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Utopias in History, History in Utopias

Utopie w historii, historia w utopiach

The problem of utopia and history can be seen in two perspectives. The first one, the history of utopia, which is both the most obvious and the most extensively used in critical studies involves an attempt to explain particular utopian texts and their evolution in terms of the historical conditions that generated them. Thus, utopia, understood as any radical and "impossible" model of the state and society introduced in both fictional and non-fictional texts, is seen as a product of the social, economic and political conditions obtaining at the time of its composition, and its evolution is seen as brought about by the changes in the same conditions. However, the failure to make the distinction between the social functioning of literary (fictional) and non-literary texts renders the results of such studies highly unsatisfactory as none of them have managed to solve the problem of how the socio--economic system is translated into the system of literature and its own immanent dynamics governed by the dialectic of tradition and innovation. For example, it is commonly claimed that utopia flourishes in the times of deep social, economic or political crises. However, even a cursory look at any comprehensive bibliography of utopias clearly demonstrates that no such simple relationship exists. The number of utopias shows a steady rise from the sixteenth century onwards, reaching its peak in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This renders the critics' claim essentially meaningless, as we either have to accept this claim despite its being counterfactual or else we ought to consider the last five centuries of human history as a state of permanent crisis.

Another example of the same kind is Lewis Mumford's suggestion that the eighteenth century, being the Age of Reason, was not conducive to the construction of imaginary models of the perfect society.[1] Here again the number of texts written at the time contradicts Mumford's suggestion. In fact the number of utopian texts composed in the eighteenth century exceeds that of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries put together.

Very often, this kind of "historical" approach is characterized by blatant ahistoricism. Thus, Karl Kautsky, and many other Marxist critics argue that More's *Utopia* is an ambitious but essentially inept attempt to transcend the limitations of the socio-economic conditions of the times and to construct an image of the glorious future of mankind in some respects resembling the one offered by "scientific" communism. Kautsky speaks of "the whole tragedy of More's fate, the whole tragedy of a genius who divines the problems of his age before the material conditions exist for their solution; the whole tragedy of a character who feels obliged to grapple with the solution of the problems which the age has presented, to champion the rights of the oppressed against the arrogance of the ruling classes, even when he stands alone and his efforts have no prospect of success".[2] This essentially ahistorical approach to More's Utopia is not exclusive to the nineteenth-century enthusiasts of scientific communism. A recent religious interpreter, having praised More for his psychological insights concludes with some regret: "This is still far short of Marx's understanding of the effect of material conditions on the human mind and the map of our inner mechanism drawn by psychologists like Freud and Jung, but More's contribution is still impressive in its own right".[3] In cases like these the actual functioning of More's *Utopia* in its immediate cultural context is ignored as irrelevant and the text is reinterpreted in terms of an ideological system that has little to do with the ones existing at the time of the text's appearance.

This suggests another dimension of the history of utopias, that of the "life" of the utopian text as it moves from one cultural system to another. Seen in this context the Marxist approach to More's *Utopia* is perfectly justifiable as a cultural activity of constructing the text's meanings in accordance with a new cultural code. In this sense it is a case of legitimate participation in the system of literature but any claims as to the scientific status of such an activity seem groundless. The act of assigning meanings to

[1] L. Mumford: *The Story of Utopias*, New York 1963, p. 113.

[2] K. Kautsky: *Thomas More and His Utopia*, translated by H.J. Stenning, London: Lawrence and Wishart 1979, p. 249.

[3] T.I. White: "The Key to Nowhere: Pride and *Utopia*" in John C. Olin ed., *Interpreting Thomas More's Utopia*, New York: Fordham University Press 1989, p. 57.

a text is a different activity from the study of how they are constructed in various cultural systems which alone can be the object of rational analysis.

The functioning of More's *Utopia* in different cultural systems is most instructive in this respect. The text, originally written in Latin, functioned within the system of the universalist European culture of the Renaissance. The addressee of the text was a European humanist equipped with the knowledge of classical authors and their works. The immediate generic system in terms of which the text was to be decoded was that of the menippean satire after the manner of Lucian or the Platonic best-commonwealth exercise rather than the contemporary socio-political tracts.[4] This is evinced by a number of features exhibited by More's text, especially his use of the dialogical method on practically all levels of the text's structure. As a result, the text both affirms and questions the image of the perfect commonwealth depicted in it and so that image cannot be in any way considered as a model to be implemented in practical life. The translation of *Utopia* into English and then into other national languages changed the cultural system in terms of which the meanings of the text were to be decoded. The elimination of many "polyphonic" textual signals, such as the prefatory letters and margin notes, in the process of translation placed the image of the perfect commonwealth in the centre of attention. However, even the simplified version of the text did not function as a socially viable proposal for practical action aimed at implementing the perfect pattern depicted in the text. The text continued to function as a part of the literary system, constantly reprinted and constantly present in the literary consciousness of later generations in the next three centuries as a genre model but not as a part of the systems of social, political or economic thought.

A good description of the functioning of utopia in the first three centuries of its existence can be found in Robert Burton's metatextual comments on his own utopia in the *Anatomy of Melancholy*:

"I will yet, to satisfy and please myself make an utopia of mine own, a New Atlantis, a poetical commonwealth of mine own, in which I will freely domineer, build cities, make laws, statues, as I list myself. And why may I not, *Pictoribus atque poetis*, etc. - you know what liberty poets ever had [...]. For the site, if you will needs urge me to it, I am not fully resolved, it may be in *Terra Australis Incognita*, there is room enough [...] or else one of these floating islands in Mare del Zur, which like the Cyanean Isles in the Euxine Sea, alter their place, and are accessible only at set times, and to some few persons; or one of the Fortunate Isles, for who knows yet where, or which they are? There is room enough in the inner parts of America and northern coasts of Asia. But I will choose a site, whose

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[4] On More's *Utopia* as an example of the best-commonwealth exercise see G. L o g a n : *The Meaning of More's Utopia*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1983.

latitude shall be forty-five degrees (I respect not minutes) in the midst of the temperate zone, or perhaps under the Equator that paradise of the world, [...] where is a perpetual spring: the longitude for some reasons I will conceal". [5]

This is utopian poetics in a nut-shell. Utopia is conceived of as a certain game of self-illusion and reality, not a project of improvement of the human lot but an aesthetic construct, affording pleasure to the mind that constructs it. Essentially the same kind of attitude is to be found in Gonzalo's construction of the perfect commonwealth in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (Act II, scene 1) although here the ironic comments of other characters listening to his speech suggest the inner contradictions inherent in the process of constructing imaginary worlds and the delusion of the self--appointed "law-giver".

The nineteenth-century thinkers who saw in utopia the prototype of the later systems of social, political an economic thought regarded the aesthetic aspects of utopias, their literariness and ambiguity as a kind of protective device against persecution by the authorities on account of the subversive ideas contained in them. This view does not seem to be justified. First of all there is no evidence of any cases of such a persecution affecting the authors of utopias due to the publication of their works, although at the same time any attempts at radical action aimed at social reform were severely punished. Nor can one point to any links between the authors of utopias and any social groups involved in the bringing about of the perfect order described in these texts. Nothing is known about the authors' attempts to organize any groups of followers of their "projects", although groups of followers did gather around the proponents of radical reforms. The entry of fiction into the domain of social struggle begins at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the two concepts of utopia (aesthetic object and blueprint) merge into one, with a characteristic shift in the semantics of the term: the word begins to denote primarily a certain type of social or economic programme and not an aesthetic construct.

Thus, the "blueprint" conception is obviously appropriate in relation to the last two centuries, but it greatly distorts the image of the functioning of utopia in the first stage of its development when it functioned almost exclusively as a literary phenomenon and not as a political one. Considering the low, and highly suspect status of fiction at the time it could not have been otherwise. Radical social thinkers and activists, like Winstanley, who

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[5] Quoted after G. N e g l e y and J.M. P a t r i c k: *The Quest for Utopia. An Anthology of Imaginary Societies*, College Park: McGarth Publishing Company 1971, p. 351.

later came to be called "utopians" did not on the whole rely on fiction as a medium of promoting their ideas.

This, of course, does not mean that the term "utopia" had not been used in political or religious polemics, where its status as a "killer-term" was due precisely to the fact that it was regarded as a concept from the domain of literary (poetical) fiction. A few examples of the use of the term taken from the sixteenth and seventeenth century will illustrate this point.[6] John Foxe in his *Ecclesiastical History* (1570), suggests that "Belike this was in Utopia where M. More's Purgatory is founded". John Rushworth, *Historical Collections* (1642), records that Charles I spoke of the "new Utopia of religion and government into which they endeavour to transform this kingdom". For Thomas Fuller "a perfect Reformation of any Church in this world may be desired, but not hoped for. Let Xenophon's Cyrus be King in Plato's Commonwealth, and Batchelor's wives breed maides children in Mores Utopia, whilest Roses grow in their Gardens without pricles [...] These phancies are pleasing and plausible, but the performance thereof unfeisable". (1642). And John Milton in *Areopagitica*, (1644), proclaims: "To sequester out of the world into Atlantic and Eutopian polities, which never can be drawn into use, will not mend our condition". Characteristically, when talking about utopias in their proper (literary-fictional) context, the same author is full of praise for their authors: "That grace and noble invention which the greatest and sublimest wits in sundry ages, Plato in Critias, and our two famous countreymen, the one in his Utopia, the other in his New Atlantis chose [...] as a mighty continent wherein to display the largenesse of their spirits by teaching this world better and exacter things than were yet known or used". George Lawson, *An examination of the political part of Mr.Hobbes his Leviathan*, maintains that Hobbes' "covenant of everyone with everybody for to design a sovereign is but a utopian fancy". Finally, the author of an anonymous pamphlet from 1660 wonders "whether hanging or drowning be the best ways of transportation of our late Republicans to the Commonwealths of Utopia and Oceana?".

References to the fictional-aesthetic status of utopias are also numerous. Thomas Nashe in an epistle attached to Robert Greene's *Menaphon* refers to "Thomas More with his comicall wit" in *Utopia*. For George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), utopia rests "all in device, but never put into execution, and easier to be wished for than to be performed". Sir Thomas

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[6] The examples of the Renaissance views on the phenomenon of utopia are quoted after R.W. G i b s o n : *St. Thomas More: A Preliminary Bibliography of His Works and of Moreana to the Year 1750*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1961.

Smith , *De republica Anglorum*, calls utopias "fained commonwealthes, such as never was nor shall be, vain imaginations, phantasies of philosophers to occupy their time, and to exercise their wits". Finally, an eighteenth century edition of More's *Utopia* bears the generic subtitle of "a romance", and utopia becomes a popular topos in the eighteenth century novels of courtly scandal and all sorts of satirical writings, e.g.: Mrs. Eliza Haywood's *Memoirs of a Certain Island Adjacent to Utopia* or C.C.'s *The Father of the City of Eutopia.*

The literary system in which utopia originally emerged, its immediate cultural context, is that of the carnivalized literature (to use Bakhtin's term) encompassing the Platonic dialogue, menippean satire and a body of medieval texts about the topsy-turvy world or "Nemo" stories. In the course of its evolution utopia borrows many elements from the genres of popular fiction and non-fiction, mainly the adventure tale, romance and travel narrative. However, their function in the structure of the genre seems peripheral. The genre's identity is defined by the elaborate description of the state and society represented in the text as the model of perfection. The structural principle of utopia is based on a binary opposition realized both on the compositional and the axiological level. The Renaissance utopian text consists of two parts: the first depicts the author's world (shown as evil, or at least imperfect), the second presents the ideal state. This division of the text finds its reflection in the distribution of the modes of discourse: the "European" section employs mostly narrative whereas the "utopian" part relies on the static, often argumentative, description. In this sense the narrative parts can be regarded as a literary frame of a non-literary project of social, political and economic changes which functions like an entertaining device to make the serious practical discourse more easily acceptable. This, however, would have been self-defeating. The use of fiction undermined the validity of the practical suggestions the more so as the mode of their possible practical implementation in the author's world was almost never described. The transportation of the entire nation, or a group of people, to another place to make a new beginning was hardly a practical solution. So, in the light of the way in which utopias were perceived until the nineteenth century, a different approach to the mutual relations between the utopian text and its frame may be in order. It may be assumed that both the frame and the utopian text possess an aesthetic function although in each case it is realized differently, according to different structural principles. Thus, the description of the ideal country may be regarded as a kind of a text within a text. Viewed in this way the image of the country projected by the utopian text will turn out to be constructed according to the dominant aesthetic

norms of the period pertaining to the visual arts: harmony, proportion and symmetry.

The aesthetics of utopia is not the aesthetics of the narrative text; elements which define the aesthetic perception of the narrative text (plot, style, characters) are of secondary importance here. The aesthetic qualities are most strongly linked to the image of the utopian state (Sidney's idea of utopia as a speaking picture): they manifest themselves in its harmonious construction, perfection, timelessness. Karl Popper's observations on the nature of Plato's utopia are equally applicable to the construction of utopias in the Renaissance: "It is an art of composition, like music, painting, or architecture. The Platonic politician composes cities, for beauty's sake".[7] The utopian country is a finished and perfect object which requires no further improvements or modifications. Thus utopia as a model of the ideal invited the reader to contemplate this ideal and to evaluate it but demanded no practical action on his part. The perception of the model of perfection, just like the Platonic idea of contemplation, is a perception of a model which does not aim at initiating any kind of practical action. The model is the object of admiration, it involves the recognition of beauty and truth to be enjoyed for their own sake.[8]

In the literary utopia these aesthetic qualities can be observed in the organization of the artistic space, and the harmonious relations between political institutions, manners and customs of the inhabitants, all sharing the same high degree of semioticity. The arrangement of streets, buildings and the entire cities is governed by geometrical patterns such as square and circle.[9] In this nearly all utopias follow the Renaissance architectural idea of *citta felice.* Everything is constructed in accordance with the principles of symmetry and proportion. The shape of Andreae's *Christianopolis* is "a square, whose side is seven hundred feet, well fortified with four towers and a wall".[10] Campanella's *City of the Sun* is divided into seven concentric circles, with four broad streets leading to the four gates. In most other utopias the houses are of equal height, constructed of the same materials, with identical

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[7] K.R. Popper: *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. I, London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977, p. 165.

[8] Cf. J. Shklar: "The Political Theory of Utopia: From Melancholy to Nostalgia", in Frank E. Manuel, ed. *Utopias and Utopian Thought*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1971, p. 105.

[9] Cf. F. E. Manuel and F. P. Manuel: *Utopian Thought in the Western World*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979, pp. 150-180.

[10] J. V. Andreae: *Christianopolis*, translated by Felix Held, New York: Oxford University Press, p. 4.

façades. The descriptions of interiors have a similar function. They are to produce in the reader the sense of beauty and perfection:

"This vast Cupola is rear'd up into the Air with a double row of Alabaster Pillars, of the Order of the Caryatides; the workmanship most delicate, the drapery of Gold, and the base of the same upon a Pedestal of Jasper. The Frize enrich'd with Releifs of Gold, having its Corniche also of Alabaster, is surmounted with a Balister of the same Metal. The Counter Pilasters of the Corridore are proportionable to the beauty of the Columns, their hollow spaces being fill'd up with Serpentine, as in the whole concavity of the Duomo with Lapis Lazuli, the most beautiful that ever I saw in the most curious Cabinets in Italy".[11]

The same applies to the clothes worn by the inhabitants, e.g., the description of the Father of Salomon's House in *New Atlantis*:

"He was clothed in a robe of fine black cloth with wide sleeves, and a cape: his under garment was of excellent white linen down to the foot, girt with a girdle of the same; and a sindon or tippet of the same about his neck. He had gloves that were curious, and set with stone; and shoes of peach-coloured velvet".[12]

The description of his chariot aims at producing an even more powerful effect:

"The chariot was of all cedar, gilt and adorned with crystal; save that the fore-end had panels of sapphires, set in borders of gold, and the hinder-end the like of emeralds of the Peru colour. There was also a sun of gold, radiant upon the top, in the midst; and on the top before a small cherub of gold, with wings displayed. The chariot was covered with cloth of gold tissued upon blue".[13]

Numerous descriptions of various works of art seen in the utopian land have exactly the same function. Occasionally, the authors' enthusiasm for classical aesthetic models produces rather extreme images, as in this description of a painting in R.H.'s sequel to Bacon's *New Atlantis*: "he shewed me the ingenious phansie of the painter Palaton, who had pourtraied Homer that Prince of Poets vomiting, and all the rest of them licking it up".[14]

Of course, depending on whether the depicted society tends towards primitivism or advanced civilisational development the beautiful objects will be either luxurious (with extensive use of gold and precious stones) as in

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[11] H. de L'E p y : *A Voyage to Tartary*, London 1689, p. 121.

[12] F. B a c o n : "New Atlantis", in *Famous Utopias*, New York: Hendricks House, 1955, p. 238.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 238.

[14] *New Atlantis. Begun by the Lord Verulam, Viscount of St. Albans: and now Continued by R.H. Esquire*, London 1660, p. 58.

the above examples, or simple and functional. However, in each case they function aesthetically, as objects to be contemplated and admired.

The structure of the utopian text, as opposed to its narrative frame, can be characterized as a set of sub-structures of various levels all of which are variants of a single semantic field - the perfect commonwealth, whilst at the same time they have a semi-autonomous function as models of various aspects of that ideal. Such a construction of the fictional world represents the paradigmatic type of textual organization and meaning-formation characteristic of the poetic, as opposed to narrative, text. New semantic bonds (equivalences) are established between signs of different levels, from the lowest to the highest. However, unlike in the poetic text where the paradigmatic ordering is aimed at the multiplication of meanings (as in More's *Utopia* read in terms of its immediate cultural context) in later utopias it contributes to the persuasive function because all elements being governed by a single principle constantly remind the reader about the perfection of the represented model.

Thus, there is an inherent tension between the contemplation of a beautiful construction and its persuasive function owing to which the object of contemplation is no longer an end in itself but a means to another end. This other end is not at first a comprehensive programme of sweeping reforms or a call for revolutionary action but a presentation of some general idea (pride as the root of all evil in More's *Utopia* (or a particular one (the project of a research institution in Bacon's *New Atlantis*) incorporated in a detailed construction intended as its perfect embodiment. It is this tension between contemplation and persuasion that defined the two lines of development of utopia's history and constituted its immanent evolutionary mechanism. The predominance of either of the two tendencies was to turn utopia either into an aesthetic object or a blueprint, a call for some practical social action. In England, the first signs of this divergence occur in the seventeenth century at the time of various political and social upheavals. Harrington's *Oceana* and Hartlib's *Macaria* are clearly intended as programmes of social action since both suggest the practical measures aimed at implementing the model depicted in them, measures which are applicable to the conditions obtaining at the time. In both cases the Parliament is to pass a set of laws establishing the proposed order. In this sense the times of social and political upheaval are conducive to the emergence of utopias but mainly those which call for the practical implementation of the model they depict. The next such period occurred at the time following the French revolution when there was a decisive change in the social functioning of the genre of utopia. From then on utopia

acquires a predominantly ideological function so that the construction of an aesthetic object is always subordinated to the persuasive function and the particular solutions presented in the text are perceived as calling for their implementation in the real world. Consequently, those textual structures which in the earlier times functioned as signals of how a given text ought to be perceived (as an aesthetic object or a blueprint) became largely irrelevant in the new cultural, social and political system of the nineteenth century. Any depiction of an ideal state, regardless of the degree of its fictionality or literariness, was regarded as a contribution to an ideological debate, as a blueprint to be accepted or rejected according to one's ideological persuasion but never as an aesthetic object to be contemplated or admired for its own sake.

Finally we shall consider the second approach to the problem of utopia and history connected with the representation of history in the utopian text. It is here that the relationship utopia — history seems to be the most interesting. Utopia is one of the first secular literary genres to introduce a certain conception of history different from the additive, haphazard accumulation of events presented by the annalists and chroniclers, sometimes employing the rise and fall pattern of historical change. The utopian text introduces two types of history: European history consisting of events (wars, peace treaties, changes of rulers, etc.) aimlessly following one another in an endless chain, and utopian history falling into two phases divided by the act of establishing the utopian state. The first phase (pre-utopian) is in most cases identical to the European pattern (wars, civil unrest, etc.). The authors of some utopias, especially those tending towards the blueprint variety, attempt to make this similarity quite explicit by stressing the correspondence between the utopian land's past and Europe's present. For example, the anonymous author of *The Free State of Noland* makes this relationship of identity quite clear:

"As for Noland in particular, it very much resembles England both in Soil and Climate. Also (tho it may seem incredible) they are of the same religion, speak the same English Language, and have the English Laws. And their Government (till of late years) was exactly conformable to the Monarchy of England".[15]

The second (utopian) phase is qualitatively different. It no longer consists of events, constant violations of the existing order but involves the perpetuation of the same order. It is oriented towards the rules as opposed to their violations. All possible conflicts are removed outside the utopian

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[15] *The Free State of Noland*, London 1696, p. 2.

domain. For example, More's Utopians still fight their wars but on other nations' territories and mainly through mercenaries. In fact, history as such comes to a halt with the establishing of the utopian state. The system is organized in such a way as to be immune to change. This is achieved in two ways. Social and individual behaviour which might give rise to events, i.e. to violations of the existing order is controlled by strict institutionalization and ritualization of all forms of social and personal life, including sexual life. Nothing is left to chance. Thus even the random movement of people from country to city and back assumes in Utopia the form of the periodic resettlement of the entire sections of population. Since the change is recurrent it becomes a part of the pattern and thus ceases to be an event understood as an unusual occurrence which can be subject to chance. The same applies to the choice of one's wife which is also strictly ritualized, as in this eighteenth century utopia, *The Admirable Travels of Messers. Thomas Jenkins and David Lowellin*, where the following pattern of courting must be adopted:

"[it should begin] by presenting the fair one I most approved of with a rose-bud, who, if she approved the suit would place it in her bosom as a token of love, for me to present her with another half blown, that day month, and in case she also placed that in her bosom, I was at full liberty to decline, or present her with another full blown at the end of the second month, which if she likewise placed in her bosom as before, the match was so far concluded as not to be withdrawn".[16]

Any attempt to divert from the established pattern even in the domain of personal life is seen as a subversive act and as such it is duly punished. In the above example the hero is first put to prison and then expelled from the utopian land.

Precautions are also taken against any kind of change under external influence: hence the self-imposed isolation from the outside world, and very strict regulations controlling all contacts with foreigners. In fact the moment of establishing the perfect order is almost instantaneously followed by an almost complete isolation from the outside world. In More's work king Utopus who "brought the rude and uncivilised inhabitants into such good government" orders that the country be physically separated from the rest of the continent. Salomona in *New Atlantis* only wants "to give perpetuity to that which was in his time so happily established". The stability of the system is also ensured by the vision of the country's past formulated in terms of the evaluative opposition where everything taking place before the

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[16] *The Admirable Travels of Messieurs Thomas Jenkins and David Lowellin Through the Unknown Tracts of Africa*, London 1783, p. 19.

institution of the new order is seen in purely negative terms (chaos) and the present state is regarded as the realization of the perfect order.

This self-description of the utopian system is then projected onto the relationship between utopia and the author's world. Considered in such terms the author's world represents utopia's past. Conversely, utopia's present represents the author's world's desired or postulated future. This relationship, implicit at first, becomes pronounced in the eighteenth century with the rise of utopias set in the future and the events leading to the establishing of the perfect order become the world's future history (e.g., *The Reign of George VI*).

Thus, despite its later predilection for depicting the history of the future, utopia represents an essentially hostile attitude to history, once the perfect order has been established: history, identified with changes is seen as something that ought to be overcome. No evolutionary transition from the imperfect world governed by history to the timeless world of the perfect order is deemed possible. What is neccessary is not a series of changes but THE CHANGE, the end of all changes, the eschatological replacement of everything: the social system, the political system, the economic system, the cultural system.

The above model is not based on the generalization of historical experience but draws on the mythological patterns of consciousness; the eschatological pattern taken from religion is applied here to the postulated model of development of human societies. It is in this sense that we can speak of the humanistic roots of utopia[17]. In this model the overall responsibility for the course of mankind's history is in human hands. The perfect order is invariably instituted by a god-like human individual (king Utopus, Salomona, Lord Archon, etc.) for whom no limitations seem to exist, the status that he shares with the author of the utopian text.

Utopia's inherent hostility towards history did not change in the nineteenth century although the emergence of the utopian state was more and more often described as an evolutionary process leading, nevertheless, to the final elimination of history once the perfect order has been established. However, it is curious to observe that when utopian visions began to be implemented on a large scale in actual human societies in the twentieth century, isolation and immutability of the existing order became compulsory even though in terms of such a system's self-description it was but

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[17] For a detailed discussion of the secularisation of the Christian perspective see J.C. O l i n : "The Idea of Utopia from Hesiod to John Paul II", in J.C. O l i n :, ed.: *Interpreting Thomas More's Utopia*, New York: Fordham University Press, 1989, pp. 77-98.

the first stage in a long process of reaching the perfect state and the end of history. In a peculiar "return to the roots" these real-life utopias began to exhibit more and more features of their fictional counterparts, with the notable exception of the aesthetic qualities. The boundary separating the utopian land from the outside world assumed the most bizarre forms, both material and symbolical; so did the cult of the founder of the utopian state and the highly mythologized image of history. Moreover, what used to be a convenient rhetorical device of presenting the utopian society through its typical representatives turned into the tendency to treat social classes or groups, rather than individuals, as the basic units of the society. These real-life utopias are now on their way to become a part of history, leaving room for the emergence of new ones.

STRESZCZENIE

Większość dotychczasowych badań nad utopią literacką zajmuje się społeczno-politycznymi uwarunkowaniami i genezą gatunku pomijając jego faktyczne funkcjonowanie w historii kultury europejskiej. Utopia, rozumiana jako każdy radykalny i niemożliwy model doskonałego państwa i społeczeństwa, przedstawiony w tekstach literackich i nieliterackich, uważana jest za wytwór warunków społecznych, politycznych i ekonomicznych. Jednakże historia gatunku dowodzi, iż w trakcie pierwszych dwu stuleci swego istnienia utopia funkcjonowała przede wszystkim jako zjawisko literackie, którego wpływ na myśl i praktykę społeczną był niewielki. Społeczno-polityczne funkcjonowanie utopii rozpoczyna się na szerszą skalę dopiero na początku dziewiętnastego wieku, kiedy to dwie dotychczas odmienne koncepcje utopii (utopia jako przedmiot estetyczny i jako projekt doskonałego społeczeństwa i państwa) zaczynają funkcjonować łącznie w świadomości społecznej oznaczając poważny, choć nierealistyczny projekt radykalnej zmiany kształtu stosunków społecznych i ekonomicznych. Utopia jest konstruowana na zasadzie opozycji binarnej, która jest realizowana na płaszczyźnie kompozycyjnej i aksjologicznej. Typowy tekst utopijny składa się z narracyjnej ramy i statycznego opisu doskonałego państwa i społeczeństwa. W przeciwieństwie do większości krytyków można uznać, iż zarówno rama, jak i „tekst utopijny" pełnią funkcję estetyczną, choć realizowaną w odmienny sposób. Kształt państwa utopijnego jest określony nie tyle przez myśl społeczno-polityczną epoki, ile przez dominujące kanony estetyczne. Obraz doskonałego kraju i społeczeństwa przedstawiony w tekście utopijnym jest skonstruowany zgodnie z dominującymi normami estetycznymi epoki w odniesieniu do sztuk wizualnych: harmonia, symetria, proporcjonalność. Dlatego utopia jako idealny model zachęcała odbiorcę do kontemplacji i oceny, ale nie wymagała żadnego praktycznego działania z jego strony. Zgodnie z zasadą doskonałości estetycznej utopia przedstawia państwo, w którym historia społeczna zatrzymała się. Po osiągnięciu momentu doskonałości głównym celem staje się utrzymanie istniejącego stanu rzeczy, czemu służy izolacja od świata zewnętrznego, rytualizacja wszelkich przejawów życia społecznego, a nawet prywatnego, system edukacyjny, etc. Dwudziestowieczne próby urzeczywistnienia utopii wykazywały wiele cech wcześniejszych konstrukcji literackich, pomijając jednak ich walory estetyczne.