

qu'un autre, et pour ce qui concerne les Roumains, le temps depuis qu'ils ont accédé à la liberté et la dignité est trop court pour effacer les longs siècles d'amertume, au cours desquels ils ont vécu assujettis, humiliés et méprisés.



JÓZSEF LUKÁCS

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CORIN BRAGA

**Du paradis perdu à l'antiutopie  
aux XVI<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles**

Paris, Éditions Classiques Garnier, 2010

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**A**N IMPRESSIVE construction of the phenomenological hermeneutics of the imaginary has already been published under the signature of the Cluj university professor Corin Braga, with two prestigious French publishing houses. The first two volumes (*Le Paradis interdit au Moyen Âge: La Quête manquée de l'Eden oriental*, Paris, 2004, and *La Quête manquée de l'Avalon occidentale: Le paradis interdit au Moyen Âge – 2*, Paris, 2006) systematise, in rather extensive analyses, European “magical thinking” and its assumptions about the existence of earthly Paradises. As the author points out, these assumptions were curtailed by the attacks of dogmatic Christianity and, above all, by the great geographical discoveries. Through the test of empirical truth, the latter put an end to the fabulous projections of heavenly realms and closed down the chapter of the “magic” maps and of the fantastic imaginary related to terrestrial geography. What they did not eliminate was imagination itself, as an eternal impulse or drive whereby the human projects itself into meta-real categories.

The evidence is to be found in Corin Braga's study entitled *Du paradis perdu à*

*l'antiutopie aux XVI<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris: Éditions Classiques Garnier, 2010, 416 pp.). In this third volume of the project, the research premise, which is expounded in the introductory fragment, clearly expresses the idea of continuity: “les voyages modernes en antiutopie succèdent aux récits de voyage fantastiques médiévaux qui, à cause de l'interdiction dont la doctrine judéo-chrétienne avait marqué le jardin d'Eden, devaient inévitablement finir sur un échec.” An entire range of instruments are deployed to reveal and structure the prodigious inventory of texts that are the object of Corin Braga's research. Psychoanalysis and analytical psychology, psycho-criticism and psycho-geography, the history of religions and mentalities, cultural analysis, narrative poetics even, the analysis of themes and motives, of the invariants of imagination in literary texts—all these contribute to achieving a major systematisation effort, which aims to provide a coherent image of the evolution of the utopian species in the course of three centuries.

The *internal* justifications of the European system of culture and mentality represent the researcher's foremost object of study and interest. For Corin Braga, the evolutionary model can only be dialectical, involving a succession of the cultural/spiritual crises European society underwent, followed by solutions/repositionings/restructurings of the imaginary material and its forms of representation, followed by further crises, etc. The phenomenological interpretation of all these processes of continental magnitude consistently maintains its systematic nature (and ability), characteristic not only of the scholarly studies in this field, but also of the author's analytical vein. This is attested by the very structure and organisation of the volume, which starts, as noted above, from explaining

how utopia emerged as a substitute of the former medieval incursions into the fantastic geography of hypothetical Paradises. There is one major difference, however, by virtue of which the utopian species displays its novelty and originality. The “enchanted” thought of the Middle Ages involved a *living* faith in the *possibility* of the terrestrial Eden; this “narrative” motif was not merely an epic “toy” destined for enjoyable reading purposes, or for intellectual purposes in general, but amounted to an *ontological* theme, which was active in the deepest, most essential layers of the human core. Such texts revealed, in Lucian Blaga’s terms, a “formative endeavour” to recover not only the paradisiacal *place* itself, but especially the *dignity* of the human being in relation to divinity, a dignity that had been lost with the original sin. The terrestrial paradise was but the practical form of concrete representation for the desired or much sought-after absolution, a dreamed-of resolution of the eternal sin. As a guarantor of the harmonic Law of the earthly paradise, God was still the recognised sovereign. Thus, at stake were not only the *place* itself but also the *relation*. Starting from the same premise and attempting to fulfil the same need, Utopia nevertheless approaches the relationship between the human and the divine differently. By projecting the City of man as a perfect city, Utopia practically denies the divine ascendancy, presumptuously assuming equality in relation to the Creation. “Disenchanted,” Utopia descends into the concrete world, proposing itself as a mechanistic projection of a structuring fantasy rather than as a fantastic projection of a mystical core of the collective imaginary. Utopian discourse is oftentimes inclined towards “scientism” and builds entire systems of social organisation at the imaginary

level. In *Du paradis perdu à l’antiutopie aux XVI<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles*, the morphology of the utopian species begins with what Corin Braga identifies as “internal causes” and “external causes” for the failure of utopias. The conflicting tension between reason and imagination, the anguished approach to the notion of otherness, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the successive or concerted attacks of Christian theology, of Cartesian rationalism and English empiricism suffocated or amended, as the case went, the liberal drives of utopian thought. Utopia is the result of substantial mutations in European post-mediaeval thought, in the sense of the evolution “du versant de l’imagination symbolique, du *mythos*, sur le versant de la rationalité, du *logos*.” As such, it inherits all the prohibitions against the search for Paradise Lost in the Middle Ages. If, however, “le mythe paradisiaque est situé dans le passé, aux origines du temps . . . , la construction utopique est orientée vers le future.” As prospective fiction, utopia intended to mask, by this time-difference vector, the liberalist critique of the categories of the contemporary world, and, in particular, of the ecclesiastical establishment. One of the fundamental meanings of the utopian construction, if we are to return to the idea of *instrumentalisation*, is that of proposing *systems* as counterparts of the real. These compensatory models betray quite clearly the “clinical” atmosphere of the projected blueprints (of a social, economic, mentality, political, legal, psychological nature, etc.) that appear to be written with a certain narrative coldness, or with rationalist detachment. Utopias thus become a kind of manifestoes of bygone centuries, socially (rather than aesthetically) anticipating “tendentious art,” or instruments of various forms of political or social activism, which

is oriented towards the concrete categories of the world and of existence. These are the reasons why, by relying on the extrinsic rather than the intrinsic aesthetic value of these texts, which are seen as documents of mentality “states” or of historical samples of *forma mentis*, Corin Braga’s approach appears to be highly pertinent, as well as very topical in the disciplinary and cultural field it claims allegiance to.

As regards the classifications and systematisations, the author seizes the opportunity to highlight the historical and typological distinctions between millennialism and utopia, the *millénium* representing an alternative to the utopian universe. As the author contends, “les projets millénariste post-renaissants étaient en directe relation avec l’utopisme classique. Entre les deux typologies existe une ligne visible de continuité”; he then goes on to say that “la relation entre les deux est interdépendante et réversible” in a manner in which “le Millénium et l’Utopie envisagent un paradis terrestre installé ici-bas, en contraste avec Royaume céleste de Dieu de la théologie chrétienne. La transcendance est abandonnée au profit de l’espace et du temps immanent.” A detailed analysis of the concept of Millénium leads to the conclusion that “les utopies et les millénarismes expriment deux réactions opposées des classes sociales et des tendances religieuses de la Renaissance. L’utopie humaniste serait dans ce cas l’expression de l’attitude des intellectuels de l’époque face au millénarisme embrassé par les classes populaires.”

Corin Braga comments extensively on the cultural, historical and mentality functions of Utopia, as well as on its ontological and spiritual functions, so much so that the history of utopian iconoclasm and iconoclasts becomes crystallised into an in-

creasingly clearer map. From the libertines of the eighteenth century to the “strong spirits” of the eighteenth century, and then to the scientists and socialists of the nineteenth century, heterodox utopian projections push the doctrinal and institutional limits of society. A war that is sometimes occult and sometimes overt, with rather concrete casualties, is waged relentlessly between alternative utopian models and the code of divine right underlying the organisation of the historical European state. It is a war in which Utopia is adapted and transformed, undergoing substantial mutations, which modify its goals and strategies of representation. Such a mutant is the Christian utopia. Conceived by the Christian humanists as a step preceding accession to the celestial paradise, it usually describes Catholic societies or republics. This type of utopia, as the author claims, is no longer “un modèle alternatif à la société chrétienne, mais un exemple de perfectionnement pour les ‘Catholiques de nos climats,’ trop enclins aux tentations de ce monde. Tant que le christianisme continuait de rayonner dans l’imaginaire collectif, il a inspiré une variété importante d’utopies orthodoxes, posées comme des contre-exemples aux royaumes utopiques païens et hérétiques.”

Another utopian mutant is counter-utopia, which is reached through a process described here *in extenso*. Its roots lie in the aggressive Christian censorship against the utopian imaginary. Internalised by the utopians, it becomes self-censorship; this leads to the transformation of utopia into counter-utopia, which no longer violates the dogmatic prohibitions regarding the perfect world created by man rather than by God. Here we should insist, for a moment, on two terms that appear in free va-

riation throughout the book, namely *anti-utopia* and *counter-utopia*. For a nuanced understanding of the utopian theory and practices Braga analyses in this volume, the two terms should be read differently. Anti-utopia should be understood as a trend of thought, while counter-utopia is a textual result, a form of representation, a rationalisation of this trend. Analogically speaking, this is the difference established by Humboldt, in the theory of language, between *energeia* and *ergon*. The poetic state would be the equivalent of the concept of *energeia*, designating language as diffuse, potential energy, in constant motion and tension, as a *process* from which the particular forms of language arise. On the other hand, *ergon* is the *product*, poetic language, that is, a limited and constraining grammar, frozen in historical, stabilised, crystallised forms. In Corin Braga's view, counter-utopia is inextricably linked with the spiritual and political model of the Counterreformation, which sees Utopia as "une voie vers la damnation et un enfer sur terre." As nightmarish visions reflected in deforming, perverted mirrors, the negative projections of demonised hypothetical universes solve, in a violent and dramatic manner (as imaginary constructs), the crisis reached by the relations between Utopia and the ecclesiastical establishment. Only by being turned inside out, like a glove, can Utopia achieve legitimacy in man's historical city. One might say that Utopia shares the same destiny, on a macro-historical cultural and spiritual level, as tragedy. According to Nietzsche, Camus and others, ancient tragedy, related to the mythical, archetypal climate, had two enemies: Christianity and rationalism. This also holds true for the "enchanted" imaginary of medieval geographies or the

utopian orthodox or heterodox projections of the past few centuries.

The author's previous studies approached the problem of postmodern shamanism, expressing implicitly (so far) the belief in the resurrection of the enchanted imaginary, which, as the author maintains, is reasserting itself as a phantasmatic response to the pragmatism and scientist objectivation of the contemporary world. This, however, is the subject of another story. What *Du paradis perdu à l'antiutopie aux XVI<sup>e</sup>-XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* amounts to is an exciting and enlightening, indeed an excellent synthesis of human self-representations. □

CĂLIN TEUȚIȘAN

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FLAVIUS SOLOMON, KRISTA ZACH, JULIANE BRANDT (Hg.)

**Vorbild Europa und die Modernisierung in Mittel- und Südosteuropa**

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**D**ER VORLIEGENDE im LIT Verlag in Berlin von Flavius Solomon, Krista Zach und Juliane Brandt (2009) herausgegebene Band *Vorbild Europa und die Modernisierung in Mittel- und Südosteuropa*, sammelt Beiträge einer im September 2005 in Iași abgehaltenen Konferenz, die sich der Vorbildwirkung institutioneller und ideeller Konzepte aus West- und Mitteleuropa auf Modernisierungsbestrebungen in mittel- und südosteuropäischen Ländern widmete.

Die Beiträge stammen von Historikern und Historikerinnen aus Bulgarien, Deutschland, Kroatien, der Republik Moldau, Rumänien, der Slowakei, Slowenien und Ungarn und wurden von den Herausgebern in drei thematische Blöcke eingeteilt.