Iuliana Tănase

University of Bucharest

THE CONCEPTUAL AND GENERIC BORDERLINES OF UTOPIA

Abstract: *The paper focuses on the early-modern work of Th. More and is projected as a revisitation of the elements which originate and participate in the construction of the humanist utopia. It explores the contemporary socio-cultural context framing the emergence of* Utopia *and its historical-cultural lineage. The new-historicist approach and the correlative analysis of the historical and cultural (con)texts enable the disambiguation of the distinctions between the utopian vision and other imaginary, fantastic projections of the ideal. The intertextual approach unearths the paradoxes underlying* Utopia, *its divergence from its precursors as well as from the subsequent utopian writing which implies the lack of self-coextensiveness of the utopian text and further raises the question of the status of the humanist work as an exemplar of the utopian genre.*

The emergence of the humanist utopia must be read with reference to the contemporary context of a liminal world marked by dramatic historical transformations and social, political and religious convulsions associated with the dislocation of the medieval structures and on the other hand with the prospect of economic expansion engendered by the geographical discoveries and the constitution of the national states. The Morean *Utopia* expresses the two-directional relation between text and context and if pre-modern culture reverberates the tensions peculiar to the transitional condition these are inscribed in a cultural frame, attached scriptural and sacred readings. The historical crisis is read in the Apocalyptic register or through the vocabulary of the millenarian doctrines and associated with mythological and scriptural visions of the infernal or paradisial otherworld.

The construction of the historical ideal by the Christian humanist is explained both with reference to the contemporary historical, political and religious context as well as in intertextual terms. While it embodies the humanist approach to and attempt of rationalizing the contingent realities of the historical society, the utopian project ironically reinforces the unhistorical/ transhistorical and cultural grounding of the humanist ideology.

The utopian ideal signals the perpetuation and historical application within the humanist frame of the medieval metaphors of the book of nature and of the world as a book and expresses the primacy of the text over the real. *Utopia* reveals the pre-modern focus on the contingent world and is aimed at a reform of the historical society and at the redress of social injustice although the historical reform is conceived through a cultural movement. The humanist primacy of reason, of culture over the real explains the emergence of the utopian project as the counterpoint of history and the distance from and interrogation of the real as given and immutable. It is responsible for the modern exercise of historical planning and the rethinking of history as a human rational construction.

The projection of the ideal world by the Christian humanist is informed by the conjunction of Christian, classical and mythological paradigms and indicates their mutual reformulation. The Christian ideal retains an unhistorical quality, is situated in the otherworld and is identified with the kingdom of God, the heavenly realm promised to the righteous. The Christian perspective implicitly posits a chasm between the historical and the ideal condition which corresponds to that between the world and the otherworld. The unbridgeable gap between worlds implies the fact that the spiritual ideal is not achievable in the historical world.

The utopian vision is conditioned by the conception of an earthly, historical paradise or rather the convergence of a terrestrial paradise and a transcendental ideal. The scriptural exegesis reveals the coexistence of allegorical and literal approaches to the sacred history. If the interpretation of the original paradise through a New Testament symbolic, allegorical perspective as the figure of a moral ideal is advanced by Origen or Irenaeus, the literal perspective of the Old Testament Garden of Eden is perpetuated by most Church Fathers. This explains the ambivalence of the medieval conception of the paradise which expresses the coexistence of the belief in the otherworldly ideal and of the vestigial vision of the pre-historical paradise of the Garden of Eden. The historical, material perspective is evidenced in the attempts of identifying the geographical situation and topography of the Garden of Eden.

The medieval enterprise of geographical exploration is culturally validated and read in the register of the quest for a terrestrial Eden. Testimonies of explorers reveal the scriptural reading of the discovered territories based on the confluence between the Old Testament historical perspective of the earthly ideal and the New Testament projection of a spiritual, otherworldly paradise.

The late-medieval prominence of the earthly paradise over the otherworldly ideal must be put in connection not only with the literal interpretation of the Old Testament Garden of Eden by the Church Fathers but also with the millenarian reformulations of the Apocalyptic scenario by medieval monastics and theologians. The millennial revisitation of the Apocalyptic scenario of Joachim of Fiore produces the earthly conception of the post-historical City of God associated with the Third Age of the Holy Ghost. This is interpreted not as a transitional condition toward the otherworldly paradise but as an earthly paradise of spiritual perfection which supersedes the otherworld and is attached an

indefinite duration. However the monastic visions have an essentially unhistorical character and do not focus on the social organization and political governance of this future society. The ideal condition marked by the redress of historical injustice is associated with the otherworldly realm of the New Jerusalem and in the representation of the post-historical City of God the emphasis is placed on the spiritual character of the new condition, the transfiguration of the earthly humanity into a community of saints.

The examination of the lineage of utopia and carnival traces them to a common origin, the primitive conception of a natural paradise of the Golden Age defined by material abundance and natural/ moral reason. The ambivalence of the mythical paradise explains its contradictory evolution as its carnivalesque resignification is marked by the primacy of the former element and is associated with irrationality while the utopia embodies the imperative of order and moral reason.

The humanist utopia must be analysed in an intertextual relation with the classical avant la lettre 'utopia' which is reactualized as the product of an exemplary culture. 'Utopia' is patterned on the ideal advanced by the Platonic Republic whose construction must be understood with reference to the historical and cultural context represented on the one hand by the colonial projects of architects and philosopher-kings and on the other by the myths of Cronos and of the Golden Age. – Cronos or Kronos are more commonly used than Chronos although I wouldn't object to its being changed to Chronos

There is a parallel between the coordinates defining the projection of the humanist utopia and the classical construction of the philosophical ideal. The historical context of the emergence of the Humanism ideology evinces a similarity with that connected with the inception of philosophy. The humanist ideology centred on reason is aimed at reformation of the late-medieval Christian church through the elimination of superstitious and magical practices and of the recrudescent pagan forms perpetuated through the popular religion. The Platonic philosophy is similarly identified with a rational religion which supersedes the primitive, magical cults associated with the tribal culture.

There is a parallelism between the late-medieval geographical exploration and the ancient reality of the Greek conquest and colonization of the neighbouring regions. The latter explains the colonial projects of the philosopher-architect-law-giver Hippodamus of Miletus which are further extended to the established cities.

The philosophical conception of the Platonic ideal is grounded in the earthly paradise projected by the myth of the Golden Age and the classical experiments of social engineering such as those implemented in the Greek colonial settlements or those actualized in the Spartan oligarchic regime authored by Lycurgus and the Athenian democracy of Solon.

The utopian ideal is based on the principle of social justice and the centrality of the latter in both the Christian and Greek conceptions of the ideal (epitomized by the concept of common ownership) reinforces them as underpinning the Utopian state.

The confluence between the Greek and the Christian perspective is favoured on the one hand by the parallel between the theological roots of ancient philosophy and the reform of the Christian religion initiated by the humanist ideology which consists both in the religious rationalization and the focus on the return to faith and on the other hand by the ambivalent character of the Christian religion based on reason and mystery/ revelation. The founding of the ideal state of the Platonic Republic is conceived according to the Myth of the Cave which portrays the ascent of the philosopher correlated with his spiritual enlightenment and the initiation in the divine, moral truth and his worldly descent which is associated with the historical implementation of the divine vision. The Platonic work emphasizes this duality through the conception of the ideal at the discursive and metadiscursive level. The structure of the work evinces the doubling of the philosopher figure as the discursive philosopher figure is seconded by Socrates and the construction of the ideal state is textually envisaged both through ascent and access to divine reason and through the dialectical exercise of human reason. The Greek conception is marked by the convergence of revelation and rational construction. This derives from the rational conception of the divine which is identified with the good, with moral reason.

The reactualization of the Greek perspective within the humanist ideology explains the similar continuity between divine and human reason. The humanist utopia valorizes the ambivalent perspective of the realization of the ideal through illumination and human construction. Whereas the Utopian constitution is engineered by the rational enterprise of Utopus and his untextualized enlightenment, the potential reform of the earthly condition is enabled by the journey/ ascent of Hythloday to the Utopia and his subsequent discovery of the ideal order to the world. The confluence is mirrored in the ambivalent status of the philosopher-king Utopus who is a godlike figure and on the other hand a political leader, law-giver and social planner.

Both the Socratic visionary projection and the colonial social experiments indicates the classical conception of the external achievement of the ideal through the implementation of the philosopher's transcendental vision.

The Socratic conception of the ideal is founded on the cosmic perspective which is extended at the level of societal existence. There is a continuity between the individual and collective existence, the human self and society. The community is a societal body, a collective being which is interpreted as an extension of the individual self. By contrast to Christianity which advances the correspondence between subjectivity and transcendence that oppose history, the cosmic view implies the correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm and the application on the historical society. The social body reiterates the structure of the human soul which consists of the hierarchy reason, spirit (courage) and desire (appetite).

The conception of the Socratic historical ideal suggests that its construction is premised on the reality of social inequity and injustice which are rationalized as an upsetting or reversal of the hierarchy. The Socratic vision advances the restoration of justice through the reinstatement of the hierarchy which is endorsed through the myth of

metals. The philosophical myth is a political-social reformulation of the myth of the ages: the historical humanity is made up of golden beings who are closest to and preserve the spiritual purity of the Golden Age and are an embodiment of virtue and moral reason, the silver beings who are motivated by social ambition and pride, by the pursuit of honour and dignities and the bronze beings who are confined to material desire. The Socratic conception of order is conditioned by hierarchy which is perceived as immutable as the social hierarchy is considered to reflect a spiritual one and the placement into a social class is predetermined and consequent upon the characteristics of one's inner nature.

The humanist 'Utopia' is patterned on the philosophical project of the historical ideal but it also indicates a reformulation of the classical Socratic model. The Morean vision revisits the classical paradigm through the Christian perspective and is based on the conflation between the historical ideal advanced by Socrates and the Christian human ideal epitomized by the Apostolic model.

The spatial focus in Utopia on territory, on the geometrical refashioning of the utopian space into an island and the uniform division of the latter symbolically expresses the Christian perspective which informs the social constitution defined by the orientation to totality, the societal cosmos. The centrelessness of the island spatializes the Christian focus on the other which is also reflected in the principles/ laws governing Utopia: the elimination of money and material possessions, the devalorization of luxury and gold which can be conducive to self-pursuit, the common ownership of land. Within the insular condition the dualism centre-margin is abolished. The Platonic order is grounded in the immutable hierarchy of the inherently differentiated humans. Although the Utopian ideal constitution is based on hierarchy, the spiritual and social condition is not pre-determined but the utopian order is geared towards promoting the spiritual progress of the human self. Utopia features the possibility of spiritual becoming and consequently that of social mobility. Whereas the Platonic ideal is marked by the governance by the golden beings, the utopian condition is dominated by the absent presence of the founder and spiritual leader, the philosopher-king Utopus who is invested with a transcendental, godlike status.

The utopian ideal evokes the Greek colonial state through its being the result of a conquest, a foreign intervention which is concomitantly a violent, aggressive action and a civilizing act. The utopian constitution similarly with the Platonic one is conceived as an educational state and envisages the moral transformation of the individual through a public enterprise, a social reform implemented at the communal level. The humanist utopia reflects the juxtaposition between the Greek perspective of the individual being shaped by the environment and the Christian one according to which individual reform can influence society and the social order. The Socratic conception whereby the justice is effected through a collective process of political reform is reformulated in the Morean construction which asserts the interconditionning between justice at the level of the state and the moral-spiritual awareness of its citizens.

The utopian state is an embodiment of a classical ideal and of a Christian one and can be assimilated both with a monastic community and with a philosophical-mythical ideal humanity. This is suggested by the inversion of the historical thought, of the material perspective on the earthly values, the absence of the acquisitive instinct and of the transgressive desire: 'None of them is driven by any desire to extend its [the city's] boundaries. Indeed, whatever land they have, they consider themselves its tenant-farmers, not its landlords.' (More: 54).

However the humanist 'Utopia' expresses the skepticism regarding the possibility of the historical ideal. This is viewed as being conditioned by the existence of the philosopher-king: 'commonwealths will be happy only when philosophers become kings or kings become philosophers.' (More: 6). The Morean position echoes the Socratic one which advances the necessity of the philosopher-king, of the fusion between the spiritual and the secular governance for the institution of the historical ideal: 'Until philosophers rule as kings or those who are now called kings and leading men genuinely and adequately philosophize, that is, until political power and philosophy entirely coincide, […] cities will have no rest from evils, […] there can be no happiness, either public or private, in any other city.' (Cooper: 1100). Although the classical context features the existence of philosopher-kings it also suggests the tension between the two roles and the late-medieval context similarly expresses the division between the political realm and the philosophical/ spiritual one, the non-coincidence between the political and the spiritual ruler, the divergence between their perspectives.

The position of More in favour of political activism, of the philosopher's engagement in civic life stated in his counsel to Hythloday reiterates the original Platonic position which is defined by the ideal of the conflation of the political and the spiritual ruler in the figure of the philosopher-king: 'if you could bring yourself not to shrink from the courts of the princes, you could contribute a great deal to the common good through your advice. No duty of a good man […] is more important than that.' (More: 35).

The debate focused on the contemporary context discovers the discrepancy or fracture between the historical and the spiritual realms which is acknowledged by both More and Hythloday and evokes the later Platonic perspective on the philosopher's historical role. The Platonic position maintains the conversion of the philosopher into a censor of the ills of the contemporary society in the name of an unhistorical ideal. More advocates the political involvement of the philosopher and his view is reinforced by the recourse to the Platonic metaphor of the ship of state. This suggests the humanist reactualization of the classical philosopher's hope concerning the implementation of a rational ideal: 'If you cannot thoroughly eradicate corrupt opinions or cure long-standing evils to your own satisfaction, that is still no reason to abandon the commonwealth, deserting the ship in a storm because you cannot control the winds.' (More: 44).

The Morean 'Utopia' reveals that the textual projection of human reason which enables the new reality acquires primacy over the real. The cultural, textual character of the utopian vision is reinforced by its relation to its source, the Socratic dialogue, where

the work of historical engineering starts from the dialectical exercise of providing a definition of justice. The Platonic work demonstrates the textual, dialogic recreation of a world which in turn can effect the transformation of the real. The question of the realization of the ideal becomes marginal. While the question of the historical possibility of the ideal is connected with the skepticism concerning the human and historical capacity for self-transformation, the rational project of the utopian ideal marks the inception of the movement of historical reformation and anticipates the translation of the ideal state into a future one.

The construction of the Morean *Utopia* is based not only on the juxtaposition of the Greek and the Christian models of the ideal but also valorizes the carnivalesque perspective. The humanist conception of the utopian order includes and is conditioned by the carnivalesque and the dialogue between the historical and the ideal condition is informed by the play between the two modes. The carnivalesque features in the very representation of the utopian vision which is associated with folly (symbolically expressed by the moon-like shape of the island, the names of Utopia's creator and of the Utopian places which invalidate their referents). The non-rational connotation of Utopia implies its self-interrogation, the questioning of the possibility of realization of the ideal or of its validity. The carnivalesque perspective is evoked by the name of the philosopher Hythloday which similarly suggests the assimilation of the utopian vision with a carnivalesque projection, a material paradise, a nonsensical ideal whose implementation is invalidated. This interrogation of the historical ideal is reinforced by the marginal situation of Utopia beyond the boundaries of the known world. The delineation of the utopian order reveals however its difference from the former model of the natural/ material paradise. The carnivalesque universe is an imaginary, fantastic construct which is meant to remain in the margins of the real, at the subjective level. It is attached a morally negative connotation and its realization has a destructive significance symbolically expressed in the metaphor of the world upside-down. By contrast Utopia is conceived as a cosmos grounded in moral reason, as a self-sustaining order. The utopian state is advanced both as an ideal and as its embodiment and the implementation of the ideal of moral reason in the utopian constitution serves as an indirect validation of Utopus's vision which further implies its validity in the historical world. The utopia is conceived as a counterbalance to the historical order, an alternative order which competes with the centre. The relation between the historical world and the utopian ideal suggests the reversal of the relation centre-margin as the utopian order situated in the marginal space becomes invested with centrality and supplants the civilized world as the centre of the historical condition. This is consonant with the Christian, transcendental perspective according to which the centre of the world is relocated beyond its boundaries.

The carnivalesque conception of material paradise is integrated in a Christian, moral perspective and is obliquely subsumed to the reform of society through the denunciation of the flaws of the contemporary order. The carnivalesque is valorized in the representation of the historical world which is revealed as a condition governed by

material, self-centred (un)reason. The carnivalesque topos of the world upside-down participates in the dystopic delineation of the contemporary society as an anti-ideal, an inversion of the Christian ideal.

The carnivalesque is also involved in the intertextual practice and in the reworking of previous textuality which is often associated with parody. The humanist writings are marked by the reactualization of the texts of classical culture which is however not subsumed to the exercise of parodic subversion. The intertextual strategy and the valorization of the classical ideal are not aimed at parodying the pre-text, debunking the ideal, but contrarily at effecting emulation, the elevation of the contemporary world to the status of the classical civilization. The intertextual relation between the humanist Utopia and the Platonic hypotext is not one of parodic, caricatural reformulation. The classical text is perceived as the product of a paradigmatic reality and an exemplar which is valorized not solely in shaping the early modern culture, but also the forma mentis of the age, in bridging the historical hiatus and in founding the construction of the modern world. The Utopian state is conceived in a Socratic vein as an embodiment of social justice and this interpretation is reinforced by reference to the condition of the historical world represented in the first section of the work, through the contrast between the contemporary state marked by injustice and disorder and the utopian one conceived as a reparation of historical unreason and inequity, as an epitome of political/ moral order and social justice.

The construction of the Morean Utopia is based on paradox and the ambiguity and tension underlying it consist in the projection of a continuity and non-contradiction between the subjective, transcendent and the societal, collective existence. The ambivalence of the concept of utopia is responsible for the reformulation of the utopia as a literary genre, the emergence of the symmetrical genre of dystopia or anti-utopia. P.Wegner differentiates between abstract and concrete utopias, the latter being associated with the conception of the ideal as the product of human, rational construction. The carnivalesque, material paradises can be assimilated with the 'abstract utopias' which according to P.Wegner are the embodiment of the gratification of desire while the Morean utopia is identified with the 'concrete utopia' which is aimed at the transformation and sublimation of desire. This perspective implies the integration of the projections of material and carnivalesque paradises which are contrary to the philosophical/ Humanist conception of the historical ideal in the utopian genre. Paradoxically the genre initiated by the Morean work can encompass the conceptual opposite of utopia.

The early-modern period is marked by the proliferation of utopias which reflect the exercise of world-making, historical engineering, the attempt at controlling the contingent reality and refashioning the world through social or technological projects of human reason. The utopian projections of the ideal revert into visions of a dystopian future which are based on the specific data of the contemporary world. The translation from the projection of the ideal to the oblique denunciation of the historical society as an

anti-ideal or their superimposition implies the revalorization of the carnivalesque in the modern utopias which anticipates the transformation of the utopia into its opposite. The modern dystopias advance hallucinatory visions of the consequences of social planning or technological control on the human self and society.

The rationale of the utopian ideal as a project of historical recreation explains the conceptual and generic mobility of the utopia which is subject to a continuous revisitation according to the evolving and conflicting conditions of historical society. This is reflected at the narrative level in the re-authoring of the utopia and the discontinuity between the exemplar and its progenies. The utopian vision encompasses under its umbrella not only divergent but also contradictory forms and conceptions of the ideal which are associated with generic reformulations.

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