Utopia III or an ambiguous humanist utopia for the second millennium

Maria do Rosário MONTEIRO
CMUH - Centro de História d’Aquitaine e d’Além-Mar / Portuguese Centre for Global History - FCSH/NOVA-UAc
rosarimonteiro@ch.unl.pt

Abstract
There is a very long tradition of literary texts dealing with the city in literature. Many of them belong to the genre of literary utopia, founded by Thomas More in 1516. The most common issue dealt in these utopias has to do with an attempt to balance social conditions and relationships. Therefore, they usually present or defend different political statuses as a response to the actual society the author lives in. This means that utopia is naturally conditioned by time and space, and the reader must make an effort to “transport” him/herself to that time and space if s/he wants to appreciate fully the fictional world construed by the author. This said, utopian literature is rarely part of mainstream literature, or the literary canon, because it springs from a desire to change the status quo, the established social, political and cultural scheme that is responsible for the choice and promotion of an accepted and established cultural canon.

Portuguese literature does not have many examples of successful and renowned utopias, though the considered human behavior. The Venetian utopias written in foreign languages and translated to Portuguese language being quite relevant. However, in the last quarter of the twentieth century, almost at the eve of the second millennium, an important Portuguese utopia was published: Utopia III, written by Pina Martins (1998). This long novel is structured as being the sequel of More’s Utopia, presenting the history and actual status of the mother of all literary utopias. The question at the basis of the whole novel is, “What would More’s Utopia be like today?” The main goal of this text will be to present a literary analysis of Utopia III, focusing on the humanist principles and their adaptation to contemporary society, the search for a harmonious relationship between city and nature, the defence of a Portuguese identity and the appeal to a humanist renewal.

Keywords: Utopia, Humanism, Pina Martins, Social Harmony, Identity.

1. Utopia; a literary genre in search of social harmony. The beginning

Thomas More founded utopia as a literary genre in 1516, when he published his short homonymous book, written in Latin and intended for his peers, the Christian Humanists, both as a jeu d’esprit and as political intervention. This option was in accordance with some of the movement’s most eminent representatives, namely, Pico della Mirandola, Italian humanist particularly appreciated by Thomas More and his friend Erasmus. In fact, one of the characteristics of the humanist movement, which originated in Italy and then spread throughout Europe along the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, was the concern to place Man and his city at the centre of the philosophical debate. In his memorable Oration On the Dignity of Man (1496), (also known as Manifesto of the Renaissance), Pico defends the supreme status of human beings in God’s Creation. They alone have the power to choose freely their own destiny, to determine whether to descend to the level of the beasts or to ascend to heaven, equaling the angels if not surpassing them (for angels are what they are, they have no freedom of choice). This focus on the on free will, became be the cornerstone of the humanist movement, at least until the sixteenth century religious secession [Pico’s statement is cited by Pina Martins in Utopia III, Integrating explicitly his novel in the humanist movement (1989: 152)]. It would become the focus of Erasmus’ and Luther’s debate, a milestone of European cultural history.

Placing Man at the centre of creation, Pico and his fellow humanists - highly qualified in the study of humanities - saw themselves as having the moral obligation to promote the education of their fellows. Humanists’ natural milieu was the cities, the centres of knowledge and power; therefore, it became natural for them to mingle in the circles of power, as were the great Italian cities of the time: Rome, Florence, Bologna, Venice, as well as other European political centres. The great lords and nobles sought them as counsellors, ambassadors, teachers for their children. Moreover, the humanists, now looking from afar, cherished the naive dream that if they could turn a lord, a city master, or a prince into humanists, through proper education on the disciplines of humanities, their apprentices would become better governors, better chieftains, and better kings. The city would come to be a harmonious place, almost a paradise on earth, where peace would reign, for war was the most degraded human sin, especially when it took place among brothers in faith.

The Christian humanists, as came to be known the northern scholars educated either in Italy or by humanist teachers, developed an excellent net of contacts via exhaustive exchange of letters written in Latin (the lingua franca of knowledge), and adapted the Italian humanist principles to their northern reality. Northern Europe had been profoundly marked by Thomas Kempis’ The Imitation of Christ, written circa 1418-1427 (1901), a fundamental text for a new form of experiencing Christians’ spiritual life, the Devotio Moderna, that flourished in Germany and the Low Countries during the fifteenth century. Erasmus, Thomas More, Busleyden, Beatus Rhenanus, Budé and so many others, formed a circle of humanists sharing the same fundamental principles, debating the same problems and accepting their differences of judgment. All of them were concerned with the welfare of the city, seen as human creation, not a divine paradise.

It is within this circle that Thomas More wrote, in 1516, mainly to his fellow friends, a small book later entitled Utopia (1965; 1978; 2009) where, in a fictional form, the humanists’ apprehensions, beliefs and doubts concerning the best way to organize a Christian republic were presented. This was done wrapped in an ironic self-contradictory language, intended as an in-
When Raphael had finished his story, most of the time and wit of my mind which seemed very absurdly established in the customs and laws of the people described [...]. I knew, however, that he was weary with his tale, and I was not quite certain that he could brook any opposition to his views, particularly when I recited his censure of others on account of their fear that they might not appear to be wise enough, unless they found some fault to criticize in other men's discoveries. I therefore praised their way of life and his speech and, taking him by the hand led him to supper. I first said, nevertheless, that there would be another chance to think about it. These matters are more deeply and to talk them over with him more fully. If only this were some day possible! (1665: 245; 2009: 414-415).

2. Utopia III, or a contemporary evolutionary Utopia

Portuguese literature does not have many examples of successful or renowned utopias, though having many readers of utopias, judging for the number of published translations. There are several reasons that may explain this phenomenon (not to be dealt in this text), one, and probably the most self-evident, being the almost continuous strong exercise of religious and/or political censorship imposed in Portugal from the late sixteenth century to the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Every utopian text gains its full meaning when its reading is integrated in the political and cultural milieu that triggered it, for utopia presents implicit and explicit political differences meant as responses to the actual society the author lives in. Therefore, they become obvious targets for censorship. However, since the last quarter of the twentieth century, Portugal has become a democratic political system enjoying freedom of speech. If censorship was the only reason for the scarcity of Portuguese utopias, the regained freedom of speech should have allowed for the development of Portuguese utopian literature, but unfortunately, it did not. Pina Martins is definitely the Portuguese writer that seized the opportunity given and wrote an extensive utopia, having More's text as both paradigm and trigger. Due precisely to the "openness" of More's Utopia, and its final appeal for further debate, Pina Martins proposes a new discussion, not about the sixteenth century Island of Utopia, but about the contemporary one, the country that the Portuguese Raphael knew and probably would have to had evolved in time. Therefore, the character Pina Martins has for interlocutor a descendent of the Portuguese Raphael Hythlodaeus, named Miguel Mark Hythlodaeus. [The choice of character's names, both (Michael the leader of God's army), and the first announcer of the Gospel, of the good news. This may be interpreted as being the survival of Utopia and therefore the hope of redemption for western culture].

Miguel is an ambassador sent by the government of Utopia to travel abroad in order to make contact with the evolution of world societies, cultures and taking home whatever he might considered useful for his own country's evolution. This is the first major structural transformation Pina Martins uses opposing the most frequent praxis of utopian literature up to the twentieth century. Usually, utopias, considered perfect societies, are assumed immutable, for perfection is complete in itself. Nevertheless, one should not forget there is a utopia, Bacon's New Atlantis (1627), that is a direct offspring of the seventeenth century scientific revolution in it. Bacon already notes the need of contact as trigger of evolution. Probably because Bacon's text is considered incomplete (a debatable and debated question), the vast majority of utopian writers chose to ignore scientific data - human society, as any natural structure, is subject to evolution and decay (but then, the desire for perfection has always been humankind's most recurrent sin of hubris) – and closed their perfect societies to avoid "pollution".

The response to these closed "perfect" commonwealths has been, naturally, dystopia since, apart from other obvious problems, literary utopias seemed incapable of assuring the necessary means for individual evolution, and this has been the fundamental basis of occidental culture. The erosion of individual needs in profit of the common good is a price definitely too high to be paid, and accidental culture evolved precisely in the opposite direction, in history, policy and culture on the centrality of individual beings, for whom there is even a Universal Bill of Fundamental Rights. For some time, dystopia and contemporary culture seemed to have decreed a death penalty on utopia, the eutopia, the promise of happiness. Fortunately, several writers found a middle way, a third route, or a compromising position. Pina Martins followed this path. 2.1. Retrieving the dialogue

Pina Martins writes an ambiguous utopia, open to evolution. In Utopia III there are several structural, political and cultural transformations comparatively to its sixteenth century prototype.

A sociedade que o meu antepassado Rafael descreveu a Thomas More foi a semente
que cresceu e medrou. Não ficou imobili-\[\text{zada} \text{ institucionalmente no momento histórico [...].} \text{Essa sociedade evoluiu. Mod-}\[\text{ficou-se. Ampliou-se, Progrediu. E hoje diferente. Os homens vivem, multiplicam-}\[\text{se, morrem, renovam-se. Como quer que seja transformam-se.} \text{ (1989: 11)} \]

[The society my ancestor Raphael described to Thomas More was the seed that grew and thrived. It did not institutionally stand still in that historical time [...]. That society evolved. Changed. Altered itself. Grew. Progressed. It is different today. Men live, multiply, die, and renew themselves. Anyway, they change.]

At the same time, just like Thomas More, he presents a rational, sometimes violent criticism of both Portuguese and Utopian contemporary state of affairs, with the two characters stating their points of view, arguing them, as the charac-\[\text{ter More had wished.} \text{Miguel Mark Hythlodeu, as his ancestor, has a}

rough personality, prompt to acute and violent 

confrontation of two worlds] (1989: 85-303) and "A Utopia Nova tal como Miguel Hythlodeu ma relatóu" [The New Utopia as Michael Hythlodeu related it to me] (1989: 305-565). The titles of each part are almost self-explanatory: The first narrates the encounter of the two characters in quite peculiar circumstances. In my opinion this is the most "literary" part, leaving the reader in doubt concerning the "actual" existence of Miguel (and of Utopia III, naturally), suggesting, sometimes, that he is, in fact, a figment of Pina Martins’ imagination, a mixture of alter ego and 

expression of my own judgement and will.

... a sua voz tornava-se palavra dentro de mim mesmo, como se fosse uma revelação interior, mas que, sem ele, não existiria, embora só ganhasse sentido no meu en- tendimento. Possuía-me uma ilusão de que a voz de Miguel Hythlodeu fosse a minha própria voz. (1989: 11)

[the voice becoming word inside myself, as if it was an interior revelation, but, with-\[\text{out him, it would not exist, though it only}

all it only gained sense in my reasoning. I was pos-\[\text{sessed by the illusion that Miguel Hythlo-}\[\text{deu’s voice was my own.] Eu sou a Voz [diz Miguel]. A que revela e a que escuta. [...]}

Enquanto tais palavras se iam formando em períodos coerentes pronunciados pelo meu interlocutor, não me abandonava a impressão de que essas palavras me eram 

conhecidas, por estarem inscritas dentro de mim [...]. E, não obstante, eu escutava-\[\text{as pela primeira vez. Eram palavras def-}\[\text{initivas. Para serem cumpridas. Para se con-}\[\text{verterem em realidade talvez não de car-}\[\text{tiz histórico, mas decerto em realidade de vida, de vida vivida e transmitida. Eram}

dítas por outrém e constituíam a expressão 

forte do meu entender e do meu querer foi 

talvez por isso que me surpreendi dizendo, se meu saber como, como se escutasse 

dentro de mim um outro a exprimir-se pela 

minha própria voz: - Quod vis volo ac facio. Fiat Vtopica Vol-\[\text{untas! (1989: 11, 13)} \]

[I am the Voice [said Miguel]. The one that reveals and hears. [...] While those words were gaining form, be-\[\text{coming sentences coherently pronounced by}

my interlocutor, I could not shake the feeling that those words were known to me, because they were inscribed inside me [...]. Nevertheless, I hearkened them for the first time. They were definitive. To be lis- \[\text{tened to. To become reality, maybe not his-}

torically so, but surely in a lively reality, of a 

life lived and communicated. Someone else 

spoke them and they consisted of a strong 

expression of my own judgement and will. 

Maybe that is why I surprised myself saying, as if listening inside myself to another 

expressing himself through my voice: - Quod vis volo ac facio. Fiat Vtopica Voluntas!]

Thus, Pina Martins places the novel in a fiction-\[\text{al but ambiguous universe, where literary uto-}

pias naturally belong. It also gives the author the necessary liberty to engage in a violent cri-\[\text{ticism concerning actual Portuguese (and Euro-}

pean) political, cultural and social statuses. This criticism runs through the novel, but it is more persistent and direct in the second part - "The confrontation of two worlds". This sec-\[\text{tion is introduced by a quotation from Eras-

mus’ Moriae Ecomium:}

Acabaremos por encomiar, querendo os Deuses, a sentença célebre de Platão – Felizes as Repúblicas que aceitem por chefes os filósofos ou cujos chefes filósofem! Porém a História ensina-nos que, pelo contrário, o pior governo foi sempre o de um homem com pruridos de philosofo ou com a fátua pretensão a grande literator! (1989: 85)

[We will finish praising, if Gods will, Plato’s famous sentence - Happy are the Repub-\[\text{lics that accept philosophers for lieders, or}

whose chiefs philosophize! Though History teaches us that, on the contrary, the worst 

government has always been the one lead by a man who aspires to be a philosopher 

or with a fatuous claim of great literate!]

The second part, divided in eighteen chapters, 

consists on several polite, but also tough, intel-\[\text{lectual confrontations between the characters}

Pina Martins and Miguel Hythlodeu. This one
plays a similar role to the one Raphael has in the first book of More's Utopia. He criticizes almost every relevant aspects of Portuguese political, cultural, social and educational status quo. The lack of culture; the excessive pollution; the awful habit of never being punctual. In politics, the target is the lack of culture exhibited by Portuguese politicians with no preparation for public service; in education, the lack of quality; in religion, the lack of originality; in the social system, corruption in general, etc.

The character Pina Martins plays the role of More and Peter Giles, sometimes agreeing but also trying to minimize Miguel's opinions and demolishing statements. Both characters repeatedly affirm the well-known concepts of Renaissance humanists: education, religion, the return to the origins, and utopian texts in general. In order to give the reader some information regarding Utopia, the reader is informed that Miguel's island is presented in a more systematic way in the third part of the novel: “The New Utopia.” Chapter 34 exhibits, side by side, More's utopian organization and Miguel's one. Now, the island is an archipelago, due to a violent earthquake that destroyed most of the buildings and changed the geography in a radical way. Amurrote now has a rectangular structure, the cities are no longer identical, private property is allowed (though uninheritable) the orchards are no longer communal except for festivities. Money, gold and jewels are now used by the state for the general organization of foreign diplomacy and commerce. The lack of creativity is balanced by the ability to imitate. Foreign guests are scarce and subject to prior disinfection. Slavery was abolished, but convicts are condemned to up to thirty-three years of reclusion and there is no death penalty. The political system is now a democracy. The process of election is in pyramid; meaning all citizens vote as factors, who in turn vote on a smaller number of other voters, until there are thirty-three deputies that constitute a council. The Council then elects the three Magi-zarip, who are responsible for the regulation of all social, economic, and political life, within the boundaries of citizens' individual rights.

3. Conclusion

Despite all the transformations, Miguel Hyltholeu, giving voice to contemporary doubts concerning the ability of creating a harmonious society, based on ethical values, on the valuation of merit, on the respect for human rights and human differences, recognizes that, although having many positive aspects, modern Utopia is only the best provisional state that can be achieved at the actual stage. However, even this perfect imperfection has a price to pay. New Utopia, or Utopia III, cannot...
CULTURE

COMMOTION MIGHT THREATEN ITS DISSOLUTION: "IT IS A FACT THAT PORTUGUESE READERS ARE WELL ACQUAINTED WITH FOREIGN LITERARY UTOPIAS. THEREFORE, THE LACK OF INTEREST IN THE GENRE MAY NOT JUSTIFY THE "SILENCE" SURROUNDING UTOPIA III. I DARE ADVANCE MY OWN INTERPRETATION: PINA MARTINS' NOVEL DEMANDS A READER WITH SOME KNOWLEDGE ON RENAISSANCE HUMANISM AND HISTORY. THE TEXT IS A DEEP WELL OF KNOWLEDGE THAT DEMANDS, FROM THE READER, A STRONG WILL TO LEARN. IT'S EXPLICIT VAST, THE SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READINGS CONSTANT. NEVERTHLESS, IT ALSO DEMANDS A PREPARED READER FOR A FIERCE DENUNCIATION OF PORTUGUESE (BAD) HABITS IN CULTURE, POLITICS AND WAY OF LIVING. NO ONE IS SPARED IN PINA MARTINS' CRITICISM: POLITICIANS, CLERGY, JUDGES, SCHOLARS, WRITERS, ALL WHO HOLD A POSITION THAT MAY MAKE A DIFFERENCE AND FAIL TO DO THEIR PART, ARE SOME TIMES VIOLENTLY "WHIPPED" BY THE CHARACTERS' ARGUMENTS. CONSEQUENTLY, IN A COUNTRY WHERE FREEDOM OF SPEECH IS RECOGNISED, PINA MARTINS' UTOPIA III HAS BEEN SUBJECTED TO THE SUBTLE BUT EFFECTIVE CENSORSHIP OF SILENCE. THE "BLUE PENCIL" (POPULAR EXPRESSION TO DESIGNATE OFFICIAL CENSORSHIP) DOES NOT EXIST, BUT SILENT CENSORSHIP IS EVEN HARDER TO CONFRONT, BECAUSE IT DOES NOT HAVE A FACE, AN NAME. NEITHER THE AUTHOR NOR THE NOVEL DESERVED IT! UTOPIA III IS A LONG, EXHAUSTIVE LESSON ON HUMANISM, PINA MARTINS' LAST GIFT TO PORTUGUESE READING PUBLIC.

As humans, todossomosimperfeitos, embora sejamos talhados para uma suprema perfeição. Olhe para este rio tão já tópimpo. Mas erga uma cabeça e admire a pureza inacusada deste céu azul e tão limpido. (1989: 565)

[Being humans we are all imperfect beings, though destined to be supreme perfection. Look at this already impure river. However, raise your head and admire the immaculate beauty of this blue and clear sky!]

A final word about Utopia III. Since it is a utopia written in Portugal after the recovery of freedom and democracy, which seems to be well set in the minds and habits of the Portuguese people, one must wonder why the novel remains unknown to most readers, and attracted little criticism, with very few exceptions worth mentioning (NASCIMENTO, 2013; REIS, 2008; VIEIRA, 2005; MONTÉIRU, 2008; 2010; 2013). It is a fact that Portuguese readers are well acquainted with foreign literary utopias. Therefore, the lack of interest in the genre may not just justify the "silence" surrounding Utopia III. I dare advance my own interpretation: Pinha Martins' novel demands a reader with some knowledge on Renaissance humanism and history. The text is a deep well of knowledge that demands, from the reader, a strong will to learn. Its lexicon is vast, the suggestions for further readings constant. Nevertheless, it also demands a reader prepared for a fierce denunciation of Portuguese (bad) habits in culture, politics and way of living. No one is spared in Pinha Martins' criticism: politicians, clergy, judges, scholars, writers, all who hold a position that may make a difference and fail to do their part, are sometimes violently "whipped" by the characters' arguments. Consequently, in a country where freedom of speech is recognised, Pinha Martins' Utopia III has been subjected to the subtle but effective censorship of silence. The "blue pencil" (popular expression to designate official censorship) does not exist, but silent censorship is even harder to confront, because it does not have a face, a name. Neither the author nor the novel deserved it! Utopia III is a long, exhaustive lesson on humanism, Pinha Martins' last gift for those who believe knowledge makes one a better member of society and humanist values create better human beings.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES


