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Utopia and Anti-Utopia in 1870-1918

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Key words: utopia, anti-utopia, ideology, ideologized utopia, propaganda, manipulation techniques, alterity, spatial metaphors, universal decline.

Summary

By appealing to the great theoreticians of the utopian genre, but gradually disengaging from their visions, the present work has been thought and should therefore be understood as an attempt to explore a well-defined part of literary utopia history, based on both the instruments of literary critique and theory, as well as on the perspective of social imaginary. The research aims at studying literary utopias published at the border between the 19th and 20th centuries and brings forth a daring thesis: with the historicization of utopian fiction (a process that marks the whole of the 19th century), utopia is presented, in a first phase, as what we call ideologized utopia, in order to later on take the shape of anti-utopia. We believe that ideologized utopia / eutopia is a literary work that preserves the main narrative conventions of the utopian genre, but also fulfils the role of propagator of ideology (providing the necessary action models for the implementation of a certain ideology).

We have therefore brought forth a way of thinking which encompasses the three forms of manifestation belonging to the utopian genre within a causal relationship, namely of production. We have shown how ideologized utopia originates from utopia, and anti-utopia appears as a response to this process, deconstructing both the classical conventions of utopia and the ideological sense of utopia impregnated by ideological elements. We have shown that the form borrowed by the utopian genre differs according to the ideological meaning it expresses: the imagining of worlds or perfect cities, marked by a rigorous order and a way of governing with strict laws that accept no change, corresponds to utopia and the ideologized utopia (which takes upon itself the narrative form and the rigors of utopia and doubles them with a subversive and manipulative layer, specific to ideology).

Likewise, the fiction which, on the one hand, allows disorder, imperfection and unpredictability to penetrate within the utopian genre, liberating the imaginary from conventions, predetermined behaviours and foreseeable manifestations, and, on the other hand, shows the impossibility and absurdity of the claim brought by the ideologized utopia of offering solutions that are generally valid, takes the form of anti-utopia. A direction of the thesis

proposed in this paper refers to the ability of anti-utopia to free the imaginary of the utopian genre by the flattening and totalizing tendencies of utopia. With the ideologization of utopia and then its transformation into anti-utopia, the language, the imaginary and the narrative complexity change, a process followed in detail in this study.

In order to pursue the way in which literary utopia is subject to ideology, the present study focused on the component elements of ideology, as reflected in literary utopias. In this regard, we have used the research of a sociologist, specialized in political philosophy (Martin Seliger), who divides the concept of “ideology” into distinct categories “description”, “analysis”, “moral prescriptions”, “technical prescriptions”, “implements”, “rejections”). This allowed us to follow the process by which ideology infiltrates the literary text. Our approach is interdisciplinary, as we applied a specific terminology to literature, and a specific vision and vocabulary to the political imaginary.

We would not have focused on this way of looking at literary utopia if it did not inspire and influence the implementation of political-ideological beliefs, if it had not seduced readers. Despite the questionable literary value (often limited), ideologized (e)utopias written at the border of the 19th and 20th centuries require such a reading precisely because they are deliberately placed in a space of persuasion, manipulation, exaltation of social-political beliefs, or, in a word, of ideology.

Following the analysis we have conducted, we summarize the fundamental approach of this study, by highlighting its main achievements:

After presenting some of the meanings that the term “utopia” has received in the broader context of the history of culture, in the first chapter of our study, we have discussed the distinction between utopia and utopianism, making use of the studies of Alexandru Ciorănescu, Raymond Ruyer and Arrigo Colombo. Whether it is interpreted as a method, means or category of the human mind, utopism implies the availability of the human being to accept, due to reasons of pleasure derived from a mental game, different hypotheses, even false or illegal, inconsistent with the laws of the world in which he lives.

These studies, and this is a first gain of this research, allowed us to identify a criterion by which we can propose a certain delimitation between purely imaginative literally works (which undergo the utopian game at a higher level) and highly idealized works (which do not imply innovative assumptions, but they are limited to presenting fictional worlds very similar to the real ones). The utopian definition has led to the formulation of an observation that

emphasizes the importance of the utopian mental attitude in the political reality of a society (in the sense that the utopian means train the same mental structures used by ideology).

In the subchapter *Utopian Literary Genre* we have shown that the utopian genre is a literary genre of its own, with a specific way of dealing with reality and with particular operating rules. After a preliminary discussion regarding its features (enumerating the main conventions of literary utopia), the focus was placed on the meanings of the terms utopia, eutopia, dystopia and anti-utopia, as they are explained and set within the genre theory by Corin Braga.

Due to the fact that ideology and, implicitly, ideologized eutopia operates subversively with the great mythical images inscribed in the individual and collective imagination, we have conducted an analysis of the meanings of the myth and of its relation with utopia. This approach was continued by defining the archetype and establishing the differences between the archetype and the myth (if the myth is polymorphic, the archetype is universal, constant and invariable). In this sense, we have identified Thomas More's *Utopia* as the archetypal work of the utopian genre, while, at the same time, following the archetypal structure on which social design is built within utopias.

In order to bring more clarity to the research, we have analysed the connection between utopia and the fantastic genre, namely, between utopia and science-fiction literature.

The subchapter on *Totalitarian Trends of Utopia* focused on the characteristics of the utopian worlds, and the subchapter *Utopic Temperament / Anti-Utopic Temperament* tested the validity of the perspectives proposed by the literary critique and history of mentalities which identify a series of psychological constants of utopian / anti-utopian writers.

Utopia at the Border between the 19th and 20th Centuries was built around an analysis of the historical conditions, of the dominant collective mentality and of the social imaginary of this period. Considering that the social-utopian theories enter the utopian canon (although they do not follow the conventions of a formal utopia, they are fed and impregnated by the "utopian way"), we have paid special attention to the differences between literary utopia and social-utopian theories.

In this regard, we have identified four aspects: the first refers to the fact that literary utopia differs from social-utopian theories due to its narrative architecture; the second focuses on the purpose of writing: while social-utopian theories focus on the *here* and *now* options,

with the obvious aim of putting them into practice, literary utopia is written, at least at a declarative level, for strictly aesthetic reasons. Thirdly, in the literary utopia the state of harmony already exists, while utopian characters live in the best of the possible worlds, action and becoming being alien to the world of literary utopias.

Instead, social-utopian theories suggest an ideal world which has to be *established*. In order to gain access to it, the human being has to carry out a series of actions, reforms, and changes. The fourth possible difference between literary utopia and social and political theories lies in the fact that while social theories propose theoretical general principles of social organization, literary utopia presents them in action. In the subchapter *The Relationship between Utopian Thought and Utopian Practice*, we have shown, through two studies of a British sociologist, a specialist in the field of utopian imaginary (Krishan Kumar), the impossibility of actually applying social-utopian theories. This chapter also referred to the issues of utopian communities (which try to experience utopianism at a practical level) as well as to the main features of literary utopias published during the period covered by our study.

The chapter on ideology focused on the perspectives that define this concept: ideology is a conceptual system (theory supported by George Lakoff); ideology provides a distorted view of the object to which it relates with the purpose of manipulating through the occultation and mystification of reality (thesis initiated by Karl Marx and further developed by Alina Mungiu and Sorin Antohi); ideology seeks to strengthen the governing system (Karl Mannheim); ideology is the result of the relationship between the conditions of real existence and the way it is reflected in the individual's consciousness, being eternal, omnipresent and immutable in the face of changes brought upon by history (Louis Althusser); ideologies focus on identifying the best possible society (Ian Adams); ideology belongs, in the sense of "system of ideas", to the symbolic field of thought and belief; ideology is strictly linked to the idea of a social group (it is both a social representation and a component part of social culture) and is constantly moving (Teun A. Van Dijk) reproducing and propagating its own contents through discourse (Katherine Verdery).

The manipulative power of ideologies is most easily expressed through discourse. Alina Mungiu's demonstration has helped us become familiar with the techniques that propaganda and persuasion use in order to fulfil their intention of manipulation. As for the functions of ideology, Sorin Antohi talks about the function of "manipulation" through the occultation and mystification of reality, while Teun A. Van Dijk regards "concealment", "legitimation" and

“manipulation” as the main roles that ideology fulfils. Last but not least, Martin Seliger’s perspective, which identifies the components of ideology, has provided us with an optimal methodological tool for precisely identifying where ideology infiltrates the literary text. Because the imaginary of the 19th century utopia is invaded by doctrinal beliefs, action plans and mobilizing speeches, this chapter proposes possible criteria for the delimitation of utopia (in which the writer’s ideological and political choices could be identified) from ideologized (e)utopia (namely literary fiction that is just a vehicle of ideology, having the subversive purpose of controlling and manipulating the mind of the implicit reader).

After discussing approaches that place utopia and anti-utopia in a relationship of symmetry and equality, as well as theories that consider anti-utopia to be descended from utopia, the chapter *Anti-Utopia* manages to formulate some essential observations for our demonstration. First, anti-utopia is a type of de-historified writing that frees the imaginary of ideological phantasms inspired by the immediate history (not for the purpose of refocusing the attention of the human being towards the present, as Fred Polak claims, but towards the world of the absolute possibility of pure, non-ideologized fiction). Secondly, this observation also focuses on the fictional universe of utopian texts, if utopia envisions a static perfection that cancels out any trace of individuality, anti-utopia allows the dynamic spirit, characteristic of human nature, to manifest itself.

This chapter also discusses a series of theories that question the universal decline and have influenced the general state of pessimism and anxiety particular to the 19th century. We have discussed the theory of the thermal death of the universe (announced by the second principle of thermodynamics formulated by Rudolf Clausius), the thesis of the civilization’s decline (theorized by Oswald Spengler), the perspectives that mark the decline of the sacred (referring to the theory of God’s death supported by Friedrich Nietzsche and to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels’ atheist approach to sacrality) and the Darwinist theory which announces the decline of the human species.

The chapter *From Utopia to Anti-Utopia: Pathway and Functions* focuses on a way of thinking that encompasses the three forms of the utopian genre (utopia, ideologized (e)utopia and anti-utopia) within a genealogical relationship, of production (ideologized eutopia is born out of utopia, for anti-utopia to emerge in response to this process, deconstructing both the classical conventions of utopia as well as the ideologized meaning of eutopia). The study identifies the functions that the three literary forms fulfil within social imaginary. We have

shown how utopia and ideologized (e)utopia have, to some extent, common narrative and discursive functions and strategies (identifying the function of challenger of reality, the paradigmatic function (of shaping) and social function), so that the second to borrow from the functions of ideology: of legitimating, manipulating and mobilising.

Through careful and meticulous analysis of some literary utopias and anti-utopias, we have succeeded in demonstrating that anti-utopia releases the imaginary of the flattening and totalizing tendencies of utopia and of the traces with which ideology infiltrated the literary text. Anti-utopia is a literary form that criticizes utopia's fantasies of perfection and which *sanitizes the collective mentality* of the illusions generated by (ideologized) (e)utopia.

The chapters aimed at analysing literary texts, in close reading, follow how utopian fiction is shaped with the process of ideologization, namely its transformation into anti-utopia. The first three sections of the analysis [*From (E)utopia to Anti-Utopia: Edward Bellamy, William Morris; Herbert George Wells, Anti-utopian Literary Projections: The Sleeper Awakes (H. G. Wells) and The New Utopia (Jerome K. Jerome), Jack London, The Iron Heel*] have allowed us to notice how with the transformation of utopia into anti-utopia, the degree of fictionalization and the originality of utopian literary works grow.

Although each of the utopias – *Looking Backward* (1887) by Edward Bellamy, *News from Nowhere or An Epoch of Rest* (1890)¹ by William Morris and the anti-utopia *The Sleeper Awakes* by Herbert George Wells (1899) – correspond to the fictional pattern that treats literature as a social space, in which history is discussed and re-discussed in more or less fictionalized versions, and although all three novels use the same literary conventions, anti-utopia tends to deconstruct and banter the solutions proposed by utopia. One of the concluding examples in this respect, discussed in detail within this chapter, refers to the configuration of language. The way of relating to socialism and capitalism has, in each of the novels discussed in this chapter, a specific vocabulary, usually of Marxist origin. If the novels *Looking Backward*, *News from Nowhere* and *The Iron Heel* operate with a language of value, litotic, that leaves the sensation of encompassing the collective believes and will (which is basically a legitimating tactic), the anti-utopia *When the Sleeper Wakes* uses, in turn, a counterfeit language which contains however the right dose of ambiguity to succeed in combining several types of images (usually images of power and domination) that remain valid within another

¹ William Morris, *News from Nowhere. An Epoch of Rest*, translated by Andreea Mihaela Mardar, Junimea, Iași, 2012.

ideological system. If in the (e)utopia *News from Nowhere* the discourse clearly bears the mark of class infused writing, the anti-utopia *When the Sleeper Wakes* contains unreasonable, emphatic discourses that are part of the linguistic arsenal of revolutions (but, as we have seen, ineffective, in line with the anti-utopia tendency to deconstruct the literary conventions used by utopia); in Jerome K. Jerome's *The New Utopia* the language is concrete, simple, and of oral origin.

The utopias and anti-utopias discussed in this chapter have been interpreted from the perspective of Martin Seliger's design (which theorizes the component parts of any ideology) and from the point of view of the process of mythization of the characters. Ideology functions as a mobilising myth (in the sense used by George Sorel). If, in the ideologized utopia *Looking Backwards* written by E. Bellamy, there is an ideological construction that benefits from a specific logic, in *News from Nowhere. An Epoch of Rest* by William Morris, the ideologies identified in the text are closer to real history (a harsh capitalism, similar to the one described by historians and Marxist socialism). We have concluded that each of the two ideologized utopias (a category to which we can place the novel *The Iron Heel* written by Jack London) is part of the series of aesthetic-literary acts that prepare the collective mentality (or, in Raoul Girardet's terms, they enclose a certain code in the imagination of the implicit reader) to privilege the subsequent implementation of an ideology.

A common feature of the ideologized utopias, but equivocal for the anti-utopias analysed in this paper relates to the configuration of space. The archetype of the isolated island, the sacred realm or the perfect fortress disappears entirely within highly ideologized spaces. The authors' choice of real cities, presented in opposition and described in detail, has an ideological nuance.

The examples we have discussed here have allowed us to observe how the degree of social-political engagement decreases with the passage from utopia to anti-utopia, an aspect which reinforces the thesis brought forth by this paper, according to which anti-utopia sanitizes the collective imaginary of the fantasies of socialism.

The novel *The Island of Dr. Moreau* was first analysed from the point of view of the ideology that appears in the text and the way it propagates. We mention that our demonstration was drawn from Anthony Parel's observation according to which in any social group one can speak of a particular ideology, an ideology supported by its members. If, in Marxist belief, ideology had at its centre the image of class, in the non-Marxist view the term "class"

disappears, being replaced by terms such as race, nation, cult, culture or lifestyle². We have therefore treated ideology as a series of beliefs and attitudes adopted and supported by a social group in order to legitimize an authority. We have shown how the monstrous island population functions as a micro-society and how ideology transcribes and propagates the message in a unitary, propagandistic linguistic code. We have pointed out that Raoul Girardet's statement on the ideological discourse: "the combining mechanisms of collective imagination seem to have only a limited number of formulas"³, also works for the ideological discourse of H. G. Wells' fiction. The ideological discourse of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* uses a limited set of linguistic structures, marked by repetitions and associations, inscribed in a predefined "syntax". The terms through which the ideology of the novel is expressed are grouped in similar series (often identical), and their chorus status implies a similar repeatability of the slogans used by dictatorial systems. We have also analysed the *The Island of Dr. Moreau* from the perspective of the major scientific theories of the century (theories that explain and demonstrate that the whole universe is in an inevitable decline), following the way in which these visions are organized within fiction as well as the scenarios generated by them.

The chapter dedicated to the analysis of H. G. Wells's novels (*The Time Machine* and *The War of the Worlds*) analyses the novels from an ideological stand point, as well as an from the perspective of how scientific theories regarding the inevitable end of the world are transposed into fiction. We have followed the way in which the view of the traveller on the anti-utopian world is shaped in accordance to the alterity he encounters there, and we have analysed the ideological filter by which he relates to what he discovers.

For example, *The Time Machine* takes on a concept from a real ideology, and unlike ideologized utopia, it brings it into the realm of fiction, completely transforming it into a creative act. We have thus shown that this anti-utopia does not have a subversive attempt to support a certain ideology and manipulate the mind of the implicit reader, as is the case, for example, in the novel *The Iron Heel*. There are no indications, technical prescriptions on the implementation of any ideology or moral considerations, approving or disapproval attitudes. There is a general pessimism about the future of class struggles, which is, in fact, an obvious critique of the capitalist society of the late 19th century.

² Anthony Parel (ed.), *Ideology, Philosophy, and Politics*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Canada, 1983, p. 4.

³ Raoul Girardet, *Mituri și mitologii politice*, translation by Daniel Dimitriu, European Institute, Iași, 1997, p. 7.

The chapter dedicated to Edward Morgan Forster first sought out the relationship between the dialectic (inside-outside) theorized by Gaston Bachelard and the spatial images of *The Machine Stops*. In trying to focus on a single aspect from this perspective, we note the following observation: in *The Machine Stops* the “outside” is a return to the self and a self-assertion. The protagonist succeeds in gaining and affirming his subjectivity, as he escapes from within the cell space. This leap towards the “outside” of the Machine signifies in essence a return within the self; the outside is no longer a symbol of vastness, of openness, but it becomes a retreat within the self and a self-exploration. By stepping *outside*, Kuno is perceived as a being, assuming individuality. It goes from a non-being to a being, becoming the subject that seeks and contemplates oneself. One of the focus points of our analysis was centred on how alterity is configured. Starting from a statement brought forth by Marc Guillaume, we have analysed the instances in which the Machine appears: from an object created by man, it moves to the stage of alterity, then to the image of divinity, so that, in the end, it reaches of “total alterity”⁴. Our analysis has also focused on the “ideological” manifestations in the anti-utopian world. We have identified an ideology of the machine-universe and we have seen the space of the Machine as a microcosm in which different groups confront their beliefs and perpetuate them in order to gain followers and power. This ideology establishes and legitimizes an order, a universal discipline, which must be closely followed by the human being. We have analysed the propaganda discourse that assures and strengthens the power and control of the machine over individuals, overlapping the metaphor of the machine world over the manipulation strategies of real world ideologies.

⁴ The phrase belongs to J. Baudrillard (Jean Baudrillard, Marc Guillaume, *Figuri ale alterității*, trad. Ciprian Mihali, Paralela 45, Pitești, 2002, p. 91).