

Utopia III or an ambiguous humanist utopia for the second millennium

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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 considerable amount of published 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 mil-

lennium, 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, equalling 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 corner-stone of the humanist movement, at least until the 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 fellowmen. 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, cher-

ished the naïve dream that if they could turn a lord, a city master, or a prince into humanists, through proper education on the disciplines of *humanitas*, their apprentices would become better governors, better chiefs, 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 behaviour, especially when it took place among brothers in faith.

The Christian humanists, as came to be known the northerner 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 Christi*, 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 Renanus, 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-

tellelectual game, the counterpart of Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly*, written in 1508 at More's house and published in 1511 (1913). It was also a game of mirrors, where reality was reflected in a distorted, inverted yet better image. Since Thomas More's *Utopia* is not the main focus of this text, though being an unavoidable work, please refer to André Prevost's and Pina Martins' introductions to the cited editions, in my opinion, the best, most lucid and well informed analyses of More's *Utopia*, and also of its relation to Erasmus' *Folly* and the Christian Humanism. More's *Utopia*, being the "praise of wisdom", should be read not as political program, but as a literary text where More expresses the opinions and the doubts debated by Christian humanists concerning the best government of a commonwealth, using as foundation Plato's Republic (1997: 971-1223; 2001). Therefore, in my opinion, *Utopia* is, in a way, an open narrative avant la lettre, since the final comment, made by the character More, leaves several doubts and concerns unanswered, expecting a future dialogue with Hythlodæus about Utopia:

When Raphael had finished his story, many things came to my mind which seemed very absurdly established in the customs and laws of the people described [...]. I knew, however, that he was wearied with his tale, and I was not quite certain that he could brook any opposition to his views, particularly when I recalled 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 in to supper. I first said, nevertheless, that there would be another chance to think about it these matters more deeply and to talk them over with him more fully. If only this were some day possible! (1965: 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 *Uto-*

pia, 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 Hythlodæus, named Miguel Mark Hythlodeu. [The choice of character's names, both in *Utopia* and *Utopia III*, is definitely relevant and should be notice by readers. Raphael is the name of the Archangel that heals blindness, therefore More's character is presented as the healer of Christians' blindness that prevents them from following the proper Christian way of living. Miguel (Michael) Mark is a more complex character (therefore the uses of two proper names) being simultaneously a fighter (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 and cultures, 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 erasure of individual needs in profit of the common good is a price definitely too high to be paid, and occidental culture evolved precisely in the opposite direction, basing its 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 imobilizada institucionalmente no momento histórico [...] Essa sociedade evoluiu. Modificou-se. Ampliou-se. Progrediu. É hoje diferente. Os homens vivem, multiplicam-se, morrem, renovam-se. Como quer que seja transformam-se. (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 character More had wished.

Miguel Mark Hythlodeu, as his ancestor, has a rough personality, prompt to acute and violent criticism, but not accustomed to receiving objections to his ideas, feeling quite uncomfortable whenever Utopia's way of life or options are criticized or questioned by his friend. On the other hand, the character Pina Martins, unlike his model, is not afraid to express his opinions, to reply sharply but politely to his interlocutor, but also to agree whenever he assumes he is facing fair criticism.

The utopian ambassador commissions the character Pina Martins to write the history of twentieth century Utopia based on few documents and on the information the ambassador is willing to share (which is sometime scarce). The endeavour lasts for fifteen years. The first encounter

took place in Olinda, Brazil, in 1980, and the last conversation in 1995, in Lisbon. Sometimes, several months pass without any contact, but when they occur the reader faces sharp debates, two minds both formed on the principles of Renaissance humanism, fencing rational arguments, exchanging opinions, agreeing and disagreeing on several issues. It is a contemporary recreation of the humanist net of communication, then by letter, where friends debated ideas, sometimes in a fierce tone but also exchanged compliments.

The long novel is divided in three parts: "A revelação numinosa" [The numinous revelation] (1989: 3-83), "O confronto de dois Mundos" [The confrontation of two worlds] (1989: 85-303) and "A Utopia Nova tal como Miguel Hythlodeu me relatou" [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 wish fulfilment.

... 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 entendimento. Possuía-me a 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, without him, it would not exist, though it only

gained sense in my reasoning. I was possessed by the illusion that Miguel Hythlodeu'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-as pela primeira vez. Eram palavras definitivas. Para serem cumpridas. Para se converterem em realidade talvez não de cariz histórico, mas decerto em realidade de vida, de vida vivida e transmitida. Eram ditas por outrem 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 Voluntas! (1989: 11, 13)

[I am the Voice [said Miguel]. The one that reveals and hearken. [...]

While those words were gaining form, becoming 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 listened to. To become reality, maybe not historically 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 fictional but ambiguous universe, where literary utopias naturally belong. It also gives the author the necessary liberty to engage in violent criticism concerning actual Portuguese (and European) 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 section is introduced by a quotation from Erasmus' *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 filosofem! Porém a História ensina-nos que, pelo contrário, o pior governo foi sempre o de um homem com pruridos de filósofo ou com a fátua pretensão a grande literato! (1989: 85)

[We will finish praising, if Gods will, Plato's famous sentence - Happy are the Republics that accept philosophers for leaders, 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, intellectual 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. Education, in all levels, lacks quality, being unable to perform its function: to promote humanist values, to develop rational and productive citizens. The University became a corporation of *petit* passions and favours instead of the house of ultimate knowledge, of continuous investigation, of intellectual merit, the House of Solomon. The arrogance of those in power; the appropriation of public money by political parties, the power of corporative societies that escape public scrutiny, the inefficiency of the judicial 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 the condemnation of war, the importance of reading classical texts and authors, the need for critical thinking. These reaffirmed principles are precisely the starting point of almost every criticism.

However, the character Pina Martins tries to honour More's last wish: debate what seems unacceptable in the utopian state. This leaves Miguel in some awkward positions. For instance, he is led to confess that he would rather live in this polluted and chaotic Lisbon than in his own country:

Mesmo com tantos defeitos, com tanta po-

luição e tanta porcaria, esta capital continua a ser para mim uma terra de sortilégio, de encanto indizível e permita-me que lhe confesse, do mais fundo da minha alma, que eu desejaria viver sempre aqui e aqui terminar os meus dias. Na Utopia Nova o meu ritmo existencial quotidiano é demasiado monótono. A ordem é demasiado repetitiva. Há limpeza, respeito, educação mas os meus queridos conterrâneos não são dotados de originalidade imaginativa, de criatividade. (1989: 106)

[Even with all her flaws, the excessive pollution and so much dirt, this capital still is a place of sortilege, of inexplicable charm and allow me to confess, from the deepest of my soul, I wish I could live here forever, and end my days in this city. In New Utopia my daily routine is too monotonous. Order too dull. There is cleanness, respect, politeness, but my dear fellow citizens are devoid of any original imagination, of any creativity.]

This is precisely the most frequent and acute criticism one can present regarding More's *Utopia* and utopian texts in general. In order to protect collective interests placing them ahead of any others, utopias tend to kill human creativity, because in it resides the ability to evolve, to make things differently, to discover new knowledge, and to question. This is what keeps utopias stuck in time, what turns them into disharmonious states, what causes lack of identity. Miguel even claims Utopia's sin is the lack of alternatives:

Há uma relativa perfeição, uma relativa satisfação, [...] uma relativa alegria de

viver. A vida verdadeira é, porém, feita de luz e de sombra. Não, a perfeição não é deste mundo imperfeito. (1989: 106)
[There is a relative perfection, a relative happiness, [...] a relative joy of life. True life, though, is made of light and darkness. No, perfection does not belong to this imperfect world.]

There are several moments throughout the novel where Miguel is forced to admit that there are flaws in his world, and if sometimes the confession seems quite spontaneous, as the one quoted, most of the times it is almost "extracted" by force or "confirmed" with rage, denouncing his wild (warrior) temperament, similar to the one revealed by Raphael. The intellectual duel is vivid, tough, but always fair.

Though the reading of the second part gives the reader some information regarding Utopia, the more accurate and complete list of what changed through the centuries in Raphael/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. Amaurote now has a rectangular structure, the cities are no longer identical, private property is allowed (though uninheritable) the orchards are now gardens with fountains and small libraries. Agriculture is no longer a common work, each utopian may choose his own trade of business, and women are no longer obliged to learn a trade. Full time motherhood is accepted, since mothers are considered the first tutors of future citizens. Work is limited to six hours per day, plus

the practice of nonviolent sports. The rest of the day is dedicated to reading according to each one's preferences. Thirty-three ambassadors travel around the world establishing commercial treaties. Clothing is no longer equal. Family is still the basic structure of society, but every couple has their own home. The elderly are still considered as a valuable repository of knowledge, deserving society's respect. Meals 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 on electors, who in turn vote on a smaller number of other electors, until there are thirty-three deputies that constitute a council. The Council then elects the three *Magistri*, 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 Hythlo-deu, 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

yet find a perfect balance between order and creativity, between rights and laws, between reason and desire. It cannot find its place in the world without the constant fear of losing what was achieved. Therefore, there is a continuous supervision and censorship, as if utopians' identity is still such a fragile achievement that any commotion might threaten its disintegration:

Esta desordem [de Lisboa], esta indisciplina, estes palavrões, esta agressividade, tudo isto me diverte, me estimula, me excita... Também a ordem, a disciplina, a mansidão e o silêncio podem cansar, aborrecer ou mesmo adormecer numa imóvel monotonia, numa espécie de modorra, numa inércia infecunda. [...] Vou dizer-lhe muito em segredo - e Miguel Hythlodeu baixou o tom de voz quase a um sussurro [...] estou a escrever um grande ensaio [...] antropológico intitulado "Das razões metafísico-ontológicas por que a poluição da Velha Lísia poderá servir de modelo à da Nova, inexistente mas potencialmente futurível, para que possamos, na integridade pura da nossa humilde solidão, recuperar uma alegria completa e um optimismo de que a nossa perfeição nos privou". (1989: 181-182)

This [Lisbon's] disorder, this unruliness, these obscenities, this brashness, all of this amuses incites and excites me... Order, discipline, calmness and silence may exhaust, bore or even soothe oneself in an immobile monotony, a kind of drowsiness, a sterile inertia. [...] I am going to tell you a secret - and Miguel lowered his voice to a whisper [...]. I am writing a long anthropological-ontological essay

entitled "The ontological and metaphysical reasons why Old Lísia's pollution may serve as model to the New Lísia, pollution that does not yet exist but which may eventually exist in the future, so that we may, in the pure wholeness of our humble solitude, recover a full happiness and an optimism that our perfection has deprived us off".]

Therefore, the novel reaffirms the need for utopia but set on different bases: on human and democratic principles. Utopia, to be viable, must give way to imperfection, must assume its essential inability to create a perfect society, but also believe in people's capacity to become better. A society that should have as corner-pillars humanist philosophy, ethical and moral values, shared by all, aiming to the common good. A kind of merit-democratic society. An ambiguous utopia set on earth and aiming at the heavens, as Christian humanists would express it.

Como homens, todos somos imperfeitos, embora sejamos talhados para a suprema perfeição. Olhe para este rio já tão impuro. Mas erga a cabeça e admire a pureza imaculada deste céu azul e tão límpido. (1989: 565)

[Being humans we are all imperfect beings, though destined to as supreme perfection. Look at this already so impure river. However, rise 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; MONTEIRO, 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 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. 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 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 sometimes 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, a name, an identity. Neither the author nor the novel deserved it! *Utopia III* is a long, exhaustive lesson on humanism, Pina Martins' last gift for those who believe knowledge makes one a better member of society and humanist values create better human beings.

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