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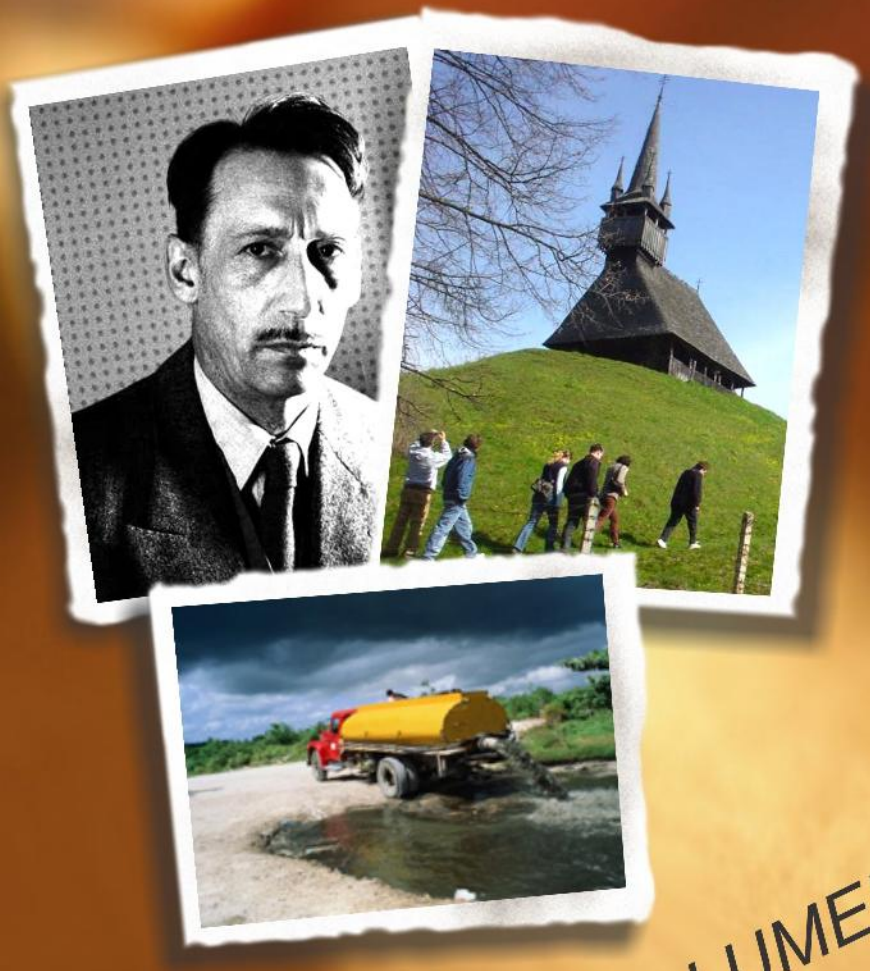
Multidimensional research in humanistic sciences



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Eva Claudia GHEȚU

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EVA - CLAUDIA GHEȚU

BRAVE NEW WORLD AND *NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR* FROM TEXT TO CONTEXT

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FOREWORD

"I wanted to change the world. But
I have found that the only thing one can
be sure of changing is oneself".
Aldous Huxley

Aldous Huxley was an incurable optimist. He really thought that by presenting a glimpse of what the future might look like he could "change the world". In the end he realised that he was wrong, he realised that Man should not be permitted to act like God. George Orwell was a realist and he tried to make people aware of a dream that was almost real.

I chose to write about dystopia because this genre had an enormous impact on me. Orwell's **Nineteen Eighty-Four** depicts a totalitarian society, prophetically envisaging a state which strikingly looks like today's global world, while Huxley's Brave New World describes a nightmarish vision of a future, comparable to totalitarian socialism.

I structured my work in five chapters: chapter I: Utopia, chapter II: Dystopia, chapter III: Aldous Huxley – **Brave New World**, chapter IV: George Orwell – **Nineteen Eighty-Four** and chapter V: **Brave New World** and **Nineteen Eighty-Four** – an overview. The first two chapters deal with theoretical issues concerning the clear distinction between utopia and dystopia, their characteristics as literary genre and examples of literary works.

In chapter III and IV I presented the methods used by these two writers in order to have a better impact on the reader, while in the last chapter I tried to compare the two novelists. Presenting what they have in common and also what distinguishes them, I found in this a better way of underlining their specificity and their contribution to the genre.

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I titled the paper **Brave New World and Nineteen Eighty-Four – from Text to Context** because I considered the pattern of circular interactions between text and context an interesting and most rewarding approach.

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1. UTOPIA

1.1. Definition of utopia as a literary genre

1.1.1. Short foray on the etymology

In our contemporary dictionaries the word *utopia* is defined as: "1. an imaginary island described in Sir Thomas More's ***Utopia*** (1516) as enjoying the outmost perfection in laws, politics etc.; 2. a place or state of ideal perfection; 3. any visionary system of political or social perfection."[1] It should be very interesting to see the way in which this word has evolved throughout the history.

It is easy to observe from the definition above, that the word appeared in 1516, representing the title of Th. More's literary work. The humanists at the beginning of the 16th century, having difficulties in writing and reading long titles, which sometimes were considered to stand even for an epitome, had retained from the title of Th. More's novel: ***Libellus vere aureus nec minus salutaris quam festivus de optimo reipublicae statu, deque nova Insula Utopia authore clarissimo viro Thoma Moro inclytae civitatis Londinensis cive & vicecomite cura M. Petri Aegidii Antverpiensis, & arte Theodorici Martini Alustenis, Typographi almae Lovanensium Academiae nunc primum accuratissimi editus*** only a single word, ***Utopia***. This term handed down to posterity was going to make a remarkable career.[2]

Al. Ciorănescu considers that this term had appeared as a result of a "collaboration of Th. More and Erasmus"[3], but before the appearance of the book. In the correspondence that existed between the two writers, they refer to *Nusquama nostra* (from the Latin adverb meaning "nowhere"). Another friend, the French humanist Guillaume Bude, in a letter sent to congratulate Th. More uses the term *Udepotia* (from the Greek adverb "never").[4]

By creating this term Th. More was practising a fashion of polyglot puns existing in that period of time. The word *utopia* seems to be an avatar of the expression *topos atopos*, and consists of a derivative from *topos*, place, to which the prefix *ou-* is added, a particle having a negative general sense. *Outopia* therefore means "the place that does not exist." Th. More, speculating the English

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pronunciation used another Greek prefix *eu-*, this one having positive connotations, "from *good* to *ideal*."[5] As Al. Ciorănescu was argued, this word, which was created by making use of the Greek language, "should mean *lack of place* or *no place* or even more clearly, the *place that does not exist*."[6] Therefore, by simply saying *utopia*, someone should have in mind the ambiguous etymology of this term, which says that happy places do have a flaw: they do not exist.[7]

If at the beginning the term utopia stood only for the title of More's literary work, at the end of the 16th century the meaning of this word had multiplied. Sir Philip Sidney, in ***Defence of Poesie*** (1595), considered utopia "a rhetorical form and a modality of knowledge." Even more than that, the poet considered it to have the same importance as poetry, for the both of them the same definition being used: "a speaking picture, with this end to teach or delight." In 1610, The Oxford English Dictionary records the transformation of the term into a noun, defining it as: "any imaginary, indefinitely remote region, country, location".[8]

Gradually, utopia tends to cover an entire literary genre, and henceforth the label spreads out and ends in including political programs made of idealistic systems and countless projects. But there are pejorative meanings given to this word, because the border existing between the domains that were considered to be utopias or those said to be utopias is very thin. So in "the socio-political area the term utopia becomes synonym with *chimera*, the utopian adjective implies *the unrealistic*, *the illusory* and even *the impossible*."[9]

1.1.2. To a definition of the term utopia

Generally, utopia is considered to be a literary genre. Even if one were to take into consideration Raymond Trousson's affirmation that utopia is an "avatar of the novelistic genre"[10], the fact that utopian poems, short-stories, plays and films do exist should not be forgotten. Other critics of this literary genre had compared utopia to a story, an imaginative fiction, its main subject being a good society. The term regarded in its broad sense may be considered a sub-genre of science-fiction.[11]

Al. Ciorănescu says that utopia is by definition a description, "the individualized literary description of an imaginary society, organized on some bases implying a subadjacent criticism of the real society."[12] Although Krishan Kumar considers utopia to stand for everything that can be encountered and experienced in perfect societies, he gives a necessary explanation: utopia is the literary work that "analyses not real, but possible worlds."[13]

Lamartine, by defining utopia as the enunciation of premature truths, anticipated somehow the function with which this literary genre was invested: to him utopia is a warning. His line of argument is continued by Karl Marx; the writer presents utopia from a historical perspective as "a dialectic projection of

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human destinies to a future *it* prepares, based on the refusal of the present."[14] This projection may represent the new image of which Al. Ciorănescu was talking about when referring to utopia.[15]

Darko Suvin defines utopia as a verbal construction: "Utopia is the verbal construction of a certain quasi-human community where the socio-political institutions, the norms and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than that existing in the author's community, this construction being based on estrangement derived from an alternative historic hypothesis."[16] David Bleich completes this definition and says that utopia is: "a psychological and verbal permanence."[17]

It is well known that utopias were written for paupers; it is this social class that inspires them. Following this idea, K. Kumar thinks that utopias are mechanisms of "social and political speculations."[18] Therefore, at one moment, when the political situation in a state does not fulfil the people's aspirations, they dream of a better world. Mircea Opriþă thinks that the power of utopia finds its roots right in this "desire of changing the evil into good".[19] Th. More was actually the first to emit this idea in a letter addressed to his friend Peter Giles; there he said that utopia is "a fiction which can help reality, as it would be covered with honey, to be easily accepted by people."[20] And to conclude, Emil Cioran says that utopia is "a principle of regeneration of institutions and nations."[21]

1.1.3. A short characterization of utopia

Even if the roots of the utopian spirit are easy to trace back to Antiquity, and it expresses the aspirations of the whole human culture along the centuries, utopia, as an independent genre, appears only in Renaissance.[22]

Utopia is characterized by its appearance in a certain moment of history, as a result of some specific intellectual and cultural traditions.[23] K. Kumar discovered that there is neither utopian tradition, nor utopian thought outside the Occidental world. A reason for why it is hard to find utopias in the non-occidental societies might be that these were dominated by religious thinking systems. Utopia practitioners, besides the fact that they were pious Christians –like Th. More and Francis Bacon – stressed upon the role of human reason, being more preoccupied with The Human's Citadel than The God's Citadel.[24]

Utopia aims to present a way and a pattern of a life different from what exists in reality. Al. Ciorănescu thinks that the appetite to create these novelties often begins with the presence of a boring atmosphere oriented toward what is already known. Even more than presenting a different pattern of life, utopia aims to show, in a "detailed description."[25], not just the characters' travels to a new world, the native's daily lives' peculiarities, but also the distinctive natures of this country, the circumstances that certify and identify it, mentioning the proper nouns and the

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particular features. This is the reason why it has been said about this literary genre that it is individualized, the utopian country being not that of generalization and pure theory, but that of exemplary virtuality.[26]

Characterized by optimism, even though it finds its sources in the past, utopia has the vocation of the future and opens itself to smiling and full of attraction perspectives. The genre easily resembles a temptation or a desire and, because of this connotation given to the term, utopia has been described to be a conditional model; utopia seems to have chosen to be "the history of the future or the novel of the future."[27]

Utopia has a preventing function, easily determined in the moment when the solutions proposed by this literary genre dovetail with the aspirations of the modern thinking or even in some cases, with the reforms or contemporary achievements. Although it takes a sort of liberty creating imaginary countries, utopia is obliged to maintain itself between the limits of a number of some rules and scruples laying down its design.[28]

The pejorative connotations associated to utopia have made it possible to be assimilated by the prospect of the impossible, by a useless dream or chimera, a project which has no chance of being transformed into reality.[29] E. Cioran has the courage to go even further with this comparison and says that in practice utopia resembles alchemy very much: following through different domains a related dream of transmutation, one approaches the impossible in nature, the other in history.[30]

Described as an impossible perfection, and in a sense not surpassing the possibility of human condition, the practical role of utopia seems to be the one to transmit the conditions of immediate reality, but also to describe others, of which desirability attracts like a magnet. Despite the fact that it is a visionary, at the same time it is also inaccessible; it seems that from here utopia draws its powers. K. Kumar says that utopia is more than a social or political treatise, utopia's values stands not in its contemporary practices, but in its relation with a possible future. Concluding, the critic says: "utopia might be a *nowhere*, but historically and conceptually, it can be *everywhere*.[31]

The characters of utopia are some automata, fictions, symbols; none of them can surpass their condition, no one has a reality. More than that, they are characterized as "having no vigour, they are perfect and null, blinded by the brilliance of Good, without sins and vices, incorporeal and dull."[32] They gain, temporarily, in the idyllic society created by the author, the Paradise, in order to lose it again, and to return to the route that was drawn for them.

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1.1.4. The utopist

Utopias' inventors[33] were influenced, in the era when this literary genre appeared, by the great geographic discoveries. These discoveries had a great impact over the writers' mentality through their spirit and spectacular opening imposed by the measureless spreading of the ancient world, reaching a planetary level.

Not only the geographic discoveries influenced the utopist, but also the scientific experiment, in the way this was understood by Giordano Bruno or Galileo Galilei. It contributed to arising new convictions, but also to the appearance of new mentalities. In this way had emerged the conscience of the man endowed with power and stateliness, able of making his own destiny. He tends to submit nature to a number of firm rules: laws of thinking governed by the ideal of equilibrium; this makes him a person ready to convincingly assert his own genius, creative individuality, personality.[34]

Although the utopist presents dynamic and abundant details, with which we can easily build the desirability and practicability of every social scheme[35], he cannot have the liberty he desire, one might actually say that liberty is his enemy.

The instruments he works with are the logic and the contradiction; the imagination is hidden behind judgement, and all he is asked for is to show that the truth is false and that the false is true.[36]

E. Cioran thinks that the utopist needs a "doze of candor, even more, of foolishness"[37] in order to be able to create a real utopia, to be able to paint with conviction the ideal society picture.

Following the logic of the events, like the historian does, the only support the utopist has is the rigour of his logic. Despite this comparison, the history is not accessible to the utopist; utopia being a description, the traveller that traverses its realm relates only what he sees, and he is seeing only the surfaces. The synchronism and horizontal section implies the lack of depth, and history, which represents the depth of the present, is forbidden to the utopist.[38]

The utopist builds and sometimes foresees the future. He is the prophet or the engineer of this future.[39] Misery is the material he works with. This is his great mainstay, the substance that feeds his thinking, the luck of his obsession. Without it, the utopist would have no job; it is the misery which gives him something to do, fascinates, and sometimes troubles him, whether he is poor or rich.[40]

1.1.5. A definition of the utopian method

Lalande was the first to define utopian method as a fictive state of things actually realized, in order to evaluate and to infer the derivations and the last consequences. Raymond Ruyer comes and completes this definition and says that

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