumbled but landed on his feet. Stumbled more than once. What a clumsy dancer Bloch was!

I wish I had known him.

I came close, very close. In the summer of 1961, after he fled East Germany, before he could be arrested for his treasonous ideas against Stalinist communism, he accepted a position as visiting professor at the University of Tübingen in West Germany and gave his initial lecture, "Can Hope Be Disappointed?" in November of that year. From what I heard, the auditorium was packed and all the seminars of this seventy-six-year-old professor remained packed until his death in 1977. I actually studied at the University of Tübingen during the summer semester of 1962, but unfortunately, I didn't study with him. I was enrolled in a

series of lectures on contemporary German literature and politics held by Walter Jens, who was one of Bloch's good friends. At that time, I had never heard of him.

But soon I did and was overwhelmed.

Bloch was one of the major German philosophers who supported the student movement to change German universities, often administered by ex-Nazis, and the society, often controlled by Nazi sympathizers, during the 1960s and 1970s. This movement was a belated reaction by young people to the Nazi period, and Bloch was outspoken in his critique of the reactionaries not only in Germany but in all Western societies. Though difficult to read, Bloch's words of hope and resistance had a huge impact and resounded among young people. I know this firsthand because I kept encountering diverse thinkers, critics, professors, and students who were either close friends of Bloch or followers of his philosophy. Among them were the renowned literary critic Hans Mayer, the radical philosopher Oskar Negt, the East German singer and dissident Wolf Biermann, and the entire editorial boards of the prominent left-wing journals *Telos*, *New German Critique*, *Ästhetik und Kommunikation*, and *Allemagne d'aujourd'hui*. During the 1980s and 1990s, I began writing on Bloch, and published *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature* (1987), a translation of his significant essays, with Frank Mecklenburg, and edited a special edition of *New German Critique* on Bloch and Heidegger in 1988.

At one point, while I was teaching at the University of Florida in 1987, I invited his son Jan to come to Gainesville and deliver a few talks. This was the closest I ever came to the Bloch family. Yet, Bloch has filled my life with the spirit of utopia as he has with thousands of people throughout the world. Despite my sadness about the present state of the world, bordering at times on depression, it is Bloch's philosophy that still gives me hope we can change the world for the better. It is through collaboration with numerous young friends and groups resisting the tides of neo-fascism throughout the world that I have turned once again to the gawky dancer Bloch with hope that the future will be better than the present.

Strangely, but perhaps understandably, Bloch wrote most of his famous three-volume book, *The Principle of Hope*, in America, where he was unwelcome.

Despite his vehement critique of capitalist America, Bloch and his wife Karola had fled with their infant son Jan to America to escape the Nazis

in 1939. Not to Russia, a country that symbolized a possible new world of communism to them. They remained in America until 1947 and even became American citizens. Their friends, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, formidable critical thinkers, who transferred the Institute for Social Research (now known as the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory) to New York, refused to help Bloch, who was more or less blacklisted in America. Because of their communist sympathies, few people helped Bloch and Karola. Consequently, they were poor and had to live under difficult conditions. Ironically, in 1948, after he was offered a professorship in philosophy by the University of Leipzig, Bloch returned to Stalinist East Germany in 1948, hoping to restore democracy to this new nation-state, where he remained until he could no longer bear the hypocrisy and deceit.

Disappointed but still hopeful, Bloch moved to West Germany.

Ironically, it was there that Bloch became famous until his death in 1972. And he still is. Somewhat.

Bloch is not well known outside of contemporary Germany. Americans have no idea who he is, and it is doubtful that Brits and other English-speaking people have the slightest clue who he is. I do not think my book will bring fame to Bloch. This is not my intention. It is a personal tribute before I die to a great thinker who changed my life.

Minneapolis, USA

Jack Zipes

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I want to thank Tom René, who supported my proposal for this book at Palgrave Macmillan, and Vicky Bates and Ellie Freedman, who have carefully supervised the entire production. Also, I am very grateful to a group of artists, actors, and writers who met with me throughout 2018 and 2019 to discuss Bloch, Herbert Marcuse, Thomas Piketty, and Zygmunt Bauman. They—Maria Asp, Sonja, Kuftinec, Emily Zimmerman, Leif Jurgensen, David Hanzal, Wendy Richardson, and Steve Matuszak—were given the name crazy Marxists because only the insane can maintain sanity and humanity in the world in which we live. They are the markers for the future.

Of course, the craziest of them all is my wife, Carol, who has put up with me for over thirty-five years. It is to her that I dedicate this book with hope.

A NOTE ON THE TEXTS

The chapters in this book include three essays published in three other books I have published:

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This article first appeared in *New Literary History* 13 (Winter 1981–82): 309–325.

“Epilogue: A Curious Legacy: Ernst Bloch’s Enlightened View of the Fairy Tale and Utopian Longing, or Why the Grimms’ Tales Will Always be Relevant” from *Grimms Legacies: The Magic Spell of the Grimms’ Folk and Fairy Tales* by Jack Zipes. © 2015 by Princeton University Press. Reprinted by permission.

“Introduction: Toward a Realization of Anticipatory Illumination” from Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays* translated and edited by Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg. Introduction, Jack Zipes. © 1988 Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Reprinted by permission.

“The Utopian Function of Fairy Tales and Fantasy: Ernst Bloch the Marxist and J. R. R. Tolkien the Catholic” from *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* by Jack Zipes. © 1979 Jack Zipes.

It is important to note that they have all been revised and lengthened a great deal to engage with our present times. Two other chapters are based on talks delivered at conferences. For the most part, they have been thoroughly updated. Three more essays stem from seminars I have directed in the last ten years. At times, I have duplicated Bloch's quotations and concepts whenever they have suited the topics of the chapter. In fact, this was a method that Bloch himself employed to emphasize the comprehensive application of his thinking, which, he knew, could be baffling. Repetition is not the same in different contexts.

Bloch's language is difficult and, at times, almost impossible to translate. Not only are his concepts complex, but they are also obtuse and constantly changing, just as he also changed his texts after their original publications. In his insightful study, *Ernst Bloch and His Contemporaries*, Ivan Boldyrev notes that "Bloch's language is at times deliberately enigmatic. Many passages require supplementary commentaries, and his literary style, like that of any other apocalyptic writer, does not really contribute to the clarity of philosophical distinctions. But when his philosophy unfolds—in aesthetics, in politics, and in a dialogue with the contemporaries—it undoubtedly becomes clearer, as we begin to understand what constitutes its meaning and purpose."¹

In this regard and with great care, I have translated most of the Bloch quotations in this book, but I have also used at times the excellent translations by valorous scholars, who have, I am sure, pondered for hours over his aphorisms. Therefore, I have sometimes tweaked words and expressions in line with my thinking and understanding of Bloch's intentions. For instance, I prefer to use the term temporally non-egalitarian (*Ungleichzeitigkeit*) rather than non-synonymous or non-contemporaneous. Bloch was concerned more with social justice and inequality than he was in shifts of time. This is not to diminish the effects of temporal changes. Rather, I propose to analyze the impact of shifts and shocks and how people react to them personally and politically. In Thomas Piketty's recent brilliant book, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, he discusses the disequilibria in the world that threatens to foster the rise of fascism and injustice. This disequilibria is exactly what Bloch was writing about in the 1930s, and Piketty strikingly recalls Bloch's concern in his book:

I focus not only on the level of inequality as such but to an even greater extent on the structure of inequality, that is, on the origins of disparities in income and wealth between social groups and on the various systems of

economic, social, moral, and political justification that have been invoked to defend or condemn those disparities. Inequality is not necessarily bad in itself; the key question is to decide whether it is justified, whether there are reasons for it.²

Bloch pugnaciously decried disequilibria, and he was often knocked off his feet as he endeavored to fight for hope in a better world. He was a contentious philosopher who bounced back from disequilibria to fight for social justice. Who could ask for anything more?

NOTES

1. *Ernst Bloch and His Contemporaries: Locating Utopian Messianism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014): 14.
2. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017): 25.

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